

ICEC Conference

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

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Hotel Aquino, Berlin

Results of the workshops

Challenges and opportunities at local level

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The workshops aimed at discussing international and national examples of local governance of access to early childhood education and care (ECEC). Each workshop focused on a particular aspect. Afterwards, three commentators commented on the results and contents of the workshops in plenary.

In **Workshop A**, participants discussed to what extent **ECEC places can be fairly allocated**. Local examples from Sweden and Germany were presented to feed into the exchange. In addition, a new digital allocation system was presented, which aims at bringing together individual preferences of parents and allocation criteria of providers. Furthermore, the system is supposed to foster a stable matching and a fair distribution of places. Based on examples, the advantages of such an allocation system became clear (e.g. less time-consuming, stable matching, no strategic considerations of parents necessary). In the discussion, however, participants also addressed challenges (e.g. possible tension between the autonomy of providers and fair allocation criteria) and identified the need for research on central allocation mechanisms. Therefore, various questions arose: How are allocation criteria to be designed in order to achieve equitable digital allocation of places? To what extent do we (not) need to consider municipal interests for establishing social environments when allocating places? In how far can (new) disadvantages arise due to registration deadlines, when places are needed at last minute or when relevant knowledge on registration for digital allocation of places is missing?

Workshop B focused on the **potential of local networks** to provide low-threshold and needs-based access to early childhood education and care. By looking at relevant definitions and local examples of integrated services from different countries (e.g. networking services of the federal program on ECEC access (*'Kita-Einstieg - Brücken bauen in frühe Bildung'* in Germany, Early Excellence Centres in England, *'Huis van het Kind'* in Flanders), necessary conditions and criteria to implement these services were identified. Firstly, local stakeholders should want to network. Secondly, services should be demand-oriented, i.e. when planning integrated services it should be taken into account, which structures already exist and which are needed in the specific neighbourhood. Thirdly, the participation of families was exemplified, i.e. an integrated service can only succeed when parents are

involved in designing the offer. Fourthly, participants pointed out, that integrated services have to be managed accordingly - clear and reliable structures for families are needed. Fifthly, all stakeholders should have a common vision and continuously affirm it.

Workshop C focused on the relation between **different financing models** (within) a child care system and (un)equal access conditions. Local examples from Canada and Germany highlighted the importance of sufficient financing for equal access. Thereby, diverse challenges for the municipalities came to the fore, when financing ECEC and promoting equal access conditions. While in Canada inadequate and low financing of the ECEC system is a burden for municipalities as a whole, participants discussed the value of needs-based management of financial resources in ECEC-services critically along various aspects by referring to the example from North Rhine-Westphalia. The risk of increasing segregation tendencies through the distribution of targeted funds was reflected, as well as the question to what extent the amount of work to create a 'fair' distribution of funds is legit when considering the limited resources of time municipalities have. In addition, participants critically reflected the need for independently collected data that would be necessary as the basis for a targeted distribution.

Prof Sabine Bollig is Professor for Social Pedagogy at the University of Trier in the field of educational sciences. Her research focuses on childhood, youth and family, on pedagogical institutions and the field of early childhood, education and care. Her current research projects focus on the relationship between families and ECEC centres from the perspective of inequality theory (BMBF joint project PARTNER) and cross-border educational and care arrangements in early childhood (project GRENZPENDLER).

Daniela Kobelt Neuhaus is member of the board of the Karl-Kübel-Stiftung für Kind und Familie, a charitable trust aimed at supporting children and families. She is also president of the German Federal Association of Family Centres. Based on the idea of 'Holistic education in social areas', she promotes the participative development of childcare centres towards centres of education, health and prevention for families. She holds a diploma in special needs pedagogy.

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