

Strengthening the Current and Future Workforce

European Business Leader Actions to Support Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)



A report initiated by:



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION



King Baudouin
Foundation

Working together for a better society

Acknowledgements

Initiators and Funders



The Jacobs Foundation was founded by Klaus J. Jacobs and his family in 1989 with the goal to support future generations by improving opportunities for youth development to encourage socially responsible and productive members of society. The Foundation is committed to scientific excellence and evidence-based research; it emphasizes effective implementation, public dialogue, and advocacy.



The Bernard van Leer Foundation has worked in over 50 countries, having invested more than half a billion dollars toward improving opportunities for young children of socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition to focusing on investing in young children, the Foundation pursues projects supporting global knowledge, local solutions and healthy child development.



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

The Aga Khan Foundation has been working in Portugal since 1983, where they contribute to research and innovative direct intervention in the areas of early childhood education, social exclusion and urban poverty.



Compagnia di San Paolo, with historical roots dating back to the 16th century, aims to promote cultural, civil and economic development in the areas of research and education; art, activities and cultural heritage; health; and social policy. Through the ZeroSei Programme, Compagnia di San Paolo promotes a number of interventions co-designed and implemented in cooperation with public and civil society organizations to increase the culture of investing in early childhood and to test new methodologies and services in favor of children ages zero to six years.



Working together for a better society

The King Baudouin Foundation, named for Belgium's late head of state, was established in 1976 with the goal of making a lasting contribution to greater justice, democracy and respect for diversity. Each year, the Foundation financially supports more than 2,000 organizations and individuals.

ReadyNation: Business, Kids, Workforce

Business executives building a skilled workforce by promoting solutions that prepare children to succeed in education, work, and life.

ReadyNation is a business membership organization whose more than 1,500 executives, including current and former Fortune 500 CEOs, advocate for improving the economy and workforce through increased investments in ECEC. Since 2014, ReadyNation has worked internationally to help a variety of countries create their own business networks to encourage public and private investments in ECEC. ReadyNation International welcomes company executives in any country to join our free network and receive our global e-newsletter on worldwide company action for ECEC.

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Executive Summary

While many countries in Europe face uncertainty and change, one constant remains: business leaders want to hire skilled employees, find customers who can afford their goods and services, and operate in an environment that spurs innovation and economic vitality.

Extensive evidence shows the root of these factors lies in children who have a good start that will prepare them for success in school and in life. **A child's brain grows to 90 percent of its adult size by age five, and learning gaps show up well before entry into primary school.** Economists have determined that investments in effective early services generate benefits far exceeding their costs.

Business leaders across Europe recognize that the chances of a child growing to productive adulthood should not be determined by his/her early circumstances. Giving children an equitable chance to prosper will promote economic vitality not only for their countries, but also globally. **Executives around the world—from multi-national CEOs to shop**

owners in small towns—are starting to take action to create the conditions that will help young children thrive, fulfill their potential and become healthy, productive adults. Company leaders care about children's futures and see the value to their companies, communities and nations.

ReadyNation supports executives to take actions that improve the economy and workforce through effective investments in early childhood education and care (ECEC), defined here as the integrated health, social and education system for children from birth to age five.

At the direction of five foundations—Jacobs Foundation, Bernard van Leer Foundation, Aga Khan Foundation, King Baudouin Foundation, and Compagnia di San Paolo—ReadyNation helped conceptualize and execute the first European Business Leader Forum on Early Childhood in October 2016 and also produced this report for the conference. Business leaders from several European countries discussed ways the private sector can support ECEC for the benefit of the current and future workforce. Experts and business leaders discussed the business case for investing in early childhood, what companies and business organizations are already doing, and next steps to develop further interest and action on the part of their respective business communities.

This report describes six types of actions companies are taking in order to ensure that children get the start they need in life:

1. Influence public policies
2. Educate key audiences and decision-makers
3. Create social innovations that produce profit while contributing to the social good
4. Inform customers
5. Support employees
6. Provide resources to their communities

This report concludes with basic advice on next steps that companies can take.

