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**DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION  
EDUCATION POLICY COMMITTEE**

**EDU/EDPC/ECEC/RD(2010)13  
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**Network on Early Childhood Education and Care**

**RESPONSES ON FINANCING ECEC SERVICES: IRELAND**

**21-22 June 2010  
Conference Centre Room CC4  
OECD, Paris**

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**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE 7<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE NETWORK ON EARLY CHILDHOOD  
EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC): FINANCING ECEC SERVICES**

**PART I: Data on ECEC costs and financing and data-related issues**

**1.1 General information: types of ECEC services**

1.1.1 This question aims to update the information on childcare and early education services presented for your country. Please review Annex A. If updates need to be made, please provide the necessary information below. If existing information is still accurate, simply indicate “No Change”; you do not need to duplicate.

**In the box “Early Start and Infant school (pre-school), with primary school” please amend to read “ECCE, Early Start and Infant school (pre-school), with primary school”.**

If your country is *NOT* listed in Annex A, please list different types of ECEC services offered in your country and provide the following information for each of the services:

- Which category (a) centre-based care (b) family-day care or (c) pre-primary education;
- What age range is covered;
- Whether public or private; and
- Whether compulsory or not.

1.1.2 This question aims to complement Question 1.1.1 and elicit a fuller picture. Which type of ECEC provision is mostly in use or in operation in your country? Please indicate in the table below the proportion of:

- Children registered for each type of ECEC provision as a percentage of the total number of children of the age group; and
- Care services, centres or pre-schools for each type of ECEC provision as a percentage of the total number of such services.

Type of provision	Early Childcare		Pre-primary education		Integrated system	
	% of registered children	% of services, centres, pre-schools	% of registered children	% of services, centres, pre-schools	% of registered children	% of services, centres, pre-schools
Public provision	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%		
Private not for profit provision	25%	27%	25%	25%		
Private for profit provision	75%	70%	75%	75%		
Other type of provision: Registered, home-based childminders (NB childminders with <3 children do not have to register and may account for up to 60% of provision)	-	3%	-	-		

**Source(s): Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs (OMCYA)**

**Known data limitations: Estimates based on multiple data sources.**

**1.2 Public spending on ECEC services**

**1.2.1 Public spending on public and private ECEC services**

This question aims to clarify whether public expenditure on ECEC services is spent *only* on public ECEC provision *or* on a mixture of public and private provision, which is not currently well understood.

Annex B provides the public expenditure data on childcare and early education currently available in the OECD Family Database (those figures are currently being updated through other OECD official channels). The public expenditure does not include cash allowances or tax expenditure such as tax credits, parental leave, etc.; here, you should include only public expenditure spent on ECEC services.

Please indicate in the table below the split in public expenditure between public and private ECEC services in your country, indicating the year the data is from.

2010	Early childcare		Pre-primary education		Integrated system	
	Public services	Private services	Public services	Private services	Public services	Private services
Public expenditure (as % of GDP )	-	0.02%	0.02%	0.14%		

Source(s): OMCYA

Known data limitations: New scheme introduced from January 2010 – also GDP is not a stable figure at present.

### 1.2.2 Public spending on ECEC services at different levels of government

This question aims to clarify funding arrangements between national and sub-national governments. While Annex B provides overall public expenditure data on ECEC services, we do not currently have figures for what is spent by national governments *versus* what is spent at sub-national levels (e.g. regional and/or local).

Please provide the most recent data for public spending for national and sub-national levels of government. Please note that “fiscal transfers” between levels of government should be netted out in order to avoid double-counting. Please also note that the question focuses on direct public spending on ECEC services, excluding cash benefits or tax credits.

Year 2010	Early childcare		Pre-primary education		Integrated system	
	Total amount (local currency)	% of GDP	Total amount (local currency)	% of GDP	Total amount (local currency)	% of GDP
National/Federal	€20m	0.02%	€260m	0.16%		
State/Provincial/ Regional	-	-	-	-	-	-
Local/Municipal	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source(s): OMCYA

Known data limitations: New scheme introduced from January 2010 – also GDP is not a stable figure at present.

### 1.2.3 What is covered by public spending?

This question aims to understand what the public money is specifically spent on. Please indicate the estimated share, as a percentage of total ECEC public spending, for each category in the table below. The total should add up to 100%.

