



Professionals and parents to Act Towards a Holistic or Whole Approach for early YearS education

Cooperation with Parents in Inclusive, Digital and Green Environments in ECEC: Policies and Practices in Four European Countries

Catarina Leitão, Maria Filomena Gaspar, Maria João Seabra-Santos, with (in alphabetical order) Elena Georgiana Bîzu, Maria Coman, Maria Floare Coman, Adina Curta, Alessandra Emanuelli, Rosita Farnesi, Sara Marchetti, Ana Matulyte, Chiara Palazzetti, Claudia Pleșa, Inga Puiša, Maria Seician, Gordana Smudja, Ljiljana Vasi



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Executive summary

This document intends to present a context analysis and scientific review of policies and practices aiming to promote cooperation between ECEC professionals and parents, including by enhancing professionals' competences/skills regarding inclusiveness, and green and digital environments. It includes a short review of the European context, and a description of current policies and recent or ongoing practices in Italy, Lithuania, Romania, and Serbia. The partner organisations in these countries followed a search protocol to identify relevant policies and practices, and a predefined set of categories to describe them. The identified policies and practices aim to inform the development of the Training Curriculum for ECEC professionals with the Pathways project.

1. Introduction

The Pathways project aims to foster a holistic or whole approach to children's wellbeing through high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services¹ that can create inclusive, digital and green environments. Pathways has the goal of enhancing and strengthening ECEC professionals'² strategic competences and skills on topics such as inclusiveness, green and digital environments, to be approached in relation to parents/guardians³. The current document intends to present a context analysis and scientific review of policies and practices aiming to promote cooperation between ECEC professionals and parents, including by enhancing professionals' competences/skills regarding inclusiveness, and green and digital environments. It includes a short review of the European context, and a description of current policies and recent or ongoing practices in Italy, Lithuania, Romania, and Serbia.

Good communication between parents and ECEC professionals can enhance the latter's knowledge about the children, and ensure the continuity of learning for children at home (OECD, 2020). The engagement of parents with ECEC services has been found to be positively associated with children's academic readiness and later achievement, and social-emotional development (Graue et al., 2004; Powell et al., 2010; Sylva et al., 2004; Voorhis et al., 2013). Parents from diverse backgrounds can become more engaged in ECEC, with positive outcomes for children (Barnett et al., 2020; Voorhis et al., 2013).

Terms such as cooperation and partnerships between ECEC professionals and parents, and parental engagement and involvement can be broad and include various types of practices or behaviours aiming to support children's learning and development. Partnerships can be described as parents and professionals working together to co-construct the child's learning environment, including

¹ Early childhood education and care (ECEC) services refer to regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age, including centre-provided and family day care, privately- and publicly-funded, pre-school and pre-primary provision.

² ECEC professionals refer to those involved in the education of children from birth to six years old, including: Early years teachers/preschool teachers/educators/ECEC core practitioners; ECEC managers/leaders/heads of the services; and auxiliary staff.

³ Parents refer to the primary carers and legal guardians of children (e.g., mothers, fathers, foster carers, adoptive parents, step-parents, grandparents, or other main carers).

engagement, involvement, cooperation, and participation (Epstein, 2018; Hayes et al., 2013; Norheim & Moser, 2020).

Following Pathways' aims and terminology, cooperation between ECEC professionals and parents will be the term mainly used throughout this document, understood here as ECEC professionals and parents working together to support children's learning, development and wellbeing. Cooperation between professionals and parents can include face-to-face or digital practices such as: exchanging information about the curriculum, activities, or children's development/progress (e.g., via scheduled meetings or daily contact); building parents' capacity to promote children's learning and wellbeing, including the provision of help regarding interactions with children, and implementation of learning activities in the home (e.g., sharing guidelines directly, organising workshops); participating in ECEC activities, and cooperating or co-constructing in their implementation (e.g., jointly creating individualised learning plans, engaging in the operation or management decisions of the service, organisation of a parents committee; Alieva, 2021; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019; OECD, 2019).

2. European context

The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021–2030) prioritises improving quality, equity, inclusion and success for all, enhancing competences and motivation in the education profession, and supporting the green and digital transitions in and through education and training (Council of the European Union, 2021).

2.1. Cooperation between ECEC professionals and parents

Cooperation between ECEC services and parents is recognised as a key dimension of pedagogical quality (Cohen & Anders, 2020). The proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for ECEC by the European Commission (2014) sets that *"ECEC services can complement the family and offer support as well as additional opportunities to parents and children"* (p. 8). This framework encourages involving parents in democratic decision-making processes associated with the management of ECEC services, and a curriculum requiring staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents (European Commission, 2014).

The European Union's Council Recommendation (2019) on High-Quality ECEC Systems asserts that *"Within a context that is set by the national, regional or local regulations, families should be involved in all aspects of education and care for their children"* (p. 6). This recommendation also highlights the relevance of providing time for staff for professional activities such as reflection, planning, engaging with parents and collaborating with other professionals and colleagues (Council of the European Union, 2019).

Despite widespread recognition of the importance of cooperation with parents, there are differences between and within education systems. The inclusion of parents in decision-making, and the definition of cooperation modalities depend on institutional settings set at national, regional, and

local levels (Alieva, 2021). For instance, some countries specify the frequency or format of meetings with parents to exchange information on their child's progress and development (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). Countries can influence the engagement of parents by integrating this focus into curriculum frameworks (OECD, 2019).

The Toolkit for Inclusive ECEC (European Commission, 2021a) refers to ECEC staff's competences for working with families as follows:

- ECEC assistants: *“develop effective relationships with families and the local community; treat all families with respect and according to their needs”*
- ECEC core practitioners: *“ensure the ECEC setting's approach to working with parents and the local community is implemented effectively; ensure parents are regularly involved in their children's ECEC activities; work with families to support their parenting skills”*
- ECEC leaders/head of services: *“support individual children and their families whose experiences make it more difficult for them to succeed in an ECEC setting; establish and monitor the ECEC setting's policy for working with families and the local community; establish and maintain good working relationships with families and the local community”* (p. 89).

Professionals working with families were found to consider learning from others, including peers, as one of the most effective ways of developing professionally (Slot et al., 2018). Early years or preschool teachers with less experience can benefit from peer-to-peer learning, particularly with more experienced professionals (Alieva, 2021). Regular team meetings to reflect on the work with children and families, including how to address their needs, and professionals' beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and skills can support continuous professional development (Slot & Nata, 2019).

According to Eurydice's key data on ECEC, most European countries emphasise the relevance of cooperation with parents, and encourage ECEC services to include measures in their planning (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). Practices have included: i. information sessions and parent-teacher meetings in the ECEC setting, which have been reported as the most frequent, constituting the basis of regular dialogue with parents/families; ii. parenting programmes offering formal classes on various topics (e.g., encouraging speech/language development, maintaining discipline, building self-esteem, and understanding challenging behaviour); iii. home learning guidance by providing information and ideas on how to help their children with curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning; and iv. home visits (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

The Toolkit for Inclusive ECEC (European Commission, 2021a) also describes the following practical measures to promote parental involvement in ECEC that have been found successful in different contexts:

- *“informing parents about the ECEC offer and welcoming them into the ECEC setting by creating an open environment;*
- *selecting activities that appeal to families and invite them to join in;*
- *developing inter-generational activities which include grandparents;*
- *developing parent to parent support activities;*

- *creating specialist roles to support outreach work with parents/community;*
- *allocating space to work with parents e.g. using one room for parents to play with their child(ren), meet other parents, talk to ECEC staff;*
- *providing feedback to parents on the specific needs of their child(ren);*
- *producing and sharing the ECEC setting's weekly schedule with parents to encourage greater involvement from parents and awareness of the setting's plans;*
- *increasing the opening hours and provide more flexibility to families, while respecting the children's developmental and health needs;*
- *involving parents in decision making and consultation on changes to provision;*
- *working with other agencies to develop inter-agency working which support families;*
- *when students are based in ECEC settings, ensuring inclusion is part of their training;*
- *ensuring all the information on the ECEC setting's provision and operational arrangements is on an IT platform as this supports parents who have less opportunity to visit the setting" (p. 90).*

Cooperation with parents has been recognised to improve when ECEC services and professionals approach parents as valued partners, instead of within a power hierarchy, in a two-way exchange of information, where parents can feel listened to (Alieva, 2021; European School Education Platform, 2023). Building a trusting relationship and open communication with parents, focusing on the children's learning or wellbeing, and promoting parents' involvement in decisions can maximise parents' engagement in services (Aguar & Pastori, 2019; Slot & Nata, 2019).

Cooperation between ECEC services and parents can be promoted through frequent communication, shared goals and aspirations; this can contribute to consistent approaches to socialisation, daily routines, child development and learning, and continuity of children's experience across environments (OECD, 2012).