Why Should Businesses be Interested in Early Education?

Companies across the globe share similar concerns: Where will we find good employees? Who will buy our products or services? How do we retain talent on the job? What can be done to create an environment that encourages innovation and widespread prosperity that leads to economic growth and stability? The answer lies in creating a productive citizenry, and that process begins in the earliest years.

During the first five years, starting during pregnancy, children develop many of the skills and abilities that will help them mature into productive adults and contributing members of society. Business leaders have a vested interest in fostering an environment that helps young children become the future employees, customers, citizens and neighbors that their communities and countries need. While most of an executive's time will be consumed with running a successful enterprise, business leaders are such unexpected voices that even a small investment in time can generate tremendous attention and pay large dividends for multiple generations.

“ We know that early care and education is essential to supporting our current workforce and developing a productive workforce in the future.”

Milan Prenosil, President, Sprüngli

The rationale for business involvement in the early years starts with the evidence. A strong body of research supports early childhood development as vital to later success.

The Evidence Base Examined

■ ECEC Contributes to Later Success

The infant brain grows at a faster rate than at any other time in life, with 90% of brain growth occurring by age five. During this critical period, the brain creates 700 synapses per second—the neural connections that lay the foundation for

700 Number of synapses that develop every second in a young child's brain.

To strengthen our workforce, we have to start early

The foundation for many skills needed for 21st century jobs is established in the earliest years.

The brain develops more rapidly in early childhood than in any other period, with 700 synapses—neural connections that support learning and skills—developing every second.¹

The learning gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children shows up as early as 9 months of age. Disadvantaged children can start primary school as much as 18 months behind their peers. Many of these children never catch up, and are at an increased risk of dropping out of school.²



In order to impact child development, programs must be high quality.

cognitive knowledge and executive functioning skills (e.g., persistence, creativity and conflict resolution) that help determine later success.

Because of this biological fact, hundreds of studies from many countries document the impact of quality early childhood development programs and services—such as proper nutrition, health care, early education and parental supports—on later physical health, mental health and productivity.³ For example, a key meta-analysis of **30 different programs across 23 countries in Europe, Africa, Central/South America, and Asia** found overwhelmingly positive impacts of early childhood programs on health, education, cognitive ability and emotional development.⁴



“The evidence on ECEC in the first three years for disadvantaged children indicates that high quality ECEC can produce benefits for cognitive, language, and social development.”⁵

Professor Edward Melhuish,
Oxford University, et al.

However, the research is also clear that, in order to impact child development, programs must be high quality.⁶ The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) identified five areas of quality that ECE programs need to focus on: (i) quality goals and minimum standards; (ii) curriculum and learning standards; (iii) workforce quality; (iv) community and family engagement; and (v) data, research and monitoring.⁷

Positive Impacts of Early Childhood Programs Across Europe



Norway

Reforms in Norway that increased paid/unpaid maternity leave (49 weeks full salary; 59 weeks at 80% pay)⁸ led to **decreased secondary school dropout rates**, with the greatest impact noticeable for children with lesser-educated mothers.⁹

Switzerland

In Switzerland, the ZEPPELIN-Study provides home visiting services, using the Parents as Teachers model, to over 100 socially and materially disadvantaged mothers in 14 communities in and around Zurich. Preliminary results have been positive, and it is expected that the program will continue to **improve children's language development**, as well as mothers' educational attitudes and confidence.¹⁰

Germany

In Germany, center-based care was found to **strengthen children's skills in language, socializing and behavior management** among 2 to 3 year olds. By ages 5 to 10, these children also had improved non-cognitive skills and better grades after exposure to formal early childcare.¹¹

