

# START

A good start for all: Sustaining  
Transitions across the Early Years

Sustaining Warm and Inclusive  
Transitions across the Early Years.  
Final report with implications for policies and practices



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## 1. Introduction

Transitions across the home environment, early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings and compulsory school education (CSE) mark significant changes in the life of children and their families and communities. Positive experiences of transition between educational levels can be a critical factor for children's future success and development, while negative experiences can have lasting challenges leading to poorer educational performance, especially for more disadvantaged children<sup>1</sup>. Adopting a more unified approach to caring and learning (educare) across educational settings in order to sustain continuity of children's experiences over time, can significantly improve children's educational achievement and socio-emotional development<sup>2</sup>. In turn promoting inter-institutional professional learning communities of ECEC and primary school staff as well as involving parents in the transition process are considered to be key factors in ensuring successful transitions<sup>3</sup>.

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1 Dumcius, R., Peeters, J., Hayes, N., Van Landeghem, G., Siarova, H., Peciukonyté, L., . . . Hulpia, H. (2014). Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in preventing early school leaving (ESL). Report for the European Commission DG Education and Culture. Brussels

2 Brooker, L. (2008) Supporting Transitions in the Early Years. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill.

3 Dunlop, A. W., & Fabian, H. (2007) Informing transitions in the early years. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education.

Margetts, K., & Kienig, A. (Eds.). (2013) International perspectives on transition to school: Reconceptualising beliefs, policy and practice. London: Routledge.

Moss, P. (Ed.). (2013). Early childhood and compulsory education: Reconceptualising the relationship. London: Routledge.

Taking these crucial elements into account, practitioners and researchers from four different countries have collaborated in a transnational action-research study (START/Erasmus +) in order to foster warm and inclusive transitions across the early years. In line with the European Commission priorities (see Appendix 1) the general objectives of the project were:

- to ensure a good start in education for all children, by enhancing the quality of ECEC and by ensuring that the benefits of ECEC are carried through to statutory school/ education levels;
- to support teachers and ECEC staff to adopt new methods and tools for dealing with complex classroom realities and diversified groups of learners.

More specifically, four pilot projects in four different countries (SI, It, UK, Be) were established to develop warm and inclusive transitional practices with specific attention to children and families who face complex family situations (e.g. socio-economic disadvantage) and are at 'risk of social exclusion' (e.g. Roma, children with migrant background, refugee children, children with special educational needs). These innovative practices were enabled by setting up inter-institutional professional learning communities of ECEC, primary school staff and/or other local stakeholders. By engaging in action research supported by researchers, ECEC and primary school staff explored new pedagogical approaches and educational methodologies that supported children and families in facing successful transition processes.

In order to contribute to transnational exchange and learning as well as to the improvement of educational policies at local, regional, national and EU level, the START project provides three inspiring outputs:

- four in-depth case studies involving research institutions (UNIBO, ERI, VBJK, Pen Green Research Base) along with childcare, preschool and primary school institutions at each country location (DD Vignola, OŠ Tišina, Mezennestje, Mensen voor Mensen, Sint Maarten Institute Moorselbaan, Our Lady of Walsingham and Rockingham Primary School)
  - Balduzzi, L., Lazzari, A. (2019). *Rethinking educational continuity through participatory action-research and professional development pathways*. Case Study Italy. Bologna: UNIBO.
  - Van Laere, K., Boudry, C. (2019). *Enabling Well-being and Participation of Children and Families Living in Poverty during Transition Periods across Home, Childcare and Kindergarten*. Case Study Belgium. Ghent: VBJK.
  - Režek, M., Mlinar, M., (2019). *Developing Transitional Activities for Romani Children and Their Families for Smoothing the Transition between Home and Institutional Environment*. Case Study Slovenia. Ljubljana: ERI.
  - Dewsbery, F., Holton, E., Branston S., Studders, T., Bannigan, S., Prodger, A., Geraghty, S., Jackson, S., Welsh, C. (2019). *A Parent and Professional Partnership to Ensure Continuity from Early Care & Education Centres to Primary School in England*. Case Study England. Corby: Pen Green.
- A comprehensive literature review mapping and analysing empirical studies focusing on transitions across home, early childhood settings, preschool and primary school carried out within EU Member States.
  - Balduzzi, L., Lazzari, A., Van Laere, K., Boudry, C., Režek, M., Mlinar, M., McKinnon, E. (2019). *Literature Review on Transitions across Early Childhood and Compulsory School Settings in Europe*. Ljubljana: ERI..
- A training kit illustrating some methods that were used in the START professional learning communities for discussing and improving educational transition practices with various groups of ECEC and primary school professionals as well as parents
  - Režek, M., Mlinar, M., Van Laere, K., Boudry, C., Balduzzi, L., Lazzari, A., Prodger, A., Geraghty, S., Welsh, C. (2019). *Transitions in Early Years. A Training Kit for ECEC and Primary School Professionals*. Ljubljana: ERI.

This final report will discuss the challenges of the lack of well thought out transitional practices on children and families, how this problem can be addressed and what the implications are for policies and practices in the EU and its member states (EU MS).

## 2. What is the problem?

Each educational system is characterised by institutional splits. When institutional splits occur, this can differ from country to country. Some countries have a unitary ECEC system in which integrated services exist from birth until CSE, while other countries have a split ECEC system in which there is an additional transition between childcare services for the youngest and preschool provision for the older children. All EU MS have an institutional split between ECEC and CSE/primary school education. In countries with an ECEC split system, preschools are often located on the same sites of primary schools. Whereas, in countries where ECEC is provided within a unitary ECEC system, services from birth to CSE tend to share the same ground and are to be completely separate from primary schools.

