



Engaging parents and guardians in early childhood education and care centres

This policy brief draws on data from the OECD Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS Starting Strong) 2018 and focuses on the engagement of parents and guardians in early childhood education and care (ECEC) centres. Data from nine countries are used to examine different practices regarding family engagement, including regular communication, support for child development at home, and involvement in ECEC centre operations. Practices in centres serving lower and higher shares of children from disadvantaged homes are compared. The reports of ECEC staff and centre leaders on satisfaction with parental support and their professional development and training related to parental engagement are also examined. Results highlight some differences in practices according to socio-economic context and the training received by staff in working with parents and guardians. This brief concludes with a presentation of policy considerations that could support centres and staff in facilitating engagement with parents and guardians. These include supporting relevant staff education and training, creating conditions to put theory into practice, and developing mechanisms to review the needs of families.

Introduction

Parents and guardians play a fundamental role in the learning and development of young children. Their behaviours and interactions with their children have a profound impact on children's well-being, socio-emotional development and cognitive skills, as well as their motivation to learn. Research has shown that parents' and guardians' involvement with their children's ECEC providers can also be associated with improved socio-cognitive outcomes for children, through an enhanced understanding of child development, a richer set of interactions, and increased self-confidence in their parenting skills (Sim et al., 2019^[1]; OECD, 2020^[2]). This policy brief examines data on parental and guardian engagement in ECEC centres based on reports from ECEC staff and centre leaders collected as part of the first cycle of TALIS Starting Strong to gain a better understanding of the variety of practices relating to family engagement in ECEC taken across and within the nine participating countries: Chile, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Norway and Türkiye.

Staff can engage parents and guardians with their children's learning and development in three main ways: 1) staff can communicate with parents and guardians about the activities taking place at the ECEC centre and keep them informed about their children's participation in these activities and progress; 2) staff can guide parents and guardians in their own interactions with their children. In addition, 3) parents and guardians may be given opportunities to actively participate in the organisation of the ECEC centre, either by engaging in operational activities or by contributing to decision-making.

Engaging with families is particularly important for children from disadvantaged homes, who may have access to fewer resources, learning opportunities, and quality interactions with their parents at home (Flood et al., 2022^[3]; Bradley et al., 2001^[4]). Involving parents in ECEC could help to counteract possible disadvantages by encouraging parents to learn more about child development and informing them on ways they could interact with their children. Improved connections with parents could also incite children to become more engaged with learning through ECEC. Policies encouraging parental involvement could make a contribution towards closing early developmental gaps, given evidence that the relationship between improved children's outcomes and parental engagement in ECEC can be stronger for families from disadvantaged backgrounds (Barnett et al., 2020^[5]). In some countries, ECEC programmes targeted at parents and children from disadvantaged homes have therefore been established (such as Early Head Start and Head Start in the United States), with positive results (Bennett, 2008^[6]).

Across countries, there are substantial differences in the extent to which ECEC centres engage parents and guardians and this policy brief builds on the OECD's previous reporting on TALIS Starting Strong 2018 by considering the ways in which various types of parental engagement are combined in ECEC centres (OECD, 2019^[7]). The brief then takes a deeper look at the practices adopted by ECEC centres regarding parental engagement and whether these differ according to the composition of children enrolled, to understand whether practices may counterbalance socio-economic disadvantage or reproduce societal inequalities. Staff perceptions of parental engagement are then considered, along with the relationships between relevant staff training and practices, to investigate potential needs and supports.

What is TALIS Starting Strong?

The OECD's TALIS Starting Strong is an international, large-scale survey of staff and leaders in ECEC. TALIS Starting Strong uses questionnaires administered to staff and leaders to gather data. Its main goal is to develop robust international information relevant to developing and implementing policies focused on ECEC staff and leaders and their pedagogical and professional practices, with an emphasis on those aspects that promote conditions for children's development, learning and well-being. TALIS Starting Strong 2018 included nine countries: Chile, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Norway, and Türkiye. All of these countries collected data from staff and leaders in pre-primary education (ISCED level 02) settings. In addition, four of the nine countries (Denmark, Germany, Israel and Norway) collected data from staff and leaders in settings serving children under age 3. The objective of the survey was to obtain a representative sample in each participating country of staff and leaders providing ECEC for each level of ECEC in which the country participated. The international sampling plan for TALIS Starting Strong used a two-stage probability sampling design: staff were randomly selected from the list of in-scope staff in each of the randomly selected ECEC settings. The leader of each setting (i.e., the person with the most responsibility for administrative, managerial and/or pedagogical leadership) was automatically selected for participation as well. A more detailed description of the survey design and its implementation can be found in the TALIS Starting Strong 2018 Technical Report (OECD, 2019^[8]). Denmark did not meet technical standards on response rates; its results are therefore not shown in figures presenting international comparisons but are discussed in the text.

Note: The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is an instrument for compiling statistics on education internationally. Source: (OECD, 2019^[8]), TALIS Starting Strong 2018 Technical Report, <http://www.oecd.org/education/talis/TALIS-Starting-Strong-2018-Technical-Report.pdf>.

Box 1. How does TALIS Starting Strong measure family engagement?

TALIS Starting Strong collects information on three key dimensions of family engagement in ECEC: communication, support for parent-child interactions at home, and parental involvement in ECEC centres. Reports from staff and centre leaders provide complementary perspectives about family engagement practices at their ECEC centres given their different roles, which should be taken into account when comparing results on similar areas of practice.

Communication with parents and guardians

Centre leaders are asked about both informal and formal communication with parents and guardians and whether these practices occur “daily”, “weekly”, “monthly”, “less than monthly”, or “never” at their centre. However, staff are not asked about the frequency of their own individual practices regarding parental engagement as this may result in social desirability bias. Instead they are asked how well statements like “parents or guardians are informed about the development, well-being, and learning of their children on a regular basis” and “parents or guardians are informed about daily activities on a regular basis” describe how staff at the centre engage parents and guardians (“not at all”, “somewhat”, “well”, “very well”). The interpretation of staff responses should therefore consider their reliance on staff views of what communication “on a regular basis” entails, as well as their awareness of overall staff

practices. In addition, staff responses rely on their awareness of overall staff practices in the centre, which may vary by setting and the extent to which staff communicate on such issues.

