

IMPACT REPORT

Providing Access to Childcare and Employment (PACE)

Interreg 
2 Seas Mers Zeeën

PACE

European Regional Development Fund

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Colophon

This impact report was prepared by An Raes, Wendy Eerdeken and Jan Naert from Artevelde University of Applied Sciences. Their work was co-funded by Artevelde University of Applied Sciences and the Province of East-Flanders. The PACE project has received funding from the Interreg 2 Seas programme 2014-2020 co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund. City of Mechelen was the Lead Partner of the PACE project.



PACE

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This impact report would not have been possible without the support of many people. We want to thank each one of them:

- the parents who were willing to share their experiences;
- the researchers: Katrien Van den Bosch, Tim Vanhove, An Piessens, Dietlinde Willockx;
- the employees of the PACE project partners, specifically in the areas of project management, childcare, family support, activation and employment.



For more information on the PACE project, visit the website at <http://www.mechelen.be/pacefinalevent>

Graphic design by www.gestalte.be

Introduction

Childcare and employment are not equally accessible for everyone

Single parents, low-skilled parents, parents living in poverty or parents who immigrated from outside the EU have less access to high-quality childcare and to stable and sustainable employment. Furthermore, when a family has limited access to childcare, access to employment becomes more difficult and vice versa. Employment and childcare are not well aligned, in policy nor in practice.

Childcare is a main barrier to employment

If there is a lack of childcare that is available on the short term, parents moving from welfare into work cannot follow training courses, do job interviews or start working. Expensive childcare or rigid funding schemes make it difficult for families with low incomes to move into work, or even start considering a trajectory into work. Most of the childcare offer is based on stability, continuity and long-term planning. This excludes families who have irregular lives, little income and little possibility to look and plan ahead.

Unemployment can also be a barrier to childcare

Being employed often gives prioritised access to childcare. Also, childcare can be more expensive if you do not work (enough). It is up to parents themselves to glue and craft their own solutions. In practice, this is an enormous and sometimes impossible task. **Why?**

Parents have no real impact on the contemporary macro processes. Childcare is often too rigid and the labour market is demanding more and more flexibility.

A high-quality childcare setting that has to be reserved nine months in advance is no help to a parent starting work the next day. A single parent might have to refuse a dream job that starts at 7.30 am while childcare opens at 8.00 am.



Most parents are motivated to work, but do not see where and how to start. They have difficulties navigating the often complex systems of employment support and childcare.

It is often unclear to parents how their income will change when they start working. What happens to their benefits if they take on a temporary job? And will they still be able to pay for childcare after their contract has ended?



Childcare and employment are important, but parents are confronted with other barriers as well. These can be mobility barriers, physical or mental health problems, or family issues. Even when childcare and employment are accessible, 'life can get in the way'. *A child with health issues can make the puzzle of childcare and work very challenging. What if the early years setting that provides care for children with special needs is a 40 minute bus drive away? A family that has regular appointments in the hospital for health issues will have more difficulties attending training or taking a regular job.*

This report outlines how the access to childcare and employment can be enhanced for families living in vulnerable conditions by investing in strong systems, organisations and staff. It highlights what measures can be taken to support families into childcare and employment and to enhance their overall quality of life.

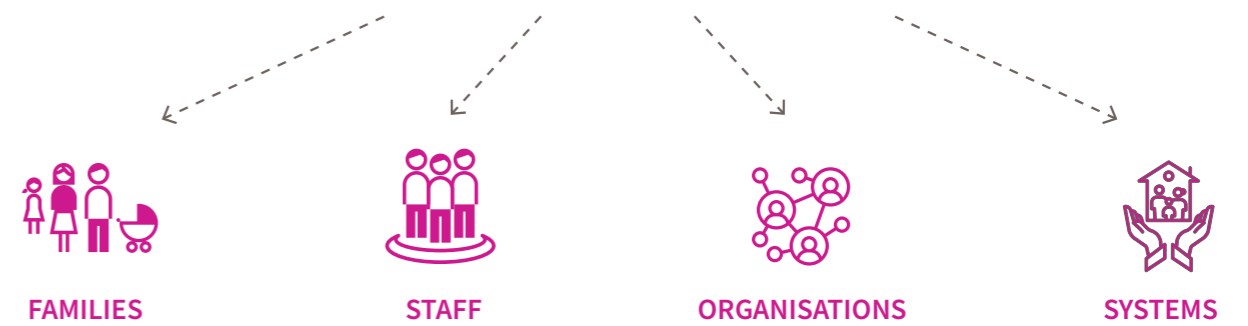
Providing Access to Childcare and Employment (PACE)