Service category	% of total public expenditure on		
	Early childcare	Pre-primary education	Integrated system
Infrastructure	23%	8%	
Workforce supply (e.g. salaries, recruitment etc.)			
Workforce development (e.g. in-service training, support services for staff, etc.)	37%	15%	
Curriculum and pedagogical materials			
Ancillary services (transport, meals, etc.)			
Research on ECEC			
Others, please specify: Irish system is based on capitation fees, which effectively purchase pre-school places for qualified children, and subventions, which pay not-for-profit organisations to reduce fees for disadvantaged and low income families. These capitations are not linked to salary etc.	40%	77%	
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source(s): OMCYA, Dept of Education

Known data limitations: \_\_\_\_\_

### 1.3 *Private spending on ECEC services*

This question aims to give a comprehensive picture of private spending relative to public spending, covering both childcare services and early education, which has long been wished for by many countries.

The UOE (UNESCO-UIS/OECD/EUROSTAT) has attempted to answer this question with regard to early education (\* in shaded cells) and is in the process of updating the data (See Annex C).

In order to complement what is already known from the UOE data, please provide in the table below figures on private spending for early childcare (please indicate the year the data is from).

If your country has an integrated system, please provide the figures, which have not been asked by the UOE data collection process.

		Total spent, in local currency		
		Early childcare	Pre-primary education	Integrated system
Private sources	Household expenditure	m	*	
	Expenditure of other private entities	m	*	
	All private sources	m	*	
Private: of which subsidised		m	*	
Others, please specify				

**Data not easily estimated, as much early childcare is in the informal sector**

### 1.4 *Issues on data collection*

Some network members have expressed their concern that data on ECEC in general are collected based on availability rather than policy needs.

1.4.1 What are the most critical gaps in national data and international comparisons?

**The Irish system is in flux with very significant expansion of the pre-school system and economic re-adjustments which are impacting on the childcare sector, and so there will be a period before more precise national data is available.**

1.4.2 Bearing in mind the possible quality limitations of comparative data, what internationally comparable data on financing ECEC would be most relevant for policy making in your country?

**The focus in Ireland is consolidation of the new scheme, and while there will be some changes to improve the scheme, significant policy changes are not envisaged in the short to medium term.**

1.4.3 Where quantitative data is not available, what kind of qualitative information – at a national and international level – on financing ECEC would be most useful for policy making in your country?

**The focus in Ireland is consolidation of the new scheme, and while there will be some changes to improve the scheme, significant policy changes are not envisaged in the short to medium term.**

1.4.4 What are the biggest challenges in collecting data on financial aspects of ECEC services in your country (e.g. low policy priority, jurisdictional, lack of resources and capacity, fragmentation of ECEC services, lack of agreed common definitions of ECEC services within a country, etc.)?

**2010 has seen a very significant development in the Irish system, with the introduction of a free pre-school year, in the year prior to starting primary school (the average age for starting primary school in Ireland is just before the child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday – Irish children start primary school in September, aged either 4 or 5 years old). 75% of services operate on a commercial basis, with the remainder being not-for-profit. Data regarding costs is collected, however, as the system is based upon capitation, whereby a qualified service is paid a fee for each qualified child, the details of costs are not vital to receipt of the funding. It is hoped to improve the quality of the data over the coming 2 years.**

Detailed data regarding costs for Early Childcare is only available from the not-for-profit sector. Home-based childminders are popular in Ireland for younger children, particularly those under 18 months, and regulation and information in that sector is limited.

1.4.5 If you have taken some actions to improve data on financial aspects or ECEC in general, please describe your country experience.

The Irish Government introduced a new scheme in 2008 for supporting the childcare costs of disadvantaged and low-income families. In the scheme, not-for-profit services were required to calculate with 'cost price', and charge this, less subvention provided by the State, to families, based on category of need. This was effected by means of a returns process that identified unit costs. This data is now aggregated and gives good indications of average and aggregate costs in the not-for-profit sector. However, these figures cannot be extrapolated for the sector as a whole, as salaries in the not-for-profit sector are generally higher than in the commercial sector, and the non-commercial sector generally has little or low rental costs.

