

The Finnish National Agency for Education

National core curriculum for early childhood education and care

FINNISH NATIONAL
AGENCY FOR EDUCATION

Regulation OPH-700-2022

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1. National core curriculum for early childhood education and care and local curricula for early childhood education and care

Pursuant to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care¹, this national core curriculum for early childhood education and care is a national regulation issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education (formerly Finnish National Board of Education). The local curricula for early childhood education and care and children's individual early childhood education and care plans are prepared and early childhood education and care is implemented in compliance with the national core curriculum. The formulation of the national core curriculum is directed by the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, in particular, which contains provisions on the right of the child to early childhood education and care as well as the objectives for early childhood education and care. Pre-primary education, which is regulated under the Basic Education Act², is part of early childhood education and care. Pre-primary education is guided by the National core curriculum for pre-primary education, a regulation issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is part of the Finnish education system and an important stage on the child's path of growing and learning. The objective of ECEC is to support the child's prerequisites for learning and to promote lifelong learning and the realisation of equality in education in line with the principles of inclusion³. These principles include equal rights for all children, equality, equity, non-discrimination, appreciation of diversity as well as social participation and togetherness⁴. Inclusiveness is a broad concept and should be seen as a principle, value and holistic way of thinking that applies to all children in the provision of ECEC. The preparation of this core curriculum was underpinned by the principles of inclusion, which are examined particularly in Chapter 2 discussing the underlying values. In Chapter 3, they are examined from the perspective of operational culture, and in Chapter 5 from the perspective of support provided for the child. The primary responsibility for bringing up children rests with the guardians. ECEC supports and complements the home's educational task and bears its share of the responsibility for children's well-being.

The purpose of the national steering of ECEC is to create equal preconditions for the holistic growth, development and learning of the children participating in early childhood education and care.

This national core curriculum responds to the current changes in the environment where children grow up and develop as well as in the operational environment of ECEC. Legislative amendments have also been taken into account in the core curriculum. The core curriculum was prepared in

¹ Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018)

² Basic Education Act (628/1998) and Decree (852/1998)

³ Section 3 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁴ HE 148/2021 vp: Government proposal to Parliament on amending the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, pp. 30–31

cooperation with stakeholders, drawing on the findings of latest research and development efforts.

The national core curriculum for ECEC plan consists of three levels. It comprises the national core curriculum for early childhood education, the local curricula for early childhood education as well as children's individual early childhood education and care plans.

1.1 The national core curriculum for early childhood education and care and related obligations

The purpose of the national core curriculum for early childhood education and care is to support and steer the provision, implementation, and development of ECEC and to promote the implementation of high-quality and equal ECEC. Early childhood education and care refers to a systematic and goal-oriented whole consisting of education, instruction, and care with particular emphasis on pedagogy⁵.

The national core curriculum for early childhood education and care specifies the key objectives and contents of early childhood education and care, cooperation between the ECEC service organiser and children's guardians, cross-sectoral cooperation as well as the contents of the child's ECEC plan⁶.

The national core curriculum for early childhood education and care is a regulation that is legally binding for ECEC service organisers. In addition to regulations, the core curriculum document contains descriptions that support understanding it as a whole. At the end of each chapter, a list of issues subject to local decisions is given. These steer the preparation of the local curriculum for ECEC and the implementation of early childhood education and care. The national core curriculum for ECEC also contains references to legislation. The purpose of these references is to clarify the connection between the core curriculum and its legislative foundation.

In this core curriculum, **ECEC service organiser** refers to a municipality, joint municipal authority, or private service provider⁷. The concept of the guardian is used to refer to the child's parent or other legal guardian.

1.2 Local curriculum for early childhood education and care

The ECEC service organiser shall prepare and adopt local curricula for early childhood education based on the national core curriculum for ECEC. The obligation to prepare a curriculum for early

⁵ Section 2 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁶ Section 21 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁷ Section 1 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

childhood education and care also applies to open activities in ECEC procured by the municipality as well as private ECEC, including private centre-based early education activities or private family daycare supervised by the municipality. Local curricula for ECEC are binding and they must be evaluated and developed. A local curriculum for early childhood education and care may apply to all forms of ECEC services (centre-based early education activities, family daycare and open activities in ECEC), or a separate curriculum may be prepared for each service form. The ECEC service organisers may also agree upon cooperation across the boundaries of providers regarding the formulation, evaluation, and development of the curriculum.⁸

The curriculum for ECEC shall be formulated to determine, steer, and support the organisation of early childhood education and care at the local level. When preparing the curriculum, the education and care provider shall take into account local special features, potential pedagogical emphases, the children's needs, and outcomes of evaluation and development work relevant to ECEC. Local curricula may add detail to the national curriculum, but they may not exclude any goals or contents stipulated by an act, a decree, or the core curriculum for ECEC.

When preparing the curriculum for ECEC, other local plans and curricula are taken into account, including

- plans relevant to ECEC, children, and families
- the National core curriculum for pre-primary education
- the National core curriculum for basic education
- a possible curriculum for instruction preparing for basic education
- a plan for the well-being of children and young people referred to in the Child Welfare Act⁹
- an integration plan¹⁰
- an equality and equity plan¹¹.

The ECEC service organiser ensures that the personnel of early childhood education and care, guardians, and children are provided with an opportunity to participate in preparing and developing the local curriculum for ECEC¹².

In order to secure the continuity and integrity of the child's growth and development path, representatives of pre-primary and basic education participate in preparing and developing the curriculum for ECEC. The preparation of a local curriculum for ECEC involves cooperation with the different administrative branches in the municipality, especially the local social welfare and health care officials (Chapter 3.3).

⁸ Section 22 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁹ Section 12 (1292/2013) of the Child Welfare Act (417/2007)

¹⁰ Section 15 of the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010)

¹¹ Section 5b of the Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986) and section 6a of the Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014)

¹² Section 20 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

A curriculum for early childhood education and care shall be separately adopted by the ECEC service organiser for education given in the Finnish, Swedish and Sámi languages and in other languages, where needed¹³.

An ECEC service organiser shall evaluate the early childhood education and care it provides and take part in external evaluations of its operations¹⁴. In the evaluation of local ECEC, evaluation data obtained from the national data warehouse for early childhood education and care Varda¹⁵ as well as the evaluation tools produced by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre¹⁶ can be used. For more detailed information on evaluation, see Chapter 7.

1.3 The child's early childhood education and care plan

According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, each child in ECEC has a right to systematic and goal-oriented education, instruction, and care. In order to ensure this, an individual ECEC plan is prepared for each child in an early education centre and family daycare¹⁷. The basis for the child's ECEC plan shall be the best interest¹⁸ and needs of the child. The child's opinion and wishes should also be heard and taken into account in the individual ECEC plan process¹⁹. The personnel are responsible for finding appropriate methods for determining the child's viewpoints. It is important that the observations and views of both the child's guardian and the personnel concerning the child's development and learning stages and ability to act in a group are taken into account.

When preparing an individual ECEC plan for a child, it is important to be aware of the child's knowledge and skills, strengths, interests, and personal needs. The children's background in terms of their language, culture, and worldview are also taken into account in the preparation process. When drawing up or updating the plan, any previous individual ECEC plan of the child and pedagogical documentation are relied on (Chapter 4.2). The objectives recorded in the child's ECEC plan concern the personnel's pedagogical activities. They describe how the child's development, learning and well-being are supported by pedagogical activities and learning environments. When setting the objectives, the guardian's and any other experts' views of the child's well-being, development, learning, and support needs are also taken into account.²⁰

The child's ECEC plan is a tool for planning and evaluating activities. The goals arising from the children's individual ECEC plans are taken into account in the planning and implementation of activities for the group of children as well as development of learning environments and the

¹³ Section 8 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁴ Section 24 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁵ Sections 65–73 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁶ Act on the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (1295/2013)

¹⁷ Section 23 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁸ Section 4 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and p. 34 of HE 148/2021

¹⁹ Section 23 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

²⁰ HE 148/2021, p. 34

operational culture. An individual early childhood education and care plan is prepared for a child after they have started attending an early education centre or family daycare. The plan is reviewed as required by the child's needs, at least once per year²¹.

The child's ECEC plan process consists of various stages. Persons in charge of the child's instruction, education and care participate in the process together with the child and child's guardian. At early education centres, a person qualified as a teacher in early childhood education and care is responsible for preparing and evaluating the child's ECEC plan. The competence of a social pedagogue in early childhood education and care may be utilised, particularly in the context of knowledge in the service system for children and families. A special education teacher in early childhood education and care participates in evaluating the child's support needs, support measures or their implementation as necessary. A teacher (ECEC) or a special education teacher (ECEC) may participate in the individual ECEC plan process of a child in family daycare. If necessary, experts or other relevant actors who support the child's development and learning also participate in preparing and evaluating a child's ECEC plan.²²

Any support provided for the child's development, learning and well-being, the delivery of this support, and the way in which the effectiveness of the support and the implementation of support measures are evaluated and recorded in the child's ECEC plan. If the child has a chronic illness that requires medical treatment, a medical care plan is prepared for the child in health care services²³. To the extent that the information included in the medical care plan is necessary for the provision of the child's early childhood education and care, it is recorded in the child's ECEC plan²⁴. The implementation of medical care in early childhood education and care is agreed locally. For more information about support provided in early childhood education and care, see Chapter 5.

The implementation of the child's personal early childhood education plan and the impacts of pedagogical practices in ECEC on the child's development and learning are monitored regularly. The child's ECEC plan must be reviewed at least once a year. However, the plan shall be revised whenever a reason based on the needs of the child for this exists.²⁵ The child's need for support and the adequacy, appropriateness and effectiveness of support must be evaluated, and the plan must be updated whenever the child's support needs change. If the child receives intensified or special support, the child's ECEC plan is updated as set out in the administrative decision on the support²⁶. The initiative to review the plan may come from persons working with the child or the child's guardian. An evaluation of a child's ECEC plan focuses especially on the arrangements for the activities, delivery of pedagogy and the effectiveness of support measures.

The child's early childhood education and care plan shall include the following:

²¹ Section 23 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

²² Section 23 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and p. 34 of HE 148/2021

²³ Section 8 of the Health Care Act (1326/2010)

²⁴ Section 41 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

²⁵ Section 23 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

²⁶ Section 15e of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

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- the child's strengths related to development and learning as well as interests
- objectives supporting the child's development, learning and well-being as well as measures supporting these objectives and the evaluation of their achievement
- when necessary, the support needed by the child (Chapter 5)
- a possible medical care plan
- matters agreed together by the child, personnel, and guardian
- other possible experts who participated in drawing up the plan
- the date when the plan was prepared and revised and when it will be revised.

The child's ECEC plan is a confidential document²⁷. According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the persons responsible for the child's ECEC and those involved in evaluating the child's support needs, support measures or their implementation have, notwithstanding the obligation to maintain confidentiality, the right to receive from each other, and to disclose to each other and the ECEC service organiser and provider, information that is necessary for the organisation, provision, and implementation of support. The disclosure of information aims at safeguarding the implementation of ECEC in accordance with the child's best interest. The provision on receiving and disclosing information also concerns situations in which the child transitions from ECEC organised by a municipality or a private service provider to ECEC organised by another municipality or service provider, or in which the child transitions to pre-primary education or basic education from ECEC. The child's client relationship in ECEC is public data. However, confidential information may be related to the provision of early childhood education and care for the child.²⁸

1.4 Issues subject to local decisions

As laid down in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the local curriculum for ECEC and the child's ECEC plan shall be prepared as decided by the ECEC service organiser in compliance with the goals and principles described in this Chapter and elsewhere in this document. Issues that must be decided and described in the local curriculum are listed at the end of each chapter of the national core curriculum for ECEC.

The local curriculum for ECEC may include text from the core curriculum. However, it is essential to explain the text and include concrete examples to ensure that the curriculum guides and supports the implementation and development of ECEC at the local level.

²⁷ Section 40 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

²⁸ Section 41 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and e.g. section 24 of the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999)

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Separate plans may be drawn up for the different forms of ECEC services at the local level. The local curricula for early childhood education and care may also be formulated in cooperation between ECEC service organisers.

The local ECEC curriculum may be adopted fully or partly as specific to a municipality, a unit, a group or an ECEC service. A private service provider's ECEC curriculum may be adopted on the basis of the aforementioned principles or as applicable to the entire operation of the service provider.²⁹ The local curriculum is evaluated regularly and developed based on the evaluation.

When formulating a local curriculum, the ECEC service organiser shall determine

- the languages for which the curriculum will be prepared and approved
- whether the curriculum for ECEC is entirely or partially specific to a unit, a group, a form of ECEC service, or a regional plan
- the structure of the curriculum, the order in which the topics are approached and the form in which the curriculum is published
- how the ECEC personnel and the children and guardians participate in the preparation, evaluation, and development of the curriculum³⁰
- how cooperation with pre-primary education, basic education, social welfare and health care experts of the well-being services county and other necessary partners will be realised in preparing the curriculum for ECEC
- how local special features, different ways to organise ECEC, local development goals and other local plans relevant to children will be taken into account in the preparation of the curriculum
- how the implementation of the local curriculum for ECEC is evaluated and developed (see also Chapter 7).

The local curriculum shall describe

- the process of preparing an individual ECEC plan for a child from a local perspective. The description determines the cooperation and responsibilities related to the preparation, monitoring, and evaluation in accordance with the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and this core curriculum
- practices related to the disclosure and exchange of confidential information on ECEC
- the process of drawing up administrative decisions on support³¹ from the local perspective.

²⁹ Section 22 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

³⁰ Section 20 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

³¹ Section 15e of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

2. Mission and general goals of early childhood education and care

Early childhood education and care is a societal service with a number of tasks. The mission of ECEC is to promote children's holistic growth, development and learning in collaboration with their guardians. ECEC promotes equality and equity among children and prevents social exclusion. Knowledge and skills acquired in ECEC strengthen children's participation and active agency in the society. In addition, ECEC supports guardians in educating their children as well as makes it possible for them to work or study.

2.1 Obligations that direct the organisation of early childhood education and care

The municipality is responsible for organising early childhood education and care to the extent and using the forms of ECEC services required in the municipality. The aim is to organise ECEC in the proximity of service users and during hours that correspond to local needs³². According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, ECEC may be provided as centre-based early education activities, family-based daycare or open activities in ECEC³³. The right of the child to ECEC specified in the Act applies to the early childhood education and care provided at an early education centre or as family daycare. The child's guardian shall make the decision concerning the child's participation in ECEC. According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, each child in pre-primary education has a right to participate in ECEC as specified in the Act³⁴.

A municipality or joint municipal authority may organise early childhood education and care or purchase the ECEC services from a public or private service provider. When the ECEC services are purchased from other service providers, the municipality or joint municipal authority must be able to ascertain that the outsourced services meet the standards required of municipal operations. The ECEC service organiser is responsible for ensuring that the outsourced services are organised in compliance with the relevant statutes and this core curriculum for ECEC³⁵. A municipal body or an office holder decided by the municipality, the Regional State Administrative Agency, and the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health are responsible for the steering, guidance and monitoring of private service providers³⁶.

The municipality must ensure a child's access to early childhood education and care provided in child's mother tongue if this language is Finnish, Swedish or Sámi³⁷. Chapter 4.6 issues provisions on other languages.