The PACE project was part of the **Interreg 2 Seas 2014-2020 programme**. This is a European Territorial Cooperation Programme covering England, France, the Netherlands and Flanders. Its objective is providing innovative answers to cross-border challenges in the 2 Seas area. In PACE, thirteen international partners worked together to **improve access to childcare** and to **facilitate access to employment** from within childcare.



- 13 active project partners
- 10 observer partners
- € 6,551,267.06 total budget
- € 3,930,760.24 funding from the European Regional Development fund
- 13 cross-border partner meetings

The PACE project set out to make a difference on the level of...



by providing ...

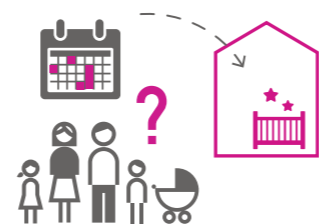
- Occasional and flexible childcare places, activities for parents and families in childcare.
- Staff training to increase parental involvement and volunteering within childcare.
- A network of engaged stakeholders from within childcare.
- A strategy to reach and engage policy makers and inform them on the PACE approach.
- Soft and employment skills training for parents from within childcare.
- Coaching in early years settings.
- A network of employers.
- Volunteering possibilities in childcare.
- Key workers who support parents into employment from within childcare.
- A coaching and education pack using a Personal Development Plan (PDP).
- A strategy to inform and engage early years settings.
- Support for parents in accessing a variety of services.

with the final aim of ...

- Increasing access to sustainable childcare and employment.
- Enhancing staff's skills in working with vulnerable families, involving parents in childcare and supporting parents as volunteers and helping them into employment.
- Installing a whole-family approach in childcare and employment; create more flexible and occasional places in childcare.
- Better aligning childcare and employment and adapting policies and regulations to support this alignment.

How PACE made a change – impact highlights

The impact analysis consisted of interviews and focus groups with parents, staff and external stakeholders. In addition, we collected quantitative data on how parents progressed towards employment. Here we outline the “impact highlights”: which elements were most impactful in bringing parents closer to childcare and employment?



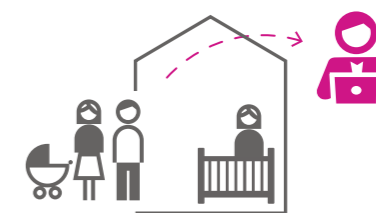
Support parents in securing a place in childcare. Make parents feel comfortable in childcare settings. Provide occasional and flexible childcare that matches parents' needs.



Give parents and children the opportunity to adapt to childcare at their own pace. Involve parents and children in childcare, welcome them again and again inside childcare.



Coach and support childcare staff, work on an empathic attitude towards families and on awareness of parents' broader situations.



Appoint a designated key worker who accompanies the parent throughout his journey



Support the key workers by creating a team and a network around the key worker. Install a reflective climate in the team.

In Gravesham, UK, nurseries and childminders offered occasional and flexible places in childcare for parents following training courses or in need of childcare at short notice. PACE staff collaborated with the local Jobcentre to signpost parents to the new offer. The city of Ghent, Belgium, developed a pop-up childcare setting and a system of occasional childcare that parents could access at very short notice.

“My son started to go to nursery and now I can go to the English course which is very helping me and I have time to cleaning and doing my housework properly. My son he is happy to go to the nursery.” *(a mother from Gravesham, 2020)*

In 38 Volt in Mechelen, Belgium, parents and children could adapt to childcare at their own pace. Parents were always invited inside. They could stay with their children and participate in activities in childcare.

“38 Volt is a place to find peace for me. The childcare professionals notice when I have a difficult moment. They say ‘Come, stay a little longer and have a coffee’.” *(a mother from Mechelen, 2018)*

A pedagogical coach supported the childcare staff in Turnhout and Mechelen (Belgium). Working on a shared attitude towards parents was a major part of this coaching.

“This approach means that we are getting closer to the families and that we no longer only have a childcare place to offer. Through this ‘family approach’ we are not only a provider but also a go-between [for parents] towards a wider context, tailored to their needs and at their pace.” *(staff member from the city of Turnhout, 2020)*

All PACE projects worked with easily accessible key workers or a team of key workers. Building a strong and trusting relationship with this key worker was a crucial element of success in PACE, as was the competence of this key worker in supporting parents in different areas of their life and helping them to navigate the worlds of childcare and employment.

“What is important here? A good key worker. That is someone who takes the initiative, but without a barrier between us, who is honest, who invests in the parents by accompanying them and listening to them.” *(a mother from Arques, 2020)*

“I have no friends and my family lives far away. I was glad my key worker was there. First, she came to my house to visit me. We couldn’t talk much at the time because I always wanted to prepare food. My key worker then said that I better come to her office. This way, I was away from home and so I could visit her more.” *(a mother from Ghent, 2020)*

The community centre in Saint-Martin-Boulogne, France, organized interdisciplinary team meetings to make staff more aware of each others work and to create a shared understanding of families and family support.

“We haven’t changed anything. There are no new buildings, there is the same number of children, the same people, but what has changed is our practice and mentality.” *(staff member from Saint-Martin-Boulogne, 2018)*



**“Align the clocks”:
provide childcare for appointments and training courses and adapt the hours of childcare to match working hours.**

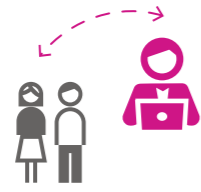
The main ‘gamechanger’ in PACE was the integrated approach towards childcare and employment on different levels:

- look for tailored childcare and employment solutions for individual parents and families
- advocate for more flexibility among early years settings and employers and get this organised
- raise awareness of the lack of alignment of childcare and employment and of the issues faced by parents in combining care tasks and employment on the levels of staff, organisations and policy.

“When I saw the flyer for PACE I thought ‘oh my god mothers do exist’.” *(a mother from Brighton & Hove, 2020)*



Motivate parents and create ownership through working with a Personal Development Plan (PDP).



Combine individualized one-to-one support with a package offer of training, volunteering, support with CV and applying for jobs.



Create a network of collaborators. Invest in joined-up working from a shared vision on parenting and supporting parents to work.



Create a network of parents: bring parents together in courses or activities but also create informal meeting spaces and places for parents and families.

The community centre in Wattrelos, France, worked with a PDP that was accessible and usable for all parents. It helped to set shared goals and to make sure parents were in charge of their own journey.

“De Mussen” in The Hague, the Netherlands, appointed a volunteer mentor for every parent in PACE. This mentor supported the parent towards employment step by step by an offer of training, volunteering, work placements and coaching.

In Brighton & Hove, a very strong network of collaborators was installed. Both the internal team and the collaboration with external stakeholders was organised around the needs of parents.

The French community centres organised informal and formal meeting opportunities for parents and parents and children together. For parents, the social contacts they build in PACE are supportive and a durable result from the project.

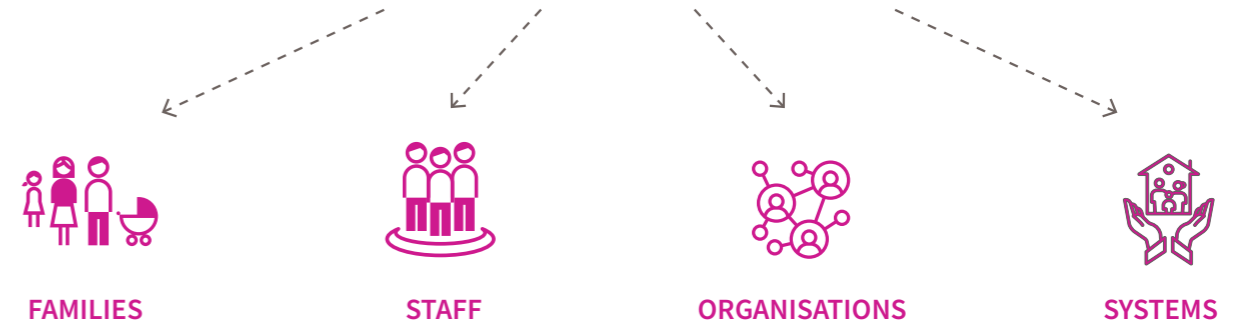
“What has been important for me in PACE? The PDP and completing this together. It was my stepping stone towards employment. Also, it lifts out your strong and weak points and helps to talk about yourself, what your expectations are, it targets what you should work on. I already had a concrete idea, but PACE helped me to make it a reality.” (a mother from Wattrelos, 2018)

