

Chapter 5

Developmental continuity in transitions from early childhood education and care to primary school

To ensure continuity in young children’s development, high-quality ECEC needs to be followed by quality education throughout school, and particularly during the first years of primary education. Collaboration is the watchword for developmental continuity, and is explored here for a range of actors involved in child development, including children themselves, their parents, ECEC and primary school staff, and community services. The chapter draws on a survey of OECD countries and partner countries to outline key trends across jurisdictions, as well as similarities and differences. It describes five main challenges highlighted by participating countries that are hindering developmental continuity, along with a wealth of practical strategies for tackling them. It concludes with some pointers for policy development as food for thought for countries seeking to improve developmental continuity in transitions.

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Key policy messages

Developmental continuity is improving, but gaps remain. Research tells us that:

- **Strong collaboration among all actors involved in children's early development is key for successful transitions:** these include children, parents, ECEC and primary school teachers and professionals of community services. Such collaboration helps children develop a sense of belonging and connectedness to school.
- **Children's views need to be included when preparing transitions:** relationships (maintaining and making new friends), acquiring learning competencies and knowing about school rules are perceived by children as the most important elements for a positive transfer to primary school.
- **The use of transition practices, such as visits to primary school, help children to better adapt to a new learning environment.** Furthermore, the number and type of transition activities that children and parents engaged in are positively associated with children's academic and socio-emotional development.
- **Parental involvement in learning before, during and after transition is essential for development and continuity,** especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Children with involved parents tend to do better in reading and numeracy, have positive social and emotional social skills, and be more motivated to learn.
- **Children tend to transition better when ECEC centres and schools work together with parents.** The most effective settings in promoting children's learning are those where there is a high level of parental involvement; where child-related information is shared between parents and staff; and where parents participate in defining children's learning programmes.

International comparisons reveal some clear trends

- **In 93% of countries, children are being prepared for the transition to primary school** through activities in the final year of ECEC. Of the eight most common activities (open-house days, parental information meetings, taster days, materials for parents, specific information materials for children, exchange days, support from specialists and home visits), countries offer five on average, with the most popular being visits to the primary school (93%); parent information meetings (89%); and taster days at primary schools (85%).
- **Most countries (74%) offer special needs children specialist support** (e.g. from psychologists or social care workers) during or after transitions. The important role of community services in ensuring developmental continuity in transitions is recognised in the majority of countries.
- **Countries vary in how they include children's views in transition preparations:** while some jurisdictions recognise the importance of children's participation in their curriculum frameworks and/or education acts (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Wales (United Kingdom)), others involve children in research (e.g. Finland and Sweden). In practice, children's involvement differs across municipalities, ECEC settings and schools.
- **Collaboration among teachers takes several forms:** including school and ECEC exchanges, sharing information on child development, and forming collaborative professional learning groups as platforms to exchange ideas and practices across sectors.
- **Staff-parent collaboration is likely to be higher in preschool than in primary school.** For example, sharing child development information is much more prevalent in preschool than in primary school (93% and 70%, respectively).

Countries have a wealth of strategies to address developmental continuity challenges

Challenge 1. Children's views on transitions are not fully accounted for when shaping policies and practices for transitions

- **Strategy:** Specify in education acts or curricula children's rights to participate, *e.g. in Norway, this is explicit in both the Education Act and Framework Plan. Kindergarten teachers are trained to see children's interests and use them in pedagogical situations in everyday life.*
- **Strategy:** Conduct research involving children, *e.g. in Finland, children's views and children themselves are increasingly included in research and as researchers.*

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Key policy messages (continued)

Challenge 2: Parents' lack of awareness of the importance of the transition process hinders their involvement

- Strategy: Develop and provide support materials for parents on transitions, e.g. *Australia has a host of materials explaining what parents need to know to support their child's transition to school.*
- Strategy: Offer multiple activities to increase parents' awareness and participation in transitions, e.g. in *Finland, parents or guardians co-operate in organising ECEC teaching and pedagogies.*

Challenge 3: Difficulties engaging parents from disadvantaged backgrounds in the transition

- Strategy: Adapt support materials to the needs of immigrant parents and children, e.g. *Lower Austria provides parents with information on transitions in several languages (e.g. Bosnian/Croat/Serbian, Bulgarian, Czech, and Turkish).*
- Strategy: Develop new participatory activities to involve parents, e.g. *The HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) programme is implemented in Australia, Austria, the Netherlands and the United States. Parents are encouraged and empowered to create learning situations for their own children.*
- Strategy: Complement transition activities with parenting programmes, e.g. *Wales' Flying Start programme, which provides parenting support guidance.*

Challenge 4: Unequal relationships between ECEC staff and primary school teachers

- Strategy: Develop initiatives to share child development information, e.g. *Wales' Early Years Development and Assessment Framework.*
- Strategy: Organise joint training for ECEC and primary school teachers e.g. in *Austria, Japan and Denmark.*
- Strategy: Create collaborative professional learning groups, e.g. *the Netherlands "startgroepen".*
- Strategy: Integrate both levels of education in the same location, e.g. *Austria's campus model.*

Challenge 5: Limited co-operation with community services

- Strategy: Establish working teams with professionals from different sectors, e.g. *Austria has two types of working teams – the "transition team" and the "committees for transition".*

Several policy pointers arise from this research

- Understand and enhance transitions through children's views: Accounting for children's views when planning transitions needs to be further advanced to ensure children's needs are at the core of transition policy making.
- Tackle parents' lack of awareness of transitions: A better understanding of the rationale, goals and tasks of the transition process can facilitate parental involvement in transition activities, which is core for ensuring developmental continuity.
- Tailor transition practices to fit parental needs: Efforts to reach out to parents, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, would be helped by adapting practices to parental needs and providing multiple opportunities for parents to participate.
- Build strong and equal partnerships between ECEC settings and schools, for instance through collaborative learning environments. This is key for continuity in children's learning experiences.

Introduction

Early child development and learning set the foundations for future learning, health and well-being. Children develop on a continuum, where new skills are formed based on skills that were formed at earlier stages (Heckman, 2000). The experiences and the relationships that children are exposed to during early childhood contribute not only to shaping the brain architecture, but also affect all aspects of their development – intellectual, social, emotional, behavioural and physical (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). During the transition process, developmental continuity is supported when new learning experiences build upon children's developmental progress and their previous learning experiences (Peters, 2000).

While children experience a number of transitions over their life-times, the transition from the last year of ECEC to primary school is a critical one (see Box 5.1 for definitions). It has been argued that it is one of the most important moments in a child's life: setting "...the tone and direction of a child's school career" (Pianta and Kraft-Sayre, 1999; p.47).

Successful transitions require the participation of all actors involved in children's early development, including children, parents, ECEC staff, primary school teachers, the community and other services linked to ECEC and early development (e.g. health professionals, psychologists, social workers and before and after out-of-school services). Solid, responsive and reciprocal relationships among all these participants help ensure continuity for children when moving to a new learning environment (Chapter 4; Chapter 6; Lillejord et al., 2017). Collaboration among multiple actors, however, may be challenging as they may have different values and expectations; different ways of working; different competencies to prepare children during this period; and scarce time and resources to devote to transition activities (Lillejord et al., 2017; Broekhuizen et al., 2015; Arndt et al., 2013).

This chapter examines how the various actors involved in transitions from the last years of ECEC and the first year of primary school participate in enhancing children's developmental continuity. The chapter begins by summarising the literature on the importance of developmental continuity and collaboration in transitions. Although the evidence comes from studies and white papers published in countries with different contexts and different education systems, several commonalities can be found in terms of conclusions and challenges. The chapter then explores and compares what OECD and partner countries are doing to promote developmental continuity. It draws on in-depth country reports by 8 OECD¹ countries and 1 partner country (Kazakhstan), as well as a questionnaire completed by 27 OECD countries and 3 partner countries (Colombia, Croatia and Kazakhstan) in 2015/2016 (see Annex A for details on the methodology). The chapter then identifies five key challenges, along with a wealth of strategies countries have developed to address them. The chapter concludes with a selection of policy pointers to inform future policy discussions.

Box 5.1 Key definitions

Throughout this report the term **early childhood education and care** (ECEC) will be used to refer to regulated arrangements that provide education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age (in integrated systems), or from birth to pre-primary education (in **split systems**). The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is the reference classification for categorising education programmes and related qualifications by education levels and fields. The latest version (ISCED 2011) has nine levels of education, from level 0 to level 8, where **ISCED 0** refers to early childhood education and **ISCED 1** refers to primary education. Education programmes at ISCED level 0 are sub-classified into two categories depending on age and the level of complexity of the educational content: early childhood educational development (ISCED 01) and pre-primary education (ISCED 02). The latter include ECEC centres that provide services for children to support early development in preparation for participation in school and society, and that accommodate children from age three to the start of primary education. The focus of this publication is on ISCED 02 and the terms pre-primary, preschool and ECEC are used interchangeably.

Transitions are defined as a "change process" that children go through from one educational stage to another over time (Fabian and Dunlop, 2002). This can include horizontal and vertical transitions. Horizontal transitions involve children's transitions during their everyday lives between, for instance, a pre-primary education setting or primary school and an after-school centre. Vertical transitions refer to the transitions between different educational settings, such as between an ECEC setting and school (Kagan, 1991; Ackesjö, 2013). This chapter focuses on vertical transitions. See glossary.

Another term used in this chapter that needs to be clarified is "parents", which also extends to guardians and carers, whose important role is recognised in most studies and policies reviewed here. Here we use the terms "parents" and "family" to refer to this group.

For more information, see the Glossary; and OECD/Eurostat/UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2015), *ISCED 2011 Operational Manual: Guidelines for Classifying National Education Programmes and Related Qualifications*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264228368-en>; UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2015), "ISCED mappings", <http://uis.unesco.org/en/isced-mappings>

What does the literature tell us about developmental continuity during transition from ECEC to primary school?

The first years of life lay down the foundations for children's future skills development and learning (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Research in neuroscience shows that the brain sensitivity of highly important developmental areas – such as language and numeracy, social skills and emotional control – peaks in the first three years of life (Naudeau et al., 2011). The neural connections that are formed during this period are the basis upon which future learning depends (Center on the Developing Child, 2009). Strong foundations in the early years increase the chances of positive learning and development, while weak foundations are more likely to lead to struggles.

Well-prepared transitions can ensure a positive start in school, carrying forward the benefits from high-quality ECEC throughout the primary school period and beyond. However, badly-managed transitions risk undermining any positive effects from ECEC (OECD, 2006; AIHW, 2009). To ensure developmental continuity, high-quality ECEC needs to be followed by quality education throughout school, and particularly during the first years of primary education (Woesmman, 2008). Furthermore, continuity in learning needs to acknowledge the differences between sectors and build upon the strengths of each (Stipek et al., 2017).

The transition experience, as with any other learning experience, is shaped by multiple factors in the child's learning context (Dumont, Istance and Benavides, 2010). The involvement of and collaboration among parents, ECEC settings, primary schools and other early years' services are key for a positive influence on children's developmental continuity and transit to school (see Figure 6.1, Chapter 6; also Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner 1986). In line with the ecological and dynamic models of transitions, Ahtola et al. (2011a) conclude that the child must be surrounded by a "web of relationships" whereby all participants influence each other and each of them facilitates children's transitions between two different learning environments and, in turn, their continuity in learning and development (Lillejord et al., 2017; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004).

Solid relationships or partnerships among all actors involved in transitions help to build a strong foundation for primary school and for developing children's sense of belonging and connectedness to school. When responsibility is shared across actors, the transition to school is clearer and more predictable (Margetts, 2014). Thoroughly planned transition practices place the responsibility for transitions on all actors involved in children's education. These actors include parents, ECEC staff, primary school teachers, community services and children themselves.

For the child, the transition from the last year of ECEC to primary school is a period of excitement and pride as well as insecurity, anxiety and nervousness of the new and unfamiliar (Lillejord et al., 2017). Most children tend to navigate the transition process smoothly, but some children struggle, experiencing problems such as restlessness and anxiety (Lillejord et al., 2017; Jindal-Snape, 2010). Research shows that particular groups of children struggle more when starting primary school. For instance, children with an immigrant background tend to have more difficulties than their native peers, and boys tend to experience more school adjustment difficulties than girls (Hausken and Rathburn, 2002; Sylva et al., 2004). Differences in developmental outcomes by gender and socio-economic background begin early in life and before children start primary school (Feinstein, 2003; Bradbury et al., 2011; Sylva et al., 2004) – hence the important role of parents, ECEC staff and school teachers in identifying the individual support needs of children before, during and after the transition.

The transition experience is sensitive to individual differences and unique for each child. Transition practices that take into account the individual characteristics of the child and the kind of learning environments where she/he has been in previous years help to increase the chances of a successful transition (Peters, 2010). Successful transitions are associated with: a strong and positive sense of identity and belonging (how much children feel valued and supported, and connected with

the school environment and to others); positive attitudes and dispositions towards school learning; feeling competent and capable; positive relationships with pedagogical staff and peers; and liking school, among others (Appelqvist-Schmidlechner et al., 2016; Nolan et al., 2009). All participants in the transition process should ensure that socio-emotional competencies are promoted during the transition process to school. These competencies can be beneficial for developmental continuity, for better coping during transitions and for progressing through school (Margetts, 2014; Fitzpatrick and Pagani, 2012; Dunlop and Fabian, 2006).

Children's views need to be accounted for when preparing transitions

Since the turn of the century, children's views are increasingly being taken into account for shaping their own transition and learning. This approach stems from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), as well as from research highlighting the importance of children's active participation in pedagogies and education (Hilppö et al., 2016; Ebbeck, et al., 2013; Lipponen, Kumpulainen and Hilppö, 2013; Einarsdóttir, 2007; Bandura et al., 2001). Behind these notions lies the view of children as an active agent in their own life (Strandell, 2010; Lipponen et al., 2013). Research in Finland, for example, suggests that children's role as agents in the context of transition is key for developing children's competencies and capabilities. If children are active participants in aspects that matter in their life, they can commit more deeply to the activities required (Lipponen et al., 2013).

Similarly, Ackesjö (2013) argues that understanding children's perspectives on how they experience the transition is essential for developing suitable transition practices. When transitions are based on children's perspectives, interests, motives and questions, they contribute to making the transition transparent and to giving children and parents a sense of continuity and agency. Furthermore, children's views and concerns may differ from those of parents and teachers (Docket and Perry, 2003). Hence, listening to children talk about their expectations (when they are in preschool) and their experience (when they are in primary school) helps to better understand the challenges they face; and helps to improve the support that parents and pedagogical staff in ECEC settings and schools can provide.