³² Section 5(4) of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

³³ Section 1 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

³⁴ Sections 1 and 12 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

³⁵ Section 5(2) of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

³⁶ Section 52 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

³⁷ Section 8 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and p. 89 of Government proposal HE 40/2018 vp

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The obligations guiding the organisation of early childhood education and care are based on the Constitution of Finland, the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and the Government Decree on Early Childhood Education and Care³⁸ as well as this national core curriculum for ECEC. The Administrative Procedure Act³⁹ and the Act on the Openness of Government Activities⁴⁰ are also applied to early childhood education and care. Pursuant to the Constitution of Finland, no one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other persons on the ground of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability, or other reason that concerns child's person⁴¹. Obligations arising from other legislation and international agreements to which Finland is party must also be taken into account in the provision of early childhood education and care. These include, among others, the Non-Discrimination Act⁴², the Act on Equality between Women and Men⁴³, the European Convention on Human Rights⁴⁴, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child⁴⁵, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities⁴⁶, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples⁴⁷ as well as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals⁴⁸.

A child who attends early childhood education and care is entitled to support,⁴⁹ regardless of who the ECEC service organiser is⁵⁰. ECEC is organised and developed in keeping with the principle of inclusion. This means that all children have the right to participate in ECEC together, regardless of such aspects as their support needs, disability, or cultural backgrounds.

When a child's development, learning and well-being needs support (later referred to as support for the child) and the child receives support measures and services provided by social welfare and health care, the applicable legislation comprises the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care⁵¹, the Social Welfare Act⁵², the Act on Disability Services and Assistance⁵³, the Act on Special Care for Mentally Handicapped Persons⁵⁴ and the Health Care Act⁵⁵ as well as provisions on social and health care services elsewhere in the law.

³⁸ Government Decree on Early Childhood Education and Care (753/2018)

³⁹ Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003)

⁴⁰ The Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999)

⁴¹ Section 6 of the Constitution of Finland (731/1999)

⁴² Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014)

⁴³ Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986)

⁴⁴ European Convention on Human Rights 1990

⁴⁵ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (59/1991)

⁴⁶ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2007 (27/2016)

⁴⁷ UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007

⁴⁸ Sustainable Development Goals – Agenda 2030. The UN General Assembly 2015

⁴⁹ Section 15a of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁵⁰ Municipality, joint municipal authority or private service provider, see Chapter 1.1

⁵¹ Section 15a of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁵² Social Welfare Act (1301/2014)

⁵³ Act on Disability Services and Assistance (380/1987)

⁵⁴ Act on Special Care for Mentally Handicapped Persons (519/1977)

⁵⁵ Health Care Act (1326/2010)

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The national goals of early childhood education and care are laid down in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. These goals steer the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of the national core curriculum as well as the local curriculum for ECEC and a child's ECEC plan.

According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care⁵⁶, the aim of ECEC is to

- 1) promote the holistic growth, development, health, and wellbeing of every child according to the child's age and development;
- 2) support the conditions for the child's learning and promote lifelong learning and the implementation of equality in education in keeping with the principles of inclusion;
- 3) carry out versatile pedagogical activities based on the child's play, physical activity, arts and cultural heritage and enable positive learning experiences;
- 4) ascertain that the child's early childhood education and care environment fosters development and learning and is healthy and safe;
- 5) safeguard an approach that respects children and ensure that the interpersonal relationships between the children and the early childhood education and care staff are as stable and longstanding as possible;
- 6) provide all children with equal opportunities for early childhood education and care, promote parity and gender equality, and help the children develop their capacity to understand and respect the general cultural heritage and each other's linguistic, cultural, religious, and ideological background;
- 7) recognise the child's need for individual support and provide the child with appropriate support in early childhood education and care, including support involving multiprofessional cooperation where necessary;
- 8) develop the child's interpersonal and interaction skills, promote the child's ability to act in a peer group, and guide the child towards ethically responsible and sustainable action, respect of other people and membership of society;
- 9) ensure that the children can participate in and influence matters concerning them;
- 10) act together with the child and the child's parent or other persons who have custody of the child for the benefit of the child's balanced development and holistic wellbeing, and support the parents or other persons who have custody with the child in their task of bringing up the child.

An ECEC service organiser has the duty to inform the guardians about the goals and operation of different forms of ECEC. The guardian is provided with an opportunity to participate in and influence the planning, implementation, and assessment of the child's ECEC. In addition, guardians are regularly offered an opportunity to participate in the preparation and evaluation of local and unit-specific curricula for ECEC. For a more detailed description of the guardian's participation in the planning and evaluation of any support provided for the child, see Chapter 5.

⁵⁶ Section 3 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

Factors that determine children's participation in early childhood education and care include families' choices, children's statutory rights, and decisions of the ECEC service organiser⁵⁷. These shall be taken into account when preparing local curricula.

In ECEC, the learning environment must promote development and learning and be healthy and safe, taking the child's age and development into account. The facilities and equipment shall be appropriate and take accessibility into account⁵⁸. Children in early education centres and in family daycare must be provided with a balanced diet. Meals must be appropriately organised and supervised.⁵⁹ ECEC shall not demand or lead to religious, philosophical, or political commitment. ECEC may not be used as a channel of commercial influence. ECEC based on an alternative pedagogy, or a particular worldview are specified in Chapter 6.

Provisions on the qualification requirements of ECEC personnel and staffing ratios are complied with in early childhood education and care⁶⁰. The municipality must provide a special education teacher's (ECEC) services that meet the needs emerging in ECEC⁶¹. Provisions on personnel qualifications are laid down in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care⁶².

Provisions on occupational safety and security, provisions on the processing of personal data and data protection and acts on checking of the criminal backgrounds of persons working with children are taken into account in ECEC. Children are protected from violence, bullying and other harassment with systematic prevention and immediate intervention (Chapter 3.1)⁶³. Promoting safety must be systematic and regularly evaluated.

When providing early childhood education and care, the municipality shall work in close collaboration with actors in charge of education, physical activity and culture, social welfare, child protection, child health clinics and other health care as well as other relevant actors.⁶⁴ ECEC personnel are also bound by the regulations pertaining to referral to social welfare services and making a child welfare notification to child protection services⁶⁵.

⁵⁷ Sections 12 and 19 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁵⁸ Section 10 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁵⁹ Section 11 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁶⁰ Sections 25–33 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and section 75 of Government Decree on Early Childhood Education and Care (753/2018)

⁶¹ Section 25 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁶² Section 75 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁶³ Section 10 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁶⁴ Section 7 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁶⁵ Section 35 of the Social Welfare Act (1301/2014) and section 25 (88/2010) and 25a (1302/2014) of the Child Welfare Act (417/2007)

2.2 Forms of early childhood education and care services

The forms of early childhood education and care services include early education centre activities, family daycare and open activities in ECEC⁶⁶. The goals of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and the national core curriculum for ECEC steer all forms of ECEC services. The Act on Early Childhood Education determines which parts of the act apply to open activities in ECEC⁶⁷. The forms of ECEC services differ from each other. Differences emerge in contexts such as the learning environments, resources, education and qualification requirements for personnel, personnel structures, group sizes as well as the children to personnel ratio. The possibilities of providing support also vary. The characteristics of the different forms of services are taken into account in the preparation of the local curriculum for ECEC, and the objectives are specified for each service form.

It is important that guardians are provided with enough information about the contents and characteristics of each form of ECEC service. The municipality must provide guardians with guidance and advice on the available ECEC services. The form of service and scope of ECEC that optimally meets the child's needs and promotes child's best interest are discussed with guardians if necessary. Advice and guidance are provided when guardians are considering ECEC services and when the child is already within the scope of the services.⁶⁸

Early childhood education and care organised in early education centres is the most common form of ECEC services. Early education centre activities are organised in groups. The groups of children may be formed in different ways, for instance, by taking into account the children's ages, sibling's relationships or needs for support. The groups must be pedagogically appropriate, and provisions on staffing ratios and maximum group sizes as well as support must be complied when forming them⁶⁹. Multiprofessional personnel of an early education centre is a resource for high-quality early childhood education, as it allows the utilisation of everyone's training and competence and the appropriate performance of duties, tasks, and professional roles. Early education centres must have a head responsible for the centre's activities⁷⁰.

The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care puts emphasis on the significance of pedagogy and, at the same time, the pedagogic responsibility of teachers (ECEC) and special education teachers (ECEC)⁷¹. The teachers (ECEC) bear the overall responsibility for planning the activities for groups of children, implementation of activities with a goal-oriented and systematic approach and evaluating and developing the activities. Teachers (ECEC) and special education teachers (ECEC),

⁶⁶ Section 1 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁶⁷ Section 1 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁶⁸ Sections 4 and 16 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁶⁹ Sections 34–38 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁷⁰ Section 25 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁷¹ Sections 2, 25 and 35 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

social pedagogues (ECEC), childcarers and other ECEC personnel plan and implement activities together.

Family daycare is ECEC realised in a small group. It is provided in private homes or other home-like places of care⁷². Family daycare can be provided by one or two childminders or, under special circumstances, as ECEC jointly provided by three childminders⁷³. The number of personnel in a family daycare or the forming of groups of children must take into account children with disabilities or other support needs⁷⁴. Family daycare childminders are in charge of the activities of their groups. The pedagogical management and supervision support goal-oriented planning and implementation of activities by family daycare childminders.

The implementation and priorities of open activities in ECEC depend on the decisions made by the early childhood education and care service organiser. Open activities in ECEC can be organised as playground or club activities, for example. The activities are supervised and goal-oriented. Activities offered in open ECEC may include outdoor activities, play, and art or physical education. Open activities in ECEC may also provide guardians together with their children with opportunities to spend time together in organised activities. The open activities must be planned so that the objectives of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care can be taken into account in them. The more regular and frequent the participation of children in the activities is, the more comprehensively and transversally must these objectives be taken into consideration. Based on the nature of the activities, more emphasis may be put on certain objectives than others.⁷⁵

Shift care must be provided within the required scope for children who need this due to their guardian's work or studies. Shift care may be provided in the evenings, weekends, and nights as early education centre activities or family daycare. The participation of children in shift care in ECEC is often irregular. This should be taken into account in the planning and implementation of pedagogical activities and support provided for the child.⁷⁶

2.3 Early childhood education and care as part of the child's growth and development path

Early childhood education and care is an important part of the child's growth and learning path. ECEC lays a foundation for lifelong learning. Children take their previous life experiences with them in the ECEC, and the interaction and attachment in the relationship between the guardian and the child play a significant role in this. The personnel have the duty to create a confidential relationship with the child. Collaboration between the guardian and personnel creates continuity

⁷² Sections 1 and 38 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁷³ Section 2 of the Government Decree on Early Childhood Education and Care (753/2018)

⁷⁴ Section 38 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁷⁵ Section 3(2) of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and HE 40/2018, p. 85

⁷⁶ Section 13 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

and security in the children's lives. Open, respectful, and equal encounters are key in agreeing on the goals of the child's ECEC. Regular cooperation is essential for the shared educational task of families and personnel to form a whole that is meaningful for the child.

Understanding the significance of childhood and awareness of children's growth, development and learning lay a foundation for pedagogical activity. Knowing each child and taking child's individual development into account is equally important. For the personnel to know the children, the interactive relationships between the personnel and children need to be as stable as possible⁷⁷.

ECEC, pre-primary education that is part of it, and basic education form an entity that proceeds consistently in relation to the child's growth and learning and build a foundation for lifelong learning. The starting point for a high-quality entity is that the personnel of ECEC as well as pre-primary and basic education are familiar with the education system and know the goals, characteristics, and practices of its different phases. In the interest of supporting the well-being and development of children and their learning, transition phases are also planned and evaluated.

The ECEC service organiser creates practices for cooperation and transfer of information that ensure as flexible transitions as possible. Such transitions are the children's transition from home to ECEC, during early childhood education and care and from ECEC to pre-primary education and from there to basic education. Collaboration with the guardian at the transition phases is guided by the best interest of the child. When transferring information, documentation collected during the ECEC describing the progress and learning of the children as well as the individual ECEC plan drafted for the child may be utilised. The currently valid provisions are adhered to in the transfer of information.⁷⁸

2.4 Underlying values

The general principles in the underlying values of the national core curriculum for early childhood education and care are the best interests of the child as the primary consideration, the child's right to well-being, care and protection, consideration of the opinion of the child as well as the requirement of equal and equitable treatment, principles of inclusion, and protection against discrimination in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child⁷⁹, the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care⁸⁰ and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities⁸¹.

⁷⁷ Section 3(1)(5) of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁷⁸ For example, sections 40–42 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁷⁹ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (59/1991)

⁸⁰ Section 20 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁸¹ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016 27/2016

The intrinsic value of childhood

The task of ECEC is to protect and promote children's right to a good and safe childhood. ECEC is based on the concept of the intrinsic value of childhood. Each child is unique and valuable just as child is. Each child has the right to be heard, seen, noticed, and acknowledged as a person and a personality and as a member of community.

Growth as a human being

ECEC is based on respect for life, human rights, and sustainable development as well as the inviolability of human dignity. The personnel support the children's growth as human beings who strive for truth, goodness, beauty, justice, and peace. ECEC respects knowledge and ability, which manifest themselves in our attitudes to ourselves, other people, the environment and information, in the ways we act, and in our willingness to do what is right. The personnel guide the children to act based on the underlying values and discuss values and ideals. Bullying, violence, racism, or other types of discrimination are not acceptable in any form or by anyone.

Rights of the child

Children have the right to express themselves, their opinions, and thoughts. They also have the right to be understood in the different ways in which they are able to communicate. Every child has the right to good instruction, caring, and encouraging feedback. Children have the right to play, learn by playing and experience joy of learning, and build their views of themselves, their identity, and the world from their personal starting points. Each child has the right to experience togetherness and belong to a group. Children have the right to adequate and timely support in ECEC⁸². Children have the right to be provided with versatile information, to process emotions and conflicts, and to experiment with and learn new things.⁸³

Equity, equality, and diversity

ECEC promotes the democratic values of the Finnish society, such as equity, equality, and diversity. Children must have an opportunity to develop their skills and make choices independently of reasons associated with, for instance, gender, origin, cultural background, or other reasons related to the person. The personnel are responsible for creating an atmosphere that respects diversity. ECEC is built on a diverse cultural heritage, which continues to be formed in interaction between the children, their guardians, and the personnel.

Diversity of families

An open and respectful attitude towards diverse families and their different languages, cultures, worldviews and religions, traditions and views of education creates preconditions for good educational cooperation⁸⁴. Children's family identities and familial relationships are supported so that each child can perceive their own family as valuable.

⁸² Section 15a of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁸³ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (59/1991)

⁸⁴ Section 3(1)(6) of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

Healthy and sustainable way of living

The task of ECEC is to guide children towards ways of living that promote health and well-being. Children are provided with opportunities to develop their emotional skills and aesthetic thinking. The principles of a sustainable way of living are followed in ECEC, taking its social, cultural, economic, and ecological dimensions into account. ECEC lays a foundation for ecosocial knowledge and ability, allowing people to understand ecological sustainability as the precondition for social sustainability and the realisation of human rights.

2.5 The conception of learning

The National core curriculum for early childhood education and care is based on a conception of learning according to which children grow, develop, and learn in interaction with other people and the immediate environment. The conception of learning is also based on a view of the child's active agency. Children are naturally curious and wish to learn new things and revise and repeat what they have learned. Learning is holistic and occurs everywhere. It combines knowledge, skills, actions, emotions, sensory perceptions, bodily experiences, language and thinking. Among other things, learning occurs when children observe and examine their surroundings and as they imitate the actions of others. Children also learn by playing, moving, exploring, working on different assignments, and expressing themselves as well as through activities based on arts.

