

Helsinki

# Helsinki's curriculum for early child- hood education and care



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# Introduction

**W**elcome! This publication introduces you to Helsinki's curriculum for early childhood education and care (ECEC). A city that is open and community-centred, encourages engagement and listens to every child is being built together with children.

ECEC is part of Helsinki's care and education system and an important step on a child's path through growth and learning. High-quality early childhood education and care promote parity and prevent social exclusion. The entire city functions as a learning environment, and all its operators provide education and affect how children's rights as citizens are implemented.

Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC is based on the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018) and the National Core Curriculum for ECEC 2018. It governs the operations of the early childhood education and care

providers in Helsinki, including private service providers, and covers all forms of ECEC.

In Helsinki, children are allowed to play and influence through play. Children's inclusion in their own child group, in their home neighbourhood and as residents of Helsinki and Finland is boosted. Helsinki is a versatile learning environment that lets children be seen and heard!

Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC consists of the content of the National Core Curriculum for ECEC and a description of the characteristics and approaches of ECEC in Helsinki.

The ECEC curriculum provides an organised structure for early childhood pedagogics and their regular evaluation. The evaluation utilises Varda, the national data warehouse for ECEC, as well as the evaluation material and quality indicators of the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre.

ECEC units create annual action plans, based on Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC. An action plan must describe the pedagogical principles of a unit's operations. Furthermore, children and their guardians take part in planning these operations.

**The ECEC curriculum has three tiers. It consists of the National Core Curriculum for ECEC, local ECEC curricula and children's individual ECEC plans.**

—National Core Curriculum for ECEC 2018

When planning, arranging and developing early childhood education and care, the primary goal must be to safeguard the children's interests. A case- and situation-specific assessment of these interests must be carried out from the perspective of an individual child, child group and children in general.

—Section 4 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018) and Government Proposal 40/2018 vp, p. 85



# 2

## It's fun to be young in Helsinki

### 2.1 The significance of childhood

The roots of early childhood education and care in Helsinki reach as far back as the late 19th century. ECEC began as social care and education provided for impoverished children, and over time and through changes in legislation it has developed into every child's right to have early childhood education that is pedagogically planned and supports their development and learning. Modern-day ECEC together with modern-day children creates new cultural heritage. Simultaneously, we are also honouring history and childhood traditions.

In Helsinki, children and their childhood are allowed to be seen and heard as part of the urban landscape. Helsinki provides a rich and diverse learning environment to children, as well as opportunities to arrange experience-based activities and learning. Together with children, we are building a city that is open and community-centred, a city where different people with differing backgrounds are valued and respected.

Helsinki is an international city that promotes parity and equality. Children are part of a community that is both linguistically and culturally diverse. We are providing children with better opportunities to participate and influence.

Together with cultural, library, sports and environmental services, as well as other operators, we are building a Helsinki that broadens children's horizons, values childhood and encourages encounters between different generations.

Helsinki consist of a compact city centre and the surrounding residential neighbourhoods, whose unique characteristics are part of children's growing environment and a source of experiences. Public transport enables children to become familiar with the entire city. The diverse range of culture and art available belongs to every child in Helsinki.

#### Support for evaluating the operations

##### A few examples of the questions guiding the creation of an action plan

Are all staff members aware of the underpinning values and committed to them?

What has been done to promote local sense of community with guardians and other forms of ECEC?

How have the city's services promoting cultural, sports and environmental awareness been utilised?

How well have you managed to maintain equality between the children and enable their participation while allowing everyone to be who they are?

Do your operating and learning environments respect diversity and promote equality?

## 2.2 The underpinning values forming the basis for ECEC in Helsinki

**E**CEC in Helsinki is based on the values defined in the National Core Curriculum for ECEC and the values of the City of Helsinki. In all its work, the City of Helsinki puts an emphasis on honesty, fairness, equal treatment and openness.

### The inherent value of childhood

The purpose of ECEC is to safeguard and promote children's right to a good and safe childhood. ECEC is based on an idea that childhood has inherent value. Every child is unique and valuable just the way they are. Every child has the right to be heard, seen and listened to as an individual and a member of their community.

### Growing as a human being

ECEC is based on respect for life, a sustainable lifestyle and human rights and on the inviolability of a person's dignity. The staff members support the children's growth as human beings, characterised by striving for truth, kindness and beauty, fairness and peace.

ECEC places value in personal growth, made evident by a person's attitude towards themselves and others, the environment and knowledge, and by their tendency and willingness to do the right thing. Staff members guide the children to act according to the underpinning values and to discuss values and ideals.

ECEC prevents and identifies racist and discriminatory activities and makes interventions. No form of bullying, racism or violence is tolerated from anyone.

### Children's rights

Every child has an equal right to be heard and seen and to express their views. Every child has the right to express themselves, their opinions and thoughts and to be understood through the means of expression that they have available. ECEC supports children's active agency and helps them identify their own resources.

Every child has the right to receive good teaching, care and encouraging feedback. Every child has the right to play, learn through playing, feel joy about the things they have learnt, and form an understanding of themselves, their identity and the world, based on their own background. Every child has the right to participate in and be a member of a group. Every child has the right to receive a wide range

of information, process their emotions, handle conflicts, and experiment with and learn new things.

### Parity, equality and diversity

ECEC promotes the democratic values of Finnish society, including parity, equality and diversity. Every child has the right to develop their skills and make choices, regardless of their gender, heritage, cultural background or any other personal factor.

Gender equality is a basic human right and a fundamental social value. The staff create an atmosphere that respects diversity. ECEC is built on diverse Finnish cultural heritage, which is formed through the interaction between the children, their guardians and the staff members.

Helsinki's bi- and multilingual nature is an asset. The vitality of languages and cultures is supported through various forms of collaboration.

### Diversity amongst families

A professional, open and respectful attitude towards the diversity amongst families and their various languages, cultures, beliefs and religions, traditions and views on how to raise children facilitates fruitful cooperation in education and care. Children's family identity and family ties are supported in a way that allows every child to feel that their family is valuable.

### A healthy and sustainable lifestyle

The purpose of ECEC is to guide children towards healthy lifestyles that promote wellbeing. Children are provided with opportunities to develop their emotional skills and aesthetic thinking.

ECEC identifies and complies with the principles of a sustainable lifestyle, factoring in the social, cultural, financial and ecological aspects. ECEC creates a foundation for ecosocial learning, so that a person can understand that social sustainability and human rights require ecological sustainability.



## 2.3 Arranging ECEC and its various forms

The national objectives of early childhood education and care are provided for by the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018). These objectives steer the creation, implementation and assessment of the National Core Curriculum for ECEC, local curricula and children's individual ECEC plans.

According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the aim of ECEC is:

**1** to promote the overall growth, development, health and well-being of every child, based on each individual's age and development level;

**2** to support the preconditions for learning and promote life-long learning and educational equality;

**3** to conduct diverse pedagogical activities that are based on play, exercise, arts and cultural heritage and to facilitate positive learning experiences;

**4** to guarantee an ECEC environment that is stimulating, promotes learning and is healthy and safe;

**5** to guarantee methods that respect the children and ensure as stable an interaction between the children and the ECEC staff as possible;

**6** to provide all children with equal access to ECEC, to promote parity and gender equality and to enhance the ability to understand and respect shared cultural traditions, as well as everyone's linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds and beliefs;

**7** to identify individual children's ECEC support needs and to arrange appropriate, multi-professional aid when such needs arise;

**8** to improve children's cooperation and interaction skills and skills for working in a peer group, and to guide them towards acting ethically and sustainably, showing respect for others and being members of society;

**9** to ensure that every child has the opportunity to participate and have a say in matters that involve them;

**10** to work together with children and their parents or other guardians, promoting their balanced development and overall wellbeing, and to support the children's parents or other guardians in providing the children with care and education.

In Helsinki, ECEC is provided by daycare centres and family daycare. Open ECEC is arranged at playgrounds and playgroup clubs. Evening and round-the-clock care is provided by specific daycare centres, based on demand. ECEC in Helsinki is available in Finnish and Swedish, and as a bilingual service using both Finnish and Sámi.

Private ECEC services complement the public services. They also provide an added range of services with various pedagogical and language options. The options in private ECEC include daycare centres and family daycare. The city steers and monitors the operations of private service providers in Helsinki. Each service provider is responsible for ensuring that their operations comply with the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the National Core Curriculum for ECEC and Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC. Private daycare centres describe their operating methods in more detail in their annual action plans.

Through case management, guidance and comprehensive communications, guardians can be guaranteed to receive information about all of the ECEC options and what they involve. If necessary, this information can also be distributed in multiple languages.

### Daycare centres

Activities in daycare centres take place in groups. These groups are designed to be pedagogically appropriate. When forming groups, the children's age, sibling relationships and any support needs, as well as regulations pertaining to staff numbers and maximum group size, are factored in. Furthermore, group formation and activity plans enable the children to be active participants in their peer groups and act and learn in a way that is natural to them.

Having a multi-professional staff complement is an asset to daycare centres and facilitates high-quality ECEC.