In both cases, however, EU Member States share a common challenge which is linked to the institutionalised nature of transitions. In fact, discontinuity in the way structural organisation, pedagogical approaches and educational practices are displayed across childcare and preschool settings - as well as between ECEC and CSE settings - set up additional hurdles especially for those children and families from disadvantaged background<sup>4</sup>. For some children the experience of their transition can be critically important in terms of their future learning, education, and life chances due to them having a special educational need or/and disability or because they live in families characterised by complexity or who experience poverty, socio-cultural disadvantage and marginalisation. The START literature review identifies two different perspectives from which transitions are studied and that deeply affect how educational practices are implemented in ECEC and school. The first perspective focuses on transition in term of enhancing children's (pre)school readiness making while the second one relates to supporting schools to be child ready in a diverse societal context.

### 2.1. School ready children or children ready schools? Impact on social exclusion/inclusion

Due to an increasing schoolification tendency ECEC professionals and primary school teachers feel more top down pressure to prepare the children well for what comes next. This puts a lot of pressure on teachers and forces them to work with practice that is focussed on making children school ready. In that perspective little, if any, attention is paid to the educational, caring and pedagogical needs of the child; the emphasis is firmly upon classroom management meaning the ability to control the children's behaviour and provide structured teacher-led sessions<sup>5</sup>. The idea that children need to be made school ready is however, especially jeopardising disadvantaged children and families, as demonstrated in the following examples:

- In ECEC split systems there is an extra institutional split between childcare/home environment and the preschools. Recurrent views of preschool teachers in these countries is that young children between two and a half and four years old are often not yet able to 'really learn' because of their physical and emotional caring needs (e.g. eating, sleeping, going to the toilet, emotional comfort,...). Therefore, it is often believed that children need to be made preschool ready beforehand, in the home environment or in the childcare services. Yet, often in these systems childcare is not accessible enough for families living in poverty and children from migrant backgrounds. Different studies in these countries demonstrated how middleclass children tend to experience easier transitions compared to disadvantaged children and families as the implicit norm is that a child has already attended childcare<sup>6</sup>
- In both the transition to preschool and primary school, teachers expressed concerns that children, especially from migrant backgrounds, may not be fluent in the language spoken in the host country. Indeed, a common teachers' bias is that children are 'language poor' or 'have a language delay' and as a consequence sometimes these children are perceived as not being able or motivated in early learning. Italy for example has introduced in 2012 SEN policies, to face the high number of migrant students in mainstream schools. With the introduction of the SEN category of children with linguistic, cultural, social and economic disadvantage, there has been a tendency

4 Peters, S. (2010) Literature Review: Transition from Early Childhood Education to School. University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

5 Bennett, J. (2013). A response from the co-author of 'a strong and equal partnership'. In P. Moss (Ed.), *Early Childhood and Compulsory Education. Conceptualising the relationship.* (pp. 52-71). London: Routledge.

6 Amerijckx, G., & Humblet, P. C. (2015). The transition to preschool: a problem or an opportunity for children? A sociological perspective in the context of a 'split system'. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 23(1), 99-111.

to extensively use such label for migrant children then leading to what has been defined as the 'SENitization' of migrant children<sup>7</sup>. This is a troubling tendency since teachers' deficit beliefs in the learning capabilities of children inform how they interact with these children, which in turn impacts negatively on their learning outcomes<sup>8</sup>.

- Heterogeneity (in terms of abilities, language and socio-cultural background) of children's groups seems to become a problem following the increased focus on formalised learning that accompanies the transition from preschool to primary school. The clear shift from a focus on play and social development in ECEC – where children's different circumstances tend to be seen more as an asset than as a challenge – to an outcome-oriented view of learning in CSE – where children's performance becoming more of a focus – very often lead to stigmatisation of diversity and to the application of selective procedures. In particular, findings from recent studies carried out in Sweden and Germany indicate that children from socio-economically disadvantaged families tend to be subjected to selective mechanism leading to their retention in preschool or hindering their attendance of mainstream primary schools<sup>9</sup>.

In this sense, findings from research carried out in the EU context seems to be in line with international research pointing out how implicit ideas and practices of readying children for (pre)schools is paradoxically contributing to marginalize and stigmatize children considered disadvantaged<sup>10</sup>. Consequently (Pre-)school readiness ideas are detrimental for the social inclusion of socially vulnerable children. Due to a lack of dialogue between ECEC centres (childcare and pre-school) and primary schools, transitional experiences of children and families are not in the spotlight and there is little sense of problem ownership on the problematic experiences of children and families during these institutional splits.

Notwithstanding, the '*school readiness*' approach still has an influence on policy debates within EU Member States. More recent thinking about transition to (pre-) school recognises that readiness does not reside solely in the child, but rather reflects the environments in which children find themselves<sup>11</sup>. In this sense, the children-ready school approach has been increasingly gaining ground backed by research<sup>12</sup>. Within this view, the role of (pre)primary institutions in receiving the children coming from settings within to the earlier level of the education system is seen to be an important factor in ensuring children's positive experiences of transition. By stressing both the role of early childhood and primary school institutions during transition, more focus is given to the equal responsibility of both ECEC and CSE systems in enabling smooth pedagogical transition.

The *children-ready school approach* emphasises the necessity to empower all the actors involved. This means giving particular importance to negotiated values and pedagogical assumptions of families and professionals, to recognise and to enhance the children's agency and to overcome a top-down model of curriculum. The studies carried out within this approach underline the importance of educational

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7 Migliarini, V., D'Alessio, S., & Bocci, F. (2018). SEN Policies and migrant children in Italian schools: micro-exclusions through discourses of equality. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 1-14. doi:10.1080/01596306.2018.1558176

8 Van Houtte, M. (2011). So where's the teacher in school effects research?: The impact of teacher's beliefs, culture, and behavior on equity and excellence in education. In K. Van den Branden, M. Van Houtte, & P. Van Avermaet (Eds.), *Equity and excellence in education: Towards maximal learning opportunities for all students* (pp. 75-95). New York: Routledge.

9 Rothe, A., Urban, M., & Werning, R. (2014). Inclusive transition processes: considering socio-economically disadvantaged parents' views and actions for their child's successful school start. *Early Years*, 34(4), 364-376.

