2 Curriculum frameworks, pedagogy and process quality in early childhood education and care

This chapter discusses the relationship between curriculum frameworks, pedagogy and process quality in early childhood education and care. By articulating policy-relevant questions and key indicators, this chapter links research findings and conceptual work with the policy levers needed to enhance process quality and support children's learning, development and well-being. This chapter provides an overview of policies concerning these indicators across OECD countries and jurisdictions. It also provides concrete examples of good practices that can enhance process quality and child development through these policy levers.

Key messages

- In participating countries and jurisdictions, the share of mandatory curricula is higher for curriculum frameworks covering children aged 3 to 5 than for those covering children aged 0 to 2 or those covering a broad age range (0 to 5). Some 14% of participating countries and jurisdictions do not have a curriculum framework for children aged 0 to 2. The absence of curricula for the youngest children can result in differences in the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) across ages. It can also make transitions to pre-primary education more difficult than when there is curricular continuity for children from birth to entry into primary education. There is no common curriculum framework for all children aged 0 to 5 in 40% of participating countries and jurisdictions. In almost 25% of participating countries and jurisdictions, there is more than one curriculum in place per age group, which may create equity issues as well as challenges for monitoring. A few countries also have multiple curricula per setting, which may lead to additional complexity for ECEC staff.
- The majority of curricula covering children aged 0 to 2 and 0 to 5 y design their developmental and learning goals for children around principles and values and broad competences, whereas the goals of the majority of curricula targeting children aged 3 to 5 reflect traditional learning areas. The learning areas covered are broad, including socio-emotional, physical and cognitive skills. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are less frequent than other learning areas.
- Most curricula across age groups suggest the use of multiple pedagogical approaches. Whereas curricula for ages 0 to 2 and 0 to 5 typically build on pedagogical approaches that view learning as an active exchange, approaches on readiness for school, outcome/performance-based education, and didactic/direct instruction are more frequent among curricula for children aged 3 to 5. This difference may correspond to a stronger alignment of curricula for children aged 3 to 5 with primary school pedagogical practices.
- A majority of curricula are child-centred and based on a holistic vision of the child, despite differences in the ways this is portrayed. Most participating countries and jurisdictions also recognise the importance of play in ECEC in the principles and goals of their curriculum frameworks.
- Most curricula include or are accompanied by guidelines for implementation that provide examples of pedagogical practices to support the use of curricula in practice. Guidelines are mostly directed at ECEC settings despite the fact that the majority of curricula for all age groups explicitly sets goals to highlight the importance of co-operation with families and community as part of children's broader learning, development and well-being. Only 40% of guidelines address parents, 30% address local governments, and less than 12% are directed to community groups and agencies.
- Monitoring of curriculum implementation is mandatory in most participating countries and jurisdictions. More than one-third of them conduct external monitoring of curriculum implementation at least once a year in all age groups, and 23% of them conducts it depending on the last monitoring results. The most common method for external monitoring of curriculum implementation is inspections. Staff self-assessment as part of external monitoring is also common. Only a few curricula are monitored through child assessments and peer reviews.
- Countries and jurisdictions monitor process quality, but they focus on some types of interactions more than others. Less than a half of participating countries and jurisdictions monitors interactions among children and between children and materials, and only 37% monitor interactions between ECEC staff and parents.
- While a majority of participating countries and jurisdictions engaged central government agencies and ECEC staff in the development of their curriculum frameworks, fewer included parents and communities in the process. Very few countries and jurisdictions include children in curriculum design processes.

Introduction

Curriculum frameworks define early childhood education and care goals, learning and development content, and types of activities that can be used by staff to foster children's development, learning and well-being. They can be regulated, changed and adapted to evolving goals and quality standards, and thereby constitute a core lever for policies. Pedagogy, on the other hand, refers to the practices and methods employed by staff to support children's development, learning and well-being. The ways in which curricula are implemented through pedagogy have direct effects on children's experiences in ECEC (OECD, 2018[1]; Shuey et al., 2019[2]). Curriculum frameworks and pedagogy are, therefore, important drivers of the quality of interactions in ECEC and home-learning environments, including how ECEC staff engage with children and parents and how children interact with one another. These interactions are the basis of process quality in ECEC.

The *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review collected information on different characteristics of curriculum frameworks and pedagogical approaches and built key indicators to better understand how countries differ in their approaches to supporting process quality (see Box 2.1 in the next section). Countries and jurisdictions have reported information on 56 curriculum frameworks. Drawing on research literature, this chapter explains different dimensions of curriculum frameworks and pedagogy that matter for process quality. It presents a selection of indicators of the key parameters of curriculum frameworks and pedagogy in countries and jurisdictions that participated in the *Quality beyond Regulations* data collection. The chapter also discusses features of curriculum frameworks and pedagogy in specific countries and jurisdictions. More indicators and figures on policies targeting curriculum frameworks and pedagogy can be found on the platform Starting Strong: Mapping quality in early childhood education and care, available at https://quality-ecec.oecd.org.

Defining the concepts

Curriculum frameworks are documents that set out principles, goals, guidelines, values and approaches to children's development, learning and well-being in a country or jurisdiction (European Commission Working Group, 2014[3]; OECD, 2011[4]). For early childhood education and care, they generally cover knowledge, competencies and skills areas, the characteristics of children's interactions with staff and other children, and the experiences and resources that children are offered within the ECEC setting and sometimes in the home-learning environment (Wood and Hedges, 2016[5]).

These documents provide policy directions as well as technical specifications to ensure that children's experiences in ECEC settings support their learning and development. They often provide guidance to help staff organise their practices to address developmental goals and may also include guidelines on pedagogies (OECD, 2018[6]). Curriculum frameworks aim to constitute overarching agreements among various institutions and stakeholders at the national or sub-national level and to articulate a broad vision of curricula within the context of ECEC and education systems (OECD, 2011[4]). The design, revision, implementation and evaluation of curriculum frameworks are important levers to support process quality and children's development, learning and well-being (OECD, 2015[7]).

Pedagogy can be defined in multiple ways. In a narrow sense, pedagogy refers to the practices and methods employed by staff to support children's development, learning and well-being. It refers to the set of strategies and techniques implemented by staff to provide opportunities for young children's development in skills, attitudes and dispositions within a particular social and material context (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002[8]). Research emphasises the need to understand pedagogy as an interactive process between staff, children and the environment, rather than as a top-down process (Edwards, forthcoming[9]). With this definition, pedagogy can be considered as subsidiary to curriculum, and a variety of pedagogical practices may be employed within a given curriculum framework.

In the broader sense, pedagogy can denote the theoretical foundation of a curricular approach, setting principles and values for specific methods of teaching or interacting. In this perspective, pedagogy reflects the meaning and purpose of education as well as informs the specific modes of learning across activities. Thus, taken in this sense, pedagogy can both inspire and support curriculum (Edwards, forthcoming[9]; Sylva et al., 2016[10]).

A shared understanding of the relationship between curriculum and pedagogy can help ensure both that curriculum makes sense for the cultural values and expectations in a community, and that pedagogy will work in synergy with curriculum towards the same established goals. Without a clear definition of the relationship between curriculum and pedagogy, the capacity of these policy levers to support process quality may be hindered because the nature of learning and teaching intended within the ECEC setting is not clearly established (Edwards, forthcoming[9]). It is also important to rely on initial education and professional development to provide opportunities and guidance for all ECEC staff to understand and interpret the relationship between curriculum and pedagogy in ECEC, including the specific pedagogical approaches used in their own context (see Chapter 3).

Box 2.1. *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review: Coverage and methodology

This chapter is based on findings on curriculum frameworks and pedagogy from the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy questionnaire for the reference year 2019 and country background reports (see the Reader's Guide for more information). Twenty-six countries, covering 41 jurisdictions, completed the policy questionnaire, and six countries (Australia, Canada, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg and Switzerland) provided background reports. Given the complex architecture of ECEC systems, the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review collected information for each of the different curriculum frameworks (56 in total) and ECEC settings (121 in total) that exist within the participating countries and jurisdictions.

Regarding curriculum and pedagogy, the questionnaire included questions on:

- each curriculum framework's developmental goals and areas
- pedagogical approaches in place
- the process of designing and implementing each curriculum framework
- the engagement of families and communities through curriculum frameworks
- monitoring the implementation of each curriculum framework.

Standardised age groups were assigned to the different curricula and settings to facilitate analysis and comparisons. The age groups were assigned as follows:

- **Age 0 to 2**: If the majority of years of a setting or curriculum targets or covers children aged 0 to 2. This includes settings or curricula that start for children from birth (e.g. 12 weeks, 3 months, etc.) and end at age 3.
- **Age 3 to 5/primary school entry**: If the majority of years of a setting or curriculum targets or covers children aged 3 to 5. This includes settings or curricula that start earlier than age 3 (e.g. 2.5 years) or later than age 3 (e.g. 4 years).
- **Integrated for age 0 to 5/primary school entry**: If a setting or curriculum targets or covers children aged below and above the cut-off point of 3 years to a similar extent (e.g. 0 to 8 years).

Information was then aggregated across curricula for indicators where information was the same or very similar within these standardised age groups (e.g. for a country with two curriculum frameworks in place for the same age group). No information for different curricula or settings was aggregated across different age groups.

Table A.A.1 in Annex A shows the list of curriculum frameworks for participating countries and jurisdictions included in this report.

Features of curriculum frameworks that support process quality

Several features of curriculum frameworks can have effects on the quality of interactions that take place in ECEC settings, i.e. process quality. These features include curriculum frameworks' characteristics such as their coverage, principles, goals, learning areas and material resources, which can affect process quality by promoting conditions that allow all children to develop relationships with peers, ECEC staff, space and materials, parents and family, and the community in a consistent way throughout their ECEC experience (Edwards, forthcoming[9]).

Coverage across age groups and settings

Age range and settings covered by curriculum frameworks are important factors for ensuring continuity and progression in ECEC and from ECEC to primary education. When curriculum frameworks target specific age groups or settings, the alignment of their goals and standards within ECEC and with primary school curricula can have positive effects on children's early experiences with education systems (OECD, 2017[11]). At the same time, curriculum frameworks that cover broad age ranges need to be adapted to children's developmental needs at various ages.

High-quality ECEC aims for a comprehensive approach to children's development that includes cognitive, social and emotional development, while primary school tends to be more academically oriented. Efforts to promote continuity across these levels creates a risk of "schoolification'' in ECEC, which is when curricula and pedagogy become increasingly like those used in later stages of schooling (Slot et al., 2018[12]; Shuey et al., 2019[2]). However, curricular alignment across ECEC and primary school can be done in ways that maintain the holistic and child-centred approaches that are typical in ECEC.

Ensuring that curricula cover children aged 0 to 2 in all settings is also fundamental to avoid differences in the quality of ECEC provision across age groups and ensure continuity in transitions to pre-primary education. In some ECEC settings, especially those for the youngest children and those in home-based settings[1], curriculum frameworks may not be implemented either because the setting is not officially covered by the curriculum or because the ECEC workforce in these settings lacks preparation to use the curriculum.

The results from the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review show that there is no common curriculum framework for all children aged 0 to 5 in 40% (14 out of 35) of participating countries and jurisdictions (Table 2.1). Some countries have a curriculum for children aged 0 to 5 in specific settings, but a different curriculum for children aged 3 to 5 in other settings, with no overlap between them. For example, this is the case in **Japan**. In other countries, there are separate curricula in place for children aged 0 to 2 and 3 to 5.

There is no curriculum framework in place for children aged 0 to 2 in 14% (5 out of 35) of participating countries and jurisdictions. This is the case in the **Czech Republic**, **France**, **Israel**, **Portugal** and the **Slovak Republic**. The share of mandatory curricula is significantly higher in the 3 to 5 age group (94%, 17 over 18) than in ages 0 to 2 (50%, 3 out of 6) and 0 to 5 (62%, 20 out of 32), which reflects stronger importance placed on curricula as the level of education increases (see Table C.2.1).

There is a single curriculum framework per specific age group in most participating countries and jurisdictions (80%, 28 out of 35), but in some countries, two or more curricula are in place (Table 2.1). This is the case in **Canada** (New Brunswick), **Chile**, **Japan**, **New Zealand**, **Switzerland** and **Turkey**. In these countries, children in the same age groups may have a different experience of ECEC according to the curriculum framework applied in the setting they attend. Furthermore, in some cases, in some of these countries or jurisdictions, ECEC settings may be required to follow the guidance of two or more frameworks simultaneously. While co-existing frameworks may provide additional resources on how to best support quality in ECEC, it may also create challenges for monitoring curriculum implementation, as well as complexity for ECEC leaders and staff. In these cases, aligning the frameworks and providing support for curriculum implementation can help overcome these complexities.

Table 2.1. ECEC curriculum framework coverage

Curriculum frameworks' coverage across age groups and settings, 2019

	Broad coverage across age groups and settings
	Specific coverage across age groups and settings

Country/jurisdiction	Ages covered by ECEC curriculum framework(s)[1]	Common curriculum framework(s) across age groups and settings[2]	Single curricula per age group[3]
Australia	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Belgium - Flanders	All ECEC ages	No	Yes
Canada - Alberta	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Canada - British Columbia	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Canada - Manitoba	All ECEC ages	No	Yes
Canada - New Brunswick	All ECEC ages	No	No
Canada - Nova Scotia	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Canada - Ontario	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Canada - Quebec	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Canada - Saskatchewan[4]	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Chile	All ECEC ages	Yes	No
Czech Republic	Only ages 3 to 5	No	Yes
Denmark	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Estonia	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Finland	All ECEC ages	No	No
France	Only ages 3 to 5	No	Yes
Germany - Bavaria	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Germany - Berlin	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Germany - Brandenburg	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Germany - North Rhine-Westphalia	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Iceland	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Ireland	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Israel[5]	Only ages 3 to 5	No	Yes
Japan	All ECEC ages	No	No
Luxembourg	All ECEC ages	No	Yes
Mexico	Only ages 3 to 5	No	Yes
New Zealand	All ECEC ages	Yes	No
Norway	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
Portugal	Only ages 3 to 5	No	Yes
Slovak Republic	Only ages 3 to 5	No	Yes
Slovenia	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes
South Africa	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes

Country/jurisdiction	Ages covered by ECEC curriculum framework(s)[1]	Common curriculum framework(s) across age groups and settings[2]	Single curricula per age group[3]
Switzerland	All ECEC ages	No	No
Turkey	All ECEC ages	No	No
United Kingdom - England	All ECEC ages	Yes	Yes

1. In some countries and jurisdictions, some children aged 3 to 5 might be under the coverage of primary school's curriculum frameworks, which are beyond the scope of this review.
2. Common curriculum framework across age groups and settings: "Yes" refers to countries or jurisdictions where at least one curriculum framework covers children aged 0 to 5 in all settings; "No" refers to countries and jurisdictions where there is no curriculum framework covering children aged 0 to 5 in all settings.
3. Single curriculum per age group: "Yes" refers to countries and jurisdictions where there are no overlapping curricula for the same age group; "No" refers to countries or jurisdictions where an age group is covered by more than one curriculum framework simultaneously.
4. In Canada (Saskatchewan) an overarching framework, Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide, covers children aged 0 to 5. However, in this report, the curriculum frameworks analysed are the following age-specific documents: Play and Exploration for Infants and Toddlers (covering children aged 0 to 2), and Essential Learning Experiences (covering children aged 3 to 5). See Table A.A.1 for reference.
5. In Israel, a curriculum framework for children aged 0 to 2 is currently under development.
Note: Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD *"Quality beyond Regulations"* database.

