



Working for inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion

Summary of the EC programme and its findings



Working for inclusion



Working for inclusion: how early childhood education and care (ECEC) and its workforce can help Europe's youngest citizens

Led by



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Associate partners who participated in this programme are **BUPL, Pedagogues' Trade Union, Denmark; Le Furet, France; National Institute for Family and Social Policy, Hungary; APEI Association of Early Education Professionals, Portugal; Ministry of Education and Sport, Slovenia**

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Foreword

The *Working for Inclusion* programme brought together facts, figures, anecdotes and insights, which we believe present a persuasive call for national, regional and local governments to invest in developing higher quality services for our youngest children.

The programme, funded by the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity, with the support of the Scottish Government, included government at all levels; local, regional and national, trade unions and a range of institutions and organisations involved in the education and support of the early years workforce, as well as practitioners.

This summary report highlights the key activities and findings from the programme, and shows the contribution that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services make to children's wellbeing and lifelong learning. It also attests to their economic value, not only in preventing more expensive interventions later but in galvanising local economies and tackling poverty.

One of the strongest issues to emerge is the value of fully integrated early years systems – overcoming the continuing divide between early education and care, which can still be found in many European countries. Those countries with fully integrated systems and other important interconnected policies designed to support early childhood and families appear to have higher-qualified, better paid staff, lower levels of child poverty and higher levels of child wellbeing.

Working for Inclusion has provided important new information on the role that services for young children and their workforce can play in tackling child poverty and promoting social inclusion, to help us all in addressing these issues.

Since the publication of our final report in December

2010 the European Commission has issued a Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care (COM 2011 66 final) advocating integrated universal services and the European Parliament's Education and Culture Committee has published a report on early years learning recommending a similar approach. The EC Communication proposes an EU wide programme of research and information exchange and suggests that member states should make use of the Structural Funds to explore models for developing services. Such initiatives at an EU level, whilst they may regrettably be seen as falling short of required action by member states, can help in promoting developments at national and local level. It may for example be noteworthy for some other countries that in February 2011, the Polish Government signed a new act on early childhood education and care services for children under the age of three, introducing a broader and more child and family centred approach to services associated with transferring responsibility from the Health Ministry to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.

Developing a better understanding of how the early years services and their workforce can contribute to improving the lives of Europe's youngest citizens within countries and across the EU has been at the heart of the *Working for Inclusion* programme. Its findings and many publications offer an extensive resource for all those working to improve the lives of Europe's youngest citizens

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Programme overview, research findings and conference summary

Programme overview

The two-year *Working for Inclusion* programme sought to focus attention on and strengthening understanding of how the early years workforce can support social inclusion and address poverty.

The programme was funded by the European Commission under the EU Progress (Employment and Social Inclusion) programme with the support of the Scottish Government and led by Children in Scotland with partners and associate partners in nine other countries.

The main partner organisations and countries were:

Scotland and UK: Children in Scotland
Italy: La Bottega Di Geppetto
Norway: Nordland Research Institute
Poland: Comenius Foundation for Child Development

Other partner countries were Denmark, France, Hungary, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden.

The programme encouraged discussion and an exchange of ideas and information across member states and formed part of the Open Method of Coordination introduced in Lisbon in 2000, to support member states learning with and from each other in addressing the goals set out in the Lisbon Treaty.

Each of the main partners led learning and debate on a specific theme, hosting four study visits with a range of delegates – including politicians and practitioners who shared their insight and learning nationwide – and conferences with up to 200 national and international delegates.

1. Working with the child as protagonist – active agents in their own learning.

Lead partner: La Bottega Di Geppetto, Italy, May 2009

2. Working with diversity, particularly ethnicity, language, disability and gender.

Lead partner: Children in Scotland, Scotland and

UK, September 2009

3. Inclusive workforce models for rural and remote areas.

Lead partner: Nordland Research Institute, Norway, January 2010

4. Working inclusively with children and families across agencies and age groups.

Lead partner: Comenius Foundation for Child Development, Poland, May 2010

Study visit summaries, pages 12-18

Research findings

Research undertaken as part of the programme indicates that the countries with the lowest levels of child poverty and inequality offer publicly-funded universal provision in which care and education are fully integrated. In countries which pay less attention to child poverty and do not fully fund early childhood services, the care and education of young children is often split, both by age (children in the age groups 0-3 and 3-6 years attend different types of services) and administrative function (different ministries are involved with different aims and concepts of work with children). Split services often result in less than ideal early education settings, with inappropriate child:staff ratios and pedagogies that do not take into account the wellbeing and natural learning strategies of young children. In turn, 'childcare' services are often poorly funded and the educational level and work conditions of staff undermine pedagogical quality and intensive outreach to parents and communities.

