

# Reader's guide

The OECD Starting Strong series provides comparable international information on early childhood education and care (ECEC) to support countries and jurisdictions in their review and redesign of policies to strengthen their delivery of quality services.

This volume of the series, *Starting Strong VI: Supporting Meaningful Interactions in Early Childhood Education and Care*, represents the culmination of the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review undertaken between 2018 and 2021 to foster an understanding of the different dimensions of quality in ECEC, focusing on process quality in particular, as part of the OECD's long-term strategy to develop ECEC. Process quality encompasses children's daily interactions through their ECEC settings – including with other children, staff and teachers, space and materials, their families and the wider community – which are directly linked to their development, learning and well-being. A primary goal of the policy review was to identify and discuss the main policy levers that can enhance process quality and provide countries with concrete examples of policies. Building on a multidimensional approach to quality in ECEC, the review focused on the following policy levers, with the first two being the main focus of the present report:

1. curriculum and pedagogy
2. workforce development
3. family and community engagement
4. quality standards, governance, and financing
5. monitoring and data.

An online platform, *Starting Strong: Mapping quality in early childhood education and care*, complements this report. This platform provides a visualisation of the policy levers that countries can draw on to promote (process) quality in ECEC. Its multidimensional map allows users to explore the interrelation between process quality and policy levers, and to access related indicators and visuals, as well as the underlying data. The platform is available at:

<https://quality-ecec.oecd.org>

A series of brief country profiles summarises the key findings related to policies and practices for process quality in countries that decided to engage in the policy review in greater depth, namely Australia, Canada, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg and Switzerland. The country profiles are available at <https://oe.cd/3N6>.

All information related to the *Quality beyond Regulations* project, and the OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care, is available at [www.oecd.org/edu/earlychildhood](http://www.oecd.org/edu/earlychildhood).

## Methodology, data and content of the report

The first phase of the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review culminated in a literature review and meta-analysis of the links between different dimensions of quality and children's learning, development

and well-being, published under the title *Engaging Young Children: Lessons from Research about Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care* (OECD, 2018).

In the second phase of the project, members of the OECD's Early Childhood Education and Care Network were invited to share information on policies that have been shown by research to matter for process quality by completing a questionnaire. In addition, six countries participated in the project by completing in-depth country background reports.

Together, these two sources of information, developed specifically for the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review, provide the data for the main analyses presented in this publication. The comparative data and the country background reports were collected before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Findings from the aforementioned data sources were supplemented by data from other OECD projects, such as the Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS Starting Strong), the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Education at a Glance, exploring synergies to provide a more comprehensive picture of the ECEC sector.

This report includes three chapters. The first chapter discusses the main trends and issues shaping the ECEC sector. Chapters 2 and 3 are dedicated to specific themes: **curriculum and pedagogy** and **workforce development**. These thematic chapters discuss policies that support process quality for the two areas of focus while also touching upon linkages between them and other policy levers, namely family and community engagement and monitoring and data. Each chapter builds on research to identify the policy levers that contribute to process quality and discusses how these policies are developed in participating countries and jurisdictions according to information provided in the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy questionnaire and country background reports.

### ***Policy questionnaire***

Between April and October 2019, the OECD Secretariat distributed a policy questionnaire to the OECD's Early Childhood Education and Care Network, a unique knowledge-sharing platform for national, regional and local policy makers working on developing ECEC policies.

In total, 26 countries completed the policy questionnaire, resulting in a rich database of information on ECEC systems around the world and their efforts to promote high-quality ECEC as of the year 2019. Given the complex architecture of ECEC systems, the review collected information for different curriculum frameworks (56 in total) and ECEC settings (121 in total) in place within participating countries and jurisdictions.

Guided by the project's data collection framework, the questionnaire included questions organised around the focal policy levers of curriculum and pedagogy and workforce development. The last section aimed to capture key contextual information shaping the two priority areas to enhance process quality.

Overall, information was collected on the following areas:

- background information on settings and curricula
- curriculum and pedagogy
- initial education, professional development and working conditions of the ECEC workforce
- contextual information (e.g. governance, standards and funding).

Annex B provides more detailed information about the collection and treatment of data through this policy questionnaire.

## **Country background reports**

Complementary country background reports (CBRs) were completed by six countries that provided additional support to the project: Australia, Canada, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg and Switzerland. These background reports responded to a common set of issues and questions, and followed a common framework to facilitate comparative analysis and maximise knowledge-sharing opportunities. These reports were undertaken by the respective national governments, as well as provincial governments in Canada. The CBRs are available at <https://oe.cd/3N6>.

## **Scope**

### **Country coverage**

ECEC systems are often decentralised, with authority for different types of settings or particular aspects of ECEC provision falling to different levels of governance. In federal countries, the mix of responsibilities between national governments and sub-national entities (e.g. provinces, states, cantons) can make understanding ECEC systems even more complex from the perspective of international comparisons.

Given the goal of providing internationally comparative data, the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review focused on collecting national data from all countries. However, in federal systems where sub-national data was deemed invaluable given variations in policies for indicators, their jurisdictions are clearly noted in the analysis of the Starting Strong VI report.

