

ICEC Conference

Addressing Diversity and Equity in ECEC: Converging Trends in European Countries?

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Abstracts & Curricula Vitae

Inclusive and equitable ECEC: The promises (and challenges) of local public-private Collaboration

Prof Dr Paul Leseman, Utrecht University, Netherlands

Following a review of research on differences between national ECEC systems in architecture, welfare mix, governance, funding, and regulation, this presentation proposes to regard ECEC systems as complex systems, where multiple characteristics interact to produce specific outcomes, where different configurations may serve the same public values equally well, but where isolated policy measures risk to result in adverse effects. Critical in complex ECEC systems is the behaviour of organizations who provide ECEC and other services. A key question is: what makes organizations contribute to the public value of equity and inclusion? The self-organizing dynamics of complex systems is foregrounded, emphasising the role of local public-private collaboration between ECEC organisations, other social services, communities, and governments. Drawing upon the Institutional Logics Approach, research will be discussed showing how mission-oriented and value-based governance can reshape local hybrid markets and foster public-private network collaboration to create equitable and inclusive ECEC.

Paul Leseman is a full professor of educational sciences at Utrecht University. He was principal investigator of the Dutch national cohort study pre-COOL (2009-2022), studying the long-term effects of early childhood care and education on children's development and school achievement. Leseman was also scientific coordinator of the European Union's FP7 project CARE (Curriculum and Quality Assessment and Impact Analysis of European Early Childhood Education and Care; 2014-2016) and the EU Horizon 2020 project ISOTIS (Inclusive Education and Social Support to Tackle Inequalities in Society; 2017-2019). He was principal investigator of the EU Horizon 2020 project L2TOR (2016-2018) on humanoid robots as language tutors for dual language learners. Currently he is co-leader of the EVENING project (2019-2026), a large scale policy evaluation study that employs econometric methods to assess the effectiveness of additional hours of preschool education on child development. Leseman is a member of the Technical Advisory Group to the OECD studies TALIS 2024 and Starting Strong 2024. He has published extensively on emergent literacy and numeracy, bilingual development, development of executive functions, self-regulation and creativity, and on the efficacy of preschool education and care programs in leading journals such as *Child Development*, *Developmental Psychology*, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *Learning and Instruction*, *Review of Educational Research*.

Insights into the research of the International Centre Early Childhood Education and Care (ICEC)

*Dr Tijana Lujic, Tabea Schlimbach, Dr Antonia Scholz, Daniel Turani,
German Youth Institute (DJI)*

The **TALIS Starting Strong Survey** is the largest quantitative international survey of early childhood staff and leaders and serves as a global barometer for the ECEC sector. In 2024, the study was conducted for the second time since 2018 in the ISCED 0.2 and U3 sector in a total of 16 countries on five continents (including e.g. Norway, Japan, and Canada). As national study centre, the ICEC is responsible for the implementation and analysis in Germany. The contribution presents the study and highlights the topic of diversity within the study framework.

The qualitative study **Team Concepts and Diversification** examines developments and challenges in the area of staff profiles and team concepts in Finland, Ireland, and Slovenia, with a particular focus on the potential and risks of staff diversification in ECEC. The presentation highlights current findings from Finland and Ireland and discusses how the implementation of heterogeneous teams brings with it various challenges. A key point is the need to clarify roles in order to promote cooperation and maximize its potential.

The qualitative study **Local Governance and Needs-based ECEC in Immigrant Societies (LoKi)** examines the ECEC participation of children from migrant families. It focuses on intersections between early education and integration policies and implementation at the local level. Using a comparative approach, we examine what strategies municipalities in Germany and Sweden pursue for these families to ensure equal ECEC participation and offer inclusive services. For this purpose, we conducted interviews with representatives of local authorities (early childhood education, integration, labour market) and other local stakeholders on inclusive governance strategies in the ECEC context. Among other things, results show that language support and development can be a crucial lever for municipal governance at this intersection.