A second finding from the research was the centrality of a valued, well-qualified and appropriately remunerated workforce. *Working for Inclusion* research shows that across Europe, childcare workers are almost universally less well paid and less well regarded than those whose role is considered to be education, a situation that needs to change. One potential contribution to addressing this, seen on the Polish study visit, was felt to be the development of a 'pedagogy' or 'social education' model for

Programme overview, research findings and conference summary

qualifications that would create a more effective, flexible, and coherent approach to early childhood education and care across Europe.

With higher status and greater rewards, the early years workforce could become a source of good quality employment, galvanising local economies, and tackling poverty. In this sense, the development of effective early childhood education and care services not only contribute to better long-term outcomes for children, but provide in the here and now greater wellbeing for children and families, with tangible economic benefits for local communities in terms of employment and more effective services.

A third element to emerge strongly from the research was the clear possibility of change, even in challenging economic times. The countries performing best today in terms of balancing quality with equality of access began with split models similar to current practice in many European countries. While a number of the successful countries have well established tax and benefit systems to support integrated early childhood systems, effective integration and universal provision are not based on a nation's wealth alone. Slovenia, for example, with a modest GDP compared to the former EU-15 countries, has been able to develop an effective integrated approach in the early childhood field. Political will and leadership are important contributors to the provision of accessible, integrated services. In this matter, the European Commission has a key role to play in informing member states, as is demonstrated by the several significant publications from the Commission during 2010 and the recent communication: *Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow*. Calls were made by several participants in the *Working for Inclusion* project, requesting the Commission to publicise available sources of funding, such as Structural Funds, for use in developing sustainable early childhood systems and services.

The 'Working for Inclusion' research was undertaken by Professor Peter Moss, and Dr John Bennett.

Key points from the programme, pages 6-8

Final conference

The programme concluded with a conference, organised with the support of Eurochild, hosted at the European Parliament in Brussels in December 2010.

The clear message to come from the event was the growing sense across Europe that the time for talking is over. Now, practitioners and policymakers agree, is the time for action, if we are to create and establish early education and care services that will benefit children, parents and communities both now and for years to come.

Conference summary, pages 9-10

Programme statistics

Number of events/conferences - 6

Number of study visits - 4

Duration of programme - 2 years

Number of participants in events - 1,000

Number of countries involved - 10

Number of research reports - 12

Total number of publications - 22

Summary of the Final Report Key Points from the WFI programme

www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfifinal

2010 was the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. At the same time as this increasing urgency to address poverty, social inclusion and discrimination at EU level, there is also a growing consensus that one crucial way to achieve this is by investing in services not just for children from age three, but to provide support for families and children from birth.

The economic argument for this is compelling: early childhood education and care systems that include reliable childcare enable parents to work, and by supporting children in their early learning and parents in their parenting, we can contribute to reducing poverty and disadvantage and help to prevent problems of social exclusion and discrimination in later life.

An expansion in services for young children and their families with an integrated and well-educated birth-to-six workforce would contribute to the increase in good quality employment that is an aim of the EU, attracting young people with increasingly high levels of education, rather than the decreasing supply of poorly educated young women at risk of social exclusion themselves.

The work undertaken by *Working for Inclusion* researchers and delegates has created a picture of how the early years workforce fits within a society's attitudes towards children, government structures and social welfare systems.

This summary of the programme findings, and final report is intended to present that picture: how it is that the development of early years workforce and services can support a reduction in poverty and an increase in social inclusion.

Focus on the early years to reduce child poverty

Families with young children are at particular risk of poverty – across Europe nearly one in six households with a child under six lives in poverty. In some countries these children are the population group at most risk of poverty

To make a significant difference to reducing child poverty and increasing social inclusion across Europe, policy should focus on the experience of young children and their families.

The *Working for inclusion* programme found that countries with low levels of child poverty and high child wellbeing also have consistently the highest levels of fully integrated early childhood care and education provision associated with generous benefit systems and strong income redistribution. In general, these countries have a better qualified and higher paid workforce, and systems based on strong values of equality, rights and democracy.