Hellblom-Thibblin, T., Sandberg, G., & Garpelin, A. (2017). Obstacles and Challenges in Gaining Knowledge for Constructing Inclusive Educational Practice: Teachers' Perspectives. In *Pedagogies of Educational Transitions* (pp. 43-58). Springer, Cham.

10 Lehrer, J. S., Bigras, N., & Laurin, I. (2017). Preparing to Start School: Parent and Early Childhood Educator Narratives. In S. Dockett, W. Griebel, & B. Perry (Eds.), *Families and Transition to School. International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development* (Vol. 21). Cham: Springer.

Bloch, M. N., & Kim, K. (2015). A cultural history of "Readiness" in Early Childhood Care and education: Are there still culturally relevant, ethical, and imaginative spaces for learning open for young children and their families. In J. M. Iorio & W. Parnell (Eds.), *Rethinking Readiness in Early Childhood Education: Implications for Policy and Practice* (pp. 1-18). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

11 Dumcius, R., Peeters, J., Hayes, N., Van Landeghem, G., Siarova, H., Peciukonyté, L., . . . Hulpia, H. (2014). Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in preventing early school leaving (ESL). Report for the European Commission DG Education and Culture. Brussels.

12 Tarrant, K. and S. Kagan (2010) 'Integrating pedagogy, practice, and policy: A transition agenda' In: S. Kagan and K. Tarrant (Eds) *Transitions for Young Children: Creating connections across early childhood systems*, Brookes, Baltimore, Maryland, pp. 313-326.

contexts valuing multiple ways of learning, not only teacher directed but indeed co-constructed by all actors involved, starting from the children's and families' needs and interests. Another strength is related to a teacher's team work seen as extended collegiality, to enhance and support teachers' shared reflection on practice and educational approaches<sup>13</sup>. In the children-ready schools' approach, different researches play particular attention to children and parents from marginalised groups. The key question is how pre-schools and primary schools can be supported to deal with a diversity of children, families and local communities while resisting the homogenization of the school population. This is especially a crucial question as teachers in Europe often feel unprepared and insecure when confronted with learners from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds<sup>14</sup>.

In the appendix, you can read how the latest OECD Starting Strong report on transitions also made a strong plea to focus more on making schools ready for children instead of children ready for schools as a key feature of successful transitional practices<sup>15</sup>.

## 2.2. Experiences of children and families before the pilots

As part of doing action research, the four different inter-institutional professional learning communities analysed, with the help of researchers, the voices of children and families in transitions. We summarise the main issues coming out of these analysis of local needs in the different countries before piloting innovative transitional practices.



By observing and analysing children's drawings, it became clear how aspects of time (shorter/ fragmented vs integrated experience) and space (rigid vs flexible organisation) drastically change in institutional transitions, which makes it especially more difficult for children with additional needs. Moving on to a new environment also signifies an implicit change in rules and expectations. This can be seen in the children's drawings in which children experience a sense of loss of control over the learning environment. The older children become, the more they need to get used to adult-initiated and directed learning activities. Parallel to this, children seem to experience a fundamental change in identity. Whereas they previously are perceived by childcare workers in childcare centres or pre-

13 Rantavuori, L., Kupila, P. & Karila, K. (2017). Relational expertise in preschool-school Transition. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*, 6(2), 230-248.

14 European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2019). Integrating Students from Migrant Backgrounds into Schools in Europe: National Policies and Measures. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

15 OECD. (2017). Starting Strong V. Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education. Paris: OECD.

school teachers in preschools as competent and autonomous children, they are often perceived in the next phase (pre-school or primary school) by the pre-school teachers or primary school teachers as 'incompetent novices' who are hindered by their own caring needs (e.g. not yet toilet trained, crying, seeking comfort and reassurance from adults) or behave too 'childlike and wild'. Moreover, the drawings and observations point out how children also transition into a new group of peers in which they need to redefine their roles. In a lot of cases, especially vulnerable children are not able to self-regulate in the new environment, which manifested into difficult behaviours, using patterns of constant running around and using physicality to 'fit in'. In order to help themselves to regulate, they use objects such as swinging on a swing when feeling overwhelmed, carrying and playing exclusively with one set of toys (animals). Furthermore, parents pointed out how peer relationships are changing for their children and parents expressed the hope that their child would be able to connect and find new friends. In general, parents also expressed how they face big changes during transition. Our interviews and focus groups show how they found themselves in rather complex positions in which they questioned the expectations of the (pre-) school.

'Aren't children normally ready to go to the toilet autonomously when they are three years old or older? My child is two and a half years old and needs to start preschool soon. I feel the pressure to make him already potty trained although I think he is not ready for this. I experience some fears when he has to go to school. What if he is not potty trained and will not be seen by the preschool teacher? I have the impression that a child in preschool suddenly needs to grow up.' (Parent, Belgium, FI)

It should be noted that irrespective of the context and the ECEC/school system, many questions on emotional and physical care and safety were addressed by parents in these transitions. Especially when families are more at risk of societal exclusion (e.g. Roma families, parents of children with special needs, families living in severe poverty,...) these caring questions seem to also represent a political need to belong and be included in the (pre)school and broader society. It is remarkable how the questions on care are related to the overwhelming need of parents to talk and exchange information about the transition of their child with professionals from childcare, pre-school or primary school.

