

Inclusion in early childhood care and education in high-income countries

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GLOSSARY

Acronym	Full name
ACEQA	Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AEDC	Australian Early Development Census
AIM	Access and Inclusion Model
CFM	Child Functioning Module
ECCE	Early childhood care and education
FaFT	Families as First Teachers
GEM	Global Education Monitoring
IEP	Individual education plan
IP	Individual Plan
<i>Kaiako</i>	Teacher, instructor (Māori)
<i>Naíonraí</i>	Irish medium playgroup (Irish)
NCS	Non-Chinese speaking
NQF	National Quality Framework
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
<i>Stiúrthóir</i>	Leader (Irish)
<i>Te reo Māori</i>	Māori language
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WG-SS	Washington Group Short Set

ABSTRACT

This report reviews the international research and policy literature concerning approaches to inclusion in early childhood care and education (ECCE) in different high-income jurisdictions globally. Each chapter highlights examples of policies and practices which can foster inclusion in ECCE across the themes set out in the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report in 2020.

As a critical period for children's intellectual, emotional, social, physical and moral development, supporting inclusion in ECCE is of particular importance for supporting lifelong learning and equitable opportunities for all children. A number of key messages emerging from this review that are instructive to designing policies to promote inclusion in ECCE are summarised below.

- Inclusion in ECCE is fostered through **complementary universal** and **targeted approaches** to most aspects of ECCE governance, financing, policy and service delivery.
- The **implementation** of ECCE laws and policies is key to supporting inclusion.
- As the central actors delivering ECCE services, **collaboration within the ECCE workforce** is crucial to supporting a community of practice which leads and shares inclusion, while avoiding risks of specialisation.
- Finally, while many existing ECCE policies, resources and tools are grounded in a deficits-based approach to understanding need, inclusion may be better supported through an approach which focusses on child **learning needs and strengths**.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Established under the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report monitors and reports on national and international progress towards the education objectives set out under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and other SDGs. The GEM Report also analyses a theme identified in the Education 2030 Framework for Action that poses a barrier to progress towards SGD targets. In 2020, the selected theme was inclusion and education (UNESCO, 2020).

To expand upon the challenges related to inclusion in the early childhood care and education (ECCE) context, this report reviews the international research and policy literature concerning different approaches to inclusion in ECCE in high-income countries.

1.1 What is inclusion?

The GEM report defines inclusion as both a ‘process’ and a ‘result’. As a process, inclusion consists of ‘actions and practices that embrace diversity and build a sense of belonging, rooted in the belief that every person has value and potential and should be respected’ (UNESCO, 2020). As a result, inclusion is a ‘multifaceted’ state of affairs which is difficult to define with precision (UNESCO, 2020).

In ECCE practice, inclusive actions are guided by principles of equity, including the objective that all children should be able to access the same ECCE services, regardless of ability, socio-economic status or cultural background (Department of Education and Training, 2017).

1.2 Report scope

ECCE encompasses the care and education of children from birth to eight years old (UNESCO, 2021). This is considered a critical period for children’s intellectual, emotional, social, physical and moral development, and influenced by the environment and relationships surrounding a child (UNICEF, 2006).

This report reflects the broad formulation of inclusion adopted in SGD 4 and the GEM Report, extending to ‘all children’ and, therefore, considers multiple aspects of inclusion and diversity. Aspects of inclusion considered in this report include gender, remoteness, wealth, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, religion and other beliefs and attitudes (UNESCO, 2020).¹ The GEM Report highlights issues relating to exclusion created by the Covid-19 pandemic, and these are considered in Chapter 8.

In preparing this report:

- a desktop review was conducted to establish a ‘long list’ of policies based on the review scope
- policies were categorised by type of policy, area of inclusion, and country
- a shortlist for consideration and further analysis was selected to provide a general cross section. The policies selected for inclusion in this report are summarised in Appendix A.

1.3 Structure of this report

¹ Aspects of inclusion which are not considered in this report include incarceration, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. The search for policies did not identify policies specifically targeting these subgroups, however many of the policies described here seek to drive a universal understanding and awareness of child diversity.

The remainder of this report follows the overall structure of the GEM Report, examining inclusion in ECCE practices with a focus on each of the following themes:

- Chapter 2 – legal and policy frameworks
- Chapter 3 – financing and resourcing
- Chapter 4 – data and monitoring
- Chapter 5 – governance
- Chapter 6 – curricula, teaching materials and pedagogy
- Chapter 7 – workforce
- Chapter 8 – infrastructure and settings
- Chapter 9 – parents and communities.

These themes are discussed with reference to policies and practices in different high-income jurisdictions globally, highlighting examples which can foster inclusion in ECCE.

2. LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

The GEM Report highlights the importance of inclusive ECCE laws and policies in ‘level[ing] the field’ for children from an early age (UNESCO, 2020). This chapter outlines the different international conventions set out the rights of children to access inclusive ECCE, as well as the challenge of translating these rights into national and regional laws to achieve inclusion in practice.

2.1 Inclusive legal frameworks in early childhood settings

This section identifies the international rights-based obligations for ensuring inclusion in ECCE. A major source for rights-based obligations with respect to inclusion and ECCE is the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC). The UNCRC establishes the right to education for children, including ‘every human being below the age of eighteen years’ (UN, 1989). While Article 28 of the UNCRC does not explicitly extend the right to education beyond primary, secondary and higher education, Article 29 provides that education should be directed to the development of a child’s abilities ‘to their fullest potential’.² This has been interpreted to support the right to education as ‘beginning at birth’ in the UNCRC General Comment No. 7 (*Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood*) – however, this interpretation is non-binding on state parties (UNICEF, 2006).

The UNCRC also recognises the right of the child to ‘engage in play’ (Article 31), and to ‘enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language’ (Article 30). Article 18 of the UNCRC also provides that states should ‘take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible’.

Further aspirations for inclusion in ECCE are outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in the *UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. SDG 4.2 expresses a commitment to ‘ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education’ (United Nations, 2015). SDG 4 also contains aspirations for inclusion in education, stating the aim to ‘eliminate gender disparities’ and ‘ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations’ (SDG 4.5).

Other international agreements may also provide for a right of the child to ECCE within a region. For example, Pillar 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights provides that all children ‘have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality’, and ‘[c]hildren from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities’ (European Commission, 2020).

2.2 Domestic policies promoting inclusion in ECCE

This section describes the laws and mechanisms which have been implemented to translate international obligations with respect to inclusion and ECCE into domestic policies.

High-income countries have taken varying approaches to achieving the obligations set out in the UNCRC. Some jurisdictions have introduced domestic rights to access ECCE in the form of a universal entitlement to ECCE, guaranteeing access to a full-day, year-round place in an ECCE service. This

² Other UNCRC articles specifying rights of the child in early childhood include Articles 5 (evolving capacities of the child), 24 (infant and child mortality and health) and 27 (standard of living) (UNICEF, 2006).

right may begin at the age which aligns with the end of parental leave, or more commonly in the year prior to the commencement of primary school (Eurydice, 2021). Some examples of domestic policies enacting a universal right to ECCE are provided in 0.

Table 2.1 Examples of universal ECCE policies in high-income jurisdictions

JURISDICTION	POLICY	DESCRIPTION
FINLAND	Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE Act) (540/2018)	The ECCE Act enshrines the right of the child to free ECCE, from the age of eight months (the end of the parental leave period in Finland) to the start of school at seven years of age (Eurydice, 2021). This creates an obligation for all municipalities to provide ECCE services according to local need.
SWEDEN	Education Act (2010:800)	Establishes a right of the child to free ECCE for at least 525 hours per year from three years of age (Eurydice, 2020). Municipalities are required to provide preschool activities and childcare for children aged one to 12 years of age, to the extent that their parents are unable to provide care due to work commitments or based on the child's needs.
DENMARK	Act on Day Care	Establishes a guarantee for a place in ECCE for every child from 26 weeks of age (European Commission, 2020). Municipalities are required to ensure the provision of ECCE services.
NORWAY	Kindergarten Act	Establishes a right to ECCE from the age of 1 in a kindergarten in the local municipality (European Commission, 2020).
LATVIA	Education Law (s 17)	Section 17 of the Education Law requires local governments to ensure that every child from 18 months of age can access ECCE (European Commission, 2020).
SLOVENIA	Kindergarten Act, Articles 9 and 10	Establishes a right for parents to child a child in an ECCE programme (European Commission, 2020).
ESTONIA	Preschool Childcare Institutions Act	Establishes an obligation for municipalities or city governments to provide all children from the age of 18 months with the opportunity to attend preschool (European Commission, 2020).
GERMANY	<i>Sozialgesetzbuch (SGB) - Achtes Buch (VIII)</i>	Municipalities must provide a centre- or home-based place in childcare for all children from the age of one, and a centre-based place from the age of three (European Commission, 2020).

