



Curriculum and Quality Analysis and Impact Review
of European Early Childhood Education and Care



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CARE

**Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European
ECEC**

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Early childhood education and care: promoting quality for individual, social and economic benefits

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Accessibility and use of early childhood education and care:
a comparative analysis of 34 European countries
Executive Summary
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Dissemination Level		
PU	Public	X
PP	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research indicates that high-quality ECEC has a profound and lasting positive effect on children's development and yields a high social return on investment. However, ECEC services are not equally accessible for everyone: disadvantaged families tend to face more obstacles and to make less use of services. The obstacles are partly related to their own social situation (micro-level), partly to the characteristics and operation of local services (meso-level), and partly to the design of national ECEC systems (macro-level). Our focus in this report is on the impact of ECEC system characteristics on the perceived accessibility and the use of ECEC – among low-income and immigrant families in particular. For this purpose, we use multilevel analysis based on existing EU-wide datasets: EU-SILC contains information about the actual use of various types of ECEC services, whereas the 2012 European Quality of Life Survey provides information about perceived accessibility and quality of services. In both cases, we combine the micro-data with country-level variables reflecting key characteristics of national ECEC systems.

The findings can be summarised around three key questions:

- ***Who provides ECEC services, and under what conditions ?***
 - There is no association between the presence of *private commercial ECEC* and take-up; however in countries that allow for private ECEC, perceived accessibility is significantly lower.
 - The starting age of *free ECEC provision* is not significantly associated with increased take-up or perceived accessibility. On the other hand, we see a significant increase in ECEC take-up as well as perceived accessibility – albeit marginally significant in the latter case – in countries where the *legal entitlement* to ECEC starts early.
- ***How is provision organised and regulated ?***
 - Whether the ECEC system is *split, mixed or integrated* across age groups (usually 0-3 versus 3-6) is not correlated with take-up for the general population. However, mixed and integrated systems seem to be correlated with higher ECEC use (than split systems) among low-income and immigrant families. Unitary systems also have a significant positive effect on perceived accessibility.
 - As regards structural quality, higher *salaries and qualifications of teachers* working with 3-6 year-olds are not associated with perceived accessibility. However take-up is higher in countries that have higher teacher qualifications and salaries, and the effect is stronger for disadvantaged families.
- ***Who pays for ECEC ?***
 - In countries where the public spending per child (0-5 years old) in care or education is higher, both take-up and perceived accessibility are higher. However, the (average) proportion of private and household funding in ISCED 0 is correlated neither with take-up nor perceived accessibility.

The overall message is that disadvantaged groups tend to respond in the same way, but more sensitively than the general population, to public investment in ECEC services (higher public expenditure per child, higher structural quality, integrated childcare and preschool systems, guaranteed provision). Private commercial provision and parental fees do not seem to harm take-up, although the existence of private commercial provision lowers the perceived accessibility of services.

Figure 1 ECEC Take-up across Europe (source: EU-SILC 2014, weighted data)