United Kingdom

One U.K. study indicated that effects of a preschool experience (beginning at age 3) are evident in a student's **early academic success**, including performance related to intellectual development at ages 6 and 7; and independence, concentration and social acumen

when starting primary school.¹² Another study showed that early education in the U.K. has been associated with increased labor market participation through enduring improvements in cognitive functioning as well as enhanced probabilities of reaching academic milestones.¹³

Netherlands

Preschool education in the Netherlands (starting at age 3) has been linked to large reductions in primary grade repetition during the first two years of school, particularly for boys from disadvantaged families.¹⁴

Denmark

A study analyzing the long-term effects of preschool expansion in Denmark found that a higher number of children enrolled in preschool (starting at birth) in a given area can be associated with a **higher likelihood of completed schooling and increased adult earnings**.¹⁵ Another Denmark study found that quality preschool was associated with better language skills in 9th grade. Results were particularly strong for boys and for non-native children, possibly helping to equalize socio-economic outcomes for these children.¹⁶

Northern Ireland

By age 11, children in Northern Ireland who attended a high-quality preschool (starting at age 3) **outperformed children who did not attend preschool** on both

reading and math. Underscoring the importance of high-quality programs, there were no significant benefits from preschool when the quality was low- or medium-level.¹⁷

United Kingdom

The Millennium Cohort Study from the UK reported a positive and significant impact of formal care for young children (18 months old) on their cognitive outcomes in the short term (age three) and medium term (ages five and seven). The effect was significantly larger for children with low-educated mothers. The study also simulated the effects of a policy that introduces formal care for all children from low socio-economic backgrounds and found that it would **reduce disparities in cognitive outcomes**.¹⁸

Italy

Recent research using Italian data found that public childcare availability has **positive effects on children's reading test scores** in primary school.¹⁹ Another Italian study showed that early childcare attendance has a positive impact on long-term outcomes such as secondary school grades.²⁰

United Nations

Research by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) found that **early education leads to higher future wages** of \$6.4 to \$17.6 per dollar spent on preschool programs, which would lead to potential long-term returns of \$11 - 34 billion.²¹



ECEC Supports Working Parents

Support for quality childcare increases current workforce retention and productivity.²² Flexible care enables shift workers to respond to changing schedules. Employees who know their children are in reliable, quality childcare can focus on their jobs. Family-friendly company policies—from breastfeeding stations to paid parental leave—further support working parents. For example, the **Italian** study cited above also examined the effects of the availability of public childcare on mothers' work participation rates. It found that public childcare availability has positive effects on the probability of mothers' working.²³

■ ECEC Helps Reduce Public Expenditures

A variety of cost-benefit studies on disadvantaged children demonstrate substantial savings from the positive impact of early childhood programs on expensive, government-financed services, such as criminal justice, health care, education and welfare.²⁴ Nobel Laureate James Heckman and others found an annual return on investment of 7 to 10%.²⁶

■ ECEC Supports the Local Economy

Investing in early childhood programs produces immediate economic benefits, often referred to as the multiplier effect, as the dollars initially invested in an early learning program re-circulate through the local economy. Additional spending is generated (U.S. research shows roughly USD

\$2 for each dollar invested) when early learning centers purchase local goods and services needed to operate and when teachers and staff spend their wages on local goods and services.²⁷

■ ECEC Improves Societal Well-Being and Equity

The European Commission tackled “Social and Cultural Inequalities through Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe,” by highlighting the greater efficiency and equity that comes from investing in education earlier, as opposed to correcting shortcomings later in life, particularly for children of disadvantaged backgrounds.²⁸ The European Commission also developed a framework for quality in early childhood care and education, focusing on accessibility, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, and governance and funding.²⁹

Preschool can help societies reduce socioeconomic inequalities by having a substantial impact on children from disadvantaged families. For example, preschool attendance in **France** (starting at age 2) was associated with reduced grade repetition, higher test scores, increased rates of secondary school graduation as well as higher adult wages. The positive impacts were even larger for disadvantaged children.³⁰