Beyond the European context, it is relevant to acknowledge Joyce Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement of youth, family, and community in schools (Epstein et al., 2009)⁴. The six types of involvement within this framework are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. The framework provides representative practices and strategies, challenges and redefinitions, and expected results for each type of involvement. Janet Goodall presents a new framework allowing school communities to chart their progress from parental involvement in the school toward parental engagement with learning, documenting a shift from parents being perceived as helping teachers/supporting the school toward being active partners in children's learning (Goodall, 2022)⁵.

Cooperation between professionals and parents is addressed in implemented projects. Some examples⁶ involving various European countries include the following:

⁴ More information is available on the Organizing Engagement's website:

<https://organizingengagement.org/models/framework-of-six-types-of-involvement/>

⁵ More information is available here: <https://journal.uwp.co.uk/wje/article/id/463/>

⁶ The projects mentioned as examples here and throughout the document do not constitute an exhaustive list. They are meant to provide reference to actions that have been developed.

- High Quality Feedback – the key to successful cooperation between teachers and parents in preschools (from 01-10-2020 to 31-08-2023; Bulgaria, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania): It investigates recommendations for preschool teachers on how to provide high quality feedback on child’s development to parents (e.g. how ICT tools can be used to provide more attractive and interactive feedback to parents).
- Family Skills (from 01-09-2020 to 31-08-2023; Italy, Poland, Belgium, Romania): It aims to promote parenting support actions concerning educational needs through training and information activities aimed at parents, those who work or take care of children (birth-6 years), and operators involved in parenting education. The project’s outputs include guidelines to design the training, the implementation of a training path integrated with virtual reality, and a digital self-assessment tool focused on family skills⁷.
- Free Kids - Overparenting (from 01-09-2020 to 31-08-2023; Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Türkiye): It aims to support teachers and parents regarding parenting, raising independent individuals, and decreasing stress factors for parents. Parents are expected to learn mindfulness skills, and techniques related to parenting styles. Both parents and teachers are expected to learn ICT skills. The project includes a training program for teachers to support parents in parenting.
- Cross European Project to develop a model of support for transitions from pre-school to primary school with parental involvement (from 01-09-2020 to 31-08-2023; Belgium, Bulgaria, Ireland, United Kingdom): It seeks to improve transitions by enhancing awareness and skills of practitioners to enable parents to support children during this stage. It includes developing training resources and materials for professionals.
- START- Sustaining Transitions Across the Early Years (from 01-09-2016 to 30-04-2019; Belgium, Italy, Slovenia, United Kingdom): It aims at improving practices for supporting children and families facing the transitions between educational settings. It includes a Training Toolkit⁸ for Professionals addressing work with parents.
- Let’s Fathers, Come Preschools! (from 01-09-2016 to 31-08-2018; Netherlands, Sweden, Türkiye): It aims to get fathers more involved in their children’s education and to increase the visibility of father involvement in early childhood education. It provides a Father Involvement Handbook, which includes different activities that can be used to involve fathers⁹.
- Children’s rights, UP! (from 01-09-2020 to 28-02-2023; Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Spain): It aims to prevent child sexual abuse by promoting key competences and healthy behaviours in young children from all cultures. It includes tools for teachers¹⁰ (didactic guide and online course) and families (prevention and awareness-raising kits).

⁷ This resource can be found here: <https://www.familyskills.eu/en/>

⁸ This resource can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-content/2e30b701-640d-433d-b568-e5fb61cbb691/IO7_TRAINING_TOOLKIT.pdf

⁹ This resource can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-content/b161b3a3-44d4-4bb1-a7e6-3c2b2d17ca5d/Handbook_-_English_-_Full_Text.pdf

¹⁰ <https://childrensrighsup.eu/teachers/>

2.2. Inclusiveness

The Recommendation on Investing in Children – Breaking the cycle of disadvantage encourages creating inclusive learning environments by strengthening the link between education services and parents, and providing tailored support when needed (European Commission, 2013). As affirmed in the European Pillar of Social Rights, everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, and equal opportunities regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation (European Commission, 2017). The Council of the European Union highlights that education helps to ensure social inclusion by providing every child with a fair chance and equal opportunities to succeed (European Commission, 2018), and recommends that countries work towards ensuring that early childhood education and care are inclusive (Council of the European Union, 2019).

The Pathways project aims to promote inclusive environments in ECEC services for diverse children and families, including children with special or additional needs, low-income families, and families with ethnic minority status and/or migrant backgrounds. Effective cooperation between education professionals and parents can contribute to reducing social inequalities by promoting immediate and long-term education-related gains, such as health, wellbeing, and income (Alieva, 2021; European Commission, 2020a). Research reinforces the importance of supporting families to engage in dialogue toward developing a shared vision of inclusive environments, and policy- and decision-making processes (Aguiar & Pastori, 2019; van Kessel et al., 2019).

The project IECE - Inclusive Early Childhood Education (2015–2017) from the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, aimed to promote the main characteristics of quality IECE for all children, and focused on the need for close partnership with families. The IECE project's contribution included a Self-Reflection Tool, which enables practitioners to review their service's quality in terms of the inclusiveness of physical, social and other learning environments. This tool includes a section on a family-friendly environment¹¹.

2.2.1. Special or additional needs

The European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 (European Commission, 2021b) reinforces the need to include children with special or additional needs in mainstream education, complemented with individual support. ECEC professionals can become central figures in supporting parents by sharing information, tools, and strategies tailored to the specific circumstances of the families (Alieva, 2021). Assistive technologies and alternative communication channels also play a key role in supporting children and families.

Examples of multinational projects in Europe include the following.

- Be Inclusive - Towards inclusion of children with special needs and their parents in ECEC (from 28-02-2022 to 27-02-2025; Belgium, Iceland, Portugal): It aims to address the need to strengthen

¹¹ Information on this tool can be found here: <https://www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/inclusive-early-childhood-education-environment-self-reflection-tool>

the competencies of ECEC professionals to work with children with special needs and build a collaborative partnership with their parents. It will include a reflection toolkit, case study reports, and training resources on inclusive ECEC.

- Early Inclusion through Learning from Each Other (from 1.10.2015 to 30.3.2018; Austria, Hungary, Turkey, Macedonia, Luxembourg, United Kingdom, Germany): It aims to support preschool children who have or are at risk of having special/additional needs. It includes Inclusion Briefing Packs with information on special needs¹².
- Shape! - Sharing and adapting a complex sensitisation program in the Central-European region (from 01-12-2019 to 30-11-2021; Hungary, Romania, Slovakia): It aims to improve the integration of children with special needs in kindergartens and primary schools. It includes a Guide on organising parental consultation sessions¹³.
- Individualized learning process development in pre-primary and primary education institutions (from 01-09-2019 to 31-08-2022; Latvia, Poland, Romania, Türkiye): It aimed to support individualised learning process opportunities for children with special/additional needs. It included educators creating a program to support parents to develop their knowledge and understanding of children's learning and needs¹⁴.

2.2.2. Low-income, ethnic minority status and/or migrant backgrounds

Quality ECEC contributes to equity when it can reach children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (European Commission, 2022a). The overall positive personal relations with professionals at the local level, including in education settings, can constitute a protective buffer against the negative effects of public media's discrimination discourse on the wellbeing and sense of belongingness of parents of diverse contexts (Broekhuizen et al., 2019). To potentiate positive relations and cooperation, it is relevant that professionals move away from the perception that parents lack skills, experience, or interest in the educational aspects (Alieva, 2021).

Regarding families with ethnic minority status and/or migrant backgrounds, professionals' intercultural competences and practices can play a major role in establishing partnerships with parents. Professionals' reflections on their own beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and skills, and enactment were identified as key mechanisms for changing professionals' intercultural competences (Slot & Nata, 2019). Cultural mediation, translation services, and resources promoting multilingualism (including digital tools) have also been identified as important in supporting inclusiveness (Aguar & Pastori, 2019).

Examples of projects aiming to foster inclusive learning environments in various European countries are described next.

