

Milan Participatory Workshops – June 2025

Within the EDUFIRST project, the Municipality of Milan organised a series of participatory workshops in June 2025. The workshops were designed to collect different perspectives on the current ECEC system, its strengths, challenges and possible areas for improvement, involving actors who occupy different positions within and around the municipal 0–6 services.

The process involved ECEC service managers, early childhood educators and teachers, families, municipal project staff and research support. Rather than seeking immediate solutions, the workshops were conceived as spaces for listening, discussion and shared reflection, contributing to the development of common meanings, criteria and priorities for the subsequent stages of the project. This participatory process was intended to prepare the development of the EDUFIRST ECEC model, the self-evaluation tool and the later co-design activities.

Workshop 1 – ECEC service managers

19 June 2025

Participants:

- 8 ECEC service managers / heads of Educational Units
- 3 members of the municipal project staff

The workshop focused on the perspective of professionals with pedagogical and organisational responsibilities within the Milan ECEC system.

Main areas explored:

1. Universal services needed during the first 1,000 days of a child's life.
2. Strategies and services to reduce inequalities in contexts characterised by cultural and social diversity.
3. Key features of high-quality ECEC services in Milan.
4. Main functions of early childhood services: education, care, work–life balance, inclusion and reduction of inequalities.
5. Challenges affecting the educational profession and its social and professional recognition.
6. The relationship between the political-institutional and pedagogical levels.
7. Further challenges to be considered within EDUFIRST.

Discussion highlighted the importance of integrated educational, social and health services; accessibility and flexibility; multidisciplinary teams; stronger territorial networks; genuine family participation; and the role of ECEC services as spaces of community and citizenship.

Workshop 2 – Early childhood educators and teachers

24 June 2025

Participants:

- 10 early childhood educators and teachers
- 3 members of the municipal project staff
- 1 researcher

The workshop explored the same broader challenges from the perspective of professionals working directly with children and families.

Main areas explored:

1. Universal services needed during the first 1,000 days.
2. Strategies for addressing inequalities in multicultural contexts.
3. Characteristics of high-quality ECEC services.
4. Functions of early childhood services.
5. Challenges for educational professionalism and professional recognition.
6. Relationships between educational practice and the institutional/political level.
7. Emerging challenges for children, families and services.

Participants emphasised the need for services that support children and families together, greater openness towards neighbourhoods and communities, active involvement of families, recognition of home languages and cultures, inclusive environments and shared professional development. The discussion also raised concerns about families' increasing isolation, emerging vulnerabilities, the impact of digital technologies and the need for stronger territorial networks and updated professional training.

Workshop 3 – Families

25 June 2025

Participants:

- 11 parents/family members
- 3 members of the municipal project staff
- 1 researcher

This workshop was specifically designed to bring families' experiences and perspectives into the participatory process.

Main areas explored:

1. Universal services needed during the first 1,000 days.
2. Main functions of ECEC services.
3. Characteristics of high-quality ECEC services in Milan.
4. Conditions and actions that can strengthen family participation in ECEC services.

Families highlighted the importance of integrated and accessible services during the first years of a child's life, including family counselling centres, paediatric services, post-partum support and spaces for socialisation. Economic accessibility and greater flexibility in accessing nursery services were also identified as important issues.

ECEC services were described as multifunctional spaces in which education, care, socialisation, inclusion and support for work–life balance are closely intertwined. Quality was particularly associated with meaningful relationships, professional competence, educational continuity, well-designed spaces and connections with the surrounding territory.

Family participation was associated not only with formal meetings but with practical opportunities for involvement, flexible meeting arrangements, everyday communication and the co-design of activities and community events.

Workshop 4 – Self-evaluation of ECEC services

26 June 2025

Participants:

- 12 participants
- 3 members of the municipal project staff
- 1 researcher

The fourth workshop focused specifically on evaluation and self-evaluation practices within ECEC services.

Main areas explored:

1. How evaluation and self-evaluation are understood in ECEC services.
2. Previous experiences with evaluation and self-evaluation tools.
3. Characteristics of useful and sustainable self-evaluation tools.
4. Working methods that can support collective reflection and improvement.
5. Conditions for integrating self-evaluation into the ordinary life of services.

Participants distinguished self-evaluation from external judgement, describing it primarily as a collective process of reflection capable of making implicit educational practices more visible.

Previous experiences suggested both the limitations of highly standardised instruments and the potential of more flexible and participatory approaches.

Particular importance was attributed to tools that are clear, understandable, motivating and sustainable within the ordinary workload of services, combining simple indicators with opportunities for qualitative reflection and collective discussion.

Overall purpose of the Milan workshops

Across the four workshops, the aim was not simply to collect opinions but to involve participants as contributors to a shared process of inquiry and service development. The workshops generated qualitative material on accessibility, equity, inclusion, quality, participation, professional practice and self-evaluation and provided a basis for the subsequent thematic groups, training activities and co-design process carried out in Milan.