

Early childhood Education and Care Access for Children from Disadvantaged Backgrounds: A Review of Effective and Promising Practices

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CONTEXT

High-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) can have substantial beneficial effects on overall child development and educational success. This is particularly true for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, making ECEC a powerful strategy to alleviate the effects of poverty from an early age. Unfortunately, it is well documented that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are underrepresented in ECEC. A growing body of literature looks at the reasons for this access inequity to high-quality ECEC and documents interventions targeting these barriers. The objective of the review is to gather and present the variety of actions that can be taken to improve access to ECEC for children from disadvantaged families (low socioeconomic background and/or new immigrants).

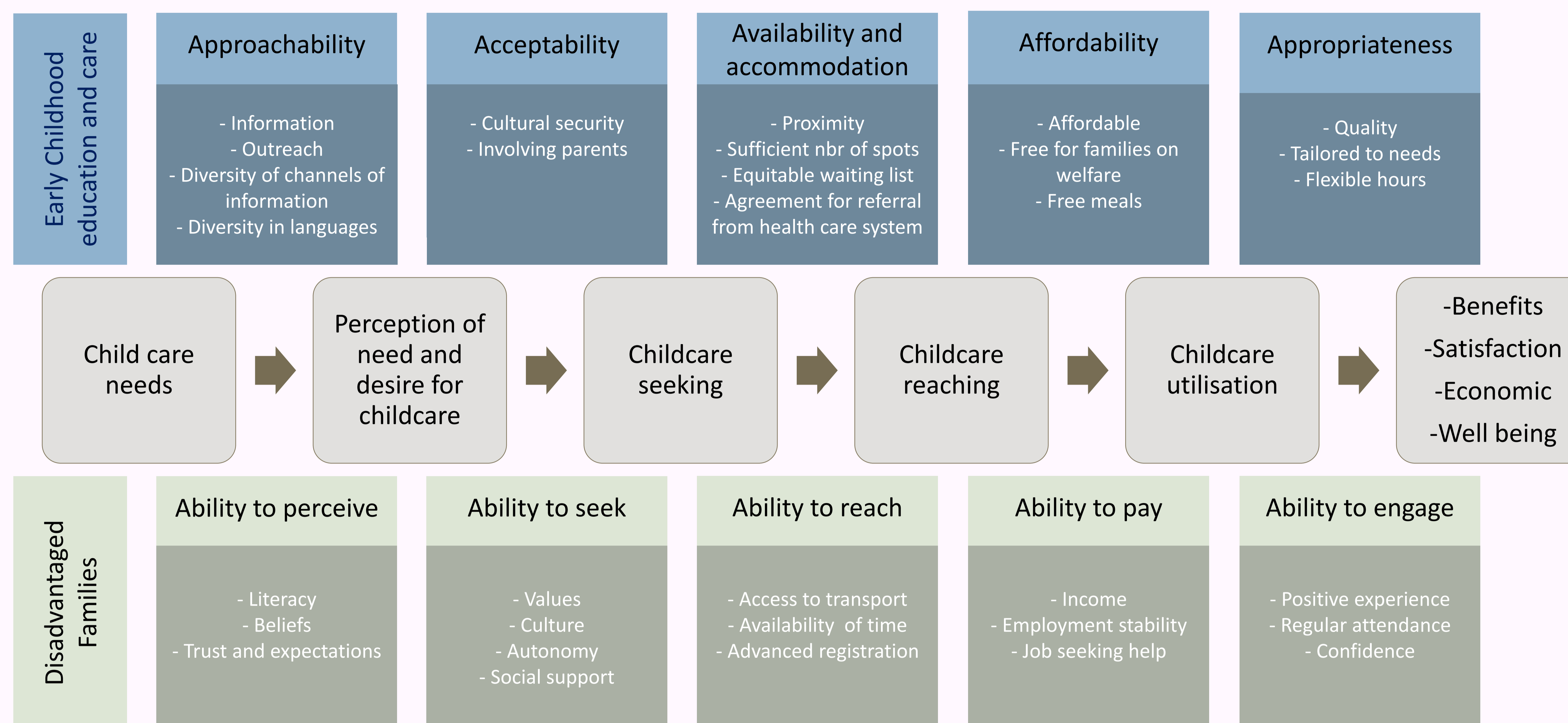
RESULTS

APPROACHABILITY AND ABILITY TO PERCEIVE CHILD CARE NEED

- Raise level of confidence for ECEC and inform about benefits, quality, costs and registration procedures^{5,11}
- Reach immigrant families in their milieu²
- Work with intersectoral partners⁶
- Use social and organisational connection channels³ (e.g.: health care system, immigration agents⁴)
- Communicate in multiple languages⁵
- Use information technologies⁶

FRAMEWORK : FACTORS INFLUENCING ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

The review, based on 17 articles, presents effective or promising practices in different countries and different contexts. In order to organize results, a conceptual framework used for access to health care¹ was adapted. The framework considers characteristics of ECECs, as well as of vulnerable families that influence access to, and use of, ECECs. The characteristics are organized along a continuum of stages from need to use.



ACCEPTABILITY AND ABILITY TO SEEK

- Train ECEC employees and managers on:
 - cultural security and poverty prejudice³
 - how to accompany disadvantaged children and families
- Integrate parents (as volunteers or observers)²
- Have flexible hours⁶
- Have bilingual employees⁵
- Simplify registration procedures³
- Empowerment of families and social support development¹²
- Support for finding ECECs¹²

AVAILABILITY AND ACCOMODATION AND ABILITY TO REACH

- Raise number of ECEC spots available in disadvantaged neighborhoods^{10,12,14}
- Develop a policy of equal access (change in priority criteria on waiting lists)¹³
- Support programs for ECEC directors regarding accessibility issues¹³
- Acknowledge accessibility for disadvantaged groups as a central quality criterion for ECEC¹⁴
- Support for ECEC visits and registration¹²

AFFORDABILITY AND ABILITY TO PAY

- Public financing and management of ECECs¹¹
- Universal access¹⁴
- Devoting resources to daycares has better results than providing funding to families directly^{11,14,15}
- Cost reductions to families must be significant^{16,12,2}
- Families on welfare should have free access to part-time ECEC²
- Provide free meals and snacks²

APPROPRIATENESS AND ABILITY TO ENGAGE

- Quality evaluation for all types of ECECs and making results public
- Allow flexible attendance
- Offer part-time attendance

CONCLUSION

Access to quality ECEC is a complex problem that goes far beyond individual preferences. Presenting the results of the review using a conceptual framework helps understand the extent of possibilities and the different focus of interventions aimed at improving access to ECEC for underprivileged families. An additional overarching layer of action could be added to the framework, describing public policies that have an impact on ECEC and on families along the continuum from need to use.

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