The overall responsibility for planning a child group's activities, achieving the operational goals and evaluating and developing the operations lies with the ECEC teacher. The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care emphasises the importance of pedagogics, and subsequently the pedagogical responsibility of ECEC teachers and special needs teachers. ECEC teachers, ECEC special needs teachers, child minders and other ECEC staff plan, implement and evaluate their operations together. Roles, responsibilities and duties are appropriately assigned, with everyone's abilities fully utilised.

### Family daycare

Family daycare is a form of ECEC that takes place in small groups. It can be arranged at a family daycare provider's or a child's home, as three-family daycare or as group family care.

This daycare form facilitates children's individual growth and development in small groups and a home-style environment. At family daycare, children learn various everyday skills through play under the instruction of their care provider.

The entire city is a learning environment. Children will first get to know their own neighbourhood and then gradually become familiar with areas further afield. Daily routines can be flexibly adjusted based on the children's input and any special skills that their care provider has. Collaboration with a daycare centre is coordinated and smooth. All children will always have a familiar daycare place.

**Every child has an equal right to be heard and seen and to express their views. ECEC supports children's active agency and helps them identify their own resources.**

The operations are governed by Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC and the children's individual ECEC plans, created together with their guardians. The family daycare management supports the goal-oriented planning and implementation of the family daycare providers' operations.

### Open ECEC

**Playgroup clubs** operate at daycare centres and playgrounds. These clubs are intended for 2–4-year-old children being cared at home, and they operate for 2.5–3 hours on pre-arranged days. At the clubs, children can feel part of a group and have a chance to participate in a variety of pedagogical activities through outdoor recreation, exercise, playing and art. The clubs allow families to form contacts with other families with children in the area.

**Playgrounds and family houses** organise planned, goal-oriented and open ECEC as part of the growth and learning paths of children in Helsinki.

Playgrounds have an active role in collaborating with their area's stakeholders and wide range of cooperation partners. Together, these operators create and implement various activities and events for children and families.

At playgrounds, people of all ages can play and meet others. Instructed activities for families with young children strengthen the interaction and joy of spending time together as a family. For families with babies, playgrounds organise specific activities that continue from where the maternity and child health clinics' family coaching left off. Playground units draw up annual action plans together with their clients. Ideas and needs regarding the daily activities are identified through everyday interaction and time spent together, as well as annual client surveys. The transversal competence goals and learning areas are comprehensively factored into the operations. Playing, exercising, discovering new things, the various forms of expression and the diverse world of languages are all tangible parts of instructed and open ECEC activities and the operating environment of playgrounds, both indoors and out.

## 2.4 The principles of collaboration

Cooperation between various operators supports the arrangement of ECEC in a way that allows for children to receive education and care according to their individual development stage and needs. ECEC providers are responsible for ensuring that the cooperation is successful and follows a plan. They are also responsible for guaranteeing that the collaboration is multi-professional.

### Collaboration with guardians

The aim of the collaboration with guardians is for the guardians and staff members to become committed to promoting the healthy and safe growth, development and learning of children. The cooperation is interactive in nature and requires that the ECEC staff take an active role and show initiative. Varying family backgrounds, children's individual needs and matters related to a guardian's or a parent's role are taken into account in the collaboration.

Discussions on a child's day between their guardian and the staff form the basis for guaranteeing the overall wellbeing of the child. Making the operations and operational content transparent is an important part of the cooperation. Documents created on the ECEC activities are used as support when working together with the guardians. The importance of the collaboration is highlighted when a child starts ECEC or preschool or if they change groups (Chapter 2.8).

The children's guardians can take part in the planning and development of the ECEC activities and goals together with the staff and children. When guardians form networks and work together at various events, it provides a boost to the sense of community and supports the work conducted by the staff.

The ECEC in Helsinki utilises jointly developed models of functional inclusion, which aim to make the guardians part of the ECEC community and build trust between the ECEC professionals and the guardians. Concrete activities that promote this cooperation are described in the ECEC units' action plans.

### Multi-professional cooperation

Multi-professional cooperation aims to ensure that ECEC is provided at the operating units in accordance with the children's needs. ECEC in Helsinki is conducted as multi-professional cooperation between schools, maternity and child health clinics, Child Welfare Services and other social services and healthcare providers.

The extended health check-ups of 4-year-olds who are attending ECEC are performed in cooperation between the families, ECEC and maternity and child health clinics. This is called the Hyve model. It includes a child's ECEC discussion, hearing the child's views and an extended health check-up performed by a nurse and a doctor at a maternity and child health clinic. An alternative to individual check-ups is an operating model that brings a maternity and child health clinic to the daycare centre. It includes a health check-up and an oral health check-up for 3-year-olds and a peer discussion option selected by the guardians.

Collaboration is developed with different forms of ECEC and other public administration, organisations, resident communities and businesses. The aim is to improve children's inclusion as social agents and to further develop and diversify the available ECEC activities.

Helsinki is working to reduce inequality and prevent social exclusion amongst children and young people. Together with the Social Services and Health Care Division, the Education Division is creating operating models to promote the wellbeing of children and families and to provide the required forms of special support needed in ECEC child groups.

The continuum of learning paths from preschool to basic education is guaranteed through close cooperation with the providers of basic education. The curriculum for ECEC creates a foundation for the preschool and basic education curricula.

As agreed, the ECEC staff will work together with Child Welfare Services if required by a family's situation or a child's need. Together they will agree how ECEC can meet the child's needs as part of the overall support provided for their growth.

Child Welfare Services must be contacted in order to assess a child's support needs if problems in the child's everyday life are identified and their parent is willing to receive help from Child Welfare Services. If Child Welfare Services cannot be contacted together with the parents, but the ECEC staff members are concerned about a child and their situation, a child welfare notification must be filed.

## Children are active agents and learning is a holistic process



## 2.5 Views on learning

Children grow, develop and learn through interaction with other people and their surroundings. **The views on learning are based on the idea of children as active agents.** Children are naturally curious and want to learn new things, but also review and repeat things they already know. Learning is a holistic process and happens everywhere. It is a combination of prior knowledge and skills, actions, emotions, sensory input, bodily sensations, language and thinking. Children learn by playing, moving, observing, completing different tasks, expressing themselves and taking part in activities connected to art. Learning takes place when children observe and monitor their environment, mimic what others are doing and interpret these experiences in a peer group.

The ECEC views on learning emphasise the importance of a community and a sense of community, which manifest as help provided for friends and learning in a group. Being included and having equal chances for interacting in a peer group enable children to learn and feel that they belong. The staff must make sure that every child becomes an equal member of a group.

In ECEC, learning is based on the children's prior experiences, their interests and skills. It is important that the new things that children learn have a connection to their develop-

ing abilities and other experiences and cultural background. Children learn best when they feel well and safe. The ECEC in Helsinki pays special attention to the quality of interaction and sensitive, warm encounters with the children.

**Playing** is the main activity form in ECEC. ECEC recognises the inherent value that playing has to children, as well as its functional pedagogical significance. Playing motivates children and brings them joy, while simultaneously allowing them to learn and acquire new information. Playing promotes the overall development and wellbeing of children. Through activities that are natural to children, such as physical activity, exploration and artistic experiences, children can develop their transversal competence (Chapter 2.7) and various learning contents can gain new meanings (Chapter 3.7).

The staff must promote pedagogically supported playing by making observations and responding to the initiatives from the children. The quality of play is kept high, and children's own game ideas are given room. The learning environment is modified together with the children, based on their play-related needs. Observing and documenting games is vital to the development of game ideas with the children. Every child must experience success and feel joy about their actions and being a learner.

## 2.6 Learning environment

The aim of ECEC is to guarantee a learning environment that is stimulating, healthy and safe and promotes playing, exercise and inclusion. A learning environment refers to facilities, places, communities, practices, instruments and equipment that support children's development, learning and interaction.

Learning environments are designed and built together with children. They are attractive to children's natural curiosity and willingness to learn. Learning environments encourage playing, physical activity, exploration and artistic experiences. Children have the chance to study the surrounding world using all of their senses and their whole bodies. Children's ideas, games and things they have created are visible in the learning environments.

Rules and practices negotiated together help create a learning environment with a safe atmosphere where people respect each other and feel solidarity. In a safe atmosphere, showing emotions is allowed and the staff help the children express and control their feelings. Children are encouraged to ask questions, and their questions are answered.

ECEC learning environments include built environments, nature and the hobbies, culture and exercise options offered by the city. These provide experiences, material and a wide range of opportunities to play and explore. They are used for physical activity, nature exploration and learning. The diversity of the environment and the principles of sustainable development are taken into account when planning the activities.

Cooperation with various operators in the area is a natural part of ECEC. Regional activities are important for creating a sense of community. Children are connected to their immediate surroundings through festivities, trips and traditions. Children's culture is boldly made visible in the neighbourhood. Museums, libraries and theatres, as well as public transport, are part of the learning environment in Helsinki.

Together with other operators in the Education Division, ECEC is developing new ways for residents to participate. The operations emphasise community-orientation, networking amongst the operators and participation of guardians in the development of their own neighbourhood and their children's ECEC. The development partners include Helsinki's wide and diverse networks connected to culture, sports, environmental education, youth division and elderly services. The diversity of a learning environment and the local cooperation networks are recorded in the action plans.

### Health, safety and a sustainable lifestyle

ECEC values healthy, safe and physically active lifestyles. ECEC communities take part in a wide range of physical activities, both indoors and outdoors, and avoid staying seated for extended periods of time.