Nordic countries have the best track record on early childhood education and care, inequality and child wellbeing. However, Slovenia has shown that such success is not the preserve of these countries, and local administrations such as San Miniato in Italy demonstrate that it is not just country-wide policies that can make a difference.

Importance of fully integrated systems at European, national and local levels

Fully integrated systems of Early Childhood Education and Care have no divide between education and care for children under the age of three and children from three until the age of compulsory schooling. Full integration is manifest in government departments, workforce education, qualifications, funding, pay and conditions, service structures, inspection regimes and curriculum.

Only six European countries (Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Slovenia and Latvia) have fully integrated early childhood education and care systems. Four countries (Germany, Austria, Spain and the UK) have partially integrated systems, which retain a division, particularly within the workforce.

Fully integrated Early Childhood Education and Care systems – associated with high levels of universal entitlement and a high quality, well paid workforce – are a key indicator of a country's success in reducing child poverty and promoting social inclusion.

Summary of the Final Report Key Points from the WFI programme

www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfifinal

When Early Childhood Education and Care is not integrated or only partially integrated (as is the case in the majority of European member states) children aged under three, and their families, experience a poorer standard of care with a higher cost to parents, with less equal access to all families, and more poorly educated and poorly paid staff.

Split systems are unequal systems, unequal for children, parents and the workforce.

Key issues for national, regional and local government

The importance of fully integrated systems

National, regional and local government should find ways to move towards integrated systems in early childhood education and care, establishing it as an important direction of travel.

The importance of universal provision

Governments should resist budget cuts that reduce the universalism of provision for young children and their families, as this would increase the inequality of early childhood education and care that is at the heart of child poverty and social inclusion. The Working for Inclusion research review found that fully integrated services in association with a universal approach reach disadvantaged groups more effectively than targeted provision.

Early Childhood Education and Care and the economy

Budget cuts that reduce the infrastructure of early childhood education and care may impact a family's ability to take up paid employment. The provision of early childhood education and care is a vital part of general economic planning, as well as being core to reducing child poverty and increasing social inclusion in particular.

Conversely investment in Early Childhood Education and Care services can galvanise local economies through creating jobs and at the same time improving and upskilling the labour supply.

General points about Early Childhood Education and Care

Having the active child at the centre of early years policy

Children are active citizens who shape their own learning in partnership with adults in ways that are unpredictable and can challenge adults' expectations. Children and their families should be valued and respected and considered equal partners in learning by staff given time to develop positive and in-depth relationships with them.

Universal integrated Early Childhood Education and Care systems

It is necessary to rethink traditional structures and remits of services from the perspective of the child and family to bring together traditionally divided notions of (child)care related to gender equality in employment (until age three) and (early) education (from age three onwards).

Care and education are equally important to children. Split systems are unequal systems. Flexible, part- and full-time services that link parental leave from birth to entitlements to services from age one promote social inclusion and reduce child poverty. Targeted support can entrench social exclusion – services should be universal.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce initial education

Investment in a highly qualified, autonomous workforce capable of democratic, reflective practice means a flexible, sustainable, more gender-balanced workforce working with all young children and their families.

Working with parents and communities

Priority should be given to the meaningful participation of parents and local communities in decisions about the management and curriculum of early childhood services. Not only do families benefit from information and support provided by services, but also parents' expert knowledge helps staff in their observation and understanding of each child's development. Such a

Summary of the Final Report Key Points from the WFI programme

www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfifinal

two-way exchange is an important manifestation of a democratic approach.

Equitable social welfare systems

Unequal societies beget inequality. Without strong income redistribution policies and supportive, universal welfare systems, the work of the best early years workforce will not be enough to eradicate child poverty and achieve social inclusion.

Conclusion

Countries with low levels of child poverty and high child wellbeing also have consistently the highest levels of Early Childhood Education and Care provision; that is a high quality, well-paid workforce, high levels of universal entitlement and access to services, with strong parental leave policies and fully integrated services. They also have generous benefit systems and strong income redistribution, and all are based on strong values of equality, rights and democracy.

The findings of this project present a challenge for most European countries. Realising the vision is not impossible, but it cannot be achieved overnight, as delegates on the study visits have been able to observe.

