

## Linguistically and culturally diverse service guidance in ECEC

This material/webpage provides information about issues that should be brought up when you have a discussion with the custodian of a child with an immigration background.

Service guidance is based on the Act on early childhood education and care (section 16): *Municipalities shall organise guidance and advice for the parents or other custodians on the early childhood education and care services available to them. The guidance shall describe the various types of early childhood education and care, the available options and any other factors that have a bearing on the organisation of early childhood education and care for the child.*

Guidance on the available ECEC services is provided to the parents or other custodians of a child of ECEC age. In addition to the ECEC personnel, every employee at child health clinics and in services for families with children encounters children and families with an immigration background in their work. In such situations, they tell these children and families about Finnish society, the different services, the education system and the study path. At the same time, they offer important, low-threshold guidance on the services and build trust and good cooperation with the custodians according to the families' needs. Service guidance is provided in the child's initial discussion, in the discussion about the ECEC plan and whenever necessary. Linguistically and culturally responsible encountering makes it possible to have a genuine dialogue and promote matters together.

The ECEC provider should ensure that information about the ECEC provided in the municipality is available both to custodians and to cooperation partners, such as parties responsible for integration, actors in the wellbeing services county and the employment administration.

Read more about service guidance in ECEC (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/varhaiskasvatuksen-palveluohjaus-ja-neuvonta#anchor-palveluohjaus-varhaiskasvatukseen>

## Having an interpreter in discussions

Service guidance must be accessible in terms of language. The custodians must be able to get information, be understood and understand the instructions given to them, for instance, with the help of interpretation. If necessary, an interpreter is ordered to discussions between the custodians and the personnel to enable all parties to understand each other. The use of an interpreter is the right of the custodians and the personnel alike (Administrative procedure act 434/2003, section 26).

The custodians are asked what language or dialect they want the interpreter for. The custodians are told that the interpreter will interpret everything that the personnel and the custodian say and that the interpreter is impartial and bound by confidentiality. The interpretation service is free of charge to the custodian.

Read more interpretation services for persons with an immigration background on the website of the Finnish National Agency for Education (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/teemat-ja-kehittaminen/maahanmuuttotustaisten-tulkkauspalvelut>

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It is important to ensure that the custodians have understood the concepts and the instructions given to them. During the discussion, concepts are explained to the custodians as necessary, additional questions are asked to ensure they have understood everything, time is given for answering and understanding, clear language is used and, if necessary, what has been said is repeated.

### The child has the right to ECEC

Early childhood education and care is an important part of the Finnish education system. Provisions on ECEC are laid down in the Act on early childhood education and care (540/2018). In addition to the Act, ECEC is governed by the National core curriculum for early childhood education and care (2022), which is a binding document issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education, and by the local practices based on the National core curriculum. In addition, the child's early childhood education and care plan is drawn up for each child. It is advisable to discuss the governing legislation and documents with the custodians.

The child has the right to participate in ECEC before reaching the age of starting school. The task of ECEC is to support the child's growth, development, learning and wellbeing in cooperation with the parents. While the primary responsibility for bringing up children rests with the custodians, early childhood education and care supplements and supports this task. The division of cooperation and responsibility (e.g., instruction of the child's mother tongue/mother tongues, the child's illness or the implementation of support measures) is discussed with the custodians in the discussion about the child's ECEC plan at the latest.

### Importance of regular ECEC

Early childhood is a phase of intense development and learning. The main developmental changes already take place before school age. The events in the child's life during that period of time are therefore meaningful in terms of the child's present and future life.

According to studies, regular and high-quality ECEC has a number of positive impacts on the child. ECEC is developed and reformed actively on the basis of research information. For example, studies have shown that the more the child is exposed to the language learned, the better the child learns it. A multilingual environment does not harm the child's language development.

### Types of ECEC and the personnel

ECEC is provided in an early education centre, in family-based childcare or as open activities in ECEC. It is advisable to discuss the most suitable type of ECEC for the child and the choice of the language of instruction in the child's ECEC with the custodian. The choice of language is affected, for example, when in a bilingual municipality, the custodian may be offered a language course in one national language (Swedish), whereas the child's ECEC is provided in the other national language (Finnish).