## Part II. Why invest in ECEC? Research on benefits of ECEC

This section aims to gather updated information on existing research from network member countries relating to ECEC participation and children's outcomes.

Please provide details of research NOT already included in *Starting Strong II*, which you do not need to duplicate. List relevant references and attach corresponding documents if available. If articles/reports are not in English or French, please provide abstracts in English or French.

2.1 What research has been carried out in your own country on:

- Net benefits to children, parents and society of public and private investment in ECEC
- Net benefits or evaluations of specific ECEC programmes or initiatives

Ireland has invested significantly in the development of both the physical infrastructure necessary to deliver on national objectives in ECEC and in research and development underpinning the production of national practice frameworks which are intended to support and guide the development of high quality practice in ECEC settings. Siolta is the national quality framework for ECEC ([www.siolta.ie](http://www.siolta.ie)) and Aistear is the national framework for Early Learning ([www.ncca.ie/early-learning.htm](http://www.ncca.ie/early-learning.htm)). Both have been underpinned by significant research and consultation and documentation on both is available at the web addresses provided. At present, early stage dissemination and implementation of these practice frameworks is commencing across the ECEC sector and it is anticipated that evaluation data should become available within the next two years. In addition a number of Prevention and Early Intervention Programmes (PEIP) have been established in specific areas of economic disadvantage in Dublin. These are being rigorously evaluated and should yield valuable insight in the coming years.

2.2 What research has been carried out in your country on the relative benefits of public ECEC investment to increase accessibility (*i.e.* children's enrolment) *versus* increasing quality of services (*e.g.* raising staff qualifications, improving staff/ child ratio, etc.)?

## Part III. Financing mechanisms and funding strategies

### 3.1 Overall policy contexts

#### 3.1.1 Policy objectives

*Starting Strong II* identified 5 main policy objectives for public investment in ECEC:

1. Responding to the rise of the service economy and the influx of women into salaried employment;
2. Reconciling work and family responsibilities in a manner more equitable for women;
3. Managing demographic challenges: falling fertility and continuing immigration;
4. Acting against child poverty and educational disadvantage;

## 5. Early childhood education and care as a public good.

Please indicate which of the above can explain the current policy objectives, underpinning your country's public investment in ECEC. If there has been a shift of policy focus in recent years, please describe how policy thinking has evolved.

**The main stated objective of investment in ECEC services, at this time, is to improve the long-term outcomes for children. Additional benefits of supporting parents into employment, and employment in the field itself, are also seen as benefits from this investment.**

There has been a political move to increase financial support for childcare in Ireland since the middle of the last decade. There has been significant investment in childcare from 2001, through the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006 (EOCP), an EU/Exchequer co-funded programme. This supported capital investment, and also improvements in quality through training etc, however the only ongoing (staffing grant) supports it gave to reduce childcare costs were limited to a small number of services in disadvantaged areas. The main purpose of the staffing grant, which was supported by the ESF, was to support Women's participation in the Labour Market.

From around 2004, childcare costs became more topical as a political issue, particularly due to an increasing proportion of the population having a childcare need, largely through an increasing labour market participation by women, and also increased immigration, where migrant workers did not generally have the same access to family and informal childcare solutions as the general population. Both of these factors were driven by very significant economic growth and social change. A number of groups proposed a variety of responses, such as tax relief for childcare costs, or general subsidies to childcare facilities, but the main Government responses, up to 2008, focussed on supporting families with young children, by increasing their Family (cash) Benefits. Child Benefit (a universal benefit for all families) increased significantly, and in the space of a decade had quadrupled (from €40 to €160 per month per child). The Early Childcare Supplement (ECS) was introduced from 2006, which was a further cash benefit of €1,000 p.a. for children aged under 6 (in recognition of the higher childcare costs for pre-school children). Part of the rationale for using Family Benefits, rather than subsidising childcare costs, was that some parents choose to take a career break to care for their child in the pre-school years, and a direct subsidy to childcare facilities could be seen to discriminate against those families. Similarly, there would be difficulties in attaching such a benefit to the use of home-based childminders, many of whom operate informally. Improving fertility rates was not an objective of the ECS, however it would appear to have had an effect in this area. In the years 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005, the birth rate was very stable, with between 60,500 and 61,700 births each year, the figure being 61,042 in 2005. The payment was announced at the start of December 2005, and there were 64,237 births in 2006, 70,620 in 2007, and 75,065 in 2008. Preliminary figures from 2009 suggest some 75,000 births in that year. It is likely that a significant amount of this is a result of what had been deferred family formation, caused by high property prices and childcare costs, and the ECS may have made the costs associated with starting a family more affordable for middle income families in particular.

