

# How can policy increase access to early years childcare support for ethnic minority families?

IPPO Policy summary

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## Project outputs

This policy summary distils evidence and recommendations from a package of associated outputs: [Increasing access to early childhood education and care \(ECEC\) among Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children and families in Wales](#) | WCPP

- **Rapid Evidence Review**
- **International Policy Scan**
- **Systems Map**
- **Evidence Synthesis Map**
- **Theory of Change Workshop Insight Note**

The Rapid Evidence Review and International Policy Scan aimed to provide independent evidence, insight, and information on possible approaches for decision-makers to consider.

To gain insight into the local context and strengthen our recommendations, IPPO engaged a mixture of Welsh Government policy, research, and equalities-focused officials; community mentors (people with lived and professional experience); and sector representative bodies through systems mapping workshops and a final theory of change workshop.

# Introduction

**Increasing access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a global priority.**

ECEC is widely seen as key for reducing educational and social inequalities. Experts and [policymakers agree](#) that investing in high-quality, child-centred, inclusive, and affordable ECEC services strengthens future educational attainment, prevents early skill gaps and school leaving, reduces long-term social inequalities, and contributes to social cohesion. ECEC's status as a priority is cemented through international initiatives like the [UN Sustainable Development Goal](#) on 'quality education' and the [G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development](#). There are similar ECEC-related policy goals across the UK.

Demand for early childhood care and education [often exceeds supply](#) in high-income countries, with many families unable to locate or afford childcare support that best suits their needs.

**Engagement with ECEC can also vary significantly across demographic groups.**

Identifying barriers and enablers influencing unequal access to ECEC is especially important given research indicating that the most disadvantaged children [are also the most likely to benefit](#) from early care with ECEC helping to [reduce poverty and social exclusion](#). Understanding broader determinants of engagement in ECEC [can play an important role](#) in supporting national policy initiatives aimed at achieving equitable provision, reducing developmental disparities among children, and promoting positive life outcomes such as academic achievement, employment opportunities, and social skills.

## Project background

This project stems from discussions with the Welsh Government about their policy goals related to Early Childcare, Play, Learning and Care (the Welsh Government's approach to ECEC) and as part of their commitment to make Wales anti-racist. In 2022 the Welsh Government launched its [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan](#) (ArWAP) based on [evidence reviews](#), stakeholder engagement, lived experience expertise, and wider consultation on how to improve race equality in Wales. The ArWAP highlights Childcare and Play as a key policy area due to its importance for child development, lifelong learning, and social integration. This resulted in a commitment to developing an anti-racist approach within the childcare and play sector which includes: improving experience within the workplace; offering more culturally appropriate provision; and improving the experience of children.

A clearer identification of potential barriers and facilitators will inform the ongoing phased expansion of Early Years Provision in [Wales](#) and [England](#) and support the ArWAP's delivery especially in terms of [childcare and play](#). Preliminary evidence in Wales identified the [low uptake](#) of early years childcare among Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic children and families as an issue of concern. Although there is a need to scope possible approaches to intervention, there is also a lack of consistent, comparable data on the current scale of the challenge.

The research questions and approach to this project were developed in consultation with the Welsh Government but designed to be relevant across the UK and globally. Our approach is detailed in Appendix A. To inform broader early years policy discussions we examined:

- **What evidence exists** about the nature and scale of the challenge in terms of participation in ECEC among ethnic minority children and families?
- **What are the barriers and enablers** to participating in ECEC among ethnic minority children and families?
- **What interventions** have been tried to encourage participation in early years education and care among ethnic minority children and families? How far are these interventions effective?
- **How have other countries approached equitable participation** in early years childcare and education for ethnic minority families, as well as other minoritised or disadvantaged groups?

