

# Council conclusions on early childhood education and care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow <sup>[1]</sup>

3090th Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting Brussels, 19 and 20 May 2011

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## AVAILABILITY

Conclusions document in pdf <sup>[2]</sup>

See also: The Irish ECEC advocacy organization Start Strong's excellent summary of recent developments <sup>[3]</sup> in the European Union.

## Excerpts from the Council conclusions document:

The Council of the European Union...

Recognizes that:

1. High quality early childhood education and care (ECEC)<sup>9</sup> provides a wide range of short- and long-term benefits for both individuals and society at large. Complementing the central role of the family, ECEC lays the essential foundations for language acquisition, successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and employability. If solid foundations are laid during a child's formative years, later learning becomes more effective and more likely to continue throughout life, increasing the equity of educational outcomes and lowering the costs for society in terms of lost talent and public spending on welfare, health and even justice.
2. High quality ECEC is beneficial for all children, but particularly for those with a socioeconomically disadvantaged, migrant or Roma background, or with special educational needs, including disabilities. By helping to close the achievement gap and supporting cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development, it can help to break the cycle of disadvantage and disengagement that often lead to early school leaving and to the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next.
3. In this respect, the provision of generalised equitable access to high quality ECEC can make a strong contribution to the success of the Europe 2020 strategy, and in particular to achieving two of the EU headline targets: reducing early school leaving to below 10%, and lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion.
4. Moreover, since ECEC provides an opportunity for the early detection of learning difficulties and early intervention, it can help to identify young children with special educational needs and, wherever possible, facilitate their integration into mainstream schools.
5. While the Member States have made good overall progress in recent years in improving the availability of ECEC, further efforts are needed in order to reach the objective of a 95% rate of participation by 2020 agreed under the "ET2020" strategic framework<sup>10</sup>, and in particular to ensure greater access for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
6. Providing high quality ECEC is just as important as ensuring its availability and affordability, and attention needs to be devoted to issues such as environment and infrastructure, staffing, the curriculum, governance and quality assurance.
7. A systemic and more integrated approach to ECEC services at local, regional and national level involving all the relevant stakeholders - including families - is required, together with close cross-sectoral collaboration between different policy sectors, such as education, culture, social affairs, employment, health and justice.
8. Increasing the proportion of men in ECEC is important in order to change attitudes and show that not only women can provide education and care. Having role models of both sexes is positive for children and can help to break gender-stereotyped perceptions. A workplace composed of both sexes contributes to widening children's experience and can also help to reduce gender segregation in the labour market.
9. ECEC tends to receive less attention than any other level of education and training despite evidence that investing efficiently in quality early years education is much more effective than intervening later and brings considerable returns throughout the lifecycle, particularly for the disadvantaged.
10. There has been comparatively little research on young children's education undertaken or gathered at EU level which can inform the development and implementation of ECEC policies in the Member States. There is a need to make existing research evidence more widely

accessible, and to supplement this with more extensive research into ECEC provision and its effects across the Member States, taking account of cultural diversity and recording examples of good practice and experience.

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Invites Member States to:

1. Analyse and evaluate existing ECEC services at local, regional and national level in terms of their availability, affordability and quality, as outlined in these conclusions.
2. Ensure that measures aimed at providing generalised equitable access to ECEC and at reinforcing its quality are in place.
3. Invest efficiently in ECEC as a long-term growth-enhancing measure.

**Related link:** Feb 2011 European Commission's communication on ECEC [4]

**Region:** Europe [5]

**Tags:** quality [6]

funding [7]

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