It is also advisable to explain to the custodians that the personnel are highly educated and that they have professional competence related to the socio-emotional development of children of ECEC age and supporting their learning. It is also important to tell them that it is not possible work in ECEC without sufficient education and that the people with different titles in ECEC are respected as professionals. The custodians can also be told that a criminal background check is conducted on members of personnel when they start to work in ECEC.

**Read more**

Types and provision of ECEC (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/tietoa-varhaiskasvatuksesta-monialaisen-yhteistyon-tueksi#anchor-varhaiskasvatuksen-toimintamuodot-ja-varhaiskasvatuksen-jarjestaminen>

ECEC is the child's right (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/tietoa-varhaiskasvatuksesta-monialaisen-yhteistyon-tueksi#anchor-varhaiskasvatus-on-lapsen-oikeus>

Applying for a place in ECEC and starting in ECEC (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/varhaiskasvatuksen-palveluohjaus-ja-neuvonta#anchor-kun-lapsen-varhaiskasvatuksen-aloitustulee-ajankohtaiseksi>

What skills are practised in ECEC? (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/tietoa-varhaiskasvatuksesta-monialaisen-yhteistyon-tueksi#anchor-mita-taitoja-varhaiskasvatuksessa-opetellaan>

ECEC is based on research (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/tietoa-varhaiskasvatuksesta-monialaisen-yhteistyon-tueksi#anchor-varhaiskasvatus-perustuu-tutkimukseen>

Activities in ECEC (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/tietoa-varhaiskasvatuksesta-monialaisen-yhteistyon-tueksi#anchor-varhaiskasvatuksen-toiminta-on-suunniteltua-ja-tavoitteellista>

National core curriculum for early childhood education and care in the eRequirements service (in Finnish) <https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/fi/kooste/varhaiskasvatus>

## Cooperation with custodians

Cultural and linguistic diversity and different worldviews in the children's community and surroundings are valued in ECEC. The preconditions for good cooperation in education are a professional, open and respectful attitude towards diverse families and their varying languages, cultures, worldviews and religions, traditions, and views on education. Children's family identities and familial relationships are supported so that each child can perceive their own family as valuable.

Custodians must have the opportunity to influence and participate in the child's ECEC, for example, by coming to read a book in their own language or to talk about their culture. The activity of the personnel supports the cooperation carried out with custodians and custodians' participation, making the diversity of cultures and worldviews a natural part of the child's day in ECEC.

### The child's ECEC plan

The child's ECEC plan is used to agree how the child's development, learning and wellbeing will be supported according to the child's needs in ECEC at the time. The wishes related to the family's language, cultural background or worldview can be recorded in the plan as well as matters that have been agreed together, such as the languages used at home and the use of interpretation services. The objectives and methods for supporting the development of the child's language proficiency, linguistic and cultural identities and self-esteem in a versatile manner are also recorded in the child's plan.

### Time must be reserved for integration

ECEC is an important part of the child's and the family's integration into Finnish society. The custodians should ensure that the child's mother tongue has been entered correctly into the Population Information System. It should be discussed with the custodians what daily and regular participation in ECEC makes possible for the child: learning Finnish or Swedish, making friends, belonging to a community and familiarisation with the immediate environment and Finnish customs. If the child's mother tongue is a language other than Finnish, Swedish or Sámi, the custodians are responsible for teaching the mother tongue.

### Worldview education is discussed with the guardian

It is important to already explain to the custodians what worldview education and communication about activities related to worldview education mean when they are at the familiarisation stage. In addition, for example the family's traditional celebrations can be discussed with the custodian. The goal of worldview education is to promote mutual respect and understanding of varying worldviews as well as to support the development of children's cultural identity and worldview. Worldview education in ECEC focuses on examining the religions and other worldviews present in the group of children together. Religions and worldviews are also examined more widely with the children. Irreligion is examined on an equal basis with other worldviews.

ECEC does not demand or lead to religious, philosophical or political commitment. Not demanding of leading to commitment means that worldviews are examined on an equal basis, without evaluating them. The child must also not be directed towards any worldview and not be influenced in terms of worldviews.

### The child has the right to physical integrity

In Finland, the law prohibits physical punishments of children. The child has the right to physical integrity. The personnel have an obligation to intervene in and discuss these matters with the custodians if suspecting that they occur.

In Finland, female genital mutilation, FGM, is a punishable act under the provisions on assault laid down in the Criminal code. Acts that severely injure a genital organ meet the definition of an aggravated assault. Planning FGM is also about planning an aggravated assault on a child, an offence to which the authorities' notification duty applies. The circumcision of boys is strictly regulated.

Honour-based violence may manifest itself as psychological, physical, sexual and financial violence, pressurising, threatening, forcing, restricting, isolating and persecuting, for example.

### Read more

Legislation concerning ECEC and the system of ECEC plans (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/tietoa-varhaiskasvatuksesta-monialaisen-yhteistyon-tueksi#anchor-lisatietoa-varhaiskasvatuksen-lainsaadannosta-ja-varhaiskasvatussuunnitelmien-kokonaisuudesta>

Check the information recorded on you in the Population Information System (in Finnish) <https://dvv.fi/todistukset-ja-henkilotiedot-vaestotietojarjestelmassa>

Worldview education in ECEC and pre-primary education <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/varhaiskasvatus/varhaiskasvatuksen-tueksi/katsomuskasvatus-varhaiskasvatuksessa-ja-esiopetuksessa> (link in Finnish)

THL Non-medical male circumcision <https://thl.fi/en/guidelines-for-professionals/duty-to-notify-violence-against-a-child/notifying-non-medical-male-circumcision>

THL Female genital mutilation (FGM) <https://thl.fi/en/guidelines-for-professionals/intervening-in-female-genital-mutilation-fgm->

## Starting ECEC and familiarisation with ECEC

The initial discussion and familiarisation in ECEC, exchanging the daily news, and regular discussions about the child's ECEC plan are important for the organisation of the child's ECEC. Successful start in ECEC is significant for the development of cooperation between ECEC and home and for the integration of the family. It helps to create a foundation for a mutually trusting relationship. The cooperation takes into account the diversity of families, children's needs and issues related to custodianship and parenthood.

Acceptance and the attention paid to the family's language and culture plays a significant role in the development of the child's linguistic and cultural identity. The opportunities for participation and cooperation in ECEC are explained to the custodians. During the child's familiarisation period, it is important to encourage the custodian to accompany the child for 1–2 weeks. This gives the child and the custodian an opportunity to learn about the activities and everyday life of the child group.

When the child starts in ECEC, an initial discussion is often arranged. It is also a good idea to tell the families about the different practices related to daily life in ECEC, such as the meals, naps and the role of outdoor activities as part of the pedagogical activities in ECEC. It is also important to go through matters related to clothing, such as the need for clothing according to weather and spare clothes as well as what layered clothing is like. Other things needed by the child during the day in ECEC, the practices of reporting absences, the practices for dropping off or picking up the child are discussed with the custodians and it is ensured that the custodians have the contact details of the ECEC unit. Furthermore, the importance of regular participation in ECEC is explained to the custodians; for example, that the child's linguistic development benefits from daily attendance in ECEC.

### Read more

When it is time for the child to start ECEC (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/varhaiskasvatuksen-palveluohjaus-ja-neuvonta#anchor-kun-lapsen-varhaiskasvatuksen-aloitus-tulee-ajankohtaiseksi>

Read more about cooperation and transfers of information in ECEC (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/varhaiskasvatuksen-ja-neuvolan-yhteisty#anchor-varhaiskasvatuksen-ja-neuvolan-yhteisty-on-lain-velvoittamaa>

**Remember to discuss the following with the custodians:**

- Familiarisation with ECEC together with the child; the custodian accompanies the child for 1–2 weeks
- The content of the child's day in ECEC, e.g., activities appropriate to the age level, goal-oriented activities, opportunities for play and making friends, free meals
- Daily outdoor activities and clothing according to weather
- Naps, spare clothes, nappies, sleep buddy and other things the child will need
- Possible medication according to the agreement on medication
- ECEC is based on shared underlying values, which are based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Act on early childhood education and care
- Upbringing of children in Finland
- The child's right to physical integrity
- Building/strengthening a positive self-image and identity
- The child has the right to receive the support for development, learning and wellbeing they need
- Dropping off and picking up the child
- Cooperation with custodians, e.g., initial discussion, the child's ECEC plan, daily exchange of news, other participation and communication between home and ECEC
- Supporting the child's mother tongue/mother tongues
- Finnish or Swedish as a second language
- What pre-primary education is

## Language-aware ECEC

In ECEC, children's curiosity and interests in the languages, texts and cultures present in the group or in the immediate environment are strengthened. Language-aware ECEC supports the language development of each child and supports the child in learning the language of instruction in ECEC. In language-aware communities, attitudes towards languages and language communities are discussed. The key importance of language for learning, interaction, cooperation, the building of identities and socialisation is understood in such communities. Children are encouraged to diverse use of languages. Bilingual and multilingual children may speak and use their own mother tongues in ECEC. Making multilingualism visible supports children's development in a culturally diverse world.

ECEC personnel must be aware that they are linguistic models for the children and should pay attention to their own use of language and non-verbal communication. The personnel encourage children in diverse language use. Children's individual prerequisites are taken into account in ECEC and children are provided with time and opportunities to practise in varying situations.

Custodians can be encouraged to participate in ECEC activities. The language awareness of the whole group can be enriched by providing custodians and employees who speak different languages with opportunities to teach songs and numbers or read stories in the children's languages. It is important to discuss the importance of reading for the child with the custodian. At the same time, the custodian can also be told about the multilingual services of libraries.

## Instruction of Finnish or Swedish as a second language

The child's language development and learning of the language of instruction in ECEC – Finnish or Swedish –

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are supported in ECEC in a systematic manner, diversely and from the point of view of the child's needs. The language is learned through play in all situations during the child's day. The personnel have conversations with the children, name things with them and, for example, read stories with the children. Teachers specialised in teaching Finnish or Swedish as a second language may also work in ECEC. It is advisable to tell the custodians about their job description.

The importance of the child's regular attendance for the learning of the second language and the fact that learning a language is a time-consuming process are discussed with the custodians. Studies have shown that the child's learning of Finnish may be delayed if the child does not participate in ECEC regularly. According to studies, a multilingual environment does not delay the child's language development.

### Supporting the child's mother tongue or mother tongues

It is important that the child also learns their own mother tongue in addition to Finnish or Swedish. A child may have one or more mother tongues. The knowledge of one's mother tongue lays a foundation for learning other languages. Children may also speak and use their own mother tongues in ECEC while learning the language of instruction in ECEC. The child can learn several languages side by side.

When the proportion of Finnish or Swedish increases during the child's day and its role grows especially in pre-primary education, the custodians should consciously strengthen the child's mother tongues, for example, by reading, naming things and having conversations with the child in their own mother tongue.

The custodian takes care of maintaining the child's mother tongue or mother tongues at home.

Multilingualism in itself does not delay language development and it is not a risk factor for a developmental language disorder.

The custodians have an important role in observing possible problems in the child's learning of their mother tongue. The three-part Developing language-aware pedagogy in early childhood education and care (LangPeda) tool helps to examine the language world of a multilingual child and monitor the progress in the child's skills in Finnish/Swedish in cooperation with the custodians. The custodians are told about the possibilities to use the library, also about how the library can support the learning of the child's own mother tongue.

### Read more

Language aware ECEC and pre-primary education (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/opettajat-ja-kasvattajat/kielitietoinen-varhaiskasvatus-ja-esiopetus>

Learners with an immigration background in ECEC (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/maahanmuuttotataustaiset-oppijat-varhaiskasvatuksessa>

Supporting the language development of a multilingual child (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/opettajat-ja-kasvattajat/monikielisen-lapsen-kielen-kehityksen-tukeminen>

Delayed language development of multilingual children and speech therapy (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/opettajat-ja-kasvattajat/kielen-kehityksen-vaikeudet-varhaislapsuudessa#anchor-monikielisten-lasten-kielen-kehityksen-viiveisyys-ja-puheterapia>

Developing language-aware pedagogy in early childhood education and care (LangPeda) tool and KieliVertailu (LanguageComparison) tools and phonetics supporting language-aware ECEC (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/opettajat-ja-kasvattajat/kielipeda-ja-kielivertailu-tyovalineet-ja-fonetiikka-kielitietoinen#anchor-kielipeda-tyovalineet>

## From pre-primary education to primary education

Pre-primary education is systematic and goal-oriented instruction provided mainly to 6-year-olds and mainly before starting in primary education. Pre-primary education is mandatory and an important period in the life of a child. In pre-primary education, children have an opportunity to be enthusiastic, experiment with and learn new things. The education also provides them with opportunities for diverse interaction and strengthening their social skills.

ECEC, pre-primary education, and primary and lower secondary education form an entity proceeding consistently in relation to the child's growth and learning and build a foundation for life-long learning. During the year in pre-primary education, the child has the right to participate in ECEC that supplements pre-primary education.

Cooperation between pre-primary education and primary education makes starting school easier for the child. When the child moves on to primary education, participation in the instruction of the child's mother tongue, its benefits and usefulness should be discussed with the child's custodians and advice should be provided to them on how to apply for instruction in the child's own mother tongue in the services of the education provider concerned. In many municipalities, the pupil is registered for instruction of the pupil's own mother tongue at the same time as they register for the first grade. The municipality may provide instruction preparing for comprehensive education for children of pre-primary education age who have an immigration background.

### Instruction preparing for comprehensive education for children of pre-primary education age

Some municipalities offer instruction preparing for comprehensive education in pre-primary education. In instruction preparing for comprehensive education, the child receives more support for learning Finnish or Swedish. The child receives preparatory instruction to the amount of 900 hours a year. For children of pre-primary education age, preparatory instruction is organised, for example, by providing pre-primary education and preparatory education to the total amount of 24 hours a week.

Children with an immigrant background *who were born abroad* can participate in the instruction. In preparatory instruction, the children learn the basics of the language of instruction – Finnish or Swedish – and language and concepts related to the different areas of learning functionally and through play. The aim is to provide capabilities for participating in pre-primary education and primary education.

Cooperation with the custodians plays a key role in instruction preparing for comprehensive education. The objectives and contents of instruction as well as practical arrangements will be explained to the custodians. The custodians are informed about the child's progress during preparatory instruction. It is particularly important to describe how the child's learning path will continue after preparatory instruction well in advance.

### Read more

Instruction preparing for comprehensive education (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/perusopetukseen-valmistava-opetus>

Transversal competence and the learning areas (ECEC and pre-primary education) (video, in Finnish) <https://youtu.be/LbzyInU0NBY?si=GLwJUOp3-IZXC-fj>

## Support for the child

Every child in ECEC has the right to get support for learning, development and wellbeing if their needs require it. For example, the support may be activities in small groups, support provided by a special educational needs teacher in early childhood education and care, use of pictures or aids, or additional guidance in different everyday situations. The child may need short-term or long-term support. The support for child's development, learning and wellbeing is always discussed with the custodian and if necessary, a decision is made on it. In discussions with the custodian, it is important to tell the custodian about the support services and explain that the support given to the child does not label the child or have a negative impact on the child's learning path.

### Read more

In ECEC, support is given according to the child's need (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/tietoa-varhaiskasvatuksesta-monialaisen-yhteistyon-tueksi#anchor-varhaiskasvatuksessa-annetaan-tukea-lapsen-tarpeen-mukaan>

Support for the child in ECEC (in Finnish) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/varhaiskasvatus/varhaiskasvatuksen-tueksi/lapsen-tuki-varhaiskasvatuksessa>