

# Evidence synthesis map

Increasing ethnic minority access to early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Possible approaches	Global evidence	Local intelligence
What did we learn from other countries and the evidence reviewed about potential approaches that have some promising insights?	What did we learn from existing, published evidence about factors influencing ethnic minority participation in ECEC and barriers they might face?	What did we learn from local expertise about how policy and practice might affect ethnic minority participation in ECEC at different stages of access?

## Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic ECEC\* Need

Localised and culturally sensitive outreach strategies can address gaps in understanding and misconceptions. Using social networks can be powerful, but also exclusive if applied in isolation. Action must be backed by a high-quality ECEC workforce. Approaches can be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General marketing strategies</li> <li>Targeted marketing and outreach</li> <li>Language support and multi-lingual material</li> <li>Supporting home-visits</li> <li>Mobilising community and informal networks to reach and support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gaps in understanding and awareness exist in Wales and the UK with access to ECEC for ethnic minority families.</li> <li>We have little insight into why the gaps exist and we have some insight into the size of the gap.</li> <li>Possible drivers that surfaced were: confusion about eligibility criteria, how employment/entitlements affect eligibility, lack of accessible information, lack of multi-lingual material, unclear value-offer to families, and/or a negative reputation.</li> </ul>	Wales lacks data on nature of problem. Key barriers identified were a lack of awareness and/or information about opportunities and how to access them. Also, a lack of inclusive provision of cultural and linguistic difference. Enablers put forth were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signposting by key brokers such as health visitors, community mentors, activists, and other local groups</li> <li>Ensuring communications about ECEC are current and multi-lingual</li> <li>Improving data collection around ethnicity on access and experience</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multicultural workforce development to recruit, retain, and mobilise ethnic minority staff in outreach (eg home-visits) and provision (eg teachers)</li> <li>National frameworks, training, toolkits, and supportive guidance</li> <li>Clear, simple communication of eligibility and application processes</li> <li>Targeted placement of services nearer to where communities live</li> <li>Financial support: to target/expand services, provide flexible provision, and/or develop responsiveness</li> </ul>	Inclusivity of ECEC workforce, organisational policy, and service practices were key. Barriers can be a lack of adequate training and support for services to be culturally sensitive and responsive. Enablers highlighted were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating welcoming services that make all cultures feel valued</li> <li>ECEC staff acting as cultural brokers between families and services</li> <li>Being flexible and adaptive to the needs of ethnic minority parents</li> <li>Being inclusive of extended families</li> </ul>	Flexible, friendly, inclusive ECEC policy and practice development was key. Two developmental areas highlighted were: <p>Workforce development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be inclusive and culturally sensitive</li> <li>Attracting and retaining a diverse workforce with ethnic minority representation and multi-lingual staff</li> </ul> <p>Guidance and/or training support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Places for siblings at the same provider</li> <li>Flexible attendance (hours), payment policies, and commitment periods</li> <li>Inclusive practice/content e.g. visual representation in books, pictures or art</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexible eligibility criteria eg through referred professionals</li> <li>Less rigid, or family-friendly hours eg offering weekend or evening care</li> <li>Placing services in communities or nearer to people's routines and other services they might access</li> <li>Systems/policies that prioritise those most marginalised/most in need</li> </ul>	Although affordability is important, global evidence pointed to the need to ensure ECEC was also acceptable and available. Beyond ensuring sufficient provision, adequate availability includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alignment of care to parental need/schedules</li> <li>Local availability</li> <li>Not long wait times</li> <li>Transparency in allocation</li> <li>Proximity to public transport</li> </ul>	Even if eligible, currently in Wales there are shortages in placements and waitlists. Key enablers associated with boosting availability could be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing presence of services in different localities</li> <li>Government funded expansion</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fee removal - as of April 2022, all children in Bulgaria attend nursery and kindergarten free of charge</li> <li>Rolling out '\$10-a-day centres' in Canada with fee subsidies and supports to meet a range of affordability needs</li> </ul>	Government funding is crucial and has increased access. In Wales, evaluations of the Childcare Offer evidenced positive impacts on lower-income families, enabling employment and increase their working hours and/or earnings. <p>Funding cuts, or fiscally constraints, can result in inconsistencies in quality and/or reduce supports for ethnic minority children and families, and also affect workforce recruitment and retention.</p>	Ways to offer affordability support that arose were to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand of Flying Start areas, provision and programmes. For example, extending the programme to more schools</li> <li>Provide public funding/subsidy</li> </ul> <p>A challenge in Wales is limited public resources to fund more targeted high quality provision.</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use surveys, focus groups, and community consultations for insights into barriers and continuous improvement of outreach and services</li> <li>Implementing needs assessments to tailor to the specific needs of ethnic minority families and children</li> <li>Community advisory boards with parents, ECEC staff, and community leaders to guide the development and implementation of ECEC developments</li> <li>Provide integrated language support such as language classes for parents</li> </ul>	Feedback and continuous improvement and evaluation are vital for assessing effectiveness of ECEC interventions and for ensuring information is targeted and accessible.	There are key challenges in Wales: wider systemic pressures; the fragmented and fragile system; low status, pay, and qualified workforce; and lack of data and evaluation on effectiveness. Key possible enablers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Voice and inclusion of ethnic minorities. Trust building is key for engagement in provision and also evaluation.</li> <li>More integrated, connected ECEC. E.g: Home Office facilitating childcare to help with integration; links to local authorities; taking a cross-departmental approach; partnering with Universities for accreditations; public body data sharing.</li> </ul>
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**APPROACHABILITY**