In ECEC, children's previous experiences and their interests and competences are the starting point for learning. It is important that new knowledge and skills learned by children are connected to their developing competences as well as the world they experience and their cultural backgrounds. Children learn best when they are feeling well and secure. Positive emotional experiences and interactive relationships promote learning. The peer group and the experience of belonging to a group are key to the child's learning and participation. Children are entitled to the support and guidance of the personnel for their learning. Interesting, goal-oriented, and suitably challenging activities inspire the children to learn more. Each child is entitled to gain experiences of success and joy in child's actions and of themselves as a learner.

Play is significant for the learning of children of ECEC age. It motivates the children and brings joy while allowing the children to learn many skills and acquire knowledge. In ECEC, it is necessary to understand the intrinsic value of play for the children as well as the pedagogical significance of play in learning and children's holistic growth and well-being.

2.6 The entity of education, instruction, and care with a pedagogical emphasis

The pedagogy of the national core curriculum for early childhood education and care is based on the specified underlying values as well as the conception of child, childhood, and learning. Pedagogy refers to systematic and goal-oriented activities based on multidisciplinary knowledge,

particularly in the fields of educational sciences and early childhood education, that are professionally managed and implemented by professional personnel aiming to support children's well-being and learning. It is apparent in the operational culture and ECEC learning environments as well as in the entity of education, instruction, and care. The emphasis of pedagogy in the entity of ECEC requires pedagogical expertise as well as the personnel's shared understanding of how to best promote children's learning and well-being⁸⁵.

ECEC is realised in interaction between the personnel, children, and the environment, in which education, instruction and care form a coherent entity. Although it is possible to examine these three as separate concepts, they are integrated as an entity in practical operations. This enables a holistic approach in promoting the child's growth, development, and learning. Education, instruction, and care are given different emphases in the activities of children of different ages as well as the different forms of ECEC services.

Education consists of activities that help communicate, shape, and update cultural values, customs, and norms. In part, the goal of education is to pass on cultural heritage and values and traditions considered important to the following generation. Education guides the children to form opinions and evaluate critically the prevailing ways of thinking and acting as well as to act in an ethically sustainable manner. The task of education is to consciously guide children in forming their personal identities so that the children learn to recognise the impacts of their actions on other people and their surroundings. Children's development is supported, ensuring that they learn to act as well as to use their competence also for the good of other people.

Instruction is based on the conception of learning defined in the national core curriculum for ECEC. The task of instruction is to promote children's learning and to help the children understand themselves, other people, and the surrounding world. In ECEC, children are encouraged and motivated to learn new things as well as guided to use different ways of learning. The instruction supports and utilises children's natural curiosity and desire to experiment. The instruction takes into account children's developing skills, interests and strengths as well as their needs for individual support. In addition, the instruction is based on the objectives set for learning environments (Chapter 3.2), transversal competences (Chapter 2.7) pedagogical activity (Chapter 4) and support for the child (Chapter 5).

Care entails taking care of physical basic needs as well as emotional caring. The goal is that children feel valued and acknowledged and experience a connection with other people. A reciprocal and respectful interactive relationship as well as positive touch and intimacy lay the foundation for good care and nurture. Daily situations, such as meals, dressing, and undressing, rest and taking care of personal hygiene are an essential part of the child's day and the pedagogical work. In ECEC, the care situations are always both educational and instructive

⁸⁵ Sections 2 and 23 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

situations where the children learn, among other things, interaction skills, skills related to taking care of oneself and time management as well as adopt good habits.

2.7 Transversal competences

Early childhood education and care lays the foundation for children's transversal competences. Transversal competence is an entity consisting of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and will. Competence also means an ability to apply knowledge and skills and act in a given situation. Children's use of knowledge and skills is influenced by the values and attitudes they have adopted and their willingness to take action. The need for transversal competence arises from changes in the surrounding world. Competences that cross the boundaries of and link different fields of knowledge and skills are a precondition for personal growth, studying, work and civic activity now and in the future. The development of transversal competence promotes children's growth as individuals and as members of their community. The development of competence begins in early childhood and continues throughout one's life. The objectives of transversal competence form a continuum from the national core curriculum for ECEC to the national core curricula for pre-primary education and basic education. The objectives of transversal competence have guided the preparation of this document and shall be taken into account in the local curricula for ECEC.

High-quality pedagogical activities strengthen children's transversal competences. The development of transversal competences is affected by many factors: the approaches used, the way learning environments are used and how children's learning and well-being are supported. The objectives of transversal competence are taken into account when developing operational culture and learning environments as well as in education, instruction and care. The purpose of the learning areas described in Chapter 4.5 is to promote children's transversal competence.

Six interconnected transversal competence areas are described in the national core curriculum for early childhood education:

- thinking and learning
- cultural competence, interaction, and self-expression
- taking care of oneself and managing daily life
- multiliteracy
- digital competence
- participation and involvement.

The following sections specify what the different areas of transversal competence mean. The task of ECEC in each area is also defined.

Thinking and learning

Thinking and learning skills are developed in interaction with other people and the surroundings, and they form the foundation for the development of other competences and lifelong learning. Acquiring and structuring information and creating something new require creative and critical thinking, whose foundation is laid in ECEC. The task of ECEC is to support children's thinking and learning skills.

Children develop their thinking and learning through versatile and meaningful experiences. Room must be left for experiencing wonder, insights, and joy of learning. Play provides children with an opportunity to use their imagination and creativity, try out their ideas together and explore the world. Children's ability to analyse, name, and describe elements in their surroundings is supported according to their age and development. Children are encouraged to ask questions and to question. Their successes are celebrated together, and they are invited to encourage others. Children are also encouraged to persevere, not be disheartened by failures, and come up with solutions in different situations. They are guided to direct and maintain their attentiveness. Engaging in sufficient, daily physical activity supports children's thinking and learning. Pedagogical documentation of (Chapter 4.2) and reflection on activities together help children keep track of their learning and recognise their strengths. This strengthens children's confidence in their own abilities.

Cultural competence, interaction, and self-expression

The children are growing up in a culturally, linguistically, and ideologically diverse world. This puts emphasis on the significance of social and interaction skills as well as cultural competence. Competence includes the ability to listen, identify and understand different perspectives as well as to reflect on one's own values and attitudes. Interaction skills and the ability to express oneself and understand others have a major significance to the individual's identity, functional capacity, and well-being. Good interaction with people with diverse cultural backgrounds and worldviews requires familiarity with and respect for one's own cultural background and worldview as well as those of others. ECEC has the task of promoting children's cultural competence as well as their interaction and self-expression skills.

Children are encouraged to get to know other people, languages, and cultures. The personnel provide the children with a model for encountering other people and diversity in languages, cultures, and worldviews positively. Children are guided towards friendliness and good manners. Activities based on cooperation create opportunities for practising interaction and self-expression skills in different situations and with different people. The children are guided in putting themselves in the place of others and seeing things from different perspectives as well as in solving conflicts constructively. This strengthens children's social skills. Children are supported in building cultural identities. Experiences, knowledge, and skills of cultural heritage acquired in ECEC strengthen the child's ability to adopt, use and change culture. For example, play, meal breaks,

and festivities provide opportunities for sharing experiences of different traditions and customs. Children are supported in creating a positive relationship with the diverse environment.

Taking care of oneself and managing daily life

Skills related to taking care of oneself, health and safety are important for everyone. The task of ECEC is to strengthen children's skills related to well-being and safety and to guide them in making choices in line with a sustainable way of life. ECEC supports children's positive attitude towards the future.

Gradual increase in the children's level of independence is supported. Children are helped and they are encouraged to ask for help when necessary. Different skills, such as getting dressed, eating meals, and taking care of personal hygiene and possessions are practised with the children. Children are guided to act responsibly and safely in the ECEC learning environments, including the local nature and traffic. Issues promoting the children's well-being, such as the significance of rest, nutrition, physical activity, and mental well-being, are discussed with the children. Children are helped in expressing and regulating their emotions. Children's emotional skills improve as they practise perceiving, acknowledging, and naming emotions. Children are also guided to respect and protect their own and others' bodies.

Multiliteracy

Multiliteracy is needed in the everyday lives of children and families, interaction, and participation in the society. Multiliteracy promotes children's equality in education. The task of ECEC is to promote the development of these skills.

Multiliteracy is a core competence from the viewpoint of interaction and understanding culturally diverse messages and the surrounding world. Multiliteracy refers to skills in interpreting and producing various types of messages. Multiliteracy is founded on a broad conception of text according to which different texts may be, among others, written, spoken, audiovisual or digital. Multiliteracy comprises different types of literacy, such as visual literacy, numerical literacy, media literacy and basic literacy. It is closely connected to thinking and learning skills. Children practise naming things and objects and learn different concepts. Children are encouraged to explore, use, and produce messages in different environments, including digital ones. In order to develop their multiliteracy, children need an example provided by an adult and a rich textual environment, culture produced by children and cultural services appropriate for children.

Digital competence

Digitalisation is part of the society in which the child grows up. Digital competence is needed in interaction between people, participation in society and learning. Strengthening digital competence promotes children's educational equality. The task of ECEC is, together with the home, to support the child's understanding of digitalisation.

The role of digitalisation in everyday life is explored and observed with the children. Digital tools, applications and environments are used in documentation, play, interaction, games, exploration, physical activity and artistic experience and production. Possibilities for practising, experimenting and personally and collaboratively producing content with the help of digital tools promote creative thinking, teamwork skills and multiliteracy in children. The personnel guide children in versatile, responsible, and safe use of digital environments.

Participation and involvement

Active and responsible participation and involvement create a foundation for a democratic and sustainable future. This requires skills and a desire in the individual to participate in the activities of the community and trust in their own possibilities of making a difference. The right to be heard and involvement in issues affecting one's own life are enshrined in the rights of the child. ECEC shall respect these principles central to the implementation of democracy. The task of ECEC is to support the child's gradually developing skills for participation and involvement and encourage a child to take initiative.

Encountering children appreciatively, hearing their viewpoints and responding to their initiatives strengthen children's ability to participate and be involved. Children plan, implement and evaluate their actions together with the personnel. In doing so, children learn interaction skills as well as the significance of shared rules, agreements, and trust. The personnel shall ensure that each child gets an opportunity for participation and involvement. Children develop their self-image, enhance their confidence and shape social skills needed in a community through participation and involvement.

2.8 Issues subject to local decisions

When formulating a local curriculum, it is important to discuss what the tasks of early childhood education and care and the general goals determined in this chapter mean and how the implementation of goals set for ECEC can be assured in the different forms of ECEC services.

Chapter 2 includes parts which it is appropriate to integrate into the local curriculum for ECEC. These include:

- objectives in accordance with the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care
- underlying values (Chapter 2.4)
- conception of learning (Chapter 2.5) and
- transversal competences (Chapter 2.7).

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Local additions may be made to these sections.

The local curriculum shall also describe

- provision of ECEC and the different forms of ECEC services as well as the cooperation between these services from a local perspective
- the local practices at transition points, when the child begins ECEC, transfers to another group or service provider, and when the child transitions to pre-primary education or the activities of another ECEC service organiser.

Separate curricula for ECEC may be prepared for the different forms of ECEC services in accordance with Chapter 1.2.

The underlying values and conception of learning as well as the objectives of transversal competences are taken into account and further expanded in the curriculum chapters on the operational culture, planning, implementation and assessment of pedagogical activity, and support for the child.



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3. The operational culture of early childhood education and care

An operational culture is a historically and culturally evolving way of doing things. It develops in the interaction of the community. The ECEC service organisers and those in charge of early childhood education and care are responsible for creating preconditions for developing and evaluating the operational culture in the different ECEC services and units. Efforts to develop the operational culture start with inclusive pre-primary education in which each child may act, develop, and learn as a unique individual and a member of the community.

The operational culture of ECEC is an entity comprising of, for instance

- values and principles
- interpretation of the norms and goals that direct the work
- learning environments and working methods
- collaboration in all of its forms
- interaction and atmosphere
- competence, professionalism, and development approach of personnel
- leadership structures and practices
- the organisation, planning, implementation, and evaluation of work

Some of the factors that shape the operational culture are acknowledged, while the personnel is not aware of others, and some factors are occasionally also unintentional. All members of the community influence the operational culture, while the operational culture affects all within its sphere, whether its significance and impacts are recognised or not.

All working methods in ECEC shall support the child's development and learning. There shall also be pedagogical justifications for all methods applied. It is important for the personnel to acknowledge that the ways in which they act and interact with others are communicated as a model to children, who adopt values, attitudes, and customs prevalent in their early childhood education community.

The operational culture of ECEC is developed following the principles of inclusion, and it is relevant to all aspects of pedagogical activities⁸⁶. An inclusive operational culture promotes children's participation and learning and responds to the different needs of all children. Each child has the right to belong to a group, participate in joint activities and grow into their full potential, supported by their strengths and positive learning experiences, together with their peers. Children are offered suitable learning challenges and provided with the necessary support (Chapter 5). Suitable learning environments are assessed and developed together with children.

⁸⁶ HE 148/2021, pp. 30–31

A prerequisite for delivering inclusive ECEC is high-quality pedagogical and special pedagogical competence and activities, taking care of children's well-being and the personnel's commitment to the principles of inclusion. Preconditions for an inclusive operational culture include leadership and development of inclusion and assessing its realisation.

The operational culture affects the quality of ECEC. It plays a key role in implementing ECEC and accomplishing its goals. An operational culture supporting the goals of ECEC creates favourable conditions for children's development, learning, participation, security, well-being, and sustainable way of living.

Leadership significantly affects the operating culture of ECEC, and its development and quality. The leadership of ECEC is based on promoting the well-being and learning of every child. Preconditions for developing the operational culture and its inclusiveness include pedagogical leadership, which entails goal-oriented and systematic leadership, assessment, and development of the entity of ECEC. It includes all measures used to create preconditions for the personnel's good working conditions, utilisation and development of their vocational competence and education as well as pedagogical activities (Chapter 4.1).

3.1 The development of the operational culture and the principles guiding it

The operational culture of a community is in constant transition and must also be evaluated and developed ensuring that it supports the achievement of the objectives set for early childhood education and care. Commitment to shared goals promotes the implementation of the underlying values and the conception of learning. Considering the impacts of the operational culture and recognising and rectifying its undesirable features are an important part of its development. The basic precondition for constantly developing the operational culture is that the personnel understand the significance of the values, knowledge and beliefs underlying their actions and are able to assess these. Dialogue that is characterised by respect for others, ensures the participation of all members of the community and inspires trust is key to the development. The child's best interest must be the primary concern in the planning, provision, and development of ECEC. The child's best interest must be taken into consideration on a case and situation specific basis from the viewpoint of the child, group of children, and children in general.⁸⁷

The heads of early education centres and family daycare promote an operational culture that encourages active participation by creating structures for professional discussion. The head also encourages the working community to regularly develop and make innovations on the operational culture of the community. The head supports the community's development into a learning community where competence is developed and shared. The aim is that the shared operational concept and the goals of the activities are apparent in the practices. The head is in charge of

⁸⁷ Section 4 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and p. 85 of Government proposal HE 40/2018 vp

ensuring that shared working practices are made visible and regularly examined and assessed. Children and guardians are involved in developing and evaluating the operational culture.

The following principles are followed in developing the operational culture of ECEC:

A learning community at the heart of the operational culture

ECEC work as a community where children and personnel learn together and from each other. There is room for different opinions and emotions in the learning community. Children and personnel are encouraged to share their thoughts and experiment with different working approaches confidently. A community constantly evaluating and developing its operations challenges itself as well as recognises and utilises its strengths. The learning community appreciates respectful and thoughtful behaviour. The community encourages experimentation, trying one's best and persevering, and also allows making mistakes. The community is strengthened by working together and through participation.