Supporting parent-child interactions at home

TALIS Starting Strong asks leaders whether their ECEC centre provided any “workshops or courses for parents or guardians regarding child rearing or child development” in the past 12 months, whether this was alone or in conjunction with another organisation. Leaders are therefore invited to indicate the provision of support through formal events connected with the ECEC centre – but not necessarily facilitated by their own staff. In contrast, staff are asked how well family engagement at their centre can be described by the statement “parents and guardians are encouraged by staff to do play and learning activities with their children at home”. Responses are therefore focused on staff support for parents and guardians but may also refer to informal encouragement by staff that takes place outside of formal workshops or courses.

Involving parents and guardians in the organisation of ECEC centres

Since the involvement of parents and guardians in ECEC centre decision-making and operations relate to settings’ governance and organisation, related questions are only posed to centre leaders in TALIS Starting Strong. Leaders are asked to indicate whether their centre’s provision in the past 12 months included “support for parents’ or guardians’ involvement with the operation of the ECEC centre (e.g. fundraising, cleaning of the ECEC centre)” or “meetings to allow parents or guardians to contribute to ECEC centre management decisions”.

What are the main ways in which ECEC centres engage with families?

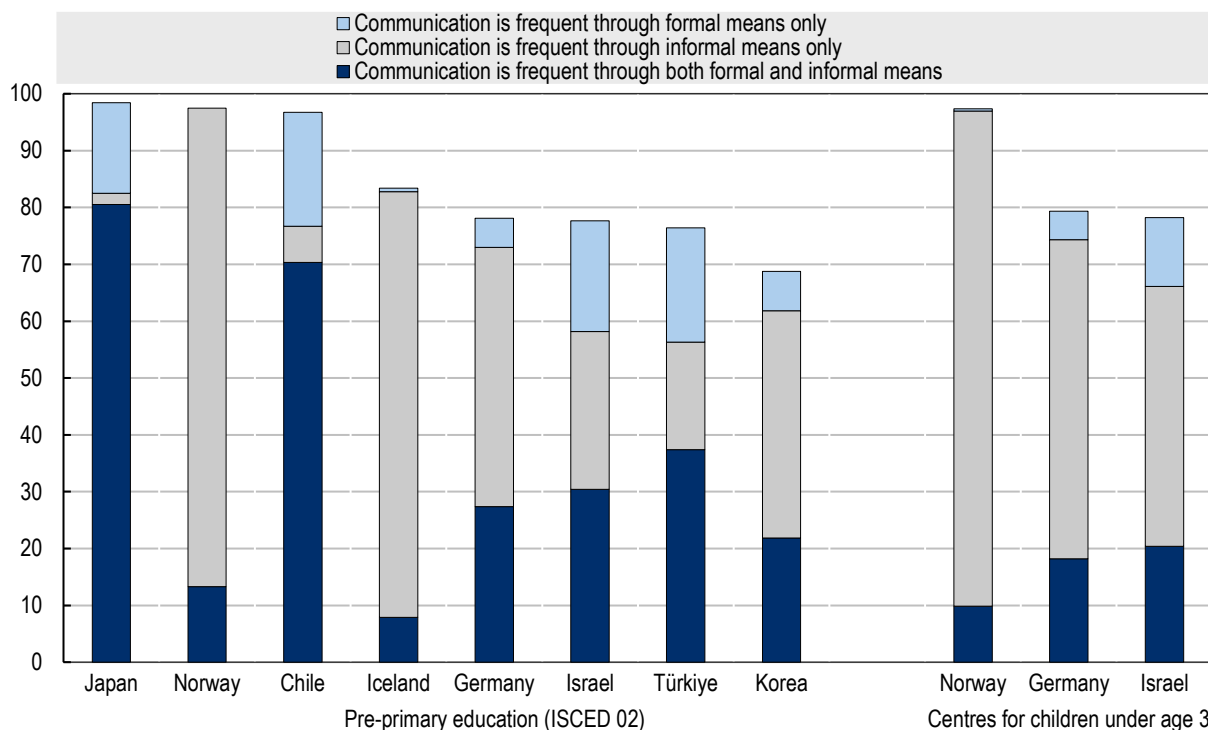
Communicating with parents and guardians

For ECEC centres, communication is a key form of engagement with parents and guardians, the frequency of which tends to be positively related to the quality of care provided for children (OECD, 2006^[9]). Through regular contact, communication can help to build parents’ trust in staff and make them more informed about their children’s development (O’Toole et al., 2019^[10]). Equally, parents may also be more likely to share information about their children that could support the work of staff. At the same time, contact through informal channels (e.g. conversations at drop-off and pick-up times) can end up being focused on immediate concerns and provide limited opportunities for mutual learning, and may need to be supplemented by other, more formal communication channels, such as parent-staff meetings (OECD, 2006^[9]; Ališauskienė and Kairienė, 2023^[11]).

As part of the TALIS Starting Strong 2018 data collection, ECEC centre leaders were asked to describe how often communication takes place with parents or guardians. Communication through informal activities, such as conversations at pick-up time, could be considered as frequent if occurring on a weekly or daily basis. However, formal communication might be considered as frequent if it takes place at least monthly, given that formal meetings tend to require more time to organise. Responses from leaders suggest that frequent communication with parents is generally common when considering any type of communication, with over two-thirds of leaders reporting such practices in their centre in all countries (Figure 1). However, it is much less common for leaders to report that both informal and formal communication practices are frequent in their centres, falling below 50% in all countries except Chile, Denmark (at the pre-primary level with low response rates), and Japan (Figure 1). This is because it is generally less common for leaders to report frequent formal communication with parents and guardians, except in Chile and Japan (OECD, 2020^[12]).

Figure 1. Communication with parents and guardians in ECEC centres

Percentage of centre leaders by reported frequency of informal and formal communication with parents and guardians



Note: Frequent communication includes centre leader reports of both informal communication with parents or guardians “weekly” or “daily”, and formal communication “monthly”, “weekly” or “daily”.

Source: (OECD, 2019^[13]), TALIS Starting Strong 2018 Database.

Data collected from staff also suggest that communication with parents and guardians is common practice across countries, although their responses cannot be directly compared with those of centre leaders since staff were not asked about the frequency of communication practices. Staff were asked if their centre could be described as informing parents and guardians “on a regular basis” about daily activities, as well as their children’s development, well-being and learning. For each topic, over 80% of staff reported that their centre could be “well” or “very well” described as engaging in such practices in all countries except Israel, where the relevant share of staff was still high at 76% regarding regular communication about daily activities (OECD, 2019^[7]).