This emphasis started to shift from cash benefits to parents towards grant aiding ECEC services, with the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme 2008-10 (CCSS), which directly subsidises childcare costs for qualified families in the not-for-profit sector. The cost of this scheme was €60m in 2009. This replaced a smaller €37m scheme where services in areas of designated disadvantage were grant aided by means of a staffing grant. The CCSS has a greater reach, and has supported a greater number of children.

In 2008-9, as the Government sought to reduce overall expenditure, the ECS, which had a budget of €506m, came under greater scrutiny. Initially, the rate, which had been increased to €1,100 following the formation of the current Government in 2007, was reduced to approximately €1,000 p.a., and eligibility was cut back to 5½ years. However, further reductions in Public expenditure were required, and there was a general expectation that the payment would be either phased out or abolished in 2009-2010. In the event, a decision was made to replace it with one free pre-school year of 15 hours per week, 38 weeks per year (coinciding with the Primary school year), at a cost of

€170m p.a. (An equivalent number of free hours can be spread out over 50 weeks in childcare facilities). Children in the year prior to starting primary school are entitled to this support, regardless of family income etc. Announced in April 2009, the scheme came into effect in January 2010, and has been widely welcomed. 80% of qualified children participated in the scheme, in addition to a further 5% who would have qualified but instead participated in the more generous CCSS. In addition to making pre-school accessible to all children (the service must be free, and any extra payments for additional hours or services must be optional), thereby benefiting children who wouldn't have attended pre-school, it has also benefited the parents of children who would have attended pre-school and paid fees in the absence of the scheme. The scheme does not discriminate against families where a parent stays at home to mind their child, as the scheme is focussed on improving the outcomes of all children.

It has also facilitated the requirement of higher standards in the sector, through the contractual obligations placed on participating services, and this emphasis on quality is considered important by the OMCYA. In the longer term, it is intended to increase standards, and one of the earliest changes to the scheme, prior to its implementation, was a higher rate of capitation where staff have higher qualifications.

### 3.1.2 *Political debate – balance between parental leave benefits and childcare services*

Countries often look to find a balance between encouraging parents with young children to stay home to care for their children and encouraging parents, especially mothers, to maintain an attachment to the labour market by providing ECEC services. Policy instruments – which can be used in combination – include:

- Paying parents through “parental leave”, “child-rearing leave” with low flat-rate payment, etc.
- Giving universal child/ family allowances;
- Giving targeted child/ family allowances by income level,
- Giving targeted child/ family allowances by work status, etc.

Regarding public investment in childcare services *versus* parental leave benefits, what are the current challenges and trade-offs in your country? Are these underpinned by specific policy objectives?

**The pendulum has swung from the payment of cash payments to the provision of pre-school services, and it is considered unlikely to move back. There has been some debate about the nature of universal Family Benefit payments, notably Child Benefit (a universal payment) and there is ongoing consideration being given to either means test this, or tax it.**

**There are currently no plans to improve parental leave etc, and given the fiscal context, such a change is unlikely to be seriously considered for another 2-3 years at least.**

## 3.2 *Main sources of financing ECEC – where do resources come from?*

### 3.2.1 *Various sources*

This question aims to give a fuller picture of the main sources of financing ECEC services in your country to complement your responses in questions under 1.1.2 and 1.3. Six major sources of financial resources have been identified in past research:

1. governments (See question 3.2.2);
2. parents;
3. for-profit providers,
4. ECEC as business communities;
5. social organisations, and
6. international organisations

Please indicate which of the above is applicable in your country and describe challenges and advantages associated with the current financing mechanism. Feel free to answer separately for the childcare and early education sectors if more appropriate in countries with the “split systems”.

