TRANSATLANTIC FORUM ON INCLUSIVE EARLY YEARS
INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN FROM MIGRANT AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Integrated systems for Children and Families – Continuity and alignment of Services
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Synthesis report

1. Setting the scene

Quite a range of different services in our welfare states support families with young children in many different ways. Not only do people have a right to these kinds of basic provisions and mechanisms, but there is also overwhelming evidence on how important these services can be in the early years for children's holistic development, now and in the long run. The most vulnerable groups however, those who would benefit the most[1], not only experience huge barriers in accessing them; they also experience difficulties in finding their way in the maze of existing services or in making smooth transitions from one provision to another. More and better integration and alignment between such services (childcare, preschool, preventive health, social services, parenting support...) is being developed or under discussion in many countries, with strong arguments, both on cost efficiency and on content improvement. Albeit that the Irish Minister for Children and Youth affairs, James Reilly, correctly pointed out that the focus often still remains with older children, more needs to be done in the early years and that better integration and alignment of service need to render higher quality services.

Researching, discussing and working on quality, which includes accessibility as well, has lead the ECEC sector to move forward on this issue of integration and better alignment of services. Michel Vandenbroeck sets the scene, starting from the common issue of poverty: a multi-faceted, persistent and intergenerational problem of lack of both material and immaterial resources. An increasingly shared answer could lie in more integration of services, offering more accessibility and addressing real needs, albeit in diverse ways, for different reasons, set in different contexts and thus raising new questions to solve. While there is a common agreement on the necessity to work towards more integrated services, more cooperation, smoother transitions and better alignment, practice shows that this is often easier said than done, as most (ECEC) services all have their own history, visions and missions and as responsibilities remain scattered among different authorities.

Bronwen Cohen adds on to this diversity in services, pointing out the differences in e.g. the staff qualifications, the programmes offered, the finance system, the orientation etcetera. While the discussion on integrated services is not all that new as such, shifts in the content are noticeable. It is not only a question of efficiency and closing the gaps. It is also about universal entitlements, having and exercising equal rights on access and enjoying services, reaching all families and raising the general level of qualifications of staff. This debate is also framed by the larger policy context: is there a split system in ECEC or not? On what policy level are services being financed? Figures show that a more integrated ECEC

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[1] See also TFIEY, meeting 1 on accessibility
(http://en.calameo.com/read/00177429593a24d899610?authid=ydOk80GNRu0b)

system, as we know them in some Scandinavian countries, is more successful reaching disadvantaged groups of babies and toddlers, compared to countries with a split system.

Another issue in the integration debate is the question of what there is TO integrate. Charlie Bruner brings illustrations on child poverty and the lack of basic provisions in the US altogether. He points out on the benefits of combining knowledge on children's well-being and development opportunities in a multidisciplinary way and makes it clear, yet again, that it does take a village to raise a child. Systems need to be built, in which links are made between services of ECEC, health, family support with attention for the diversity among families and children (e.g. disabilities, ethnicity, socio-economic situation...). in suh a system, every service has and knows its role and everyone does what fits his practice and expertise best. More specifically, Charlie Bruner warns that 'If we don't give opportunities to children in poverty , there will be no more middle class left in the US.'

2. The many shapes and forms of integrated systems

Integrated services, cooperation, networking ... these are all frequently recommended strategies, while it is not always clear what it really means in the heads of all professionals and organisations involved. Different models have been developed. Some have grown bottom-up, some were introduced top-down. Some build on stronger links between two sectors, some comprise the whole range of early years services. During the 5th TFIEY several illustrations were presented.

The case of Ireland (see Canavan , Doherty and Lughadha): strategic planning and monitoring

In 2000, the Irish government drafted a first National Children's Strategy, based on the UN CRC and aimed at proactive work on improving children's well-being on different levels (education, health, social inclusion etc.). Starting from the child's perspective, instead of a services' perspective, was a radically new way of thinking and working. However, joining policy levels did not automatically or immediately translate in joined up workforces and services. A shared vision, clear planning and strong monitoring are all required tools to foster and shape better and meaningful cooperation.