'Well I don't know whether he has eaten in primary school, I don't know whether he has had a good day, bad day, don't know what kind of mood he is going to be in, don't know anything!... The preschool was more relaxed...more friendly and welcoming... Now, you have to stand in the playground, you have to stand outside. The children come out one by one, go straight to the parents and then you leave so you don't even get to talk to a teacher or find out anything...I felt like I could tell the preschool staff anything...now I don't feel like I can say anything. The only place you can go into is the office of the principal, which always seems to be locked, or you go through the office and sit in the corridor.' (Parent, UK)

### 3. What can make a difference?

#### 3.1. The power of inter-institutional professional learning communities

In order to face these challenges, four different pilot projects were set-up in four different countries starting in September 2016:

- Pilot in Aalst, Belgium: Collaboration between a childcare centre, a pre-and primary school and a poverty advocacy group to enable well-being and participation of poor children and families in transition
- Pilot in Corby, UK: Collaboration between an integrated ECEC centre and primary schools to ensure continuity based on a parent and professional partnership.
- Pilot in Tišina, Slovenia: Collaboration between pre- and primary school staff to develop transitional activities for Roma children and their families.
- Pilot in Vignola, Italy: Collaboration between pre- and primary school staff to re-think educational continuity for children and families

The process, outcome and implications for national policies and practices is described in four START case study reports. In each pilot an inter-institutional professional learning community was established. This is a group of staff from different institutions (childcare, preschool, ECEC centre

and/or primary school) sharing and critically interrogating their transitional practice in an on-going, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way<sup>16</sup>. Each professional learning community engaged in participatory action research projects (*ricerca-form-azione*)<sup>17</sup> where practitioners worked side by side with researchers – in shared processes of critical reflection aimed at generating transformative change in educational institutions starting from situational analysis, data collection and interpretation and leading to joint planning, documentation and evaluation of experimental projects<sup>18</sup>.

In a first phase children were observed or interviewed (e.g. comments on drawings), parents were interviewed individually or in groups. The researchers presented the data and together with the practitioners analysed and reflected on the different standpoints in order to develop new actions and practices.

The second phase of the action research aimed to implement some new actions and practices in order to smoothen the transitions between childcare/home environment and pre-school and between pre-school and primary school. The main themes that have been discussed is the establishment of a welcoming and familiarisation policy in both institutions by exchanging practices and ideas and rethinking the anticipation process of going to pre-school or primary school from the perspective of children and families.

Furthermore, all the members of the professional learning communities had the opportunity to meet colleagues from the other countries in two exchange/training weeks in Corby (UK) and Tišina (Slovenia). These international weeks were crucial in order for professionals from the different countries to be inspired and to be able to think out of the (institutional and cultural) box. During the first meeting, ideas were shared on action research methods and how to build sustainable, reciprocal and trusting relationships with parents. During the second meeting ideas were shared on observation methods and how to create inclusive ECEC centres and primary schools. After the experimentation of new transition practices children, parents and professionals were questioned again in order to evaluate their pilot projects.

### 3.2. Main changes

By organising regular meetings of the inter-institutional professional learning communities for a minimum two years in each country and doing action research together, the following changes were addressed in all countries.

#### 3.2.1. Children's and parent's needs as focal point

By understanding and discussing the different standpoints in transition, the practitioners in the different countries gradually worked towards a pedagogy in which the caring and learning of children, irrespective of age, is inseparable, while also taking into account that parents and families are crucial partners in the transition story. By stimulating collaborative learning of professionals from different settings (childcare, pre-school and primary school) and from different countries, we experienced that all practitioners gradually moved beyond thinking from a solely institutional, historically engrained perspective: they started thinking from what children and parents expressed as to what they need in these transitions. Professionals from different settings and countries realised: why are we looking and acting so differently towards the same children and parents?

'It is actually amazing to notice what children are already capable of before they enter primary school.' (*Primary School Teacher, Italy*)

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16 Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: a review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change*. 7(4), 221-258.

Sharmahd N., Peeters J., Van Laere K., Vonta T., De Kimpe C., Brajković S., Contini L., Giovannini D.; Transforming European ECEC services and primary schools into professional learning communities: drivers, barriers and ways forward, NESET II report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017. doi: 10.2766/74332.

17 The Italian term *ricerca-form-azione* is the combination of three different words, meaning respectively research (*ricerca*), professional development (*formazione*) and action (*azione*).

18 Asquini, G. (Ed.) (2018) *La ricerca-formazione: temi, esperienze, prospettive*. [Action-research-for-professional-development: themes, experiences, prospects] Milano: Franco Angeli.

### 3.2.2. Working towards a more democratic approach of pedagogical quality

It was remarkable how the initial research on the voices of children and parents, as part of the first phase of the action research, slowly became a continuous focus of the professionals in the different countries. For example, in Italy the success of the transition actions and practices was also supported by the positive feedback the professionals received from parents. At the beginning of the school year, parents were asked to describe their own children by using artefacts such as pictures, videos, words... and after that they could talk about their transitional experience through video interviews.

'I had another child who attended the school some years ago. I saw the difference... everything was smoother, no child was crying, we had enough time to prepare the child but also our self.'  
(Mother, Italy)

Also in Belgium the positive and critical feedback from parents on the new transition practices (e.g. parents can come into the classroom everyday (this was not allowed previously), there was more pedagogical attention towards the importance of sleeping, play ground,...) this gave a boost to the pre- and primary school staff:

'I used to say to parents that 'my door was always open' and I really believed this was the case. Since parents are able to take time to say goodbye to their child and talk to the teachers in the classroom, I can really say that we have more and better contact with parents. Parents often come to me and talk and I also easily start talking to them. I often go outside to be able to talk to parents, even about small things.'  
(Schooldirector, Belgium)

### 3.2.3. Increasing shared responsibility and problem ownership among professionals

By investing in inter-institutional professional learning communities, the mutual respect and understanding was growing between the professionals from the different settings. Although broader society often gives different praise and acknowledgement (e.g. difference between childcare worker and primary school teacher), the various groups of professionals felt more connected in their mission to develop educational practice that is suitable and meaningful for the diversity of children and parents with whom they engage.

'We feel that the project has connected us more. Previously, it almost felt like we were part of two separate institutions, even if formally we belong to the same one. Now we gather at informal as well as at formal ones. Quite a few teachers from the primary school went to observe practice in the preschool and reflected together on the observation afterwards. I think that this was one of the best collaborations achieved. We were all positively surprised and enthusiastic about the dynamics of groups or classes and about the work of our colleagues. We were comparing methods of our work, methods of work with children who need different approaches. Just recently, preschool teachers of the oldest preschool group participated in structuring the first grades (which children go to which group) in order to support them in the most meaningful way, knowing the dynamic of the group and the future teacher.'  
(Primary school teacher, Slovenia)

## 3.3. Impact

By embedding professional collaboration across institutional and professional boundaries, staff felt better supported to ensure warm and inclusive transitions for a diversity of children and families. In the different pilots we saw similar positive impacts on children, families and staff.