Supporting home interactions and involving parents in the organisation of ECEC centres

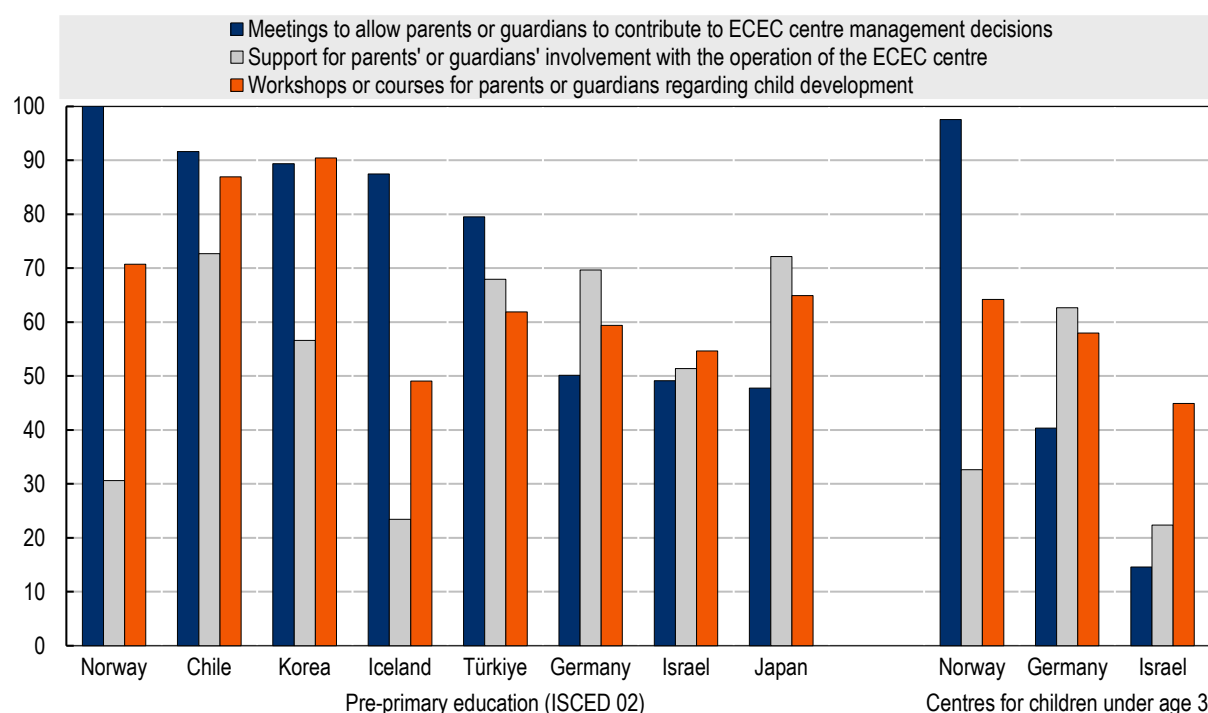
Beyond communication practices, ECEC centres can also engage with parents and guardians by providing them with guidance on how to support children with learning activities at home. Helping parents to learn more about child development and parenting has been linked to positive outcomes in multiple studies, as it can increase parents’ knowledge and self-confidence in implementing developmentally-appropriate educational practices (OECD, 2012^[14]). Alongside communication, such support for parents may be one of the most effective forms of engagement for improving children’s outcomes (Axford et al., 2019^[15]).

Compared with communication practices, however, results from TALIS Starting Strong suggest that ECEC centres are generally less likely to offer parents guidance on child development that may support them in interactions with their children. Less than two-thirds of leaders said that their centre had offered any related

workshops or courses in the 12 months prior to being surveyed in all countries except Chile, Korea and Norway (at the pre-primary level) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. ECEC centre practices to support home interactions and involve parents in the organisation of ECEC centres

Percentage of centre leaders reporting that their centre engaged in the following practices over the 12 months prior to the survey



Source: (OECD, 2019^[13]), TALIS Starting Strong 2018 Database.

Centre leaders could also provide information in TALIS Starting Strong about activities offered to support parent engagement through opportunities to volunteer and contribute to decision-making. The effects of centre-oriented parental engagement through volunteering or participation in decision-making have not been widely studied (Axford et al., 2019^[15]). Some evidence suggests that this type of engagement is less important for children's outcomes than interventions that directly engage parents in their children's learning, although it may contribute to parental satisfaction with ECEC services (Harris and Goodall, 2007^[16]). However, multiple studies emphasise the importance of parent participation in ECEC centre activities or decision-making for strengthening the trust and collaboration of parents and guardians (Hummel, Cohen and Anders, 2023^[17]; Purola and Kuusisto, 2021^[18]; Rautamies et al., 2021^[19]).

In most countries, eliciting centre-oriented parental engagement through volunteering is less common than practices to communicate with parents or to help them stimulate child development at home. At the pre-primary level, less than 50% of centre leaders in Denmark (with low response rates), Iceland and Norway reported providing support for parents and guardians to get involved in the operation of their centre in the last 12 months (Figure 2). In Denmark (with low response rates), Israel and Norway, leaders reporting such support were also in the minority in centres for children under age 3. In the majority of countries, a more common centre-oriented engagement practice is to support parental involvement in decision-making. This is particularly prominent in Chile and Norway (for children under age 3 and in pre-primary) where over 90%

of leaders reported that meetings had been held to allow parents or guardians to contribute to ECEC centre management decisions in the last 12 months.

As part of TALIS Starting Strong, staff were also asked about practices to support families with parent-child interactions at home. Similarly to centre leaders, staff in all countries were less likely to report this type of support for parents and guardians in their centre than they were to indicate regular communication with parents and guardians about their children's development. At the same time, staff reports suggest that parents may receive some support with child development from staff informally rather than through formal activities like workshops or courses. In Chile, Denmark (with low response rates), Israel, Korea and Türkiye, over 70% of pre-primary staff reported that staff at their centre could be "well" or "very well" described as encouraging parents and guardians to do play and learning activities with their children at home (OECD, 2019^[7]). In centres for children under age 3, this was only the case in Denmark (with low response rates).

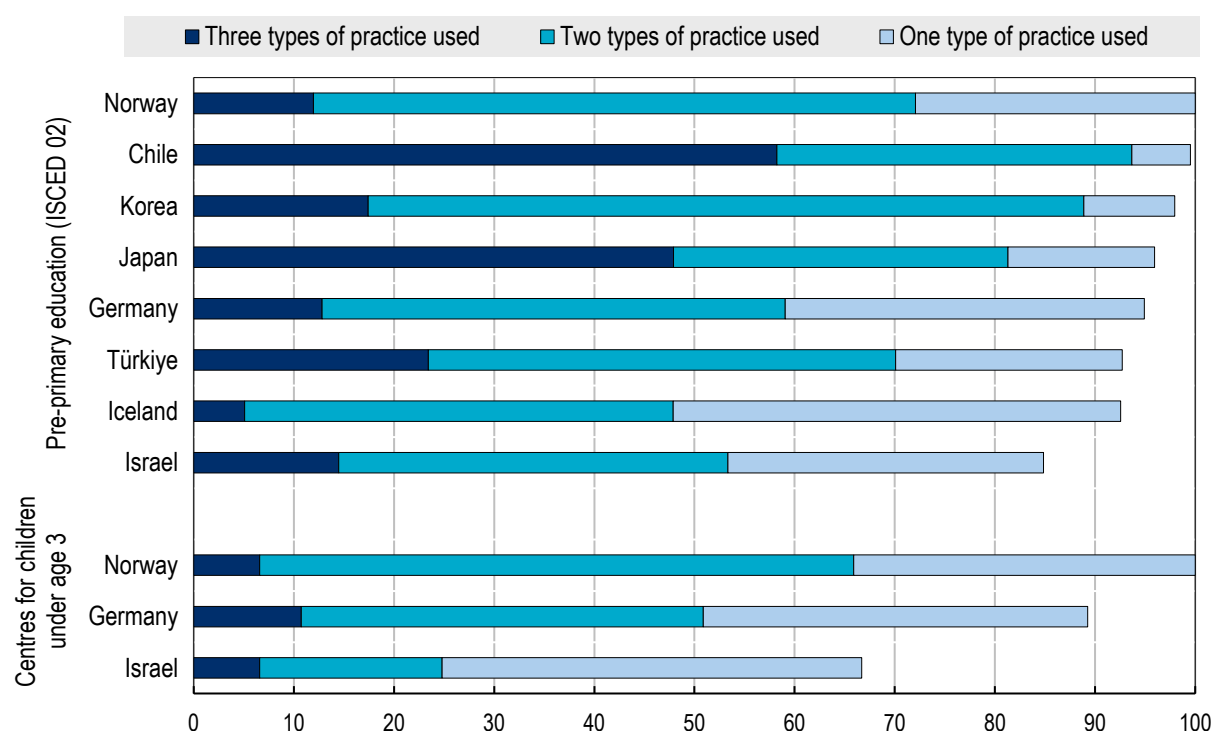
Multi-faceted engagement with parents and guardians

Using more than one type of practice to engage parents and guardians could help ECEC centres to build a more positive relationship with families. Supporting parents with practices that can help their children at home while communicating for a better understanding of what happens both at home and in the centre can be a promising strategy to ensure continuity between the ECEC centre and home environment. At the same time, giving parents opportunities to participate in operations and decision-making could support parental awareness of the activities of the ECEC centres and facilitate communication with staff. Not only can measures be complementary, a multi-faceted approach may also allow ECEC centres to better meet a diversity of family needs (OECD, 2012^[14]).

More often than not, centre leaders at the pre-primary level indicate that a multi-faceted approach to parental engagement is taken in their centres. In all countries except Iceland, more than half of pre-primary leaders report more than one type of practice regarding parental engagement out of the following: frequent communication with parents; support for parents with child development; and parental involvement in the organisation of the centre (Figure 3). In centres for children under age 3, leaders reporting a multi-faceted approach are in the majority in Germany and Norway but are in the minority in Israel and Denmark (with low response rates). At all levels, it is generally much less common for leaders to report more than two types of practice. Nevertheless, the majority of leaders (58%) indicate the use of three types of approaches to parental engagement in Chile.

Figure 3. Multi-faceted engagement with parents and guardians in ECEC centres

Percentage of centre leaders by reported number of family engagement practices, including communicating frequently, supporting home interactions, and involving parents and guardians in the organisation of the centre



Note: Centre leaders are counted as reporting communicating frequently with parents and guardians as a type of practice if they report both informal communication with parents at least weekly and formal communication at least monthly in their centre. Supporting home interactions is included as a type of practice if a leader reports that their centre provided parents and guardians with workshops or courses in child rearing or development in the 12 months prior to the survey. Involving families in the organisation of the centre is counted as a type of practice if a leader reports the provision of at least one of the following in the 12 months prior to the survey: support for parents and guardians to become involved with the operation of the centre; meetings have been held to allow parents and guardians to contribute to centre management decisions.

Source: (OECD, 2019^[13]), TALIS Starting Strong 2018 Database.

To what extent do practices for family engagement vary according to the socio-economic composition of ECEC centres?

Communicating with parents and guardians

There is not a consistent pattern of differences across countries regarding the ways in which ECEC centres communicate with parents and guardians according to the socio-economic background of children enrolled in the centre. In some countries, there is evidence that centres engage better with parents and guardians when over 10% of children enrolled in the centre are from socio-economically disadvantaged homes. In others, communication practices are more established in centres where less than 10% of children come from such backgrounds.

According to reports from ECEC centre leaders, there are few significant differences in the frequency of communication between centres serving higher and smaller shares of socio-economically disadvantaged children. Considering formal communication that takes place “monthly”, “weekly” or “daily”, differences are only statistically significant in Israel (pre-primary) (Table 1). Regarding informal communication on a

“weekly” or “daily” basis, significant differences are found only in Iceland. In both cases, centres with a larger share of children from disadvantaged homes tend to report more frequent communication.

Table 1. Practices to communicate with families by ECEC centres’ socio-economic composition

Differences in the percentage of centre leaders or staff reporting specified communication practices, by share of children from socio-economically disadvantaged homes in the ECEC centre

	More frequently reported in centres with higher shares of children from disadvantaged homes
	Less frequently reported in centres with higher shares of children from disadvantaged homes
	Differences are not significant
	Missing data

	Percentage of ECEC centre leaders reporting regular communication with parents and guardians		Percentage of ECEC staff reporting that the following statements describe how the ECEC centre engages parents and guardians “well” or “very well”:		
	Informal (at least weekly)	Formal (at least monthly)	Parents or guardians are informed about the development, well-being, and learning of their children on a regular basis	Parents or guardians are informed about daily activities on a regular basis	Parents or guardians participate in formal communication
Pre-primary centres (ISCED 02)					
Chile					
Germany*					
Iceland					
Israel					
Japan					
Korea					
Norway					
Türkiye					
Denmark**					
Centres for children under age 3					
Germany*					
Israel					
Norway					
Denmark**					

* Estimates for sub-groups and estimated differences between sub-groups need to be interpreted with care.

** Low response rates in the survey may result in bias in the estimates reported and limit the comparability of the data.

Note: ECEC centres are counted as serving higher shares of children from socio-economically disadvantaged homes when more than 10% of children in the centre have this background.

Source: (OECD, 2019^[13]), TALIS Starting Strong 2018 Database.

Differences in communication practices according to centres’ socio-economic composition are more apparent from staff reports. At the pre-primary level, there are significant differences in the share of staff indicating that parents or guardians participate in formal communication in Germany and Denmark (with

low response rates), and in centres for children under age 3, significant differences are found in Germany and Norway (Table 1). In all these cases, the percentage of staff reporting that formal communication is well-established in their centre is smaller in centres with a greater share of children from socio-economically disadvantaged homes. These differences may stem from additional barriers that low-income families can face regarding logistics, time and money, for example being able to afford transportation costs and rearranging work schedules (Beatson et al., 2022^[20]; Axford et al., 2019^[15]). Moreover, disadvantaged families also tend to have less social capital and may feel reluctant to participate due to a reduced sense of self-confidence in such matters (O'Toole et al., 2019^[10]).

However, differences in the share of staff stating that parents and guardians are regularly provided with information on the development, well-being and learning of their children are not common. In Israel, staff in centres for children under age 3 with a higher intake from socio-economically disadvantaged homes were more likely to report that this practice describes well or very well how their centres engage with families. In Germany, however, staff in pre-primary centres with more children from disadvantaged homes were less likely to report that this information is regularly shared.

In most countries, the percentage of staff reporting the regular provision of information about daily activities as a well-established practice also did not differ greatly according to centres' socio-economic composition. At the pre-primary level, statistically significant differences were only found in Israel and Türkiye. In Türkiye, staff were more likely to report that parents and guardians are regularly kept up to date about daily activities in centres with higher shares of children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The opposite was the case in Israel.

Supporting home interactions

Evidence from TALIS Starting Strong 2018 suggests that, in some countries, ECEC centres offer more support for parents and guardians with child development when there are higher shares of children in the centre from socio-economically disadvantaged homes. In Japan, Korea and Norway (in centres for children under age 3), larger proportions of leaders report that their centre has provided parents and guardians with workshops or courses in child development in the past 12 months when over 10% of children in the centre are from disadvantaged homes (Table 2).

Regarding staff reports of practices related to helping parents with child development at home, differences are only found in Germany and Norway in centres for children under age 3. In both cases, staff in centres with more children from socio-economically disadvantaged homes more frequently report that parents and guardians are encouraged by staff to do play and learning activities with their children at home (Table 2). When significant differences are found, it may be reassuring that more support for parents is reported in centres serving higher shares of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This may reflect conscious efforts to provide more support to vulnerable households. However, significant differences are not found in the majority of countries.

Table 2. Practices to support and involve families by ECEC centres' socio-economic composition

Differences in the percentage of centre leaders or staff reporting specified practices regarding support for parents and guardians with child development at home and parental involvement in the organisation of ECEC centres, by share of children from socio-economically disadvantaged homes in the ECEC centre

	More frequently reported in centres with higher shares of children from disadvantaged homes			
	Less frequently reported in centres with higher shares of children from disadvantaged homes			
	Differences are not significant			
	Missing data			

Supporting parent-child interactions at home		Involving parents and guardians in the organisation of ECEC centres		
ECEC staff reports that their centre is "well" or "very well" described as encouraging parents or guardians to do play and learning activities with their children at home	ECEC centre leader reports that the following have been provided to parents and guardians in the past 12 months			ECEC centre leaders who "agree" or "strongly agree" that parents and guardians are given opportunities to actively participate in ECEC centre decisions
	Workshops or courses for parents or guardians regarding child rearing or child development	Support for parents' and guardians' involvement with the operation of the ECEC centre	Meetings to allow parents and guardians to contribute to ECEC centre management decisions	
ISCED 02)				

* Estimates for sub-groups and estimated differences between sub-groups need to be interpreted with care.

** Low response rates in the survey may result in bias in the estimates reported and limit the comparability of the data.

Note: ECEC centres are counted as serving higher shares of children from disadvantaged homes when more than 10% of children in the centre have this background.

Source: (OECD, 2019^[13]), TALIS Starting Strong 2018 Database.

Involving parents and guardians in the organisation of ECEC centres

In several participating countries, there are statistically significant differences between ECEC centres with higher and lower shares of children from socio-economically disadvantaged homes regarding the involvement of parents in the organisation of the centre. In Chile, Iceland, Israel (pre-primary), and Norway (in centres for children under age 3), leaders are more likely to "agree" or "strongly agree" that parents and guardians have opportunities to actively participate in ECEC centres' decisions when more than 10% of children at the centre are from disadvantaged homes (Table 2).

However, there were no statistically significant differences in these countries regarding the share of leaders reporting that meetings had been held in the past year to allow parents and guardians to contribute to ECEC centre management decisions. This may be because parents and guardians in centres with larger shares of children from disadvantaged homes may be encouraged to participate in ECEC centre decisions by means other than meetings, such as through email or surveys (Burris, 2019^[21]). Differences in the share of leaders who held meetings for parents and guardians to contribute to ECEC centre management decisions were only statistically significant in Korea, where they were more commonly reported by leaders in centres with higher shares of children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Significant differences in the support for parents and guardians to become involved in ECEC centre operations are also uncommon between centres with different socio-economic compositions. In Chile and Israel (at the pre-primary level), leaders in centres with higher shares of children disadvantaged homes were more likely to report that this type of support had been given to parents and guardians in the past year. By contrast, in Denmark (in centres for children under age 3 [with low response rates]) and Korea, leaders in centres with more children from disadvantaged homes were more likely to report that this type of support had not been provided.