Several strategies and frameworks were to follow, designing agenda's for children's services, including clearly defined outcomes to be reached, as well as specific guidelines for all professionals involved, on all levels. In this national context, 1 single stand-alone Children's department and 1 minister for Children were established for the first time in 2011. A new national framework 2014-2020 – Better Outcomes: Brighter Futures - was drafted containing 136 policy commitments on 5 overarching 'national outcomes' for children and young people: Active and healthy, physical and mental well-being/ Achieving the fullest potential in all areas of learning and development/ Safe and protected from harm/ Economic security and opportunity and Connected, respected and contributing to their world.

This framework also contains more general transformational goals, such as emphasizing the role of parents, value investment in early years, listening to the voice of children, focusing on quality (effective, efficient and trusted services) and keeping an eye on transitions by minding the gaps.

National targets are set for services to gather around and identify a shared agenda and common, comprehensive and coordinated approach in order to reach the expected outcomes.

In order to translate these high ambitions into real changes for children, some new structures were set up, while existing structures were reorganised towards more alignment. Drafting plans is important, but implementing them is what makes a change. The implementation is to be carefully monitored and full

commitment is expected from all sectors on all levels. Ongoing communication needs to make the whole framework and approach to become 'common sense' for all services involved. This is work in progress, as views on tricky issues such as 'poverty' and how to fight it, are not always the same.
This kind of collaborative work requires a collaborative mindset: all stakeholders need to get involved from the very first start to decide what the most needed actions would be, in order to actually make a change and reach the desired outcomes.

The case of Switzerland (see Neumann , Tschumper , Zimmerli) : putting the puzzle together on different policy levels
ECEC in Switzerland is characterised by its administration on canton and community level, which results in many different regulations and services. Care arrangements have several sources for diversification and complexity. They are influenced by a complex interplay of affordability, accessibility and desirability. Determining factors here, are for example: the parent's needs and choices, different structures of day care services, the amount of facilities on the local community level, different regional childcare cultures and different rules and the conditions of enrolment in the settings.
Integration on this rather scattered ECEC-field should first and foremost serve the interests of the children involved and it should answer to the needs of families and the specificities of the local context (rural/urban, disadvantaged/affluent areas...). More integrated policies have been advocated both on the national (Primokiz programme) and the city level (Primano programme). The Primokiz programme is a cross sectoral programme - health care, social services and education – by which services are offered on different levels: basic services for all, more specific services for specific groups, and early prevention and intervention services where needed. The whole programme aims at positive outcomes for all children's development. Crucial elements are political will and strong networks between all providers (both horizontal and vertical). The Primano programme, successfully implemented in Bern, aims at improving access to ECEC services, linking childcare, home visits and schools.

The case of UK and Ireland: cooperate towards social change
In the UK, the Pen Green centre (see Whalley) was developed in the 1980's by practitioners and families together from the very start, building on local resilience and the shared commitment to improve children's life chances. In a context of severe poverty, high unemployment and lack of services, the Pen Green centre for Children and Families started with a strong vision on emancipation and empowerment, building on what was there, on actual needs of families and children. Many different services are deployed, such as ECEC, adult community education, health services, inclusive education as well as training and research. Principles of mutual respect, inclusion, cultural negotiation, co-construction, capacity building and commitment are translated in all programs and actions. "Co-production is what Pen Green is all about." Parents are involved in the planning, the programming, as volunteers, as learners, as advocates for their children and possibly staff in training. Parents and staff bring together 2 sets of knowledge: the professional, public, generalised theoretical knowledge about children and their development and the personal theory about a child in a given context. On the level of staff this requires a.o. a qualified staff with a theoretical basis but being reflective and open to dialogue, good working conditions in a well-resourced and securely funded provision and a focus on social change. Principles of equality, cultural humility and proactive work are at the basis of all the work.
Stepping away from classical approaches in working in severe disadvantaged areas has also proven to be successful in Dublin, with the Early Intervention Programme in the Colin area (see Drayne). In this

program the vicious cycle of disadvantage has been turned around into a virtuous cycle of better chances. Both private and public sectors have started to cooperate in developing programme outlines with clear goals, to be measured by detailed indicators. In cooperation between several sectors (health and social care, schools, community work, volunteers, local business…) a detailed action plan was developed, containing services such as home visits, speech and language therapy for children, an early parenting programme, outreach work, counselling and community based activities, fostering social cohesion. On all actions a programme performance management is monitoring the outcomes in detail.