Achieving high levels of Early Childhood Education and Care provision is not the preserve of whole countries. You can go it alone: San Miniato, and Reggio Emilia, both local authorities, have managed to create an environment supportive of young children and their families while Italy itself falls short of providing such country-wide policies (though life is harder where national policies don't support local ones).

And using whole-country poverty is no excuse for not emulating wealthy Nordic achievements. Post-communist Slovenia, with a per capita GDP of 89% of the EU average, has put in place many of the necessary structures and entitlements to support a professional workforce that supports families and young children in a relatively short and recent timeframe.

Working for inclusion means shaping and directing processes over time. It might not be possible to achieve everything at one go, but establishing a goal and a clear direction of travel is the most important step in transforming the lives of young children.



Key points from the *Working for Inclusion* Conference - Brussels, December 2010

The *Working for Inclusion* closing conference, which presented the key messages from the programme, took place at the European Parliament in Brussels on 9 December 2010.

Representatives of the lead countries (Scotland, Norway, Italy and Poland) joined practitioners, policymakers and politicians from across Europe to discuss the programme's findings.

The conference was chaired by Mary Honeyball MEP, Rapporteur EP Report on Early Years Learning for the Culture and Education Committee, and Catherine Stihler MEP for Scotland.

Speakers at the event included:

Nora Milotay

(Policy Officer European Commission, DG EAG)

Irena Woycicka (Undersecretary of State, Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland)

Bronwen Cohen (chief executive of Children in Scotland and Working for Inclusion programme director)

Stig Lund (European Trade Union Committee for Education)

Jana Hainsworth (Secretary General of Eurochild)

Peter Moss and John Bennett (Working for Inclusion researchers)

Margarida Gameiro (Head of Unit, DG Education and Culture), and **Marie-Anne Paraskevas** (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities)

Among the key points raised:

- **Early years is currently a focus for Europe – the time is right:** The findings from *Working for inclusion* are timely. 2011 will bring an EC Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care; the Education and Training Strategy 2020 has a significant early years dimension; and in January Hungary will take over the EU presidency with early years a stated priority. The programme also addresses issues

related to poverty and exclusion raised during the European Year for Combating Poverty 2010. Each of the partner countries have significant developments taking place at all levels in relation to early years. *Nora Milotay* reinforced the point that the context and political will are there to bring change, following ministers' repeated interest in cooperating on issues related to Early Childhood Education and Care that culminated in the ET2020 strategy in 2009.

- **Fully integrated systems are the most effective:** This was the strongest single finding of the *Working for inclusion* programme. The countries with the lowest levels of child poverty and inequality are those which offer universally available, accessible services that are fully integrated. Where responsibility for ECEC services is split, for example by function (education, health, social services) or by age (0–3, 3–6, 7 and over) there is a marked inequality in access to services.
- **A well qualified, appropriately remunerated workforce is essential:** It was felt there is value in exploring the pedagogue model as a means of creating a more effective, flexible, and coherent approach to Early Childhood Education and Care across Europe. Childcare workers are almost universally less well paid and less well regarded than those whose role is considered to be education: this should change. *Stig Lund* commented: "A well qualified professional is the single most important element for quality".
- **Fairness:** Universalism, with equitable social welfare systems and strong income redistribution, is a key feature of systems that achieve the best levels of equality.

Additional key points:

- **Collaborative partnership and cross learning:** Bronwen Cohen highlighted how the sharing of experience, ideas and thinking had contributed to *Working for Inclusion*, and how

Key points from the *Working for Inclusion* Conference - Brussels, December 2010

this way of working could be of value to member states in other contexts. For this to be effective it requires openness to and respect for others, and an appropriate awareness of cultural and societal differences.

