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# **Working with multilingual children and families in early childhood education and care (ECEC): guidelines for continuous professional development of ECEC professionals**

*Analytical report*



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**AUTHORS:**

**Lisandra BERGERON-MORIN**, Ghent University, VBJK (Center for Innovation in the Early Years, Ghent, Belgium)

**Brecht PELEMAN**, Ghent University, VBJK (Center for Innovation in the Early Years, Ghent, Belgium)

**Hester HULPIA**, VBJK (Center for Innovation in the Early Years, Ghent, Belgium)

**CONTRIBUTORS:**

**Claudia SEELE**, RAA Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Section 3.1)

**Anne LAMBRECHTS**, Elmer (Section 3.2)

**Duha CEYLAN**, VUB, Belgium (Chapter 5)

**Aimee KELLEY**, Ghent University (reviews)

**PEER REVIEWER:**

**Jan PEETERS**, independent ECEC expert

**Dragana AVRAMOV**, NESET Scientific Coordinator

**LANGUAGE EDITOR:**

**James NIXON**, freelance editor

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture  
Directorate A – Policy Strategy and Evaluation  
Unit A.4 – Evidence-Based Policy and Evaluation

*E-mail: eac-unite-a4@ec.europa.eu*

*European Commission  
B-1049 Brussels*

**Contractor:**

**PPMI**

PPMI

Gedimino ave. 50, LT - 01110 Vilnius, Lithuania

Phone: +370 5 2620338 Fax: +370 5 2625410

www.ppmi.lt

Director: Rimantas Dumčius

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edited by: *Lisandra Bergeron-Morin, Brecht Peleman, Hester Hulpia*

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## List of abbreviations

CEU	Council of the European Union
CPD	Continuous professional development
DECET	Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training
EC	European Commission
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
EPIC	European Platform for Investing in Children
EU	European Union
ISSA	International Step by Step Association
NESET	Network of Experts working on the Social dimension of Education and Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
TFIEY	Transatlantic forum on inclusive early years
UN	United Nations
VBJK	Centrum voor vernieuwing in de basisvoorzieningen voor jonge kinderen (Center for innovation in the early years)

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## Executive summary

An increasing number of children are growing up in environments in which more than one language is spoken. For many of these children, early childhood education and care (ECEC) is often their first contact with the majority language of the country in which they are growing up. This situation adds to the crucial role that ECEC professionals play in children's education.

Children from multilingual families bring an added richness to the ECEC centre. Their full language repertoire is both a resource for the child's own holistic development, and enriches the learning experiences of the other children. Policy recommendations at European level, as well as the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child advocate for language learning from a young age and promotion of multilingual education in ECEC.

However, multilingualism presents specific challenges for ECEC professionals. To support multilingual children and families, ECEC staff must possess complex knowledge, skills and competences, as well as an understanding of child development and early childhood pedagogy. Many ECEC professionals feel an insecurity or lack of experience about working with multilingual children and families. In addition, educational practices are often geared toward monolingualism, and approach diversity and multilingualism as a problem instead of a resource. Multilingual parents (or non-native speakers of the institutional language) may also be uncertain when faced with making choices for their child, and often face barriers to engaging in reciprocal relationships with ECEC professionals.

Some of these challenges may be overcome through the participation of ECEC professionals in continuous professional development (CPD), which can positively impact the quality of pedagogical practices towards children and parents. However, CPD must be of high quality and must meet specific criteria – which, as evidenced by the findings of recent research, is not always guaranteed. CPD in relation to multilingualism in the ECEC context is often not attuned to the complex realities of multilingual families and may not always incorporate up-to-date scientific insights. To overcome this, CPD requires ongoing review and development. With this in mind, **the purpose of this report is to formulate research- and practice-based policy recommendations for high-quality CPD to support ECEC professionals working with multilingual children and families.**

This report is built upon two sources of secondary data: 1) a literature review on multilingualism, CPD, ECEC and diversity, which draws on scientific research articles, international reviews and reports of relevant European projects (presented in Chapter 2); and 2) two case studies: one on *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa* in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany, and another on *Elmer Childcare services* in Brussels, Belgium (presented in Chapter 3). Chapter 4 of the report provides general recommendations, while Chapter 5 explores how the report's key findings and recommendations apply to CPD relating to working with multilingual children and families with a refugee background.

## Key findings and recommendations

We present five recommendations for CPD on multilingualism in ECEC. These recommendations are based on key findings about multilingualism in early childhood, and the necessary conditions for effective CPD. The recommendations offer concrete avenues for consideration by policymakers, centre leaders and ECEC professionals.

### Recommendation 1

**The development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should follow a step-wise design, in which the desired outcomes for multilingual children and families are defined in advance of selecting the targeted practices and CPD delivery modes.**

To address the complexity of multilingualism and CPD in ECEC, a multifaceted approach is required. The step-wise pathway proposed in this report provides a framework that can be used by policymakers, ECEC leaders and trainers to successfully implement CPD on multilingualism in ECEC. It comprises the following steps:

1. Why? – Reflecting on the desired outcomes for multilingual children and families.
2. What? – Targeting specific practices to support multilingual children and families in ECEC.
3. Who? – Analysing the baseline situation and needs of the ECEC professionals involved.
4. How? – Selecting specific CPD delivery modes.
5. Where? – Adjusting the CPD to macro-context conditions for sustainable implementation.

### Recommendation 2

**The development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should emerge from a positive vision of multilingualism and through collaboration with parents. The development of CPD should draw on scientific knowledge, and also work well with existing policies.**

Language policy is shaped by the social, economic and cultural landscape and history of a country or region. Any disconnect between multilingualism policies and scientific knowledge is a barrier to the implementation of practices for multilingual children and parents, as well as to the development of CPD on multilingualism. The existence of such disconnects calls for a rethinking of linguistic and cultural diversity at policy level, and a shifting of perceptions about multilingualism, from being regarded as a problem to being a resource.

Such a shift should be based on the following principles:

- CPD should start from a holistic strengths-based and rights-based vision for child development. Multilingual children should be seen as competent and resourceful.
- Desired outcomes for children’s language development in ECEC should be directed towards both the institutional language and the home language(s). There is growing evidence that creating opportunities to integrate children’s home language(s) into ECEC can foster general institutional language development and multilingual development.
- From a social justice perspective, the inclusion and participation of multilingual parents in the ECEC centre, as well as in the wider community, should be promoted. CPD should help ECEC professionals to develop reciprocal relationships with multilingual parents, which enhance parents’ confidence and agency.
- Opportunities for dialogue about multilingualism should be created at various policy-making levels (e.g. by organizing joint conferences for stakeholders and practitioners, or through innovative European projects involving ECEC centres and



decision-makers), in order to achieve a shared vision and to align with existing scientific knowledge.

- ECEC curricula should be reviewed, revised and/or adapted to ensure they provide space and legitimacy for ECEC professionals to explore and implement practices supportive of multilingual children and families.

### Recommendation 3

**The development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should be tailored to the needs and capabilities of professionals. CPD should be adapted to specific contexts, and a range of practices and delivery modes should be put forward.**

There is no clear, single answer to any of the complex questions inherent in pedagogical work with multilingual children and their families. Families, communities and professionals must take account of this complexity by interpreting and 'customizing' their practices. CPD trajectories should be adapted to the specific contexts and needs of the professionals concerned, meaning that both ECEC practices and CPD must be able to respond to the diversity of paths towards multilingualism, the diversity of contexts, and diversity in the needs and capabilities of ECEC staff.

This should be based on the following principles:

- Experimentation by ECEC professionals with different possibilities to integrate home language(s) within meaningful, high-quality interactions, taking advantage of the language repertoires of staff, parents and children.
- Systematic mapping and use of existing (multilingual) resources within a team, where possible pairing multilingual staff with multilingual children and families.
- Sustaining constant reflection and experimentation by ECEC professionals to support and fine-tune the choices made between different practices.
- Defining parallel professional outcomes with ECEC professionals in order to consolidate individual and team-based reflective skills, as well as fostering their engagement in defining centre-based language policies.
- Favouring a menu-based approach to CPD (i.e. proposing various delivery modes that embody the criteria for effective CPD, which can be combined together to adapt CPD to different contexts and the needs of different professionals).

### Recommendation 4

**The development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should be embedded within a sustainable, system-based policy on staff professionalisation.**

Because multilingualism is complex and multi-faceted, it is necessary to consider all criteria for effective CPD that can promote high-quality ECEC practices:

- CPD should be a long-term, sustainable trajectory.
- CPD should be planned at a system level, and require collaboration at different levels.
- CPD should provide different types of knowledge (i.e. theoretical knowledge as well as practical knowledge linked to the day-to-day practice).

- CPD should address ECEC professionals' beliefs and should align with scientific knowledge.
- CPD should include components of reflection and enactment by creating the conditions and space for ECEC professionals to experiment with new multilingual practices.
- CPD should include provisions for individualised feedback facilitated by a pedagogical coach or tutor.
- CPD should support the involvement and agency of ECEC professionals.
- CPD should be supported by strong leadership at national or regional level to ensure the necessary preconditions for sustainable implementation.

### Recommendation 5

#### **The development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should be integrated into an ongoing focus on quality within ECEC.**

The 2019 Council Recommendation on High Quality ECEC Systems formalises the position of European Union (EU) Member States with regard to the importance of quality ECEC. This comprehensive framework provides a unifying foundation to support the important role played by ECEC services in promoting social inclusion. Multilingualism is a reality, as well as a right, during a child's early years. For this reason, quality ECEC cannot be achieved without the integration of multilingualism into all five domains of the European Quality Framework on ECEC: access; workforce; curriculum; monitoring and evaluation; and governance and funding. In this sense, multilingualism should be considered a transversal topic, rather than a separate one. Furthermore, an explicit focus on multilingualism in CPD might offer a refreshing angle from which to reinforce commitment to quality ECEC. Designing and implementing CPD for multilingual children can, in turn, strengthen and transform ECEC practices for *all* children.

This should be based on the following principles:

- ECEC practices presented in CPD should centre around creating opportunities for meaningful, high-quality interactions with multilingual children throughout daily life in ECEC.
- Practices to increase collaboration with multilingual parents can be supported by creating a welcoming environment, engaging in constant dialogue, and seeking opportunities to collaborate, such that parents' competences and expertise are valorised.
- Exploration of multilingual activities in CPD should not overshadow the importance of child-centred interactions during such activities.
- Broader reflection on the accessibility of ECEC services to multilingual families should be incorporated within the CPD trajectory, in alignment with ECEC practices that support collaboration with multilingual parents.

Furthermore, **specific recommendations on CPD, and on working with refugee children and families in ECEC**, highlight the need to consider the particular legal situations of these families, as well as the extra stressors that influence their experiences, emotions and sense of belonging. Also important is the conceptualisation of language development within a holistic vision for child development, ensuring that development of the home language is maintained in parallel with that of the institutional language.

## Résumé analytique

De plus en plus d'enfants grandissent dans des environnements où l'on parle plusieurs langues. Pour nombre d'entre eux, l'éducation et l'accueil des jeunes enfants (EAJE) constituent souvent leur premier contact avec la langue majoritaire du pays dans lequel ils grandissent. Cette situation renforce le rôle crucial que jouent les professionnels de l'EAJE dans l'éducation des enfants.

Les enfants issus de familles multilingues apportent une richesse supplémentaire dans les centres d'EAJE. Leur répertoire linguistique complet constitue à la fois une ressource pour le développement holistique de l'enfant lui-même et un enrichissement des expériences d'apprentissage des autres enfants. Les recommandations politiques au niveau européen, ainsi que la Convention des Nations Unies sur les droits de l'enfant, préconisent l'apprentissage des langues dès le plus jeune âge et la promotion de l'éducation multilingue dans les structures d'EAJE.

Cependant, le multilinguisme présente des défis spécifiques pour les professionnels de l'EAJE. Afin de soutenir les enfants et les familles multilingues, le personnel des services d'EAJE doit posséder des connaissances, des aptitudes et des compétences complexes, ainsi qu'une compréhension du développement de l'enfant et de la pédagogie de la petite enfance. De nombreux professionnels de l'EAJE éprouvent un sentiment d'insécurité ou un manque d'expérience lorsqu'ils travaillent avec des enfants et des familles multilingues. En outre, les pratiques éducatives sont souvent axées sur le monolinguisme et considèrent la diversité et le multilinguisme comme un problème plutôt que comme une ressource. Les parents multilingues (ou dont la langue institutionnelle n'est pas la langue maternelle) peuvent également être indécis lorsqu'ils doivent faire des choix pour leur enfant et se heurtent souvent à des obstacles qui les empêchent d'établir des relations réciproques avec les professionnels de l'EAJE.

Certains de ces défis peuvent être surmontés grâce à la participation des professionnels de l'EAJE au développement professionnel continu (DPC), lequel peut avoir un impact positif sur la qualité des pratiques pédagogiques à l'égard des enfants et des parents. Toutefois, le DPC doit être de grande qualité et répondre à des critères spécifiques, ce qui n'est pas toujours garanti, comme le montrent les résultats d'études récentes. Le DPC relatif au multilinguisme dans le contexte de l'EAJE n'est souvent pas adapté aux réalités complexes des familles multilingues et n'intègre pas toujours les connaissances scientifiques les plus récentes. Pour y remédier, le DPC doit faire l'objet d'un examen et d'un développement continu. Dans cette optique, **l'objectif de ce rapport est de formuler des recommandations politiques fondées sur la recherche et la pratique pour un DPC de haute qualité destiné à soutenir les professionnels de l'EAJE travaillant avec des enfants et des familles multilingues.**

Ce rapport se base sur deux sources de données secondaires : 1) une analyse documentaire sur le multilinguisme, le DPC, l'EAJE et la diversité, qui s'appuie sur des articles de recherche scientifique, des revues internationales et des rapports de projets européens pertinents (présentés au chapitre 2) ; et 2) deux études de cas : l'une sur les programmes *Griffbereit* et *Rucksack KiTa* dans le Mecklembourg-Poméranie-Occidentale, en Allemagne, et l'autre sur les milieux d'accueil de jeunes enfants *Elmer* à Bruxelles, en Belgique (présentées au chapitre 3). Le chapitre 4 du rapport contient des recommandations générales, tandis que le chapitre 5 examine la manière dont les principales conclusions et recommandations du rapport s'appliquent au DPC relatif au travail avec des enfants multilingues et des familles issues de l'immigration.

## Principales conclusions et recommandations

Nous présentons cinq recommandations pour le DPC sur le multilinguisme dans l'EAJE. Ces recommandations se fondent sur les principales conclusions concernant le multilinguisme dans la petite enfance et les conditions nécessaires à un DPC efficace. Elles offrent des pistes concrètes à prendre en compte par les décideurs politiques, les responsables de centres et les professionnels de l'EAJE.

### Recommandation 1

**L'élaboration et la mise en œuvre du DPC sur le multilinguisme dans l'EAJE devraient se faire par étapes, en définissant d'abord les résultats souhaités pour les enfants et les familles multilingues avant de sélectionner les pratiques ciblées et les modalités du DPC.**

Pour aborder la complexité du multilinguisme et du DPC dans l'EAJE, une approche à multiples facettes est nécessaire. La démarche par étapes progressives proposée dans ce rapport fournit un cadre qui peut être utilisé par les décideurs politiques, les responsables des services d'EAJE et les formateurs pour mettre en œuvre avec succès le DPC sur le multilinguisme dans l'EAJE. Elle comprend les étapes suivantes, identifiées par cinq questions clés :

1. Pourquoi ? - Réfléchir aux retombées souhaités pour les enfants et les familles multilingues.
2. Quoi ? - Cibler des pratiques spécifiques pour soutenir les enfants et les familles multilingues dans l'EAJE.
3. Qui ? - Analyser la situation de départ et les besoins des professionnels de l'EAJE concernés.
4. Comment ? - Choisir des modalités de DPC spécifiques.
5. Où ? - Adapter le DPC aux conditions du macro-contexte pour une mise en œuvre durable.

### Recommandation 2

**L'élaboration et la mise en œuvre du DPC sur le multilinguisme dans l'EAJE devraient découler d'une vision positive du multilinguisme et de la collaboration avec les parents. L'élaboration et la mise en œuvre du DPC devrait s'appuyer sur des connaissances scientifiques et s'inscrire dans le cadre des politiques existantes.**

La politique linguistique est façonnée par le paysage social, économique et culturel et par l'histoire d'un pays ou d'une région. Tout décalage entre les politiques en matière de multilinguisme et les connaissances scientifiques constitue un obstacle à la mise en œuvre de pratiques pour les enfants et les parents multilingues, ainsi qu'au développement du DPC sur le multilinguisme. L'existence de tels décalages appelle à repenser la diversité linguistique et culturelle au niveau politique et à modifier les perceptions du multilinguisme, qui ne devrait plus être considéré comme un problème mais comme une ressource.

Ce changement devrait se fonder sur les principes suivants :

- Le DPC devrait partir d'une vision holistique du développement de l'enfant, fondée sur les forces et les droits. Les enfants multilingues devraient être perçus comme compétents et pleins de ressources.

- Les retombées souhaités pour le développement du langage des enfants dans l'EAJE devraient être orientés à la fois vers la langue institutionnelle et vers la ou les langues parlées à la maison. Il est de plus en plus évident que la création d'occasions pour intégrer la ou les langues familiales des enfants dans l'EAJE peut favoriser le développement de la langue institutionnelle, de même que le développement multilingue.
- À partir d'une perspective de justice sociale, il convient de promouvoir l'inclusion et la participation des parents multilingues dans les centres d'EAJE, ainsi que dans la communauté au sens large. Le DPC devrait aider les professionnels de l'EAJE à développer des relations réciproques avec les parents multilingues, qui renforcent la confiance et le pouvoir d'action des parents.
- Des possibilités de dialogue sur le multilinguisme devraient être créées à différents niveaux de décision (p.ex. en organisant des conférences conjointes pour les décideurs et les professionnels, ou par le biais de projets européens innovants impliquant des centres d'EAJE et des décideurs), afin de parvenir à une vision commune et de s'aligner sur les connaissances scientifiques existantes.
- Les programmes d'études de l'EAJE devraient être revus, révisés et/ou adaptés afin de garantir qu'ils offrent un espace et une légitimité aux professionnels de l'EAJE pour explorer et mettre en œuvre des pratiques qui soutiennent les enfants et les familles multilingues.

### Recommandation 3

**L'élaboration et la mise en œuvre du DPC sur le multilinguisme dans l'EAJE devraient être adaptées aux besoins et aux ressources des professionnels. Le DPC devrait être adapté à des contextes spécifiques et un éventail de pratiques et de modalités devrait être proposé.**

Il n'existe pas de réponse claire et unique aux questions complexes inhérentes au travail pédagogique avec les enfants multilingues et leurs familles. Les familles, les communautés et les professionnels doivent tenir compte de cette complexité en interprétant et en « personnalisant » leurs pratiques. Les parcours de DPC devraient être adaptés aux contextes et aux besoins spécifiques des professionnels concernés, ce qui signifie que les pratiques d'EAJE et le DPC doivent pouvoir répondre à la diversité des parcours vers le multilinguisme, à la diversité des contextes et à la diversité des besoins et des ressources du personnel des services d'EAJE.

Cela devrait se fonder sur les principes suivants :

- L'expérimentation, par les professionnels de l'EAJE, de différentes possibilités d'intégrer la ou les langues parlées à la maison dans le cadre d'interactions significatives et de qualité, en tirant parti des répertoires linguistiques du personnel, des parents et des enfants.
- Recenser et utiliser de façon systématique les ressources (multilingues) existantes au sein d'une équipe, en associant si possible le personnel multilingue aux enfants et aux familles multilingues.
- Maintenir une réflexion et une expérimentation constantes par les professionnels de l'EAJE afin de soutenir et d'affiner les choix effectués entre les différentes pratiques.
- Définir des résultats professionnels parallèles avec les professionnels de l'EAJE afin de consolider leurs compétences réflexives individuelles et en équipe, et de favoriser leur engagement dans l'élaboration de politiques linguistiques au sein des centres.

- Privilégier une approche du DPC basée sur un « menu » de possibilités (c.-à-d. proposer différentes modalités qui incarnent les critères d'un DPC efficace et qui peuvent être combinées pour adapter le DPC à différents contextes et aux besoins de différents professionnels).

#### Recommandation 4

##### **L'élaboration et la mise en œuvre du DPC sur le multilinguisme dans l'EAJE devraient s'inscrire dans une politique durable et systémique de professionnalisation du personnel.**

Le multilinguisme étant complexe et à multiples facettes, il est nécessaire de prendre en compte tous les critères d'un DPC efficace susceptible de promouvoir des pratiques d'EAJE de grande qualité :

- Le DPC devrait s'inscrire dans une trajectoire durable et à long terme.
- Le DPC devrait être planifié au niveau du système entier et promouvoir une collaboration à différents niveaux.
- Le DPC devrait fournir différents types de connaissances (c.-à-d. des connaissances théoriques et des connaissances pratiques liées à la mise en œuvre au quotidien).
- Le DPC devrait aborder les croyances des professionnels de l'EAJE et s'aligner sur les connaissances scientifiques.
- Le DPC devrait inclure des éléments de pratique réflexive et de mise en œuvre en créant les conditions et l'espace nécessaires pour que les professionnels de l'EAJE expérimentent de nouvelles pratiques multilingues.
- Le DPC devrait prévoir des modalités de rétroactions individualisées facilitées par l'accompagnement d'un coach pédagogique ou d'un tuteur.
- Le DPC devrait soutenir l'implication et le pouvoir d'action des professionnels de l'EAJE.
- Le DPC devrait être soutenu par un leadership fort au niveau national ou régional afin de garantir les conditions préalables nécessaires à une mise en œuvre durable.

#### Recommandation 5

##### **L'élaboration et la mise en œuvre du DPC sur le multilinguisme dans l'EAJE devraient être intégrées dans une démarche continue sur la qualité de l'EAJE.**

La recommandation du Conseil de 2019 sur les systèmes d'EAJE de qualité formalise la position des États membres de l'Union européenne (UE) quant à l'importance d'une EAJE de qualité. Ce cadre global fournit une base unifiée pour soutenir le rôle important joué par les services d'EAJE dans la promotion de l'inclusion sociale. Le multilinguisme est une réalité, ainsi qu'un droit, pendant les premières années de la vie d'un enfant. C'est pourquoi la qualité de l'EAJE ne peut être atteinte sans l'intégration du multilinguisme dans les cinq domaines du Cadre de qualité européen pour l'EAJE : l'accessibilité, le personnel, le programme éducatif, le suivi et l'évaluation, ainsi que la gouvernance et le financement. En ce sens, le multilinguisme devrait être considéré comme un sujet transversal, plutôt que comme un sujet distinct. En outre, un accent explicite sur le multilinguisme dans le cadre du DPC pourrait offrir un angle d'approche rafraîchissant pour renforcer l'engagement en faveur d'une EAJE de qualité. L'élaboration et la mise en œuvre du DPC pour les enfants multilingues peuvent, à leur tour, renforcer et transformer les pratiques d'EAJE pour *tous* les enfants.

Cela devrait se fonder sur les principes suivants :

- Les pratiques d'EAJE présentées dans le cadre du DPC devraient être axées sur la création d'occasions d'interactions significatives et de qualité avec les enfants multilingues tout au long de la vie quotidienne dans l'EAJE.
- Les pratiques visant à renforcer la collaboration avec les parents multilingues peuvent être soutenues par la création d'un environnement accueillant, l'engagement d'un dialogue constant et la recherche d'occasions de collaboration, de sorte que les compétences et l'expertise des parents soient valorisées.
- L'exploration d'activités multilingues dans le cadre du DPC ne devrait pas occulter l'importance des interactions centrées sur l'enfant au cours de ces activités.
- Une réflexion plus large sur l'accessibilité des services d'EAJE aux familles multilingues devrait être intégrée dans le parcours de DPC, en accord avec les pratiques d'EAJE qui favorisent la collaboration avec les parents multilingues.

En outre, **des recommandations spécifiques sur le DPC et sur le travail avec les enfants et les familles de réfugiés dans l'EAJE** soulignent la nécessité de prendre en compte les situations juridiques particulières de ces familles, ainsi que les facteurs de stress supplémentaires qui influencent leurs expériences, leurs émotions et leur sentiment d'appartenance. Il est également important de conceptualiser le développement des langues dans le cadre d'une vision holistique du développement de l'enfant, en veillant à ce que le développement de la langue parlée à la maison se poursuive parallèlement à celui de la langue institutionnelle.

## Kurzfassung

Immer mehr Kinder wachsen in einem Umfeld auf, in dem mehr als eine Sprache gesprochen wird. Für viele dieser Kinder ist die frühkindliche Betreuung, Bildung und Erziehung (FBBE) der erste Kontakt mit der Mehrheitssprache des Landes, in dem sie leben. Auch aus diesem Grund spielen FBBE-Fachkräfte heute für die Bildung von Kindern eine wichtigere Rolle als je zuvor.

Kinder aus mehrsprachigen Familien sind für Kindertagesstätten und Kindergärten ein echter Schatz. Ihr großes sprachliches Repertoire ist eine wichtige Ressource für ihre eigene ganzheitliche Entwicklung und bereichert die Lernerfahrungen der anderen Kinder. Auch politische Empfehlungen auf europäischer Ebene und die UN-Kinderrechtskonvention sprechen sich für einen frühen Sprachunterricht und mehrsprachige Bildung in der FBBE aus.

Mehrsprachigkeit stellt FBBE-Fachkräfte jedoch vor ganz spezielle Probleme. Um mehrsprachige Kinder und Familien richtig unterstützen zu können, brauchen sie komplexe Kenntnisse, Fähigkeiten und Kompetenzen sowie Wissen über die kindliche Entwicklung und frühkindliche Pädagogik. Viele Fachkräfte in der FBBE fühlen sich unsicher, weil sie keine Erfahrung mit der Arbeit mit mehrsprachigen Kindern und Familien haben. Außerdem zielen viele Bildungspraktiken auf Einsprachigkeit ab und behandeln Diversität und Mehrsprachigkeit als Problem und nicht als Ressource. Auch mehrsprachige Eltern (oder Eltern, die keine Muttersprachler der in der FBBE gesprochenen Sprache sind) fühlen sich oft unsicher, wenn sie Entscheidungen für ihr Kind treffen müssen, und haben Probleme, eine gleichberechtigte Beziehung zu den FBBE-Fachkräften aufzubauen.

Wenn FBBE-Fachkräfte entsprechende Angebote zur beruflichen Weiterbildung wahrnehmen, lassen sich womöglich ein Teil dieser Probleme vermeiden und die pädagogischen Praktiken im Umgang mit Kindern und Eltern verbessern. Diese Weiterbildung sollte jedoch von hoher Qualität sein und bestimmte Kriterien erfüllen, was, wie aktuelle Studien zeigen, nicht immer gewährleistet ist. Weiterbildung zum Thema Mehrsprachigkeit in der FBBE ist oft nicht an die komplexe Realität mehrsprachiger Familien angepasst und auf dem neuesten wissenschaftlichen Stand. Um diese Mängel zu beheben, müssten Angebote zur beruflichen Weiterbildung laufend überprüft und weiterentwickelt werden. Vor diesem Hintergrund **soll dieser Bericht auf der Grundlage von Forschungsdaten und Praxisbeispielen politische Empfehlungen für eine hochwertige berufliche Weiterbildung formulieren, die FBBE-Fachkräfte bei der Arbeit mit mehrsprachigen Kindern und Familien unterstützt.**

Für diesen Bericht wurden Sekundärdaten aus zwei Quellen herangezogen: 1) einer Literaturrecherche zu den Themen Mehrsprachigkeit, berufliche Weiterbildung, FBBE und Diversität, bei der wissenschaftliche Artikel, internationale Übersichtsarbeiten und Berichte über einschlägige europäische Projekte berücksichtigt wurden (diese wird in Kapitel 2 präsentiert) und 2) zwei Fallstudien: eine zu den Programmen *Griffbereit* und *Rucksack KiTa* in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern und das zweite zu den *Elmer Childcare services* in der belgischen Hauptstadt Brüssel (diese werden in Kapitel 3 vorgestellt). Kapitel 4 des Bericht enthält allgemeine Empfehlungen und Kapitel 5 untersucht, ob die wichtigsten Ergebnisse und die Empfehlungen des Berichts auch für Weiterbildungsangebote für die Arbeit mit geflüchteten mehrsprachigen Kindern und Familien gelten.

## Die wichtigsten Ergebnisse und Empfehlungen

Im Folgenden präsentieren wir fünf Empfehlungen für die berufliche Weiterbildung zu Mehrsprachigkeit in der FBBE. Diesen Empfehlungen liegen unsere Ergebnisse über Mehrsprachigkeit in der frühen Kindheit und die notwendigen Bedingungen für eine



erfolgreiche Weiterbildung zugrunde. Die Empfehlungen bieten konkrete Anregungen für die Politik und die Führungskräfte und Mitarbeitenden von FBBE-Einrichtungen.

### **Empfehlung 1**

**Die Entwicklung und Umsetzung von Weiterbildungsangeboten zu Mehrsprachigkeit in der FBBE sollte stufenweise erfolgen, wobei zunächst der gewünschte Nutzen für mehrsprachige Kinder und Familien definiert und dann die zielgerichteten Praktiken und geeignete Wege und Formen der Weiterbildung gewählt werden.**

Um dem komplexen Problem der Mehrsprachigkeit und beruflichen Weiterbildung in der FBBE gerecht zu werden, ist ein vielschichtiger Ansatz erforderlich. Das in diesem Bericht vorgeschlagene stufenweise Vorgehen bietet Politikern, FBBE-Führungskräften und Weiterbildungsanbietern einen Rahmen für die erfolgreiche Umsetzung von Weiterbildungsangeboten zu Mehrsprachigkeit in der FBBE. Es besteht aus den folgenden Schritten:

1. Warum? – Nachdenken über den gewünschten Nutzen für mehrsprachige Kinder und Familien.
2. Was? – Bestimmung konkreter Praktiken in der FBBE, die mehrsprachige Kinder und Familien unterstützen.
3. Wer? – Analyse der Ausgangssituation und Bedürfnisse der betroffenen FBBE-Fachkräfte.
4. Wie? – Auswahl konkreter Wege und Formen der beruflichen Weiterbildung.
5. Wo? – Anpassung der Weiterbildung an den größeren Kontext für eine nachhaltige Umsetzung.