The universalist perspective: low threshold Family Centres
Universalist services, combining different functions in a low threshold setting, have been developed to serve a wide range of families with advice and support and to allow people to meet and share parenting experiences. Fostering the holistic development of children in diverse contexts is a central aim. The input from parents themselves is essential in the underlying philosophy of families and professionals learning from each other.

In the Scandinavian model of Family Centres (see Kekkonen), different services work together on fostering stimulating factors for children's well-being and holistic development, while trying to bring answers or mediate the negatively influencing factors. Both parents and children are welcome to a complete range of services – maternal health care, childcare, preventive social work - within the same premises, aligned with the local needs and context and ready to respond to all kinds of questions and issues that turn up in any possible course of parenting (parental stress, poverty, pedagogical questions...). In the Family Centre model, different levels of advice, help and early support are available: ranging from universal services for all (e.g. preventive health for babies, parent meetings), over selected interventions for specific pedagogical questions (e.g. referral to a social service) to indicated interventions for serious problems (e.g. prevent placement of a child). More specialised support or intervention is not offered in the Family Centre but there is an openness for parents to feel at ease to ask questions and receive timely and adequate referral when necessary.

Research has resulted in describing 5 types of centre models, of which the multidisciplinary model has shown to be the most integrated one. Critical success factors would be: clearly defined and understood goals and action plans, strong and cross-sectoral coordination, multi-professional cooperation and integrative management. Specific competences that are needed in order to deliver qualitatively strong services are: communication and customer orientation, problem solving and innovative thinking, knowledge of different (sub)cultures, leadership and teamwork, pedagogical skills, knowledge on special needs and intercultural issues. The multidisciplinary model has been proven to be an effective one and the preferable one for parental involvement, peer support, low threshold meeting places and the build-up of social networks. There is however, still room for improvement on the level of dialogue and stronger participation of both parents and children.

Another example of accessible basic support provisions is the Flemish concept of Family Centres, the 'Houses of the Child', that have recently been constructed (see Verhegge). In order to keep it as close as possible to local context and needs, the idea is to have local municipalities and services to engage themselves in a system of cooperation, bottom-up. The legal requirements are kept to a minimum to allow adaptation to the local context and leaving a range of freedom to the initiators. This results in a variety of cooperation and integration schemes throughout Flanders.

To be eligible for funding as a House of the Child, certain partnering organisations/functions need to be engaged as a minimum: preventive health care, parenting support and social support and social cohesion. They can either work in shared premises or not, mix private and public services or not and add other providers as well. The goals of these partnerships are a.o. to increase accessibility of services, more adequate and timely referrals, increase professional competences, avoid both gaps and overlap and exchange knowledge and experiences. A House of the Child is not aimed at specific groups but open to all parents and children, which should avoid stigmatization. As all parents at a given time have questions or need advice, they can all simply walk in and look for what they may need. The starting point is not so much an actual problem, but simply being a family or having a baby. Very often, the start is with an Infant Consultation Bureau, a well-known service in Flanders since many years and with an attendance of over 95% of parents with young children. The element of bringing families together in a non-formal setting is an important focus, adding to social cohesion. Having families, both parents and children, actively participate, beyond the mere 'customer' status, does remain a challenge.

3. What makes integration and cooperation work?

Out of all these varied examples, some elements seem to come up over and over again. While most of these may seem evident, they don't always prove to be so easy to achieve. Working together and building bridges between sectors and services takes time and commitment. What was mentioned as key points in any model of integration of services and programmes:
-   A shared vision on the issue and the approach
-   Deep-rooted respect for democratic values, such as reciprocity, participation and dialogue, respect for diversity and an open, no-blame approach
-   Multidisciplinary work, without a hierarchy between disciplines
-   Clear planning, knowing who is responsible for what, setting goals and agreement on how to monitor outcomes
-   A child perspective instead of a service perspective
-   Approaching parents as partners, not customers
-   Strong leadership and integrative management
-   Aimed at structural, systemic change (not just individual solutions)
-   Involving all stakeholders from the start, including reaching out to families to begin to understand what is really needed
-   Co-constructing practice and actions: professionals and families thinking, working and acting together
-   Staff is well-trained, knowledgeable of social and cultural diversity, and open for reflection and questioning
-   Use a combination of impact measuring methods, both qualitative and quantitative.
-   Respecting and considering the local context and needs of the community

4. Working on smooth transitions between home, care and education

From an early age, most children will be spending their daily lives in several different settings. They make a first move from home to childcare and later they move on to Kindergarten, primary and secondary

school. Depending on the care and education systems, some of these transitions can be either smooth enough or pretty harsh. In essence, every transition can hold promises and excitement or can represent (yet another) barrier or challenge, especially for children with a background of poverty and/or migration. What factors can make transitions easier and more positive?

