



PARENTS AND EXPERTS INTERVIEWS REPORT

COMPARATIVE REPORT



CARE2LEARN

Supporting the Transition from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary School

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1. SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW FINDINGS

In order to develop a quality tool for monitoring and development of key early competencies of a child in the transition from preschool to school, it is crucial to validate the assumed competencies and activities for their development and create a curriculum according to which the tool will be developed. The aim of this PR is, therefore, to create a quality, scientifically based and practically usable basis for the development of PR2 and PR3.

The first step of PR1 was **the literature review** that was followed by **expert work group on line meeting** where findings were discussed in detail and were experts **designed the interview** which was later conducted with *40 participants* in total.

Due to the restrictive measures that must be adhered to because of Covid-19 interviews were conducted in person one on one or via Focus groups depending on situation in each partner's country.

The respondents were *20 parents* of children attending kindergarten, ECEC or primary school and *20 experts* which work in ECEC or primary school (kindergarten psychologists, classroom teachers, preschool teachers etc.).

After the interviews each partner create a document with their findings which was compiled into this one document.

The results of the interviews provided us with a lot of useful information and will definitely help us in the further development of our project – the final document **C2L SCHOOL READINES DEVELOPMENT TOOL CURRICULUM**, which will serve as a base for PR2 and PR3.



2. APPENTICE 1

Interview results (Parents)

1. Which competences of children do you believe are the most important for the successful transition from ECEC institutions to primary school?

The parents that completed the questionnaire expressed a few diverse opinions about which competences are important about the transition of children to primary school (PS), but did share major commonalities.

In interview reports from three different partner countries the following answers were provided:

- All parents agreed on the importance of **communication and social skills**. These two competences were highlighted by every parent as the foundation for a smooth transition to primary school. Being able to meet new peers, make friends and express himself/herself during a conversation, are all crucial for this transition.
- Parents also consider **socio-emotional maturity** as one of the key competences that helps children smoothly transition from ECEC institutions to primary school. This entails being able to differentiate between good and bad deeds and to recognize and name emotions in self and others. Most of the parents considers all other competences and skills are easier to adopt, once the social maturity is achieved. They believe that if the child has **the socio-emotional characteristics and maturity**, it has the experience and knows how to participate and behave in a peer group, to accept defeat, share and participate in joint activities.
- In **Cyrus** two parents stated that the child will need to have developed his/her **adaptability skills**, in order to ensure that the child is able to adjust to unfamiliar environments.



- They also consider **independence in simple self-care activities** (such as eating, dressing and maintaining personal hygiene) a crucial step in preparing a child for the transition to primary school. Specifically, one parent from **Cyprus** stated that the school that his child is attending, also known as the Montessori School. This type of schooling promotes intergenerational learning, by promoting older children to educate younger children in certain topics, in order for them to learn how to lead and for the younger children to learn in an interactive manner. Related to independence, parents in **Croatia** also mentioned traffic safety; they think children should know how to behave in traffic and be safe, but also to know that they are not allowed to enter a stranger's car.
- Parents agreed that regardless of the psychological competences, children should also be able to master some **motor activities**. These include; holding a pencil, being able to sit on their chair, being able to color within the lines of a framework and to be able to write the letters and numbers.

Other answers that were provided were:

- Two parents from **Cyprus** stated that the child will need to have developed his/her **adaptability skills**, in order to ensure that the child is able to adjust to unfamiliar environments.
- Some parents also consider **self-confidence and self-awareness** as important indicators of emotional competence as well as adjusting to a community with certain expectations (for example, sitting still for 45 minutes).
- Some parents in **Serbia** mentioned that it is very important for children to have **digital competences** because they will not be able to manage school assignments without them.
- **Articulation and clear speech** were also mentioned as a significant component that can contribute to a smoother transition, as the child will be able to communicate his/her needs.
- Some parents from **Serbia** shared their experience in terms of **academic skills** also; their experience is that a child should know how to **read and write** because majority of children have those skills and a teacher adjusts approach to majority so a child that does not have those skills stays behind. Their children did not have those skills and this caused fear and insecurity.



2. What competences do you think are important for parents to have that could support their children in transition to primary school?

All parents agree on them having a **vital role** in supporting their children during their transition from ECEC to primary school. They are aware of their role as a **model for their child** and that they can greatly influence their children's lives by their actions.

The parents shared a few common opinions, regarding the competences required for a parent to withhold, that can ensure to the smooth transition of the child to PS such as:

- **Good communication** with the child and **listening** to their children, instead of just directing them.
- Most parents think **patience** and **understanding** is the foundation of a quality parent-child relationship and that every parent should dedicate enough time to their child every day, to work and play with them and nurture their emotional bond.
- Parents also reported that **setting certain ground rules**, but **maintaining balance**, trusting your child and **not being overprotective** is one of the most significant skills a parent should develop. This ability can help regulate the child's maturity and promote autonomy
- Parents from **Cyprus** expressed a challenge they are currently facing, which is the ability to spend quality time with their children, since nowadays, occupations require a lot of time from your daily life, limiting the time they have with their families. Hence, they expressed that ensuring you allocate a time from your non-working hours to your children, is an essential component for securing a smooth PS transition.
- Parents think that their parental **emotional stability** and **maturity** can support their children. They perceive the transition to school as an important change for parents too and they think that is very important for a child that his/her parents know to stay calm when needed.

Some of the other answers were:

- Parents from **Croatia** listed actively being **involved in their child's educational process** as one of the competences.
- Some parents also think that a parent's **attitude toward school** should be a positive one; that the parents should think and show the child that school is a fun and good thing. It is important for the parents to be relaxed because the children will be then relaxed too.
- Few parents expressed that is important to try and recognize their own flaws and essentially apologize to their children when necessary.