- **Complex challenges require multidimensional solutions:** Margarida Gameiro spoke of the need for: "... political commitment, matched with financial investment and evidence-based policymaking" to create conditions where member states are not just providing the minimum, but where children, parents and communities can "have the maximum". *Marie-Anne Paraskevas* reinforced this view, pointing to the need for tax and benefit structures, parental leave policies and all services that have contact points with families (such as health, education and social care) to be taken into account if effective services are to be created.
- **Value of Structural Funds:** These were acknowledged to have made a valuable contribution to work in Poland, and there was interest in promoting their availability to develop work within Early Childhood Education and Care. Other funding possibilities should also be publicised more widely to encourage take-up.
- **Good European models already exist:** There is a need to recognise, value and build on work already being done. John Bennett commented: "Why do we continue to be tempted by Anglo-American models when we have much better models here in Europe?"
- **Economic value of developing Early Childhood Education and Care:** The early years workforce can become a source of good quality employment. Developing Early Childhood Education and Care has economic value both now (galvanising local economies, developing smarter working practices, and tackling poverty) and in the future (preventing more expensive interventions, developing better educated and skilled citizens).
- **Change is possible:** It was pointed out that all those countries now performing best in terms of equality of access to services began with split models similar to those in many member states at present. While a number have well established tax and benefit systems to support this approach, Slovenia was highlighted as a member state that has developed an effective integrated approach based on a far less well-established tax system and lower levels of funding.
- **Clear leadership is required:** A fully integrated approach to early years at national and international level would help people deliver services at a local level. There was felt to be a clear role for the EC in providing a strong lead on the importance of early years and the development of early years services across member states.
- **There is a need to challenge our perceptions of children:** A child-centred approach is important. Often the subconscious (or conscious) image of the child is of someone who is weak, vulnerable and in need of care and protection: but children should be participants, actively engaged in the systems and processes that affect them, with a voice that can be heard.
- **Rights and citizenship:** Children are citizens now, not only in the future, and to have 20 million of Europe's citizens living in poverty should be a cause for concern. The children's rights agenda, enshrined in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, should be driven forward as a means of reinforcing this. Jana Hainsworth commented: "It's important to recognise that children have rights from the day they are born and before ... I'd like to focus on how we take this forward and where it sits in the bigger picture."
- **Wellbeing:** Good Early Childhood Education and Care services were shown to make a real contribution not just to children's wellbeing, but also to that of parents and their communities.



Images on pages 2, 11, 14, 18.19 and 20 are courtesy of San Miniato's research and documentation centre on childhood, La Bottega di Gepetto (www.bottegadigeppetto.it)

Study visit summaries

Italy

Theme – Working with the child as protagonist – active agents in their own learning.

Lead partner: La Bottega Di Geppeto, Italy, May 2009

The thematic area taken on by the Italian partners was the concept of the 'child as protagonist', which is integral to the delivery of services for the under-threes in San Miniato, a small Italian town at the heart of Italy's Tuscan region, chosen as the location of this study visit.

Despite its size, the town has an expansive view of the child, and of the child's role at the heart of the community

The protagonist concept ensures the primacy of the child. It is a radical approach through which their voice and the voice of their families become more powerful. Crucially, the approach seeks to empower not just children but the role of parents, other family members and the community as a whole.

In San Miniato in Italy, the image of the child is of a citizen who, from the very beginning, is a competent person and holder of rights. Educators are not expected to work towards helping children achieve predetermined outcomes because there is no way of knowing in advance what those outcomes will be. If children are agents of their own experience, they are not predictable.

The belief in San Miniato is that every aspect of delivering ECEC services, as well as those elements that define their quality, should be built around this image of the child being in charge. The lessons we draw from San Miniato could help in showing us how to bring children's choices, views and experiences from the margins to the centre of learning.

Summary of the visit

Delegates on the study visit included elected representatives from national and local government, staff members responsible for a wide range of children's services, managers from voluntary organisations, academics, and officials and consultants from many levels of the public sector.

They took away many ideas from San Miniato, most specifically about how its example contributes to our ongoing dialogue about child policy and legislation. Perhaps the core lesson to be drawn is that, when the right services are in place for children and families, they can and do improve lives. Delegates found that San Miniato's protagonist concept ensured a model for the delivery of services that is naturally holistic and takes the child and their family as the starting point. The child as citizen is entitled to participate, and their rights are seen as unassailable. The contribution of children is always honoured, but the protagonist approach means that they are never labelled or catalogued as being 'in need', or requiring the assistance of adults. Instead, they are enabled to feel empowered.

Delegates learned that seeing the child as protagonist, leading their own learning, is not just a value, but an integral way of working; this was apparent from the empowered and valued workforce who in turn respect and involve parents, the extended family and the community in learning.

The result is that children, staff and the wider community feel involved and empowered – and it is this empowerment that can ultimately have the effect of helping to address poverty and promote social inclusion. San Miniato may be a small town, but its achievements in addressing poverty and inclusion deserve and inspire some international comparison. San Miniato has shown that an aspiration to lower poverty rates and improve inclusion can be made real if these aims are defined in legislation and championed at a local level. Combined with its underpinning philosophical approach to children and the financial commitment and belief of the local authority, this achievement marks San Miniato out as a highly significant international model.