Steps are taken to reach and make diverse families aware of ECEC offers and need; to create a positive reputation; to recognise and respond to diverse family structures, beliefs and values.

*E.g. the higher the perceived quality of ECEC is in a country, the less access inequities there are (Van Lancker and Ghysels 2016)*

**ACCEPTABILITY**

Steps are taken to make ECEC offerings welcoming, culturally sensitive, flexible and needs-sensitive. Services and staff are flexible to family needs and potential barriers to access (eg hours of attendance, paperwork).

*E.g. Training in cultural sensitivity, language awareness, employing staff from diverse backgrounds, accepting less formal documents.*

**AVAILABILITY**

There are adequate spaces, locations, and times for ECEC across places/geographies. If not, waitlist practices are sensitive to the needs of diverse families.

*Eg supporting equitable access policy and practice development by addressing provision gaps and practices like first-come-first-served which can be a barrier.*

**AFFORDABILITY**

Free and subsidised provision for ECEC. This is also about the approach to financing.

*Eg cost reductions need to be enabling, even a reduced contribution can be too high for some. Some countries found more positive effects increasing the supply of affordable ECEC rather than giving direct financial support to families.*

**APPROPRIATENESS**

ECEC services are of high quality there are partnerships and more integrated supports or services for children and families.

*Eg building partnerships between ECECs and community organisations to offer services to parents can help with adherence and have wider benefits.*

Local intelligence	Global evidence	Possible approaches
What did we learn from local expertise about what may facilitate or inhibit ethnic minority participation in ECEC in Wales at different stages of access?	What did we learn from existing, published evidence about factors influencing ethnic minority participation in ECEC and barriers they might face?	What did we learn from other countries and the evidence reviewed about potential approaches that have some promising insights?
Ethnic minority families may choose not to access ECEC because they have family support. A key reason could also be cultural preferences with language, religion, values, norms, and even foods. Potential enabler highlighted was: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Friendships and relationships</li> <li>Community groups</li> <li>Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic representation in ECEC staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perceptions can impact access. This can be family and/or cultural ideas about the role of the parent, children being too young, lack of trust that their child will be safe.</li> <li>Current perceptions can stem from previous poor experiences with ECEC.</li> <li>Other potential barriers are:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of ethnic minority representation in staff</li> <li>Parental insecurities about their language and literacy levels or their child's current abilities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Word of mouth: using social and/or community networks</li> </ul>