2.3 Discussion points

Inclusion in ECCE is a country-level responsibility and must be translated into domestic policy.

The UNCRC (including General Comment No 7) and SGD 4 express support for a universal right of the child to ECCE. While supranational legal frameworks can establish the direction and aspirations for inclusion in ECCE, the responsibility of enacting practical policies to support inclusion in ECCE lies with national and regional governments.

Inclusion is supported by universal access to ECCE

Universal ECCE policies are seen to foster inclusion through establishing a foundational expectation that all children can access a minimum level of ECCE services, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, language, or remoteness.

Inclusion in ECCE has been found to have particular importance in preparing children from all backgrounds for success in lifelong learning. Findings from Programme for International Student Assessments (PISA) demonstrate that, even after accounting for socio-economic status, children who attended pre-primary education tend to outperform their counterparts who did not attend pre-primary education (Paul A. Bartolo, 2016).

3. FINANCING AND RESOURCING

The GEM Report identifies the importance of adequate financing policies in achieving equity and inclusion outcomes in schools (UNESCO, 2020). This section discusses the financing and resourcing policies implemented to support a child's right to access ECCE, including both universal supports to ensure that ECCE is affordable for all, and targeted funding to support inclusion outcomes for individual children.

3.1 Practical resourcing to deliver inclusive policies

3.1.1 Universal early years financing and resourcing

Where domestic legislation establishes a right of the child to ECCE, realising this right requires defining practical policies to ensure the availability and affordability of ECCE to children from all backgrounds.

Some jurisdictions impose the duty to ensure the availability of sufficient places in ECCE on local municipalities. For example, the Education Act in Denmark imposes a duty on municipalities to ensure ECCE provision for all children between 26 weeks and the start of primary school. To ensure compliance with this requirement, municipalities which fail to provide sufficient ECCE services are fined (European Commission, 2020).

A universal right to access ECCE also requires policies to ensure the affordability of ECCE for children from all backgrounds. For example, the *Free Quality Kindergarten Education Policy* in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) China offers funding to kindergartens and childcare centres to allow all children to receive free pre-primary education (Nirmala Rao, 2018). This universal funding also supports children with special learning needs, as well as non-Chinese speaking children in learning the Chinese language.

3.1.2 Targeted financing and resourcing for children in need

Additional targeted resourcing may be required to support the inclusion of children with learning needs of different complexity. For example, in New Zealand, the Special Education Grant provides funding to support children with moderate special education needs, including for resources and teacher training (Ministry of Education, 2021). The Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) also provides additional teaching, specialist programmes, therapy and education support for children with high special education needs. Other relevant ECCE resourcing schemes include:

- the Targeted Funding for Disadvantage scheme also provides funding to ECCE centres with a high proportion (20 per cent or above) of children from disadvantaged backgrounds
- the Annual Top-up for Isolated Services provides further funding for services located in isolated areas, which would otherwise fail to generate sufficient Funded Child Hours.

Targeted resourcing should also be available to ensure children from different socioeconomic backgrounds can access ECCE services. For example, the Early Years National Funding Formula sets hourly funding rates for free early education entitlements for children in the United Kingdom. The scheme provides up to 15 hours per week of free childcare for two-year-old children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Children aged between three and four are also eligible for 15 hours of free childcare per week (the 'universal entitlement') – or 30 hours per week for working parents (the 'extended entitlement') (Department for Education, 2018).

Another example of targeted financing to support inclusion in ECCE services is the School Readiness Funding Model in Victoria, Australia (Department for Education and Training, 2021). Funding is provided to kindergarten services based on by the level of need of children enrolled at the service, based on parental occupation and education data. Services can use the funding for discrete items listed under a 'menu' of evidence-informed supports. For example, items to support the inclusion of children from families experiencing intergenerational poverty include a breakfast club, a transport program, and specialised trainings in working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

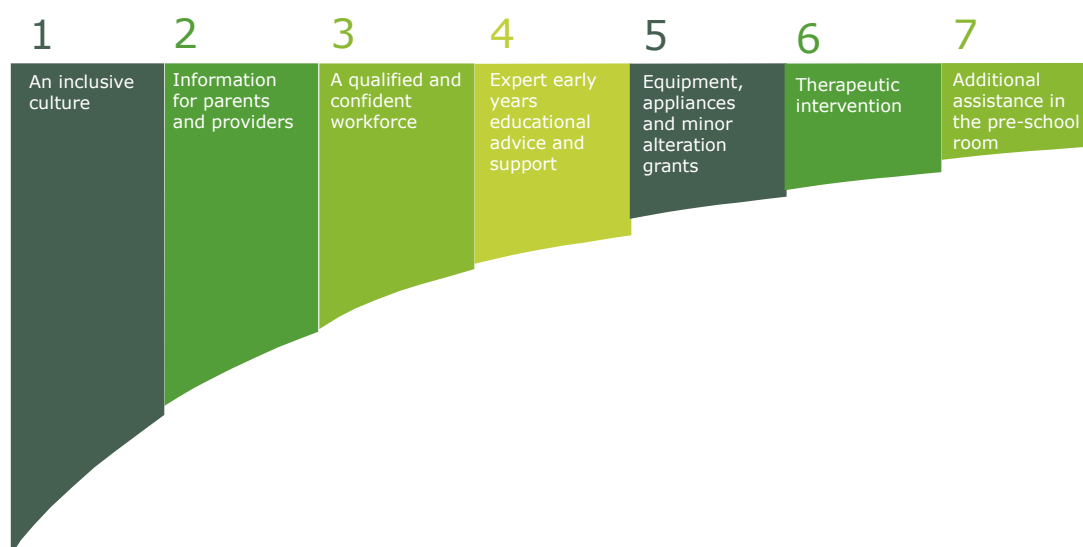
An alternative approach to providing targeted resourcing for children in ECCE is the Guaranteed Space Payment in Manitoba, Canada (Child Care Information Services, 2013). This payment is available to family and group childcare homes to keep an open space within the total number of licenced spaces available. This is intended to ensure that the provider can spend more time with a child with additional support needs.

3.1.3 Multi-tiered levels of support

To support the provision of resourcing in ECCE according to child complexity and learning needs, a multi-tiered system of resourcing policies can provide a holistic model for universal and targeted supports in ECCE. Multi-tiered systems can facilitate inclusion through enabling children to receive targeted supports in a universal setting, avoiding the need to identify or segregate children on the basis of special education labels (Grisham-Brown, 2019).

An example of a multi-tiered system of policies in ECCE is the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) in Ireland. AIM is a model of supports to ensure that children with disabilities can access mainstream ECCE programs (AIM.ie, 2020). The model consists of seven levels of progressive supports, offering practical resourcing depending on the needs of a child and without requiring a formal diagnosis of disability. The supports offered under the model progress according to the complexity of a child's learning needs, beginning with universal supports such as an inclusive culture, information for parents and providers, and a qualified and confident workforce. More complex supports include access to expert early years educational advice and support; equipment, appliances and minor alteration grants; targeted therapeutic intervention; and additional assistance in the preschool room.

Figure 3.1: AIM model of multi-tiered support policies



Source: AIM.ie, 2020

3.2 Discussion points

Implementing a universal right to ECCE must be defined in practical policies ensuring the availability and affordability of ECCE, regardless of a child's learning needs or socioeconomic background.

Without domestic policies supporting the availability and affordability of ECCE to children from all backgrounds, a legal right to ECCE may lack substance in practice. Relevant domestic policies to support access to ECCE include funding to support universal access for all children, as well as targeted resourcing to support for children with varying levels of learning needs. It is also necessary to allocate supplementary resourcing to enable children from different socioeconomic backgrounds to access ECCE services.

Multi-tiered resourcing models can provide an integrated source of funding and support across different learning needs.

One active area of policy development involves a progressive approach across child complexity – prioritising universal provision for all and building upon this universal provision to provide increasingly targeted levels of support based on increased complexity. This model can support inclusion in ECCE by ensuring that all children can access mainstream ECCE programs.

4. DATA AND MONITORING

The GEM Report identifies data collection and monitoring practices as a priority focus for supporting inclusion in education (UNESCO, 2020). This chapter discusses data collection processes which can help to compare population-wide measures of inclusion and track progress towards inclusion over time. Monitoring practices can also support the early identification of learning needs for children of all learning needs.

4.1 Inclusive data and monitoring policies in early childhood settings

At a jurisdictional level, population-wide data collection practices can be used to track relevant student benchmarks and monitor a region's progress towards inclusive ECCE over time. The practice of monitoring and evaluating such benchmarks can also provide an evidence base to guide decision-making in ECCE policy design.