“In an era when most policies are divisive and disappointing, early childhood development has a magic to it. Nurturing kids' brains can improve education, health, childcare, future productivity of the workforce and crime prevention all at once.”²⁵

Simon Kuper, Columnist,
Financial Times

■ Qualitative Benefits of ECEC for Businesses

Beyond the benefits listed above, companies may have other reasons for publicly supporting early education investments. For example, such actions can:

- Enhance the company's image;
- Help attract more customers;
- Encourage prospective employees to relocate to the area;
- Enable the company to expand;
- Improve employee morale; and
- Provide leadership opportunities for company employees who help coordinate initiatives.³¹

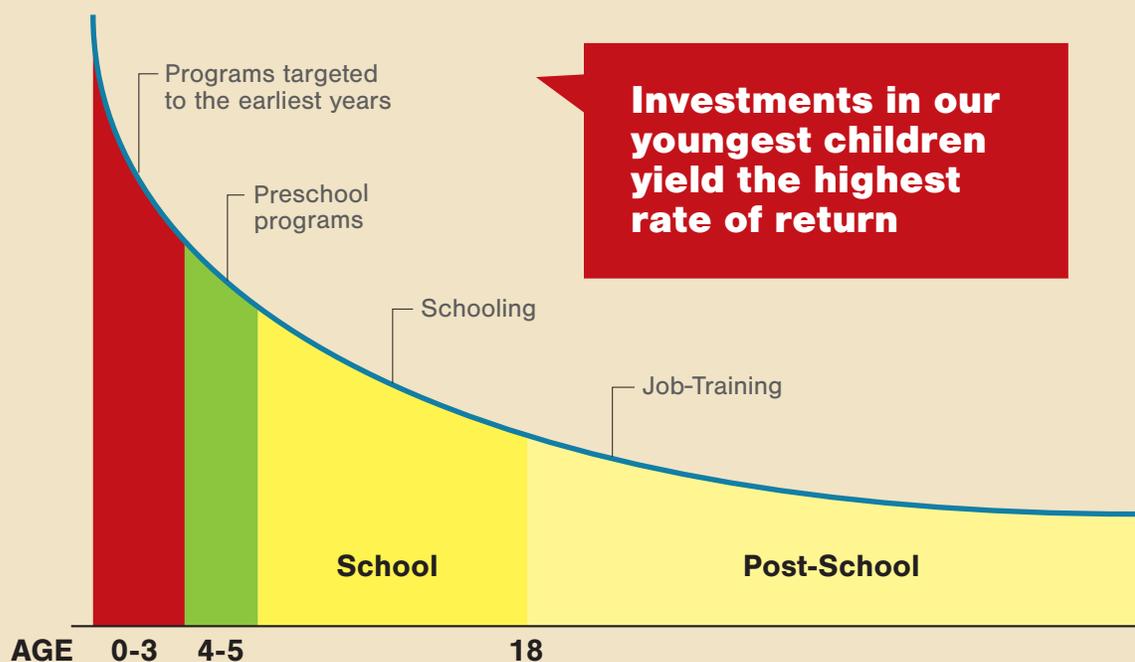
■ Additional Supporting Economic Arguments From Around the World

Other international studies have suggested the strong positive impact that early education has on the long-term success of a country.

“ Investments in early childhood pay off, not only for children, but also for parents, the state and the economy.”³²

Sandro Giuliani, Managing Director,
Jacobs Foundation

Rate of Return to Human Capital Investment at Different Ages



Source: Nobel Laureate Dr. James Heckman, 2013



The benefits are real.