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-content/2c037f52-b150-42e4-870f-c4527641d55c/O1_Briefing_Packs_EN.pdf

¹³ More information on the project: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2019-1-HU01-KA201-060932>

¹⁴ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2019-1-LV01-KA201-060391>

- TOY for Inclusion (Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Netherlands, Turkey): It has created eight Play Hubs for young children, designed to help children develop skills and knowledge for formal education, and provide parenting support. A particular focus is put on Romani, migrant and socially disadvantaged children. Activities can occur in the Hubs and settings, such as preschools. Positive results include an improved transition experience for Romani children to schools (Toy for Inclusion, 2020). The project includes a guide and a toolkit on implementing the Hubs, and brochures explaining the activities included¹⁵.
- EquaP - Enhancing Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care through Participation (from 01-09-2014 to 31-08-2017 Belgium, Italy, Greece, Latvia, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden): It aims to improve teachers' competences, and collaboration between schools, teachers, families and communities, particularly in the context of socioeconomic and cultural diversity. It offers a toolbox to promote family participation approaches in ECEC¹⁶. Results of the project included increased competences of the ECEC staff regarding participation (EQuaP, 2022).
- ISOTIS - Inclusive Education and Social Support to Tackle Inequality in Society (from 01-01-2017 to 31-12-2019; Czech Republic, England, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal): It aimed to combat inequalities and increase inclusiveness, including in ECEC centres and primary schools. The project included the creation of the ISOTIS Virtual Learning Environment, an online platform for children, parents and education professionals that promotes the use of different languages and interculturalism at home and (pre)schools¹⁷.
- inEDU - Inclusive education model for children with migrant background in pre-schools (Czechia, Estonia, Italy, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Sweden, United Kingdom): It aims to facilitate access to mainstream, quality, inclusive preschool education through developing solutions and recommendations for policymakers, including on how to facilitate the participation of migrant families. It includes a handbook for policymakers with best practices and tools¹⁸.
- Supporting Social and Emotional Competences of Pre-School Children from Disadvantaged or Culturally Different Environments (from 31-08-2014 to 30-08-2016; Czechia, Slovakia, United Kingdom): It aimed to provide preschool staff with tools for effective support of children and parents from disadvantaged environments. It included training sessions for preschool teachers¹⁹, and a Good Practice Guide²⁰, which addresses cooperation with parents.
- Khetaun (Together) - with key steps towards the inclusion of Roma children in quality preschool programmes (from 01-09-2015 to 30-11-2017; Latvia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Slovakia): It

¹⁵ These resources can be found here: <https://www.reyn.eu/toy-for-inclusion-resources/>

¹⁶ This resource can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-content/02fa6d8e-0d28-43cc-9e51-f80c8e82a951/Toolbox_EN.pdf

¹⁷ More information is available here: <https://www.isotis.org/nl/vle/pages/>

¹⁸ The handbook can be found here: <https://isig.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Index.pdf>

¹⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-content/c5c11f93-8e6a-4560-b815-02f57c3713cb/Training_Program_UK_CZ_SK.pdf

²⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-content/fcdbaed4-6ee6-4759-8a32-61c06cb30477/good_practice_EN_4_copy.pdf

aimed to include more Romani children in ECEC programmes. It includes guidelines on the inclusion of Romani children and their families in early childhood programmes²¹.

It is also relevant to highlight the publication *Inclusion from the start: guidelines on inclusive early childhood care and education for Roma children* (UNESCO/Council of Europe, 2014), which includes a focus on initial education, professional development and support for early childhood practitioners, and addresses working with parents.

2.3. Digital environments

Using digital tools, such as online tools, messaging software, audio, and video can support families to be involved in children's education remotely or from a distance. The use of digital communication for parental involvement has been found to have positive learning and behavioural outcomes among students (Alieva, 2021).

The Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) sets out a vision of high-quality, inclusive and accessible digital education in Europe (European Commission, 2020b). The European Digital Education Hub aims to reinforce cooperation on digital education at the EU level, and contribute to the exchange of good practices, co-creation, and experimentation. The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu) describes what it means for educators to be digitally competent, and includes a focus on working with parents.

The Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training (European Commission, 2023) highlights that competent professionals at the ECEC level can support children and their families in developing skills for safe interaction with technology whilst ensuring equal opportunities. The Council Recommendation also refers to age- and developmentally-appropriate activities. In ECEC, these can include unplugged digital education activities (promoting the development of digital skills without using digital devices), and play-based learning of digital skills (e.g., pedagogical approaches where young children can explore, experiment, discover, and solve problems in imaginative and playful ways; European Commission, 2023).

Digital tools have been used in various projects in European countries to work with early years or preschool teachers and families, some of which were already referred to previously. Other examples include:

- Home, but not alone: Empowering preschool teachers and parents for digital education (from 01-06-2021 to 31-05-2023; Belgium, Czechia, Macedonia, Spain, Türkiye): It aims to support preschools teachers and parents by focusing on digital tools and teacher-parents relationships. The project includes: an interactive eBook of good practices in preschool education; and an online course (MOOC)²² for preschool teachers to develop their digital competencies and soft digital skills, addressing topics such as technology-supported pedagogies, online content creation tools, and game-based/gamified instructional designs.

²¹ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-content/4d707d33-415f-4ebd-860a-72b208f97722/Guidelines_for_Inclusion_of_Romani_Children.pdf

²² Modules available here: <https://hbna.anadolu.edu.tr/>

- Unlimited Online Space (from 01-06-2022 to 31-05-2023; Hungary, Romania, Slovakia): It aims to promote the correct use of ICT tools, support educators in informing parents about the possible dangers and harmful effects of the digital, online world, and support families in the right balance of Internet use at home.
- CARE2LEARN - Supporting the Transition from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary School (from 01-11-2021 to 30-04-2024; Croatia, Cyprus, Serbia): It aims to increase the capacity of parents of preschool children to support them in developing early key skills, and school readiness. The project includes developing a mobile application through which parents can assess, monitor, and promote children's school readiness by receiving information on the child's development, ways to support ECEC and transition to primary school, and similar.

2.4. Green environments

Early childhood environmental education can promote children's environmental literacy, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development (Ardoin & Bowers, 2020). The European Sustainability Competence Framework (GreenComp) set in the European Green Deal, and the Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability (European Commission, 2022b) highlight the need to develop the sustainability competences of all learners, and guidelines for educators.

Multinational projects focusing on green environments have been developed in Europe. Some examples are described next.

- Little Outdoor Learners (from 02-11-2021 to 01-12-2022; Greece, Lithuania, Romania): It aimed to raise the participation of teachers, preschoolers, parents, and community members in outdoor activities. The proposed activities included celebrating International Water, Forest, and Earth Days, open lessons with parents, outdoor games, workshops (e.g., music, arts, science, math), theatre shows, and visit to gardens/parks.
- (Pro)Food for Sustainable Development (from 01-10-2022 to 30-09-2024; Croatia, Slovenia): It aims to create a rich learning environment for children based on nature using research skills, involving professionals and parents. It will include a food lab (educational laboratory for food processing), a planted orchard, and a greenhouse, which will support achieving the goals of various curriculum areas through research. The project will also include a recipe book, and workshops for parents on food waste.
- Let's share our games! (from 01-09-2019 to 31-08-2022; Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania): It aimed to explore different types of games from seven European countries that preschools can practice. One of the goals included building a partnership between parents, teachers, and children through trust and mutual understanding. The project includes practical resources on games for the practitioners, including outdoor games²³.

²³ More information on these resources can be found here: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2019-1-BG01-KA201-062605>

3. Policies and practices in Italy, Lithuania, Romania, and Serbia

This section aims to provide an overview of current policies and recent or ongoing practices in Italy, Lithuania, Romania, and Serbia, focusing on ECEC services' cooperation with parents, and inclusive, digital, and/or green environments.

3.1. Contextual and structural indicators

Some contextual and structural indicators of ECEC in the four countries are addressed first to contribute to framing the identified policies and practices.

Italy

ECEC is organised in an integrated system, which is part of the education system and is not compulsory. This integrated system includes two levels:

- Educational services for childhood for children between birth and three years old (nurseries, playgrounds, centres for children and families, and home-based services) - Educators in public settings must hold a Bachelor's degree (ISCED 6) in Science of Education, specifically for working in this type of settings, and there are no top-level regulations concerning staff qualification in other types of settings. Families pay fees. The services are run directly by the municipalities or indirectly by private and public subjects, based on the criteria defined by regional and central regulations. The Ministry of Education and Merit has general responsibility for allocating financial resources to local authorities, providing educational guidelines, and promoting the integrated system at the local level.
- Childhood schools for children between three and six years old - Teachers in State settings must hold a Master's degree (ISCED 7) in Science of Primary Education. Families do not pay fees. The Ministry is responsible for this stage of ECEC, while the municipalities organise the offer at the local level and are responsible for providing and maintaining the premises. Public and private organisations can run ECEC settings for children of this age range. Educational guidelines are published at the central level (Eurydice, 2022a).

Lithuania

ECEC provision is divided into two parts:

- Non-obligatory pre-school education for children from birth until they begin attending pre-primary education programme at around six years. Educational guidelines apply to all settings, but preschool education providers are free to design their curriculum. In public kindergartens, families only need to pay for children's meals and other necessary supplies (e.g., office supplies). Private kindergartens can set their fee.
- Compulsory year of pre-primary education, which children must start in the calendar year they turn six. Parents can choose to send their children to pre-primary education a year earlier, but

not before they are five years old. There is a nationally approved programme for the compulsory last year of pre-primary education.

Pre-school and pre-primary educational institutions fall under the authority of local governments. State and municipal kindergartens, and private ECEC settings provide pre-school education. In addition to these services, general education schools can provide pre-primary education. Each family can choose the type of institution they wish: state, municipality, or private (Eurydice, 2022b).

Romania

ECEC is part of school education and includes:

- Ante-preschool education for children between birth and three years old, which it is not compulsory. It is delivered in crèches, kindergartens, and day-care centres, whether state-owned or private. This ECEC stage is under the shared responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Labour and Social Justice. The daycare centres offer care and protection services for children under 18 months, are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labor and Social Justice, and are overseen by town halls and child protection departments.
- Preschool education for children aged three-six years - organised in kindergartens, which may be autonomous or part of a school with other levels of education (state or private). The Ministry of Education is responsible for the ECEC of children aged three and over. The last year of preschool education is compulsory.

