

# Increasing Access to Childcare for Ethnic Minority and Disadvantaged Communities

A rapid evidence review

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**A RAPID EVIDENCE REVIEW**

**Rosa Mendizabal-Espinosa, Kate Bonhote, Sum Yue (Jessica) Ko, Kelly Dickson**

## Author affiliations

- Rosa Mendizabal-Espinosa, EPPI Centre, UCL Social Research Institute
- Kate Bonhote, EPPI Centre, UCL Social Research Institute
- Sum Yue (Jessica) Ko, EPPI Centre, UCL Social Research Institute
- Kelly Dickson, EPPI Centre, UCL Social Research Institute

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## How to read this report

Because this is the technical report of a rapid evidence review that uses transparent methods, some sections of the report are necessarily detailed. Without compromising on the transparency that is expected of an evidence review, we have structured this report to help those who are more concerned with the findings than the methods. Therefore, Part I contains the results and implications, followed by the background section and a brief section on the methods. The findings are split between three chapters. Chapter 3 presents a brief overview of the map findings generated to identify studies to answer the in-depth review question. Chapters 4 and 5 present the review findings. Part I concludes by discussing the findings and implications for policy and research. Part II contains additional details about the review’s methods and processes.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### What is the issue?

Increasing access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a global policy priority. This is evident in international policy initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which have set a 2030 target to ensure all children, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, have access to quality early childhood education, including pre-primary schooling. Similarly, the G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development (ECD) aims to promote access to quality early childhood education and development programs to support a foundation of lifelong learning (Richter et al., 2018). The G20 Initiative for ECD also highlights the need for government buy-in and financial investments during the early years to narrow achievement and opportunity gaps between children from different backgrounds.

Across the UK, the early years sector has seen an expansion in the number of free childcare hours available to parents of young children, with eligibility differing across the four nations but focused mainly on term-time childcare for working parents of two to four-year-olds, with additional eligibility for disadvantaged families. UK policymakers and practitioners have also been collaborating to examine the challenges disadvantaged families face in accessing childcare services and the potential facilitators and barriers they encounter to help inform this phased expansion of the Early Years Provision.

Low participation and poorer experiences in early childhood education and care ECEC among Black, Asian, and minority ethnic children and families have been recognised by the Welsh Government's Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, which highlights the importance of ECEC for child development, social integration, and parents' ability to work. There is a need for more clear and recent data to understand the scale and nature of the participation challenge faced by these ethnic minority children and families, and to identify the barriers and facilitators that policy can address. This evidence is crucial for informing the expansion of ECEC provision in the UK and supporting the delivery of the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan.

### What do we want to know?

Although recent reviews have focused on the quality, outcomes, and the need to reduce disparities in ECEC, there is a gap in review-level evidence specifically addressing the experience and process of accessing ECEC by ethnic minority and disadvantaged families. Our systematic map of evidence<sup>1</sup> indicated that there was sufficient primary research to answer the following review questions:

- *What are the barriers and enablers to participating in ECEC among ethnic minority and disadvantaged children and families?*
- *What interventions have been tried to encourage participation in early years education and care among ethnic minority and disadvantaged children and families? How far are these interventions effective?*

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<sup>1</sup> A systematic map of evidence provides an overview of existing research on a topic. It describes what research has been done and identifies gaps and areas for further study.

It should be noted that we expanded the scope of the review to include disadvantaged groups as initial scoping suggested there might be a lack of evidence on ethnic minority children and families and that data from a broader population group might provide relevant insights to policymakers. After exploring and describing the available research, we identified two significant gaps in the UK evidence base. Firstly, the lack of studies investigating Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic perspectives on access to childcare and secondly, the lack of disaggregation of data on Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities when evaluating interventions and policies aimed at increasing early years education and care uptake. Although we have taken steps to prioritise evidence from ethnic minority children and families, the findings of this review should be interpreted in light of these considerations.

## How did we approach the evidence review?

This review was conducted in two stages. First, we generated a systematic map to identify a wide range of studies on access to childcare. Second, we used a framework synthesis approach to explore the barriers, enablers, and intervention approaches that impact the participation of ethnic minority and disadvantaged children in early years education and care. We included primary studies conducted in the UK and equivalent welfare systems that were published in English. The equivalent welfare systems identified were: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. The primary studies considered had collected qualitative or quantitative data on the views, experiences, attitudes and perceptions of what would support uptake and evaluations of strategies and initiatives to increase uptake of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, immigrants, asylum seekers and disadvantaged groups. For this review, we defined disadvantaged groups as populations or communities that experience social, economic, or health disparities when compared to the broader population. To find relevant studies, we searched educational and social science databases and online resources. The search was structured around the three concepts that need to be present in each of the study citations: 1) ECEC Setting, 2) Topic (e.g. access to ECEC by BAME and disadvantaged groups) and 3) Geographical location. Each study was assessed for its methodological quality and relevance to our review questions. We then extracted descriptive data and narratively synthesised the findings. More detailed information about the methods can be found in the “Technical description of the rapid evidence review”, Part II of this document.

## What did we find?

We found that while parents, across the UK, are aware of childcare entitlements, there are still gaps in understanding among certain groups, like ethnic minority and disadvantaged families. Misconceptions about who is eligible and confusion about the different types of entitlements can prevent these families from taking advantage of available services. Community and informal networks play a crucial role in spreading information, especially among disadvantaged families. Word-of-mouth is powerful, but it can leave out those who are not well-connected in their communities. There is a lack of centralised information systems and regional networks to reach ethnic minority and disadvantaged families effectively. Marketing and messaging strategies are essential for raising awareness about ECEC services. While general marketing campaigns help to inform the broader public, targeted campaigns with tailored messaging—such as multilingual materials, postcards, and vouchers—are more effective at reaching specific demographics. Home visits are particularly effective in engaging ethnic minority and disadvantaged families. These visits

provide a culturally sensitive and accessible way to build trust, address individual needs, and offer personalised support. However, home visits are resource-intensive and may not be feasible to implement on a large scale. Financial constraints pose a significant challenge to delivering effective marketing and outreach efforts. Translating all materials into different languages can be expensive, and simpler alternatives, like providing contact numbers in various languages, might not be sufficient. Additionally, conducting home visits requires ongoing investment to maintain their positive impact.

In brief, while there is high general awareness of childcare entitlements, targeted efforts and investments are needed to address gaps in understanding and reach ethnic minority and disadvantaged families effectively. Building robust centralised information systems, enhancing targeted marketing strategies, and ensuring sufficient funding for translation and home visits are crucial steps toward increasing access to ECEC services for all families.

## What are the implications?

Based on the global evidence about the barriers and enablers to participating in ECEC among ethnic minority and disadvantaged children and families, as well as UK interventions that might encourage participation, policymakers might consider the following:

### For policy:

- **Localised Outreach:** Community events, workshops, and multilingual materials might help better inform ethnic minority and disadvantaged families about childcare benefits.
- **Clear Communication:** Simplifying childcare information with visuals and videos could help families understand their options. Simplifying the application process may also be beneficial.
- **Support from Community Leaders:** Community leaders, healthcare providers, and social workers could play a key role in sharing accurate information and assisting families with childcare applications. One-on-one support at accessible locations might be helpful.
- **Employer and School Involvement:** Employers and schools could share information about childcare benefits through seminars, newsletters, and meetings to reach more parents.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Regular feedback from surveys and focus groups could help improve communication and outreach efforts.
- **Quality and Cultural Relevance:** Ongoing training for childcare staff on teaching skills and cultural sensitivity, along with ensuring childcare facilities are safe, welcoming, and well-equipped, might address quality concerns.
- **Cultural Brokers:** Community liaisons might help build trust and facilitate communication between families and childcare staff. Partnerships with community organizations could promote childcare services effectively.
- **Diverse Workforce:** Recruiting and retaining a diverse childcare workforce, along with inclusive policies that respect cultural diversity, might make families feel more welcome.
- **Flexible Hours:** Offering flexible childcare hours could accommodate working parents' schedules. Employment support services at childcare centres might help parents find stable jobs.
- **Community Advisory Boards:** Advisory boards with parents, childcare staff, and community leaders could ensure diverse voices are included in policy decisions.

- **Language Support:** Multilingual staff, language classes, translated materials, and interpretation services might support non-English speaking families.
- **Expand Capacity:** Expanding the number of childcare spots by increasing existing facilities and building new ones in underserved areas, along with consistent funding to improve service quality and staff training, could be effective. Regular monitoring and evaluation of programs might inform necessary adjustments.

**For research:**

- **Understanding the unique childcare needs of diverse communities:** We need to hear directly from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities in the UK about their experiences with childcare. By understanding their specific challenges, we can create policies and practices that ensure fair access to early childhood education for everyone.
- **Tracking progress on access for all children:** It's important to regularly collect and analyse data about different ethnic groups' access to early childhood education and care. This helps us see what's working and what's not, allowing us to address any barriers specific communities may face.
- **Clear communication is key:** Targeted and culturally sensitive outreach can help clarify these entitlements, particularly for ethnic minority and disadvantaged families. By evaluating these efforts, we can refine our approach and ensure everyone knows the options available to them.
- **Tapping into community networks:** Informal community networks play a crucial role in sharing information about childcare services. We need to understand how these networks function across different communities and explore ways to collaborate with them to enhance our outreach and engagement efforts.
- **Valuing family-based care:** Many families from ethnic minority and disadvantaged backgrounds rely on extended family, especially grandparents, for childcare. Researching the role of these family networks and the quality of the home-learning environment they provide can help us better understand how formal childcare services can complement and support these existing arrangements.
- **Long-term studies for lasting impact:** We need comprehensive, long-term studies to assess how different policy interventions, such as funding entitlements and extended childcare hours, affect access to early childhood education and developmental outcomes for children from diverse backgrounds. These studies should consider regional and population differences to identify the most effective practices and any gaps in our policies.

# Part I: Background, brief methods, findings and discussion

## 1 Background

### 1.1 Accessing early childhood education and care

Increasing access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a global priority (Motiejunaite, 2021; WHO, 2018). This is evident in international policy initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which has set a 2030 target to ensure all children, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, have access to quality early childhood education, including pre-primary schooling (SDG 4). Similarly, the G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development aims to promote access to quality early childhood education and development programs to support a foundation of lifelong learning. The demand for equitable provision of ECEC has grown in highly industrialised societies where the number of children living with one or more parents in full-time employment has increased (Eurydice 2019). Many government initiatives acknowledge that high-quality ECEC plays a significant role in children's development and reducing inequalities (OECD 2023). In addition, the G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development recommends the need for government buy-in and long-term commitment to financial investments during the early years to narrow achievement and opportunity gaps that exist between children from different backgrounds (Richter et al., 2018).

The demand for ECEC can often exceed supply in high-income countries, with many families unable to locate or afford childcare arrangements that best suit their needs (Petitclerc et al. 2017, Wood et al. 2023). In England, using ECEC can vary significantly across different population groups (Campbell et al. 2018, National Audit Office 2020), yet large-scale data on participation rates in ECEC among ethnic minority children and families not always routinely collected (Department of Education 2023). While ethnic minority and disadvantaged families in England do access some form of childcare provision, the reasons for that uptake are not always clearly outlined delineated (Albakri et al. 2018). Globally, policy contexts, such as paid maternity leave and universal ECEC subsidies, can significantly influence participation rates. Lower income and education levels can also be associated with reduced use of ECEC (Petitclerc, 2017). Recent reports have also suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic limited the availability and uptake of childcare provision for ethnic minority children and families in the UK due to temporary closures. However, engagement with ECEC among families from some ethnic minority groups was arguably already low before the pandemic and simply dropped further (La Valle, 2022).

Identifying factors that influence 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 (Schmutz 2024). Determining which policies and practices might mitigate unequal access to reduce developmental disparities among children is critical. Understanding these broader determinants of engagement in ECEC can play an important role in supporting national policy initiatives aimed at achieving equitable ECEC provision, reducing developmental disparities among children and promoting positive outcomes later in life, such as academic achievement, employment opportunities, and social skills (Van Huizen and Plantenga 2018).

## 1.2 Childcare entitlements in the UK

ECEC provision in the UK has undergone significant policy changes in the last decade, shifting towards greater government investment and a focus on increasing children's development and parental employment (Melhuish and Gardiner 2019).

In Wales, all three- and four-year-olds are eligible for ten hours of free education per week during school terms; this period is referred to as the Foundation Phase. Additionally, working parents, with children aged 3 and 4, are eligible for 30 hours of early education and childcare for 48 weeks per year. This provides at least 10 hours of early education and up to 20 hours of childcare. Although funded childcare hours can be used more flexibly, the amount of early education hours available depends on the Local Authority. Targeted childcare assistance is accessible via benefits and tax-free childcare systems. The Welsh Government's Flying Start program, running since 2006-2007, also provides targeted early years support for families with children under four years of age who live in the most disadvantaged areas of the country (Welsh Government, 2019). The programme is currently undergoing expansion to focus on increasing access to funded childcare for 2-year-olds, prioritising communities with higher levels of deprivation, and providing comprehensive support such as enhanced health visitor services, parenting support, and support for speech, language, and communication development

In England, current legislative measures include universal rights for all three- and four-year-olds to 570 hours of free early education each year, which often translates to 15 hours per week for a minimum of 38 and a maximum of 52 weeks of the year. The two-year-old entitlement targets 40% of the most disadvantaged children and provides 15 hours of supported early education. In April 2024, the UK Government expanded free childcare access to eligible working parents of two-year-olds, also providing up to 15 hours per week of free early education or childcare. The enhanced entitlement, implemented in September 2017, gives free childcare places equal to 30 hours per week for 38 weeks of the year. Alongside the universal and extended entitlements, the benefit system provides targeted childcare assistance (e.g., Universal Credit) and tax-free childcare.

In Scotland, The Education and Care Act of 2000 and the Children and Young People Act of 2014 established entitlements for children aged between two and four years of age. The Children and Young People Act of 2014 extended the entitlement to 600 hours of free childcare per year for 38 weeks. Local governments are obligated to provide parents with various childcare providers from which to choose, per the government's recently introduced Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) framework. Beginning in August 2020, the entitlement for eligible two-year-olds and all three- and four-year-olds was increased to 30 hours for 38 weeks per year. Scotland has also established a new position known as the Equity and Excellence Lead, whose primary responsibility is to assist the most disadvantaged students in narrowing the achievement disparity.

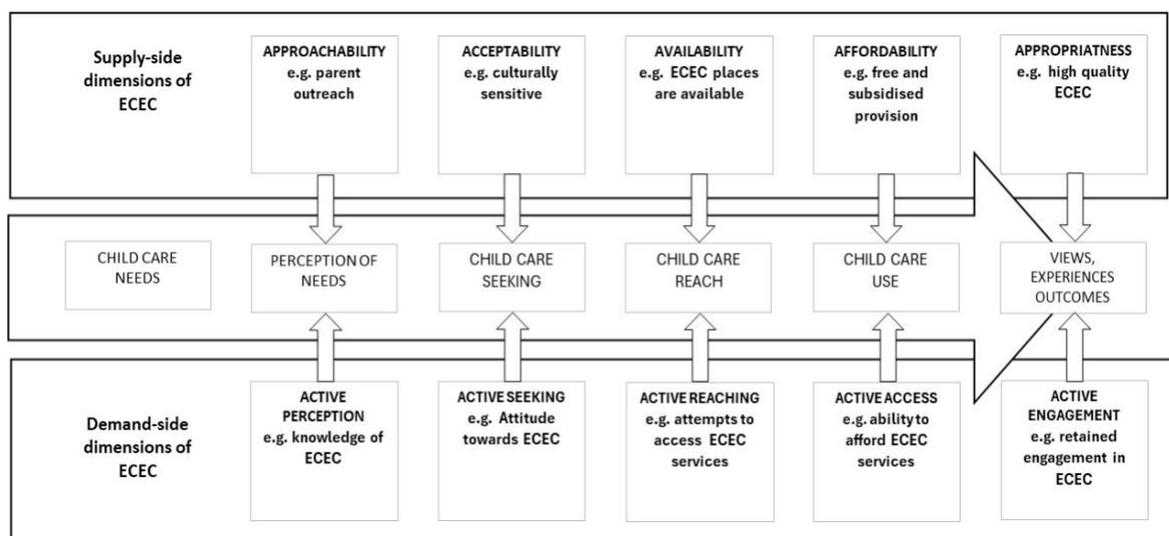
Although there is no directly available free childcare scheme comparison in Northern Ireland, the Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP) provides funded places for a total of 12.5 hours in various childcare settings, including day nurseries, primary schools, nursery schools, playgroups, and day-care providers, for children aged three to four, during term time. Non-statutory providers are responsible for ensuring that available places are allocated to children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds who are in their concluding year of preschool. In disadvantaged regions, preschool settings that meet the eligibility criteria and identify children with social, emotional, communication,

and language requirements are also eligible to receive Extended Service Funding. While there is no universally applicable free entitlement for two-year-olds, parents residing in disadvantaged areas may qualify for the Sure Start programme. The five Education Authorities in Northern Ireland receive financial support from the Department of Education for their Special Educational Requirements Early Years Inclusion Service (SENEYIS). The primary objective of this service is to facilitate the optimal development of preschool children who have special educational requirements.

### 1.3 Potential factors influencing access to early childhood education and care

The possible factors influencing engagement in early childhood education and care are outlined in Figure 1.1 (see below). Archambault et al. (2019) developed this framework as an adaption of Lévesque et al.'s (2013) conceptual framework for access to healthcare. The framework was chosen for this review as it provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the range of issues potentially influencing ethnic minority and disadvantaged people's access to ECEC. These factors consider both system-level factors and also how individual families respond to and interact with those system-level factors. We adapted the framework from 'ability to' perceive, seek, reach, access and engage to 'active' perception, seeking, reaching, accessing and engagement to reflect individual choice and agency. The framework was also chosen because it considers the entire process, from initial awareness of the need for childcare to continued engagement with childcare services, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of what mechanisms can support greater access to ECEC using a supply and demand side perspective. This aligns with our review questions on parents' and providers' views on the barriers and enablers to (demand-side) and potential approaches to encourage (supply-side) participation in early years education and care among ethnic minority and disadvantaged children and families.

