

# OECD thematic review of Policies on Transitions between ECEC and primary education

## Country Background Report for AUSTRIA

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## Chapter 1: The transition system and its organization

The purpose of this chapter is to describe some of the main features of the transition system in terms of organization, governance as well as performance. This chapter will provide much of the detail needed to understand the process of design, decision-making, and implementation. The issues covered in this chapter will be referred to also in subsequent sections of this country note.

### A. Distribution of Responsibilities

Austria's education system is partly decentralized due to the federal character of the country. Administration is partly shared between the federal and regional governments. Such fragmented organization has resulted in parallel structures at the federal and federal states level, which do not always pursue the same principles and policies.

The federal government partly sets the broad legislative framework for the school system. Detailed legislation is then implemented and enforced by the regional governments of the federal states, e.g. school organization (construction, maintenance, student number, teaching hours). Supervisory boards, curricula, and the training of primary school teachers completely fall within the federal responsibility. The administration of schools on the federal level falls within the responsibility of the minister and supervisory authorities which are, themselves, under the supervision of the ministry. On the federal states level, these supervisory authorities take the form of school boards (including outposts). In Vienna the responsible school board is the Wiener Stadtschulrat (Vienna Board of Education). School managers have some budgetary and curricular autonomy but none in staff matters. Responsibilities pertaining to transition are also regulated by these laws, so there are no separate provisions.

The structure of the Austrian administration in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) consists of three levels:

- the Federal Government (without legal competence)
- the administration of the nine federal states
- the administration of more than 2,300 Austrian municipalities and private providers.

At federal level three ministries are invested in designing ECEC policies:

- Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs is only responsible for training of kindergarten teachers.
- Federal Ministry of Families and Youth is only responsible for youth welfare and not specifically for ECEC. Youth welfare laws are, like kindergarten laws, in responsibility of the federal states.
- Federal Ministry of Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs in the case of language promotion.

However, federal states take on the main responsibility for ECEC<sup>1</sup>, especially the concrete design of the last year of kindergarten (where legislation and execution are concerned). These results in nine different state laws regulating the domain of ECEC education, except education and professional requirements for kindergarten teachers which are regulated at federal level.<sup>2</sup> Teachers have to pass the final examination respectively the matriculation examination and final examination for kindergarten at a Kindergarten Teacher Training College.

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<sup>1</sup>[webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Overview](http://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Overview)

<sup>2</sup>Bundesgesetz über die Anstellungserfordernisse für Kindergärtnerinnen, Erzieher. BGBl. Nr. 406/1968 idgF

As regional governments are fully in charge of ECEC, they also exert considerable influence on the school sector. Efforts in the two sectors are difficult to coordinate. There is no information available whether there are any tensions between these actors or not. To overcome the lack of central legislation a nation-wide law to guarantee a certain minimum quality for all children in ECEC is demanded. A new focus should also be placed on minimum standards for transition. There is also no central financing of ECEC as every state autonomously decides on the budget and the salaries for kindergarten teachers.

The general objectives defined by the nine federal state laws are similar in nature. Crèches are supposed to complement and support the education provided within the family and to provide supervision, care, social rooting, and educational development for children up to three years (only Carinthia specifies in their legislation “children from 1 to 3 years”). Kindergarten is supposed to support and complement education within the family (special emphasis being placed on co-operation with parents and guardians), to promote individual development through appropriate measures as well as social interaction of peers and to prepare children for school life (by involving parents and primary schools). Municipalities, churches, and other private providers are responsible for the establishment and maintenance of kindergartens and crèches.

Due to the fact that different authorities are responsible for ECEC and primary school, there is no shared approach towards cooperation between kindergarten and primary school. As a result no explicit cross-regional strategies or programs exist in regard to transition. Strategies and programs are mainly designed by the involved schools and kindergartens, with the help of school development counseling. The development of a concept of transition therefore happens site-specifically. On the regional level attempts are made, in cooperation with the respective supervisory authority, to actively react, trying to succeed in balancing the demands of academic findings and bureaucracy.

## **B. Policy context**

### **Recent actions of education policy in a nutshell**

In Austria the political and social significance of ECEC has noticeably increased over the last years. ECEC is now considered an indispensable foundation for lifelong learning.

Over the last 10 years government has introduced measures specifically in regard to early language learning support. In 2008, an agreement (in accordance with article 15a B-VG) was ratified between the federal government and the federal states (BGBl. II Nr. 478/2008). It stipulated the expansion of ECEC institutions and introduced mandatory early language learning support in ECEC. Due to this agreement kindergarten and school teachers together have to provide assessment of language development and language learning support for children with a poor knowledge of German.

Furthermore, the agreement was the fundament for the development of the “Statewide Framework Curriculum for ECEC institutions in Austria” offering education and care to children from the ages of 0 to 6 (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2009a). Since then, it has been gradually implemented. Being only a framework curriculum, each federal state has the right and possibility to add specifications or more detailed guidelines. Still, its legal implementation is missing in most federal states, e.g. Vienna only mentions the Viennese Curriculum, which already existed as mandatory before (Magistratsabteilung 10, 2006). In the same year, a supplement to the framework curriculum focusing on early language acquisition was published. This supplement was also part of the agreement between the federal government and the federal states with the goal to facilitate transition and cooperation between ECEC and primary school (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2009b).

The curriculum was developed by experts from Charlotte Bühler Institute in cooperation with the federal states and the former Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (now Ministry of

Education and Women's Affairs). The framework curriculum might be regarded as a step across the boundaries imposed by divided legislative responsibilities. The National Framework Curriculum also constitutes a first step towards a national consensus in regard to the scope of ECEC.

In the Framework Curriculum for ECEC institutions (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2009a) the federal states avow themselves to the educational goals of institutional forms of learning and child care confirming their significance for the educational path of the child. The framework also emphasizes lifelong learning and consistency in education as central principles in Austria's tradition of education. The goal is to establish continuity between ECEC and primary education by developing a mutual understanding of education and of didactic approaches.

The continuity of education and learning requires a successful transition to ongoing institutions of learning. Transitions are linked to feelings of anticipation, tension, and curiosity as well as to insecurity, fear of the unknown, and fears of failure. A child has to deal with many unfamiliar situations during the period of transition. Therefore, the greatest possible continuity between kindergarten and primary school facilitates a mastering of the new and its integration into the different areas of life (Hollerer, 2009).

The most prominent challenges that children typically face during transition from ECEC to primary education is the adaption to a new environment and surroundings. Primary school teachers report that children who attended kindergarten have noticeable advantages in school. For this reason, considerable attention was devoted to the topic of transition in the context of the Austrian framework curriculum. Positive experiences of transition are important for the development of a child and meaningful for all further transitions (Griebel & Niesel, 2004). Successful and sustained cooperation between ECEC and primary school results in the formulation of shared goals and strategies for the practice of transition. It is central that cooperation partners become familiar with the organizational procedure, educational goals and expectations towards each other and the cooperation itself. In order to ensure continuity, it is important that educational domains of ECEC and primary school overlap and that similar forms of learning are employed.

The Austrian framework curriculum can be seen as an important milestone in the field of ECEC policy. As such, it increasingly influences policies and legislative decisions. The implementation of a mandatory year of kindergarten in 2010 was another important step which was based on another agreement according to art. 15a B-VG. This agreement determined that children are obliged to attend kindergarten to a minimum extent of 16 to 20 hours per week, on a minimum of four days a week in the year preceding compulsory education. Mandatory attendance is free of charge – a further policy milestone which makes early and equal access to education possible. This specifically helps to support children with an insufficient knowledge of German prior to the start of school. In order to finance this measure, 70 million Euros in federal subsidies are provided each year. During the last year of kindergarten a specific focus is put on examining one's own processes of thinking and learning. This also serves as the foundation for lifelong, self-reflective learning (Weinert, 1999). Since the implementation of the mandatory year, kindergarten teachers have increasingly undertaken intergroup activities, projects, workshops in order to promote literacy and numeracy within children in their last year in kindergarten.

The agreement also stipulated the design of an additional special module for 5-year-old children. This module "Addition to the Austrian Framework Curriculum" (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2010) serves to strengthen the basic competences of children of that age, also paying special attention to the transition to primary school. Furthermore, it uses a more strength-based approach and views transition as an important opportunity of further development.

The module for the last year of kindergarten forms the fundament for pedagogical activities during the year prior to school enrolment. The module is the foundation for guidance, support and documentation of a child's individual learning process. On its basis, suggestions may be

provided which aim at encouraging its interests and talents and which try to balance out potential disadvantages. Furthermore, it also delineates how competences important for the process of transition might be promoted in view of the forthcoming enrolment in school (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2010).

Current government continues base its work on the insight that kindergarten attendance and transition to school are greatly significant for the future education of a child. The Austrian government's work program 2013-2018 includes a number of measures designed to improve ECEC. Besides strengthening ECEC education in general, there is particular emphasis on improving the transition process, including transfer of child-related information from kindergarten to primary school as well as interinstitutional cooperation. Moreover, the last year of ECEC and the first two years of primary school will form a new "joint school-entry phase". This new, three-year transition phase creates a structure for cooperation and will ensure that important knowledge gained in ECEC is not lost, but used to facilitate integration at primary school (Directorate-General of Education and Culture, 2015).

Since 1999 legislation has provided for the possibility of a flexible school entry phase, also including the possibility for preschooling. The purpose of preschool education is to support children who are not yet mature enough to attend primary school. There is no assessment of the child's performance, the annual report only states that the child participates in non-assessed compulsory subject classes (BMBF, 2014a). Preschool may be organized on a separate basis (its intensive form) or in an integrated form. It may be offered as an integrated part of first grade or as integrated into a combined first and second grade. The advantage of the latter being that there are no separate classrooms, also children can be included in regular instruction. This kind of integration also reduces the likelihood of classes with a majority of students with insufficient language competences to be formed. A child might also be taught according to the curriculum of the previous or subsequent grade if made necessary by his/her learning environment and provided that demands in regard to his/her mental or physical capacities are not excessive (BMBF, 2015c).