"It is very typical of the best local experiences of early childhood education in Italy that they understand what they have achieved is founded on culture and values."

Study visit summaries

Scotland

Theme – Working with diversity, particularly ethnicity, language, disability and gender.

Lead partner: Children in Scotland, Scotland and UK, September 2009

The thematic area taken on by the Scottish partners As a term, diversity is usually used to refer to educational work with children who may be differentiated in a variety of ways: by ethnicity, immigrant status, gender, language, social class or background, poverty, disability, membership of a different church or association, or even by a life experience that distinguishes the child from the majority of children. In much of this work, diversity is often treated as a negative, minority issue, as the exception rather than the rule. In practice, of course, diversity applies to every child and family, and some dimensions of diversity can be valued positively, as bringing advantage and inclusion.

Summary of the visit

Delegates had a valuable opportunity to make comparisons, learn from a range of services, hear about current practice in Scotland, and share insights and ideas.

Through the series of visits to services in Edinburgh, Glasgow and West Lothian and the one-day seminar *Working for Inclusion – The Diversity Dimension*, delegates were able to explore issues of diversity in the context of the project's overall theme: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and social inclusion. The contrasts delegates drew between their experience of working with diversity in their own countries, and what they found in Scotland, was of particular value. From these comparisons some key learning points and insights emerged:

The 'diversity of diversity' – The overriding theme that emerges from delegates' comments could be described as the 'diversity of diversity'. There is a powerful sense of the need to approach diversity from the point of view of its richness and its potential, rather than from the perspective of it being a problem

or an obstacle. This informed many delegates' views on the way services were set up (ie with a mainstream or specialised approach), attitudes to additional support, workforce training, and the use of language in relation to diversity.

Lack of services for under-3s – While there was a consensus about the overall high quality of services for children aged three to five, some delegates highlighted the absence of services for children under the age of three. Italian delegate Gloria Tognetti commented that, "services for children from zero to two and for their families seem to be lacking". This response identifies the wider problem of Scotland's highly fragmented early years services. Concern was also expressed about the capacity of some services to adequately involve families in the life of the nursery or children's centre. Perhaps because of the high value attached to family participation and the impact this has on practice in San Miniato, this was a particular concern for Italian delegates.

Additional Support for Learning – Responses from Italian and Norwegian delegates illustrated profound differences in policy approaches to children with additional support needs. Although there was often a presumption that children with additional support needs would go into mainstream education at a later point, in the majority of early years services visited there was a degree of segregation of these children, either in the form of dedicated facilities or through the provision of specialised learning programmes in services where children with ASN made up a proportion of the nursery community.

Race and language – At a session with Glasgow City Council's Race Equality Officer Samir Sharma, delegates heard about the council's priorities for race equality work: addressing attitudes to race in the early years, and working with parents to improve understanding and knowledge of racism. Emphasis was placed on the need for partnership working to educate children and families about race equality, and about the key role headteachers could play in establishing an ethos of respect for diversity within schools.

Study visit summaries

The workforce – Some of the most significant learning points from the study visit emerged from discussion of workforce development. The role of partnership working was a recurring topic in discussions of how to improve the approach to diversity in early years settings, and it was suggested that a multi-agency workforce built on creative partnerships, and with the ability to blur lines between individual professions, would ultimately be able to improve children's experiences of early education. The value of the social pedagogy model was also discussed as not only offering a holistic way of working with children and young people but also simplifying the qualifications structure in a way that could facilitate access to under-represented groups. However, there was also discussion of the importance of ensuring that the requirement for qualifications is appropriate and does not unnecessarily exclude some groups. In up-skilling the workforce proper attention needs to be paid to facilitating access to qualifications and recognising prior experience. It was clear that legislative frameworks – which all workers can refer to and be led by – have a crucial role to play in reinforcing shared values across the workforce. Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* and Norway's Framework Plan were cited as positive examples of these.