Monitoring individual student outcomes is also important to supporting early needs identification, by determining whether individual learning needs are being met, or whether additional targeted supports are required to provide children with equitable access to ECCE services. However, there is a risk that such practices can result in pathologizing children support requirements, by creating a dichotomy between 'normal' and 'special' children, and therefore pre-determining how certain children are expected to behave and what they can achieve.

This section outlines the use of a universal measure of student progress in the year before schooling. It briefly discusses the benefits and limitations of such an approach compared to other measures such as the Washington Question Set, and then details the use of a supplementary tool to capture more tailored information for children with additional needs.

4.2 Universal data collection

Universal data collection processes aim to systematically capture information across a group within a defined region, typically through a population-wide survey or census.

In ECCE, an example of a population-wide data collection practice is the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). Formerly the Australian Early Development Index, the AEDC is a population census of five-year-old children in school across Australia. Based on the Canadian Early Development Instrument tool, the AEDC collects data relating to childhood development and access to ECCE services by surveying teachers in a child's first year of fulltime school.

The AEDC has been held every three years since 2009, and is run at a cost to the Australian Government of approximately \$28 million in 2012 (Brinkman, 2014). This funding partly supports resourcing for teachers to undertake training on completing the AEDC questionnaire, to reduce the level of subjectivity between responses. Additional funding for a cultural consultant is also provided for teachers completing questionnaires for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The AEDC questionnaire involves a teacher-rated checklist completed at the commencement of a child's first year of primary school, rating the child's ECCE experiences in the previous year, as well as different physical, social, emotional, linguistic and vulnerability indicators through a set of 100 detailed questions (Australian Early Development Census, 2019). Indicators also track a child's status as an Indigenous or non-Indigenous learner; having 'special needs'; speaking a language other than English at home; being born overseas; or being located in a small or remote community.

4.3 Discussion points

Universal data collection allows for the evaluation of ECCE effectiveness

In fielding population-wide surveys to capture experiences and outcomes in ECCE services, levying at the age of mandatory school entry provides an opportunity to capture those who did not attend ECCE services (O'Connor, 2020). In Australia, this design has enabled the AEDC to capture approximately 97.5 per cent of the whole five-year-old population (Brinkman, 2014).³ This may also enable capturing a greater share of children from areas of socioeconomic disadvantage, who are typically less likely to be enrolled in ECCE services in Australia (AIHW, 2020).

Population-wide data collection at the ECCE level also creates opportunities for data linkage projects, which can examine the impact of child development on other outcomes later in life. For example, AEDC data used in 2016 study of children attending preschool to investigate relationship between preschool attendance and later school attendance (Sharon Goldfield, 2016). Findings from the study included that Indigenous children and children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families were the least likely to attend preschool or day-care prior to entering school, and that preschool attendance was associated with reduced likelihood of being in developmentally vulnerable range for both children from advantaged and disadvantaged communities.

However, Brinkman notes that census results can reflect the political and geographical representation of the survey writers and respondents. For example, in the first year of the AEDC the level of coverage varied across jurisdictions within Australia, ranging from 92.2 per cent of the estimated five-year-old population in the Northern Territory, to 99.9 per cent in New South Wales (Brinkman, 2014).

Box – Trade off in census coverage and detail

The GEM Report highlights the Washington Group Short Set (WG-SS) of Questions as an example of an universal data collection tool for use in surveys (UNESCO, 2020). Providing a simpler set of questions, the adoption of the WG-SS can enable the consistent comparison of basic developmental outcomes across different jurisdictions. For example, in a 2020 review of data and metadata on disability from 103 countries, the United Nations Statistics Division found that 35 countries used questions similar to those of the WG-SS, while 29 used similar questions as well as other questions, and 50 used other types of questions (UN Economic and Social Council, 2019).

However, complementary census tools such as the AEDC are also required to capture more detailed or granular data which can be linked with other data sets for more sophisticated analysis over time.

Further, the accuracy of any analysis comparing outcomes between children who did or did not attend preschool depends on the educator's knowledge of a child's preschool attendance – which may be less often known for children from areas of socioeconomic disadvantage, meaning that the AEDC may underestimate the share of children from this group who are in preschool (O'Connor, 2020).

³ Despite being conducted as a census of the entire population of children in their first year of full-time schooling, the AEDC typically achieves a coverage rate of less than 100 per cent. This is due to differences in the response rate across different states and territories, as well as between public and independent schools: Brinkman, 2014.

Universal data collection supports analysis of outcomes and experiences across diverse groups

By observing outcomes across the entire population, a census can be used to undertake evaluations of small subpopulations, such as children in remote Australia, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners (Brinkman, 2014).

For example, the AEDC has been used to inform a study examining the impact of a universal childcare access policy in Australia on attendance outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Results from this study showed that while the national share of children attending preschool increased after the implementation of the policy, the share of children from disadvantaged backgrounds fell (O'Connor, 2020). These findings were used to suggest evidence of the 'inverse care law', whereby families with more social and economic advantages were better able to leverage the universal access policy relative to families from areas of socioeconomic disadvantage (O'Connor, 2020).

Similarly, another study examining children's access to speech-language pathology services found that of the 27 communities in Australia where more than 20 per cent of children were identified as developmentally vulnerable or at risk in the AEDC census, none had access to speech language pathology services in their geographical area (McCormack, 2015).

Universal data collection is commonly 'deficits' based, testing the extent to which a child deviates from a pre-determined developmental norm

By testing whether an individual child is meeting expectations of 'normal' development, tools such as the AEDC may tend to encourage the use of **deficit labels**, labelling certain children as 'special needs' or developmentally delayed from an early age.

For example, Peers notes that some AEDC questions tend to encourage a comparison between the child and an ideal child coming from a stable family unit, and create an assumption that any results otherwise are outside this "norm" (2011). Some AEDC questions include (AEDC, 2018):

Is this child considered Special Needs?

How would you rate this child's ability to use language effectively in English?

Would you say that this child is distractable, has trouble sticking to any activity?

An alternative approach is to focus data collection and monitoring practices on **learning needs**, or to test the level of support required and received by a child. The GEM Report highlights that an approach which focusses on learning needs as opposed to disabilities may help to rebut the assumption that a developmentally delayed child will fail without intervention (UNESCO, 2020) – disrupting any potentially harmful narratives imposed on children by deficit labelling from an early age.

Box: Monitoring and measurement tools

While universal data collection practices can capture population-wide data, more nuanced approaches are required to capture student support requirements more broadly.

An example of a monitoring tool to track individual student outcomes is the Early Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (Early ABLES) assessment tool in Victoria, Australia. The Early ABLES online learning tool is intended for childhood educators to systematically observe and assess learning outcomes for children with disabilities or developmental delay. The tool was developed to align with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF), to enable

educators to report and evaluate against the learning and development outcomes set out in the local ECCE curriculum.

The Early ABLES assessments encompass a broad range of learning and development areas, assessing not only numerical and communication skills but also a range of social, emotional, and dispositional outcomes. This is intended to help educators to develop appropriate learning goals for the child, as well as monitor progress and provide targeted support where necessary.

5. GOVERNANCE

The GEM Report defines governance to encompass both ‘formal administrative and management systems’, as well as ‘informal processes that distribute power in these systems and determine decision making at all levels’ (UNESCO, 2020). This chapter discusses the governance of ECCE systems with respect to the structures by which governments administer, coordinate and implement ECCE policies and services (Neuman, 2005).

5.1 Inclusive governance in early childhood settings

Effective governance can provide overarching guidance and quality assurance to ECCE services – determining whether services meet expectations for quality, quantity, affordability and inclusion outcomes (Neuman, 2005). This is particularly important in ECCE compared to primary and secondary settings, due to the larger share of children enrolled in private and for-profit ECCE services in many high-income countries (OECD, 2019).

Some key areas of quality identified in ECCE systems include child-to-staff ratios, class size, and teacher qualifications (OECD, 2011).

5.2 Inclusive governance frameworks

5.2.1 Integration of ECCE systems

In some high-income countries, responsibility for governing ECCE systems is split between different public agencies or across different age levels in early childhood. This split governance framework can create differences in care and learning objectives for children within each system – with many services focussed on ‘care’ for children up to three years of age and ‘education’ from three years of age and older (Neuman, 2005).

In other countries, responsibility for ECCE is integrated into a single comprehensive governance framework across all age levels in early childhood. Integrated ECCE governance frameworks have been introduced in Finland, New Zealand, Australia, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, England, and Denmark (OECD, 2019).

There is evidence that integrated ECCE governance systems may support greater consistencies in ECCE policies, curricula, and workforce for children of different age levels (Neuman, 2005). Integrated ECCE systems may promote inclusion by minimising the fragmentation of services, reducing the logistical burden for children and families in navigating the ECCE system, which may in turn minimise barriers for children from disadvantaged backgrounds in accessing services.