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Goals and principles

The goals of curriculum frameworks, including their breadth or specificity, as well as their target (children and/or staff), may influence process quality in ECEC. For curriculum goals that target children, broad approaches focused on well-being can be more appropriate in ECEC (OECD, 2011[4]). Research shows that while it is important that curriculum frameworks set broad goals for children's development, skill-specific targets even for the youngest children support children to develop competencies in specific domains. For example, skill-specific curricula targeting pre-academic (e.g. literacy, mathematics) and social-emotional skills (e.g. self-regulation, problem solving) show positive effects in these domains (Jenkins and Duncan, 2017[13]).

The *Quality beyond Regulations* policy questionnaire asked whether developmental and learning goals were expressed in terms of broad strands of concepts or competencies (e.g. communicating, developing curiosity), values or principles for ECEC (e.g. respect, equality, opportunities for play), and traditional learning areas (e.g. arts, sciences).

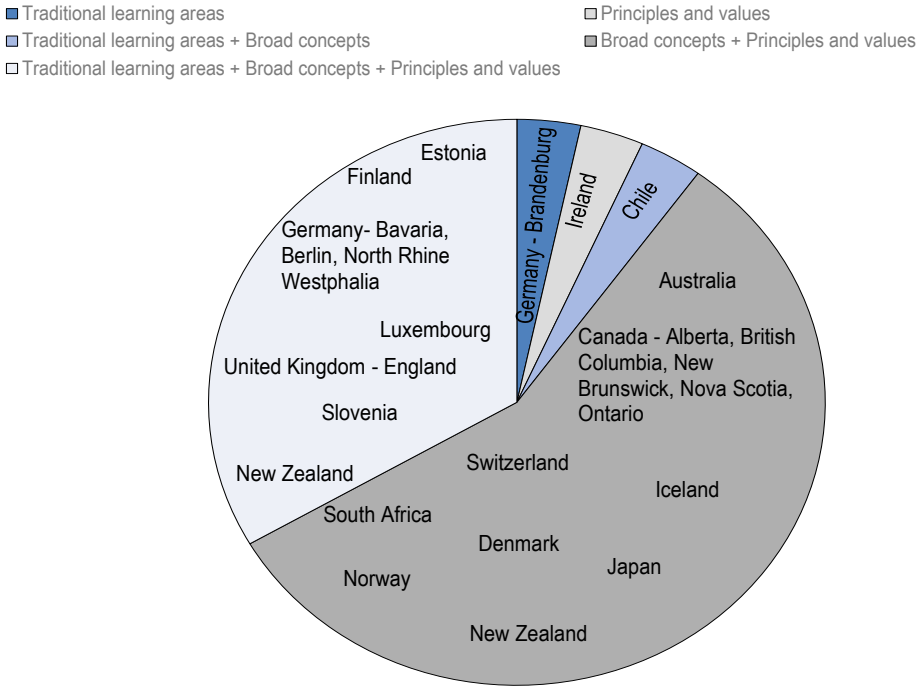
Most participating countries and jurisdictions specify the goals in their curricula using combinations of broad concepts or competencies, values or principles and traditional learning areas. Goals around broad strands of concepts or competencies and around principles and values are found in all curriculum frameworks covering ages 0 to 2, as well as in most of those for ages 0 to 5, but they are less frequent in curricula for ages 3 to 5. Instead, goals reflecting traditional learning areas are more common in curricula for ages 3 to 5 (72%, 13 out of 18), compared to curricula for 0 to 2 (33%, 2 out of 6) and for 0 to 5 (37%, 12 out of 32) (see Figure C.2.1).

The prevalence of traditional learning areas in pre-primary curricula may aim to align with primary school curricula. In **Switzerland**, for example, the curricular goals for children age 3 to 5 are expressed as both traditional learning areas and broad concepts or competences. The subject areas are aligned with teaching and learning areas included in primary and secondary school curricula, such as mathematics and sciences. However, in ECEC settings, these subject areas are more oriented towards child development and are approached with an interdisciplinary perspective.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the different combinations that countries and jurisdictions use in curricula covering children aged 0 to 5. More than half of these curricula set goals both around principles and values and broad strands of concepts or competencies. In one-third of them, goals are expressed using the three categories.

Figure 2.1. Specification of developmental and learning goals in curriculum frameworks covering children aged 0 to 5

Percentage of curriculum frameworks covering children aged 0 to 5/primary school entry with goals expressed in the following ways, 2019



Notes: In countries with multiple curriculum frameworks reported at the sub-national level, when goals are expressed in the same way across sub-national jurisdictions, only the name of the country is shown. When pedagogical approaches are specified in different ways, the name of the jurisdiction is also indicated. Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

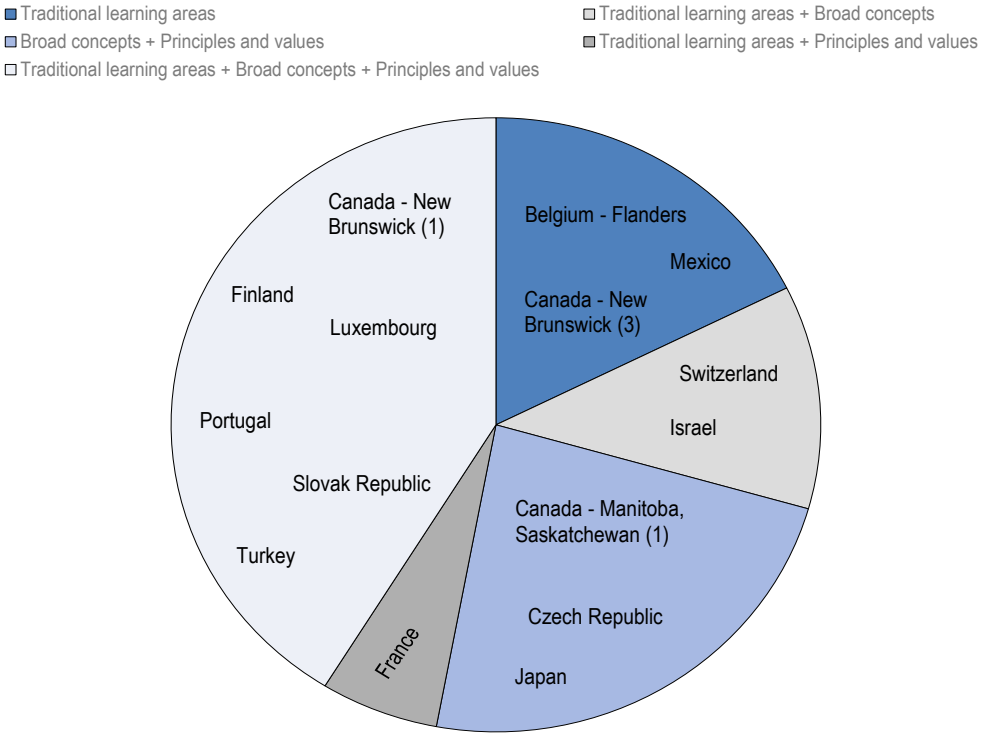
StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934248825

In one of the curricula in **Chile**, for example, goals are expressed in the form of traditional learning areas and broad concepts or competencies. In **Germany** (Brandenburg) and **Ireland**, goals are expressed respectively as traditional learning areas and as principles and values. In **Ireland**, the curriculum includes 12 principles presenting the core values of the framework, such as "equality and diversity", a "child's uniqueness", and "holistic learning and development" (NCCA, 2009[14]). It is also organised in four interconnected themes, which structure the aims and goals for child learning and development. In **Australia**, five principles underpin the curriculum (e.g. "high expectations and equity", "secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships", "respect for diversity"), which are accompanied by five learning outcomes to foster child development, building on broad competencies and concepts. In **Canada**, curriculum frameworks across provinces typically describe broad learning goals or pathways (e.g. well-being and belonging, play, discovery and experimentation) rather than normative developmental or academic goals.

Among curriculum frameworks covering children aged 3 to 5, some build exclusively on goals reflecting traditional learning areas, which is less common in curricula for children aged 0 to 5 and 0 to 2, respectively (Figure 2.2). This is the case of **Belgium** (Flanders), for example, where the curriculum for children aged 3 to 5 sets goals for Dutch, introduction to mathematics, sciences and technologies, physical education, and artistic education, among others. All curriculum frameworks targeting children aged 0 to 2 structure their goals around principles and values and broad concepts or competencies. Among them, two also have goals reflecting traditional learning areas (see Figure C.2.1). For example, in **Belgium** (Flanders), the curriculum targeting children aged 0 to 2 emphasises the interactive process between childcare practitioners and children and on the learning environment, instead of referring to learning areas. It aims to provide opportunities for child development in skills, attitudes and dispositions within a particular social and material context.

Figure 2.2. Specification of developmental and learning goals in curriculum frameworks covering children aged 3 to 5

Percentage of curriculum frameworks covering children aged 3 to 5/primary school entry with goals expressed in the following ways, 2019



Notes: In countries with multiple curriculum frameworks reported at the sub-national level, when goals are expressed in the same way across sub-national jurisdictions, only the name of the country is shown. When pedagogical approaches are specified in different ways, the name of the jurisdiction is also indicated. Countries and sub-national jurisdictions that have multiple curricula can appear more than once. In these cases, the curriculum is identified by a reference number in parentheses (see Table A.A.1). Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

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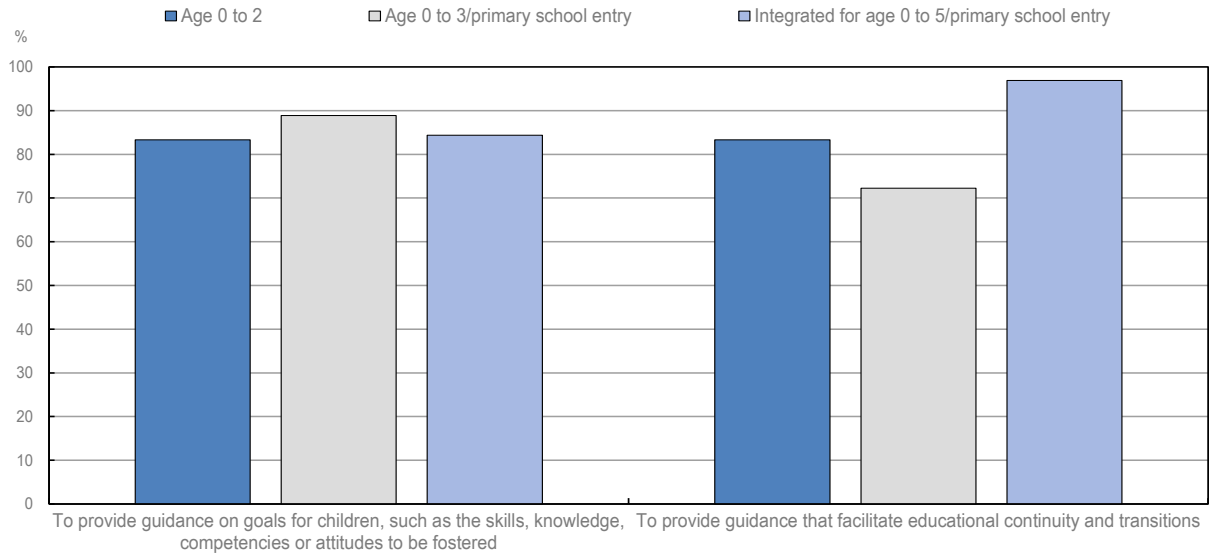
In addition to asking about the framing of developmental or learning goals, the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy questionnaire also asked more broadly about the stated goals of the curriculum framework around supporting goals for children. The majority of curricula for all age groups explicitly provide guidance on the holistic development, learning and well-being of children (Figure 2.3). This is not the case, however, of curriculum frameworks in France (ages 3 to 5), Iceland (ages 0 to 5) and Mexico (3 to 5). More than 80% of curricula in all age groups also provide guidance on goals for children, such as the skills, knowledge, competencies, or attitudes to be fostered. The percentage of curricula that includes the facilitation of continuity and transitions among their goals is slightly higher in the 0 to 2 and 0 to 5 age groups, as compared to the 3 to 5 age group.

Figure 2.3. Stated goals in curriculum frameworks

Percentage of curriculum frameworks that includes the following as stated goals, by age group, 2019



Note: The percentages are calculated within each age group. Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934248863

Countries and jurisdictions might not explicitly state these goals for children in their curricula, but they can be implicit or provide guidance to achieve similar outcomes through policy levers other than curriculum frameworks. For instance, in **Denmark**, the curriculum framework aims to set goals for the pedagogical learning environment. In **Iceland**, guidance is provided to teachers to support children's holistic development, learning and well-being. Some countries highlight specifically that they set developmental goals for children, not for teachers, and that they provide guidelines and resources directed at teachers to help them support children in achieving those goals. For example, **Japan's** curriculum framework states goals for children, and it requires teachers to develop the appropriate environment to support them, taking into account their individual characteristics. In **Switzerland**, curricula for children aged 3 to 5 mostly focus on describing what children should be able to know and to do at the end of the cycle, and how teachers can support them, instead of describing the content that teachers should teach.

The ECEC literature recognises that taking into account children's perspectives is fundamental for process quality. Children's perspectives are not just about their participation in the classroom, but how they should inform, inspire and structure ECEC policies (Broström, 2017[15]; Clark, Mcquail and Moss, 2003[16]; Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson and Hundeide, 2010[17]; Samuelsson and Carlsson, 2008[18]). Curriculum frameworks that are built taking into consideration children's perspectives, priorities and experiences can facilitate a child-centred approach to ECEC (OECD, 2015[7]). Child-centred curriculum frameworks are informed by evidence on children's learning and development and set principles to support it through play, enjoyment, active participation, experimentation and interaction (OECD, 2015[7]).

The recognition of the active role of the child matters as it has been shown that the quality of interactions in the classroom is influenced by whether activities are exclusively teacher-directed or also child-initiated (Edwards, forthcoming[9]). Research also shows the importance of balancing play with adult-directed interactions and with interactions with peers (Bowman, Donovan and Burns, 2000[19]; Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, 2004[20]). For example, a study found that play aligned with adult-led interactions can effectively support young children's development (Stephen, 2010[21]). In this conceptualisation of "playful learning", the direction of the interactions between children and staff goes both ways, although the teacher has the role of establishing the conditions for the activities in the first instance. In the same way, research on child development has shown the importance of both active engagement of children and receiving feedback for learning (Edwards, forthcoming[9]).

Awareness has grown across OECD countries on the importance of developing curriculum frameworks that are child-centred in recent decades (OECD, 2015[7]) (Box 2.2). Curriculum frameworks need to be informed by understanding children's experiences, which are rooted in their individual needs, strengths, interests, language and culture (OECD, 2015[7]).

Learning from countries: A child-centred approach to curriculum frameworks

> *In **Luxembourg**, both curriculum frameworks for formal and non-formal education sectors[2] give children agency and consider them co-constructors of knowledge, identity, culture and values. They also propose ways of making children's views visible by creating enabling free spaces and recommending that staff regularly consult with children about their interests and wishes.*
>
> *Similarly, **Ireland's** curriculum framework promotes a holistic vision of learning and development, recognising the child's uniqueness and incorporating children's views (see Box 2.5 later in this chapter). The curriculum promotes a balance of child-led and adult-led learning, for which it provides sample interaction practices.*
>
> *In **Australia**, curricula state that ECEC staff and children contribute to knowledge development and acknowledges the importance of recognising children's views. They promote practices of collaborative learning between children and staff, with a balance between child-initiated and staff-supported learning.*
>
> *In **Japan**, curriculum frameworks set expectations that ECEC should be provided from the standpoint of children. The staff's role is to provide an enabling environment that encourages children to initiate and develop the activities of their choice.*
>
> *In **Slovenia**, the curriculum emphasises the principle of active learning. It encourages providing a learning environment that provides opportunities for the child's own initiatives, together with activities with planned and unplanned guidance from ECEC staff.*

Box 2.2. Supporting inclusion, diversity and multilingualism through curriculum frameworks and guidelines

Curriculum frameworks can be an important tool to foster inclusion, equity, diversity and multilingualism in ECEC.