- One parent from **Cyprus** reported that a skill required by parents that are currently living in Cyprus is to speak the National Language. She indicated that the parents that do not speak Greek, will not be able to assist their children in the lessons they might be learning and thus their children might be struggling. Hence, it is vital for a parent living in a different country from his/her origin, to speak the language, to ensure a smoother transition for their children.

3. Do you think that your relationship with your child is important for his/her successful transition to primary school?

All parents replied YES to this question.

- All parents agree that the **relationship with their child** is extremely important for their successful transition to primary school. If the child is facing some difficulties in his/her school or with the lessons, they will communicate these with their parents and realize they are not alone and are always supported.
- They emphasize the need to **positively present the image of the school** to the child so that school can feel like a safe place for them. This can mean talking about the experience before the transition, **identifying possible fears or hesitations** that the child might have. It is important to **show interest in their new phase of life**, be physically present and **encourage them** with words of affirmation. In conclusion, the attitudes of parents towards primary school and learning are extremely important because of that they directly affect children's attitudes.
- Parents also emphasized **trust** as an important part of that relationship (for example, that a child trusts their parents enough to tell if there is a problem and is not afraid of their reaction). They stated that they are responsible for guiding their children with daily involvement in tasks, creations and tips on how to behave as well as practice.



4. Do you think that the ECEC system has prepared your child for the successful transition to primary school?

Most parents from every partner's county think their children were prepared for the transition to primary school by the ECEC system. They stated that the:

- Children happily went to kindergarten, and later to school, had **no problems with separation** and knew the **basic school rules**, raising hands, etc.
- They also mentioned that the ECEC system helped their children in improving their **concentration**, developing **empathy** towards their peers, participation in games, developing **motor skills** and graphomotor skills and a number of other positive things.
- Parents from **Croatia** said kindergarten also supported children in **developing their interests**.
- In the preschool year they focused on **developing attention** and other skills important for the transition. In parent's opinion, kindergarten did not ignore **physical development either** and they were developing **good cooperation** with parents.
- Also, they stressed that shortcomings that happened were related to a specific person, not to a system.

However, some parents think the ECEC system prepared their children for school only to some extent. The readiness they were lacking in their opinion refers to :

- **Social readiness** (successful communication with peers and adults, independence and cooperation, adoption of norms of behavior and following rules)
- **Emotional readiness** (recognizing and controlling emotions, postponing the satisfaction of their needs, separating from parents and independent functioning, evaluation of their achievements)
- **Speech development** (listening, following and understanding instructions, clear pronunciation, everyday vocabulary, communicating their thoughts and needs)
- **Intellectual maturity** (observation of connections and relations between things, development of observations, opinions, attention and memory, as well as adapting to new and changing situations) and **psychomotor development**.
- Some of the parents also think the ECEC system should give the children **more assignments** to prepare them for school, especially ones connected to **writing and developing graphomotor skills**.
- One of the parents from stated that there is a **lack of information sharing between kindergarten and school** and joint planning of transition practices which might have



positive effects on children's behaviour during the transition process and initial adjustment.

- They also pointed out **the number of children in the group**, because usually there are too many and the **personal approach to each child is lost**, meaning some children who might need it more (ie gifted children or children with disabilities) can feel neglected.

5. Have you ever asked for assistance or guidance from your child's educators regarding the transition to primary school?

- a. What kind of specific guidance was or would be helpful?*
- b. Did your child's kindergarten help in the transition of your child to primary school?*

- Most of the parents from **Croatia** have not asked for assistance or guidance from their child's educators regarding the transition to primary school, but one of them regularly **communicated with educators** about the child's progress and preparation for the first grade. One of the parents shared that their daughter was quite messy with coloring and writing, which someone drew her attention to and then they **practiced tidiness** a little more at home. They think that the school should **recognize potential problems** in time and warn the parents so they can start working on it as soon as possible. Other parents state the guidelines should be to create a **transition curriculum** within which it would be possible to achieve continuity of educational activities. The guidelines should also be **clearer**, and the observation of the child made so that the child is helped from the very beginning of primary education. A couple of parents got guidance from a **speech therapist** but further support is lacking because there is not enough speech therapists in the preschool and school system available for therapy. A lot of children (including their own) have to attend private speech therapy.
 - Parents suggested **organizing PTA meeting** with school pedagogue/teacher; parents need that informations come directly from the school system. They also suggested an app developed for that purpose. They believe that would make parents feel much safer in terms of their child's school readiness. They believe that, in their case, this step was skipped because of the Covid-19 situation.
 - Parents agreed that the child's **kindergarten helped** in the transition process to primary school through the preschool program and activities such as **workshops, plays, P.E., foreign language courses** etc. One of them gave praise to the



preschool educators for working hard and having an **individual approach** to each child. One of the parents said they noticed the help in strengthening a positive image of a child and their abilities, teaching them **how to say what they want and how to stand up for themselves, agreeing on rules and following them, teaching independence, satisfaction of the child's current interests, supporting their spontaneity and initiative, encouraging the child to express what they feel** etc.

- All parents from **Serbia** agree that they did not receive any help during the transition of their child from preschool to first grade. One respondent added that the most important thing for her was that she heard the **experience of another mother**, who had gone through the same process a year before, and that it was helpful for her. They believe that it would be useful to receive some materials or guidelines from the kindergarten or preschool institution on how to prepare the child for the first grade and how to make it easier for him.
 - Parents think that educators should be educated to help parents and tell them what is good to say to children and what is not, as well as to **hold a meeting** or lecture for parents once a month or once every two weeks by psychologists or pedagogues on the topic of transition from preschool to primary school. In addition, it is important to hear the experiences of some other parents, in the form of some support groups or talk groups.