Integrating ECCE services into a single education system alongside primary and secondary schooling can also help to position ECCE as a public good, supporting an assumption of universal access to ECCE for all children.

Box: integrated ECCE governance systems

An example of an integrated ECCE governance system is Sweden, which changed responsibility for ECCE from the Ministry of Social Affairs to the Ministry of Education in 1996. Benefits of this change for inclusive education include positioning ECCE services as a public good alongside primary and secondary education, fostering an assumption that all children will and should attend ECCE services.

Integrating ECCE systems across all age levels in early childhood also enables the introduction of a consistent curriculum, which can be used to foster inclusivity. This was also demonstrated in New

Zealand, where the integration of ECCE services into a single education portfolio led to the introduction of the national ECCE curriculum, as well as the setting of higher qualifications for ECCE educators, and improvements in ECCE workforce conditions and compensation (Kaga, 2010).

At the same time, there is concern that integrating ECCE into education system may lead to the marginalisation of ECCE pedagogies and practices, and lead to ‘schoolification’ of the ECCE curricula (Kaga, 2010). This in turn may hinder inclusion outcomes, by encouraging the assessment and segregation of children on the basis of learning needs and abilities from an early age.

5.2.2 Coordination with pre-primary and primary education

In addition to children transitioning between the care and education stages of split ECCE systems, children may also be required to transition between pre-primary and primary education. Increasing attendance of four-year-old pre-primary programs is increasing demand for coordination with primary schooling, to facilitate a smooth transition between the two stages (Kaga, 2016).

This demand has driven a ‘school readiness’ approach to ECCE governance in some high-income countries, focussing on preparing children with the skills required for primary school. Alternatively, other jurisdictions implement a ‘ready school’ approach to ECCE governance, focussing on how ECCE services will influence primary schooling, and how primary schools will adapt to a child’s demonstrated developmental needs.

As an example of the ‘**ready school**’ approach, some jurisdictions in Europe have introduced measures intended to increase the coordination of pre-primary and primary education and ease the transition for children and parents (European Commission, 2019). For example, the *Decree on Basic Conditions for Quality Preschool Education* in the Netherlands requires ECCE settings to develop a plan for a smooth transition to school at four years of age. In Denmark, there is collaboration between nurseries and primary school teachers to transfer knowledge about a child’s interests and learning needs, establishing continuity in provision of services for individual students.

Alternatively, the Head Start program in the United States provides an example of a ‘**school ready**’ approach. The Head Start program funds the provision of a range of services to promote the school readiness of children from low-income families, with services tailored to the needs of different communities. For example, Head Start offers childcare services at no cost to children from low income families in a range of settings, including centres, family childcare or a home setting (Office of Head Start, 2020). American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start programs offer traditional language and cultural practices for children in ECCE. Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs offer services to children from families who regularly migrate to do agricultural work.

One criticism of a school readiness approach is that it may value outcomes commonly associated with school achievement (such as language, literacy and numeracy) over the focus on broader developmental outcomes. Introducing a focus on schooling in early childhood settings can also reduce the scope for educators to focus on diversity outcomes, reducing time spent socialising and building basic developmental and learning skills (Katrien van Laere, 2012). Focussing on school preparation in ECCE settings may also facilitate the segregation of learners from a young age, by identifying how a child is *not* prepared for school, as opposed to exploring early strengths and identifying development needs.

Narrowing the scope of ECCE curricula to formal school preparation may also tend to exclude children from disadvantaged or minority language backgrounds. For example, there is evidence that children from poor and second language backgrounds may underperform in formal classrooms (Kaga, 2010).

5.2.3 Intersectoral coordination

To ensure that ECCE policies and services align with other relevant childcare, health and education policies across different government portfolios, ECCE governance frameworks can be supported by a holistic, cross-portfolio office for children. Cross-portfolio offices can support inclusion in ECCE by ensuring that a jurisdiction's ECCE service delivery and policy response around a child is coordinated and consistent.

Globally, the ratification of the UNCRC was the genesis for the establishment of many public agencies with a focus on child welfare. For example, the **Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs** was established to coordinate policy making for children in Ireland (Children's Rights Alliance, 2008). The Office encompasses different units for child policy, including ECCE, child welfare and protection, youth justice, and a children's strategy unit. The Office is intended to enable a harmonised government approach to policy development and service delivery. To this end, the Early Years Education Policy section of the Department of Education is co-located with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, to facilitate the close cooperation of policy across the departments (Children's Rights Alliance, 2008). Similarly, the **Office of the Children's Guardian** works to promote the interests and rights of children. The Guardian is a central body providing oversight of organizations which work with children and young people, in New South Wales, Australia.

5.2.4 Quality assurance and monitoring of ECCE

General governance frameworks are an important mechanism for providing overarching quality assurance in ECCE settings, and can support inclusive ECCE services through safeguarding provider ability to support every learner.

For example, many high-income countries have implemented minimum standards for quality in ECCE, such as child to staff ratios, staff qualifications, and regulating the area of indoor and outdoor space available to children (OECD, 2011). Maintaining these minimum standards supports access to quality ECCE services by children from all backgrounds. This is particularly important where families are unable to access alternative providers. Consistent frameworks for monitoring quality in ECCE are also important given the increased private provision of services compared to other stages of schooling, and the risks to children of poor-quality services.

Minimum quality standards in ECCE must also be complemented by consistent monitoring and enforcement practices, to ensure that quality standards are implemented consistently in practice. For example, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) is an independent authority which helps to administer the National Quality Framework (NQF) for ECCE across Australia. ACECQA activities include publishing a detailed guide to how ECCE services can meet the minimum requirements set out under the NQF; assessing individual and organization qualifications; maintaining a national register of approved providers and services; and awarding excellence ratings. However, the ACECQA does not assess and rate individual services.

6. CURRICULA, TEACHING MATERIALS AND PEDAGOGY

The GEM Report identifies the curriculum as ‘the central means through which the principle of inclusion is put into action within an education system’, providing overarching direction as to the content that is to be taught, the way in which it should be taught, and the learning objectives for students (UNESCO, 2020). A curriculum is supported by access to teaching and learning materials, and the application of consistent pedagogical methods.

6.1 Inclusive curricula in early childhood settings

Curricula can support inclusion in ECCE settings through helping children to feel a sense of belonging through seeing their own abilities, identities, languages and worldviews valued in ECCE settings (Ministry of Education, 2017). This can create a sense of belonging, which in turn enhances learning and development outcomes for children through ensuring that learning is relevant and meaningful (Chan, 2019).

Inclusive curricula in ECCE settings may be challenged by some unique issues not found in other educational settings. One such challenge is that many education systems do not provide standardised curricula for children under three years old, including a third of education systems in Europe (European Commission, 2019).

Another common challenge in analysing ECCE curricula documents can be the use of vague or ambiguous language. This may be the result of the separation of ECCE curricula in some jurisdictions, where regional governments are expected to adapt and define the national curriculum in the local context (European Commission, 2019). Similarly, some ECCE curricula target more holistic development goals for children, as opposed to concrete learning outcomes in preparation for the transition to school (Jonna Kangas, 2020). However, in some cases ambiguity in a curriculum may also indicate a gap between ECCE policy and practice in a jurisdiction (Chan, 2019).

6.2 Universal inclusive ECCE curricula

A key choice in inclusive curricula design is the choice of integrating special care students into regular teaching lessons, as opposed to providing separate or segregated supports. Each approach may have different benefits for children at different stages of development (Nilsen, 2017).

This section outlines two examples of universal inclusive curricula which apply to all ECCE services in high-income countries. Examples establish a universal curriculum which is designed to be inclusive of all children, as opposed to separate curricula applicable to diverse groups.

6.2.1 Te Whāriki

Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō nga Mōkōpuna o Aotearoa (*‘Te Whāriki’*) is the national early childhood curriculum in New Zealand. *Te Whāriki* adopts an explicit ‘bicultural framing’ to encourage the inclusion of Indigenous learners as well as ‘all immigrants to New Zealand’ in universal ECCE settings (Ministry of Education, 2017). *Te Whāriki* is also framed to encompass other aspects of inclusivity, including ‘gender and ethnicity, diversity of ability and learning needs, family structure and values, socio-economic status and religion’ (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Rather than providing a series of prescriptive standards and requirements, *Te Whāriki* is intended to support the building of inclusive local curricula by setting out a **high-level framework** of expectations for service providers and ECCE practitioners which should inform practice in local ECCE settings (Ministry of Education, 2017). This framework consists of four overarching principles for

service provision (empowerment, holistic development, family and community, relationships) and five strands, goals and learning outcomes to guide ECCE practitioners (wellbeing, belonging, contribution, communication, exploration).