In **Australia**, curricula view children as intrinsically connected to their family, community and place. ECEC staff are expected to promote all children's participation, with an informed understanding of their different circumstances and abilities, and to encourage children to use their home languages in the ECEC setting, in addition to English. The curricula also encourage staff to provide resources that reflect each child's social world and expressly embraces the cultural and linguistic diversity of the community. For example, they recognises the unique place of Indigenous Australian cultures and the wealth of learning and experience available within local communities. States and territory governments also provide support to adapt ECEC curriculum design and implementation to the different cultural and socio-economic profiles and backgrounds of their communities.

In **Canada**, curriculum frameworks across the country stress that ECEC should recognise each child's strengths, capabilities and interests, and celebrate diversity in their family, community and culture. This is illustrated by British Columbia and New Brunswick, where the curriculum frameworks include supporting diversity and social responsibility as a goal to guide educators in their practice. In Quebec, ECEC settings are encouraged to consider each child's context, environment and resources when applying the curriculum framework. In all provinces, there are also examples of approaches that foster cultural diversity and multilingualism. For example, Nova Scotia's curriculum framework recognises four founding cultures in the province, including Indigenous people, the Acadian/Francophone population, African Nova Scotians and the Gaels. The curriculum also calls for a deep understanding of all cultures' values and ways of learning.

In **Luxembourg**, the concepts of inclusion and respect of linguistic and cultural diversity are also embedded in curriculum frameworks. In non-formal education, the curriculum fosters interactions that support the language development of children. The aim is to offer an early playful introduction to the Luxembourgish and French languages and create an ECEC environment that encourages openness towards other languages and cultural contexts. Children in all settings are encouraged to express themselves in their home language, with the aim of supporting process quality for cultural minorities or migrant children. In formal education, too, the curriculum takes a multilingual approach, acknowledging and recognising all children's multilingual potential. The conceptual framework for language education in this sector focuses on Luxembourgish as the main language but also promotes playful initiation to French and the home languages of the children.

Play has a strong and historical presence in Western European approaches to ECEC, informed by philosophical thinking about childhood as a period of natural learning that is aided through opportunities for children to participate in exploratory, hands-on activities (Wood, 2010[22]). There is an established understanding across OECD countries of the importance of play and exploration to capitalise on children's natural curiosity (OECD, 2015[7]). Through experimentation of the material world around them and playful interaction with one another, children are able to develop cognitive and non-cognitive competencies (OECD, 2015[7]). Research has shown the advantages of play for young children in terms of their social development, emotional regulation and language learning. It is thus recommended as a primary approach for teaching and learning in the early years (Wisneki and Reifel, 2012[23]).

How to best integrate play in interactions with and among children is still debated. Some authors argue that play is a culturally determined activity and that its value in ECEC may not be intrinsic but conditional on whether it is adequate in supporting children according to the socio-cultural context where they live, and in preparing them for participation in that context (Edwards, forthcoming[9]). Some authors argue that only play initiated by the child may have this value since it consists of an activity that is freely chosen and pleasurable for children, as compared to "pretend-play" activities guided by teachers (Pyle and Alaca, 2018[24]). Other researchers, however, argue that play and exploration alone are not sufficient to develop conceptual knowledge and that staff support in understanding structured content is needed (Hedges and Cullen, 2005[25]). In the middle, notions of guided play, incorporating both child-initiated and adult-oriented activities, have been proposed as a lever to support children's development (Broadhead, 2018[26]). In this sense, curriculum framework guidance is fundamental to support teachers in applying a child-centred approach to play that takes into account children's socio-cultural diversity.

Most participating countries and jurisdictions recognise the importance of play in ECEC in their curriculum frameworks, either in the principles and goals or as a thematic area. Also, all curriculum frameworks for all age groups include "play" as a learning area (see Figure 2.4 further below).

Learning from countries: Integrating play in curriculum frameworks

> *In **France**, the principle of learning by playing is affirmed in the curriculum's preamble.*
>
> *In the **Slovak Republic**, one of the general aims of ECEC in pre-primary education is to support children in engaging in life and learning through play, experience and exploration.*
>
> ***Australia's** curricula reflect children's right to play in its learning outcomes and practices and provides staff with guidance for play-based learning.*
>
> *In **Ireland**, the curriculum includes as a principle the importance of play and hands-on experiences for children. It also provides resources and guidelines for teachers to support learning and developing through play.*
>
> *In **Japan**, the curriculum framework is based on the belief that educational aims are comprehensively achieved through play-centred instruction and promotes learning through play as a spontaneous activity of children.*
>
> *In **Luxembourg**, curriculum frameworks stress the importance of play and provide guidance for an "education based on games'' with different ways of playing proposed: free play, structured play, exploration games, building games, symbolic games and games with specific rules.*
>
> *In **Slovenia**, play occupies a central role in the curriculum and is considered an important means to children's development and learning.*
>
> *In **Switzerland**, the curricula emphasise the need to support children's learning through play and provides guidance on guided play and activities as well as on free play.*
>
> *In **Canada**, all provinces' curriculum frameworks recognise play as crucial for children with different developmental stages of play (solitary, parallel, social) and types of play. For example, curricula in New Brunswick and Alberta incorporate "dizzy play", understood as an activity where children take pleasure in engaging in rough and tumble play and experiencing exhilarating physical release and laughter.*

Substantive content and learning areas

Substantive content is a key aspect of curriculum frameworks that can support process quality. There is a consensus among researchers that children should be supported in their development along multiple areas, including both cognitive and socio-emotional dimensions as well as their well-being. Hence, curriculum frameworks need to have broad coverage in terms of substantive content. Research suggests that curricula where content is based on research and policy evidence can improve children's development, learning and well-being (Burchinal, 2018[27]).

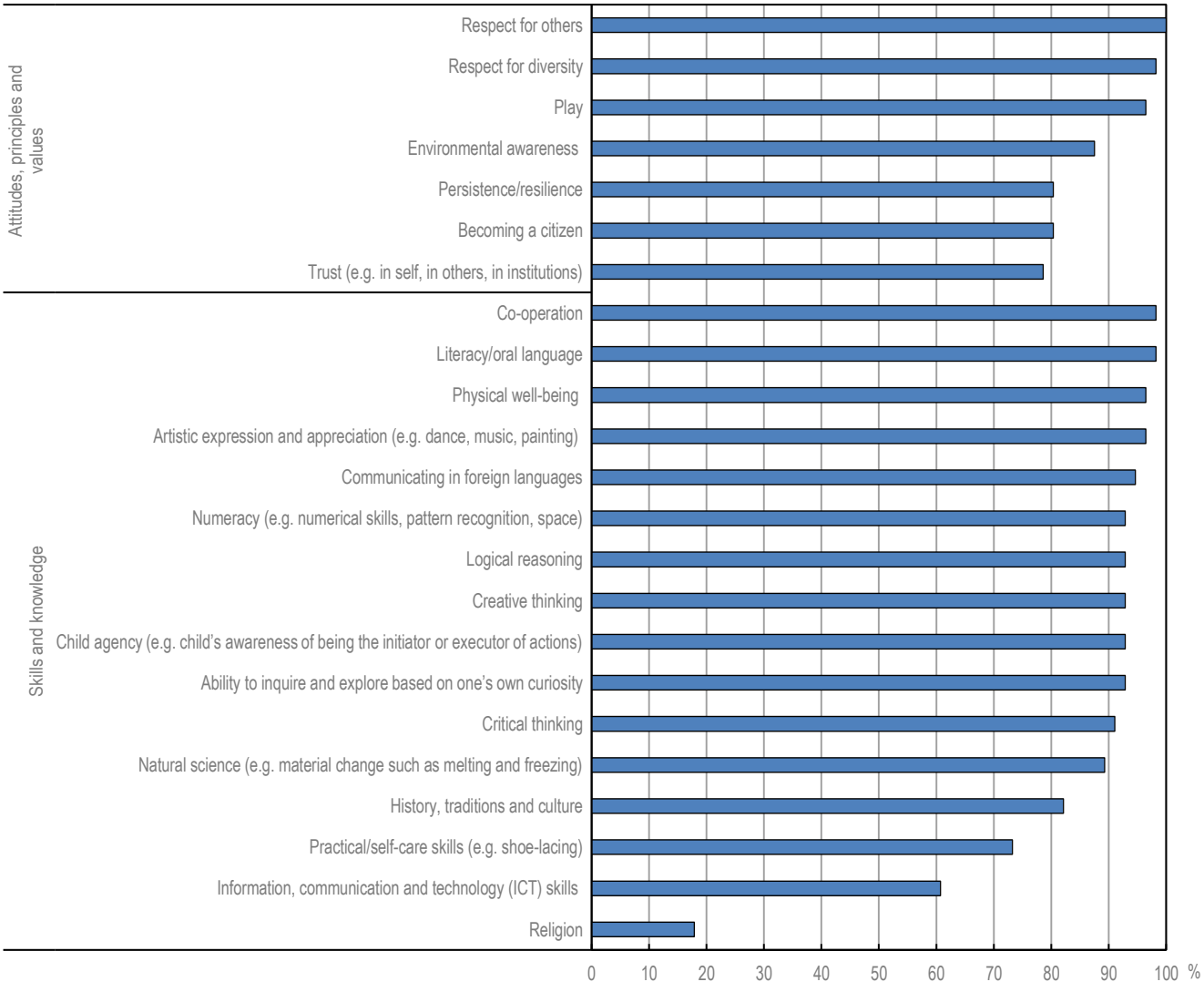
In addition, curriculum frameworks should be relatively specific in terms of content while providing flexibility to staff. For example, **New Zealand's** ECEC curriculum is based on a social pedagogical approach that does not specify content in terms of subject matter so that this content can be developed locally by teachers. A critique of this approach is that it can lead to a reduction in subject-specific content and learning experiences that provide opportunities for rich interactions between ECEC staff and children, as well as among children (Blaiklock, 2010[28]; Edwards, forthcoming[9]; Denny, Hallam and Homer, 2012[29]). At the same time, the alignment of a curriculum's content with children's cultural background and real life has been found to help support children's development, learning and well-being (Edwards, forthcoming[9]). New Zealand's curriculum intends to make these linkages to children's everyday experiences and to special events celebrated by local and cultural communities.

Some studies have focused on the cultural appropriateness of curriculum frameworks' content and how this affects process quality. For example, a study on **Indian** pre-primary settings that adopted a curriculum framework inspired by British ECEC showed that content (focused on mathematics and English) did not provide sufficient opportunities for staff to develop the skills required for children to participate in their communities and was considered disconnected from their real lives (Admas, 2019[30]). These findings highlight the need for curriculum frameworks to account for the diversity of children in terms of socio-economic background, native language and cultural background.

Across participating countries and jurisdictions, curriculum frameworks strike a balance between learning areas based on subjects, attitudes and values, as well as on skills (cognitive and meta-cognitive; physical and practical and socio-emotional). Most of the areas considered in the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy questionnaire are included in all curriculum frameworks across participating countries and jurisdictions and age groups (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4. Developmental and learning areas specified in curriculum frameworks

Percentage of curriculum frameworks specifying the following developmental and learning areas, 2019



Note: Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934248882

All curricula include respect for others as an area, and most of them include literacy/oral language, co-operation, respect for diversity, play, artistic expression and appreciation, and physical well-being. Another area present in almost all curricula is communicating in foreign languages. In some participating countries and jurisdictions, this area may take the form of an introduction or openness to multilingualism, for example, in **Canada** (New Brunswick) and **Germany** (North Rhine-Westphalia). The inclusion of foreign languages in curricula has increased over time, reflecting a growing commitment to supporting diversity in ECEC settings. In a similar policy questionnaire administered to countries and jurisdictions in 2016, only 37% (20 out of 54 countries and jurisdictions) included foreign languages (OECD, 2017[11]).

Areas that are least frequently included across curricula are practical self-care skills (73%, 40 out of 56), ICT skills (61%, 34 out of 56) and religion (18%, 10 out of 56). Compared to 2016, the inclusion of religion is less frequent (41% of the considered curricula in 2016). In contrast, the percentage of curricula that includes ICT skills has increased in four years (compared to 43% in 2016) (OECD, 2017[11]).

Interactions and resources

Interactions between children and ECEC staff are at the core of process quality (Arnett, 1989[31]; Melhuish et al., 2016[32]; Pianta, 2001[33]; Pianta, LaParo and Hamre, 2007[34]). Interactions with material and spaces have also been emphasised as important for young children's development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006[35]; Escayg and Kinkead-Clark, 2018[36]; Tiko, 2017[37]; Ukala and Agabi, 2017[38]; Edwards, forthcoming[9]). The literature also suggests that activities and resources are important features of curriculum that can enable high-quality interactions (Edwards, forthcoming[9]). Participation in routines and activities depends, in practice, on the possibilities for children to engage with the materials and space available around them. For example, a wider range of material resources available was found to be associated with more opportunities for free play, which in turn is linked to children's dispositions, such as curiosity and problem solving (Admas, 2019[30]).

OECD countries increasingly recognise the importance of including a range of interactions in their curriculum frameworks (OECD, 2015[7]). Countries and jurisdictions that highlight interactions in their frameworks are **Australia**, **Belgium** (Flanders, ages 0 to 2), **Canada**, **Germany** (Bavaria), **Ireland**, **Japan**, **Luxembourg**, **New Zealand**, **Slovenia** and **Switzerland**.

Learning from countries: Reflecting the importance of multiple interactions in curriculum frameworks

> *Curriculum frameworks in some countries provide guidance to foster process quality and highlight that space and materials in the ECEC environment matter for the quality of interactions.*
>
> *In **Australia**, the curriculum promotes interactions among children and between children and adults, places, technologies and natural and processed materials. It also stresses that the use of outdoor space can promote children's appreciation of nature, opportunities for individual exploration and play-based learning, as well as discussions and collaborative learning among children.*
>
> *Across **Canada**, curriculum frameworks provide guidance for supporting children's development and learning through relationships with others, including children, adults, families and communities.*
>
> *In **Ireland**, the curriculum provides guidance to inform interactions within and beyond ECEC settings, including child-child, child-staff, staff-staff, staff-parents, child-parents and child-community.*
>
> *In **Japan**, curricula recommend that space and materials available in ECEC promote relationships among children and enrich children's play. It also highlights that staff's choice of the type, quantity and quality of materials should be informed by a good understanding of children and their interests and should create an enabling space for them to engage with the surrounding environment.*
>
> *In **Luxembourg**, the curriculum framework for non-formal education emphasises interactions between adults and children, but particularly interactions within the peer group and with the environment. Both curriculum frameworks provide guidelines on the design of indoor and outdoor spaces and the materials that can support quality interactions.*
>
> *In **Switzerland**, curriculum frameworks refer to interactions between children with adults, with the peer group and with their spatial-material environment. The relationships with parents, families and communities are also mentioned.*

Pedagogical approaches to support process quality

ECEC curriculum frameworks can be based on a specific pedagogy, prescribing certain practices, values and beliefs to ECEC staff. Conversely, pedagogy can be considered as a vehicle for curriculum frameworks, allowing multiple pedagogies to emerge according to a local context's specific needs.

Different traditions of pedagogy exist in ECEC among OECD countries and are considered in the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy questionnaire (Box 2.3). The pedagogical model that is followed can influence ECEC staff practices and thus affect process quality. However, while neuroscience has advanced understanding over the last decades of children's development and principles that can support it, there is no consensus on a pedagogy that should prevail, as various factors affect how pedagogical practices influence process quality in practice, such as cultural factors. The goals that countries and jurisdictions have for children's cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes can be attained through different pedagogical approaches.