**Notes on terminology:** This project uses 'early childhood education and care' (ECEC) for its global resonance. While we recognise that there is no universally accepted term to describe the

diversity of groups which may experience racism in society, we follow the [ArWAP](#) in using Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, as well as ‘ethnic minority’ as shorthand. We also refer to ‘families who experience disadvantage’ or ‘disadvantaged communities’. Although these groups are not interchangeable, we widened searches to identify a greater range of potentially transferable evidence.

## Policy context

In Wales and the UK more broadly, increasing the number of government funded childcare hours available to parents of young children has been the primary policy intervention for increasing access to ECEC. Eligibility varies across the four nations but generally, between 12 and 30 hours of childcare per week of term-time is offered to working parents of 2- to 4-year-olds, with additional entitlements for disadvantaged families. Successive waves of funding expansions and increasing the availability of childcare hours across the UK are linked to primarily supporting working parents to maintain employment or become economically active, though this government objective is not always aligned with objectives concerned with child development and learning.

As well as increasing overall access to ECEC for young children, policymakers and practitioners are also concerned with ensuring equal access to these services across demographic groups so that ECEC helps to reduce, not widen, education inequalities more broadly across the life course. There is some evidence of low participation and poorer experiences in ECEC among Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic children and families. This includes a 2022 [study](#) by the Centre for Evidence and Implementation, a 2018 [evidence review](#) for England’s Department for Education (DfE), and [qualitative evidence](#) shared with the Welsh Parliament. However, large-scale data on participation rates in ECEC among ethnic minority communities is not routinely collected across services. One [international study](#) also suggests that lower income and education levels are associated with reduced use of ECEC, although the gap in uptake was reduced where universal state subsidies were provided.

## Welsh policy context

Wales is actively building a new approach to ECEC through a phased expansion of early years support through Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC). The Welsh approach to ECEC has a strong focus on promoting child development, social opportunities, wellbeing, equality, and promoting the Welsh language, integrating its early years support with wider strategies such as [Cymraeg 2050: a million Welsh speakers](#). In Wales, all children aged 3-4 are entitled to a minimum of 10 hours per week of nursery education through their local authority. Other key supports in Wales are the [Childcare Offer](#) which gives eligible parents of children aged 3-4 an additional 20 hours of funded childcare per week for up to 48 weeks per year, and [Flying Start](#), the flagship early years programme for children aged 0-4 living in disadvantaged areas which is currently being expanded through a phased approach to provide 12.5 hours per week of childcare for 39 weeks of the year to all 2-year-olds in Wales.

To create a more equitable nation for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, the Welsh Government is examining and addressing the ways racism is built into policies and ways of working following the launch of the Anti-Racist Action Plan for Wales (ArWAP). Through community engagement and consultation, the ArWAP identified childcare and play as a key policy area for action. It recognises the wider social impact that childcare provision can have on the ability of parents and carers to work and access the labour market. The actions outlined in ArWAP strongly focus on addressing under-representation in the workforce, but also commit to working with the sector, community groups and parents to identify and address issues. Acting on this commitment, the Welsh Government [recently welcomed](#) new anti-racist guidance for childcare settings developed by the [Diversity and Anti-Racist Professional Learning](#) organisation (DARPL) in partnership with [Cwlwm](#) (a consortium of early years providers).

## Overarching findings

The global evidence base revealed an abundance of policies and initiatives, but few robust evaluations of efficacy and longer-term impact. Many countries took collaborative and bespoke approaches to policy development to address challenges unique to their context. Key themes from the evidence suggest:

- **Government-funded entitlements and programs can increase ECEC uptake but need to be tailored to target population needs.** Universal approaches can overlook the distinct participation challenges of specific communities and places.
- **Removing financial barriers is only part of the solution, cultural barriers need to be addressed as well.** Concerns about quality, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability to the different needs of ethnic minority children and families also play important roles.
- **Lack of ethnic minority representation in the ECEC sector can affect uptake.** Research, staff and family experiences and our stakeholder engagement reported representation matters in two key areas:
  - **Diversity of ECEC staff:** recruiting and retaining people across the early years sector from diverse ethnic backgrounds and with diverse language skills.
  - **Inclusive and diverse ECEC practice:** being inclusive of dietary restrictions, religious practices, and through the representation of cultural practices in books, activities and celebrations.
- **Established community relationships are essential for supporting ethnic minority families to access ECEC.** Communities can be key enablers for raising awareness and understanding about ECEC and embedding services for accessible outreach and/or setting locations, which support families to enrol, maintain attendance, and improve ECEC practice.
- **Workforce quality, morale, and retention impact ECEC availability and perceptions of appropriateness.** Low pay and lack of funded training and professional development opportunities contribute to high staff turnover, limited provider hours, and low capacity to provide additional (e.g. language) support. These challenges impact families' willingness and ability to participate in ECEC.

## UK challenges

When focusing on the UK specifically, our review of the evidence and engagements with stakeholders highlighted two key overarching themes:

- **Accessibility gaps:** In the UK, gaps in awareness, reach, and participation exist for ethnic minority children and families—childcare availability and accessibility remain significant challenges for many. This inequity persists despite evidence confirming that for parents more generally, government investment in ECEC has increased access to ECEC and increased the awareness of entitlements as well as the benefits of ECEC.
- **Inadequate data:** To inform robust ECEC policy action and monitor the effectiveness of interventions, existing evidence and data on the uptake, perspectives, and experiences of ethnic minority families in the UK is inadequate. Within the ECEC sector, there is a lack of routinely collected data and data disaggregation to better benchmark uptake and participation by ethnic minority families. There is also a lack of routine evaluation to inform ECEC sector improvements based on ethnic minority staff, children, and family experience and understanding of non-participation.

# Summary of findings and recommendations

IPPO recommendations are aimed at national and local governments who wish to remove barriers and increase ethnic minority access to childcare. The findings and recommendations are drawn from our engagement with local stakeholders in Wales, a rapid evidence review, and an international policy scan. Three broad themes emerged from the evidence base which help group our recommendations:

1. **The need for a bespoke and integrated strategy** to adequately address the multiple, interrelated factors affecting ethnic minority access. Our review of the evidence repeatedly highlighted that reducing cost is necessary, but not sufficient, to maintain increased ECEC attendance. Our policy scan identified various countries making strategic, longer-term investments in ECEC. These approaches go beyond addressing affordability and were developed through active testing, learning, and collaboration. Integrating early years support with other services can make it more accessible, enhance outreach, and provide more comprehensive support to families.
2. **Addressing social, cultural and practical barriers.** There is a need to better understand and respond to the needs of specific communities and develop more culturally sensitive practices, particularly by involving ethnic minority voices in the design of provision. Increasing ECEC sector diversity is seen as a key step. Further steps should be taken to tackle barriers such as by simplifying eligibility and application processes which can otherwise deter families. Sector-wide training and support is needed to improve practice and policy.
3. **Community outreach and engagement are key to increasing participation in ECEC.** Targeted outreach is an effective strategy for increasing participation amongst specific ethnic minority communities. Promising strategies include resourcing community and cultural brokers (e.g. bicultural workers, support workers, community liaisons); home visits to encourage ECEC engagement; and home-based or community-based ECEC provision.

To learn more about how we translated these global findings and recommendations to Wales, read our [Workshop Insight Note](#).

Finding	Recommendation
<b>Theme 1: Developing an integrated strategy</b>	
Reducing cost is necessary but not sufficient.	Develop a long-term, comprehensive approach to closing the access gap in ECEC.
ECEC policies must be integrated with other policies, services and sectors.	Take an integrated approach that includes connecting with employers, community institutions, and other government services to better reach and support families.
Interventions might initially increase uptake in ECEC but fail to sustain participation or improve developmental outcomes.	Allocate resource for long-term evaluation of ECEC-related interventions as part of policy design and experimentation (policy and practice development by trying, testing, and learning).
A lack of data and evaluation of initiatives hinders effective policy implementation to improve ECEC access.	Embed long-term evaluation and routine ethnicity data collection that is reliable and available. Take a holistic approach to evidence on barriers and experiences to effectively develop and improve policy and practice.