The topic of transition is not only covered in the government program, it also constitutes an integral part of the Austrian Strategy for Lifelong Learning LLL:2020 (Republik Österreich, 2011). The strategy aims to strengthen ECEC as durable foundation and to prepare children for their educational career, thereby also ensuring a continued process of education.

In 2012, a further agreement between the Federal Minister of Economy, Family and Youth and the federal states on the need and organization of early language support was reached (BGBl. II 258/2012). The agreement aims at the language learning support of 3 to 6-year-old children with insufficient knowledge of German in ECEC settings (specifically of children with a first language other than German). Moreover, the federal government was obligated to make targeted contributions towards the federal states for the period of 2012 to 2014. In August 2015 it was renewed until 2017/18 (BGBl. II Nr. 234/2015). The Art. 15a B-VG agreement on early fostering of language skills makes reference to: instruction and early fostering of learning skills according to the Framework Curriculum, according to the guidelines focusing on language learning and according to the education standards for language competence at the start of compulsory education.

Providing early language learning support should facilitate children's entry into primary school. It also optimizes educational opportunities for the entry into school and creates better conditions for future education and employment opportunities. In regard to children with a need for language learning support early fostering of language skills can be complemented by support of other important areas of development in order to facilitate their overall development.

"Early fostering of language skills" refers to pedagogical assistance measures in regard to the promoting of German as the language of instruction, German being used in a form suitable for children (i.e. suitable for children, individual, appropriate, additional), in order to optimize the opportunities for learning for the period of school entry and thereafter.

Kindergarten teachers and/or additional professionally qualified staff are in charge of the language learning support. The language learning support happens as part of everyday routine, in an age-adequate and play-based manner. The additional pedagogical staff routinely designs and documents the measures aimed at the fostering of language skills. He/she does so in accordance with the respective team leader and/or head teacher.

All federal states are obliged to assemble a report on the early fostering of language skills and have to develop a concept in regard to the early fostering of language skills. Both have to be submitted to the federal level where they are verified and approved by the Austrian Integration Fund and the Federal Ministry of Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs. Representatives from the federal level might make announced visits to kindergartens and inspect records documenting the promotion of language skills on a selective basis.

Some federal states require additional pedagogical staff to complete special training in regard to the promotion of language skills. Coaching for pedagogical teams and other specific supporting measures to ensure professional quality of language learning are offered.

Kindergarten teachers are obliged to conduct language skills assessments for all children who are in their last two years of kindergarten. If possible they should do so at the start of the kindergarten year. After a measure of early fostering of language skills has been completed language skills have to be re-assessed. At the very latest this has to happen by the beginning of the following kindergarten year. Children who, in the meantime, have moved on to primary school are not exempt from this regulation.

In October 2015 a new agreement (according to Art. 15a B-VG) on the implementation of the free and mandatory last year in kindergarten was stipulated for the years 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18. This agreement replaces the earlier agreement from 2009. Federal states now are obliged to implement and monitor the framework curriculum, the module for 5-year-olds and the supplement focusing on language learning.<sup>3</sup>

### **C. Strategic partnerships in education policy**

The initiative “Neustart Schule” (“Relaunch School”) by the Federation of Austrian Industry draws attention to the necessity of a comprehensive education reform. In April 2015 a concept based on scientific research called “ECEC: Best-possible education from the start” (“Elementarpädagogik: Beste Bildung von Anfang an“) was presented. Policy recommendations were made in regard to six areas of action: qualification, professionalization, diversity; quality of structure, framework conditions, offer; pedagogy, domains of education, involvement of the home environment; transition, continuity, duty to secure education; competences, autonomy, funding; quality assurance, quality control, evaluation. The field of action of “transition – continuity – duty to secure education” defines the final two years of kindergarten as mandatory “basic education”. An optimization of the transition from ECEC to primary school should be ensured by an increased cooperation between teachers who also have to be considered equal partners in the process, by completion of the same basic modules as part of professional training and continued education and by compulsory ECEC-primary school partnerships. The period of ECEC and primary school has to be regarded as one and continues to fall within the mutual responsibility of ECEC institutions and school. The guidance and assessment of a child’s readiness for school ought to take place during the second of the two “basic years”. An assessment of preparatory skills is also necessary for a smooth transition. Documentation in regard to a child’s development (i.e. portfolios) must not be seen as a tool for selection but as a means of informing school on the specific needs of a child and its specific support (Industriellenvereinigung, 2015.)

In a 10-point program Austria’s social partners and the Federation of Austrian Industry demand ECEC to be defined as a federal responsibility. Investments in high quality ECEC

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<sup>3</sup>57. Kundmachung des Landeshauptmannes vom 15. Oktober 2015, Zl. 01-VD-VE-129/13-2015

would benefit each child individually as ECEC promotes cognitive abilities, the willingness to learn, stimulates a love of learning and further promotes the integration of socially disadvantaged children. The advantages of ECEC are specifically pronounced for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. ECEC reduces disadvantages in regard to education. In order to ensure a successful transition to school, mandatory attendance of kindergarten should be expanded to include a second year (starting at the age of four). Thereby two so-called “basic years” of ECEC would come to exist. These two basic years would still fall in the responsibility of kindergarten, but would provide for increased cooperation with school in the second year. In the course of the second year, preschool content as well as language, motor, emotional, and social preparatory skills would be acquired in a play-based manner and with the goal of strengthening readiness for school. Optimal transition from ECEC to primary school is premised on cooperation that is characterized by professionalism, respect, and equality. It requires alternating mutual lesson attendance and a shared concept of transition. Sufficient resources are to be provided. It is the program’s vision to weld this basic period and the first two years of school into one single entity. (Bundesarbeitskammer, Industriellenvereinigung, Landwirtschaftskammer Österreich, Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund & Wirtschaftskammer Österreich, 2015).

Without sufficient knowledge of German, full participation in learning becomes difficult. Thus, Lower Austria’s Chamber of Labour, its Trade Union Federation, Federation of Industry and Economic Chamber demand a comprehensive language skills assessment during the first of the two demanded basic years, with annual re-assessment. The earlier potential deficits are identified and addressed, the smoother and the more successful all future learning will be. Deficits in language competence must not become obstacles in the realization of one’s potential. Support plans in combination with language skills assessment should therefore assist children in developing language skills that allow them to participate in learning. The support measures of language should occur intensively and be part of regular classroom instruction (WKO, 2015).

In 2012, the Austrian Association of Research and Development in Education created a separate section called “ECEC”. Currently it consists of 100 members from universities, including the University Colleges of Teacher Education, from kindergarten teacher training colleges and individual persons. The section ECEC aims to establish relations between institutions, groups and individuals engaged in the field of ECEC. It also organizes meetings and conferences on topics related to ECEC (2013: Symposium „Transition vom Kindergarten in die Schule im Spannungsfeld zwischen punktuellen Leistungserhebungen und kontinuierlichen Prozessdokumentationen“ / “Transition from ECEC to school – Tensions between occasional assessment and continuous documentation). Furthermore, it supports the publication of scientific research, stimulates exchange between the fields of research, practice, administration, and policy in regard to ECEC.

The platform “EduCare” is a working group which consists of interest groups, affiliations of providers, representatives of institutions, and experts from the field of ECEC without affiliation. EduCare works towards a reform of ECEC. It does so on a non-profit basis. EduCare launches initiatives on various levels and pushes cooperation between all interested parties. EduCare also aims at promoting collaboration between different stakeholders, from the fields of research, society, politics, economy, and media.

#### **D. Nationwide networks for the improvement of equality of opportunity and of transition from ECEC to primary school**

Due to the emphasis placed on ECEC and primary pedagogy, the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs (September 2013) initiated network projects with the objective of developing local approaches, of improving the individual support given to each child, by taking a more holistic approach to each child’s needs, and thus of allowing each

child to develop its skills to its full potential during the transition to primary school. It aims at improving the level of education and at promoting equality of opportunity and of gender.

In September 2013 the network project “language learning support” was launched. One year later, in September 2014, the network project “ECEC – primary school” was initiated. Both projects are scheduled to run until the end of the school year 2015/16. A steering committee consisting of stakeholders from all institutions involved (i.e. boards of educations, federal states governments, school psychologists, university colleges of teacher education, representatives from different ECEC institutions and schools) is actively working on a cross-regional strategy for a comprehensive implementation. The implementation process is scheduled to start at the beginning of the school year 2016/17.

In the realm of this network, Charlotte Bühler Institute was commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs to devise guidelines for the early language learning support during transition from ECEC to primary school. As an instrument with the potential to shape the transition period, the guidelines demonstrate the compile and show the similarities between both curricula. The guidelines are based on the latest research findings in regard to transition, and have the acquisition of first and second language skills and multilingualism at their center. They are also meant to offer practical guidance in the language learning support during the school entry period.

Additional guidelines on transition with a special focus on individualization and differentiation during the school entry period („Individualisierung und differenzierte Förderung in der Schuleingangsphase“) were also developed. These guidelines stress the significance of individualization and holistic support during the school entry period and try to provide practical guidance in this regard. For this reason the guidelines were furnished with tips and examples. They also include questions aimed at professionals, stimulating self-reflection. An addendum further contains impulses taken from model projects.

Both guidelines are already being used in primary schools and kindergartens.

### **Network project “language learning support”**

According to the Ministerial Council Decision from December 4, 2012 all children with need for language learning support should receive support. For this reason a multi-level program for language learning support was presented in May 2013 which had been devised by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs (BMBF, formerly BMUKK) in cooperation with the State Secretariat for Integration and numerous experts (BIFIE, 2013).

The multi-level program takes language learning support as principle for ALL children, especially, however, for children with German as their second language, and for children with language development disorders: in accordance with the respective school board, an adequate offer in regard to integrated and intensive language learning support is developed – following the principle of collective acquisition of language skills in heterogeneous groups.

In its entirety, the multi-level program comprises ten points, six of which are immediate measure designed to be implemented gradually (starting with the school year 2013/14). One of the immediate measures stipulates the launch of pilot projects with the aim of devising and testing comprehensive, site-specific language learning support (= Netzwerkprojekt Sprachförderung).

The model projects are implemented in the context of so-called “cooperative clusters” which are coordinated by the school boards. In a “cooperative cluster” University Colleges of Teacher Education with adjoined schools for practical training, primary schools located in the region, kindergarten teacher training colleges with adjoined kindergartens for practical training and further kindergartens cooperate. On the basis of this project structure, 12 cooperative clusters have been developed nationwide. The overall coordinative responsibility of the project lies with the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs (Division I/1). They are evaluated by the Federal Institute for Educational Research, Innovation and

Development of Education (BIFIE), partly in cooperation with the University Colleges of teacher Education of the respective federal state. The evaluation's aim is to promote development work and to identify both facilitating and inhibiting conditions for the implementation of projects and measures. All findings are to be integrated into the training of teachers.

The Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs provides the financial resources for the project's supporting measures (activities, hiring of external experts, pedagogical resources etc.). The (federal state's) school supervisory authority inspector bears the final responsibility for the allocation of funds and their appropriate use.

BIFIE has been commissioned to develop an instrument for the language skills assessment to be applied in primary schools. It is intended as a hands-on screening instrument that also features a detailed skills description and support recommendation. The instrument should be developed on the basis of the already existing observation tool „Unterrichtsbegleitende Sprachstandsbeobachtung - USB-DaZ“ (“Observation of German as Second Language - USB-DaZ“) and be suitable for children with both, German as a first and second language. The use of the instrument is ensured by guidelines distributed to the school management.

Depending on diagnostic findings language learning support is provided integrated in a regular school class or separately in a preschool class (with the possibility of flexible transition to a regular class). There is also the possibility of granting an additional year of instruction (3 years for elementary level 1 instead of 2).

#### **Network project “transition ECEC – primary school”**

On basis of the government program a project with focus on the transition from ECEC to primary school has started. The aim is to facilitate cooperation between teachers of both institutions, to ensure qualitative guidance and to better coordinate the phase of school entry. The last year of kindergarten and the first two years of primary school are taken to constitute “school entry”. This way children may be the beneficiaries of a continuous learning opportunity.

All in all 35 primary schools and cooperating kindergartens from across all nine federal states participate. The aim of the network projects is to test successful factors for a nationwide implementation. They also garner impulses for staff initial and in-service education and training. Project measures, for example, are: improved cooperation between ECEC and primary school through collaborative projects, the collection of best-practice examples, the transfer of information between ECEC and primary school via specifically designed forms or portfolios and the creation of so-called “transition teams” (for further details please refer to Chapter 3).

The selection criteria for schools wanting to participate in the “Network Kindergarten - Primary School” required that, for example, a focus be placed on cooperation with at least one ECEC institution (in the shape of a guided transition), the development of site-specific models for individual support, also including preschool, and the use of alternative forms of student assessment.

#### **Evaluation of the networks**

Currently the network projects are being evaluated by BIFIE (BIFIE, 2015). First results regarding the aspect of cooperation between ECEC and primary school, specifically in regard to its scope and changed nature, are already at hand. People who are actively involved in the projects were interviewed (i.e. head teachers, teachers, national school board, University College of Teacher Education). In relative comparison to the previous year, an improvement in regard to the exchange of information and of portfolios between teachers was observed. Many interviewees noted that cooperation had become more frequent and had improved in quality.

Both, factors encouraging cooperation between ECEC and primary school and challenges, were assessed in the context of the evaluation. Factors facilitating cooperation which were named: one's attitude towards one's partners of cooperation – a positive attitude, openness, transparency and willingness to cooperate as well as mutual respect and understanding. Interviewees also pointed to the supportive nature and significance of interinstitutional lesson attendance and trainings. They also named shared goals and projects, support by school boards, supervisory control or municipalities as important. A lack of resources and a complicated legislative framework were identified as main challenges (for further details please refer to Chapter 5).

As a nationwide implementation of the network projects is planned (starting with the school year 2016/17), interviewees were asked to identify factors relevant for a comprehensive implementation. In this regard, cooperation between ECEC and primary school was most often mentioned. Smooth cooperation, communication and exchange between the involved institutions and/or management were seen as prerequisites for the project's successful implementation. Particularly the need for sufficient resources in regard to time, personnel and funds as well as the necessity for targeted, comprehensive and, at least partly, shared trainings was also indicated.

## **E. Policy and Programs to advance equity goals**

### **Home visiting programs**

The program HIPPY<sup>4</sup> (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) aims to provide support to the socially disadvantaged families and parents of three to seven-year-old children. Once a week a person from the same sociocultural background pays a visit to the family and provides first language assistance. The visitor acquaints parents or guardians with games and learning materials in German. Parents or guardians should thereby be empowered to create learning situations for their own child. In Vienna the HIPPY Plus-Program also includes support in school. Bilingual tutors are used in schools with a high percentage of migrants.<sup>5</sup>

### **Special needs education**

In the last years the issue of inclusion has received increased attention. The approach of inclusion is firmly anchored in the National Framework Curriculum. The approach aims at ways of thinking and acting that take into account the needs and interests of others and that simultaneously values difference. Inclusive pedagogy acknowledges the differences between children and their talents. Therefore collective and individual learning lie at its center (Biewer, 2009).

Legal regulations provide for the possibility of integrated teaching of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils in primary schools (and in lower secondary schools and in the lower level of secondary academic schools). The decision whether a disadvantaged child will be educated in a special needs school or in a conventional school rests with the parents of the child or other persons vested with the right of education.

Guidelines for measures of differentiation and management in the context of the assessment of special needs education were made available to the responsible authorities (i.e. the national school boards, administrative bodies of the federal states governments, school board on the level of the federal state and of the district). The guidelines work as a tool based on preset and binding criteria that should allow for greater precision in regard to differentiation and should

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<sup>4</sup>**Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** - The charitable organisation [beratungsgruppe.at](http://beratungsgruppe.at) is a national provider of the program "HIPPY Austria" and implemented it in 2007 in coordination and support from HIPPY International in Austria

<sup>5</sup> Funded by the Federal Ministry of Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union.

help improve the transparency of the assessment procedure. They describe a binding framework for the preparation of expert opinions (in regard to special educational needs) and are meant to serve as quality standards. They are also designed to contribute to a higher degree of comparability on the national level and increase transparency (BMUKK, 2012b).

In the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities the National Action Plan on Disability 2012-2020 (BMASK, 2012) was devised in 2012 and states the objective of the federal government. It stipulates the development of an inclusive education system and demands the implementation and evaluation of model initiatives.

On the basis of guidelines that were passed by the federal government (BMBF, 2015e) three inclusive model regions have been defined so far. In these model regions, measures for the implementation of an inclusive education system are devised and tested. It is the aim of inclusive education to allow for the highest possible degree of education by employing measures of individualization, more flexible internal differentiation and flexible allocation of resources. The inclusive model regions therefore test the concept of a joint school with the ultimate goal of overcoming a separation according to special needs education, language deficits, and development.

The inclusive model regions serve as testing grounds for quality development and three essential structural changes that are planned to be implemented (Raditsch, 2015). First, the Centers for Inclusive and Special Educational Needs (ZIS) are planned to be put on a new organizational basis. Facilities for consultations should be created with the national school boards (including outposts). As a result, the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs expects a qualitative and quantitative increase in support of inclusive measures at all schools. Second, a more efficient, demand-oriented and flexible use of resources is necessary. Third, an increase in the quality of the assessment of special educational needs is sought. Preventive measures like consultations and support should be provided at the center in order to prevent children from being assessed and therefore stigmatized (Feyerer, 2015). Gained insights should then be utilized in the general and gradual process of implementation. Inclusive model regions have been set up in Carinthia, Styria and the Tyrol. BIFIE has been commissioned with a formative evaluation<sup>6</sup>.

In consideration of the insights gained in the context of these model projects, the existing guidelines should be revised and decreed as foundation for the federal states. All federal states are expected to have established inclusive model regions by 2020.

### **Monitoring**

As of today there is no standardized monitoring instrument or process at national level. Monitoring processes vary in the different individual institutions of ECEC and primary schools, but are mainly limited to conversations with children and parents as well as feedback forms. Observation sheets and documentation as well as portfolios are mainly used to monitor a child's development, and in most cases not used for transition monitoring.

Monitoring is also implemented in the context of the network projects in order to identify conducive conditions and obstacles. It is conducted by kindergarten teachers as well as by ECEC supervisory authorities. Information about which instruments are used is not available. Monitoring aims at ensuring the best-possible transition for each child and at providing a sound foundation for the projects' nationwide future implementation. Monitoring activities are carried out by regional school boards as well as ECEC supervisory authorities and are supported by experts of the university colleges of teacher education in the field of organizational development. The results of the project are broached in the context of the initiative SQA (School Quality in General Education, an initiative by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs targeted at the development and assurance of pedagogical quality) and in the context of annual target agreements between the respective divisions of the ministry and the school boards.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.bifie.at/node/3401](http://www.bifie.at/node/3401)

## **National Education Reports**

The “National Education Reports” are the most important indicator-based monitoring report in Austria. First issued in 2009, the reports focus on the Austrian school system. They were commissioned by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs and are published every three years. The reports have three main functions:

First, to support the policy-makers’ deep understanding of the education system through evidence-based knowledge; second, to give account of the state-of-affairs in the school system towards the public and legislative bodies; and third, to offer critical, research-based guidance for education reforms.

Among other topics, the national education report 2009 discusses ECEC and the period of school entry in a trend-setting manner. Besides from delineating early learning environments (home, day care and ECEC setting) school enrolment is discussed. Quality aspects and the need for research are shown, measures (on political and pedagogical level) for a redesign of the cooperation between ECEC and primary schools are recommended (Stanzel-Tischler & Breit, 2009).

While in 2012 emphasis was put on other fields of education, ECEC and primary education regain in importance in the current report 2015 which will be published soon. The report will discuss cooperation of both institutions and is intended to present a comprehensive view of the organization and design of the school entry period (Wohlhart et al., 2016, Bruneforth et al., 2016).

### **Educational Reform 2015**

In November 2015 a comprehensive reform package was introduced. With this reform package the government tries to focus on current demands and challenges of the educational system. Important reform elements target the areas of ECEC, the phase of school entry and primary school, including language learning support.

In the domain of ECEC, an important step towards the development and implementation of a binding national quality framework step-by-step until 2025 was made. This also includes defined education objectives as criteria for a continuous documentation of language skills and development (the so-called “education compass”, see chapter 3). Educational standards for ECEC education as well as a focus on competences regarding language learning support are further reform goals.

The reform demands the expansion of mandatory time spent in ECEC to include two years. For children with a first language other than German and for children from socially disadvantaged families two mandatory years in kindergarten would serve as a good basis for education.

The education reform also aims at establishing a new school entry phase, consisting of the (currently) last mandatory year of kindergarten and the first two years of primary school. Transitions should be designed according to the needs of children, strengthening their basic skills, talents, and interests.

Enhancement and expansion of the cooperation between teachers of ECEC and primary school (in the context of the network, see chapter 1.D) has been stipulated. Additionally, a nationwide basis for the transfer and utilization of data regarding need for support (between ECEC and primary school) ought to be created. A basis for the exchange of data should facilitate the holistic assessment of children during the process of enrolment. The documentation of a child’s individual development (by way of the “education compass”) can be incorporated in the process of school enrolment and support planning.

The reform also stipulates joint meetings between ECEC and school supervisory authorities. Such meetings aim at a professional guidance and reflection on the following: implementation

of the new school entry phase, new form of data exchange, language learning support, development of curricula, and quality.

Curricula of primary schools ought to be refined and updated. A focus should be put on the acquisition of such basic and cultural skills as reading, writing, and calculation. Attention should also be devoted to the future challenges of migration and digitalization.

The reform of primary schools, planned by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs, will also focus on the implementation of alternative forms of evaluation. Failing a grade should no longer be possible during the first three years of primary school.

In the domain of language learning support new pupils who do not have a sufficient knowledge in German in order to follow instruction should be mandatorily supported in the context of language "starting courses", provided pupils are located in areas of dense agglomeration.

### **Current Debates**

One prerequisite for the provision of adequate transition support consists in the alignment of pedagogical attitudes and approaches; both should have a new culture of learning at their core. Network projects and increased cooperation between the ECEC and school supervisory authorities make this pedagogical alignment possible.

The implementation of a nationwide basis for the dissemination and utilization of child-related data is also discussed. A shared basis would allow information on the development, strengths, interests, and talents of each individual child not to get lost, it could then easily be shared between kindergarten and primary school. Observations and language support measures that occurred in the context of ECEC are documented and evaluated. This kind of documentation could be highly useful for the phase of school entry. It would allow for the facilitation of the best possible support of each child and would help actualize a child's full potential.

Moreover, the "education compass" as a portfolio process determines a potential analysis to be made early in kindergarten. The measure is not supported unanimously as it runs the risk of placing a focus on deficits. False interpretations and stigmatizations have to be avoided, especially during the transition to primary school. As the "education compass" entails new diagnostic requirements, kindergarten teachers should receive a professional education at least at the level of a Bachelor's degree (see chapter 5).

## Chapter 2: Professional continuity

This chapter is concerned with how professional continuity is ensured or arranged. Furthermore, it addresses initial education and training in ECEC and primary school as well as professional development.

### 2.1 Leadership

In regard to transitions there is no uniform definition of the role management in ECEC or primary school. Depending on the commitment of the respective management different functions are performed and different types of support are offered. This, in turn, influences the degree to which cooperation between ECEC and primary school happens. In principle, management can be seen as a key component for the cooperation of ECEC and primary schools (Hollerer, 2014; Schmich & Breit, 2009). Its functions include: fostering exchange between management and staff of the various institutions, the coordination of joint projects, parental consultations per se and in regard to the transition period, support measures for children, the job of making available time resources, the arrangement of trainings across institutions, providing professional support by supplying material resources or professional literature. Material resources vary from institution to institution as there are no provisions or obligations to this effect. Available are, on an optional basis, didactic games, professional literature, workbooks, resources and media which help foster language acquisition/language learning materials) etc. Financial resources for both, trainings in the school and a supervision through the University College of Teacher Education are only made available in the context of network projects (see chapter 1.D).

An important role, that management of primary schools fulfills nationwide, is the conduct of pupil enrolment during the last year of ECEC, for further details please refer to Chapter 3. Additionally, the school's management is responsible for the quality of instruction offered and thereby also for providing quality assurance.

The quality of ECEC management has central implications for the entire institution. It is the responsibility of the manager to lead the ECEC facility competently, to support its staff, to continuously reflect on the facility's offer and to adapt it to the needs of both, children and parents. ECEC management is also in charge of public relations and collaboration with the parents and responsible provider. The ECEC manager is expected to qualify for the responsibilities of the job on an autonomous basis and to provide for appropriate additional staff training (Kronberger Kreis für Qualitätsentwicklung in Kindertageseinrichtungen, 2001; Tietze, 2004).

One could definitely say that there are managers who consider themselves as visionaries and motivators for a joint concept on transition from ECEC to primary school education. These managers function as role models who may influence the process of transition in a positive way.

### 2.2 Staff support

Besides from selecting and planning (collective) trainings (see chapter 2.C) and/or meetings, support is also offered via feedback sessions and internal evaluations. Furthermore, pedagogues are supported through the dissemination of current scientific findings. This often happens in the context of counseling sessions with specialists or in trainings. Especially in the network projects best practice examples are shared and discussed in the context of mutual observations, visits and consultations.

There is nearly no additional personnel to help staff with this process. In Carinthia however, advice and support is provided 2 hours per week by a special pedagogue for the transition period who helps with the organisation und coordination of kindergarten and primary school. Apart from that additional staff is only available in special cases, for instance, when working with children with developmental delays or special needs. In this instances, inclusion or

special education teachers, speech therapists or school psychologists are sometimes drawn upon (see chapter 3).

An appropriate qualification of staff is indispensable for the quality in ECEC. The training of ECEC teachers occurs at kindergarten teacher training colleges (BAKIP) after having completed lower secondary level. They may also register for a special course of lectures after having passed school leaving examination which qualifies to work as team leaders in ECEC settings.<sup>7</sup>

The current curriculum of BAKIP (2014) refers to the topic of transition in the areas of didactics and ECEC practice. The concept of transition, the promotion of transition competences, the development of competences for the last year of kindergarten and models of settling-in are explicitly named<sup>8</sup>. Due to these efforts to reform kindergarten teacher training colleges, subjects and teaching contents have been revised. In the school year of 2016/17 a new curriculum will become valid (BMBF, 2016a). New topics will be the cooperation of ECEC and primary school within the scope of the school entry period, models of interinstitutional cooperation and critical reflection of current discussions within education policy.

Since October 2015 primary school teachers graduate with a Master's degree after a study time of 4 years. Major changes of the curriculum for primary school teachers affect areas such as inclusion, which has now been integrated as a specialization. Even ECEC pedagogy is already offered as specialization by some University Colleges of Teacher Education which equip graduates with necessary competences and know-how in the field of transition processes (e.g. observation, communication, planning).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, those colleges also increasingly provide further education in the field of ECEC pedagogy which starts to influence educational offer more and more. This new development may help to foster an understanding of kindergarten teachers' work.

### **2.3 Collaborations between authorities and ECEC/primary school on professional continuity**

First off, there is nearly no opportunity for ECEC staff and primary school teachers to express their opinion in policy matters related to professional continuity in Austria. Only in the course of the evaluation process of the network projects they could express their opinion for example concerning relevant factors facilitating cooperation and current challenges. This information is needed for the nationwide implementation.

School management works closely with the respective school supervising authority (BMBF, 2014b). One of the supervising authority's tasks is to guarantee regional planning in collaboration with the other institutions of national school supervisory authority. In doing so it has to consider the responsibilities of federal, regional, and local authorities. In the context of this regional planning the school authority provides expertise for human resources development, the distribution of material resources and personnel according to demand and for the implementation of support structures.

Training of staff is another contact point between ECEC settings, primary schools and other authorities. In Austria the training and further education for teachers who work in a school setting, is planned and organized by the University Colleges of Teacher Education. In some of the federal states these University Colleges also offer trainings for ECEC staff or trainings across institutions. Due to the growing importance of transition as a topic, an increasing number of trainings, networking events and networking meetings on the topic of transition has been offered in the last years. Content included, for example, parent-teacher conferences,

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<sup>7</sup>[www.abc.berufsbildendeschulen.at/de/page.asp?id=32](http://www.abc.berufsbildendeschulen.at/de/page.asp?id=32)

<sup>8</sup>[bakipmistelbach.ac.at/images/pdf/lehrer/Lehrplan%20NEU%20SV\\_BAKIP\\_Entwurf\\_April2014.pdf](http://bakipmistelbach.ac.at/images/pdf/lehrer/Lehrplan%20NEU%20SV_BAKIP_Entwurf_April2014.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.lehramt-so.at/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/08122015\\_Bachelor\\_Verbund\\_final.pdf](http://www.lehramt-so.at/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/08122015_Bachelor_Verbund_final.pdf)

[http://www.lehramt-so.at/wp-](http://www.lehramt-so.at/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Curriculum_Primar_Bachelor_KPH_Graz_28_04_2015.pdf)

[content/uploads/2014/10/Curriculum\\_Primar\\_Bachelor\\_KPH\\_Graz\\_28\\_04\\_2015.pdf](http://www.lehramt-so.at/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Curriculum_Primar_Bachelor_KPH_Graz_28_04_2015.pdf)

kindergarten portfolios, tips and tools for the period of transition, observations and documentation during the school entry period.

The responsible authorities on the federal level as well as public and private providers are primarily in charge of providing specialist trainings and further education for kindergarten teachers.

Especially the clusters of the so-called network projects receive support through targeted measures from the University Colleges of Teacher Education. On state level and since project start, each school supervisory authority disposes over a budget for support measures – for both, trainings in or across schools. In the context of these trainings, experts work on a specific topic with a team of teachers for a period of two to four hours. The Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs recommends that trainings be planned and carried out until the end of the school year in cooperation with the respective University College of Teacher Education.

In general, in the last years there is growing interest in further education and events in the field of transition from kindergarten to school with the aim of fostering interinstitutional understanding and exchange, e.g. „Early childhood education during the transition from kindergarten to school“ – a workshop of Austria, Germany and Switzerland (BMBF, 2016b) or “International Days” at University College of Teacher Education Burgenland which focused on transition pedagogy as interdisciplinary topic. In addition, there is a training course at the university college of teacher education on “early language acquisition support” funded by the Ministry of Education and Women’s Affaires since 2008. After adaptation, the curriculum now consists of three modules about scientific basics, language acquisition and development as well as measures of assistance and didactics. Nationwide already more than 1000 pedagogues had already participated until summer 2014 (Grillitsch, Fageth & Kowatz, 2014).

## Chapter 3: Pedagogical continuity

This chapter is concerned with how pedagogical continuity is ensured between early learning and primary education. It addresses aspects like curriculum, child development, pedagogy and pedagogical approaches to explain the current situation in Austria.

### A. Curriculum framework and development goals

As a framework the “Statewide Framework Curriculum for ECEC institutions in Austria” only describes educational domains, those of Emotions and Social Relationships, Ethics and Society, Aesthetics and Creativity or Nature and Technology. It sets no developmental goals or outcomes for children. However, in the “Addition to the Austrian Framework Curriculum for five-years-old children”; (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2010) exemplary competences are mentioned. The module is not intended as checklist for the learning goals prior to school enrolment. It does aim, however, at highlighting the specific educational demands and learning needs in regard to five and six-year-old children. During the extended school introduction phase the module may serve as a point of departure for the support and documentation of a child’s individual learning process prior to the start of school. In principle, the Framework Curriculum is meant to serve as a national frame of reference ensuring that children acquire the necessary competences for all further educational processes and periods of transition.

The Austrian Framework Curriculum is defined as a play-based curriculum for ECEC institutions. Play is understood as one of the most powerful driving forces in early childhood development. Thus, the framework curriculum encourages ECEC teachers to provide opportunities for learning through meaningful situations and experiences in a high quality environment. Especially free play and unstructured play allow children to experiment, make mistakes, learn from them, and find out diverse approaches and solutions. In ECEC institutions their divergent thinking skills, intrinsic learning motivation, and problem-solving abilities are fostered. In this respect, the child will be ready for school and prepared for lifelong learning.

The Curriculum of Primary School (BMUKK, 2012) has also been designed as framework curriculum. Contrary to the Austrian Framework Curriculum for ECEC institutions, it may not, however, be amended by federal states. Its general educational goal is to assist in the development of youth by offering instruction which corresponds to the child’s development. Primary school is obliged to equip youth with the knowledge and skills necessary for life and future employment. It is also obliged to nurture the self-reliant acquisition of skills and knowledge. At its heart lie: the instilment and stimulation of enjoyment of learning, of interests and skills, the nurturing of faith in one’s own abilities, the enhancement of one’s capacities as a social actor, of one’s linguistic abilities and the gradual development of a suitable attitude towards learning and work. The curriculum determines which subjects serve for these purposes and lists the number of hours per week. At primary school the compulsory subjects are Religious Education, General Studies, German, Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Music, Arts, Textile/Technical Work and Sports. Additionally, the curriculum lists one modern language as mandatory.

By way of providing continuity in the process of education and learning, competences already acquired in the ECEC setting (in the fields of language, ethics, motor skills, natural science, mathematics, health, creativity, and technology) may be further developed and stimulated in the context of primary school subjects. Austria puts a special emphasis on the continual acquisition and development of language skills during kindergarten and primary school. ECEC institutions put a focus on the fostering of everyday speech for the purpose of information exchange, sharing individual emotions, needs, experiences, desires and ideas (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2014). While kindergarten also makes children familiar with

German as the language of education, it is primary school's explicit goal to assist children in developing it. For the domain of language there is a supplement to the framework curriculum focusing on language learning. This supplement serve as a basis for the support, stimulation, and documentation of the individual educational processes pertaining to language (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2009b).The guidelines for early language acquisition during transition from kindergarten to primary school (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2014) underline the importance of acquisition of language skills during the period of transition (see Chapter 1).

The curriculum of primary schools specifies educational tasks, learning content and didactical principles. Because of its framework character, teachers have autonomy in the selection and structuring of content as well as in determining teaching methods and materials. They are also allowed to put different emphasis on the content, and can decide on how much time they spend on a certain subject matter. In addition, within the scope of the curriculum schools have the possibility of increasing or reducing the number of hours of compulsory subjects, may not, however, cancel them completely.

The curriculum further emphasizes the use of different forms of learning in order for instruction to be child appropriate, lively and stimulating. Panning out from the play-based forms of learning of ECEC, children should take steps towards conscious, independent and goal oriented learning. Forms of learning with which children are already familiar from the ECEC setting are specifically recommended: learning through play, free, project-based, investigative/explorative learning, informative instruction and training.

The focus of early childhood and school education is placed on the development of competences for lifelong learning in order to ensure continuity in the educational career. "Competence" is seen as a net of knowledge, skills, abilities, strategies, and routines which every person needs to have in addition to motivation, in order to retain a sense of agency in various situations (Weinert 1999).

From a holistic educational perspective, the promotion of self, social and professional competences as well as meta-competence and competence in learning methods, the latter especially in the last year of kindergarten, is of particular importance. Competence in learning methods refers to the development of the awareness of one's own learning processes and of successful learning strategies. Meta-competence refers to the ability to assess one's own competences, to apply one's skills and knowledge appropriate to the situation and to identify the growth in one's capabilities autonomously. Competence in learning methods and meta-competence form an important basis for the processes of further learning and are therefore essential lifelong learning competences.

On the school level, the concept of academic standards places a special emphasis on the acquisition of basic professional competences as prerequisite for lifelong learning. They describe fundamental expectations vis-à-vis the outcomes of teaching and learning processes in regard to student's abilities. For compulsory subjects the standards define a specific level of achievement that has to be reached by each student. In setting a standard, a systematic selection of basic competences, which have to be acquired in class in a sustainable manner, is made. The respective competences are meant to equip the learner with the skills necessary for coping with the challenges of work and everyday life. They were formulated on the basis of a model of competence that has been derived from the curriculum. The model grasps the core area of a subject and turns abstract educational goals into concrete tasks (BIFIE, n.d.).

In a nutshell, both curricula are independent documents. In fact, the framework curriculum for ECEC and the addition to the framework curriculum are developed in line with the curriculum for primary school. Both are based on similar, but not identical principles of education. That's the reason why an adaption of both curricula would promote a common language and a mutual understanding of kindergarten and primary school.

## **B. Pedagogy**

### **“Neue Lernkultur”– A “new culture” of learning**

The growing significance of ECEC institutions, the implementation of the Framework Curriculum and the network projects gradually lead kindergartens and primary schools to align their approaches to education. In Austria, elementary and primary education is increasingly marked by a “new culture of learning”: Children are expected to acquire competences in a manner that is appropriate for their age and pure teaching is gradually replaced by a notion of mentoring and support. The goal is to guarantee a well-founded, holistic early childhood and school education (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2015). An aligned approach to education should not only prevail during the last year of kindergarten but during the entire time spent in ECEC and primary school settings.

This “new culture of learning” increasingly influences the prevailing definition of the concept of school. Learning at school happens less and less “according to curriculum”. Instead, learning is more frequently understood as co-constructive process. According to this view the child is seen as competent individual that, from the very beginning, perceives and explores its environment with all its senses. Children not only shape their own learning processes, they also actively shape their social and cultural environment. Girls and boys learn and develop through co-construction. Concepts of co-construction are based upon an understanding of social constructivism. This means that the child is regarded as a social being, its development is expected to be imbedded in social relationships and it is assumed that learning happens through interactive and co-constructive activity (Dahlberg, 2010). Learning and development happen in social contexts and apart from the children themselves, there are also other participants actively involved in learning processes, for example parents, siblings, teachers, experts etc. Offering different impulses for learning, helps children develop the ability to self-regulate, i.e. to plan, execute and assess their own learning processes.

The view of the child as a co-constructor of its own learning processes requires the consideration of individual prerequisites for learning when designing lessons. Children are unique individuals. They have distinct personalities, distinct social and cultural backgrounds, different needs, learning potentials or paces of development. Therefore, each child has a particular learning style and rhythm. This is why differences among children (Curriculum of Primary School) and their uniqueness (National Framework Curriculum) should be taken into account by applying methods of differentiation and individualization. While individualization devotes attention to a child’s personality, traits, and resources, differentiation describes conditions, methods, and measures for the stimulation of individual learning. According to the curriculum, both concepts are to be understood as promoting and stimulating the development of the child. They also allow primary schools to meet their obligation of promoting giftedness.

It is an approach that is becoming increasingly noticeable in Austria. The guidelines on the topic of “Individualization and differentiation during the school entry phase” developed within the framework of the network projects exactly illustrate this notion.

Particularly the transition from kindergarten to primary school is characterized by an approach of “smooth transition” in many ECEC institutions. Through collaboration with the home environment and with ECEC institutions, school entry is intended to occur as smoothly and as supported as possible. During the first phase children are given time to become acquainted with their classmates and build a positive rapport with both them and their teacher. Each child should also become familiar with the school building and the way time is structured. Aim of each kindergarten should be the equipment of each child with the necessary information and competences in order to cope with the transition into school (BMUKK, 2012).

For children with special needs transition is easier and more effective due to the extant cooperation between kindergarten and primary school – primary school teachers are already familiar with the specific needs of the child.

### **A regular day in kindergarten and primary school – differences**

A regular day in kindergarten primarily consists of play, exploration, and project time. Primary school takes up play and other forms of learning suitable for children. Gradually activities become more oriented towards achievement. The biggest difference can therefore be found in the way in which both institutions deal with performance requirements. While the National Framework Curriculum promotes a pedagogy that focuses on appropriate tasks to foster a co-constructivist exploration of the world, the curriculum for primary schools puts the emphasis on introducing children to achievement. The latter does, however, take into account that the pace of development may vary from child to child and still considers play as primary form of learning during this time (BMUKK, 2012).

Freedom of decision is not as great anymore – children now have to learn to follow structures and to adhere to routines. At primary school a regular day is commonly more structured (where time is concerned). The laws regulating time at school determine the structure of the school day more rigidly: children have to be at school by a certain time (while kindergarten allows for children to arrive more flexibly). Children also have to sit still and be attentive for longer periods of time.

## **C. Child development**

### **Monitoring tools and practices in kindergarten**

Already in kindergarten, the need for additional language support of a child is determined in the last year before school entry. This language skills assessment is meant to document any additional language support so that additional resources might be provided. For this reason, linguistic competences of children from 4 to 5 years of age are assessed. The observation sheet for the assessment of language/linguistic competence (in German) of children with German as first language (BESK 2.0, Breit 2011a) or for children with German as second language (BESK-DaZ 2.0, Breit 2011b) or similar, linguistic and pedagogical well-founded instruments may be used in order to produce a clear picture of whether or not an early fostering of language skills will be needed. The two methods developed by Ulich und Mayr at the State Institute of Early Childhood Research in Munich – *sismik* (documentation of language development for children with a first language other than German, Ulich & Mayr 2003) and *seldak* (documentation of language development for children with German as their first language, Ulich & Mayr, 2006) – are being used for example. Some of the federal states (e.g. Vorarlberg, Lower Austria) also continue to employ federal-state specific methods. For the context of school there is also a specific observation sheet to assess language skills of children with German as second language during the lessons (Fröhlich, Döll & Dirim, 2014). This sheet is meant to assess language skills regularly and continuously in order to provide adequate measures for promotion/support.

On an increasingly regular basis portfolios are assembled with the children during their last year of kindergarten. These portfolios help document the child's competences and development. In Lower Austria it has been mandatory to work with portfolios since 2012. Portfolios therefore constitute a routine practice (Stundner & Lammerhuber, 2014). The portfolio in Lower Austria consists of a "development portfolio" which documents the competences, strengths, talents, and development of a child and is maintained by the child in cooperation with the kindergarten teacher. It also comprises a separate "transition portfolio" (as part of the development portfolio) which contains a selection of works/, documents and notes made by the child, kindergarten teacher and family. It may be taken along and serve as basis for conversations with school. Additionally, there is a tool called "treasure chest" that might be used in order to store three-dimensional works which are meaningful to the child or

document its development. Observations and conclusions drawn from the portfolio serve as basis for the planning the education of a child. In the context of comprehensive studies it was shown that the usage of portfolios positively influences learning and development (Stundner & Lammerhuber, 2014).

The federal state of Salzburg is also planning an implementation of “transition portfolios” starting in 2016/17. Conversations in regard to transition shall be facilitated between institutions of ECEC and primary school.

### **Monitoring tools and practices for school readiness**

All children permanently residing in Austria are subject to general compulsory education. School starts on September 1 following the child's sixth birthday, and continues for nine years.

Children reaching the age of 6 prior to 31 August of a given year are required to attend school from September 1 of that year. Children subject to compulsory education must be registered at a primary school by their parents or guardians in the last year of kindergarten. Registration occurs in the period between October and January of a given year, depending on the federal state. At enrolment, the school readiness of the child is determined. A child is said to be ready for school if it can be assumed that they are able to follow the lessons of the first grade without being overwhelmed physically or mentally (BMBF, 2015b). School management has to determine a child's readiness for school on the occasion of registration. The decision determines whether a child is assigned to preprimary education or starts attending primary school.

For the concrete design of the registration process numerous testing procedures and diagnostic instruments are available. Guidelines and observation sheets are also used and made available on the website of school psychology by the Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of registration cognitive, motor, emotional, social, and physical skills are assessed, and whether a child's linguistic competences correspond to its age. Ideally, the period of transition is also shaped by long-term observations of the child where all information gained from support measures are collected. This may turn out to be more significant than conclusions drawn from momentary assessments. Information on learning prerequisites and competences of a child can only be passed on if ECEC and primary schools cooperate and parents consent. The only exception is the federal state of Vorarlberg which has regulated (§ 8 Abs. 5 VlbG KGG) cooperation between kindergarten and primary school. Cooperation is now mandatory and ECEC teachers have to provide information respectively data to school management if requested and if necessary for determining the child's readiness for school (LGBl. Nr. 52/2008 idgF).

The assessment of a child's readiness for school requires a holistic view on the child (and not solely of its mental development). This is why guidelines for school managers published by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs recommend that the “short observation window” which registration offers should be expanded. Portfolios, cooperation with kindergarten, and conversations with parents may complement briefer impressions or might put them into a larger perspective.

If there are grounds for believing that the child is not ready for school at enrolment, or if the parents or guardians require a review of the school readiness of their child, the administration of the school decides. School-age children who are not ready for school are entered into the pre-school level (BMBF, 2015b). There is no possibility for children who are not ready for school to remain in kindergarten for one further year.

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<sup>10</sup>[www.schulpsychologie.at/bildungsinformation/beim-schuleintritt/lehrerinnen/](http://www.schulpsychologie.at/bildungsinformation/beim-schuleintritt/lehrerinnen/)

### **Options to address developmental delays in kindergarten**

On the basis of their training, ECEC teachers are asked to recognize and assess developmental delays or giftedness in the various areas (language, motor skills and social behavior). On the basis of the documentation of a child's development and education appropriate support measures should be initiated in collaboration with the home environment. If needed, external support and expertise might be drawn upon.

In some kindergartens there is the possibility of receiving additional support from special needs teachers. In some cases mototherapists, speech and language therapists or psychologists may also provide support. In a few selected kindergartens in the federal state of Carinthia the (private) operating agency offers additional teaching staff to an extent of 25 hours per week maximum. The teachers then work with integrated groups of children who either speak German as a second language or display slight language problems.

### **Options to address developmental delays in school**

Children who are still not able to follow instruction in German after kindergarten or lateral entrants (e.g. the children of migrants or refugees) may attend language courses in German as well as additional lessons in their first language. Their lack in language competence may not, however, be assessed as special educational need. It also does neither constitute a ground on which readiness for school can be denied. The respective child may therefore not be placed in a preprimary setting. Another possibility for a child who's language skills are not yet sufficiently developed to follow in class, is to continue school attendance as a guest student for one or two years maximum. Language problems are considered in the context of performance assessment. The child receives a confirmation of school attendance instead of a certificate.

### **D. Collaboration between authorities and ECEC/primary school on pedagogical continuity**

There is no information available concerning the collaboration on matters related to pedagogical continuity between ECEC and primary school, e.g. on curriculum development and implementation policies; learning standards, or development goals.

### **E. Future prospects**

Austrian educational policy has devoted increasing attention to elementary education. As mentioned, Austria's education reform commission prescribed a comprehensive package in regard to ECEC. Educational goals in this field need to be compiled in an agreement between the federal states and the federal government as a general framework. Additionally, the implementation of a comprehensive, uniform and continuous portfolio process ("Bildungskompass") has also been stipulated. Based on a mandatory potential analysis at the age 3.5 years including a language and development screening, the portfolio process serves to continuously document a child's development throughout the educational career. In case of transition this process should help to display the competences and strengths of a child at the time of school entry and to determine the specific nature of promotion measures. It is therefore designed to accompany the child in each educational setting and in its development.

## Chapter 4: Developmental continuity

This chapter is concerned with how developmental continuity is established, i.e. how collaborations with the home environment are organized on transitions, how ECEC settings develop collaborations amongst themselves to steer transitions, how ECEC settings and primary schools collaborate on the topic of transitions, and whether any collaboration with other early child services or organizations/agents is sought with the purpose to establish better transitions for the child. This chapter will first address how settings collaborate with the child his- or herself on transitions.

### Collaborations with the child

Preparation for school starts with the enrolment into kindergarten. As in previous years the holistic development of the child is also attended to during the last year of kindergarten. It contains activities and impulses for language development, literacy, the improvement of children's perception skills, mathematics etc.

The skills which are required for a successful transition to primary school are also part of the daily routine and are aligned with the educational domains and pedagogical principles as defined by the framework curriculum for ECEC institutions. The process of learning is continuously attended to, described and reflected upon. Also measures are set in order to broach the topic of school with the children. The "Addition to the Austrian Framework Curriculum for ECEC institutions" also serves as basis for strategy development, implementation and reflection. It is designed to help develop and differentiate competences that children are meant to have acquired by the time they start school.

Participation occurs in the form of staff-child conversations in which the children's expectations vis à vis school can be addressed. So-called „reflection talks“, preparing children for school, take place, are, however, not widespread. There are rather mutual visits of teachers and/or children, joint projects or activities, like celebrations, sport events, singing, acting or project days.

### Collaborations with the home environment

Collaboration with the home environment which specifically addresses the transition process starts, at the very latest, when the child turns 5. Parents of five-year-old-children are contacted individually to officially provide them with information on the last mandatory year of kindergarten. Already before this, information on ECEC and public support measures is distributed to all parents after the child's birth. Moreover internet services and various brochures (in Vienna these are multilingual and include versions in English, Serbian, Bosnian, Croat and Turkish) provide information on ECEC services and on the transition from ECEC settings to primary school.

The framework curriculum regards the transition from home environment to ECEC setting as one of the first transitions to occur. Individual and quality-focused settling into kindergarten falls within the shared responsibility of the family and the early care institution. Parents receive information on the concept and methods of familiarization and are thereby involved in the child mastering the period of transition. One well-known model in Austria is the "Berliner Eingewöhnungsmodell" (Laewen, Andres & Hédervári, 2003). It describes how to facilitate a smooth transition to the ECEC setting in three phases.

The folder "Welcome to school" by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs (BMBF, 2015a) is intended to serve as a guide to parents. It shows how parents may support their child until the start of school and how they may help maintain the child's pleasant feelings of anticipation. Topics such as getting ready for school, the way to school, and the importance of play are pointed out. Additionally, it includes general and legal information on the official start of school and on the ways in which parents may contribute and take over responsibilities in the school setting. Moreover, tips for parents can be found in folders and

brochures for children at preschool-age, e.g. how to prepare for school (playing, sharing experiences, reading and telling stories, painting...) and for the way to school, how to arouse joy for school and also tips for a successful play.

The federal state of Lower Austria also provides parents with the necessary information and support for the transition from ECEC settings to primary school. It does so by furnishing parents with folders in various languages (e.g. Bosnian/Croat/Serbian, Bulgarian, Czech, Turkish). Advice for the promotion of educational domains is offered and it is demonstrated how the home environment may support the child in his/her preparation for school (Land NÖ, n.d.). Styria also supports parents with information and handy tips for four- to six-year-old children in a respective brochure. Amongst others, parents find information on accompanying children in their transition to school and ways of a positive support of this transition (Land Steiermark, 2011).

Parents also legally play a vital role during the transition from an ECEC setting to primary school. Information on the child may only be passed on between the different educational settings with their consent. Collaboration between ECEC settings and primary schools therefore also requires that parents cooperate.

The curriculum for primary schools takes into account the importance of the collaboration among parents and teachers. Teachers and parents are supposed to consult, especially in regard to measures that help stimulate the child's development in the best possible way. The curriculum therefore recommends that parents participate in the arrangement of school activities and an exchange of information is explicitly encouraged.

### **Collaborations at setting level**

As defined by the Austrian framework curriculum the teachers of all involved institutions accompany and moderate the process of transition. They provide opportunities for the integration of the two systems. They do so by planning joint activities and by inviting all persons that are involved in the process to participate in meetings. In practice, opportunities for collaboration often occur as joint celebrations, visits of primary school children to the kindergarten and vice-versa, often in the context of so-called „reading days“ or reading buddy lessons.

The collaboration between ECEC and primary school and stakeholders may take different forms. There is no generalized practice of sharing information on the development of children between the different stakeholders (e.g. policy officials, ECEC staff, parents). Cooperation and exchange mainly occurs between kindergartens and schools – but, as already mentioned, only with the consent of the legal guardian. Some providers offer special observations of children in their last year of kindergarten or information for parents but not mandatorily so.

In most cases ECEC institutions and primary schools are physically separate. The capital of Vienna wants to promote cooperation between institutions aimed at the education of children between the ages of 0 and 14. It does so by building schools according to a so-called “campus model”. The “Vienna Campus Model” brings together the pedagogy of ECEC, primary school and leisure in one physical locale. So far, four education clusters have been built. The buildings are designed to the benefit of the pedagogical demands. As ECEC and primary school are located in the same building, physical space may be used by both institutions and joint activities may be planned and realized. At the Campus Monte Laa in Vienna, for example, partner groups are selected at beginning of the school year. One class then collaborates with one or multiple partner groups; it does so for the duration of the entire year. Together teachers of ECEC and primary school plan and realize different activities. Children attending kindergarten, for example, take part in the first grade's “Buchstabetag” (“Alphabet Day”). This not only makes transition easier for children as they are already familiar with the environment, it also facilitates cooperation between teachers of both institutions.

For the ECEC settings and primary schools that participate in the project networks, communication and information platforms have been established (Project Care). The

participating institutions have explicitly been asked by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs to share the resulting ideas, concepts, experiences etc. with the other participants via these platforms (collection of best-practice examples). Furthermore, the responsible school supervisory authorities are currently initiating and establishing an interlinking of all project partners on the level of the federal state (including schools, kindergartens, advisor of school development of the University Colleges of Teacher Education, ECEC supervisory authority).

In May 2015 a meeting was organized in Vienna during which both network projects, the project „Fostering Language Skills“ and the project „Transition from ECEC to Primary School“ (cf. Chapter 1), were brought together. The meeting had the exchange of experience at its center – a strong focus was placed on the discussion of ideas and models that had been developed in the course of the projects and which had been successfully tested. It also devoted attention to organizational and legal matters. The basis for a nationwide implementation has thereby been initiated.

One further meeting, under the title of „We are transition – from project to implementation“ („Wir leben die Transition – vom Projekt zur Implementierung“) is planned to take place in Vienna in October 2016. This event is meant to serve as completion of the project stage and as preparation for the nationwide implementation.

Beyond the network projects, the federal state of Salzburg issues a folder on the transition from ECEC to primary school. The folder offers an overview of all projects and models currently employed by kindergartens and primary schools on the level of the federal state. The goal is to publicize projects and activities in order to inspire ideas for new projects and to promote collaboration. Furthermore, in some areas of Austria smaller networks have been established on the local level. In these networks kindergartens and primary schools exchange information and carry out projects together.

ECEC and primary school teachers also find opportunities for the exchange of experiences in the contexts of events like „Schultütenkinder reloaded“ at the Parochial University College for Teacher Education Graz and „International Days“ at the University College of Teacher Education Burgenland. Such events not only facilitate professional exchange, they also encourage participants to look beyond their own institutional setting (PH Burgenland, 2015).

### **Collaborations with early childhood services and other settings, agencies or organizations**

The curriculum for primary schools mentions that School Psychological Services, school physicians, teachers working as assistant teachers or centers for special education and inclusion may provide valuable assistance where necessary. The collaboration with services offered outside school is therefore recommended and falls within the school's own responsibility.

In regard to school readiness school management may, in accordance with its responsibilities, call on a „transition team“. This team then assesses the situation and tries to obtain an impression of whether the child is ready for school: it also tries to determine his/her language competences. The „transition team“ thereby supports school management in shaping the process of transition from ECEC to primary school. It consists, depending on the case, of teachers from native-tongue lessons, speech therapists, school psychologists or social workers and – as far as possible – also of kindergarten teachers. The task of the „transition team“ is to jointly assess the child's development, considering his/her individual circumstances, and, if necessary, to suggest appropriate support assistance measures. A physical exam carried out by a school physician helps to determine the child's physical maturity.

The „transition team“ may consider conversations with the child as well as with his/her legal guardian within the obligatory language skills assessment during registration. Medical reports, expert opinions, reports from doctors or therapists and carers may as well be used, but only when entitled by the legal guardian (BMUKK, 2013). In regard to integrated teaching

so-called “committees for transition” have been proven to be of value on the district level. These committees include the school supervisory authorities, representatives from (special educational needs) kindergartens, school psychologists and school physicians. It is the purpose of the committees to develop a comprehensive picture of all children with special educational needs who are about to start school in order to identify the best school for the best possible support of the child. Additionally, some kindergartens employ particular teachers for the integration of children with special needs who also provide support and assistance during the process of transition.

Support of children with special needs in ECEC does not automatically presuppose special needs education in school. A separate assessment procedure is hence required. Unless a specific request for an assessment procedure is made by the child’s parents, no special assistance is provided for children with special educational needs. The assessment of a child’s special needs has to be requested as soon as it is clear that the child will not be able to follow instruction. This either happens prior to a child’s school entry or at a later point, i.e. when it turns out that the child requires special assistance.

Ideally parents file a request in the context of the registration processes at school. This then puts a 5-month-long observation process into operation during which expert opinions (from special educational needs experts as well as from school psychologists or school physicians with the consent of the parents) are obtained by the school board on the district level. If the process is completed prior to the start of school, a timely allocation of resources is feasible (Zöhrer, 2009).

## Chapter 5: Challenges and strategies

The following chapter intends to collect information on what challenges Austria in transitions in general, and in ensuring professional, pedagogical and developmental continuity in particular.