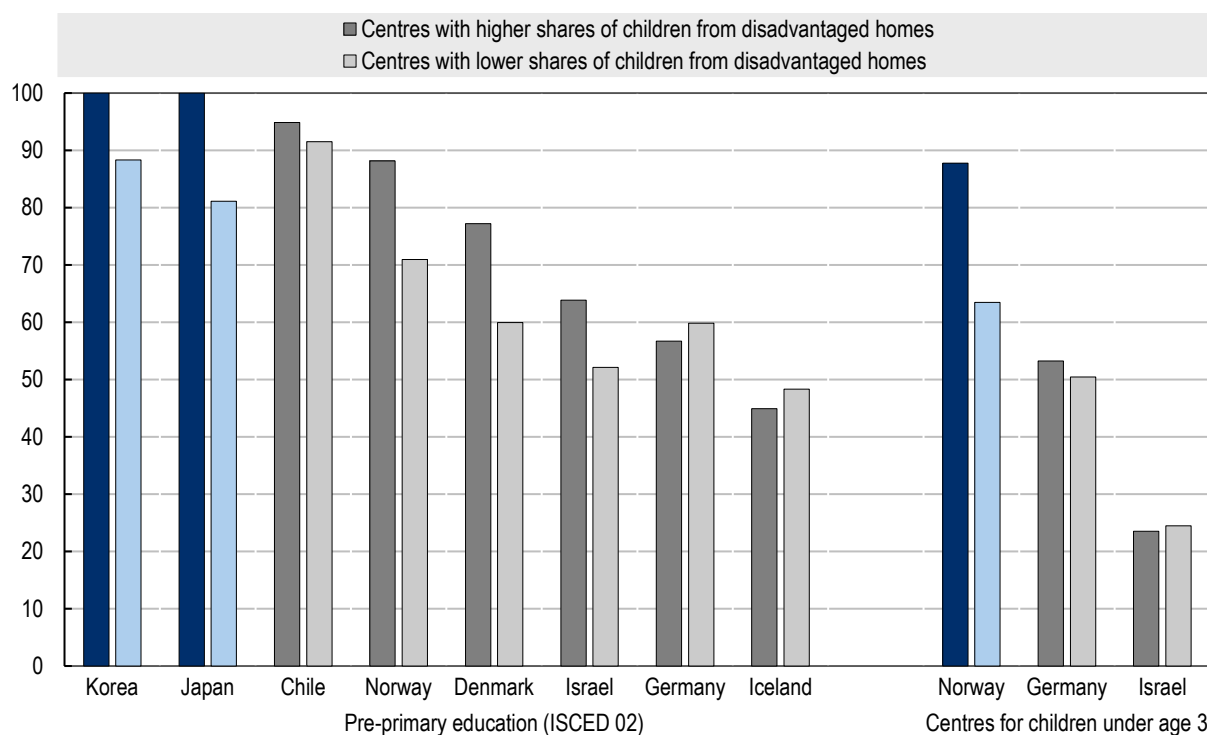
Multi-faceted engagement with parents and guardians

Regardless of their socio-economic composition, the majority of leaders across participating countries report that their ECEC centre engages with parents and guardians in more than one type of practice relating to frequent communication, the stimulation of child development at home, or the involvement of parents and guardians in the organisation of the centre—with the exception of Iceland (in pre-primary) and Israel (in centres for children under age 3) (Figure 4). In most of these countries, however, there are no statistically significant differences between centres according to the share of children from disadvantaged homes. Exceptions include Japan, Korea, and Norway (in centres for children under age 3), where leaders in centres with higher levels of disadvantage are more likely to report using more than one type of approach to parental engagement.

Differences between ECEC centres according to their socio-economic composition are not generally observed in terms of multi-faceted parental engagement. This suggests that centres working with more children from socio-economically disadvantaged homes do not systematically face greater challenges to engaging with parents and guardians in a multi-faceted way. However, given that children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds may benefit more from effective parental engagement practices, this could indicate untapped opportunities to improve support to vulnerable families.

Figure 4. Multi-faceted engagement with families by ECEC centres' socio-economic composition

Percentage of centre leaders reporting that their centre engages in more than one type of family engagement practice out of communicating frequently, supporting home interactions, and involving parents and guardians in the organisation of the centre



Note: Centre leaders are counted as reporting communicating frequently with parents and guardians as a type of practice if they report both informal communication with parents at least weekly and formal communication at least monthly in their centre. Supporting home interactions is included as a type of practice if a leader reports that their centre provided parents and guardians with workshops or courses in child rearing or development in the 12 months prior to the survey. Involving parents in the organisation of the centre is counted as a type of practice if leaders report the provision of at least one of the following in the 12 months prior to the survey: support for parents and guardians to become involved with the operation of the centre; meetings have been held to allow parents and guardians to contribute to centre management decisions.

Statistically significant differences between centres with different socio-economic backgrounds are shown with bars in blue. For more information on significance tests, see Annex C in (OECD, 2019^[22]).

Source: (OECD, 2019^[13]), TALIS Starting Strong 2018 Database.

What are the views of ECEC staff and leaders on the engagement of parents and guardians?

Notwithstanding the type of family engagement practices employed in an ECEC centre, it is also important to consider the quality of relationships between ECEC professionals and parents and guardians, which can reflect the effectiveness of communication, trust-building, and cooperation. As a survey of ECEC staff and centre leaders, TALIS Starting Strong provides insights on their views of the quality of these relationships, including their satisfaction with the support received from parents and guardians. In general, both ECEC staff and centre leaders indicate that parents and guardians provide them with adequate levels of support across countries. Over 70% of staff and leaders surveyed in every participating country “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they are satisfied with the level of support that they receive from parents and guardians.

However, there are statistically significant differences in the level of support perceived in centres with a higher intake of children from disadvantaged homes in several countries (Table 3). Such differences were reported by staff in Chile, at the pre-primary level, and in Germany, at both levels, with staff in centres with higher shares of children from disadvantaged homes being less satisfied. In pre-primary centres in Germany, leaders were also less likely to report satisfaction with parental and guardian support in centres with more children from disadvantaged homes. In Türkiye, significant differences were not found in the levels of satisfaction with parental and guardian support between staff in centres with varying shares of children from disadvantaged homes. However, there was a statistically significant gap in the levels of satisfaction of leaders, with only 56% of leaders being satisfied with parental and guardian support in centres with more children from disadvantaged homes.