### **Empfehlung 2**

**Die Entwicklung und Umsetzung von Weiterbildungsangeboten zu Mehrsprachigkeit in der FBBE sollte von einer positiven Sicht auf Mehrsprachigkeit ausgehen und eine vermehrte Zusammenarbeit mit den Eltern anstreben. Außerdem sollten bei der Entwicklung von Weiterbildungsangeboten wissenschaftliche Erkenntnisse und bereits bestehende Initiativen berücksichtigt werden.**

Sprachpolitik ist immer vom sozialen, wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Hintergrund und von der Geschichte eines Landes oder einer Region geprägt. Wenn die politische Strategie in Bezug auf Mehrsprachigkeit wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnissen widerspricht, behindert dies die Umsetzung geeigneter Praktiken für mehrsprachige Kinder und Eltern und die Entwicklung entsprechender Weiterbildungsangebote. Liegen solche Widersprüche vor, sollte die Politik ihre Position zu sprachlicher und kultureller Diversität überdenken und versuchen, Mehrsprachigkeit weniger als Problem und mehr als Ressource zu begreifen.

Dieser Prozess sollte auf den folgenden Grundsätzen beruhen:

- Die Weiterbildung sollte von einer ganzheitlichen Vision der kindlichen Entwicklung ausgehen, die sich auf die Stärken und Rechte des Kindes konzentriert. Mehrsprachige Kinder sollte als kompetent und erfindungsreich verstanden werden.
- Der gewünschte Nutzen für die sprachliche Entwicklung von Kindern in der FBBE sollte sowohl auf die in der Einrichtung gesprochene Sprache als auch auf die zuhause gesprochene(n) Sprache(n) abzielen. Immer mehr Forschungsdaten zeigen, dass die Integration der zuhause gesprochene(n) Sprache(n) in die FBBE

die allgemeine Sprachentwicklung und die mehrsprachige Entwicklung fördern kann.

- Für mehr soziale Gerechtigkeit sollte die Eingliederung und Teilhabe mehrsprachiger Eltern in der FBBE-Einrichtung sowie in der Gesellschaft allgemein gefördert werden. Die berufliche Weiterbildung sollte FBBE-Fachkräfte dazu befähigen, eine gleichberechtigte Beziehung zu mehrsprachigen Eltern aufzubauen, die Selbstvertrauen und Handlungsfähigkeit der Eltern stärkt.
- Auf verschiedenen politischen Entscheidungsebenen sollten Gelegenheiten für einen Dialog über Mehrsprachigkeit geschaffen werden (z. B. gemeinsame Konferenzen von Interessenträgern und Berufsvertretern oder durch innovative europäische Projekte, an denen FBBE-Einrichtungen und Entscheidungsträger beteiligt sind). Ziel sollte es sein, eine gemeinsame Vision zu entwickeln, die dem aktuellen Wissensstand entspricht.
- Lehrpläne im Bereich FBBE sollten überprüft und so überarbeitet und/oder angepasst werden, dass sie FBBE-Fachkräfte ausreichend Freiräume bieten, neue Praktiken zu erproben und umzusetzen, die mehrsprachigen Kindern und Familien zugutekommen.

### **Empfehlung 3**

**Die Entwicklung und Umsetzung von Weiterbildungsangeboten zu Mehrsprachigkeit in der FBBE sollte genau auf die Bedürfnisse und Fähigkeiten der Fachkräfte abgestimmt sein. Die berufliche Weiterbildung sollte sich durch viele unterschiedliche Praktiken und Formen an den jeweiligen Kontext anpassen lassen.**

Auf die komplexen Fragen, die sich aus der pädagogischen Arbeit mit mehrsprachigen Kindern und ihren Familien ergeben, gibt es nicht die eine klare Antwort. Familien, Gemeinschaften und Fachkräfte müssen diese Komplexität akzeptieren und ihre Praktiken laufend hinterfragen und „personalisieren“. Weiterbildungsangebote sollten an den jeweiligen Kontext und die Bedürfnisse der betroffenen Fachkräfte angepasst werden. Das heißt, dass sowohl die pädagogischen Praktiken als auch die Weiterbildungsangebote in der Lage sein müssen, auf viele unterschiedliche Wege zur Mehrsprachigkeit, den jeweiligen Kontext und die konkreten Bedürfnisse und Fähigkeiten der Mitarbeitenden einzugehen.

Diese Anpassung sollte auf den folgenden Grundsätzen beruhen:

- FBBE-Fachkräfte sollten mit unterschiedlichen Möglichkeiten experimentieren, wie sich die zuhause gesprochene(n) Sprache(n) in sinnvolle und hochwertige Interaktionsformen integrieren lassen und dabei das sprachliche Reservoir der Mitarbeitenden, Eltern und Kinder nutzen.
- Systematische Erfassung und Nutzung bestehender (mehrsprachiger) Ressourcen im Team und, wenn möglich, der Einsatz mehrsprachiger Mitarbeitender für mehrsprachige Kinder und Familien.
- Die Entscheidung für bestimmte Praktiken sollte von den FBBE-Fachkräften regelmäßig hinterfragt und durch die Erprobung neuer Praktiken individuell abgestimmt werden.
- Für die FBBE-Fachkräfte sollten parallele professionelle Entwicklungsziele definiert werden, um die Fähigkeit zur individuellen und gemeinsamen Reflexion zu stärken und die Mitarbeitenden an der Definition der für die Einrichtung geltenden Sprachpolitik zu beteiligen.

- Förderung eines breit gefächerten Weiterbildungsangebots (d. h. mit unterschiedlichen Lernformen und -wegen, die den Kriterien für eine wirksame Weiterbildung entsprechen sowie kombiniert und an den jeweiligen Kontext und die Bedürfnisse unterschiedlicher Fachkräfte angepasst werden können).

#### **Empfehlung 4**

**Die Entwicklung und Umsetzung von Weiterbildungsangeboten zu Mehrsprachigkeit in der FBBE sollte Teil einer nachhaltigen und systematischen Strategie zur Professionalisierung der Mitarbeitenden sein.**

Da Mehrsprachigkeit sehr komplex und facettenreich ist, müssen alle Kriterien für eine sinnvolle berufliche Weiterbildung berücksichtigt werden, die hochwertige FBBE-Praktiken fördern:

- Weiterbildung sollte ein dauerhafter und nachhaltiger Prozess sein.
- Weiterbildung sollte auf Systemebene geplant werden und erfordert die Zusammenarbeit mehrere Ebenen.
- Weiterbildung sollte mehrere Wissensformen vermitteln (d. h. theoretisches Wissen ebenso wie praktisches Wissen mit Bezug zum Arbeitsalltag).
- Weiterbildung sollte auch die Überzeugungen von FBBE-Fachkräften thematisieren und dem Stand der Wissenschaft entsprechen.
- Weiterbildung sollte FBBE-Fachkräften die Bedingungen und Freiräume bieten, um mit neuen mehrsprachigen Praktiken experimentieren zu können, und entsprechende Elemente der Reflexion und Erprobung enthalten.
- Weiterbildung sollte die Möglichkeit zu individuellem Feedback durch einen pädagogischen Dozent oder Tutor bieten.
- Weiterbildung sollte die Teilhabe und Handlungskraft von FBBE-Fachkräften unterstützen.
- Weiterbildung braucht stabilen Rückhalt auf nationaler und regionaler Ebene, der dafür sorgt, dass die notwendigen Voraussetzungen für eine nachhaltige Umsetzung gegeben sind.

#### **Empfehlung 5**

**Die Entwicklung und Umsetzung von Weiterbildungsangeboten zu Mehrsprachigkeit in der FBBE sollte Teil einer ständigen Qualitätsoffensive in der FBBE sein.**

Die Empfehlung des Rates zu hochwertiger frühkindlicher Betreuung, Bildung und Erziehung von 2019 zeigt, dass den EU-Mitgliedstaaten eine hochwertige FBBE wichtig ist. Dieser umfassende Strategierahmen unterstreicht unter anderem die wichtige Rolle, die FBBE bei der sozialen Inklusion spielt. Mehrsprachigkeit in den ersten Lebensjahren ist für viele Kinder Realität und gleichzeitig Rechtsanspruch. Aus diesem Grund lässt sich eine hochwertige FBBE nur erreichen, wenn Mehrsprachigkeit in alle fünf Bereiche des Europäischen Qualitätsrahmens für die FBBE integriert wird: Zugang, Personal, Bildungsprogramme, Monitoring und Evaluation sowie Steuerung und Finanzierung. In diesem Sinne sollte Mehrsprachigkeit nicht als Einzelproblem, sondern vielmehr als Querschnittsthema verstanden werden. Außerdem könnte ein ausdrücklicher Fokus auf Mehrsprachigkeit in der beruflichen Weiterbildung neue Perspektiven eröffnen und das Engagement für eine hochwertige FBBE mit neuem Leben füllen. Die Planung und

Umsetzung von beruflichen Weiterbildungsangeboten für die Arbeit mit mehrsprachigen Kindern, kann ihrerseits die FBBE-Praktiken für *alle* Kinder verbessern und transformieren.

Dieser Prozess sollte auf den folgenden Grundsätzen basieren:

- Die in der Weiterbildung vermittelten FBBE-Praktiken sollten darauf abzielen, während des gesamten Tagesablaufs sinnvolle und hochwertige Interaktionen mit mehrsprachigen Kindern zu ermöglichen.
- Durch entsprechende Praktiken sollte die Zusammenarbeit mit mehrsprachigen Eltern verbessert werden. Dazu eignen sich eine einladende Atmosphäre, der ständige Dialog und die aktive Suche nach Kooperationsmöglichkeiten, bei denen die Kompetenzen und Erfahrungen der Eltern wertgeschätzt werden.
- Die Erkundung mehrsprachiger Aktivitäten in der beruflichen Weiterbildung sollten die Wichtigkeit der auf das Kind konzentrierten Interaktion bei diesen Aktivitäten nicht überschatten.
- In die Weiterbildungsangebote sollte auch das Thema der Zugänglichkeit der FBBE für mehrsprachige Familien integriert werden, ebenso wie FBBE-Praktiken, die die Zusammenarbeit mit mehrsprachigen Eltern unterstützen.

Des Weiteren zeigen **spezielle Empfehlungen zur beruflichen Weiterbildung für die Arbeit mit geflüchteten Kindern und deren Familien in der FBBE**, dass es wichtig ist, die rechtliche Situation dieser Familien und die zusätzlichen Stressfaktoren zu berücksichtigen, die ihre Erfahrungen, Emotionen und ihr Zugehörigkeitsgefühl beeinflussen. Abschließend ist es wichtig, die sprachliche Entwicklung als Teil einer ganzheitlichen Vision für die kindliche Entwicklung zu begreifen und sicherzustellen, dass sich die Beherrschung der zuhause gesprochenen Sprache ebenso gut entwickeln wie die der in der Einrichtung gesprochenen Sprache.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Context: importance of supporting multilingualism in the early years

*"Learning and education start from birth and the early years are the most formative in children's lives as they set the foundations for their lifelong development."*  
(Council of European Union [CEU], 2019a)

It is now widely acknowledged and scientifically recognised that early childhood, traditionally regarded as the period from birth to the age of 6, is an essential and formative period in an individual's life. The early years lay the foundation for further development in terms of physical, social, emotional and cognitive growth. In this sense, education and learning during early childhood, both within the child's home environment as well as in the educational institutions that a child attends, can have strong and long-lasting effects on child development (European Commission [EC], 2014a; Lenaerts et al., 2018; van Belle, 2016). Early childhood education and care (ECEC) services play a crucial role in this regard, and need to be recognised as fundamental to the educational trajectory and overall well-being of children (CEU, 2019a). Indeed, research has shown the beneficial effects of ECEC services on children, families and society as a whole (EC, 2014a; Eurofound, 2015). ECEC services can strengthen social cohesion and inclusion by serving as meeting places for families, by contributing to the development of children's language competences (both in the language(s) of the service, and the home language(s) of the child, as further discussed in this report) and by enabling children's social-emotional learning (CEU, 2019a). A report by the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years (TFIEY, 2015<sup>1</sup>), on the topics of multilingualism, identity and diversity, states that "ECEC should be about offering safe places where children have their first encounters with the society they live in and where they are seen and respected for who they are" (p.2).

Research evidence shows, however, that only high-quality ECEC services can deliver such benefits (Sylva et al., 2015). The European Quality Framework (EQF) for ECEC (CEU, 2019a) provides a clear vision and statement on ECEC quality, based on five distinct dimensions (access, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, and governance and funding). While taken together, all of these dimensions are essential to ensuring high-quality services. The workforce in particular is, however, seen as crucial. To fulfil their professional roles in supporting children and their families, ECEC staff require complex knowledge, skills and competences as well as a deep understanding of children's holistic development and early childhood pedagogy. The professional development of staff is therefore key, as higher levels of training and better-supported practitioners correlate positively with the greater overall quality, richer staff-child interactions, and hence better outcomes for children (EC, 2021a; CEU, 2019a).

With an increasing number of children growing up in environments in which more than one language is spoken (Extra & Yagmur, 2011), ECEC is becoming, for many of these children, their first contact with the majority language of the country in which they live (Sawyer et al., 2017). This adds to the crucial role ECEC professionals play in a child's education, but it also brings specific challenges. Many ECEC staff feel insecure about their competences to respond to children's linguistic needs in multilingual environments (Michel & Kuiken,

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<sup>1</sup> The Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years (TFIEY) was an initiative led by Belgium's King Baudouin Foundation, together with operational partners the Centre for Innovation in the Early Years (VBJK) from Europe and the Migration Policy Institute from the USA. From 2013 to 2016, seven high-level meetings were organised, summarising the current state of research, providing testimonies of inspiring practices and policy debate on topics including accessibility; workforce preparation and curriculum; parental involvement; evaluation and monitoring; integrated services; and multilingualism and multiple identity. The sixth meeting, in June 2015, took place in Washington DC (US) and focused on the topics of multilingualism and diversity, with a preparation document (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2015) and a synthesis report (TFIEY, 2015). All TFIEY reports can be found at <https://vbjk.be/en/project/transatlantic-forum-on-inclusive-early-years-tfey>

2014; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2020). This indicates the need to optimise continuous professional development (CPD) concerning multilingualism in ECEC, which is the focus of this analytical report.

### 1.1.1 Multilingualism in Europe

Within the European Union [EU], there are 24 official languages. However, it is estimated that across EU territory, more than 60 local and regional languages and dialects are spoken, and that approximately 175 languages or dialects from countries outside Europe are in use (EC, 2014b). Two-thirds of Europeans speak more than one language: 35% use two languages; 21%, three languages; and 8%, four or more languages (Eurostat, 2019).

Different regions in Europe face very different realities in relation to multilingualism. While linguistic diversity is growing across the EU, certain regions are experiencing what has been called 'super-diversity'. This draws on an initial concept by Vertovec (2007), and describes a situation in which a majority of families in a local context use different 'minority' languages, and where 'the majority' is in fact made up of various minorities (Vandenbroeck, 2017). This is the case in the city of Brussels, presented in the case study from Belgium in Chapter 3, where almost 50 different languages can meet daily in ECEC settings. Other regions have experienced a recent growth in migration, resulting in a sudden influx of multilingual children into ECEC within a few years, as shown in the case study from Germany in Chapter 3. Forced displacements into Europe during recent decades have brought into ECEC settings a flow of refugee children with a wide range of experiences (both educational and personal) and languages. In addition to opportunities, this creates challenges for ECEC professionals to welcome such a sudden influx of diversity. Meanwhile, other regions within Europe experience specific multilingual situations linked to their geopolitical or historical background. In several European regions, for example, specific linguistic communities exist that speak a minority language that has no official status in the country, such as the Bayash language in Croatia.

It is clear that multilingualism is a reality, an aspiration and even a necessity for European citizens, but it is also a fundamental right (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). At European policy level, the reality of multilingualism is embraced and valued as a fundamental component of European culture. Consequently, Member States are recommended to enhance language learning from a young age onwards, and to promote multilingual education in ECEC (CEU, 2019b).

This position forms a solid and sufficient basis to support policies at national and local levels, and can provide guidelines for educational programmes and training for education professionals. However, it is noted that despite the many positive discourses about multilingualism and multiculturalism, Europe "still grapples to adapt itself to its vibrant demography" (Quintana Sarria, 2022, p. 1). Indeed, it appears that educational practices too often adopt a monolingual mindset that implicitly favours homogeneity and regards diversity (including multilingualism) as a problem to overcome, rather than a condition for learning (Ellis et al., 2010; Vandenbroeck, 2017). Language policies that include support for multilingual children within their educational trajectory still provoke tensions and debates, prompted by differences in beliefs and knowledge about multilingualism. As Van Avermaet et al. (2018, p. 2) state: "Education systems have mostly responded to the present climate of heightened linguistic diversity in polarized ways, which have left little room to negotiate and engage more fully with what it means to be a multilingual speaker in today's globalized world". Changes in multilingual educational policies and practices are therefore not self-evident, despite a supposedly positive view on multilingualism in Europe.

Two previous NESET analytical reports (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2017; Le Pichon-Vorstman et al., 2020)<sup>2</sup> have focused on multilingualism in primary and secondary

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<sup>2</sup> All NESET reports are accessible via <https://nesetweb.eu/>.

education systems. In these reports, the authors confirm that a multilingual stance within education systems is not yet a reality in most European countries. Even when innovative multilingual practices are in place, it appears necessary to continue adopting actions that recognise and value linguistic diversity. This is a challenge that must be tackled at various levels of the educational system: in concrete pedagogical practices, at the level of an institution's leadership, in the relationship between the school and the community, and in the pre- and in-service training of professionals. Moreover, support and valorisation for multilingualism must begin during early childhood, and continue throughout other levels of education (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2017; Le Pichon-Vorstman et al., 2020). This is in line with the recommendation of the Council of the European Union (2019b).

**In the present report, we therefore focus on multilingual children whose early language development, between 0 and 6 years old, occurs in different (home and institutional) languages.**

### 1.1.2 Early multilingualism

It is important to acknowledge that the concept of early multilingualism evokes different individual and societal realities, which can raise completely different issues. Much of the research on multilingualism and ECEC comes from bilingual contexts in the USA and Canada, which do not always fit with the more complex linguistic and cultural realities experienced in Europe. Early multilingualism can also be related to the awakening of children to different languages, or to the early learning of a second (dominant European) language. To avoid confusing the different facets of multilingualism, in this report, we focus on the pathways of children for whom one of their home language(s) differs from their institutional one(s) (see Box 1), which can be seen as a circumstantial multilingualism.

#### **Box 1. Home and institutional language(s)**

**Home language(s):** language(s) spoken in the family context. The term heritage language(s), mother tongue(s) can also be found in the literature.

**Institutional language(s):** official language(s) of education in a country, or societal language(s).

When developed at an early age, both can be considered a child's first language(s) (CEU, 2019b) as "language variety(-ies) acquired in early childhood (approximately before the age of two or three years) in which the human language faculty was first acquired".

In a specific country and context, certain home language(s) of children and parents are seen as more dominant (and may be pictured as 'majority' versus 'minority' languages). This influences the way in which they are perceived and received in ECEC centres (Le Pichon-Vorstmann et al., 2020).

The trajectory of each of these children, from home through the education system, including ECEC, is unique. It is recognised, however, that without the implementation of practices that value and support these different multilingual trajectories, the multilingual reality can reinforce social inequalities for most of these children (Aguar & Pastori, 2010). This is especially true when they are superimposed on other challenges relating to diversity within European societies (e.g. socio-economic background, level of parental education, etc.). A comprehensive understanding of these tensions and of current knowledge in this field is therefore essential to support decision-making and to foster debates through substantiated arguments.

### 1.1.3 Multilingualism in ECEC: a period of opportunities and challenges

The potential roles played by ECEC in the lives of multilingual children and their families are documented on several levels: supporting the development of language(s) through

daily interactions (Buysse et al., 2014); ensuring pedagogical and linguistic continuity with families and communities (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2017); and strengthening social cohesion and inclusion in a linguistically and culturally diverse environment (CEU, 2019b).

With regard to the development of language(s) among multilingual children, professionals working in ECEC have to undertake a dual function: offering high-quality interactions and fostering the dominant institutional language(s), while at the same time recognising, respecting and supporting the home language(s). At first glance, supporting the development of language(s) may appear simple: it requires *only* interactions in daily routines – listening, observing, being responsive, building conversations with children. Research has shown, however, that the quality of such interactions in ECEC centres is not always sufficient, and is even less so in settings welcoming a greater number families living in disadvantaged circumstances and in settings with higher levels of cultural and linguistic diversity (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2007; Hulpia et al. 2016).

At the same time as supporting children’s development and well-being, ECEC professionals must welcome children’s parents or caregivers, with whom they often do not share a language or culture (Aghallaj et al., 2021). While the importance of building relationships with parents in linguistically and culturally diverse contexts is widely acknowledged, the literature on parent-educator collaboration also highlights that this is far from straightforward (Halgunseth et al., 2009; Tobin, 2019).

Moreover, ECEC professionals may have to negotiate their visions and practices within a team that is itself sometimes culturally and linguistically diverse, as well as diverse in terms of beliefs and convictions. They must anchor their approach within a vision of horizontal continuity with other early childhood actors and communities (e.g. between health services and ECEC centres, or with a local library) and vertical continuity with the primary school environment, or within the ECEC sector (e.g. between a day care centre and a preschool). In the light of the ECEC sector’s contemporary struggles with hiring, motivating and retaining staff (EC, 2021a), this can be considered an additional challenge. ECEC professionals must also navigate between often-contradictory discourses about multilingualism within their society, and between differences in expectations between the ECEC environment and parents. They may be confronted by persistent beliefs about multilingualism (e.g. “exclusive exposure to the dominant language is better”) that are based on impressions or intuition, on a person’s own experiences of learning a second language as an adult, or on a person’s own experience as a multilingual child, whether or not this is in the context of wider social issues.

It is therefore unsurprising that many ECEC professionals express insecurity about their competences to respond to children’s linguistic needs within multilingual environments and to foster collaboration with multilingual parents (e.g. Michel & Kuiken, 2014). Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all answer to such questions. There are probably as many trajectories towards multilingualism as there are multilingual children: families, communities and the professionals around them must interpret acknowledged good practices in the light of the various factors that shape their own context: what is important for them and for the children – and above all, what is possible. Nonetheless, an array of good practices exists to respect and support the multilingual development of such children in all of the closely overlapping life contexts of their early years, from home to ECEC educational settings, which can be explored by trained ECEC staff (TFIEY, 2015).



#### 1.1.4 Continuous professional development in ECEC in the area of multilingualism

Knowledge regarding what is efficient in CPD and how to implement such initiatives has grown in recent years as a result of previous European reports (EC, 2021a<sup>3</sup>; Peleman et al., 2018; Romijn et al., 2021). This body of knowledge provides a better understanding on how to support individual competences and competences on the level of the entire system (Urban et al., 2011). CPD modalities that take this complexity into account have been researched and tested, and several projects in recent years have brought new insights on CPD practices.

Even so, transforming practices that support language(s) remains a challenge, with some initiatives in CPD demonstrating only moderate positive effects (Markusson-Brown et al., 2017) and/or difficulties in scaling up (Piasta et al., 2017). Indeed, although the criteria for effective CPD are documented, CPD initiatives for ECEC professionals still often take the form of *ad hoc* training (Citivillo et al., 2018; Schachter et al., 2019), a modality that is recognised as not being very effective when used alone (Peleman et al., 2018; Zaslow et al., 2010). This *modus operandi* is justified by financial and organisational considerations: one-time workshops are inexpensive and ECEC professionals can easily attend them outside work hours (Schachter et al., 2019). Thus, challenges remain in the development and implementation of effective CPD trajectories for ECEC professionals.

In addition, the focus of CPD documented in ECEC appears mostly to address inclusion and diversity in a broader way (e.g. EC, 2021b), indicating the need for a more specific look at multilingualism (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2018; Slot & Nata, 2019) that embraces the complex linguistic diversity in Europe. As such, the lessons learned from projects and studies on multilingualism and CPD need to be bridged together and, when needed, transferred to the European context.

#### 1.2 A conceptual framework for CPD initiatives

This report employs a conceptual framework for professional development initiatives based on a model by Romijn et al. (2021), designed within the context of the ISOTIS project<sup>4</sup> (see Figure 1).

While there are many theoretical models on CPD, most of these fail to capture the complexity of CPD in relation to supporting multilingual children and families in ECEC. While it recognises this complexity, the framework presented in this report remains 'simple' enough to be understood by various audiences (Boylan et al., 2018) and to guide decision-making processes. Furthermore, the framework moves beyond individual approaches to professional development by highlighting the importance of the system that surrounds individual ECEC professionals. This aligns with earlier recommendations from the CoRe study on competence requirements in ECEC, which emphasise the need for a competent

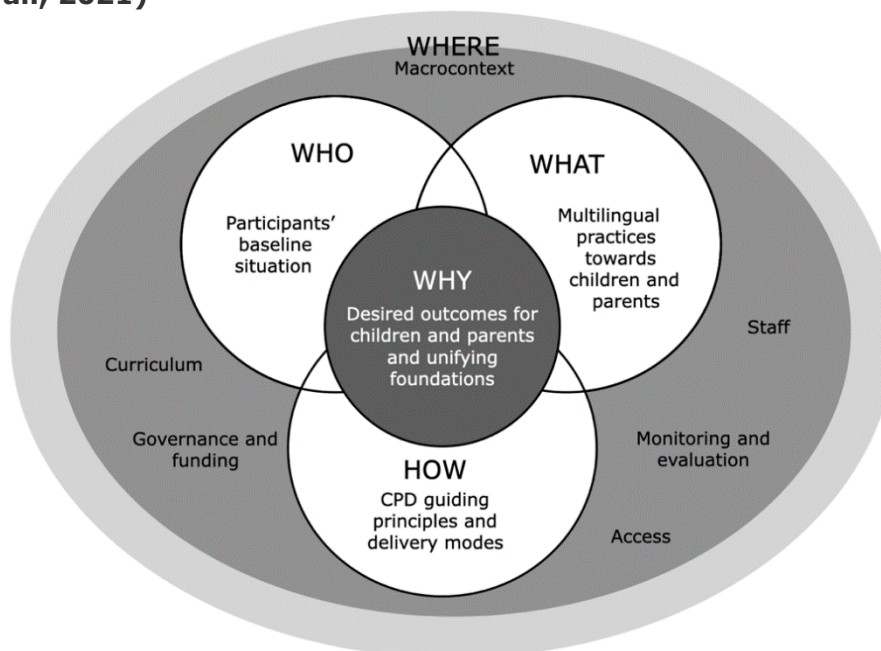
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<sup>3</sup> As part of the European Union strategic framework for policy cooperation in education and training, an expert group was set up (*ET2020 Working Group on ECEC*) to offer a forum for the exchange of experiences and best practices on the professionalisation of ECEC staff and leaders. Over a two-year period (2018-2020), the working group discussed how to advance high-quality ECEC, with a special focus on inclusion and staff development. The working group included national experts from 35 countries and representatives from eight European organisations with expertise in ECEC, as well as three European or international organisations. The group produced two reports: "*How to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff?*" (EC, 2021a) and "*Toolkit for inclusive early childhood education and care*" (EC, 2021b). They are available at <https://op.europa.eu>

<sup>4</sup> ISOTIS (*Inclusive Education and Social Support to Tackle Inequalities in Society*) was a three-year project carried out between 2017 and 2019 under Horizon 2020, coordinated by Utrecht University. It involved 17 partner organisations from 11 countries. The central goal of the project was to contribute to the development of effective policy and practice to combat educational inequalities and increase inclusiveness. In its approach, the project extensively combined research (interviews, literature reviews, inventory and case studies of promising programmes, etc.) with design-based research, including a focus on supporting families in linguistically diverse contexts. All reports can be consulted at <https://www.isotis.org/>.

system, without which we cannot expect individual competences to fully express themselves (Urban et al., 2011).

**Figure 1. Framework for continuous professional development (adapted from Romijn et al., 2021)**



The conceptual framework comprises five components, each headed by a question. Together, these form a step-wise, reflective path to developing CPD on multilingualism in ECEC, with each question pointing to an indispensable step. All too often, the planning and implementation of CPD begins by immediately defining its concrete modalities, based on the time and resources available within the organisation (Guskey, 2014). In contrast, the proposed framework first considers the goals of CPD (the 'why'), and a clear vision of quality practice with multilingual children and their families (the 'what') before moving on to practical arrangements. Each component/step is described below:

- **Why?:** *what goals or outcomes for multilingual children and families are envisioned by setting up CPD for ECEC professionals?*

The desired outcomes of a CDP initiative should always resonate with the reasons for which it is put in place, the motivation that animated and drove the implementation of actions: namely, the desired outcomes for multilingual children and families in ECEC. In the model, the 'why' can be understood as 'for what purpose?', and is explicitly placed at the centre, because CPD initiatives should always go hand in hand with a clear vision and a set of underlying values that drive the pedagogical work with multilingual children and families in ECEC. Furthermore, its central place also illustrates its connection with the particular political and macro context.