1. Government supports to ECEC mainly come from the Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs (OMCYA), but there are also supports for a limited number of pre-schools funded by the Dept of Education. That department would also fund training for the sector. The National Training Agency (FAS) would also fund the allowances of workers/trainees in Community Employment (CE), many of whom are childcare workers/trainees in the not-for-profit sector. FAS and local Vocational Educational Committees pay a childcare allowance to parents attending their courses. The Health Service Executive fund a number of pre-school services with a particular focus on Disability and/or disadvantage, and also pay childcare services a placement fee for some children. Some local municipalities would provide small levels of funding to community based childcare projects.

2. Parents generally pay 100% of the childcare fees for their children. The exceptions are (a) where the child is attending free pre-school in the year prior to primary school. Where such a child is instead attending a childcare facility in that year (e.g. full day care in a crèche), their fees are subsidised and they pay the balance, and (b) Disadvantaged families in community childcare facilities pay the cost price of their childcare, less the subvention they attract under the CCSS.

3. Approximately 75% of ECEC providers operate on a commercial basis. Nearly all of these would have received some form of state support, e.g. through the capital grant stream of the EOCP.

4. ECEC as business communities – it is not common for employers to pay towards the childcare costs of their staff, and there is no legal requirement for them to do so.

5. Social organisations, including charities etc, often provide childcare services, however the funding for these is generally through the State grant schemes. In some cases they may further subsidise those services from their core budgets.

6. EU funds played an important role in the roll out of the childcare infrastructure in Ireland under the EOCP, however they are no longer involved in the direct funding of ECEC services in Ireland.

The varied sources of funding reflect a variety of responses which arose in response to specific needs, and a focus over the next 2-3 years will be an attempt to consolidate funding as much as possible.

### 3.2.2 Sources from governments

This question aims to identify what kind of public revenue sources are allocated to ECEC services at different levels of governments. Please complete the table below, indicating “x” in the columns applicable in your country.

Types of public finance	Federal/ national	State/ province/ region	Local/ municipal
General tax revenues	x		
Ear-marked tax revenues for ECEC sector			
Earmarked tax revenues for specific ECEC programmes, type of services or categories of expenditure			
Transfers from other levels of government as part of general block grants	x		
Transfers from other levels of government as block grants to ECEC sector			
Transfers from other levels of government earmarked for specific ECEC programmes, type of services or categories of expenditure			

Source(s):OMCYA

Known data limitations: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3.3 Funding strategy – how to manage financial resources for ECEC

#### 3.3.1 Strategies to increase public spending on ECEC

Has there been an increase in public spending on ECEC services since 2005? If yes, how much increase? What were the driving forces in making a case for increased spending on ECEC? Feel free to answer separately for the childcare and early education sectors if more appropriate in countries with the “split



systems". Yes. The benefit of investment in ECEC has been recognised across the political spectrum for some time. Ireland started from a lower base than many countries 10 years ago, as it is only in the last 15 years that women's participation in the labour market has climbed to levels closer to the European norms, and traditionally, home-based childminders were the preferred childcare choice of most families. Over the period 2000-2009, significant investment – from the Exchequer and the EU – has built up a childcare infrastructure that has allowed greater choice for parents.

The creation of this infrastructure has allowed the State the opportunity of providing ongoing ECEC supports to families. Grant aid to childcare and pre-school services from the Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs has increased from €37m in 2007 to over six times that amount in 2010, largely funded by re-direction of Family Benefits that were previously intended to support families (see above).

This happened in the first case through the introduction of the CCSS, which cost approximately €60m in 2009, compared to the scheme it succeeded, the EOCP, which cost €37m in 2007. The new scheme provided greater support to disadvantaged families in a more targeted way. The introduction of the ECCE scheme from January 2010 (see above) was seen as a more appropriate way of supporting childcare and pre-school costs, as it is directly paid to services, and has allowed enhancement of quality in services as a condition of entering the scheme. Also, by making the places free to parents, services can no longer compete based on cost, and are now required to do so on quality. Safeguarding investment (and employment) in the sector was a further consideration which would have been a factor in the Government decision.