The study visits' conclusions point towards a vision for a radical restructuring of the workforce. Overall, delegates' feedback signalled a consensus that there are essential qualities, values and ethics required to work with diversity. Perhaps the most significant lesson to be drawn from this is the importance of not entrenching divisions between a specialised and a universalist approach to diversity. Instead, the priority should be ensuring that everyone has a shared understanding of the issues, and that everyone's perspectives and input is recognised as having equal merit. The study visit demonstrated that examining and comparing different workforce models can enable the early years workforce to address these issues, exchange ideas and develop enriching dialogue about the nature of diversity.

"Above all this visit made me think about diversity among children and the role of diversity in the development of society."



Study visit summaries

Norway

Theme – Inclusive workforce models for rural and remote areas.

Lead partner: Nordland Research Institute, Norway, January 2010

The thematic area taken on by the Norwegian partners explored ways of developing inclusive workforce models for rural and remote areas.

There is no single, EU-wide definition of what is meant by the term 'rural'. Individual countries have different definitions based on factors such as dispersed population, an agriculture-based economy, distance from major urban centres and lack of access to major services.

Rural regions differ from urban in a number of ways affecting access to and use of early childhood education and care services, including demographic, geographic and economic factors and social, cultural and service conditions. Provision and availability of services, and access to them, may be compromised in rural regions compared with urban settings. However rural areas may offer extensive access to outdoor environments and may make more use of parental and community support.

Summary of the visit

Delegates from Italy, Poland, Portugal and Scotland visited five municipalities in Nordland, Norway: Bodø, Beiarn, Fauske, Saltdal and Steigen. The visits took place in January 2010 and responses from the delegates form the basis of the report. The delegate groups included officials and consultants from the public sector and national children's agencies; managers and staff responsible for a wide range of children's services; academics; representatives of local government; and developers of early years policy. The aim of the visit was to explore models of good practice in a remote region of Norway and to feed responses, ideas and questions into the ongoing debate on how best to develop inclusive workforce models across Europe.

During the study visits delegates were asked to address the following questions:

- What are the most effective models for early years services in rural and remote areas and what implications are there for workforce education and development?
- What are the needs of the service users in rural areas, and how can access to services be ensured?
- What measures ensure that remote areas can attract, maintain and develop a professional early years workforce?

Each delegate received a background briefing paper, to introduce the topic of provision in rural and remote areas; to identify the factors that influence service delivery and access; and to provide a cross-European context on rural-urban differences in approaches and access to services.

At a concluding seminar to the study visit findings from the programme were published based on statistics from 28 European countries. These concluded fully integrated Early Childhood Education and Care services that are universally applied and coordinated by a single department across access, funding, regulation and workforce are more beneficial for children and go hand in hand with reduced child poverty and inequality.

Overall conclusions from the study visit included:

- Coordination, cooperation and integration in planning, developing and delivering early childhood and educational services is highly effective in meeting the needs of children and families.
- A high degree of integrated practice offers real support to the social, cultural and economic development of local communities, even where these are scattered or isolated.
- Universally available services with a single,

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coordinated point of access are highly effective in identifying and meeting needs at a local level, and reducing any stigma related to a need for additional support or intervention.

- Investing time and resources in developing and communicating a shared vision among service providers at every level of the workforce and also among service users, has a key role in establishing good practice.
- Flexibility and autonomy in delivering centrally agreed objectives contributes to maintaining core principles effectively across a range of settings.
- A prominent role for the outdoors in education has a multitude of benefits, for pupils, and in staff recruitment and development.
- Effective training and development for staff ensures the quality of provision in rural areas keeps pace with that in more urban-based populations.
- Building good relationships among service providers and service users, with respect for each others' skills and competences, contributes to effective service delivery that meets local and individual needs.

"Passion for the education system and welfare of the children among staff and parents means learning can take a personalised dimension."

Poland

Theme – Working inclusively with children and families across agencies and age groups.

Lead partner: Comenius Foundation for Child Development, Poland, May 2010

The thematic area taken on by the Polish partners explored ways of working inclusively with children and families, across agencies and age groups. Across Europe exclusion is not only related to low income but also many other factors that deny access to services and participation, including: parents' employment situation; ethnic and immigrant status; national and regional government structure, provision and priorities; prevailing social and cultural assumptions; and the national and sometimes international economic situation.

Three approaches to promoting social inclusion predominate in Europe.

The first is a democratic egalitarian approach, which seeks to prevent poverty and targets inequality actively through national and local government intervention.