Research Evidence from Around the Globe

An extensive body of research in education, developmental psychology, neuroscience, medicine and economics shows that quality early education programs produce better education, health, economic and social outcomes for children, families, and the nation. The “**Early Childhood Education Consensus Letter**,” sponsored by the National Institute for Early Education Research in the U.S. was signed by more than 1,200 researchers from 34 countries.³³

A 20-year follow up of a randomized trial with an early childhood program for disadvantaged toddlers in **Jamaica** showed that participants had a 25% increase in earnings, higher levels of education, better social skills, and less involvement in violent crimes.³⁴

Children in **Canada** from disadvantaged families who received the greatest number of hours of childcare services had significantly better reading, writing, and mathematics scores at age 12 than their counterparts who received the fewest hours of childcare services. This study determined that childcare services could reduce social inequalities reflected in academic performances up to early adolescence, with earlier participation in center-based services eliminating such inequalities.³⁵

Status of Young Children

Key business-related institutions have taken great interest in early childhood development as a tool to strengthen a country’s workforce. The **World Bank, Organisation for the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), European Commission** and **United States Federal Reserve** have publicly

recognized the importance of ECEC to a country’s future economy and society. The UN included early childhood education in the recently established Sustainable Development Goals, including indicator 4.2 which seeks to ensure by 2030 that “all boys and girls to have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.”³⁶

The World Bank Group urged immediate action and investment in early childhood development programs as a means to stimulate national development and economic growth. In 2014, it authored a report on integrated interventions for early childhood, stating that ECD interventions yield higher annual rates of return than those directed towards older children and adults.³⁷ The World Bank has invested over \$3.3 billion in ECD since 2001, given evidence on the benefits of



The first of these cornerstones of [economic] opportunity...is resources available to children in their most formative years.”³⁸

Janet Yellen, Chair of the United States Federal Reserve System

focusing resources on a country's youngest children and their families.³⁹

Many U.S. Federal Reserve leaders have described the importance of learning basic cognitive, emotional and social skills early in life on later outcomes.⁴⁰ OECD has published several reports in their *Starting Strong* series on the areas of quality in early childhood education and care.⁴¹

Progress and Challenges for Europe

Europe has some of the most family-friendly policies around early childhood. Yet, concerns remain. For example, the European Union (EU) mandates employers to offer at least four months of parental leave during their child's first eight years of life; however, the leave does not have to be paid,⁴² which makes it much more difficult for lower-income families to participate. While European countries

often have early childhood education and care codified in their laws, quality standards are variable, and there is sometimes not enough supply of care to meet demand. As mentioned above, to optimize positive impacts, early childhood programs must be high-quality.⁴³

What Are Businesses Doing?

Businesses are taking a wide range of actions to positively affect early childhood development. Such actions generally fall into six principal categories.

1 Build Public Will to Influence Public Policies

Changing the lives of entire generations of children will ultimately require more than private funds and individual actions. It requires public policies at the local, national and international levels that direct funding streams to provide research-backed supports

Duration of maternity leave in European Union member States



Countries participating in the Forum were shown where data were available.

Source: Maternity, paternity, and parental leave: Data related to duration and compensation rates in the European Union." Directorate General for Internal Policies. Policy Department C: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs. 2015.

In 2015, ReadyNation released two open letters to the UN, signed by more than 150 global business executives, supporting the inclusion of early childhood in its Sustainable Development Goals report.



to young children in need. Perceived as objective observers without a vested interest in funding decisions, executives can aptly convey the importance of effective investments in early childhood to public leaders, complementing the long-standing work of traditional children’s advocates.

Mariëtte Hamer, President of the Social and Economic Council of the **Netherlands**, presented at a conference on the importance of robust ECEC and published a report calling for a long-term system of child services for all children, with additional resources for those with disadvantaged backgrounds.⁴⁴

John Pepper, former Chairman and CEO of Procter & Gamble, has been perhaps the most visible business leader advocate for ECEC in the United States. He has authored media articles, testified before Congress and met with key policymakers on issues ranging from home visiting and

Enrollment at age 3 in Pre-primary Education



Countries participating in the Forum were shown where data were available.