<b>Positive impact on ECEC and primary school staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the positive and negative emotions children and parents can experience in transition</li> <li>• Sees the child and families as they are, have real encounters with them based on genuine interest</li> <li>• Starts from the image of a rich, competent child</li> <li>• Has positive views on multiple identities and multi-lingualism of children and families</li> <li>• Feel sure enough to deal with diversity</li> <li>• Sees the children and parent as indispensable partner</li> <li>• Sets the conditions so children and parents feel comfortable to talk and speak up</li> <li>• Is able to regularly dialogue with parents on learning and caring needs</li> <li>• Has a shared responsibility on transition with other professionals</li> <li>• Is able to do external work and develop relational expertise to work with other professionals</li> <li>• Questions institutional logic and engrained practices</li> <li>• Understands the importance of reflection and research as part of practice</li> </ul>
<b>Positive impact on children</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feel welcomed in the new environment</li> <li>• Increased well-being and learning opportunities</li> <li>• Less emotional stress in transition</li> <li>• Positive new social experiences</li> <li>• Recognised in their holistic development, caring and learning needs:</li> <li>• Feel safe, cared for in order to explore autonomously</li> <li>• Feel positively supported to develop and grow</li> <li>• Are more at ease as there is continuity between school and home – parents and teachers know each other and trust each other</li> <li>• Feel that they belong to the educational community and broader society</li> </ul>
<b>Positive impact on families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiences trust to deal with the uncertainty of a new phase</li> <li>• Feels supported by staff in anticipating transitional moments and not pressured into making their child school ready</li> <li>• Is reassured which in turn has a positive impact on the child</li> <li>• Feel understood that this is a new, exciting yet sometimes worrying phase</li> <li>• Feel welcomed</li> <li>• Feel comfortable to asks questions to the staff</li> <li>• Feel valued and recognised in their parental role</li> <li>• Feel that they also belong to the educational community and broader society</li> <li>• Trust ensures that parents also send their children regularly to pre-school and primary school which in turn enhances their learning opportunities.</li> </ul>

### 3.4. In sum

Whereas at the beginning of the project we solely perceived the institutional splits as a huge problem, we gradually understood that these institutional splits are actually an opportunity to think outside the institutional and cultural box: by collaborative learning and confrontation of childcare workers, pre-school teachers, and primary school teachers coming from four different countries, traditional child- and family images were deconstructed and pedagogical practices were reinvented in line with the needs of children, families and communities in diverse societies. Although this work will never stop in the pilot projects, it is also remarkable how the initial focus of professionals on making children

(pre)school ready gradually disappeared. In our experience systematic change, even in an increasing international context of schoolification is possible by taking small steps in which relationship, care, trust and community are considered key levers. This is possible by:

- constantly engaging with children and families to keep us focused on the issues that matter to them in transitions;
- constantly supporting and connecting practitioners from different settings and countries in dealing with the challenges that such a transformative process implies;
- investing in recursive interaction between research and experimentation, between theory, policy and practice.

Based on the positive experiences of the START pilot projects and the literature review, the following implications for policies and practices were developed.

## 4. Implications for policies and practices

Transitions are complex phenomena involving many interrelated spheres: from the political level to the pedagogical one, from the institutionalised practices to the working cultures of ECEC services and schools, from the possibility of children's agency to the acknowledgment of different families' cultures. In a well-balanced system, different educational phases share responsibility for smoothing and streamlining children's positive learning experiences during transition periods. We structured the implications for policies and practices according to four processes that are important for having all the elements from the above equation ready for smooth transition: pedagogical continuity, continuity with the home environment and community, professional continuity and structural continuity<sup>19</sup>.

### 4.1. Pedagogical continuity

*Children's need as the starting point (not the institutional organisation) / educare / whole child approach/ participatory work with children*

- Adopt an educare (caring is learning and learning is caring) approach that takes into account children's socio-emotional and physical care needs and values their capabilities along a continuum from home to ECEC and from ECEC to school
- Analyse how existing transitional practices may include or exclude certain children as this can have a significant and lasting effects on their learning opportunities. Become aware that underlying notions of (pre-)school readiness unintentionally exclude the most vulnerable children.
- Rethink a school day of a child, starting from the child, not from the institutional logic. Ensure emotional safety and continuity during the day so children will feel confident enough to explore and become autonomous. Besides the vertical transitions (from one educational environment to the following one), horizontal transitions are also happening on a day to day basis in children's life (e.g. from home to the setting, from the class to the playground, from the class to after school care...
  - Implement a more flexible organisation of time and children's groupings in the daily schedule of (pre)-school work in order to allow children to gradually get acquainted with the new environment.
  - Invest in higher adult-child ratios for preschool/primary school in order to have better educare for a diversity of children during the whole day! (not just in the class)
  - Urge to have flexible policies to deploy teachers, childcare workers, pedagogues, social workers in a school day (e.g. shifts, cooperative time...)
- The necessary resources should be provided for school institutions that have unsuitable lay-outs to rebuild their infrastructure into age-appropriate educare facilities for young children.

19 Dumcius, R., Peeters, J., Hayes, N., Van Landeghem, G., Siarova, H., Peciukonyté, L., . . . Hulpia, H. (2014). Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in preventing early school leaving (ESL). Report for the European Commission DG Education and Culture. Brussels

OECD. (2017). Starting Strong V. Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education. Paris: OECD.



- Rethink and rearrange the (pre)school infrastructure and lay-out spaces in order to improve the well-being of children (peaceful eating, toileting, sleeping and appropriate outdoor playing). In primary school institutions, the layout of first-grade classrooms could be re-arranged in a more flexible way in order to allow morning circle conversations, individual and group work, children's self-directed activities and play during free-time.

