

## INTRODUCTION

### Aim of the policy profile

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has become a policy priority in many countries. A growing body of research recognises that it provides a wide range of benefits, including social and economic benefits, better child well-being and learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning, more equitable outcomes and reduction of poverty, and increased intergenerational social mobility. But these positive benefits are directly related to the “quality” of ECEC.

Definitions of quality differ across countries and across different stakeholder groups depending on beliefs, values, a country’s (or region’s) socio-economic context, and the needs of the community of users. While definitions should be interpreted with caution and sensitivity when comparing cross-country practices, the OECD has taken a two-tier approach to define “quality” to proceed policy discussions. Therefore, this policy profile considers quality in terms of “structural quality”<sup>1</sup> and “process quality”<sup>2</sup>, and sets out “child development” or “child outcome” as quality targets.

Based on international literature reviews findings, the OECD has identified five levers as key policies to encourage quality in ECEC:

- 1) Setting out quality goals and regulations
- 2) Designing and implementing curriculum and standards
- 3) Improving qualifications, training and working conditions
- 4) Engaging families and communities
- 5) Advancing data collection, research and monitoring

Of the five levers, Portugal has selected “designing and implementing curriculum and standards” to be the theme of this policy profile. As reference countries in focus for international comparison, Portugal has selected Australia and Scotland (United Kingdom).

### Structure of the report

This report consists of three chapters:

#### **Chapter 1: What does research say?**

This chapter aims to help you to brief political leaders, stakeholders and the media about the latest research and explain why a framework, such as curriculum or learning standards, matter for better child development. It includes an overview of research findings on why curriculum matters, what the effects of different curricula are on child development and the quality of ECEC provision, which aspects matter in curriculum, policy implications from research, and knowledge gaps in current research.

### ***Chapter 2: Where does Portugal stand compared to other countries?***

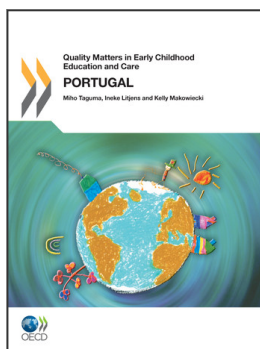
Chapter two provides an international comparative overview of where your country stands with regard to curriculum design. It identifies the strengths and areas for reflection for Portugal in comparison with the selected reference countries. The chapter can provide insight into which aspects of curriculum Portugal might consider taking policy action on, and it can raise awareness about policy issues.

### ***Chapter 3: What are the challenges and strategies?***

Chapter three presents the challenges countries have faced in designing, revising and implementing curriculum and gives alternative approaches to overcome these challenges. This chapter provides a quick overview of what Australia and Scotland (United Kingdom), and other countries, have done to tackle challenges in designing, revising or implementing curriculum.

## **NOTES**

- 1 Structural quality consists of “inputs to process-characteristics which create the framework for the processes that children experience”. These characteristics are not only part of the ECEC location in which children participate, but they are part of the environment that surrounds the ECEC setting, *e.g.*, the community. They are often aspects of ECEC that can be regulated, though they may contain variables which cannot be regulated (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).
- 2 Process quality consists of what children actually experience in their programmes – that which happens within a setting. These experiences are thought to have an influence on children’s well-being and development (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).



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