

Europe de l'Enfance recommendations for early childhood policies in Europe from 2010-2020

Florence Pirard and Benoît Parmentier report on the recommendations agreed by the Permanent Intergovernmental Group Europe de l'Enfance at their meeting in Brussels in November 2010

Europe de l'Enfance was set up in the year 2000, under the French Presidency of the EU, to enable information exchange and comparison of policies relating to children and childhood at a national level. It brings together Ministers or representatives from national ministries responsible for childhood policies and forms part of the European Forum on the Rights of the Child. It meets on the invitation of the country holding the EU presidency.



The Permanent Intergovernmental Group Europe de l'Enfance, met at the invitation of the Belgian Presidency, in Brussels in November 2010 and focused its attention on early childhood education and care (ECEC). The Group discussed some of the basic principles and agreed 11 recommendations. These are based upon a review of the relevant literature and intended to support member states in working together in an open and collaborative way.

Principles – The Group Europe de l’Enfance acknowledges:

- the fundamental right of each child from birth to have his/her development supported, promoted and encouraged. While parents or guardians are responsible for their child’s upbringing and development, early childhood education and care (ECEC) should supplement the home by creating the best possible settings for ensuring that each child’s development is rich and varied.
- the parental freedom of choice to use ECEC services or not to use them.
- that the development of ECEC services must be part of a wider integrated policy on families and children which combines measures to support families, including parental leave, and takes into account the national historical and cultural context. ECEC services are defined as formal childcare structures, regulated and organised in group and family settings that realise educational, social and economic functions, and are aimed at every child and his/her family equally.

The Group Europe de l’Enfance recommends:

- directing policies and public funding where possible in favour of the development and wellbeing of children and to consider this as an investment for the future.
- making a responsible and realistic commitment to continuing the development of a high-quality supply of ECEC, taking due account of the socio-economic situation in each EU Member State and that countries which have achieved the objectives set in 2002 by the Barcelona European Council consider setting more ambitious objectives for the decade ahead.
- examining proposals to adopt a coherent policy framework,

regulated and controlled by public administration, in order to encourage a system of education and care that is both accessible and affordable for all.

- promoting measures to ensure that all children can access high-quality, diversified and integrated ECEC services, which suit all situations experienced by children and their families and guaranteeing access to ECEC services for children with special needs and children living in poverty or vulnerable situations and ensuring support for these children and their families.
- developing mechanisms to ensure that the appropriate requirements necessary for the implementation of high-quality ECEC services, including the adult to children ratio and staff qualifications, the size of groups provided, taking into account the availability of resources within each member state.
- developing incentives aimed at encouraging pedagogical approaches which recognise diversity and which are based on the competencies and needs of children, whilst respecting the child’s own background and roots, and which allow for the participation of children, their families and professionals.
- examining and developing qualification criteria, educational systems and other learning frameworks for all staff in ECEC services, by investing available resources in basic and continuous training and professional support, and also placing a focus on working with young children in vulnerable situations and their parents. This should be undertaken with a view to issuing recommendations regarding professionalisation.
- where possible, in the context of the national juridical situations, ensuring favourable working conditions, salary levels, and professional status for staff in order to develop a professionalised ECEC workforce, which displays

increased social diversity and encourages the gender mix of staff.

- continuing in each Member state and at European level, the work which led to defining the conditions necessary for achieving high-quality education and care services and to the development of coherent procedures to gather and analyse data about all activities developed by ECEC services.
- supporting and developing research and networks of researchers, practitioners, parents and politicians, with a view to encouraging the exchange of wide-ranging information, experiences and good practices from across the sector.
- implementing a regular evaluation of progress made in implementing the ECEC policies by each Member State and supporting participative, democratic and transparent evaluation relating to the quality and accessibility of services.

Europe de l’Enfance agreed to undertake regular evaluation of the progress made in implementing the recommendations.

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