**Figure 1.1 Access to Early Years Education and Care (adapted from Archambault et al. 2019)**



The five interrelated factors include:

**1. *Perceived approachability and active identification of childcare need:***

For families to identify a need for childcare, they must be aware of Early Childhood Education and Care, perceive them as approachable, and understand the potential advantages they may offer. Steps taken to recognise diverse familial structures, socioeconomic challenges, or other barriers could increase approachability and bridge important gaps in the uptake of ECEC by ethnic minority and disadvantaged families.

**2. *Acceptability and active seeking of childcare***

The active seeking of childcare among ethnic minority and disadvantaged families will likely depend on their perceived acceptability and alignment of ECEC with their specific needs. Identifying and understanding what approaches can be taken to increase acceptability could feed directly into strategies that encourage greater utilisation of those services.

**3. *Availability and actively reaching out***

The availability of ECEC is likely to play a pivotal role in families actively seeking these services. Ensuring widespread geographical and economic access to ECEC could be a key driver in increasing participation rates. Many families, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, benefit from conveniently located ECEC centres with sufficient spaces to accommodate local needs.

**4. *Affordability and active accessing***

An equitable system where quality ECEC remains within financial reach can empower families to make informed choices. Free childcare is dependent on social welfare systems and will influence the degree to which all families, including those from ethnic minority and disadvantaged backgrounds, will utilise ECEC.

**5. *Appropriateness and active engagement***

Active engagement in ECEC is more likely to occur when services are perceived to be appropriate. Families may begin to reflect on the positive influence of ongoing and consistent attendance, easing any concerns they had. This shift may occur over time and be influenced by the previous factors outlined above.

**1.4 [Aims and rationale for the current review](#)**

Initial scoping to influence the shape and direction of the rapid review indicated that while there are recent reviews on the quality, outcomes, and need to reduce disparities in early childhood education and care (Eadie et al., 2022; Furenes et al., 2023; Murano et al., 2020; Von Suchodoletz et al., 2023), there is a lack of review-level evidence on access to ECEC among ethnic minority and disadvantaged families. The scoping exercise also indicated that while there is primary research data on trends in uptake across different socio-economic and disadvantaged groups, there was a need to further examine the literature to consider if sufficient evidence exists to conduct a synthesis on addressing barriers and enablers to engagement in order to inform how to increase uptake of ECEC.

To address this gap, we conducted a staged review process. In the first stage, we mapped systematic studies by asking:

*RQ1: What is the nature and extent of primary research on increasing access to early childhood education and care by ethnic minority and disadvantaged families in the UK and equivalent social welfare systems?*

This supported us to identify studies to answer in-depth review questions on:

*RQ2: What are the barriers and enablers to participating in ECEC among ethnic minority and disadvantaged children and families?*

*RQ3: What interventions have been tried to encourage participation in early years education and care among ethnic minority and disadvantaged children and families? How far are these interventions effective?*

## 2 Brief methods

This chapter provides a brief overview of the methods used to conduct this review. A more detailed description of the methods is provided in Part II, Chapter 8 of this report. This report adheres to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) guidance reported in Appendix 1. Where necessary, the PRISMA guidance has been adapted to accommodate the systematic map approach taken.

### 2.1 Stakeholder engagement

Consultations with the Welsh Government, particularly with the Children, Families and Childcare team, have informed the development of this project, with research questions agreed collectively. Further stakeholder conversations were conducted with the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan team to inform the scope. Two workshops were conducted with policymakers and community mentors with lived experience to inform our initial understanding of barriers and enablers to ECEC access among ethnic minority and disadvantaged families in Wales.

### 2.2 Eligibility criteria

The review included primary studies conducted in the UK and equivalent welfare systems that were published in English. The equivalent welfare systems identified were: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. The primary studies considered had collected qualitative or quantitative data on the views, experiences, attitudes and perceptions of what would support uptake and evaluations of strategies and initiatives to increase uptake of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, immigrants, asylum seekers and disadvantaged groups. For the purposes of this review, we defined disadvantaged groups as populations or communities that experience social, economic, or health disparities when compared to the broader population. Broadening the definition of disadvantage beyond socio-economic deprivation also speaks to the role of ECEC in addressing forms of social exclusion at the individual, familial and social levels.

### 2.3 Study identification

Literature searches were undertaken in education and social science databases and specific early years online resources and journals between January and February 2024. The search was structured around the three concepts that need to be present in each of the study citations: 1) ECEC Setting, 2) Topic (e.g. access to ECEC by BAME and disadvantaged groups) and 3) Geographical location. Where possible, the database searches were limited to citations published in English. Synonyms and alternative words for each concept were used to search titles, abstracts, keywords, and controlled vocabulary fields in the databases to capture a wide range of primary research. The search was developed as part of the ERIC scoping exercise and translated into other databases as appropriate.

### 2.4 Data extraction

The data extraction was carried out in two stages. We initially mapped the available literature to identify the nature and extent of primary research on increasing access to early childhood education and care by ethnic minority communities or other disadvantaged groups in the UK and equivalent social welfare systems. This first stage included codes such as date, geographical location, population, and study design.

The second stage included coding for study aims, sampling and data collection methods, types of ECEC, and an extraction of the authors' results and summary description of their findings. The latter was organised by drawing on the work of Archambault et al. (2019) using a framework that considers the range of factors influencing access to ECEC for disadvantaged populations. These factors consider two important processes: i) system-level barriers and enablers and ii) how individual families may respond to and interact with system-level barriers and enablers. The five interrelated factors include:

- Perceived Approachability and Active Identification of Childcare Need
- Acceptability and Active Seeking of Childcare
- Availability and Actively Reaching Out
- Affordability and Active Accessing
- Appropriateness and active engagement

Two reviewers (RME, KD) independently piloted the tools. Three reviewers (RME, KD, KB) then coded each study independently, reaching a consensus to produce a final agreed-upon coding.

## 2.5 Critical appraisal

The review focuses on assessing the quality and relevance of studies in the context of ECEC. This assessment process involved three 'weight of evidence' (WoE) components (Gough et al 2007):

- WoE A—soundness of studies—evaluated the methodological quality of each study in three key areas: the study's objectives, data collection, and data analysis.
- WoE B—appropriateness of the research design and analysis—was judged based on the research design and analysis used for answering each review question.
- WoE C—relevance of the study topic—was determined by the extent of their population and experiences, perspectives, and preferences.

We also rated studies based on their overall quality of evidence (WoE A, B, and C), with high ratings reflecting high-quality and highly relevant studies. The full breakdown of the criteria and methods is provided in chapter 8.

## 2.6 Synthesis

We used a framework synthesis process to analyse the data and answer the review questions. This method allowed for systematic and efficient analysis of data across studies. Our process involved: extracting information from the studies (prioritising participant quotes, participation rates, and author's descriptions), matching extracted data to the Archambault et al. (2019) framework outlined in section 2.4, and then identifying smaller subthemes within the data. This process allowed us to organise the data and discover new themes specific to each research question. To reduce potential misinterpretation, we reviewed the grouping of similar themes and double-checked their understanding by revisiting the original definitions in the framework.

### 3 Brief overview of studies

This chapter provides a summary of the studies identified to answer our first review question on the nature and extent of primary research on increasing access to early childhood education and care by ethnic minority and/or disadvantaged families. The number of studies that fell into a category or sub-category are denoted using “n=”.

#### 3.1 Key characteristics of identified studies

The systematic mapping exercise identified 106 primary studies conducted across 15 countries since 2004. The identified studies span a broad range of populations and topics related to uptake and access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Studies were grouped into three categories:

##### 3.1.1 What individual and socio-demographic factors influence uptake of ECEC? (n=26):

- Studies have investigated the characteristics of parents/families to consider if they are associated with (n=9) and/or can predict the uptake of ECEC services (n=17).
- Factors included ethnicity (n=17), socioeconomic status (n=12), and other determinants (e.g. personal beliefs) that might influence parental childcare decision-making.
- Studies draw on routinely collected survey data of representative samples, with some studies focusing exclusively on population sub-groups such as migrants (n=12) or mothers (n=4)
- Studies have been conducted between 2007 and 2024, largely in European countries, with far fewer studies from England (n=1), Australia (n=2), and New Zealand (n=2).

##### 3.1.2 What initiatives/interventions increase uptake of ECEC? (n=29):

Studies have considered the extent to which government policies and initiatives aimed at increasing participation in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) have had an impact by investigating:

- The relationships between the availability of subsidised childcare and utilisation of ECEC for different ethnic groups (n=10) in Europe, including the UK (n=11).
- Multi-component early childhood support programmes that include childcare services with data relevant to Ethnic minority families in England (e.g. Sure Start=2) and low-income families in Wales ( e.g. Flying Start=1)
- Programs targeting First Nation and Indigenous populations in Australia (n=4), New Zealand (n=2) and Canada (n=2)

##### 3.1.3 What are the barriers and enablers to the uptake of ECEC? (n=50):

Studies have explored the views and experience of formal and informal childcare arrangements, including ECEC services, to better understand what could support greater accessibility and uptake.

- Studies have sought the perspectives of minority ethnic groups (n=41), including migrant families (n=19) and local and Indigenous communities (n=22), as well as families living at a socio-economic disadvantage (n=8)
- In addition to the views of parents and caregivers (n=46), studies have also collected data from ECEC providers (n=12)
- In most cases, data has been collected consistently via interviews (n=34) or other qualitative or mixed methods approaches (n=12) since 2004.

## 4 Barriers and enablers to participating in early childhood education and care

In this chapter, we draw together key findings from 42 qualitative studies to explore the barriers and enablers to participating in ECEC among ethnic minority and disadvantaged children and families and providers of ECEC. The findings are organised according to the key themes outlined in the framework (see section 1.3 for more details):

- Perceived Approachability and Active Identification of Childcare Need
- Acceptability and Active Seeking of Childcare
- Availability and Actively Reaching Out
- Affordability and Active Accessing
- Appropriateness and active engagement

These overarching themes have been populated by evidence that emerged from participants' data and authors' descriptions of findings presented in studies. The evidence is drawn from studies using interviews, focus groups, and survey views data, examining participants' perceptions of initiatives and strategies to increase participation and their overall experiences and perspectives on participation in ECEC. Sub-themes from studies collecting data directly from ethnic minority families were prioritised in the write-up and presentation of the synthesis findings. Studies containing data from other population groups, such as disadvantaged families, and providers, were also included where they provided relevant and supportive insights.

### 4.1 Theme 1: Approachability and active identification of childcare need

Studies explored the extent to which families were aware of the existence of ECEC and perceived these as relevant and approachable. This included the applicability of funded entitlement and the role of informal and community networks in spreading awareness of childcare options.

#### 4.1.1 Awareness of free early education entitlement

In the UK, recent surveys of families experiencing disadvantage report that parents are aware of funded childcare options, but there can be gaps in understanding and awareness among some population groups (Albakri et al. 2018, Scottish Government 2022, Welsh Government 2022, Hughes and Jones 2021). For example, in Scotland, 93% of parents are aware of the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) entitlement targeting three to five-year-olds experiencing disadvantage (Scottish Government, 2022). However, in Wales, only '72% of parents surveyed were aware of the Childcare Offer before becoming eligible. This is a similar proportion of parents who noted the same during the year four evaluation' of 75% (Harries et al., 2023, p.33). In England, data reveals that ethnic minority and lower-income parents can have lower awareness of their entitlements, with only 61% of ethnic minority parents being aware of the universal three and 4-year-old entitlement in England, compared to 85% of white parents (Albakri et al., 2018).

In Scotland, parents with English as a second or additional language and those from deprived areas were also more likely to experience difficulty accessing information about ELC options, with parents in deprived areas more likely than others to say they do not use their full entitlement and a significant percentage of parents of two-year-olds (25%) were unaware of funded childcare options: "I wasn't aware that I would only be entitled to 22.5 hours a week as the whole 'advertisement' of it all is 30 hours funded." (Scottish Government, 2022, p. 34). In England, there was confusion among

ethnic minority and disadvantaged families about eligibility criteria, leading to assumptions of ineligibility for Free Early Education Entitlements (Albakri et al., 2018, p. 52). Parents in England also had many misconceptions about how employment status and welfare benefits affected eligibility, ‘...does it come out of my wages? Would I need to pay a top-up? It's still a little bit confusing.’ (Albakri et al., 2018, p. 53). (p. 10). Some also expressed confusion about the different types of entitlements and how they change as the child ages (Albakri et al., 2018).

When interviewing couples and lone parents receiving Universal Credit in England, the study by Wood (2021) found that there was low awareness, with 30 out of 49 participants in England not aware of the childcare element of Universal Credit. There was also evidence of misinformation or misunderstanding about the childcare element, with some participants having incorrect information about eligibility requirements or how the system worked. Some parents indicated that this lack of awareness could have hindered their ability to return to work or arrange childcare. 'Right, well yeah, that would be good...No, yeah, I've been really wanting to work now for a while.' (p.209). Where parents were aware, they were more likely to have heard through word of mouth or childcare providers, speaking to the role and value of community networks in parental childcare decision-making.

Confusion about prerequisites for access to government-approved childcare settings in Australia highlighted the lack of accessible information for Indigenous families, with misconceptions that these services were only for working parents (Jackiewicz et al., 2011).

#### 4.1.2 Community and networks

The wider community network can facilitate greater awareness of ECEC services for disadvantaged parents. For example, in England, Albakri et al. (2018) found that parents often learned about their childcare options, including entitlements, through informal channels, such as word of mouth, from other parents. This was consistent across London and non-London parents. Similar findings are reported in Wales, where many low-income parents first hear about the childcare offer through word of mouth, such as other parents or providers. However, Albarkri et al. (2018) also note that this reliance on informal networks can be a barrier for parents who are not well-connected within their community, such as those who are new to the area. Similarly, immigrant and refugee families in England, France, Germany and Italy tried to find programmes they believed would meet their child's needs both presently and in the future, often relying on word-of-mouth from other recently arrived parents (Tobin, 2020). Parents from multicultural groups in Australia reported choosing early childhood services, such as preschools, based on the ethnicity of other users and staff, especially if they shared a common language (Hopkins et al., 2017); community networks and relationships played a crucial role in sharing information about which services were utilised or recommended by individuals with similar backgrounds.

Klaus (2019) examines the Traveller Education Support Services (TESS) for Roma families in the UK, highlighting the importance of regional and national networks in promoting awareness of programmes but, at the same time, the frustration of staff by the lack of mechanisms to promote services. Consequently, there was a dependence on local resources and knowledge, which limited the spread of awareness to the local community. As a result, families in other regions who may have derived benefits from the programme may have been excluded. Without a centralised information or support system, families may be compelled to depend on informal communication or limited local resources to acquire knowledge about the services that are accessible to them. For ethnic minority

and disadvantaged families such as the Roma, who may already have obstacles in obtaining information and services, this might provide a particularly difficult challenge.

## 4.2 Theme 2: Acceptability and active seeking of childcare

Families' perceptions of ECEC services, such as their benefits and drawbacks, and different groups' cultural norms and social factors, influence attitudes towards ECEC and play an important role in parental decision-making regarding their children's early education.

### 4.2.1 Perceived benefits and quality of early childhood education and care

Global research shows that a vast number of parents had a positive perception of ECEC and were convinced of the benefits its role in developing their children's social skills (Guilfoyle, 2010; Mhic and Nic, 2021; Mitchell and Ouko, 2012) and getting their children ready for school (e.g., listening to teachers and potty training), as well as granting them some much-needed rest and relief (Beatson et al., 2022, Scottish Government 2018, 2022). Specifically, according to Pastori et al. (2021), ECEC allowed Moroccan immigrant mothers in Italy more freedom to pursue further education and/or employment and engage in social activities, knowing their children were being cared for. In a similar vein, immigrant parents in some European countries such as England, France, Germany, Italy perceived ECEC as a means of providing their children with education and knowledge that they could not, specifically regarding the local language skills in which they lacked fluency (Tobin, 2020). Migrant parents from India also perceived the Australian ECEC system as being superior in its 'multicultural nature, superior infrastructure, quality of education, culture of sports, and extracurricular activities', which helped to 'accelerate their children's holistic learning and development' while also meeting 'children's learning capabilities and needs' (Patel and Agbenyega, 2013, p.51). These factors exemplify the facilitators of the uptake of ECEC services by parents.

Confusion about ECEC included reports of some parents, such as low-income families in New Zealand, being unsure of what their children's participation in ECEC entailed (Mitchell and Meagher-Lundberg, 2017), while others were unable to fully comprehend the extent of the benefits of ECEC services for their children's development (Grace, 2012), thinking of them merely as babysitting arrangements (Beatson et al., 2022; Jackiewicz et al., 2011).

Negative perceptions included concerns regarding the subpar quality of ECEC services. Specifically, mothers in Sweden raised issues surrounding 'high staff turnover, large numbers of substitute teachers, and a lack of qualified staff' working in preschools (Garvis, 2021, p.393). Parents in rural areas in Canada also highlighted a lack of 'formal literacy/numeracy programmes' available in their area (Graham and Underwood, 2012). Some others raised the issue of challenges surrounding registering their children in a 'good preschool with plenty of learning' and how there is simply 'no guarantee because of the long queues' (Garvis, 2021, p. 393). This perceived lack of quality of and access to ECEC services served as a barrier to parents' uptake of such services. In the UK context, families in England described ECEC services as 'just money making', with the environment being 'dirty' and their children 'not learning anything' (Edwards, 2018, p.134) and 'just a load of kids running around, sneezing, coughing, and... sharing stuff' (Albakri et al. 2018, p.44). Parents questioned when childcare was free if that meant it was also of poor quality. They were also worried that in a setting with multiple children, their child might not receive adequate individual attention and care from the provider and had concerns that their child would adopt the negative behaviours of other children. These issues were especially pronounced for parents of two-year-olds, who were perceived to require more dedicated supervision (Albakri et al., 2018).

“...it's not really the nursery, it's the children in the nursery. So I don't want my son picking up the habits of other children in the nursery” (Parent of eligible two-year-old, Outer London)

#### 4.2.2 Social and cultural factors

Attitudes towards ECEC services and parents' uptake of these services were shaped by social factors, these include concerns about societal stigma, familial perceptions and dynamics and cross-cultural sensitivity issues.

