



## Call for Proposals

**Deadline for submission: May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

### What is the Conference about?

Complexity is the defining character of the changes we face in today's societies. This complexity influences our choices on how to address the challenges that young children and families are facing in the early years, the foundational period for lifelong learning. Migration, increasing poverty and inequality, segregation, multilingualism, mass-communication channels and tools, increasing unemployment rates, uncertainty regarding the future, social tensions and a lack of trust in political institutions, are only a few of the circumstances which affect family stability and well-being, and the environments in which young children grow and learn about themselves and the world around them.

These rapid changes can also bring opportunities: in an increasingly urbanized world, cities can play a key role in designing solutions to respond to the needs of young children and families. Increased connectivity across the globe makes it easier to learn about and share these solutions. The speed of the changes in today's world

also requires substantial shifts in the way early childhood *systems* are designed, equipped, governed, financed and supported, if we are to capitalize on the tremendous gains that can be realized from investing early in child development. It is no longer possible to have a parallel discourse that creates distance between institutional arrangements, political priorities and the living experience of families. Investment in *systems* aimed at the majority excludes families on each end of the curve. Change management gives opportunities to customize local services/responses to all families regardless of their social and cultural background.

It is time to embrace a systemic approach to addressing the critical problems that hinder children and families rights, and to learn from local responsive approaches to build *competent early childhood systems*.

## What are the Conference Strands?



**Towards competent  
early childhood  
workforce and  
services**



**Towards a competent  
early childhood  
inter-institutional  
environment**



**Towards competent  
early childhood  
governance and  
policies**



The early childhood workforce is the powerhouse of the early childhood system. It is through them that services become meaningful, useful, and relevant for young children and families. The

current context of rapid societal change requires readiness to respond to increasing demands. This means ensuring that both pre-service and in-service training are improved beyond the traditional and sector-siloed view of the early childhood professions, and ensuring early childhood services provide a nurturing, stimulating and supportive professional environment for the workforce.

Closing the gap between theory and practice means building those competences which contribute to equalizing opportunities for all children and families, across all sectors in the early childhood workforce. Are pre-service and in-service training fit for purpose? Do they equip the early childhood workforce with the emerging competences they need to provide high-quality early years services today? What approaches in training and pedagogical coaching contribute to building a competent workforce?

In addition to the physical aspect of working with young children, the aging profile of its professionals and the unpopular career choice, a continuous search for boosting commitment and raising participation levels brings new challenges in managing an early childhood workforce.

Ensuring a motivating and supportive professional environment for the workforce is crucial. This relies upon the capacity of early childhood services and training institutions to provide professional development opportunities that value personal and professional growth, teamwork, peer learning and group reflection, and an ongoing concern for responsive quality practices through a close dialogue with families and communities.

The concern of institutions for pedagogical leadership, diversity in both workforce and professional learning experiences, and career development adds to the complex picture of providing competent early childhood services with competent staff. Thus, to what extent do the current early childhood services, pre-service and in-service institutions embrace structural and process changes to promote professionalism and services attuned with children's and families' demands?

The inter-institutional environment which supports educators and early childhood center managers must also be competent. This requires collaboration between local early years services and other social, educational and cultural institutions; including city council departments, organizations of ECEC centers, umbrella organizations and training institutions. Together they represent the architecture of the early childhood system. Children and families in vulnerable situations ask for systemic responses to various, interconnected needs in which material and immaterial resources are linked. A common culture

and a shared image of a competent and active child among practitioners from different sectors, pre- and in-service institutions, and local authorities is pivotal to inter-agency collaboration. With this in mind, which initiatives are needed on the inter-institutional level to further support creative pedagogical strategies for equipping practitioners with the capacity to meet the current demands of families and children? Peer learning



groups around common issues or inter-vision sessions among different services and institutions could be one avenue, and in this sense training centers (university colleges, universities, in-services training centers) and innovation centers may play an essential role. Integration of services in a more systemic way is yet another. Didactical tools on different aspects of working with children, parents and in neighborhoods can also be developed for pedagogical counsellors on institutional and inter-institutional level.

How can collaboration between services and sectors or the integration of early childhood service delivery (childcare, kindergarten, parental support centers, infant health centers, preschools) be strengthened to better meet the diverse needs of parents and children?



In a competent early childhood system the close collaboration between policymakers, researchers and practitioners is crucial for realizing effective policies which lead to sustainable change. While

research seeks to show the complexity of issues in a nuanced way, policymakers are looking for quick and efficient solutions supported by scientific evidence. In order to achieve sustainable change, close dialogue between policymakers and practitioners is crucial. It can be nurtured through democratic consultation groups involving policymakers and ECEC stakeholders, including the ECEC workforce, parents and community representatives. What ways are there for nurturing dialogue among policymakers, researchers, practitioners and other stakeholders to stimulate in-depth analysis and critical thinking around early years policies and attuned service delivery?

The governance level refers amongst others to vision, financing and monitoring. Legislation differs substantially across countries. Despite this, structural conditions (and thus competent governance) including decent working conditions, remuneration, and

In developing the quality of services, the voices of the workforce, parents, children and communities can contribute in close dialogue. Ensuring smooth transitions between childcare and kindergarten and between pre-primary and primary is another challenge for efficient inter-institutional cooperation. Collaboration between immaterial services (e.g. child care or parent support) and material services (housing, employment, urban development, welfare allowances, etc.) is also another challenge.

How do national, European and international projects contribute to strengthening the competences of early childhood services and to creating a competent inter-institutional environment addressing the challenges of contemporary hyper-diverse societies?

adequate funding for pre-service, in-service training and service delivery play key roles.

Quality assurance systems, scientifically based and democratically debated curricula, professional and training competence profiles and adequate monitoring systems are essential components of a *competent early childhood system*.

Consistency and coherence among these components should be ensured; the awareness to know that issues on one level impact on all the other levels. With this in mind, which effective policies are needed to translate these components into a continuous and self-learning system that delivers high-quality early childhood services?

International organizations like the European Union, UNICEF, UNESCO, OECD, World Bank and international foundations, play an important role in guiding policy and governance. They can strongly contribute to strengthening national early childhood systems and providing inspiration for approaches at a country level. However, they may also narrow the discretionary space of regional or local policies. To what extent are their efforts supporting country policies and governance and contributing to the architecture of a competent early childhood system?

Bringing these strands together in a coherent framework creates competent early childhood systems. Building this architecture creates systemic responses to the societal challenges surrounding children and families, as well as professionals and services. Early childhood development and early childhood services are the foundation for lifelong learning and development. Developing these systems will be essential if we are to realize the potential of human development in all societies.

### Do you want to contribute to the Conference learning community?

- Allocate sufficient time during your session for dialogue among participants
- Encourage critical reflection in discussions
- Stimulate learning through the exchange of diverse experiences and expertise.