Box 2.3. Pedagogical approaches in early childhood education and care

Different pedagogical approaches exist in ECEC, inspired by different traditions and ideologies. The main approaches to pedagogy in ECEC that are considered in the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy questionnaire are:

Constructivist/interactive: Approaches that view learning as an active exchange between the child and environment that progresses in "stages", with adults and peers providing important stimuli in learning. Based on the idea that learners construct new ideas and concepts based on their existing knowledge.

Developmentally appropriate practices: A balance of child-initiated learning and guidance from staff members. The approach provides a wide range of different activities, which are carried out in groups or independently. The approach focuses on socio-emotional, physical and cognitive development. All practices are based on: 1) theories of child development; 2) individual needs; and 3) the child's cultural background.

Didactic/direct instruction: Classic method of learning with mainly teacher-initiated activities, including repetition. This approach normally follows highly academic programmes that emphasise literacy and numeracy skills.

Experiential education: This approach focuses on the emotional well-being and the level of involvement of children. It emphasises satisfying children's basic needs so that they feel at ease and self-confident, allowing them to act spontaneously and to be concentrated, interested and fascinated.

Readiness for school: This approach emphasises preparing children for primary school, e.g. by developing children's early literacy and mathematics development. The pedagogy is aligned with primary schooling.

Social pedagogy: This approach stresses content and quality of practice rather than assessing children's achievement levels. It highlights the importance of dialogue between adults and children, as well as creative activities with discussions and reflections.

Outcome-based education/performance-based education: This approach sets specific aims and strategies for teachers to achieve outcomes for children, e.g. literacy and numeracy skills, specific subject knowledge, intelligence quotient (IQ) scores as well as children's socio-emotional and soft skills, such as motivation to learn, creativity, independence, self-confidence, general knowledge and initiative.

Source: Wall, S., I. Litjens and M. Taguma (2015[39]), *Early Childhood Pedagogy Review: England,* https://www.oecd.org/education/early-childhood-education-and-care-pedagogy-review-england.pdf.

Pedagogy informed by children's views also fosters process quality (Edwards, forthcoming[9]). Children's spontaneous interests derive from their social and cultural experiences. Therefore, incorporating their views helps ensure that the ECEC experience is appropriately connected to their lives. Cultures hold particular values about children, and the values and traditions of a community influence the ultimate form in which pedagogy is enacted, beyond what is stated in countries' formal curriculum frameworks.

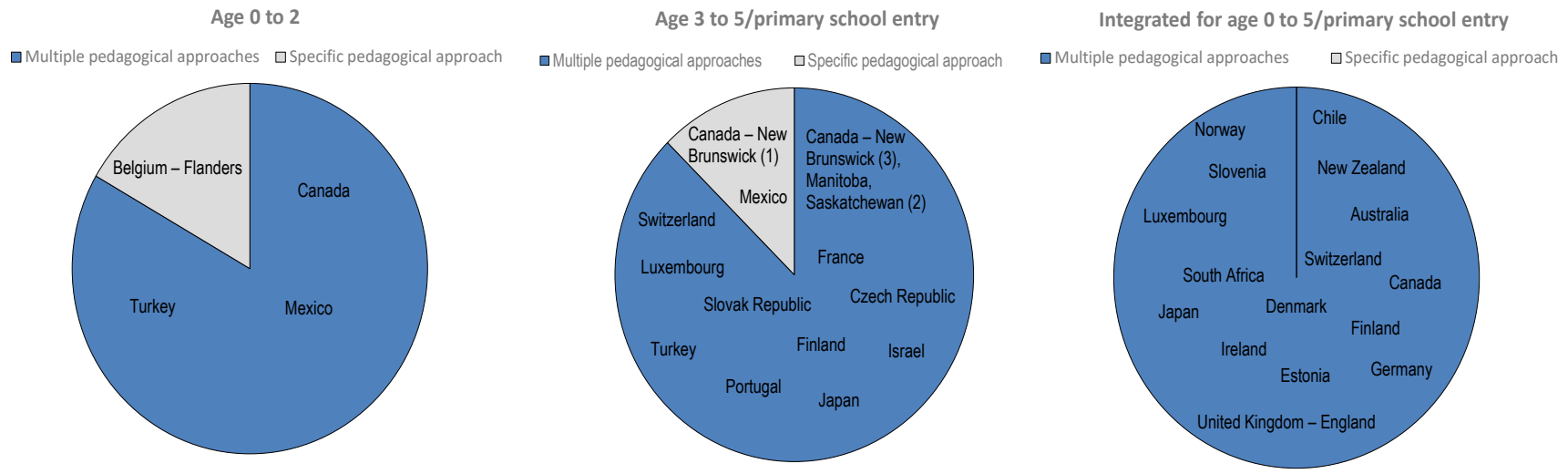
Therefore, adapting pedagogical approaches to the local context is of great importance. The ability of countries to provide flexibility in curriculum frameworks in order to allow the right pedagogical approaches to emerge can make a difference for process quality. At the same time, countries need to find the balance between flexibility and richness in an evidence-based curriculum framework content so that opportunities can be maximised by pedagogy. In addition, while local flexibility can enhance process quality when it is responsive to the needs and values of the community, variability in the implementation of curriculum frameworks can also create uneven access to high-quality ECEC and contribute to concerns around equity. Some curricula allow ECEC staff, centres or jurisdictions to choose their preferred pedagogy but recommend and favour certain approaches.

Depending on guidance included in curriculum frameworks, ECEC staff might propose different activities that will impact the quality of interactions in the setting. ECEC staff autonomy to decide how to implement curriculum frameworks can help them tailor activities to local contexts and specific needs, which can be beneficial for children's engagement in positive interactions. Depending on the curriculum framework, ECEC staff may have more flexibility to design activities within the curriculum, or a curriculum may be more prescriptive, specifying the activities to follow as well as the teaching and learning materials.

Most curriculum frameworks in participating countries and jurisdictions encourage the use of multiple pedagogical approaches in all age groups. This is the case for all curriculum frameworks for children aged 0 to 5 and 83% (15 out of 18) of those for children aged 3 to 5 (Figure 2.5). Among countries with curriculum frameworks in place covering children aged 0 to 2, **Canada** (Manitoba), **Mexico** and **Turkey** foster multiple approaches. In **Belgium** (Flanders), for children aged 0 to 2, only one pedagogical approach is specified in the curriculum framework. ECEC staff are, however, given flexibility in applying this pedagogical approach, and they use it building on the environment, the vision of the setting, and parents' preferences, among other factors.

Figure 2.5. Specification of pedagogical approaches in curriculum frameworks

Percentage of curriculum frameworks specifying multiple and specific pedagogical approaches, by age group, 2019



Notes: In countries with multiple curriculum frameworks reported at the sub-national level, when curriculum frameworks specify pedagogical approaches in the same way (multiple or specific) across sub-national jurisdictions, only the name of the country is shown. When pedagogical approaches are specified in different ways, the name of the jurisdiction is also indicated. Countries and sub-national jurisdictions that have multiple curricula can appear more than once. In these cases, the curriculum is identified by a reference number in parentheses (see Table A.A.1). Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934248901

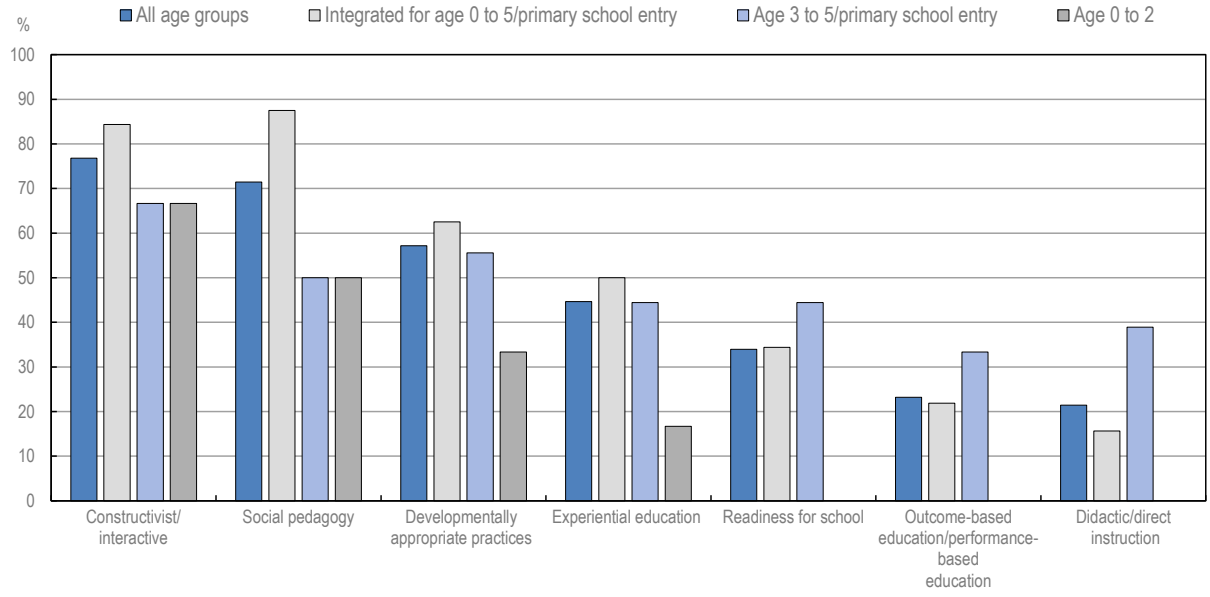
Among the various pedagogical approaches considered in the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy questionnaire, countries and jurisdictions could specify all the approaches included in their curricula. When curriculum frameworks for all age groups are considered, more than three-quarters of them include the "constructivist/interactive" and "social pedagogy" approaches (Figure 2.6). The "developmentally appropriate practices" approach is present in more than half of curricula, and the "experiential education" approach in 44% (25 out of 56) of curricula. For instance, in **Canada**, provinces' curriculum frameworks primarily adopt social pedagogical approaches, although some provinces also include other approaches. In **Ireland**, the curriculum reflects a socio-cultural view of children's development and promotes an integrated approach to practice that combines care and education (academic and play-based approaches).

One-third of curriculum frameworks specifies a "readiness for school" approach, and 23% (13 out of 56) includes an "outcome/performance-based education" approach. This is the case of curricula in **Australia**, **Canada** (New Brunswick), the **Czech Republic**, **Estonia**, **Japan**, **Luxembourg**, **New Zealand**, the **Slovak Republic**, **South Africa** and **Switzerland**.

Another 21% (12 out of 56) of curricula specifies a "didactic/direct instruction" approach. This is the case in **Canada** (New Brunswick), **Chile**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Israel**, the **Slovak Republic**, **South Africa** and **Switzerland**.

Figure 2.6. Pedagogical approaches specified in curriculum frameworks

Percentage of curriculum frameworks specifying the following pedagogical approaches, by age group, 2019



Note: Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934248920

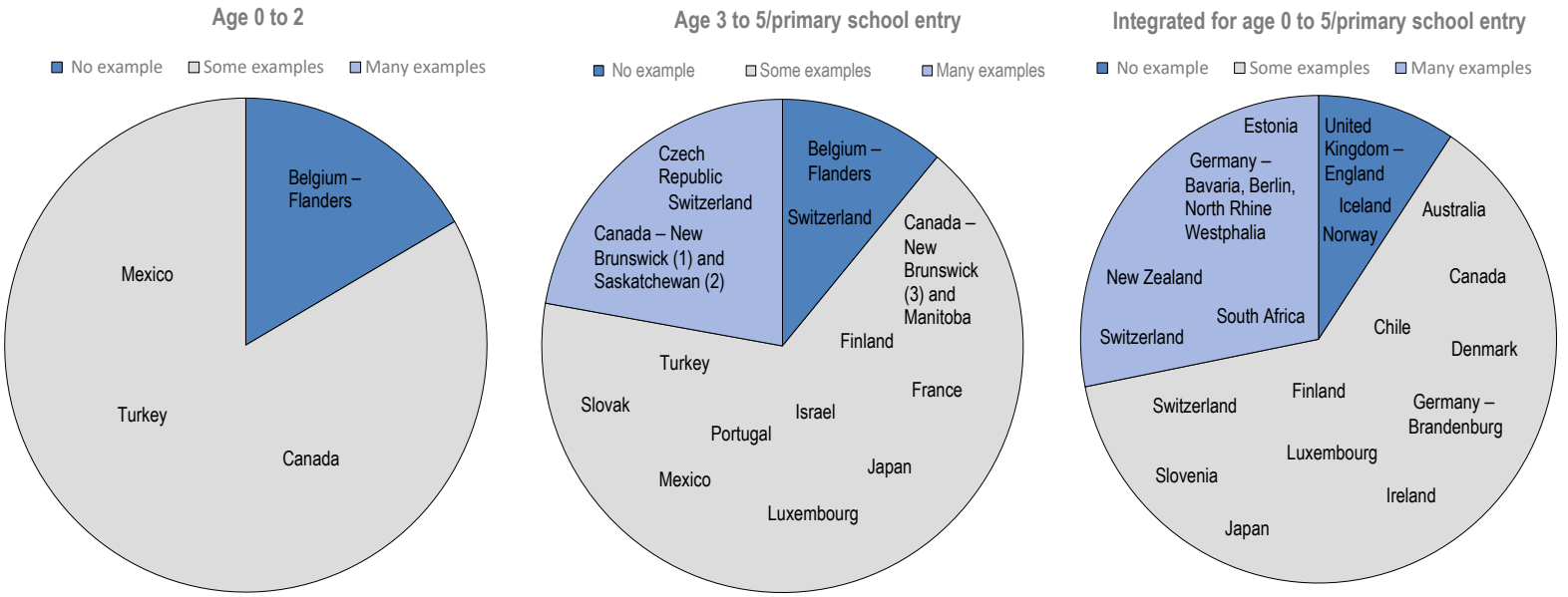
Pedagogical approaches of curricula for children aged 3 to 5 tend to be more aligned with those of primary education, while those of curricula for children aged 0 to 5 or 0 to 2 specify more holistic approaches. The "social pedagogy" and "constructivist/interactive" approaches are more often specified in curricula for children aged 0 to 5 and 0 to 2. None of the curricula for children aged 0 to 2 includes "readiness for school", "outcome/performance-based education", or "didactic/direct instruction". These approaches are more frequent among curricula for ages 3 to 5 than for ages 0 to 5.

In practice, a curriculum is implemented through discussions among ECEC staff as well as with children (Sylva et al., 2016[10]). There is an inevitable gap between curriculum frameworks as they are conceived and implemented, making it important to promote balanced, dynamic and flexible pedagogical approaches that respond to children's needs and the specific characteristics of the group of children staff are working with.

Curriculum frameworks can give more or less autonomy to ECEC staff in their use of pedagogical practices. Some curricula are more specific and prescriptive regarding the pedagogical practices to be implemented and how to apply pedagogical approaches, while others are less specific. Across participating countries and jurisdictions, curriculum frameworks vary in the degree of detail in which they provide pedagogical guidance and support. The majority of reported curricula covering all age groups provides some examples of specific pedagogical practices and/or curriculum implementation suggestions but give staff flexibility to use other approaches as well (Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7. Pedagogical guidance and support for staff as provided in curriculum frameworks

Percentage of curriculum frameworks providing examples of specific practices and/or implementation suggestions to guide teachers in using the specified pedagogical approach(es) by age group, 2019



Notes: Countries and jurisdictions that have more than one curriculum framework providing different examples of practices (many, some, or no examples) can appear multiple times. In countries with multiple curriculum frameworks reported at the sub-national level, when curriculum frameworks provide different examples of practices (many, some, or no examples) across sub-national jurisdictions, only the name of the country is shown. When specified in different ways, the name of the jurisdiction is also indicated. Countries and sub-national jurisdictions that have multiple curricula can appear more than once. In these cases, the curriculum is identified by a reference number in parentheses (see Table A.A.1). Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

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Providing many examples of pedagogical practices in curriculum frameworks does not necessarily translate into less autonomy for teachers. For example, in **New Zealand**, where the curriculum provides many examples of practices, the framework highlights that its role is to set the direction, but that it is up to teachers, along with families and communities, to implement the curriculum in a way that is appropriate for their setting and for children's learning needs.