One of the most recurrent findings from studies listening to children's voices is the importance of making the transition with friends, which enables children to like school, and to reduce anxiety and nervousness when entering the new learning environment (Margetts, 2007). A study in Finland, for example, finds that for preschool children, peer relations – maintaining and making new friends – is one of the most important elements for a positive transfer to primary school; followed by children's beliefs and expectations of learning (Eskelä-Haapanen et al., 2016). Similarly, Huf's (2013) comparative ethnographic study from England and Germany highlights the importance of starting school with former peers for strengthening children's sense of agency (i.e. the degree to which children are allowed to make choices and decisions on matters related to their own learning experience). In England, where children remained with their peers in the same group, children were better able to establish their new role and to actively contribute to their new learning environment than their German peers, who were split and placed in different groups at school entry.

A qualitative study involving children in Australia showed that there are a number of factors that children regard as important to know before they start school (Margetts, 2009; Margetts, 2013). These include: affective and social relationships (knowing how to make friends and having someone to rely on); pre-academic skills (knowing how to learn and knowledge of literacy and numeracy); school rules and school procedures (knowing what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and knowing what to do); classroom procedures (knowing what the classroom is like and how to behave); and feelings (knowing how to feel good and how to avoid feeling scared). By understanding and facilitating experiences that allow children to learn about these issues and having realistic expectations of what will happen at school, parents and teachers can help children have a smoother and happier start at school.

Parental involvement facilitates the transition to primary school

Parental involvement in children's learning and development begins at birth, by providing guidance, developing habits, imparting values, supporting learning experiences and sharing expectations. In addition, supportive relationships that generate healthy attachments positively affect children's understanding and regulation of emotions as well as their feelings of security and tastes for exploration and learning (OECD, 2015a). The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and many other studies show that children whose parents engage in activities such as reading, writing words, telling stories and singing songs not only tend to better in reading and numeracy skills, but are also more motivated to learn (Scottish Government, 2016; Van Voorhis et al., 2013; OECD, 2012; Sylva et al., 2003).

Some of the most robust evidence for the importance of parental involvement for child development comes from longitudinal studies such as the Effective Provision of Preschool Education study (EPPE; Sylva et al., 2003). This study examined the quality of the home learning environment on preschoolers' development using a range of parental activities (e.g. reading with the child, teaching songs and nursery rhymes, painting and drawing, playing with letters and numbers, visiting the library, teaching the alphabet and numbers, taking children on visits and creating regular opportunities for them to play with their friends at home). Results suggest that parental involvement in children's learning was more important than parental education, occupation or income for the child's cognitive and socio-emotional development (Sylva et al., 2003). The EPPE report concludes that "What parents do is more important than who they are" (Siraj-Blachford et al., 2008, p. 25). Research shows, however, that while parental involvement reduces the negative effects of disadvantage on children's early learning and well-being, it cannot fully eliminate them (Hango, 2005; Kiernan and Huerta, 2008).

Families play a particularly important role in shaping children's learning and development during infancy and early childhood. During the transition stage to primary school, parents play a critical role in supporting children's developmental continuity (McWayne et al., 2012). An affectionate and supportive parent-child relationship leads to smoother schooling transitions, higher academic achievement and fewer behavioural difficulties (Pianta et al., 1997; Pianta and Harbers, 1996). This period is an opportunity for parents to identify children's difficulties and provide the support needed to get off to a stronger start at primary school (Lillejord et al., 2017). This is particularly true for children lagging behind in their socio-emotional development (Malsch et al., 2011) or for children from disadvantaged households (Margetts, 2007).

Numerous factors, however, affect the extent to which parents engage in transition activities and in children's education in general. These include children's age, parents' socio-economic characteristics, parent's marital status, language, and attitudes to and expectations of education (OECD, 2001). An important barrier is the time parents devote to other activities, including employment. Parental employment may limit their involvement as it decreases the quantity and quality of time they can spend with their children (Huerta et al., 2014; Waldfogel, 2006). Children from disadvantaged households tend to have less parental engagement because parents or carers may work long and/or unusual hours (weekends and night shifts); may not speak the language spoken at the ECEC setting or school; and/or may be so stressed by financial constraints that they lack the energy needed to engage in child-related activities.

The intensity and frequency of the transition activities targeted towards parents might also matter for developmental continuity. "High-intensity" transition activities for parents are those that involve personal contact with ECEC and/or primary-school teachers before the child transits to primary school (Little et al., 2016). These activities may include parents attending an orientation session prior to the school year; teachers visiting children's homes at the beginning of the school year; parents meeting with the preschool teacher, etc. By contrast, "low-intensity" activities are less

personal. They may include sending information home after or before school starts, hosting an open house, or parents and children visiting the primary school prior to the start of the school year (Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al. 2005). Evidence from the United States shows that “high-intensity” activities are more effective and beneficial, but they tend to be less common in high-poverty areas where they are most needed (Schulting et al., 2005).

Additionally, research shows that the number of transition activities that parents participate in is positively associated with academic and socio-emotional gains in the first year of primary school, even after controlling for factors such as socio-economic status (Margetts 2007; 2003; Puccioni, 2015; Schulting et al., 2005). The effect is stronger for children from lower-income households, suggesting that transition activities moderate the negative association between disadvantage and child learning outcomes (Schulting et al., 2005). It is worth noting that it is possible that these results are driven by parental engagement in children’s learning more than by participation in these activities. This is because parents who are engaged in children’s education are likely to participate most in transition activities.

Engaging parents in the transition process not only helps to improve children’s preparedness for school (Margetts, 2003), it also helps parents feel more engaged with the ECEC and school community and more aware of support and resources available (Van Voorhis et al., 2013). It thus contributes to increasing parental participation in primary school (Schulting et al., 2005; 2008).²

Parental engagement is, however, often encouraged more in preschool than in primary school (Stipek et al., 2017). Parents who have been involved in preschool activities need to be given opportunities to continue engaging in children’s school-related activities when in primary school. If parent-staff collaborations weaken when children transit to primary school, parental engagement in children’s school-related activities is likely to decrease, which in turn may negatively affect children’s learning experiences (Stipek et al., 2017). Hence, continuity in parent-staff collaborations when children transit to primary school is also important.

Collaboration between parents and staff is key for a successful transition

Parents are a critical partner of ECEC settings and schools as they help provide continuity to children’s learning when they move to primary school (Peters, 2010; Dunlop and Fabian, 2006). The transition from ECEC to primary school is an optimal moment to establish a positive relationship between parents and staff both in ECEC and primary-school settings (Peters, 2010). Strong and supportive relationships among these actors are key for a successful transition (Docket and Perry, 2009). Furthermore, the quality of these relationships during the transition period can foster developmental continuity in learning as children move vertically and horizontally across levels and settings (Bohan-Baker and Little, 2002). It can also facilitate continuity in parental involvement when children start school (Schulting et al., 2005; 2008).

Parents together with preschool and primary school teachers are part of the transition experience of the child, and as such they should regularly monitor children’s development and well-being and should ensure the child receives the support needed during the transition process (Lillejord et al., 2017). A strong collaboration with parents enables them to support children at home with activities that complement those being conducted in preschool or school. Fisher (2009) emphasises the importance of dialogue among teachers, children and parents to collaborate as these exchanges allow the different expectations of these groups to be recognised.

Staff and parents cannot assume that adjustment to school is organic and unproblematic, even when the child seems to adjust easily to the new environment (Ackesjö, 2013). During the transition process, children may experience stress which can bring about changes in their behaviour, including regressive behaviours such as thumb sucking and bed wetting (Hirst et al., 2011). It is important that

parents are informed of these possible behaviours. Raising awareness of these potential difficulties may allow parents and teachers to identify children that require additional support and to provide it before behavioural problems lead to struggles.

ECEC staff and primary school teachers should share with parents and children the reason and purpose of the transition activities, explain the difficulties children may experience during this process and provide practical information and advice. Evidence shows that transition programmes that provide relevant information to parents on the process help build parents' self-efficacy in managing this experience (Hirst et al., 2011). This can include for example: information on how to support their child in preparing for school; the common behaviours and challenges that children experience during transition; and whether the child is coping well during the transition or if they need additional support (Hirst et al., 2011).

Evidence from the Head Start programme³ in the United States corroborates the importance of school collaboration with parents. This programme prepares parents and their children for entry into school (kindergarten in the United States) in three ways: 1) sharing information with parents about differences and similarities; 2) providing emotional support for children, including visits to the school's playgrounds and classrooms; and, 3) empowering parents as advocates for their children and enabling them to participate in school activities. A qualitative study with parents, ECEC staff and first year primary-school teachers revealed that parents value these initiatives and find them helpful in supporting children during the transition (Malsch et al., 2011). Another study showed that these collaborations helped improve early literacy success in children by encouraging home literacy practices for both English-speaking and English-learners (Zaslow et al., 2004).

Similarly, findings from the EPPE study show that children tend to do better in ECEC centres that work together with parents (Sylva et al., 2004). The most effective settings in promoting children's learning are those where there is a high level of parental involvement with the ECEC centre activities (Sylva et al., 2003 and 2004); where child-related information is shared between parents and staff; and where parents participate in defining children's learning programmes (Huser et al., 2016; Lillejord et al., 2017; Hirst et al., 2011).

One obstacle for collaboration between parents and teachers is when they have different ideas and expectations of learning and development, and of school readiness (Arndt et al., 2013). Parents, in general, hold high expectations for children's pre-academic learning, perceiving it to be a precondition for a smooth transition and a positive school adjustment. The CARE project (Curriculum and Quality Analysis and Impact Review or European Early Childhood Education and Care) found that parents in all participating countries⁴ thought that fostering social and emotional skills (e.g. interpersonal skills, emotional regulation and personal learning attitudes) together with pre-academic skills were important developmental goals for young children (Broekhuizen et al., 2015). Furthermore, this study suggests that parents allocate increasing importance to all learning and developmental goals as children grow older, especially goals related to pre-academic skills. There are, however, differences in expectations among parents. For instance, immigrant parents tend to give greater importance to pre-academic goals than non-immigrant parents (Broekhuizen et al., 2015).

On the other hand, staff in both ECEC and primary schools tend to have a more holistic approach to learning, though with some nuances: primary school teachers consider pre-academic skills to be a learning area of high importance, while ECEC staff consider pre-academic skills of lower importance than socio-emotional development (Arndt et al., 2013; Lillejord et al., 2017). Other evidence points to a misalignment in preschool and primary school teachers' beliefs regarding the importance of the set of skills needed at school entry (Abry et al., 2015). Research shows that exposure to this misalignment is negatively associated with children's school adjustment (Abry et al., 2015).

Differences in teachers' and parents' beliefs and expectations are likely to vary depending on the context, with teachers likely to be influenced by their experiences during pre-service training, by their practice in the classroom and by educational policy (Abry et al., 2015). For example, countries such as France, the United Kingdom and the United States place a stronger emphasis on "readiness for school", even at pre-primary level, as opposed to the Nordic countries, which emphasise life preparation in a broader sense (see Chapter 6).

The relationship between parents and preschool and primary school teachers is not always straightforward or egalitarian. Some studies have observed that the views of pedagogical staff tend to dominate those of parents (Lillejord et al., 2017). The relationship may be especially unbalanced and difficult for parents who have feelings of distrust or inadequacy; who themselves had poor school experiences; or who believe that schools hold conflicting cultural values to their own (Arnold et al., 2006; Lillejord et al., 2017; Turunen, 2012). This can be especially true for parents from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Collaboration between ECEC and primary school is another important precondition for successful transitions

Strong collaboration across ECEC settings or between ECEC centres and primary school can also help children and families better navigate the transition to school, as we have seen in previous chapters. When the school builds upon and improves what the children have already learned in early childhood education and care, it contributes to continuity in their learning experiences (Lillejord et al., 2017; see Chapter 4). An Australian study found that children who experience similar environments in different settings, such as an ECEC setting and school, are likely to find the transition to school, as well as school in general, easier (Dockett and Perry, 2001). This means that collaborative measures are needed that connect the last period of ECEC with the school start (Lillejord et al., 2017).

Several differences between ECEC and primary schools may act as barriers to the collaboration between staff in the two institutions. These differences include not only different educational practices and learning environments (see Chapter 4), but also different attitudes, expectations, qualifications, resources and working conditions (see Chapter 3). These gaps are likely to differ across countries, with less integrated and decentralised systems having greater risks of fragmentation and poor alignment, making co-operation across sectors and across settings more challenging (see Chapter 2).

One impact of these differences can be unequal relationships between the two levels of education, which explains in great part the tensions between pedagogical staff and the difficulty in establishing fruitful collaborations (Lillejord et al., 2017). Several studies have concluded that schools' views and practices tend to dominate the collaboration between ECEC settings and schools (Lillejord et al., 2017) (see Chapter 4). The influence of school on preschool practice has been observed in previous studies, with ECEC staff expressing concerns about pressure to adopt the teaching methods of primary school (Peters 2000; see also the literature review in Chapter 4). Dockett and Perry (2014), on the other hand, observed that in Australia staff in both institutions believe their practices are the best and most important to implement. Such imbalances in the relationship pose challenges to co-operation between the two sectors.

Pedagogical collaboration on curriculum issues, teaching practices and sharing child development information between ECEC and school settings has been positively associated with children's later academic skills, as evidence from Finland shows (Ahtola et al., 2011b) (see Chapter 4).⁵ Close communication about children's previous experiences and learning contributes to easing children's stress and school adjustment; to better tailoring transition activities; and to

identifying children in need of additional support (Lillejord et al., 2017). Likewise, evidence from a multistate study in the United States found that when preschool teachers shared information about curricula or specific children, children developed positive social competencies and fewer negative behavioural problems (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008).⁶

Professional collaboration is challenging, however. A Norwegian case study emphasises that for it to be fruitful, it requires a common understanding of goals and aims, as well as respect for the other's expertise, background, practices and institutional cultures (Lillejord et al., 2017). It concludes that communication is crucial and that staff from both sectors need to learn about their counterparts' practices so that the collaboration is based on knowledge and not on prejudices (Lillejord et al., 2016). Initiatives from both educational levels can lead to more equal relationships and to a "professional learning community" (Boyle and Petriwskyj, 2014) (see Chapter 3).

Strong communication between education sectors also allows for the exchange of other information that can ease children's transitions to school. For example, good communication between staff across sectors can ensure the child has a friend in the same class upon school entry – an element that can have a positive impact on children's developmental continuity and well-being. This option, however, may be difficult to implement, especially in jurisdictions without an integrated system. Structural differences across systems may or may not permit this kind of collaborative practice.