Table 3. ECEC staff and centre leaders' views of interactions with parents and guardians, by ECEC centres' socio-economic composition

Differences in the percentage of leaders or staff reporting the following, by share of children from socio-economically disadvantaged homes in the ECEC centre

	More frequently reported in centres with higher shares of children from disadvantaged homes
	Less frequently reported in centres with higher shares of children from disadvantaged homes
	Differences are not significant
	Missing data

	Satisfaction with the support received from parents and guardians in the ECEC centre ("agree" or "strongly agree")		Effectiveness is limited by lack of parent or guardian involvement and support ("quite a bit" or "a lot")
	Staff	Leaders	Leaders
Pre-primary centres (ISCED 02)			
Chile			
Germany*			
Iceland			
Israel			
Japan			
Korea			
Norway			
Türkiye			
Denmark**			
Centres for children under age 3			
Germany*			
Israel			
Norway			
Denmark**			

* Estimates for sub-groups and estimated differences between sub-groups need to be interpreted with care.

** Low response rates in the survey may result in bias in the estimates reported and limit the comparability of the data.

Source: (OECD, 2019^[13]), TALIS Starting Strong 2018 Database.

In the countries where staff or leaders in centres with more children from disadvantaged homes are less satisfied with parental support, leaders of these centres are also more likely to report that their effectiveness is limited "quite a bit" or "a lot" by the lack of parent or guardian involvement and support

(Table 3). Differences in leaders' perceptions of an impact on their effectiveness can also be found in Israel (in centres for under 3s), although high shares of both staff and leaders in all centres reported being satisfied with the support received from parents and guardians.

Table 4. ECEC staff and centre leaders' views of interactions with parents and guardians and multi-faceted engagement practices in ECEC centres

Differences in the percentage of leaders or staff reporting satisfaction with the report received from parents and guardians, and stress due to addressing parents or guardian concerns

	More frequent when centre-level multi-faceted parental engagement practices are reported
	Less frequent when centre-level multi-faceted parental engagement practices are reported
	Differences are not significant
	Data on differences are missing

	Satisfaction with the support received from parents and guardians in the ECEC centre ("agree" or "strongly agree")		Addressing parent or guardian concerns is a source of stress ("quite a bit" or "a lot")	
	Staff	Leaders	Staff	Leaders
Pre-primary centres (ISCED 02)				
Chile				
Germany*				
Iceland				
Israel				
Japan				
Korea				
Norway				
Turkey				
Denmark**				
Centres for children under age 3				
Germany*				
Israel				
Norway				
Denmark**				

Note: Multi-faceted parental engagement practices for staff include cases where both communication with parents and encouragement to do development and play activities at home are reported as well-established. For centre leaders, multi-faceted practices more than one type of practice out of the following: communicating frequently with parents and guardians both formally and informally; providing workshops of courses in child rearing or child developing; involving parents in the organisation of the centre through meetings to contribute to centre management decisions or support to become involved with the operation of the centre.

* Estimates for sub-groups and estimated differences between sub-groups need to be interpreted with care.

** Low response rates in the survey may result in bias in the estimates reported and limit the comparability of the data.

Source: (OECD, 2019^[13]), TALIS Starting Strong 2018 Database.

Staff satisfaction with the support received from parents and guardians may also be linked to the types of parental engagement practices implemented by ECEC centres. In most countries, staff in pre-primary centres are more likely to report that they are satisfied with parental support received when they perceive that both communication and stimulation with development at home are well-established means of parental engagement in their centre (Table 4). This could indicate that combining these approaches to parental

engagement is beneficial in improving relationships between staff and parents. At the same time, differences could also reflect that having positive relationships between staff and parents allows for more successful implementation of a range of engagement practices.

Evidence from TALIS Starting Strong does not generally suggest that centre leaders' satisfaction with parental support is facilitated by the implementation of a variety of family engagement practices. Significant differences in leaders' satisfaction with support from parents and guardians are only found in Chile and Korea at the pre-primary level (Table 4). As for staff, in these cases, leaders were more likely to be satisfied with the support received from parents when they report a greater number of approaches to family engagement.

Differences between ECEC staff and centre leaders in the pattern of relationships between multi-faceted family engagement and satisfaction with parental support may stem from the nature of interactions that families have with staff and centre leaders, respectively. Staff may perceive the benefits of multi-faceted engagement more immediately through their daily interactions with children and their regular contact with parents and guardians at drop-offs and pick-ups.

Further, in some countries staff reports of multi-faceted family engagement are associated with an increased propensity to experience stress from addressing parent and guardian concerns (Table 4). For staff, this relationship is found at the pre-primary level in Israel, Japan and Denmark (with low response rates). In centres for children under age 3, there is a similar association in Norway. However, these relationships are not generally found in countries where there is a link between staff satisfaction with parental support and their reports of a combined approach to parental engagement, with the exception of Japan. These results suggest that care is needed in implementing a variety of family engagement practices to ensure that they contribute to positive relationships with parents and guardians, as there is a risk that staff feel the burden of related tasks without necessarily experiencing the benefits of improved connections with children's families.