Children's wellbeing is promoted by allowing them to calm down and rest during the day and providing them with a balanced, healthy and sufficient diet. All communities should be able to operate in an environment that avoids rushing and promotes concentration, which is taken into account when developing the operating culture. A clear and goal-oriented, yet flexible daily structure promotes wellbeing.

Having children and adults take part in activities together ensures that the adults pay attention to the children and the children feel more included. The adults respond to the children's initiatives. The staff have a positive attitude and act as role models for functional interaction, which makes the atmosphere in the entire group safer and more accepting of diversity. The growth community decides on the methods with which positive interaction is to be supported and conflicts resolved.

Bullying prevention begins with ECEC. Group bonding and a happy atmosphere of a child group prevent bullying effectively. Every day in ECEC, the staff must make sure that none of the children are left on their own. The phenomenon of bullying amongst young children is explained to guardians, and the necessary approaches to prevent it are agreed on. Effective structures play a major role in the prevention of bullying.

In ECEC, children can play in peace. Declaring playtime peace is a good way of initiating the work conducted together by the children, guardians and staff and strengthens friendships and prevents bullying. The children's own ideas are heard and they themselves can take part in planning and implementing an event's theme and content.

Safe ECEC includes the systematic prevention and monitoring of accidents, health and safety training and looking after the facilities and equipment. ECEC requires safety management that is well-functioning and committed, in addition to which the staff must be familiar with safety matters. A systematic approach and predictability are key to safety (annual assessment of workplace hazards). Children are provided with an opportunity to face acceptable risks in inspiring, challenging and monitored playing and learning environments.

The necessity of adopting an ecologically, socially, culturally and financially sustainable lifestyle is accounted for in all operations. Everyday choices and actions reflect a responsible attitude towards nature and the environment. ECEC promotes shared use, fixing and reuse of equipment and facilities, as well as their use in moderation.



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The learning environments are monitored, evaluated and modified during the operating period.  
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The children take part in assessing and modifying the learning environment.  
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The area's operators in ECEC, culture, sports and environmental matters form an active cooperation network that promotes playing and helps children join communities.  
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The staff must ensure that every child feels comfortable in ECEC and has a sense of belonging in a group.  
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## 2.7 Transversal competence

The pedagogical activities of ECEC are steered by the transversal competence goals and the support provided to learning processes. ECEC forms the foundation for children's transversal competence. Transversal competence is a combination of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and will. Having competence also means the ability to apply knowledge and skills to practice and to act according to a specific situation. The practical application of knowledge and skills depends on the values and attitudes that the children have adopted, as well as their willingness to act.

The need for transversal competence arises from the changes in the surrounding world. Growing as a human being, studying, working and being a citizen now and in the future require competencies that span across and combine different fields of knowledge and skills. The development of transversal competence promotes children's growth as individuals and as members of their community. Skills begin to develop during early childhood, and they continue to do so throughout our lives.

The goals of transversal competence form a continuum from the National Core Curriculum for ECEC to the core curricula of preschool and basic education.

### The five areas of transversal competence

Thinking and learning

Cultural competence, interaction and expression

Self-care and everyday skills

Multi-literacy and ICT competence

Participation and advocacy

#### Thinking and learning

The purpose of ECEC is to support children's skills in thinking and learning. These skills develop through interaction with other people and the environment and form a basis for the development of other skills and lifelong learning. Acquiring and analysing information and discovering new things requires creative and critical thinking, and the foundation for this is formed during ECEC.

Children's thinking and learning develop through a diverse range of meaningful experiences. There must be ample space for wonderment, discovery and the feeling of joy from learning. While playing, children can use their imagination and creativity, try out new ideas together and explore their world. Children's abilities to analyse, name and describe their surroundings and associated phenomena are supported in a manner appropriate for their age and development stage. Children are encouraged to ask questions and to question things. Adults rejoice with them over their successes and help them learn to encourage others.

Children are encouraged to persevere, not give up if they fail and find solutions to problems. At the same time, they will also learn to handle disappointment.

Sufficient daily physical activity supports children's thinking and learning. Documenting the activities pedagogically and discussing them together helps children become more aware of their learning and identify their own strengths. This boosts their trust in their own abilities.

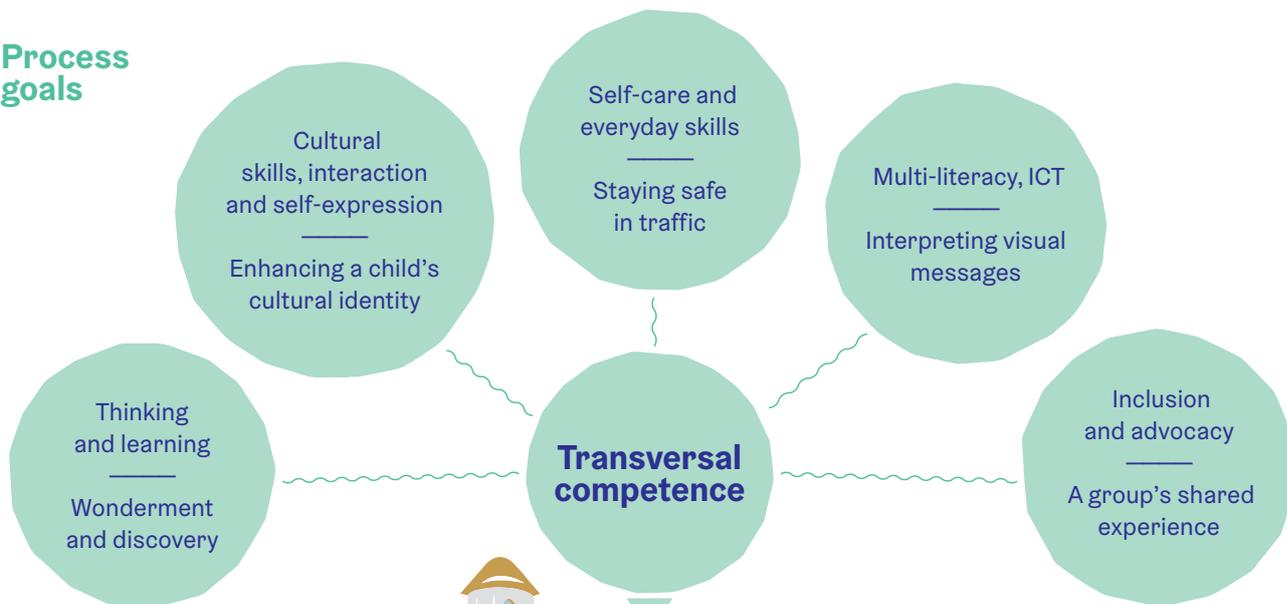
#### Cultural competence, interaction and expression

Children grow up in a world of different cultures, languages and belief systems. This highlights the importance of social, cultural and interaction skills. The skills include the ability to listen, identify and understand different views and to analyse personal values and attitudes. Smooth interaction between people with different cultural and religious backgrounds requires a person to understand and respect their own cultural and religious background and that of others.

The purpose of ECEC is to promote the children's cultural skills, as well as their skills in interaction and self-expression. The children are encouraged to learn about other people, languages and cultures. Experiences, knowledge and skills gained during ECEC regarding cultural heritage help the children adopt, use and change their culture. The children receive support in building their cultural identities and forming a positive relationship with their diverse surroundings. The children learn about different cultures and form their cultural identities through stories, games, festive traditions and culinary customs from around the world. Abilities related to self-expression,

# An example of planning a daytrip and setting an objective pedagogically

## Process goals



## Substantive goals





interaction and understanding others are important to a person's identity, functioning and wellbeing. Activities that are based on cooperation provide opportunities to practise interaction and self-expression skills in different situations and with different people. The children are guided towards kindness and good manners. The children learn about stepping into other people's shoes, viewing things from various angles and resolving conflicts constructively. This enhances their social skills.

The staff function as role models for the children when it comes to encountering different people, languages, cultures and beliefs positively. The staff promote a safe and open atmosphere and treat the children and their families with respect. Helsinki provides comprehensive information about various cultures and cooperation. International collaboration can also be done through digital means.

### Self-care and everyday skills

The purpose of ECEC is to enhance the children's skills concerning wellbeing and safety and to steer them towards making choices in accordance with a sustainable lifestyle. ECEC boosts the children's positive attitudes towards the future.

It also supports the gradual increasing of their independence. The children are assisted and encouraged to ask for help when they need it. Together with adults, the children learn various skills, such as dressing themselves, having meals, and looking after personal hygiene and belongings. The children are instructed to act responsibly and safely in the ECEC learning environments, nearby natural environments and in traffic. Together with adults, the children talk about factors that promote their overall wellbeing, such as rest, nutrition, exercise and mental wellbeing. The children are helped to express and self-regulate their emotions. The children's emotional skills will improve when they are helped to identify, name and be aware of their feelings. Furthermore, they are instructed to respect and protect their own body and the bodies of others.

ECEC welcomes children's questions about the human body and sexuality. Every child's healthy body image is supported through an accepting and safe attitude, so that they are able to value their body and respect the privacy of other people's bodies. (The Family Federation of Finland: Kehotunnekasvatus, in Finnish).