A curriculum covers the entire ECEC phase. Early education is free in public institutions (Eurydice, 2022c).

Serbia

ECEC comprises three levels determined by the age of children:

- Nursery for children from six months to three years old
- Kindergarten for children from three to five and a half years old
- Preschool preparatory programme for children over five years and a half to six years and a half. It is compulsory for all children and free if children participate in a daily 4-hour programme. It may be delivered in ECEC institutions or primary schools.

State or local authorities fund many public ECEC institutions, and private ECEC institutions are also available. ECEC institutions are responsible for providing children meals, care, preventive healthcare, and social protection services. ECEC falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, which provides educational guidelines for the entire ECEC phase (Eurydice, 2022d).

Indicators across countries

The percentage of pupils enrolled in ECEC in the four countries under focus in 2020 is shown in Table 1. Italy was the country with both the lowest percentage of pupils under three years of age in ECEC, and the highest percentage for pupils older than three years (it does not have compulsory ECEC).

Table 1. Pupils enrolled in ECEC as percentage of the population of the corresponding age in 2020

Context	Under 3 years old	From 3 years old to the start of the primary level
European Union - from 2020	18.48%	93.0%
Italy	5.22%	94.6%
Lithuania	29.83%	90.9%
Romania	8.12%	78.2%
Serbia	28.16%	69.1%

Source: Eurostat (2022b, 2022a)

Table 2 shows information on the starting age for compulsory education, staff requirements (having at least one staff member with a tertiary qualification in education sciences, and the need for continuing professional development as a professional duty or necessary for promotion), and curriculum or educational guidelines. There is one compulsory year previous to primary education in Lithuania, Romania, and Serbia, with the starting age varying between five and six years old. The mentioned staff requirements and curriculum/educational guidelines exist for children from the age of three in Italy, and for all ages in Lithuania. In Romania and Serbia, the continuing professional development and curriculum/educational guidelines cover the entire ECEC phase. In Romania, having at least one staff member with a tertiary qualification is not required; in Serbia, this is required to work with children aged three or more.

Table 2. Starting age, staff requirements, and curriculum or educational guidelines, 2021/2022

Context	Starting age		Staff		Curriculum or educational guidelines
	Compulsory ECEC	Compulsory primary education	At least one staff member with a tertiary qualification in education sciences	Continuing professional development - professional duty or necessary for promotion	
Italy	-	6 years	children aged 3 years or more	children aged 3 years or more	children aged 3 years or more
Lithuania	6 years	7 years	entire ECEC phase	entire ECEC phase	entire ECEC phase
Romania	5 years	6 years	-	entire ECEC phase	entire ECEC phase
Serbia	5 years and 6 months	6 years and 6 months	children aged 3 years or more	entire ECEC phase	entire ECEC phase

Source. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2022). Note: Entire ECEC phase=From birth to the start of compulsory education

Table 3 shows information on the support for parents in ECEC issued by top-level authorities²⁴ regarding home-learning guidance and parenting programmes. Home learning guidance refers to *“fostering the child’s learning at home, by providing information and ideas to families about how to help their children with curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning”* (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020, p. 30). Parenting programmes have similar aims as home learning guidance, but *“in the case of parenting programmes, parents attend formal courses covering a variety of topics related to children’s education and development”* (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020, p. 30). Lithuania has both types of support across the entire ECEC phase. Romania has parenting programmes across the entire ECEC phase.

Table 3. Support for parents in ECEC issued by top-level authorities, 2019/20

Country	Home-learning guidance	Parenting programmes
Italy	-	-
Lithuania	entire ECEC phase	entire ECEC phase
Romania	-	entire ECEC phase
Serbia	-	-

Source. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2020)

3.2. Search protocol and analysis

Pathways’ partners from Italy, Lithuania, Romania, and Serbia searched for policies and practices in their context with a focus on promoting cooperation between ECEC professionals and parents (with children from birth to compulsory school age), inclusiveness, and digital and green environments. The manual used by the partners to search and describe the policies and practices is in Appendix A. The inclusive criteria to select policies included:

- Focus: Cooperation between ECEC professionals/services and parents
- Context: Being followed/implemented at the time of this review at the national, regional, municipal, or kindergarten levels.

The inclusion criteria to select practices were:

- Focus: Cooperation between ECEC professionals/services and parents, and at least one of the other topics - inclusiveness, digital environments, green environments
- Potential: For a practice to be considered as having the potential to promote cooperation with parents, it should meet at least one of the following: There is one study or more indicating positive results; It is considered relevant among professionals, stakeholders, academics, or parents/families, or within the community; It has been implemented for a long time in ECEC settings; It addresses a particular challenge in the context of its implementation regarding cooperation with parents, inclusiveness, and/or digital and green environments

²⁴ Bottom up, NGO and pro-profit educational activities that are not initiated/supported from top-level were not considered (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020).

- Context: Ongoing, implemented in your country in the last five years (since the start of 2018), or in preparation.

Each policy's and practice's information was entered following predefined sets of boxes. Pathways' partners could write "not applicable" or "no information" when needed.

The information related to policies included: name; focus/theme; level of implementation; and guidelines for promoting cooperation with parents, inclusiveness, digital environments and green environments.

The information related to practices included: name; level of implementation; period of implementation; type (integrated into the ECEC setting functioning, part of a project, or other); target population (children, parents/caregivers, and/or professionals); children's age; main target group (all, or specific groups based on participants' background or characteristics); where; when; staff delivering the practice; goals; activities for children, parents, and/or professionals; forms of cooperation with parents; focus on inclusiveness, digital environments, and green environments; findings; references/links. In the next section, the dimensions target population, children's age, and main target group appear together in the same box of each table.

3.3. Identified policies and practices

3.3.1. Policies

In Italy, six policies were identified, as shown in Table 4. Three policies are implemented at the kindergarten level, and three at the national level. The policies involve cooperation with parents via meetings, participation in different project phases, workshops, and parents' committee, and recognise the importance of dialogue and relationship between ECEC professionals and parents. The use of digital environments involves sharing photos and videos, and using a digital book. Regarding green environments, one of the policies refers to children creating a garden with the support of parents and professionals.

Table 4. Identified policies in Italy

Name	Educational garden ²⁵	Educating together: school and family ²⁶	Digital book ²⁷	Child and family welcome to kindergarten/ environment ²⁸	National guidelines for educational services for children ²⁹	National guidelines for the nursery school curriculum and the first cycle of education ³⁰
Focus	ECEC workforce	ECEC workforce	ECEC workforce	Quality. ECEC functioning	Quality. ECEC workforce	Curriculum
Implementation level	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	National	National	National
Cooperation with parents	Monthly meetings with parents. Parents' participation in all steps of creating a garden	Meetings with parents. Workshops with parents during holidays	Parents' access to information on reading activities	Welcoming the child and parents to the service	Dialogue with families. Parents recognised as active and competent interlocutors, and educators as supporting parents	Importance of the educator-parent relationship, and educational alliance
Inclusiveness	Photos, videos, materials, activities representing the garden creation, and positive effects	Parents' committee that can make proposals	-	-	-	Plurality of family contexts
Digital environments	Photos, videos	Photos, videos	Digital book	-	-	-
Green environments	Creation of a garden by children, parents and professionals	-	-	-	-	-

In Lithuania, six policies were identified, as shown in Table 5. Three policies are implemented at a national level, and three at a kindergarten level. The focus on cooperation with parents involves asserting parents' rights to receive information and participate (as in the Education Law).

²⁵ Orto didattico

²⁶ Educare insieme: scuola e famiglia

²⁷ Libro digitale

²⁸ Accoglienza del bambino e della famiglia al nido/ambientamento

²⁹ Orientamenti nazionali per i servizi educativi per l'infanzia

³⁰ Indicazioni Nazionali per il curriculum della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione

Inclusiveness is promoted regarding access to education for all, including socially vulnerable groups, and equal rights and prohibition of discrimination (as in the Equal Opportunities law). Digital environments are addressed in regulations on teacher training (requirements in terms of qualifications, competencies, and training provision), which assert computer and media literacy as key competences. Reference to green environments was not identified within the selected policies.