The global evidence shows that ethnic minority parents worried about how others perceived them and their children. For example, some parents felt insecure and ashamed of their lack of literacy skills and ability to read or sign the necessary enrolment paperwork for their children (Mitchell and Meagher-Lundberg, 2017). Thus, they chose to abstain from sending their children. Some migrant parents also felt aware that they differed from the other families culturally, linguistically, and ethnically (Ebbeck, 2007; Patel and Agbenyega, 2013; Shuker, 2016), discouraging their uptake of ECEC services for their children. Other migrant parents felt that ECEC was valuable, however, their children fell behind due to lack of language fluency and others were concerned that they would not be able to compete or succeed academically (Tobin, 2011).

Familial perceptions and family dynamics also influence attitudes towards ECEC. For some families, particularly those from ethnic minority communities in Wales, traditional beliefs emphasized the role of parents and extended family in childcare and early education. For example, a parent who grew up in China expressed a preference for the family-oriented childcare model they were accustomed to, stating, "In China, we have very high expectations of our little emperor children. I think my thinking [as a Chinese mother] is not always understood here" (Hughes and Jones, 2021 pg. 49). Global research shows that extended family members, such as grandparents, can be reluctant to utilise ECEC services as they believed it was the family's direct responsibility to bring up the children and that children would be more loved at home (Jackiewicz et al., 2011; Lie 2010). Several parents concurred, putting forth the belief that young children are still too little and require more time with their families (Albakri et al., 2018; Beatson et al., 2022).

Cross-cultural sensitivity factors were also at play in determining the uptake of ECEC services. Some mothers were hindered by shame and worry that their uptake of services would be judged by other family members or members in the community for being incompetent or lazy (Jackiewicz et al., 2011). This was especially prevalent in countries such as Poland (Barglowski and Pustulka, 2018) and Zaire (Jose and Wall, 2004), where cultural/gendered expectations and norms encourage women to dedicate themselves to caring for their young children rather than sending them to childcare. In certain cultures, it was also expected that ECEC services would be inclusive and culturally relevant for ethnic minority communities, such as migrants or the Aboriginal community, thereby providing children with opportunities to learn their ancestral language and be engaged in culturally relevant activities (Graham, 2012; Hopkins et al., 2017; Jackiewicz et al., 2011; Mitchell and Meagher-Lundberg, 2017; Wu and Poveda, 2022).

### 4.3 Theme 3: Availability and actively reaching out

Influenced by factors such as language proficiency, cultural preferences, and immigration status, ethnic minority, immigrant, and refugee families face a variety of barriers to engaging with ECEC services. The critical role of inclusivity, effective communication, cultural identity, and language support in fostering a supportive and engaging environment for children and their families are highlighted by various studies.

#### 4.3.1 Barriers to accessing services

Immigrant and refugee families' expectations for ECEC programmes varied based on their local context, influencing their perspectives on language, culture, academic preparation, and social inclusion in early childhood settings (Ebbeck, 2007); some of them worried that “their children start out behind because of a lack of fluency in the national language” (Tobin, 2020 p.15). Studies showed how immigrant and refugee mothers often face challenges with language barriers in childcare settings. Teachers may expect children to understand and speak English, leading to misunderstandings and discomfort when parents speak a different language at home:

“...when I first put him in the teachers there would talk to him [in English, they only spoke English]. They'd come and talk to me and say does your child speak English? I'd go, no. ... She goes what do you speak at home? I go I speak English and my husband speaks Arabic....She sort of like – she didn't like it. She said well you've got to know that you've got to talk English to your kids now. I go, I do talk to them in English” (A mother in De Gioia 2015, p.668).

The availability of childcare that aligns with the cultural practices of ethnic minority families in Wales was limited. A Thai parent noted the challenges their child faced due to differences in disciplinary approaches between Thailand and Wales, highlighting the need for more culturally sensitive childcare options (pg. 52). Pastori (2021) suggests language barriers and a lack of cultural understanding within educational institutions can lead to distant relationships and poor communication between teachers and immigrant parents in Italy.

Some families preferred their children to stay in home environments where their language is spoken, highlighting a cultural and religious preference for family-based care over institutional early childhood education, despite government policies promoting ECEC participation (Mitchell and Meagher-Lundberg, 2017; Albakri et al., 2018). Interviews with parents from London of Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Turkish and Romanian heritage revealed that they wanted to teach their children about their culture and religion early, instilling values they believe would not be provided elsewhere, and teach their children mother tongue languages for communication with older relatives (Albakri et al. 2018). For example;

“I wanted to teach her about the religion a bit more too, you know, while she's at home. And when she's a young age. I find a lot of nurseries don't really help with those sort of religious things.” (Parent of eligible four-year-old, outside of London, p.44)

“I'm not really ready to put him out into the wide world yet, I just want him to have a better understanding of himself and our culture, and just kind of give him a stronger grounding before he goes out.” (Parent of eligible three-year-old, Outer London, p.44)

Shared language was important for others; one Indian mother explained that her son was more comfortable in a childcare centre with many Indian children and staff who spoke their language, as

he struggled to understand and communicate in English at another centre, which caused him distress (Hopkins et al. , 2017). Indigenous early childhood workers emphasised the importance of cultural reflection in childcare settings, advocating for community responsibility in child-rearing practices, such as sharing food responsibilities to avoid shaming parents if parents could not provide lunch for their children (Grace, 2012).

For some parents in English speaking settings, lack of English proficiency could be a source of shame, as it implied low social status and poor education in their home country. One Vietnamese mother mentioned the difficulty of not having an interpreter at school, feeling like she was missing out and experiencing shame. This issue extended to other services, such as medical visits, where communication barriers made it challenging to explain needs to healthcare providers (Hopkins et al. 2017). Language barriers also affected grandparents who provided additional childcare, impacting their ability to communicate effectively with childcare workers and teachers (O'Callaghan, 2023).

Immigration status was seen as a barrier when accessing ECEC services. Immigrant and refugee mothers often face severe limitations in their childcare options due to a lack of resources upon their arrival. One mother described her situation of returning from overseas with no home, car, or license and choosing a childcare centre solely based on its proximity to her residence, as she had no other options or choices available (De Gioia, 2015). Immigrant women face barriers to accessing childcare due to immigration status, including long waiting lists, high costs, and ineligibility for subsidies (Frankowicz, 2007). Migration status, such as student visas, restricts access to early childhood services, creating stress and anxiety for families who struggle with basic needs like education and health services (Hopkins et al. , 2017). Accessibility to ECEC was conditioned by parents' employment status; unemployed or precariously employed mothers had less chance for their children to be admitted to childcare services (Pastori et al., 2021). Long waiting lists for childcare services hindered parents' ability to work, adding to the challenges faced by immigrant families (Hopkins et al., 2017). The high needs of disadvantaged families often meant that early childhood education was not a priority until more pressing social issues were resolved (Mitchell and Meagher-Lundberg, 2017).

Beatson et al. (2022) explains that at the policy level, around two-thirds of parents and providers mentioned barriers related to government policies, especially eligibility criteria for subsidised early childhood education and care (ECEC). These barriers were primarily related to family income, child age, and citizenship or visa type. Both parents and providers also highlighted the need for better funding to support children with additional healthcare or developmental needs.

#### 4.3.2 Support and facilitation

Some parents across programmes appreciated the generally welcoming atmosphere (Agbenyega, 2010; Bowes, 2011), which made everyone feel valued, irrespective of their cultural or ethnic background (Craig et al., 2007). De Gioia, (2015) highlighted the importance of ongoing communication between childcare providers and parents in building trust and reassurance. This was made evident by a mother's experience, Hanife, who faced initial distress when her child, Kanzah, was upset during the first few days at a childcare centre; the director's daily reassurances, provided in both English and Arabic, helped Hanife feel more comfortable. These conversations also allowed Hanife to express her preferences for Kanzah's education, seeking a balance between her cultural beliefs and the childcare centre's activities.

The application process, especially online forms, can be challenging for parents with limited IT skills or those who do not speak English as a first language. Albakri et al. (2018) noted that parents with English as an additional language (EAL) were reported to find the process difficult and confusing and to lack the necessary IT and literacy skills to complete an online application form independently' (p. 16). Graham and Underwood (2012) pointed out the necessity of having bilingual and Francophone staff in early childhood education settings in Canada. A parent emphasised that addressing concerns and seeking help becomes more challenging when not conducted in one's native language, highlighting the need for accessible communication.

Families also recognised the value of how targeted support can make a significant difference; Badr recounted how a Sure Start keyworker was instrumental in securing a place for her two-year-old child in a nursery. The keyworker's special referral and support with the application process were crucial in helping Badr obtain childcare for her child. As a result, Badr felt relieved and regained a sense of personal time and vitality after a challenging period (Edwards, 2018).

#### 4.3.3 Service provision and expectations

At times, the services provided did not necessarily meet the expectations of parents (Busch et al. , 2018). For example, one parent commented on how their child learnt singing and dancing, but they would have much preferred for their child to learn how to read and write, especially in English (De Gioia, 2015).

Jackiewicz et al. (2011) identify a critical barrier to childcare access as the lack of available places. Indigenous childcare providers in Australia frequently faced extensive waiting lists and often had to turn families away shortly after opening: "We have only been open two weeks this year, and we are full, now we are turning families away" (Service provider, regional); This absence of formal childcare services increased the need for informal childcare. In their evaluation of an ECEC programme for low-income families in New Zealand, Mitchell and Meagher-Lundberg (2017) found that taking part in ECEC depended on whether ECEC was available locally, had family-friendly hours, and offered spaces without long wait times.

Complementing these perspectives, Wu and Poveda (2022) explore the flexible and intensive childcare support provided by grandparents in migrant families, particularly among Chinese immigrants in Spain. Grandparents' involvement is pivotal in managing the irregular working hours and heavy workloads of migrant parents. For instance, Hui, a mother of four, benefited immensely from her parents-in-law, who moved to Spain to assist with childcare. They provided reliable and dedicated care, allowing Hui and her husband to work in their phone stores without concerns about their children's well-being. The grandparents not only took care of the grandchildren but also assisted with household chores, enhancing the family's overall functionality. This highlights the role of extended families in providing flexible and reliable childcare solutions in migrant families.

Adding to these challenges, Beatson et al. (2022) reveals a mismatch between available childcare schedules and parents' work needs; a parent expressed frustration, noting that while local centres offer short day sessions, working parents require long days. Similarly, in Scotland, while parents were satisfied with the flexibility of funded hours, some parents still desired greater flexibility to align with their work schedules and minimize the need for additional paid childcare (pg. 6). Those who were dissatisfied wanted longer sessions on fewer days, shorter sessions on more days, or sessions during school holidays (Scottish Government 2022 p. 6). Albakri also noted that, limited

flexibility in childcare options, such as rigid schedules or lack of weekend/evening care, can be a barrier for parents with non-traditional work hours or cultural preferences, providers noted that 'both London and non-London LAs reported a gap in provision for evening, overnight and weekend care.' (p. 9).

#### 4.4 Theme 4: Affordability and active Accessing

The accessibility and affordability of ECEC services are important factors for diverse communities, including Indigenous families in Australia, Roma children in the UK, and refugee and migrant families worldwide.

##### 4.4.1 Resource variability and service accessibility

Jackiewicz et al. (2011) highlights the significant variability in childcare costs for Indigenous families in Australia, influenced by community type and available care. Mainstream childcare services were prohibitively expensive, whereas Indigenous-specific services, though cheaper, remained challenging for many families to afford. Some communities had unique support mechanisms, such as community councils covering fees or requiring minimal contributions towards food costs. Yet even these reduced fees can be burdensome for some families, particularly larger ones, where the cumulative cost became unsustainable despite low individual fees.

Klaus (2019) discusses the impact of structural changes on Traveller Education Support Services (TESS) in the UK, which faced reorganisation, downsizing, and closures due to funding cuts and austerity measures. These changes strained the financial resources of local government councils, making it difficult for schools to support the needs of Roma children; schools with Roma Teaching Assistants developed cultural bridging understandings, but struggled to meet the demands of their student populations under limited funds. Social welfare benefit cuts further exacerbated these challenges, particularly for families in the informal labour market, affecting schools' ability to secure additional funds through the pupil premium. Consequently, schools were required to cover costs for language support, special staff, and learning needs, despite limited resources. In cities experiencing a significant influx of Roma children, the lack of specific community infrastructure overwhelmed available services, diminishing the capacity to address particular needs and eroding trust built over years.

Graham and Underwood (2012) and Klaus (2019) further underscore the importance of accessible services within communities. Parents from both Indigenous and Roma backgrounds emphasised the need for both routine and specialised services to be available nearby. The accessibility of these services is crucial for the well-being and support of their children, enabling families to navigate their daily lives more effectively.

In the context of refugee families, to increase their access to resources and services and cater to their varied needs, some ECEC educators commented that consistent communication between ECEC and other connected support services was paramount (De Gioia, 2015). In having connections to other support services, they could then provide refugee families with the necessary information, which would grant them access to resources and services (Grace, 2012). As such, one of the key roles of ECEC service providers was to broker refugee families' access to different agencies (Mitchell and Meagher-Lundberg, 2017).

#### 4.4.2 Cost and affordability of childcare

Affordability was a significant barrier for many families, particularly those from ethnic minority communities in Wales. The cost of childcare often exceeded the financial capacity of these families, especially for those with limited income or single-parent households. A Thai-English speaking family mentioned the financial burden of additional English language sessions for their child, stating, "*The price for this was expensive and on a single wage we couldn't afford it*" (Hughes and Jones, 2021 pg. 52).

In many instances, the use of kinship networks highlights financial constraints and the need for flexible childcare solutions (Bojarczuk, 2022). Jackiewicz et al., (2011) details the reliance on family members for childcare among Indigenous families which is attributed to issues with availability, flexibility, and trust. describing the reliance on family members for childcare among Indigenous families. However, while some see kinship networks as a cost-effective solution, not all families can access this option. In some cases, grandparents struggled with the demands of caregiving, illustrating the complexities and limitations of relying on family networks. In the context of migrant families in Australia, O'Callaghan et al., (2023) describe how grandparents often take on childcare roles to help alleviate the financial burden on parents. This arrangement was preferred for its economic benefits and the retired status of grandparents, who can provide care without conflicting work obligations. However, this setup is more out of necessity than an ideal choice, as parents strive to establish financial stability.

Wong (2014) provides an example from the African immigrant community in England, where female kin play a critical role in childcare during the initial settlement period. Fremah, a nurse, sent her children to her aunt in Ghana due to the high cost of childcare in the UK and the need to work night shifts. This transnational caregiving arrangement allowed her to work full-time and support her family financially, despite the emotional difficulty of being separated from her children. Similarly, Wu and Poveda (2022) discusses the experiences of Chinese immigrant families in Spain, who also rely heavily on kinship networks for childcare. Faced with high childcare costs and inflexible working hours, parents sent their children back to China to be cared for by grandparents. This arrangement allowed them to focus on their work and repay debts, although it comes with the emotional cost of separation. Over time, economic stability enables parents to compensate grandparents financially for their caregiving efforts, reflecting a sense of gratitude and familial obligation.

### 4.5 Theme 5: Appropriateness and active engagement

Parents' experiences with ECEC services highlight the critical importance of supportive relationships and community involvement; relationships of trust are crucial to the active engagement of culturally diverse groups. Yet, several challenges exist to ensure the sustainability of services and overcome structural barriers.

#### 4.5.1 Relationships and engagement

Trust, alongside connections between the family and service providers, paved the path for parents and carers to feel comfortable with the children being a part of such services (Leske, 2015; Miller, 2015). For instance, one mother shared how the SureStart programme provided significant help and support, expressing her satisfaction and appreciation for the service (Edwards, 2018). Workers who built strong connections with families often adopted a strengths-based approach, recognising and valuing the potential within every family. Jenny, an Indigenous ECEC worker in Australia, emphasized

the importance of developing genuine relationships with families to uncover their strengths, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Building trust with local community Elders and mainstream centres, although challenging and time-consuming, was seen as crucial for productive collaborations (Grace, 2012).

Programmes like the Early Participation Fund (EPF) in New Zealand demonstrated the importance of sustained relationship-building. EPF coordinators worked with Congolese refugee families for up to 36 months, fostering trust and providing ongoing educational support, such as weekly learning activities to engage children at home (Mitchell and Meagher-Lundberg, 2017).

The global evidence suggests that mothers generally viewed ECEC positively when teachers prioritised children's well-being, equity, and formative experiences. This often involved going beyond their institutional roles to offer emotional support and empathetic engagement. Such relationships were particularly valued by Moroccan immigrant mothers in Italy, who frequently lacked other sources of advice and support regarding their children's education and care (Pastori et al., 2021).

However, trust issues can significantly impact parents' confidence in ECEC services (Fleer, 2004). One mother lost trust in her daughter's childcare program after staff mishandled confidential information about her child's need for additional services, leading to discomfort and frustration (Graham and Underwood, 2012).

Parents were concerned about the safety of their children at ECEC settings due to the perceived lack of supervision by teachers in schools. Many were unsure whether their children would be safe and whether adults in the ECEC setting could be trusted (Hare and Anderson, 2010; Mitchell and Meagher-Lundberg, 2017). Many mothers felt insecure that their children would be subjected to unsafe physical environments due to the increased group sizes of children in preschools and the lack of regulations on group sizes in Sweden. Some mothers had even heard stories from other mothers about children returning with injuries and the teachers in charge not knowing what had happened or how such injuries had happened (Garvis, 2021). Parents who did not have positive ECEC experiences themselves, such as indigenous parents, also lacked trust in such services and therefore were wary of sending their children to be taken care within ECEC environments (Jackiewicz et al., 2011).

Many parents, particularly in London, did not utilise the ECEC services due to a lack of trust in childcare providers. Albakri et al. (2018) report that the main concerns were leaving their child with strangers. "I just don't feel comfortable leaving my kid with people that I don't know. I have to trust you in order for me to leave my kid with you. I can't just leave my child with anyone. (Parent of eligible 2 year old, Outer London, p. 45) However, parents who were familiar with a provider were more likely to trust them: would use it because I know the person that works there. So I kind of trust them. (Parent of eligible 2 year old, Outer London, p. 45).