Helsinki wants to promote the physical activity and wellbeing of its residents of all ages. The learning and operating environment is used for a wide range of activity options for children, taking place indoors, outdoors and in nature. At the same time, situations that require people to remain seated for extended periods of time are avoided. The staff are familiar with the document Varhaisvuosien fyysisen aktiivisuuden suositukset (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016) and develop their activities further regularly in a way that allows children to enjoy a variety of physical activity forms daily.

### Multi-literacy and ICT competence

Multi-literacy refers to the skills of interpreting and creating various types of messages. It includes different forms of literacy, such as visual literacy, numerical literacy, media literacy and conventional literacy. Multi-literacy is closely connected to the skills of thinking and learning. Children are encouraged to analyse, use and create messages within different environments, including digital ones. ICT competence refers to the skill of using digital devices and services as support for learning, self-expression, interaction and social influence.

Adults help the children consider the role of ICT in their daily lives and learn about digital devices, applications and games. The staff instruct the children on the comprehensive use of ICT. In ECEC, the children practise using digital devices and services as learning tools together with the staff. Studying and comparing information from different sources and discussing observations enhances the children's information retrieval skills and critical thinking. Children's own interests are utilised when practising information retrieval.

**Helsinki promotes the physical activity and wellbeing of its residents of all ages. The learning and operating environment is used for a wide range of activity options for children, taking place indoors, outdoors and in nature.**

## Learning multi-literacy

Be aware of your role as a (media) educator and hone your skills.

Utilise networks, shared knowledge, and diverse learning environments and skills in your own work as well!

Together with the children, verbalise and make visible what they have experienced and learnt.

Take advantage of the interests, skills and experiences of the children in your group.

Take an interest in the media culture of the children in your group.

Try out different methods and equipment boldly and creatively.

Identify opportunities provided by media culture to ECEC; do not forget the rules.



Children's interests, playing and experiences connected to media, games and apps are used when planning activities. Adults discuss the safety factors related to games, such as age limits and online codes of conduct, with the children. Digital games and applications provide the children with an opportunity to practise their problem solving skills through interaction with other children. The games selected must be pedagogically and age appropriate.

The children are encouraged to produce their own digital material by programming, recording, videoing or drawing, for example. Digital equipment is used to support creativity and as means of self-expression. The chance to experiment and produce content together with other children promotes children's skills in creative thinking, collaboration and literacy.

Digital documentation is utilised in games, exploration and physical activity, artistic experience and content production. Children can take part in the digital documentation by photographing or filming games or events that are meaningful to them, for example. The documented material is studied together, and it can also be shown to the guardians.

Helsinki is innovatively developing new ways of using digital devices and services and further developing digital pedagogics together with the ECEC staff. Joint experimentation and assessment creates pedagogics that support those skills that the children will need in the future, including digital ones.

The use of ICT equipment as learning support is part of the children's study paths from ECEC to the upper secondary level. All children are provided with an opportunity to become familiar with digital devices and services in a safe environment together with the ECEC staff. Cooperation partners' equipment and skills are also utilised when practising multi-literacy and ICT skills.

### Participation and advocacy

Active and responsible participation and advocacy create a basis for a democratic and sustainable future. This requires that individuals have the skills and willingness to take part in their community's activities and that they believe they can have an influence. Children's rights include being heard and having a say in matters that affect their lives. ECEC respects these key principles of democracy. The purpose of ECEC is to support the children's developing skills of participation and advocacy and to encourage them to take initiative.

Treating children with respect, listening to their views and responding to their ideas strengthens their participation and advocacy skills. The children and staff plan, implement and assess the activities together. At the same time, the children learn interaction skills and the meaning of shared rules, agreements and trust. The staff ensure that every child has the chance to take part and have a say. This will allow the children to form an understanding of themselves, build self-confidence and acquire the social skills needed in a community.

## In Helsinki, the adults' actions are based on the following cornerstones of inclusion

1

The first cornerstone is the creation of suitable conditions and atmosphere for inclusion.

2

The second one is the ability to collect information about the children in various ways and gain access to their world.

3

The third cornerstone is the adults' ability to utilise the information received from children as a foundation for shared activities.

4

The fourth one is the adults' willingness to develop approaches that support inclusion as part of their work.

## 2.8 Children's individual ECEC plans

According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, every child in ECEC has the right to receive education and care that is systematic and goal-oriented. In order to achieve this, an individual ECEC plan is created for every child in a daycare centre or family daycare together with the child and their guardians. This plan includes goals that are set together and promote the systematic care and education provided for the child.

A child's ECEC teacher is responsible for creating and evaluating the child's individual ECEC plan. This is a process and involves several steps. In addition to a discussion and the writing process, the creation of a plan includes an assessment and observation of the child's strengths, needs and views, as well as an evaluation of the child's previous ECEC plan. All staff members working with the children take part in the process, and the creation, observations, documentation and evaluation are conducted multi-professionally.

The plan is based on the child's strengths and interests, as well as on their best interest and needs. The pedagogical goals and measures, and any support measures and their implementation, are recorded in the plan (Chapter 4). The linguistic and cultural background and linguistic skills and abilities of a child who speaks a foreign language or is bilingual are factored in when creating their individual plan. The plan will describe how the child's linguistic identity in mother tongue and in Finnish-language is supported based on their abilities and needs (Chapter 3.5 The diverse world of languages). The child's cultural and religious background will also be considered when creating the plan. If necessary, a professional interpreter will be used with the guardians in order to ensure mutual understanding.

The pedagogical goals and measures, which are listed in a child's individual ECEC plan and based on the child's strengths and needs, form the foundation for the planning and implementation of the child group's operation. All staff members working with the child play an important role in promoting the child's wellbeing, implementing goal-oriented activities and meeting with and talking to the guardians daily.

The child's ECEC plan is evaluated and supplemented with the child and their guardians at least once a year and whenever the child's needs require. Together with the child, the staff gather documents and creations that are important to the child as part of their ECEC plan assessment and portfolio.

The ECEC unit's supervisor ensures that the education and care team has suitable conditions to plan, implement and assess their operations. In family daycare, the plans are created by the daycare provider, instructed by their supervisor.

**Children's individual ECEC plans are confidential.** According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, people responsible for a child's early childhood education and care, and those taking part in assessing a child's support needs, support measures or their implementation, have the right, regardless of the obligation of secrecy, to receive from and disclose to one another and an ECEC organiser and provider information that is vital for arranging and providing early childhood education and care and assessing support needs. The aim of the information exchange is to guarantee that children receive ECEC that best serves their interests.

—National Core Curriculum for ECEC 2018

### Parents were asked for their thoughts about their children entering ECEC or a new group

When a child enters ECEC or moves from one group or ECEC form to another, their needs must be taken into account:

Sufficient time must be allowed for making the introductions. ECEC staff are sensitive to the needs of those involved and ensure smooth communication with both the children and their guardians.

Families are informed well in advance about the upcoming change, the group's activities and the practical aspects of the entry phase. The staff take an active role, and the child is escorted to their new group. Friendships and inclusion are ensured.

When a child transfers from ECEC to school, staff must make sure that some of their friends are placed in the same class and information passed on to the new teacher. A safe continuum is created, safeguarding a child's individual needs.

# Instructions for creating an individual ECEC plan

**A child's ECEC discussion**

**Multi-professional cooperation**

**An individual plan**

**Preparation**

Staff observations

Guardian's observations

Hearing out the child's wishes

**Creating a plan**

Assessing the child's previous ECEC plan and planning a new one

The child's strengths, interests and needs

Operational goals and measures to achieve these goals

Implemented through the group's activities



- ▶ Setting more detailed goals
- ▶\* Creating a plan

**Start of ECEC**

Familiarisation

**Pedagogical documentation of the activities**

Observation, planning, evaluation and development

**Preschool education**





# 3

## Developing the operating culture and the pedagogics of play

### 3.1 Developing the operating culture

In Helsinki, the operating culture is recognised as one of the key quality factors in early childhood education and care. The management is responsible for creating suitable conditions for the development and assessment of the operating culture and being aware of the factors that have an impact on its formation.

An operating culture is a historically and culturally formed way of operating, created through the interaction within a community. An operating culture is affected by conscious, subconscious and occasionally even unintended factors. All the members of a community have an effect on their operating culture, which in turn affects all the members, regardless of whether its significance is recognised or not.

#### The ECEC operating culture forms a whole, consisting of:

values and principles

interpretation of the norms and goals that steer the work

learning environments and work methods

cooperation in its various forms  
interaction and atmosphere

staff members' skills, professional approach and willingness to develop the operations further

management structures and practices

the organisation, planning, implementation and evaluation of the operations

Children's best interests take priority when planning, arranging and developing ECEC. These best interests are considered both in terms of individuals and child groups, according to each case and situation. The work methods are pedagogically justified and support the children's development and learning.

It is important for the staff to be aware that their way of behaving and interacting serves as a model for the children. A pedagogical operating culture creates suitable conditions for the children's development, learning, inclusion, safety, wellbeing and sustainable lifestyle.

The ECEC operating model includes the staff's mutual cooperation and interaction with the guardians and the surrounding environment. The members of the community respect one another and value collaboration. The community encourages the children to interact well with others and act as members of their group. The staff support the formation of peer relationships between the children and safeguards their friendships. A safe community intervenes in conflicts and promotes the learning of constructive means to resolve and prevent disagreements.