- In **Cyprus**, parents reported that they didn't ask for assistance or guidance from their child's educators regarding the transition to primary school. The parents that asked for assistance, required additional support for their child, regarding the child's articulation. Hence, both parents asked for a speech therapist for their children.
 - Two of the parents stated that the **kindergarten** that their child attends to **has helped** in this transition. One of them stated that they assisted in this, by integrating the child into an organized ensemble and taught them to collaborate in a group and follow certain rules.



6. Do you think that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected your child's performance in terms of competences and skills necessary for successful transition to primary school?

a. Is there something that surprised you regarding your child's skills/ did you notice a lack of skills for your child?

According to the responses, the parents varied in their opinions on how the pandemic affected their children. 60% of the parents that participated in this interview think that the pandemic hasn't affected their child's performance in terms of competences and skills. The rest 40% parents think that it has, and as one of them says, it has affected every human being because it is impossible that this way of life does not affect your life in some sphere (which may manifest itself later). It did not affect their physical abilities, but what children were deprived of was **relationships / socializing with other children, extended family, relatives.**

- **Croatian** parents think that preschool teachers alleviated impact of pandemic as well as the earthquake that happened in Croatia last year. Teachers were **sending materials** that they could use with their children at home and everything **went smooth** and they think that, thanks to the preschool institutions, Covid-19 had a minimal impact on their child's performance in terms of competences and skills.
- They also think that maybe some children felt the impact of pandemic because not all parents have the knowledge and approach of a preschool teacher and during the lockdown they **could not offer** their children **appropriate activities**, especially because they had to work and spend time with their children at the same time, in the same space.
- **Serbian** parents all parents agree that the Covid-19 pandemic affected the development of children's competencies, and that they have been disrupted in some respects. Namely, the parents believe that the children did not learn to **socialize**, their socialization was different. In addition, **graphomotor skills** are less developed and they need more time to master these hand movements.
- In Cyprus, parents that answered affirmative to this question indicating that the most impacted competence of their children, were their **social and communication skills**. Due to the lockdown, the children were not able to see their friends and were of course crying for this restriction. However, one parent stated that once the measures were lifted, their child depicted signs of **anxiety**, as he was worried and shy when exposed with other individuals, except from his family.



Some of the examples of something that surprised them regarding their child's skills were:

- In **Croatia** one mother said that she expected her son will cry but she expected him to be crying for 2 days and it lasted for 2 weeks. She is aware of his emotional immaturity but the extent surprised her. Another one reported that her son is very silent in school. This was a very big surprise for her because this is not the child she knows; he is very communicative and open at home and in other environments. She thinks that maybe he does not feel good about his /academic competencies because he did not know how to write and read at the beginning.
- Other mothers reported positive surprises; one was surprised by her daughter's inclusion in advanced mathematical program; she expected her daughter to excel in artistic and sport activities and did not know that she has mathematical potential also. Moreover, her daughter is shy but she enrolled herself in basketball practice and this was also a pleasant surprise in term of child's assertiveness. One mother reported that she is surprised by her daughter's perseverance in different tasks.
- One parent from **Cyprus** stated that his child was crying when they took away his tablet, whilst all the other parents did not share any specific experience.

7. Which children's competences do you believe are the most important for the successful transition of your child to primary school? (Please, rate each competence on a scale from 1- not at all important to 5 extremely important)

The average score that was provided by each parent for each competence was calculated, in order to estimate the level of importance for each skill.

	M
Overall health/Physical well-being	4.8
Psychomotor skills	
Gross psychomotor skills (e.g. running, jumping, climbing)	4.3
Fine psychomotor skills (e.g. writing, drawing, cutting)	4.4
Language and literacy skills	
Fluent communication	4,5
Vocabulary	4,4



Storytelling	4,1
Awareness of the written text	3,6
Knowing letters	3,2
Reading	3
Pre-mathematical knowledge	3,4
Early numeracy skills	3,6
Sorting, ordering, classifying	3,4
Early life science concepts and general knowledge of the world that surrounds us	3,5
Self-care (e.g. brushing teeth, going to the bathroom, dressing up, eating)	4,8
Socioemotional skills	
Interpersonal skills	4,7
Communication	4,7
Relating and interacting with others	4,5
Self-regulation of emotions	4,6
Self-regulation of attention	4,4
Keeping focus	4,5
Behavioural self-control	4,5
Ability to follow instructions	4,5
Motivation and Learning	
Willingness to learn	4,4
Curiosity	4,8
Persistence	4,6
Attentiveness	4,5



Ranking results range from M=3.0 (lowest) to M=4.8 (highest). The competency that the parents ranked as most important for a successful transition from ECEC to primary school are **overall health/physical well-being** (M=4.8) **self-care** (e.g. brushing teeth, going to the bathroom, dressing up, eating) (M=4.8) and curiosity (M=4.8). They are closely followed by: **interpersonal skills** (M=4.7) and **communication** (M=4.7), self-regulation of emotions (M=4.6), persistence (M=4.6). The lowest rated are: **knowing letters** (M=3.2) followed by **reading** (M=3.0).

8. In your opinion, does your child need additional support to develop some of the competences listed above in the period of transition from ECEC to school?

a. If yes, please specify which competences listed above does he/she lack the most and could need additional support to develop them.

Ten out of **twenty** parents that gave this interview stated 'YES', that their child require additional support, whilst **ten** parents reported 'NO' that their child does not require additional support.

The parent that answered 'YES' to the previous question said that the **will** and **desire to learn** is something their child lacks. Parents also listed following competencies:

- encouraging curiosity,
- communication
- self-regulation of emotions
- reading
- communication skills and the vocabulary
- attention
- interaction with others
- curiosity

9. What competences of parents do you think are important for you to have to support your child's transition to primary school?

(Please, rate each competence on a scale from 1-not at all important to 5 extremely important)

	M
Building quality relationship with the child	5
Spending quality time with the child	5



Stimulating curiosity, motivation and learning	4,8
Supporting child's autonomy	4,9
Supportiveness	5
Responsiveness	4.8
Emotional warmth and tenderness	5
Play	4,7
Communication	5
Answering questions	4.8
Reading	4,5
Providing various experiences (neighborhood, local community, etc.)	4,8
Providing opportunities for interactions with peers	5

Ranking results range from M=4.5 (lowest) to M=5.0 (highest). The competency that the parents ranked as most important for a successful transition from ECEC to primary school are **building quality relationship with the child** (M=5.0), **spending quality time with the child** (M=5.0), **supportiveness** (M=5.0), **emotional warmth and tenderness** (M=5.0) and **communication** (M=5.0). They are closely followed by: **supporting child's autonomy** (M=4.9), **stimulating curiosity , motivation and learning** (M=4.8), **responsiveness** (M=4.8), **answering questions** (M=4.7) and **play** (M=4.7). The lowest rated is **reading** (M=4.5).

10. In your opinion, do you think that you could use an additional support to develop some of the above specified parental skills/behaviours to support your child for successful transition to school?

a. If yes, please specify which competences/behaviours do you lack the most and could need additional support to develop them.

Ten from twenty parents answered 'NO' to this question, whilst **ten** of them indicated 'YES' and that they could use an additional support to develop some of the above specified parental skills/behaviours to support their child for successful transition to school.

- In **Croatia** the parent that responded 'YES' to the previous question shared that they could use some support in encouraging **curiosity, motivation and learning**. They stated



that the most important thing is to **find a way to explain the rules, effects and impacts of their actions to kids** in a way that is understandable to them, instead of using punishment methods. They also mentioned that they could use help in **answering some of their child's questions** and building a **quality relationship** with them – which is the hardest thing.

- In **Cyprus** each parent from the four individuals that responded 'YES' to the previous question, shared their distinct perspectives.
 - One of the parents stated that a parent should cultivate their knowledge about this transition, by participating in educational courses and learn the specific Do's and Don'ts.
 - Another parent indicated that it is important for the parents to also participate in physical and fun activities with their children, such as extracurricular activities, exercise, music and painting.
 - The other two parents expressed that is essential for the parent to develop skills that can assist in supporting the child's autonomy, trigger their curiosity and emotionally support their children
- Parents in **Serbia** listed following competencies: **communication, reading, providing different experiences, more parental involvement in school work, commitment and understanding.**

11. Is there anything that I/we did not ask you regarding successful transition of children from ECEC to primary school and you think it is important to mention?

There were no additional comments from most of the parents, but some of them wanted to give their opinion on some subjects. For example :

- One of the **Croatian** parents thinks that some parents rely only on preschool and the work of educators with their children, which is sometimes not enough. The parents think it's every parent's responsibility to **invest their time and patience in working with the child during the transition period** from ECEC to primary school. The everyday tasks in first grade are much bigger than the ones in ECEC. The child suddenly has to learn how and when to rest, listen, focus, be punctual etc. All this can be a big shock to their system. The child in this period of life is in dire need of parents' support. In order for a child to have a nice and easy start of the school experience, to like this new beginning without being



disappointed and lost, the parents really need to **be supportive throughout the whole process.**

- Another parent points out a difference between the “**child ready for school**” and the “**school ready for a child**” model. The first one suggests that children should work hard to prepare for primary school and is based on the readiness of the child for school as a criterion for enrollment in primary school, while the second model implies that schools should adapt to the child and their needs.
- One parent from **Cyprus** stated that it would be appropriate to incorporate some questions about the language of the parents and the children. The possibility that migrant children need to learn the language of the country they are living in, prior attending the PS.

12. If you could do something different with for/with your child regarding transition from ECEC to primary school, that could better prepare her/him, what would it be?

Eight out of twenty parents consider their children's transition to be successful and wouldn't do anything substantially different. One of them said that it's important that their child learned how to take care of tidying up their bag and school supplies. They also mentioned that they taught them **responsibility** and made them as **independent** as possible, along with doing some standard exercises such as drawing, writing, reading.

Other twelve parents could think of some things they could have done differently:

- In **Croatia** one of the parents thinks they should have practiced **reading** more, while the other one regrets not getting more **involved in the educational process** in preschool and primary school. The other parent thinks they should have given their child **more 'carefree time'** – enrolling them in art workshops, spending more time in nature and out with friends etc. They would have been more patient and spend more time playing and having fun with the child, instead of constantly reminding them of what has to be done for school.
- One mother said that she would insist to **know the teacher**. She thinks that the teacher does the “technical” part of the program very well, but that she is lacking emotional warmth and support and that her daughter and other children do not have the chance to develop their potentials because she does not offer anything out of the program while being very inflexible.
- One parent from Cyprus expressed that it would be more suitable to organize an **'induction week/day'**, a few days before the child's first day at PS, in order to familiarize



the child with the environment, the teachers and their peers. This can also help the parents **meet the teachers** and exchange information about the child, to lay the appropriate foundations and recognize at which aspects the child, requires support.

- Another parent indicated that she would try to allocate more **time with her children**, in order to provide the appropriate amount of attention to the needs of her child.

3. APPENTICE 2

Interview results (Experts)

1. What do you think contributes to a smooth transition for children from pre-school to primary school?

Most of the interviewed experts agree that **preparation for a smooth transition** is needed and it is usually incorporated in the early and preschool educational system and that adults (parents and preschool teachers) have the responsibility to present school to a child, not only through information, but through their positive approach and attitudes.