Tijana Lujic completed her studies in political science at the Universities of Regensburg and Heidelberg. She wrote her doctoral thesis on bilateral migration agreements and the ontological security seeking by states. During her doctoral studies, she was a research associate in the “Strategic Migration Policy” project. Since 2024, she has been working as a researcher at the German Youth Institute (DJI) in the International Centre Early Childhood Education and Care (ICEC) in the projects “Team Concepts and Diversification” and “TALIS Starting Strong.” Her work focuses on diversity in ECEC, multi-professionalism, and the diversification of ECEC teams.

Tabea Schlimbach holds a diploma in educational science. She has been working as a research associate at the German Youth Institute (DJI) since 2009. She specializes in qualitative methods of social research and has been involved in numerous research projects (longitudinal studies, community studies, network research) within the framework of various research programs of federal ministries and EU institutions. Her areas of work and interest include inequality research, migration and educational governance. Since 2023, she has been conducting research at the International Centre Early Childhood Education and Care (ICEC) at the DJI on (un-)equal participation in early childhood education.

Antonia Scholz holds a diploma in Cultural and Business Studies and a PhD in political science. She has been working as a researcher at the International Centre Early Childhood

Education and Care (ICEC) at the German Youth Institute (DJI) for 12 years. Previously, she was a research associate in the research group of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) in Nuremberg. Antonia's research focuses on policies and systems of early childhood education and care, including international comparisons. Her focus is on governance issues related to access, participation, and diversity in early childhood education.

Daniel Turani, Dipl.-Soz., has been working as a research associate at the International Centre Early Childhood Education and Care (ICEC) in the Children and Childcare Department at the German Youth Institute (DJI) in Munich since 2017. He is the national project manager for the TALIS Starting Strong Survey 2024 in Germany and a member of the international OECD ECEC Network. In addition to international comparisons and developments in the field of ECEC, his work focuses on the topic of leadership and working conditions in ECEC centres.

Levelling down: What lessons can we learn from the decline of school-based early education and care in England?

Dr Ludovica Gambaro, Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB), Germany

In England Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is offered by different providers, ranging from nursery classes inside publicly funded primary schools to for-profit private nurseries managed by large chains. In the second decade of the Millennium the proportion of children attending publicly funded school-based ECEC has diminished. This is a problem, because ECEC taking place in schools has the advantage of being staffed by qualified teachers, whereas elsewhere staff often lack any relevant vocational qualification. Pay and working conditions are also more favourable in the school sector, with very little regulation other than the minimum wage floor among private providers. Children from low-income families, whose later educational attainment remains persistently below that of their more advantaged peers, are disproportionately affected by the decline of school-based ECEC provision, which risks reinforcing inequalities among children. Analysis of eleven years of administrative data on ECEC in England points to three core factors behind the decline of school-based provision: 1. Public funding changes, favouring lower-cost providers serving higher paying families; 2. changes in the geographical patterning of poverty; 3. the design of new public funding for places for 2-year-olds. Although the ECEC system in England is very different from the German one, it offers cautionary notes against the risk of underfunding better-quality providers serving more disadvantaged families. It also highlights the need of combining coherent and supportive policy frameworks at national level with context-sensitive and locally tailored service provision.

Ludovica Gambaro is senior researcher at the Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB) in Wiesbaden. Her research broadly concerns inequalities in childhood, and the way diverging developmental trajectories may relate to social policies affecting family and education services, housing and, more recently, migration. She has written extensively on early childhood education and care services in England and in Germany, and her work has been published in scholarly journals from different disciplines as well as in numerous policy reports. Before joining the BiB in 2022, she held research positions at DIW Berlin, University of Tübingen, the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at University College London, and the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). She holds a PhD in Social Policy from LSE.

How to create inclusive learning environments for young children: A matter of intercultural competences

Dr Bodine Romijn, Utrecht University, Netherlands

Feeling like you belong and that you are valued for all you are – in other words inclusion – is vital for the well-being of young children. The European Horizon2020 ISOTIS project investigated what young children need to create this feeling of inclusion by going directly to the source: the young children themselves. This presentation will discuss two aspects that young children consider important for inclusion: safe spaces for learning and competent professionals. We will investigate what is necessary to create a safe space for all children, regardless of their background. Moreover, we zoom in on the attitudes ECEC professionals have towards diversity and the competences they need to adequately support children from diverse backgrounds. Lastly, we discuss what the role of professional development is in strengthening these so called intercultural competences.