Learning from countries: Providing flexibility to ECEC staff through curriculum frameworks

> *Curriculum frameworks can encourage staff to be flexible in adapting a curriculum's principles to their ECEC setting context and children's individual needs through relevant pedagogical practice.*
>
> *For example, in **Australia**, ECEC staff are encouraged to use their expertise, knowledge and understanding of each child to propose activities and interactions that support them in achieving outcomes. Additionally, guidelines encourage ECEC staff to explore new ideas and approaches and to meet the needs of every child. The curriculum also provides examples of pedagogical practices, including responsiveness to children, learning through play, intentional teaching and cultural competence.*
>
> *Likewise, the curriculum framework in **Ireland** provides information to support staff and leaders in adapting all curricular principles and themes to their settings' needs. It also promotes pedagogical practices that are emergent, play-based, a balance between group and individual learning, and a balance between being adult-initiated and child-initiated.*
>
> *In **Luxembourg**, the objectives in curriculum frameworks are deliberately general, allowing ECEC settings to decide on the most relevant ways to implement them. Settings are free to develop their own activities and practices to implement the curricula in the way they consider appropriate to the local context and children's individual needs.*
>
> *In **Canada,** too, across provinces, curriculum frameworks encourage staff to be responsive to children's contexts, interests and capabilities when implementing its principles. Curricula promote pedagogical practices such as intentional teaching, reflective practice, and observation and documentation.*
>
> *In **Finland**, whereas the curriculum framework goals remain an orientation for ECEC pedagogy, ECEC staff are encouraged to apply pedagogical practices based on observation, documentation and ongoing development of the culture of the ECEC setting and every child's needs.*
>
> *In **Japan**, curricula provide general standards, but it is up to each setting to formulate their pedagogical practices with a deep understanding of each child's needs and feelings. The curriculum promotes basic approaches, including comprehensive, play-centred instruction and instruction based on the individual characteristics of each child.*
>
> *In **Slovenia**, the curriculum suggests possible content, activities and methods to achieve its goals. However, it allows ECEC staff autonomy to decide which, when and how to apply them according to their professional judgment, considering the characteristics of the children, their parents and the environment.*
>
> *In **Switzerland**, ECEC staff can decide how to apply curriculum and teaching content, topics, tasks and materials to support children's different needs. However, the implementation of pre-primary settings' curriculum is the responsibility of cantons, which may require ECEC staff to use certain teaching materials and subjects.*

The design and implementation of curriculum frameworks

Curriculum frameworks go through several processes: design, implementation, and, over time, revisions. The design and reform processes include the definition of curriculum frameworks' goals and content, as well as planning and directions for the implementation stage, including training for ECEC leaders and staff on the new curriculum, materials for parents, availability of resources, etc. Curriculum frameworks design and reform processes vary in their characteristics; for example, they can involve different types and numbers of stakeholders, have more or fewer mechanisms for consultation at the design and reform stages and prescribe different strategies to ensure stakeholders' support at the implementation stage.

Designing a curriculum framework's goals and content can be a challenge due to the multiplicity of visions on curriculum among a variety of stakeholders, including policy makers, researchers, ECEC professionals, and parents and communities, in addition to including children's views. Furthermore, aligning curriculum goals and content with the future needs of society at large can be challenging, especially with rapid changes, such as increasing migration and advances in information and knowledge economies. In order to foster process quality in ECEC settings and support children's development, learning, and well-being, curriculum frameworks need to adapt to multiple stakeholder's needs as well as to global trends, local contexts and children's needs.

Another factor that may ensure that curriculum frameworks support process quality effectively is stakeholders' support for implementation, which can be achieved by involving them early in the design process. Curriculum implementation and reform need support from stakeholders, which can be built via sufficient and strategic consultation from the early design stage. Increased empirical investigation via comparative research establishing the definition of curriculum and pedagogy held by various ECEC stakeholders may also be helpful in the design and implementation of ECEC internationally (Edwards, forthcoming[9]).

Implementing a complex and rich curriculum successfully is linked to the quality of support for ECEC staff and to their training and qualifications, in particular their opportunities for professional development on relevant pedagogical practices (Sylva et al., 2016[10]). Preparing conditions for staff to implement a curriculum effectively is also important. Insufficient guidelines and resources are likely to enhance difficulties, especially for inexperienced, new staff or staff with lower qualifications. Other important factors include providing practical support materials to facilitate implementation in ECEC settings; setting out clear, informative guidelines for ECEC staff and parents; and providing expert assistance on curriculum frameworks to ECEC providers. Also, changes to curriculum may require ensuring alignment with ECEC staff initial education and training. Working environment factors, such as child-staff ratios and group size, as well as material conditions of ECEC centres, may also hinder or support practising the pedagogy suggested in the curriculum (Chapter 3).

Stakeholder involvement in curriculum framework design

Depending on the historical, political and cultural context, the design processes of a curriculum framework may have different characteristics and involve different actors.

The *Quality beyond Regulations* policy questionnaire asked participating countries and jurisdictions whether different categories of actors had been involved in the development of the most recent version of the curriculum framework, including the central government, ECEC staff, parents, children, community groups, representatives of ECEC training programmes and associations of ECEC professionals.

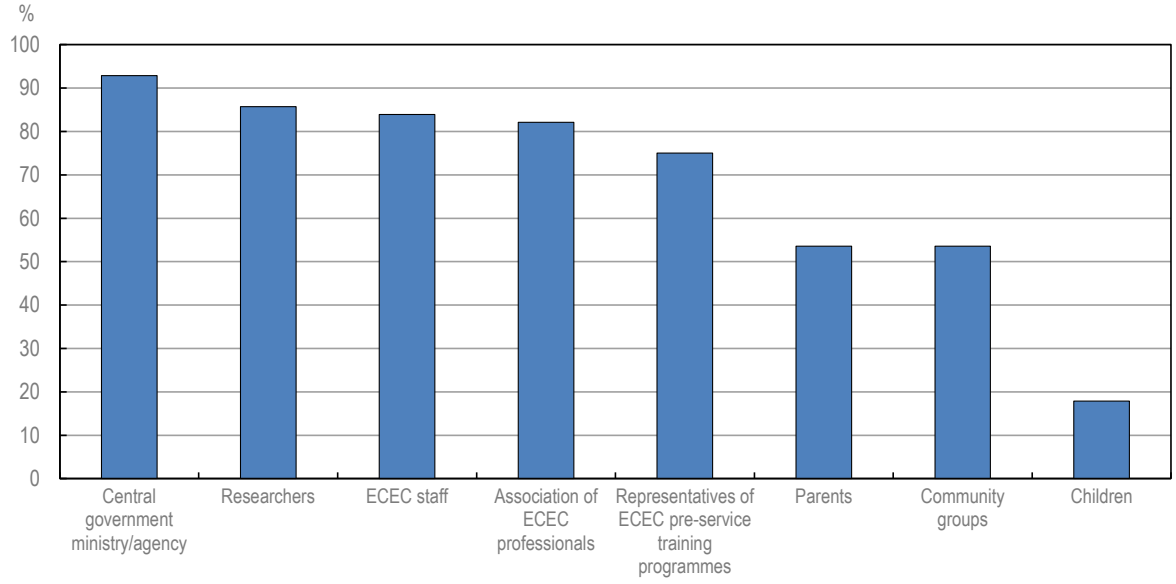
Across age groups, central government ministries or agencies were unsurprisingly the most frequently included in the development of curriculum frameworks, followed by researchers, ECEC staff, associations of ECEC professionals, and representatives of ECEC pre-service training programmes (Figure 2.8). Parents and community groups were less frequently included (52%, 30 out of 56 curricula). The least commonly included category is children, with only 18% (10 out of 56) of curricula involving children in the design processes.

The countries and jurisdictions that involved children in developing their curriculum frameworks are: **Belgium** (Flanders, ages 0 to 2), **Canada** (Alberta and Saskatchewan, ages 0 to 2), **Estonia**, **Finland**, **Ireland**, **New Zealand** and **Portugal**. Ireland, for example, included children's views in the development process of their curriculum framework and is planning to do so again to inform the update process of the curriculum. In Belgium (Flanders), this was done through consultation with the children's rights commissioner, who represented children's views.

The percentage of the categories of stakeholders involved in the design of curriculum frameworks covering children aged 0 to 5 varies from 100% (8 out of 8) in **Estonia** and **Finland** to 37% (3 out of 8) in **Luxembourg** and the **United Kingdom** (England) (Figure 2.9). Similar variations among countries are found for curriculum frameworks covering other age groups (see Figure C.2.2 and Figure C.2.3).

Figure 2.8. Stakeholders involved in curriculum framework design

Percentage of curricula that involved the following categories of stakeholders in the development of the most recent version, 2019

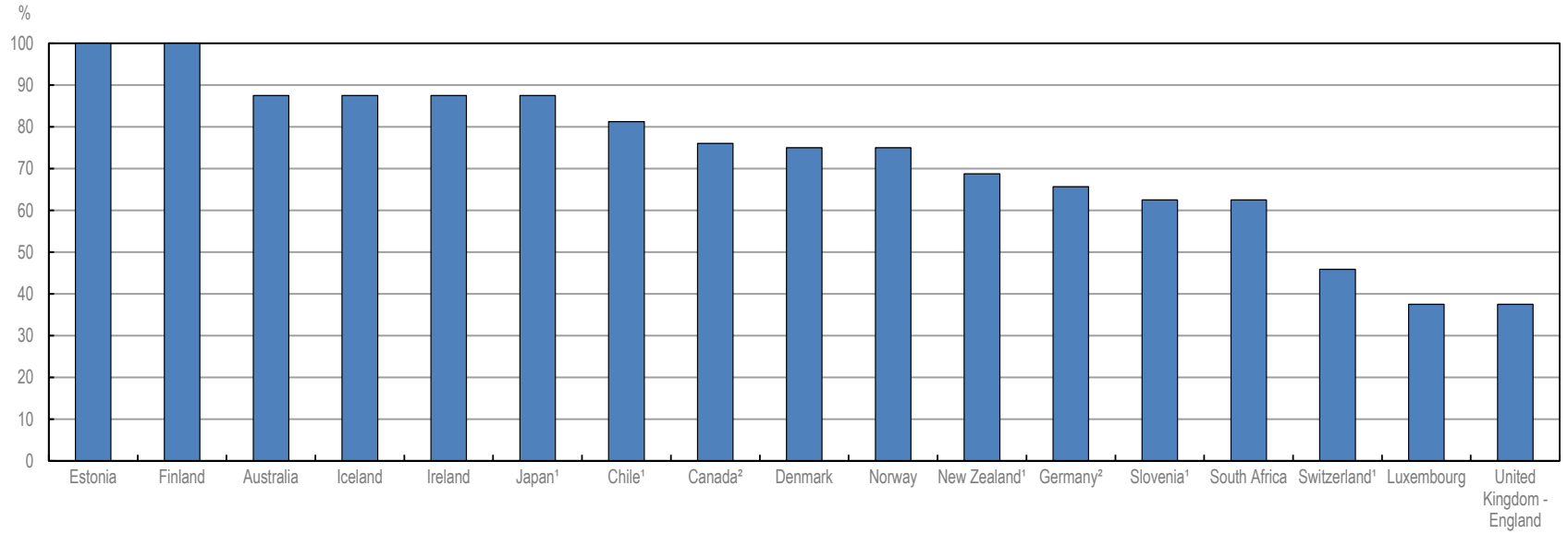


Note: Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934248958

Figure 2.9. Scope of stakeholders' involvement in the design of curriculum frameworks covering ages 0 to 5

Percentage of categories of stakeholders (among the eight considered categories) involved in the most recent version of the curriculum framework, for curricula covering ages 0 to 5/entry to primary school, 2019



1. Chile, Japan, New Zealand, Slovenia and Switzerland have more than one curriculum covering the age group 0 to 5. Thus, the values are the average of the percentages.
2. For Canada and Germany, the value is the average of all jurisdictions' values.
Note: Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934248977

Box 2.4. Consultation and collaborative approaches to the design and revision of curriculum frameworks

In **Australia**, the curriculum frameworks were developed based on evidence of best practices for ECEC quality. This was done in collaboration between national, state and territory governments, with input from the ECEC sector. It was the result of a large consultation process that included national symposiums, national public consultation forums, consultation of focus groups, and an online forum and case-study trials.

Across **Canada**, all provinces have based the development of their curriculum framework on collaborative processes and broad consultations, particularly in Indigenous and multicultural communities. For example, in Yukon, consultation was held with First Nations communities across the territory. Governments, ECEC and curriculum experts, and advisory groups are some example of the actors that led the process of curriculum development in different provinces.

In **Ireland**, the development of the curriculum framework also took place on the basis of broad consultation, to ensure that the framework would be relevant to the everyday experiences of children and staff. In particular, a study was commissioned to collect information on children's interests and experience of ECEC, with the objective of incorporating their views in the design of the framework.

In **Japan**, the development process of the curriculum framework for pre-primary settings has involved discussions and reports by a council composed of experts. Besides the national government, several actors have been consulted, including ECEC staff associations, parents, community groups and representatives of ECEC pre-service training programmes.

In **Luxembourg,** a thematic conceptual framework for early language learning was developed under the oversight of a working group including experts and ECEC staff. A draft version of the framework had been discussed with hundreds of ECEC professionals. The design of the curriculum framework for the formal education sector in 2017 took place in a similar fashion.

In **Switzerland**, the curriculum that sets the main guidelines for ECEC resulted from a systematic consultation process with experts and ECEC practitioners. To design the framework, an ECEC training and research institute conducted a study with structured groups of experts, practitioners, researchers and policy makers.

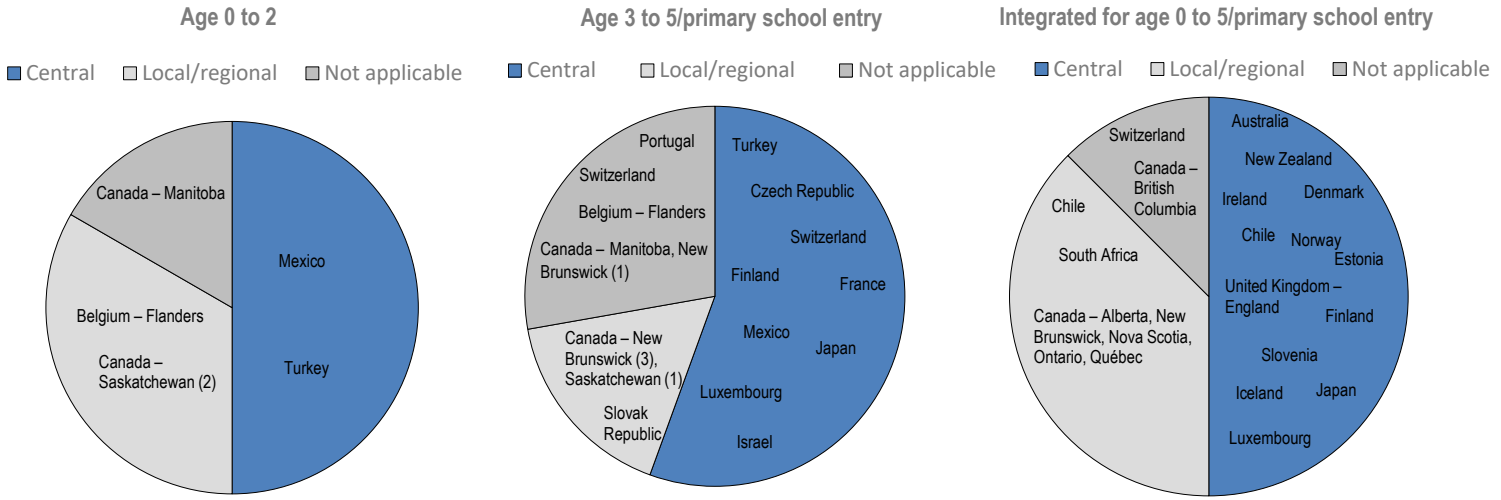
Supporting curriculum implementation

Different policies and mechanisms exist to support and facilitate curriculum implementation. As mentioned in the sections above, providing practical support materials and setting out clear, informative guidelines for different audiences facilitates curriculum implementation in the ECEC context.

Among participating countries and jurisdictions, most curriculum frameworks include, or are accompanied by, guides for implementation. For most of the curriculum frameworks, the central government elaborates these guidelines (see Figure 2.10).

Figure 2.10. Implementation guides or documents accompanying curriculum frameworks

Percentage of curriculum frameworks for which guidelines to support implementation are set by the central or local/regional government, by age group, 2019



Notes: In countries with multiple curriculum frameworks reported at the sub-national level, when curriculum frameworks' guides for implementation are developed at the same level of government across sub-national jurisdictions, only the name of the country is shown. When specified in different ways, the name of the jurisdiction is also indicated. Countries and sub-national jurisdictions that have multiple curricula can appear more than once. In these cases, the curriculum is identified by a reference number in parentheses (see Table A.A.1). Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
"Not applicable" corresponds to countries/jurisdictions where there are no guidelines to support implementation in place.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

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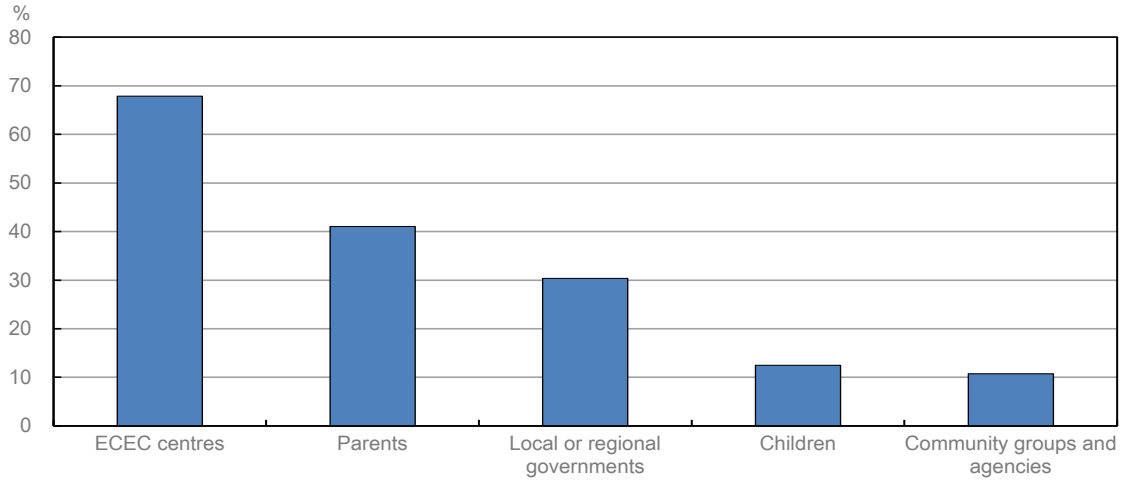
Learning from countries: Supporting and facilitating curriculum implementation

> ***Luxembourg*** *offers support to curriculum implementation by organising conferences on pedagogy and curriculum, as well as by distributing documentation, publications and posters on pedagogical topics free of charge. Support is also provided through Internet platforms that publish information on the ECEC system, as well as explanations, films and practical examples of different areas of the curricula.*
>
> ***Australia*** *provides additional resources about curriculum decision making, the intended operation of the curriculum and expectations in terms of principles, practices and learning outcomes that ECEC services should meet. These resources are targeted to the ECEC sector, including ECEC staff, state and territory government, families and the community.*
>
> *In* ***Ireland****, where the curriculum framework is accompanied by a quality framework for ECEC, several resources support ECEC staff and families in the understanding of the two frameworks. For example, a practice guide explains the two frameworks with supporting materials, which are available on line, including self-evaluation tools, examples of pedagogical strategies and ideas for planning, documenting, assessing and action planning.*

ECEC settings are the audience most frequently targeted by curriculum framework guidelines provided by central governments, across all age groups in participating countries and jurisdictions, at almost 68% (Figure 2.11). Some 41% (23 out of 56) of curricula's guidelines are targeted at parents, and one-third of them are directed at supporting local governments in curriculum implementation. Only 12% (7 out of 56) of curricula includes guidelines directed at children; this is the case of **Estonia**, **Germany** (Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia), **Mexico**, **New Zealand**, the **Slovak Republic** and **Turkey**. Another 11% (6 out of 56) of curricula is accompanied by material targeted to community groups and agencies, such as in **Australia**, **Canada** (New Brunswick), **Estonia**, **Mexico** and **Turkey**.

Figure 2.11. Audiences targeted by implementation guides or documents accompanying curriculum frameworks

Percentage of curriculum frameworks where accompanying guidelines to support implementation provided by governments target the following audiences, 2019



Note: Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934249015

Designing resources that target community organisations can promote further involvement from these groups in supporting children's learning and well-being. For example, the **United Kingdom** (England) developed a campaign to support children's learning at home and through everyday activities in the community. The campaign aims at providing ideas to parents and community members to engage with children, e.g. while catching the bus or doing the shopping. Businesses are engaging in this initiative. For example, a bus company has included posters on the ceiling of some buses suggesting activities to do with young children, such as "chatting about what has happened so far in the day". In addition, frontline staff in shops are being trained to engage with children. The campaign also has a website with resources and organises book events, where free children's books are provided in places like bus stations or shops.

Apart from guidelines and documentation accompanying curricula, a highly qualified workforce is also a fundamental resource to ensure good curriculum implementation and appropriate pedagogical practices (Sylva et al., 2016[10]). For this, countries may implement different measures, including enhancing professional development and the role of ECEC leaders in fostering staff development and training (see Chapter 3).

Learning from countries: Supporting ECEC staff in the implementation of curriculum frameworks

> *In **Australia**, pre-service training for ECEC staff includes the ECEC curriculum as a central element. Also, ECEC settings are required to designate an educational leader to develop and implement educational programmes. This includes building staff's educational capability through professional development. There are guidelines available to support leaders and providers in this mission.*
>
> *In **Ireland**, different measures aimed at supporting alignment between curriculum and pedagogical practices have been put in place. These include plans to integrate the curriculum into staff initial education programmes, as well as on-site mentoring and training for staff and education-focused inspections.*
>
> *In **Luxembourg**, in-service training for teachers is required to comply with the principles and pedagogical objectives of the national curriculum framework.*
>
> *In **Switzerland**, too, the orientation framework and pre-primary school curricula offer guidance for leaders to create enabling conditions for high-quality pedagogical practices in their centres, taking into account teachers' needs.*

Engaging families and communities through curriculum frameworks

Research shows that strong parental involvement in ECEC can improve children's reading and numeracy outcomes and have a positive impact on their behaviour and social and emotional skills, particularly for socio-economically disadvantaged children (Sim et al., 2019[40]; OECD, 2020[41]). In addition, supportive child-parent relationships generate healthy attachments and can positively affect children's understanding and regulation of emotions, as well as their feelings of security and taste for exploration and learning (OECD, 2015[42]). 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 achieve better reading and numeracy skills as they age, but they are also more motivated to learn. There is also evidence that community engagement in ECEC can help ensure continuity in children's development beyond what is happening in ECEC settings and is therefore important for process quality (Weiss, Caspe and López, 2008[43]). In addition to promoting social cohesion, involving community actors and institutions in ECEC is important to create connections between families, ECEC settings and other services for children.

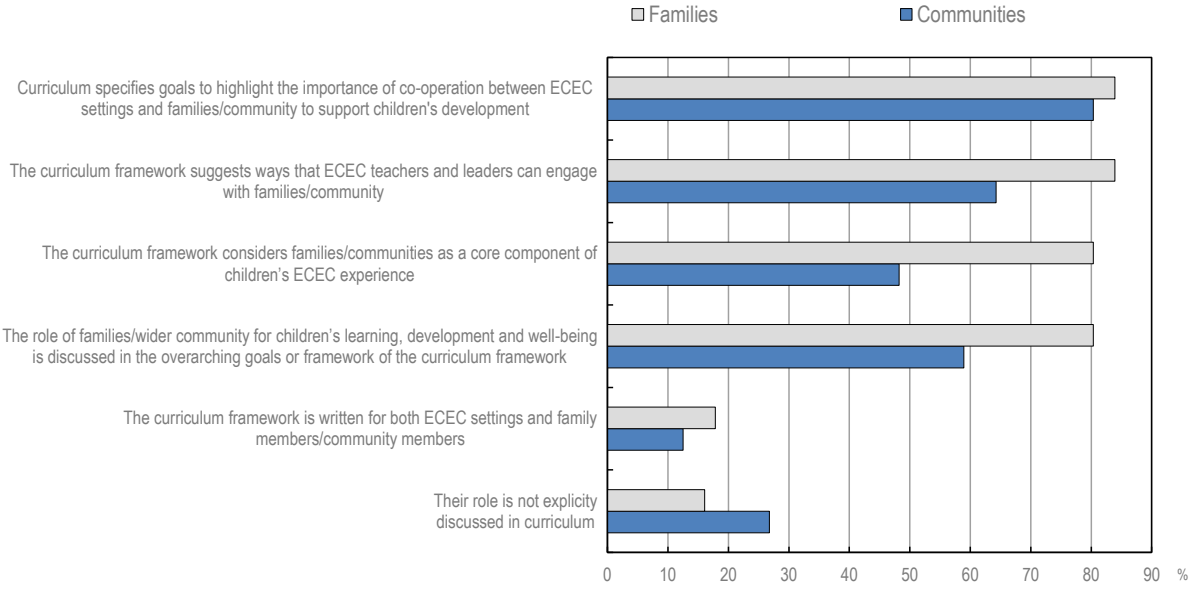
Curriculum frameworks can play a key role in recognising the importance of the engagement of parents and communities in ECEC and in specifying their role. The continuity between the ECEC centre and the home-learning environment is important for children's development, learning and well-being. Parents and families play a role in the implementation of curriculum frameworks by supporting children at home through practices and values that might be aligned (or not) with the goals of curriculum frameworks. Curricula written in a user-friendly format can facilitate the understanding of ECEC goals among the wider public and align practices in the ECEC and home-learning environments. Curriculum frameworks also provide guidance and strategies for the ECEC setting to communicate with parents, families and communities.

Across OECD countries, there is increasing recognition of the fundamental role of parents and communities in children's development and of the importance of integrating them in ECEC (OECD, 2015[7]; 2017[11]). To capture the extent to which parents are involved in ECEC, the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy questionnaire asked countries and jurisdictions whether curriculum frameworks support the involvement of families in different ways.

Most curriculum frameworks in participating countries and jurisdictions include co-operation between ECEC settings and families and communities to support children's development as one of their goals (Figure 2.12). Most of them also suggest ways in which ECEC staff and leaders can engage with families, and around 80% of them discuss the role of families in children's development, learning and well-being. Some 80% of curricula also consider families as a core component of children's ECEC experience.

Figure 2.12. Inclusion of families and communities in curriculum frameworks

Percentage of curriculum frameworks that include families and communities in the following aspects of curriculum frameworks, 2019



Note: Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

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Findings from the OECD Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS Starting Strong) on nine participating countries found that the exchange of information between ECEC staff and parents was common, in line with the findings from this policy questionnaire (OECD, 2019[44]). However, they also pointed out that fewer ECEC staff encouraged parents to play and carry out learning activities at home with their children.

Still, 16% of curricula do not explicitly discuss the role of families. This is the case for curricula covering children aged 0 to 2 in **Canada** (Manitoba and Saskatchewan); children aged 3 to 5 in **Belgium** (Flanders), **Canada** (Manitoba and Saskatchewan), **Israel**, **Luxembourg** and **Switzerland**; and children aged 0 to 5 in the **United Kingdom** (England). Although the majority of curricula include families in different ways, only 19% are written for families.

Curriculum frameworks aim to engage communities in ECEC to a lesser extent than parents. Two-thirds of them suggest ways for ECEC staff and leaders to engage with the community. The role of communities in children's development, learning and well-being is discussed in less than two-thirds of curricula, and half of curricula consider communities as a core component of children's ECEC experience. Only 12% of curricula are written for communities, and 27% of curricula do not explicitly discuss the role of communities.

Learning from countries: Recognising the importance of guardians, parents and communities in curriculum frameworks

> *In **Australia**, the interconnectedness of children with family, community and culture is recognised throughout the curriculum frameworks, which encourage ECEC staff to support child-parent relationships and to provide opportunities for children to engage with their local community and environment.*
>
> *In **Luxembourg**, too, the curricula encourage the collaboration of ECEC settings with parents and families, as well as networking with other formal institutions such as social, medical and therapeutic services, and emphasises that children's interactions with the cultural environment enrich their horizons.*
>
> *In **Canada**, across provinces, all curriculum frameworks stress the need to establish co-operation between ECEC settings and parents. Some curricula emphasise the important role of the community (e.g. in Alberta and British Columbia, the frameworks encourages ECEC staff to foster interactions with elders and community leaders).*
>
> *In **Ireland**, the curriculum framework highlights that parents are children's first educators and includes guidelines to support learning at home. These encourage staff to build partnerships with parents and foster continuity between the ECEC and home-learning environments.*
>
> *In **Japan**, the curricula place great emphasis on the importance of children's interactions with the local community, and they encourage ECEC staff to foster their relationships with local nature spots, public facilities and also human resources, including the elderly, working people and local children of different ages.*
>
> *In **Switzerland**, although curricula do not explicitly discuss the role of communities, they do encourage ECEC settings' co-operation with parents, and different initiatives are in place to foster such co-operation, including practical guidelines, traditional counselling services for parents and home visits, among others.*
>
> *In addition to recognising the role of parents and communities, curriculum frameworks of several countries and jurisdictions include concrete guidance for ECEC staff to engage them in ECEC (Box 2.5).*

Box 2.5. Guidance for ECEC staff to engage families and communities in ECEC

In **Australia**, curricula encourage staff to plan their activities by working in partnership with families and involving them in decisions so as to better identify children's strengths and interests and choose appropriate teaching strategies. One strategy implemented as a result is to facilitate communication between staff and parents through several websites managed by national, state and territory governments. For example, one of these websites suggests to parents different practices that can be implemented at home to better support children's experiences, and provides resources that can be downloaded in six commonly used languages.

In **Ireland**, the guidelines accompanying the curriculum incites staff to organise information sessions for parents, including on curriculum content, and to invite parents to spend time in the setting and join in with activities. It also suggests ways in which ECEC staff can support continuity with the home-learning environment, for example, by informing parents about topics that interest their children; asking about their interests at home; and lending storybooks and tapes for children to take home. The curriculum also includes a set of guidelines for parents, with specific suggestions for them to spend time together with children at home, such as reading to children and enjoying books; having fun, playing, singing songs and telling stories; having conversations and encouraging children to ask questions.