#### 4.2. Continuity with the home environment and community

*Families' need as the starting point (not the institutional organisation)/co-education/ participatory work with families and communities*

- Prioritise warm welcome policies for newcomer children and parents in (pre-) school instead of lowering children's age for compulsory education in order to increase attendance rates of vulnerable children.
- Develop sustainable familiarisation policies/practices in both ECEC and primary school.
- Create opportunities for daily exchanges and dialogue between teachers and parents in order to facilitate the establishment of reciprocal relationship of trust between families and professionals.
- Introduce activities for involving families on a more flexible basis (drop-in sessions before and after school, informal parent and toddler sessions, workshop in Roma settlements) with the intention of reducing non-attendance of the most vulnerable children.
- Create a community-based network for reaching out to children and families who were not attending ECEC and organise activities (e.g. meeting spaces, playgroups..) for them to get acquainted with the preschool environment
- Implement outreaching activities in communities who are exposed to extreme societal marginalisation such as Roma or Traveller communities, refugee families in closed centres' with the aim of building trust between children, families and educational institution.
- Ensure that the parents and extended family get the advocacy and support they need in an ECEC environment, developing their capacity to cope with the more rigid schools processes such as choice of schools and the application process including appeals.
- Offer a flexible transition program, allowing for all parents, i.e., those who are working, those who have younger children, those with access issues etc. to be able to participate fully in the process.
- Rethink and rearrange the (pre)school infrastructure and lay-out spaces in order to ensure that parents can meet professionals. Creating a welcoming environment for parents will automatically evoke more opportunities to share the educational responsibilities of children.

#### 4.3. Professional continuity

*Inter-institutional professional learning communities and shared critical reflection/future and current staff feels supported and there is an increased shared responsibility and relational expertise of professionals from different institutions to do 'boundary work' together*

- As part of in-service training of professionals, ensure that inter-institutional professional learning communities (of childcare, preschool teachers and primary school teachers) can be established.
  - Invest in pedagogical support of the professional learning communities in order to initiate and accompany the reflection. This can be an external or internal person who takes responsibility for the overall process and can enhance the relational competences of staff to work together and to critically reflect on practices.
  - Support ECEC and schools how they can become better at listening to and translating the voices of children and families in educational practices.
  - Develop a shared vision among ECEC and CSE professionals by challenging the taken for granted assumptions underlying institutional practices (image of the child, image of parents, understanding of learning)
  - Elaborate a joint action-plan for addressing the needs emerged in each context by taking into account the concerns of all actors involved, including plans for outreach work to those children and families who are less present in formal settings



- Jointly implement transition projects by involving ECEC and CSE professionals on an equal basis (reciprocal observations, job shadowing, inter-vision, collective reflection on documentation)
- Evaluate the sustainability of innovative practices developed within the transition projects at each location over the long term – min. two years is required to have sustainable change in vision and organisation that ultimately will make the difference for children and families!
- Develop a deontological framework on information exchange between professionals of different institutions in respect with the privacy law and in respect with the fact that parents are in control and need to give their permission in any case of personal information exchange.
- Invest in good working conditions facilitating INTER-institutional professional collaboration and learning within and across ECEC and CSE institution – such as entitlement to CPD and child-free working hours for collective reflection – even in the context of ECEC split systems.
- In-service training institutions invest in the development of collaborative in-service training for professionals from ECEC and primary schools.
- Revise the pre-service curricula of ECEC professionals and primary school students whether attention is paid to the importance of vertical and horizontal transitions.
- Initiate the debate on curricula alignment of different professional student profiles in relation to transition, image of the child and image of the parent, resisting the top down schoolification pressure and school-readiness thinking.

#### 4.4. Structural continuity

However, a forth consideration is also crucial to support these good practices to work on a broader scale. In order to have warm and inclusive transitions additional work on a structural, more systemic level needs to be done. This is called the importance of *structural continuity* and it concerns the level of governance in order to stimulate pedagogical continuity, continuity with the home and community and professional continuity. Structural measurements and policy visions needs to be developed in order to have systemic change in EU member states.

The new European Quality Framework on ECEC is considered a true milestone<sup>20</sup>. Not only does it endorse a participatory quality approach of working with a diversity of children and families which will have a positive impact on the social inclusion of vulnerable groups. It also encompasses a systemic view on professional competence, in which different stakeholders all together are responsible for enabling ECEC professionals to provide good quality ECEC services<sup>21</sup>. The underlying view and rationales completely concur with the starting points of the START project. There is however still one structural problem in many EU MS. Many institutional splits exist in the educational services for young children and their families. If we would like to have high quality provision that is available to all families and that strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity, the institutional transition phases need to receive sufficient attention as often both policy makers as practitioners do not experience problem ownership on the transitional experiences of children and families.

- At the European level we advise the current EQF ECEC working group to proactively tackle the negative effects of institutional transitions across the home environment, ECEC and CSE in the further implementation and operationalisation of the European Quality Framework.
- In line with statement 6, indicator 15 of the EQF ECEC, structural collaboration needs to be established with the CSE sector to ensure that more primary schools are required to use a curriculum that is built

20 Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care – Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission, (2014)

European Commission (2018) Proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52018DC0271>

European Commission (2018) Monitoring the Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care – Complementing the 2014 ECEC Quality Framework proposal with indicators: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/825252b4-3ec6-11e8-b5fe-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-69668493>

21 Statement 9: *Stakeholders in the ECEC system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organizations*

upon children's experiences of learning in ECEC.<sup>22</sup>

- Continue to invest in opportunities for the EU MS to exchange transitional innovative practices and policies as this cross-country confrontation helps educational stakeholders and professionals to think out of the (institutional) box.
- At the level of the EU MS, governments of different fields (eg. childcare, welfare, education) and governments of different levels (local, regional, national) should collaborate more intensively to:
  - Deal proactively with the artificial institutional split to avoid having detrimental effects on the social inclusion of children and families living in poverty.
    - By aligning further the work of different ECEC and primary school policy domains, pre-service training institutions, in-service training institutions and foremost the work of childcare centres, preschools and primary schools > *conceptual integration of caring and learning into EDUCARE in childcare, preschool and primary school*
    - By enabling childcare centres, preschools and primary schools to collaborate and work in a more integrated way > *structural and conceptual integration of caring and learning into EDUCARE*
  - Create a common vision on the importance of warm and inclusive transitions in the educational system for the diversity of children and families.
  - Enable an equal partnership between ECEC and CSE in which complementary and continuity in child curricula are central (in contrast to curricula built solely upon a vertical hierarchy of learning outcomes for what comes next)
  - Explore new sustainable funding models that allow different institutions and teams to collaborate in a more integrated way.

