Foreword

Some of the workplace skills that we value most, whether it's curiosity and creativity, or an ability to think independently while still working collaboratively, are best developed in the earliest years of life. Early childhood education and care (ECEC), as children's first experience outside the home environment, holds immense promise for guiding children towards a positive and rich life-long learning and development path. However, this role of ECEC is coupled with great responsibility in not only ensuring access to but also quality of services.

Historically, policies on ECEC have focussed on setting norms to safeguard the safety of young children, such as the formulation of standards on buildings, materials or staff-to-child group ratios. However, it is the quality of interactions which children experience, known as *process quality*, that matters most for their development, learning and well-being. This leads to two key questions:

1. Which policies set the best conditions for children to experience high quality interactions in ECEC settings?
2. To what extent are existing policies in OECD countries supportive of high quality interactions in ECEC settings?

Fostering process quality involves designing policies in a way that best facilitates meaningful interactions in ECEC settings, going beyond simply a regulatory nature. This was the focus of the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review, which the OECD developed to help countries and jurisdictions better support the different dimensions of quality in ECEC. This report summarises the main findings of the policy review and is accompanied by a website that presents policy indicators in participating countries and jurisdictions, clarifying their links to process quality.

The report identifies five policy levers that are instrumental to the quality of children's everyday interactions: 1) quality standards, governance and funding; 2) curriculum and pedagogy; 3) workforce development; 4) monitoring and data; and 5) family and community engagement. It gives particular attention to two of them, curriculum and pedagogy, and workforce development.

Curriculum and pedagogy are powerful tools to shape interactions within ECEC settings. The former sets the principles and goals that ECEC staff use to foster children's development, learning and well-being, while the latter refers to the strategies and techniques implemented by staff to offer these opportunities. Perhaps one of the most important observations of this report is the vast variety of approaches to curriculum and pedagogy that exist across countries and jurisdictions, and the at times complex nature of ECEC landscapes within a country or jurisdiction. For example, multiple curricula may exist for a specific age group or setting, while the youngest age group (0 to 2 year olds) is not always covered by a curriculum. Some countries adopt a very comprehensive approach to children's development with a curriculum framework for after-school activities, while other countries consider it to be outside the scope of policies to foster child development.

The ECEC workforce encompasses professionals who interact with children and families in ECEC settings, reconciling formal objectives with community expectations. Countries often use qualification requirements to set standards on workforce quality. However, such a one-sided indicator is not always sufficient as

features like the inclusion of a practicum and pre-service trainings on early childhood and curriculum implementation are essential to prepare staff to interact in a rich and informed way with children. Policies on staff initial education vary significantly across countries and jurisdictions, and many are evaluated based on their capacity to better regulate the quality of these initial education programmes for different staff categories. Participation in professional development is crucial for all staff to refine and expand their knowledge and skills, as well as to bring new research-based practices to life in the classroom or playgroup. However, facilitating participation for all categories of employees is a challenge for many countries and jurisdictions, with many implementing requirements on the number of yearly training hours, but few following up with monitoring the quality of trainings provided.

The realisation of this report and its accompanying website was possible due to the continued collaboration with participating OECD ECEC Network countries and jurisdictions, who shared their insights and provided an inside look into their systems and policies. The project has highlighted the complexity of the sector and the difficulty to compare ECEC systems across countries, even though it is often successfully done for primary and secondary school education. It provides a solid basis to better understand how system level policies, when designed carefully, support process quality; and provides a multiplicity of examples of good policies, while also highlighting areas for improvement. Overall, it demonstrates that carefully designed policies can support meaningful interactions for all children as part of their ECEC experience - this is where focus should be placed.

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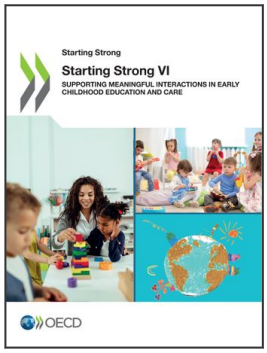

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