### **Settings, curricula and age groups**

Consistent with previous OECD work on ECEC, the data collection for the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review included all settings belonging to countries' regulated ECEC systems: childcare, *crèches*, kindergarten, nursery or preschool, integrated centre-based ECEC, and home-based care. Countries were asked to report information on all settings regardless of type, funding, opening hours or programme content, provided that they were subject to certain rules, minimum standards or were otherwise regulated.

Standardised age groups were assigned to the different settings and curricula to facilitate analysis and comparisons across age groups within and across countries and jurisdictions. Depending on their coverage, settings and curricula were classified as belonging to the following age groups: 1) Age 0 to 2; 2) Age 3 to 5/primary school entry; 3) Integrated for age 0 to 5/primary school entry. Information was then aggregated across settings or curricula for indicators where information was the same or very similar within these standardised age groups (e.g. for a country with several curricula for the same age group).

To understand the actual age groups covered in settings under the standardised age groups in countries and jurisdictions, readers should consult the dedicated reference table in Annex A. For further details on the collection and treatment of data from the policy questionnaire, readers should see Annex B.

### **Staff roles and development in setting types**

The professionals working in ECEC systems have many different roles and titles, including pre-primary school teachers, pedagogues, care workers, educators and counsellors. To address the workforce development policy lever of the *Quality beyond Regulations* policy review, it was deemed necessary to consider these different staff roles and the different types of ECEC settings in which they work.

To collect data that are meaningful across countries and address the different roles of staff across settings, the policy questionnaire asked countries to report on workforce development policies based on the structure of their ECEC systems. That is, countries with an integrated system serving children ages 0 to 5/primary school entry were asked to report on workforce development policies for centre-based ECEC

within this integrated system. While countries with a split system were asked to report policies relevant for centre-based ECEC settings separately, first for those serving children under the age of 3 and second for those serving children aged 3 to 5/primary school entry. All countries were asked to report on workforce development policies relevant for home-based or family childcare settings.

In addition, countries were asked to report on workforce development policies for three categories of staff: teachers, assistants and leaders. Although these staff categories are not exhaustive, they capture the majority of staff within ECEC centres across countries and jurisdictions and are consistent with the primary categories used in the TALIS Starting Strong survey.

When a detailed breakdown of information was not possible, either by type of ECEC setting or by staff category, countries had the option to report policy information at an aggregate level.

## Figures

### **Symbols**

Certain symbols are used to denote non-reported information:

- **a**: “no, not regulated or not required”, “not applicable”. For instance, in countries and jurisdictions where no external monitoring process for curriculum implementation is in place, information on related items, such as the frequency of inspection, is classified as “not applicable”.
- **m**: “missing”.

### **Interpretation of data**

For the use and display of data in comparative figures and tables, both in the present publication and the interactive website *Starting Strong: Mapping quality in early childhood education and care*, information was aggregated across settings and curricula, within the same age groups, treating all settings and curricula of equal importance. For further details on the method of aggregation, readers should consult Annex B.

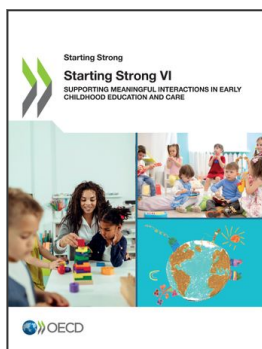
Throughout the report, in figures showing the distribution of a response across countries and jurisdictions, the share of settings and curricula is based on the full set of curricula or settings within an age group or across all settings/curricula across age groups, including those for which information is “not applicable” or “missing”. Figures, however, only display the names of countries and jurisdictions with information available for at least one setting or curriculum (within an age group or across all age groups). As a result, readers should be careful in interpreting figures and in particular in drawing conclusions for the level of countries and jurisdictions. A category that is shown for a country or jurisdiction in a figure may, for instance, only apply to one of several settings or curricula within a country, but not all of the settings or curricula. At the same time, countries and jurisdiction may appear in different categories within the same age group in the same figure, representing different settings of that country.

For figures showing the percentage of response categories that apply for a country or jurisdiction, the percentage represents the simple value where information is the same across settings or curricula within an age group in that country. Where information differs, the figure shows the average calculated for that country across settings or curricula, again within the same age group. For some figures showing the percentages of response categories, the value presented for a country with sub-national information is the average of all jurisdictions. Again, readers should interpret with caution these averages and the extent to which they allow for the drawing of conclusions regarding the level of the country or jurisdictions. Full data tables are available for download from the *Starting Strong: Mapping quality in early childhood education and care* website at <https://quality-ecec.oecd.org>.

**StatLinks**

This report has OECD StatLinks available at the bottom of the tables and figures. To download the matching Excel® spreadsheet for each table or figure, type the link into your Internet browser, starting with the <http://dx.doi.org> prefix, or click on the link from the e-book version.

The results referred to in this volume can be found in Annex C and through the OECD StatLinks at the bottom of the tables and figures throughout the report.



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