#### 4.5.2 Suitability of services and structural barriers

The appropriateness of early education and childcare in the Welsh context was affected by language barriers. For families where English was not the primary language, accessing and utilising childcare services that catered to their language needs was challenging. A Mandarin Chinese-English speaking family expressed a preference for English-medium education due to their limited exposure to the

Welsh language, indicating a need for more linguistically diverse childcare options (Hughes and Jones 2021, pg. 53).

Several parents commented that one of the key barriers to the uptake of ECEC services was the lack of suitability to their specific needs in terms of session timing and duration. For instance, some felt that shorter days would have been more appropriate for their younger children, but this was not provided as an option (Beaston et al., 2022). Additionally, according to Busch et al. (2018), there were structural barriers to the uptake of ECEC services such as the lack of available public transportation links for parents to utilise in bringing their children to attend childcare groups, the inability of schools to cater to the different age groups of children, as well as the lack of learning materials in the appropriate language or learning level of the child (e.g., materials were too difficult for their child to understand).

Further, structural barriers were not only experienced by parents of children who utilised ECEC services, but also the providers of such services. Studies often revealed that staff members working within ECEC services can feel unqualified or unprepared. Specifically, practitioners felt that they were unequipped to work with immigrant families as they had insufficient training in working with second-language learners and/or had limited cultural knowledge of the groups of children and parents they were tasked to work with (Tobin, 2020). Others felt that due to a lack of training, they were not in a position to provide support to families with complex needs, such as victims of domestic violence/abuse or who have experienced significant trauma (Beaston et al., 2022; Grace et al., 2012.) Several practitioners also discussed the mental strain experienced when having to deal with sensitive topics pertaining to the families they were supporting, such as seeking asylum, deportation, war experience, and separation of families (Busch et al., 2018).

## 5 Interventions to encourage participation in early childhood education and care

In this chapter, we draw together findings from 11 studies to provide an overview of the strategies used to increase participation in early years education and care (ECEC) in the UK. The studies fall into two main categories: i) approaches targeting the general population and ii) approaches targeting specific populations, such as ethnic minority and disadvantaged families. The approaches in the first category include broad strategies designed to enhance ECEC participation across all families. The approaches in the second category targeted specific population groups and were often delivered in those communities. Like the decisions taken in the previous chapter on barriers and enablers, we prioritised data relevant to ethnic minority children and families. However, the lack of disaggregated data limits our ability to fully assess the success of these interventions in increasing participation among ethnic minority children.

### 5.1 Approachability

Studies investigated strategies and efforts to reach and inform families about ECEC provision. This included raising awareness about the existence and benefits of ECEC programs, using various communication channels to disseminate information, and ensuring that the information is presented in a way that is understandable and appealing to target populations.

#### 5.1.1 Marketing and messaging: general, targeted and multi-lingual

Studies investigate the use of marketing strategies to increase awareness and uptake of Free Early Education Entitlements (FEEE) and Sure Start Programmes in England. Many local authorities (LAs) used general marketing campaigns to build recognition and familiarisation with FEEE to increase awareness and uptake. These general marketing strategies included: advertisements on bin lorries and bus stops and the distribution of flyers via settings used by families of young children (such as children's centres, libraries and General Practice surgeries) (Albakri et al. 2018 p. 61.). Targeted marketing campaigns aimed to increase the uptake of early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs, particularly among disadvantaged families. In 2019, the Department for Education (DfE) asked nine local authorities experiencing low take-up rates for the disadvantaged entitlement to pilot alternative ways of contacting families who might be eligible. Instead of using an official letter, LAs used postcards to grab attention and convey messages in a more approachable manner. They also sent 'Golden Tickets', which were vouchers that could be exchanged for their entitlement. When contacted through these new methods, the number of families applying for, and utilising childcare entitlements increased observably (National Audit Office, 2020).

Developing multilingual marketing materials such as flyers and videos was essential for reaching parents who didn't speak English (Albakri et al. 2018). However, both Craig et al. (2007) and Albakri et al. (2018) highlighted the financial challenges of translating all materials into diverse languages spoken within communities. In Albakri's research, childcare providers acknowledged their inability to fully cater to linguistic diversity, stating, "providers were aware that they were unable to translate all information into the community languages of their local populations" (p. 53). This constraint may have limited some families' access to program information and services. Similarly, Craig's study found that most Sure Start Local Programs (SSLPs) did not translate materials due to cost. One SSLP attempted a workaround by including a contact number in Urdu on their letters, recognising the need for multilingual support. However, the authors suggest that this was likely to be insufficient

and the overall lack of translated materials potentially created a barrier for non-English-speaking families.

### 5.1.2 Home visits

Two studies highlight home visits as pivotal for engaging ethnic minority families in Sure Start (Craig et al., 2007; Hamm et al., 2010) and another two studies point to home visits as a potential strategy for boosting awareness and uptake of FEEE, especially for disadvantaged families (National Audit Office 2020, Albakri et al. 2018).

Home visits were identified as a key programme component to ensure Sure Start improved attendance rates of ethnic minority and disadvantaged families. In their 2007 evaluation of Sure Start for Black and Minority ethnic families, Craig et al. emphasised the pivotal role of home visits in the program's success: "The whole reason why our service works is because we are going to their homes" (p. 48).

In Hamm (2010), home visits were seen as essential for engaging with Pakistani-origin mothers who may have been hesitant to access services outside their homes and were often the only way to reach women who were "trapped in the house" due to cultural expectations and family responsibilities. The study found that the home is a culturally significant space for many families, and providing services in this space could be more acceptable and less intimidating than expecting families to come to a centre. The authors highlighted that cultural and religious norms can shape the relationship between women and the home, making home visits even more critical for Pakistani-origin mothers. The visits also allowed for one-on-one support in a familiar environment, building trust and confidence before mothers explored the full range of Sure Start services. The authors noted:

"The home is where the family will live and grow up and the woman's place is to nurture that...and we have some very devoutly Islamic people here, and they believe that, and it's their absolute right, and we can't invade on that to say 'you will come to this, because you live in Brambleton'. (pg. 509)

Overall, both Craig et al. (2007) and Hamm et al. (2010) emphasize the purpose of home visits in supporting a greater understanding of and opportunity to address the unique needs and cultural contexts of the target population. Although Craig et al. (2007) do not explicitly state participation rates, they mention that most SSLPs kept track of the number of families using their services, typically ranging from 600 to 700 families per year. In one case study area with a majority Pakistani population, the proportion of Pakistani participants in services nearly matched their representation in the overall population.

The evaluations of Free Early Education Entitlements (National Audit Office 2020, Albakri et al. 2018) also highlight the use of home visits as a strategy to increase awareness and uptake of FEEE, particularly for disadvantaged families. The National Audit Office reports that local authorities sought to increase take-up by 'visiting parents at home to tell them about the entitlements and put them in contact with providers'(p.26). Albakri et al.(2017) provides further context, stating that home visits are a form of 'direct contact' used by local authorities to engage parents who are likely to be eligible but not taking up FEEE. This study highlights a case in an outer London borough where

"direct and persistent contact with parents," including door-knocking informed by insights from children's centres, was considered instrumental in increasing take-up of the 2-year-old entitlement.

While both the National Audit Office (2020) and Albakri et al. (2018) acknowledge the potential of home visits to improve FEEE uptake, they also point out challenges and limitations, as home visits can be resource-intensive, potentially hindering their widespread implementation (National Audit Office 2020). Albakri et al. (2017) also note that some local authorities found door-knocking (a form of home visit) to be less effective because parents found it too intrusive. However, overall, home visits were identified as a potential strategy to increase FEEE awareness and uptake, particularly among disadvantaged families.

## 5.2 Acceptability

Studies explored the relationship between high-quality staff and attracting parents to enrol their children. They also considered the extent to which employing staff who also reflect the community's diversity can enhance trust and acceptability.

### 5.2.1 High quality workforce

A high-quality workforce is essential for delivering good quality ECEC and a key factor influencing parents' decision to enrol their children. Qualifications, training and competitive pay all contribute to attracting and retaining staff to ensure optimal ECEC provision and, consequently, increase uptake.

Maintaining high-quality ECEC is a core goal of programs like Flying Start in Wales. To achieve this, Flying Start childcare staff must hold higher qualifications than those in non-Flying start settings, with a minimum requirement of a level 3 qualification in childcare. The program aimed to further improve standards by having leaders or managers achieve level 4 qualifications by 2010 and ensuring all support staff obtained at least level 3. While the 2010 target for level 4 qualifications wasn't reached, the program did significantly increase the number of staff with these qualifications overall (Welsh Government 2013).

Recent reports by the Welsh government reveal widespread staffing challenges in childcare settings, including difficulties filling vacancies, covering absences, and finding 1:1 support for children. These issues were worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, with 19% of surveyed providers reporting a negative impact on recruitment. Staff burnout and feeling undervalued are additional concerns. In England, Albakri et al. (2018) highlight how insufficient funding rates prevent providers from offering competitive salaries, contributing to high staff turnover. While providers offering funded childcare for 2-year-olds are motivated by promoting equality and improving outcomes for disadvantaged children, they often must reduce "the staffing ratio for 3 and 4 year olds to minimum permitted ratios" (p. 34) to manage costs.

The National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) also contends that inadequate funding rates prevent childcare providers from offering competitive salaries. This contributes to high staff turnover, impacting the quality of care and making it difficult to build consistent relationships with children and families (National Audit Office, 2020). The NDNA's concerns underscore the need for improved funding and staffing strategies to enhance childcare services. The 2020 National Audit Office report revealed widespread staffing issues across all types of childcare settings. Providers reported difficulties filling vacancies, covering absences, and recruiting 1:1 support for children. In some cases, settings had to reduce capacity or limit spaces for younger children due to staff shortages. The

COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, with 19% of surveyed providers reporting a negative impact on recruitment. Concerns were also raised about staff burnout and feeling undervalued, particularly among those who remained open throughout the pandemic.

### 5.2.2 ECEC staff as cultural brokers

Several strategies are described for how ECEC staff can identify, approach, and facilitate the acceptance of services among ethnic minority and disadvantaged groups in England. Examples of staff acting as cultural brokers between families and ECECs include delivering school training and mentoring so that the curriculum is culturally relevant for specific groups, such as Gypsy Roma and traveller children, while, at the same time, providing information for families in different languages to explain the British school system (Klaus et al., 2019).

Craig et al., (2007) evaluated Sure Start Local Programs (SSLPs) and found significant variation in the ethnic diversity of staff across different programs. Some SSLPs had a high percentage of ethnic minority staff, while others had very few. The authors argue that staff diversity should reflect the community served by the SSLP, especially as the presence of local community members among the staff was found to enhance trust and understanding within the community. They found that having staff who speak different languages increases the accessibility of services. For example, an SSLP in an inner-city area employed black and minority ethnic staff who collectively spoke up to 12 different languages, helping Arab families and others feel less isolated and more able to engage with the services (Craig, 2007). They highlighted the positive impact of Black and Minority Ethnic staff as role models, especially as the first point of contact for new users (p. 10).

However, the authors also identified challenges in employing a diverse staff. One program struggled to maintain continuity in parent relationships when staff who spoke the parents' language were absent. Hamm (2010) also examined a Sure Start program in a multi-ethnic area and found that the staff were almost all white, despite the community being predominantly Pakistani. This mismatch was seen as a potential barrier to engagement. Furthermore, Black and Minority Ethnic staff were underrepresented in management roles, which was criticized for not reflecting genuine community ownership and understanding of Black and Minority Ethnic service users' needs. Additionally, some staff felt that their cultural sensitivity was not reciprocated by senior staff who were not from minority ethnic groups. Both studies suggest that making Sure Start programs accessible to ethnic minority populations requires addressing these staffing issues to ensure programmes are more acceptable and encourage greater engagement from families from diverse backgrounds.

## 5.3 Availability

Availability refers to the presence and accessibility of childcare services. The availability of different types of early education providers plays a crucial role in take-up rates.

### 5.3.1 Government funding for childcare providers

Government funding for childcare providers in the UK has typically sought to increase availability, quality of service provision and outcomes for children. During the early 2000s, one initiative was to provide free part-time early years education for three-year-olds in all Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in England. The initiative sought to improve parental employment and foster child development, specifically targeting disadvantaged children. The introduction of this policy increased

the number of children accessing these services, with coverage rising from 37% to 87.9% between 1999 and 2007. However, the evidence suggests that the increase in actual attendance was relatively modest, with only 2.7 genuinely new places created for every ten funded places. However, this policy, overall, was part of a broader governmental shift towards investment in early intervention programs. (Blanden et al. 2016).

More recently, the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) has been introduced to help close the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers by providing funding to early years providers. Roberts et al. (2017) collected data from 30 early years settings in England to understand how the program was being used. They report that the funding amount was determined by the number of eligible children at each setting, with a national rate of £300 per eligible child per year. The total amount of funding received by providers varied considerably from £300 to £4,000, with the average amount received being £1,206.50. This financial input enabled providers to extend their hours or offer more flexible provision in response to increased demand. This included extending sessional provision to full-time and offering additional hours to parents who needed them but couldn't afford them without financial assistance.

### 5.3.2 Targeted placement of early childhood education and care services

Many Sure Start Local Programs (SSLPs) sought to increase their reach and connect with ethnic minority communities that were not fully utilising their services. This involved establishing satellite locations in areas with higher minority populations to make services more accessible and convenient for these communities. 'In those areas where minorities were a majority of the population, clearly SSLP services were likely to be accessed by minority families as they were the mainstream'. (Craig et al., 2007, p. 34). An example of this was placing a baby service near a mosque frequented by the Bengali community to facilitate their access to other services. By bringing services closer to where local families lived and removing geographical barriers, SSLPs sought to encourage greater participation (Craig et al. 2007).

## 5.4 Affordability

Affordability is a critical factor in determining access to ECEC, especially for disadvantaged families. This section examines key policies implemented in Wales, Scotland, England, and Northern Ireland to improve childcare affordability. We present data on the impact of these policies on increasing childcare take-up.

### 5.4.1 The Childcare Offer for Wales

The Childcare Offer for Wales, which provides 30 hours of government-funded childcare to working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds has most recently been evaluated in Year 4 (2020-2021) and year 5 (2021-2022) suggest there has been consistent take-up from September 2020 to August 2021, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. While not providing disaggregated data for ethnic minority or disadvantaged families, the report notes that the Childcare Offer, has had the most significant positive impact on lower-income families, enabling them to remain employed and increase their working hours and/or earnings (Welsh Government 2021).

### 5.4.2 Funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in Scotland

In Phase 1 of the Scottish Study of Early Learning and Childcare (SSELC), the focus was on eligible two-year-olds and their uptake of funded early learning and childcare (ELC). The study found that

the "full costs of ELC at the setting included in the survey were met for 93% of parents" (Hinchliffe, et al. 2019, p. 18). The focus of Phase 2 of the SSELc examined the uptake of ELC among four- and five-year-olds. The study found that around half of the families (47%) used additional childcare services beyond the funded ELC provision. However, this use of additional childcare was more common among couple parents (50%) than single parents (37%) and increased as levels of deprivation decreased (Hinchliffe et al. 2021a).

Phase 3 of the SSELc focused on three-year-olds and found differences in the uptake of funded ELC between two groups: "Eligible 2s" (children eligible for funded ELC at age two) and "Comparator 3s" (a nationally representative sample of three-year-olds). The study found that most parents in both groups reported that the full costs of ELC were met by the government, although this proportion was higher for the Eligible 2s (92%) than the Comparator 3s (78%) (Hinchliffe et al. 2021b). This suggests that the funded ELC provision was more likely to be taken up by families who were already eligible at age two, potentially due to continued eligibility based on socioeconomic factors. For the Comparator 3s, there were clear relationships between full funding and demographic factors. Almost all respondents not in work or training had full funding, compared with 73% of those who were employed or in training. Lower-income families were also more likely to have full funding, indicating that the existing funded ELC provision was effectively targeting those most in need of financial support for childcare (Hinchliffe et al. 2021b).

#### 5.4.3 Funded entitlements in England

##### 5.4.3.1 *Disadvantage entitlement: 15 hours per week for disadvantaged 2-year-olds*

The aim of the Disadvantage Entitlement for 2-Year-Olds in England is to provide additional funding to support enrolment in early education for children from low-income families or families who have no recourse to public funds. Families can also be eligible for non-economic reasons e.g. they have an Education Health and Care (EHC) plan, receive disability living allowance, are looked after by a local authority, or have left care under an adoption, special guardianship, or child arrangements order.

Prior to the pandemic, in 2019, the take-up rate for the disadvantage entitlement for 2-year-olds was 68%, lower than the Department for Education's target of 73-77% and marking a decrease from the previous year of 72% in 2018. Take-up rates varied widely among local authorities, with the lowest rate of 39% in Tower Hamlets (London) and the highest of 97% in Stockport (Greater Manchester). Even within a single county like Essex, district rates ranged from 58% to 99%. Data analysed for this period, also revealed a link between deprivation levels and take-up rates. The 20% most deprived areas had an average take-up of 68%, while the least deprived areas reached 74%. (National Audit Office, 2020,). Similarly, areas with higher proportions of children from ethnic minority backgrounds and those with English as an Additional Language (EAL) generally had lower take-up rates (Albakri, 2011). However, recent data, suggest that the estimated percentage of eligible children registered for the disadvantage entitlement has increased from 69% in 2020 to 74% in 2023, of which 30% were from an ethnic minority background (See [Department of Education, 2024](#)).

##### 5.4.3.2 *Universal entitlement: 15 hours per week for all 3- and 4-year-olds.*

The aim of the universal entitlement in England is to provide all three- and four-year-olds with access to 15 hours of free early education per week for 38 weeks a year. All children in this age range are eligible until they reach compulsory school age with no means-testing or other restrictions applied. Evidence from the National Pupil database in 2010-2011 suggests that 'one in five children

did not access their free place from the beginning, and the proportion is much higher among children from families with persistently low incomes" (Campbell et al. 2018 p.515). However, since then, the take-up rate for the universal entitlement has grown, ranging between 93% and 95% between 2015 and 2019 (National Audit Office, 2020, p. 6). This trend has continued, only dropping to 90% during the pandemic in 2020 (LaValle et al. 2022) but returning to 94% in 2023. However, where recorded, only 28% of 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the universal entitlement are from ethnic minority families.

#### 5.4.3.3 *Extended entitlement: An additional 15 hours per week for 3- and 4-year-olds with working parents (30-hour entitlement)*

The 30-hour entitlement in England is for working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds. If both parents work and earn at least the equivalent of 16 hours a week at the national minimum or living wage, but below £100,000 a year, they are eligible for an additional 15 hours of funded childcare per week. The extended entitlement, introduced in 2017, saw an 80% take-up rate in 2019 (National Audit Office, 2020, p. 6). In 2023, 17% of 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the 30-hour entitlement were from an ethnic minority background, lower than the universal and disadvantage entitlement. (Department of Education, 2024)

#### 5.4.4 Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP)

The Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP) in Northern Ireland offers a year of funded pre-school education to every eligible child in their immediate pre-school year. The program is universally available on-compulsory service, meaning it is open to all eligible children. It is in high demand, with approximately 23,000 children participating annually since its expansion in 1998. There has been government investment in expanding the number of funded pre-school places, aiming to ensure a funded place for every target-aged child whose parents want it. While exact uptake rates are not published, the combination of universal availability, high demand, and increased funded places suggests a substantial proportion of eligible children are participating in the PSEP.

## 5.5 Appropriateness

Appropriateness in the context of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) refers to the degree to which services meet the specific needs and expectations of families and children. When services are perceived as appropriate, they are more likely to be utilised consistently. This is particularly crucial for disadvantaged children and families, as well as ethnic minority populations, who may face unique challenges and barriers.

### 5.5.1 Needs assessment and responsive services

Needs assessments are essential for understanding and addressing the specific needs of families and children, which can lead to improved outcomes and greater equity in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). By gathering information about the unique challenges and barriers faced by different groups, such as disadvantaged families and ethnic minority populations, service providers can tailor their programs and interventions to ensure they are effective and equitable.

Needs assessments are often conducted through various methods, including surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observations. These methods allow providers to gather information directly from parents, children, and staff about their experiences, preferences, and challenges. For example, in Roberts et al. (2017), providers in England used "informal observations and experiences of working

with children" and "data on the development and progress of children" to inform their spending decisions for the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP).

Once needs are identified, providers can develop targeted strategies and interventions, such as allocating resources, providing staff training, adapting services, and collaborating with other agencies and organisations to provide comprehensive support. However, conducting comprehensive needs assessments and implementing tailored services can be challenging, particularly for smaller providers with limited resources. Balancing the needs of individual children with the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of ECEC services is crucial. By investing in resources and staff training that benefit multiple cohorts of children, providers can ensure that their efforts extend beyond individual cases.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the use and provision of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services in England. Case studies conducted during the pandemic revealed that LAs have demonstrated the ability to quickly identify and understand the needs of local families and identify strengths and weaknesses in their local ECEC system. Doing so, enabled them take action to support children's early education and welfare, as well as parents who need to access ECEC for work. They have also built stronger partnerships with local providers and other family support services, which helped the ECEC system operate during a time of great uncertainty. However, there are weaknesses in the ECEC system. The research by LaValle et al. (2022) revealed considerable variation in the capacity of LA teams to support the ECEC system. In some areas, ECEC was considered a key priority, with adequate resources and staffing, while in other areas, support was fragmented, limited, and poorly coordinated. In some cases, there was no strategic oversight of what LAs did to support the ECEC system.

### 5.5.2 Cultural Sensitivity

Sure Start aimed to improve the health and well-being of children and families in disadvantaged areas. While the program's overall ethos and focus remained consistent, the staff delivering Sure Start services also sought to adapt their approaches to the specific needs of the communities they served. A study by Hamm (2010) highlighted this adaptability, particularly in how Sure Start staff responded to the needs of Pakistani mothers. Many of these women lived in extended families, which could both support and constrain their agency. Staff recognised the importance of respecting the cultural norms of the Pakistani mothers while also providing opportunities for them to expand their roles and access services outside of the home.

While Sure Start demonstrated adaptability and cultural sensitivity in many cases, the study by Craig et al. (2007) suggested that there was room for improvement, particularly in tailoring services to the needs of specific ethnic groups. The authors recommended that Sure Start Local Programs (SSLPs) receive additional guidance and support in understanding and responding to the diverse needs of their communities. This guidance should include comprehensive cultural sensitivity training for staff, ensuring that they are equipped to respectfully and appropriately engage with families from various cultural backgrounds. In conclusion, while Sure Start staff demonstrated adaptability and cultural sensitivity in delivering services, there remains a need for further refinement and tailoring of services to meet the unique needs of diverse communities. By incorporating recommendations such as enhanced cultural sensitivity training, targeted outreach, diverse staffing, and language services, Sure Start can further its mission of providing equitable and effective support to all children and families, regardless of their cultural backgrounds.

## 6 Discussion

In this chapter, we bring together the synthesis findings on barriers, enablers, and interventions to increase participation in early years education and care among ethnic minority and disadvantaged children and families. Firstly, we use both syntheses to present an updated version of the Archambault et al. 2019 framework on accessing Early Childhood Education and Care using the sub-themes generated in each synthesis before summarising the key findings under each framework domain (see section 6.1 and figure 6.1). Secondly, we present implications for policy, practice, and research (section 6.2) and reflect on the strengths and limitations of this review.

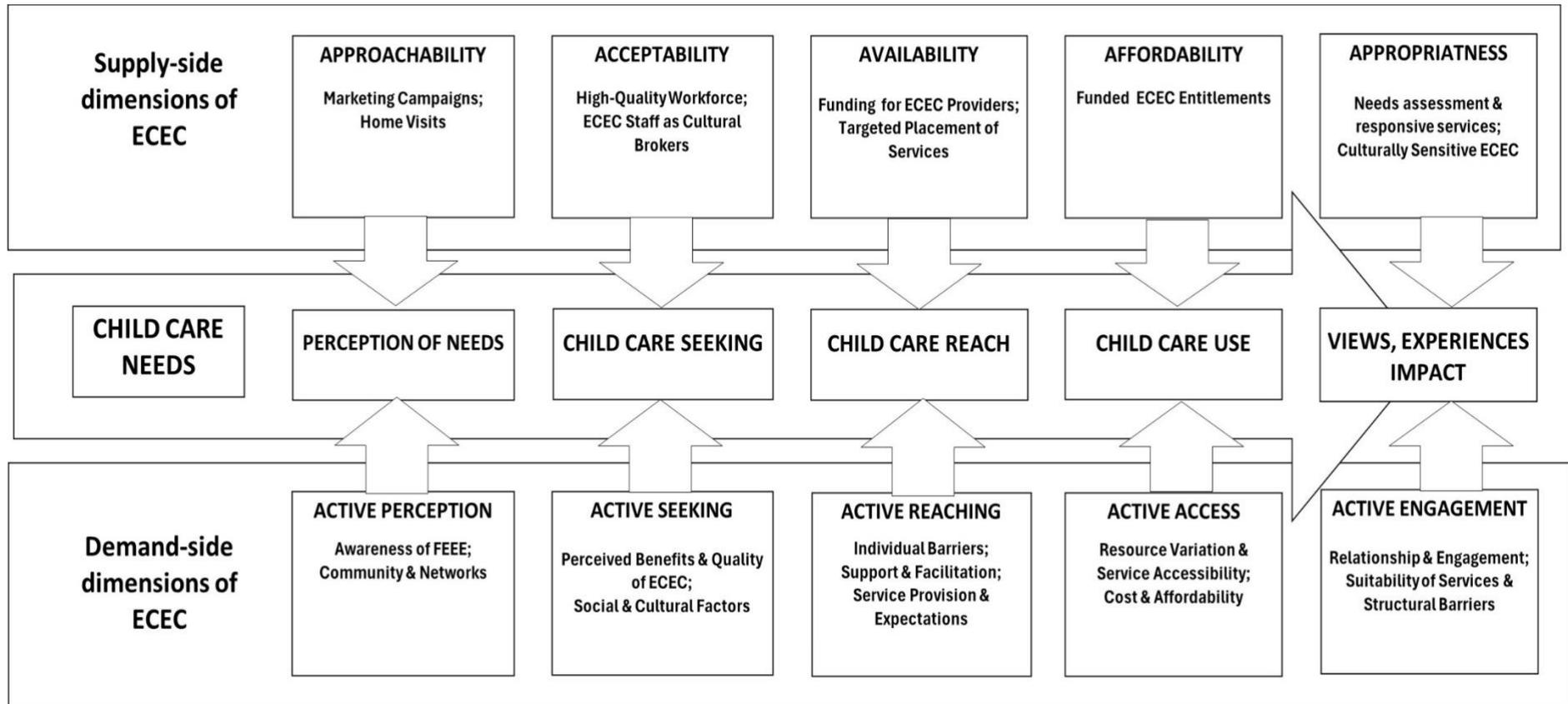
### 6.1 Summary of findings and cross-cutting themes

Based on the evidence reviewed, we have updated the framework for access to early childhood education and care (first introduced in section 1.3). The demand side speaks to the individual characteristics of families seeking childcare (e.g. knowledge, perception and awareness). The social, cultural, and physical environment also influence the likelihood of seeking and engaging with ECEC services. The supply side of childcare refers to the characteristics of the childcare system and institutions providing services, such as the types of programs, quality, hours of operation, and staff qualifications. The institutional environment includes government policies, funding mechanisms, and the location of childcare services. The interaction between these supply- and demand-side factors determines the accessibility, acceptability and affordability of childcare for families, particularly those from ethnic minority and disadvantaged backgrounds.

#### 6.1.1 Approachability and active identification of childcare need

- **Parents are aware of childcare entitlements but gaps exist:** While most parents are aware of Free Early Education Entitlements (FEEE), there are gaps in awareness and understanding among specific groups, such as ethnic minority and disadvantaged families. Misconceptions about eligibility criteria and confusion about the types of entitlements can be a risk to take-up.
- **Community and informal networks are crucial but limited:** Word-of-mouth communication significantly raises awareness, especially among disadvantaged families. However, this can create barriers for those not well-connected within their communities. Centralized information systems and regional networks are lacking, especially for ethnic minority and disadvantaged families.
- **Marketing and messaging strategies can raise awareness of ECEC services:** General marketing campaigns can raise awareness, which increases uptake. Targeted campaigns, with tailored messaging (e.g., postcards, vouchers) and multilingual materials, can effectively reach specific demographics.
- **Home visits as a powerful tool:** Home visits have been identified as crucial in engaging ethnic minority and disadvantaged families. They provide a culturally sensitive and accessible way to build trust, address individual needs, and offer personalised support. However, they can be resource-intensive and may not be feasible for widespread implementation.

Figure 6.1 Updated Access to Early Years Education and Care framework (building from Archambault et al. 2019)



- **Financial constraints can limit the delivery of marketing and outreach efforts:** translating all materials can be costly, and alternative solutions, such as providing contact numbers in different languages, may be insufficient.

Overall, while general awareness of FEEE and ECEC programs is high, targeted outreach and support are needed to ensure that all families, particularly those facing disadvantage, have access to accurate information and can make informed decisions about their children's early education.

#### 6.1.2 Acceptability and active seeking of childcare

- **Parents generally acknowledge the benefits of ECEC:** Parents recognise the advantages of ECEC in fostering children's social skills and school readiness and offering parental respite. Migrant parents particularly value ECEC for providing education and language skills that they cannot offer at home. It also offers further education and employment opportunities, especially for migrant mothers.
- **Parents also expressed concerns about the quality of ECEC services:** Issues with the quality of ECEC services, such as staff qualifications, inadequate facilities, unengaging environments, and insufficient individual attention, contribute to hesitancy in utilising ECEC services. These concerns were particularly heightened for parents of very young children.
- **Social and cultural factors influence attitudes towards ECEC:** Parents may feel insecure about their literacy skills or their child's academic abilities, hindering their engagement with ECEC services. Extended family members may view childcare as solely the family's responsibility, discouraging women from utilising ECEC services. Additionally, the lack of cultural inclusivity in some settings can alienate families from diverse backgrounds.
- **The quality and diversity of ECEC staff can impact parental engagement:** High-quality staff with relevant qualifications and training are vital for delivering good-quality ECEC and attracting parents to enrol their children. Employing staff who also reflect the community's diversity can enhance trust and acceptability. Staff who speak multiple languages and understand cultural nuances can better serve families from diverse backgrounds.
- **ECEC staff as cultural brokers:** ECEC staff can bridge the gap between families and services. This can include providing culturally relevant curricula, translating information, and acting as role models for children from diverse backgrounds.
- **Staff retention and diversity can be a challenge:** Insufficient funding can prevent providers from offering competitive salaries, leading to high staff turnover and negatively impacting the quality of care. The underrepresentation of Black and Minority Ethnic staff in management roles can hinder community ownership and understanding of local needs.

Overall, while many parents recognise the potential benefits of ECEC, various factors influence their decision-making. Addressing gaps in understanding, cultural barriers, quality concerns, and staffing challenges is essential to increasing the active seeking and utilisation of ECEC services.

#### 6.1.3 Availability and actively reaching out

- **Language is a barrier for migrant and refugee families accessing childcare:** Migrant and refugee families often face significant language barriers that affect their children's fluency in the national language, leading to concerns about academic preparation and social inclusion.

Miscommunication between teachers and parents can result from the expectation that children speak the majority language (such as English), causing discomfort and misunderstandings. This can lead to a preference for family-based care.

- **Immigration status and employment status can limit access to childcare.** Immigration status and employment barriers can limit childcare options for immigrant families. Resource limitations, such as long waiting lists, high costs, and ineligibility for subsidies, restrict access to childcare. Additionally, unemployed or precariously employed mothers face even greater difficulties securing childcare services, further compounded by these resource constraints.
- **Childcare availability and accessibility remain significant challenges for many families.** Families face difficulty accessing suitable childcare due to limited places, waiting lists, and formal services. Informal care, like grandparents, is often resorted to for flexible and reliable childcare. Parents often find existing services inadequate, leading to increased reliance on informal care.
- **Government funding has increased access to ECEC:** Government funding for childcare providers is central to increasing the availability and improving the quality and flexibility of ECEC services. However, the impact on actual attendance may be more modest than expected, highlighting the need to carefully monitor strategies.
- **Targeted placement of services can help reach communities:** ECEC services can be strategically placed to increase accessibility and increase reach. Satellite locations in minority-majority areas can remove geographical barriers and encourage participation.

#### 6.1.4 Affordability and active accessing

- **Government-funded entitlements and Programs can increase ECEC uptake, but variation exists:** Various government-funded entitlements and programs aim to increase access to ECEC services in the UK:
  - In **Wales**, the Childcare Offer has seen consistent take-up and benefits for lower-income families.
  - In **Scotland**, there is evidence of consistent uptake of free-childcare offers, especially among those already eligible at age two and those with lower incomes
  - In **England**, while take-up rates have generally increased, they vary among deprived areas and can be lower for ethnic minority families.
  - In **Northern Ireland**, there is high demand and government investment in expanding funded preschool education, eligible for all children
- **Kinship networks and flexible childcare solutions:** Many families rely on kinship networks for childcare due to financial constraints and the need for flexible solutions. Grandparents and other family members often provide care, though this arrangement is challenging. Migrant and refugee families frequently depend on transnational caregiving arrangements to manage childcare costs and work demands.

#### 6.1.5 Appropriateness and active engagement

- **Trusting and supportive relationships pave the way for parents to feel at ease with ECEC services:** Establishing trusting and supportive relationships between families and providers is essential for continued service engagement. This trust and support is cultivated through consistent, positive interactions and transparency between families and ECEC staff. When staff use a strengths-based approach, they foster meaningful relationships that facilitate

understanding, engagement, and the effective utilisation of services. These connections are critical for creating an environment where families feel valued and supported. A lack of trust, often stemming from mishandling confidential information or negative past experiences, can significantly deter participation.

- **The suitability of ECEC services is a key factor in their uptake.** Parents often find ECEC services unsuitable due to inflexible session timings that do not cater to their specific needs, such as shorter days for younger children. Structural barriers, such as lack of transportation and inability to cater to different age groups, can hinder access to services. Additionally, staff may face challenges due to insufficient training or resources to work with diverse families and complex needs.
- **Needs assessments are essential for understanding and addressing the specific requirements of families and children.** This involves gathering information from and actively engaging with communities to amplify the voices of children and families from ethnic minority communities. Once needs have been identified, they need to be implemented in culturally sensitive ways. Key areas include allocating resources, providing staff training, and collaborating with other agencies.
- **ECEC services benefit from being culturally sensitive and adaptable to the needs of diverse communities.** ECEC programs have shown the importance of adapting to the community's specific cultural norms and needs. However, there's room for improvement in tailoring services to specific ethnic groups, with recommendations for comprehensive cultural sensitivity training, targeted outreach, diverse staffing, and language services.

Overall, ensuring the appropriateness and active engagement in ECEC services involves addressing trust issues, overcoming structural barriers, conducting comprehensive needs assessments, and demonstrating cultural sensitivity.

## 6.2 Implications

### 6.2.1 Implications for policy and practice

- **Localised and culturally sensitive outreach strategies** can address gaps in understanding and misconceptions about childcare entitlements among specific groups such as ethnic minority families and disadvantaged communities. This may include community events, workshops, and information sessions held in collaboration with local community centres, religious institutions, and cultural organisations, with materials available in multiple languages and tailored to specific community needs and concerns.
- **Clear and simple communication** supports informed decision-making. Simplifying the language in informational materials about childcare entitlements and using visual aids, infographics, and videos can effectively overcome language barriers. Eligibility criteria for financial assistance and subsidies should be communicated clearly, and simplifying application processes can aid families who need help navigating them.
- **Community leaders (such as indigenous elders, church leaders, playgroup facilitators, service representatives, representatives of local initiatives or members of local City Councils), healthcare providers, and social workers can disseminate accurate information about entitlements and assist families with the application process**, but they may need training. In-person support, such as help desks or information booths in strategic locations

like public libraries, healthcare centres, schools, and community centres, can provide one-on-one assistance.