- Experts also mentioned intensive **collaboration between preschool educational system and school system**. This collaboration can be accomplished by preschool children visiting schools but also by school children visiting kindergartens. Other forms of collaboration include sharing information about children between kindergarten and school (between teachers, but also between psychologists, pedagogists, special needs therapists etc.).
- One of the most common points the experts made was that children need to reach a certain level of maturity before transitioning from pre-school to primary school. This implies **physical maturity** (good health and proper physical development), **intellectual maturity** (well-developed speech, developed attention, psychomotor skills, memory and thinking) **emotional maturity** (self-control and emotional stability) and **social maturity** (adaptability to school obligations and behaviors, communication and interaction with peers and adults, and independence in caring for oneself and one's belongings). They all agree that emotional maturity is one of the key component in a child's transition to elementary school. The more emotionally mature a child is, the more ready he is to accept changes and new challenges in the school environment and to be more ready to adapt to new situations. One of the experts from **Cyprus** mentioned that there is a difference between Cyprus and other European countries, in that Cyprus followed a policy that a child is ready to transition to primary school at only 5 years old, which they



think is way too early, because children require more time to develop emotional maturity.

- The importance of **social skills – communication and collaboration** in adjusting to a new environment was highlighted by most experts. In that context, they mentioned the need for tolerance for the behavior of others, the habit of a child working and functioning in a group, to have the ability to set personal boundaries and communicate them openly.
- According to the experts, **independence** in simple tasks, such as going to the toilet on your own, performing hygienic habits and the habit of sitting still in class, contributes to an easier transition from preschool to elementary school.

Other answers provided by the experts stated that:

- **Graphomotor and academic skills** can ease the transition. They report that digital competencies are those that are often neglected in kindergarten, they think that developing self-protective behaviors related to virtual surroundings should be supported.
- **Individual approach** to the child is necessary in order for them to accept the change of the environment as easily as possible and to accept a new role in their life - the role of a student. The responsibility of the educational institutions is to observe, collect, monitor and document information about children in order to gain insight into the individual development of children's achievements and interests.
- It is very important that a child knows what their **school's expectations** are. Basic knowledge about the **physical environment and structure of the school process** can facilitate their transition.
- One expert listed a variety of factors that can assist in the smooth transition of children to primary school. She indicated that the **relationship between the parents and the educators** is quite significant and that there should also be opportunities for kindergarten children to interact with the children from primary school and to participate in common events.

2. Which competences of children do you believe are the most important for the successful transition of children from ECEC to primary school?

Answers to this question were quite similar to the answers given to the first one. Experts said the previously mentioned competences can assist the children in their transition to primary school, including emotional maturity, independence, social skills, communication and collaboration skills.



Most experts agree that:

- **Emotional maturity** of the child, which includes **self-regulation of emotions, communication and successful interaction with other students**, is one of the most important competencies that a child must develop to feel safe and successful transition from kindergarten to school. They believe that it is important for a child to know how to **communicate their needs** and be ready to cooperate. A value that seems to be important to most of them is empathy and tolerance (feelings of care for others, helping peers, respecting teachers and elders).
- **Independence in simple self-care tasks** is a very important competence, meaning children should know how to take care of themselves, their possessions. They should also have hygienic habits and be independent in eating, dressing etc.

Experts from **Cyprus** and **Croatia** state that motor skills such as being able to hold the pencil and write are also significant competences for children in the transition period. Croatian experts highlighted the importance of verbal expression (rich vocabulary appropriate to age) in terms of being able to express one's own opinion in complete sentences, understanding others and storytelling (noticing the key elements of the story, summing up and being able to discuss after hearing the story).

Other competences mentioned are:

- **motivation and desire to learn**
- basic level of **literacy and mathematical knowledge**, which all **Cypriot experts** agreed on.

When asked if they noticed a lack of specific skills in children for this transition, **Croatian** and **Serbian** experts:

- noticed a change in coping in life-practical situations which in their opinion is the result of the overprotective style of parenting. Experts feel that parents are generally overprotective and don't teach their kids to be independent. Some children in kindergarten still have troubles when separating from their parents and this generates problems in their social relations.
- agreed that some children **do not respect other's boundaries** and do not comprehend other's needs and rights; they **perceive only themselves**. Experts state that children are often egocentric and want to get what they want right now, and in that sense they lack self-regulation of emotions and behaviour.



- noticed that children have **low levels of concentration**; they especially have **problems focusing on and hearing each other**. As well as the ability to concentrate and pay attention.
- stated that a lot of children have **poor verbal competencies**; most of them have troubles in expressing themselves, without crying and frustrating. Their verbal expressions are very much simplified and shortened, often limited to YES or NO. Accordingly, they have troubles with **voice synthesis and analysis**. It has to be said that not all skills have to be developed in order for a child to be ready for school.

Croatian experts note that less and less children come to school with adopted spatial relationships and that they have problems comparing items and sorting them by given criteria. One of them said that what is missing are hand motor skills and fine motor skills of hands and fingers, which one of the experts believes are absolutely absent in current generations. They agree that **disproportion between children's intellectual and socio-emotional development** is huge. Most of first graders know how to count, write, sort etc., but they **lack independence, accepting differences** and **critical thinking**.

Three experts from **Cyprus** agreed that Covid-19 has impacted the children's ability to develop certain competences.



3. What do you think the current ECEC system is lacking for preparing the children for this transition?

Because educational systems differ from country to country, the answers experts provided to this question can be sorted by country of origin.

Croatian experts:

- agree that **cooperation between different sectors** would help transition, especially when considering children with special education needs (Centers for social work, pediatrics etc). Sometimes different sectors do not agree that a child needs extra support and this can limit the possibilities of a certain child. One of them suggested organizing workshops that would guide parents towards what they especially need to develop in their child. They often say that „it is not a big deal“ or that „it is a phase“ and expect that it will pass when a child enrolls into school. Experts feel frustrated and sorry for those children because they think children could do better and progress if their parents would take care of them properly. PTA meetings and workshops are only attended by those who want to and those who need their support the most often do not attend. Some children even do not attend preschool although it is mandatory (250 hours minimum). That should be reported to Centre for social care but it is rarely done.
- perceive that there is **no connection between preschool teachers and classroom teachers** and this results in uneven demands toward children. Moreover, they report that they have children in their classes with special educational needs that were not identified in the preschool system, or not identified on time. They believe that this shouldn't happen in a situation where a child was in the system for 5 years.
- think that the **parents should make the final decision whether a child should go to school or not**, but the system should enable sufficient information about the child's level of readiness. They can not make an informed decision if they do not have enough information. Teachers think that the parents are not supported enough in making that decision. Parents can not know what circumstances will influence on their child in that transition. It would be helpful if they had (a team of) experts explaining what are their child's accomplishments in different developmental areas in comparison with school demands and that would give a parents enough information to be able to make that decision.