Table 5. Identified policies in Lithuania

Name	Education Law	Learning Agreement ³¹	Kindergarten internal control policy	Kindergarten personal data protection policy	Equal opportunities law	Regulations on teacher training
Focus	Access to education. ECEC workforce. Rights and responsibilities	Rights and responsibilities	Risk mitigation. Rights and responsibilities	Protection of data of ECEC professionals	Rights and anti-discrimination	Workforce training
Implementation level	National	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	National	National
Cooperation with parents	Parents' rights (receive information, participate) and responsibilities (cooperate in solving children's educational issues). Teachers' responsibilities (inform parents)	Document signed by school/kindergarten and parents, describing rights and responsibilities of each party (echoing the Education Law)	Document defining guidelines of how the kindergarten is run, and employees' rights and responsibilities (echoing the Education Law)	-	-	-
Inclusiveness	Access to education for socially vulnerable groups. Protection against violence	-	-	-	Equal rights as in the Constitution. Prohibition of discrimination	-
Digital environments	Focus on cybersecurity. Condemns online bullying	-	-	-	-	Computer and media literacy as key competences

³¹ Mokymosi sutartis

In Romania, the five policies shown in Table 6 were identified. Four are implemented at the national level, and one at the kindergarten level. These policies assert cooperation with parents (such as the Curriculum for ECEC), their participation in kindergarten’s decisions (such as the Education Law), and the creation of Councils of Parents. The promotion of inclusion focuses on supporting families at risk of social exclusion (as in the Strategy for Preventing and Combating Discrimination), children from disadvantaged contexts (as in the policy “Every child in kindergarten”), and children with special needs (as in the Education Law). Digital tools can be used in diverse activities, such as reading stories, and meetings. Regarding green environments, activities can include children and parents in diverse ecological activities following the curriculum, and involve other stakeholders.

Table 6. Identified policies in Romania

Name	Curriculum for early childhood education ³²	Every child in kindergarten ³³	National Education Law nr.1/2011 ³⁴	National strategy for preventing and combating discrimination "Equality, inclusion, diversity" ³⁵	Regulation of the organisation and operation of the Kindergarten with Extended Program "Scufița Roșie" ³⁶
Focus	Curriculum	Access to kindergarten	ECEC workforce. Quality. Access to kindergarten	Quality	ECEC workforce. Quality. Access to kindergarten
Implementati on level	National	National	National	National	Kindergarten
Cooperation with parents	Curriculum includes cooperation with parents, and partnership with families and communities	Children receiving social assistance have social vouchers to attend kindergarten	Parents’ involvement in decision-making. Council of Parents with representatives from each class	Reduction of discrimination in Romanian society, and promotion of equal rights/opportunities for all via coherent, integrated and inter-institutional measures	Regulations for staff, preschoolers, and parents (rights and duties; establishment of Parents' Committee)
Inclusiveness	Promotion of democratic values in a framework of socio-cultural	Promotion of kindergarten attendance by children from	Support for students with special needs (procedures for their detection;	Strategic area of intervention: education - safe, inclusive, and diverse	Contract between the family of the child with disabilities and

³² Curriculum pentru educație timpurie

³³ Fiecare copil în grădiniță

³⁴ Legea Educației Naționale nr.1/2011

³⁵ Strategia Națională pentru prevenirea și combaterea discriminării „Egalitate, incluziune, diversitate”

³⁶ Regulamentul de organizare și funcționare a Grădiniței cu Program Prelungit “Scufița Roșie”

Name	Curriculum for early childhood education ³²	Every child in kindergarten ³³	National Education Law nr.1/2011 ³⁴	National strategy for preventing and combating discrimination "Equality, inclusion, diversity" ³⁵	Regulation of the organisation and operation of the Kindergarten with Extended Program "Scufița Roșie" ³⁶
	diversity. Exchange of information between professionals and parents	disadvantaged families	insurance framework for teaching staff with adequate training and specific therapies)	educational environment	the kindergarten, ensuring access to services/interventions
Digital environments	Digital tools in kindergarten activities (e.g., parents reading stories)	Online communication with local authorities on children's presence in the kindergarten	During an emergency/alert state or restrictions, teaching-learning-evaluation activities can be done online	Publicly accessible database	Possible online meetings on various topics
Green environments	Parents' participation in setting up an outdoor playground with recyclable materials, and ecological activities (e.g., planting)	Beneficiaries get a card loaded with specific amounts monthly (reducing the use of materials)	-	-	Partnerships with organisations (e.g., Environmental Protection Agency)

In Serbia, the six identified policies are shown in Table 7. All are implemented at the national level (and two also at the kindergarten level). Cooperation with parents includes a focus on providing information and supporting parents regarding their family's rights and access to services. The Law on Preschool Education also asserts parents' involvement in preschool, including in the transition to primary school plan. There is the role of Pedagogical Assistant, who can conduct home visits to support families. Regarding inclusiveness, the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma focuses on building the capacity of public services and local self-governments. The Rulebook on Additional Support supports children with difficulties by informing and involving parents, and providing the necessary equipment according to their needs. A Network of Practitioners for Supporting Preschool Education develops work on inclusive education, among other issues. Resources to support culturally and linguistically diverse families, and children with additional/special needs are acknowledged in the Law on Preschool Education, and Law on Foundations of Education. In terms of digital environments, there is a portal for pedagogues and psychologists (learning community), a platform

for distance learning, a Unified Information System of Education, and a Unique Educational Number. Reference to green environments was not identified within the selected policies.

Table 7. Identified policies in Serbia

Name	The Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma for the 2016-2025 Period ³⁷	Rulebook on additional support for the educational, health and social needs of the child, learner and adult	Rulebook on the Pedagogical and Andragogical Assistant	Network of Practitioners for Supporting Preschool Education ³⁸	Law on Preschool Education ³⁹	Law on Foundations of Education
Focus	Access to education. Quality of life/Rights	ECEC workforce. Quality. Access to kindergarten	ECEC workforce, quality, equity, pedagogy	Curriculum. Quality	ECC workforce. Curriculum. Pedagogy. Quality. Access	ECC workforce. Curriculum. Pedagogy. Quality. Access
Implementation level	National	National	National	National	National. Kindergarten	National. Kindergarten
Cooperation with parents	Support for parents to exercise the right to education, health and social security, adequate housing and work	Parents' involvement in their children's needs assessment. Information for parents on supports available	Pedagogical assistant role includes home visits, informing parents on their and child rights, and enabling families' access to supports (e.g., preschool)	Assistance to education system's employees regarding the prevention of child dropout, support of inclusive education, protection from violence, and education of national minorities	Definition of parents' involvement in preschool. Parents can choose the kindergarten within the mandatory program, and participate in the transition to primary school plan	-
Inclusiveness	Strategy's primary beneficiaries are the citizens of Roma ethnicity. But, it creates conditions for broader	Additional support for promoting development, and social and educational inclusion of children with difficulties	Affirmative measures and types of support for children and families with difficulties. Pedagogical assistants bridge families living	Supports for children from vulnerable groups or victims of violence/abuse in the process of inclusion in preschool	Culture and language of minority groups supported through educational activities, and pedagogical assistants. Remote	Education for all, with a focus on children with difficulties, different cultures, and gifted children. Mandatory preschool.

³⁷ Strategija za inkluziju Roma (2020-2025)

³⁸ Mreža praktičara za podršku Predškolskom obrazovanju

³⁹ Zakon o predškolskom vaspitanju i obrazovanju

Name	The Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma for the 2016-2025 Period ³⁷	Rulebook on additional support for the educational, health and social needs of the child, learner and adult	Rulebook on the Pedagogical and Andragogical Assistant	Network of Practitioners for Supporting Preschool Education ³⁸	Law on Preschool Education ³⁹	Law on Foundations of Education
	inclusion policies		in extreme poverty with services		kindergarten. Physical, curriculum, and pedagogical adaptations to children with needs	Culture and language-related curricula for national minorities. Serbian language program for refugee and migrant children, and in readmission. Sign language
Digital environments	-	-	-	Portal "Learning Community of Pedagogues and Psychologists" on the Institute for the Improvement of Education's website	-	National Educational Platform for distance learning. Unified Information System of Education. Unique Educational Number

3.3.2. Practices

In Italy, four practices were identified, which are shown in Table 8. Three were implemented at the kindergarten level, and one at the national level. The practices included: the creation of an educational garden; activities for children and parents related to holidays (crafts and arts); a digital book platform (the only one for children above three years old among the practices selected); and welcoming families to the ECEC centre. The practices' goals focus on children's development, and the relationship between the ECEC service and family. Regarding inclusiveness, practices were available to all children enrolled in the ECEC services. In terms of digital environments, there was the digital book platform that allows reading, and two activities that involved sharing photos and videos online. Considering green environments, some activities were conducted outdoors, including the creation of an educational garden.