The personnel are encouraged in self-assessment, sharing of knowledge and competence and, at the same time, professional development. Reflecting on jointly agreed goals and tasks, regularly assessing one's work as well as the feedback obtained from guardians and other partners promote the learning of the community. Learning is also promoted by drawing on information received through development efforts, evaluations, and research.

Community encouraging play and interaction

An operational culture that encourages children to play recognises the significance of play for a child's well-being and learning. The personnel recognise factors that set limits to play and develop approaches and learning environments that promote playing. The children and personnel have the opportunity to experience the joy of doing things together and playing together. The community encourages everyone to use their inventiveness, imagination, personal expression, and creativity. Playing may be seen and heard. Room, time, and peaceful settings are given to children's initiatives for playing, experiments and experiences. Playing children and adults are given an opportunity to concentrate on play.

The operational culture of ECEC includes cooperation among personnel and with guardians and the local area. The members of the community respect each other and appreciate the collaboration. The community encourages children in good interaction and acting as members of a group. The personnel support the emergence of peer relationships among the children and foster friendships. A safe community intervenes in conflicts and the children learn constructive ways of solving them.

Participation, equality, and equity

An inclusive operational culture promotes participation, equality⁸⁸ and equity in all activities. The initiatives, views and opinions of children, personnel and guardians are respected. This requires conscious development of structures and practices that promote participation. Children develop their understanding of the community, rights, responsibility, and consequences of choices through participation. Participation is strengthened when the children are encountered sensitively and when they experience that they are seen and heard. Children's and guardians' involvement in planning, implementing, and assessing the activities promotes their participation. Each member of the personnel is an important part of the educational community.

Members of the community are encountered and treated as equals, independently of personal characteristics⁸⁹. Equity does not mean that everyone is treated the same. In order to develop the operational culture, it is important that attitudes towards equity and equality are discussed in the working community. The way in which attitudes related to such aspects as language, ethnicity, worldview, disability, gender, and its diversity manifest themselves in people's talk, gestures, actions, and operating methods should also be considered. Models of interaction and language use as well as ways to act according to stereotypical presumptions are passed on to the children. ECEC is gender sensitive. The personnel encourage the children to make choices without gender-related role models or any other stereotypical roles or presumptions related to other personal characteristics. The personnel recognise features that lead into inequality in encounters between the children and intervene in them with tact and consistency. Positive and encouraging interaction supports the development of the children's identity and self-esteem.

Cultural diversity and language awareness

ECEC is part of a culturally transforming and diverse society. Cultural diversity is perceived as a resource. The community recognises the right to one's own language, culture, religion, and worldview as a fundamental right. ECEC appreciates and draws upon diverse cultural heritage and the national languages as well as cultural, linguistic, and philosophical diversity in the community as well as in its environment. To facilitate this, personnel members must have knowledge of cultures and worldviews and an ability to see things from different perspectives and put themselves in the place of others. The children and personnel constructively discuss different ways of thinking and acting, and also create new ways of acting together. This also enables them to promote culturally sustainable development.

ECEC with language awareness acknowledges that languages are present constantly and everywhere. The personnel understand the key importance of language for children's development and learning, interaction, and cooperation and for the building of identities and belonging to the society. Making multilingualism visible supports children's development in a

⁸⁸ Section 3(1)(6) of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁸⁹ Sections 7 and 8 of the Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014)

culturally diverse world. The personnel must acknowledge that they act as a linguistic model for the children and pay attention to their personal language use. The personnel encourage children in diverse language use. Children's individual prerequisites are taken into account, and they are provided with time and opportunities to practise in varying situations.

Well-being, safety, and a sustainable way of living

Healthy, safe, and physically active ways of living are valued in ECEC. The children and personnel of ECEC are physically active indoors and outdoors. Children are guided to avoid sitting for long periods. Children's well-being is promoted by providing them with an opportunity for calming down and resting during the day as well as versatile, healthy, and sufficient nutrition. When developing the operational culture, attention is paid to the right to an environment that is free of urgency and that promotes concentration. Clear and systematic, but also flexible, daily structure promotes well-being.

The physical, mental, and social security of the entire community must be ensured in ECEC. Children must be protected against violence, bullying and other harassment⁹⁰. Children are entitled to being consoled whenever needed. Bullying, violence, or harassment is not tolerated. Bullying is recognised, intervened in, and consciously and systematically prevented as part of developing the operational culture. Supporting the peer relationships between children and well-being in the community is essential to the prevention of bullying. The personnel play a key role in supporting children in practising and developing their social and emotional skills. Children practise recognising and resolving conflicts in a constructive manner. Any incident of harassment, bullying or violence is discussed with the children's guardians and solutions are sought together. The promotion of safety also entails systematic prevention and monitoring of accidents, safety education and looking after the facilities and equipment. ECEC requires functional and committed safety management as well as personnel competent in aspects of safety.

All activities take into account the necessity of an ecologically, culturally and economically sustainable way of living. Everyday choices and actions reflect a responsible relationship with nature and the environment. ECEC promotes the shared use of equipment and facilities, moderation, and economy in using them as well as repairing and reusing them.

3.2 Learning environments of early childhood education and care

The goal of early childhood education and care is to ascertain that the children's learning environment promotes development and learning and is inclusive, healthy, safe and, accessible⁹¹. Learning environments refer to the facilities, locations, communities, practices, and equipment which support children's growth, learning and interaction. In ECEC, the concept of the learning

⁹⁰ Section 10 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁹¹ Section 3(1)(2) and section 10 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

environment includes, among other things, physical, social, and psychological dimensions. Learning environments are developed ensuring that the objectives set for ECEC can be achieved and that they support the development of the children's healthy self-esteem as well as social and learning skills. When building and developing the learning environments, attention is paid to ergonomics, ecological qualities, comfort, and accessibility as well as the lighting, indoor air quality and tidiness of the premises.

Learning environments are planned and constructed together with the children. They shall support children's natural curiosity and desire to learn as well as guide them to play, be physically active, explore, express themselves through art as well as experience art. Children must have an opportunity to explore the world with all of their senses and their entire bodies. Learning environments provide the children with alternatives for doing things that they enjoy, physically activity in versatile and fast ways, games and play as well as rest and spending time in a peaceful setting. Children's ideas, play and outcomes of their efforts are visible in learning environments.

Diverse pedagogical activities can be carried out in the learning environments, which can be adjusted when needed. The personnel must take into account the children's interests, individual skills and needs, as well as the implementation principles of ECEC (Chapter 4). In the ECEC learning environments, children act flexibly in groups of different sizes which allow each member of the community an opportunity to participate in the activities and interaction. Acting in pedagogically appropriate groups promotes concentration as well as child-focused activities.

Jointly agreed rules and operating methods help create a learning environment with a safe atmosphere that encourages showing respect for others and sharing responsibility. A safe atmosphere allows showing different kinds of emotions. It also helps the personnel to support children in expressing and regulating their emotions. Children are encouraged to ask questions, and they receive answers to their questions.

Learning environments are designed and developed to strengthen equity and gender equality. This enables breaking away from traditional gender stereotypes. The learning environments promote children's linguistic development and language awareness and make cultural diversity visible.

The natural environment as well as yards, playgrounds and other built environments also provide learning environments for ECEC. They provide experiences, materials and versatile opportunities for play and exploration. They are utilised in gathering experiences of physical activity and nature and also as places of learning.

An adequate amount of versatile, age-appropriate, pedagogical, and safe toys and equipment must be available for the children's use. These must take into account children's needs for individual support and interests when needed. Technology is part of a versatile and participatory learning environment. Digital tools, applications and environments are used as a part of ECEC in

the most suitable way. Children's personal digital devices, toys and other equipment are used in the manner defined by the ECEC service organiser, and the use is agreed with the guardians.

Cooperation with other stakeholders as well as both physical and virtual visits, for example to libraries, museums, cultural heritage sites, concerts, the theatre, and guardians' workplaces enrich the children's learning environments. The planning of learning environments also offers a natural opportunity for collaboration between personnel and guardians.

3.3 Cooperation in early childhood education and care

Cooperation promotes the achievement of the objectives of ECEC and high-quality pedagogical activities in ECEC. The responsibility for systematic cross-sectoral cooperation and its implementation and planning rests with ECEC service organisers⁹².

Cooperation with guardians

The significance of cooperation with the guardians is highlighted in ECEC⁹³. The cooperation aims to promote joint commitment of guardians and personnel to children's healthy and safe growth, development, and learning. This educational cooperation is supported by the building of trust and equal interaction and mutual respect of participants.

The values, goals and responsibilities related to educational work are discussed both among personnel and with guardians. The cooperation is interactive and requires the personnel of ECEC to act with initiative and actively. The cooperation takes into account the diversity of families, children's individual needs and questions related to guardianship and parenthood. An interpreter may be used in the discussions to ensure mutual understanding⁹⁴.

Cooperation may have different roles and take various forms during the child's ECEC. Children's daily events and experiences are shared with the guardians. Encouraging feedback that describes the child's learning and development is important. Discussions between the guardian and personnel on the child's day lay a foundation for safeguarding the child's holistic well-being.

The cooperation plays a particularly important role in transition phases, such as when children begin in ECEC and the transitions during ECEC as the children change early education centres or begin pre-primary education. Joint discussions have a special task when an individual ECEC plan is drafted for the child (Chapter 1.3). The significance of cooperation with the guardian is highlighted in the planning and implementation of the support for the children's development and learning (Chapter 5). An atmosphere of trust also enables cooperation between the guardian and

⁹² Section 7 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁹³ Section 3(1)(10) of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁹⁴ Section 18 of the Language Act (423/2003) and section 203 of the Aliens Act (301/2014)

personnel in challenging situations, such as when there are worries regarding the child's well-being.

Children's guardians must be provided with an opportunity to participate in planning and developing the early childhood education activities and goals of educational work together with the personnel and children. Information and communication technology is utilised in the cooperation with the guardians. The cooperation may also support interactions between guardians. Networking and the guardians' joint activities at various events enhance community spirit and support the work of the personnel.

Cooperation with different parties

The aim of the cooperation is to ensure the implementation and development of high-quality ECEC. According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the municipality shall organise ECEC in cross-sectoral cooperation and create the necessary structures for cooperation⁹⁵. If necessary, a private service provider must engage in cross-sectoral cooperation⁹⁶.

The partners of ECEC refer to all the regional and local actors with which ECEC collaborates naturally. For instance, cooperation with actors providing education, physical activity, library and cultural services and other stakeholders in the local area add to the diversity of learning environments and support the goals of ECEC. Other partners of ECEC include NGOs, parishes and other communities based on a worldview, the police as well as catering and cleaning services.

Instigating and developing cooperation between the municipality's ECEC services and private ECEC service providers operating in its area as well as collaboration between municipalities are important. ECEC service organisers can work together with higher education institutions, educational institutions, research institutes and authorities to develop their activities.

ECEC is also implemented in cooperation with professionals at child health clinics, child protection services as well as other actors in health care and social services. The significance of cooperation is highlighted when any of these actors raise a concern related to the child's development or well-being or when support is planned and organised for the child. Extensive health examinations may include, with the written consent of the child's guardian, an assessment produced by ECEC and pre-primary teaching personnel on the coping and well-being of a child of under school age. This assessment by the ECEC personnel is an important part of the assessment of the child's holistic growth, development, and health as well as early recognition of the child's needs for support in cross-sectoral cooperation.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Sections 7 and 22 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁹⁶ Section 7 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

⁹⁷ Sections 7, 9 and 13 of the Government Decree on maternity and child health clinic services, school and student health services and preventive oral health services for children (338/2011) and section 7 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

3.4 Issues subject to local decisions

The local curriculum shall describe

- the goals of developing the operational culture of early childhood education and care, the manner in which these goals are to be attained, and evaluation practices
- development and implementation of inclusive practices
- learning environments used for ECEC and practices connected to their evaluation
- the goals and practices of cooperation with guardians
- the goals, structures, and approaches of cross-sectoral cooperation
- the evaluation practices of the different forms of cooperation
- how bullying, violence and harassment are prevented, how they are intervened in, and how the implementation of measures is monitored.

The ECEC service organiser ensures that each operating unit of ECEC may specify the goals connected to their operational culture and the development of their learning environments as well as practices related to cooperation. These complementary details may be documented in the local curriculum decided by the ECEC service organiser.

4. Planning and implementing pedagogical activity in early childhood education and care

4.1 The framework for pedagogical activity

A holistic approach describes the pedagogy activities of early childhood education and care and their implementation. The aim is to promote children's learning and well-being as well as their transversal competence (Figure 1). Pedagogical activity is carried out in interaction and shared activities between children and personnel. Children's free activities as well as those that the children and personnel come up with together or that are planned by the personnel supplement each other. Pedagogy is emphasised in all activity.

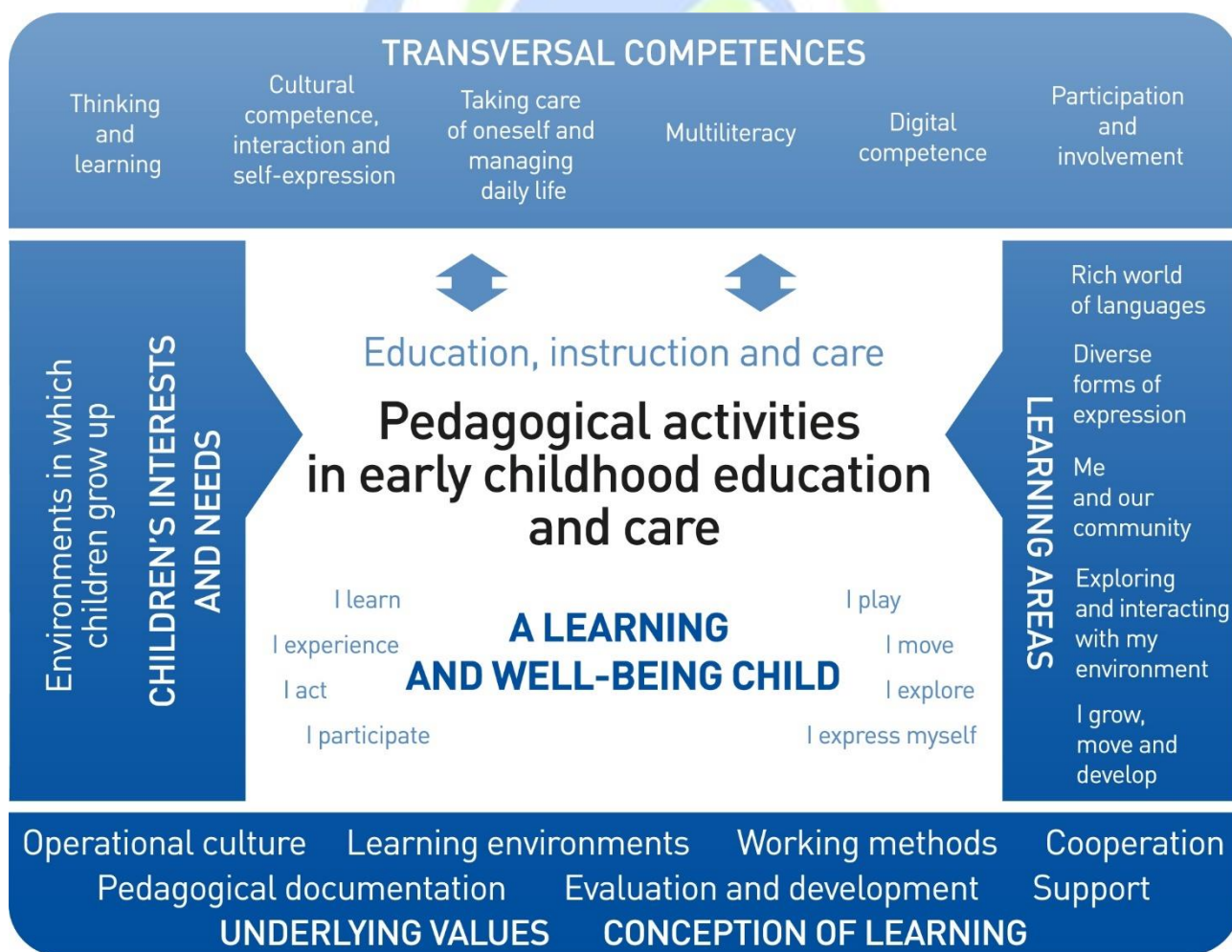


Figure 1. The framework for pedagogical activity in early childhood education and care

The underlying values (Chapter 2.4), the conception of learning (Chapter 2.5) and the operational culture (Chapter 3) based on these as well as versatile learning environments (Chapter 3.2), cooperation (Chapter 3.3.), working methods (Chapter 4.3) and support for the child (Chapter 5) lay the foundation for goal-oriented and inclusive activities. The planning of the activities begins with the children's interests and needs as well as meaningful aspects in the environment where children grow up. The learning areas described in Chapter 4.5 are also used as a basis for the planning. The precondition for high-quality pedagogical activities is systematic documentation, evaluation, and development (Chapters 4.2 and 7). The objectives of transversal competences also guide the planning of the activities (Chapter 2.7).

The local curricula for ECEC shall specify the objectives and principles for the pedagogical activities. When specifying the objectives, the different forms of ECEC services, their personnel structures and other characteristics should be taken into account. The local curriculum for ECEC as well as the children's individual early childhood education and care plans (Chapter 1.3) shall be used as a basis for planning the activities for the group of children. The activities shall be implemented so that each child has the right to progress in learning, ensuring that ECEC and pre-primary education form a continuum that is meaningful for the child.

4.2 Pedagogical documentation

Pedagogical documentation is an essential working approach in planning, implementing, evaluating, and developing early childhood education and care. This documentation is a continuous process where observations, documents and their interpretation in interaction create an understanding of pedagogical activity. Pedagogical documentation enables the participation of children and guardians in evaluating, planning, and developing the activities.

Pedagogical documentation produces concrete and versatile knowledge about the children's lives, development, interests, thinking, learning, and needs as well as the activities of the group of children. Individual documents, such as photographs, drawings or the personnel's observations make it possible to examine the children's development and learning together with the children. The knowledge and skills already acquired by the children as well as their interests and needs are made visible through pedagogical documentation and used as a basis for planning the activities.

The aim of systematic documentation is that the personnel get to know individual children, understand the relationships between the children as well as the nature of the interaction between the personnel and children in the group. The purpose of pedagogical documentation is to implement ECEC in a child-focused manner. The knowledge and understanding acquired through documentation are utilised for such purposes as continuously shaping the working methods and learning environments as well as the goals, methods, and contents of activities to better meet the children's interest and needs. The individual ECEC plan of a child is part of the pedagogical

documentation process (Chapter 1.3). Systematic pedagogical documentation is also required for assessing the needs for support for the child (Chapter 5).

Documents collected over a longer period of time are an important part of evaluating pedagogical activities, self-assessment of the personnel's work (Chapter 7.1), and development of the operational culture.

4.3 Versatile working methods

The tasks and goals set for early childhood education and care and the age, needs, prerequisites and interests of children guide the selection of working methods. Working methods that are functional and promote the creativity and participation of children provide natural ways of learning. These include children's supervised and free play, exploration, physical activity as well as experience of and expression through art. Digital tools, applications and environments are utilised in the activities. Versatile working methods are not only a vehicle for, but also a target of, learning. It is therefore important for the personnel to guide the children to experiment with and use different working methods in groups of different sizes as well as independently. Children are encouraged to ask questions and express wonder as well as to make conclusions and solve problems together while working.

Professional competence and sensitivity to identify pedagogical possibilities in different situations are required of the personnel. Among others, this is manifested as the personnel's ability to observe children's initiatives and emotions and redirect their own activities accordingly. The initiatives of younger children are often physical and non-verbal. Understanding and responding to these require sensitive presence and familiarity with the child.

Children participate in planning and selecting the working methods in line with their personal prerequisites. Children must have an opportunity to explore the world with all of their senses and their entire bodies as well as experiment with different working methods. The varying use of working methods provides the children of different ages learning in diverse ways with experiences of succeeding. Versatile working methods require versatile learning environments. The competence of personnel and children is utilised in using the working methods and new working methods are experimented with and developed.

4.4 Play as source of development, learning and well-being

Play is a key practice in early childhood education and care. The task of ECEC is to provide all children with opportunities for different kinds of play and games. Play promotes the child's development, learning and well-being. While children learn by playing, they do not personally see

play as a vehicle for learning but a way of spending time, living, and perceiving the world instead. Experiences that stimulate the children's emotions, curiosity and interest inspire them to play.

For the child, the significance of play lies in the play itself. Play produces joy and pleasure for the children. Children are active agents when they play: they structure and explore the surrounding world, create social relations, and form meanings based on their experiences. Children construct ideas of themselves and others through play. Through play, children imitate as well as create new things and alter what they have seen. By doing so, they model and test their hopes and dreams. The use of imagination enables children to experiment with different roles and ideas which they could otherwise not carry out. Through play, children can process experiences that they find difficult. Play makes it safe to experiment, try and fail.

Play combines key elements that promote learning: enthusiasm, doing things together and challenging personal abilities. Play evolves and takes different shapes as children gain more experiences. Interactions between the personnel and children as well as among the children lay a foundation for the development of thinking, language and developing play skills. Children make observations, experiment, and learn the rules of the community through play. When playing in a group, children learn to regulate their emotions and desires as well as to take the viewpoints of others into account. Play increases sense of community, which strengthens a positive emotional atmosphere.

Play is the key working method in ECEC. In pedagogical activities, for example drama, improvisation or fairy tales can be combined in developing plots for play and constructing imaginary worlds. The personnel must acknowledge the significance of concentrated exploration, spontaneous creative expression as well as boisterous play and physical games on children's well-being and learning. Different situations may be enriched by introducing playful aspects to them. Nursery rhymes, wordplay, songs, and playfulness strengthen a positive atmosphere, which supports learning and well-being.

The personnel have the duty to secure the preconditions for playing in line with the principles of inclusion, supervise play in a suitable way, and ensure that each child gets an opportunity to participate in playing together as allowed by their skills and capabilities. The personnel must support the development of the children's play with a systematic and goal-oriented approach by either guiding it from outside or participating in it. The physical and psychological presence of the personnel support interaction among the children and prevent conflicts from arising.

The personnel must observe and document the children's play. Observation of play increases the personnel's understanding of children's thoughts and interests as well as their emotions and experiences. The observations are used in planning and guiding play and other activities. Subtlety, professional competence as well as gender sensitivity in detecting children's initiatives for play and responding to them in an appropriate way are required of the personnel.

Time, peace, and space as well as appropriate toys and materials available for the children are necessary for sustained games and play. The learning environments must provide flexibility necessary for the play, as play and games can take place anywhere.

Knowledge of children's culture and media aimed at children help personnel understand the children's play. Different games as well as digital devices and applications also provide diverse opportunities for play. In a learning environment that encourages playing, adults are also learners. The personnel together with guardians discuss the importance of play and observations related to children's games and play together with guardians. This makes it easier for the same games to continue at home or in ECEC.

4.5 Learning areas

The following learning areas describe the key objectives and contents of pedagogical activities in early childhood education and care. They guide the personnel in planning and implementing versatile and integrative pedagogical activities together with the children. Children are entitled to gather versatile experiences of the different learning areas. Rather than being independent entities that are implemented separately, the themes of the learning areas are combined and applied according to the children's interests and competence. The learning areas have been grouped into five entities as in the national core curriculum for pre-primary education⁹⁸:

- Rich world of languages
- Diverse forms of expression
- Me and our community
- Exploring and interacting with my environment
- I grow, move, and develop.

Pedagogical activities that integrate and apply different areas of learning enable broad-based examination and exploration of things and phenomena. Children's interests and questions serve as a key premise for the activities. For example, the themes may emerge from play and games, fairy tales, excursions or spontaneous interactive situations between the children and personnel or in the interaction among children. The ways in which the objectives of the learning areas are dealt with will depend on the selected themes, situations, and the children's learning. The personnel have the task to ensure that the pedagogical activities promote the development and learning of children of different ages.

⁹⁸ National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education 2014

Rich world of languages

The task of ECEC is to strengthen the development of children's **linguistic skills** and **capacity** as well as their **linguistic identities**. ECEC strengthens children's curiosity towards and interest in languages, texts, and cultures. Supporting linguistic development is connected to the development of the child's multiliteracy (Chapter 2.7). It is also connected to, among other things, transversal competences associated with children's cultural skills and interaction. The developing linguistic skills provide the children with new ways to influence and to participate actively.

Language is both an object of and a vehicle for learning for children. It provides children with means to manage different situations and things as well as interact with others, express themselves and acquire knowledge. A versatile language environment in ECEC as well as cooperation with guardians, support children's linguistic development. In ECEC, children are provided with encouraging and consistent feedback on their language use and interaction skills.

ECEC supports the development of each child's skills in the language of instruction. The fact that children grow up in different linguistic environments and may learn several languages simultaneously is taken into account in the education and instruction. The ways of using language and interacting vary between families, and several languages may be spoken in the children's homes. Linguistic and cultural diversity is made visible in ECEC in cooperation with guardians. For its part, this supports the development of children's linguistic identities. Perspectives related to language and culture in ECEC are discussed further in Chapter 4.6.

It is important for language learning to acknowledge that children of the same age may be going through different phases in different areas of linguistic development. **Linguistic identities develop** as children are provided with guidance and support in the main areas of linguistic skills and capacity.



Figure 2. The main areas of children's linguistic development in early childhood education and care

For the development of **interactive skills**, children's experiences of being heard and getting responses to their initiatives are important. The personnel's sensitivity and responses to children's messages, including non-verbal ones, are essential. The development of interaction skills is supported by encouraging the children to communicate with other children and personnel.

Children's **language comprehension skills** are supported with abundant linguistic modelling. Verbalising activities in a consistent manner and discussions support children in developing their vocabulary. Descriptive and accurate language is used in different situations. Images, objects, and gestures are used for support when needed.

The development of children's **speech production skills** is monitored and guided. Children are encouraged to speak in different situations, both with adults and other children. This helps children use and understand spoken language. The children's attention will gradually be drawn to different tones of voice and emphases.

Children's **language use skills** are guided and the use of language in different situations is reflected on together with the children. The aim is to strengthen language use with situation awareness. The children practise narrating, explaining, and speaking in turns. Empathy, use of humour and learning good manners also strengthen children's language use competences. Familiarisation with different texts supports the development of language use competences and helps children to notice differences between spoken and written language.

Children diversify their linguistic expression as their **linguistic memory** and **vocabulary** expand. The personnel have the duty to consciously support this development. The development of linguistic memory is supported by, for example, the use of nursery rhymes and singing games. Playing with language, naming things, and using illustrative words promote the development of children's linguistic memory and vocabulary. Discussions, reading and telling stories in an unhurried atmosphere provide opportunities for considering the meanings of words and texts and learning new concepts in their contexts.

Observing different languages in the immediate surroundings support the children's developing **language awareness**. The personnel have the task of attracting and encouraging the children's interest in spoken and written language and gradually also in reading and writing. Language is observed and examined to direct children's attention from the meanings of words towards the shapes and structures of language, including words, syllables, and phonemes. Children are encouraged to playful writing and reading.

Rich and diverse texts are used in ECEC. Children are familiarised with versatile children's literature. Stories are told to them, and they are also encouraged to make up their own stories. Children's stories, nursery rhymes and verbal messages are documented. To support multiliteracy, visual, auditory, and audiovisual messages and texts among others are used alongside spoken language.

Diverse forms of expression

A task of ECEC is to support the development of children's **musical, visual, crafts** as well as **verbal** and **physical expression** in a goal-oriented manner as well as to familiarise them with different art

forms and cultural heritage. A holistic approach and creative combination of different ways to express characterise children's expression. Artistic experiences and expression promote children's learning potential, social skills, and positive self-image as well as their capacity to understand and structure the surrounding world. Children develop their thinking and learning skills as they explore, interpret, and create meanings by practising different ways to express. The ability to imagine and evoke mental images is also key to the development of the child's ethical thinking. Familiarisation with cultural heritage, art and different forms of expression also strengthen children's competence in the areas of multiliteracy, participation and involvement.

Culture is an important part of the child's identity. ECEC provides children with opportunities to see and experience art and other culture diversely. The experiences related to art and culture strengthen children's ability to adopt, use and change culture. At the same time, the children learn to understand the meaning and value of art and cultural heritage.

Different forms of expression provide the children with means to experience and perceive the world in a manner that speaks to and inspires them. Artistic expression provides means for making observations, emotions, and creative thinking visible in a way that motivates children. Children familiarise themselves with different forms of expression by using multiple senses, working methods, and learning environments as well as the cultural offerings available in the local area. The aesthetic and inspiring qualities of the learning environments and versatile equipment and materials and sufficient guidance available in them are significant when children familiarise themselves with different forms of expression.

The arts education includes both spontaneous and planned activities. The processes of expression and learning emphasise experimenting, exploring, practising the different stages of doing things and documenting these. Each child's individual expression is supported, and a sufficient amount of time and space is reserved for children's joint creative processes. Utilising special competence of the personnel, children and other actors enriches arts education.

The aim of **musical expression** in ECEC is to provide the children with musical experiences as well as strengthen the children's interest in and relationship with music. Children are guided to immerse themselves in music and make observations on the sound environment. Children develop their capabilities for understanding music as well as the duration, volume, tonal colour, and strength of sound through musical activities. Children sing songs and enjoy nursery rhymes, experiment with different musical instruments as well as listen and move to music together with the personnel. Children gather experiences of basic beat, rhythm in words and making music with their bodies. Children are encouraged to use their imagination and express their thoughts and emotions stirred by music, for example by explaining them verbally, visually or through dance. Children also gather experiences of creating music together as well as the processes of practising small-scale musical performances and the joy of success brought by the performances.

The goal of **visual expression** is to develop the children's relationship with visual arts, other forms of visual culture and cultural heritage. Children have an opportunity to enjoy creating images and gather aesthetic experiences through art. Children practise visual thinking, observation, and interpretation of images through versatile visual expression. They develop their skills in producing images by using multiple senses and by building connections with other forms of expression. Children experiment with various methods, tools, and materials for creating an image, for example by painting, drawing, building, and making media presentations. In addition to the images independently produced by children, artwork, contents in the media, objects and sites in the built and natural environment are observed with the children. Children are guided to interpret and explain their thoughts about visual messages. When examining images, attention is paid to such aspects as colours, shapes, materials, the artist, context of presentation, and emotions stirred by the images.

The children practise planning skills, creative problem solving, fine motor skills, knowledge of structures, materials and techniques, and design with the help of crafts suitable for children (both technical and textile). These techniques may include moulding, cutting, nailing, sawing, and sewing. The goal of **crafts expression** is to bring to the children the joy of experimenting, exploring, doing things together, experiencing and making discoveries as well as the enjoyment of seeing the result of their creativity and personal touch. Children are provided with opportunities to independently experiment with, explore and combine different materials as well as to learn different craft techniques. Children get to produce and implement ideas for different kinds of artwork and objects. Crafting traditions related to the children's backgrounds as well as the local area can be observed and utilised with the children.

Children are encouraged to engage in **verbal** and **bodily expression**, for example through drama, dance, and play. The aim is that the exercises and games offer children opportunities to versatile verbal and bodily experiences, expression, and communication. Topics arising from children's imagination or things experienced and perceived by them are worked on together. Children gather experiences of both spontaneous expression and a jointly planned, implemented, and assessed creative process. For example, children's literature, literary art, different forms of theatre, dance and circus are utilised diversely in the activities.

Me and our community

Children expand their living environment as they begin ECEC outside their homes. In addition to the traditions, operating models, values and views of their homes, children come across different ways of thinking and acting. The mission of ECEC is to develop children's capabilities of understanding the diversity of the local community and practise acting in it. This topic is approached from the perspectives of **ethical thinking, worldviews, the past, the present and the future of the local community** as well as **the media**. For example, fairy tales, music, visual arts, play, drama, different media contents as well as visitors, visits and events in the local area can be used diversely in the activities. The learning area of me and our community particularly supports

transversal competences related to the children's cultural competence, interaction, and expression as well as their thinking and learning (Chapter 2.7).

The development of **ethical thinking** skills is supported by reflecting together on ethical questions that arise in different situations or that concern the children. For instance, the themes may be connected to friendship, telling wrong from right, justice or causes of fear, sadness, and joy. Ethical questions are discussed in a manner that enables the children to feel safe and accepted. The rules of the group and their justifications are also reflected on with the children.

Worldview education in ECEC focuses on examining together the religions and other worldviews present in the group of children. Religions and worldviews can also be examined more extensively with the children. Irreligion can also be examined. The goal is to promote mutual respect and understanding of varying worldviews as well as to support the development of the children's cultural identities and worldviews. The children are familiarised with different worldviews and related traditions. For example, annual celebrations and events as well as daily situations, such as dressing or meals, provide natural opportunities for examining worldviews. Room is given for the children's wondering, and life questions that puzzle them are reflected on together.

Worldview education is organised in cooperation with guardians, being aware of and respecting the background, worldviews, and values of each family. Among others, worldview education supports transversal competences related to the children's cultural competence, interaction, and expression as well as their thinking and learning (see Chapter 2.7).

By discussing **the past, the present and the future of the local community**, children's interest is geared towards historical matters and building a good future. Diversity in the children's growth environments is also observed.

Children are offered possibilities to immerse themselves in past events and situations. The children and their personal histories, members of the local community and its environments and artefacts are important sources of information. In addition, the expertise of the children's guardians in their cultural heritage may be utilised. For instance, the games and music from the childhood of the children's grandparents can be used in familiarisation with past times.

The presence is examined by discussing current topics that concern or interest the children. Diversity in the local community is also respectfully observed with the children. Among others, the diversity of people, genders and families is explored. The goal is to educate children to understand that people are different but equal.

In addition to the past and the present, it is important to reflect on the future and how we can influence the realisation of a favourable future. Anticipation of the future may be connected, for instance, to planning games for the coming season or personal learning environments. This can be

done, for example, by constructing imaginary future worlds or talking about professions that the children find interesting.

The task of the **media education** in ECEC is to support the children's possibilities for being active and expressing themselves in their communities. Children are familiarised with different media and producing media content is experimented with playfully in safe environments. The contents and reliability and truthfulness of media related to the children's lives are considered together with the children. At the same time, the children practise their developing source and media criticism. The children are guided in using media responsibly, taking into account their own and other people's well-being. Themes presented in the media may be dealt with the children, for example, though play with physical activity, by drawing or with the means of drama.

Exploring and interacting with my environment

The task of the ECEC is to provide children with a capacity to observe, analyse and understand their surroundings. The children are guided to explore and act in the natural and built environment. ECEC supports the development of the children's **mathematical thinking** and strengthens their positive attitude towards mathematics. ECEC also includes **environmental education** and **technology education**. Personal observations and experiences related to learning environments help children understand causal relationships and develop as thinkers and learners. Children's developing competence of naming phenomena and using different concepts promotes their multiliteracy.

The goal of ECEC is to provide the children with joy of invention and learning in different phases of their **mathematical thinking**. Children familiarise themselves with mathematics and its areas through illustrative and playful activities. Children are guided to pay attention to the shapes, amounts and changes they come across in daily situations and environment. Children are encouraged to consider and describe their mathematical observations by expressing and examining them, for example by using their body or different devices and images. Children are provided with opportunities to classify, compare, and rank different things and objects and to discover and produce regularities and changes. They are also encouraged to discover, consider, and deduce problems related to the learning environment and find solutions to them.

The development of the concept of numbers is supported diversely in interactive situations, such as by utilising play and materials that appeal to children. Children are encouraged to perceive numbers and amounts in their environment and, as they advance their competence, to join them to numeral words in writing and numeric symbols as permitted by their skills. Number sequencing and naming skills can be developed, for instance, with nursery rhymes and rhyming. Measuring is experimented with, and the concepts of location and relation are practised with the children, for example through games involving physical activities, by drawing or using different instruments.

Different exercises are used to support children's perception of space and plane. Children are encouraged to examine objects and shapes and to play with them. In order to strengthen children's geometric thinking, opportunities for building, arts and crafts and clay modelling are arranged for them. The concept of time is explained, for example by observing the times of the day and seasons.

The goal of **environmental education** is to strengthen children's relationship with nature and ability to act responsibly in nature as well as to guide them towards a sustainable way of living. Environmental education comprises of three dimensions: learning in the environment, learning about the environment and acting for the environment. The local natural and built environments are not only objects of learning, but also learning environments.

Making field trips to natural and built environments and exploring the surroundings are an important part of ECEC. Through positive learning experiences, children learn to enjoy nature and the local surroundings, which strengthens their relationship with nature. Natural phenomena are observed through the use of different senses and in different seasons. They are discussed and examined. At the same time, children learn to use concepts connected to nature. Practice in identifying different plant and animal species strengthens children's knowledge of nature. Children learn to search for information on interesting topics. Nature can also be a place for aesthetic and peaceful experiences.

Children are guided to respect nature, its plants, and animals. Environmental education promotes the children's growth into a sustainable way of living and the practice of skills needed in it. These practical skills include not littering while on excursions, learning moderation and being economical, responsibility related to meals, saving energy as well as decreasing the amount of waste by such means as recycling, repairing, and reusing things. At the same time, children are guided to pay attention to the impacts of their actions. It is important to ensure that children feel they can contribute to a sustainable way of living through their actions, however without having to bear too much responsibility for maintaining it as children.

The goal of **technology education** is to encourage children to familiarise themselves with experimental and inquiry-based approaches. Children are also guided to observe technology in the environment and to come up with their own, creative solutions. Children are encouraged to ask questions, find explanations together and draw conclusions.

Technological solutions that children come across in their daily lives are observed with them. Children familiarise themselves with digital devices and applications and their functions. Particular attention is paid to the safe use of machines and devices. Children are provided with opportunities to carry out their own ideas, for example by building things out of different materials and testing how different devices work. Children are encouraged to describe the solutions they have made. The children solve problems and celebrate successes together. The goal is that their personal

experiences help children form an understanding of the fact that technology is an outcome of human activity. Technological solutions available in the surroundings, such as toys and other everyday technology, can be used in the activities and their operating principles can be examined.

I grow, move, and develop

The learning area of I grow, move, and develop includes objectives related to **physical activity, food education, health, and safety**. The task of ECEC is to build a foundation for children's way of living which values health and well-being and promotes physical activity together with guardians. This learning area particularly supports transversal competences related to taking care of oneself and managing daily life.

A goal of ECEC is to encourage children to be physically active in versatile ways and to experience joy of **physical activity**. Children are encouraged to spend time outdoors and engage in physically active play during all seasons. In addition to supervised exercise, it is ensured that children get plenty of opportunities for independent physical activity both indoors and outdoors every day. Physical education must be regular, child-focused, versatile, and goal-oriented. Sufficient daily physical activity is important for the child's healthy growth, development, learning and well-being. Physical activity refers to various types of activity with different levels of physical strain, including playing indoors and outdoors, excursions and instructor-led physical activity. Physical activity in a group develops children's social skills, such as interaction and self-regulation skills. Physical activity must be a natural part of the child's day. Together with guardians, children are also encouraged to exercise in their free time both indoors and outdoors.

The task of ECEC is to develop children's knowledge of their bodies, body management as well as fundamental movement skills, such as balance, locomotor, and manipulative skills. Different senses as well as equipment made out of different materials encouraging children to be physically active are utilised in the physical activities. Children's physical activities must be naturally versatile in terms of their duration, intensity, and pace. Children must gain experiences of physical activity independently, in pairs and with a group. In ECEC, children gather experiences of different physical games, such as traditional outdoor games as well as moving to stories and music. Different seasons must be utilised so that children get opportunities for learning outdoors activities typical for each season.

Regular and supervised exercise plays a key role in children's holistic development and learning of motor skills. Therefore, it is important to observe the children's motor skills systematically. The personnel must plan the daily structure, indoor and outdoor environments as well as the contents of activities so that the children get an opportunity to enjoy physical activity diversely in different situations. Exercise equipment must be available for the children also during free physical activity and play. ECEC takes the safety of exercise equipment into account.

The aim of **food education** is to promote positive attitudes towards food and eating and support versatile and healthy eating habits. Children are guided to eat independently and to obtain versatile and sufficient nutrition. Daily meals are organised in an unhurried atmosphere where the children learn to eat without disturbances and with good table manners. They are also familiarised with a culture of eating together with others. Children familiarise themselves with foods, their origins, visual appearance, textures, and tastes through the use of different senses and exploration. Discussions, stories, and songs connected to food promote the advancement of the children's vocabulary related to food.

Issues connected to **health** and **safety** are considered together with the children in ECEC. Children's capabilities for taking care of their health and personal hygiene are supported. The significance of exercise, rest and good interpersonal relationships to health and well-being are discussed with the children. Children learn about issues connected to safety in everyday situations. These may include situations where children are getting dressed, eating, playing, and spending time outdoors. Children's age-appropriate curiosity towards sexuality and the body is guided respectfully. Children practise safety in traffic in their local area as well as rules and customs related to safe mobility. The goal is to support the children's sense of security and to provide them with capabilities for asking for and seeking help and for operating safely in different situations and environments.

4.6 Special perspectives of language and culture

In the national core curriculum for early childhood education and care, perspectives related to language and culture are considered to apply to every child participating in ECEC. Children's varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds and capabilities are perceived to enrich the community in a positive way. In linguistically and culturally aware ECEC, languages, cultures and worldviews are integrated in all activity.

According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the municipality must ensure that the child can be provided with ECEC in child's mother tongue if the language is Finnish, Swedish or Sámi. ECEC may be provided in sign language for children using sign language. ECEC may also be provided in the Roma language.⁹⁹ Also other languages can be used in ECEC, provided that this does not risk the achievement of the objectives set in the core curriculum. In such cases, it shall be ensured that the development of Finnish/Swedish as the child's mother tongue is also supported. Cooperation between personnel, guardians and different cultural communities supports the cultural traditions of children and families as well as the children's opportunities for demonstrating their cultural backgrounds. Children are encouraged to interact in bilingual and multilingual environments.

⁹⁹ Section 8 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, HE 40/2018 pp. 88–89 and Sign Language Act (359/2015)

In ECEC, there are children who speak both **Finnish** and **Swedish** as their mother tongue. It is important for the development of these children's language skills and identities that both languages are supported, and the children are encouraged to use them.

A special objective of the early childhood education and care of **Sámi children** is to strengthen the children's Sámi identity and awareness of their own culture and to provide the children with an opportunity to learn Sámi folklore and traditional skills. The Sámi people are an indigenous people whose right to their own language and culture is protected under the Constitution¹⁰⁰. The immediate environment and cooperation with guardians and the Sámi community shall be utilised in the activities. When ECEC is organised in one of the three Sámi languages, its special objective is to strengthen language development, comprehension, and use. The aim is to improve the children's capabilities for acting in a Sámi language environment, to learn the Sámi language and to learn in the Sámi language. The personnel promote the preservation of the Sámi language and Sámi cultural heritage in cooperation with the guardians.

In the early childhood education and care for **Roma children**, a particular objective is to support the positive development of the children's identity and their awareness of their own history and culture as well as to increase their participation in the society. The linguistic development of the children is also supported in cooperation with the guardians and the Roma community. Whenever possible, opportunities are arranged for the children to use and acquire skills in the Roma language. The personnel promote the preservation of the Roma language and cultural heritage in cooperation with the guardians.

Early childhood education and care for children using **sign language** can be realised either in groups for sign language users or in groups consisting of children using sign language and spoken language. Sign language may be the child's mother tongue, first language or second language. Children using sign language may be deaf, hard of hearing, or hearing. The goal of ECEC in sign language is to support and strengthen the children's linguistic and cultural identity by providing them with an opportunity to use and adopt sign language in Finnish or Finnish-Swedish in collaboration with guardians. The aim is also to improve the children's capabilities for acting in different language environments and to strengthen the children's Finnish or Finnish-Swedish sign language expression and reserve of signs.

The language skills of **foreign language speaking and plurilingual children**, as well as the development of their linguistic and cultural identities and self-esteem, are supported in ECEC. The development of Finnish/Swedish skills is promoted with a goal-oriented approach and underpinned by pedagogical planning in different areas of linguistic skills and capabilities based on children's needs and abilities. Versatile interactive situations and learning environments are used to provide children with opportunities to use and learn Finnish/Swedish as a second language in

¹⁰⁰ Section 17(3) of the Constitution of Finland (731/1999)

education and teaching situations. Concrete everyday language and its resource of expressions are the starting point for learning the Finnish/Swedish language. Language comprehension and production skills develop in connection with one another. Children learn to make observations as well as express their ideas, emotions, and opinions in a manner that is suitable for the situation and natural to them. Some of the children only start familiarising themselves with the Finnish culture and Finnish/Swedish as they begin ECEC. The familiarisation with and learning of Finnish/Swedish related to the child's linguistic development should not be compared to support provided in ECEC (Chapter 5). Guardians are informed about the goals, contents, and methods of Finnish ECEC. The family's linguistic environment, language choices, formation of plurilingual and multicultural identities as well as the stages and importance of the development of mother tongue(s) are discussed with the guardians. ECEC supports the integration of children into Finnish society.

Whenever possible, children are provided with opportunities for also using and learning their own mother tongue(s). Children's mother tongue and learning Finnish/Swedish as a second language lay the foundation for their functional bilingualism and plurilingualism. The family is primarily responsible for preserving and developing the child's mother tongue(s) and culture. If necessary, an interpreter should be used in the discussions with the guardians to ensure mutual understanding.

Bilingual early childhood education and care

Bilingual early childhood education and care is organised by decision of the municipality or a private actor. The goal of bilingual ECEC is to utilise the children's early sensitive period for language learning by providing the children with language education that is more versatile than mainstream education. Children are provided with opportunities for acquiring language skills and using languages functionally and through play, thus building a foundation for lifelong language learning. The objective is that acting in a multilingual environment will stir children's linguistic curiosity and desire to experiment. This will also enable diverse cultures to meet naturally.

Bilingual ECEC is divided into large-scale and small-scale bilingual education and care. The aim of small-scale bilingual ECEC education is to stir interest in and a positive attitude towards languages in children. The aim of large-scale bilingual ECEC is to create capabilities for the children to act in bilingual and multilingual environments.

Large-scale bilingual early childhood education and care

Early total immersion in the national languages in ECEC

Immersion in Swedish may be organised in ECEC provided in Finnish and immersion in Finnish in ECEC provided in Swedish. Immersion in Sámi may also be organised in ECEC provided in Finnish and Swedish. Early total immersion in the national languages is a programme that begins in ECEC and continues until the end of basic education. The language of instruction and the second

national language or Sámi combine to form an entity. ECEC is mainly provided in the immersion language. The development of the children's skills in their mother tongue(s) is supported in cooperation with homes and guardians. The aim in the activities is that each member of the personnel consistently uses one language only: either the immersion language or the language of instruction of ECEC. While children are encouraged to use the immersion language, they must also have the possibility to be understood in their mother tongue. The objective is to provide children with capabilities for continuing in pre-primary education and further on to basic education implemented as immersion.

Other large-scale bilingual ECEC

Part of the activities (at least 25%) in other large-scale bilingual ECEC is implemented in a language other than the language of education and care laid down in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. Some children may speak this language as their mother tongue. The activities are planned so that the different language groups receive the support for linguistic development they need. The groups may also include children who speak neither of the languages used in the education and care as their mother tongue. The ECEC service organiser decides on a case-by-case basis when these arrangements support the child's development by discussing the matter with the guardian.

The activities of bilingual ECEC are planned so that the ECEC realised in two languages forms an entity where both languages are present and developed gradually through the modelling of the personnel and active participation of the children. If possible, each member of the personnel will actively use only one of the languages. Children must also have the possibility to be understood in their mother tongue, in Finnish or Swedish. Children are encouraged to use both languages. The objective is to provide children with capabilities for continuing in bilingual or Finnish/Swedish pre-primary education and basic education.

Small-scale bilingual early childhood education and care

Language-enriched ECEC

Language-enriched early childhood education and care refers to ECEC in which less than 25% of the activities are regularly and systematically carried out in a language other than the languages of education and care laid down in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. The goal is to support language-learning, motivate children and diversify their language choices. A further aim may be to continue studies in language-enriched or other bilingual pre-primary education or basic education or other early language instruction.

Language nest

In early childhood education and care, language nest activities refer to activities strengthening children's awareness of their own culture. They also provide children with an opportunity to learn

an endangered minority or indigenous language. The principles of language nest activities may be similar as those of language immersion.

4.7 Issues subject to local decisions

The local curriculum for early childhood education and care shall specify the following objectives and principles for the pedagogical activities, taking the child's age and development as well as the characteristics of the different forms of ECEC services into account. The objectives and contents of pedagogical activities in the different ECEC services can be specified in the local curricula.

The local curriculum shall describe and specify

- principles of planning and implementing pedagogical activities as well as related monitoring and evaluation practices
- principles and practices of pedagogical documentation in ECEC
- principles applied to selecting working methods and directing their use
- practices that support children's play in line with the principles of inclusion
- goals and contents of learning areas
- ways of taking into account the children's interests and participation in planning and implementing pedagogical activities
- implementation of ECEC for different linguistic and cultural groups
- implementation of bilingual ECEC, if this is provided
- supporting foreign-language speaking and plurilingual children in learning Finnish/Swedish
- cooperation and practices related to the family's language choices and supporting their mother tongue.

5. Support for the child

A child who attends early childhood education and care has the right to receive general, intensified, or special support as provided in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care¹⁰¹. Timely, individually targeted support that meets the child's needs promotes the child's development, learning and well-being. It also prevents the child's problems from growing and taking on more diverse forms as well as the risk of social exclusion.

The organisation of support is based on each child's strengths and needs related to learning, development, and well-being. The child is heard, taking child's age and development into account. In ECEC, the support consists of meeting the child's individual needs and solutions associated with the ECEC community and learning environment. It is ensured in ECEC that each child feels accepted as himself or herself and as a member of the group. Encouraging children and providing them with opportunities for experiencing success support the development of the child's positive self-image. The support and measures the child needs are included in child's ECEC plan at an early education centre or in family daycare.

5.1 Principles that guide the provision of support and responsibilities

An ECEC service organiser¹⁰² has the duty to provide the support a child needs at an early education centre or in family daycare. The child's need for support is assessed, and support is arranged without delay. In early childhood education and care, support is provided as general, intensified, and special support in keeping with the principles of inclusion. As a basic premise, children have the right to receive support in their child group delivered through different flexible arrangements. If the child's support needs so require, the child has the right to participate in ECEC provided in a small group or a special group.

It is important for the child that the support forms a coherent continuum while the child attends ECEC and pre-primary education and when the child transitions to basic education.

Responsibilities for organising and delivering support

The ECEC service organiser decides on the practices, delivery, operating methods, and evaluation of support provision at an early education centre and in family daycare. The ECEC service organiser monitors and assesses the effectiveness and adequacy of the support provided.

The ECEC service organiser decides on the structures, responsibilities and operating methods related to cooperation with guardians as well as multidisciplinary cooperation. In the context of

¹⁰¹ Section 15a of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁰² Municipality, joint municipal authority or private service provider, see Chapter 1.1

multidisciplinary cooperation, the division of labour between different actors in the provision of support should also be decided. When requested by the ECEC service organiser, social welfare and health care experts must participate in conducting an evaluation if this is necessary for assessing the child's support needs¹⁰³.

The ECEC service organiser is responsible for ensuring that the child's right to receive the services of a special education teacher (ECEC) and the interpretation and assistance services and aids required for participation in ECEC is realised¹⁰⁴.

The decisions on intensified and special support and support services are made by the municipality responsible for organising ECEC¹⁰⁵. In case of ECEC organised by a private service provider, the decision is made by the municipality in which the ECEC unit is located on the service provider's proposal.

If the child in need of support participates in ECEC services of more than one ECEC service organiser¹⁰⁶, the support must be planned, delivered, and assessed in cooperation¹⁰⁷.

Assessing the need for support, providing support, and developing the operational culture and methods are the responsibility of the entire personnel as indicated by their training, job descriptions and responsibilities.

The head of early education centre is responsible for providing high-quality support in ECEC, its delivery, and the personnel's up-to-date competence in a manner that meets the children's needs¹⁰⁸. The head ensures that the personnel plan the support for the child as part of child's ECEC plan. The planned support is reviewed in the light of the child's needs, at least once a year.

The child has the right to the services and instruction provided by special education teacher (ECEC) if their need for support so requires. The special education teacher participates in planning and assessing the child's need for support, support measures and their implementation if necessary. The special education teacher may provide support as instruction for individual children and/or child groups¹⁰⁹. The support may be regular, part time or full time. It may be delivered by means of team teaching or co-teaching with the teacher of the child's group. The expertise of the special education teacher is also drawn on when consulting personnel and guardians¹¹⁰. A person qualified as teacher (ECEC) or special education teacher (ECEC) is responsible for planning the support to be recorded in the child's ECEC plan and for assessing its delivery.

¹⁰³ Section 15d of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁰⁴ Section 15c of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁰⁵ Section 15e of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁰⁶ Municipality, joint municipal authority or private service provider, see Chapter 1.1

¹⁰⁷ Section 15b of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁰⁸ Section 31 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁰⁹ Section 15c of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹¹⁰ Section 15d of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

A family daycare provider is responsible for delivering support for children in their group. The support may be planned and assessed together with a teacher (ECEC) and/or special education teacher (ECEC)¹¹¹. When the child's best interest so requires, moving the child to an early education centre to enable him or her to access the support he or she needs may be discussed with the guardian.

Child or group specific assistants¹¹², whose task is to support the child or children in the group as well as to enable their participation in activities, may work in ECEC. This may also mean that the assistant helps other children while the teacher (ECEC) works with the child in need of support and introduces pedagogical contents associated with the child's individual objectives to the interactive situation.

5.2 Cooperation while support is being provided

Early childhood education and care is provided in cooperation, ensuring that each child receives education, instruction and care as required by child's stage of development and needs as well as gets the support needed¹¹³. Effective local cooperation structures and the development of communal operating methods are needed to provide support for the child.

Cooperation with the child and the guardian

The starting point for providing early and adequate support is sharing information about the child and the child's needs between the guardian and ECEC personnel. The child's right to support, the key principles of organising support, the support provided for the child and the forms of delivering the support are discussed with the guardian. The child participates in the cooperation in a way that is appropriate and suitable for the child's age and development. The child is heard, and the child's opinions are taken into account.¹¹⁴

The personnel contact the guardian directly as developmental or learning problems appear or when there are concerns over the child's well-being. The guardian is provided with information on the handling of issues regarding the child and the provision, transfer, and confidentiality of information¹¹⁵. If necessary, an interpreter is used in these discussions. The goals of delivering support for the child can be optimally accomplished when all parties work together.

¹¹¹ Section 15c of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹¹² Sections 35 and 38 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹¹³ Section 15a of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹¹⁴ Section 15d(4) of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹¹⁵ Sections 40–41 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

The child may also receive support through other services for children and families. It is important that the local services for children and families form an appropriate entity for providing support for the child.¹¹⁶

Cross-sectoral cooperation

The best interests of the child as the primary consideration shall guide the cross-sectoral cooperation. Collaboration practices and principles must be determined with the child health clinic, child protection services, educational advice centre, family counselling centre and other services of the municipal social administration for situations where the child's issues are discussed or intervention by the authorities is required. The cross-sectoral cooperation is primarily implemented with the guardian's consent. Provisions on confidentiality and exchange of information must be complied with in the cooperation¹¹⁷.

ECEC is also provided within the scope of specialised medical care. Cooperation between ECEC services and a hospital or other similar institution ensure the continuity of the child's ECEC as indicated by the child's condition and ability to cope. Particular attention is paid to maintaining the child's safe interpersonal relationships.

A child may need extended compulsory education due to a severe disability or illness¹¹⁸. Decisions on beginning extended compulsory education are mainly made before the compulsory education starts. The child's guardian must be provided with timely information on matters related to the implementation of extended compulsory education. Decisions on and alternative ways of implementing extended compulsory education are specified in the national core curriculum for pre-primary education¹¹⁹.

5.3 Implementation of support in early childhood education and care

Participation in early childhood education and care lays a good foundation for the child's development, learning and well-being. Difficulties are prevented by pedagogical arrangements and different working approaches. These include systematic differentiation of activities, flexible changes of groups and shaping of learning environments. Clear daily routines and rhythm of daily activities support all children. If high-quality pedagogy does not meet the child's individual needs, a suitable level¹²⁰ and forms¹²¹ of support are determined following the principles that guide support provision. The forms of support in ECEC refer to the pedagogical, structural, and care-

¹¹⁶ Section 7 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and HE 40/2018 pp. 87–88

¹¹⁷ Sections 40–42 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹¹⁸ Section 2(3) of the Act on Compulsory Education (1214/2020)

¹¹⁹ The National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education 2014, Chapter 5.5 Special Support

¹²⁰ Section 15a of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹²¹ Section 15b of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

related support measures needed by the child. The initiative for stepping up the support provided for the child may come from the personnel of the child's group, the guardian, or other experts.

The child has the right to receive support at an appropriate level as soon as the need for support has been identified. No medical diagnosis or other opinion issued by the health care or social welfare services is needed in order for the child to access support. The child also has the right to support services and aids as indicated by child's need for support¹²². The ECEC service organiser is responsible for the support measures and aids that the child needs in order to participate in ECEC. They include

- arrangements related to mobility and other physical activities, including wheelchair ramps and handrails; or
- aids related to communication, vision, hearing, mobility, or the child's other physical need, including toys that support communication, digital applications, games, or audio books.

The levels of support used in ECEC are general support, intensified support, and special support. The child may move flexibly from one level of support to another, and the level of support needed is always assessed on a case-by-case basis. Having first received support at a lower level is not a precondition for receiving intensified or special support. A child receiving intensified or special support must be taken into account in the staffing ratio of the early education centre and family daycare¹²³.

General support

A child participating in ECEC has the right to receive, as part of basic ECEC activities, the general support required by the child's individual development, learning or well-being as soon as the need for support becomes apparent. General support is delivered in the child's own group.

General support is the first response to a child's need for support. General support consists of individual forms of support, including individual pedagogical solutions and support measures through which the situation can be resolved to as early as possible. The support received by the child is of shorter duration and/or of lower intensity compared to intensified and special support. For example, the child's individual support needs are met by using suitable materials, equipment, curricula, or part-time support provided by a special education teacher.

An administrative decision is not needed to provide general support, which is always provided when the need for it arises. General support is organised in cooperation between a teacher (ECEC) and other personnel. An administrative decision is made on any support services, including interpretation and assistance services and aids¹²⁴.

¹²² Section 15c of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹²³ Sections 35 and 38 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹²⁴ Section 15c of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

Intensified support

When general support is not adequate, the child must be provided with individually and communally planned intensified support in ECEC. This form of support is more individual and of a higher intensity than general support. Support is provided for a shorter or longer period of time as required by the child's individual needs, and its provision starts as soon as the need for support emerges. Intensified support is provided for as long as the child needs it.

The support for the child is enhanced through planning the support and increasing or intensifying its delivery methods. It consists of several forms of support delivered regularly and simultaneously. Intensified support provided at the right time may prevent the child from developing more complex support needs later.

Any later diagnosis received by the child or initiation of rehabilitation may not be used as a precondition for receiving support¹²⁵. An administrative decision is made on providing intensified support¹²⁶.

Special support

When general or intensified support is not adequate, the child must be provided with individually planned special support in ECEC. Special support may be provided because of a disability, illness, delayed development, or other need for support for a child's learning and development that significantly reduces the child's functional capacity. Special support is the most intensive level of support provided in ECEC. If the child's need for support so requires, the provision of support can be started directly at the level of special support.

The child has the right to receive special support as soon as the need for it arises. Special support consists of several forms of support and support services, and it is continuous and full time. An administrative decision is made on providing special support¹²⁷.

Forms of support

The different support forms are used at all levels of support as required by the child's needs¹²⁸. Different forms of support can be delivered simultaneously as part of basic ECEC activities as soon as the need for support emerges. The working methods and ECEC learning environments are adjusted to meet the child's individual needs. The support measures are planned pedagogically, ensuring that the child's participation and right to learn and act as part of the peer group are realised in keeping with the child's best interests. The support for the child may include **pedagogical, structural, and care-related** forms.

¹²⁵ HE 148/2021 vp, p. 32

¹²⁶ Section 15e of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹²⁷ Section 15e of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹²⁸ Section 15b of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

Support for the child is organised as part of the daily activities of ECEC. When determining the size of the child group, children's best interests and support needs as well as the possibility of achieving the goals set for ECEC in the group are taken into consideration.

The **forms of pedagogical support** include setting up recurring activities and clear and predictable daily routines for the child. The support for the child includes sensitive and accessible interaction and communication methods. They may include communication methods that replace speech, including signs, images, or different technological solutions. In order to respond to the child's needs, the ECEC personnel must use common and consistent pedagogical and special pedagogical working methods and techniques. Pedagogical support forms also include the planning, observation, documentation, and evaluation of ECEC activities.

Special pedagogical methods based on the child's individual needs can be planned, applied, and implemented as joint activities with one child, in a small group or with the entire group of children. In keeping with the inclusive underlying values of ECEC, the planning and delivery of pedagogical support should primarily be based on operating methods in which the support needed by the child is provided in child's peer group.