Source: Source: Excerpted from OECD. Table C2.3 See Annex 3 for notes (www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm). StatLink: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933398383>

parental supports to childcare and the importance of early education.⁴⁵

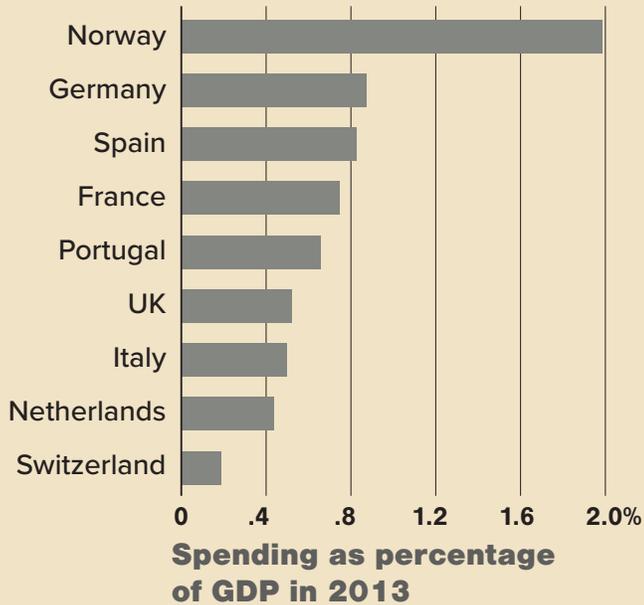
From 2013 to 2015, executives and ReadyNation members, like John Pepper, helped win policy victories that increased state and federal funding for ECEC in the U.S. by more than USD \$3 billion.



I view this as the moral, social and economic imperative of our generation. We must give all our children the fair opportunity to grow up to be educated, independent and contributing citizens.”

John Pepper, former Chairman & CEO, Procter & Gamble; former Chairman, Walt Disney Company

Spending on Early Childhood Education Institutions



Countries participating in the Forum were shown where data were available.

Source: Excerpted from OECD. Table C2.3 See Annex 3 for notes (www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm). StatLink: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933398383>

2 Educate Key Audiences

Business leaders are skilled communicators who can reach new audiences with information on the roles audience members can play. They have encouraged and in some instances created a national dialogue around early childhood. Platforms including press conferences, news articles, and summit events have catapulted the issue in several countries: from the United States to Romania and Uganda to Australia.⁴⁶ For example, Romania’s first business leader summit promoting private sector support for ECEC recently held in Bucharest in 2016 generated 34 media pieces. And between 2013-2015, ReadyNation generated more than 500 earned media pieces in the United States.

In **France**, nearly 400 employers representing over 10% of the French labor force signed a well-publicized “Charter of Parenthood in Corporations,” pledging to educate managers and HR staff to “take better account of parenthood and create a favorable environment for employees with children,” including “support for childcare.”⁴⁷

3 Social Innovation—Producing Profits While Contributing to the Social Good

There is a worldwide movement towards “social innovation”—where for-profit companies engage their core operations to contribute to social goods, including in ECEC. Another variation under the social innovation theme is non-profit ECEC organizations operating in a business-like manner in order to be self-sustaining.

Philips, a **Dutch** technology company, created the Philips Avent uGrow digital platform—an innovative parenting mobile application for parents to track progress, remember milestones, and learn about their baby’s healthy development.⁴⁸

The **London** Early Years Foundation consists of 38 community nurseries in the city that reinvest profits directly into the nursery business. This reinvestment includes supporting 48% of subject parents with free nursery services.⁴⁹ Bain & Company is a major supporter with advice on a self-sustaining business model.

After opening its first childcare center in 1966, ABB Schweiz, a **Swiss** energy and technology company, created a nonprofit organization that helps 38 member companies provide childcare services to their employees and is supported by its customers.⁵⁰

Aroundsquare Ltd., a certified “B” corp. or benefit corporation, is a for-profit company which, among other factors, commits to making a positive material impact on greater society.⁵¹ One of this small **Canadian** company’s principal goods—Goodwood Deconstruction Blocks—is designed to help children develop through creative, play-based learning.⁵²



By leveraging their brand, companies can promote positive parenting advice and practices to their customers, with the potential to further improve their public reputation.