Bodine Romijn is a researcher and teacher at the Department of Development and Education of Youth in Diverse Societies (DEEDS). Her research focuses on quality, equal opportunities, diversity, and inclusion in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and primary education. She explores how organizations can contribute to high-quality and inclusive learning environments, with particular attention to the intercultural competencies of professionals. She is currently involved in the Dutch National Child Care Monitor (LKK), commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. Previously, she contributed to the European Horizon2020 ISOTIS project, which aimed to support the development of policies and practices to combat (educational) inequality.

Unseen, Unheard, Invisible: Subtle Inequalities in Finnish ECEC

Prof Maiju Paananen, Tampere University, Finland

The presentation explores how small, often unnoticed moments of exclusion in ECE accumulate over time, shaping children's experiences in ways that can have lasting effects. Drawing on a range of studies across different early learning environments, the presentation highlights how national and local policies beyond ECE policies, available spaces, and adult expectations can create exclusive environments for some children, often without educators realizing it. These small acts of exclusion, when repeated over time, amount to what we call slow violence—a gradual but powerful form of inequality that affects children's participation and sense of belonging. By recognizing how these patterns emerge and build up, we can rethink early education policies to create more inclusive and responsive environments.

Maiju Paananen is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at Tampere University, Finland, where she co-leads the "Child Politics and Early Childhood" research group. Her research delves into the intersections of early childhood education policies, governance, and the everyday experiences of children and families. She has a particular interest in identifying subtle sources of inequality within early childhood education systems. Recently, her work has focused on the politics of ostracism, datafication of early childhood education and its implications for both children and educators.

More than ever: The need for democratic and inclusive ECEC

Dr Jan Peeters, VBJK, Belgium

There is plenty of scientific evidence that ECEC with an inclusive approach has very positive outcomes for children living in poverty and for children, who speak another home language. We have also many excellent examples of inclusive democratic practice. Moreover, ECEC is seen by international organisations like the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO and the European Union as a tool to break the circle of disadvantage. They support the investment in quality ECEC for disadvantaged children. However, due to the current political climate in the world with growing populist and discriminatory tendencies, some ECEC workers get discouraged. It is more than ever necessary to invest in a democratic pedagogy based on the inclusion of all young children and their families. In his presentation, Jan Peeters will speak about successful programs and pedagogical practices in Eastern and Western Europe that can inspire because they implement – sometimes under difficult political circumstances – democratic inclusive approaches on all levels of the ECEC system.

Jan Peeters started at Ghent University (Belgium) the Centre for Innovation in the Early Years, an international research and innovation Centre for ECEC. He is an expert in policy-oriented research and in policy advocacy. He was the promotor of several European Research projects with a focus on professionalism and democratic pedagogy. Over the past years, he worked as a consultant in projects of UNICEF and international NGO's on ECEC in Eastern Europe, Jordan, Vietnam and South Africa. He authored and co-edited numerous books, special issues and articles on inclusive pedagogy, professionalism, gender and continuous professional development in ECEC. He just published with Sarah Klaus and Tatjana Vonta 'Early Childhood Education in Social and Political Transitions' – a book on the transition towards a democratic inclusive ECEC in Eastern Europe and Central Asia after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Moderation of the Conference

Samuel Bader is a research associate at the International Centre Early Childhood Education and Care (ICEC) at the German Youth Institute. Since 2019, he has been working in the project team of the OECD TALIS Starting Strong Survey, acting as national data manager in Germany. Samuel Bader holds a PhD in political science, his dissertation examines the role of structures of the public sphere in democracies. His work at ICEC focuses on working conditions and job satisfaction, as well as on staff retention in ECEC centres.

Birgit Riedel holds a degree in political science and specialised in international comparative research on social services and welfare pluralism. Since 2004, she has been working as a research fellow at the German Youth Institute, where she co-founded the International Centre Early Childhood Education and Care. In her research she focused on issues such as the expansion, structural development and governance of ECEC, as well as on ECEC policies at local and international level relating to access, ECEC providers and monitoring. She is a member of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care of the European Commission, DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture.