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# BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

**A WHITE BOOK TO ADVANCE  
EARLY CHILDHOOD  
INTERVENTION IN EUROPE**

## SUMMARY

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## Executive summary

The following document summarises the main information presented in **Building a brighter future: A White Book to advance Early Childhood Intervention in Europe**.

This document draws on the findings from the [Erasmus+ EarlyBrain project](#) and country-level policy analysis in Belgium, Italy and Spain. It aims to support evidence-based policymaking in Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) across Europe. The document is organised in the following section:

1. **Introduction to the concept of ECI** with a presentation of its historical development, key characteristic and inspiring practices from Portugal, Ukraine, the together the United-States, Brazil and Australia.
2. **Country factsheets on Belgium, Italy and Spain** presenting their respective ECI national frameworks, good practice, and a comparative analysis highlighting challenges, and transferrable solutions.

**Policy recommendations** to EU policy makers, Member States and services providers, as well as guidelines for measuring impact assessment and an effective implementation of ECI services.

## What is ECI?

**ECI refers to services that support young children who have, or are at risk of, developmental delays or disabilities due to biological or environmental factors, and their families.** The initial chapter of the White Book outlines the development of ECI from a research perspective and highlights international and European legal advancements. It presents the transition of ECI from a medical model, traditionally conducted in rehabilitation settings that excluded parents and focused on addressing the child's "deficits," to a holistic, approach embedding the child in its family and community. It **focuses on the strengths of the child and the family**, actively involving and empowering them and **aligns with international rights-based policy frameworks such as the United Nation Conventions on the rights of the Child and of Persons with Disabilities**. Additionally, ECI plays a crucial role in **preventing institutionalisation**. By addressing the family needs, it prevents the placement of children in institutional settings and supports the transition from institutional care to support within families and the community.

In the same chapter, three international examples that serve as key **benchmarks for ECI** are presented. Key features, benefits, challenges, and potential for transferability are outlined.

- **Portugal, National System of Early Intervention (SNIEP):** Developed in the late 90s, it ensures accessible, family-centred services through early screening, identification, and tailored support to children 0–6 and their families.
- **Ukraine, Early Childhood Intervention service:** Started in 2002, it supports children 0–4. Its methodology is aligned with the most advanced approaches to promote child participation and family wellbeing, with support continuing despite war and displacement. Methods include interviews, coaching, hands-off techniques, and video. Strengths lie in inclusion, functional goals, and expert training.
- **The Basics Learning Network:** Initiated at Harvard University in 2015, it aims to engage caregiver-child relationships, particularly in marginalised communities, using research-based methods starting from birth. It involves health and support professionals and shares practical resources (videos, tip sheets, toolkits) through community settings, online platforms, and media.

## Comparative analysis of Belgium, Italy and Spain

The country factsheet's chapter outlines the state of play across these three countries, highlighting their legal frameworks and implementation models for ECI. The chapter includes **three examples of good practices** per country offering family-based support to professionals, and local authorities. For each practice, a comprehensive description is provided including what organisation implement it and where, the target group, how the service is run, its main strengths and challenges, as well as the potential transferability of the model.

Services offer include:

- Events and activities to **connect and engage families**;
- Access to **leisure activities** (playground, recreational, culture) and sport inside and outside schools for children and their families;
- The **provision of childcare, intervention services** for babies and toddlers coordinate across education, health, and social services.

**Common challenges and barriers** across all three countries include:

- **The lack of standardised frameworks** is seen as a key challenge in all countries.
- **Lack of harmonised regional definitions** can lead to **uneven regional implementation**, with decentralised ECI systems and different definitions in Belgium and Spain and big disparities between regions in Italy.
- In addition, **insufficient cross-sectoral coordination**, between health, education, and social services, is highlighted as a key weakness across the three countries.
- The **lack of funding**, both for the overall policies and for the individual practices, which can exacerbate inequalities in access and quality of care.
- Shortages of **trained staff and limited professional development opportunities**, highlighted with a challenge for many of the practices, combined with the lack of long-term commitment from national and local authorities.
- The **lack of data** on children with disabilities makes it difficult to track progress, assess needs, and link relevant policy areas.

All these factors contribute to **uneven access and quality of services**. In all countries, systemic reforms and financial investments are crucial for consistent, high-quality early intervention. In the case of Belgium and Spain, they need more national-level strategies, particularly for deinstitutionalisation and inclusive play spaces.

The analysis of adaptable practices shows that the key lies in a **holistic approach** that places the child within their family and community. This model promotes universal access through personalised support, cross-sector collaboration, and culturally sensitive interventions. **Training for professionals and parents** is essential to create inclusive environments and foster family and community engagement. Trust and resilience are further built through **accessible play spaces and supportive activities** for both vulnerable families and those with children with disabilities. For effective scaling, strategies **must be locally adapted and backed by strong policies, with sustainable funding, and coordinated systems** across health, education, and social sectors.

# Key recommendations to set up and implement ECI system

The final chapter presents recommendations to EU and national policymakers, service providers, and civil society, and includes two guidelines on implementing ECI practices and stakeholders' engagement. It concludes with recommendations for a robust monitoring framework to assess the impact of ECI services and practices. This section will summarise recommendations made to EU and national authorities, service providers, civil society, and citizens. For more details, see Chapter 3 of the White Book.

## **Recommendations for EU policy makers:**

1. Initiate an **EU-wide strategy on ECI** as part of the next phase of the **European Disability Strategy**. This shall include:

- A **comparative study** on national ECI policies and practices;
- EU **guidelines** for ECI systems, the promotion of the development of national ECI systems;
- **Exchange of information and experiences**, via the Disability Platform;
- The use of **EU funding and** tools and scale up the dissemination of knowledge and best practices on ECI.

2. **Enhance training and workforce development on ECI** under the **Union of Skills Strategy**. This shall include:

- The integration of ECI into the guidelines for curriculum development in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC);
- The development and dissemination EU-level training resources, such as micro-credentials and common learning modules;
- The creation of a platform for ECI training;
- The promotion of cross-border professional exchanges and the recognition of skills and qualifications for the ECI workforce.

3. Improve **monitoring and data collection** on ECI. This shall include:

- Develop **ECI monitoring indicators** as a part of the Child Guarantee and European Semester's monitoring frameworks and align their data collection systems;
- National indicators based on these frameworks and align data collection on ECI.

## **Recommendations for national policy makers:**

1. **Develop and implement a comprehensive national ECI strategy**, based on country situation analysis with clear quality standards, sustainable funding, and mechanisms for active family participation and inter-sectoral collaboration.
2. **Harmonise definitions, legal frameworks, and service standards** to ensure consistent definitions of disability and inclusive education, aligning laws and policies to promote equitable access to ECI services nationwide with uniform quality and inclusivity criteria.
3. **Invest in training and capacity building** by establishing and funding standardised, continuous programmes for professionals in health, education, and social sectors to enhance collaboration and improve competencies in family-centred, and inclusive practices.
4. **Enhance data collection, monitoring, and evaluation systems** by establishing robust, harmonised data systems to track children with disabilities and monitor ECI service delivery. Develop and use ECI indicators to monitor the Child Guarantee implementation and disseminate knowledge on sector-specific responsibilities to improve inter-ministerial coordination.
5. **Promote inclusive education and deinstitutionalisation** with clear strategies, goals, timelines, and resources, that enable children with disabilities to grow up in family and community settings.

### **Recommendations for services and practitioners:**

1. **Embed family-centred, participatory approaches in service delivery.** by regularly reviewing methodologies, providing interdisciplinary training to staff on inclusive and rights-based practices and fostering co-production.
2. Strengthen **cross-sector coordination and collaboration**, through clear protocols and communication channels joint planning frameworks, and integrated case management, to **align goals and track progress for individual child** and family needs.
3. **Ensure accessibility and inclusion in early childhood environments**, including play and learning spaces, using **assistive technologies** and tailored materials and conducting ongoing evaluation in collaboration with children and families.

### **Recommendations for civil society and citizens**

1. **Advocate for a national inclusive, family-centred ECI framework:** Build alliances to push for inclusive, family-centred ECI strategies, ensuring sustainable funding, quality standards, and family participation in policymaking.
2. **Monitor implementation and promote accountability:** Participate in national monitoring mechanisms on child and disability policies, produce independent reports to spotlight gaps and successful practices and empower families and communities to share their experience and hold authorities accountable.
3. **Strengthen family and community participation:** Create platforms for co-creation, support family capacity-building in decision-making, and run inclusive campaigns promoting diversity and children's rights.



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