- **What?:** *which practices towards multilingual children and families can be implemented in ECEC centres?*

The 'what' in the model refers to the possible practices that can lead to the desired outcomes for multilingual children and families. Indeed, it is not only important to know why multilingual children and their families should be supported, but also what

good practices exist that can make this happen. Such practices provide both the direction and content for CPD trajectories.

- **Who?:** *who are the professionals targeted by the CPD? What are their needs, questions and experiences with multilingualism, and how can CPD pathways be tailored accordingly?*

When implementing CPD, the different initial characteristics of the participants must be taken into account, as these influence the engagement, motivation and learning trajectories of professionals. These characteristics may vary in terms of qualifications, experiences with multilingualism, knowledge about multilingual development, reflective skills and practices, etc. (Buysse et al., 2009; Peleman et al., 2022). As a crucial first step in designing targeted CPD for ECEC professionals, this should begin with a baseline assessment of what ECEC teams are already doing and what they are not yet doing, where they want to go, and how this journey is embedded into the functioning of the team.

- **How?:** *Which CPD delivery modes and strategies should be chosen?*

The 'how' refers to CPD strategies and delivery modes, as presented by Romijn et al. (2021) who used a classification of nine different delivery modes first proposed by Parkhouse et al. (2019). These are: workshops, action research, immersion experience, professional learning communities, coaching, self-rating, video feedback, critical friendships, and an online component. It is recognised that combining different modes into what is often called a professional development '*dispositif*' enhances the effectiveness of CPD, by reaching different learners in different ways and approaching different aspects of the content (e.g. reflecting on beliefs versus enacting a new skill in daily practice).

- **Where?:** *What macro-context conditions can strengthen – or hinder – CPD trajectories?*

Different contextual factors can allow or hinder the implementation and upscaling of CPD initiatives (EC, 2021a; Peleman et al., 2018; Urban et al., 2011). Each component of the model is influenced by the wider context, and cannot be treated completely separately. Context is not a fixed entity: it can be modified to allow the implementation of certain practices, or be changed in response to the emergence of new practices in the field (Coldwell, 2019). It is also a layered entity: ECEC centres are always embedded within an ECEC system, which has its own place within the wider health and education system, which is embedded within a country's policies, which are again influenced by the European context. The five dimensions of the EQF for ECEC (CEU, 2019a) offer an interesting starting point to look at macro-context conditions: access, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, and governance and funding.

### 1.3 Aims and research questions

The aim of the present NESET report is to formulate research- and practice-based policy recommendations on how to develop high-quality CPD to support ECEC professionals in their practices in relation to multilingual children and families.

More specifically, the report aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) What CPD trajectories can be developed to support ECEC professionals in working with multilingual children and families?
- 2) How can CPD aimed at supporting multilingual children and families be attuned to local, national and EU policies, in specific contexts and situations?

- 3) What recommendations can be formulated that will serve as important (first) steps in improving ECEC policies and practices to better support multilingual children and families?

Because working with refugee families in ECEC is also highly relevant, this report aims in addition to explore how its key findings and recommendations can apply to the development of CPD for working with multilingual refugee families and children in ECEC.

## **1.4 Methodology**

### **1.4.1 Literature review**

To address the first objective, a scoping literature review was carried out of research papers, policy studies and experts' recommendations on multilingualism and CPD in ECEC. The aim of this review was to explore up-to-date, relevant knowledge that could feed each of the reflective steps (see Section 1.2) proposed in the planning of CPD. The review was complemented by a document analysis of the project reports of relevant European projects at the nexus of ECEC, CPD and multilingualism. This work was supported by timely insights from experts, as well as interviews with key leaders from some of these projects. The findings of the literature review are outlined in Chapter 2.

### **1.4.2 Case studies**

Two in-depth case studies were carried out to gain an enriched understanding of the link between policies, practices and CPD aimed at supporting multilingual children and families in ECEC. Drawn from a selection of initiatives and projects from across Europe, the cases were chosen to illustrate the complexity and long-term decision-making processes necessary for the systematic implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC. As such, these cases were not necessarily selected to reflect 'best practices'; however, they do propose inspiring pathways from which to learn, in different national multilingual contexts.

Each of the two case studies addresses a specific topic, within a specific context, in order to answer the following research questions:

- A. In which ways can CPD on multilingualism foster positive collaboration between parents and ECEC settings?
- B. How can CPD strategies support ECEC staff to work with multilingual children and families in a context of super-diversity?

The analysis of the cases was mainly based on a semi-structured interview with one key expert closely involved with the case. This case study analysis was complemented with insights from local/contextual policy documents, reports, and relevant articles.

### **1.4.3 Experts' consultation on working with multilingual refugee families**

Due to the high relevance of the topic of receiving and welcoming refugee families in ECEC, the aim was to illustrate specific recommendations in relation to working with multilingual refugees and their families in ECEC. However, there is a lack of evidence and documented practices on this topic. To reflect on how to complement the present report with recommendations relevant to the situation of welcoming multilingual refugees into ECEC (and how to support ECEC staff in this task), a two-round Delphi procedure was used (see Chapter 5 for a more detailed description of the procedure and its findings).

## Chapter 2. Transforming ECEC practices to work with multilingual children and families

When implementing or adapting CPD initiatives, a common concern is how to rely on and use existing knowledge and lessons learned. This chapter addresses that concern by integrating current 'state-of-the-art' research findings and recommendations into the conceptual framework outlined previously in Section 1.2. The chapter follows the five steps of the framework:

- It begins by offering insights into the desired outcomes for multilingual children and families in ECEC, which will eventually become the final aims of the CPD (the 'why', Section 2.1).
- Then, a synthesis of the current knowledge on practices that support multilingual children and families is presented. Guidelines are offered on what content to include in CPD on multilingualism for ECEC professionals (the 'what', Section 2.2.).
- The specific content of the CPD must be adapted to the needs of the ECEC professionals targeted and to their actual knowledge, beliefs and existing practices. Elements to take into consideration in this regard are presented in Section 2.3 (the 'who').
- Section 2.4 draws on recent literature reviews and meta-analyses to describe the essential criteria for CPD to be effective in ECEC (the 'how').
- Lastly, Section 2.5 explores the macro-context conditions that have to be taken into account when implementing CPD on multilingualism in ECEC (the 'where').

At the end of each section, the key ideas are summarised in order to provide clear guidelines for policy-makers, local stakeholders, ECEC coordinators, pedagogical coaches and other involved parties when planning and implementing CPD on multilingualism in ECEC.

### 2.1 Why: desired outcomes for children and families

The ultimate objectives of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should be rooted in a vision of what is desired for (and by) multilingual children and their families. Seeking such a shared vision and values provides the strong foundation necessary for the implementation of CPD initiatives (EC, 2021a; Larue & Kelly, 2015). The more deeply rooted the objectives of CPD are in strong, well-defined values and principles, the easier it is to transform these objectives into action (OECD, 2017; Ragnarsdóttir, 2021; TFIEY, 2015). Furthermore, a unified and shared understanding of the desired outcomes leads to more concerted CPD actions, which are more effective than scattered actions by local actors (EC, 2021a).

A shared vision also helps to consolidate continuity which, as previously mentioned, is crucial for children's language development within a multilingual environment. Parents play a crucial role in both horizontal and vertical continuity. When all parties work together to develop a common, comprehensive approach to language development, children are given a sense of "linguistic security", meaning that they know what to expect in terms of language use and can feel comfortable using all parts of their linguistic repertoires (Hélot, 2003; Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2017).

This section therefore first seeks to synthesise state-of-the-art knowledge on multilingual development, which helps to clarify the desired outcomes for multilingual children and for multilingual parents. It then goes on to examine more concrete aspects of CPD development. This not only provides a foundation on which to define the focus of CPD, but also outlines the possible challenges that may be faced when discussing multilingualism with ECEC professionals or policymakers.

### 2.1.1 Outcomes for multilingual children

This subsection of the report first explains how consideration must be given to language development in all of a child's languages, both the home language(s), and institutional language(s). It then outlines how desired outcomes beyond language should also be determined, to include the child's socio-emotional development and well-being, and their participation and inclusion in daily interactions within the ECEC group. It concludes by showing how these outcomes are embedded within a holistic, strengths-based and rights-based vision for the child.

#### *Sustaining multilingual language development*

The role of language development in long-term learning is well documented. Longitudinal research has shown that early language development can influence later academic trajectories. For example, a meta-analysis from Duncan et al. (2007) showed that a child's language skills at five years old are the second most important predictor of academic achievement at grade 4 after mathematical skills. Oral language also supports precursors to literacy, including knowledge of the rules of writing and phonological awareness, skills that also correlate strongly with reading success in primary school (Justice et al., 2005). In the case of multilingual children, however, these findings are often misinterpreted. As outlined earlier in this report, the stereotypical multilingual child does not exist. There are many ways in which a child can grow up with his or her different languages. The social contexts in which a child lives and the interactions that take place within these contexts have an important influence on the language development of multilingual children. Consequently, one cannot simply apply theories of language development rooted in a monolingual mindset to the language development of multilingual children. Box 2 below provides further insights into multilingual language development.

#### **Box 2. Simultaneous and successive language acquisition**

To better understand multilingualism during the first years of life, two general trajectories are often highlighted:

- **Simultaneous language acquisition:** from birth, children learn several languages simultaneously, as they systematically come into contact with them. This simultaneous language acquisition broadly follows the same stages that monolingual children go through when acquiring their mother tongue. In the home environment, multilingual children are addressed in two (or more) 'first languages' simultaneously, which may include the majority language.
- **Successive language acquisition:** children learn the basics of their home language(s) from birth and come into contact with a second or third language only afterwards, usually when these children enter childcare or school. When acquiring this 'new' language, these children build on common features from their home language(s), as well as their other communication and cognitive skills.

Multilingual children acquiring language either simultaneously or successively who grow up in a home environment in which the institutional language is not present will experience this language in the ECEC service as a new language. This is not the case for children who grow up in a multilingual family context in which the dominant language of the society is part of the linguistic repertoire in the family. For the former children, the ECEC service provides space for institutional language learning without the pressure of evaluation or impact on learning in other academic subjects. As such, ECEC plays an important role in ensuring that multilingual children (and their parents) have positive first experiences with the institutional language.

#### **The earlier the better?**

It is essential to mention that the principle of 'the earlier, the better' is not necessarily universal when it comes to learning a new language. A recent study in Sweden, for example, shows that the specific age at which children start to develop a new institutional language, if this occurs before the age of 6 years old, has no impact on their proficiency in that language later in life (Smolander et al., 2020). In the same vein, according to some experts, when a child begins to acquire a second language during the first three years of life, they may later be considered simultaneously bi- or multilingual (see Paradis et al., 2011). In practical terms, this means there should be no pressure to begin introducing children to a new institutional language as early as possible. Evidence now suggests that a solid basis in a home language, even when this is spoken exclusively during the early years, provides an excellent (and sufficient) foundation for learning a later institutional language (Cummins, 2021).

Studies on bilingually raised children provide important empirical insights that can help to disentangle persistent myths about multilingualism (De Houwer, 2018):

- First, all bilingually raised children will eventually learn the institutional language, without negative consequences for their language development. Even when language learning difficulties or cognitive disabilities are present, evidence now suggests that multilingualism does not increase a child's difficulties in learning the institutional language. As such, it does not prevent a multilingual environment being maintained for the child (Thordardottir et al., 2014).
- Also, it is perfectly normal that both languages do not develop equally for a bilingual child. Rapid attrition and reacquisition of a language is possible for all bilingual children (De Houwer, 2018). There appears to be consensus that being multilingual does not necessarily mean perfect and equal mastery of all the languages one uses (Francot et al., 2020). Multilingualism refers more to multilingual repertoires in which each language is developed to a different level, depending on usage and exposure. This understanding opens the door to valuing and legitimising all languages and dialects, regardless of their societal status, and acknowledges the many possible paths towards multilingualism without judgement from parents or professionals' prior choices. Instead of developing each language perfectly, the goal should be to make the most of each child's linguistic repertoires (TFIEY, 2015).
- It has also been documented that most bilingually raised children adapt their language to the person to whom they are speaking. They tend not to use a language that their interlocutor does not understand. Even so, all bilingually raised children mix their languages in some contexts (e.g. they use utterances with words from the two languages interchangeably, often termed 'code-switching'). This does not alter their language development or their awareness of languages.
- In multilingual development, the assumption that greater exposure to a language is always better is not always correct. While exposure – or input – is undoubtedly an important feature of language acquisition, the relationship is not linear and depends on many factors (Beller, 2008). In a scoping review, Bialystok (2018) considered the case of bilingual education in both institutional and home language. Compared with monolingual education, the quantity of language input in the institutional language is consequently 'less' in bilingual education. However, Bialystok's results show that by grade 6, bilingual children who received bilingual education in preschool score more highly on language evaluation in the institutional language than bilingual children whose educational trajectory from ECEC onwards was monolingual. Moreover, the development of the home language was also better supported in bilingual education, which brings an additional positive impact. These findings illustrate that offering input in a child's home language in ECEC and school

does not jeopardise institutional language development – and may, in fact, have the opposite effect.

**It is therefore important to remember that making space and time for home languages in ECEC, even when this reduces the overall amount of input in the institutional language, is not detrimental to children’s acquisition of the institutional language.** On the contrary, experts in the field of linguistics agree on the importance of sustaining home languages in ECEC, and recommendations in every report on the subject are unanimous on this point:

- For example, Aguiar and Pastori (2010) recommend to “build on partnerships and professionalism to design culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate policies supporting heritage languages.”
- Similarly, Herzog-Punzenberger et al. (2017) argue that “the proactive and strategic use of learners’ first languages and the use of culturally embedded tasks give pupils access to higher conceptual and cognitive tasks.”
- This is also embedded in Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989): “The development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own.”
- The importance of sustaining home languages in ECEC is also reflected in the European Council’s recommendation for a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages (CEU, 2019b): “Strengthening the competence in the languages of schooling as the basis for further learning and educational achievement in school” and “Learners’ entire linguistic repertoire can be valued and supported in school and also used as a pedagogical resource for further learning of all learners.”

When language policy is developed on the basis of incorrect assumptions about multilingual development, this can lead to the prioritisation only of immersion in the institutional language, which enforces the monolingual orientation already inherent in many European countries’ educational systems (Gogolin, 1997). The positive impacts of welcoming, valorising and using a child’s home language in ECEC are documented, although empirical evidence could be further reinforced (Beller, 2008). In addition, the inclusion of a child’s home / non-dominant language should not be restricted to oral communication, but should include written material so that multi-literacy is also developed and maintained. This also offers opportunities to develop the home language, which can sustain complex language comprehension and use later in the child’s school career.

**In summary, the planning of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should begin with a vision of language(s) development that does not focus solely on promoting institutional languages alone. CPD should also aim to foreground, support and promote home language(s).**

### **Socio-emotional development and well-being**

In addition to linguistic and academic objectives, the socio-emotional and identity aspects of languages should not be overlooked (Aguiar & Pastori, 2010). ECEC centres are indeed also spaces for developing one’s identity – or, indeed, identities (Wagner, 2020). The



founding principles of the DECET network<sup>5</sup> express this as follows: “Constructing together early childhood education services and communities where everyone feels that he/she belongs, is empowered to develop the diverse aspects of his/her identity” (DECET, 2007). Research findings confirm that the well-being of children is supported by CPD that focuses on socio-emotional functioning through interactions (Brunsek et al., 2020). It is shown that building strong and sensitive relationships with children is particularly crucial for children from socio-economically disadvantaged contexts, or from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For example, studies demonstrate that without strong emotional support, such children benefit far less from high-quality language support, especially those who are multilingual (Gosse et al., 2014; Willard et al., 2021). Socio-emotional development and well-being are thus closely linked with the development of language(s).

Experts nevertheless point out some pitfalls. In certain contexts, some children may not wish to be seen as multilingual, and may prefer instead to merge into the dominant monolingual identity (Aleksić & García, 2022; Wagner, 2020). There is also the risk of the ‘essentialisation’ of a language or culture, which limits language and culture to broad stereotypes (e.g. the typical food or clothes from a country), even when such perceptions emerge from good intentions (Davoodi et al., 2020). This means that supporting the socio-emotional development and well-being of multilingual children must be embedded within a wider vision of inclusion, as well as openness to children’s and parents’ voices about what multilingualism, well-being and identity mean to them.

**In summary, pursuing objectives that relate to children’s well-being – both as a goal in itself and as the starting point for the development of language(s) – should be included in a CPD trajectory, alongside objectives in relation to language(s).**

### **Inclusion and participation of every child**

Alongside long-term objectives in terms of language development, CPD initiatives focusing on multilingualism must include short-term goals that focus on the here-and-now experiences of children in a given ECEC centre.

**The engagement of children in meaningful interactions** should be a goal in itself, to support active participation in a group. This is in line with initiatives that focus on the development of language skills through high-quality and meaningful interactions for children, with the aim of promoting communication and engagement, as further discussed in the subsection 2.2.1 (OECD, 2021; Sabol et al., 2013). The more a child engages in meaningful interactions, the more she/he communicates, the more she/he has the opportunity to use her/his language abilities, the more she/he receives adapted feedback from adults. Thus, this creates a virtuous circle, as output – the language use – and feedback are important features of language development (Beller, 2008; Hoff, 2020; Roberts & Kaiser, 2011). The 2021 OECD Starting Strong report<sup>6</sup> stated that these meaningful interactions should be a central pillar of an ECEC curriculum, which could be supported through the initial training and continued professional development of ECEC staff (OECD, 2021).

It is important to mention that while there is wide consensus in favour of such an approach to professional practices in ECEC, divergence can be seen between initiatives to support language development that hail from different pedagogical currents (for a discussion on this topic, see the OECD’s Starting Strong report VI, 2021). For example, in some CPD

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<sup>5</sup> The DECET network (*Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training*) was a consortium of organisations from eight countries (Belgium, Ireland, Spain, UK, Greece, Netherlands, Germany and France) which worked together to promote the place of diversity in ECEC. Information about the DECET network can be found at <https://vbjk.be/en/publications/making-sense-of-good-practice>.

<sup>6</sup> The 2021 OECD Starting Strong VI report: *Supporting Meaningful Interactions in Early Childhood Education and Care* can be consulted at <https://www.oecd.org/>

initiatives, the short-term objectives for language development are very specific and refer to measurable aspects of language development such as vocabulary, grammar, narrative skills and phonological awareness (Müller et al., 2020). On one hand, a strong focus on vocabulary has shown promising results (Larson et al., 2020). On the other hand, such a focus can also limit space for interactions and child-centred practices. Thus, while these approaches may be complementary, a clear focus on children's participation in daily interactions needs to prevail in order to support child-centred practices (Lerikkanen et al., 2016). Such practices facilitate children's use of all of their communicative resources, their whole repertoire of languages, and their non-verbal communication skills.

**In brief, although desired outcomes for the development of language(s) are a central focus within a CPD trajectory, they should go hand-in-hand with the aim of sustaining the here-and-now experiences and inclusion of multilingual children in meaningful interactions in ECEC.**

### **A holistic, strengths-based and rights-based vision for the child**

Important values and perspectives underpin the pedagogical endeavour to socialise children into the institutional language necessary for academic and social purposes, while simultaneously building on their home language(s). In the reports and research papers reviewed for this study, approaches to multilingualism in ECEC are mainly rooted in a holistic, strengths-based and rights-based vision of the children:

- **Language as part of a holistic vision for child development:**

The summary report from the TFIEY (2015) states that a holistic approach to early learning is necessary, and assessment tools and systems should reflect this important philosophy. This approach recognises that 'language' is present in all spheres of a child's development, and that it interacts with all domains (e.g. motor, cognitive, socio-affective, social) and cannot be isolated. In primary education, every teacher can be considered a language teacher. Translated to the context of ECEC, it also means that every activity, every moment of care, every interaction is an opportunity for the child to explore his or her language abilities and for all adults to support the child's language development (i.e. the core ECEC professionals, as well as ECEC assistants and even other staff such as the cook).

Practices that follow a holistic approach to child development are more child-centred than adult-directed practices. Such practices are a precondition to promote contexts for meaningful interaction that correspond to children's interests and facilitate their engagement. They also align with the concept of 'educare' (Van Laere & Vandebroek, 2017). For example, the PEPELINO portfolio<sup>7</sup> (Goullier et al., 2015), is a reflective tool developed at the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe to support initial training and CPD. It places a strong emphasis on adopting practices that reflect a holistic vision for child development and a child-centred approach, before moving on to more specific competences regarding multilingualism.

- **A strengths-based and rights-based approach:**

Herzog-Punzenberger et al. (2017) observed that linguistic skills and abilities receive insufficient attention as a positive resource in European education systems, and that a shift in orientation is needed towards the valorisation of children's multilingualism. No matter what language or its position in the social context of a country, every language that a child brings to the ECEC centre should be considered an enrichment of its diversity. It is equally important to view a child's full linguistic

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<sup>7</sup> The PEPELINO portfolio can be found on the European Center for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe website at <https://www.ecml.at/>

repertoire as a strength, beyond their mastery of the institutional language. To adopt an approach that valorises a child's home language and culture, it is necessary to understand and believe that the non-dominant language is not a threat or obstacle, but instead a resource and an opportunity (Michel & Kuiken, 2014). The baseline is to acknowledge that maintaining and nurturing home language(s) is a fundamental right of children and families (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; Romijn et al., 2021).

**In summary, CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should start with a clear vision for multilingual language development, in which language(s) development is indivisible from the development of the whole child (a 'holistic vision'). Multilingual children should be seen as competent, and all the resources they bring into the ECEC setting should be recognised and acknowledged (a 'strengths-based vision'). Lastly, multilingualism needs to be conceptualised as a basic right (a 'rights-based vision').**

### 2.1.2 Outcomes for multilingual parents

Putting forward a vision for multilingual development in ECEC when planning CPD not only requires considering the outcomes for multilingual children, but also the outcomes for multilingual parents (Salem et al., 2020). Building reciprocal partnerships with parents is not a new recommendation in the field of ECEC. It is well documented that investing in strong, safe, warm relationships between staff-children-parents can result in higher well-being and better outcomes (TFIEY, 2015). To overcome obstacles that may arise when working with a diverse group of children, it is necessary to engage with their families and communities to pinpoint needs and challenges with regard to ECEC involvement (CEU, 2019a; OECD, 2021). This type of partnership is included within the ECEC curriculum in most European countries (OECD, 2020). Within its social mission, ECEC also seeks to create a reciprocal connection between parents and the ECEC centre. For many multilingual parents, the ECEC centre becomes the first place in which they must negotiate between their home language policy and the language policy of the centre.

As previously noted, ECEC professionals may feel insecure about their role with regard to multilingual parents, as well as their ability to collaborate with parents who do not share the institutional language. This may cause tensions and may be challenging for the professionals (Michel & Kuiken, 2014; Aghallaj et al., 2021). For this reason, there is a need for more specific guidelines on how to collaborate with multilingual parents, beyond general recommendations such as 'investing in strong partnerships with parents'. This subsection of the report highlights two important elements to consider when determining more specific goals of CPD with regard to collaborating with multilingual parents: 1) giving parents confidence in their choices and competences, and 2) facilitating the agency of parents. It then goes on to explain how and why collaboration should be approached from a social justice perspective, in order to strive for inclusion and participation, both in the ECEC centre and in society.

### Confidence in choices and competences

Just as ECEC professionals may feel insecure about their role with regard to multilingual children and families, so do many parents (Aghallaj et al., 2021). Indeed, many parents are confronted with ambiguities concerning their role with regard to language development. They have to balance their ability and desire to transfer their home language(s) to their children with their wish to give their child the best possibilities to learn the institutional language of the country, while taking account of a predominant monolingual gaze in society that may consider these goals to be incompatible (Sevinç & Dewaele, 2018). Consequently, making decisions about family language policy is not self-

evident, and may cause parents stress or doubt. These decisions will also need to be revisited as their children grow and circumstances change.

Because there are many different paths to multilingualism, each of which is valid and valuable, **ECEC professionals should find ways to validate parents' choices and give parents confidence in their abilities to support their child's language(s) development.** Research shows that there is no 'best' way to raise a multilingual child; what is important is that parents are comfortable with the use of languages inside and outside the family. It is also important to realise that not every family can freely choose which language(s) to use. For example, families that have recently migrated cannot simply 'choose' to use multiple languages in the family context. The linguistic context of the family thus determines multilingual parenting. For example, the Erasmus+ project Planting Languages<sup>8</sup> (Planting languages, 2021) proposes discussion grids containing open-ended questions and tools, to help ECEC professionals in creating a non-judgemental space for parent to 'draw' and explain their linguistic home context. One specific desired outcome for CPD could thus be to facilitate such an exchange with parents.

### Agency

In many cases, parents who have only recently arrived in a new country make decisions about their children's education and care based on limited and flawed information, including word-of-mouth advice from other recently arrived parents (Crosnoe, 2007). They combine this information with prior experiences of education and care in their home country – experiences which, unfortunately, often do not apply to their new setting (Tobin, 2016). By making parents feel welcome, by creating places for dialogue and a trusting relationship, ECEC professionals can allow parents to “express their needs and enable services to take these into account when tailoring provision to the demands of local communities” (EC, 2021b, p. 89). The forming of strong reciprocal relationships between parents and ECEC professionals is far from straightforward, however, especially in contexts with high levels of cultural and linguistic diversity. Barriers and challenges exist on both sides, which can complicate the establishment of a partnership in which the multilingual upbringing of the child is shared. As discussed above, this remains a challenge, and may require ECEC staff to reach out to parents proactively using interpreters, family liaisons and culturally trained staff to ensure that they are able to communicate meaningfully with teachers and other staff members (TFIEY, 2015).

A specific desired outcome regarding agency can be to enhance parents' involvement with ECEC activities, in order for them to get to know the setting better, gain confidence and eventually ease in expressing their needs, as documented in case of the TRANSLA programme<sup>9</sup> in Luxembourg (Aleksić, 2022).

### Collaboration with multilingual parents from a social justice perspective

The Council of the European Union recommends that ECEC centres should strive for equity, irrespective of a family's language background (CEU, 2019a). ECEC centres can indeed create an atmosphere that enables parents to feel recognised, welcomed and valued, and to feel comfortable in exchanging and negotiating ideas and proposals, when this atmosphere is rooted in a social justice perspective (DECET, 2007). This requires an honest and open relationship with parents, starting from the conviction that the parents and ECEC professionals are acting as partners to best support both this relationship as well as their shared interest in the child's development and well-being (Conus & Ogay, 2018).

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<sup>8</sup> All tools developed during this project are available online via <https://www.plantinglanguages.com/>.

<sup>9</sup> For further information about this project, visit <https://transla-program.org/>.

To achieve this, ECEC needs to act as an agent of change for equitable educational opportunities. However, shifting the perspective of ECEC to one based on social justice through CPD alone is not easy (Citivillo et al., 2018). There are additional avenues in which such values can be encompassed, such as ECEC mission statements and curricula. For example, in Iceland the ECEC curriculum stipulates that “preschool practice and methods shall be characterised by tolerance and affection, equality, democratic cooperation, responsibility, concern, forgiveness, respect for human values” (Ragnarsdóttir, 2021, p.411).

**In summary, CPD for ECEC professionals should emerge from a social justice perspective and should aim to reinforce collaboration with multilingual parents. It should provide support to ECEC professionals to select specific goals that strengthen parents’ confidence in their own choices, as well as their agency.**

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## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING CPD ON MULTILINGUALISM IN ECEC**

### ***Step 1: Defining desired outcomes for multilingual children and families***

Reflecting on the desired outcomes for multilingual children and families (the ‘why?’ question) should always be the starting point when planning CPD on multilingualism in ECEC. This reflection should be grounded in up-to-date knowledge about multilingualism in the early years, and should consider the following guiding principles:

- Desired outcomes for children’s language development in ECEC should aim to develop both the institutional language and the home language(s), as there is growing evidence that supporting the multilingual development of children by creating opportunities to integrate their home language(s) into ECEC can support institutional language development.
- Alongside language(s) outcomes, CPD should also pursue objectives relating to children’s well-being and sustaining their participation and inclusion in daily meaningful interactions in ECEC.
- CPD objectives should be nested within a holistic, strengths- and rights-based vision for child development, one in which multilingual children are seen as competent and resourceful. CPD should also support such a vision.
- Specific desired outcomes for collaboration with parents should be part of any CPD initiative concerning multilingualism in ECEC. CPD should therefore strengthen ECEC professionals’ ability to reach out to facilitate collaboration with multilingual parents, seeking to enhance parents’ confidence and agency with regard to their educational choices for their children.
- From a social justice perspective, the inclusion and participation of multilingual parents should also be promoted, both in the ECEC centre as well as in the community.

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## **2.2 What: practices working with multilingual children and families**

This section outlines practices that professionals can implement in their ECEC centres to support multilingual children and families, and ultimately, to pursue the desired outcomes

(see Section 2.1.) The supportive practices described in this chapter can also be seen as intermediate outcomes in a CPD trajectory on multilingualism in ECEC (Coldwell & Simkins, 2011).

Throughout the subsections that follow runs a common thread: the fact that there is no single 'best' practice when working with multilingual children and their parents. It is well established that contextual factors influence both the implementation of practices as well as their effects (Romijn et al., 2021). Therefore, the most successful practices are those that are best suited to the particular context, that align with the team's vision, and wherein the unique story of each multilingual family is acknowledged. There are many paths to multilingualism and just as many ways to combine specific practices based on different contextual and personal factors.

Furthermore, there is no simple answer to the question that always arises when working with multilingual children and families: which language(s) should ECEC professionals use in their interactions? Language choices in an ECEC centre should always be embedded within a language policy. This is defined as the convergence of "three interrelated but independently describable components: practices, beliefs, and management" (Spolsky, 2007, pp. 3-4). 'Language practices' refer to the behaviour of ECEC professionals – in other words, "what they actually do" with languages. 'Language beliefs' relate to what professionals think is appropriate or desirable language use. 'Language management' refers to attempts to modify the practices or beliefs of the ECEC team (Spolsky, 2017). According to Van Oss et al. (2021), the vertices of the language policy triangle are significantly and positively interrelated, but are also truly distinct from each other. In brief, language choices are not only based on enabling the best outcomes for a child's language development, well-being and future school achievement, but also depend on individual professionals' proficiency in languages, experience with multilingual practices, beliefs, etc. In addition, they are always influenced by language policies at the macro level.

The subsections that follow provide an overview of ECEC-practices that support multilingual children, and those that support multilingual parents. The practices described with regard to multilingual children focus mainly on how to create meaningful, high-quality interactions, while the practices described that are aimed at multilingual parents focus on creating a welcoming environment, nurturing dialogue, and enabling opportunities for reciprocal collaboration in ECEC.

### **2.2.1 Practices in relation to children**

There is consensus regarding the importance of offering meaningful, high-quality interactions to all children in their daily life in ECEC (see, for example, OECD, 2021). This encompasses three building blocks: 1) creating meaningful opportunities for interaction, 2) sustaining reciprocal verbal interactions, and 3) offering high-quality support for language development. Here, we explore each of these building blocks, linking them to possibilities to welcome and to include home language(s) within ECEC.

Overall, many studies have found that meaningful, high-quality interactions have positive effects on the institutional language development of multilingual children, including receptive and expressive vocabulary and oral language growth (Buysse et al., 2014). As such, sustaining these interactions in ECEC should be central to CPD on language and multilingualism, and, as explained in this subsection, should not be overshadowed (as is still often the case) by a focus on 'structured language activities' (OECD, 2021). Therefore, it is first essential to review the scientific evidence about the importance of such meaningful, high-quality interactions.

#### **Creating meaningful opportunities for interaction**

Meaningful interactions capture the child's attention and interest and meet her/his need and desire to communicate. For the youngest children in ECEC, attention primarily focuses on what is happening in the moment. For example, something may catch their eye and cause them to exclaim in surprise, thus expressing a desire to communicate. By closely observing the child – her/his utterances, words, glances, sounds or gestures – and by being responsive to these attempts at communication, ECEC professionals can adopt 'child-centred' practices.

A child-centred approach in ECEC is found to be a stronger predictor for children's development in later school years than adult-directed practices (Lerkkanen et al., 2016). Moreover, child-centred practices have been proven to be "equally beneficial for the academic skill development of children with varying initial skill levels" (Lerkkanen et al., 2016, p. 151). Being responsive, in this context, means providing prompt and relevant answers to the child's interests and attempts at communication. If quantity of input is important in language development, the adult's verbal answers facilitate greater language development when they are related to the current focus of the child's attention, particularly through authentic and shared moments (Cabell et al., 2013). High potential also exists for meaningful interactions during moments of care, when children's engagement can be high, such as during one-to-one interactions (e.g. eating, diaper changes, getting dressed).

As simple as this might appear, it can actually be quite counter-intuitive, as it requires a mindset of supporting children's language development by observing first instead of talking. Observation - and remaining silent at times - allow the child to take more of a lead in the interaction (Wasik & Hindman, 2018). To initiate interactions, multilingual children who are in the process of learning the institutional language may require ECEC staff to pause and listen for longer. Creating interactions with less time pressure also facilitates multilingual children to use a wider portion of their communication repertoire.

What is meaningful to the child is also what resonates with his or her own experience. ECEC professionals can intentionally connect what is happening within the group, and with children's previous experiences in the group and in their family's daily lives. For multilingual children, this includes linking their ECEC experience with their linguistic and cultural heritage, with the aim of employing linguistically and culturally responsive practices, i.e. practices that provide children and families with opportunities to build on their rich personal experiences, underlying knowledge and resources and worldviews, often collectively referred to as funds of knowledge (Larson et al., 2020). Cultural knowledge, prior experiences and children's frames of reference can be used to make encounters more relevant (Romijn et al., 2021). Studies have also shown that children – and parents – who feel that intervention strategies align with their cultural beliefs, values and practices are more inclined to engage, which can ultimately improve all of the desired outcomes (Larson et al., 2020). More concretely, Buysse et al. (2014) state that the starting point should simply be taking an interest in the languages and culture of the children and being curious about the unique trajectories of children and their families, rather than clustering children into linguistic or cultural subgroups. A first and simple step can be to make children's home language(s) visible in ECEC centres, as explained in Box 4 below.

#### **Box 4. Making home languages visible and welcome in ECEC centres**

A wide variety of strategies can be used to demonstrate that home languages have a place in an ECEC setting. These includes actions and objects which indicate that all languages are welcome, and that development of a child's home language is of equal importance to their development of the institutional language. Creating opportunities for children (and their families) to interact with these languages is also crucial. From a wall with words in different languages, to children's books, games and songs in different languages or dialects, there are many creative possibilities to do so.

For example, the Erasmus+ Project PEACH<sup>10</sup> developed a "Guide for educators – How to support multilingual children". This included a comprehensive list of suggestions to welcome languages into the ECEC setting (Carton & Rosenback, 2021). Some materials can also be co-created with parents and/or be used as a bridge with the child's home context (see, for example, the Erasmus+ project AVIOR<sup>11</sup>; Kambel, 2019). The webpage of the TRANSLA project<sup>12</sup> also provides an array of ideas to make an ECEC centre more multilingualism-friendly and exploit the creative potential of diversity (Aleksić, 2022).

Meaningful interactions also nurture children's participation in exchanges with the adults around them. As explained in Section 2.1, the greater a child's participation, the more she or he is to initiate conversations, interact with others and practice her or his language skills. Such participation also creates opportunities for adults to provide adapted feedback, and allows the child to become an agent in her/his own language development.

Learning, through CPD, to create opportunities for meaningful interactions with multilingual children does, however, bring challenges beyond just reproducing a proposed activity from a toolkit. It involves developing a reflective view of what happens during a day in ECEC, the opportunities for interactions that occur, and the possible barriers to such interactions that are present. In-depth discussion and team reflection must take place regarding how to (re-)structure routine activities to favour moments where professionals can immerse themselves in interactions with children. This will be further discussed in Section 2.3.

#### **Sustaining reciprocal verbal interactions**

The concept of interaction encompasses the idea of reciprocity and relation. The term reciprocity refers to the adult's ability to engage with the child in sustained conversations (meaning at least two back-and-forth exchanges), mutual turn-taking, and goal-oriented exchanges (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). Adults can extend interaction with practices that facilitate communication, such as commenting and repeating, as well as asking open-ended questions (sincere questions, to which the adult doesn't have the answer, and questions that invite the child to respond with more than a simple "yes" or "no") (Dockrell et al., 2015; Girolametto et Weitzman, 2002; Piasta et al., 2012). Such practices help to create multi-turn conversations in which other language development practices are embedded. Such a recommendation (i.e. supporting language by engaging children in conversation) may appear intuitive at first glance, but it has been shown that multi-turn conversations are rare in ECEC centres (Cabell et al., 2013; Peleman et al., 2019). They are even rarer with less verbal children such as babies, young toddlers and children learning a new language (Pentimonti & Justice, 2010). To sustain interactions with these children means that professionals must also use non-verbal communication, in order to detect subtle intentions and plan moments when the child feels comfortable and secure. To optimise such opportunities, professionals can, for example, reduce the time pressure during

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<sup>10</sup> More information on this project can be found at <https://bilingualfamily.eu/>.

<sup>11</sup> Further information and deliverables from this project can be found at <https://avior.risbo.org/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://transla-program.org/>



activities or propose them to smaller groups. These small adaptations can be essential in enhancing peer interactions in groups where most of the children do not share the same home language, or do not use the instructional language at home.

Affective aspects of interactions are also essential. These facilitate the child's access to opportunities for development, but they also support children's well-being. Emotional support from adults is essential for multilingual children to experience a 'linguistic security' (see Section 2.1) that allows them to explore a new language or make use of their home language competences. The ability to develop relationships with children that are both developmentally supportive and caring are listed as important competences of ECEC professionals (EC, 2021a).

While those interactions often occur in the institutional language, home languages can be used to feed exchanges. Larson et al. (2020) are clear in their review: "Given the success of interventions which support the home language, all early childhood educators may consider supporting the home language directly in the classroom" (p. 175). Although giving time and space to home languages in ECEC centres does not hinder the objective of institutional language development (as noted in Section 2.1), the higher the number of languages present in a single setting, the greater the need for ECEC professionals to be conscious, intentional and reflective in their work, as ECEC professionals often cannot master all of the children's home languages. Such practices can begin with continuous questioning: *Where can I use home language(s) to support engagement, well-being, interaction and children's development?* (Buysse et al., 2010). Box 5 explores various strategies to include home languages. Nevertheless, professionals may feel insecure when interaction occurs in a home language that they do not fully understand. Experimenting progressively with multilingual practices may be one of the keys to overcoming reluctance, by observing children's reactions to such interactions. This could become an explicit focus for CPD.

### **Box 5. Using home languages in ECEC centres**

Every action in multilingual ECEC practice can contribute to making children feel that all languages matter, including the child's own home language(s). Moreover, an array of practices can be used to actively integrate home languages into ECEC settings and to help children to rely on their whole linguistic repertoire. These practices can be described under the umbrella term 'translanguaging' (Duarte, 2020).

The initial definition of translanguaging refers to the deliberate practice of alternating languages, so that one language reinforces the other, in order to increase understanding as well as children's use of both languages (Williams, 2002, as cited in Duarte, 2020). While code-switching occurs naturally in a multilingual population, translanguaging is a more intentional use of all available language repertoires. Positive effects on promoting home languages, maximising engagement and language learning have been documented (Duarte, 2020; Mary and Young, 2017). For example, the use of home language(s) to add definition and conceptual clarification seems to positively impact the development of children's vocabulary (Buysse et al., 2014). Also, the flexible use of different languages during book reading seems to promote more metalinguistic talk (Wagner, 2020). Translanguaging practices take various forms, from acknowledging languages – which does not require ECEC professionals to be proficient in those language(s) – to scaffolding languages present within the group and using them for content and language learning for children, which in turn need to be supported by teachers fluent in all of the languages used (Duarte, 2020).

The peers of multilingual children are also an important source of interactions in multiple languages. It has been shown that group dynamics, influenced by the proportion of peers with similar languages, facilitate language development among children (Washington-Nortey et al., 2020). It is beneficial to increase teachers' awareness of the possible

benefits of peer interactions, and how they foster complex interactions among multilingual children.

Within the TRANSLA project<sup>13</sup> in Luxembourg, a CPD trajectory was proposed to ECEC professionals that focused on translanguaging, bringing this to light in relation to various aspects of CPD and transferring it into practice (Aleksić, 2022; Aleksić & García, 2022). An 18-hour professional development course in translanguaging pedagogy was offered to 40 teachers over six months. The results showed a positive change in attitudes towards children's home languages, children's language development in both languages, and children's well-being. The project also led to the development of illustrated books and examples of activities to facilitate ECEC professionals' first steps in translanguaging.

### **Supporting the development of language(s) through high-quality interactions**

Interactions also need to be of high quality, especially for children learning an additional language in ECEC. High quality of interactions starts, as previously noted, from a high level of emotional support, adult responsiveness, a child-centred focus, and reciprocal back-and-forth exchanges. Moreover, these interactions must also be adjusted to the child's level of language development. Lower-level verbal input is not enough to stimulate the child's learning. Input that is overly complex may, however, not benefit the child either (Ramirez et al., 2021). Adjustment to the child's level of language development should be situated in the proximal zone of the child's development. Recognising children's individual diversity in language development trajectories is essential when selecting the appropriate practices of adjustment for a particular child at a particular moment in his or her development (Buysse et al., 2014). Examples of specific adjustments for multilingual children include visual cues and the use of routines to support understanding, using home language(s) to nurture relationships and interactions, and reinforcing conceptual comprehension.

To sustain high-quality interactions that scaffold languages, ECEC professionals can also use higher-level language supporting practices in conversations. These include reformulating, refining concepts, expanding on the child's utterances, providing new information, and making inferences. Practices supporting emerging literacy in different languages can also be sustained, as explained below in Box 6. Frequent use of such higher-level scaffolding practices is closely linked to children's language and cognitive development (Cabell et al., 2013; Sabol et al., 2013). It has been shown, however, that their use in ECEC is inconsistent, with wide variation between contexts. CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should therefore focus specifically on the use of high-level scaffolding practices to foster the development of language(s) (Piasta et al., 2012).

#### **Box 6. Multiliteracy**

Literacy practices in ECEC contexts, such as interactive story reading, have received considerable attention, as systematic reviews and meta-analyses have confirmed their positive effects on the development of language and pre-literacy in more than one language (Skibbe et al., 2011; Wasik et al., 2016; Wood et al., 2021). Positive impacts on the later development of literacy skills in a child's home language, termed 'multiliteracy', has been increasingly documented. It is essential to consider bridging well-documented emerging literacy practices with multilingualism, in which public libraries and early literacy programmes can become allies.

Several projects have explored emerging literacy practices in different ways:

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<sup>13</sup> Further information about this CPD trajectory can be found at <https://transla-program.org/>.

- In the Erasmus+ project Kamilala<sup>14</sup> (derived from the work of the French DULALA organisation), a Japanese-inspired *kamishibai* storytelling technique was used to support ECEC professionals' engagement with multilingual practices (Kamilala, n.d.).
- The Pro-M project<sup>15</sup> (Pro-M, 2022) on multilingualism in the early years (0-3) in the Flemish Community of Belgium, partnered with the umbrella organisation of public libraries to develop specific training for library workers and volunteers to foster multiliteracy practices.
- The COMPARE project<sup>16</sup> in Luxembourg documented collaborative literacy practices between parents and ECEC centres (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2021; Kirsch & Bebić-Crestany, 2022).

### The need for an explicit focus on meaningful, high-quality interactions in CPD

Meaningful, high-quality interactions should provide multilingual children with a secure space in which they can experiment with the institutional language, receive contextualised input and feedback to refine their skills, and build on their full repertoire of languages (Duarte, 2020). This means that no matter what activity the children are participating in, from reading a book to having their diaper changed, the activity itself is less important than the quality of the interaction taking place. This principle should always be explicitly incorporated into CPD that relates to language development. The principle is, however, still not always self-evident, even where a strong consensus exists with regard to the primary importance of meaningful, high-quality interactions.

For instance, many ECEC programmes, interventions, and curricula are highly activity-based, placing too much emphasis on the activity itself rather than on its underlying purpose. A systematic review of studies on language-focused interventions for young children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Larson et al., 2020) showed that 34% of the interventions fell into the category of activities providing explicit instruction on targeted skills, and 32% focused on specific interactive book reading interventions. A further 31% of the studies explored more general effects of a bi-or multilingual curriculum, proposing various levels of language immersion, while only 5% were interested in naturalistic, routine-based interventions. The implementation of a prescribed 'language' activity or programme may fail to provide sufficient freedom, time and space for professionals to follow children's interests and inputs. It may also detract from the importance of reflective practice. It is therefore essential to remember that the primary aim of ECEC activities should be to create a rich environment in which high-quality interactions can be grounded. Activities themselves should not overshadow the importance of interactions.

Activities can, however, offer a structure to exploring and testing out multilingual practices. Shared interactive book reading is a good example, as it occurs in an authentic context that offers opportunities to interact with children and to make connections between the story, the characters' feelings and the children's own experiences. In such an activity, ECEC professionals can use multiple strategies to increase the participation of each child and support multiliteracy skills (Romijn et al., 2021).

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<sup>14</sup> For further information, see <https://kamilala.org/>

<sup>15</sup> Information on the project, as well as training modules (in Dutch), can be accessed at <http://pro-mproject.be/>.

<sup>16</sup> The project website can be accessed at <https://compare.uni.lu/>.

**In summary, meaningful, high-quality interactions support the development of language(s) of all children, including multilingual children, and should therefore be central to CPD on multilingualism in ECEC.**

### **2.2.2 Practices in relation to/with parents**

In this subsection, we highlight three specific practices directed towards multilingual parents that can be targeted in CPD trajectories on multilingualism in ECEC: creating a welcoming environment, engaging in dialogue with and about language(s), and creating opportunities for collaborative projects or activities.

Practices to support collaboration with parents in ECEC have been widely documented. For example, the European commission's toolkit for inclusive ECEC<sup>17</sup> (EC, 2021b) identifies various competences for working with parents. These range from developing trusting relationship with families, to treating families respectfully and on the basis of their needs, as well as involving parents on a continuous basis and even supporting parents in their parenting role. The toolkit provides a wide range of practical measures that have been shown to be successful in encouraging parent involvement in ECEC (e.g. inviting parents to join in some activities, creating a specialist role to support outreach, sharing the ECEC schedule with parents, engaging in inter-agency collaboration, etc.), as well as examples of inspiring initiatives and reflective tools that can be adapted to different contexts.

For many ECEC centres and programmes, however, building relationships with parents continues to present challenges such as overcoming 'unidirectionality' – namely, that ECEC professionals often appear to define the goals and direction of parental involvement in a one-sided way, leaving little room for input from parents themselves. This frequently causes interactions between parents and professionals to stop at basic information-giving. Consequently, parents are often limited or restricted in their ability to co-create or co-construct pedagogical practices (Zucker et al., 2021). With parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, this is even more challenging (Tobin, 2016). The present situation thus indicates the need for increased support for ECEC professionals to implement high-quality collaborative practices with parents.

#### **Creating a welcoming environment**

As outlined in the European Quality Framework on ECEC (CEU, 2019a), the accessibility of an ECEC centre is essential to its quality. Several barriers can prevent parents from feeling welcome and participating in the ECEC centre (Tobin, 2019). If families feel they are not fully respected for who they are, or if they feel they cannot truly express their concerns or questions about their child, they will feel unwelcome and uncomfortable. This, in turn, may be transmitted to the child (Dusart et al., 2020).

In this sense, creating a multilingualism-friendly environment in which parents feel welcome, along with their linguistic and cultural histories, is a first aspect to consider in CPD on multilingualism and its relationship with multilingual parents.

*"First contacts with parents are very important for us. Often, we don't know in advance what language a particular person speaks. If we see that someone speaks French, we will involve one of the colleagues who is really French-speaking to translate. At that point, you feel that this makes parents calmer and a little less nervous because they can explain in their own language what their relationship is with their child and what the relationship with us might be in the future. Once in our group I had a mother who found it difficult to make contact with us and by offering a pot of coffee every day, and simply sitting next to it, I was able to build*

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<sup>17</sup> The Toolkit for inclusive ECEC can be downloaded from <https://op.europa.eu>

*a relationship of trust with that mother.*" (ECEC centre coordinator in the Flemish Community of Belgium, Ubuntu, VBJK, 2017).

Such issues can also easily be addressed by presenting professionals with examples of existing practices from other ECEC centres. For example, by showing how ECEC centres display different languages on the walls of the centre, or how they demonstrate curiosity by asking for and learning words in children's home language(s), etc. Some centres explicitly make linguistic and cultural matches between staff members and parents to facilitate communication with parents who have a different linguistic repertoire. These actions are not only appreciative towards the various identities of families; they also send a strong message to the ECEC team. Moreover, adding such examples to an in-service CPD trajectory can help teams to reflect on, acknowledge and document their multilingual practices.

### **Engaging in dialogue with and about language(s)**

The active engagement of professionals in communication or dialogue with parents creates a foundation for ongoing partnerships (De Gioia, 2015). Dialogue should be bidirectional. It should begin with valuing listening to parents, without judgment or expectations, and be fully aware of present power imbalances. Not only might this allow ECEC centre staff to learn from families' values, beliefs and languages, which may influence their practices towards children, it is also an opportunity for them to express positive attitudes towards language and multilingualism (Larson et al., 2020; Mary & Young, 2017). Moreover, it can also help professionals to build an image of a competent and unique child, and to adjust their multilingual practices as necessary. For parents who speak a minority language, this can be very important, as they may not always feel confident in their approach to the multilingual upbringing of their children (Eisenchlas et al., 2013).

Such a goal can, however, still be challenging, especially when cultural and linguistic differences add to the complexity of the situation. A thin line exists between engaging in dialogue with parents and wanting to 'teach' parents what to do. In some 'parent involvement programmes' offered alongside ECEC services, parents' involvement is often instrumentalised in furtherance of predefined educational goals (Larson et al., 2020; Zucker et al., 2021). ECEC professionals must also be aware that they have a proactive role in this dialogue: it is up to them to take the first step.

Certain prejudices, doubts and insecurities on the part of both parents and professionals can also impede good communication. In a report by Children Crossing Borders, a five-country project on parents' perspectives and participation in ECEC, Tobin (2016) describes the difficulties encountered in listening and responding to the voices of parents from diverse backgrounds. Even when the ECEC centre has a multilingual language policy, staff still need to be very attentive and receptive to parents' insecurities about how the policy might affect their child's trajectory in learning the institutional language. Parents are not always comfortable about initiating exchanges, and may have preconceptions of what ECEC professionals expect of them in terms of their children's language development. It is not necessarily for lack of questions that parents fail to voice their concerns or queries (Tobin, 2016; Van Laere & Vandenbroeck, 2017). As noted previously, multilingual parents may be confronted by dilemmas and questions concerning their own family language policy, and may not know how to collaborate with ECEC institutions to support the multilingual trajectory of their children (Seele, 2020). Since the situation regarding home language(s) is different for each family and not all parents have the same ideas or wishes about their child's language education, it is important that ECEC professionals actively explore the ideas, expectations, and questions that parents have with regard to language. In this way, the ECEC centre and the parents can shape the child's upbringing together. Ways to communicate through parents' various home languages should also be explored, as discussed in Box 7.

Successful parent-staff communication cannot be achieved overnight, and tensions and disagreement can be expected, as parents and professionals may not share the same ideas and values concerning the (multilingual) upbringing of the child. To address potential conflicts, time and space should be created in ECEC in which disagreements have a right to exist (Vandenbroeck, 2009). Dialogue must be ongoing with all parents, not just during formal introductory talks or evaluation interviews, but also at informal drop-off and pick-up times, organised parent activities, and at informal moments when parents are present in the ECEC centre. It must also occur on a regular basis, because as the children grow up, the family context and parents' life situation will also change. CPD should therefore not only focus on formal communication, but also on informal and ongoing moments.

### **Box 7. Communication between ECEC staff and parents who do not share a common language**

Some multilingual parents are able to use the institutional language in addition to their own home language(s). Other parents can only express themselves well in one language that is other than the institutional one. Multiple possibilities thus exist with regard to which languages are used with parents, and these should first be openly negotiated with them: seeking a common communication language, supporting communication with visuals and gestures, or offering them a space in which to practice their own 'institutional language skills'. However, the truth remains that when all parties do not share a common language in which everyone is sufficiently competent, communication can become a struggle.

While taking into consideration the whole language repertoire of both ECEC professionals and parents (e.g. looking for words that may be alike in both languages), gestures and pictograms are commonly used to support communication. See, for example, the recently developed bank of pictograms with translations in Ukrainian<sup>18</sup> (EC, 2022). Pictograms can help to clearly inform the other party about the main topic of a discussion, which has been shown to support mutual comprehension. Pictograms are not, however, always easy or comfortable to introduce into dialogue without altering the complexity of the themes involved in discussions with parents, and there are some caveats to this practice:

- Professionals should not assume that every parent understands every pictogram. Pictograms can be ambiguous and may be interpreted differently.
- There should not be an 'overload' of pictograms. The message should remain clear without appearing to be a simplification, which undermines the conception of the competent parent.
- When professionals use pictograms, it is best to provide a short explanation for parents, with an interpreter, if possible, about the meanings of the images used. It is also important to regularly ask parents whether the use of pictograms actually helps them.

In some contexts, where one home language is shared by a large community, providing ECEC staff with the opportunity to learn the basics of this language can be proposed, as is the case in Croatia, where a specific community speaks Bayash, a dialect that does not have official status. Open Academy Step by Step and REYN-Croatia developed an in-service Bayash language course. The programme's baseline proposal is: *what if one step towards members of this community can help them take four steps towards the institutional language?* By learning some basic expressions and linguistic gestures in Bayash, ECEC educators improve their exchanges with parents (REYN-Croatia, n.d.).

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<sup>18</sup> A database of English-Ukrainian pictograms can be found at <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/>

Working with interpreters and using translation technology are also often cited as communication methods, applications such as Google Translate<sup>®</sup> or Google Lens<sup>®</sup>, DeepL<sup>®</sup> and Say hi<sup>®</sup> are becoming more efficient in translating written or spoken languages sufficiently correctly to enable parents and staff to understand one another. In parallel, communication with parents is also becoming increasingly mediated by technology, through SMS, What's App<sup>®</sup> chat groups and class/group-based applications. On the one hand, this may mirror and provide a bridge to the use of technology at home, which may also be used for various translation and language-learning purposes (Vaiouli & Obojska, 2022). On the other hand, the use of technology in ECEC remains quite undocumented: questions such as how messages are understood and received, the quality of communication, possible misunderstandings, ethical aspects, etc., remain unexplored in research.

### Creating opportunities for collaborative projects or activities

Some ECEC centres also offer collaborative projects that allow parents to use and valorise their own language skills. For example, in Luxembourg, ECEC centres are encouraged to develop collaborative practices with parents by inviting them, for example, to read stories or sing songs in their home language with the children (Aleksić, 2022; Kirsch & Bebić-Crestany, 2022; Multilingualism matters, 2022). Such activities also take place in Belgian day care centres, as one staff member explained: "We do activities around multilingualism. In reading, for example, a facilitator reads a book in Dutch and that same book is then read by a mum, for example, in Turkish or in another language. And with songs, we do the same. We sing songs in Dutch and then sometimes we ask parents to sing along in their own language." (VBJK, 2017). Similarly, under the auspices of the Erasmus+ AVIOR project<sup>19</sup>, board games have been co-developed with parents in several languages, for use both in groups and at home (Kambel, 2019). In another project studied by Young & Hélot (2007), parents in France were asked to propose activities, while educational professionals suggested ways to make those activities interactive. By inviting the parents' suggestions, the professionals recognised the parents' cultural and linguistic capital and their right to provide this to their children, even in a country with a predominant monolingual mindset. Small-scale collaboration can also facilitate daily interactions, such as asking parents to share some words (in phonetics) in their home languages, which ECEC educators can include in their routines and thus facilitate children's transition.

Thus, CPD can present ECEC professionals with different examples of activities to engage multilingual parents. Attention should also be given to preparing such activities: how to discuss with parents their role in interactions with children; the use of different language(s); the role of the ECEC professional, etc. (Kirsch & Bergeron-Morin, 2023).

**In summary, just like multilingual children, a stereotypical 'multilingual parent' simply does not exist. Consequently, there are no ready-made answers regarding how to approach those parents in ECEC. As such, the objectives of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC can contribute to creating a shared culture involving mutual dialogue, in which parents feel welcome, are encouraged to express their ideas and needs, and where they are invited to collaborate using their own resources. Throughout the CPD trajectory, ECEC professionals should be encouraged to critically question their own assumptions and adopt a perspective of curiosity and openness in dialogue with multilingual parents. Listening and conversational skills with parents should also be explored, in relation to both formal and informal moments of communication.**

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<sup>19</sup> <https://avior.risbo.org>

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## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING CPD ON MULTILINGUALISM IN ECEC**

### **Step 2: Selecting ECEC practices in relation to multilingual children and families**

This section of the report presents an array of practices that can be sustained through CPD (the 'what') in relation to working with multilingual children and their families in ECEC. The selection of practices to be promoted through CPD can be informed by the following guiding principles:

- The ECEC language-supporting practices presented in CPD should centre around creating opportunities for meaningful, high-quality interactions in daily life in ECEC.
  - ECEC professionals should experiment with different possibilities for integrating home language(s) into meaningful, high-quality interactions in ECEC settings, taking advantage of the language repertoires of staff, parents and children.
  - When multilingual activities are explored during CPD, it is important to make sure that the activities themselves do not overshadow the importance of child-centred interactions.
  - Practices to enhance collaboration with multilingual parents can be supported through the creation of a welcoming environment, engaging in constant dialogue, and seeking opportunities to collaborate in ways that ensure parents' competence and expertise are valorised. In a CPD trajectory, existing examples from other ECEC centres about these practices can be used to initiate reflection.
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## **2.3 Who: constructing meaningful CPD for and with ECEC professionals**

This section of the report is divided in two subsections. The first of these identifies the CPD needs of ECEC professionals by documenting their baseline situation, while the second discusses complementary professional outcomes for professionals and teams.

Thus, this section explores ways to acknowledge and valorise the competences that ECEC professionals bring to the CPD process. Moreover, it includes reflection on how to align the content of CPD with what professionals need to explore – in terms of knowledge, beliefs and attitudes – in order to implement the practices described previously in Section 2.2 with regard to multilingual children and families. Lastly, the section also touches on issues related to motivating ECEC professionals to participate in CPD.

Both in this section and throughout the report, we use 'ECEC professional' or simply 'professional' to refer to anyone in ECEC who works directly with children and parents. This includes core practitioners, assistants and centre leaders.

### **2.3.1 Documenting the baseline situation of ECEC professionals**

Before designing specific CPD activities and deciding on the content to be addressed, an in-depth (co-)documentation of the targeted ECEC professionals' baseline situation should be performed. Various aspects of this baseline situation that should be considered are described in this section: initial training and prior professional development activities; individual and team experiences with multilingualism; existing practices and beliefs about multilingualism; and actual collaboration with external partners.

A better understanding of the existing situations of prospective participants can allow CPD content to be adjusted to the specific needs and questions of the ECEC professionals concerned. Moreover, this can give professionals the agency to co-determine their goals, which has been shown to be more effective in achieving the desired outcomes of CPD (EC, 2021a; Portner & Portner, 2012; Zaslow et al., 2010).

### **Initial training and professional development**

Initial ECEC training courses across Europe vary in terms of their length, content and focus – not only between countries, but also within a single country. Scrutinising the initial training of ECEC professionals can help to structure the further development of knowledge and practices. However, the impact of initial training on both the quality of interactions with multilingual families and beliefs about these issues is not straightforward (Schachter et al., 2016). Other contextual and personal factors are also important to consider. Among these are personal motivation and professionals' own engagement in their professional development trajectory or career path, as well as their disposition towards learning and their openness to change (Coldwell & Simkins, 2011). How ECEC professionals view their role in the development and well-being of young children and families will also affect the outcomes of CPD in this regard.

A baseline assessment can also help in understanding how learning and professional development already occurs within a team, both in general and specifically with reference to multilingualism. Although ECEC professionals consider team discussions on the topic of multilingualism to be very important, they do not feel this is an easy topic to raise. As such, integrating CPD content into existing modes of team reflection, learning and training can enhance its sustainability and efficiency (see Section 2.4). For example, in the PRO-M project in Belgium, a 'train the trainer' workshop and guide<sup>20</sup> on how to support ECEC professionals in approaching multilingualism were developed for an existing and growing network of pedagogical coaches. The guide proposes an array of possible CPD reflective

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<sup>20</sup> This guide (in Dutch) is available for download at <https://reflectiewaier.vbjk.be/>.

activities from which coaches can choose in order to enhance their role in supporting ECEC professionals (Hulpia & Peleman, 2022).

How leadership is structured within an ECEC organisation is also an important consideration, as leaders serve as mediators between policy and practice. Centre leaders also play a vital role in facilitating the transfer of what has been learned in a CPD trajectory into the ECEC centre. Specific CPD trajectories can also be developed that are tailored to the needs of ECEC leaders.

### **Individual and team experiences with multilingualism**

Every ECEC professional will bring her or his own personal and professional experiences with multiculturalism and multilingualism into their CPD trajectory. Trainers must be aware of the influence of these experiences on the beliefs ECEC professionals hold about multilingualism. It has been shown having multilingual experience oneself is linked with holding positive attitudes and practices towards home languages in ECEC (Peleman et al., 2022). Taking into account the various experiences each member of the ECEC team may have with multilingualism can thus help to open up discussions on the topic.

The linguistic and cultural diversity within a team can also be regarded as a strength to build upon. Having a team that reflects the diversity of the population it serves can foster culturally sensitive relationships, help in recognising the barriers faced by multilingual families, and facilitate communication through shared, common languages (EC, 2021b). This may reduce the possible disconnect that sometimes exists between culturally and linguistically diverse families and ECEC professionals (Aghallaj et al., 2021).

Establishing and valorising linguistic diversity within a team also raises the question of language proficiency, in terms of the development of both home language(s) as well as institutional language(s). Because the institutional language used to interact with children may be an ECEC professional's second or third language, the question then arises as to what level of proficiency is sufficient to foster high-quality interactions. In some countries, a minimum level of B1 or B2 (cf. Common European Framework of References) in the institutional language is required. According to a study in the Netherlands, 50% of ECEC staff members did not meet this level (Droge et al., 2010, as cited in Michel & Kuiken, 2014). Specific language courses were then offered in parallel in another CPD trajectory. However, studies show that the positive effects of having a diverse team may outweigh the negative effects of having a team with varying levels of proficiency in the institutional language. In fact, a diversity of speakers, including native speakers of the child's home language or the institutional language, can ensure the overall quality of language input for a child (Hoff, 2020; Struys, 2022, as cited in VBJK, 2022)

### **Existing practices and knowledge concerning multilingualism**

An analysis of the ECEC situation prior to the implementation of a CPD initiative should also include an enquiry into the ECEC professionals' existing beliefs and practices. This view can be guided by the following questions (Lagarde 2020, as cited in Bergeron-Morin, 2022).

- To what extent do professionals already implement the practices targeted?
- What practices are absent, or are not sufficiently present?
- Why are such practices not currently employed?
- What resources and support would professionals need to implement these practices?

Answers to these questions can help to identify needs such as new knowledge or a better mastery of specific skills, but also uncover whether specific conditions are required in the working environment in order to implement the practices targeted, or whether a shared vision must first be strengthened. This information can thus highlight various aspects on which CPD initiatives should focus first – which may not relate directly to multilingualism itself.

Knowledge is also often filtered through one's beliefs about multilingualism and multiculturalism (Citivillo et al., 2018; Wieduwild et al., 2021). ECEC professionals may have different beliefs about learning multiple languages in early childhood, or about multilingual parents; such beliefs may not necessarily be aligned with research, as discussed in Sections 2.1 and 2.2. Unsubstantiated beliefs may, however, be reinforced by monolingual trends in society and by the fact that, as shown before, some research evidence is counterintuitive (Choi et al., 2021; Haukås, 2015). Beliefs about language use and learning are shaped by multiple factors, including language history, national policies, a professional's own linguistic and social ideologies, pedagogical practices, working experience, and personal experiences (Pettit, 2011; Kirsch & Aleksić, 2021). Being mindful of these factors is helpful when making initial assessments to determine what CPD programmes would be useful and appropriate, as will be discussed in Section 2.4.

### **Collaborating with external partners**

Working with multilingual families should not be the responsibility of ECEC centres alone. A recent study in the Wallonia region of Belgium showed that as collaboration between different actors (health and social services, community services, ECEC centres, schools, municipalities, etc.) increases and the services become more integrated, ECEC becomes more accessible for families, and more parents' voices are better heard – reducing the 'invisibility' of certain families in the social and educational systems (Mottint & Dusart, 2022). The ways in which early childhood services are integrated, and the role ECEC professionals play in such integration, should be part of the reflection within a baseline study (Herzorg-Punzenberger et al., 2017; Vandekerckhove et al., 2019).

It is also important to look at all levels and determine who the key figures are at each level of a system; what role does each one play, and what is necessary for such a role; how can external partners be informed about or involved in CPD initiatives? There are many possibilities for achieving this, including organising monitoring committees, inviting managers to participate, and actively rallying the involvement of stakeholders such as representatives of governing bodies for the ECEC sector, as such actors are not (yet) highly involved in CPD initiatives (Romijn et al., 2021; Zaslow et al., 2010).

**In summary, CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should, as far as is possible, address the actual needs of professionals. The content of CPD should be negotiated between practices that are shown by research to be effective (see Section 2.2.), and the needs and preferences of the ECEC professionals concerned. Making a conscious analysis of the baseline situation in order to better understand the participants and their contexts will not only lead to the CPD being better aligned with the ECEC professionals' actual needs, but it will also give the professionals a strengthened sense of agency, and will lead to greater motivation for them to participate. ECEC professionals have a variety of experiences with multilingualism, and these experiences should be considered as resources to build upon; however, this requires strong leadership to create an atmosphere in which professionals feel sufficiently safe and confident to express their thoughts and ideas.**

### 2.3.2 Defining complementary professional outcomes for ECEC staff and teams

In addition to considering ECEC professionals' baseline situation, complementary outcomes can be formulated for the proposed CPD. These complementary outcomes target individual professionals' reflective skills, as well as the capacity of individuals and teams to play a leadership role in multilingualism issues within ECEC (Coldwell & Simkins, 2011). Such professional outcomes should be defined together with the ECEC professionals themselves, as this increases the agency, motivation and ownership of the practitioners (Portner & Portner, 2012).

#### Consolidating individual and team-based reflective practices

As highlighted in Section 2.2, a common denominator in the implementation of ECEC practices aimed at children and parents is the importance of reflection. Because practices with multilingual families are embedded in personal and societal beliefs, and because there is no single strategy or best practice that fits all children and families, an essential element of all CPD is providing opportunities for ECEC professionals to engage in explicit reflection (Citivillo et al., 2018). Moreover, some experts believe that critical reflection is a skill that must be mastered before professionals are able to critically examine their own belief systems (Romijn et al., 2021). Faced with a range of possible practices, the ECEC professional must frequently make choices, experiment with them, and evaluate their effects on children and parents in order to make timely and adequate adjustments. In addition to personal reflective skills, however, ECEC professionals also require support, as outlined by Silva et al. (2020): "what is needed is a constant support for staff to reflect on their daily practice, on their assumptions, on their ideas, to put them in dialogue with the ones of families and find contextualised answers" (p. 100).

Multilingual practices should also be negotiated among colleagues, within the framework of an ECEC language policy. This requires the development of skills needed to reflect, discuss and challenge beliefs held within the team. Participating in discussions on this topic can lead to a greater awareness of one's own background and beliefs, as well as identifying ways to benefit from the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of all team members.

#### Collaborating on language policies and ECEC curriculum

As previously noted, practices that are aligned with language policy and the ECEC curriculum, both at local and national levels, have a higher chance of being implemented successfully. However, practices can, in turn, also drive changes in policies. For example, in Dublin, Ireland, a pilot project on *functional multilingual learning* in preschool and primary school illustrated that experimenting with new practices and documenting the outcomes of such projects can create changes in policies at a higher level (Little & Kirwan, 2015, as cited in TFIEY, 2015). An ECEC centre's language policy will be more firmly rooted in supportive practices towards multilingual children and families if it is negotiated and developed with all staff. And just like family language policies, an ECEC centre's language policy also needs to be flexible enough to evolve, depending on the staff and how they experiment with new multilingual experiences (TFIEY, 2015). In other words: what could also be targeted as a secondary goal of CPD is how ECEC professionals can become more involved in transforming their ECEC centre's policies.

**In summary, parallel professional outcomes for ECEC professionals may also be defined when designing CPD on multilingualism in ECEC. First, it may be necessary to sustain skills in individual and team-based reflection. These may need to be enhanced in order for ECEC professionals to fully engage in CPD. Second, supporting ECEC professionals to co-develop language policies might allow ECEC policies to become better aligned with a positive view of multilingualism.**

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## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING CPD ON MULTILINGUALISM IN ECEC**

### **Step 3: Considering the needs of ECEC professionals**

The development of CPD initiatives requires the inclusion of content that is adapted to the baseline situation of the participants, in terms of knowledge, skills, practices and beliefs (the '*who*' question). Such a baseline analysis also needs to assess what practices are already in use, and what obstacles and resources are therefore present. CPD content that is finely tuned to the actual needs of ECEC professionals can strengthen participants' motivation and engagement in transforming their practices.

- While specific additional knowledge about multilingual development might be needed, CPD also needs to support reflection on professionals' existing beliefs and attitudes towards multilingualism.
  - Existing (multilingual) resources within a team should be systematically mapped and valued.
  - Mapping existing CPD, leadership and collaborative processes allows CPD initiatives to be anchored into the context of a particular ECEC centre. This improves the chances of CPD being implemented sustainably.
  - Parallel professional outcomes should also be defined for, and together with, ECEC professionals, in order to consolidate individual and team-based reflective skills, as well as their engagement in co-defining centre-based language policies.
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## 2.4 How: CPD delivery modes and learning strategies

*The participation in in-service training (or professional development) is the most consistent predictor of quality staff-child interactions, and also has direct links to child development and learning. (OECD, 2018, p.79).*

The previous three sections have described the first steps to be taken in establishing CPD on multilingualism in ECEC. They emphasise the importance of first reflecting on the vision of the desired outcomes for multilingual children and families. To properly embed this vision and the desired practices into a CPD path, it is also important to conduct an analysis of the baseline situation so that the CPD can be tailored to the concrete needs and experiences of the participants. Only once these steps have been taken can the delivery modes used for CPD and its practical format be considered. These delivery modes are therefore the topic of this section.

In recent decades, much research has been conducted on CPD in ECEC. The majority of studies have concerned language and literacy initiatives, but few of these have specifically considered multilingual children (Markussen-Brown et al., 2017; Eurofound, 2015; Schachter, 2015; Zalsow et al., 2010). We can, however, broadly affirm that, when it includes key, evidence-based components, CPD can positively affect ECEC professionals' language support practices and foster better relationships with parents (Markussen-Brown et al., 2017; Schachter et al., 2019).

This section summarises and reviews the documented criteria that should be considered in order to deploy CPD effectively. Following this, a selection of possible CPD delivery modes is described.

### 2.4.1 Criteria for effective CPD

Effective CPD is that which can transform ECEC practices and impact its quality – which, in turn, enhances positive outcomes for children and their families (Eurofound, 2015). The criteria that should be considered in order to design and implement such effective CPD are well documented, although they are not always easy to systematically follow. This is mainly due to logistical and financial considerations, and will be discussed further in Section 2.5.

What appears crucial, however, is not to overlook these criteria when selecting delivery modes for CPD – especially when it deals with a phenomenon as complex as multilingualism.

Based on a review of the available literature, we have identified seven criteria required for CPD to be effective. CPD can have an impact on the quality of ECEC practices when:

1. It constitutes a long-term, sustainable trajectory.
2. It is planned at system level, and requires collaboration between different levels.
3. It provides different types of knowledge, i.e. both theoretical and practical.
4. It addresses ECEC professionals' beliefs.
5. It features core learning strategies: reflection and enactment.
6. It includes provisions for individualised feedback.
7. It encourages and supports professionals' involvement and agency.

Each criterion above is described in further detail in the sections that follow.

### A long-term, sustainable trajectory

Professional development is a lifelong journey that begins with initial training and induction into the field (EC, 2021a). This is further developed through in-practice learning experiences (i.e. continuous professional development).

There is consensus that isolated, one-off training experiences are unlikely to result in changes to practices. Available research shows that CPD on language support strategies in ECEC needs to be of sufficient duration and intensity to have an impact on practices; however, a precise indication of what duration and intensity are sufficient has yet to be determined. According to some studies, initiatives longer than two years show greater effectiveness (Eurofound, 2015), while focused CPD can be more efficient in the short term (Fukkink & Lont, 2007). Lastly, CPD on complex topics such as multilingualism requires more time to bring about changes in practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Based on the current evidence, policymakers are advised to develop long-term learning strategies (EC, 2021a). Mapping existing CPD trajectories and building on these by adding specific content about multilingualism, can therefore be an essential stepping-stone, as mentioned in Section 2.3. This offers greater potential for sustainable implementation than developing brand-new initiatives.

### **Planned at system level, and requiring collaboration between different levels**

For an individual professional, being surrounded by a competent system is recognised as a precondition for individual competency (Urban et al., 2011). Indeed, an ECEC staff that feels supported is more inclined to experiment with new practices. In this regard, CPD should be planned at system level. This will establish or embed individual competences within a supportive system so that what is learned at an individual level can be transferred to the team level.

In fact, CPD should aim to reinforce collaboration at all levels. Looking for modalities that allow exchange among staff members within a team, as well as between different organisations, is highly recommended (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; EC, 2021a; Urban et al., 2011; Zaslow et al., 2010). The increasingly widespread implementation of professional learning communities is an example of this (see previous NESET report on professional learning communities in ECEC<sup>21</sup>, Sharmahd et al., 2017).

### **Providing theoretical and practical knowledge**

Offering evidence-based knowledge is widely recognised as a key feature of CPD, as this can provide a team with a shared conceptual foundation and common vocabulary, as well as enhancing participants' engagement in CPD and supporting professionalisation (Larson et al., 2020). As outlined in Sections 2.1 and 2.2, establishing a shared vision of evidence-based knowledge is crucial in this regard. Knowledge about language development can also promote the validation of, reflection on, and verbalisation of one's own practices, as ECEC professionals are better able understand how a certain practice plays a role in a child's learning process, and to possess the vocabulary to describe this. Both of these aspects can help to validate their practices and bolster their sense of competency. Understanding and awareness of language development are considered prerequisites for supporting children's language awareness, and an essential factor in the implementation of multilingual strategies (see, for example, Young & Mary, 2021).

Up-to-date theoretical knowledge may also be necessary to challenge prevailing beliefs about multilingualism and to provide a solid basis for team discussion, as well as dialogue with multilingual parents (Ragnarsdóttir, 2021). For example, being able to understand and provide examples about the importance of home language(s) in ECEC, as well as explaining that these have no negative effect on learning the institutional language, may be essential to implement practices and to support parents in their parental roles. Most

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<sup>21</sup> Accessible at <https://nesetweb.eu/>

books and training programmes about multilingualism include a section outlining facts and common myths about multilingualism. Particularly in the context of a predominantly monolingual culture, dispelling such myths appears to be of high importance (Hulpia & Peleman, 2022).

From a good baseline analysis of participants' prior knowledge (see Section 2.3), it is possible to target specific knowledge gaps that need to be addressed. In doing so, it is important not to focus on theoretical knowledge alone, but also on more practice-based knowledge. Indeed, while many CPD programmes propose workshops that offer specific theoretical knowledge about multilingualism, language development, and language-supporting practices, there is evidence that the correlation between this type of knowledge and actual changes in practice is not very strong (Markusson-Brown et al., 2017). For example, Ramirez et al. (2021) have shown that professionals' knowledge of bilingual language development does not correlate significantly with the growth of bilingual children's vocabulary. It has also been documented that even when ECEC professionals report having knowledge of language-supporting strategies for use with multilingual children, they nevertheless may still feel insecure about their practice (Choi et al., 2021). Such findings indicate that offering only theoretical knowledge is often insufficient to transform language-supporting practices in multilingual settings (Schachter et al., 2016; Horan & Hersi, 2011, as cited in Young & Mary, 2021).

Practice-based knowledge is gained mainly through enactment (experimenting with) and reflecting on one's practice. For some ECEC professionals, practical knowledge of how to manage certain tasks, such as preparing meals, while still giving time and attention to verbal interactions with children, can also be complementary (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2020). For others, practical knowledge may involve awareness of their reactions to a child's use of their home language, how it may hinder conversation, and then experimenting with alternative strategies. It can also refer to strategies to initiate a conversation with parents in a way that makes parents feel secure enough to discuss their choices and preferences concerning language use. Alternatively, it may focus on how the whole language repertoires of both parties can be used in situations where parents and professionals do not share a common language. This kind of knowledge is hard to 'teach' through conventional training, and calls for more reflective and practical CPD delivery modes.

### **Addressing professionals' beliefs**

Beliefs and attitudes are important to take into consideration when designing CPD on multilingualism in ECEC. Beliefs can be defined as cognitive mental states that reflect how ECEC professionals understand and think about multilingualism (Lundberg, 2018). In a study on multilingual beliefs among Swedish primary school teachers, it was suggested that "the discrepancy between language policies promoting more pluralistic approaches to teaching and teachers' pedagogical decision-making in classrooms is at least partly based on teachers' beliefs rooted in monolingual and traditional ideologies." (Lundberg, 2018, p.280) Beliefs can also make discussions between colleagues challenging, and can disrupt continuity at various levels of a system, creating tensions. A better understanding of one's own beliefs and the extent to which those beliefs align with evidence-based knowledge is a prerequisite for deconstructing and rebuilding beliefs that are supportive of multilingual education (Young, 2014).

CPD on multilingualism and multiculturalism in early childhood should directly address belief systems on these topics, although shifting such systems is not easy (Citivillo et al., 2018; Lorenz et al., 2021; Lundberg, 2018; Romijn et al., 2021). Research shows that even when reported beliefs align with research-based knowledge, ECEC professionals may not always translate these beliefs into practice (Schachter et al., 2016), as mentioned previously. Differing societal expectations about the role of multilingual ECEC is a frequently mentioned tension or barrier (Romijn et al., 2021) to making such a translation



into practice possible. This highlights the importance of the first steps in planning CPD, which involve the establishment of a shared vision of the desired outcomes for multilingual children and families (see Section 2.1). Aligning the content as well as the modalities of a CPD trajectory with this vision is crucial, as it will touch upon the various levels of the ECEC system that are necessary for the sustainable implementation of CPD on multilingualism.

Experiences from Luxembourg have shown that CPD, when combined with a multilingual curriculum that presents a coherent vision of multilingualism at different levels of decision-making can bring about positive changes in beliefs about multilingualism (OECD, 2022). This in turn enables ECEC professionals to experiment more with multilingual practices, and to adopt a more positive attitude towards multilingual children and parents, creating a virtuous circle, to which knowledge about children and families, grounded in curiosity, can also contribute.

Addressing beliefs through CPD can sometimes lead to changes in what is or is not considered problematic, from regarding multilingualism as a challenge to overcome when learning institutional language(s), to seeing multilingualism as both a right and a resource. (Romijn et al., 2021). This is also important, considering the key role that professionals play in contributing to children's and parents' own attitudes towards their cultural and linguistic heritage.

### **Featuring evidence-based core learning strategies: reflection and enactment**

*Enquiry and reflection should be recognised for their important role in school improvement, as they support the establishment of shared meanings about education.*  
(Urban et al., 2011)

Romijn et al. (2021) identify two core learning strategies and facilitators of change: reflection (activities in which participants explore their experiences in order to create new understandings and appreciations) and enactment (the translation of a belief, knowledge, or experience into action, which encompasses the idea of active learning activities). This is in line with other experts' recommendations on CPD in ECEC (Eurofound, 2015; Zaslow et al., 2010).

The importance of reflection in relation to practices aimed towards multilingual children and families has been underlined in previous sections of this report, as well as the need to sustain critical reflection as a professional goal in itself (Romijn et al., 2021). As such, it has been stated that CPD trajectories should include various and continuous opportunities to reflect on one's own beliefs about multilingualism and how these shape pedagogical practices (EC, 2021a). Guided reflection, with active facilitation by a coach or trainer, appears more effective, especially in relation to realising change in professionals' belief systems (Romijn et al., 2021). Reflection should focus on day-to-day practices, and should be combined with the enactment of such practices. This allows for the better implementation and adaptation of practices in a particular situation. As explained previously, new multilingual practices must be attempted and tested. Experimentation with multiple languages in safe spaces in which risk-taking is allowed, and reflection to support this, should thus be encouraged (Duarte, 2020; Wagner, 2020).

While reflection is now included in most CPD initiatives, this is not the case for enactment, which deserves greater attention (Romijn et al., 2021).

### **Providing individualised feedback**

Combined with reflection and enactment, individualised feedback that is tailored to the needs of the learner is recognised as a key ingredient for CPD on language development (Brunsek et al., 2020). Eurofound's report on CPD in ECEC (2015) showed that the only

short-term CPD programmes that had positive effects on practices were those that included an individual feedback component (mostly video-based feedback).

Similarly, Neuman and Wright (2010) found that only CPD initiatives that included individualised feedback led to significant changes in educators' language-supporting practices. The component of individual feedback not only allows best practices to be presented, but is also used mainly to encourage the ECEC professionals' personal reflection and choices. Neuman and Wright (2010) also highlight the importance of building a relationship of trust between the coach and the ECEC professional for individual feedback to be successful.

The main disadvantage of individual feedback is that it is rather expensive (Eurofound, 2015). It may, however, be combined with other delivery modes, such as self-reflection tools or professional learning communities.

### **Encouraging and supporting participant's involvement and agency**

Motivation, and the involvement of ECEC professionals in their own professional development, is key. In this regard, Section 2.3 underlined the importance of tailoring CPD content to professionals' needs. Furthermore, it has been found that when professionals are given the opportunity to determine their own CPD goals and priorities, the learning outcomes of a CPD trajectory are positively impacted (Zaslow et al., 2010). This is in line with the findings of Eurofound (2015) which highlighted the importance of staff participation in decision-making.

There are various starting points for implementing practices that sustain meaningful interactions (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2021). What works best is whatever is adapted to a particular context, and creates a space in which ECEC professionals can choose together which practices to target first. Instead of offering turnkey programmes that demand high levels of adherence to a rubric in terms of their implementation, highly diverse and multilingual contexts require more flexible approaches that are adaptable to different situations. CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should therefore offer an array of possibilities that provide ECEC professionals with building blocks that they can choose from and combine to construct meaningful, high-quality interactions with multilingual children and families (Zaslow et al., 2010).

#### **2.4.2 Selecting CPD delivery modes**

One important recommendation, based on research in recent decades, is to design what is often termed a '*dispositif*' for professional development. The concept of a *dispositif* refers to a combination of different CPD delivery modes, taking into account the previously mentioned criteria for effective CPD (Bergeron-Morin et al., 2021; EC, 2021a). The use of a combination of CPD delivery modes, instead of just one (e.g. a single workshop), allows better adjustment to different learning styles through the inclusion of guided reflection and enactment, and by covering different types and sources of knowledge. Moreover, it offers the opportunity to combine both individual and team-based support. It has been shown that adding one additional delivery mode to such a *dispositif* enhances the positive effects on practices more than prolonging the length of a single delivery mode (Markusson-Brown et al., 2017).

Furthermore, an issue as complex as multilingualism requires an array of different contextualised propositions. Thus, there is thus a need to move away from turnkey programmes to a 'menu-based' approach (EC, 2021a; Hulpia & Peleman, 2022). This means that trainers and ECEC leaders can select, from an array of different options, whichever CPD delivery modes will best allow the specific needs of the participants to be explored, within the available resources. Box 8 lists various examples of CPD delivery modes.

This idea of a *dispositif* is more and more integrated into research-based projects: in the review of Romijn et al. (2021), most of the CPD initiatives studied combine two or three different components. An other example is the *Reflectiewaaijer*<sup>22</sup>, developed in Belgium for pedagogical coaches. Among other delivery modes, this combines videos of ECEC practices with reflective questions, evidence-based knowledge cards aimed at promoting discussion and challenge beliefs, cases and vignettes to seek solutions in the team, worksheets to reflect together over the ECEC centre language policy, etc. (Hulpia & Peleman, 2022). The two case studies presented in Chapter 3 provide interesting examples of such a combination of delivery modes.

**Box 8. Combining an array of CPD delivery modes into a *dispositif***

Delivery modes, or CPD components, can be classified into the following broad categories (Parkhouse et al., 2019; EC, 2021a; Schachter, 2015, Markussen-Brown et al., 2017):

- Workshops and courses
- Coaching
- Professional learning community and critical friendship
- Immersion experience and job-shadowing
- Self-reflection tools and individual learning plans
- Experimenting with a new curriculum
- Action research and participation in international projects

Extra components can be added to those delivery modes, such as:

- Materials
- Video feedback
- Online components

Based on a systematic review, Schachter (2015) identified 35 possible combinations of components. Romijn et al. (2021) listed 23 combinations. The possibilities are thus numerous (see Schachter et al., 2019, for a list of the benefits and limitations of common ECEC professional development delivery modes).

The efficiency of a CPD *dispositif*, which seeks to not only pass on expertise in a 'magistral' and classical way, but to support, listen, adjust and challenge beliefs, also depends on the trainers. Some delivery modes, mainly those which build on reflection, require trainers to have very specific interpersonal coaching skills. Implementing such a *dispositif* may thus require specific training to be proposed for the trainers themselves – for instance, through professional learning communities (Portner & Portner, 2012).

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<sup>22</sup> <https://reflectiewaaijer.vbjk.be/>

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING CPD ON MULTILINGUALISM IN ECEC

### Step 4: Selecting CPD delivery modes

To increase the effectiveness of CPD on complex topics such as multilingualism in ECEC, it is recommended that providers offer a combination of different CPD delivery modes (the 'how' question) in what is termed a professional development *dispositif*. To address the complexity of working with multilingual children and parents in ECEC, the following guidelines should be taken into consideration when designing CPD formats:

- Consideration should always be given to criteria for CPD that are documented to have an impact on the quality of ECEC practice:
  - CPD should be planned as a long-term, sustainable CPD trajectory, for example, by integrating specific content about multilingualism into existing trajectories.
  - CPD should be planned at system level, by reinforcing collaboration between different levels – i.e. not focusing solely on individual competences, but also, for example, on sustaining learning communities at a centre or at regional level, and by involving stakeholders and policymakers.
  - CPD should provide different types of knowledge, i.e. theoretical foundations that support the understanding of the processes behind quality practices for multilingual children and families, as well as more practice-based knowledge that enables professionals to make connections with their day-to-day practice in relation to children and families.
  - CPD should address the beliefs of ECEC professionals, to ensure they align with evidence-based knowledge, as well as with a shared vision on multilingualism, as described in previous sections of this chapter.
  - CPD should facilitate the core learning strategies of reflection and enactment, by creating conditions and spaces of trust in which ECEC professionals can experiment with and reflect upon new multilingual practices.
  - CPD should propose ways to provide individualised feedback, for example through video-feedback, facilitated by a pedagogical coach or tutor.
  - CPD should support ECEC professionals' involvement and agency, by offering them the opportunity to choose and prioritise particular practices and topics, and by tailoring the content to their needs.
- A menu-based approach to CPD should be favoured, i.e. by proposing different delivery modes that satisfy the criteria for effective CPD mentioned above, which can be combined as building blocks to design a CPD *dispositif* that is adapted both to professionals' needs and to their context.

## 2.5 Where: considering the context

*National, local and organizational policies should guarantee time and resources for professionals' continuous development and a shared mission and strong leadership are essential to ensure sustainable change. (Romijn et al., 2021)*

The last step in planning a CPD trajectory is to consider macro-context conditions that can facilitate or hinder its implementation. This section focuses on the importance of aligning CPD with various political levels, and of establishing coherence between all aspects that influence the quality of ECEC (CEU, 2019a), namely:

- Access;
- Workforce;
- Curriculum;
- Monitoring and evaluation; and
- Governance and funding.

Without embarking on a historical-linguistic journey through the different socio-political contexts of European Member states, it can be recognised that planning and implementing CPD on multilingualism in ECEC is highly context-dependent – both in terms of the larger 'social-political-cultural-economic-linguistic' context, and the local ECEC context. Both of these contexts should, however, be considered dynamic realities that have a bidirectional relationship with concrete practices. Indeed, just as the socio-political context (e.g. funding, legislation) has an impact on ECEC practice, so concrete initiatives can, in turn, also influence the political context from the bottom up.

In almost every context, the mismatch between evidence-based multilingual early education practices and a monolingual perspective on language education is one of the most frequently cited barriers to implementing multilingual practices in ECEC, and to offering CPD on this topic. As explained in the introduction to this report, notwithstanding the multilingual reality in the European Member States and the fact that multilingualism is openly valorised in most European policy documents (e.g. CEU, 2019b), monolingual perspectives on (language) education still persist in the discourse of stakeholders at various levels. These are not only visible in national and local language/educational policies, but also in concrete ECEC practices. A double standard appears to exist in understandings of multilingualism: while the learning of second, dominant languages might be valued, the diverse multilingual experiences that are brought to the ECEC centre by children with different home languages (their 'full linguistic repertoire') are often still perceived as a hindrance, rather than a richness or a resource to build on. As Lundberg (2018) notes: "This more fluid understanding of language use in current multilingualism represents a challenge for educators, because it destabilises codes, norms and conventions that [professionals] have relied upon" (p. 268).

As such, the implementation of a multilingual pedagogy in ECEC should be aligned with new curricula, policies and conditions that allow ECEC professionals to engage and adapt (Lundberg, 2018). Such alignments are explored in this section of the report.

### 2.5.1 Alignment with accessibility strategies

*The provision guarantees equality of access to all members of the community throughout all its services. (DECET, 2007)*

The vision that drives CPD initiatives on multilingualism in ECEC (see Section 2.1) clearly points to the important role played by ECEC in promoting socio-cultural diversity and inclusion in society. As such, one cannot consider the valorisation of multilingualism in CPD

without taking into account the accessibility strategies of the ECEC system in a local context. Indeed, the ways in which ECEC policies and service-level practices foster access by and the enrolment of children from minority ethnic groups and low-income families have a strong influence on current ECEC practices, and thus on the experiences of both multilingual families and ECEC professionals.

It is well documented that it is more difficult for families with migrant backgrounds to find their way into high-quality ECEC services, and when they do, to find ways to be involved (Buisse et al., 2014; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2007; Tobin, 2016). A CPD initiative should therefore not be blind to those structural mechanisms that perpetuate or enforce existing inequalities. Reflection on accessibility could be incorporated within a CPD trajectory in order to develop strategies that could render ECEC centres more accessible to families from vulnerable backgrounds. An analysis of how accessible is an ECEC setting to families in terms of availability, affordability, accessibility, usefulness and comprehensibility (Lazzari & Vandebroek, 2012) can form a strong basis for discussion among professionals. In other words, the topic of accessibility is a field *par excellence* for demonstrating bidirectionality in the relationships between aspects of the socio-political context and concrete ECEC practices.

### **2.5.2 Supporting the workforce**

Staff working conditions and professional development are widely acknowledged as essential components of the quality of ECEC. Because quality ECEC requires not only a competent practitioner, but also a competent system that sustains and contributes to the ongoing professionalisation of staff, it is argued that, "in planning for ECEC quality improvements, many structural characteristics need to be considered simultaneously; with an understanding of how each structural characteristic has an impact on quality within each national system." (EC, 2014c, p.30).

The above considerations require that various aspects of working conditions should be taken into account when setting up CPD on multilingualism in ECEC. The report from the European Commission (2021a) provides further insights on how to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff – for instance, how offering career opportunities can support staff motivation to participate in CPD. One of the most widespread challenges in this regard is the difficulty of offering child-free hours that allow professionals to actively engage with CPD activities, such as time for (group) reflection and team discussion on pedagogical issues. Child-free hours require funding, of course, but also sufficient number of well-trained staff to be able to accommodate the attendance of ECEC professionals at CPD activities during their working hours. This also means that ECEC staff have to be present and available in the ECEC centre without being restricted by personal, familial or other conflicting professional responsibilities (EC, 2021a).

Aside from child-free hours, another challenge is to find a balance between obligation and voluntariness. As mentioned previously, it is acknowledged that personal motivation and eagerness to participate in lifelong learning are factors critical to the success of CPD. However, such a depiction might be seen as an "ideal world where CPD would occur because individuals (and their employers) recognise(d) its benefits and consider(ed) it is part of their professional responsibility." (EC, 2021a, p.118) Complex and, at times, demanding pedagogical work often leaves ECEC professionals without mental space to engage in CPD activities either during or after working hours. Yet it is precisely this complexity and demanding nature that points to the importance of making time for this, even if professionals see it differently. This is why CPD programmes are sometimes best started on a somewhat obligatory basis, so that participants gradually experience the added value they gain, and thus start to see the importance of it. Particularly in contexts characterised by a monolingual habitus in education, ECEC staff sometimes overestimate

their own knowledge about working with linguistically diverse families and/or they are not accustomed to having multilingualism as a topic during team meetings or moments of reflection (Cunningham, 2009).

A third element relating to the workforce is recruitment. In multilingual contexts, recruiting a diverse staff that mirrors neighbourhood diversity is often cited as a supportive strategy with benefits on many levels (see also the case study from Belgium in Chapter 3). Various strategies to achieve this are proposed in the literature: pairing highly qualified staff with multilingual staff in a qualifying trajectory, to support multilingual staff as they take classes to learn the institutional language, to connect with the community for either paid or voluntary language assistance to the programme, etc. (Choi et al., 2021). The European Quality Framework on ECEC (CEU, 2019a) also mentions the importance of recruiting staff from diverse backgrounds and of helping them to progressively upgrade their qualifications, as this significantly benefits children from poor and migrant families. "In many situations the creation of inclusive training programmes which facilitate access from underrepresented groups to professional qualifications at the tertiary level remains a challenge." (EC, 2014c, p.33)

### 2.5.3 Coherence with ECEC curricula

ECEC curricula come in many shapes and many forms and vary in the extent to which they are linked to day-to-day practices in ECEC centres (for further information, see Janssen & Vandebroek, 2018). In addition, the way in which a vision for welcoming and supporting multilingualism is integrated into these curricula can take various forms: from specific curricula that prioritise multilingualism, to general guidelines about working with diversity. The more general these guidelines are – for example, "*parents and the ECEC setting should collaborate*", without further clarification –, the wider the margin for interpretation by ECEC professionals and centre leaders (Conus et Ogay, 2018),.

Various types of formal bilingual/multilingual ECEC curricula exist, which have emerged to serve different needs and goals. For example:

- Introducing second language learning (English) from very early on (e.g. in a bilingual day care centre in Strasbourg, Ebersold, 2018);
- Supporting a specific home language used by a majority of children (e.g. a Spanish-English bilingual kindergarten in the United States, Buysse et al., 2010);
- Preserving a regional language (in some autonomous regions of Spain – Vila et al., 2017);
- Offering children a multilingual education in a multilingual country (e.g. multilingual ECEC programme in Luxembourg, OECD, 2022);
- Meeting all of these multiple needs at once (e.g. trilingual schools in Frisian-Dutch-English in the Netherlands, Duarte, 2020).

Moreover, one must be aware of the fact that framing an educational curriculum as 'bilingual' or 'multilingual' can cover different loads. For example, it can refer to programmes that provide children with high-quality, meaningful interactions in the proposed languages, with professionals who speak one or both languages. But it can also refer to more flexible ways of presenting languages, as is the case in trilingual Luxembourg, where a familiarisation with multiple institutional languages is promoted, together with the use of translanguaging practices (Duarte, 2020; OECD, 2022). Without simply stating in a dichotomous way that one is 'good' and the other is 'bad', it is important to note that some educational programmes which claim to be 'multilingual' nevertheless adopt a

compartmentalised vision of languages, rooted in a monolingual vision of language development (Cummins, 2021; Duarte, 2020; TFIEY, 2015).

Specific language awareness curricula also exist for ECEC. These curricula aim to develop a positive attitude and curiosity towards different languages and to stimulate metalinguistic awareness for all children, without a particular focus on any one child's home language. For example, in such a programme, ECEC professionals may play children a song in a particular language and ask them to identify words that sound similar in other languages. Language awareness curricula have a long history in Europe, with the European project Eulang, which led to the founding of EDILIC<sup>23</sup> (see EDILIC, n.d.). This organisation oversees the implementation of language awareness curricula in various countries (e.g. EOLE, in French-speaking Switzerland; DULALA, in France; and since recently, in French-speaking Belgium, an 'éveil aux langues' curriculum is being systematically implemented from the age of 3 onwards). Language awareness approaches have been widely documented over the years, with numerous books, articles and theses being written on the subject. This has resulted in the creation of innovative multilingual materials (e.g. ELODIL<sup>24</sup> multilingual books, developed in Canada, Armand et al., 2021).

However, even if an ECEC centre has implemented a bilingual, multilingual or a language awareness curriculum, professionals must still include and welcome children with a diverse range of home languages, and still require guidelines on making a place for these languages (Duarte, 2020). Indeed, without support and coaching, ECEC professionals do not, for example, often naturally transfer translanguaging practices used in a language awareness activity on to the rest of their daily routine and activities. In Luxembourg, the CPD trajectory proposed in the programme TRANSLA<sup>25</sup> has just such a specific focus (Aleksić, 2022).

On the other hand, this does not mean that these curricula don't matter. Quite the contrary – having a curriculum that opens the door to multilingualism, even if it is not fully experienced or integrated, can nevertheless contribute to a more open and positive attitude towards multilingualism in the ECEC centre. Because these curricula legitimise multilingualism, they can facilitate a step towards experimenting with other practices that more fully exploit the potential of the full linguistic repertoire of children, parents and professionals (Duarte, 2020).

Bearing this in mind, the main question might not be which curriculum to implement, but **in what ways each ECEC curriculum – by not having to have a sole focus on multilingualism alone – gives space and legitimacy to ECEC professionals to explore and implement practices that support multilingual children and families.**

#### 2.5.4 Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation – understood as processes of systematic data collection, research and ongoing assessment – are powerful tools for promoting the continuous improvement of ECEC provision. They can address several dimensions (CEU, 2019a): service quality (e.g. monitoring compliance with regulations and standards through inspections, collecting parents' perspectives on quality); staff quality, e.g. (self-) evaluation directed to the improvement of staff practices and skills; child development and outcomes, e.g. formal and informal assessment<sup>26</sup> to document children's experiences including the development of his/her language(s); curriculum implementation (e.g. to

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<sup>23</sup> Information about EDILIC can be found at <https://www.edilic.org/>

<sup>24</sup> ELODIL materials can be consulted at <https://www.elodil.umontreal.ca/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://transla-program.org/>

<sup>26</sup> It is beyond the scope of this report to tackle the topic of the language evaluation of multilingual children, which nevertheless remains a very important and sensitive issue, as the forms of assessment and screening developed for monolingual children may be misinterpreted when carried out with multilingual children. For further discussion on this topic see, among others, Jahreie (2021).



evaluate the usefulness of a curriculum); and CPD quality and outcomes (e.g. to analyse needs for change and for professional development and to evaluate CPD trajectories). Involving (multilingual) families, ECEC professionals and other relevant stakeholders in processes of monitoring and evaluation can foster agency and generate a sense of ownership that may contribute to improving the quality of ECEC practices that focus on multilingualism. Also, ensuring that multilingualism is present in all these dimensions, and translated in a culturally and linguistically sensitive way, requires the alignment of the tools and practices used for observation, monitoring, screening and assessment. In this way, a positive vision of multilingualism can be reflected and safeguarded throughout the evaluation processes used in ECEC. This is in line with the European Quality Framework on ECEC (CEU, 2019a), which clearly states that procedures and tools for monitoring and evaluation need to be designed coherently for the specific purposes intended. Monitoring ECEC quality is closely linked to the way in which ECEC professionals perceive expectations with regard to implementing the curriculum (e.g. what is expected of them in terms of supporting the development of children's language(s)).

Lastly, carefully documenting the quality, implementation and outcomes of CPD is considered an important feature of ensuring its sustainability, opening up possibilities for upscaling quality practices (EC, 2021a).

### 2.5.5 Governance and funding

Governance and funding which values and recognises the importance of ECEC can take the quality of the service much further. (EC, 2014, p.59)

As shown by Romijn et al. (2021), the effectiveness of CPD is dependent on local policy, organisational leadership, embeddedness within the wider community, and the characteristics and funding of a country's ECEC and later educational systems. Governance influences various aspects of ECEC that create the necessary conditions for successfully implementing CPD (EC, 2021a): initial professional requirements when entering ECEC; the funding and resources allocated to CPD the valorisation of the profession; vision for the long-term CPD trajectory, etc.

The role of leadership at different levels of decision-making cannot be emphasised enough (see OECD, 2019), and should be understood within the perspective of a partnership with ECEC staff, "as this helps to ensure that the policies and approaches to CPD enhance quality, place children at the centre of provision, and meet the needs of families and the local community" (EC, 2021a, p. 119). The idea of partnership can even be extended to inter-agency cooperation (e.g. between ECEC centres and social/health services); inter-professional partnerships (e.g. among ECEC institutions and schools); and networking among stakeholders (e.g. involving NGOs as well as local authorities) (CEU, 2019a). Indeed, high quality ECEC is also part of a coherent and comprehensive system of public policies that link ECEC to other services also concerned with the welfare of young children and their families (Eurydice, 2009). This is especially important for families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who live in vulnerable situations.

The case of Luxembourg, which was described in detail in an OECD report (2022), shows what role governance can play in transforming the ECEC curriculum and allowing the development of a systematic and nationwide CPD trajectory on multilingualism for ECEC professionals.

**In summary**, various aspects of the macro-context work together to create conditions that facilitate or hinder the deployment of CDP in relation to working with multilingual children and parents in ECEC. Seeking ways to enhance coherence – namely, through

dialogue about multilingualism at various levels – may be key to approaching the diversity of contexts in which CPD for ECEC professionals can be implemented.

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## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING CPD ON MULTILINGUALISM IN ECEC**

### **Step 5: Considering the macro-context conditions**

The vision and values that underlie various levels of language policies are shaped by the social, economic and cultural landscapes and backgrounds of each country or region, and vice versa. The misalignment of multilingualism policies with evidence-based knowledge is one of the most frequently cited barriers to implementing practices for multilingual children and parents, and to developing CPD on multilingualism. When implementing CPD, therefore, coherence should be achieved in all of the quality-determining dimensions of ECEC. This entails:

- Broader reflection about how accessible ECEC services are for multilingual families should be incorporated within the CPD trajectory, in alignment with ECEC practices that support collaboration with multilingual parents.
- Conditions should be optimised so as to reduce the barriers to the participation of ECEC staff in a CPD trajectory: child-free hours; policies on mandatory CPD; career opportunities, etc.
- Recruitment strategies should valorise and support diversity in ECEC teams.
- ECEC curricula should be examined, revised and adapted to ensure space and legitimacy is given to ECEC professionals exploring and implementing practices that support multilingual children and families.
- Strong leadership at national or regional level can contribute to the creation of the necessary conditions for effective CPD: ensuring coherence between the curriculum, language policies and CPD goals, as well as adequate funding and organisational possibilities (e.g. child-free hours).
- Opportunities for dialogue about multilingualism at various levels should be created, to contribute to shared visions and to enhance alignment with actual knowledge on the topic (e.g. conferences to which both stakeholders and practitioners are invited, or innovative European projects involving ECEC centres as well as decision-makers).

## Chapter 3. Seeking inspiration from two case studies

This chapter details two cases from two different contexts: one from the German Federal State of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and one from the Belgian capital, Brussels.

These cases were chosen out of a selection of initiatives and projects from across Europe. Although these cases propose inspiring pathways, they were not selected on the basis that they deploy 'best practices'. Rather, these cases are interesting because they illustrate the complexity and long-term process of decision-making that can lead to a more systematic implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC.

As such, the cases are not to be understood as a simple 'add-on' to the present report; they illustrate how ECEC practices in two local contexts have been transformed in order to foster pedagogical work with multilingual children and families in ECEC. Indeed, as will be detailed in this chapter, both the Belgian and German cases originate from a profound analysis of the context. These analyses opened the door to in-depth reflection on the desired outcomes for multilingual children and families in ECEC and in society, which formed the catalyst for the innovation and remained its driver throughout the year-long process. Each case study provides information about the local issues that formed the starting point for the development of the innovative CPD practices in question, as well as insights into the barriers to and drivers of the implementation process at different levels.

The cases aim to provide an enriched understanding of the link between policies, practices, and CPD that aims to support multilingual children and their families in ECEC.

### **3.1 *Rucksack KiTa* and *Griffbereit* in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany: scaling up and sustaining a strength-based approach towards multilingual parents**

Successive waves of migration have made Germany a very diverse country, but the histories and pathways of migration in various parts of the country are quite different. In the federal state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in north-eastern Germany, linguistic and cultural diversity has increased and become much more visible in the last 10 years, but remains very unevenly distributed. This means that some neighbourhoods have a higher concentration of culturally diverse families, creating a new reality and new challenges for certain ECEC centres.

While a monolingual view of the importance of the German language for children's educational achievement still predominates, more and more voices are seeking to acknowledge home languages as an educational added value – as resources, both in the process learning of German, and through their contribution to children's identity in a multilingual Europe. In the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, this positive stance and vision on multilingualism in the early years has made its way into policy documents: since 2020, the curriculum for the ECEC sector has included a section on the importance of awareness of multilingualism, and a call to welcome and include home language(s).

Since 2019, the federal state has funded two programmes in ECEC centres, implemented by a partner NGO, RAA M-V. *Griffbereit* is a language and family education programme with parents and their children aged from 1 to 3 years; *Rucksack KiTa* is a complementary programme for parents of children between 4 and 6 years old. Both programmes can be implemented within the same ECEC centres (*Kita*) since Germany has an integrated ECEC system covering children from 0 up to 6 years-old, when they enter formal schooling. ECEC educators receive uniform initial training, and a shared child-centred pedagogy is implemented across the whole ECEC curriculum.

Both programmes, *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa*, were initially adapted to the German context at the end of the 1990s by a team from the former RAA (later, the communal

integration centres) in the state of Nordrhein-Westfalen, which found inspiration in a programme originally developed in the Netherlands. Working with a 'parents' companion' (*Elternbegleiter*) who leads weekly encounters with parents in ECEC centres, the *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa* programmes aim to help parents to feel resourceful in supporting their children's development and in guiding their path into the German education system. They also allow multilingual practices to slowly make their way into ECEC centres that have little previous history of such practices.

Experts in the field are unanimous that collaboration with parents is essential to developing a sustainable multilingual educational policy in an ECEC setting – a view echoed in the present report. As also noted in this report, however, it has been documented that attempts to successfully embrace collaboration with multilingual parents have not been so evident. Remaining faithful to a certain vision of such a partnership while scaling up a programme is also often found to be very challenging. The next sections will explore how *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa* have been implemented in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, including how they have taken advantage of specific opportunities and found solutions to the challenges encountered.

### **3.1.1 Why: history and desired outcomes**

Before discussing the outcomes targeted by the instigators of *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa* in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, we will briefly describe the history of these programmes in order to understand their origins and the context from which they emerged.

#### ***Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa*: a historical perspective**

In 1998, acknowledging that population attending ECEC services was becoming more diverse, and that ECEC centres faced new challenges in collaborating with multilingual parents, a team from the NGO RAA (*Regionale Arbeitsstelle zur Förderung von Kindern und Jugendlichen aus Zuwandererfamilien*), working in the state of Nordrhein-Westfalen, sought inspiration from the *Rugzak Project* in the Netherlands. Through more than 10 years of implementation, the team adapted this programme to the German context and strengthened a positive vision of multilingual parents and the 'richness' that such parents bring to ECEC settings (in opposition to the 'deficit vision' that had previously prevailed). In 2013, the programme obtained public funding, which enabled its integration into public ECEC programmes. In the years that followed, the programme matured and its structure was shaped by various experiences in its implementation process, and through formal evaluations.

When similar questions and concerns about working with multilingual families emerged in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (as well as in other federal states, such as Berlin, Brandenburg, Niedersachsen and Sachsen), a team from the communal integration centres in Nordrhein-Westfalen was available to share not only their experience in implementing *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa*, but also their vision of multilingualism in ECEC. The transfer of the schemes to other states was funded by the Auridis foundation.

While different versions of 'backpack' (*'Rucksack'*) projects have been implemented in different countries across Europe, these do not necessarily share the same vision of multilingualism and parental participation, nor do they implement it in the same way. Among other aspects, in the German adaptation, the importance of regarding parents as resourceful and active partners in the education of the child was stressed from the very outset and maintained throughout the process of scaling the programme up to other German states (*Länder*).

Their account by the team behind *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa* was received positively by stakeholders in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, who were at that moment trying to find a way to integrate multilingualism into policies and curricula for ECEC. Other voices in the field

also noted that multilingual parents had difficulties in finding ways to feel involved with ECEC centres, as partners in their children's language development, because they did not know how they could contribute using their own linguistic resources. Because multilingualism was, until recently, not a topic tackled in any great depth in the initial training of ECEC professionals, staff felt neither sufficiently well prepared nor secure in building partnerships with multilingual parents. They needed support.

### **Desired outcomes for multilingual children and families**

The goals of *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa* can be described as follows:

- "Expansion of educational opportunities and participation of all children, whether with or without a migration history.
- Continuous and holistic language education in German and all other home languages.
- Strengthening parents by expanding their educational and social competencies and recognising their resources and potential
- Establishing and intensifying educational partnerships between parents and educational institutions and strengthening the participation of all families." (Seele, 2020)

Throughout the programme, parents gradually develop a relationship of trust with the *Elternbegleiter* ('parents' companion'), and with the other parents, allowing them to talk about educational topics and themes in the home environment as well as at the ECEC centre and in further educational trajectories in Germany. Moreover, they become more familiar with the ECEC centre and feel more at home there, which results in greater assurance when communicating with ECEC professionals. Sustaining emerging literacy in multiple languages is also a thread throughout the programme.

### **Vision**

The project's coordinators also specify that other goals must be supported in parallel:

- A diversity-oriented and multilingual orientation of educational institutions.
- The appreciation and active support of multilingualism as a resource in the educational biography of children
- A shared vision of parents as experts on their own children and in their respective languages, who should be encouraged to bring forward their knowledge and expertise.

#### **3.1.2 What: which practices are proposed in *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa*?**

Both programmes, *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa*, are closely related in that they are anchored in weekly meetings with parents. In *Griffbereit*, children are mainly present during those meetings, while meetings in *Rucksack KiTa* alternate between parent-child activities and parent-only meetings.

For each *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa* group, an *Elternbegleiter* is hired, who takes on the role of a parents' companion, and who is often also a parent with a multilingual and migration background. She/he receives a financial *honorarium* for voluntary work and is trained to support weekly encounters with parents (with or without children). This *Elternbegleiter* builds a bridge between professionals and parents at the ECEC centre. In parallel, a professional development *dispositif* is proposed to the whole *Kita* team.

The weekly meeting occurs at the ECEC centre itself. The *Elternbegleiter* welcomes the parents, listens to them and tries to create a relationship that is not hierarchical. During these meetings, the group explores a (huge) variety of multilingual materials, such as books, games, songs, translated into the various languages present. Materials are linked with topics that are being explored at the same time with the children in the ECEC groups. As such, the programme creates a parallel and complementary process that enriches the understanding and conceptual learning of children at home and in the ECEC centre. However, it is stressed that the role of the parent companion is not to 'teach' parents how to use this material. During the meetings, they reflect together about how they can use the material, in their home language(s), and about how this contributes to the overall development of their children. The accent is firmly placed on a participative approach, as they search together for the best ways to do things for specific parents, with specific children. Even though parents can take them home, the materials themselves are not the most important aspect of this programme: they are seen as tools to support its overarching goals.

Going home with specific, but self-chosen, activities to explore with their children gives parents concrete material to document what has been done, how their child reacted, what has been said and what has occurred during these moments. In the next session, parents can bring pictures, drawings, anecdotes, etc. to enrich dialogue and exchange with other parents. Time is also allowed to discuss other open questions and parents' everyday experiences.

The parents' companion also plays an important bridging role between parents and ECEC professionals. This role is actualised in various ways according to the settings: sometimes, an ECEC professional co-hosts the meetings (with the same voluntary status and salary basis as the parents' companion). In some cases, the parents' companion meets periodically with ECEC professionals to bring them parents' concerns, questions and ideas. They also listen to the concerns of the ECEC professionals. This process facilitates an open dialogue between ECEC professionals and multilingual parents.

Within the ECEC groups, the goal is to experiment progressively with multilingual practices that include home languages, in settings where monolingual immersion was initially the norm. In doing so, they also have access to all of the multilingual material developed in the programmes. Seele (2020) also notes that despite their thematic proposals, the programmes remain open and flexible, and their implementation is compatible with child-centred pedagogical concepts and the integration of language-supporting interactions in everyday life.

### **3.1.3 Who: CPD for both the *Elternbegleiter* and the whole *Kita* team**

There are two target groups for CPD in these programmes: the parents' companions, and the whole ECEC team.

#### ***Elternbegleiter* (parents' companion)**

The first step is the recruitment and continuous professionalisation of the *Elternbegleiter*. As outlined previously, parents' companions are themselves multilingual parents, often parents with a pedagogical diploma from another country that is not recognised in Germany. There are no other prerequisites, apart from an interest in working with parents and a positive stance towards multilingualism.

Training to become a parents' companion may also be a catalyst for an empowering trajectory for the individual themselves, leading some to continue their studies to obtain recognised ECEC official professional status.

### ***Kita* team**

The second target group is the whole team of the ECEC centre. Involvement remains voluntary, and levels of involvement vary highly between centres.

Sometimes, an ECEC centre contacts RAA, asking to start working with *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa*. In addition, RAA Mecklenburg-Vorpommern also deploys an outreach strategy towards those ECEC centres that welcome a growing cultural and linguistic diversity of children and families. The CPD strategy is therefore to adjust to each particular situation and perceived need. While some *KiTa* implement the parents' programme in parallel with a fully-equipped CPD *dispositif* for their team, others start with one step: offering a space for the parents' meetings, and growing slowly familiar to multilingual practices, leading later on to expressing the need for CPD for their team.

### **3.1.4 How: in what way(s) CPD is offered to the *Elternbegleiter* and the *Kita* team**

#### **Elternbegleiter CPD dispositif**

Both initial and continuous training is offered to all new parents' companions: the curriculum consists of seven modules, each ranging from 4 to 8 hours, depending on the needs and previous knowledge of the participants. The content of this training includes, among other elements: reflecting on one's own experience with multilingualism; exploring interest in working with parents; nurturing a positive attitude towards diversity; inclusive and participative collaboration with parents; knowledge about children's general and linguistic development; literacy in early childhood education; as well as children's rights and participation, etc.

Parents' companions from different *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa* groups in the same region meet regularly, between three and six times a year. A community of practice is thus formed to ensure ongoing follow-up, support and continuous learning, starting from their experience in the field with parents, children and ECEC professionals.

Parents' companions are equipped with *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa* material to support their work. These materials include a manual for parents, guides with information on the aims and implementation of the programmes, as well as material for parents. The materials are currently available in 28 languages for *Griffbereit* and 18 languages for *Rucksack KiTa*, in print and pdf format. Worksheets can be provided to parents in their respective home languages on request. The material is constantly being developed and further translations are being sought in the light of the most recent migration developments and parents' experience and expertise.

Both programmes aim to be offered in as many represented languages as possible, using the whole language repertoire of the *Elternbegleiter* and ECEC staff.

#### ***KiTa* team's CPD dispositif**

To adapt to emerging needs – as well as time and resources – RAA works with a flexible array of possible CPD delivery modes, addressing different content and practices, and adding components gradually to the *dispositif*.

Workshops and symposia are offered each year, accessible to participants from different centres. These reach ECEC professionals who have already expressed an interest in learning more about multilingualism. They may be confronted, when returning to their own centre after the training, by a gap between what they have learned and the prevailing language policies in their own ECEC centre and beliefs among its staff. At the same time, they can become a pivot for a team to become familiarised with multilingual practices and to develop the curiosity to go further into a team CPD trajectory.

An RAA project coordinator can then assist in some team meetings, bringing in new content on multilingualism, leading reflective activities or offering in-house training for the whole team. Other delivery modes can also be explored.

For ECEC centres, discussions focus mainly on how they can include home languages into their daily practices – and why they should. Different ways are explored with the teams: inviting parents, learning some words in home languages, including multilingual children's books and other materials, using digital media or other tools, and asking the children.

Feedback has been positive, with staff being satisfied at having more knowledge about multilingualism and feeling more secure, which encourages greater voluntary participation among the rest of the team.

### **3.1.5 Where: necessary conditions from the macro-context**

In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, certain conditions were in place that facilitated the implementation of *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa*:

- Parents' companions can be paid for their work using a voluntary honorarium (between EUR 12 and EUR 15 per hour, for 3-5 hours/week).
- The programme is publicly funded, which means that:
  - At the beginning, ECEC centres only need to offer a space for the parents' meetings and to make their staff available to meet with the parents' companion.
  - The ECEC centre is reassured that the vision proposed aligns with state education policies.
- Coherence with existing policies was reinforced by adapting the ECEC curriculum.
- RAA is an experienced and well-recognised NGO, working in various German federal states on social inclusion and participation, democracy and education. It carries out an advocacy mission to rally stakeholders in supporting the implementation of these programmes.
- The instigators of the schemes in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern could rely on more than 10 years of documented pilot projects in Nordrhein-Westfalen to explain and present the project to policymakers, supported by the voices of other policymakers.

Conversely, certain challenges had – and still have – to be overcome or dealt with:

- Not all ECEC centres have staff that reflect the growing diversity.
- Access to initial training to become ECEC professionals (five years in total) is difficult for the immigrant population, and gaining recognition for certifications gained in other countries is not easy.
- In many ECEC centres, the staff is ageing, and older professionals did not receive specific formation about multilingualism in their initial training.
- Multilingualism is not yet a big topic in initial education.
- Even after adapting the ECEC curriculum, there are still discrepancies between the policy vision at the state level and local language policies at the level of individual institutions. Also, the policy document is more normative in style, formulating demands and objectives for early education but not going deeply into the methods and means used to achieve these aims.



- As stated previously, practices at local level are not yet aligned with recent changes in ECEC language policy at state level. Currently, policy towards multilingualism is more progressive than what occurs at times in practice.

### 3.1.6 Summary and conclusions

It is widely acknowledged that collaboration with parents is essential to developing a sustainable multilingual educational policy within an ECEC setting. However, successfully embracing such collaboration with multilingual parents often proves to be not evident: multilingual parents might not feel involved in ECEC centres, nor are they always acknowledged as partners in the (multilingual) education of their child. Since 2019, the German province of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has addressed this situation by funding two complementary programmes on multilingualism in ECEC: *Griffbereit*, for the parents of children aged between 1 and 3 years old, and *Rucksack KiTa*, for parents of children aged 4 to 6. In these programmes, an individual serving as a “parents’ companion” (*Elternbegleiter*) facilitates weekly encounters with multilingual parents at the ECEC centres, with the aim of fostering parents’ ability to support their child’s multilingual development and path into the German education system. Central to the *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa* programmes is the importance of viewing parents as resourceful and active partners in their child’s education. Parents are not expected only to engage in activities at home, but are invited to take their place in the ECEC centre. In parallel, the programmes also allow multilingual practices to slowly make their way into ECEC centres that usually have little prior experience of such practices. This takes the form of a parallel professionalisation trajectory for ECEC staff that includes the entire team. By engaging in this process, ECEC teams become more inclined to take a resource-oriented approach towards parents and towards multilingualism in their practice.

Although not in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, programme evaluation studies have been conducted on *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa* programmes by Roth and Terhart (2015) at the University of Cologne, and by Prof. Dr. Timm Albers of the University of Paderborn. These point to a number of positive effects, as reported in Seele (2020):

- “Increased parental satisfaction with children’s language skills, both in German and in other family languages.
- Increased awareness of the importance of family languages and multilingualism as a resource for a successful educational pathway.
- Increased frequency of literacy-related activities in families.
- Empowerment in the sense of strengthening the self-esteem and autonomy and self-efficacy of children, parents, parent companions and ECEC professionals.
- Increased social contacts and better networking of participating parents.
- Reduction of barriers to parental participation in educational institutions and cooperation between families and institutions.
- Contribution to the openness of institutions to migration and diversity “

While, as seen before, there is a risk of instrumentalising parents’ collaboration in such programmes, *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa* in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern have been successful in promoting collaboration with parents, based on a vision of parents as experts.

To maintain that core focus and vision, certain key elements may be essential:

- The role of the parents’ companion appears crucial, both for ensuring a horizontal partnership with parents and to negotiate language, cultural background,

experiences and perspectives between the home and the ECEC centres, bringing parents' perspectives into these settings.

- Promoting an active role for parents is also essential. Parents are not just expected to carry out activities at home: they are invited to take their place in the ECEC centre. They are viewed as experts.
- The schemes must come with a parallel professionalisation trajectory for ECEC staff. The whole ECEC staff is also included in the process; they become more inclined to take a more resource-oriented approach towards parents.

### **3.2 CPD initiative in a context of super-diversity in Brussels, Belgium**

In Belgium, ECEC (organised as a split system) falls under the jurisdiction of the three language communities (the Flemish Community; the French-speaking Community; and *Ostbelgien*, the German-speaking community). In each Community, education is offered in the Community's own official language (apart from some exceptions). These are Dutch, French and German, respectively. Brussels is not only the capital of Belgium; it also is located in the geographical centre of the country, close to the border between the Flemish Community and the French-speaking Community. This location offers an added complexity for the city. Since the city is officially bilingual, there are ECEC centres from both the Flemish Community and the French-speaking Community. As a consequence, families living in Brussels can choose between ECEC services in which Dutch is the official language (regulated by the Flemish Community), or those in which French is the official language (regulated by the French-speaking Community). However, French is mostly the dominant language in Brussels, while contact with Dutch is sometimes only present in educational settings.

Aside from this already-complex relationship between Dutch and French, Brussels is also the perfect example of a 'super-diverse' city. An estimated 135 different languages are used by the inhabitants of Brussels, and around 60% of preschool children in Brussels do not speak one of the institutional languages (Dutch or French) in their home environment. It is not uncommon for families to have three or more languages in the home context.

This linguistic diversity is also highly visible in the Brussels childcare centres run by Elmer, where almost 50 different languages meet on a daily basis. Elmer is a 26-year-old ECEC provider, offering 188 subsidised places for children aged 0-3 years in four locations. It employs 112 professionals (93 full-time equivalents). Not all of these professionals work in a childcare group: some are involved in the training of non-qualified workers to become qualified childcare workers, as will be detailed below. Elmer offers childcare to parents in need of part-time, full-time, occasional, short-term or urgent care, as well as to parents who are in training, who have suddenly found work or who require childcare for social, medical or pedagogical reasons.

Elmer is regulated by the Flemish Community. It therefore has to deal with the double challenge of taking into account 50 different home languages in its approach to parents and children, while at the same time providing an environment that allows the children to build their first foundations in the Dutch language. Over the years, Elmer has developed a strong policy on professional development and recruitment that has allowed it to build a team whose composition reflects this linguistic landscape. The Elmer team is very diverse, with childcare workers speaking more than 28 languages altogether, which allows for a linguistic/cultural match between the staff and families present.

Elmer also focuses strongly on the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, on partnerships within the neighbourhood, and on alternative qualifying pathways for low-qualified people in the neighbourhood to work in ECEC.

A language policy has been developed at organisational level that allows multilingual practices to flourish while also supporting Dutch language development. This is rooted in a vision of the holistic development of all children and the participation of families. Staff and leaders collectively ensure that this language policy is embedded into the four ECEC centres, at all levels. Such work is not simply decided from one day to the next: it is firmly rooted in Elmer's history, based on strong values and a long-term vision for professional development. This will be described in the sections that follow.

### **3.2.1 Why: from Elmer's early years to its actual mission**

The way in which Elmer now works with multilingual children and parents in this super-diverse context, and its actual desired outcomes for those families, take their roots from the social mission out of which Elmer initially grew.

#### **Historical perspective from the genesis of Elmer**

More than 20 years ago, the city of Brussels was not yet as super-diverse as it is today. Still, there were signs that there was a lack of access to childcare for parents who wanted training, who needed to sort out their administration, or who suddenly received a job offer – especially those parents with migrant backgrounds. In response to these challenges, Elmer first saw the light in 1997, as an innovative project of a non-profit organisation (vzw EVA Bxl). Its initial aim was to meet both the employment and childcare needs of these parents by offering a neighbourhood-oriented service that combined childcare for disadvantaged groups with a qualifying training path to work in childcare. Elmer began as a small childcare service for 14 children, with four part-time staff members with different ethnic roots. These childcare workers were paid to work while at the same time following training.

Today, Elmer has grown to provide places for 188 children. Its qualifying trajectory has grown too, and remains an important feature of Elmer's recruitment policy and a way to maintain a diversity of staff that mirrors the changing make-up Brussels neighbourhoods. Seven childcare workers graduated during the year 2021. Of these, one employee was able to move on immediately on to a replacement contract in Elmer; another remained in the training pathway to follow general subjects and thus obtain her secondary education diploma. Currently, 18 childcare workers are participating in the qualifying trajectory and since the start, 88 employees have obtained their childcare qualification. To offer this qualifying trajectory, Elmer is recognised as an organisation in the social economy.

#### **Vision**

Elmer's four centres share a common vision and a set of values that serve as a source of inspiration for their daily work with families and children. They share a vision statement, which works as a set of guidelines that are used when writing policy documents and planning, and which help to define their CPD needs. This vision is also referred to when important decisions need to be taken or problematic situations must be solved.

The vision statement articulates five core values – each of them a strong belief that applies to children, parents and the team alike:

- That every child/parent/staff member needs safety and well-being.
- That every child/parent/staff member is constantly developing.
- That every child/parent/staff member is unique, and this diversity is precious.
- That every child/parent/staff member is equal, and that reciprocity is important

- That every child/parent/staff member has talent and potential and can take responsibility.

These strong convictions lie at the heart of Elmer's pedagogical work. In the following subsections, we highlight the organisation's desired outcomes towards children, parents and team members in relation to multilingualism.

### **Towards children: well-being and competence**

It is important to first mention that the parents who come to Elmer value the Dutch language as an important language for their child. They consider it to have economic benefits (greater opportunities in the labour market) as well as academic benefits. According to the coordinator, a general perception prevails among the inhabitants of Brussels that Dutch schools are of high quality. Attending a Dutch childcare service is, therefore, in the perceptions of many parents, a favourable strategy to get their child enrolled in a Dutch school. Coupled with this situation is the fact that despite being an 'official language', Dutch is actually a minority language in Brussels. For this reason, the Elmer team takes its role in introducing children to the Dutch language very seriously. As 80% of the children who attend Elmer centres will eventually enrol in a Dutch school, Elmer clearly states that its mission is to prepare children for Dutch education in preschool/kindergarten. However, the organisation is very conscious that for a lot of children and their families, this also means that Dutch is considered the language of instruction/school and not the language in which they 'express their emotions'. Elmer clearly sees every language – indeed, the full linguistic repertoire of a child – as a richness/added value. In this sense, its aim is twofold: to ensure children are able to keep up later on in school and feel good about themselves, and to ensure that the school sees these children as competent. The latter motivation is very important, given that schools often maintain a monolingual mindset in which multilingualism is seen as a problem to overcome rather than an opportunity for learning, or a strength that the child brings to the school.

### **Towards parents: dialogue and support on multilingual upbringing**

Multilingual parents living in Brussels are confronted with several dilemmas with regard to the multilingual education of their child. While Dutch is generally considered a necessary language in order to be ready for school and to find a job, French is also an important language to master in order to live and move around in Brussels. It also remains important for parents to pass on the family home language(s) to their children – which can present such parents with a challenge in knowing how to use and transmit them. When as many as four or five languages may be present in one family, it is not at all easy for parents to know what to do.

For Elmer, dialogue with parents about these linguistic issues is very important. Elmer finds it crucial to raise awareness with parents about the importance of reflecting on the language choices they wish to make for their children, from very early on. In the words of the coordinator: "We want parents to make a deliberate choice, or at least, that they are aware of the fact that it is important to deliberately reflect on the language choices they make for their child. However, it is also important that parents are aware that these choices can still change. It has to be a combination of 'deliberation and dynamism'."

Dialogue with parents also contributes in a broader sense to Elmer's mission towards parents: making it possible for families to participate in society. In this sense, Elmer wants parents to be aware that it provides Dutch-speaking childcare. The Elmer team therefore does its best to contribute to the child's Dutch language development – and that of the parents, as many parents take Dutch language classes while their children are at Elmer.

### **3.2.2 What: ECEC practices and competences for working with multilingual children, families and teams**

Elmer has a written language policy that forms the basis of its approach towards children, parents and team members. It has made a conscious choice to narrow this policy down to a single page. This means that it contains a broad vision with basic – but not ‘simple’ – directions with regard to practice towards children and towards parents.

#### **Practices towards children**

While Dutch is the language of instruction and the everyday language in Elmer groups, a clear space for languages other than Dutch is offered to the children. For example, to meet children’s socio-emotional needs, or to facilitate children’s familiarisation period in the childcare service, the home language of the children will often be used in addition to Dutch.

To the extent possible, children and childcare workers are paired on the basis of their shared linguistic background. As most childcare workers in Elmer can use four or five different languages, it is quite possible to match them with children growing up in a family context in which one of these languages is the most dominant. In this way, the full linguistic repertoire of the childcare workers is used to support the children. It is important to note that this practice does not come at the expense of emphasising the importance of Dutch; it is considered an added value of working with a diverse team.

#### **Practices towards parents**

In verbal communication with parents, Elmer’s policy is to use all of the available languages present among the staff. Again, this enables the full linguistic repertoire of childcare workers to be deployed to support parents. In certain situations, this can even occur between Elmer centres in different locations (e.g. allocating a staff member of Rwandan origin to another location for a day or more, to support the familiarisation period of Rwandan parents). Parents are first always greeted in Dutch in each centre, but they can then switch to a shared language to facilitate good communication. Written communication is always in three languages: Dutch, French and English. In the past, Elmer has tried to carry out communication in more languages, but encountered issues with the quality of translations. It was therefore decided to restrict communication to three languages and to allow parents to make use of technology for translation into further languages. In written communication, Elmer also works deliberately towards making the language as accessible as possible, so that everything can also be read by parents with low levels of literacy.

Besides taking into account the various home languages of the parents, Elmer also seeks to provide opportunities for parents who are taking Dutch classes to practice the language. One of the activities organized is ‘parental cafés’ – monthly meetings with parents, beginning at 4 p.m., in which various topics are discussed in relation to the education/upbringing of the children.

### **3.2.3 Who: working with a diverse team**

To minimise barriers to a wide diversity of parents and children, Elmer aims to put together mixed teams. In 2021, childcare workers at Elmer came from 30 different countries: Albania, Algeria, Angola, Belgium, Bulgaria, China, DR Congo, Djibouti, Germany, France, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Iran, Italy, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Mali, Morocco, the Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Ukraine, Rwanda, Serbia, Spain, Syria, Turkey and South Korea.

The staff experiences this ‘super-diversity’ as stimulating and enriching, and considers it a natural resource within the organisation. Also, aside from having a migration background, most of the childcare workers are themselves multilingual. Because Elmer is committed to

the importance of creating a quality language environment in the institutional language (Dutch), they ensure that these multilingual professionals also get opportunities and support in strengthening their Dutch language skills on the job.

Underpinning Elmer's vision towards its team members is a belief in growth; a strong belief in the potential of people. In the words of the coordinator: "Career changers or lateral entrants that are well supported can grow wings! And it's important that these people must also take responsibility for themselves. That way, you can work on a diverse setting. We go a very long way with people, we take time for that and we believe that they will succeed."

According to Elmer, good support for team members goes hand in hand with high expectations, which it sees as beneficial to their growth. The most important expectation that Elmer has of its team members is what it calls a "pedagogical research mindset". Such an attitude derives not from 'knowing', but from 'questioning', in the sense that what one *knows* is less important than what one is *willing to question*. This core competence requires reflective skills, creativity and an eye towards lifelong learning. As such, it is important for team member at Elmer to be able to reflect on their practices. Various opportunities are provided to engage in such reflection (see below).

### **3.2.4 How: qualifying trajectory and ongoing professional development**

Elmer's professional development policy comprises a qualifying trajectory, and ongoing continuous development of the whole team.

#### **Qualifying trajectories**

Ever since Elmer began, training and employment have remained an indispensable part of its work. Elmer offers a qualifying trajectory, whereby jobseekers without qualification can follow a training path into vocational education while they work.

One day a week during working hours, individuals on the trajectory attend classes. Internships and workplace learning takes place at Elmer during the other weekdays. This qualifying training process results in a certificate or diploma that is recognised by the Flemish Governmental Agency responsible for childcare. The entire trajectory lasts a minimum of two years. In cases where the childcare worker requires preliminary Dutch training first, it may take up to 3 or 4 years.

Elmer also actively supports intern staff to pursue higher studies at Bachelor level, to become a pedagogical coach or team coordinator.

#### **Ongoing continuous professional development of the whole team**

The management and the entire team at Elmer are strongly convinced of the importance of reflection and dialogue among colleagues as a tool to develop a quality service. The organisation invests in team meetings and makes use of specific methods to enhance reflection and dialogue: video feedback, the Italian approach of pedagogical documentation, and the Wanda co-reflection method<sup>27</sup>. Multilingualism is a topic that is embedded in this CPD *dispositif*.

**Coaching and reflection moments.** Once every two weeks on an afternoon, pedagogical reflection moments take place at all four locations. Under the facilitation of an internal pedagogical coach, childcare workers reflect on pedagogical themes. The starting point is always experiences and observations from the work floor. They discuss concrete pedagogical practice and try to find answers to problems the childcare workers are facing (e.g. the familiarisation of parents and children). The Flemish ECEC pedagogical framework

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<sup>27</sup> More information about those methods can be found at <https://www.vbjk.be>.

MeMoQ is used as a guiding principle. This comprises the following six dimensions: well-being, involvement, emotional support, educational support, environment, families and diversity. Tools such as the group reflection method Wanda<sup>28</sup> are used to reflect on and develop specific themes.

Although the composition of reflection groups changes between sessions, each sub-team is represented during each of these reflection moments to ensure cross-group exchange. During these reflection moments, video observation of activities with children is also used to enhance reflection. The childcare workers give each other feedback and inspiration for future activities.

**Exchange and construction with others.** At Elmer, there is a long tradition of 'open doors and open minds'. Since Elmer is also a training organisation on the work floor, giving feedback to each other in daily practice has become a natural part of working practice.

Each year, a team day is also organised at each of the four locations to focus on team building and training on a relevant topic (e.g. communication with parents, child poverty). In addition, two training days are also organised every year focusing on pedagogy and prevention, one planning day per site to make and evaluate plans and prepare budgets, and one thinking day linked to a specific project.

**Participating in international projects to gain inspiration.** Elmer actively participates in various international projects such as Erasmus+ projects. For example, Elmer was involved in the European Erasmus+ project EQUAP, which involved job shadowing (working in a centre in another European country for one week). The experiences of the childcare workers from Elmer with job shadowing in Latvia, Portugal, Slovenia, Italy and Sweden were very positive. This exchange has inspired parental participation at Elmer, as childcare workers discovered new ways of involving parents and families, which were very much appreciated the families involved.

Participating in these kinds of projects is an important part of ongoing professionalisation at Elmer. These international projects offer an enormous amount of inspiration for the childcare workers. Also, in the aftermath of a project, reflection processes are set up at every location to further enrich and build on the topic.

In 2022, around 20 staff members of Elmer were able to visit childcare services abroad. According to the coordinator: "It is unbelievable how inspired people return from these visits! It will stick with them for years!"

**Dutch learning support.** As explained previously, mastering Dutch is a challenge for some of the multilingual staff. To support these childcare workers, Elmer organises 'conversation tables' at which childcare workers meet once every fortnight on a voluntary basis to talk about a variety of topics. A staff member who is proficient in Dutch facilitates these conversations. In addition to these conversation tables, Elmer works together with a partner organisation, 'The House of Dutch' to facilitate Dutch in the workplace. Under this programme, a coach from the House of Dutch comes to Elmer to assist during daily childcare practice for one hour in the week, and to individually support one childcare worker for one extra hour.

### 3.2.5 Where: what influences derive from the specific context of Brussels?

As noted in the introduction to this case study, Brussels is considered a super-diverse city, particularly with regard to the number of languages present in Brussels society.

The city of Brussels is, however, also confronted by a complex situation regarding the Dutch language. The fact that Dutch is both an official language and a minority language has an influence on ECEC policy, and on the choices Elmer can make in its enrolment policy.

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<sup>28</sup> Information about the Wanda method can be found at <https://www.vbjk.be/en/publications/wanda-manual>.

A decree stipulates that childcare services in Brussels that are under the responsibility of the Government of the Flemish Community can give priority to up to 55% of families in which one of the parents has 'sufficient proficiency' in Dutch (European language level B1). At Elmer, this was the case for 51% of families in 2021. Together with the fact that there is a general shortage of childcare places and that demand for childcare places exceeds supply, Elmer decided to apply a restriction on the enrolment of families, based on the Dutch language. According to the coordinator: "With new parents, we will always look for a link with Dutch in the family. In our focus towards families, we limit ourselves to families who have a link with the Dutch language." Such a link may be interpreted broadly, but nevertheless must exist. This is important for Elmer, given the fact that Dutch remains the first language in its interactions with children and parents. It should be noted, however, that this restriction does not apply to families in crisis, or which have a child with special needs.

At the same time, Elmer has remained aligned with the language policies that prevail in schools, with the Flemish framework Memo-Q for childcare, and with its own internal language policy valorising a positive attitude towards the multilingual resources of children, parents and staff. To ensure such a policy operates vibrantly on the work floor, Elmer's coordinator highlights that the scale is important – i.e. Elmer, as an organisation, is not too small, but small enough to maintain the agency of the ECEC professionals in the teams; not too big, but big enough to be able to hire its own internal pedagogical coaches. However, what is regarded as 'big' or 'small' enough might differ in another context.

Also, as a 'neighbourhood-oriented service', Elmer targets working parents from the neighbourhood, with the aim of achieving a social mix. To do this, they cooperate with the local childcare desk (*Lokaal Loket Kinderopvang*) and various organisations that help the parents of newborn babies to find a childcare service.

### **3.2.6 Summary and conclusion**

Research on multilingualism in ECEC has mainly focused on the experiences of young dual-language learners and their families in monolingual and bilingual contexts. While CPD initiatives in such contexts might offer inspiration to better understand bilingual development in educational settings, they are difficult to translate into multilingual ECEC settings with more complex linguistic diversity. The Belgian childcare facility Elmer is located in the super-diverse city of Brussels where, in addition to the official institutional languages of Dutch and French, almost 50 different languages are spoken every day within Elmer's ECEC centres. Elmer's team is highly diverse, with childcare workers collectively speaking more than 28 languages. This allows linguistic/cultural matches to be made between staff and families, but also presents several challenges. To meet these challenges, Elmer has developed a language policy at organisational level that ensures the flourishing of multilingual practices, as well as support for Dutch language development, the holistic development of all children, and the participation of families. These features are embedded into Elmer's conception of continuous professional development and the qualifying trajectory it offers to unqualified jobseekers, who can follow a training path while working.

From its very beginning, Elmer has always worked with a diverse team of professionals. Its focus and mission have always been to realise training and create sustainable employment opportunities for unqualified or low-skilled people living in Brussels. In this respect, Elmer did not initially have an explicit focus on multilingualism in the design of its continuous professional development. However, as multilingualism is a clear reality in Brussels, possessing a linguistically diverse team is consequently also a necessity for Elmer – especially given the fact that many people in Brussels with a migration background find themselves classified as 'underqualified'.



The case of Elmer shows that it is possible to pay attention to an official language (Dutch) in a super-diverse multilingual context while at the same time building on the diversity of different home languages. In this case, the two go hand in hand.

However, to achieve this, such a goal needs to be addressed at all levels of the competent system. This case highlights, among other things, the importance of leaders as actors of change. At Elmer, the director is supported in her policy by a team of coordinators, and the pedagogical team supports the childcare workers. Elmer operates as a professional learning community (PLC) that is sustainable, and the director has succeeded in creating democratic spaces in which not only the pedagogical coordinators but also the educators are 'agents of change'. A specific CPD *dispositif* on multilingualism is embedded into the existing, ongoing CPD *dispositif*.

Both a long-term vision and a whole-system vision have been essential to developing Elmer's way of working with multilingual children, families and teams.

## Chapter 4. General conclusions and recommendations

The reality of multilingualism is growing in many European Member states, bringing with it an increasing linguistic diversity in ECEC centres across Europe. However, a monolingual view of language development still prevails, which highlights the necessity to integrate a positive vision of multilingualism, grounded in evidence-based knowledge, into educational practices. Moreover, working within a multilingual context raises additional challenges for the ECEC workforce, and professionals consequently express uncertainty about supporting multilingual children and parents. With regard to the language development of multilingual children, such professionals need to take on a dual function: 1) offering high-quality interactions and fostering the institutional language(s), while at the same time 2) recognising, respecting and supporting the home language(s). Towards multilingual parents, ECEC professionals have to nurture dialogue and create partnerships, which may be complicated when language and cultural background are not shared. Research shows that engaging ECEC professionals in continuous professional development (CPD) can have a positive impact on the quality of pedagogical practices. For those to happen, however, CPD itself needs to be of high quality and must meet several criteria. This does not always appear to be evident. Moreover, CPD is often not attuned to the complex realities of multilingual families, and scientific insights on multilingual language development are often not integrated.

From the analysis of the literature and the case studies presented in this report, five recommendations for effective CPD on multilingualism in ECEC are outlined in this chapter. These recommendations draw on key findings on multilingualism in early childhood, and on the conditions necessary for CPD to be effective. They offer concrete avenues to inspire various key actors in ECEC across the EU: policymakers, centre leaders and professionals.

### Recommendation 1

**The development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should follow a step-wise design, in which the desired outcomes for multilingual children and families are defined in advance of selecting the targeted practices and CPD delivery modes.**

To address the complexity of multilingualism and CPD in ECEC, a multifaceted approach is required. The step-wise pathway proposed in this report provides a framework that policymakers, ECEC leaders and trainers can use to successfully implement CPD on multilingualism in ECEC.

This process draws on the following steps:

1. Reflecting on the desired outcomes for multilingual children and families (the 'why?' question) should always be the starting point when planning CPD on multilingualism in ECEC. Furthermore, it should remain the central underlying foundation throughout the entire process of CPD development and implementation. (see Section 2.1)
2. Targeting specific practices to support multilingual children and families in ECEC (the 'what' question), comes second. (see Section 2.2)
3. An analysis of the baseline situation and the needs of the ECEC professionals targeted (the 'who' question) can then permit the content of the CPD to be fine-tuned. (see Section 2.3)
4. Following this, concrete CPD delivery modes can be selected (the 'what' question). (see Section 2.4)

5. Lastly, the conditions of the macro-context that surrounds the specific ECEC system must be taken into account, in order to adjust the format of the CPD to its context and to facilitate sustainable implementation (the 'where' question). (see Section 2.4)

Specific recommendations for policymakers:

- Document the baseline contextual situation, in order to better comprehend the realities of multilingual children and families, and of staff in the ECEC centre – and to better adjust CPD to address these realities.
- Involve partners from different levels (e.g. parents, ECEC professionals and leaders, local and national stakeholders) and sectors (e.g. universities, centres of expertise, social services, language centres) to collect information and reflect at each step. Bottom-up processes and local involvement are crucial to adjust CPD to a specific context. Maintain these partnerships after the CPD is implemented, as they can sustain evaluation and scaling up, as shown in the case of *Griffbereit* and *Rucksack KiTa* in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany.

Specific recommendations for ECEC leaders and professionals:

- Propose tools to **initiate dialogue** with parents and to ascertain their needs, as in the Erasmus+ project 'Planting languages'<sup>29</sup>. Parents' questions can be a trigger or catalyst for a (parallel) CPD trajectory for the ECEC team, as illustrated in the German case study.
- Promote and support **collaborative activities** with parents: give ECEC professionals time to plan such activities (see subsection 2.2.2). These can trigger professionals' curiosity towards the home languages present and foster their confidence in building partnerships with multilingual parents.

## Recommendation 2

**The development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should emerge from a positive vision of multilingualism and through collaboration with parents. The development of CPD should draw on scientific knowledge, and also work well with existing policies.**

Language policy is shaped by the social, economic and cultural landscape and history of a country or region. Disconnects between multilingualism policies and scientific knowledge are a barrier to the implementation of practices towards multilingual children and parents, and to the development of CPD on multilingualism. A prevailing monolingual habitus / mindset throughout European ECEC often impedes the full acknowledgement of multilingualism in all domains of the ECEC quality framework, which affects the experiences of multilingual children and families. This situation calls for a rethinking of linguistic and cultural diversity at policy level, shifting the perception of multilingualism from that of a problem to that of a resource.

This process draws on the following principles:

- CPD should start from a holistic, strengths- and rights-based vision for child development. Multilingual children should be seen as competent and resourceful.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.plantinglanguages.com/>

- The desired outcomes for children’s language development in ECEC should be aimed at both the institutional language and the home language(s). Growing evidence suggests that creating opportunities to integrate children’s home language(s) into ECEC can foster general institutional language development and multilingual development.
- From a social justice perspective, the inclusion and participation of multilingual parents in the ECEC centre, as well as in the wider community, should be promoted. CPD should help ECEC professionals to develop reciprocal relationships with multilingual parents, which enhances parents’ confidence and agency.
- Opportunities for dialogue concerning multilingualism should be created at different levels of policymaking (e.g. by organising joint conferences for stakeholders and practitioners, or through innovative European projects involving ECEC centres and decision-makers), in order to achieve a shared vision and to align with existing scientific knowledge.
- ECEC curricula should be reviewed, revised and/or adapted to ensure they provide space and legitimacy for ECEC professionals to explore and implement practices that are supportive of multilingual children and families.

Specific recommendations for policymakers:

- Adopt and integrate an **attitude / positive perception** of the value of multilingualism through curriculum development, professional and training competence profiles and in policy documents, reflecting European recommendations (CEU, 2019b; Convention of the Rights of the child, 1989). Also, seek **internal coherence** between the vision written in policies and concrete actions, e.g. when communicating about multilingualism.
- Ensure broad policy and legislative frameworks for ECEC systems that are based on **children’s rights**, and promote a positive approach to multilingualism (see, for example, the policy document<sup>30</sup> by the European Platform for Investing in Children [EPIC] (2019) on embedding a children’s rights perspective into policy and decision-making).
- Deploy specific requirements for CPD trajectories and initial training to include **state-of-the-art scientific knowledge** on early/emerging multilingualism. Seek ways to explicitly explain how building on the multilingual resources of children, parents and professionals **strengthens the learning of the institutional language**, instead of hindering it.
- **Facilitate access** at all levels to **evidence-informed knowledge** about multilingual development in young children and collaboration with multilingual families. State-of-the-art knowledge on early multilingualism should be easily accessible for (prospective) ECEC professionals, but also for multilingual parents. **National and local agencies** can bring together current knowledge, allow access (for example, via an up-to-date website), and provide information sessions for ECEC centres to become acquainted with this material.
- Invest in **curriculum development** that reflects multilingualism. For example, in the curriculum for the ECEC sector, a section could be included on the importance of multilingualism awareness, along with a call to welcome and include home language(s) in pedagogical practice. The curriculum is a powerful tool to ensure coherence about multilingualism at various levels, in both vision and vocabulary.