In **Japan**, the curriculum framework for pre-primary education encourages ECEC staff to provide opportunities for information exchange and joint activities with children and their families in the ECEC setting. This is done by sharing with families details about children's experience and daily activities. The curriculum framework suggests that information exchanges can take place through regular parent-staff meetings but also on an informal basis during children's drop-off and pick-up. Other ways in which communication can take place is through correspondence notebooks or letters. The curriculum also encourages co-operation between ECEC and other community institutions.

Monitoring and assessing the implementation of curriculum frameworks

Monitoring and evaluating ECEC policies can be a powerful lever to ensure quality in ECEC. Monitoring helps determine whether curriculum frameworks are implemented as intended, fulfil their goals in practice and deliver expected outcomes. Continued assessment over time also helps determine a curriculum's effectiveness and relevance, as the objectives of ECEC may change and research may bring new findings to be taken into account in the design of curricula.

In most countries and jurisdictions, the existence of multiple settings and curricula may pose difficulties in the organisation of a system for monitoring curriculum implementation. At the same time, it makes the monitoring of curriculum implementation even more important to ensure high-quality ECEC uniformly across settings and age groups. When responsibilities for monitoring are shared across different agencies and/or levels of governance, good co-ordination is crucial to enhance an efficient monitoring system that does not overburden ECEC settings. Another important element in this sense is to design plans for inspections depending on the level of need of providers. This approach allows for better use of resources than regular monitoring cycles, but it requires that monitoring systems have access to information on the quality of ECEC settings from a variety of sources. Co-ordination is essential to build capacity at the policy level for conducting evaluations, collecting valid information and data, and developing assessment procedures that are both efficient and informative (OECD, 2011[4]).

Curriculum implementation is most commonly monitored as part of the monitoring of ECEC staff. This includes assessing staff's pedagogical practices, their approaches in interpreting curricula, and their capacity to adapt it to children's specific needs and the everyday reality of the local context. For monitoring to be effective in informing policy and practice, it is necessary to design and use the assessment with the objectives of reflection and improvement. In practice, this means providing ECEC settings and staff with feedback and support on how to use monitoring results for their development (OECD, 2018[1]). Monitoring systems need to be closely linked to quality support systems to provide staff with professional development opportunities that train them in implementing the curriculum. Also, making monitoring results available to the public is particularly important to involve a multiplicity of stakeholders in the monitoring process, increase the objectivity and transparency of the assessment, stimulate parent and community engagement and increase parental satisfaction.

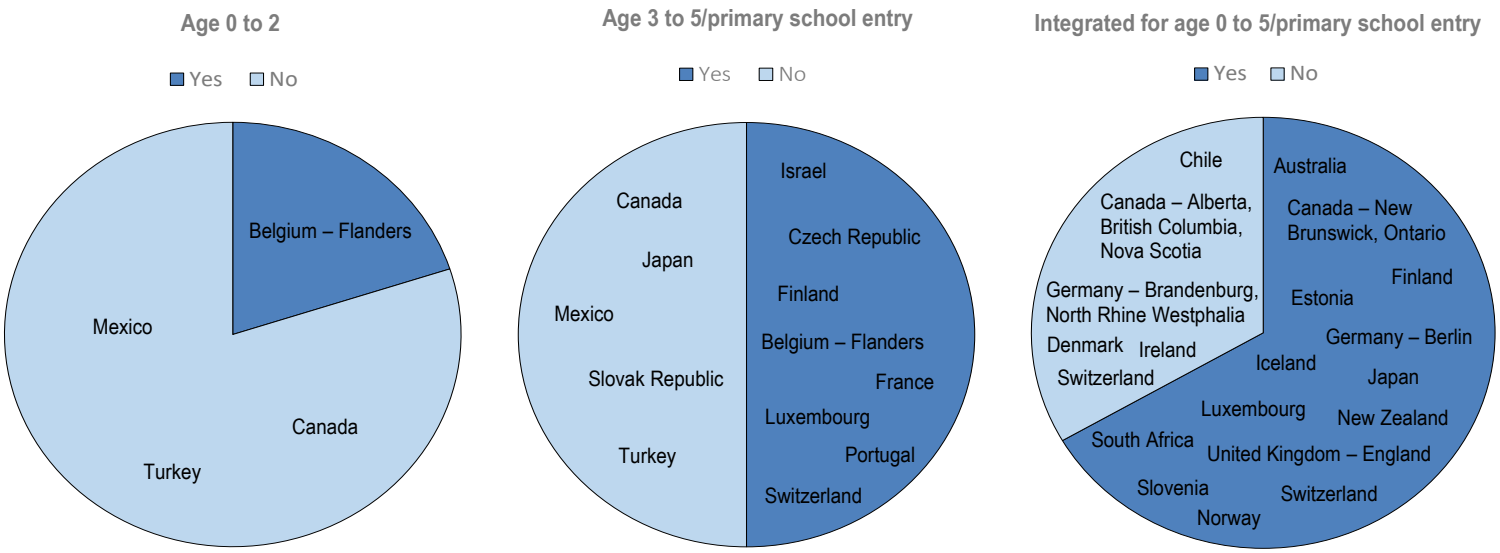
Curriculum implementation needs to be monitored for all age groups and types of settings, including children aged 0 to 2 and home-based settings. The scope of monitoring also needs to concern all aspects of process quality, including interactions between staff-child, child-child, child-materials, staff-parents and child-parents. Some studies have found that monitoring may inadvertently direct ECEC staff's attention towards only the dimensions of curricula being assessed (Denny, Hallam and Homer, 2012[29]). Adapting monitoring instruments to match curriculum framework goals and learning areas may ensure that all relevant aspects are monitored and that the results are useful to inform policy and practice.

Monitoring can be external when led by an external institution or internal when conducted by the ECEC setting or staff themselves. While these two types of monitoring might have different purposes and general methods, they can also share common tools, as internal monitoring tools are often used for external monitoring procedures. For instance, staff self-assessment practices can be part of a larger monitoring procedure conducted by an external institution (OECD, 2015[45]). Since the characteristics of internal monitoring are very diverse across participating countries and jurisdictions, and they often depend on the decisions of each ECEC setting, this chapter focuses only on external monitoring of curriculum implementation.

In participating countries and jurisdictions, external monitoring of curriculum implementation is mandatory for two-thirds of curriculum frameworks for ages 0 to 5 and for half of those for ages 0 to 3, but it is less commonly mandatory for those for ages 0 to 2 (Figure 2.13).

Figure 2.13. Mandatory external monitoring of curriculum framework implementation

Percentage of curriculum frameworks for which external monitoring of curriculum implementation is mandatory, by age group, 2019



Notes: In countries with multiple curriculum frameworks reported at the sub-national level, when curriculum frameworks have the same legal status (mandatory or not) across sub-national jurisdictions, only the name of the country is shown. When the legal status is specified in different ways across jurisdictions, the name of the jurisdiction is also indicated. Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
For Germany (Bavaria), this indicator is not applicable.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

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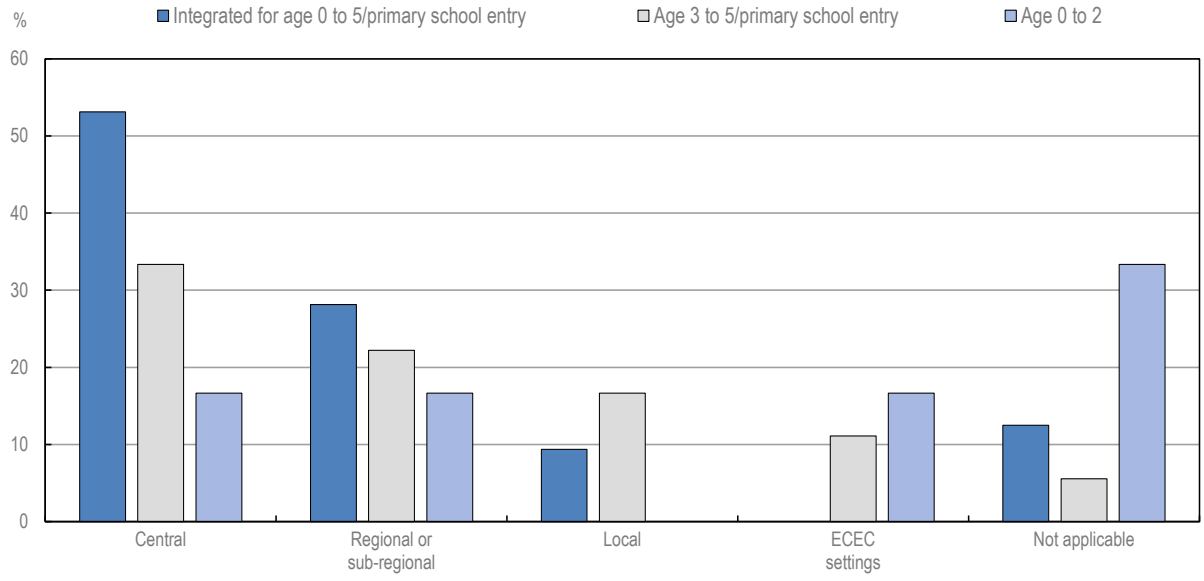
The central level is more frequently responsible for monitoring in curricula for ages 0 to 5 and 3 to 5 (Figure 2.14). The regional/sub-regional and the local level are responsible for one-third of curricula for ages 0 to 5 and one-fifth of those for 3 to 5.

In some cases, the responsibility for external monitoring is placed at the ECEC setting level. This is more common in curricula for ages 3 to 5 than in curricula for ages 0 to 5. The responsibility for external monitoring of curriculum implementation is shared across multiple levels only in two countries: **Chile** and **Luxembourg**.

External monitoring of curriculum framework implementation is conducted at least once a year in 37% of curricula for ages 0 to 5, 39% of those for ages 3 to 5, and 33% of those for 0 to 2 (Figure 2.15). In 21% of curriculum frameworks for ages 0 to 3 and in 28% for ages 0 to 5, external monitoring is conducted depending on the results of the last monitoring. For instance, this is the case in **Australia**, where the frequency of assessment is dependent on the results of the previous assessment and the risk profile of the setting, among other factors. A smaller percentage of curricula is monitored externally less than once a year; this is the case for all curricula in **Belgium** (Flanders), as well as in **Denmark**, **Germany** (Berlin), **Ireland** and **Slovenia** for curricula for ages 0 to 5. In **Slovenia**, regular inspections take place every five years, but extraordinary inspections are also conducted in some settings based on the initiative of parents, ECEC leaders, staff and staff unions, as well as on anonymous requests.

Figure 2.14. Responsibility for monitoring the implementation of curriculum frameworks

Percentage of curriculum frameworks monitored by the following levels of authority, by age group, 2019

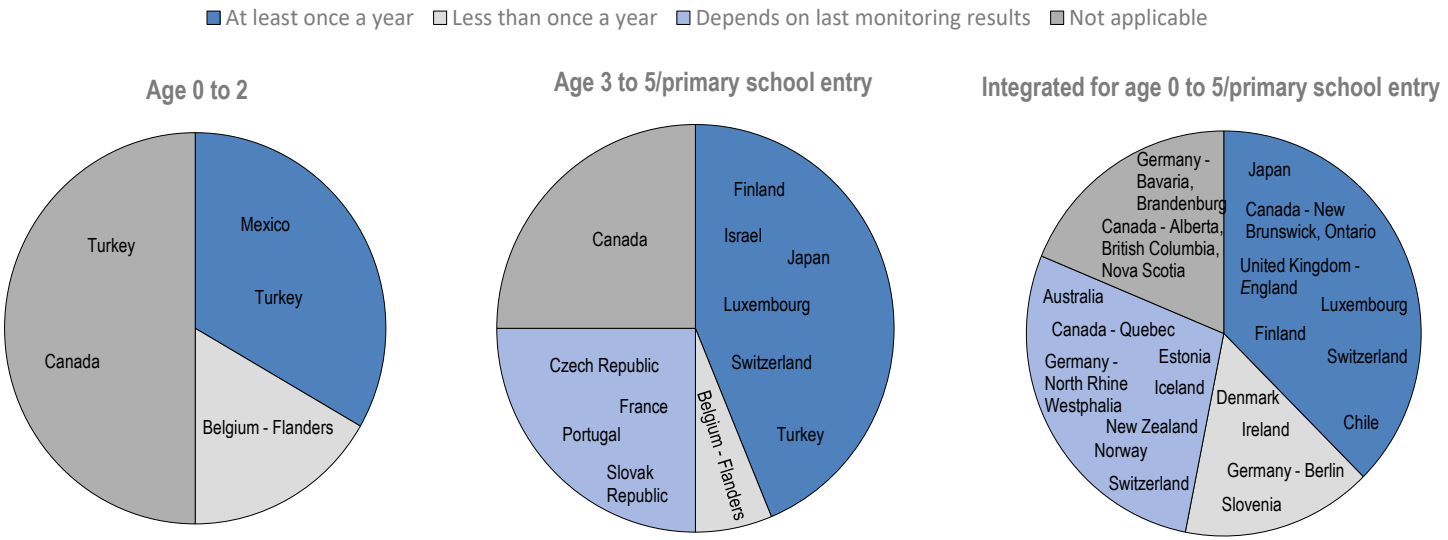


Note: "Not applicable" refers to countries and jurisdictions where there is no requirement for external monitoring of curriculum implementation. Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934249072

Figure 2.15. Frequency of external monitoring of the curriculum framework implementation

Percentage of curriculum frameworks for which implementation is monitored in the following frequencies, by age group, 2019



Notes: "Not applicable" refers to countries and jurisdictions where there is no requirement for external monitoring of curriculum implementation. In countries with multiple curriculum frameworks reported at the sub-national level, when curriculum frameworks are monitored in the same frequency across sub-national jurisdictions, only the name of the country is shown. When specified in different ways, the name of the jurisdiction is also indicated. Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

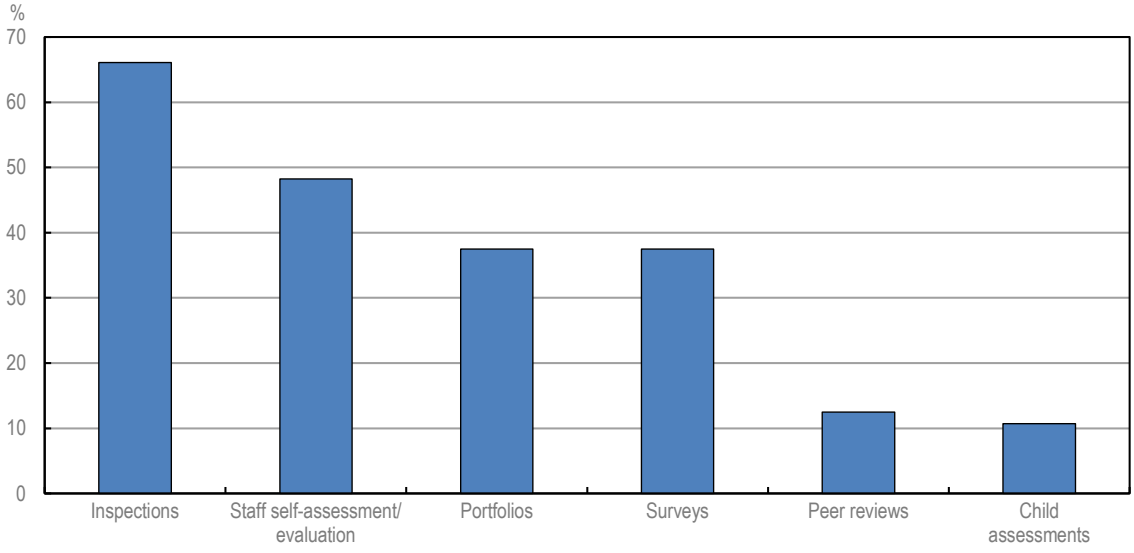
StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934249091

Inspections are the most common method for external monitoring of curriculum implementation in participating countries and jurisdictions (65%, 37 out of 56 curricula) (Figure 2.16). A smaller percentage of curricula is monitored externally through staff self-assessment/evaluation (44%, 25 out of 56). For instance, in **New Zealand**, ECEC staff are asked to complete a self-report (self-evaluation) at the beginning of the external monitoring process. This instance is an opportunity for staff to share with the monitoring institution their perception of their own effectiveness in the key aspects being evaluated.