- Employers, particularly those with many ethnic minority workers, can **provide information about childcare entitlements through workplace seminars and information materials**. Collaborations with schools and nurseries to ensure parents receive information during parent-teacher meetings, enrolment periods, and through school newsletters could also bridge gaps in understanding about government-funded programs.
- **Feedback and continuous improvement** can ensure information is targeted and accessible. Implementing feedback mechanisms to regularly assess the effectiveness of communication strategies and outreach efforts is vital. Surveys, focus groups, and community consultations can provide insights into the barriers faced by different groups. Continuous updates to informational materials and outreach programmes based on feedback can be beneficial.
- **Enhancing the quality and cultural relevance of ECEC services is important**. Continuous professional development for ECEC staff, focusing on teaching skills and cross-cultural sensitivity, can help. Upgrading ECEC facilities to ensure they are safe, welcoming, and equipped with engaging learning materials can alleviate parental concerns about care quality.
- **Cultural brokers and community liaisons can build trust with families, provide information, and facilitate communication between parents and ECEC staff**. Partnering with local community organisations, religious institutions, and cultural groups can promote ECEC services. Workshops and support groups for parents can enhance understanding of ECEC benefits and empower them to support their children's learning at home.
- **Actively recruiting and retaining a diverse ECEC workforce that reflects community demographics can help**. Inclusive policies that respect and value cultural diversity, such as accommodating dietary restrictions and religious practices, can make families feel welcome.
- **Offering flexible hours and locations for ECEC services can accommodate the varied schedules of working parents, especially those with non-traditional work hours**. Integrating employment support services within ECEC centres can help parents find stable employment, improving their eligibility for childcare services and overall family stability.
- **Community advisory boards comprising parents, ECEC staff, and community leaders can guide the development and implementation of ECEC policies and programs**, ensuring that the voices of ethnic minority and disadvantaged families are heard and considered in decision-making.
- **Providing language support and multilingual resources**, such as staff fluent in the languages spoken by the local community, language classes for parents and children, translation of materials, and language interpretation services, can be helpful.
- **Expanding the capacity of existing ECEC facilities and establishing new centres in underserved areas can reduce waiting lists and increase the availability of spots**. Sustained

and increased funding for ECEC providers can improve the quality of services, staff salaries, and training programmes, helping to attract and retain qualified staff and enhance overall quality. Robust monitoring and evaluation systems can assess the effectiveness of funding and programmes, informing adjustments to both policy and practice.

### 6.2.2 Implications for research

This review highlights several gaps and areas for future research:

- There is a notable gap in the evidence base regarding Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic perspectives on access to childcare from the UK. It is a priority to gather qualitative data from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities to understand their unique challenges and needs in accessing Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). This will help develop culturally responsive policies and practices that ensure equitable access for these groups.
- The routine collection and disaggregation of data on Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities are essential for evaluating interventions and policies aimed at increasing early years education and care uptake. This detailed data enables policymakers to identify specific barriers and challenges faced by different ethnic groups, ensuring targeted and effective interventions. Moreover, it helps assess these policies' impact, promote accountability, and inform future strategies.
- This review indicates that targeted and culturally appropriate outreach strategies could address the lack of understanding and misconceptions about childcare entitlements among specific groups, such as ethnic minority and lower-income families; their impact in increasing ECEC uptake would benefit further evaluation.
- The review highlights the role of informal community networks in spreading awareness about ECEC services. Further research is needed to explore how these networks operate across different ethnic and socio-economic groups and how formal systems can leverage or support them to improve outreach and engagement.
- Many ethnic minority and disadvantaged families rely on extended family networks for childcare, often due to cultural preferences or economic necessity. Future research investigating the role of grandparents and other relatives in providing childcare and the quality of the home-learning environment in these settings could increase knowledge on how formal ECEC services and informal childcare can complement each other.
- Prospective longitudinal studies are needed to continue assessing the impact of different policy interventions, such as funding entitlements and extended childcare hours, on ECEC access rates for ethnic minority and disadvantaged families. Analysis of regional variation is also needed to identify best practices and policy gaps.

### 6.3 Strengths and limitations

This rapid evidence review draws on methods for producing policy-relevant evidence syntheses of qualitative and mixed-method studies to answer complex questions (Wilson et al. 2021). It sought to produce generalisable evidence and evidence that can inform local policy decision-making. (Oliver et al. 2018). A key approach to selecting rapid review methods is to consult with stakeholders to refine the research question, conduct preliminary searches, and map the available literature. Although we were able to conduct initial scoping to consult with and manage expectations about the volume and

type of literature available with policy decision-makers, the review was hampered by a lack of consultation with black and minority ethnic parents. This lack of engagement with Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities is a missed opportunity to ensure their voices, experiences, and priorities are central to the research process. Thus, future research in this area would benefit from equitable collaboration to ensure research addresses the specific needs and concerns of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic populations in the UK.

When time is limited, a second approach to selecting methods is to streamline the critical appraisal process and choose methods to synthesise studies that can maximise policy relevance. In this review, we focused more on the appropriateness and relevance of the research to answer the review questions and reduced the number of questions used to assess the quality and methodological coherence of studies. This approach is often used when producing evidence to inform local decision-making rather than when producing generalisable evidence, but it limits the extent to which statements can be made about the overall trustworthiness of the evidence base (Oliver et al. 2015, Dickson 2017). The use of framework synthesis is also a time-efficient choice when navigating a large data set, as it enabled us to identify complimentary themes within and across each synthesis. However, important differences may have been missed by prioritising commonality when looking across data on a range of populations, intervention approaches, geographical locations, and time periods.

By prioritising the views of families who are often marginalised and underrepresented in research, the synthesis of qualitative data has sought to centre their experiences and perspectives. However, there remains a lack of research from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic perspectives from the UK, limiting the relevance of this review to the UK policy context. The qualitative evidence synthesis also aimed to maintain diversity in perspectives by analysing a larger number of studies than is typical of a qualitative synthesis. However, this also limited its potential interpretative power. The decision was made to limit the synthesis of intervention approaches to the UK context to increase the applicability and transferability of evidence. However, this means important approaches and lessons from the global evidence will have been missed in this review. Like other systematic reviews, especially rapid evidence reviews, despite making the best possible effort to conduct a thorough and sensitive search, it is inevitable that some studies will be unintentionally missed. This is particularly the case for relevant data that is more likely to be found in reports, found manually rather than through the database search.

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## Part II: Technical description of the rapid evidence review

### 8 Methods

This chapter describes the methods used in more detail; e.g. the approach used to search for, identify, analyse and synthesise studies to answer the in-depth review questions. This report draws on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) guidance to support transparency in reporting but is adapted to consider the rapid, not full systematic review approach taken.

#### 8.1 Type of rapid evidence review: three stage review

Taking an iterative review approach to assess whether there is sufficient literature to answer the in-depth review question, we conducted the review in stages. Firstly, to inform the development of the protocol, we conducted a brief scoping exercise in November-December 2023. The aim of the scoping exercise was to identify any existing systematic reviews on access to early years childcare education. Conducting an initial horizon scan of the literature enabled us to make informed decisions to answer the first question about the nature and extent of literature. This informed the third stage to answer each of the in-depth review questions.

#### 8.2 Stakeholder engagement

Consultations with the Welsh Government, particularly with the Children, Families and Childcare team, have informed the development of this project, with research questions agreed collectively. Further stakeholder conversations were conducted with the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan team to inform the scope. Two workshops were conducted with policymakers and community mentors with lived experience to inform our initial understanding of barriers and enablers to ECEC access among ethnic minority families.

#### 8.3 Study identification

Studies included in this review were identified from a systematic map of empirical literature seeking to identify the nature and extent of primary research on increasing access to early childhood education and care by ethnic minority communities or other disadvantaged groups in the UK and equivalent social welfare systems. To produce this systematic map, searches were undertaken in the following databases: ASSIA (Proquest); AEI (Proquest); BEI (EBSCO), Child Development & Adolescent Studies (EBSCO) ERIC (proquest); Econlit; Sociological Abstracts (Proquest); Dissertation Abstracts (Proquest). We also searched online resources and topic-specific and regional websites (e.g. department of Education), Focused searches of Google and Google Scholar Citation, and contacted experts in the field.

The lead reviewers developed and implemented the search strategy (RME, KD). The search was structured around three concepts that needed to be present in each of the study citations: 1) Setting, 2) topic and 3) Geographical location. Where possible, the database searches were limited to citations published in English. Synonyms and alternative words for each concept were used to search titles, abstracts, keywords, and controlled vocabulary fields in the databases to capture a wide range of primary research. The search was developed as part of the ERIC scoping exercise and translated into other databases as appropriate.

Studies were selected according to the criteria outlined in table 7.1

**Table 8.1: Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies**

**A. Criteria for inclusion in the systematic map.**

<b>Include studies:</b>		<b>Exclude studies:</b>
<b>Applied at title and abstract</b>		
<b>EX1: Language</b>	Published in English	Not published in English
<b>EX2: ECEC</b>	Investigating access and/or uptake of ECEC	Investigating access and/or uptake of ECEC
<b>EX3: Geographical Location</b>	Published Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Netherland, New Zealand, UK	Not published in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Netherland, New Zealand, UK
<b>Applied at full text to include in the Map</b>		
<b>EX4: Population</b>	Focused on disadvantaged and ethnic minority groups	Not focused on disadvantaged and ethnic minority groups
<b>EX5: Study design</b>	Studies collecting qualitative or quantitative primary data	Not conducting an empirical primary research
<b>Applied at full text to answer questions on barriers and enablers (RQ2)</b>		
<b>EX6: Reporting Data: views</b>	Collecting and reporting data on parents' or providers' views on barriers and enablers for accessing ECEC	Not collecting and reporting data on parents' or provider views on barriers and enablers for accessing ECEC
<b>Applied at full text to answer questions on interventions to increase participants (RQ3)</b>		
<b>EX7: Reporting data: UK interventions</b>	Collecting and reporting data on intervention approaches and policies from the United Kingdom	Not collecting and reporting data on intervention approaches and policies from the United Kingdom

**Language:** We focused on studies published in English language

**Early childhood education and care:** For the purpose of this review ECEC refers to the provision of care and education for children from birth to the start of primary school. It encompasses a wide range of formal and informal services, including childcare, preschool education, and other forms of early learning. The focus is on supporting children's development in cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains during their early years. It is often a comprehensive approach that includes the care, education, and development of children from and also refers to the importance of providing a nurturing environment that supports children's learning and well-being from infancy through their preschool years (UNESCO).

Access to early child education and care refers to enhancing participation rates and meaningful engagement in ECEC. It could include strategies and mechanisms to increase access alongside an understanding of the barriers and enablers contributing to increasing the involvement of and encouraging more families to enrol their children in formal childcare, preschool, or early learning initiatives.

**Geographical location:** We focused on studies conducted in the UK and equivalent welfare systems. These will include: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece Iceland, Italy, The Netherland, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.

**Population:** While we recognise that there is no universally accepted term to describe the diversity of groups which may experience disadvantage in society, we used the following definitions:

- **Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic People:** We followed the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan in using the term 'Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic' and 'ethnic minority' as shorthand.
- **Disadvantaged groups:** populations or communities that experience social, economic, or health disparities compared to the broader population. Broadening the definition of disadvantage beyond socio-economic deprivation also speaks to the role of ECEC in increasing forms of social exclusion at the individual, familial and social level.

**Study designs:** we included primary studies collecting qualitative or quantitative data on the views, experiences, attitudes and perceptions of what would support uptake and outcome evaluations of strategies and initiatives to increase uptake.

## 1.5 Study selection

Search results were de-duplicated and imported into the systematic review software, EPPI-Reviewer 4 (Thomas et al. 2010), which was also used to manage all subsequent stages of the review described below. We piloted the exclusion criteria by comparing decisions in groups of two or more reviewers using worksheets with guidance notes on a small sample of records (for example, 10-20). Disagreements were resolved through consensus and any required refinements to the criteria will be made and recorded in a working protocol document. A further sample of records were screened by reviewers independently and differences resolved by discussion or consulting with a third reviewer. When agreement was adequate (90-95%) for this second sample, the remaining citations were screened by a single reviewer. References were screened initially on titles and abstracts and full reports were obtained for those references judged as meeting the inclusion criteria or where there was insufficient information from the title and abstract to assess relevance. A second opinion was made available for any study where a reviewer was unsure of its eligibility. A record of the screening process is reported in this report using the PRISMA flow diagram.

## 8.4 Data extraction

The data extraction was carried out in two stages.

### 8.4.1 Stage one: mapping

We initially mapped the available literature, seeking to identify the nature and extent of primary research on increasing access to early childhood education and care by ethnicity minorities or other disadvantaged groups in the UK and equivalent social welfare systems. This first stage included

codes such as date, geographical location, population, and study design. This will be presented in the appendices of the technical report.

#### 8.4.2 Stage two: in-depth review

The second stage included coding for study aims, and sampling and data collection methods, types of ECEC, as well as an extraction of the authors' results and summary description of their findings. The latter was organised drawing on the work of Archambault et al. (2019) using a framework that considers the range of factors influencing access to ECEC for disadvantaged populations. These factors take into consideration two important processes: i) system-level barriers and enablers and ii) how individual families may respond to and interact with system-level barriers and enablers. The five interrelated factors include:

- Perceived Approachability and Active Identification of Childcare Need
- Acceptability and Active Seeking of Childcare
- Availability and Actively Reaching Out
- Affordability and Active Accessing
- Appropriateness and active engagement

Two reviewers (RME, KD) independently piloted the tools. Each study was then coded independently by three reviewers (RME, KD, KB), who then reached a consensus to produce a final agreed coding.

#### 8.5 Assessing the quality and relevance of studies

We took a streamlined approach to quality appraisal based on previous EPPI-Centre reviews conducted to inform time-sensitive rapid evidence reviews. This was achieved by using three components to help make explicit the process of apportioning different weights to the findings and conclusions of different studies (Gough 2007). These weights of evidence take into consideration both the methodological coherence of an individual study and their appropriateness and policy relevance to answering the review questions. They were based on the following:

**A. Soundness of studies**, e.g. the internal methodological coherence, based upon the study only. The critical appraisal tool assessed the methodological quality of each study in three key areas:

- (i) **Aims and rationale** of the study reported (e.g. the extent to which they are clearly reported and in alignment with the data collection and analysis approach taken)
- (ii) **Data collection** (e.g. including steps taken to increase the rigour in sampling the quality and appropriateness of the tools to collect data)
- (iii) **Data analysis** (e.g., what methods were used, and is the analysis reliable).

#### **B. Appropriateness of the research design and analysis used for answering the review questions**

Studies were judged on WoE B according to the methods used in the study. To be considered HIGH on WoE B studies answering RQ2 on barriers and enablers needed to:

- i) State that they used an 'open question' approach for data collection and/or an emergent approach to data analysis and
- ii) Ensure that the findings were grounded in the data by providing examples of participant quotes

Stating that an ‘open question’ approach was used was a requirement for studies to be judged as using a methodological approach that ensured the perspectives, experiences or preferences of participants were obtained, studies which did not take this approach, were be judged as low on this criterion. Studies which took an open approach but did not provide direct data from participants voices were judged as medium.

To be considered HIGH on WoE B, studies answering RQ3 needed to:

- i) provide data on ethnic minority children, families, communities and/or disadvantaged groups
- ii) report their approach to and provide a breakdown of their sample

Studies were judged as low if they did not meet criteria one and medium if they only met criteria two.

**C. Relevance of the study topic to answer the review question**

WoE C was judged according to how broad or narrow the focus was in terms of population and type of experiences, perspective and preferences collected and reported. We wanted to know about a specific group of populations so we could determine what is relevant to them. We also wanted to know about a range of experiences and impacts so we can understand what is important to those population in particular the relative importance of particular approaches to increasing access to ECEC. Therefore, studies which have a narrow population focus but a broad focus on a range of experiences were judged as high. Studies judged to be medium has some limitation on population focus (e.g. too broad and difficult to disaggregate data) or a limitation in the breadth of experiences/ outcomes. Studies judged as low had both a broad population and a narrow focus.

**D. Overall weight of evidence judgement**

An overall judgement was made taking in to account the three judgements made for WoE A, B and C. An overall rating of high was used to reflect studies which had been rated as high on all three individual elements of WoE A, and Criterion B and C. The appropriateness of the research design and relevance of the study for answering the review questions, was felt to be particularly important for this review given the review questions requirements to identify what was important to participants. Therefore, a distinction between medium and low studies was made according to individual studies rating on these two criterion WoE B and C. Any study which was rated as low on WoE B or C was rated as - overall. The table below illustrates how decisions for overall ratings were made.

<b>Overall judgement</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
High	Studies which are high on A B and C
Medium	Studies which are not rated high on all counts but are not rated low on B and/or C
Low	Studies which score low on B or/and C

## 8.6 Synthesis

### 8.6.1 Approach to synthesis

We decided to include a wide range of studies in our review of barriers and facilitators to answer the research question comprehensively. Although we limited the studies by population and geographical location, the final number ( $n=x$ ) was still larger than usual for a qualitative synthesis. Due to the volume of data, adopting a deeper, more interpretive analysis (as described by Sandelowski and Barroso 2007) within our timeframe provide difficult. Give the varied policy contexts across countries, a detailed international synthesis of interventions to encourage ECEC participation was also not feasible. Therefore, to strike a balance between breadth and depth, we narrowed our focus in this synthesis to interventions in the UK. Initially, we planned to use the Archambault et al. framework for the qualitative synthesis, as outlined in our protocol. However, after the mapping exercise, it was clear that some element of interpretation and analysis would be required to bring the data from each synthesis together in any meaningful way. We therefore decided to use framework synthesis, a method employed in previous EPPI-Centre reviews (Lorenc 2008; Oliver 2008), for both syntheses.