Some examples of the expectations for inclusive practice set out in *Te Whāriki* include statements that (Ministry of Education, 2017):

[a]ll children should be able to access *te reo Māori* in their ECE setting

[i]t is desirable that children in ECE settings should also have the opportunity to learn NZSL, an official language of New Zealand, and to learn about Deaf culture

Kaiko [teachers] should be inclusive, ‘enabling all children to learn with and alongside their peers’ and ‘respect and encourage children’s home language

[o]ffering an inclusive curriculum also involves adapting environments and learning approaches as necessary and removing any barriers to participation and learning. Barriers may be physical (for example, the design of the physical environment), social (for example, practices that constrain participation) or conceptual (beliefs that limit what is considered appropriate for children) (Ministry of Education, 2017).

For *kaiako* [teachers], *Te Whāriki* also sets out a broad expectation that ECCE practitioners should apply ‘**critical theories**’ to actively consider and address social inequality issues which may arise in the early childcare classroom. *Te Whāriki* provides that practitioners should examine ‘the influence of social conditions, global influences and equity of opportunity on children’s learning and development.’ (Ministry of Education, 2017) For example, this creates an expectation that ECCE practitioners will critically examine and adapt dominant ECCE assessment techniques to suit the abilities and experiences of all children (Chan, 2019).

First published in 1996, the curriculum was revised in 2017. Key revisions included strengthening the alignment of the ECCE curriculum to the primary school curriculum and the practicing teacher guidelines, and reducing the number of learning outcomes from 118 to 20, to reduce the potential for misinterpretation or ‘cherry-picking’ of outcomes by ECCE teachers (McLachlan, 2017). Changes also reflected a shift away from the use of deficit labels such as ‘special needs’, instead focusing on the responsibility of teachers to meet the needs of all students (Moffat, 2019). Labelling students as ‘special needs’ can hinder inclusion through creating an expectation that only some children will receive separate supports (UNESCO, 2020).

6.2.2 National Core Curriculum

In Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture and National Agency for Education issue the *National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care* (2018), a ‘core plan’ used to build local curriculum in different municipalities (Rutanen, 2011).

Similarly to *Te Whāriki* in New Zealand, this curriculum is intended as a **high-level guide to national ideals and aims** for ECCE service provision, with the practical content of the framework determined in each municipality (Rutanen, 2011).

The National Core Curriculum emphasises early childhood learning and development as a holistic experience designed not only to prepare a child to enter formal schooling, but to support parents in raising a child (Salminen, 2017). The document identifies five key objectives and areas of content. While these objectives are provided in the curriculum, there are no mandatory standards required in meeting them at the end of ECCE (Salminen, 2017):

- me and our community – supporting children to think about different ways of life, religions, events in surrounding society
- I grow, move and develop – encouraging healthy living, physical activity, healthy diet
- diverse forms of expression – encouraging children to communicate through music, visual means, verbal and physical forms
- the rich world of languages – encompassing language skills and competencies
- exploring and interacting with my environment – ability to observe, structure, understand their environment (Salminen, 2017).

6.3 Discussion points

Universal ECCE curricula can support inclusive practice in ECCE settings by establishing a foundational expectation that all children’s needs will be met in the mainstream ECCE setting.

In designing local curricula, municipalities are typically bound by the principles of the national curriculum – meaning that they can add or amend to its content, but not derogate from the minimum principles set out in the national curricula. This may encourage inclusive practice by ECCE service providers by prioritising the responsibility of teachers to actively respond to the individual needs of all children (Moffat, 2019).

Local curricula can enhance inclusivity by enabling service providers to identify and prioritise local inclusion aspirations.

By establishing a non-prescriptive national framework, the National Core Curriculum and *Te Whāriki* can be adaptable to the diverse and complex inclusivity aspirations of local communities (Chan, 2019). This flexibility enables service providers to build a local curriculum through choosing equitable pedagogies that respond to the specific inclusivity aspirations of the local community (Chan, 2019). For example, this is reflected in *Te Whāriki* in the expectation that teachers will proactively work with a child’s family and act to respond to their needs and preferences:

Perspectives on empowerment are culturally located, hence *kaiako* need to seek the input of children and their parents and whanau when designing the local curriculum’ (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Similarly, the National Core Curriculum emphasises key role of teachers in incorporating parents in ECCE settings (Salminen, 2017).

However, curricula which are too ambiguous may lead ECCE services to fail to act upon the inclusive expectations set out in the national curriculum.

Without defining prescriptive requirements for ECCE providers, both curricula principally rely on **teacher ability** to translate these inclusive expectations into outcomes for children in practice (Salminen, 2017) (Chan, 2019). Without establishing practical follow-through steps or methods of assessment, ECCE services may fail to act upon the claims and statements set out in the national curriculum, such that the implementation of the curriculum in practice may not be inclusive (Andreassen, 2017).

Accordingly, inclusivity in ECCE curricula depends both on the quality of national standards as well as teacher ability in interpreting and applying inclusive curriculum in daily practice.

As a result, the quality of an inclusive curriculum relies on further policy and funding to realise the principles set out in the document in practice (Moffat, 2019). For example, Chan highlights that the statement in *Te Whāriki* that teachers should support ‘children from all backgrounds to grow up

strong in identity, language and culture’ could be interpreted by teachers to mean that they should treat all children equally, not equitably (Chan, 2019). Chan also highlights that teachers may find implementing these principles challenging and unfamiliar (Chan, 2019). In Finland, the Ministry for Education has sought to address this challenge by commissioning regular studies of pedagogical quality (Salminen, 2017). One potential tool for applying universal curricula to an individual student context is the individual education plan (IEP), discussed below.

Box: Individual education plans

Globally, many jurisdictions may complement a national ECCE curriculum with personalised learning plans for learners with more complex learning needs (see, e.g., Finland, Ireland, Norway, Australia). In New Zealand, the ECCE curriculum is also complemented by a national framework for the provision of Individual Plans (IPs) for children with special education needs. Rather than removing children with different learning needs from the mainstream childcare curriculum, the IP Guidelines acknowledge that the national curriculum is intended to be ‘relevant to all students, including those with special education needs’, and that the ‘special education needs of many students can be met by class- and school-wide strategies’ (Ministry of Education, 2011). Instead, IPs are designed to ‘adap[t] the school programme to fit the student’ in cases where students individual barriers to learning have been identified (Ministry of Education, 2011). IPs are created through a collaborative process involving a child’s parents, teachers, and other specialists, discussing the strengths and needs of the child to design an educational plan.

7. WORKFORCE

The GEM report identifies the need to help teachers be agents for inclusion and adapt to meet the learning needs of all children in the classroom. An approach which delegates specialised knowledge on learning needs to a subset of the workforce can marginalise issues of diversity and prevent teachers from acting for inclusion of all children (UNESCO, 2020). This chapter discusses pre and in-service policies within ECCE settings that support all ECCE educators to have knowledge of inclusive approaches.

7.1 Inclusive workforce frameworks in early childhood settings

The need to support all teachers to be open to diversity begins in ECCE settings. ECCE educators should be aware that all children have different learning needs, and be equipped with the skills to identify needs of different complexity. However, educators should also be aware of the risks of introducing deficit labelling to children at an early age.

A key difference to encouraging inclusive approaches in the ECCE workforce compared to primary and secondary schooling educators is the wider range of **minimum qualifications** required of ECCE practitioners in different jurisdictions. For example, only one third of jurisdictions in Europe require a bachelor's degree for working with children under the age of three (European Commission, 2020).

7.2 Inclusive professional learning policies

The GEM Report identifies that many pre-service and in-service training courses for ECCE educators treat inclusion as a specialization, rather than as a general skill. There are some general pre-service ECCE qualifications which focus on building educators' capacity to undertake inclusive approaches to ECCE services.

7.2.1 Pre-service training

One pre-service teacher education programme which provides training on aspects of inclusive education is the *Higher Diploma in Early Childhood Education (Inclusive Education)* offered by the Hong Kong College of Technology. This is a qualification for students wishing to work as a kindergarten teacher, childcare worker, childcare supervisor or special childcare worker.

The program equips students with general knowledge of special childcare education, as well as the analytical and practical skills to work effectively with young children and their families in an inclusive manner. The focus on inclusive education includes encouraging respect for diverse needs, and the importance of early intervention for children with signs of special education needs (Hong Kong College of Technology, 2021). The program also includes a focus on cultural inclusivity supports, such as programmes and models to help Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS) children learn Chinese language and local culture.