Table 8. Identified practices in Italy

Name	Educational garden ⁴⁰	Educating together: school and family ⁴¹	Digital book ⁴²	Child and family welcome to kindergarten/environment ⁴³
Implementation level	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	National
Period	Ongoing	Finished and in preparation	In preparation	Finished
Type	With a stakeholder	Integrated into the ECEC setting functioning	Part of a projet	Part of a projet
Target population	Children (0-3). Parents. Professionals	Children (0-3). Parents. Professionals	Children (3-6). Parents. Professionals	Children (0-3). Parents. Professionals
Where	External to the ECEC setting	ECEC setting	ECEC setting	ECEC setting
When	Within regular working hours	Holidays	Within regular working hours	Within regular working hours
Staff delivering the practice	Early Years or Preschool teachers	Early Years or Preschool teachers	Early Years or Preschool teachers	Early Years or Preschool teachers
Goal(s)	Children's development and healthy lifestyles	Family-kindergarten relationship	Children's development	Family/children-kindergarten relationship
Activities for children	Educational garden - taking care of it, and experimenting on a daily basis	Arts and crafts, experimentation (e.g. use of paints and colors)	Creation of stories using the digital book	Knowledge and exploration of the environment. Knowledge of peers.
Activities for parents	Educational garden - a day in the setting	Arts and crafts - a day in the setting (e.g., fingerprints of parents and children)	Digital book -Access to reading activities	Knowledge and exploration of the environment
Activities for professionals	Observation and care	Observation and care	Digital book - Read books and share readings with parents	Observation. Building a trust relationship with parents and particularly with children
Forms of cooperation with parents	Building parents' capacity. Cooperation or co-construction of the implementation	Building parents' capacity. Cooperation or co-construction of the implementation	Informing parents. Cooperation or co-construction of the implementation	Informing parents. Building parents' capacity. Cooperation or co-construction of the implementation. Advocacy
Inclusiveness	Activities available to all	Activities available to all	Activities available to all	Activities available to all

⁴⁰ Orto didattico

⁴¹ Educare insieme: scuola e famiglia

⁴² Libro digitale

⁴³ Accoglienza del bambino e della famiglia al nido/ambientamento

Name	Educational garden ⁴⁰	Educating together: school and family ⁴¹	Digital book ⁴²	Child and family welcome to kindergarten/environment ⁴³
Digital environments	Sharing photos and videos online	Sharing photos and videos online	Digital book/library	-
Green environments	Nature as a context for development and learning through play	-	No use of paper	The setting can be done outside
Findings	Beneficial effects of being outdoors on child's development and care for the environment	Participation and enthusiasm of the families as perceived by ECEC professionals	Positive effects of reading activities for children	The practice allows the child to build a trust relationship with the educator
References/Links	https://re.istruzioneer.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2022/05/Scuola-allaperto-buone-pratiche-di-outdoor-education-1-LORETI.pdf	https://rivistedigitali.erickson.it/integrazione-scolastica-it/visualizza-pdf/1792	https://www.miur.gov.it/scuola-digitale	https://educazione.comune.fi.it/system/files/2019-04/ambientamento%281%29.pdf

In Lithuania, the four practices shown in Table 9 were identified, which include two at the national level and two at the kindergarten level. All were aimed at children or parents of children aged three or older. The practices included: workshops where parents present their jobs; demonstrations and activities organised with the Lithuanian Armed forces (organised by parents); garden activities (e.g., beetle hotel); and a Handbook for Teachers and Parents on how to promote multicultural education. The practices' goals focus on promoting children's learning and development; the handbook focuses on promoting multilingual and multicultural education in kindergartens. The promotion of inclusiveness comprised the use of various languages. Digital environments comprised having presentations and the handbook online. The focus on green environments involved outdoor activities, and learning about nature.

Table 9. Identified practices in Lithuania

Name	Let's try the profession out! ⁴⁴	Kindergarten + elementary school (Forest school) ⁴⁵	Kindergarten "Vieversys", Vilnius	Multicultural kindergartens. A Handbook for Teachers and Parents. Good practice Guide
Implementation level	National	Kindergarten	Kindergarten	National
Period	Finished	Finished	Ongoing	Finished

⁴⁴ Išbandykime profesiją!

⁴⁵ "Miško mokykla"

Name	Let's try the profession out! ⁴⁴	Kindergarten + elementary school (Forest school) ⁴⁵	Kindergarten "Vieversys", Vilnius	Multicultural kindergartens. A Handbook for Teachers and Parents. Good practice Guide
Type	Part of a project	Integrated into ECEC setting functioning	Integrated into ECEC setting functioning	Part of a project
Target population	Children (3-5). Parents. Professionals	Children (3-6)	Children (3-5)	Parents (of children 3-5). Professionals
Where	ECEC setting and external	ECEC setting	ECEC setting	External to the ECEC setting
When	Within regular working hours	Within regular working hours	Within regular working hours	Within or outside regular working hours
Staff delivering the practice	Early years or Preschool teachers. Parents	Lithuanian armed forces	Early years or Preschool teachers. Parents	Publication available digitally
Goal(s)	Children's learning professions	Children's learning about the armed forces	Children's development	Multilingual and multicultural education in kindergartens
Activities for children	Listening to presentations. Workshops on parents' professions	Relay races (crawl under a net, shoot at a target, etc.)	Exploration of nature	-
Activities for parents	Presentation of their professions (e.g., showing carpenters' tools, and building a nesting box with children)	Organisation of Armed Forces' visit. Activities like hikes, cooking	Construction of toys for children (cars, boats)	Tips for parents: activities for parents and children; how children in multinational families can learn Lithuanian
Activities for professionals	Participating in the workshops	-	-	Tips for professionals: ways to engage with children in multicultural environments
Forms of cooperation with parents	Cooperation or co-construction of the implementation	Cooperation or co-construction of the implementation	Cooperation or co-construction of the implementation	Informing parents
Inclusiveness	-	Staff speaks three languages	-	Available in four languages (Lithuanian, English, Russian and Polish)
Digital environments	Some presentations online	-	-	Available online
Green environments	-	Outdoor activities. Learning about nature	Outdoor activities (e.g., Beetle Hotel - children can observe and learn about insects)	-

Name	Let's try the profession out! ⁴⁴	Kindergarten + elementary school (Forest school) ⁴⁵	Kindergarten "Vieversys", Vilnius	Multicultural kindergartens. A Handbook for Teachers and Parents. Good practice Guide
Findings	Children have become more confident and communicative by meeting people from different professions (as perceived by ECEC professionals)	Children learned about the importance of cooperation, patriotism, national defence, and the requirements of military work (as perceived by ECEC professionals)	-	-
References/ Links	https://www.svietimonaujienos.lt/bendra-darbiavimas-su-tevais-igyvendinant-projekta-ismeginkime-profesija/	https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064845935157/search/?q=t%C4%97vai https://miskodarzelis.lt/#!mokomes-lauke-lt	https://www.vieversys.lt/2022/09/	https://www.etwinnings.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/LT-leidinys-INTERNETUI_A4.pdf

In Romania, five practices were identified, as shown in Table 10. Three were implemented at the national level, and two at the kindergarten level. The practices included: home learning and was carried out during covid; a garden of relaxation with outdoor activities; the Eco-kindergarten; the educational project "Inclusive Education in Kindergarten", focused on children with special needs, and promoting diversity among all children and parent; and project "The bag with two books" with reading activities aimed at children and parents in low-income areas (the only for children aged up to three years old). The practices' goals included supporting children's development, and diversity. The promotion of inclusiveness comprised supporting children with special needs, and children in more poor or vulnerable contexts. Digital environments comprised using the classroom platform and other message systems, and sharing/accessing resources online. The focus on green environments involved outdoor activities, and the use of recycled materials.

Table 10. Identified practices in Romania

Name	Kindergarten from home ⁴⁶	National program "Garden of relaxation, peace and learning" ⁴⁷	National Educational Program EcoKindergarten ⁴⁸	Educational project "Inclusive Education in Kindergarten" ⁴⁹	National project "The bag with two books" ⁵⁰
Implementation level	Kindergarten	National	National. Kindergarten	Kindergarten	National
Period	Finished	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
Type	Integrated into the ECEC setting functioning	Part of a project	Part of a project	Part of a project	Part of a project
Target population	Children (3-6). Parents. Professionals	Children (3-6). Professionals	Children (3-6). Professionals	Children with special needs (3-6). Parents. Professionals	Children from underprivileged communities (0-3). Parents. Professionals
Where	ECEC setting	ECEC setting	ECEC setting	ECEC setting	External to the ECEC setting
When	Within regular working hours	Within regular working hours	Within regular working hours	Within regular working hours	Outside regular working hours
Staff delivering the practice	Early Years or Preschool teachers	Early Years or Preschool teachers	Early Years or Preschool teachers	Early Years or Preschool teachers. School counsellor, Psychologist, Speech therapist	Early Years or Preschool teachers. Social workers, medical assistants, librarians, town hall employees, priests
Goal(s)	Children's development	Children's development	Children's development and healthy lifestyles	Children's positive response to diversity. Development of children with special needs	Children's development
Activities for children	Activities for home according to the National Curriculum. Online meetings	Activities in the garden following the Curriculum (garden's zones: quiet, learning, surprise wall, learning and practising relaxation)	Nature care (e.g., planting, observing), experiments, practical works, orientation, relaxation, exhibitions	Activities on diversity/inclusiveness: We learn to give; We play together; We give help to those who need it; A friend in need is a friend indeed	Reading activities carried out by volunteers. Receiving books (bag with two books selected by ECEC specialists)

⁴⁶ Grădinița de acasă

⁴⁷ Programul Național "Grădina de relaxare, de liniște și învățare"

⁴⁸ Programul educațional național Ecogrădinița

⁴⁹ Proiectul educațional "Educația Incluzivă în grădiniță"

⁵⁰ Proiectul Național "Punguța cu două cărți"