The Austrian educational system is, in comparison to the education systems of other industrial or service sector societies, marked by a high degree of horizontal and vertical fragmentation. Especially where the transition from kindergarten to school is concerned, there is a structural, institutional and mental disjuncture. It is characterized by different responsibilities, different approaches to education and differently educated pedagogical staff (Zöhrer, 2009).

Decentralized responsibility for ECEC across the 9 federal states poses a great challenge. As a consequence, ECEC varies from state to state in quality. Therefore some experts wish for a centralized administration, e.g. at the ministry of education. Without a fundamental change of responsibilities, coordination of quality control will always have to rely on regional initiatives (Dudenbostel, 2014).

As a consequence different pedagogical concepts emerge. This further complicates the successful support of children transitioning from an ECEC setting which has not been cooperating with the respective primary school. Additionally, different providers offer different forms of employment and pay of staff. This also creates different conditions for the same kind of work.

These differences in regard to responsible authorities also result in diverging curricula for ECEC and primary schools. In spite of the National Framework Curriculum and the Curriculum of Primary Schools the pedagogical approaches of both institutions are not aligned due to a lack in communication. This might be explained by the fact that the framework curriculum has only recently been developed. Additionally, it tries to integrate recent pedagogical developments. Nevertheless continuity to the Curriculum of Primary Schools was sought. The intended reform of primary school, together with projects that have already been commissioned (e.g. guidelines that pedagogically align both curricula) could help overcome these obstacles in the future.

The education of qualified kindergarten teachers as a means of quality control of ECEC education constitutes another important issue. In this regard still no federal policy initiatives seem to be planned. The fact that the education for teachers of kindergartens and of primary schools is different in nature continues to be a topic for manifold discussions. Initial education and professional development training in the context of the same institution would lead to a higher degree of familiarity and knowledge and would, ideally, result in a shared approach to education. Also the professional standing of kindergarten teachers would be increased (socio-) politically by lifting the initial education of kindergarten teachers to the tertiary level. It could also help kindergarten and primary school teachers to communicate more on an equal footing. In making the education of kindergarten teachers' part of the tertiary level, one would furthermore establish the necessary proximity to the field of early childhood research. Currently there are attempts to facilitate communication and collaboration through joint workshops or trainings and project initiatives.

There is no uniform legal regime regulating the institutional framework of the process of transition for both settings. This can be seen as great obstacle and therefore poses another future challenge.

ECEC and primary pedagogy have a different (socio-) political standing. Longer on-site hours for kindergarten teachers directly for care, less time for planning and less pay put a strain on the relation between ECEC and primary school staff. This often leads to kindergarten teachers having professional conversations and carrying out consultations in their leisure. Time for planning varies depending on the federal state. While it is at 5 hours in the states of Carinthia

and the Tyrol, it amounts to 10 hours in Styria. Working hours and timetables that allow for more flexibility are a necessary prerequisite for facilitating smooth transitions, as are additional hours for exchange and collaboration. The amount of time that cooperation requires is further increased by the physical distance of the institutions. Campus models, where ECEC settings are under the same roof as primary schools would help minimize the time spent on collaborating.

So far only pilot projects for the aspect of cooperation between ECEC and primary schools exist. These have not been implemented nationwide. Therefore primary schools most often only cooperate with ECEC institutions in their proximity. As a result, school entry happens without further support for most children and parents. In this regard, the insights gained in the context of the network projects could facilitate a nationwide implementation process.

Austria's educational institutions lack financial resources as well as adequate resources concerning time, space (for exchange and conversations) and personnel. This also has a negative impact on the efforts made when trying to facilitate transitions. A large number of children per group in ECEC settings further complicates the process. The lack in human resources is partly countered by hiring teachers for special educational needs and the support of language acquisition as additional staff. These can, however, only assist in certain cases and hence do not supplement regular support. Therefore, additional pedagogical staff is required who, together with kindergarten and primary school teachers, then form a permanent "transition team". This way challenges could well be met.

A requirement of data protection works as a further barrier in ensuring pedagogical continuity. Information relating to the child may only be passed on to the respective educational institution with the consent of the parent or legal guardian. In the context of the network projects a form has been devised which, when signed by the parents, facilitates the transfer of information. (Transition) portfolios offer another way to share information. In Lower Austria the child might take the portfolio along to primary school. A portfolio comprises documentation over a longer period of time. It may complement the picture during the official assessment of a child's readiness for school and it may serve as an additional avenue for the exchange of information between children / parents and ECEC and primary school staff. The education reform of 2015 stipulates the implementation of a portfolio system facilitating the flow of information. This way, relevant information on a child's development can be passed on to the subsequent educational setting with the involvement of both, parents and children.

Difficulties in communication and, often, a lack of German skills on the part of the parents may further complicate the process of collaboration. Home visits (see Chapter 1) could be of assistance in such cases. It not only benefits the children but also their families and most often their mothers.

Among parents there is still insufficient awareness of the importance of ECEC institutions and even more often of the importance of an active involvement in the process of education. This poses a further hindrance. In spite of the fact that kindergarten has asserted itself as central educational institution (in society and media), parents and/or legal guardians continue to consider primary school as the central educational institution. With the start of school "the serious side of life" begins – this line of thinking still prevails. It will therefore be the sociopolitical challenge for pedagogical staff to foster a perception of school as place for the continuation of learning processes which already started in kindergarten. Parent-staff conversations about transition, in addition to the regular discussion of the child's process of development, could further assist in developing a different perception. Some parents, however, do not seize these opportunities. For this reason there is a desire for mandatory conversations on the topic of transition.

A similar attitude of "Let children be children for the time being. They will have to start school anyway" still prevails among some ECEC teachers and often hampers collaboration. In the context of joint trainings such approaches are discussed and addressed.

Evidence-based policy and practice are an important approach in the field of education and in their usage are not limited to the period of transition. Davies defines evidence-based policy and practice as an approach that “helps people make well-informed decisions about policies, programs, and projects by putting the best available evidence from research at the heart of policy development and implementation” (Nutley, Walter & Davies, 2007, p. 3). The evidence-based practice movement has grown in impact in recent years and standards for research leading to evidence-based practice have been defined. However, the slow and incomplete uptake of research findings especially in the field of education obviously has shown that the development, implementation, and dissemination of sustainable strategies require intensive cooperation between researchers, politicians and administrators. Cooperation with media is also important, as they exert considerable influence regarding political decisions (Spiel & Strohmeier, 2012).

The role and function of management in ECEC and primary school settings will have to be revised. A revised understanding should then focus less on administrative tasks than on leadership. Leadership in this context promotes the formulation of goals, the motivation and steering of staff. Leadership is therefore associated with change and development whereas management is linked to leading an institution efficiently and effectively. For the successful management of institutions as well as positive transitions from ECEC to primary school both are, however, essential (Schmich & Breit, 2009).

It is complex and therefore difficult to overcome the problems associated with transition. Without structural changes continuity between both institutions cannot be ensured. This becomes apparent through the numerous projects of individual persons, facilities and regions that have often acted on their own initiative (Zöhrer, 2009). It therefore remains to be seen how the further realization of the network projects will develop, what will happen with the insights and best practice examples garnered in this context and how a nationwide implementation is going to be effected.

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### **Legal regulations**

57. Kundmachung des Landeshauptmannes vom 15. Oktober 2015, Zl. 01-VD-VE-129/13-2015, betreffend die Vereinbarung gemäß Art. 15a B-VG über die frühe sprachliche Förderung in institutionellen Kinderbetreuungseinrichtungen für die Kindergartenjahre 2015/16 bis 2017/18

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### **Links Continual Professional Deevolment**

Land Oberösterreich: [www.ooe-kindernet.at/xchg/hs.xsl/38\\_DEU\\_HTML.htm](http://www.ooe-kindernet.at/xchg/hs.xsl/38_DEU_HTML.htm)

Land Steiermark: [www.verwaltung.steiermark.at/cms/ziel/74836025/DE/](http://www.verwaltung.steiermark.at/cms/ziel/74836025/DE/)

Land Tirol: [www.tirol.gv.at/bildung/kindergaerten-horte-kinderkrippen/fortbildungen/](http://www.tirol.gv.at/bildung/kindergaerten-horte-kinderkrippen/fortbildungen/)

Kinder in Wien – KIWI: [www.kinderinwien.at/kiwi-akademie/kiwi-akademie/](http://www.kinderinwien.at/kiwi-akademie/kiwi-akademie/)

### **Other links**

[www.abc.berufsbildendeschulen.at/de/page.asp?id=32](http://www.abc.berufsbildendeschulen.at/de/page.asp?id=32)

[bakipmistelbach.ac.at/images/pdf/lehrer/Lehrplan%20NEU%20SV\\_BAKIP\\_Entwurf\\_April2014.pdf](http://bakipmistelbach.ac.at/images/pdf/lehrer/Lehrplan%20NEU%20SV_BAKIP_Entwurf_April2014.pdf)

[www.bifie.at/node/3401](http://www.bifie.at/node/3401)

[www.bmbf.gv.at/schulen/service/fluechtlingskinder.html](http://www.bmbf.gv.at/schulen/service/fluechtlingskinder.html)

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[www.kphgraz.at/index.php?id=598&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=261&cHash=19accd700d14d2f1fadaa04c2e979ddb](http://www.kphgraz.at/index.php?id=598&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=261&cHash=19accd700d14d2f1fadaa04c2e979ddb)

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[www.schulpsychologie.at/bildungsinformation/beim-schuleintritt/lehrerinnen/](http://www.schulpsychologie.at/bildungsinformation/beim-schuleintritt/lehrerinnen/)

[webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Overview](http://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Overview)