Inclusivity can also be fostered in ECCE settings by supporting diversity within the ECCE workforce. In Australia, the *Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE)* is a program designed to provide employment pathways for residents of remote communities to pursue a career in teaching and in early childcare. The program enables residents of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to study teaching while working in remote childcare centres, with the possibility of then proceeding to further education (Department of Education (NT), 2020). The pilot program is due to commence in the Northern Territory in 2021.

7.2.2 In-service training

Case studies of in-service training practices also highlight some important considerations in in-service ECCE inclusive practices. One form of in-service training is **peer learning activities**. For example, the Wanda method adapted in Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary and Czechia is designed to support ongoing improvement in inclusive practice by ECCE practitioners by providing opportunities for critical reflections on pedagogical practices (ISSA, 2019). The method aims to create a **community of learning** between ECCE practitioners and pedagogical experts by organising group sessions reflecting on cases or situations of pedagogical practice in ECCE – creating ‘a competent system around an individual practitioner’ (ISSA, 2019).

Another important component of in-service training is supporting educators to practice leadership in undertaking best-practice inclusion techniques. In Australia, the *Dynamic Leadership in Early Childhood* project supported ECCE educators in Victoria to undertake a research project regarding sharing research with families, other ECCE colleagues and collaborators. The course was found to help bring different groups of ECCE workers together, creating a community of practice to support the broader dissemination of best-practice research and methods among leaders in the ECCE workforce.

7.3 Specialised inclusive ECCE advisors

Inclusive education in ECCE settings also requires access to specialised inclusive ECCE advisors who can complement and strengthen inclusive practices across the general ECCE workforce. Some examples of these specialised advisors are provided below. However, the risks of specialisation in separating inclusive skills and practices from the general workforce is also noted.

7.3.1 Pre School Field Officer (PSFO)

The Pre School Field Officer (PSFO) program is available to staff working in government funded preschool programs in Victoria, Australia. The PSFO is an inclusive education advisor who works closely with a kindergarten teacher in an advisory role to enhance the capacity and confidence of the educator to provide inclusive programs in universal ECCE settings.

The PSFO can support ECCE educators in the identification, referral and inclusion of children with ‘additional needs’ in universal ECCE settings. Children with additional needs defined as children presenting with developmental concerns, which may include language delays, disabilities, or challenging behaviours. The PSFO program is also available to children funded under the Early Start Kindergarten program, which includes children who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or children from families which have had contact with Child Protection services (Department of Education and Training, 2020).

For example, the PSFO can support ECCE educators by: providing information and resources to help plan inclusive programs; supporting the assessment of children’s learning needs; modelling specific skills; as well as building professional partnerships and strategies with other educators (Department of Education and Training, 2020).

7.3.2 Kaitakaweanga

Kaitakaweanga are Maori cultural advisors who can be employed to provide cultural support for a child and family in a special education environment in New Zealand preschools. *Kaitakaweanga* are trained advisors, working to support educators and families in developing strategies and suggestions for children with special education needs. Required qualifications for *Kaitakaweanga* include a teaching diploma, proficiency in *te reo Maori*, and at least three years’ experience teaching *te reo Maori* or working in the community in Maori development.

Kaitakaweanga work by developing relationships with educators and family, as well as departmental staff and other relevant agencies. They can also provide advice to the Ministry for Education on programme development and system changes in ECCE services (Ministry of Education, nd).

7.4 Discussion points

General pre-service workforce training can encompass skills, strategies and techniques for working effectively with children from diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs.

In training the general ECCE workforce, it is important to demonstrate that additional learning needs are relevant to all children, and not only a cohort with 'special education needs'. This can be facilitated by training educators on a strengths-based learning needs approach and avoiding identifying children on the basis of their needs from an early age.

In-service workforce training is also important to support the ongoing development of the ECCE workforce capacity to deliver inclusive education.

This in-service training can be delivered through a range of methods, including through building collaborative partnerships with inclusive education specialists in addition to professional development materials and training.

Opportunities for general collaboration within an inclusive 'community of learning' can create conditions to promote inclusion in ECCE services.

Providing in-service coaching by inclusive leaders can help to create a 'learning community' which stimulates practitioners to reflect on and improve their inclusive practice (Sharmahd, 2014).

Specialised inclusive counsellors, coaches or advisors can complement resources for ECCE educators in general ECCE settings.

Specialised advisors can encourage ECCE educators to improve their inclusive practice by providing ongoing guidance and stimulating reflection. For example, *Kaitakaweanga* support children with different learning needs in general classroom alongside other children, and also advise the Ministry of Education on system-level changes.

At the same time, identifying a separate specialised workforce to provide inclusive services may risk separating inclusive practices and skills from the general ECCE workforce. To mitigate against this risk, specialised inclusive ECCE advisors may collaborate with the general ECCE workforce to transform practices rather – or in addition to – services delivered directly to the students and their families.

8. INFRASTRUCTURE AND SETTINGS

The GEM Report highlights the importance of school infrastructure and culture in promoting inclusive ideals and behaviour, and enabling physical access by all children (UNESCO, 2020). This chapter discusses aspects of inclusive design with respect to the infrastructure and composition of ECCE learning environments. This includes considerations such as building design, and whether children learn together or are separated based on characteristics such as disability, language and ethnicity. Policies which support the delivery of ECCE programmes at home are also considered in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns mandated globally in 2020.

8.1 Inclusive infrastructure and design settings in early childhood settings

Infrastructure and settings can act as barriers or facilitators to inclusion in ECCE by limiting or supporting participation by students from different backgrounds and shaping their learning experience (UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, 2021). In recent years, the importance of design in architecture has been extrapolated to other areas of the learning environment. For instance, universal design aims to integrate children with disabilities into the mainstream through designing physical structures that are accessible by children with and without disabilities (The RL Mace Universal Design Institute, 2019). Principles of universal design can also be applied to other areas such as ECCE curricula, environment and pedagogy (Lien Foundation, 2014).

8.2 Inclusive building design policies

An example of a policy which can support inclusive infrastructure in ECCE settings is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design. The Standards help to set guidelines for accessibility to places of public accommodation and commercial facilities for individuals with disabilities, including in ECCE settings (United States Department of Justice, 1991). The Standards outline minimum scoping and technical requirements for newly designed and constructed or altered public accommodations, government facilities, and commercial facilities that are to be readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.

Under these requirements, childcare centres designed and constructed for first occupancy after 2012 are required to be readily accessible to individuals with disabilities and built in compliance with the design standards (U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2020). The Standards also require existing private childcare centres to remove architectural barriers which constrain the participation of children with disabilities – however, this obligation only arises where the alterations are this is deemed ‘readily achievable’, or if subsequent alterations are made (Bromberg, 2011). Similarly, centres run by government agencies have been required to ensure their programs are accessible, unless implementing changes would impose an ‘undue burden’. Examples of barriers to access which should be removed include the installation of grab bars in toilet stalls, rearranging furniture, and installing offset hinges to widen door openings. The Department of Justice has a primary role in enforcing the ADA through the investigation of complaints and filing discrimination suits on behalf of complainants (Bromberg, 2011).

Box: Early Childhood Facilities Design Standards and Guidelines (South Australia)

Another example of inclusive building design standards is the Early Childhood Facilities Design Standards and Guidelines in South Australia. These design standards inform the planning and design of new childhood facilities and redevelopment of existing facilities, including prescribing design

requirements that support the delivery of integrated education for all children, including learners with disabilities.

The guidelines outline the need for realms such as the physical, social, and cognitive to be interwoven and interrelated, and for spaces to foster feelings of safety, security, and support as well as belonging to the group.

New ECCE buildings are required to supported an integrated approach to program provision with facilities needing to meet all requirements for access for those with disabilities; examples of provisions to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities include the requirement that door widths cater for wheelchair users, and the need to have a physical environment that maximises acoustic properties to support learning for children, particularly those with hearing disabilities.

8.3 Inclusive model preschools

Universal design principles can also extend to the way in which programs are structured and delivered to make early childhood education inclusive and accessible for students of all abilities and backgrounds. The Kindle Garden in Singapore is an example of a preschool that offers an ‘inclusive model’ under which children with different learning needs are fully integrated with their typically developing peers (Lien Foundation, 2018).

Approximately 30 per cent of children who attend Kindle Garden have conditions including cerebral palsy, autism spectrum Disorder, and Down’s syndrome, and participate in a common schedule of activities alongside their typically developing peers (Lien Foundation, 2014). Children are taught the same content, but specialised teachers offer various modes of lesson delivery, modifying materials or using additional aids according to child need.

This integrated delivery of early childhood education is supported by a multidisciplinary team of preschool teachers, early interventionists and therapists who aim to foster individual strengths and abilities through personalised learning plans. The physical features of the classrooms, including topographical mounds and soft enclosures, are also designed to be accessible by children of varying abilities.