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22 'promoting further integration of early childhood education and care in the education continuum and in supporting collaboration of ECEC and primary school staff for sustaining smooth transition for children to primary school' / Statement 6 - *a curriculum which requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice*. Indicator 15 - *The percentage of primary schools which are required to use a curriculum which builds on children's experiences of learning in ECEC*.

## 5. Appendix - EU and other international policy text supporting the implications for policies and practices

### European's ambition in reducing poverty and social inequalities

The Council of Europe identifies poverty, inequality and exclusion as being among the main challenges for children's rights. Its Strategy for the Rights of the Child for the period 2016–2021 states that “*Child poverty and social exclusion can most effectively be addressed through child protection systems that carefully integrate preventive measures, family support, early childhood education and care, social services, education and housing policies*”. At the same time, countering discrimination and promoting equal opportunities is particularly crucial for children belonging to groups at higher risk of discrimination, such as children with disabilities, children in alternative care, children on the move or affected otherwise by migration, or Roma children<sup>23</sup>. One of the targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy, adopted in 2010, was to lift 20 million people out of poverty. In line with this strategy, the European Commission adopted in 2013 the Recommendation ‘*Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*’. It not only covers issues related to resources and income, but also puts a strong emphasis on equality, equal access to services such as ECEC and education and the right of children to participate.

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#### International and European human rights provisions on access to quality services, as reflected in the second pillar of the European Commission's 2013 Recommendation on investing in children

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<i>Reduce inequality at a young age by investing in early childhood education and care (ECEC)</i>	Article 10 ICESCR, Articles 3 and 18 CRC, Article 27 ESC, Article 24 EU Charter
<i>Improve education systems' impact on equal opportunities</i>	Article 13 ICESCR, Article 28 CRC, Article 2 Protocol No. 1 to the ECHR, Article 17 ESC, , Article 14 EU Charter

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Source: FRA, 2018, cited in European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018, pg. 34

A 2018 report of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights on child poverty addressed however that EU institutions and EU MS need to make better use of this recommendation by ensuring equal access to affordable quality ECEC and educational services for everyone. The right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality is also stressed in the European Pillar of social rights and is currently being investigated as inherent part of a Child Guarantee Scheme for children in vulnerable situations. In terms of children with disabilities, it is noteworthy to state that The EU and the EU MS have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which guarantees children with disabilities the right to inclusive education.

### Quality ECEC matters

Early childhood education and care has gained, since the Council Recommendations on Childcare in 1992, an increasingly prominent position on European policy agendas. Initially, the main rationale for investing in ECEC was driven by socio-economic concerns about employment, competitiveness and gender equality. In more recent times, EU policies have been accompanied by a growing attention to children's rights, equal educational opportunities and social inclusion. Longitudinal studies in the USA and the UK have demonstrated that ECEC can improve outcomes in terms of children's cognitive development, socio-emotional functioning and educational performance<sup>24</sup>. Although preschool education is considered beneficial for all young children, the highest return is expected for children from low socio-economic backgrounds and children with migrant backgrounds, particularly those who speak a minority language at home. This claim is only legit when the provided ECEC is of good quality.

23 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2018). Combating child poverty: an issue of fundamental rights. Brussels: FRA.

24 see reviews of:

Lazarri, A., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2013). Accessibility of ECEC for children from ethnic minority and low-income families. Retrieved from: <http://en.calameo.com/read/001774295780e9c56e158?authid=lunFhaVetzQ6>

Melhuish, E., K. Ereky-Stevens, K. Petrogiannis, A. Ariescu, E. Peneri, K. Rentzou, A. Tawell, P. Leseman & M. Broekhuizen (2015) A Review of Research on the Effects of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) on Child Development. London: CARE project. Retrieved from: <http://ecec-care.org/resources/publications/>

Vandenbroeck, M., Lenaerts, K., & Beblavy, M. (2018). Benefits of Early Childhood Education and Care and the conditions for obtaining them. Brussels: European Expert Network on Economics of Education. Retrieved from: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/14194adc-fc04-11e7-b8f5-01aa75ed71a1>

In the European agenda, the quality of ECEC therefore, including the support for the professional development of ECEC workforce, started to gradually receive more attention after 2000s. The need to ensure the accessible provision and quality of ECEC was repeatedly recognised in a number of policy documents, beginning with the 2006 Council conclusions on efficiency and equity in European education and training systems. Increased political attention to this issue prompted calls for evidence based information, which led to a thorough review of the existing policy and practice of Member States ECEC service provision. This review resulted in the development of a quality framework in early childhood education and care in which a well-qualified workforce is considered particularly important when it comes to defining the quality of ECEC<sup>25</sup>.

### **Quality matters...but what about the reality of institutional splits between ECEC and primary and between childcare and preschool?**

The new European Quality Framework on ECEC is considered a true milestone. Not only does it endorse a participatory quality approach of working with a diversity of children and families which will have a positive impact on the social inclusion of vulnerable groups. It also encompasses a systemic view on professional competence, in which different stakeholders all together are responsible to enable ECEC professionals to provide good quality ECEC services. The underlying view and rationales completely concur with the starting points of the START project. There is however still one structural problem in many EU MS. Many institutional splits exist in the educational services for young children and their families. As explained earlier, these institutional splits are characterised by a lack of ownership which has detrimental effects on the learning and well-being, especially of more vulnerable children and their families.