4 Inform Customers

Companies often have access to parents of young children through their customer base. By leveraging their brand, companies can promote positive parenting advice and practices to their customers, with the potential to further improve their public reputation.

The **Belgian** supermarket chain, Delhaize Group, partnered with UNICEF and other health institutions to create communication materials for parents of young children on breastfeeding, complementary feeding, and responsive feeding. The Delhaize retail stores have distributed related posters and leaflets for its customers throughout Serbia.⁵³

Danone, a **French** multinational food-products corporation, emphasizes the importance of early life nutrition, especially during the first 1000 days of a baby's life,⁵⁴ and advocates for breastfeeding while offering nutritional support to families through education and services.⁵⁵

The Vroom initiative aims to spread awareness on children's brain development, by providing accessible tools for parents to engage with their children. Global food products company Goya has printed Vroom's parenting tips on their food packaging.⁵⁶

5 Support and Educate Their Employees

Companies of all sizes in Europe are taking action to promote the healthy development of their employees' children, including supporting their employees' parenting responsibilities.⁵⁷

These practices are so widespread that a variety of countries have even created awards for family-friendly workplace practices. Working Families, in the United Kingdom, named more than 40 companies as "Top Companies for Working Families."⁵⁸

VauDe, a **German** outdoor equipment manufacturing and distribution company, has its own on-site childcare center (Kinderhaus) for employees' children (ages 1-10). It is available year round between 7:00- 17:00. The Kinderhaus allows parents to eat lunch with their children and engage in parent-child activities.⁵⁹

Solvay covers the cost of childcare centers for children (ages birth-3) for employees working in its factory in Spinetta Marengo, Northern **Italy**.⁶⁰

Luxottica, an **Italian** global leader in the design, manufacture and distribution of eyewear, donated a childcare center to the Sedico municipality, in the Province of Belluno, where employees receive enrollment priority. The company also organizes a baby-sitting on demand service, to ensure employees have childcare at their home whenever needed, even for emergencies. And through its “newborn care service,” Luxottica employees new to parenting can access a team of experts to answer questions and address doubts and fears. Luxottica also offers five days of paid leave for new fathers, and recently added a “baby week” to enable new parents to stay with their children during their first days at a childcare center.⁶¹

Vodafone has pioneered innovative parental leave policies that many European companies look to emulate.⁶² The **British** multinational telecom company recently announced a striking new policy to recruit and retain employees, which supports 16 weeks of paid maternity leave plus full-time pay for six months while returning new mothers work at just 30 hours per week.⁶³

Italian pharmaceutical enterprise Angelini offers its female employees one month of additional paid maternity leave beyond the usual Italian maternity provision⁶⁴ (20 weeks at 85% salary).⁶⁵

COFACE Ibérica, the **Spanish** division of the French insurance company COFACE, gives its employees flexibility to choose work start and end times as long as they meet monthly targets of working hours. This allows parents to adjust their work schedule and manage family time accordingly.⁶⁶

The software company SAP AG offers options for job-sharing, part-time

employment, or working from home. The company, headquartered in Walldorf, **Germany**, provides a parent-child office to allow parents to bring children to work when normal childcare arrangements fall through.⁶⁷

6 Benefit the Local Community: The Importance of Corporate Social Responsibility

Companies can choose to support programs in their community that help young children thrive. The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) field has begun to emphasize the value of contributing funds not just for public relations purposes, but to advance key priorities. Since company involvement in ECEC is less frequent than with other issues, such action sends an important signal to policymakers in countries that traditionally have not made their youngest residents a high priority. A relatively small investment can have a tremendous return on society.