Please share your country experience such as:

- where the increased resources came from;
- strategies or research evidence that helped the argument for the increase;
- challenges associated with the increase and policy lessons you have learnt in tackling them;
- key political debates among politicians, general public, and the media of the time;
- how the increased budget was spent (e.g. to build more childcare places, increase the number of staff, increase staff salaries, increase participation of low-income families, etc.); etc.

### 3.3.2 Distribution of public resources to the providers (supply-side subsidies)

Past research categorises supply-side subsidies broadly into two types:

1. government-run and subsidised non-profit private ECEC services; and
2. subsidies to for-profit private providers.

Please fill in the table below with relevant information. Examples are provided in Annex E. Where information is missing, please enter "m". If your country has the "split system" for childcare and early education sectors, please prepare separate tables; one table for childcare and another for early education.

	Government-run and subsidised non-profit private ECEC services	Subsidies to for-profit private providers	Others (Specify)
Name/ type of scheme	<i>ECCE &amp; CCSS</i>	<i>ECCE</i>	
Duration of programme : hours per day, days per week, hours per year	<i>ECCE: 15 hrs X 38 wks or 11.25 hrs X 50 wks ; CCSS: varies</i>	<i>ECCE: 15 hrs X 38 wks or 11.25 hrs X 50 wks</i>	
Purpose of subsidies	<i>ECCE: to provide free pre-school CCSS: To subsidise childcare for disadvantaged/low income families</i>	<i>ECCE: to provide free pre-school</i>	
Universal or targeted (if targeted, specify conditions or eligibility)	<i>ECCE: Universal for children in pre-school year ; CCSS: Based on income status of family</i>	<i>ECCE: Universal for children in pre-school year</i>	
Parents' share (e.g. %, free, set ceiling, etc.)	<i>ECCE: No parent fees; CCSS: Cost price less subsidy (subsidy is up to €130 p.w.)</i>	<i>ECCE: No parent fees</i>	
Annual costs of programme per child/family (in local currency, year)	<i>ECCE: €2,425-€2,850 per child CCSS: up to €6,760 per child</i>	<i>ECCE: €2,425-€2,850 per child</i>	

Source(s): Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs

Known data limitations: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3.4 **Other policy issues**

*Market mechanisms to widen access to, and ensure quality of, ECEC services*

3.4.1 How are ECEC services regulated by public authorities? Please detail minimum quality standards. How are these statutory quality standards set? Who polices them and how? How is the quality (e.g. curriculum, staff qualifications, staff-child ratio, space, etc.) of individual services communicated to parents?

**Pre-School services are required to comply with the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations 2006, made under the Child Care Act 1991. These regulations specify minimum standards regarding staff-child ratios, space per child, and other requirements such as the need for educational content, open play areas, health & safety requirements etc. Services are required to notify to the Health Service Executive (HSE) and are subject to inspection by the HSE Pre-School Inspectorate. Inspectors are assisted in their inspection role by a standardised inspection tool and will also be further supported by new National Quality Standards for Pre-School Services which are at a late stage of development. These are intended to assist both services and the Inspectorate to implement and adhere to the Regulations in a way which supports the best quality outcomes for children. There are further quality frameworks, adherence to which is a condition of the schemes funded by the Government, although these requirements are contractual, rather than statutory.**

3.4.2 Are the for-profit providers eligible for public funding in your country? If yes, besides the financial incentives, what other incentives do you give to stimulate them to provide more and better ECEC services (e.g. regulation or deregulation on the minimum standards)? [

**Yes, commercial pre-schools constitute 75% of participants in the ECCE scheme. Participating services are contracted to adhere to higher standards than the minimum required under the Pre-school Services regulations, particularly in the areas of staff qualifications and curriculum. A system of quality co-ordinators has been established to support services in meeting these higher standards.**

3.4.3 If your country has any case studies of a provider failure, inspectorate reports, and/or research on low quality of the private ECEC services, please list references and attach relevant documents, if available.

#### *Financial crisis and ECEC*

3.4.4 Please share your country experience with an increase/ decrease on the budget on ECEC services as a result of, or in response to, the economic crisis. Was there a budget cut on ECEC as a result of the crisis; if yes, how much? Has ECEC been included in the stimulus package; if yes, what was the rationale/policy thinking behind the decision?

**There has been a very significant increase in ECEC funding (see above).**