<b>Theme 2: Addressing social, cultural, and practical barriers</b>	
Inclusive policies that respect and value cultural diversity are key to developing approachable and acceptable provision for ethnic minority children and families.	Develop a cultural sensitivity and inclusivity programme for ECEC settings.
The ECEC workforce is key to widening access to childcare.	Develop a workforce strategy to increase the diversity of ECEC staff and improve sector retention, quality, and professionalisation.
Families can disengage because of application processes which require documents and may assume digital skills, devices, and literacy.	Ensure a minimal burden of proof for free or subsidised ECEC services.
<b>Theme 3: Community outreach, engagement, and mobilisation</b>	
Trusting and supportive relationships pave the way for ethnic minority parents and families to engage with ECEC services.	Adopt a relational approach to ECEC outreach and delivery through home visits, community engagement, and home-based support (where appropriate for specific groups).
Targeted outreach can support ECEC uptake.	Develop a community-oriented strategy to centre community partnerships, engagement, and voice in the ongoing development and implementation of ECEC policy and provision. This should explore using community leaders, mentors, infrastructure, and advisory groups.
Community relationships play a key role in facilitating, supporting, and improving ECEC access for ethnic minority children and families.	
ECEC practitioners acting as cultural brokers can support ethnic minority access and engagement; some evidence suggests brokers can positively impact child development.	National and local government should work with providers to actively recognise, resource, and support cultural brokers' across the ECEC sector

# Recommendations and findings

## Theme 1: Developing an integrated strategy

### Recommendation 1: Develop a long-term, comprehensive approach to closing the access gap in ECEC.

**Key finding:** Reducing cost is necessary but not sufficient.

- **Cost presents a significant barrier to access to childcare.** Removing fees generally increases uptake in the short term.
- However, **reducing cost alone does not maintain increased ECEC attendance** among minority ethnic and other structurally disadvantaged communities.
- **Approachability and acceptability of childcare** significantly impact ongoing engagement, suggesting that addressing family and community attitudes toward accessing ECEC services is critical.

Our policy scan found examples of other countries making strategic, longer-term investments into ECEC which address more than just affordability. Developing a comprehensive approach to ECEC should include testing approaches to:

- expand funded childcare hours.
- ensure culturally sensitive practices and policies.
- innovate and evaluate community outreach approaches.
- address concerns about childcare workforce and quality.
- integrate with wider education and workforce policies.

### Recommendation 2: Take an integrated approach that includes connecting with employers, community institutions, and other government services to better reach and support families.

**Key finding:** ECEC policies must be integrated with other policies, services, and sectors.

- **Community-based outreach is essential for raising awareness** and understanding of existing ECEC entitlements and the benefits of formal ECEC.
- It is important to **connect ECEC to other support services** for disadvantaged groups, especially in the case of refugees. Reciprocal links between ECEC providers and health, housing and social services increase uptake in ECEC and support wider social outcomes.
- **In-person, one-to-one assistance in understanding and applying for funded ECEC makes a big difference.** ECEC outreach workers can assist families with the application process and dispel misconceptions within communities. Trained community leaders, healthcare providers, and social workers can also play this role.

Integrating support and services provision to reach ethnic minority families better can include:

- **Targeted awareness-raising initiatives in the community** through partnerships with local community organisations, religious institutions, and cultural groups; they can host information sessions or support groups to better reach parents who might otherwise hesitate to engage with formal services.
- **Signposting about childcare entitlements through locally used services**, for example using schools, employers, health, and social services to disseminate information.

Offering wider supports to parents in addition to ECEC such as:

- **Integrating employment support services within or near ECEC centres** to help parents find stable employment (increasing eligibility for free childcare services).



- **Language classes** to support community cohesion.

### **Recommendation 3: Allocate resource for evaluation of ECEC-related interventions as part of policy design and experimentation.**

**Key finding:** Interventions might initially increase uptake in ECEC but fail to sustain participation or improve developmental outcomes.

- Our research found **positive results from bold, experimental approaches** to policy development – like trialling different forms of community outreach and one-to-one support. By ‘experimentation’, we refer to developing policy and practice by trying, testing, and learning.
- Such tailored approaches are particularly recommended since evidence shows that reducing cost is often insufficient to close access gaps for some communities.
- However, **experimental interventions require robust evaluation** to build confidence in public investment and ensure responsive and evidence-based policy. Deciding which outcomes to track and for how long is key to evaluating effectiveness.
- **Positive impacts from interventions can take time to emerge**, so it is important to **evaluate interventions over time** to get an accurate picture of effectiveness. For example, developmental outcomes for children can take years to realise.

### **Recommendation 4: Embed long-term evaluation and routine ethnicity data collection that is reliable and available. Take a holistic approach to evidence on barriers and experiences to effectively develop and improve policy and practice.**

**Key finding:** A lack of data and evaluation of initiatives hinders effective policy implementation to improve ECEC access.

- Globally, there is a lack of routine data monitoring related to ethnicity and ECEC access and outcomes, making it difficult to evaluate the ethnicity gap in take-up of ECEC.
- **Collecting accurate and comparable ethnicity data at local authority and ECEC provider level** is crucial to monitoring the effectiveness of ECEC-related and wider interventions.
- **National and local data collection should disaggregate ethnicity data to evidence, monitor and address gaps and challenges in access to services including ECEC.**
- Barriers to participation in ECEC for ethnic minority families can be dynamic and structural as well as social and cultural. Data collection and evaluations should take a holistic approach to access and include evidence into ECEC being culturally sensitive, adaptable to the needs of diverse communities.
- Positive **impacts on uptake can be offset** by challenges in other parts of the system, such as lack of places or workforce shortfalls. This emphasises the need to **continually assess the experiences of ethnic minority** families to understand where new challenges may be emerging. Qualitative data should be complemented by reliable, routine quantitative data collection across the ECEC sector monitoring equitable access.

<b>Examples from global practice: Developing an integrated strategy</b>	
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
<b>Developing a comprehensive approach</b>	To enable tailored and bottom-up solutions to emerge, a key component of Australia’s new Early Years Strategy is an Inclusion Development Fund for Innovative Solutions Support to help ECEC services find solutions to tackle inclusion barriers. This has been used to resource Indigenous community mentors and bicultural support workers.

	<p>The State of Victoria in Australia has developed a suite of initiatives and supports tailored to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) access needs, including a Community Event toolkit, a CALD Outreach initiative with CALD outreach workers, and more direct services and resources for CALD families such as free interpretation.</p> <p>The Canadian Government invested \$27 billion in 2021 into improving ECEC in all provinces, with investment details differing for each province to respond to local needs. The Early Learning and Child Care Act 2024 (currently still a Bill) also puts forward a range of policies to support recent migrants, minority language and cultural groups, and First Nations communities in Canada.</p>
<p><b>Allocating resource for evaluation</b></p>	<p>In advance of rolling out a policy of universal fee removal in 2020, Bulgaria conducted a national randomised control trial of several interventions to understand what was most effective.</p> <p>Australia’s Inclusion Support program – aimed at promoting ECEC participation among children with additional needs – was first evaluated in 2021, and followed by a full independent review in 2023, which reported significantly developed outcomes.</p> <p>Continuous evaluation of the Promoting ECE Participation Project in New Zealand led the project to evolve based on key success factors for increasing participation. This process resulted in consolidating focus on three specific initiatives: Engaging Priority Families, Supported Playgroups, and Targeted Assistance for Participation</p>
<p><b>Embed long-term evaluation and take a holistic approach</b></p>	<p>One year after removing fees in Bulgaria, registration and attendance among Roma children had increased, but developmental outcomes had not improved. However, a follow-up evaluation two years later did evidence higher literacy and numeracy, demonstrating the importance of evaluating outcomes longer-term.</p> <p>A qualitative evaluation of Canada’s “\$10-a-Day Childcare” programme showed increased uptake and positive impacts for those families who could access it but reported that its positive impact was jeopardised by issues such as long waitlists and workforce quality.</p> <p>Ongoing evaluation found that the Australian Government’s Child Care Package improved childcare affordability for low- and middle-income families, but when disaggregated, there was no clear increase among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and some culturally and linguistically diverse children, suggesting they experience additional barriers to access.</p>

## Theme 2: Addressing social, cultural, and practical barriers

### Recommendation 5: Develop a cultural sensitivity and inclusivity programme for ECEC settings.

**Key finding:** Inclusive policies that respect and value cultural diversity are key to developing approachable and acceptable provision for ethnic minority children and families.

- **National guidance and frameworks** can help to standardise and prioritise culturally sensitive practice across the ECEC sector.
- Rolling out **culturally sensitive needs assessments** can enable a better response to the needs of children and families.
- Policy developments to make ECEC more culturally sensitive and inclusive should **involve lived experience expertise** of both family and staff from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- Establishing **community advisory boards** made up of parents, ECEC staff, and community leaders, can help to guide development and implementation of culturally sensitive policies.

Factors to consider include:

- if opening hours exclude working parents on differing shift patterns
- proximity to public transportation and accessibility of those options
- application processes including eligibility proof
- how space is allocated and how waiting lists are handled (e.g. first-come-first-served versus prioritising those with greater need)
- how accommodating ECEC services are to dietary restrictions and religious practices to fully enable inclusivity and cultural expression

### Recommendation 6: Develop a workforce strategy to increase the diversity of ECEC staff and improve sector retention, quality, and professionalisation.

**Key finding:** The ECEC workforce is key to widening access to childcare.

- Our review of the evidence and engagement with Welsh Government community mentors (people with lived and professional experience) highlighted that families are aware of and concerned about workforce quality and turnover.
- Studies have shown that high staff turnover can jeopardise the positive impacts of increased ECEC uptake among ethnic minorities and disadvantaged groups.
- Studies have shown that a well-trained, well-paid workforce with good career development prospects is crucial to the success of new ECEC programmes. In Canada, the low pay and status of ECEC staff from minority groups have been key obstacles to expanding access.
- The suitability of ECEC services is a key factor in their uptake, and in addition to quality, the diversity of ECEC staff and leadership can impact parental engagement.
- Measures are needed to **recruit and retain a diverse ECEC workforce** that reflects the community's demographics in both ECEC provider settings and outreach programmes
- A **workforce plan** should aim to increase ECEC sector diversity, upskill staff, evaluate progression pathways for retention and diversifying sector leadership, and reduce turnover through improving pay and professional development opportunities for staff.
- **Specialised training and provision for staff across the ECEC sector** is needed to address social and cultural barriers and should be linked to **accredited professional development**. Highlighted trainings were unconscious bias training, anti-racism, and cultural competency.

## Recommendation 7: Ensure a minimal burden of proof for free or subsidised ECEC services.

**Key finding:** Families can disengage because of application processes that may require documents and assume digital skills, devices, and literacy.

- Eligibility criteria and needing documented proof of eligibility are key barriers to accessing childcare. These include criteria relating to family income, child age, citizenship or visa status, and needing certain types of documents.
- Employment as a criterion for accessing free childcare can also act as an unintentional barrier to seeking employment.  
**Simplified eligibility processes could be introduced for specific groups**, where governments have identified a need to widen access.
- Simplifying application processes and offering support to families when applying can address access challenges head on such as parental insecurities with language, literacy or about ECEC services.
- Using visual aids, infographics, and videos to explain complex information can be particularly effective in overcoming language barriers and improving comprehension.

Examples from global practice: Addressing social, cultural, and practical barriers	
Recommendation	Evidence
Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity	<p>The Canadian Federal Government has co-developed an Indigenous Early Learning and Childcare Framework with Indigenous partners that emphasizes the importance of a child’s cultural identity and sense of worth.</p> <p>In 2023, Brazil created a specific workstream within its national Bolsa Família programme for addressing the cultural needs of Indigenous and Quilombola peoples, such as language maintenance and spiritual connections.</p>
Reduce the burden of proof	<p>The Australian Government’s childcare subsidy is tiered according to how engaged parents are in a range of activities such as paid or unpaid work, training or study, but exemptions are available including for parents of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.</p> <p>The state of Victoria in Australia accepts verbal statements from parents or a referral from local professionals as sufficient proof for subsidised childcare places for children from refugee or asylum-seeker backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, or those known to Child Protection.</p>

## Theme 3: Community outreach, engagement, and mobilisation

### Recommendation 8: Adopt a relational approach to ECEC outreach and delivery through home visits, community engagement, and home-based support (where appropriate for specific groups).

**Key finding:** Trusting and supportive relationships pave the way for ethnic minority parents and families to engage with ECEC services.

- **Targeted outreach** – e.g. support workers visiting non-participating families – has been effective in increasing uptake in other countries.
- Programmes that involve **regular home visits and involve families in educational and developmental support in their homes** have improved children’s developmental outcomes and supported higher levels of participation in formal ECEC settings.
- Although resource-intensive, targeted outreach or support programmes are associated with longer-term benefits through trust-building that can lead to: sustained engagement, change attitudes to ECEC, and create positively affirming environments for diversity and inclusion.

### Recommendation 9: Develop a community-oriented strategy to centre community partnerships, engagement, and voice in the ongoing development and implementation of ECEC policy and provision.

**Key findings:** (1) Community relationships play a key role in facilitating, supporting, and improving ECEC access for ethnic minority children and families. (2) Targeted outreach can support ECEC uptake.

- A **community-oriented strategy**, which engages families and trusted community leaders in raising awareness and building links between ECEC providers and families, is essential.
- With particular communities, **community-led research projects** can help to better diagnose and address low or non-participation in ECEC.
- Local authorities should **embed awareness-raising initiatives in the community**, including working with employers, schools, religious institutions and cultural groups to better disseminate information.
- Working in partnership with community groups to liaise, broker and signpost can be a powerful tool: Hosting joint events, information sessions, workshops, and support groups can better reach and support parents who might otherwise hesitate to engage with formal services.

### Recommendation 10: National and local government should work with providers to actively recognise, resource, and support cultural brokers across the ECEC sector.

**Key findings:** ECEC practitioners acting as cultural brokers can support ethnic minority access and engagement; some evidence suggests brokers can positively impact child development.

- Global evidence shows that support workers with strong, established community networks were more successful at engaging non-participating families.
- **Community brokers and community liaison roles** are needed to build trusted and supportive relationships with families.
- These can be bespoke roles or involve existing ECEC staff taking on additional responsibilities to provide tailored, individualised support for ethnic minority families and broker relationships between ECEC and other community institutions.

- Such roles should be **appropriately resourced** and provide opportunities for **professional development**.