- said that the existing preschool system in preparing children for this transition lacks **forming groups** so that preschool children are separated into a special group because in many mixed groups educators cannot adequately dedicate themselves to preschoolers, Preschool experts agree that smaller groups would enable individualized approach to every child. It is very hard to dedicate to every child when having so much children in one group.
- think preschool educators should **pay more attention to graphomotor exercises**, rather than incorrect letter writing (which teachers cannot correct later).

One of the experts thinks that the **Croatian national curriculum** for early and preschool education presupposes everything, but probably the whole situation is both economically and socially demanding, groups of children in kindergartens are too large, teachers in kindergartens are overburdened and of course the expected results are lacking.

Serbian experts:

- agreed that the main drawback of the ECEC system is that the programs are **increasingly imitating school and what is done in school and neglecting to teach children important things such as nurturing social relationships, empathy and positive emotions**. The focus is on children's academic achievements, to learn to read, write and count, instead of learning to get along in a team, to work in a team, to have understanding for their friends, as well as to learn why it is important to do something and learn. Two **Cypriot experts** stated that the traditional ECEC institutions do not offer activities that can help the child develop his **soft skills** and instead focus on the development of plainly academic skills.
- added that the ECEC programs strictly adhere to the prescribed programs and rules, that everything is **strict and authoritative, and** that there is a lack of stories with children and explanations why something is being done. There is a lack of knowledge of the causal relationship, to know what will happen if they do something and what will happen if they do not do something.



4. Do you receive any guidance for helping the children in your group/classroom transition to primary school?

All **Croatian experts** agree that there is not enough education in this area and that they **haven't received any guidelines**. Preschool experts consult literature and expert team and they would like to be connected better with the classroom teachers. Classroom teachers would like to **attend educations** on the latest findings in the field of developmental psychology, neuropsychology etc. In their opinion, most of education in that area consist of **recycled information** that is already well known. Classroom teachers find **verbal development** as the area where they feel especially insecure; some of them are even concerned whether their approach can make harm to a specific child because they do not have enough knowledge in that area and are not sure whether their behaviors can worsen the child's problems. Primary school teachers mentioned that they very rarely have opportunity to be in possession of **child's documentation** (written by external expert as a psychologist, psychiatrist etc.) and when they do, they are not sure which expert opinion should be considered as relevant. They would like to have a **conversation with their expert team** considering every single child in order to prepare for every child better. Their impression is that everything is a secret and that information are kept from them by their expert team in order to prevent prejudice towards a child. They lose a lot of time in an attempt to find information and that makes them low in efficiency. Information about children, in majority, come from their parents, and that information is not from an expert point of view and are biased. They **need specific information** in order to help a child, in order to prepare and educate about a certain topic in advance and a child would be in a better position with more appropriate approach. Three of the experts declared that it would be a useful guide on how to help **a child who is neglected** in the family or has some specific learning and behavioral difficulties.

Serbian experts said that they **did not officially receive any guides or guidelines** on how to facilitate the child's adaptation to the first grade. The only thing that the teachers singled out was that the professional service at the school at the beginning of the school year and the first grade introduced them to the characteristics of the class, as well as the individual characteristics of each child, so they could prepare and adapt their work to each child. As for the expert work of a psychologist and pedagogue at the school, they state that they found the guidelines independently through **various professional trainings and seminars**, but that the Ministry certainly does not prescribe any specific activities that could contribute to and facilitate teachers. The experts agreed that it is personally most important for them to get individually for each child and group of children what their characteristics are, as well as recommendations on how such a child should be approached.



They agree that knowing the characteristics of children and the group that comes to the first grade makes it easier for teachers to adapt to that group and each child. As before, this type of assistance can be provided by the professional service that enrolls in the primary school, but they also agreed that it would be good to receive **a report on the child from ECEC with a description of their characteristics.**

Two of the **Cypriot experts** were unable to answer, as they are not primary or kindergarten school teachers. However, the other three educators responded no, but suggested that the organization of a few educational seminars targeted at updating their educational materials would be helpful.

5. Which competences do you think are important for parents to have to support their children in the successful transition to primary school?

Croatian experts:

think that the most valuable thing parents can do is **listen to their child** and make sure that the child's **emotions come first**. One of the experts said that it is necessary to **stimulate curiosity and motivation** to learn and show personal interest in school and **be more involved**. Other experts listed that important competencies of parents to support children in a successful transition to primary school are: **consistency** in raising a child (setting clear boundaries and implementing them), **spending time with their child** (reading, playing, walking etc.) and **cooperation** (to cooperate with the teacher in order to achieve the best possible results for the child). All Croatian experts agree that parents need to **accept their children** as they are. This means that it is important for them to get to know their child and **coordinate their expectations with their child's level of skills and potential**. Classroom teachers notice that parents have very high academic expectations from their children and this has a negative effect on their children's emotional competences. Parents are focused on their children's grades from the start and teachers think that they should **deal with nurture/upbringing more**. However, teachers are understanding towards parents and think that **parents need support** because they are overwhelmed by numerous obligations. Moreover, experts think parents should **support children's autonomy** and sense of competence, which will then positively impact their self esteem and academic achievement. Classroom teachers point out that it is important for parents to be open to communication with their child's school for a child's benefit, without perceiving feedback as an attack.



Serbian experts:

consider the **willingness of parents to cooperate and communicate with the teacher** the most important competence. Just like their Croatian colleagues, they added that parents should nurture **independence** in their children, instead of overprotecting them, and they also believe that the transition will depend on the parents' parenting style. Some Serbian experts disagree regarding the importance of **parents' educational status** - while some believe that the educational status of parents is important and that the more educated parents are, the more they value education and have broader perspectives, the other half of experts think that it is not so important.

Finally, experts from Cyprus:

All of the experts expressed similar opinions for this question and covered the fundamental competences that parents need to withhold such as: **patience, good communication and spending quality time with their children**. Two experts suggested that parents need to work on **developing resilience** and **building their child's confidence**. One expert explained that regardless of the competences that parents might withhold, they need to comprehend that **ECEC is vital for the children**, as it exposes them to new experiences and allows them to interact with their peers. Additionally, he stated that it would be beneficial for the parents to **communicate with their children's teacher** and **attend a few educational courses**, regarding the activities they can complete to assist in this transition.



6. Do you notice a difference in a child's preparedness for school nowadays compared to previous generations?

Some **Croatian** experts said that they didn't notice a difference and they believe that a lot **depends on the interests and personality** of the child. Others say students are **less independent** and **irregular in their work**, they **lack physical activity**, they are **less concentrated** and **find it harder to follow the teacher's instructions**. Croatian preschool experts have noticed that previous generations of children were **much more curious** and **interested in the world** surrounding them. As they stated, there is a negative trend in terms of **independence** (for example pulling the chair under the desk after getting up). Children do not take care of their possessions and **aren't responsible**. All Croatian experts agree that children's **social skills** are less developed in comparison to older generations. Some children demand fulfilling their needs instantly, in a very rude manner. They suspect that could be a consequence of overprotective parenting. Preschool experts notice that children are **more frustrated with everyday situations** than they were before. They lack **problem solving skills** and express very **high stress and frustration levels** which are not in accordance with the situations. Moreover, classroom teachers notice that younger generations have **problems with reading and writing**. Teachers relate this issue with using digital devices.

Serbian experts agree with Croatians in that today's generations are growing up with digital devices and technology, and as a result, their concentration and attention are weakened, because they are constantly bombarded with various stimuli from those devices. In addition, due to the use of devices, they draw, write and paint less, so their **graphomotor skills** are less developed. However, they pointed out that digital devices also have a good side, and that is that children have **access to more information** and **know where to look for it**. Another thing that everyone agrees on is the **attitude towards adults and authority**, as well as **socio-emotional maturity and independence**. They believe that children used to be much more independent, and therefore more mature when they started school. Authority was more respected and boundaries were set that children respected. All experts agreed that today's generations, unlike the previous ones, have less developed **ability to concentrate** and **pay attention**, and worse fine **psychomotor skills**.



Finally, **Cypriot** experts agreed that there is an undeniable difference between children's preparedness nowadays, as opposed to the previous generations. They consider this to be a consequence of the shift in parental style. Parents used to be more **conservative and strict** and had firmer boundaries and more rules children had to obey. All of them agreed that the exposure to the internet does not only include benefits, but also a few drawbacks. Four experts indicated that the **internet helps children become more experienced and familiar with digital processes**, as opposed to the older generations. In addition, they added that the internet can help the children learn faster, as they can comprehend concepts through digital story-telling and illustrations. However, they also stated that the **internet delays their emotional maturity**, since they are constantly exposed to a screen and absorb irrelevant information, instead of interacting with their peers. Evidently, this **affects their attention span**, as they are constantly exposed to a different material.

7. Do you think that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the children's performance in terms of competences and skills necessary for successful transition to primary school?

Findings from **Croatian** experts' answers are:

- classroom teachers think that the pandemic did not have a significant effect on children's competences because the preschool system supported them. Only one of the experts said that the the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the children's performance in terms of competences and skills necessary for successful transition to primary school. The expert said that the greatest impact was on children's **social competences**.
- experts from kindergarten believe that children who **lack social skills** have been affected by pandemic the most because they did not have a chance to practice their social skills and being without their parents. Also, they noticed that the last generation of preschoolers that they have „sent“ to school have developed lower levels of **fine motor skills**.



Experts from **Cyprus**:

- agreed that Covid-19 deeply influenced children's social and communication skills, as they were restrained from interacting with their peers. All of them mentioned: **social and communication skills, collaboration skills, their abilities to disagree and try to comprehend another individual's perspective**. Two experts added that their **attention span** was influenced by the pandemic. Two of them stated that children might experience **PTSD and Social Anxiety Disorder** symptomatology, following the constant rapid testing to attend the school, the social distancing measures and the quarantine. However, two experts reported that their exposure to technology could have supported their **motor skills, such as hand to eye coordination**. Another expert stated that their **collaboration skills** are also affected by the pandemic, as they are not allowed to cooperate with their peers, due to social distancing. Finally, two experts shared their concern that a few children might have been exposed to **severely negative experiences**, as they were constantly locked in their houses with parents that might have been **abusing**.

All experts from **Serbia**:

- agreed that Covid-19 did influence the development of competences in students. They believe that the pandemic affected the ability of students to **maintain concentration and attention** and to have some structure. The children spent more time at home, with their parents, where they were allowed many things and there were **no boundaries or structure** and certain rituals that they had to adhere to. As a result, they are **less willing to cooperate and obey**, and more focused on their own needs and themselves. The **self-control of emotions and behavior was reduced**, due to the fact that they lost the opportunity to learn in the team how to express and communicate their emotions, because everything was allowed to them at home. They did not pass the preschool program, so they used a pencil less and practiced writing and drawing, so **the graphomotor skills are worse**.



8. Which competences do you believe are the most important for the successful transition of children from ECEC to primary school?