From home to ECEC

An Italian (see Balduzzi) and a French (see Garnier) example show how the move from home to childcare or Kindergarten can be made easier and beneficial to the child, the parent and the practitioner at the same time. It is important to bridge the gap between both worlds.

In a small scaled French action research, involving the views of children, parents and professionals, it becomes clear how different systems of care and education can influence the child's and the parents' well-being and promote the feeling of being welcome and at ease. In so-called transition classes, presented as a good practice, teachers, teaching assistants and an additional 'éducateur jeunes enfants' work together in a non-hierarchical setting, invest in communication with parents and in offering a warm, responsive group environment where children can both play and learn. Children and parents are not simply expected to adjust to a school setting, which is not reciprocal; they become part of the group and shape it together. Different than in school-like Kindergarten classes, children are considered competent, can make choices and become part of a group: they are allowed some time to 'become' pupils. In more classical school settings they need to 'be' a pupil from day one and there is not really a place for the parents to get involved in their children's growing up. Different underlying ideas of childhood (here and now or future citizen-in-the-making) and of growing up (in a process of continuity or based on test results) will shape different practices.

Involving parents, being aware of the importance of their input, is also the main consideration behind the Italian 'ambientamento' approach in childcare. This entails more than an 'adjustment' ('inserimento'), mostly sharing information on the child and the childcare centre, at the start as it was the case earlier. Based on a changed view on childcare – from necessary evil to a valued educational setting – and influenced by a growing diversity and interculturality in Italian society, the necessary reflection on adjustment approaches lead to a shift from the 'inserimento' to the 'ambientamento' approach. As described by Mantovani, ambientamento refers to the emotional and psychological process of gradual acclimatization, exploration, knowledge exchange, emotional investment, representations and ambivalences, solutions an connections that all involved actors – being children, parents and educators alike – play out during transitions. It is no longer just an issue of going through the motions when a child first starts attending childcare aimed at gaining the necessary information. It is a process of mutual acclimatization, getting to know each other on a daily basis, by which children are gradually getting used and feeling welcome in the childcare service. It involves welcoming each family and respecting all their peculiarities, their education style and beliefs, and building a relation of trust step by step. This becomes even more important in diverse societies. This approach is based on practices like pedagogical documentation, parental support and in-service training of practitioners. A recognised risk is that this approach, being essentially co-constructive and reflective, could also become some kind of traditional procedure, taken for granted and thus losing the negotiative character. Another risk could be the effects of the economic crisis, leaving access to childcare only to middle class families and losing the focus on social cohesion.

From ECEC to primary school

The issue of transitions was also illustrated in an EU study on early school leaving (see Peeters), building on the link between attending ECEC and later school success. In this study transition was considered as part of the quality debate. Where high quality ECEC has been proven to be conducive to later school achievement in general, this has certainly been the case for children with disadvantaged backgrounds, e.g. by closing the language gap, reducing grade retention, better integration, reducing risk behavior and better physical and mental health. Attending ECEC helps children to be more socially and emotionally mature and prepares them better for school. Therefore, when ECEC is expected to, in a way, prepare children for (lifelong) learning, we need to consider the effects of the transitions between childcare, pre-school and primary education as well. Such transitions can be experienced as a cultural shock and they can bring many challenges, again more often for children in poverty. Most transitions are tailored to the standards of middleclass parents, who are able to better prepare their children. Disadvantaged families often seem more scared of transitions because they are confronted again with their 'own' failure. Also the visions and expectations between professionals of ECEC and primary education are different. ECEC workers focus on the behavioral and non-cognitive and social development, while teachers are trained to prepare children for learning, counting, reading. The differences between both settings are multiple: relationships, teaching style, activities, environment and space and coping with all these changes is not always so easy. Attention is needed here since positive transition experiences provide important motivational attitudes towards (later) learning, school and abilities to succeed. It is important to view transition, not as a one-time event, but as a process of continuity, beginning well before school starts (but avoiding the risk of 'schoolification' of ECEC). Smooth transitions require a readiness of the family, of the community, of ECEC and of the school. This re-conceptualised view of school readiness requires in other words a continuity in education, with ECEC as an essential part of it, building the foundation for the subsequent levels, while the situation today still shows too much fragmentation between the different education levels. Education continuity is also reflected in continuity with home and the surrounding community. Effective transition approaches, therefore, need to take families and the community into account. With the increasing heterogeneity of today's families, parental involvement and partnership with ECEC and schools is crucial to adjust (pre-)school services to ethnic, cultural, linguistic and other forms of diversity. Moreover, active parent participation in the life of their children from the very early years may guarantee their participation in the education of their children at later stages as well.