Local intelligence	Global evidence	Possible approaches
Although ethnic minority families might perceive an ECEC need, they might not actively seek a placement because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They don't feel welcome</li> <li>Fear discrimination</li> <li>Lack confidence</li> <li>Had previous negative experiences (e.g. racism or discrimination)</li> </ul> Further, locally available offers might not align with needs; this can be in terms of quality and/or antiracist or inclusive practice. For example, a person with lived experience highlighted how only Welsh-medium provision was available.	The suitability and perceived quality of ECEC services affect uptake. Issues were raised with staff qualifications, inadequate facilities, unengaging environments, and insufficient attention to children. Other issues were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preference for home environments or for where their language is spoken</li> <li>Desire to preserve and pass on culture, religion, and/or language</li> <li>Inflexible timings or durations eg desire for shorter days for younger children or different working hours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuous communication to reassure and build familiarity; Familiarity can develop trust.</li> <li>Using cultural brokers or community liaisons to provide information, support families, and facilitate communication between parents and ECEC services. This could be with community: networks, leaders, healthcare providers, religious groups and also local workplaces.</li> </ul>

Local intelligence	Global evidence	Possible approaches
Eligibility criteria and accessibility in terms of policy and location (local availability, transport) can be key barriers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential issues with eligibility criteria: thresholds overlook self-employment; eligibility tied to working hours/status</li> <li>Inaccessibility/inflexibility: only being available at certain times (hours) and places; minimum number of hours a parent is in work, having contracts with commitments</li> </ul> Key enablers could be: transport, incentives for ECEC to reserve spaces for/take on more ethnic minority children	Structural barriers, such as lack of transportation and inability to cater to different age groups, can hinder access to services. Other barriers to reach are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long waits</li> <li>Eligibility criteria: age, income, employment status, visa type</li> <li>Application processes that require literacy, access to IT and IT skills</li> <li>Documents supporting application</li> <li>Lack of support for children with additional healthcare or developmental needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offering targeted support for example key workers supporting families to apply and secure a place</li> </ul>

Local intelligence	Global evidence	Possible approaches
Cost was raised as a barrier for ethnic minority families in Wales: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of free childcare options</li> <li>ECEC is too expensive for household</li> <li>Lack of financial means to access quality ECEC</li> </ul> Cost reduction were proposed as a possible enabler. For example, with specific concessions for ethnic minority children and families.	Affordability was a significant barrier for many ethnic minority families in Wales. This can result in use of kinship networks or even sending children to live with family abroad <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Although financial support can lead to increased uptake, the impact on actual attendance may be modest</li> <li>Reduced fees might not be enough to overcome the affordability challenge. For example, the cumulative cost of care for families with multiple children</li> <li>Social welfare benefit changes can exacerbate affordability challenges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conditional cash transfers</li> </ul>

Local intelligence	Global evidence	Possible approaches
Disengagement could stem from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of trust</li> <li>Poor quality provision negatively affecting child development</li> </ul> Evaluation is key for continuous improvement, but barriers can be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation only offered in English or Welsh and not in other languages</li> <li>Lack of representation in research and policymaker communities</li> </ul>	Integrating and connecting services to provide comprehensive support. ECEC settings can play a brokering role in respect to health, housing, and other social services and agencies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supportive, trusting relationships are crucial for the active engagement of culturally diverse groups</li> <li>Community and home-based ECEC can be a stepping stone to formal ECEC and/or education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family involvement in ECEC eg through volunteering</li> <li>There is compelling evidence to support investing in home-based ECEC support for ethnic minority children and families; it can help improve eventual uptake, attendance, and developmental outcomes.</li> </ul>

### SUPPLY SIDE: PROVIDERS, PRACTICES, AND POLICY

Support given directly to providers to influence policy and practice or support taken at the regional/national levels to address barriers or enablers.

### DEMAND SIDE: CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Support given directly to children and families to address barriers or to enable.

\*This map builds on [Mendizabal-Espinosa et. al 2024](#) Figure 1.1: Access to Early Years Education and Care, which is an adaptation of the [Archambault et. al 2019](#) conceptual framework of access to quality ECECs for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.