The competences that experts mentioned are: **relationships and interaction with others, self-regulation of emotions, self-regulation of attention, maintenance of concentration, self-control of behavior, ability to follow instructions, will and desire to learn, curiosity and attention.**

Experts rated each competence on a scale from 1-not at all important to 5 extremely important and all of them agreed that the following competencies are extremely important.

	M
Overall health/Physical well-being	4,6
Psychomotor skills	
Gross psychomotor skills (e.g. running, jumping, climbing)	4,3
Fine psychomotor skills (e.g. writing, drawing, cutting)	4,5
Language and literacy skills	
Fluent communication	4,6
Vocabulary	4,3
Storytelling	4,2
Awareness of the written text	3,4
Knowing letters	3,1
Reading	2,5
Cognitive/ Pre-academic skills and general knowledge	
Pre-mathematical knowledge	3,9
Early numeracy skills	3,7
Sorting, ordering, classifying	4,5
Early life science concepts and general knowledge of the world that surrounds us	4,2
Self-care (e.g. brushing teeth, going to the bathroom, dressing up, eating)	4,8
Socioemotional skills	
Interpersonal skills	4,7



Relating and interacting with others	4,9
Self-regulation of emotions	5,0
Self-regulation of attention	4,9
Keeping focus	4,8
Behavioural self-control	4,8
Ability to follow instructions	4,8
Motivation and Learning	
Willingness to learn	4,8
Curiosity	4,6
Persistence	4,7
Attentiveness	4,8

Ranking results range from M=2.5 (lowest) to M=5.0 (highest). The competency that the experts ranked as most important for a successful transition from ECEC to primary school is **self-regulation of emotions** (M=5.0). It is closely followed by: **communication** (M=4.9), **relating and interacting with others** (M=4.9), **self-regulation of attention** (M=4.9), self-care (M=4.8), keeping focus (M=4.8), behavioural self-control (M=4.8), ability to follow instructions (M=4.8), willingness to learn (M=4.8) and attentiveness (M=4.8). The lowest rated are: **reading** (M=2.5) and **knowing letters** (M=3.1), followed by awareness of the written text (M=3.4).



9. In your opinion, do the children lack some of the competences listed above in the period of transition from ECEC to school? (Choose one answer)

All experts said that in their opinion children lack some of the competences listed above in the period of transition from ECEC to school. When asked to specify, experts from Croatia mentioned the lack of **ability to follow instructions, persistence, attention, interpersonal skills, communication, relationships and interaction with others, self-regulation of emotions, self-regulation of attention, maintaining concentration, self-control behavior and fine psychomotor skills and socio-emotional skills**. Experts from Serbia agreed on the lack of attention, communication, **self-regulation of emotions, ability to follow instructions, attention self-regulation and fine motor skills**. They also added **motivation, independence, graphomotor skills, perseverance and willingness to learn**. Experts from Cyprus **social and communication skills, motivation and learning and self-care**.

10. Which competences do you think are important for parents to have so that they can support their children in the successful transition to primary school?

Experts rated each competence on a scale from 1-not at all important to 5 extremely important:

	M
Building quality relationship with the child	4,7
Spending quality time with the child	4,9
Stimulating curiosity, motivation and learning	4,7
Supporting child's autonomy	4,9
Supportiveness	4,9
Responsiveness	4,8
Emotional warmth and tenderness.	5,0
Play	4,8
Communication	5,0
Explaining (rules, causes, consequences etc.)	4,8
Answering questions	4,7



Reading	4,2
Providing various experiences (neighborhood, local community, etc.)	4,6
Providing opportunities for interactions with peers	4,8

According to their responses, the most important competences parents should have so that they can support their children in the successful transition to primary school are: **communication** and **emotional warmth and tenderness** (M=5.0). Close second are: **spending quality time with the child, supporting child's autonomy** and general **supportiveness** (M=4.9). The competence rated lowest in importance is **reading**. It is important to note that the score could range from 1 to 5 and the lowest rated competence was rated 4.2 so it is still considered quite important.

11. In your opinion, do the parents lack some of specific skills/behaviors listed above to support their children for successful transition from ECEC to primary school? (Choose one answer)

All experts except for one from Cyprus, believe that parents lack some of specific skills/behaviors to support their children for successful transition from ECEC to primary school. When asked to specify, experts said that due to the current work conditions, parents are not able to **spend the adequate amount of time with their children**. Another competence that experts think parents are lacking is **communication**. The lack of previously mentioned competences also means that parents spend less time **reading** to and with kids, **explaining rules** and overall building a quality **emotional connection** with the child. Two experts from Cyprus stated that parents might be a bit **overprotective** and might not allow their children to encounter a diversity of experiences, including simply interacting with their peers. Some experts from Croatia mentioned a lack of **clear boundaries setting** and being consistent in implementing them. Serbian experts highlighted the lack of **support of child's autonomy** and **stimulating curiosity**.



12. Is there anything that I/we did not ask you regarding successful transition of children from ECEC to primary school and you think it is important to mention?

One of the experts from Croatia emphasized that it is very important for parents to **fill in the questionnaire honestly** and **objectively** when enrolling the child to primary school to facilitate the experts in approaching their child in the best way. Another expert from Croatia said that children should first and foremost be **allowed to be children** and just because they will go to school there is no need to kill their creativity. It is important that the child develops **positive attitudes towards school** and the teacher, but also that the child is **prepared** to go to school. Two experts from Cyprus suggested that parents should **stop projecting their own beliefs and experiences onto their children**, as this effectively creates stereotypes. In addition, they added that they should try to get to know their child as another human being, in order to adjust the assigned boundaries and rules to the child's demands. One expert stated that ECEC institutions should aim to upgrade their facilities and **include more interactive means for education**, such as advanced playgrounds etc.

Experts from Serbia had no additional comments.