<b>Examples from global practice Community outreach, engagement, and mobilisation</b>	
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
<b>Adopt a relational approach</b>	<p>In New Zealand, support workers do targeted outreach to non-participating families to support ECEC enrolment. For example, the Promoting ECE Participation Project uses fieldworkers to do home visits.</p> <p>The “Your Story” reading support programme for Roma families has been implemented in localities across Hungary, North Macedonia, Romania, and Slovakia.</p> <p>The Slovakia Omama programme involved home visitors—who are trained Roma women (Omamas)—supporting Roma mothers to provide structured learning and stimulation to their children.</p> <p>The State of Victoria in Australia developed a CALD Outreach initiative which includes the use of CALD outreach workers employed by the local council and bicultural workers doing outreach to CALD families living in public housing.</p>
<b>Develop a community-oriented strategy</b>	<p>New Zealand developed multiple strategies such as Flexible and Responsive Home-based Services and Supported Playgroups in local communities to better reach lower participation groups including those who are rurally isolated.</p> <p>Kōhanga reo in New Zealand is a total Māori immersion ECEC service for children from birth to six years that actively involves families as volunteers.</p>



# Appendix A: About this evidence review

The [International Public Policy Observatory](#) (IPPO) exists to provide policymakers with the evidence and knowledge they need to confront strategic challenges, including tackling socio-economic inequalities. This project was jointly delivered by [the Wales Centre for Public Policy](#) (WCPP) featuring key commissions from the [International Network for Government Science Evidence](#) (INGSA) and the [Evidence for Policy and Practice Information Centre](#) (EPPI).

IPPO was asked to review the existing evidence base and produce actionable recommendations. The lack of clear and recent data on gaps in access to ECEC necessitated exploring the global evidence to provide better insight into the participation challenges ethnic minority children and families face. We developed a four-part approach to thoroughly answer our research questions.

Our approach to the evidence base was shaped by the Welsh government's commitment to anti-racism and working with communities. We complemented independent reviews of the evidence with deeper stakeholder engagement to bring together global and local perspectives. Our approach entailed:

1. **Systems mapping:** Workshops to engage policymakers and community mentors with professional and lived experience in Wales in order to gain insight into the local context. The workshops surfaced key outcomes, barriers, enablers, and actors. This practice-based and lived experience expertise broadly used the [SEPPA method](#) to [produce a systems map](#).
2. **Rapid Evidence Review:** we commissioned the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information ([EPPI](#)) Centre of UCL to provide an independent, transparent Rapid Evidence Review (RER) to address the review-level evidence gap and also to provide evidence on effective interventions for increasing access.
3. **International Policy Scan:** we asked the International Network of Scientific and Government Advice ([INGSA](#)) to provide a suite of possible policy options and solutions used by other countries to provide inspiration and guidance to governments across the UK.
4. **Theory of Change workshop:** to discuss findings with local officials and stakeholders to better enable local decision-making rooted in the global evidence base. The findings of this workshop and recommendations to Welsh Government are in our [Workshop Insight Note](#).

Due to the state of the evidence base surrounding Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic experiences of and participation in ECEC, our reviews widened to include evidence on 'families who experience disadvantage' or 'disadvantaged communities'. We broadly defined disadvantaged groups as populations or communities that experience social, economic, or health disparities when compared to the broader population.

## Underpinning framework

The EPPI Centre's preliminary scoping exercise identified the [Archambault et al.](#) conceptual framework on access to quality ECECs for children from disadvantaged backgrounds as a way to map and analyse the literature reviewed in the RER. The aims of the framework aligned with our project aims. The conceptual framework acts as a tool to group the range of issues potentially influencing access to ECEC in order to coordinate action toward increasing equity in access.

IPPO further adapted this framework to bring the findings across outputs together. Adapted versions of this framework underpinned the RER, formed the basis for the evidence synthesis map, and helped organise the findings of the systems mapping exercise. The framework more comprehensively visualises access to ECEC as a process from initial perception all the way through to sustained outcomes to surface potential barriers and facilitators along that journey. This enables a more nuanced view of the evidence and encourages integrated action to change outcomes.

## Get in touch

International Public Policy Observatory

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