The information gained through documentation and observation, as well as the prevailing values and interaction, views on learning, significance and success of playing and the dimensions of the learning environments, are included in the discussions. The children and their guardians take part in developing and evaluating the operating culture.

**The staff support the formation of peer relationships between the children and safeguards their friendships. A safe community intervenes in conflicts and promotes the learning of constructive means to resolve and prevent disagreements.**

Being committed to the shared goals is essential for achieving the underpinning values and views on learning. The staff are involved in an ongoing discussion connected to the identification, development and evaluation of the operating culture. The children and their guardians take part in developing and evaluating the operating culture.

Management has a significant effect on the operating culture. ECEC management is based on the curriculum for ECEC, a unit's action plan and a workplace community that is committed to implementing the measures described in the plan together. The pedagogical activities are developed, implemented and evaluated together by the workplace community, the children and their guardians. Interaction between the manager and the workplace community, approaches that have been agreed on together, developmental assessment and knowledge management help to do this successfully.

### **A learning community**

In ECEC, people act as a community, in which the children and the staff learn together and from each other. The children and the staff are encouraged to share their thoughts and try out new approaches boldly. A community that is constantly assessing and developing its operations is one that challenges itself, identifies its strengths and takes advantage of them.

The staff are encouraged to perform self-assessments, share information and knowledge and, simultaneously, develop professionally. Discussing the goals and tasks agreed on together, performing regular self-assessments and utilising the information gained through the assessments and research form the basis for the work. In addition to this, feedback received from guardians and other partners promotes learning in the community.

The goal is for the shared philosophy and operational objectives to be reflected in the practical approaches and for us to trust in each other's skills. The shared practices are made visible and regularly monitored and evaluated.

## 3.2 The pedagogics of play

Playing is the underpinning theme in Helsinki's curriculum for early childhood education and care. In ECEC, children get to play every day. An operating culture that encourages children to play recognises its significance to children's wellbeing and learning. The content of the various transversal competence and learning areas is reflected in the pedagogics of play. Children mimic their growing environment and experiences in their games. Playing is the main channel with which children express their emotions and an important source of wellbeing.

The children and staff are able to share the joy of playing and doing things together. The community encourages everyone to be resourceful, use their imagination, express themselves and be creative. Playing is allowed to be seen and heard. Games, experiments and experiences initiated by children are given space and time, and peaceful playtime is ensured. The operations create suitable conditions for long-lasting play.

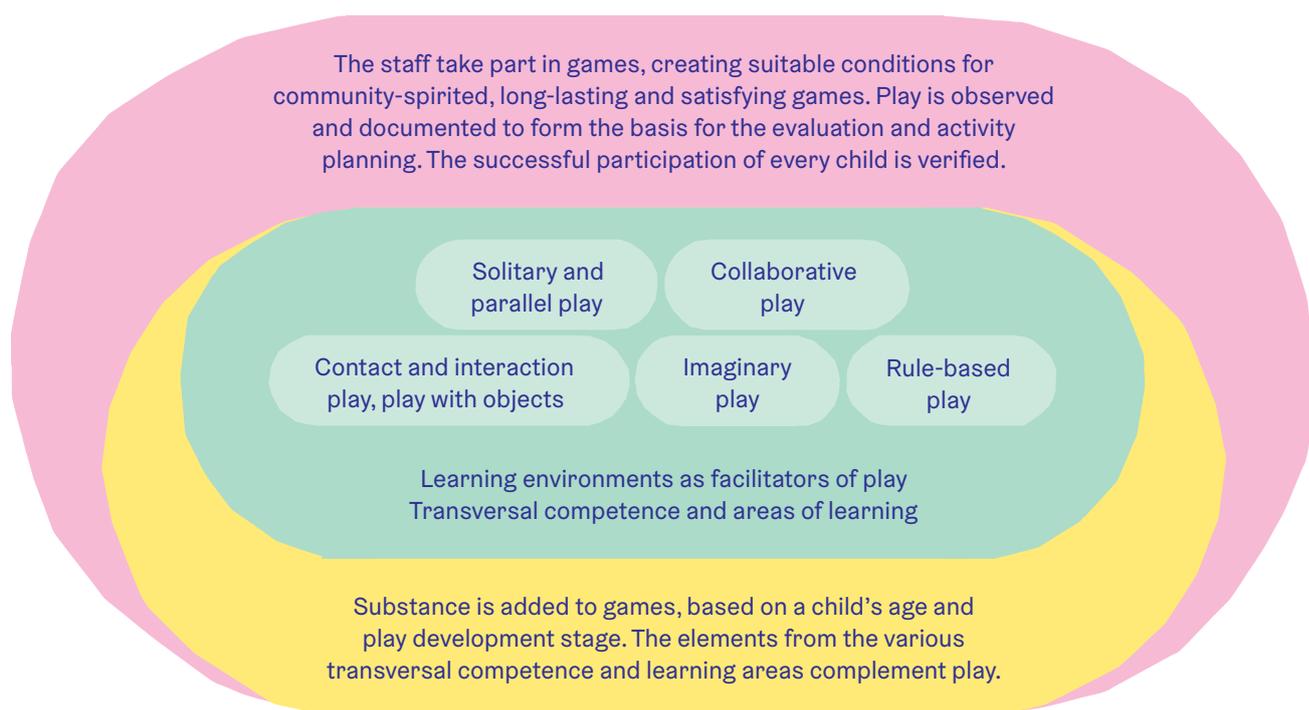
Playing allows children to interact with one another. The staff help children join in games and ensure that all the children are able to be active participants in their peer groups.

The staff are aware of and can identify the developmental stages of play. The staff are able to support and add sub-

stance to playing with elements from the various transversal competence and learning areas, factoring in the specifics of each developmental stage. These stages of play are overlapping, and every child goes through them at their own pace.

Initially, playing is about a contact and interaction between an adult and a child. After this, the child begins to show interest towards the surrounding world, and playing is targeted at objects and their purposes. During these early stages of play, playing is usually solitary or parallel. Solitary and parallel play gradually change into collaborative play, allowing children to develop interaction and different roles within a group. Play themes have their sources in the children's prior experiences. Through role play, the forms of playing develop further towards imaginary play, which is expressive and characterised by storylines, as well as games and collaborative play that require negotiations about the rules.

Staff members taking part in the playing are aware of the content and themes of children's games. Observing the playing provides valuable information about the growth, development and learning of children. Through play, it is possible to understand the world and interests of children. The play themes form a foundation for planning the shared activities.



## Inclusion, parity and equality

**H**elsinki's diverse demographics, cultural attractions and services improve inclusion, parity and equality amongst children. Helsinki is systematically developing operating models to prevent disparity and the social exclusion of children and young people.

The ideas, views and opinions of children, staff members and guardians are listened to and welcomed. This requires approaches and structures promoting inclusion to be consciously developed. Children's understanding of their community, rights, responsibilities and the consequences of their choices develop through participation. Their sense of inclusion is strengthened by a feeling of being heard and seen. Inclusion is enhanced when children and their guardians take part in planning, implementing and evaluating the activities.

Every staff member is an important part of the education community. All of the community's members are

treated equally. Being equal does not mean the same thing as being similar.

In order to develop the operating culture, it is important that the attitudes towards parity and equality are discussed in the workplace community. Furthermore, the way in which attitudes towards language, ethnicity, beliefs, disability, gender and its different forms show in speech, gestures, actions and approaches should be discussed. We are aware that ways of interacting and speaking and behaviour based on stereotypical assumptions is passed on to children.

In gender-aware ECEC, children are encouraged to make decisions without any roles and expectations tied to a specific gender. Positive and encouraging interaction supports the development of a child's identity and self-esteem.

The staff can identify any elements in children's interaction that promote disparity and will intervene gently and systematically.



## 3.4 Cultural diversity and language awareness

**E**CEC is part of a culturally changing and diverse society. Cultural diversity is seen as an asset. The community recognises that retaining your language, culture, religion and beliefs is part of basic human rights. ECEC values and utilises Finnish cultural heritage and the country's languages, as well as the various cultures, languages and beliefs within the community and its surroundings. This requires staff to possess knowledge of other cultures and belief systems and have the skills to view things from different angles and see things from other people's perspectives. Different ways of thinking and behaving are discussed constructively and new ways of working together are created.

The staff understand that language is key to children's development and learning, interaction and collaboration, identity construction and participation in society. Making multilingualism visible supports children's development in a culturally diverse world. The staff pay attention to the way they use language, as they act as a linguistic model for the children. The children are encouraged to use language in a diverse way.

The children's linguistic abilities are taken into account and they will be given time and opportunities to use language in different contexts. Every child's own mother tongue is respected and its use is enabled in addition to learning Finnish or Swedish. The Finnish as a second language (S2) teachers in ECEC provide support in activities that involve language and culture awareness and in the development of the Finnish-language skills of children who speak a foreign language as their first language or who are bilingual.

Every child's chance of being understood and understanding what is happening around them is ensured in order to guarantee their inclusion.

In ECEC in Helsinki, children are made aware of the city's diversity. Learning environments that strengthen the similarities between cultures and enhance a positive atmosphere are created together. The ECEC staff talk openly and constructively about Finnish cultural heritage, more broadly about the significance of cultural diversity and about what it means to be a resident of Helsinki.

ECEC creates an atmosphere of interaction that supports the children's participation and self-expression and values the individuality and family culture of every child. Similarities and differences are discussed in positive ways. The guardians are used as experts of their own cultures in the child groups' activities.

## 3.5 The areas of learning

The areas of learning describe the main goals and content of the pedagogical activities in ECEC. They guide the staff when planning and implementing diverse and integrative pedagogical activities together with the children. Children have the right to gain a wide range of experiences from different areas of learning. These areas are not separate or detached, and instead their themes are combined together and applied to practice according to the children's interests and abilities. The areas of learning have been divided into five groups, based on the core curriculum for preschool education:

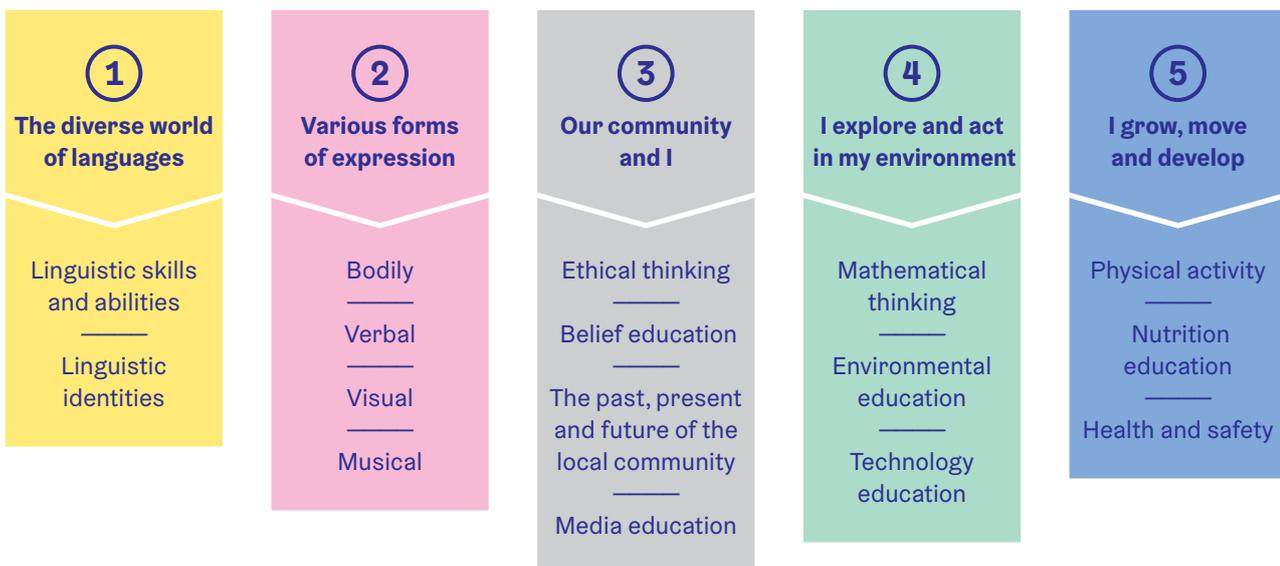
- 1 The diverse world of languages
- 2 Various forms of expression
- 3 Our community and I
- 4 I explore and act in my environment
- 5 I grow, move and develop

Integrative pedagogical activities facilitate phenomenon-based learning, and the comprehensive observation and study of different subjects and phenomena. The children's interests and questions form the basis for the activities.

The children's interests and questions form the basis for the activities.

The topics can originate in play, stories, trips or spontaneous interaction between the children or between them and the staff, to name a few sources. The way in which the goals of the learning areas are approached varies depending on the chosen topics, situations and the children's learning pace. The staff are responsible for ensuring that the pedagogical activities promote the development and learning of children of various ages.

The areas of learning are not separate or detached, and instead their themes are combined together and applied to practice according to the children's interests and abilities.





## ① The diverse world of languages

The purpose of ECEC is to strengthen a child's linguistic skills and abilities and the development of their linguistic identity. ECEC boosts the children's curiosity and interest in languages, texts and cultures. In ECEC, language and languages are simultaneously something that the children are learning about and an instrument for interaction, self-expression, participation, advocacy and acquisition of information. The children receive encouraging and systematic feedback on their language and interaction skills. Their linguistic development is supported by a diverse ECEC language environment and close cooperation with the guardians.

When it comes to learning a language, it is important to understand that children of similar ages may be at different stages of language development. The staff in ECEC understand that a child may be learning several languages at the same time. In such cases, the development and use of their linguistic skills may be fragmented. Furthermore, the staff understand that children have linguistically varying growth environments. The ways of using languages and interacting vary between families, in addition to which some families may be speaking several languages. When providing support for linguistic development, the age of the child, as well as the differences in the individual linguistic development stages and growing environments, are taken into account.

In ECEC provided in Helsinki, it is considered important that all children's Finnish-language skills are developed and that every child is able to learn new things through language. The most important skills for linguistic development include skills in interacting and understanding, speaking and using a language, and these are systematically developed during ECEC. In addition to this, the children's linguistic memory, vocabulary and language awareness are trained in ECEC.

In order to develop their interaction skills, it is important that children feel they are heard during interaction and that their verbal and nonverbal initiatives are responded to.

Verbalising activities, using precise and descriptive language and providing diverse linguistic models develop children's skills in understanding and using a language. If necessary, images and signing can be used to explain activities and improve language skills.

Language skills are developed by practising storytelling, giving explanations and taking turns during conversations.

Immersion, use of humour, becoming familiar with different types of texts and learning good manners enhance children's language skills. Unrushed talking, reading, storytelling, language play, singing games, poems and naming of things support the development of the vocabulary and linguistic memory, in particular.

The children are read linguistically colourful and varied texts and they learn about a wide range of children's literature. The children are told stories and they are encouraged to think of their own ones. The children's stories, poems and other verbal messages are documented.

Helsinki works together with the area's libraries, theatres and other cultural operators and associations that provide different ways of learning about languages, cultures and art. The systematic development of language awareness and the related activities are a daily part of the operations.

### Language and culture awareness in Helsinki

In Helsinki, ECEC is mainly provided in Finnish and Swedish, but other languages may also be used. The children's languages, cultures and beliefs are a visible and valuable part of the ECEC routines, and the children are provided with opportunities to learn about different languages. The aim is for them to learn Finnish and a number of other languages.

In ECEC, every child has the right to use their mother tongue, and using multiple languages simultaneously is considered natural and valuable. Furthermore, the staff understand that the development of a child's own mother tongue(s) functions as a basis for learning Finnish and other languages.

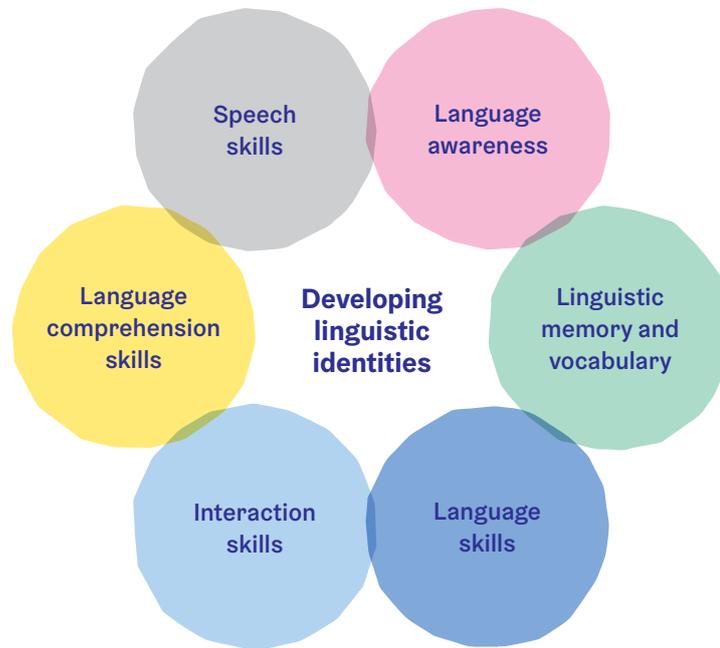
Guardians have primary responsibility for the development of a child's mother tongue(s). The staff and guardians discuss the family's language environment, language choices, the formation of multilingual and -cultural identities, and the stages and significance of the mother tongue(s) development. In order to support a child's linguistic skills, a plan is created with the guardians as part of the child's individual ECEC plan, if necessary.

ECEC provides plenty of opportunities to use and learn languages in various contexts and learning environments. In addition to this, the children learn and acquire language skills as part of their everyday lives, provided that the staff are language aware.

In language aware ECEC, the staff verbalise their actions, use precise and descriptive language, read to the children, provide examples of new vocabulary and linguistic structures and support the development of the children's skills in using a language through interaction.

The language paths that start in ECEC are planned together with the preschool and basic education staff in order to guarantee continued language learning after ECEC.

## The diverse world of languages, areas



### Bilingual early childhood education and care

The aim of bilingual ECEC is to take advantage of the children's receptiveness during the early language development stage by providing them with more diverse language instruction than usual. In bilingual ECEC, children are given opportunities to acquire languages and use them functionally and playfully. This also forms a foundation for the life-long learning of languages. The aim is for a multilingual environment to pique the children's linguistic curiosity and eagerness to experiment.