### 8.6.2 Framework synthesis

A framework synthesis can accommodate a range of study types and designs and can be conducted relatively quickly to support timely synthesis of data to inform policy decision-making. We used the same approach for the qualitative evidence synthesis as we did for the narrative synthesis of interventions but using different data sets. Where available, we extracted verbatim quotes from study participants, numerical data on uptake, and author description of findings from the result sections of included studies relevant to populations of interest (e.g. ethnic minority and disadvantaged populations). Information reported in the discussion and conclusion were also read when extracting data. If these sections contained any new data or insights, they, were also extracted and used to inform the synthesis. During this process, data were matched against the framework. As the framework contains broad domains, we also used a line-by-line thematic synthesis approach to identify subthemes. This enabled the framework to be used as the starting point for organising the synthesis but enabled the synthesis to be developed further by the introduction of sub-themes specific to each review question. For example, identification of people's experiences and perspectives (e.g. trust and concerns) or specific approaches (e.g. home visit)

Review authors carefully examined the degree to which each subtheme was distinct given the highly subjective nature of the framework and the data. They reflected on how they interpreted the data considering their individual coding, considering either the review questions' focus on participants' meanings and experiences or the emphasis on strategies to encourage participation. This was to limit not going beyond the original context of the study. In some cases, review authors went back to the original definition used in the framework for each domain to revise and re-match against the study findings to consolidate their understanding. This occurred at two key points, during data extraction and when writing up themes and identifying repetition. This process supported grouping and condensing similar themes into a smaller set of sub-themes. This was particularly the case for the qualitative evidence synthesis. For the narrative synthesis of intervention, data had been 'lumped' together under dual domains (e.g. approachability and acceptability) and the data was teased out further. In some cases, themes originally coded under one broad theme (e.g. acceptability) had a better fit with another broad theme (e.g. approachability). The constant comparative analysis continued until a consensus was reached on which a priori themes were

supported by the data, and whether new themes identified by the review authors did actually map to the pre-existing broad theme.

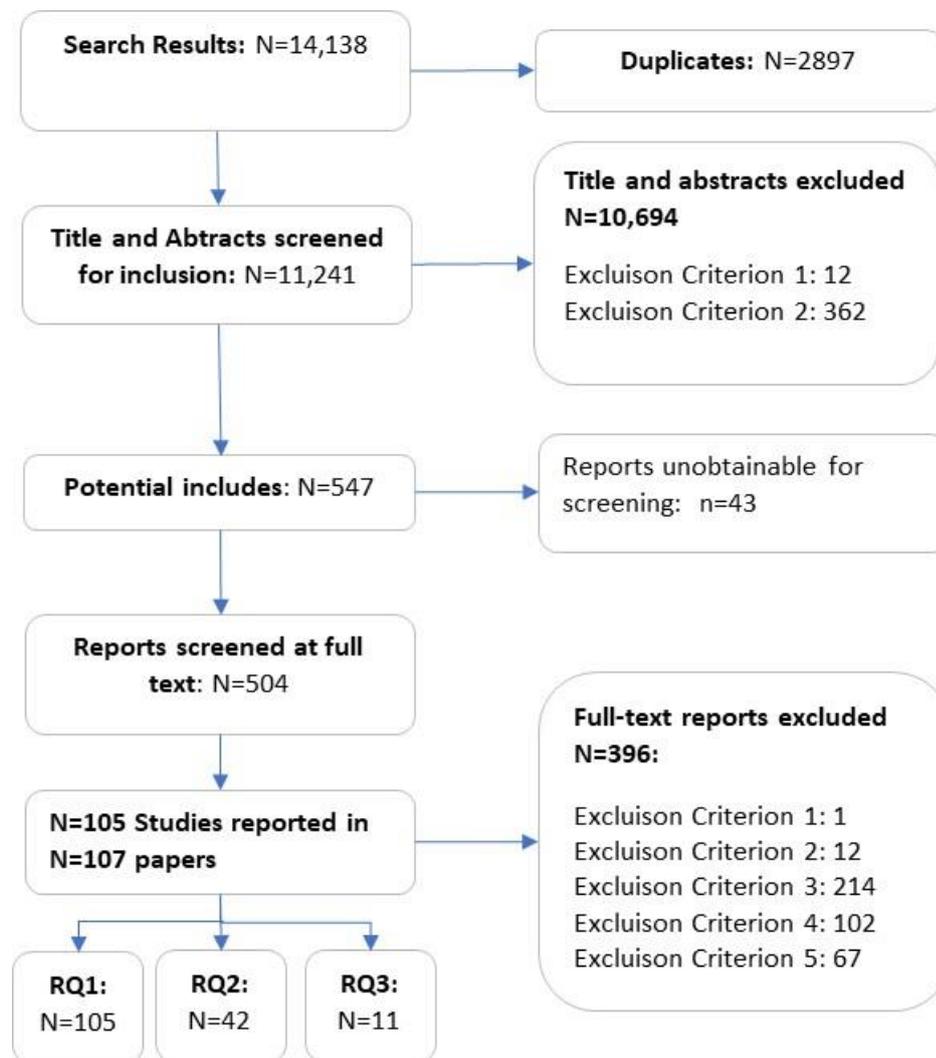
### 8.6.3 Summary of evidence and cross-cutting themes

The increasing importance of multi-component systematic reviews, which use diverse evidence to inform policy and practice, has led to significant advancements in integrating and combining synthesis findings. While a cross-study synthesis was beyond the scope of this project, we were able to consolidate and summarise the findings within each framework domain. To achieve this, we took a broad domain (e.g., approachability, acceptability) and re-examined the findings to identify key headline messages, focusing on central themes and supporting details. This information was condensed into concise statements to create a summary that transitioned from experiences (demand side) to interventions (supply side). These summaries were then used to identify implications for policy and practice. This approach has facilitated the identification of cross-cutting themes across each synthesis, leading to a final set of evidence review summaries and corresponding implications.

## 9 Flow of literature through the review

The searches identified 14,138 references, 2894 of which (20%) were duplicates. The remaining 11,241 references were screened on title and abstract, and 10,694 (95%) were excluded using the criteria listed in section 8.3. During the pilot phase of the screening process, it was evident that studies based on population and study design could not be excluded when screening on title and abstract. Therefore, these criteria were only applied when reviewing the full text of the studies. Of the 547 remaining references included at this stage, we were able to obtain the full-text reports of 504, with the remainder not accessible online. This process led to a further 396 studies being excluded at this stage in the review screening process. The remaining 106 reports deemed eligible for inclusion in the review were coded and included in the brief map. From the 106 studies, 42 studies provided data to answer RQ2 and 11 studies to answer RQ3. Three studies provided data for both syntheses. Figure 9.1 summarises the flow of references through the review.

Figure 9.1 Flow of studies through the review



## 10 Results of study quality and relevance assessment

The weight of evidence (WoE) contributed by each study was assessed by coding each study on three subcomponents and one overall judgement of quality and relevance assessment, as described in Section 8.5

### 10.1 Studies on barriers and enablers to participating in ECEC

Studies were judged to be of high (n=24) or medium weight (n=18) of evidence overall. None of the studies were considered to be of low quality or relevance.

**Table 10.1 Weights of evidence of studies included in the in-depth review**

Author(s)	WoE A	WoE B	WoE C	WoE D
Agbenyega & Peers (2010)	High	High	High	High
Albakri et al. (2018)	High	High	High	High
Bargłowski & Pustulka (2018)	High	High	High	High
Beatson et al. (2022)	High	High	High	High
Bojarczuk (2022)	High	High	High	High
Bowes et al. (2004)	High	High	High	High
Busch et al. (2018)	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Craig et al. (2007)	High	High	High	High
De Gioia (2015)	High	High	High	High
Ebbeck & Cerna (2007)	High	High	High	High
Edwards (2018)	High	High	High	High
Fjällström & Paananen (2020)	High	High	Medium	Medium
Fleer (2004)	High	High	High	High
Frankowicz (2023)	High	High	High	High
Garvis (2021)	High	High	High	High
Grace & Trudgett (2012)	High	High	Medium	Medium
Graham & Underwood (2012)	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Guilfoyle et al. (2010)	High	High	Medium	Medium
Hare & Anderson (2010)	High	High	High	High
Harries et al. (2022)	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
Hughes and Jones (2021)	High	High	Medium	Medium
Hopkins et al. (2014)	High	High	High	High
Jackiewicz et al. (2011)	High	High	Medium	Medium
Klaus (2018)	High	High	High	High
Leske et al. (2015)	High	High	Medium	Medium
Lie (2010)	High	Medium	High	Medium
Mhic & Nic Fhionnlaioich (2021)	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
Miller (2013)	High	High	Medium	Medium
Mitchell & Meagher-Lundberg (2017)	High	Medium	High	Medium
Mitchell & Ouko (2012)	High	High	High	High
O'Callaghan et al. (2023)	High	High	High	High
Pastori et al. (2021)	High	High	High	High
Patel & Agbenyega (2013)	High	High	High	High
Scholz et al. (2018)	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
Scottish Government (2022)	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
Shuker & Cherrington (2020)	High	High	Medium	Medium
Tobin (2020)	High	High	Medium	Medium

Author(s)	WoE A	WoE B	WoE C	WoE D
Trappolini et al. (2021)	High	Medium	High	Medium
Wall & José (2004)	High	High	High	High
Wong & Rao (2021)	High	High	High	High
Wood 2021	High	High	Medium	Medium
Wu & Poveda (2021)	High	High	High	High

## 10.2 Studies on Intervention approaches to encourage participation

Studies were judged to be of high (n=5) and medium weight of evidence (n=6). None of the studies were considered to be of low quality or relevance.

**Table 10.2 Weights of evidence of studies included in the in-depth review**

Study	WoE A	WoE B	WoE C	WoE D
Albakri (2018)	High	High	High	High
Blanden et al. (2016)	High	High	High	Medium
Campbell et al. (2018)	High	Medium	High	Medium
Craig et al. (2007)	High	High	High	High
Hamm (2010)	High	High	High	High
Harries et al.	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
National Audit Office (2020)	High	High	High	High
La Valle 2022	High	Medium	High	Medium
Marshall et al. (2019)	High	High	High	High
Scottish Government (2021)	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
Welsh Government (2011)	High	Medium	Medium	Medium

## Appendix 1 PRISMA Checklist

Section/topic	#	Checklist item	Reported in Chapter #
<b>TITLE</b>			
<b>Title</b>	1	Identify the report as a systematic review, meta-analysis, or both.	1: Rapid Evidence review
<b>ABSTRACT</b>			
<b>Structured summary</b>	2	Provide a structured summary including, as applicable: background; objectives; data sources; study eligibility criteria, participants, and interventions; study appraisal and synthesis methods; results; limitations; conclusions and implications of key findings; systematic review registration number.	Executive Summary
<b>BACKGROUND</b>			
<b>Rationale</b>	3	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of what is already known.	1
<b>Objectives</b>	4	Provide an explicit statement of questions being addressed with reference to participants, interventions, comparisons, outcomes, and study design (PICOS).	1
<b>METHODS</b>			
<b>Protocol and registration</b>	5	Indicate if a review protocol exists, if and where it can be accessed (for example, web address), and, if available, provide registration information including registration number.	n/a
<b>Eligibility criteria</b>	6	Specify study characteristics (for example, PICOS, length of follow-up) and report characteristics (for example, years considered, language, publication status) used as criteria for eligibility, giving rationale.	2, 8
<b>Information sources</b>	7	Describe all information sources (for example, databases with dates of coverage, contact with study authors to identify additional studies) in the search and date last searched.	8, Appendix 11
<b>Search</b>	8	Present full electronic search strategy for at least one database, including any limits used, such that it could be repeated.	8, Appendix 11
<b>Study selection</b>	9	State the process for selecting studies (i.e., screening, eligibility, included in systematic review, and, if applicable, included in the meta-analysis).	2, 8
<b>Data collection process</b>	10	Describe method of data extraction from reports (for example, piloted forms, independently, in duplicate) and any processes for obtaining and confirming data from investigators.	2, 8
<b>Data items</b>	11	List and define all variables for which data were sought (for example, PICOS, funding sources) and any assumptions and simplifications made.	8, Appendix 11
<b>Risk of bias in individual studies</b>	12	Describe methods used for assessing risk of bias of individual studies (including specification of whether this was done at the study or outcome level), and how this information is to be used in any data synthesis.	n/a
<b>Summary measures</b>	13	State the principal summary measures (for example, risk ratio, difference in means).	n/a

Section/topic	#	Checklist item	Reported in Chapter #
<b>Synthesis of results</b>	14	Describe the methods of handling data and combining results of studies, if done, including measures of consistency (for example, $I^2$ ) for each meta-analysis.	2, 8: Framework Synthesis
Section/topic	#	Checklist item	Reported in Chapter
<b>Risk of bias across studies</b>	15	Specify any assessment of risk of bias that may affect the cumulative evidence (for example, publication bias, selective reporting within studies).	n/a
<b>Additional analyses</b>	16	Describe methods of additional analyses (for example, sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression), if done, indicating which were pre-specified.	n/a
<b>RESULTS</b>			
<b>Study selection</b>	17	Give numbers of studies screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the review, with reasons for exclusions at each stage, ideally with a flow diagram.	9
<b>Study characteristics</b>	18	For each study, present characteristics for which data were extracted (for example, study size, PICOS, follow-up period) and provide the citations.	Appendix 11
<b>Risk of bias within studies</b>	19	Present data on risk of bias of each study and, if available, any outcome level assessment (see item 12).	See 10 for critical appraisal
<b>Results of individual studies</b>	20	For all outcomes considered (benefits or harms), present, for each study: (a) simple summary data for each intervention group (b) effect estimates and confidence intervals, ideally with a forest plot.	Appendix 11
<b>Synthesis of results</b>	21	Present results of each meta-analysis done, including confidence intervals and measures of consistency.	4, 5
<b>Risk of bias across studies</b>	22	Present results of any assessment of risk of bias across studies (see Item 15).	n/a
<b>Additional analysis</b>	23	Give results of additional analyses, if done (for example, sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression [see Item 16]).	n/a
<b>DISCUSSION</b>			
<b>Summary of evidence</b>	24	Summarise the main findings including the strength of evidence for each main outcome; consider their relevance to key groups (for example, healthcare providers, users, and policy makers).	6
<b>Limitations</b>	25	Discuss limitations at study and outcome level (for example, risk of bias), and at review-level (for example, incomplete retrieval of identified research, reporting bias).	6
<b>Conclusions</b>	26	Provide a general interpretation of the results in the context of other evidence, and implications for future research.	6
<b>FUNDING</b>			
<b>Funding</b>	27	Describe sources of funding for the systematic review and other support (for example, supply of data); role of funders for the systematic review.	Pg2

## Appendix 2: Search strategy

(((((MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Developed Nations") OR title(Australia OR Belgium OR Canada OR Denmark OR Finland OR France OR Germany OR Iceland OR Ireland OR Italy OR The Netherlands OR New Zealand OR Norway OR Spain OR Sweden OR Switzerland OR UK OR United Kingdom OR England OR Scotland OR Wales OR Northern Ireland) OR abstract(Australia OR Belgium OR Canada OR Denmark OR Finland OR France OR Germany OR Iceland OR Italy OR The Netherlands OR New Zealand OR Norway OR Spain OR Sweden OR Switzerland OR UK OR United Kingdom OR England OR Scotland OR Wales OR Northern Ireland)) AND la.exact("English")) AND la.exact("English")) AND la.exact("English")) AND la.exact("English")) AND la.exact("English")) AND (((((((title(Asian OR BAME OR "Black" OR BME OR Chinese OR Pakistani OR Bangladeshi OR Afro Caribbean OR Roma OR Ethnic\* OR Immigrant OR Migrant OR Minorit\* OR Refugee OR "Social Class" OR Socioeconomic OR Socio-economic OR Low Income OR Low-Income disadvantage\* OR Access\* OR Barrier\* OR Cultur\* OR Decision\* OR Equal\* OR Facilitator\* OR Incentive\* OR Strategie\* OR Participat\* OR "Parent Attitudes" OR "Parental Attitudes" OR Policy N4 Access\* OR Uptake) OR abstract(Asian OR BAME OR "Black" OR BME OR Chinese OR Pakistani OR Bangladeshi OR Afro Caribbean OR Roma OR Ethnic\* OR Immigrant OR Migrant OR Minorit\* OR Refugee OR "Social Class" OR Socioeconomic OR Socio-economic OR low income or Low-Income disadvantage\* OR Access\* OR Barrier\* OR Cultur\* OR Decision\* OR Equal\* OR Facilitator\* OR Incentive\* OR Strategie\* OR Participat\* OR "Parent Attitudes" OR "Parental Attitudes" OR Policy N5 Access\* OR Uptake)) AND la.exact("English")) AND la.exact("English")) AND la.exact("English")) AND la.exact("English")) AND la.exact("English")) AND la.exact("English")) OR ((MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Low Income Groups") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Minority Group Influences") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Ethnic Groups") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Parent Background") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Decision Making") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Context Effect") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Ethnicity") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Refugees") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Ethnic Diversity") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Barriers") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Cultural Background") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Social Differences") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Migrant Children") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Socioeconomic Influences") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Facilitators (Individuals)") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Minority Group Children") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Ethnic Grouping (1966 1980)") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Socioeconomic Background") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Social Class") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Access to Education") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Family Characteristics") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Cultural Differences") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Cultural Awareness") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Parent Attitudes") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Parent Influence") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Cultural Context") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Socioeconomic Status") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Immigrants") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Cultural Capital")) AND la.exact("English")))) AND (((MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Early Childhood Education") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Preschools") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Child Care Centers") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Child Development Specialists") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Preschool Education") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Child Care") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Child Development Centers") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Kindergarten") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Child Caregivers")) AND la.exact("English")) OR (((title("Child Care" OR "Early Years" OR "Early Education" OR Early Care " or " Early Childhood Education " OR " early child care AND education " OR Kindergarten OR prekindergarten OR pre-kindergarten OR preschool or pre-school OR preK or pre-K OR nursery or " nursery school " or " Nursery Education "")) OR

abstract("Child Care" OR "Early Years" OR "Early Education" OR Early Care " or " Early Childhood Education " OR " early child care AND education " OR Kindergarten OR prekindergarten OR pre-kindergarten OR preschool or pre-school OR preK or pre-K OR nursery or " nursery school " or " Nursery Education "")) AND la.exact("English")) AND la.exact("English")) AND la.exact("English")) AND la.exact("English"))