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<sup>30</sup> This EPIC policy memo can be found at <https://ec.europa.eu/>

- Recognise the central role played by parents in their child’s multilingual development, and thus in ECEC services, and ensure that legislation and policies are in place to **promote the active involvement of parents** in ECEC. For other insights and recommendations, consult the NESET *ad hoc* report<sup>31</sup> on parental involvement in education (Aliева, 2021).

Specific recommendations for ECEC leaders and professionals:

- **Emphasise a shared vision** and set of values regarding the desired outcomes for children and families: support the learning of the institutional language, recognise the right of children and families to nurture and foster their home language, strengthen involvement, and foster the well-being and holistic development of children.
- Observe, document and adjust how the vision of multilingualism carried in language(s) policy is **concretely expressed in daily practices** in the ECEC centre. Look, for example, for how the physical environment reflects that vision (see Box 4 in subsection 2.2.1 for information on how to make home languages visible in ECEC centres).
- **Discuss** multilingualism with the team, both as a specific topic during team meetings, and during a professional development activity. This can help to disentangle persistent (and inaccurate) beliefs about multilingual language development.
- Engage and involve ECEC professionals in **co-developing a centre-based local language policy**. This language policy should allow multilingual practices to flourish as well as supporting language development in the institutional language, the holistic development of all children, and the participation of parents. Centre leaders and staff should collectively ensure that this language policy is embedded into all levels of the ECEC service, as highlighted in in the case study from Belgium.

### Recommendation 3

**The development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should be tailored to the needs and capabilities of professionals. CPD should be adapted to specific contexts, and a range of practices and delivery modes should be put forward.**

As highlighted in this report, there is no clear, single answer to any of the complex questions inherent in pedagogical work with multilingual children and their families. Families, communities and professionals must account for this complexity by interpreting and customising their practices. CPD trajectories should be adapted to the specific contexts and needs of professionals, meaning that both ECEC practices and CPD must be able to respond to the diversity of paths towards multilingualism, the diversity of contexts, and the diversity in the needs and capabilities of ECEC staff.

This recommendation draws on the following guidelines:

- ECEC professionals can experiment with different possibilities for integrating home language(s) within meaningful, high-quality interactions, taking advantage of the language repertoires of staff, parents and children.
- Systematic mapping and use of the existing (multilingual) resources within a team should be undertaken, pairing multilingual staff with multilingual children and families wherever possible. As shown in the case study from Belgium, linguistic

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<sup>31</sup> This NESET *ad hoc* report can be consulted at <https://nesetweb.eu>

diversity within a team can be consciously pursued. The pairing of multilingual staff with multilingual children and families can also be favoured where possible.

- Constant reflection and experimentation by ECEC professionals should be sustained, to support the making of choices between different practices.
- Parallel professional outcomes should be defined with ECEC professionals in order to consolidate individual and team-based reflective skills, as well as to foster engagement in defining centre-based language policies.
- A menu-based approach to CPD should be favoured (i.e. proposing different delivery modes that encompass effective CPD criteria, which can be combined to adapt CPD to the different needs and contexts of professionals). A variety of documented delivery modes and components exists from which to develop a CPD *dispositif* (e.g. workshops, coaching, professional learning communities, online blogs) (see Section 2.4)

Specific recommendations for policymakers:

- Invest and promote **menu-based CPD offers** that can be adjusted to a variety of contexts, with an array of possible delivery modes, instead of turnkey programmes.
- Clearly define the **core unifying vision** for working with multilingual children and families (see Recommendation 2), so this can be maintained while upscaling and adapting the CPD initiative, as discussed in the German case study.
- Document the **baseline contextual situation**, in order to better apprehend and adjust CPD to the realities and needs of the ECEC staff.

Specific recommendations for ECEC leaders and professionals:

- Propose different **low-threshold first steps** towards CPD on multilingualism. 'Menu-based' CPD programmes can allow professionals to pick up a first activity without the pressure of implementing a whole trajectory (although this can still lead to doing so). As in the German case study, working in collaboration with parents can be a first activity. This requires minimal involvement from the ECEC centre, but can eventually lead to the implementation of a CPD trajectory for the entire team. The tempo of implementation can vary from one team to another.
- Use existing **reflective tools** on multilingualism and/or inclusion/diversity to help ECEC professionals to link theory with practice, and adjust their practice to their own context and to the children and families they are working with. Reflective practices should be a pillar of CPD, as no 'one-size-fits-all' practices exist for multilingual children and families (see, for example, the self-reflection tool from the Inclusive Early Childhood Education project<sup>32</sup> (EPIC, 2020)).
- **Integrate a 'pedagogical research mindset'** (see the case study from Belgium) into the expectations of the team members. This is a way of thinking that doesn't begin with 'knowing', but with 'questioning', in the sense that what one *knows* is less important than what one is *willing to question*. This core competence requires reflective skills, creativity, and an eye towards lifelong learning.

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<sup>32</sup> This tool can be consulted in various languages at <https://www.european-agency.org>.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**The development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should be embedded within a sustainable, system-based policy on staff professionalisation.**

Because multilingualism is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, it is necessary to consider all criteria for effective CPD that can promote high-quality ECEC practices (see Section 2.4):

- CPD should be a long-term, sustainable trajectory, for example by integrating specific content about multilingualism into existing trajectories.
- CPD should be planned at a system level and require collaboration at different levels, i.e. it should not only focus on individual competences but also, for example, on sustaining learning communities at a centre or at regional level, and by involving stakeholders and policymakers.
- CPD should provide different types of knowledge, i.e. theoretical foundations that support the understanding of the processes behind quality practices for multilingual children and families, as well as more practice-based knowledge that enables professionals to make connections with their day-to-day practice towards children and families.
- CPD should address ECEC professionals' beliefs and should align with scientific knowledge, as well as a shared vision on multilingualism, as described in previous sections of this chapter.
- CPD should include components of reflection and enactment by creating the conditions and space for ECEC professionals to experiment with new multilingual practices.
- CPD should include provisions for individualised feedback, facilitated by a pedagogical coach or tutor.
- CPD should support ECEC professionals' involvement and agency, by offering them opportunities to choose which practices and topics to prioritise, and by tailoring the content to their needs.

Combining different delivery modes for CPD into a CPD *dispositif* is recognised as being more effective, and allows all of the various criteria to be included.

Moreover, recruitment strategies should valorise and support diversity within ECEC teams. As shown in the case study from Belgium, linguistic diversity within a team has to be planned via a long-term perspective on professionalisation, while offering specific qualifying trajectories including, for example, language courses in the institutional language. Another example comes in the case study from Germany, where working as a 'connecting' parent (in this case, an *Elternbegleiter* or "parents' companion") can be a first step towards further working with an ECEC team.

Strong leadership at a national or regional level can contribute to the creation of the necessary conditions for effective CPD: ensuring coherence between curriculum, language policies and CPD goals, and allowing for proper funding and organisational possibilities (e.g. child-free hours).

Specific recommendations for policymakers:

- Existing CPD, leadership and collaborative processes should be mapped to allow CPD initiatives to be anchored within the context of an ECEC centre. This increases the chances of CPD implementation being sustainable.
- Create and invest in **structural conditions** that are known to have a crucial impact on successful CPD processes. Among other things, these include: **child-free hours**; team meetings and other activities to reflect on pedagogical practice; pedagogical support through **pedagogical coaching**; engaging in **professional learning communities**; deploying and disseminating existing reflective tools;
- Support the expansion of **professional development policies** in which recruitment also features. This can allow a team to be built whose composition can reflect the linguistic landscape of the community/neighbourhood (see Recommendation 1). For example, disseminate examples of inspiring professional development policies from other ECEC centres / contexts.
- Invest in hiring a **diverse workforce** in ECEC in terms of language, gender and socio-cultural background, while simultaneously safeguarding **a long-term vision** on recruitment and retention strategies for a diverse team, as seen in the case study from Belgium. Efforts should be made to facilitate access to initial training, to simplify the recognition of certifications from other countries, to propose alternative work-study possibilities, and to support institutional language learning by staff (see EC, 2021a for further recommendations on how to recruit ECEC staff).

Specific recommendations for ECEC leaders and professionals are:

- Create **safe spaces of trust**, as well as time, for ECEC professionals to experiment and reflect on multilingual practices with children and families. Particularly in settings where monolingual immersion is or was the norm, experimenting with the inclusion of home language(s) in ECEC is recommended to demystify those practices, as explained in the subsection 2.4.1).
- Provide opportunities for professionals to engage in a **qualifying trajectory**.
- Within the policy on CPD, plan how ECEC professionals can reinvest the knowledge they have acquired back into the team as shown the case study from Belgium.

## Recommendation 5

**The development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should be integrated into an ongoing focus on quality within ECEC.**

The 2019 Council Recommendation on High Quality ECEC Systems formalises the EU Member States' position on the importance of quality ECEC. This comprehensive framework is a unifying foundation that supports the important role of ECEC services in promoting social inclusion. Multilingualism is a reality, as well as a right, during a child's early years – for this reason, quality ECEC cannot be achieved without the integration of multilingualism into all five domains of the European Quality Framework on ECEC: access; workforce; curriculum; monitoring and evaluation; and governance and funding<sup>33</sup>. In this sense, multilingualism should be considered a transversal, rather than separate, topic. Furthermore, an explicit focus on multilingualism in CPD could offer a refreshing angle from

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<sup>33</sup> For further information about the EQF, the training package developed for ECEC training providers, by a cross-country team led by International Step by Step Association (ISSA) members, can be consulted at <https://www.issa.nl/node/289>



which to reinforce a commitment to quality ECEC. Designing and implementing CPD for multilingual children can, in turn, strengthen and transform ECEC practices for *all* children.

This recommendation draws on the following guidelines:

- The ECEC practices in relation to multilingual children that are presented in CPD should centre around creating opportunities for meaningful, high-quality interactions during daily life in ECEC.
- Practices to increase collaboration with multilingual parents can be supported by creating a welcoming environment, engaging in constant dialogue, and seeking opportunities to collaborate that valorise parents' competences and expertise.
- The exploration of multilingual activities in CPD should not overshadow the importance of child-centred interactions during such activities.
- Broader reflection on the accessibility of ECEC services for multilingual families should be incorporated within the CPD trajectory, in alignment with ECEC practices that support collaboration with multilingual parents.

Specific recommendations for policymakers:

- Ensure that the conditions necessary to provide **high-quality ECEC** are in place to allow trained ECEC professionals to use practices adjusted to the specific needs of multilingual children and families. Supportive working conditions include **professional leadership**, which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents (see CEU, 2019a for further recommendations).

Specific recommendations for ECEC leaders and professionals:

- Use the ECEC curriculum as a tool to enhance the focus on **meaningful, high-quality language interactions** in ECEC centres, where multilingual practices must be anchored.
- Create **conditions to listen to the voices of multilingual parents**. Practitioners should work towards reciprocal and equal relationships with parents, simultaneously strengthening multilingual parents in their roles as the first educators and experts on their own children. Practitioners should not take the parent's place or decide for them. Specific attention can be given to the use of **digital tools** such as translation apps, to facilitate communication between parents and ECEC professionals who do not share a language.
- Develop a **policy on accessibility**, and design ways to reach out to multilingual families and vulnerable families. Make use of networks of partners who work with families with young children (see, for example, recommendations and tools from the INTESYS Erasmus+ project<sup>34</sup>, and the NESET report on integrated working<sup>35</sup>).
- Build **partnerships with families and local communities** in order to incorporate multilingual practices towards children and parents. In this regard, working with 'bridging figures' can be a possible way to actively reach out to multilingual parents and to lay the foundations good relationships/partnerships between multilingual families and ECEC professionals.

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<sup>34</sup> <https://kbs-frb.be/en/intesys>

<sup>35</sup> This report (Vandekerckhove et al., 2019) is available at <https://nesetweb.eu>

## Chapter 5. Specific recommendations on CPD and working with refugee children and families in ECEC

In this chapter, we examine to what extent the findings and recommendations presented in the previous chapters also apply to the specific needs of refugee children and families in ECEC.

ECEC services can play a crucial role for newly arrived migrant children and families, by providing a safe and welcoming environment in which children and parents can be supported in their first steps into the society of the new country. In this sense, ECEC spaces can help to bridge cultures of origin with those of the host country (ISSA, 2020). Moreover, by creating a nurturing, responsive, stimulating and predictable space where refugee children can feel secure and where they can interact with responsive adults, an ECEC service can significantly contribute to the resilience and overall outcomes of those children.

While guiding principles and recommendations for multilingual children and families are also relevant for refugee children and families, additional considerations or recommendations are also necessary in order to adjust CPD and ECEC practices to meet the specific needs of these families. This is in line with an approach of 'progressive universalism' (Bove & Sharmahd, 2020).

Indeed, from previously published reports on working with refugee children and families in ECEC, we learn of specific aspects to consider. Among these are:

- Many refugee children and families have experienced significant trauma and stress, which demands a holistic approach to support that takes into account cognitive, emotional and social aspects (EC, 2022; Park et al., 2018). There is often an expressed need for calm, quiet spaces without stressors, and for individualised interactions.
- Parents who have recently migrated or fled from their home countries often lack knowledge of and experiences with ECEC in the host country, as well as the necessary resources to gain access (Bolloton & Spafford, 2015).
- Many families may struggle with legal issues relating to their official status. These add extra barriers to their participation in ECEC, in terms of administrative, legal and practical issues (EC, 2022).
- Transitional ECEC services may sometimes need to be specifically deployed in reception centres (ISSA, 2020).
- Refugees arrive in the host country with very heterogeneous identities, stories, experiences and trajectories. As such, 'refugee families' are to be considered as a heterogeneous group (ISSA, 2020).
- The needs of refugee families must be regularly evaluated and reviewed, including after the reception stage, as this often involves further displacements (Park et al., 2018). Their stay in the host country may also be temporary or of unknown duration (either because their application is denied, because they are sent to yet another country, or because they aim to return to their country of origin or to travel on further to another country). Each displacement impacts not only the needs of families, but also their sense of belonging and their 'capability to aspire' (Terbish et al., 2022), which impact the perceived necessity to learn (a new) institutional language(s).

- Multilingualism and multilingual language development are often addressed as secondary aspects in refugee reception projects. Other, more urgent objectives relating to legalisation, housing and support for their socio-emotional well-being, often overshadow or instrumentalise the issue of language, which is then presented as a barrier to overcome rather than a resource to build on (Park et al., 2018).

These aspects influence the process of developing and implementing CPD on multilingualism in ECEC when working with refugee children and families. Thus, the goal of this chapter is to provide policy-makers and ECEC professionals with additional guidelines that address this question. While several experts have considered the integration of recently arrived children into the education system, very few studies have so far been conducted in the context of early childhood (0-6 years). As a result, there is not yet an explicit consensus on the guiding principles that should be taken into account when planning CPD for ECEC professionals on working with children and families with a refugee background. To address this gap, we conducted a two-round Delphi procedure<sup>36</sup>, in which the opinions of different experts on this topic were brought together.

### 5.1 Delphi procedure

An expert panel was recruited in collaboration with the European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism (ECSPM) and the Centre for the Social Study of Migration and Refugees (CESSMIR) from Ghent University. In total, 31 experts<sup>37</sup> expressed their interest of which 28 anonymously completed the first round, and 22 the second round.

**First-round Delphi.** Statements were submitted to the experts in two categories: 1) key findings from the main report; and 2) additional points concerning the specific situations of refugee families with young children. The goal of this first round was twofold: 1) to assess the relevance of the key findings from the main report with regard to working with refugee children and families; and 2) to uncover additional, crucial points that were currently missing. Supplementary opinions and advice from the experts were also gathered.

**Second-round Delphi.** The statements presented in the first round were revised according to the feedback received from the experts, and resubmitted. In this second round, the experts were asked to rate each statement on a 5-point Likert-scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). The results of this second round showed consensus on all of the revised statements (meaning that more than 80% of the experts rated the revised statements with '4' or '5'). Experts' comments were taken into consideration to clarify concepts when needed.

### 5.2 Guiding principles

The guiding principles, presented in Chapter 2, for developing CPD for multilingual children and families, were adapted to respond to the various needs and situations of refugee children and families. These adapted principles are presented in the same way as the originals, i.e. in five sections. Most of these adapted guiding principles remain in line with what was previously stated. However, various interesting comments from the experts allowed a number of other, essential points to be added.

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<sup>36</sup> The Delphi technique is "a series of sequential questionnaires or 'rounds,' interspersed by controlled feedback, that seek to gain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts" (Powell, 2003). It is useful in situations in which individual judgments must be tapped and combined in order to address an incomplete state of knowledge. In comparison with other 'consensus' methods that rely solely on group discussions, it has been known as a quick and relatively efficient way to combine the knowledge and abilities of a group of experts, giving a voice to every expert without biases from group-specific power relationships, by ensuring anonymity and confidentiality.

<sup>37</sup> From Belgium (n=8), Netherlands (n=4), France (4), Italy (n=2), Greece (n=2), Germany (n=1), Portugal (n=1), Poland (n=1) and other non-European countries (n=8).

### 5.2.1 Why: defining desired outcomes for refugee children and families

As for all multilingual children and families, defining the desired outcomes of CPD should be the first step in designing CPD. This should begin from a curiosity and interest in learning about the needs of refugee children and families and the resources they can bring to the ECEC centre.

The following aspects should also be considered:

- Building on a strengths- and rights-based perspective, in which children and families are seen as competent, resourceful and resilient is even more important in the case of refugee families whose legal statuses and situations may differ.
- In the case of refugee children, a holistic perspective to child development is essential, meaning that supporting language development in ECEC should always go hand in hand with socio-emotional development, well-being, and engagement in daily interactions. Specific attention can be given to reducing the impact of daily stressors that may present themselves in the context of ECEC.

As stated in the previous chapters, children's multilingual language development should be supported in ECEC. **This explicitly means language development in the institutional language(s), as well as in the home language(s) of the child.** In addition, refugee children may have picked up other languages along their migration path, which are now part of their language repertoire. While historically the role of sustaining home language(s) has been left to families and communities, it is now recognised that ECEC professionals should take active responsibility for offering and creating possibilities for the home language(s) of refugee children to flourish.

- This can be achieved by recognising, valuing and fostering home language(s) as much as possible in daily interactions within the ECEC centre.
- Moreover, valuing home language(s) also supports the development of children's identities, and feelings of belonging and well-being during a transition period, which is especially important for refugee children.

Lastly, as for other multilingual parents, ECEC professionals should be supported to reach out to facilitate collaboration with refugee parents, taking into consideration the following:

- Attention should be paid and respect given to the various familial and parenting situations.
- Ways should be actively sought to strengthen the confidence of parents (and other caregivers) in their choices and agency, and to foster their inclusion and participation in the ECEC centre as well as in the community. This should be achieved by respecting their own rhythm, and by taking into account the other challenges and situations with which they are dealing.

### 5.2.2 What: practices that can be proposed for multilingual refugee children and families

As with all children, CPD should focus on practices to support multilingual language development in ECEC that are centred around creating opportunities for meaningful, high-quality interactions in daily life and routines.

- The focus on starting from high emotional support and child-centred practices should be clearly stated and highlighted, and should not be overshadowed by language learning activities.

As discussed in the previous chapters, an array of possibilities exists for integrating home language(s) into meaningful, high-quality interactions in ECEC settings, while also supporting institutional language development (see Section 2.2.). This should take place in a safe atmosphere that allows staff, children and families to use their entire language repertoires.

For professionals working with refugee children (and with all multilingual children), the following are examples of practices that could be explored through CPD:

- working in tandem with an assistant or volunteer who speaks the child's home language(s);
- inviting parents to collaborate within the ECEC setting;
- drawing on multilingual materials and books;
- discovering a few words or lullabies in the children's home language(s);
- allowing children to communicate in their home language(s) with peers or adults who share the same language.

As with all multilingual parents, but of even greater importance in the case of multilingual refugee parents, practices to enhance collaboration should be based on the following principles:

- creating a welcoming and safe environment in which the whole language repertoire of ECEC staff and parents is exploited, including what parents may be learning from the institutional language;
- engaging in constant dialogue, which implies a balance between providing information (about language development in the child's upbringing, the centre's language policy, the ECEC system in the host country, etc.) and listening to the parents, to respect their needs and rhythm;
- creating opportunities to collaborate in such a way that parents' competency and expertise is valorised.

To facilitate communication with refugee parents, various avenues should be explored from the outset, as these parents may need to express difficult emotions and concerns. As outlined in the subsection 2.2.2, these avenues include enabling cultural and linguistic matches between ECEC staff and the community (language mediators, 'connecting' parents with experience of migration and knowledge of the host country, volunteers, etc.); working with interpreters; and exploring digital (translation) devices, tools and resources.

- When working with interpreters or mediators, it is essential to have confidence in the message that is being translated. It is therefore important to pay attention to possible subtle conflicts between cultures and languages that may be hard to grasp as an outsider, but may affect trust.

Preparations can and should be made in advance to welcome a refugee child and her/his parents into an ECEC group. This can be explicitly targeted through specific CPD activities. The following points form a good basis from which to begin reflection in the ECEC centre or team:

- **Group composition:** to what extent is the present diversity in the group supportive to the child's first interactions and inclusion?;
- **Activities:** what activities and discussions can be planned to promote social cohesion and language awareness among the children?;

- **Environment:** how can a welcoming 'multilingual' environment be prepared? (Think about pictures, posters, books, names, words, etc.);
- **Routines:** how can the child's engagement in routine activities be sustained when the child does not yet speak or understand the institutional language? (Think about non-verbal participation, using home language, etc.);
- **Before starting:** how can the child and her/his parents become familiarised with the setting before they begin attending? (Think about pre-visits, familiarisation periods, intake conversations, etc.).

While multilingual activities can be proposed, it is important to ensure that these do not overshadow the importance of child-centred interactions. It is also important not to 'essentialise' languages and culture, i.e. by portraying or explain language or culture in terms of stereotypical or supposedly intrinsic traits.

### 5.2.3 Who: what are the needs of ECEC professionals?

It is important to tailoring CPD content to ECEC professionals' needs. This can be achieved by investigating, using a 'baseline analysis', what practices are already in use in the setting and by understanding what obstacles ECEC professionals have already encountered (see Section 2.3). This analysis can lead staff to target topics and concrete directions for CPD trajectories on multilingualism in general, but also concerning specific aspects that relate to the multifaceted situation of refugee families.

In addition to general knowledge about multilingual development and multilingual practices (see Sections 2.1 and 2.2 for more insights), other important topics to address through CPD may include:

- reflection on existing beliefs and attitudes towards multilingualism and refugees;
- insights on how to build on the entire language repertoire of children, families and ECEC professionals;
- insights on how to draw on the cultural capital that refugee children and families bring to the ECEC centre;
- understanding the background and situation of refugee children and families, their own hopes and dreams for (the education of) their children;
- understanding how refugee families view ECEC in the host country, and how this relates to their experiences with childcare services in their home country;
- information about the rights of refugees, including different legal statuses, reception structures and procedures within the country, etc.;
- insights on how to implement specific actions based on the Children's Rights framework;
- general knowledge about psychosocial support for refugee children and families, as well as about trauma and post-trauma support, and how to direct them to the right resources.

The valorisation of diversity within a team can also be pursued on two levels:

- 1) Mapping the language reservoir present within the team to ensure that children, families and colleagues can benefit from this language diversity;

- 2) Mapping resources, experiences and talents from refugee communities and developing fast-track mechanisms to recognise certifications and to offer qualifying trajectories for members of the refugee community to collaborate in ECEC.

As discussed in Section 2.3, in parallel with the desired outcomes for children and families, professional outcomes for ECEC professionals can also be defined:

- to consolidate individual and team-based reflective practices, as it can be difficult in some teams to talk about multilingualism and migration;
- to ensure the well-being of the professionals concerned, since working with children and families with a history of trauma is not always easy; and
- to contribute to the language and CPD policies of the ECEC setting, and to advocate for changes on the basis of experiences with refugees children and families.

These professional outcomes should be co-determined with ECEC professionals, as they can increase the agency and ownership of the practitioners with regard to CPD and within their own ECEC centre.

#### **5.2.4 How: in what way(s) CPD can be offered?**

All of the criteria for effective CPD enumerated in Section 2.4 should be considered (and, where possible, followed) when planning CPD in relation to working with refugee families and children. A combination of delivery modes and components should be adopted, rather than focusing on a single delivery mode (e.g. combining workshops, coaching, professional learning communities and online components).

- To allow exchanges between ECEC professionals who are currently working with refugee children and families, professional learning communities can be organised.
- When refugee family members are interested in collaborating in ECEC, opportunities to be included in such learning communities should be provided for them.

Specific CPD on multilingualism and working with refugee families should be embedded within the wider CPD policy, both at centre level and at regional or national level.

- It is recommended to enhance discussions on refugee inclusion and multilingualism within existing CPD trajectories, rather than devising new and separate trajectories. Indeed, as every ECEC centre may receive refugee children and families, a lot of common ground exists for exchanges about working with multilingual children and families.
- Specific working groups or expert committees can be created to support the development and implementation of specific CPD content about the refugee population into existing CPD trajectories. Such committees could also facilitate communication between local and national levels to better plan CPD, follow families' trajectories and ensure follow-ups with ECEC teams.

#### **5.2.5 Where: necessary conditions from the macro-context**

CPD on supporting multilingual refugee children and families should be embedded within the quality framework for ECEC (CEU, 2019a): access; workforce; curriculum; monitoring and evaluation; and governance and funding.

- To support the workforce, instead of developing turnkey programmes, CPD should be customisable, in order to adapt to different realities in different regions and

countries. However, countries and regions can, at times, be grouped together in order for insights to be shared about how to support the trajectories of refugee children and parents and their multilingual language development.

- Strong governance at the level of individual centres, as well as at national or regional and local levels, is paramount to enable the necessary conditions for effective CPD and quality ECEC. Therefore, parallel CPD tracks can be proposed to prepare ECEC leaders and local stakeholders to take an active role in working with refugee children and families.
- Measures should be taken to ensure continuity, stability and inclusion for children and families. Centre turnover should be reduced, as should staff turnover among ECEC professionals working with refugee children and families.
- The inclusion of refugee children into mixed groups, alongside children who speak the institutional language as well as other multilingual and/or refugee children, should be favoured, where possible, from the outset.<sup>38</sup>
- Interagency collaboration between the ECEC sector, national government, and local and international agencies and NGOs working with refugees, should be initiated or encouraged. This could lead to the establishment of new partnerships that are better able to focus on refugee parents' diverse and complex needs, and which open up new opportunities to help them find resources. Such partnerships could also help to give refugee parents a voice and play an important advocacy role in influencing policies at a higher level.

### 5.3 Recommendations

From the adapted guiding principles that emerged from the Delphi procedure, we propose five specific recommendations for policymakers and ECEC leaders and professionals, which accompany the five transversal recommendations presented in Chapter 4. While there is sometimes a need for short-term measures to provide immediate support to children and families, it is also essential to think and prepare for the linguistic inclusion of refugee children through long-term objectives (Siarova, 2022)

**Recommendation 1:** the development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should follow a step-wise design, in which the desired outcomes for multilingual children and families are defined in advance of selecting targeted practices and CPD delivery modes.

- Extra attention should be paid to creating suitable **conditions to listen to the voices of refugee parents**. As this is not always something that can be planned in advance, it is important for local governing bodies to establish a connection with members of existing refugee communities and the support organisations that surround these communities.

**Recommendation 2:** the development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should emerge from a positive vision of multilingualism and through collaboration with parents. The development of CPD should draw on scientific knowledge, and also work well with existing policies.

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<sup>38</sup> *Transitional ECEC services in reception centres (ISSA, 2020) do not follow these guidelines regarding continuity and inclusion. However, as long as quality can be ensured, they can contribute to meeting the immediate needs of some families. Considering the diversity of the trajectories of refugee families and the amount of time spent in these reception centres (which can vary from a few weeks to a year of more), no evidence is currently available on how such transitional ECEC services should be best organised.*



- Communication regarding a positive vision of the value of multilingualism is key for both policymakers and ECEC leaders and professionals. In such communication, specific attention should be given to the situations of refugee families, so that their entry into the ECEC system is not considered a problem, but rather as **a possibility to foster learning opportunities for children and to enrich networks between families.**

**Recommendation 3:** the development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should be tailored to the needs and capabilities of professionals. CPD should be adapted to specific contexts, and a range of practices and delivery modes should be put forward.

- Given the fact that refugee families are very heterogeneous, turnkey programmes for CPD on multilingualism and refugee families in ECEC are not best suited to supporting ECEC professionals. Policymakers and ECEC leaders should invest and promote **menu-based CPD offers** that are informed by practice-based knowledge about working with refugee families, and which can be adjusted to a variety of contexts, with an array of possible delivery modes.

**Recommendation 4:** the development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should be embedded within a sustainable, system-based policy on staff professionalisation.

- When designing CPD for ECEC professionals working with refugee children and families, the first focus should be on **enriching existing CPD trajectories.** Expertise centres or networks, possibly involving new partners such as local and international NGOs and health services, could be created to support existing ECEC trainers and coaches.
- **Recruitment policy** should feature fast-track mechanisms to facilitate access by refugee community members with relevant experiences and certification, as well as specific CPD trajectories for them, including learning the institutional language.

**Recommendation 5:** the development and implementation of CPD on multilingualism in ECEC should be integrated into an ongoing focus on quality within ECEC.

- Policymakers should ensure that the provision of ECEC services is always considered hand in hand with the importance of **quality**, especially for a vulnerable population such as refugee children and families.
- When focusing on the language development of refugee children, 'quality' refers to **meaningful, high-quality interactions**, prioritising **emotional support** first and foremost, in both the institutional language and home(s) language(s).

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