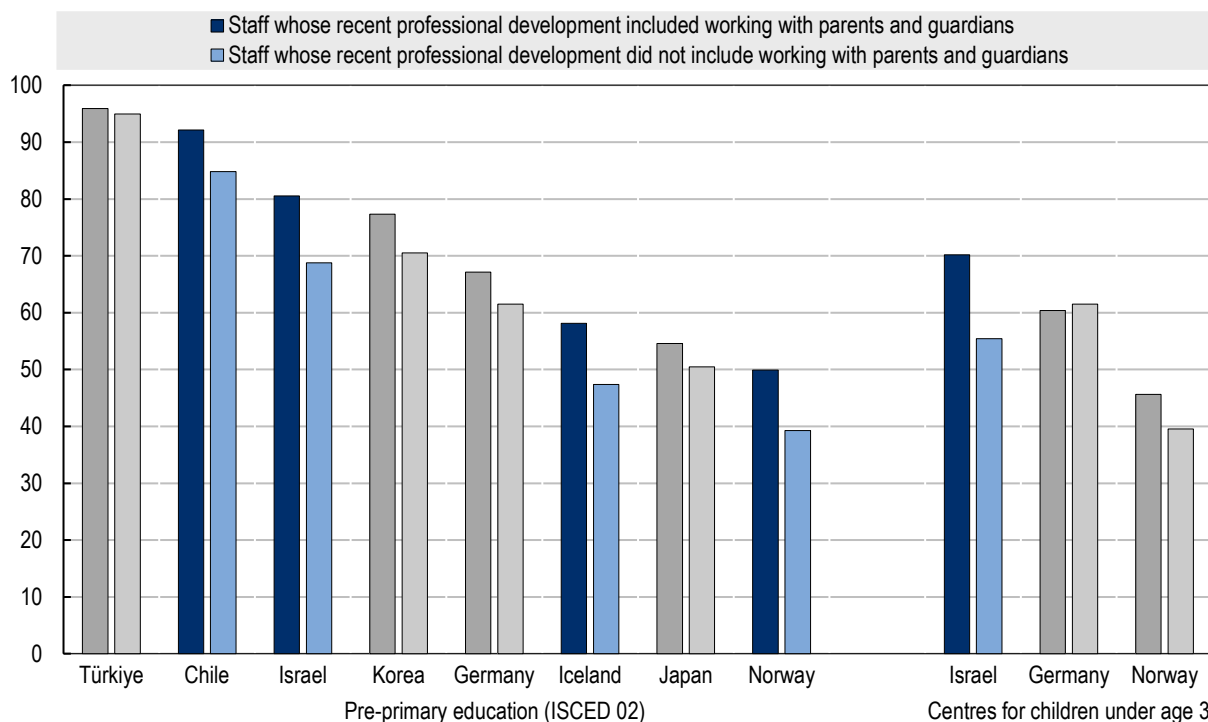
How does continuous professional development relate to family engagement practices?

TALIS Starting Strong asked staff about the content of their professional development activities in the past 12 months. Staff were therefore able to indicate whether they had opportunities to learn about working with parents or guardians/families as part of their recent training experiences.

Staff participation in professional development activities with a focus on family engagement are linked to centre approaches to parental and guardian engagement. In nearly every participating country, staff who recently participated in professional development about family engagement more often indicate that their centre can be described as having a multi-faceted approach to parental engagement, whereby both communication with parents and guardians and support for parents and guardians to do play and learning activities at home are well-established at the centre (Figure 5). There are multiple possible explanations for this result. Staff who were recently trained on family engagement might be more able to develop multi-faceted approach to engaging families in their centres, but centres that place strong focus on parental engagement may also encourage participation of their staff in training activities on these practices.

Figure 5. Staff professional development and multi-faceted family engagement practices in ECEC centres

Percentage of staff reporting that both communication with parents and encouragement to do development and play activities at home are well-established, by staff participation in professional development on family engagement in the last 12 months



Note: Staff are counted as reporting communication with parents if they indicate that at least one of the following practices describes parent and guardian engagement at their ECEC centre “well” or “very well”: parents or guardians are informed about the development, well-being, and learning of their children on a regular basis; parents or guardians are informed about daily activities on a regular basis; parents or guardians participate in formal communication. Professional development refers to activities in the 12 months prior to the survey for staff who indicated that they participated in professional development in this period.

Source: (OECD, 2019^[13]), TALIS Starting Strong 2018 Database.

Policy pointers

Given the importance of parental involvement in child development, it is a key priority to ensure that ECEC centres are engaging well with parents and guardians. The specific practices implemented in this regard may vary between contexts to accommodate different needs and priorities. However, within the set of measures implemented in each ECEC centre, it can be beneficial to encourage family engagement through a variety of approaches. These can complement each other to ensure that parents and guardians feel positive about their ECEC centre’s staff and activities, keep staff informed about their child’s development and environment at home, and are open to learning about ways in which they can interact with their children. Policy can help to facilitate this in a number of ways, including:

- **Developing support for training on family engagement.** In some countries, training in working with parents or guardians/families is linked to the implementation of a multi-faceted approach to family engagement through communication and support for child development at home. However, previous findings from TALIS Starting Strong 2018 show that less than half of staff have had both

pre-service and recent in-service training in working with parents in the majority of participating countries. Staff participation in such training could be encouraged by ensuring that pre-service education programmes systematically offer relevant courses. For existing staff, in-service professional development opportunities can also be provided by ensuring that training in this area is offered, and that staff have dedicated time and resources to participate.

- **Creating conditions for staff to facilitate a variety of forms of family engagement.** Even if staff are well-trained on how they could engage with parents and guardians, they may not be able to put their knowledge into practice if they do not have the required time and resources. Attempts to implement approaches to family engagement could become a source of stress if there is not an adequate consideration of the potential workload for staff. To ensure a sustainable and regular approach to family engagement, staff could benefit from having dedicated time in their schedules for interactions with parents and guardians. This could be of particular importance for staff working with children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, whose families might both require more support and be harder to reach. Centres could also explore ways to make certain forms of family engagement easier and more convenient for both staff and parents, for example by using digital tools to facilitate informal communication with families, especially those with particular barriers like language, or time and work constraints (OECD, 2023^[23]). This would require investment in digital devices and resources for staff—as well as relevant training.
- **Encouraging reflection on family needs.** Parents and guardians can face very different barriers and constraints to participating in ECEC communication channels and in the organisation of ECEC centres. It could be helpful to develop mechanisms to systematically incorporate parents' perspectives on the accessibility and effectiveness of engagement practices that are currently in use. This could support an ongoing review of whether resources invested in parental engagement are bringing positive returns and indicate ways in which current practices could be adapted to families' particular needs. The involvement of parents and guardians in meetings on how to run ECEC centres, which is common in several countries, can be one way to incorporate parents' perspectives into decision-making processes. Beyond these formal arrangements, digital technologies could also support ECEC centres in gathering feedback from parents and guardians.

The bottom line:

It is essential to encourage positive relationships between families and ECEC professionals, to ensure that all parties are well-informed about each child's well-being, development and needs. However, in many countries there are substantial shares of staff who do not report that their centres implement multi-faceted family engagement practices. Ensuring that staff have access to relevant training and professional development in working with parents and families could encourage the implementation of both communication and support at home. However, staff also need to have the right working conditions, with adequate time and resources, to be able to put family engagement practices into place.

In addition, some family engagement practices seem to be more commonly established in centres serving more children from disadvantaged homes in certain countries. However, there is no clear pattern suggesting that there are more systematic efforts to strengthen relationships between ECEC centres and parents and guardians in situations of disadvantage. Care needs to be taken to ensure that vulnerable families are effectively engaged in ECEC, or efforts to improve parental engagement could end up benefitting certain families only.

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