“I was then linked to a mentor. Together with him I had weekly sessions for about six months. When I started, my self-confidence was low, and I couldn’t name my qualities and talents very well. My mentor helped to rediscover them, which helped my self-confidence grow. I have also had support in writing motivation letters and writing my CV.” (a mother from The Hague, 2020)

“The network is not a goal, but it is a way of making the work more effective and efficient. Putting networks in a structure helps parents to keep the overview and be in charge. For parents it must be clear, easy to read.” (PACE manager, Brighton & Hove, 2020)

“I have a lot of emptiness in my life and a lot of routine. Every day is the same. I haven’t forgotten my profession of being a hairdresser back in Algeria. I go to the ‘ateliers PACE’, that makes me go out of the house. I meet other people and that gives me back some self-confidence.” (a mother from Wattrelos 2020)

What PACE achieved on the level of ...



Sustainable childcare for 459 families, of which 97% are involved in childcare. Less distance to the labour market for 459 parents, with 162 of them being in sustainable employment.
Parents report more self-confidence, better selfcare and mental health, better relationships with their children and a broader social network. Parents feel supported in finding childcare and employment.

172 early years staff are more skilled and confident in working with parents; key workers were successful in making the link between childcare and employment through:
• working on employment support from within childcare
• establishing close links with (private) nurseries

103 new collaborations with organisations in welfare and education were established. 91 new collaborations with employers and employment services were installed.
Childcare settings adapted their daily practice to match families’ needs better. More flexible and occasional childcare was provided.

Policy makers are more aware of the lack of alignment between childcare and employment. There were local and regional initiatives to adapt policy to make childcare and employment more accessible for vulnerable families.
107 childcare settings are ready to adopt the “PACE method”.

Take home messages

How can parents with young children and at distance from the labour market be supported towards childcare and employment? How to make sure the supportive measures enhance their overall quality of life? And how to support them into sustainable childcare and employment?

- The first and most important key message from PACE is to **coordinate and integrate the support of parents into childcare and employment**.
- **Integration also means including other areas in a parent's life.** Parents in vulnerable situations bring their whole story and complex needs. Support should be arranged accordingly, including the necessary links to construct viable answers for parents.
- **A mind shift in childcare and in employment services** is crucial to create an integrated offer. Childcare needs to be aware that parents are 'more than parents', employment services and agencies and employers need to acknowledge that childcare is a crucial condition for parents to get (back) into work. Furthermore, the role and meaning of parenting and of care professions needs to be revalued. There are no future employees without parents and children. There are no current employees without childcare.
- The **joined-up working** should be translated onto the level of staff. Create links between childcare and employment through **key workers**. These key workers can work from within childcare settings or they can work closely together with childcare. This can be done through providing a physical meeting place in or close to the childcare where parents can meet the key worker, or having a key worker present in childcare to make the first contact with parents ("in-sourcing").
- Start from the parents' own goals, their needs, wishes and possibilities. **A Personal Development Plan** can be used to formulate shared and understood targets and to make progress visible
- Invest in **sustainable collaborations** by setting up agreements, defining shared targets and defining roles and responsibilities. The collaborative network needs to be maintained, updated and re-evaluated.
- Emphasize the value of a **high-quality early years sector** to policy makers, considering the 'triangle' of childcare's social, pedagogical/educational and economic function. Dare to question the privatisation of childcare. Childcare should be a public service, affordable and accessible to all. If private providers face tension between making profit (or not making losses), ensuring high quality and accessibility, the latter will be in the disadvantaged position.
- **Take better care of carers.** Revalue care and care tasks done in families and in early years settings. Early years staff are generally undervalued and underpaid in relation to their work load and responsibilities. Invest continuously in opportunities for professionalisation. The current system leaves very little room for professionalisation on the job.
- Advocate for regulations and policies that allow childcare providers to realise what is expected from them. The current policies and regulations push early years providers towards an overregulated system with little room for flexibility. There should be **organisational flexibility combined with continuity and stability on the pedagogical level**.