## Appendix 3: Study details

**Table 11.3.1 Studies on barriers and enablers to participating in early childhood education and care**

Study	Aims	Geographical Location	Sample	Data Collection	Data Analysis
<b>Agbenyega &amp; Peers (2010)</b>	To gauge the level of access to and support for early childhood education and care programs for sub-Saharan African immigrant families in Melbourne, Australia.	Melbourne, Australia	30 parents (15 families) from sub-Saharan African immigrant community (Sudanese, Sierra Leonean, Liberian)	Face-to-face in-depth interviews during home visits	Richie and Spencer's (1993) analytic framework: familiarisation with data, identifying thematic framework, indexing/coding, charting, and mapping/interpretation of themes
<b>Albakri et al. (2018)</b>	To investigate the patterns in the take-up of the Free Early Education Entitlements (FEEE) in England and to identify factors affecting take-up.	England	21 local authority early years leads, 31 providers, and 40 parents eligible for FEEE but not using it	Rapid evidence review, analysis of administrative data, and qualitative in-depth interviews	Descriptive and regression analyses of LA areas' population characteristics and thematic analysis of qualitative data
<b>Barglowski &amp; Pustulka (2018)</b>	To explore how social class and gender norms influence early childcare choices among Polish migrant mothers in Germany and the UK.	Germany and the UK	17 Polish migrants in Germany, 37 Polish migrant women in the UK, total of 54 participants.	Semi-structured and biographic interviews, complemented by participant observations	Open-coding, hermeneutic sequence analysis, and categorical case-by-case and cross-comparative analysis
<b>Beatson et al. (2022)</b>	To investigate ECEC participation barriers and facilitators in three Australian communities from the perspectives of parents and providers.	Australia	45 parents, 63 providers (questionnaires); 21 parents, 16 providers (semi-structured interviews)	Mixed-methods: online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews	Descriptive statistics for quantitative data; thematic analysis using codebook-based approach for qualitative data
<b>Bojarczuk (2022)</b>	To investigate mobilization of social support for informal	Ireland	61 Polish working mothers in Dublin	61 semi-structured interviews and	Thematic analysis using NVivo software, preliminary codes assigned at transcription stage, patterns and

Study	Aims	Geographical Location	Sample	Data Collection	Data Analysis
	childcare among working Polish mothers in Dublin.			ego-centric network maps	differences identified, and further themes added
<b>Bowes et al. (2004)</b>	To provide evidence to drive decision-making for quality children's services and family support for Indigenous families in rural, remote, and urban NSW	New South Australia	100 Indigenous families from Far West NSW, Central West NSW, and Sydney	Community consultations, yarning sessions, disposable cameras for families	Emergent methodology focusing on respect for Indigenous cultures and practices, qualitative analysis
<b>Busch et al. (2018)</b>	Investigate challenges and solutions in an early childcare program for refugee children.	Germany	Pilot study: 28 educators; Main study: 96 educators	Pilot study: Semi-structured interviews; Main study: Closed-format questionnaire	Pilot study: Inductive content analysis; Main study: Exploratory factor analysis
<b>Craig et al. (2007)</b>	Review the practice and policy issues of Sure Start in areas with significant black and minority ethnic populations.	UK	12 case studies of Sure Start Local Programmes	Interviews, group discussions, and collection of background policy papers	Qualitative analysis
<b>De Gioia (2015)</b>	Explore challenges for immigrant and refugee mothers as their children entered childcare and identify support processes by educators.	Australia	Single case study in a childcare centre, 4 mothers and 4 educators	Interviews, participant observation, reflective journal	Qualitative analysis using NVivo
<b>Ebbeck and Cerna (2007)</b>	Examine critically and find meaning in the experiences of recently arrived Sudanese families as they began to settle into their new cultural environment, and how	Australia	30 Sudanese families	Narrative interviews, vignettes	Qualitative analysis

Study	Aims	Geographical Location	Sample	Data Collection	Data Analysis
	cultural values affect the selection of child care services.				
<b>Edwards (2018)</b>	Examine how mothers from BAME communities engage or do not engage with early years services to challenge neoliberal equality discourses.	UK	8 women (2 early years professionals, 6 mothers) from BAME communities	Narrative inquiry through focus group discussions	Qualitative analysis using postcolonial feminist theory
<b>Fjällström, &amp; Paananen (2020)</b>	To analyze the rationalities and preconditions of access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Finland.	Finland	Administrators of local ECEC services in ten Finnish municipalities.	Qualitative interviews and data from public websites and national databases.	Discourse analysis focusing on the rationalities of access to ECEC.
<b>Fleer (2004)</b>	To investigate Indigenous Australian perspectives on early childhood education.	Australia	Indigenous preschool-aged children and their families from different regions of Australia.	Families were given video cameras to record aspects of their child's life; transcripts of family discussions.	Rogoff's three planes of analysis were used to examine video and interview data.
<b>Frankowicz (2023)</b>	To gain an understanding of immigrant mothers' experiences of childcare in Canada	Canada	Primary school students from various schools across Canada.	Surveys, interviews, and performance data from school records.	Statistical analysis and thematic analysis of qualitative data.
<b>Garvis (2021)</b>	To explore skilled immigrant mothers' perspectives toward Swedish preschools.	Sweden	10 skilled immigrant mothers who do not send their children to preschool.	Semi-structured interviews.	Thematic analysis.

Study	Aims	Geographical Location	Sample	Data Collection	Data Analysis
<b>Grace &amp; Trudgett (2012)</b>	To explore Indigenous early childhood workers' perspectives on supporting the engagement of Indigenous families in early childhood settings.	Australia	Six Indigenous early childhood workers from disadvantaged communities in New South Wales.	Semi-structured interviews and focus groups.	Thematic analysis using NVivo software.
<b>Graham &amp; Underwood (2012)</b>	To examine the experiences of rural parents accessing early years support services in Ontario, Canada.	Canada	Rural parents in two communities in Ontario.	Nine focus groups and five interviews.	Thematic analysis informed by a critical ecological systems perspective.
<b>Guilfoyle et al., 2010</b>	To describe how Indigenous people perceive culturally strong childcare programs based on nationwide consultation in 2005-06, and review current literature on culturally strong programs.	Australia	Indigenous childcare providers (n = 202), Indigenous community members (n = 210), and state and territory government representatives (n = 66)	Focus groups, community consultations, and interviews with key stakeholders in the childcare sector	Qualitative analysis through coding of transcribed interviews and focus group discussions, thematic categorization, and constant review and discussion by the research team
<b>Hare &amp; Anderson, 2010</b>	To explore the perspectives of Indigenous parents and family members on the transition of Indigenous children from home to early childhood development programs in a large urban center in western Canada.	Canada	25 Indigenous parents and family members, and 2 early childhood educators	Focus groups and interviews	Qualitative analysis through thematic coding of transcribed discussions and interviews
<b>Harries et al. 2022</b>	evaluate the fifth year (Sept 2021 to Aug 2022) of the Childcare Offer in Wales.	Wales	2,002 parents surveyed, 304 providers surveyed, interviews with local authorities and Welsh Government representatives	Mixed methods (surveys, interviews, group discussions)	Descriptive statistics, thematic analysis

Study	Aims	Geographical Location	Sample	Data Collection	Data Analysis
<b>Hopkins et al., 2014</b>	To examine how multicultural groups identify and use their community connections to share information and inform decision-making about and access to early childhood services in a multicultural Australian suburb.	Australia	Families with young children from various cultural backgrounds (n = 59)	Focus groups with families, interviews with community leaders	Qualitative analysis through thematic coding of transcribed focus groups and interviews
<b>Hughes &amp; Jones (2021)</b>	To explore beliefs, behaviours, and barriers affecting parental decisions regarding childcare and early education.	Wales	A total of 53 families with three or four-year-old children across nine local authority areas in Wales. The majority of families were eligible for government-funded childcare and early education but were not utilizing it	Face-to-face meetings, telephone interviews, email conversations, screening information collection, and informal conversations.	Data was sorted and coded according to themes identified from research questions, research literature, anecdotal evidence, and additional themes identified in the data.
<b>Jackiewicz et al., 2011</b>	To examine factors affecting equitable access to government-approved childcare services for Indigenous children and their families in Australia.	Australia	Indigenous childcare providers (n = 202), Indigenous community members (n = 210), and state and territory government representatives (n = 66)	Focus groups, community consultations, and interviews with stakeholders	Qualitative analysis through thematic coding of focus groups, consultations, and interviews
<b>Klaus, 2018</b>	To explore the use of cultural brokering to promote the inclusion of Roma children in early childhood education through examining case studies of the Traveller Education Support Services in the UK and Pedagogic Assistants in Serbia.	UK, Serbia	Roma children and their families, education staff, policymakers, and local education officials	Interviews, focus groups, observations, discussions, visits, and workshops	Qualitative analysis using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, thematic coding, and comparative case study analysis

<b>Study</b>	<b>Aims</b>	<b>Geographical Location</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>Data Analysis</b>
<b>Leske et al., 2015</b>	To identify effective early childhood education and care services for Indigenous families by examining the perspectives of early childhood professionals in Mount Isa, Queensland.	Australia	19 early childhood professionals from licensed and non-licensed ECEC services	Semi-structured interviews	Inductive thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's approach
<b>Lie, 2010</b>	To explore childcare and grandparenting in UK Chinese and Bangladeshi households, focusing on transnational aspects and social networks.	United Kingdom	15 households from Chinese and Bangladeshi communities, including grandparents, parents, and children	Surveys and interviews	Qualitative analysis using thematic coding and social network analysis
<b>Mhic &amp; Nic Fhionnlaoich (2021)</b>	Investigate reasons why Irish parents chose Irish-medium preschools over other forms of early childhood education.	Ireland	Parents of children in Irish-medium preschools.	Parental questionnaire informed by international literature.	Comparative analysis with other immersion education studies.
<b>Miller (2013)</b>	Explore embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in early childhood education curricula.	Australia	Early childhood educators and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.	Qualitative methods: interviews, observations, and document analysis.	Qualitative data analysis using Miles and Huberman's framework.
<b>Mitchell &amp; Ouko (2012)</b>	Understand experiences and aspirations of Congolese refugee families regarding early childhood education in New Zealand.	New Zealand	Congolese refugee families (18 parents divided into four focus groups).	Focus group discussions, drawings, storytelling, and questionnaires.	Thematic analysis around four main themes: belonging and community, learning English, cultural identity, resettling.
<b>Mitchell &amp; Meagher-Lundberg (2013)</b>	Evaluate New Zealand Ministry of Education's Early Childhood Education (ECE) Participation	New Zealand	Families engaged in the ECE Participation Programme, programme	Surveys, interviews with programme staff, and	Mixed methods: data on enrolments, surveys, and interviews.

Study	Aims	Geographical Location	Sample	Data Collection	Data Analysis
	Programme for disadvantaged families.		staff, and local area coordinators.	interviews with a small group of families.	
<b>O'Callaghan et al. (2023)</b>	Explore caregiving arrangements in Chinese families in Australia	Australia	10 grandparents, 8 parents, 22 service providers	Interviews	Thematic analysis
<b>Pastori et al. (2021)</b>	Investigate Moroccan immigrant mothers' experiences with Italian preschools	Italy	114 structured interviews, 12 narrative-biographical interviews	Mixed methods: interviews and surveys	Quantitative analysis of survey data, qualitative analysis of interviews
<b>Patel &amp; Agbenyega (2013)</b>	Investigate Indian migrant parents' perspectives on early childhood education in Australia	Australia	6 Indian migrant parents	In-depth, face-to-face interviews	Framework analysis
<b>Scholz et al. (2018)</b>	Assess inequalities in access to early childhood education in Germany	Germany	Not specified	Surveys, interviews	Mixed methods: qualitative and quantitative analysis
<b>Scottish Government</b>	To explore use of and views on early learning and childcare services among parents in Scotland with children aged under six years who have not yet started school.	Scotland	Parents of children under six years (n = 8181)	Online survey and telephone interviews	Quantitative analysis of survey responses, including statistical comparisons with previous study from 2017
<b>Shuker &amp; Cherrington (2020)</b>	Examine the integration of ECEC policies in practice and their implications for teachers	New Zealand	ECEC teachers	Interviews	Thematic analysis
<b>Tobin (2020)</b>	Address the needs of immigrant and refugee children in ECEC settings	USA, England, France, Germany, Italy	Immigrant parents and ECEC practitioners	Video-cued interviews, focus groups	Content analysis using thematic coding
<b>Trappolini et al. (2021)</b>	Explore the role of ECEC in promoting social inclusion for immigrant children	Italy	ECEC practitioners, immigrant parents	Interviews, case studies	Thematic analysis

Study	Aims	Geographical Location	Sample	Data Collection	Data Analysis
<b>Wall &amp; José, 2004</b>	To explore the strategies used by immigrant families to reconcile work and care for young children in Finland, France, Italy, and Portugal.	Finland, France, Italy, Portugal	72 immigrant families with young children (aged 10 or less) and working parents (part-time or full-time)	Interviews with couples or lone parents	Exploratory qualitative analysis examining constraints and strategies of immigrant families
<b>Wood 2021</b>	To examine the childcare offer within Universal Credit, focusing on awareness, affordability, and the consequences of embedding childcare costs into a monthly-based means-tested system.	UK	90 participants from 53 households in the first phase, 63 participants re-interviewed in the second phase.	Qualitative interviews	Inductive coding into themes and subthemes using MAXQDA software
<b>Wong &amp; Rao (2021)</b>	Investigate the experiences of Chinese migrant families in Spain regarding kinship childcare	Spain	Chinese migrant families	Interviews	Thematic analysis
<b>Wu &amp; Poveda (2021)</b>	Examine the intergenerational relationships in Chinese migrant families and their impact on childcare	Spain	Chinese migrant families	Interviews	Thematic analysis

**Table 11.3.2 Studies on Intervention approaches to encourage participation**

Study	Aims	Intervention focus	Geographical Location	Sample	Data collection	Data Analysis
<b>Albakri (2018)</b>	To investigate the patterns in the take-up of the Free Early Education Entitlements (FEEE) in England and to identify factors affecting take-up.	Early education and childcare: Statutory guidance for local authorities	England	21 local authority early years leads, 31 providers, and 40 parents eligible for FEEE but not using it	Rapid evidence review, analysis of administrative data, and qualitative in-depth interviews	Descriptive and regression analyses of LA areas' population characteristics and thematic analysis of qualitative data
<b>Blanden et al. (2016)</b>	To understand the impact of free pre-school education on children's subsequent academic performance	Universal pre-school education: public funding with private provision	England	Children in state schools	National Pupil Database (NPD)	Regression Analysis

<b>Campbell et al. (2018)</b>	To investigate who benefits from the entitlement to free early education among three-year-olds	Analysis of take-up of the entitlement to free early education	England	Children aged 3 years	National Pupil Database (NPD)	Logistic Regression Analysis
<b>Craig et al. (2007)</b>	To examine the impact of Sure Start on Black and Minority Ethnic populations	Sure Start programme	England	BAME populations in Sure Start areas	Surveys, Interviews, Observations	Mixed Methods Analysis
<b>Hamm (2010)</b>	To examine social investment policy in a multi-ethnic Sure Start area	Sure Start programme	England	Parents and professionals in a Sure Start area	Ethnographic study, Interviews	Narrative Analysis
<b>Harries et al.</b>	Evaluate the fifth year (Sept 2021 to Aug 2022) of the Childcare Offer in Wales.	Up to 30 hours of government-funded early education and childcare are provided to working parents of 3-4-year-olds for 48 weeks/year.	Wales	2,002 parents surveyed, 304 providers surveyed, interviews with local authorities and Welsh Government representatives	Mixed methods (surveys, interviews, group discussions)	Descriptive statistics, thematic analysis
<b>National Audit Office (2020)</b>	Examine if the Department for Education is supporting disadvantaged families effectively through entitlements to free early education and childcare.	Free early education and childcare entitlements for disadvantaged families.	England	National scale data	Document review, interviews, and statistical analysis	Descriptive statistics, policy analysis
<b>La Valle 2022</b>	Investigate the impact of COVID-19 on ECEC participation and provision in England, highlighting growing inequalities.	Analysis of ECEC attendance and provision changes during the pandemic.	England	Over 300 participants including parents, providers, local authority staff, and ECEC stakeholders	National data sources, interviews, workshops	Descriptive analysis, comparative analysis of pre-and post-pandemic data
<b>Welsh Government (2011)</b>	Evaluate the impact of the Flying Start programme on children's development and parental support in disadvantaged areas.	Provision of enhanced health visiting, parenting support, early language development, and free part-time childcare for 2-3 year olds.	Wales	Families in disadvantaged areas	Surveys, administrative data, interviews	Propensity score matching, regression analysis, bootstrapping for standard errors

<b>Marshall et al. (2019)</b>	To monitor and evaluate childcare and early years provision in England.	Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers	England	Group-based providers, School-based providers, Childminders	Mixed mode survey: online and telephone	Weighting to ensure representativeness, Calibration weighting
<b>Scottish Government (2021)</b>	To evaluate the outcomes of children accessing 1140 hours of funded ELC and their parents	Expansion of funded ELC to 1140 hours per year	Scotland	Three-year-olds and their parents	Surveys and observations	Logistic regression analysis, statistical significance testing, and comparison between predictor variables and outcomes
	To gather baseline data on child and parent outcomes before the expansion of ELC hours and to assess the characteristics of ELC settings	Increase in statutory funded ELC entitlement from 600 to 1140 hours per year	Scotland	Four- and five-year-old children who received 600 hours of funded ELC, and their parents	Surveys and observations	Descriptive statistics and logistic regression to identify key drivers of developmental delays and outcomes
	To evaluate the initial impact of the ELC expansion programme and gather baseline data on child and parent outcomes	Implementation of 600 hours of funded ELC per year	Scotland	Various cohorts of children and their parents from different socio-economic backgrounds	Surveys and observations	Statistical analysis of baseline data, comparison of outcomes across different socio-economic groups

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