8.4 Language immersion schools

Language immersion schools provide a further example of how ECCE settings can be inclusive of children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. One example of such a service is *naíonraí* [playgroups], an Irish medium early-immersion setting designed to help children who are raised with Irish to enrich their language skills, and to help children raised in languages other than Irish to acquire a second language in a natural setting (Gaeloideachas, 2021).

Naíonraí operate according to the principle of **total early immersion** with the language of instruction being Irish for 100 per cent of the school day. The chief method of learning is the medium of play, through which children naturally acquire Irish language skills (Early Childhood Ireland, n.d.). The play is supervised by a *Stiúrthóir* [leader] who will understand anything children say in their first language but answers them in the second language (Irish), also providing them with vocabulary in the second language.

Naíonraí foster inclusivity for Indigenous learners through providing them with an option to learn in their own language, and also open the language up to non-Indigenous children who are able to learn a second language.

8.5 Learning at home and Covid-19

The World Health Organization has noted the significant costs which may be associated with disruption to development in early childhood as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns and activity restrictions globally.

Where ECCE services cannot be provided in an ECCE centre, ECCE can be provided by supporting parents and caregivers to provide learning materials and stimulation at home. For example, the Ministry for Education in New Zealand created a series of 'Learning from home' resources which could be provided to parents to deliver at home (Ministry for Education, 2020). Resources included routines for engaging with a child's language development, and learning through play techniques. However, access to these resources largely depends on reliable access to a device and internet connection. Where families lack these resources, the Ministry recommends contacting the ECCE centre to discuss alternative resources to access distance learning. Similarly, the Department of Education and Training in Victoria published a range of resources for families to use at home to engage in learning activities with young children (Department of Education and Training, 2020).

Some ECCE service providers switched to online service provision, using technology to deliver distance learning. In a blog post reviewing approaches to using technology to deliver distanced ECCE, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (US) highlighted the following considerations for kindergarten services in supporting equitable access for children from culturally diverse programs (NAEYC, 2020):

- partnering with families to identify challenges to participation and brainstorming potential solutions (e.g. carers' digital literacy, access to devices, internet connectivity)
- combining the use of technology with non-digital materials at home that could be used as learning tools (e.g. beans, dice, blocks)
- considering new uses of online meeting platforms (e.g. reading class books together)
- recording content delivered online to be accessible at home throughout the day.

Where services can return to physical ECCE centres, additional policies may be required to support the ECCE workforce. In Ireland, relevant policies to help children in ECCE settings prevent the spread of Covid-19 have included self-assessment checklists for ECCE services to complete (First 5, 2021). Some of the actions required under this checklist include:

- providing age-appropriate signage and directions on hand washing
- considering the layout of the room to ensure children are kept in small, consistent groups ('play-pods') and do not mix with other groups
- cleaning and disinfecting toys and equipment between use by each group of children
- introducing staggered arrival and collection times for parents.

8.6 Discussion points

Inclusive building design policies should consider how both existing and planned buildings can be designed for inclusion, and how requirements can be enforced.

While retroactive enforcement is uncommon, policymakers should consider how inclusive design standards enshrined in legislation can apply to existing buildings. For example, the ADA Standards for Accessible Design apply to existing facilities to the extent that adjustments do not constitute an 'undue burden', or where future alterations are made. In outlining an obligation for all ECCE settings, including those constructed before the passage of the legislation, to comply with the standards, inclusive design can become more ubiquitous. Enforcement of design standards is also important to ensure compliance and can be achieved through judicial processes such as private lawsuits and investigation of complaints by a central body such as the Justice Department in the United States. A

downside of this process is that it imposes time and expense burdens of compliance on parents and families, with another option being regular state-based audits of ECCE centres.

Operating under an ‘inclusive model’ can benefit both children with disabilities and their typically developing peers in universal ECCE centres.

Integrated models of ECCE delivery such as the ‘inclusive model’ adopted by Kindle Garden can benefit all children. There is evidence that children with disabilities who are included tend to outperform those who have been segregated (Hehir, et al., 2016). Children’s language skills have been shown to benefit substantially from attending preschool with students without disability (Justice, et al., 2014). Research also indicates that typically developing children in inclusive settings perform as well or better as their counterparts in non-inclusive programs (Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009).

Inclusive learning models need to be complemented by inclusive curricula as well as inclusive physical design and collaboration among ECCE professionals.

The Kindle Garden exemplifies the need for ‘inclusive model’ delivery of ECCE to be complemented by inclusive physical design choices and a collaborative, interdisciplinary team. Effective delivery of inclusive ECCE requires infrastructure and settings which are accommodative to the needs of children with disabilities, particularly in order for staff to be able to facilitate varied forms of lesson delivery. These design choices can be mandated by governments through legislation such as the ADA Standards for Accessible Design. Successful inclusion also requires cohesive collaboration between students, peers, parents, teachers, and administrators involved in the process (Stoa, 2016).

Preschools can also support the inclusion of children from varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds through language immersion, which confers a number of benefits to learners.

Language immersion preschools such as *naíonraí* foster inclusivity in ECCE through allowing children from Indigenous backgrounds to learn in their first language and opening the language up to non-Indigenous children. On standardised measures of verbal and mathematics skills, immersion students achieved just as well as, or better than, non-immersion students (Early Childhood Ireland, n.d.). These programs should be open to students from non-Indigenous backgrounds to be inclusive.

Where ECCE services cannot be provided in an ECCE centre, ECCE can be provided by supporting parents and caregivers to provide learning materials and stimulation at home.

Alternative learning from home programmes may be implemented through the provision of resources including routines for engaging with a child’s language development and learning through play techniques. However, access to these resources largely depends on reliable access to a device and internet connection.

9. PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

The GEM Report highlights the importance of negotiating with parents, schools and communities in the progress towards inclusion (UNESCO, 2020). This chapter examines policies which engage parents and communities and build ECCE upon local trust and context.

9.1 Inclusive parents and community policies in early childhood settings

Parents and communities comprise the network of people that surround and influence children (Livingstone, 2018). This network is important because when children feel secure, safe, and supported, they tend to have greater confidence to play, explore, and learn. A service that is well-connected to people, place, culture, and children's families generates safe and stable environments that promote children's sense of belonging and learning. One way to make ECCE more inclusive and accommodative to the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds is to upskill parents and engage members of the community.

In Australia, ECCE policies have been developed to better engage with members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, especially in remote Australia. Approximately one in five Indigenous Australians lived in remote or very remote areas in 2018 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019). Access to ECCE services is often constrained in remote and very remote areas due to sparse population densities, increasing the costs of service provision. Unique cultural conceptions of ECCE in different communities also creates a need for culturally appropriate ECCE policies.

Examples of inclusive ECCE programs which engage parents and communities in remote Australia include the Families as First Teacher (FaFT) program and Aboriginal supported playgroups.

9.2 Engaging indigenous families as early childhood educators

The Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program is based in the Northern Territory of Australia and is 'an early learning and family support program for remote Indigenous families with the aim to improve developmental outcomes for remote Indigenous children by working with families and children prior to school entry' (Northern Territory Government Department of Education, 2016).

The context for the program is the issue of Indigenous student disadvantage, particularly for those living in remote areas; Indigenous children are twice as likely to enter school developmentally behind compared to non-Indigenous children (Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018) and although 75 per cent of developmentally vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children live in regional and urban areas, children in remote locations tend to be more critically vulnerable.

The FaFT program operates based on dual generational learning – focusing on both child and adult learning – and the **Abecedarian Approach**. Under this approach, at-risk children are engaged in reading sessions, individualised games, and daily information-filled caregiving/language interactions with responsive adults. This helps to develop the child's expectations to receive adult input, to pay attention, and to respond. The acquisition of this social, attitudinal, and learning disposition along with the knowledge and skills integrated into games prepares children to arrive at school developmentally on track, and well-positioned to learn from ensuing experiences (Early Development Resources, n.d.). The program also focuses on linking families with support services

and agencies and providing quality child-centred early learning experiences, adult learning opportunities, and education in nutrition, health and hygiene.

However, the program has a demonstrated capacity to be replicated across various local communities. In the Australian context, this has been evidenced by the uptake of the program in 21 growth towns across the Northern Territory (Australian Institute of Family Studies, n.d.).

9.3 Aboriginal playgroups

Playgroups are informal meetings for children, which are run by parents and communities, in which facilitators lead parent-child activities through which learning and skill-development can occur (Centre for Family Research and Evaluation, 2020).

Playgroup Queensland runs the Accessible Playgroups Initiative which aims to build community capacity through assisting vulnerable families and communities, particularly those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, to establish their own playgroups (Australian Government Australian Institute of Family Studies, n.d.).

