

Round table report: Towards a European quality framework ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full report in pdf ^[2]

Description:

Last November, Eurochild organised a policy roundtable in the Netherlands on the need for a European Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. The report of the event has just been published. It contains summaries of presentations and discussion, as well as the background paper which was written by John Bennett.

The policy roundtable brought together Government and civil society representatives from 16 European countries, as well as officials from the European Commission and the OECD. From Ireland, Start Strong took part in the event and chaired the proceedings, as the Co-Chair of Eurochild's thematic working group on early care and education.

Until the publication in 2011 of the European Commission's Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care, much of the EU focus was on quantity - the number of children in early care and education services. The 2011 EC Communication saw a very welcome shift in focus, with a new priority given to the quality of services, in addition to the call for universal access.

The aim of the Eurochild policy roundtable was to help take the EC Communication forwards to the next stage by supporting the development of a Europe-wide quality framework. Such a framework would allow the benchmarking of quality standards across European countries.

The process of developing a European Quality Framework has already begun, led by the European Commission and involving European Member States, including the Irish Government. But further support is needed from civil society organisations if the idea of such a framework is to become a reality and is to have real force.

Participants at the roundtable acknowledged the challenge of developing a single European framework, given the diversity across European countries, but argued that the challenge of diversity can be overcome. Participants argued that a European Quality Framework should "set targets that can push forward policy development rather than being the lowest common denominator".

Key recommendations arising from the roundtable, highlighted in the report, included:

A European Quality Framework should be based on principles that include equity, inclusion, and the active participation of all stakeholders. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child should be a cornerstone of the framework.

The Framework should involve clear assessment mechanisms, generating comparable cross-country data that allows the benchmarking of progress at country level.

The European Commission should play a central role in developing and monitoring the European Quality Framework, and should support Member States to achieve its objectives, e.g. through prioritising early care and education in the allocation of Structural Funds.

-reprinted from Start Strong Ireland

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: quality ^[4]

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