When institutional splits occur, this can depend from country to country. Some countries are characterised by a split ECEC system in which there is an additional transition between childcare services for the youngest and preschool provision for the older children. Others countries have a unitary ECEC system in which integrated services exist from birth until CSE. All EU MS have an institutional split between ECEC and CSE/primary school education. In countries with an ECEC split system, preschools are often located on the same sites of primary schools. Whereas, in countries where ECEC is provided within a unitary ECEC system, services from 0 to CSE tend to share the same ground and are to be completely separate from primary schools.

If we would like to have high quality provision that is available to all families and that strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity, the institutional transition phases need to receive sufficient attention as often both policy makers as practitioners do not experience problem ownership on the transitional experiences of children and families. The creation of effective transition practices and professional collaboration in the transition phase has recently been a focus on the EU agenda. In the *Proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems* the importance of 'promoting further integration of early childhood education and care in the education continuum and in supporting collaboration of ECEC and primary school staff for sustaining smooth transition for children to primary school' (p. 16) has been stressed<sup>26</sup>. Along the same line, the *Council Conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school* highlighted that 'easing transitions by reinforcing structural, pedagogical, curricular and professional continuity' – within a view of developing educational institutions as learning communities based on a common vision shared by all stakeholders (including professionals, children and families) – is crucial for 'encouraging children's successful engagement in education at the different phases of the school system' (p.38)<sup>27</sup>. Currently an ECEC working group consisting out of Ministries from the different EU MS and international stakeholders are working on the implementation of the European Quality Framework. In the last decade, the issues of educational transitions gained a progressive relevance in the European debate both on the side of policies and on that of pedagogical research.

The *Council Conclusions on the ET 2020* highlighted particularly the importance to promoting access to high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) and compulsory school education (CSE) in

25 European Commission. (2014). Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission. Retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf)

26 European Commission (2018) Proposal for a Council Recommendation on high quality ECEC systems: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52018DC0271>

27 Council of European Union (2015) Council Conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52015XG1215%2803%29>

order to reduce the number of early school leavers and improve educational outcomes, especially for disadvantaged groups<sup>28</sup>. *The Council Conclusions on ECEC* further stressed that a close collaboration between the home and ECEC settings – as well as smooth transitions between the different phases of education – should be pursued as measures for providing a more equitable access to early childhood education and care, while raising the quality of provision<sup>29</sup>. By acknowledging that professionalization and training of the ECEC and CSE workforce is crucial in determining the quality of the educational environments within which children’s learning takes place, both documents invite Member States to make further efforts – together with the relevant stakeholders – in order to improve continuing professional development opportunities for staff working in pre- and primary school institutions, including early years practitioners, teachers and school leaders.

At international level, the issue of transition between ECEC and CSE started to gain policy attention since the release of Starting Strong reports and the UNESCO report<sup>30</sup>. By acknowledging that transitions between home, childcare and early education settings - as well as between these and compulsory school - mark a significant change in the life of young children, the Starting Strong I and II reports advocated for the development of a ‘*strong and equal partnership*’ linking, *along an educational continuum, services from childcare into early education and hence into compulsory schooling*<sup>31</sup>. Starting from the assumption that early childhood services have an important role to play in promoting children’s learning and socialisation, it was stressed that more efforts should be done in order to adopt a more unified educational approach by bringing together the diverse pedagogical traditions and methods – with specific reference both to early childhood and preschool institutions in split system and to ECEC and CSE institutions – and by valuing the contribution of early childhood practices for fostering children’s key dispositions and attitudes toward learning. In this perspective, the subsequent phases of education could take advantage of the knowledge and experience that young children have developed in the previous ones for designing learning pathways which value their previously acquired competence and – at the same time – the former could draw on the expertise developed by the latter in regards to children and families’ participation for elaborating more effective strategies to engage with parents and children over transition periods and beyond. For this to happen, the reports suggest, a greater focus should be placed on building bridges across administrative departments, staff training, regulation and curricula across ECEC and CSE systems. In a complementary way, the UNESCO report shed light on good practices that might facilitate the process of building such bridges during transitions by focusing specifically on the level of inter-institutional collaboration between preschool and primary school institutions. By taking into account the shortcomings of school readiness approaches, the key messages delivered by the latest Starting Strong report in order to support policy-makers striving to ensure *continuity in transitions*, clearly state that a greater focus should be placed on making schools ready for children, rather than children ready for school. In particular, the report advocates for adopting a child-centred perspective to transitions, which means adapting the cultures of both ECEC and school to the needs of the child<sup>32</sup>

In addition, the policy recommendations issued by the Starting Strong V report places a particular emphasis on the necessity of strengthening the inclusiveness of transition practices, by making specific reference to children from a disadvantaged background:

‘Although strong transitions are important for everyone, they are particularly important for disadvantaged children, who are at greater risk of developmental losses once they start primary school. Such children include those from low socio-economic backgrounds; with immigrant or indigenous backgrounds; living in poor areas or regions; and with special needs. These background factors often overlap, making the process of transitions for the child far more complex as it involves multiple hindering factors, suggesting bigger social, economic and

28 Council of European Union (2009) Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (“ET 2020”) [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/107622.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/107622.pdf)

29 Council of the European Union. (2011). Council conclusions on early childhood education and care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:175:0008:0010:EN:PDF>

30 Fabian, H. & Dunlop, A.-W. (2006) Outcomes of good practice in transition processes for children entering primary school. Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report ‘Strong foundations: early childhood care and education’ (2007/ED/EFA/MRT/PI/13). UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000147463>

31 OECD. (2006). Starting Strong II. Early childhood education and care. Paris: OECD.

32 OECD. (2017). Starting Strong V. Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education. Paris: OECD.

cultural differences between the child's home environment, and ECEC and primary school. This calls for systemic interventions involving not only ECEC and primary schools, but also community and family services, health and social services. Research has shown that children's – especially disadvantaged children's – early school adjustments, social skills and academic competence are enhanced when children and families participate in "comprehensive transition programmes". These are developed in collaboration with stakeholders and offer children and their families a number of opportunities to get familiar with school in formal and informal settings.' (p. 17).