The second is a targeted approach, addressing specific aspects of inequality, and often sponsored by national governments, the EU and/or voluntary bodies. Governments faced with social inclusion challenges propose specific solutions according to their welfare traditions, which means different approaches may be developed to tackle similar problems in, for example liberal economies, compared to social democratic regimes.

The third concentrates on technical factors by seeking to equip people with the tools that will help them participate effectively in society and the economy: frequently, this leads to a focus on education, with economic arguments used to justify starting education early and focusing on developing specific skills needed by the workforce.

Many agencies are involved in working in an inclusive way and the range and type of work is enormous, for example working with ethnicity; supporting majority language acquisition; working with gender issues; and developing additional learning supports. Frequently, distinctive knowledge and training is required in each field.

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Summary of the visit

Delegates from Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Scotland, Serbia and Slovenia visited services in Warsaw, Poland in May 2010 and their responses form the basis of the report.

The delegate groups included early years policymakers and practitioners from a range of public sector and national children's agencies; representatives of local government; and managers and staff responsible for a wide range of children's and family services.

The aim of the visit was to observe children's services in Poland, a country seeking to develop effective public services at a rapid rate and at every level, and to feed responses, ideas and questions into the ongoing debate on how best to develop inclusive workforce models across Europe.

Each delegate received a briefing paper in advance to provide background and contextual information. The programme included presentations on the education system in Poland and current approaches to workforce training and development; the role of non-governmental organisations, in particular the Comenius Foundation in initiating and supporting change, and the Nobody's Children Foundation in developing child protection strategies; and visits to services both in Warsaw and in rural municipalities. Delegates also took part in *The youngest citizens of Poland: care – education – upbringing*, a national conference at the Parliament in Warsaw that brought together early years practitioners and service providers from throughout Poland to hear ministers and senior representatives from across the Polish government discuss the *Working for Inclusion* programme's emerging findings, and share their thoughts on the way ahead for early childhood education and care in Poland.

The subsequent Act on childcare services for children under 3, passed in February 2011, which introduced the broader and more child and family centred approach to services associated with transferring responsibility from the Health Ministry to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, is seen as being helped

by the raised profile of the early years which resulted from the visit.

Overall conclusions from the study visit included:

- Observing and sharing early years practice among other political, economic and cultural contexts is immensely valuable in sharpening the focus on the values and philosophy on which service provision is based.
- Consistency in service delivery, regardless of geographical location, income, ethnic background, disability or parental education level is essential for inclusive working to take place.
- Establishing shared values across the children's services sector is important in developing and implementing services that are consistent and effective on a wide scale
- Public services, private service providers, service users and all other stakeholders need to be fully engaged and involved in developing services if they are to be consistent, effective and sustainable. This needs to be part of the process of developing and establishing shared values.
- Clear communication across the sector and at every level is essential in engaging all stakeholders in consistently implementing shared values and good practice.
- Pre-school teachers have an important role to play in the social inclusion of children, and also of their families.
- Establishing a clear qualification pathway to equip those seeking a career with young children, that reflects the complexity of the task, is important.
- Where there are many different routes into early years services it is difficult to monitor and evaluate skill levels, and the tendency to rely on unqualified staff is high.

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- Bringing responsibility for all early years services from birth upwards under one government department is seen as important in ensuring all the education and care needs of young children and their families can be met efficiently through an holistic approach. This also contributes to inclusive working.
- More attention should be paid in particular to the 0–3 age group.
- Targeted approaches should be considered for

particular groups as universal services may not fully meet the objectives of inclusive working for some groups.

“Parents were very proud of their preschool centre and were clearly learning alongside their children.”



Resources

Working for Inclusion publications

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Working for inclusion: how early childhood education and care (ECEC) and its workforce can help Europe's youngest citizens

The final report of the Working for Inclusion programme

Briefing on the Working for inclusion research findings

Main conclusions of the data research

Working for inclusion: an overview of European Union early years services and their workforce

Detailed cross-European research and analysis

In-depth country profiles outlining history and current status on all aspects of early childhood education and care: **Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden** and the **UK**

Study visit reports and discussion papers:

Scotland

Discussion paper: Working with diversity
Study visit report 2009

Italy

Discussion paper: The child as protagonist
Study visit report 2009

Norway

Discussion Paper: Inclusive workforce models for rural and remote area
Study visit report 2010

Poland

Discussion Paper: Working in an inclusive way with children and families
Study visit report 2010



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