### Language immersion

Helsinki offers continuous Swedish-language immersion from ECEC to the end of basic education. The programme's aim is for the children to acquire strong language skills in both Finnish and Swedish. In Helsinki, language immersion begins at age 3–6, and every child who has undergone it is given a place in a preschool and basic education language immersion group.

At the start of the language immersion programme, the children get plenty of exposure to Swedish and ECEC is provided entirely in that language. Acquiring and learning Swedish is supported according to the principles of language immersion pedagogics, and the staff speak Swedish to the children. The children are encouraged to use Swedish, and plenty of opportunities to practise its use are provided. However, the children may use Finnish whenever they want.

Working together with the guardians is important in language immersion to get the children to commit to the programme. The guardians are instructed to use Finnish at

home as often and as diversely as possible so that the children's Finnish-language skills will also continue to develop. The staff also explain to the guardians that the language immersion will continue from ECEC to preschool and all the way until the end of the 9th grade.

### Extensive bilingual ECEC

In extensive bilingual ECEC, no less than one quarter of the activities are conducted in a language other than Finnish. A group may have children who speak that language as their mother tongue, but also children whose mother tongue is neither one of the languages used in the group. In such cases, the staff and guardians will decide whether bilingual ECEC will appropriately support the child's linguistic development.

Bilingual ECEC activities are planned in a way that allows for both languages to be used systematically and according to a plan. The children's linguistic development is supported by accounting for their individual needs. The aim is that the children's skills in using both languages will gradually develop through the linguistic models provided by the staff and the active participation of the children. The children are encouraged to use both of the ECEC languages.

### Language-enriched ECEC

Language-enriched ECEC refers to ECEC in which no more than one quarter of the activities are planned to take place and regularly occur in a language other than Finnish. The aim of language-enriched ECEC is to pique the children's interest and make them feel positive about languages and learning them.



## ② Various forms of expression

The purpose of ECEC is to support the development of children's musical, visual, verbal and bodily expression in a goal-oriented way, and to familiarise them with various art forms and cultural heritage. Children express themselves in a holistic manner and creatively combine different means of expression. These forms of expression are also included in their play in various ways.

In Helsinki, children are provided with extensive and diverse education on expression and culture together with culture and leisure sector operators and artistic organisations.

Utilising the special skills of the ECEC staff, children and partners adds value to art education. Art education includes both spontaneous and planned activities. The processes of self-expression and learning are characterised by experimentation, exploration, practising different stages of creating things and documenting the stages. Every child's individual expression is supported and sufficient time and space is given to their shared creative processes.

Artistic experiences and expression promote children's learning abilities, social skills, positive self-image, and ability to understand and analyse the surrounding world.

The skills of thinking and learning will develop as children study, interpret and create meanings by practising different forms of expression. The ability to imagine and create mental images is also key to the development of a child's ethical thinking.

Learning about cultural heritage, art and the various forms of expression also strengthen the children's skills in multi-literacy, participation and advocacy.

The purpose of ECEC is to support the development of children's musical, visual, verbal and bodily expression are supported, and they are familiarized with various art forms and cultural heritage.

The children learn about the different forms of expression by using various senses and utilising a variety of workshops, learning environments and local cultural attractions. It is important for the learning environments to be aesthetic and inspiring, with a wide range of equipment, materials and instruction available, when learning about different forms of expression. Museums and galleries are also important places for the children enrolled in ECEC to experience art, express themselves, play and have playful encounters.

The aim of **musical expression** in ECEC is to provide the children with musical experiences and enhance their interest in and relationship with music. The children are guided towards gaining experiences by actively listening and making observations about the surrounding soundscape. They experience music through musical instruments, songs, dance, games and listening. Playing music together, experiencing a shared beat and a tempo, and practising listening and taking turns support the development of language skills and other interaction skills extensively. The children gain experiences from moving to music, body instruments and a basic beat. Their experience of art is expanded through successes and playing.

The aim of **visual expression** is to develop the children's relationship with visual arts, other visual culture and cultural heritage. The children get to enjoy creating images and gain aesthetic experiences from art. They learn about colours, shapes, materials, visual art techniques and the endless opportunities provided by creativity. Methods that improve the fine motor skills are practised through experiences and successes.

Planning skills, creative problem solving and knowledge about structures, materials and techniques are practised by doing crafts, such as sculpting, building, sewing and woodwork.

The children are encouraged to express themselves **verbally and bodily**, for example through theatre, dance and play. The aim is for the exercises and games to provide them with a range of opportunities to gain experiences, express themselves and communicate both verbally and bodily. Things that the children have imagined, experienced or seen are worked on together.

### 3 Our community and I

A child's world expands when they start attending ECEC outside of their home. In addition to the traditions, customs, values and beliefs at home, the children come into contact with other ways of thinking and behaving.

The purpose of ECEC is to develop the children's abilities in understanding the diversity of their local community and practise being one of its members. This is done by focusing on the themes of ethical thinking; beliefs; the local community's past, present and future; and media. Stories, music, visual art, play, theatre, various types of media content, visitors, visits and local events can be used as part of the activities. The learning area Our community and I supports the children's transversal competence in connection to culture, interaction, self-expression, thinking and learning, in particular (Chapter 2.7).

The development of ethical thinking is supported by discussing questions that the children have regarding ethics and beliefs. The children are allowed to ask questions and their questions are responded to in a natural way, recognising the questions' value.

In ECEC belief education, the children mainly learn about the religions and other beliefs present in their own group. Not being religious is also discussed alongside the beliefs. The aim is to promote mutual respect and understanding when it comes to different belief systems, and to support the development of the children's identities in terms of their culture and beliefs.

**By discussing the past, present and future of the local community, the children's interests are steered towards history and building a positive future.**

In Helsinki, the staff and guardians discuss the families' cultures and beliefs and in which way and to what extent these can be taken into account in a child group's activities. The cultural and belief-related backgrounds of families are considered an asset to the children's growth, development and learning.

The belief education in ECEC is not intended to encourage the children to commit to a specific belief system or to guide them according to the rules of any religion or belief. The staff explain to the guardians the ways in which the children will learn about the traditions, customs and architecture related to the religions and beliefs represented in their group as part of the group's activities.

By discussing the past, present and future of the local community, the children's interests are steered towards history and building a positive future.

The children are provided with opportunities to immerse themselves in past events and scenes. Important information sources include the children and their personal histories, the members of the local community, objects and the environments. Furthermore, the knowledge of the children's guardians about their own cultural heritages can be utilised. The children can learn about the past through games and music from their grandparents' times, for example. The Lastentarhamuseo museum, Helsinki City Museum and the National Museum of Finland are amongst our important pedagogical partners.

In addition to the past and present, it is important to think about the future as well and how we can make it positive. The children and staff can build imaginary future worlds or think about the future by focusing on potential jobs and opportunities yet to have taken form that the children are interested in, to name a few options.

In ECEC, the purpose of media education is to improve the children's chances of being active agents and expressing themselves within their community. Themes featured in media and the emotions and thoughts associated with them are discussed with the children from various angles. Media content creation and the related responsibility are practised in a diverse media environment using a wide range of tools.



## ④ I explore and act in my environment

The aim in the City of Helsinki is to form a continuous STEAM path (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) from ECEC to upper secondary level. ECEC provides children with diverse support in developing their mathematical thinking and relationship with technology, nature and the environment. The children's skills in analysing, thinking and applying technology are enhanced through exploration and experimentation. The children are encouraged to ask questions, find answers to these questions and draw conclusions together.

### Mathematical thinking

The mathematical perspective of ECEC supports the children's developing abilities to observe, analyse and understand their surroundings and causal relationships.

The children are encouraged to pay attention to shapes, numbers and changes occurring in daily life. They are also encouraged to observe, consider and describe their findings in different ways, including verbally, visually, bodily or by using some equipment.

The children are given opportunities to classify, compare and arrange things and objects and to discover patterns and changes. Children of all ages are helped to understand the concept of numbers. They are guided towards noticing numbers while playing. As the children grow, the concept is expanded to include the relationships between numbers by measuring things, for example. Spatial thinking and the concepts of mutual relations and locations are practised with games involving movement, by drawing pictures and by using various pieces of equipment. Play, toys and games introduce the children to causal relationships and the principles of programming. The children are encouraged to study objects and their geometric shapes by building, crafting and sculpting things. The concept of time is studied by observing daily and seasonal changes.

### Environmental education

The development of the children's relationship with nature and the environment is supported from three angles: learning in the environment, learning about it and taking action for the environment.

Nearby natural areas and the city's built environment are actively used as objects of learning and as learning and playing environments. Children will find it interesting to use different senses to make observations about natural phenomena and the changing seasons and will learn to enjoy nature and take responsibility for its wellbeing.

The emotional and aesthetic relationship with nature becomes stronger when children become familiar with the urban environment and its stories. The children learn about the daily environment and its substances and materials by using all of their senses.

ECEC promotes sustainable development by focusing on themes such as saving energy, reducing and sorting waste and the environmental impact of consumerism and transport.