Employees of **Netherlands**-based manufacturer LydonellBasell participate in various community service projects around the world on their annual Global Care Day. Employees volunteered at the German Entenfang-Schlosschen kindergarten to teach students about a broad range of topics, from electricity and chemistry to gardening.⁶⁸

Siemens AG, the largest engineering company in Europe, is increasing its pledge to early science education. In Europe, they have provided experiment kits to preschools in **Germany, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia**. Following a surging demand for these kits, they have expanded their initiative to serve some 30 countries around the world.⁶⁹



Business in Action

ECEC is a major focus of the Denmark-based LEGO Foundation's work: **“From putting early childhood education on the global agenda to making playful learning a reality for millions of children, our five programmes aim to make children's lives better—and communities stronger.”** These programs cover many of the possible actions in this report: “Play-based learning, sparking a global dialogue, re-imagining learning, capital of children [which mobilizes the whole city of Billund, Denmark to focus on children] and local LEGO employee engagement.”⁷⁰

Bpost (the Belgian Post) supports projects in **Belgium** to fight parental illiteracy, particularly parents with young children (0-8 years). Projects help parents to learn reading and writing skills and to transfer this knowledge to their young children by reading to them or stimulating their children's interest in reading.

UniCredit Tiriatic Bank, the **Romanian** division of the Italian global banking and financial services company, funded the Bacau Country Emergency Hospital to become a Baby-Friendly Hospital. The financial support allowed the hospital to implement the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding in order to support, encourage, and protect breastfeeding.⁷¹

IKEA **Belgium** supports projects in Belgium that aim to stimulate usage of ECEC

services by very young children (0-3) of parents living in social housing, often unemployed single parents. Children of this target group are underrepresented in ECEC services for several reasons. IKEA supports the creation and improvement of accessible quality ECEC services and meeting places for parents and children in such areas.⁷²

What to Do Next?

Choosing the Best Course of Action

With so many options, companies must decide what to do first or next. Executives need to make sound decisions about how to allocate limited time and resources to develop an initiative that will accomplish goals and be a good fit for their company.

Whether engaging in advocacy, creating a childcare center, or hosting an event to share the benefits of ECEC, developing a careful process and selecting the right partners who can help achieve success are critical. Consulting with experts in the early childhood arena will aid companies to develop and execute well-conceived plans. The following guidelines can help ensure a successful experience:

- **Assess your goals and determine what you are able to commit.** Consider these preliminary questions: What role does your company want to play? What are the major issues facing young children in the area you wish to impact? Who is your target audience: company-wide or community-wide? What is your contemplated time-frame: short-term or long-term?
- **Find compatible partners.** Understand the current conditions in your community or country, what initiatives are already underway, and who can inform your decisions. Choosing the right partners is crucial, externally and internally.

- **Establish trust.** While companies need to recognize local leaders' substantive expertise, early childhood experts need to keep in mind and balance private sector objectives.
- **Create mutual agreement, including outcomes.** Both the company and its partners should agree on what each is able and willing to do as well as expected outcomes over a specific timeframe.
- **Assess progress and adjust as needed.** Building a productive, long-term relationship requires strategy assessments and modifications, as needed.

ReadyNation as a Resource

Since 2014, ReadyNation has been helping countries create their own networks of business leaders that advocate for increased public and private investments in young children. We helped

create ReadyNation Australia, Early Steps Uganda, and a new network in Romania. Our support and technical assistance include:

- Developing networks of business leaders who encourage increased investments in ECEC
- Designing and implementing campaigns to mobilize executives as advocates for policy change
- Creating presentations, media materials and messaging that illustrate the business case for early childhood
- Organizing high-profile business summits on early childhood
- Connecting with business leaders supportive of early childhood to share experiences
- Providing examples of business actions⁷³
- Securing prominent executives to speak to key audiences



Executives can start the youngest children on the path to success.

Conclusion

Across Europe and beyond, business leaders know that the success of their company and their country depends on the ability of people to solve problems, work in teams, develop new ideas and envision a bright future. All of these qualities start in the earliest years. Executives representing many countries, sectors and sizes of business have taken up the charge of helping their youngest children start on the path to success.

The world will be better for it.

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