Name	Kindergarten from home ⁴⁶	National program "Garden of relaxation, peace and learning" ⁴⁷	National Educational Program EcoKindergarten ⁴⁸	Educational project "Inclusive Education in Kindergarten" ⁴⁹	National project "The bag with two books" ⁵⁰
Activities for parents	Supporting children doing the activities using methods indicated by educators. Posting the assignments on the classroom platform for feedback. Online meetings	Providing materials. Participating in activities (e.g., planting, reading, making toys from natural materials, etc.)	Providing materials, making costumes for the Eco Costume Parade. Participation in activities	Participation in support actions for disadvantaged children (e.g., donation of materials to foster care services)	Presence in reading activities. Informed about the importance of reading from an early age, and how to read books to their children
Activities for professionals	Adaption of the learning content to online teaching. Feedback on the activities completed by the children	Suggestions on the arrangement, and equipment. Informing parents on the efficiency of the use of space in learning	Suggestions on how to develop the activities. Setting up with materials. Making costumes. Informing parents about the educational role of ecological activities	Involving parents in support activities for disadvantaged children	Attending literacy-focused training sessions. Organising reading sessions
Forms of cooperation with parents	Building parents' capacity. Cooperation or co-construction of the implementation	Informing parents. Building parents' capacity. Cooperation or co-construction of the implementation	Informing parents. Building parents' capacity. Cooperation or co-construction of the implementation	Informing parents. Building parents' capacity. Cooperation or co-construction of the implementation	Informing parents. Building parents' capacity. Cooperation or co-construction of the implementation
Inclusiveness	Children with special needs receive additional support	Activities available to all	Children with special needs receive additional support	Children with special needs receive additional support	Implemented in the poorest rural and urban communities
Digital environments	Classroom platform, WhatsApp group, Google Meet	Sharing photos online	Sharing photos online	Sharing photos online	Online training sessions for the "reading ambassadors" in the project
Green environments	Some outdoor activities. Natural or recyclable materials	Outdoor activities. Natural or recyclable materials	Caring about nature. Natural or recyclable materials.	Activities may have an ecological focus	Reading sessions can take place outside

Name	Kindergarten from home ⁴⁶	National program "Garden of relaxation, peace and learning" ⁴⁷	National Educational Program EcoKindergarten ⁴⁸	Educational project "Inclusive Education in Kindergarten" ⁴⁹	National project "The bag with two books" ⁵⁰
Findings	Children studied the curriculum contents, and socialised with teachers and colleagues	Children enjoy the activities, and learned to use and keep materials from nature (as perceived by ECEC professionals)	Children enjoy the activities and show interest (as perceived by ECEC professionals)	Children empathise with those in difficulty, and engage in helping actions (as perceived by ECEC professionals)	So far, 47.300 preschool bags have been given to children and their families
References/ Links	https://www.facebook.com/groups/262198981486180/ https://www.gradinitalonline.ro/	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064875032369 https://covasnamedia.ro/stireazilei/gradina-de-relaxare-liniste-si-invatare---un-concept-care-scoate-prescolarii-din-salile-de-clasa	https://cdn.edu.pedu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/SCRI-SOARE-METODICA-2022-2023.pdf - page 15 https://green-report.ro/proiecte-ong-ecologie-scoli/	https://www.isj.sv.edu.ro/images/Docs/Discipline/invatamnat_p_reprimar/2017/biblioteca/Educatie-incluziva-in-gradinuta.pdf	https://www.ovid.ro/ce-facem/program-e-pentru-copii/punguta-cu-doua-carti/

In Serbia, the four practices identified are shown in Table 11. All were implemented at the national level. The practices included: the Teddy Bear Reading Programs involving parents in reading activities with their children; the Strong from the Start program providing parenting support (one particularly aimed at Roma communities, and another at all parents); and ECD+ also providing parenting support. The practices' goals included promoting parents' competencies and engagement, children's development, and social justice education. The promotion of inclusiveness comprised having materials adapted to families' needs (e.g., illustrated stories for parents that don't read) and in different languages, and materials promoting Roma culture. The practices also focus on communities in deprived or socially excluded contexts, and families whose children do not attend kindergarten (e.g., mobile service). Digital environments comprised sharing/accessing resources online. Green environments were addressed through the use of recycled materials, and raising awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyles and play in nature.

Table 11. Identified practices in Serbia

Name	Teddy Bear Reading Programs ⁵¹	Strong from the start for Roma parents ⁵²	Strong from the start - Let's give them wings - Program for all Parents ⁵³	ECD+
Implementation level	National. Regional. Municipal. Kindergarten	National	National	National
Period	Ongoing	Finished	Ongoing	Ongoing
Type	Integrated into ECEC setting functioning	Part of a project	State preschools	Part of project
Target population	Children (0-5 and older from foster care/shelters). Parents. Professionals	Children (0-7), Parents from Roma communities. Professionals	Parents with children aged 2-6). Professionals	Parents with children aged 0-7 years old. Professionals
Where	ECEC setting and external	External to the ECEC setting	ECEC setting and remote learning	ECEC setting
When	Within and outside regular working hours	Within regular working hours	Within and outside regular working hours	Within and outside regular working hours
Staff delivering the practice	Patronage staff, social/child protection officers. Trained practitioners, and volunteers (Roma communities)	Practitioners from Roma organisations	Early Years or Preschool teachers	Educators, NGOs, and Professional support teams in ECEC settings (psychologists, pedagogues)
Goal(s)	Parents' competencies and engagement	Children's development. Parent's competencies and engagement	Children's development. Parents' competencies and engagement	Parents' competencies and engagement. Social justice education
Activities for children	Being read or talked to according to their age. Creation of reading materials in Roma communities	Activities on topics such as health, safety and play. Family activities materials: Book about us, Games for the whole family	Family activities materials: Book about us, Family card games, Family games ideas, Diary of family games	-
Activities for parents	Training on involving children in reading. Support to develop nurturing care and responsive interaction. Training of responsive skills via roleplay in group	Support to recognise children's needs, promote their development, use positive discipline; and integrate this knowledge into daily life. Family activities materials (as before)	Family activities materials (as before). Brochures. Workshops: 8 on child wellbeing and resilience, positive discipline, communication skills, and gender roles' impact; 8 on healthy lifestyles,	Workshops on the development of relationships, attachment, parenting styles. Parenting support and education for social justice via home visits

⁵¹ Medini Čitalački Programi

⁵² Počni od početka Dam Len Phaka

⁵³ Program za roditelje/Snažni od početka 2-Dajmo im krila

Name	Teddy Bear Reading Programs ⁵¹	Strong from the start for Roma parents ⁵²	Strong from the start - Let's give them wings - Program for all Parents ⁵³	ECD+
			safety, socio-emotional skills, speech, language, logical and critical thinking, and creativity	
Activities for professionals	Map for Bear reader, support guidelines, and educational videos that can be shown to parents. Moderation of activities with parents	Training. Supervisory support. Facilitators conduct home visits and workshops	Training in vivo and online, and guides on workshops with parents	Training on workshops for parents, and using persona dolls to address difficult topics with children. Home visits by preschool teachers
Forms of cooperation with parents	Building parents' capacity	Informing parents. Building parents' capacity	Informing parents. Building parents' capacity	Informing parents. Building parents' capacity
Inclusiveness	Illustrated stories for parents that don't read. Positive findings for families with difficulties or considered outside the mainstream	Focus on communities in deprived or socially excluded contexts. Materials on Roma culture (stories, customs). Materials in diverse languages	Involvement of parents from both children attending and not attending kindergarten. There is a mobile service	Home visits as opportunities for education for social justice, and respect for diversity
Digital environments	Video materials. Guides on Fb page	Educational video materials. Online communication with professionals	Modules available online. Messages to parents and group discussion. Family games ideas and diary available in electronic format	-
Green environments	Magazines used for creating books (upcycling). Teaching materials also online	Healthy lifestyles via workshops. Play in nature. Use of natural materials	Healthy lifestyles addressed in the workshops	-
Findings	Data on reading practice informed the programme (qualitative data - observation, evaluation, parents' feedback). Positive feedback from parents. Creation of reading corners in Health Centers, Centres for Social Welfares, and Kindergartners. The programme became	Statistically significant positive correlation between programme participation and children's socio-emotional development and school readiness. Participating parents reported more confidence in their competence, more activities promoting children's	Positive effect of 0.26 standard deviations on parent-reported child development outcomes, and a more muted effect for the father-focused workshops. However, there was a lower likelihood of reporting physical punishment in the month than comparison parents	Results to be disseminated in the future. Early Years/Preschool teachers continued using persona dolls in addition to the primary purpose

Name	Teddy Bear Reading Programs ⁵¹	Strong from the start for Roma parents ⁵²	Strong from the start - Let's give them wings - Program for all Parents ⁵³	ECD+
	official in the job description of patronage service	development, and less severe discipline than comparison parents. Positive feedback from the field		
References/ Links	https://centarharmonija.rs/?cat=80 https://www.facebook.com/novisadcitadeci https://www.facebook.com/OdCitanjaSeRaste	https://www.cipcenter.org/index.php/pilici	https://www.cipcenter.org/index.php/pilici	http://www.skoladokoran.sk/robime/aktualne-projekty/ecdplus/

4. Concluding remarks

This document addressed policies and practices aiming to promote cooperation between ECEC professionals and parents, with a focus on inclusiveness, and digital and green environments in Europe, particularly in Italy, Lithuania, Romania, and Serbia. The aim was to contribute to Pathways' objective of enhancing and strengthening ECEC professionals' competences and skills to cooperate with parents, including through the development of a Training Compendium. Cooperation between professionals and parents can contribute to promoting children's development and wellbeing more effectively (Graue et al., 2004; Powell et al., 2010; Sylva et al., 2004; Voorhis et al., 2013).