### Technology education

The children's relationship with technology is developed when they learn how common technological devices and systems, such as home appliances, ICT and vehicles, work. In order to improve their skills in applying technology to practice, children are encouraged to come up with creative solutions and implement their ideas by using different materials and equipment to build, craft or sculpt objects or to use other means of self-expression. Programmable equipment provides opportunities for children to develop their mathematical thinking and practise their technological skills.

**In order to improve their skills in applying technology to practice, children are encouraged to come up with creative solutions and implement their ideas by using different materials and equipment to build, craft or sculpt objects or to use other means of self-expression.**

## ⑤ I grow, move and develop

The learning area of I grow, move and develop includes goals pertaining to physical activity, nutrition education, health and safety. The purpose of ECEC is to form a foundation for a lifestyle that values children's health and wellbeing and promotes physical activity together with the guardians. This area of learning supports the transversal competence that relates to self-care and everyday skills, in particular.

Helsinki's principle is that every child should acquire basic exercise skills and adopt physical activity routines. Practising physical activities and motor skills are a natural and regular part of the children's ECEC day, alongside healthy and sufficient nutrition.

The purpose of ECEC is to improve the children's body awareness and control, as well as basic motor skills, including balance, movement and equipment handling skills. Diverse physical activity inspires the children to experience the joy of moving, both indoors and out, in all seasons, with and without instruction and through activities of varying levels of demandingness. Being physically active in a group boosts a child's self-esteem and improves their skills in interaction, self-control, and body awareness and control.

The staff are responsible for planning the daily programme and activities taking place indoors and outdoors to be encouraging and inspiring so that the children can enjoy being physically active in a variety of ways and situations. The exercise equipment is available to the children during independent exercise and playing as well.

ECEC explores various exercise forms, equipment and locations. The staff make sure that every child experiences success and joy while being physically active by themselves, with a partner and in a group. Learning to exercise and honing motor skills is done through play, daytrips and games dependent on a children's age and development stage, ranging from basic movements to body control, balancing and coordination. The children are provided with opportunities to learn typical ways of exercising during each season.

Together with the guardians, the children are encouraged to be physically active daily and in various environments.

The children learn about **safety** under the supervision of an adult by becoming face to face with risks present in daily life. This is also the way in which they learn to use the local transport and adopt the rules and practices of staying safe in traffic. The aim is to provide them with a better sense of safety, the ability to ask for and seek help and behave safely in various situations and environments.

**Nutrition education** enhances a positive attitude towards food and eating and encourages children to adopt healthy and environmentally responsible eating habits. The children are taught to eat independently and to favour diverse and nutritious food choices without any pressure. The daily mealtimes take place without a rush, and the children learn about the custom of eating together, creating a sense of community through a dialogue and good table manners. By using different senses and experimenting, the children learn about foods and their origins, appearances, ingredients and flavours. Talking about food and food-related experiences, stories, songs and jokes promote the formation of a positive experience.

### How can we achieve this?

#### An example of evaluating the activities

We observe and participate in the children's playing, receive information about their interaction and interests, and discover elements that can be included in the group's ECEC content.

We can provide grounds for our selected pedagogical content.

We ensure that our operations are based on the principles of parity and equality.

Our operations meet the requirements of transversal competence, including all the different areas of learning.



## Support implementation

### Pedagogical arrangements

Planned small group activities

Flexible modification of groups

Modification of learning environments

Supporting communication (images, digital equipment, signing and drawing)

A clear daily schedule

Structured daily activities

Consultation support from an ECEC special needs teacher

Child-specific instruction

### Structural arrangements

Support from an ECEC special needs teacher

Support from a special needs assistant

Assisted group

Intensified ECEC support

Integrated special group

Special group

# 4

## Support for development and learning

**D**evelopment and learning support is part of high-quality ECEC and is the right of every child who needs it. Children receive support mainly in their daycare centres during normal ECEC activities. The activities are based on the children's strengths and their needs related to learning and development. The support consists of individual, community-based and learning environment-based solutions.

The ECEC staff ensure that every child feels accepted and receives positive experiences of success, which will strengthen their self-image.

The support provided to a child forms a logical continuum during ECEC and when the child starts attending preschool. The support includes the responsibilities, roles, support measures and the related implementation methods and evaluation pertaining to the child's development, learning support and wellbeing.

### Collaboration

The support need assessment and support planning, implementation and evaluation are conducted together with the guardians and, if necessary, other experts working with the child and their family.

Multi-professional cooperation is mostly done with the guardians' permission. However, the child's interests take priority. A child is provided with the development and learning support they need, based on what is in their best interests.

ECEC during specialist healthcare is provided case-specifically through collaborative means.

Guardians are provided with information about the options of extended compulsory education and what the effects of different options will be.

If pedagogical support is insufficient, the child's care and education team and guardians write an application for structural support. The application describes the pedagogical support that the child has been receiving and gives grounds for the structural support.

When applying for structural support for the first time, a statement from an external ECEC expert is required and will be used to provide the support and to better target it. The statement must be updated whenever required by the child's development and best interests. An ECEC special needs teacher will provide consultation assistance to the staff and guardians in case of any questions regarding the child's development.

Other authorities that support the child's development and learning, experts and other necessary parties may take part in creating the child's individual ECEC plan. If the support need assessment requires expert help from the social services and healthcare, these authorities must take part in the assessment if requested by the ECEC provider. (Section 23 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care)

### Children's individual ECEC plans

Regular evaluation is conducted on how well the goals have been met and how successful and effective the support has been. The plan is updated when necessary.

The following information is included in the individual ECEC plans:

- **Pedagogical solutions:** the learning environment, pedagogical arrangements and work methods.
- **Structural support:** the resources allocated to promote the child's growth and development and approved by the District Manager of Early Education and Care.
- **Collaboration and services:** e.g. responsibilities, cooperation with a guardian and the necessary experts, transport.
- **Evaluating the support measures' effect and the evaluation times:** When a child's need for support has ended and support is no longer being provided, a note of this is recorded in the plan.

All items agreed on and recorded are integrated to the planning and implementation of the group's pedagogical activities.



# 5

## Documentation, evaluation and improvement

### 5.1 Evaluation and development of pedagogical activities

#### Evaluating early childhood education and care

The evaluation of the structure and content of ECEC is based on the Guidelines and Recommendations for Evaluating the Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care, published by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (KARVI).

In ECEC, the evaluation of the activities is compulsory and its purpose is to develop and improve the quality of the operations. Evaluation is carried out based on Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC, the units' action plans and the goals of children's individual ECEC plans. The evaluation methods include self-assessment, pedagogical documentation, peer learning and sharing of good practices.

#### The evaluation of early childhood education and care in Helsinki

The evaluation is based on the documented information, which is collected from different organisational levels using a variety of methods.

The goal-oriented and planned self-assessment performed by the staff in Helsinki is important to maintaining the quality of ECEC and developing it further. In self-assessment, particular attention is paid to the evaluation of the quality and content of the interaction between the staff and the children and to the sensitive treatment of the children.

As an ECEC provider, Helsinki evaluates the quality of the ECEC provided in addition to the structural factors. Information received through customer feedback and surveys is used when developing and evaluating the operations. The results are discussed with the families and needs for improvement are identified based on this. Helsinki City Strategy also contains shared city-level goals, which means that evaluation is conducted as part of the City Strategy's assessment.

The quality and implementation of the ECEC units' action plans and the children's individual ECEC plans is assessed annually, in accordance with the principles of developmental assessment.

Unit-specific action plans are created annually for all forms of ECEC. Goals originating in Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC and City Strategy steer the creation of the action plans, and the measures required to achieve the goals are recorded in it. In addition to the unit-specific action plans, each group's operations are planned and evaluated separately.

A child's individual ECEC plan is used to assess together with the child and their guardians how well the child's needs related to growing, learning, developing and support have been met and how the child's strengths and interests have been taken into account.

**In ECEC, the evaluation of the activities is compulsory and its purpose is to develop and improve the quality of the operations. Evaluation is carried out based on Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC, the units' action plans and the goals of children's individual ECEC plans.**

## 5.2 Pedagogical documentation

**P**edagogical documentation is a key method of planning, implementing, evaluating and developing child-centred ECEC. The aim of plan-based pedagogical documentation is for the staff to get to know individual children and to understand the relationships between the children and the nature of the interaction between the staff and the children in the group.

The knowledge and skills the children already have, their interests and needs are made visible through pedagogical documentation and form the basis for planning the activities. The purpose of pedagogical documentation is to provide ECEC in a child-centred way. Planned pedagogical documentation is needed in order to make the children's learning and skills visible and to evaluate their development and needs for learning support.

The document commits things to memory and helps those involved understand the bigger picture, see improvements, and plan and evaluate the goals and activities.

Pedagogical documentation is done in various ways and using various methods. These include recorded and otherwise saved observations and discussions, interviews, visual and verbal descriptions of activities and games, general portfolios and growth portfolios, pictures, sound recordings, videos, self-made magazines, and media and project presentations.



### The principle of continuous planning, evaluation and development

The evaluation is systematic and continuous.

The pedagogical documentation and observation form the basis for the evaluation.

The evaluation is based on the goals that have been set in the National Core Curriculum for ECEC.

The evaluation takes the action plans and the children's individual ECEC plans into account.

The children and their guardians are allowed to take part in the evaluation.

**Images**

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