Not only a pedagogical continuity is needed but also a continuity in quality in order to sustain the many benefits of ECEC throughout the education career. A well-balanced education system is reflected in 4 dimensions: efficiency (with every part reinforcing the results of previous stages), equity (with equal opportunities for every child, regardless of their background), cohesion (shared vision on education and co-responsibility) and representativeness (diversity of pupils being mirrored by diversity of staff). It should be obvious that these dimensions are more difficult to reach in a split system than in an integrated system. Pedagogical and professional continuity is hindered by the different visions on children's learning, different training and qualifications of staff, different teaching approach and a perseverant view on ECEC being mostly care and little education. Curriculum continuity, fostering a smooth transition from play-oriented and child-centred early year settings to more structured and systematic school settings, is hard to obtain when several countries still lack a 0-3 age curriculum. In combination with a lower-qualified workforce this can be a cause for large discrepancies. For structural continuity, allowing easier transitions, we need close cooperation between educational levels and most importantly close

cooperation between teachers working with children. While this does happen on the initiative of professionals, little is regulated on a more structural policy level.

The transition debate is often still set within a 'school readiness' debate, but is this the correct or only question? (see Dunlop) Throughout the development of children, the relational approach, social interaction and communication is important for their sense of self and well-being. Emotional well-being comes from engagement, interaction, companionship, identity, sense of self, pride in achievements, reciprocal relationships and inter-subjectivity. Ideally, we can see this in transition processes as well.

The purpose of ECEC is not only to prepare children for school. Aiming at school readiness, without considering differences in family income (25% of children in Scotland live in poverty!), housing and nutrition, overall set goals for children can and will not be reached. Poverty has been having a huge impact in children's school success and even on average life expectancy. It has become clear that curricula or standards on school readiness have not been differentiated enough to correctly assess children's development and competencies. And again, the issue is not simply to get children ready for schools, but also to get schools ready for the different needs of children. E.g. Save the Children Scotland recognizes the need to provide additional support in the early years for children living in poverty, because there is clear evidence that children who grow up in poverty are starting school at a serious disadvantage compared to their classmates. In this sense, school readiness is a problematic concept since it is usually based on a particular model of the (middle class) child and it is often being used as gate keeping for school. This gate keeping puts families under pressure. Transitions and gate keeping are associated with certain skills, but parents and teachers can have different views on which skills are important.

Transitions can be positive, containing opportunities for change and growth. But for children with a disadvantaged background, it can also be negative and create challenges, new barriers and risks of exclusion. To foster the positive aspects of transitions, some elements need to be carefully considered, such as:

- the extent to which children are able to develop a sense of their own identity in the early years through opportunities for choice, self-regulation, success (in real things) and positive engagement with others, and how this is sustained over time,
- having friends and going to school with friends,
- the child's first teacher in school,
- having opportunities to start afresh and re-invent yourself,
- the extent to which any new setting allows children to demonstrate what they already know and are able to do and the extent to which children and young people feel valued in the new setting
- being in an environment where the focus is on learning rather than behaviour
- the initial contacts families have with the educational system
- the capacity of professional educators to work with families rather them telling them about education and their child.

Rethinking transitions will require more cooperation between ECEC and primary school practitioners, and more involvement of and communication with parents and children. The primary school sector can get inspired by the ECEC sector here: how to get to know children through play, how to relate better to children when you get information from the parents, how to communicate better with parents and improve encountering skills, how to create a sense of belonging and being accepted for who you are.

