

ICEC Conference

Reducing access barriers in Early Childhood Education and Care: International perspectives on local governance

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Abstract & CV

Access to Early Childhood Education and Care: The Role of Governance

Prof Michel Vandenbroeck, Ghent University, Belgium

Early childhood education has a unique potential to realize a fairer society as it combines potential effects on children (e.g. on their development), on parents (e.g. on their access to the labour market and in terms of social support) and on local communities (e.g. in terms of social justice and social cohesion). In order to realize these potentials, access and quality are the two major conditions. However, recent figures from all 28 European Member States suggest that access to quality early childhood education is unequal in all Member States, be it to varying degrees. The first generations of studies in this field primarily focused on characteristics of families to explain the inequality in enrolment. We now know, however, that governance and policies matter more than family characteristics. This evolution is also visible in two European milestones: the Barcelona targets and the more recent European Quality Framework. Based on data from our own research, as well as on expert reports from the 28 European Member States (in the context of the Child Guarantee project), we explain four criteria for equal access: Availability, Affordability, Accessibility and Adequacy.

Prof Michel Vandenbroeck is professor in family pedagogy and head of the Department of Social Work and Social pedagogy at Ghent University. His research focuses on early childhood care and education, parent support and family policies, with a special interest for processes of inclusion and exclusion in contexts of diversity.