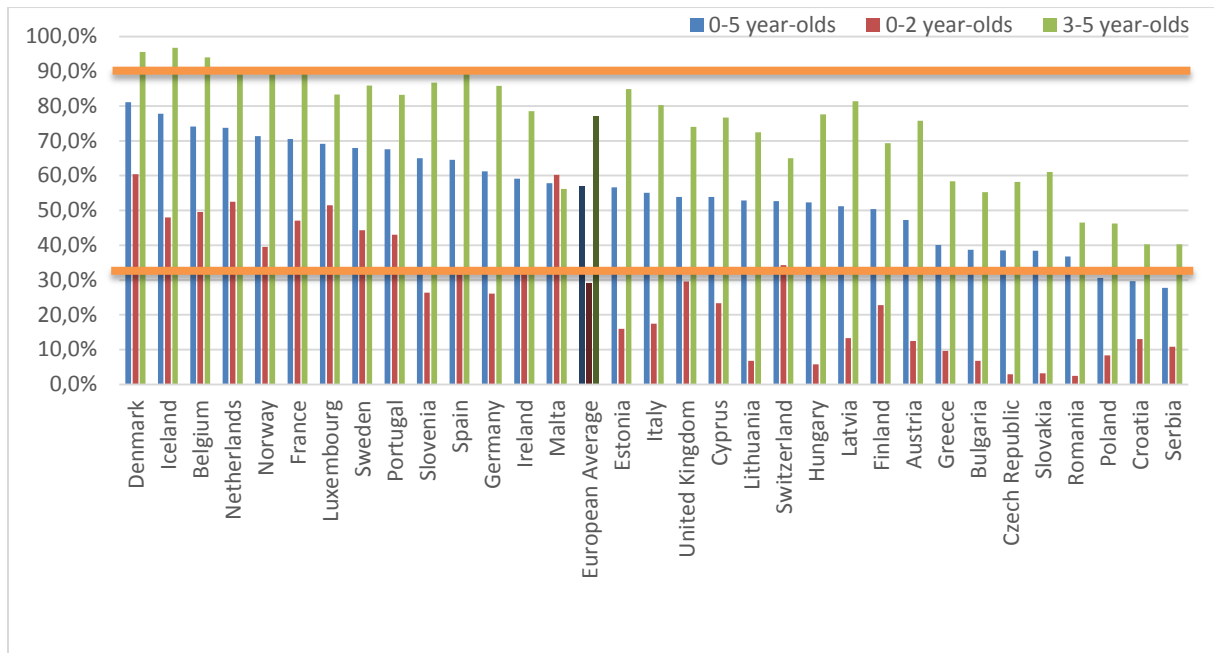


Figure 2 Perceived Childcare Accessibility Index across Europe (source: EQLS 2012, weighted data)

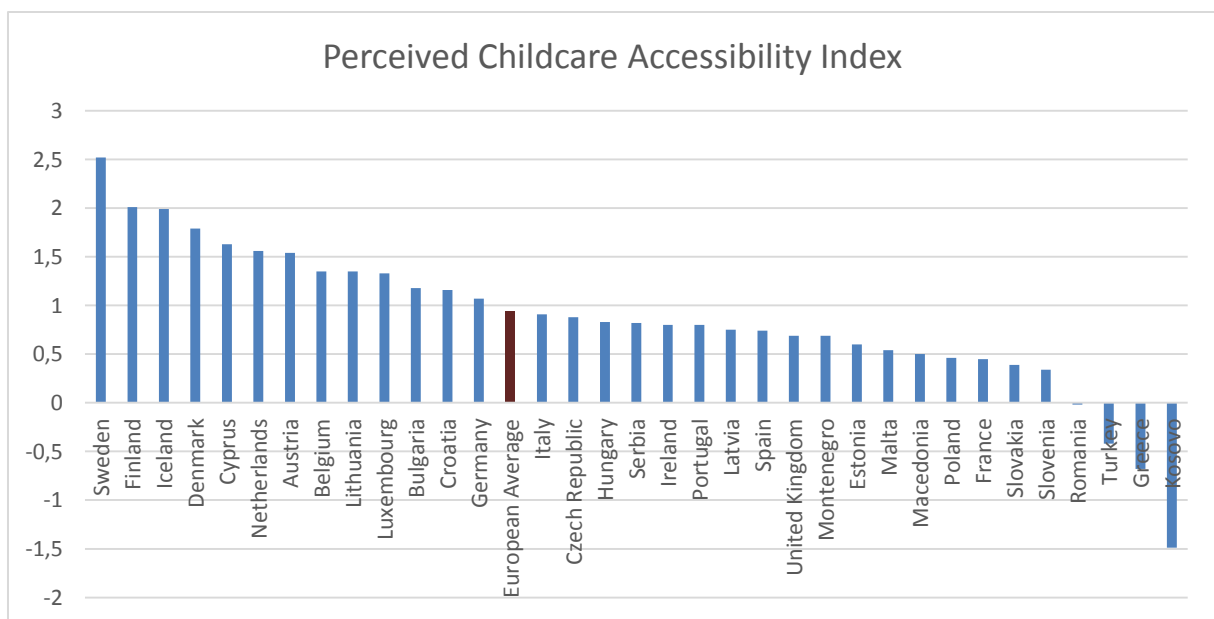


Figure 3: Perceived Childcare Accessibility Index for people with an income lower and higher than average (self-proclaimed) across Europe (source: EQLS 2012, weighted data)