From Birth to Third Grade – Equal Opportunity for All (the US context)

Ensuring readiness for future academic success through aligned preparation in the early years is critical, particularly for language minority learners (or English Language Learners, in the US context). Through a focus on family and parent engagement, quality teaching in the Pre-kindergarten to third grade years, and expanded learning opportunities, all driven by strong program and system data capability to allow for continuous program improvement, the Road Map Project in Washington state, as presented by Lynda Pederson, seeks to create a pathway to success for all students from "cradle to career".

A repeated theme that arose over the course of the Forum was the importance as well as the limitations of aligned and shared data in order to achieve service integration. Several speakers alluded to the importance not only of having access to comprehensive data, but of the need for training and assistance in the effective use and employment of such data, echoing the importance of investing in people and training in order to successfully integrate across programs and sectors. The deliberate inclusion of such training opportunities was an important piece of the Road Map Project

Making explicit considerations of how to ensure that aligned services are meeting the needs of migrant and other minority children in particular, Sam Whiting and Roxana Norouzi presented the Racial Equity Theory of Change being undertaken as a strategy in collaboration with the Road Map Project to ensure that an integrated birth to third grade strategy not only aims to narrow opportunity and achievement gaps for minority populations, but that it does so in an inclusive way that is mindful of potential underlying tensions. The Racial Equity Theory of Change emphasizes the need for individual as well as organizational change in order to sustain a real movement toward equity and inclusion—as such, the importance of increasing community input and giving a voice to those least likely to be heard is a critical element of the strategy, which is meant to inform every aspect of early childhood practice and policy in Washington state. Again, this presentation provided a reminder of the importance of the quality of human relationships in fostering effective communication and collaboration.

5. **Governance and effective cooperation**

After presentations on different models of integrated services, Vibeke Bing gives an overview of elements in an integrated system that works, the Swedish Family Centres. These centres combine different services (ante-, peri- and post-natal health care for babies and parents, social services and preschool services) in one location. This is not just a question of sharing a workplace by professionals who used to be settled in their own business; it is above all a search to find a common set of values, common goals and a shared vision on quality in servicing families. What are the priorities? How to offer services that are felt as needed by different families with different questions? How to assure access for all? … Many questions which require more than a formal cooperation to get sorted. Resources (staff and budgets) from the different services are collectively organized and managed and the underlying idea is that it is the parents who actually feed into the concept of continuity; they start coming by during pregnancy and keep coming back for the other services (open pre-school, meeting places, health care, parenting support …). Remarkably, there is no national legislation on Family Centres, but they have grown on the municipal level from 35 (1997) to 220 (2013) throughout the country, fuelled by local initiative and now, national policies on health and welfare do highlight the advantages of this type of cooperation.

This may all sound easier than it actually is. It is necessary to invest e.g. in time, energy and funding to get agreements between different responsible agencies and authorities, in developing a multidisciplinary steering group, in strategic planning and setting goals and in an effective management structure. Content wise the Family Centres honour the principle to maintain a balance between universal policies, aimed at providing for the well-being of all children and targeted approaches, aimed at supporting the most disadvantaged. It is vital that all elements in the system agree on what the content of the services should be to avoid confusion among staff itself and among the families that use the service. To support and facilitate the work in this multi-professional and multi-agency setting, daily communication and self-reflection tools are available. Also, a new training module 'working at a Family Centre' has been developed.

All in all, this model has proven to be successful and led to better outcomes for children, especially because of the low-threshold open pre-school, which has been highly appreciated by parents and children of all social strata. It has become clear that putting the main focus on the universalism (basic services for all) is key; working too much on targeted services or more interventionist approaches creates the risk of losing the 'ground floor' of the house. This has led to inspiring thoughts to consider for the future: why not increase the links to primary schools and how to strengthen efforts to better support immigrant families?

On US side, the Alameda County Early Childhood System is presented by Janis Burger. In this system as well, universal, more preventive services are linked to more targeted interventionist support for 'at risk' and 'high risk' families and situations. For different age groups, different services are offered such as e.g. parental support, playgroups, home visits, parent café's, socio-emotional and development support. The main principles are shared: parents in the lead, holistic approach, well trained workforce, common outcomes and data sharing and formal and informal supports. On a cross-sectoral level, the focus is on improving communication, developing child friendly policies and practices and initiating system changes. Indicators were developed to monitor whether children are in fact thriving, healthy and ready to move on to school. Different than in many European states (public funding), the funding here relies on combined efforts of state budget and private funding (e.g. by philanthropic organisations).