Collaboration with other child-focused and community services

Young children's development is not only influenced by the input of parents, ECEC settings and schools, but also by other members of the community. Therefore, it is important that different services – ECEC settings, health services, out-of-school services – work together and create a "continuum of services" that is reassuring for parents and can meet the needs of young children (OECD, 2011).

Other members of the community – including integrated early years services and health professionals – can also support the transition from ECEC to school. Children may struggle more when starting school and with learning if they have health issues (e.g. hearing or visual problems). The support of health professionals is therefore particularly important for these children. Similarly, early years' services programmes (e.g. Flying Start in Wales (United Kingdom) or the Head Start in the United States) are key for providing integrated services to disadvantaged families (e.g. health visiting services, language support, parenting programmes). The existence of this collaboration and involvement during the transition process is, however, less well documented in the literature.

The involvement of wider community services (e.g. health or social services and sport organisations) or community members in ECEC plays an important role in the development of young children. Community support for the early development process is considered as one of the characteristics common to high-quality ECEC centres (Henderson et al., 2002). If the connection between schools and communities is strong, it is easier for children to develop the skills needed to be successful socially and emotionally, physically and academically (Edwards et al., 2008, Oakes and Lipton, 2007; OECD, 2006).

Moreover, a continuum between ECEC services, parents, neighbours and other civil society stakeholders can enhance co-operation among different services, leading to a comprehensive services approach (OECD, 2015b). Comprehensive services are more responsive to what children actually need in terms of their overall development and to what parents need in terms of childcare, health care and other opportunities. A strong comprehensive system of community and formal ECEC services empowers disadvantaged families.

Research gaps remain

The growing political interest in transitions has led to increased research on this topic. However, there are still important gaps in the knowledge about practices that enhance children's developmental continuity. First, there is little information about how many children experience a successful transition to school and how many experience difficulties and why. Second, there is a need for more rigorous studies that shed light into what kind of transition activities are most effective in supporting children's continuity in learning and adjustment to school. Third, an area with limited evidence is the kind of transition programmes that are most effective in supporting children and parents from disadvantaged backgrounds. Fourth, more research is needed to better understand the kind of collaborations that work and that promote positive outcomes for children, parents and staff. For instance, little is known about how child development information is shared and used by the key actors involved in transitions. Fifth, there is still a need for further research from the child and parents' perspective on their transition experiences. Finally, more research is needed into the most effective type of collaboration with child-related community services for supporting a healthy transition to school.

To what extent are countries ensuring developmental continuity?

This section looks at how collaborations on transitions between different actors are organised in participating jurisdictions. It explores the policies and practices implemented by participating jurisdictions to prepare children for transitions and to involve children in shaping their own transition experience. It also compares the different approaches used by countries to encourage parental involvement in transitions and collaboration between ECEC settings and primary schools. The section ends with a review of the practices used to promote the involvement of other child-related community services in providing additional or special support to transition activities. The information for this section is mainly drawn from the 9 country background reports and a questionnaire completed by 27 OECD countries and 3 partner countries (Colombia, Croatia and Kazakhstan) in 2015/2016 (see Annex A for details on the methodology).

Nearly all jurisdictions have specific activities to prepare children for transitions

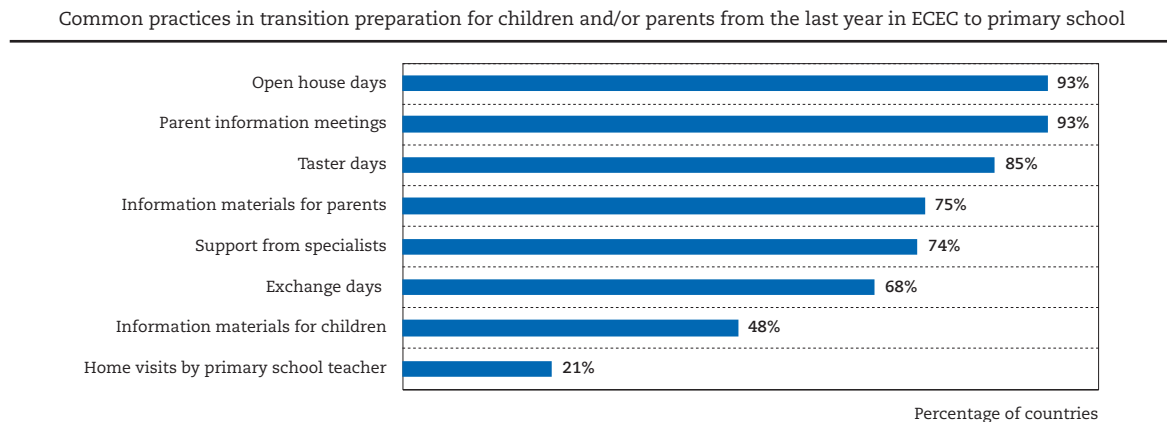
The OECD survey on transitions asked countries about their provision of eight common activities to prepare parents and children for primary school (see Figure 5.1). The list of activities is not exhaustive but represents the most common practices. Of the 28 countries who responded, all but two (Mexico and Ireland) prepare children for transitions with specific activities or lessons. The most common activities are open-house days (visits to primary schools) (93%), parent information meetings (89%) and taster days, where ECEC children participate in primary school activities for one or more days (85%). Several countries reported offering support for transitions from specialists, mainly for children with special learning needs (e.g. Austria, most jurisdictions in Canada, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Sweden and Switzerland).

Other transition activities are less common, such as providing specific information materials for children (e.g. books, booklets, TV programmes or videos designed for children) (48%) and home visits by future primary school teachers (21%). Such activities are generally only offered in specific circumstances. For example, in Canada home visits can be planned for children or families who live in rural or remote areas, or for children who have additional support needs (e.g. a physical, cognitive, neurodevelopmental, or learning disability or behavioural and/or emotional needs).

The transition activities presented above provide an overall picture of the common practices offered in participating countries. As most settings have discretion in deciding what practices they implement, it is likely that provision and practices will vary across regions, municipalities and settings. Furthermore, countries are likely to have practices that were not included in the survey.

The nine countries that provided detailed background notes (see above and in Annex A) report a number of activities to prepare children during the transition stage. These, however, vary in their timing, intensity and focus. In Austria, children are exposed to several activities to familiarise them with the school learning environment. These include mutual visits by teachers and/or children, and joint projects and activities like celebrations, sport events, singing, acting or project days. In Denmark, some of the common ways to prepare children for school are visits to the school, special organised activities for children during their last year in ECEC, and conversations with parents. In Finland, parents also visit schools during the last year before primary school, although these visits are not frequent or intense (Danish Ministry for Children and Social Affairs, 2016). Depending on local stakeholders, children can visit the school the day before the school year starts, and possibly meet the teacher beforehand.


Figure 5.1 **Open house days and parent information meetings are the most common method for preparing children for transitions**



Notes: Information on transition activities is based on 28 countries.

Data by country can be found in Annex 5.A, Table 5.A.1.

Source: OECD Network on ECEC, "Survey on transitions between ECEC and primary education", June 2016.

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In Sweden, the curriculum does not include specific practices for preparing preschool children for the transition to compulsory school. Nevertheless, a number of preparatory activities are possible. Localities may have action plans designed as a transition cycle that indicate when (point of time), what (which activity) and who is responsible for transition practices (e.g., preschool teachers, compulsory school teachers, head-teachers, teacher for special needs). For example, in May, the preschool teachers and the primary school teachers together organise a visit to the preschool class (Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

A common practice to prepare children for the transition to primary schools, not shown in the figure above, is language development support. Support and stimulation of children's language development has gained particular attention in recent years in a number of OECD countries (e.g. Austria, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Wales (United Kingdom), Canada, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands), some of which participated in this study (for examples see Box 5.2). A proficient understanding and use of the language of instruction and of children's mother tongues are considered necessary to learn, to develop a personal identity and to ensure a good start in school. In Sweden, for instance, great importance is given to language development and the Education Act stipulates that preschools should work on developing both Swedish and children's mother tongues (Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

Box 5.2 Special support for children's language development: Examples from Germany and the Netherlands

In **Germany**, the support and stimulation of children's language development has gained particular attention in recent years. Language development programmes are not explicitly aligned with the transition from ECEC to primary school, however a proficient understanding and use of the language of instruction (German, but also in children's other mother tongues) is considered a precondition for a good start in school. It is argued that oral language skills acquired in ECEC may serve as a basis to promote literacy competencies in preschool. Growing awareness of the needs of children from immigrant backgrounds has led to the introduction of language assessment/screening schemes in 14 of the 16 German Länder. These assessments are usually conducted 24-12 months before children's transition to school.

Support for other mother tongues besides German is only provided within individual projects or on the initiative of ECEC staff/centres/providers. Currently, the most common practice to enhance children's skills in German is the child-oriented approach "*Alltagsintegrierte Sprachliche Bildung*" (i.e. language education embedded into daily routines). This approach was spread nationwide through the federal programme "*Frühe Chancen: Schwerpunkt-Kitas Sprache und Integration*" [Language day nurseries: because language is the key to the world], and continued through the follow-up programme: "*Sprach-Kitas: Weil Sprache der Schlüssel zur Welt ist*" [Early Chances: Childcare centers with special focus on language and integration].

In the **Netherlands**, support for children's language development (Dutch) is also of growing importance. Implementation of language development activities started in 2009, and by 2012 the budget allocated to such activities had been increased further in larger municipalities. The same language curriculum prevails across ECEC and primary school, adapted to the different ages. This facilitates transitions and helps children be better prepared for entering school. Young children are entitled to receive language development support, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. These children can participate in ECEC-targeted programmes (*vooren vroege schoolse educaties*, vve for short), which provide support before and during the first years of school. The "vve" contain special programmes aimed at language development. All toddlers (2.5 to 4 years old) who are part of the "vve" programme receive 10 hours of language development per week. The rest of the day targeted toddlers attend the same ECEC programme as their non-targeted peers.

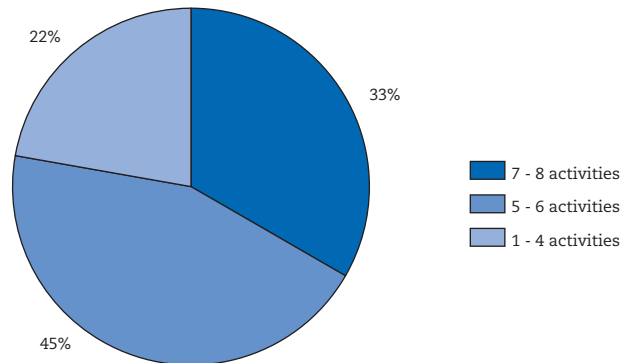
Findings from the Pre-COOL national cohort study show that this approach works (Akgündüz and Heijnen, 2016; Leseman et al., 2017). Participating in daycare centres and preschools decreases the early gap in language and executive function skills (measured by a selective-sustained attention test) for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Disadvantaged children who participate in daycare centres and preschools implementing "vve" programmes show even more enhanced language and executive function development than similar children who participated in centres and preschools without "vve". Social-emotional development has not yet been examined. The findings regarding children's work attitude as evaluated by teachers show a remaining gap for children of low-educated parents and an increasing gap for children of immigration background compared to other children. The effects on language and executive function are directly related to working with an education programme, through its focus on language instruction. There were also indirect effects, as working with such a programme was related to higher observed educational process quality, and to a higher teacher-reported frequency of guided play and pre-mathematical activities in the classroom, which in turn significantly predicted language and executive function development (Leseman et al., 2017).

Sources: <http://sprach-kitas.fruehe-chancen.de/programm/ueber-das-programm>; Akgündüz, Y. and S.M.M. Heijnen (2016), "Impact of funding targeted preschool interventions on school readiness: evidence from the Netherlands", CPB Discussion Paper 328, www.cpb.nl/sites/default/files/publicaties/download/cpb-discussion-paper-328-impact-funding-targeted-preschool-interventions-school-readiness.pdf; Leseman, P. et al. (2017), "Effectiveness of Dutch targeted preschool education policy for disadvantaged children: Evidence from the pre-COOL study", in Blossfeld, H.-P., et al. (eds), *Childcare, Early Education and Social Inequality: An International Perspective*.

The number of transition activities offered to parents and children indicates the level of policy development and commitment to transition. Figure 5.2 shows that the majority of countries offer several transition activities for parents and children, with the most common number being five out of a list of eight. One-third of countries reported providing seven to eight different transition activities, while 45% offer five to six. Germany, the Netherlands and the Slovak Republic all offer eight transition activities.⁷ On the other hand, Greece, Ireland and Mexico offer fewer than three (see also Table 5.A.1 in the chapter annex). Once again, it is possible that there is wide variation within countries on the actual number of activities offered as implementation is up to the autonomy/

discretion of municipalities and staff in the ECEC centres and schools. Nevertheless, Figure 5.2 paints a positive picture, showing that most countries have a rich set of activities to prepare children and parents for the transit to primary school, which research suggests is essential for children’s positive learning experiences.

Figure 5.2 **Most countries have multiple activities to prepare children and parents for primary school**



Notes: Information on transition activities is based on 27 countries. Countries with more than one missing value in transition activities were not considered here. These include: Chile, Italy and Japan.


Data by country can be found in Annex 5A, Table 5.A.1.

Countries with 7-8 transition practices: Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Slovak Republic, Spain, Turkey.

Countries with 5-6 transition practices: Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Wales (United Kingdom).

Countries with 1-4 transition practices: Belgium (Flemish community), Colombia, Greece, Ireland, Mexico, Norway.

Source: OECD Network on ECEC, “Survey on transitions between ECEC and primary education”, June 2016.

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Countries vary in how they include children’s views in transition preparations

Research shows that preparing transition activities with the participation of children helps ensure children better understand and take ownership of their own transition. Understanding children’s views is important for identifying their expectations, experiences and needs (Margetts, 2014). Participating countries increasingly view children as active participants in their own transition and learning. However, the extent to which children’s views are taken into account in shaping policies and practices is difficult to tell.

Some countries recognise the importance of children’s participation in their curriculum frameworks (e.g. Denmark, Norway and Wales (United Kingdom)) and/or in their education acts (e.g. Finland, Norway and Sweden) (Table 5.1). By doing so, local authorities, ECEC facilities and schools are also obliged to consider children’s views when developing their transition programmes. For example, in Norway, the Kindergarten Act states that “Children in kindergartens shall have the right to express their views on the day-to-day activities of the kindergarten. Children shall regularly be given the opportunity to take active part in planning and assessing the activities of the kindergarten. The children’s views shall be given due weight according to their age and maturity. The right to participate applies to all years of ECEC and not only to the final year” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017).

In Finland, the ECEC Act includes regulations for the participation of children and parents. The goals, tasks and working approaches are discussed with the child and her/his guardian when children move into pre-primary education and to primary school. The aim is to familiarise children and parents with the learning environments, activities and personnel of the new setting before teaching begins. These practices are implemented at the municipality level and not at the national level. The importance of children’s views is also mentioned widely in the curriculum, but not specifically linked to transitions.

Additionally, Finnish children are involved in shaping transitions through the increasing use of inclusive research methods to capture children's perspectives (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016).

The Swedish Education Act specifies that the interests of the child shall be a primary consideration at all education levels. In Wales (United Kingdom), collaboration with the child is an essential part of the pedagogical principles of the Foundation Phase framework. These countries underscore that children's views should be taken into account in all matters that concern them, including the development of policies and practices around transitions.

Austria and Denmark organise activities to involve children in the transition process. For example, Austria has organised staff-child conversations, known as "reflection talks". During these conversations, children express their expectations for the transition process and for primary school. In Denmark, there are multiple activities to gather children's views and feedback, including through dialogue between ECEC staff and parents. Both the Austrian and the Danish approach allow staff to understand how to best prepare children for school and how to ensure a smooth learning path. However, these exchanges are not widespread, and vary across settings.

The fact that some countries' education acts and curricula recognise the important role of accounting for children's views does not necessarily mean that children participate in shaping practices. While the Nordic countries have a strong emphasis on children's participation, guided either by their curriculum or their education acts, they do not standardise how children's participation should be implemented. Likewise, other participating countries lack national standards for encouraging or accounting for children's views during transition (Table 5.1). In general, children's involvement differs across municipalities, ECEC settings and schools, irrespective of whether there are national standards or not.

Equally, the staff-child conversations generally aim at informing children about the transition process, rather than involving them in planning and implementation. This was noted in Slovenia, for example, in interviews with experts and senior personnel of the National Education Institute. Although preschool teachers have conversations with children about what will happen during the transition to school, this does not ensure that teachers take into account children's views and opinions on the preparation for school (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, 2017). In addition, a study conducted in Norwegian ECEC settings in 2010 revealed that although children participated in planning, carrying out and evaluating school preparatory activities, they were less involved in research or in giving their views for shaping practices (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017). Japan mentions that children have the opportunity to learn about primary school peers and teachers through organised exchanges, but it is not clear whether they are involved in planning transition activities (Government of Japan, 2016).

Table 5.1 **Is the importance of children's views mentioned in education acts and curricula?**

	Education acts	Curricula
Austria	No	No
Denmark	No	Yes
Finland	Yes	Yes
Japan	No	No
Kazakhstan	No	No
Norway	Yes	Yes
Slovenia	No	Yes
Sweden	Yes	No
Wales (UK)	No	Yes

Note: This table refers to education acts and curricula in either preschool or primary school education. In countries where both type of acts or curricula exist, the table makes no distinction.

Source: OECD country background reports on transitions, 2016 and 2017.

Collaboration with parents is guided by policy in most countries

Research suggests that strong, trustful and respectful collaboration between parents and ECEC settings and schools can help ensure a smooth transition to school by co-developing children's competencies and learning dispositions. Most countries have programmes or activities to encourage parents to get involved in children's development. These activities can begin during the early years right after the child is born; when the child makes his or her first transition from the home environment to the ECEC setting; and when the child transitions to primary education.

Several participating countries take a long-term approach to parental involvement. Austria, for example, takes an early, continuous and long-term approach towards collaboration with the home environment. Engagement with parents starts from the moment the child is born, when parents receive information on public support measures and ECEC services. The transition from home to ECEC is considered by the curriculum framework to be the first transition to occur. At this stage, parents receive information to guide their involvement.⁸ When the child is in ECEC, parents are informed on the transition from ECEC to primary school through online resources and various brochures (in Vienna, these materials are multilingual and include versions in English, Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian and Turkish). Furthermore, parents of five-year-olds are contacted individually to provide them with information on the last mandatory year of ECEC (kindergarten). Efforts to involve parents in children's education continue into primary education. The curriculum for this level recommends that parents participate in the arrangement of school activities and exchanging of information is explicitly encouraged.

In Norway, *Forskrift om rammeplan for barnehagens innhold og oppgaver* [The Framework Plan for the Content of Tasks of Kindergarten], clearly states that kindergartens should, in collaboration with schools, facilitate children's transition to school in co-operation with parents. In Denmark, the act governing daycare facilities also promotes this collaboration with parents. Further, the ECEC system and the *Folkeskole* (public schools) are committed to collaborating with parents from the beginning of ECEC and until the child is in ninth or tenth grade. In Finland, informal discussions with parents/guardians take place in ECEC, when children transition from one ECEC group to another within the same ECEC setting. These discussions may involve consulting parents on whether the child is mature enough to be transferred to the next group. However, official discussions with the child and parents begin when the child moves to pre-primary education and they mainly concentrate on the topic of transitions. Parent-staff conversations continue when the child moves to primary education. The aim is for children and parents to have an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the goals, learning environments, activities and working approaches of pre-primary and primary education (grades 1 and 2) before beginning formal learning.

In Australia, the free Learning Potential mobile app and website (www.learningpotential.gov.au) have been developed to help parents engage with their children's education from birth to high school. The app and website contain articles and informative videos, tips and suggestions to help parents become more involved in their children's education. Learning Potential provides parents and carers with practical tips and information on how to make the most of their time with their children to support their learning and development – including information on how to help children with the transition to school.⁹

The importance of working with parents to support children's learning and development is underscored in national guidelines or curriculum frameworks in all participating countries, except Finland and Japan (Table 5.2). In general, these documents provide recommendations to support staff, but they do not provide indications of specific practices. One such country is Norway, where the curriculum framework and a national guide (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2008) emphasise that parents must be well informed on legal, practical, structural and content matters relating to school. However, they do not specify how parents should be involved. In Denmark, parents have a legislative right to form parent associations with both ECEC and school.

Table 5.2 **Is parental involvement in transitions mentioned in education acts and curricula?**

	Education acts	Curricula
Austria	Yes	Yes
Denmark	No	Yes
Finland	No	No
Japan	No	No
Kazakhstan	Yes	Yes
Norway	No	Yes
Slovenia	Yes	Yes
Sweden	Yes	No
Wales (UK)	No	Yes

Source: OECD country background reports on transitions, 2016 and 2017..

Similarly, in Austria, Finland, Slovenia, Sweden and Kazakhstan, collaboration between parents and teachers is emphasised in their curricula (Table 5.3; see also Table 4.A.7 in the annex to Chapter 4 for details of all the curricula). In Austria, the curriculum for primary schools¹⁰ recommends that teachers and parents consult each other, that parents and teachers exchange relevant information, and that parents participate in the arrangement of school activities (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2016). In Finland, the national core curriculum makes specific reference to co-operation with parents in transition phases and mandates the municipalities to plan and describe the co-operation practices in their local curriculum (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). In Slovenia, co-operation with parents is specified in the Kindergarten Curriculum and in the kindergarten annual work plan. In Sweden, both the curriculum for preschool (Lpfö 98) and the curriculum for the compulsory school, the preschool class and the recreation centre (Lgr 11), stress the importance of preparing guardians for transitions and indicate that the head teacher is responsible for ensuring co-operation between the school and the home, especially if the child experiences problems and difficulties (Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). In Kazakhstan, parental engagement is laid out in the curriculum for pre-primary education (“Biz mektepke baramyz”) and in the Education Act. The latter stipulates that parents are responsible to ensure the school readiness of their child (JSC IAC, 2017).

The German ECEC curricula makes suggestions for the collaboration of staff and parents to support transition, which Länders may decide to adapt (e.g. the Saxonian Curriculum refers to collaboration with parents). However, as in most countries, these guidelines are not mandatory.

Table 5.3 **Is collaboration between parents and staff on transitions mentioned in education acts and curricula?**

	Education acts	Curricula
Austria	No	Yes
Denmark	No	No
Finland	Yes	Yes
Japan	No	No
Kazakhstan	No	Yes
Norway	No	Yes
Slovenia	Yes	Yes
Sweden	Yes	Yes
Wales (UK)	No	No

Source: OECD country background reports on transitions, 2016 and 2017.

There is a variety of activities for involving parents in the transition stage. Common activities across countries are listed below (several are also designed to prepare children for the transition and have already been discussed in the context of Figure 5.1 above):

- parent information meetings with pedagogical staff in ECEC and primary school

- information such as documents, videos and brochures distributed in preschools and schools and available online
- collaborative joint events between ECEC centres and schools, partly organised by parents and children
- home visits by the future primary school teacher
- transition planning, including writing child development information, such as a biography about a child's likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses
- collaboration with parents of children with special education needs.

Parent information meetings are one of the most common practices, reported by 89% of jurisdictions (Figure 5.1). During these meetings, ECEC centres or schools explain what happens at school, what children are learning, how and whether the child is making progress, and how parents can help. In Austria, for example, ECEC centres and schools have special days, known as “becoming acquainted” days, for informing new parents about the school. In Finland, there are parent-occasions at the start of the school year and other regular meetings, especially during the first school year. In Slovenia, parental involvement takes place mainly through informative meetings for parents (at least one or two meetings with parents whose children attend the final year before school) and through individual consultations with the preschool pedagogical staff. Additionally, the school may organise meetings and other activities for the parents of the future pupils (these activities are left to the autonomy of the institution).

Information materials for parents and children on how to prepare for the start of primary education are available in the majority of countries that answered the survey (75% for parents and 48% for children) (see Figure 5.1). This information tends to describe the school's goals, working methods and rules. These materials also provide advice and tips on how to prepare children for the transition. For example, Finland has produced a number of brochures and “welcome” information materials for parents and children who are about to start school. In Slovenia, primary schools have to provide information to parents through materials available in print at the school and through the school's website. This must include information about the school, the programme, the organisation of the school work in accordance with the Annual Work Plan, the rights and duties of pupils, house rules and other information.

Collaborative events between ECEC centres and schools are organised in most countries. Japan has various initiatives to deepen the understanding of parents and guardians about transitions. For instance, individual boards of education, schools and facilities organise joint events to explain about the significance of transition. In these collaborative events, parents and guardians may exchange opinions with other parents from primary schools; or they can observe joint kindergarten-primary school lessons. In addition, parents receive information about school life and learning programmes in primary schools. In Finland, parents can attend the first hours of the first-school day (doors are always open). And in Slovenia, parents and children visit schools to meet the teachers and other future first-year pupils and parents.

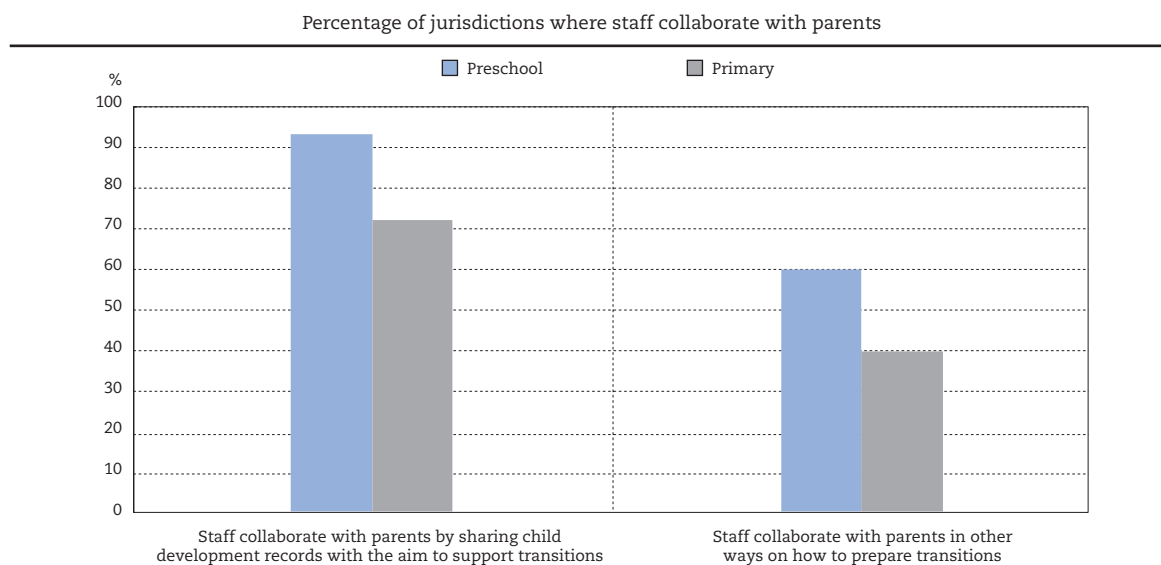
In Denmark, according to the Danish Act on Daycare Facilities, ECEC settings must co-operate with parents to ensure a good transition to school by developing and supporting basic skills and a desire to learn. Furthermore, daycare facilities must co-operate with schools to create a coherent transition to school. However, the daycare facilities act does not specify how the co-operation must be done, and it is therefore up to the council or the local municipality to decide how to secure a good transition. As a result, many different practices exist.

In Sweden, it is common for the child, parents and first grade teachers to meet before school starts. However, there is no national regulation on this, or on whether staff should share child

development information – although this is often done. National regulations only state that staff should collaborate with parents over child development.


Figure 5.3 compares the share of jurisdictions that have staff-parent collaboration in pre-primary and primary education. The figure clearly shows more collaboration at pre-primary level than at primary. While more than 90% of jurisdictions reported that ECEC staff collaborate with parents by sharing information on child development information, only 71% of jurisdictions do so in primary schools. For other types of staff-parent collaboration (e.g. parent information meetings, providing information on transitions, home visits among others), the gap between pre-primary and primary schools was similar. Around 60% of jurisdictions reported engaging in these other types of staff collaboration with parents in pre-primary education, compared to around 40% in primary education (Figure 5.3). These numbers suggest that staff-parent collaboration, which is key for parental involvement, decreases as children transit to primary school.

Figure 5.3 **Staff-parent transition collaboration is more common in ECEC settings than in primary school**



Notes: Information on staff-parent collaboration is based on 27 countries for preschool and 28 countries for primary school. Data by country can be found in Annex 5.A, Table 5.A.2.

Source: OECD Network on ECEC, "Survey on transitions between ECEC and primary education", June 2016.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933495703>

Another country where both ECEC and primary school staff collaborate on a regular basis with parents is Poland. Before the transition period, individual and group meetings with parents are held frequently to discuss various aspects including child transition. According to the Regulation by the Ministry of National Education, the preschool teacher is responsible for continuous observation of the child and for keeping up-to-date records which aim at identifying children's developmental needs. This information helps the teacher with her/his daily work and with co-operating with the child's parents. Likewise, this information provides the basis for co-operation with specialists offering psychological, educational and medical support. Moreover, the core curriculum for preschool education obliges teachers of six-year-olds enrolled in preschool to carry out an assessment of each child's readiness for school (preschool diagnosis). This assessment takes place in the school year preceding the child's enrollment in grade 1 of primary school. The results of the initial assessment are passed to the child's parents. On the basis of the initial assessment the teacher prepares an individual support plan related to the child's development. In sum, staff – in co-operation with parents and specialists – help prepare the child for primary school.

Children with special learning needs receive specialist transition support in most countries

For children with special learning needs, including speaking another language at home, the transition might be more daunting. Research shows that children with language acquisition difficulties are more likely to fail to learn how to read in primary education, regardless of the teaching method (Laloux, 2012). Working with parents as early as the first years of preschool education and through the transition to primary education can improve children's outcomes, including their reading capacity. Moreover, making efforts with parents to narrow language difficulties for non-native children can create trust and can foster a closer relationship with parents and communities.

The OECD survey on transitions indicates that the majority of countries (74%) who completed the survey (20 out of 27) provide children with support from specialists (e.g. psychologists or social care workers) during or after transitions (Figure 5.1). However, for most countries this support is especially or exclusively for children with special needs. This is the case for Austria, Canada (Box 5.3), Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, New Zealand,¹¹ Sweden and Wales (United Kingdom).

The nine countries that provided in-depth information on transitions also report organising special activities for parents of children with special needs. This includes translating information for parents of non-native children who need specially adapted language education (e.g. Austria, Norway, Wales (United Kingdom)), as well as organising targeted activities (e.g. Wales (United Kingdom)). In Slovenia, for example, the involvement of parents of children with special needs is stipulated in the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act. Parents participate in expert team meetings to discuss the development of their child, and they actively contribute to planning the transition to school. In addition, special projects for the Roma community are implemented in order to establish links and create trust between kindergartens/schools and Roma families. These projects include hiring Roma assistants and offering diverse activities in the settings (e.g. workshops, visits of Roma children to the afternoon groups in kindergarten). The education of Roma children is guided by a strategy adopted in 2004 and amended in 2011.

In Austria, the issue of inclusion has received increasing attention in recent years. Austria's approach aims to promote ways of thinking and acting that take into account the needs and interests of others and that simultaneously value differences between children and their talents. Collective and individual learning lie at its centre (Biewer, 2009). This inclusive approach is firmly anchored in the National Framework Curriculum. Legal regulations provide for the possibility of integrated teaching of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children in primary schools (and in lower secondary schools and in the lower level of secondary academic schools).

Box 5.3 Case study: Supporting the transition of children with special needs in Canada

Some Canadian jurisdictions provide resources and specialist support to facilitate transitions for children with special needs. A common tool is an individual education/programme/support services plan (the name varies between provinces and territories). This individual plan is a supporting document developed through a consultative process involving children, parents, school/programme staff, and other professionals. It provides detailed information about each specific child's learning and developmental needs (e.g. actions, strategies, and accommodations). This document is intended to guide teachers, ECE pedagogical staff, support staff, and families in providing all children with opportunities for success.

Specific examples include Alberta's *Learning Team Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs*; Newfoundland and Labrador's *Childcare Services Inclusion of Children with Special Needs Policy Manual*; Saskatchewan's *Childcare Inclusion Program*; Manitoba's *Protocol for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Additional Support Needs* [*Protocole pour l'entrée à l'école des jeunes enfants ayant besoin de soutien additionnel*]; and Quebec's *Services éducatifs aux élèves à risque et aux élèves handicaps ou en difficulté d'adaptation ou d'apprentissage* [Educational Services for At-Risk Students and Students With Handicaps, Social Maladjustments or Learning Difficulties] (EHDA).¹²

Sources: Information provided by the Canadian Government and edited by OECD.

In the Netherlands, ECEC settings with “vve” targeted programmes for disadvantaged children emphasise collaboration with parents (Box 5.2). The legislation governing the “vve” programmes stipulates that collaboration with parents is part of the programmes. Staff receive specific in-service training for these programmes, which includes how to collaborate with and provide support to parents. The Ministry of Education has drawn up agreements with the 37 largest municipalities about their “vve” efforts and goals, including efforts to collaborate with parents on supporting disadvantaged children during the transition stage. A recent study shows that because of extra funding to these municipalities, transitions between ECEC and school have significantly improved (see Box 5.2). In addition, the number of boys in the first years of primary education who have to repeat a school year has significantly decreased, indicating that these activities are helping boys become more ready for school during their ECEC years (Akgunduz and Heijnen, 2016).

In several countries, children with special learning needs receive support for the transition to school through community services (discussed further below).

Collaboration among teachers takes several forms

What staff do during transitions and how they collaborate across institutions is key for how children cope during transitions. ECEC staff and primary school teachers need to support children with carefully planned transition activities that should be conducted in close collaboration between staff of the two educational levels. Both sectors are responsible for helping the children understand and feel safe in the new context (Lillejord et al., 2017).

All participating jurisdictions have guidelines in their curriculum or national guides emphasising the importance of collaboration across sectors (Table 5.4). The Austrian curriculum framework, for example, states that the teachers of all involved institutions should provide opportunities for the integration of the two systems. Similarly, in Sweden both the curriculum for the preschool (Lpfö 98) and the curriculum for compulsory school, preschool class and recreation centres (Lgr 11) strongly highlight the need for co-operation (NAE, 2014a). Japan’s “National Curriculum of Day Care Centres” also states that active co-operation with primary schools should be promoted. In Slovenia, the Kindergarten Curriculum (*Kurikulum za vrtce*) stipulates the principle of continuity (vertical connectedness) between kindergarten (preschool) and basic school (integrated primary and lower-secondary education).

The Norwegian national guide on transitions states that the single most defining factor for successful co-operation is that teachers in kindergarten and school prioritise co-operation and meet to plan the transition. Further, *The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* clearly states that *kindergartens* should, in collaboration with schools and parents, facilitate children’s transition to school. At primary school, transitions are less of a topic, however. They are mentioned only generally in Norway’s Quality Framework for schools, which states that good and systematic co-operation between daycare institutions and primary education, primary education and lower secondary education, and lower secondary education and upper secondary education eases the transition from one education stage to the next in the course of one’s education.

Legislation in the Netherlands obliges municipalities to draw up agreements on children’s developmental continuity when transitioning from ECEC to primary education. This means that the municipality is responsible for all children experiencing a smooth transit from ECEC to school, a so-called “warm transition”.

Most participating jurisdictions have a diverse set of strategies to ensure collaboration on transitions between ECEC and primary schools. These include developing guidelines, developing the curriculum (see Chapter 4), organising meetings, sharing knowledge, exchanging information about the development of individual children, developing support materials, and organising joint activities (e.g. joint celebrations).

Table 5.4 Is collaboration between ECEC and primary school mentioned in education acts and curricula?

	Education acts	Curricula
Austria	No	Yes
Denmark	No	Yes
Finland	No	Yes
Japan	No	Yes
Kazakhstan	Yes	No
Norway	No	Yes
Slovenia	Yes	Yes
Sweden	Yes	No
Wales (UK)	No	Yes

Source: OECD country background reports on transitions, 2016.

The *Brückenjahr* project in Germany¹³ and the *Transition Statement* project in Australia highlight the importance of relationships between both sectors (see Box 5.4). What is more, they perceive this co-operation as a priority for achieving successful transitions (Huser et al., 2016). Similarly, Austria reports that most interviewees in their network project (see Box 5.5) identify co-operation between ECEC and primary school as one of the relevant factors for successful interventions (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2016).

Collaboration between both education levels, however, is not straightforward – in part due to governance issues (see Chapter 2). ECEC centres and primary schools have traditionally been considered as separate entities in many OECD countries, often operating under different ministries. Differences in laws, lack of time and resources, and too many feeder institutions are some of the blocking points to improving this type of co-operation across sectors (Dumčius et al., 2014). There is a general perception that further efforts are needed to strengthen collaboration (Bennet, 2013).

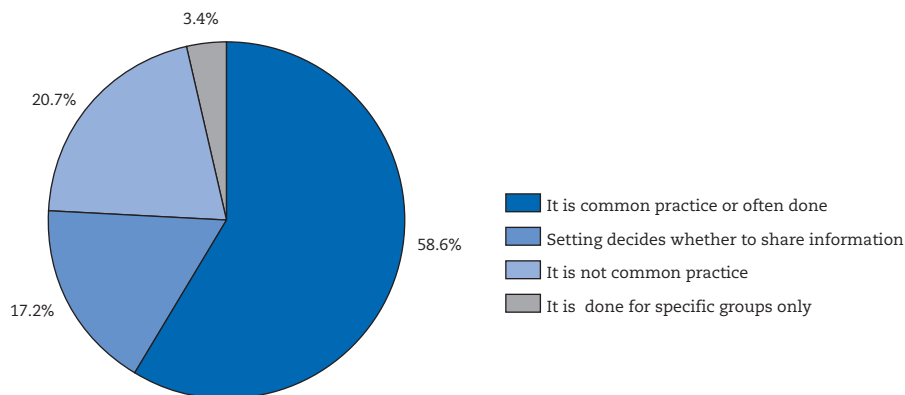
In Austria, for example, a recent study showed that 45% of teachers reported that collaboration was not sufficient between kindergarten and schools. In Norway, on the other hand, developmental continuity is considered to co-exist with the fact that ECEC (kindergarten) settings and primary schools have different characteristics (Lillejord et al., 2017). It is recognised that working on the transition process requires creating measures that acknowledge the differences and build on the strengths of each setting. A national survey in Norway reported that in the large majority of ECEC centres (kindergartens), co-operation between the two sectors is pursued: 76% of kindergartens have established common meeting points for pedagogical staff in kindergarten and school; and 94% have routines in place for co-operating on support for children with special needs (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017).

Sharing child development information is common in most jurisdictions

Sharing child development information is important for ensuring both settings are fully informed of the status and needs of children entering primary school. Figure 5.4 illustrates the degree to which this is done across 29 participating OECD and partner countries. Information sharing between the last year of ECEC and primary school is common practice or is done often in 59% of countries. On the other hand, in 21% of countries it is not common to share child development information. It is up to the settings to decide whether they share child development information in 17% of countries. And, in 3% of countries, this practice is only common for specific groups (e.g. children with special needs). These figures show the exchange of information across educational levels in both integrated and split systems. The collaboration is likely to be more challenging in jurisdictions with a split system, however.

Figure 5.4 In most jurisdictions it is common practice to share child development information

Sharing child development information between the last year of ECEC and the first year of primary school



Notes: Information based on 29 jurisdictions.

Common practice: Austria, Colombia, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey.


Setting decides whether to share information: Belgium (Flemish Community), Canada, Denmark, Finland, Greece.

Not common practice: Chile, Czech Republic, Ireland, Mexico, Slovak Republic, United Kingdom (Wales).

Done for specific groups only: Slovenia.

Missing data: Netherlands.

Source: OECD Network on ECEC, "Survey on transitions between ECEC and primary education", June 2016.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933495712>

Sharing developmental information can be a good way to foster collaboration by staff from both sectors (see Box 5.4 and Chapter 4). In some participating countries (e.g. Austria, Norway and Slovenia), the exchange of information about an individual child across sectors has to be done in co-operation with parents. Parents must give their consent for transferring children's information to primary school. Regulations on information transfer, however, have been implemented in Austria and Slovenia to tackle challenges that have emerged due to rules on data protection (see Chapter 3).

Ethical issues on the transfer of information have to be taken into account. This has been discussed recently in Norway (Turunen, 2012). Transfer of information, however, cannot replace dialogue – either between teachers in different settings (preschool and primary school) or between teachers and parents.

Exchanges between primary schools and ECEC settings are frequent

Opportunities for collaboration across sectors that were frequently cited by participating jurisdictions are visits to primary school and ECEC settings. Around 93% of jurisdictions that responded to the survey reported offering visits to schools, while 68 % reported having exchange days, allowing children from primary school to visit their peers in ECEC settings and vice versa (Figure 5.1). In Austria, these visits often take place in the context of the so-called "reading days" or "reading buddy lessons". Slovenian head-teachers report that planning school visits helps ensure pedagogical continuity between kindergarten and school. When planning visits, preschool and primary school teachers also collaborate on developing common topics and methods of work (e.g. language and speech competences of children in relation to creativity, shared ideas, experiences, and practices). Finnish staff also co-ordinate preschool and primary school visits together, organise joint events and provide some joint teaching (Ahtola et al., 2011a).

Logistical barriers, however, may pose challenges for these types of activities. This may be the case when ECEC settings and schools are situated in different buildings or are far apart. Slovenia reports that transition practices can become more difficult to implement and also less efficient when kindergarten and schools are not linked, i.e. do not share managers or facilities.

Box 5.4 Case study: Sharing child development information as a tool to improve communication: examples from Australia and Ireland

Across **Australia**, a number of initiatives aim to improve communication between schools and early childhood education and care services. The Transition to School Statement, for example, was introduced in New South Wales in 2014 to improve communication between early childhood services, families and schools (NSW Government, 2016). The statement records a child's strengths, interests and learning, in line with the Early Years Learning Framework. Its aims are to help school teachers prepare for children entering kindergarten by planning appropriate and individualised learning and teaching programmes.

An evaluation of the statement found that both parents and kindergarten teachers who had received them felt better informed about the child's strengths and interests, as well as of ways to help their transition to school, than respondents who did not receive statements (NSW Government, 2015). Most families surveyed felt that their children made a smooth transition to school, and felt that their child was well supported in their transition. The evaluation found that although the statement was seen as a valuable resource by early childhood educators, workload and time constraints made it challenging to complete.

Recent reforms to the national primary curriculum in **Ireland** have introduced a new transitions initiative as part of a government ruling requiring the transfer of information on children's learning and development (DES, 2011).

The ruling requires all schools and state-funded ECEC settings to provide written reports of children's progress and achievements in a standard format to their new schools and settings (following their admission). The new national transition initiative, being undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum Development and Assessment (NCCA), will integrate information transfer between the ECEC and primary school sectors. Transition templates to record and monitor transitions for each child between ECEC and primary schools are currently being piloted by the NCCA with a variety of ECEC settings and primary schools, and in consultation with children, parents and other key stakeholders, such as primary school principals and ECEC managers. They will be published and in use by September 2018. The reform has also commissioned a review of literature nationally and internationally, an audit of policy across jurisdictions and an audit of transfer documentation in Ireland. Additional proposed activities of the wider transition initiative include the establishment of local networks, the dissemination of information to families, reciprocal visits by primary and preschool staff and children to schools and preschools, and the development of materials and books to support children during the transition process.

Sources: Case study prepared by the Australian Department of Education and Training, and the Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs, edited by the OECD Secretariat.
DES (2011), "Literacy and numeracy for learning and life", Department of Education and Skills, Dublin, www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/lit_num_strategy_full.pdf; NSW Government (2016), The Transition to School: Literature review, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation; NSW Government (2015), Evaluation of the Transition to School Statement, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, www.cese.nsw.gov.au/images/stories/PDF/Transition_to_School_Report_final.pdf; O'Kane, M. (2016), "Transition from preschool to primary school", Research Report 19, NCCA, www.ncca.ie/en/file/early/ResearchReport19_LR.pdf; O'Kane, M. and R. Murphy (2016a), Transitions from Preschool to Primary School: An Audit of policy in 14 Jurisdictions, www.ncca.ie/en/file/early/International-Audit-Draft-11.pdf; O'Kane, M. and R. Murphy (2016b), Transition from Preschool to Primary School: Audit of Transfer documentation in Ireland, www.ncca.ie/en/file/early/National-Audit-Draft-10.pdf.

Equally challenging is the fact that primary schools can receive children from many different kindergartens – often the case in large cities. This makes co-operation between so many schools especially difficult. To tackle this challenge some Danish municipalities organise joint collaboration among all the ECEC and local schools within the same catchment area (see Chapter 3).

Collaborative professional learning groups are formed in a few jurisdictions

Several participating jurisdictions have created collaborative professional learning groups as platforms to exchange ideas and practices across sectors (see Chapter 3). Examples of this type of collaboration were reported in Austria, Denmark, Japan, Slovenia and Wales (United Kingdom).

Austria recently established a network project to facilitate co-operation on transitions between staff of ECEC settings and primary schools. This group has developed a communication and information platform containing examples of best practices in order to share the ideas, concepts and experiences of the institutions participating in this network (see Box 5.5).

Box 5.5 Case study: Collaborative platforms of best practice in Austria

The Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs has initiated several network projects with the objective of developing local approaches to improve the individual support given to all children. In September 2014, the network project "Transitions ECEC-primary school" was initiated. The aim is to facilitate co-operation between teachers of both institutions, to ensure qualitative guidance and to better co-ordinate the school entry phase. The last year of kindergarten and the first two years of primary school are considered to be the "school entry" stage. This extended period of entry to the school system allows children to benefit from continuity in learning.

A total of 35 primary schools and co-operating kindergartens from across all nine federal states participate. The aim of the network projects is to test successful factors for a nationwide implementation. They also give support for initial and in-service education and training. Examples of project activities to improve co-operation between ECEC and primary school include: collaborative projects; the collection of best practice examples; the transfer of information between ECEC and primary school via specifically designed forms or portfolios; and the creation of so-called "transition teams" (described in the section below).

For the ECEC settings and primary schools that participate in the network projects, communication and information platforms are established. The Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs requests participating institutions to share the resulting ideas, concepts and experiences with the other participants via these platforms. This exchange produces a collection of best practice examples.

Additionally, the federal state of Salzburg has issued a folder on the transition from ECEC to primary school. The folder offers an overview of all projects and models currently employed by kindergartens and primary schools at the federal state level. The goal is to provide inspiration for new projects and to promote collaboration. Furthermore, in some areas of Austria smaller networks have been established at the local level to allow kindergartens and primary schools to exchange information and carry out projects together.

Source: Charlotte Bühler Institut (2016), *Austria Country Background Report on Transitions from ECEC to Primary School*, www.oecd.org/edu/school/SS5-country-background-report-austria.pdf.

Collaboration with other child-focused and community services is common in many jurisdictions

The objective of community service collaboration in transitions is to create coherence, continuity and progression in children's development and learning (explained in the Swedish curriculum; Skolverket, 2011, see Table 4.A.7 in Chapter 4). The various services should co-operate to exchange knowledge, experiences and information about the education programme and the development of individual children. The type of community services involved seems to vary across countries and according to the needs of the child. It can include professionals such as school psychologists, school physicians, speech therapists, auxiliary teaching staff, native-language teachers and social workers. Health professionals are often involved in providing support for children with special learning needs.

All participating countries report some type of co-operation among ECEC, primary schools and other community services. However, only half the participating countries recognise either in their education acts and/or their curriculum the important role of community services in enhancing children's transition to school (Table 5.5). For example, Finland's Basic Education Act states that to secure a continuous learning path for children it is important to provide an opportunity for other early childhood and basic education personnel to participate in the transition process. Similarly, the Austrian curriculum for primary schools recommends collaboration with services offered outside the school. The exceptions are Denmark, Japan, Wales (United Kingdom) and Kazakhstan.

Child-related and community services support children's transition through a variety of activities, including assessing children's school readiness, providing health check-ups or giving help to children with special learning needs. These are described in turn below.

Table 5.5 **Is collaboration with community services mentioned in education acts and curricula?**

	Education acts	Curricula
Austria	No	Yes
Denmark	No	No
Finland	Yes	No
Japan	No	No
Kazakhstan	No	No
Norway	No	Yes
Slovenia	Yes	Yes
Sweden	No	Yes
Wales (UK)	No	No

Source: OECD country background reports on transitions, 2016 and 2017.

Teams of professionals assess children's school readiness in several countries

Some jurisdictions report collaboration with community services outside the school for assessing school readiness. It is worth noting that the definition of “school readiness” varies widely across countries. In the English-speaking countries in general, it focuses in the acquisition of a range of knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for entry into compulsory school. In other countries, such as the Nordic ones, the ECEC years are seen as a preparation for life and the foundation of lifelong learning (OECD, 2006; see also Chapter 6).

School management in Austria, for example, may call in a “transition team” to assess whether the child is ready for school or not and to suggest appropriate support assistance measures. Depending on children's needs, this team may consist of a wide range of professionals. In addition, a school doctor may conduct a physical examination to determine children's physical maturity. Medical reports, expert opinions, reports from other doctors or therapists and carers may also be used, but only when permitted by the legal guardian (BMUKK, 2013).

In Denmark, the Pedagogical Psychological Counselling service (*Pædagogisk Psykologisk Rådgivning* or PPR) is responsible for determining children's school readiness. Among other functions, PPR employs a team of language consultants and psychologists who are often included in supporting and assessing the child's development before the child starts school.

In Slovenia, to assess school readiness, schools may collaborate with external services such as the department of mental health (to conduct psychological testing) or the counselling centre for children, adolescents and parents. All six-year-olds have to pass a health check-up done by paediatricians in a healthcare organisation before starting school. The check-up includes a medical examination and a quick screening of basic competences. The doctors may suggest deferring admission, and are also on the school committee responsible for assessing and evaluating school readiness.

In Wales (United Kingdom), children with special educational needs who are about to start school are assessed by a so-called “committee for transition”. These committees include the school supervisory authorities, representatives from special educational needs kindergartens, school psychologists and school physicians. The purpose of the committees is to develop a comprehensive picture to identify the best school to give the best possible support to the child.

Health professionals are often involved in transitions

Health centres are also involved in the transition of children in many participating jurisdictions (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Kazakhstan, Slovenia and Wales (United Kingdom)). Finnish ECEC centres

co-operate with children's health clinics at the municipal level. One method of collaboration is through a health check-up for four-year-olds (known as the Hyve 4). This assessment was developed based on research that showed that problems with learning during the early stages of schooling can be predicted by the age of four.

In Kazakhstan at the end of pre-primary education all children undergo a medical examination. Each child gets a "Passport of child's health" from the children's polyclinic before entering compulsory education. If the child attends a preschool institution, the passport is filled out by a preschool healthcare worker. After finishing pre-primary education, the passport is transferred to school for ongoing checks of children's health.

In Wales (United Kingdom), children who have a recognised significant health condition receive transition support from the health services. The universal child health surveillance programme, run by Health Visitors, is designed to identify children with developmental delays and to respond to parental concerns.

In the Netherlands, the healthcare services for young children (consultatiebureaus) are responsible for monitoring children's physical, cognitive (language) and social-emotional development from birth until the child starts primary school at the age of four. These services give advice to parents on diverse topics including the possibility of sending their children to an ECEC setting with a targeted programme. These services for young children build a close relationship and co-operation with parents and ECEC staff.

There is a mandatory health check-up for children before they start primary school (*Schuleingangsuntersuchung*) in 15 German Länder (except Bayern, where it is only mandatory in special cases). The paediatrician checks the child's physical (e.g. visual, hearing or speech disorders), cognitive and socio-emotional development. If the medical assessment concludes that the child is not yet "ready" to start school, the child may be allocated additional support, such as physio, ergo or speech therapy. The results of the check-up are however confidential and are not shared with the preschool.

Multi-actor collaboration is common for children with special needs

In Norway, in addition to parents, the kindergarten and the school, many other key actors may be involved to support special needs children with the transition to primary school. These may include the public health centre and the child welfare service (PPT). The municipalities of Ål, Gol, Hol, Hemsedal, Nes and Flå run a co-operation project together with Statped, the national service for special needs education. The topic of transitions between kindergarten and school is part of this collaborative project. The goal is for staff in kindergarten, schools, the public health centre and the PPT to all contribute to a coherent, safe and predictable start of school for all children and their parents (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2008; Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2014).

In Wales (United Kingdom), any child demonstrating developmental problems is offered appropriate interventions from health professionals and community resources. If – despite these interventions – the child has a residual difficulty likely to affect her or his education, the health professionals refer them on to local authority education services for an assessment of any special educational needs that may require additional support in school. Additionally, some kindergartens employ specific teachers to help with the integration of children with special needs, and who also provide support and assistance during the process of transition. Schools and nurseries are reporting a sharp increase in the number of children with delayed speech and language. Programmes are in place to provide support and knowledge to parents in order to help them develop children's language skills as early and effectively as possible. The Welsh Government has also commissioned a review of the support services available for early intervention on speech and language difficulties.

Other participating countries providing additional support via community services for children with special needs in collaboration with parents include Japan, Slovenia and Sweden. In Japan, all children with disabilities, including developmental disabilities, receive support from medical, welfare and other relevant local organisations. This support is conducted in collaboration with families and with early support co-ordinators or similar officers who act as the point of contact. In Slovenia, the kindergarten counselling service helps parents to arrange the documentation in time for the child to get appropriate support from the first day of school. In Sweden, health professionals and special needs teachers can help facilitate transitions for children in need of extra or special support.

By contrast, in Austria, no special assistance is provided for children with special educational needs unless a specific request for an assessment procedure is made by the child's parent. Ideally, parents file a request during the registration processes at school. This request is followed by a five-month-long observation process during which special educational needs experts as well as school psychologists or school physicians (with the consent of the parents) make a recommendation to the school board of the corresponding district.

Cross-setting collaboration also occurs to ensure developmental continuity during horizontal transition

Reciprocal exchanges on the pedagogical approaches of the preschool, the preschool class, the school and before and after-school care can help enrich children's development and learning in their "horizontal transitions" (see Box 1.1, Chapter 1). Some countries collaborate with other ECEC centres and after-school organisations to support horizontal transitions (see also Chapter 4). In Finland's municipalities, for example, staff in ECEC, pre-primary¹⁴ and primary education work together to implement curricula and also to co-operate on transitions. After-school activities can, for example, be organised by non-government organisations, adding yet another actor for inclusion in ensuring quality transitions.

Some preschool settings in Luxembourg apply transitions practices that support intersectional coherence and continuity. These practices aim at ensuring a smooth transition between sectors and types of learnings at different moments of the day: the child's transition from home to the daycare centre; arrival and separation from parents; handing the child over to the childcare worker and the child's integration into the playroom; and the transition between situations of "formal lessons" and informal learning (Bollig, Hong and Mohn, 2016).

In Japan, some nursery and ECEC settings focus on co-operating with after-school children's clubs. The objective of this kind of service is to support the upbringing of primary school children whose parents/guardians are absent from home due to work responsibilities. After-school clubs use children's recreational facilities or other school facilities and provide adequate opportunities for spending the afternoon playing, learning and sharing with other peers.

In Wales (United Kingdom), Flying Start services are often involved in helping the transition from childcare settings to an early education setting. Specific guidance is given on how services should be involved. However, there is great variation in how well this operates in practice due to variations in the management structures in local authorities and location of services.

In Sweden, when children start at preschool class they also attend a recreation centre. The recreation centre is a part of the school system and its aim is to complement the education provided by the preschool class and school. The centres stimulate development and learning as well as allowing children to have meaningful free time and recreation. Such reciprocal exchanges between the pedagogical approaches of the preschool, the preschool class, the school and the recreation centre can help enrich children's development and learning. Recreation centres are thus one of the key players in Sweden involved in ensuring a good start in compulsory school.

What are the common developmental continuity challenges and how are they overcome?

This section explains the main challenges in achieving fruitful collaborations among the stakeholders involved in transitions. Drawing on the information gathered in the country background reports, it describes the discussions and debates which jurisdictions are having on this topic and outlines a wealth of strategies developed to tackle these challenges (summarised in Table 5.6).

Table 5.6 **Challenges and strategies in ensuring developmental continuity**

Challenges	Strategies
Children's views are not fully accounted for when shaping policies and practices for transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specify in education acts or curricula children's right to participate • Conduct research involving children
Parents' lack of awareness of the importance of the transition process hinders their involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and provide support materials for parents on transitions • Offer multiple activities to increase parents' awareness of and participation in transitions
Difficulties engaging parents of disadvantaged backgrounds in the transition process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt support materials to the needs of immigrant parents and children • Develop innovative participatory activities to involve marginalised parents • Complement transition activities with parenting programmes
Unequal relationships and poor understanding between ECEC staff and primary school teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop initiatives to share child development information • Organise joint training • Create collaborative professional learning groups • Integrate both levels of education in the same location
Limited co-operation with other child development services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish working teams with professionals from different sectors

Challenge 1: Children's views are not fully accounted for when shaping policies and practices for transitions

Understanding children's views of their experience of the transition process is essential for developing transition practices (Ackesjö, 2013). Listening to children and their experiences helps to better understand the challenges they face and help to improve the support given by parents and schools. Children's participation, however, appears to be limited in reality, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Slovenia also noted this in its country background report.

Strategy: Specify in education acts or curricula children's right to participate

Some countries report having clauses in their education acts and/or curricula on the importance of accounting for children's perspectives when designing, planning and evaluating transition programmes. This approach can be a first step to ensure ECEC centres and primary schools consider children's views when developing their transition practices.

In **Norway**, children's right to participation is explicitly mentioned in both the Education Act and the Framework Plan. Kindergarten teachers are trained to identify children's interests and use them in pedagogical situations in everyday life. Furthermore, the national guide on transitions emphasises that the child is the most important actor and that her/his experiences and perspectives should be the starting point for developing activities. The guide underlines that children often have clear opinions on what is important to know when they are about to start school and they should be heard.

Similarly, in **Sweden** the Education Act stipulates that the views of the child should be mapped out as far as possible. Children should have the possibility to freely express their opinions in all

matters that concern them. The opinions of the child should be weighted in relation to their age and maturity. The best interests of the child should be a primary consideration.

Strategy: Conduct research involving children

In **Finland**, children’s views are increasingly being taken into account in recent years. Furthermore, children are also being involved in research more and more. They contribute to knowledge not only by being surveyed, but also by acting as researchers themselves. These inclusive research methods aim at better understanding children’s daily experiences from their own perspectives (Karlsson and Karimäki, 2012; Eskelä-Haapanen et al., 2016).

Challenge 2: Parents’ lack of awareness of the importance of the transition process hinders their involvement

Most jurisdictions report that there is still insufficient parental awareness of the powerful role parents play in children’s education, particularly during the transition stage. Certain attitudes and beliefs, combined with this lack of awareness, are likely to obstruct parents from being active players in their child’s transition. In many countries, parents continue to consider primary school as having a much more prominent role in children’s education than ECEC. Austria, for example, mentions that the belief that “the serious side of life begins with the start of school” still prevails. Another common line of thinking that obstructs parental involvement is that the transition process is unproblematic and transition activities are hence taken for granted.

Parents as well as children would benefit from greater awareness of the issues surrounding the transition to primary school, including the differences in the learning environment and why specific measures or activities are implemented. However, ECEC staff often do not explain transition activities well enough. A high level of uncertainty is not positive for the child, the parents or the teachers (Lillejord et al., 2017). Lack of communication with and from school is hence an important barrier to parental involvement (Malsch et al., 2011).

Countries have developed a range of strategies to raise awareness among parents of the importance of preparing and supporting children before, during and after the transition period.

Strategy: Develop and provide support materials for parents on transitions

The majority of countries develop and publish support materials to inform and orient parents on what life and learning will look like in primary school, and to provide advice to parents on how to support children during this stage (see Box 5.6 for an example of Wales (United Kingdom)).

In **Austria**, the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs has produced a guide for parents titled “Welcome to school” (BMBF, 2015). This publication explains how parents can support their child until the start of school. Topics covered include getting ready for school, the way to school, and the importance of play. Additionally, it includes general and legal information on the official start of school and on the ways in which parents may contribute and take on responsibilities in the school setting. Moreover, a series of folders and brochures contain ideas for activities that parents can carry out with their child such as how to prepare for school, how to encourage positive views of school and tips for successful play.

Early Childhood **Australia** has compiled many print and online resources for parents, carers and educators to provide support during the transition period (For further information, please see: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/parent-resources/transition-school). One example is a book for parents and carers, “Your child’s first year at school: Getting off to a good start”, explaining what parents need to know to support children’s transition to school and containing specific tools for children with

disabilities or socio-emotional and behavioural needs (Hirst et al., 2011). Additionally, KidsMatter Australia has issued several materials to help parents recognise and seek support if children present difficulties. The Queensland Department of Education and Training and the Victoria State Government have also developed several guides for parents, ECEC providers, and schools to explain the importance of successful transitions beyond a “good first day”, and to provide advice and techniques to support their child (Queensland Government, 2015a, 2015b; State Government of Victoria, 2009).

Similarly, the Ministry of Education in France introduced the parent’s suitcase (“*la mallette des parents*”) in 2012. The aim is to support the main transitions in school, including from preschool (*maternelle*) to the first year of primary education (*cours préparatoire*, or CP). Parents receive the suitcase during a school meeting with teachers. It contains tools on learning how to read; helping the child to learn about primary school; and well-being in school. These subjects are presented during school meetings where parents can learn more about how to help their children. This method of co-education aims to enable parents to better understand how primary schools function (French Ministry of Education, 2015; 2016).

Box 5.6 Case study: Parents’ transition support materials in Wales (United Kingdom)

The Welsh Government has developed several initiatives to communicate with parents. These include “How is my Child Doing in the Foundation Phase?”, a document which all parents receive when their children start the Foundation Phase. This document explains the fundamental pedagogical principles and broad approaches of the Foundation Phase; sets out what parents can expect from schools and settings; and offers suggestions on how parents can support children’s learning and development. In addition, the FaCE (Family and Community Engagement) guidance, published in 2015, places an emphasis on engagement that helps families to actively support their child’s learning. There is a focus on how to engage with families of children who are currently underperforming, children from deprived backgrounds, and those receiving less support for their learning at home. “Ready to Learn” is designed to help parents and carers prepare their child for school through a range of engaging resources available from schools and nurseries. Resources aimed at parents and carers of children who are aged four or soon-to-be starting school provide advice and tips on how to prepare children for the transition, with ideas ranging from play to more structured learning. It includes a ready-to-learn activity leaflet.

Source: Case study prepared by the Welsh Government, edited by the OECD Secretariat, Welsh Government (2014), “How is my child doing in the Foundation Phase? A guide for parents and carers”, <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/140707-how-is-my-child-doing-in-the-foundation-phase-en.pdf>.

Strategy: Offer multiple activities to increase parents’ awareness of and participation in transitions

In **Austria**, there is a desire to make parent-staff conversations about transitions mandatory to raise awareness of the importance of parental involvement in children’s education. Currently, some parents do not participate in these exchange opportunities with staff. It is believed that regular joint discussions of children’s developmental progress could assist in changing parents’ perceptions.

In **Finland**, most parents or guardians co-operate in organising ECEC (pre-primary education) teaching and pedagogies. This active involvement ensures that all children receive teaching, guidance and support in accordance with their own development level and needs.

Slovenia reports good collaboration with parents over transitions. It seems that the activities it has implemented to encourage parental involvement are associated with this positive perception. These include individual consultations about child development in kindergarten and informative meetings at school prior to school entry. This more personal approach helps parents to get to know the staff in kindergarten and schools, and helps them build confidence and trust in their relationship. The transition process is discussed with children and their parents, which allows staff to explain the importance of active participation by both parents and children, as well as to identify children’s and families’ specific needs. It also strengthens collaboration with parents.

In addition to providing transition guidelines, **Sweden** offers other activities, including parents' meetings in the preschool class which include primary school teachers, preschool school visits for the preschool class, and assigning preschool children "buddies" in the primary school.

In **Japan**, individual boards of education, schools and facilities undertake a variety of actions to address the concerns of parents and guardians and to deepen their understanding of transitions. These include holding information sessions, providing opportunities for parents/guardians to exchange opinions with each other, and organising visiting days to allow newcomers to become acquainted with the new setting. ECEC and basic education providers are required to set out practices and co-operation in their local curriculum, in addition to the goals defined in the national core curriculum.

The *Brückenjahr* project in **Germany** (Lower Saxony) addresses parental engagement by providing multiple opportunities for parents to participate in transition activities. These include providing support materials; organising a wide range of workshops; and inviting families to school events and festivals. Parental involvement is enhanced by assuming a shared responsibility between parents and teachers for shaping children's learning experiences. These activities are complemented with other strategies aimed at fostering connections between kindergarten and primary schools (Huser, Dockett and Perry, 2016).

Challenge 3: Difficulties engaging parents from disadvantaged backgrounds in the transition

Participation in transitions can be especially limited for families from disadvantaged backgrounds. These include families of low socio-economic status, families of immigrant origin, indigenous families and families with children with special learning needs. Denmark and other participating jurisdictions report that it is particularly difficult and challenging to engage these vulnerable children and their families. Yet evidence suggests that opportunities to become familiar with the new learning environment are of particular importance for disadvantaged children (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008).

The immigrant population of many OECD and partner countries has grown rapidly over the past decade and diversity in ECEC centres and schools is increasing as a result. Attention to the needs of language-minority children is becoming of utmost importance. Taking parental background into consideration can reduce the risk of an unsuccessful transition (Peters, 2010). At the same time, evidence from the United States shows that children that are at most risk when transitioning to compulsory school are less likely to be exposed to the supportive practices that could give them the best chance of experiencing a successful transition (Schulting et al., 2005). Participating jurisdictions have implemented a number of strategies to encourage parents from disadvantaged households to participate in the transition process.

Strategy: Adapt support materials to the needs of immigrant parents and children

In **Norway**, the national guide on transitions underscore the need to provide adequate and relevant information (e.g. legal, practical, structural and content) on schools to parents of language-minority children. The guide is not directed at parents specifically, but at municipalities, schools and ECEC centres as support material on how to engage with this type of families. The guide also suggests translating relevant materials and using interpreters in areas where there is a large number of language-minority children.

Austria's network project "ECEC-primary school" (see Box 5.5) develops guidelines for local approaches for improving the individual support given to each child during the transition to primary school. The guidelines are based on the latest research findings on transition, and put the acquisition of first and second language skills and multilingualism at the centre. As part of this project, the federal state of **Lower Austria** also provides parents with the necessary support and information on transitions from ECEC settings to primary school in different languages (e.g. Bosnian/Croat/Serbian, Bulgarian, Czech, Turkish). Parents receive advice on how to promote children's learning and on how the home environment can support the child in her/his preparation for school.

Wales (United Kingdom) and **Australia** have both developed a package of activities designed to reach disadvantaged families (see Box 5.4 and 5.6). In 2015, **Wales** issued a toolkit for schools on how they can engage with families and communities. The FaCE (Family and Community Engagement) guidance explores how to engage families of children who are currently underperforming, children from deprived backgrounds, and those receiving less support for their learning at home. The resources place an emphasis on providing tools that help families to actively support their child's learning.

Strategy: Develop innovative participatory activities to involve marginalised parents

The HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) programme is implemented in a wide range of countries, including Australia, Austria, the Netherlands and the United States. HIPPY aims to provide support to socially disadvantaged families and parents of children aged three to seven. Once a week the family is visited by trained peers from the same sociocultural background who provides first language assistance and learning activities for children. The visitor acquaints parents with games and learning materials in their mother tongue. Parents are also encouraged and empowered to create learning situations for their own child. In Vienna (**Austria**), the HIPPY Plus-Programme includes support in school. Bilingual tutors are used in schools with a high percentage of migrants. In **Australia**, the programme has been adapted and it operates in at least 100 communities across the country. The programme is fully funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Social Services (<http://hippyaustralia.bsl.org.au/about/>).

The **Welsh** Government has developed the “Education Begins at Home” campaign, aimed at narrowing the learning gap between the most affluent and the most deprived pupils. It emphasises how small things done at home can help children in school. “Ready to Learn”, launched in 2016, is a key element of this campaign. It is designed to help parents and carers prepare their child for school through a range of engaging resources available from schools and nurseries (described earlier). Wales’ Flying Start programme supports families with young children (zero to four) in disadvantaged communities. The core elements of the programme include free quality part-time childcare for two to three-year-olds; an enhanced health visiting service; access to parenting support; and support for the development of speech, language and communication. Several studies have shown that this programme is positively associated with children’s language skills and social and emotional development, all of which are important for school readiness (Welsh Government, 2015; Welsh Government, 2013a).

In **New Zealand**, “*Belonging mana whenua*” is a key strand of the ECEC curriculum which aims to ensure that children and families of indigenous origin feel welcomed and at ease in the ECEC settings and in the wider learning community. The ECEC curriculum is aligned with the school curriculum’s “Participating and Contributing”, underlining the importance for children’s engagement and learning of developing a sense of belonging (Peters, 2010).

Another example of support to at-risk families is found in the well-researched **United States** Abecedarian (preschool) programme, which provides sustained assistance to families and has improved children’s learning outcomes as a result. The K-2 Programme (which begins after the preschool Abecedarian project) includes supportive services to enable parental involvement; to influence the child’s home learning environment; and to provide training and support to teachers for the first three years of primary school (kindergarten and grades 1 and 2). Educational support services are implemented by a master teacher with experience of working with at-risk families who can help parents assist their children in negotiating the transition more successfully.¹⁵ Children who participated in the combined Abecedarian preschool and K-2 programmes were found to have better mathematic and reading performance than all other control groups (Ramey et al., 2000).

Strategy: Complement transition activities with parenting programmes

Another way to support and encourage parents to participate in shaping children’s transition to school is through parenting programmes. Research shows that the quality of parenting is associated

with children's future learning, health and well-being. Parenting interventions can help reduce inequalities in outcomes and when complemented with transition activities can help both parents and children better navigate the transition process.

Wales' Flying Start programme (described above), provides parenting support guidance. A qualitative evaluation conducted in 2013 identified a range of positive outcomes reported by parents (Welsh Government, 2013b). In particular, parents whose children had attended Flying Start childcare believed their children had more confidence and were better prepared for school. Parents with high needs reported their children had improved language skills and social and emotional development, which are important for school readiness. These positive associations are not necessarily attributed to the parenting support, but it could be one factor in these perceived positive outcomes.

Australia has several parenting programmes in place. One of particular relevance is the AusParenting in Schools Transition to Primary School Parent Program. This provides multiple activities to encourage parents to participate in shaping children's learning experiences. The objectives are to: 1) provide opportunities to learn strategies to support children's adjustment to school; 2) promote families' involvement in children's learning at home and at school; and 3) facilitate collaboration between families and schools (Hirst et al., 2011). An evaluation of the programme suggests that participating parents reported lower levels of concern regarding the transition process than parents who only participated in routine transition practices. Moreover, participating parents reported higher levels of self-efficacy in managing transitions and greater involvement with school (Giallo et al., 2007; Giallo et al., 2010).

Challenge 4: Unequal relationships and poor understanding between ECEC staff and primary school teachers

Unequal relationships between ECEC staff and primary school teachers create tensions that hinder fruitful collaboration and successful transitions (Lillejord et al., 2016). This imbalance is derived from the numerous differences prevailing between the two levels of education (see Chapter 3), a lack of understanding and awareness of the different approaches and pedagogies (see Chapter 4) as well as of lack of time and resources for co-operation (Chapter 2). In Norway, research suggests that kindergarten staff seem to have a better understanding of the school day and learning situations at school than primary school teachers (Rambøll, 2010); and they tend to put more weight on transition and coherence than primary schools (Hogsnes and Moser, 2014).

Most participating countries reported this as an area with room for improvement. Kazakhstan, for instance, reports that the lack of a network of ECEC settings and primary schools makes it difficult to ensure continuity across the two levels of education.

Strategy: Develop initiatives to share child development information

Sharing information about the developmental progress of the child can foster collaboration between sectors and with other actors involved in transitions. However, such information is not always transferred from ECEC to primary school (see Chapter 3). Consequently, teachers in primary school tend to start from zero at the beginning of the school year, which hinders developmental continuity. For close co-operation on sharing information, countries may consider complementing written reports with face-to-face meetings between preschool and school teachers as well as with parents, as suggested by kindergarten (preschool) and school teachers in **Finland** (Hogsnes and Moser, 2014).

Slovenia reports that kindergartens and schools usually co-operate in determining the child's school readiness, when necessary. An emerging and consistent challenge, however, is the transfer of information about an individual child between the two settings. The law helps to define the data that can be collected and in what circumstances it can be shared (e.g. the postponement of

children's entry to school). Some local authorities encourage sharing individual information for transition planning. This can be a tool to strengthen continuity, but it should be accompanied by discussions between parents and teachers to build a shared understanding of the transition process.

In **Finland**, preschool staff and primary school teachers co-ordinate on several levels to prepare the transition stage. The preschool teacher, the grade-one teacher, and any involved specialist (e.g. school psychologist) meet to discuss school entrants in terms of their skills, peer relations and preferences. In **Norway**, sharing child development information across sectors is well established at the local level. Parents play an important role in this exchange process. They can decide what information is transferred and they have to give their consent before the kindergarten can provide the information to the school. According to the Framework Plan, the information must focus both on what children can do and are capable of, and where they need special assistance. A survey of schools showed that most municipalities (95%) have a system for transferring child development information from the ECEC setting (kindergarten in Norway) to school. In most cases, this includes all the kindergartens and schools in the municipality (Vibe, 2012). In addition, a survey of ECEC settings showed that practically all (98%) ask the parents for consent to transfer information about the child to the school (Sivertsen et al., 2015).

In **Wales** (United Kingdom), progress has been made in implementing effective processes to share information between settings. The Early Years Development and Assessment Framework aims to establish approaches to align the various development assessments and ensure that they are shared across all relevant services. Individual profiles are provided for each child who is leaving Flying Start childcare and starting in a new Foundation Phase setting. Another effective way of information sharing which has been adopted by many Flying Start teams is arranging face-to-face meetings between Flying Start and Foundation Phase professionals. These meetings provide an opportunity for discussing and collaborating over the individual needs and skills of a child as they move from Flying Start to the Foundation Phase.

Strategy: Organise joint training

Teachers' initial education and professional training are important moments for professionals to learn about each other's professional contexts and where they can start to understand themselves as equal collaborators. In **Austria**, attitudes such as "Let children be children for the time being. They will have to start school anyway" are discussed and addressed in joint training of ECEC staff and primary school teachers. In **Japan**, joint training for the teaching staff of kindergartens, nursery centres and primary schools is one of many initiatives to facilitate co-operation across settings. Similarly, **Denmark** envisages more and better coherence in the initial training and education of teachers and ECEC staff. This common approach will ensure both consistency as well as better cooperation opportunities between ECEC and school (see Chapter 3).

Strategy: Create collaborative professional learning groups

As we discussed earlier, some participating countries have set up working teams to enhance collaboration among professionals of different sectors. Working teams, however, do not always guarantee co-operation (as noted in the Swedish inspectorate of schools report (Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2015)). The same professional jealousies and lack of understanding described above can obstruct co-operation, even within working teams. This, in turn, complicates children's developmental continuity.

Slovenia counts on professional networks for sharing practices. These networks operate within the National Education Institute and are part of so-called study groups. The National Education Institute has several regional units that organise study groups. The study groups are organised separately for preschool teachers, counsellors and heads and meet regularly (four times per year, either in person or online).

In **Japan**, some boards of education are establishing liaison councils to promote staff exchanges between kindergartens and primary schools and to promote an integrated system of kindergartens, primary and junior high schools that includes transitions. At the same time, ECEC staff, primary school staff and university teachers collaborate with the support of local government to formulate transition curricula.

In the **Netherlands**, a good example of close collaboration between ECEC settings and primary schools are the “startgroepen”. These enable collaboration on ensuring continuity in children’s development; offering similar programmes, aligning goals, etc. These collaborations are monitored and evaluated by researchers, who have noted positive results.¹⁶

Strategy: Integrate both levels of education in the same location

In **Austria**, most ECEC centres and primary schools are physically separate. The capital city of Vienna has built schools around a so-called “campus model” to promote co-operation across sectors working with children between the ages of 0 and 14. The “Vienna Campus Model” brings together the pedagogy of ECEC, primary school and leisure in one physical space. So far, four education clusters have been built. This facilitates co-operation between teachers of both institutions and makes transition easier for children as they are already familiar with the learning environment.

In **Scotland**, when nurseries are located in primary schools, collaboration between nursery staff (ECEC) and school teachers can be part of a regular routine of forward-planning meetings, staff meetings and in-service days. For stand-alone settings such as nursery schools and partner provider centres, joint planning may present more of a challenge (Scottish Executive, 2007).

Challenge 5: Limited co-operation with community services

Research into co-operation with child-related services at the time of transitions is not well documented. Furthermore, little is known about the impact of collaboration with services outside the school on child well-being and early learning. Participating jurisdictions report a number of activities and guidelines to foster such collaboration, but few signal challenges in this area. However, this does not mean that this type of co-operation is free of challenges. It is likely that it suffers from similar hurdles as those faced in the co-operation between ECEC and primary schools, especially when professionals are housed in different ministries.

Strategy: Establish working teams with professionals from different sectors

Austria has implemented two types of working teams – the “transition team” and the “committees for transition” – both recognised as valuable projects that provide appropriate support measures during the transition to school. In **Finland**, the more modern school buildings are now mainly designed to be community centres where it is easier to develop a continuum with actors from different sectors.

In **Slovenia**, counselling services operate directly in the kindergarten or school (*svetovalni delavec*). Counsellors might be psychologists, special educators (defectologist), pedagogues, social pedagogues, special and rehabilitation pedagogues, social workers and others. The counselling service implements different activities with different stakeholders, including parents, social work centres and medical centres. Personal data on children needing support and counselling are collected with the agreement of the parents or legal guardians, with the exception of cases where children are endangered by their families and need protection. The role of the counselling service is to assist children and their parents (and staff) in a number of activities, including their transition to primary school.

What policy development pointers arise from this research?

This final section outlines five key policy pointers for ensuring developmental continuity. These are cross-cutting themes emerging from the literature and countries' experiences and struggles outlined above. They are exploratory only, seeking to provide a source of inspiration when designing and revising policies and practices. Not all policy orientations will be relevant for all countries as each country needs to take into account their context (values, traditions, characteristics of ECEC and education systems) and their policy priorities.

Listen to children's voices to improve transitions

National guidelines and curricula emphasise that the child is the most important actor and that the starting point for planning transition activities must be the child's experiences and perspectives. Many jurisdictions have implemented initiatives to take into account children's voices and to make them active participants in their own transition. However, jurisdictions report that children's participation is still limited, and also varies across jurisdictions. In Wales (United Kingdom), the Foundation Phase Curriculum sets opportunities for children to express themselves and be actively involved in initiating and directing their own learning experience. Finland and Sweden, on the other hand, account for children's views by listening to children's voices through research. Studies using children's reports or children's stories help professionals understand the transition process from the perspective of the main actor in transitions. Swedish children, for example, mention that the most problematic issue of transit to preschool class is the separation of friends. Hence, social continuity seems to be an important factor for children's successful transition that needs to be accounted for when planning transitions. These examples illustrate how participation and inclusion of children in developing transition activities and education can be further advanced to really place children's needs at the centre of the debate.

Tackle parents' lack of awareness of transitions

Parents should be better informed of the importance of transitions so they can take a more active and supportive role. Despite important efforts by jurisdictions in providing information to parents through special publications, brochures and parental meetings, further work is needed. The belief that transitions are straightforward and organic hinders parental involvement in transition activities. The rationale and purpose of the transition activities should be explicitly explained to children and parents before, during and after the transition. Parents should be aware that starting school is one of the most exciting, but also one of the most challenging, experiences for young children. They should be aware that while preparing for the start of school, children may experience stress and present some behavioural changes and difficulties – being prepared for these will help enormously.

Information provided in support materials provides useful orientations and advice, but for the transition activities to be effective it needs to be complemented with a wide range of other activities. These include regular discussions with parents and children to familiarise them with the process, activities, new learning environment, and staff of primary schools. Programmes like the AusParenting in Schools Transition to Primary School Parent Program in Australia and Flying Start in Wales (United Kingdom), which offer comprehensive support to parents, have had positive results. As reported above, evaluations of the Australian study indicate that participating parents expressed less worry and concern about transitions than parents who were less exposed to informative activities. Similarly, a qualitative study of Flying Start reported that participating parents perceived that their children were more ready for school (Welsh Government, 2013b).

Tailor transition practices to fit parental needs

Participation in transition activities by families from disadvantaged backgrounds is more difficult to achieve. This group of parents faces numerous barriers to taking an active role in child-related

activities, both at home and at school. These include time availability, language issues, and distance from the ECEC centre or school. Countries have made various efforts to reach out to such families, most often by adapting support materials to their language. Jurisdictions recognise the need to do more, especially given the increasing diversity of backgrounds due to increased migration.

ECEC settings and primary schools could develop “comprehensive transition programmes” to foster parental engagement, instead of offering individual isolated activities or events. It is important to reach all families, especially those whose children are at risk of experiencing learning difficulties and lagging behind. Comprehensive transition programmes are developed in collaboration with families and other stakeholders and give children and their families many formal and informal opportunities to get familiar with school.

Settings often expect parents to adapt to existing transition practices regardless of their cultural and social background. Consideration should be given to particular contexts and families’ diverse needs, adapting policies and practices accordingly. For example, one approach could be to consult with parents on their availability and organise activities around their schedules.

As discussed previously, research suggests that both the frequency and the number of transition activities matter for positive outcomes. It is possible that frequent exposure to activities gives parents a better grasp of what they can do to support their child. At the same time, more frequent contact with school activities and school personnel may ensure trustful relationships with pedagogical staff.

Build strong and equal partnerships between ECEC settings and schools

As we have seen throughout this report, greater collaboration between ECEC centres and schools can contribute to smoother transitions. There is general agreement among participating countries that there should be more collaboration between schools and ECEC in general. Furthermore, it is recognised that working on the transition process requires measures that acknowledge the differences and build on the strengths of each setting. Research in Finland suggests that co-operation between the preschool and primary school, particularly over developing the curriculum and sharing developmental information on individual children, is the best predictor of children’s positive learning outcomes (Ahtola et al., 2011). Austria’s network project on transitions from ECEC to primary school is a good example of a project bringing together the approaches from each sector and working with their respective strengths (see Box 5.5).

Annex 5.A. Detailed country-by-country responses

For **WEB** tables, see: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264276253-en>

WEB	Table 5.A.1	Common practices in preparing parents and children for transition
WEB	Table 5.A.2	Staff collaboration with parents by educational sector

Notes

1. Austria, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and Wales (United Kingdom).
2. In this US study, parental involvement in ECEC was assessed using reports by parents. The activities included: open-house or back-to-school night, parent-teacher association meetings, parent-advisory group or policy council meetings, regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences, school or class events, volunteering at school and fundraising activities (Schulting, et al., 2005; 2008).
3. The Head Start programme is a comprehensive programme providing early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families.
4. The CARE project conducted a Stakeholders Study involving parents/carers, ECEC staff and policy makers in nine European countries: Germany, Greece, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal and England (United Kingdom).
5. This type of collaboration was noted as the most important factor influencing later academic achievement, but was also the least implemented transition practice (19% of seven ECEC settings implemented this practice).
6. Social-emotional competencies were measured using the Teacher-Child Rating Scale. Examples of the items assessed include: “participates in class discussions”, “completes work”, “well-liked by classmates”, “disruptive in class”, “anxious” and “difficulty following directions”.
7. The eight transition activities included in the questionnaire were:
 1. Taster days, where the child can participate in primary school for one or a few days before starting primary school
 2. Exchange days, where primary school pupils go to an ECEC setting, and vice versa
 3. Open house days, where children can visit the primary school
 4. Parent information meetings to inform parents on how to prepare the child for school
 5. Home visits by the future primary school teacher
 6. Specific information materials for children (books, booklets, television programmes, etc.)
 7. Support from specialists (specifically trained people who do not teach in ECEC, such as psychologists, social care workers etc.) during or after transitions
 8. Information materials for parents including flyers, internet and other materials on how to prepare the child for school.
8. One well-known model in Austria is the “*Berliner Eingewöhnungsmodell*” (Laewen, Andres and Hédervári, 2003). It describes how to facilitate a smooth transition to the ECEC setting in three phases.

9. For more information see: www.learningpotential.gov.au/primary-school-zone-ahead; www.learningpotential.gov.au/ready-set-school; www.learningpotential.gov.au/top-tips-for-starting-big-school.
10. The Bundesgesetz über die Schulpflicht (Schulpflichtgesetz 1985) no. 6: framework curriculum.
11. New Zealand provides speech and language therapy for children with special needs.
12. Education Alberta: <https://education.alberta.ca/media/3531893/learning-team-handbook-for-parents.pdf>; Education, Newfoundland and Labrador: www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/publications/childcare/child_care_services_inclusion_of_children_with_special_needs_policy_manual.pdf; Government of Saskatchewan: <http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/86777-Inclusion%20Program%20Application%20Information%20Mar%202015.pdf>; Government of Manitoba: www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/publications/protocol_early_childhood_transition.pdf; Government of Quebec: www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/dpse/adaptation_serv_compl/19-7065.pdf.
13. The project was conducted in one German Land: Lower Saxony.
14. Pre-primary education in Finland is part of the ECEC system; it refers to the year before compulsory school starts, mainly for six-year-old children.
15. Details of the intervention, which included a summer programme, learning activities and other family services, are available in Ramey et al. (2000).
16. See www.startgroepen.nl.

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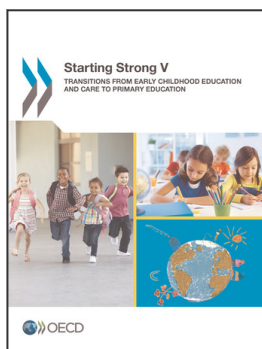
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