



Factsheet on Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) in Greece

Key issues to be taken into consideration

Coordination of actions between different actors and sectors is necessary to create a holistic ECI framework. This is needed to define a coherent mechanism that ensures:

- The provision of ECI services for all children and families who need them
- The effective implementation of existing legislation by public authorities
- A clear definition of what family-centered ECI is, understood and valued by policymakers, service providers and families
- Inter-agency work among different Ministries and services and coordination across sectors to prevent overlaps and gaps in the service provision
- Training and re-skilling of professionals with unified protocols and a comprehensive approach
- The development of clearly defined quality standards for (public and private) ECI services
- Adequate and flexible financing mechanisms.

What is family-centred ECI?

The way in which we raise children today, will reflect the world we will live in tomorrow. The first six years are the most formative in children's lives, set the foundations for their lifelong development, and shape their health and quality of life. For children with support needs, these years are even more crucial: early identification of challenges, access to support, and coordination of families and community resources can significantly increase their capabilities and wellbeing.

ECI is economically and socially critical to a prosperous society: investing in the start of life is decisive for inclusion and positive social transformation. Family-centered ECI services design and provide support around the needs of children with disabilities or at risk of developmental delays and their families through coordinated services that promote the child's age-appropriate growth and development. ECI is co-created with and for families and offers them tools to better support their children.

Quality ECI services:

- 1 – Recognize the central role family plays in a child's life, thus encouraging families to be included and contribute to their child's learning and development;**
- 2 – Use evidence and outcome-based approaches.** Early childhood intervention professionals provide services grounded in research and clinical reasoning.
- 3 – Promote the engagement of all children,** regardless of their needs, in all aspects of life based on each child's strengths. They therefore foster learning in natural environments such as daily routines, at home, and in the community.
- 4 – Work with well-trained professionals** from various disciplines and backgrounds to meet the diverse needs of each child and ensure quality teamwork.

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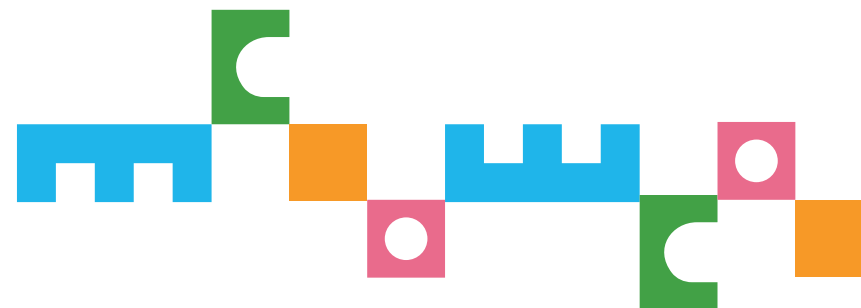


ECI in Greece

The components of an ECI system are present in the country, but not structured as an integrated ECI system. Different services are available for children with disabilities and their families, delivered by both the public and private sectors in the areas of health, social welfare and education.

Although many providers offer high-quality services and employ qualified staff, the lack of a framework generates confusion on what an ECI system entails for both providers and families. Furthermore, the dominant approach is limited to a medical perspective focusing on children's weaknesses rather than building on their strengths and supporting the family through community resources. **To sum up, the primary issues of the ECI provision in Greece highlighted through research and consultations, are:**

- ☰ **Lack of uniform quality standards and regulations** for ECI providers
- 👥 **Unequal availability and accessibility** of ECI programs at a national, municipal, and regional level
- ⌚ **Delayed response** to children with significant gaps in service provisions for children under the age of 3
- 📺 **Underdeveloped screening and referral system** with multiple and non-coordinated entry points
- 🚫 **Lack of standardized procedures** for involving families in the initial assessment, the development, and monitoring of individualized therapeutic programs
- ✖ **Lack of coordination among the different access points** to the service system, the involved agents, services and ECI professionals
- 🏥 **A medical approach** where families' needs, priorities, and resources are not at the center of the intervention.



The ECI Greece project

The "Technical Support to implement reforms to support the development of family-centered early childhood intervention services in Greece" project – (otherwise known as ECI Greece) runs **from September 2021 to January 2024**. It is funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument and is implemented by the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) in cooperation with the Directorate General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM) of the European Commission, and counts on the continued cooperation and support of national and international stakeholders.

The project supports the Greek **Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family Affairs** in developing **an evidence-based methodology** for service providers for children with disabilities in Greece and an **action plan for a legislative and financial framework** for family-centered Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services.

The project is doing so by:

- ① Developing **training methodologies** for Greek service providers based on good practice examples from EU countries
- ② **Piloting** these new methodologies for a year
- ③ Producing a comprehensive **country report** on ECI in Greece
- ④ Organizing **awareness-raising activities** for public authorities, assessment services, medical staff, and families
- ⑤ On the basis of findings from the other activities, **developing an action plan** to establish a legislative and financial framework for family-centered ECI in Greece.