6. Policy debate and takeaways

Policymakers (Richard Buery, New York, Sean Holland, Northern Ireland and Håkan Linnarsson, Sweden) all agreed on the added value of cross-agency cooperation and the sense of strong leadership. Support can be offered in many different ways: better and reliable funding, less bureaucratic requirements, alignment of regulations, support staff, time and space for dialogue and coordination.

Clear thinking needs to be done on the question whether to create new structures or more collaboration among existing ones. E.g. integration of health and social services in Ireland has not really done so much better for young children than before, as they need to serve all age groups and choices need to be made. There is also the risk of overlap and duplication. In every field of public work, there is 'waste', that could be decreased by integrating services, but this has to be carefully considered. Different professionals will have different perspectives on children's lives and chances. This again, may turn out to be a barrier instead of leading to better services. Politics usually react on crisis situations. In child protection e.g., the death of a child can be a trigger, but at the same time it distorts reality and the real daily work in early

years. Policymakers need to keep an open look, start from the <u>perspective of the service users and their needs</u>, and focus on the larger picture: invest in early years from a universalist perspective, not only in problematic areas or child protection issues.

There is also the 'Be careful what you wish for' challenge. When professionals want to share more data, they have not always thought beforehand what should be shared, when, why and with whom. There is a tendency to join cooperative integration of services as long as the co-working is relevant for the professional themselves. In order to have efficient and successful cooperation, <u>all participants will need to give up some of their own beliefs, working methods and vision</u>. There is a need for not only regulations and protocols, but also for human relationships, and building a common understanding and language. We also need to be realistic: <u>cooperation takes enormous amounts of time even when there already is communication</u>. There is competition among partners as well and mandatory cooperation does not always result in real cooperation.

Another <u>danger is the one of using 'averages' as policy bases</u>. While Sweden e.g. is considered to be the ultimate welfare state, there is also the reality of severe poverty, xenophobia, social exclusion and even young children who are starving. Moving away from the average and address the problem where it is and share this with public opinion. "We all know places where we don't want our own kids to live."(Linnarsson).

Looking at the need for sustainability of integrated services, <u>public funding seems essential</u>. "Charity will never guarantee sustainability, only taxes will!" (Holland) <u>Private or charity funding can serve the need for experimental space</u>, adding new possibilities, try out time, but it should be used wisely and with an eye on the long term. Great ideas are not enough here: think about how funds can transform practice in the end. Philanthropy can in fact innovate, transform, change, inspire but political commitment for adequate public funding is the only guarantee for sustainability and long term effects.

Offering integrated services in itself will have little effect on living conditions of families as such. <u>Action on different levels is needed</u> combining commitment of parents, authorities and communities to address the lack of personal resources, provide material resources and install supportive services in the community. It really does take a village…

In order to monitor what really works, what really makes a difference for families, big scale quantitative data need to be completed with 'small' qualitative data: observations, self-evaluation, documentation, children's and parent's voices … There is more evidence than only RCT outcomes. Combining several data can add to the arguments for more investment in early years. Professionals also need this diversity in data: a social worker cannot use the child abuse statistics in his daily practice, but he can use what qualitative research shows on how to relate to abuse victims. The quantitative return on investment argument can have its value but "we should not ever turn children's lives into a future commodity!" (Holland) We should stop to justify investing in basic children's services only when it concerns children in poverty. These debates, are not only politically, but also ethically framed. Policymakers need to take up responsibility and foundations can be active advocates in these debates.

7. Lessons learned?

- Integration of services seems to ease the access for disadvantaged groups (Cohen) and it can be financially sound (Kekkonen)
- Both horizontal and vertical networking is important (Primokiz)
- There are many ways and drivers of integration and alignment: very structured or regulated, bottom-up initiatives, combining existing services or new services emerging thanks to inspiring people (Pen Green)
- Integrated servicing does require very strong leadership and commitment of all participants to build a common vision, share values
- Investing in integration = investing in people
- Transitions are not just set moments in time, but a process of change, in which reciprocal adjustment is essential
- Links are made not only between services, but also between and within families and communities
- Integration of services requires ongoing dialogue and the development of a common language/understanding.

In sum, there is not a single answer to the question of what kind of collaboration works best. What is effective and efficient will inevitable depend on the goals and the history of the network as well as on local and political conditions.