Other countries and jurisdictions use surveys and portfolios (collections of pieces of work that provide information on child or staff achievement in given areas) as a method. In **Canada** (New Brunswick), portfolios serve to document ECEC staff's reflections and pedagogical learning journeys. In **France**, too, portfolios are used during evaluation and inspections of ECEC settings. In **Finland**, surveys constitute the main source of data for the external evaluation of curriculum implementation. Only a small percentage of curricula are monitored through peer review and child assessments. In **New Zealand**, for instance, child assessments are conducted following the principles and strands of the curriculum framework. No participating countries or jurisdictions conduct staff tests to monitor curriculum implementation.

Figure 2.16. Methods for external monitoring of curriculum frameworks' implementation

Percentage of curriculum frameworks for which implementation is monitored using the following methods, 2019



Note: Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934249110

Across OECD countries, initiatives exist to enhance monitoring systems to better assess curriculum implementation. In **Belgium** (Flanders), for example, three monitoring instruments were developed in alignment with the content of the curriculum framework for children aged 0 to 2: one to measure process quality in a representative sample of all home-based settings in Flanders; another for monitoring process quality in each home-based setting, used by inspectors; and a self-assessment tool to be used by ECEC staff in individual settings. These instruments are part of a wider initiative to measure and monitor quality in home-based settings, which was developed by a wide range of stakeholders, including experts from universities. Developing monitoring tools specially designed for monitoring curriculum implementation can enhance process quality in ECEC (see Box 2.6)

Box 2.6. Developing monitoring tools for curriculum frameworks' implementation and process quality

In **Australia**, external monitoring and inspection occur through an assessment and rating of ECEC settings' quality against the standards of the quality framework accompanying the curriculum. Curriculum implementation is one of the areas of the quality framework. The evaluation visits determine whether and to what extent the settings meet the underpinning requirements. Following the evaluation, ECEC settings receive a report, after which the ratings are published and available to families. Areas of process quality that are evaluated include staff-child and child-child relationships, as well as staff pedagogical practices.

All provinces across **Canada** monitor the implementation of their curriculum frameworks. Some provinces developed monitoring tools that are aligned with concepts from their own curricula. Continuous quality improvement processes are also in place in some provinces. For example, Nova Scotia has an initiative in place that evaluates ECEC settings' compliance with regulations and the quality of the programme, including implementation of the curriculum framework and different areas of process quality. This process takes place through the completion of a self-assessment tool and the development of a quality improvement plan by the centre. In Quebec, the evaluation of process quality takes place through the CLASS assessment tool, along with interviews for setting leaders and staff as well as questionnaires for parents. Monitored areas include interactions between staff and children, as well as between staff, staff and parents; the nature and variety of the activities offered to children; and the physical structure and materials that surround them.

In the non-formal education sector in **Luxembourg**, process quality is monitored at least twice a year in ECEC settings that receive public funding. These providers are required to incorporate measures to support process quality in their programmes in line with the national curriculum framework. External monitoring checks that the pedagogical practices, in-service training for staff and the general quality of service align with the curriculum. The areas of process quality monitored in most settings include the implementation of the curriculum, the use of learning and play materials and the implementation of the educational principles of inclusion and multilingualism.

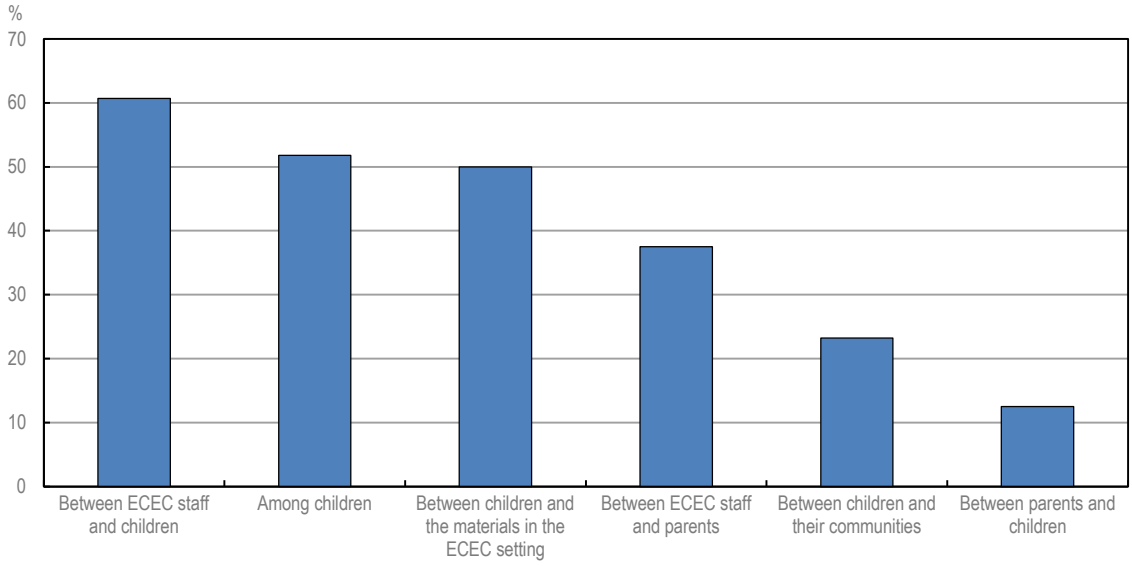
The *Quality beyond Regulations* policy questionnaire asked countries and jurisdictions to indicate the types of interactions included in the monitoring of the implementation of the curriculum framework. Although all types of interactions are stressed in curriculum frameworks across countries and jurisdictions, not all of these interactions, which all matter for children's experiences in ECEC, are monitored equally (Figure 2.17). Although interactions between staff and children are monitored in the majority of curricula (60%, 34 out of 56), less than one-half targets interactions among children and between children and materials, which are of fundamental importance for children's development. Further, even though most curricula recognise the importance of engaging parents and families in ECEC, only 37% monitors interactions between ECEC staff and parents. The least monitored interactions across participating countries and jurisdictions are between children and parents, and children and communities. Although these relationships occur outside of ECEC settings, they are a core element for educational continuity across ECEC and the home-learning environment. These results may indicate that countries and jurisdictions' monitoring frameworks are not always aligned with curriculum frameworks regarding the importance given to quality in all types of interactions. Monitoring frameworks, through their evaluation standards, as well as methods and tools, may be promoting the evaluation of certain types of interactions more than others.

Related to these findings, TALIS Starting Strong 2018 asked ECEC centre leaders about the frequency and content of inspections and showed that monitoring activities tend to focus more on assessing the

facilities and financial situation of centres than on process quality (OECD, 2019[44]). Overall, both sources of findings suggest that monitoring should place more focus on process quality and the full range of interactions included in curriculum frameworks. Monitoring these interactions can provide valuable knowledge to inform ECEC policies and practices to support children's experiences.

Figure 2.17. Interactions monitored in external monitoring of curriculum frameworks' implementation

Percentage of curriculum frameworks for which the following interactions are monitored, 2019



Note: Information on curriculum frameworks included for each country and jurisdiction and classification according to standardised age groups is provided in Annex A.
Source: OECD "Quality beyond Regulations" database.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934249129

Learning from countries: Actions following curriculum implementation monitoring

> *In almost all participating countries and jurisdictions, the results of curriculum implementation monitoring are provided through reports, which are sent to the ECEC setting. In some cases, these reports are also made available to parents and the wider public. For example, in* ***Turkey****, the reports are shared with ECEC settings and the relevant province, district, and school administrations. In* ***Iceland****, the results are published on line for public access. In other countries, interviews or feedback sessions with the ECEC setting are common. This is the case, for example, of* ***Germany*** *(Berlin and Brandenburg) and* ***Israel****.*
>
> *Following the monitoring process, some countries and jurisdictions provide recommendations for quality improvement that ECEC settings are expected to follow. In* ***Australia****, ECEC settings are required to have a quality improvement plan, which includes self-assessment against the monitoring framework standards and identifies areas for improvement. In the* ***Czech Republic****, monitoring reports provide an overview of the ECEC setting's strengths and weaknesses, as well as recommendations for improvement. In* ***Iceland****, ECEC settings are required to design a reform plan and to report to the ministry on the reform process. In* ***New Zealand****, a report provides recommendations to both the ECEC setting and the ministry, which are both expected to take into consideration.*

*Some countries' and jurisdictions' monitoring systems track that the recommendations provided are taken into account by the ECEC settings, and that actions for quality improvement are put in place. This is usually done through follow-up visits to check the improvements made by ECEC settings, as happens in **Belgium** (Flanders, in settings for children aged 0 to 2 years); **Estonia**, **Portugal** and the **Slovak Republic**, among others. In some cases, ECEC settings are given a specific timeframe to address the issues identified during inspections. This is the case, for example, in **Canada** (Ontario) and **Slovenia**. ECEC setting leaders and staff are expected to design and implement adjustments to their pedagogical practices. The quality improvement of the setting is evaluated at a future inspection.*

*Some countries also provide quality support following the monitoring of curriculum frameworks. In **South Africa**, the type of support provided stems from the analysis of the monitoring results report. In **France**, this includes visits from pedagogical counsellors to the ECEC settings, the organisation of professional development activities for ECEC staff and the provision of guidance and support. In **Switzerland**, a national committee provides supplementary materials and organises conferences for ECEC staff.*

Policy pointers

This section provides policy pointers for countries to support process quality through curriculum frameworks and identifies strategies that build on the information presented in this chapter.

Ensure children's holistic development through curriculum frameworks that are adapted to children's stages of development

A significant percentage of countries and jurisdictions do not have a common curriculum framework for all children aged 0 to 5. Where split curricula for different age groups are in place, aligning curriculum framework's principles, goals and pedagogical approaches across them can help ensure that an integrated approach to ECEC is taken. In particular, curricula for children aged 3 to 5 rely more strongly on traditional learning areas, in preparation for children's entry to primary school. Also, while pedagogical approaches based on a social-pedagogical tradition are present more frequently in curricula for children aged 0 to 2 and 0 to 5, curricula for children aged 3 to 5 seem to more commonly build on approaches based on readiness for school, outcome/performance-based education and didactic/direct instruction. The risk of "schoolification" in this age group could be avoided by setting broad developmental goals and by promoting balanced, dynamic and flexible pedagogical approaches that allow ECEC staff to support children in developing their cognitive skills, in addition to socio-emotional, physical, practical and meta-cognitive skills. This requires the articulation of strategies for facilitating play, exploration and opportunities for interactions. Curricula aimed at children aged 0 to 5 also need to consider children's specific developmental needs at every age to ensure quality ECEC for all children.

In countries where only curricula for children aged 3 to 5 are in place, expanding coverage to children aged 0 to 2 in all settings, including home-based, is crucial to ensure quality ECEC for the youngest. Curricula for this age group recognise the foundational learning that occurs in ECEC settings during this developmental period and provides strategies to guide staff in intentionally supporting children's exploration and engagement with others and with their environments. Providing guidance for transitions can also ensure continuity in children's experiences across levels and settings.

Support ECEC staff in implementing curriculum frameworks through pedagogical practices

ECEC staff play a crucial role in translating curriculum frameworks principles into practice. Some countries and jurisdictions face difficulties in ensuring that all staff apply some of these principles, such as adopting

a holistic, child-centred vision of the child and incorporating play, in practice. This is the case, for example, in **Ireland**, **Japan**, and the **Netherlands**, among others. Additional complexities arise for ECEC staff and leaders in applying curricula when multiple frameworks exist for the same settings or age groups, as is the case in a quarter of countries and jurisdictions.

Initial education and continued professional development are crucial levers to ensure that ECEC staff are prepared to apply curriculum frameworks. **Ireland**, for example, has implemented measures in this sense. Also, providing guidelines and resources for staff, as well as including examples of pedagogical practices in curricula, can help staff understand the principles and aims of the curricula. These can illustrate how abstract ideas may look in practice and what types of behaviours to look for in children to successfully adapt activities to children's needs and emerging abilities. These examples should not be prescriptive but an orientation, giving ECEC staff the flexibility to adapt the curriculum responding to children's needs and the specific characteristics of the local context. This is the case, for example, in **New Zealand**.

Make the most of curriculum frameworks to further engage families and communities in ECEC

Most curricula across age groups discuss the importance of co-operation between ECEC settings and families and provide guidance for staff to engage with them, although the percentage is smaller regarding communities. In a small percentage of countries and jurisdictions, still, the role of families and communities are not explicitly discussed. Further developing curricula's guidance and resources, as well as enhancing professional preparedness, is fundamental to ensure that ECEC staff understand the importance of involving parents and communities in ECEC, and that they can effectively promote opportunities for interaction and communication with them.

Involving parents and communities in curriculum design and implementation can also help ensure that curriculum frameworks reflect children's social and cultural backgrounds. Including children themselves is also crucial to design curriculum frameworks that reflect children's experiences, interests and needs. However, only half of countries and jurisdictions involve families and communities in the design process of curriculum frameworks, and very few of them include children. Also, only 40% of guidelines to support curriculum implementation are addressed to parents, and very few to community groups and agencies. Developing materials to disseminate to community organisations can help build continuity between ECEC settings and children's experiences elsewhere.

Enhance the monitoring of curriculum framework implementation, in particular regarding interactions in ECEC settings

Countries and jurisdictions need a broad range of tools to monitor the implementation of the principles and goals of their curriculum frameworks across ages and settings, including in home-based settings. These tools can include inspection visits, the establishment of learning communities for ECEC settings to monitor and learn from one another, self-assessment, as well as collecting feedback from key stakeholders such as centre leaders, staff, families and children. To enhance the efficiency of monitoring, these various tools can be used at different time intervals to support continuous quality improvement even between major inspection visits. In countries and jurisdictions where external monitoring is conducted at least once a year, it would be informative to reflect on the potential gains in efficiency of approaches based on the level of risk of the settings, while maintaining clear commitments to ensuring process quality in all settings.

Special focus should be placed on the monitoring of the actual child's experience, which includes all interactions that take place in the ECEC setting. Although most participating jurisdictions recognise the importance of process quality in their frameworks, they monitor some types of interactions more than others. Less than half of countries and jurisdictions monitor interactions among children and between children and, and only 37% monitors interactions between ECEC staff and parents. The least monitored

interactions are those between children and parents, and children and communities. Although these relationships occur outside of the ECEC settings, they are a core element for curricular and overall educational continuity across the ECEC and home-learning environments. In order to enhance the quality of interactions in practice, it can be helpful to design monitoring frameworks in alignment with curriculum frameworks, and to provide support to inspectors and ECEC staff in the use of diverse monitoring methods and tools, which can be adapted to the measurement of all types of interactions.

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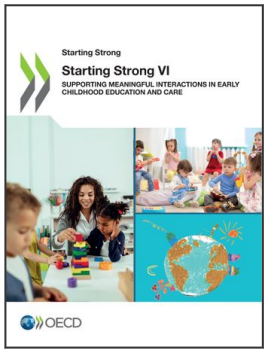
Notes

1. "Home-based settings" refers to early childhood education and care that is provided in a home setting rather than a centre. These settings may or may not have an educational function and be part of the regular ECEC system. The minimum requirements defined for home-based settings vary widely across countries. Registered home-based settings providers are accredited to take care of children in their own homes.

2. In Luxembourg, non-formal education is distinguished from formal ECEC offered by schools within the public school system. In the context of the non-formal ECEC provision, children can spend time in centres or in home-based settings.



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