The **forms of structural support** include building the skills and special pedagogy competence of the personnel related to observing the child's need for support and delivering the support. Structural forms of support also include reducing the number of children in the group as well as finding solutions related to the staffing ratio and/or structure and adjusting them to the child's need for support¹²⁹. For example, the personnel structure of the group can be strengthened with a special education teacher (ECEC). By reducing the number of children, the staffing ratio can be altered, making it possible to deliver support for the child as planned and to achieve the objectives set for ECEC in the group. In addition, structural forms of support needed by the child may include the interpretation and assistance services required for participation in ECEC, the use of aids, paying attention to accessibility, and a small or special group.

Care-related forms of support refer to methods and practices that respond to the child's needs for care, attention, and assistance. The child's health care needs are addressed as part of the care-related forms of support, including assistance needs and aids related to the treatment, medication, diet, and physical activity associated with the child's chronic illnesses. ECEC personnel work together with social welfare and health care specialists, for example with regard to guidance and consultation for ECEC personnel.

The possibility of delivering the child's medical care or treatment as part of the child group's basic activities is always assessed case by case at ECEC. Each child's overall situation is assessed. Rather than depending on the level of support referred to in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the child's medical care or treatment are provided as required by the child's needs.

¹²⁹ Sections 35(2) and 38(2) of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

The pedagogical, structural, and care-related practices of the support must be in keeping with the child's best interest and needs for support, and local and case-specific consideration is applied to them. For example, when planning the use of the child's aids or assistance provided for the child, these support measures should primarily be arranged ensuring that the child remains part of a peer group and joins the rest of the child group in the same facilities and situations.

5.4 Evaluating support provided for a child

The support provided for a child is evaluated at all levels of support in early childhood education and care¹³⁰. The child's need for support as well as the adequacy and realisation of support are evaluated as necessary, however at least once a year, for example as the child's ECEC plan is reviewed or the need for support or the learning environment changes. The process for assessing the child's need for support may be triggered by observations made by ECEC personnel. The initiative may also come from the guardian, the child health clinic or social welfare and health care personnel.

When examining the delivery of support as a whole, the optimal solutions for promoting the child's best interests are always determined for each child. The child's need for support, support measures and their delivery are assessed together with the guardian, and the child's opinion and wishes are taken into account¹³¹.

A special education teacher (ECEC) participates in assessing the child's support as necessary. The social welfare and health care authorities participate in producing the assessment on request by the ECEC service organiser if pedagogical expertise other than that held by the ECEC personnel is also required to assess the child's need for support and to justify support solutions.

5.5 Child's early childhood education and care plan during the provision of support

The support needed by the child, or the support forms and levels and their implementation as well as the responsibilities and division of duties related to them are included in the child's early childhood education and care plan¹³². A person qualified as a teacher (ECEC) and/or special education teacher (ECEC) is in charge of preparing and assessing this document in collaboration with other personnel and the child's guardian. The personnel's task is to support the guardian's and the child's participation in preparing and assessing the plan. The aim is to achieve mutual understanding between the pre-primary education unit, the child, and the guardian. The child's opinion is heard and taken into account in preparing and evaluating the plan (Chapter 1.3).

¹³⁰ Sections 15a and d of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹³¹ Sections 15d and 20 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹³² Sections 15d and 23 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

The need for and delivery of support are assessed, and the plan is reviewed as necessary at least once a year or as the child's need for support changes¹³³. The achievement of the activities' objectives is recorded, and the objectives are modified to meet the child's changing need for support. The plan must indicate if support is no longer needed and if the measures have been discontinued. The need for support is always assessed when the child begins pre-primary education. Regulations on support for the growth and learning of children participating in pre-primary education are given in the National core curriculum for pre-primary education. With regard to ECEC that complements pre-primary education, any support must be coordinated with the support provided in pre-primary education and recorded in the child's ECEC plan.

Before the provision of intensified or special support is initiated, an assessment of any previous support measures and their effectiveness is recorded in the child's ECEC plan. This assessment includes a description of the support measures, an assessment of how effective they have been and how they should be developed, and justifications for the types of support measures that the child benefits from and that optimally promote the individual child's best interests.¹³⁴

The child's ECEC plan can be used when making an administrative decision on the provision of intensified or special support or support services¹³⁵. If the child's need for support has been assessed in the individual ECEC plan, this assessment must be taken into account when issuing an administrative decision on intensified or special support or a decision on support services. The child's ECEC plan is updated in keeping with the content of the administrative decision.

In addition to what is stated in Chapter 1.3, when a child receives support in ECEC, child's ECEC plan should include the following:

Forms of pedagogical support

- solutions related to the structure and daily routines of the child's day in ECEC
- solutions related to learning environments
- the required special pedagogical methods
- interaction and communication methods, including the use of signs and images
- practices that enable the child to participate in the activities of the peer group, including addressing accessibility.

Forms of structural support

- building the personnel's skills in delivering support and competence in special pedagogy
- solutions related to the staffing ratio and structure
- solutions related to the size and structure of the child group
- interpretation and assistance services and the use of special aids

¹³³ Sections 15d and 23 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹³⁴ HE 148/2021 vp, p. 34

¹³⁵ Section 15e of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

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- a small or special group or other group form as required
- part-time or full-time teaching provided by or in consultation with a special education teacher (ECEC).

Care-related forms of support

- methods related to basic care, attention, and assistance
- health care needs, including assistance and aids related to the treatment, medication, diet, and physical activity associated with the child's chronic illnesses

Cooperation and services required for the support

- cooperation with the child and the guardian
- responsibilities for implementing the support provided for the child
- use of specialist services
- guidance and consultation provided by social welfare and health care professionals
- arrangements and responsibilities for possible transport.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the support

- monitoring the need for and the adequacy and delivery of support
- evaluation of the impacts of the support measures, conclusions and measures based on the evaluation, and the intervals between evaluations.

In addition, any social welfare and health care services, including rehabilitation received by the child, are recorded in the child's ECEC plan if this is essential for organising the child's ECEC¹³⁶.

5.6 Decision on intensified and special support and support services

The ECEC service organiser shall, without delay, make an administrative decision on intensified or special support based on an assessment of the child's need for support¹³⁷. The administrative decision procedure laid down in the Administrative Procedure Act should be followed. Before making a decision, the ECEC service organiser must consult the child's guardian or other legal representative¹³⁸. A guardian may also apply for intensified or special support for the child¹³⁹. The administrative decision is made by the municipality responsible for organising ECEC services, and the decision is valid until further notice. Appeal instructions must be attached to it, as the guardian may request a review of an administrative decision¹⁴⁰. The reasons for the decision shall

¹³⁶ HE 148/2021 vp, p. 35

¹³⁷ Section 15e of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹³⁸ Section 34 of the Administrative Procedure Act

¹³⁹ HE 148/2021 vp, p. 35

¹⁴⁰ Section 62 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

always be supplied¹⁴¹. The administrative decision is amended or repealed if the child's need for support changes¹⁴².

A decision on intensified and special support states and determines the following:

- forms of support
- the ECEC unit where support is provided
- support services¹⁴³.

If no decision on intensified or special support is made for the child, a separate administrative decision is made on the support services. The decision states and determines the following:

- support services¹⁴⁴.

An administrative decision concerning a child attending private ECEC that falls within the scope of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care is made, on the service provider's proposal, by the municipality where the ECEC unit is located¹⁴⁵. When a child attends ECEC provided as an outsourced service, the administrative decision is made by the municipality responsible for organising ECEC services. If ECEC services are paid for by a service voucher issued by a municipality, the administrative decision is also made by this municipality.¹⁴⁶

ECEC may be provided for a child by more than one ECEC service organiser. If a child participates in ECEC organised by two different municipalities, for example when the child's guardians are separated, each municipality makes its own administrative decision. In this case, ECEC service organisers have the duty to work together on the planning, delivery, and assessment of support, promoting the child's best interests. A separate administrative decision is made by each actor.

An administrative decision on intensified or special support or support services must be implemented immediately. The decision may be implemented before it is final. Implementation before the decision is final is essential in terms of legal protection. An administrative decision cannot contain decisions concerning the child's social welfare and health care services, including medical rehabilitation aids, or services and support measures provided under the Act on Disability Services and Assistance.

The child's need for support and the adequacy and delivery of support are reviewed as necessary (see Chapter 5.4). The administrative decision is amended or repealed if the child's need for support changes in connection with a review or other assessment of the child's ECEC plan.

¹⁴¹ Sections 34, 45(1) and 47 of the Administrative Procedure Act and section 15a of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁴² HE 148/2021 vp, p. 36

¹⁴³ HE 148/2021 vp, p. 34

¹⁴⁴ Sections 15c and e of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁴⁵ Section 15e of the Act on early childhood education and care

¹⁴⁶ HE 148/2021 vp, p. 30

5.7 Issues subject to local decisions

The local curriculum for early childhood education and care determines and describes the practices for providing support in centre-based and family-based ECEC.

The local curriculum shall describe

- local principles and practices that guide the organisation of support for a child
- practices and responsibilities related to assessing the child's need for support
- delivery of support in ECEC: pedagogical, structural, and care-related forms of support
- complementing a child's ECEC plan from the perspective of support as described in Chapter 5.5, local responsibilities and practices related to drawing up and assessing the plan
- the practices of cooperation with children and guardians while support is being provided
- cross-sectoral cooperation and division of responsibilities and duties between various actors in the organisation of support, and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of support
- activities related to transitions and practices connected to transfer of information while the child attends ECEC and when child transitions to pre-primary education
- procedures related to administrative decisions on intensified and special support and support services (hearing the guardian and the child as well as drawing up, amending, and repealing the decision).

General support

- arrangements for the provision of general support in practice
- cooperation and division of responsibilities and labour between various actors
- cooperation with the guardian and the child
- practices and cooperation with the child and the guardian when preparing the child's ECEC plan and organising general support.

Intensified support

- practical arrangements for the organisation of intensified support
- operating methods in the initiation, implementation, and discontinuation of the child's intensified support
- practices related to the preparation, assessment, and reviews of the child's ECEC plan
- cooperation and division of responsibilities and labour between various actors in the preparation of the child's ECEC plan, organisation of intensified support, and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of support
- procedures concerning the use of potential expert statements
- practices and cooperation with the child and the guardian when preparing the child's ECEC plan and organising intensified support.

Special support

- the organisation of special support in practice
- cooperation and division of responsibilities and labour between various actors in the preparation of the child's ECEC plan, organisation of special support, and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of support
- procedures concerning the use of potential expert statements
- procedures and cooperation with the child and the guardian in the preparation of the child's ECEC plan, organisation of special support, and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of support
- for children within the scope of extended compulsory education, referring the child to extended compulsory education and multidisciplinary cooperation in this process
- cooperation with other ECEC and pre-primary education and other cooperation, division of responsibilities and labour between the various actors
- cooperation with the guardian and the child
- practices used when a decision is made to discontinue special support or to replace it with general support.

Forms of support laid down in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

- arrangements for the provision of support in practice
- cooperation and division of responsibilities and labour between various actors
- operating methods related to informing guardians and children and to the cooperation with them.

The administrative practices related to interpretation and assistance services and special aids are specified in the local curriculum as decided by the ECEC service organiser.

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6. Early childhood education and care based on an alternative pedagogy or a particular worldview

The goals and operating principles set for early childhood education and care in legislation, agreements and this core curriculum are complied with in all ECEC. These goals and operating principles also apply to ECEC based on an alternative pedagogy or a particular worldview.

The ECEC service organiser may provide an ECEC service that is based on an alternative pedagogy or a particular worldview. Examples of these services include the Steiner, Montessori, Freinet and Reggio Emilia pedagogies or ECEC services based on specific worldviews.

When a guardian selects an ECEC service based on an alternative pedagogy or a particular worldview, it must be ascertained that the guardian is provided with sufficient information about the special objectives and values of the activities.

6.1 Issues subject to local decisions

A local curriculum for early childhood education and care based on an alternative pedagogy or a particular worldview can be idiosyncratic, but it shall not be inconsistent with the legislation on ECEC or this core curriculum.

In addition to what has previously been prescribed in the core curriculum document, the ECEC service organiser shall decide and describe in the curriculum

- what the views of the alternative pedagogy or particular worldview complementing the underlying values, pedagogical principles and solutions of ECEC are
- how these views are manifest in the operational culture, working approaches and pedagogical activities of ECEC.

7. Evaluation and development of operations in early childhood education and care

The purpose of the evaluation of operations is to support the implementation of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and development of ECEC. Pursuant to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the ECEC service organiser shall evaluate the ECEC it provides and take part in external evaluations of its operations¹⁴⁷. The operations of ECEC must be systematically and regularly evaluated. Systematic evaluation requires the ECEC provider to have a functional evaluation system. This evaluation helps promote the quality of ECEC, recognise the strengths of the activities, and highlight development needs and improve the activities.

7.1 Evaluation and development of pedagogical activities

The purpose of the evaluation of pedagogical activities is to develop the quality of early childhood education and care and to improve conditions for children's development and learning¹⁴⁸. The monitoring, regular evaluation, and development of the local curriculum for early childhood education and a child's ECEC plan are part of this duty. ECEC operations are evaluated and developed at national level as well as from the perspectives of education and care providers, units, and individuals.

At the national level, the purpose of the evaluation is to support ECEC service organisers in matters concerning evaluation and quality management. National level evaluations serve the development of ECEC at the local, regional, and national levels¹⁴⁹. The evaluation information may be also utilised in international comparisons.

The ECEC service organiser regularly monitors and evaluates the curricula for early childhood education and care and their implementation in the different forms of ECEC services. The ECEC service organiser decides on the practices used in the evaluation at the education and care provider and unit level. It is important that local decision-makers, guardians and ECEC personnel have current information about the implementation and quality of ECEC. Key evaluation results must be published¹⁵⁰. Evaluation at the education and care provider and unit level is an essential part of the management and development of ECEC at the local level. Children and their guardians shall be provided with an opportunity to participate in evaluating ECEC regularly¹⁵¹.

¹⁴⁷ Section 24 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁴⁸ Section 24 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁴⁹ Section 1 of the Act on the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (1295/2013)

¹⁵⁰ Section 24 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

¹⁵¹ Section 20 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

The personnel's goal-oriented and systematic self-assessment is essential for maintaining and developing the quality of ECEC. The targets of assessment may include interaction between the personnel and children, atmosphere in the group, pedagogical working approaches, contents of activities or learning environments. The implementation of support for the child (Chapter 5) is a key object of assessment.

Assessment at the level of individuals means the evaluation of the implementation of children's individual ECEC plans. It is important to always evaluate the implementation of the child's ECEC plan before revising it or preparing a new plan. In the context of the evaluation, the child, guardian, and personnel consider for their part how the jointly formulated goals of and agreements on the activities have been taken into account and how these have been accomplished in the ECEC activities. Evaluating the support provided for the child is included in the child's ECEC plan. This evaluation duty is described in more detail in Chapter 5.

The issues subject to local decisions included at the end of each chapter of the national core curriculum for ECEC steer the preparation of the local curriculum for ECEC as well as its planning and implementation. The ECEC service organiser revises the local curriculum and improves its quality and functionality. In addition, local needs and outcomes of development work guide the evaluation.

7.2 Issues subject to local decisions

The principles and practices of evaluation in early childhood education and care described in the core curriculum shall be specified in the local curriculum. The local curriculum shall also include decisions on and descriptions of how

- implementation of the national core curriculum for ECEC is systematically monitored, evaluated, and developed in the different forms of ECEC services
- the implementation of support for the child is monitored, assessed, and systematically developed at early education centres and in family daycare
- feedback is collected from children, guardians and other partners and utilised in maintaining and improving quality
- the information obtained through the evaluation is utilised in the management and development of ECEC services
- the key results of evaluation are published.