The program operates based on the 'Not Just Kids Play' model which is driven by consultation with families and communities to enable culturally appropriate delivery of the playgroups; it assists families to identify and develop their own strengths and resources, allowing parents and carers to develop and maintain pride in their family and cultural identity, in turn enabling children to develop a positive sense of identity through understanding their family and culture.

These factors reinforce trust, and promote a sense of community ownership, encouraging active engagement in the program and establishing a foundation for building long-term relationships in the community. These connections increase community and family capacity to support children in the long-term.

Given that playgroup participation by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian is more common than attending parent support groups (Centre for Family Research and Evaluation, 2020), they are an accessible means through which parents and children can practice skills and establish early relationships.

9.4 Discussion Points

Government-facilitated parent support programs can be effective at engaging parents in remote communities.

FaFT and Aboriginal playgroups have been shown to lead to improved child outcomes, as well as community benefits (Australian Institute of Family Studies, n.d.; Centre for Family Research and Evaluation, 2020). While formal evaluation of the playgroups is yet to be conducted, there is evidence to suggest that they are effective; this includes increased interaction between schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and higher enrolment rates into the first year of formal schooling and Year 1 for attendees of the playgroups than for non-attendees (Australian Government Australian Institute of Family Studies, n.d.). Evaluation of the FaFT program has shown it to be effective in engaging local families and increasing student participation (Australian Institute of Family Studies, n.d.). Schools teachers' perceptions are that there has been an increasing number of children enrolling in preschool, higher attendance, and that children are more ready to attend preschool.

Success factors for inclusive parents and communities' policies and programs include community trust, local participation, and context.

Given the unique multiplicity of history, experiences, and culture of Indigenous communities, policies and programs to foster inclusive ECCE need to be built on community trust and local participation. With each community being different, programs need to cater for the specific needs and draw on the wisdom and experience of those within the respective contexts. With different cultures having different perspectives on what is important in childcare, provision of ECCE services needs to be responsive to the different priorities of a community. In doing so, these programs can foster community participation and also build trust within the communities. These are important foundations not only for the success of formal inclusive ECCE programs, but also to foster positive relationships and community involvement around children so that they are able to learn in a supportive, safe environment in which they feel they belong.

These programs are impacted by community enablers and barriers.

Local access, transport availability, and trained, local Indigenous staff are all factors that affect sustainability of inclusive programs. Challenges faced in running successful playgroups for Indigenous families include having adequate funding to engage families and the wider community, develop trust, and facilitate the role of Aboriginal staff, Elders, and advisory groups who play an important role in making the playgroup culturally appropriate and safe (Centre for Family Research and Evaluation, 2020). Accessibility of the playgroups may also be a barrier without adequate transportation services. Factors which limit the delivery of the FaFT program include lack of housing availability, insufficient venues for program delivery, inhibitive reporting and data management requirements, and challenges in managing the broad scope of the program at the community level (Australian Institute of Family Studies, n.d.).

10. CONCLUSION

This report has reviewed the international research and policy literature concerning different approaches to inclusion in ECCE in high-income countries across the themes set out in the GEM Report (UNESCO, 2020). Each chapter has highlighted examples of policies and practices in different high-income jurisdictions globally which can foster inclusion in ECCE.

As a critical period for children's intellectual, emotional, social, physical and moral development, supporting inclusion in ECCE is of particular importance for supporting lifelong learning and equitable opportunities for all children. This review has also revealed some of the key challenges in promoting inclusion in ECCE compared to other stages of schooling, and policies and practices to overcome these challenges. A number of key messages which have emerged from this review in designing policies to promote inclusion in ECCE are summarised below.

10.1 Key messages

Inclusion in ECCE is fostered through **complementary universal** and **targeted approaches** to most aspects of ECCE governance, financing, policy and service delivery. Beginning with the right of the child to ECCE, inclusion outcomes are supported by universal access to ECCE in creating a foundational assumption that all children can access ECCE services. The content of this universal right must also be defined in universal resourcing policies to ensure the availability and affordability of ECCE for all children. To support the provision of resourcing in ECCE according to child complexity and learning needs, a **multi-tiered system of financing and resourcing policies** can provide a holistic model for the provision of both universal and targeted supports in mainstream ECCE settings. Similarly, universal ECCE curricula can support inclusive practice by establishing an expectation that all children's needs will be met in mainstream ECCE settings.

The **implementation and enforcement** of ECCE laws and policies is also key to supporting inclusion. Cross-portfolio offices can support inclusion in ECCE by ensuring that ECCE policy implementation and service delivery around a child is coordinated and consistent. Minimum quality standards in ECCE safeguard the provision of services of a minimum quality for all children, but must also be complemented by consistent monitoring and enforcement practices, to ensure that standards are implemented consistently in practice. Curricula which are adapted to the local context can enhance inclusivity by enabling service providers to identify and prioritise local inclusivity aspirations. Success factors for inclusive parents and communities' policies and programs include community trust, local participation, and context

As the key actors delivering ECCE services, **collaboration within the ECCE workforce** is crucial to supporting a community of practice which leads and shares inclusion. Opportunities for general collaboration within an inclusive 'community of learning' can create conditions to promote inclusion in ECCE services. Collaboration between the general ECCE workforce and specialised inclusive counsellors, coaches or advisors can create an additional resource for ECCE educators in supporting inclusion in general ECCE settings, without risking the segregation of inclusive ECCE practices from the general ECCE workforce.

Finally, while many existing ECCE policies, resources and tools are based in a deficits approach to understanding child need, inclusion may be better supported through an approach which focusses on child **learning needs and strengths**. For example, data collection in ECCE and other stages of schooling is commonly 'deficits' based, testing the extent to which a child deviates from developmental norms. Multi-tiered systems can facilitate inclusion through enabling children to

receive targeted supports in a universal setting, avoiding the need to identify or segregate children from an early age.

APPENDIX A– POLICIES REVIEWED

The policies selected for inclusion in this report are summarised in 0 below. These policies were selected through:

- a desktop review to establish a ‘long list’ of policies based on the review scope
- policies were categorised by type of policy, area of inclusion, and country
- a shortlist for consideration and further analysis were selected to provide a general cross section.

Table A.1: Policies selected for inclusion in the report

Chapter	Jurisdiction	Policy
Legal and policy frameworks	United Nations	<i>United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child</i> (UNCRC), Articles 18, 28, 29, 31
	United Nations	UNCRC General Comment No. 7
	United Nations	Sustainable Development Goal 4.2 and 4.5
	Europe	European Pillar of Social Rights, Pillar 11
	Finland	Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE Act) (540/2018)
	Sweden	Education Act (2010:800)
	Denmark	Act on Day Care
	Norway	Kindergarten Act
	Latvia	Education Law (s 17)
	Slovenia	Kindergarten Act, Articles 9 and 10
Financing and resourcing	Estonia	Preschool Childcare Institutions Act
	Germany	<i>Sozialgesetzbuch (SGB) – Achtes Buch (VIII)</i>
	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) China	Free Quality Kindergarten Education Policy

	New Zealand	Special Education Grant
	New Zealand	Ongoing Resourcing Scheme
	New Zealand	Targeted Funding for Disadvantage
	New Zealand	Annual Top-up for Isolated Services
	United Kingdom	Early Years National Funding Formula
	Ireland	Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)
	Australia	School Readiness Fund Menu
	Canada	Guaranteed Space Payment
Data and monitoring	Australia	Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)
	United Nations	Washington Group Short Set (WG-SS)
	United Nations	Module on Child Functioning (CFM)
	Australia	Early Abilities Based Learning and Education Support (Early ABLES)
Governance	Sweden	Ministry of Education (integrated ECCE governance)
	Netherlands	Basic Conditions for Quality Pre-School Education
	United States of America	Head Start program
	Ireland	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
	Australia	Office of the Children's Guardian
	Australia	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
Curricula, teaching	New Zealand	<i>Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō nga Mokopuna o Aotearoa</i>

materials and pedagogy	Finland	National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care
	New Zealand	Individual Plans
Workforce	Hong Kong SAR China	Higher Diploma in Early Childhood Education (Inclusive Education)
	Australia	Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education (RATE)
	Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Czechia	Wanda method
	Australia	Dynamic Leadership in Early Childhood project
	Australia	Pre School Field Officer (PSFO)
	New Zealand	Kaitakawaenga
	Infrastructure and settings	United States of America
Australia		Early Childhood Facilities Design Standards and Guidelines
Singapore		Kindle Garden
Ireland		<i>Naíonraí</i> language immersion
New Zealand		‘Learning from home’ resources
Australia		Learning at home resources
United States of America		Equitable considerations in the use of technology to learn from home
Ireland		Covid-19 Self-Assessment Checklists
Parents and communities	Australia	Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program
	Australia	Aboriginal playgroups

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