Based on the work conducted, the following highlights can be made:

- The importance of ECEC services-parents cooperation/parents' engagement is asserted in European policy and multinational projects. Cooperation/engagement is acknowledged in national policies and practices of the four countries under focus in different forms.
- Overall, exchanging information with parents, and building their capacity/competences to promote children's development/wellbeing seemed to constitute more frequent practices than involving parents in the co-construction of the implementation or decision-making processes. However, involving parents in decision-making can offer an opportunity to move towards the broader recognition of parents as equal partners in education (Alieva, 2021).
- Promoting inclusiveness is acknowledged in policies and practices at the European level and the four countries under study, including children with special or additional needs, low-income families, and families with a minority status. Supporting the belongingness of children and families within education settings and systems requires programmatic and preventive policies, including concrete guidelines and goals at the organisational, regional and/or national level (Aguar & Pastori, 2019; Slot & Nata, 2019). Cooperation with parents can be potentiated when ECEC services consider the diversity of needs and strengths of families.

- The focus on promoting digital and green environments is evident in current European policy. However, digital and green environments do not seem to be so explored yet regarding cooperation with parents. Engaging parents in digital and green environments can contribute to a holistic approach in ECEC.
- The selected practices in the four countries included diverse types of activities with parents, such as trainings, workshops, home visits (which provide a better understanding of the family's situation), participation in activities with children (e.g., creation of a garden, reading activities), and actions to support disadvantaged children. Parents' engagement can be potentiated when activities go beyond strictly academic matters; and more beneficial effects can be reinforced when there is a focus on nurturing children's motivation, autonomy and self-efficacy (Alieva, 2021). Educational professionals can develop clear plans and instructions for parents regarding the forms and methods of meaningful parent-school cooperation (Alieva, 2021).
- Some selected practices included mediators and dedicated professionals working with families (e.g., pedagogical assistants who can conduct home visits). The role of mediators and professionals visiting families has been recognised as potentiating engagement with culturally diverse families (European Commission, 2021a).
- Some of the selected practices included coordination between agencies (e.g., public services/local authorities; stakeholders). Cooperation with parents can be fostered by inter-agency working, particularly when supported by top-level policies (Guerra et al., 2019).
- The policies and practices mentioned in this review do not mean to represent an exhaustive list of all available. The goal was to showcase examples that can be used as guidelines or references. Children and parents are not homogenous groups, and ECEC professionals work in various contexts and services, which highlights the need to consider the diverse conditions and characteristics in policy and practice development. Educational organisations and professionals sharing policies and practices can inform future developments in cooperation with parents.

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Appendix A: Manual

Pathways: 2.3. Context analysis and scientific review

Manual

Activity: A2.3. Context analysis and scientific review

Leading organisation: University of Coimbra | **Participating organisations:** All

Description of the activity: Partners from IT, LT, RO and RS will collect the latest information regarding practices from their context on the Training Curriculum (TC) topics. The University of Coimbra will provide a short literature review at the European level to be provided as training material.

TC topics: Transversal topic: Cooperation with parents, which can include supporting parenthood, meaningful engagement and communication, and the participatory role of parents in the life of ECEC settings. Main topics: Inclusiveness; digital environments; green environments.

Definitions:

- *Practices (what is done/applied; actions or steps taken).* Practices can include interventions, programmes, services, projects, activities, approaches, strategies, training, and materials.
- *Policies (what is proposed; please include only policies that exist in a written form/in a document).* Policies can include regulations, guidelines, frameworks, directives, legislation, or similar.
- *ECEC professionals.* Early Years and preschool teachers, ECEC managers, and auxiliary staff involved in the education of children from birth to six years old.

Request to partners: To describe policies and practices aiming to promote the cooperation between ECEC professionals and parents by enhancing ECEC professionals' competences/skills regarding inclusiveness, and green and digital environments. They can be described in the Excel file provided (it includes a case of the Portuguese context as an example). Please, do not include confidential information in the file, so it is suitable for reporting and publication purposes.

1. Policies

Please describe the available ECEC policies that meet the following criteria:

- Focus:** Cooperation with parents (it is not mandatory that the policies also address inclusiveness, digital or green environments).
- Context:** Are currently being followed/implemented in your country at the national, regional, municipal, or kindergarten levels.

The policies can be described in the sheet named “Policies” in the Excel file. Each column should correspond to one policy. You can write “not applicable” or “no information” when needed. The Excel file includes the following rows.

Rows
Name of the policy (in your language and English)
Focus of the policy (For instance: ECEC workforce, curriculum, pedagogy, quality, access to kindergarten)
Level of implementation: (1) National; (2) Regional; (3) Municipal; (4) Kindergarten
Cooperation with parents: What are the main guidelines for promoting cooperation with parents?
Inclusiveness: Are there guidelines for promoting inclusiveness? Which are the main guidelines?
Digital environments: Are there guidelines for promoting digital environments? Which are the main guidelines?
Green environments: Are there guidelines for promoting green environments? Which are the main guidelines?

2. Practices

Aim (if possible): 3 or 4 practices per country (1 per each TC topic)

2.1. Where to search

- Ask local/regional/national stakeholders/experts
- Search within:
 - Governmental and NGO publications and websites
 - European Commission’s platforms: [Erasmus+](#); [CORDIS](#)
 - Search engines (e.g., Google, Bing)
 - University databases, national specialised journals, and academic databases (e.g., [ERIC](#))

2.2. How to search

You may use the following keywords (these are examples and not an exhaustive list):

- **Practices:** Practice, intervention, programme, service, project, approach, strategy, training
- **Population:** early childhood education; birth to six years old
- **Focus:** Cooperation with parents; family-preschool partnership; parent engagement in education; parent involvement in education; inclusiveness; diversity; digital; virtual; green; ecologic

2.3. Which criteria to select practices

Please describe practices that meet the following criteria:

- i. **Focus:** Cooperation between ECEC professionals and parents, and at least one of the other TC topics (inclusiveness, digital environments, green environments).
- ii. **Potential:** For a practice to be considered as having the potential to promote cooperation with parents, it should meet at least one of the following reasons:
 1. There is one study or more indicating positive results

2. It is considered relevant among professionals, stakeholders, academics, or parents/families, or within the community
 3. It has been implemented for a long time in ECEC settings
 4. It addresses a particular challenge in the context of its implementation.
- iii. **Context:** Ongoing, implemented in your country in the last five years (since the start of 2018), or in preparation (if relevant as input to the Compendium). It can have been designed before 2018, but it should have been implemented in the last five years.

2.4. How to describe

The practices can be described in the sheet named “Practices” in the Excel file. Each column should correspond to one practice. You can write “not applicable” or “no information” when needed. The Excel file includes the following rows.

Rows
Name (your language and English)
Level of implementation: (1) National; (2) Regional; (3) Municipal; (4) Kindergarten
Period: (1) Ongoing; (2) Finished; (3) In preparation
Type: (1) Integrated into the ECEC setting functioning; (2) Part of a project; (3) Other
Target population: (1) Children; (2) Parents or Caregivers; (3) Professionals
Children’s age (even if the practice targets professionals or parents, please indicate their children’s age range).
Main target group: (1) All; (2) Specific groups based on participants’ background or characteristics (specify)
Where: (1) ECEC setting; (2) External to the ECEC setting
When: (1) Within regular working hours; (2) Outside regular working hours
Staff delivering the practice: (1) Early Years or Preschool teachers; (2) Other specialised professionals, such as psychologists, special educational needs teachers, pedagogues, etc. (specify); (3) Other, such as NGOs, parents, children (specify)
Goal(s) of the practice (the main ones)
Activities for children (main activities, strategies or materials)
Activities for parents (main activities, strategies or materials)
Activities for professionals (main activities, strategies or materials)
Forms of cooperation with parents: (1) Informing parents; (2) building parents’ capacity; (3) cooperation or co-construction of the implementation; (4) advocacy
Inclusiveness: What type of inclusiveness (e.g. including persons with different backgrounds, or diverse characteristics)?
Digital environments (how are they addressed, if applicable)
Green environments (how are they addressed, if applicable)
Reasons for selecting the practice: (1) Positive results found in research; (2) Considered relevant; (3) Implemented for a long time (4) Addresses a particular challenge in its context
Findings: Which positive results have been found regarding this practice, if any? Please, provide the respective reference or link, if possible.
References/Links to access information on the practice