

Childcare-policy responses in the COVID-19 pandemic: Unpacking cross-country variation

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Source: www.pixabay.com

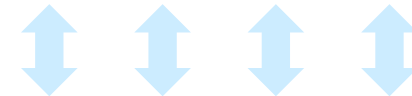
COVID-19 and ECEC/school closures

ECEC/School closures

in most countries
as of mid-March
2020; some until
new school year

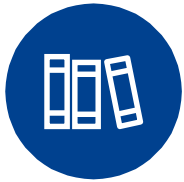
Care & Home-
schooling
responsibilities
'shifted fully
onto parents'
(Yerkes et al.
2020: 4)

- Increased risk of social exclusion & growing social inequalities in children's educational opportunities (OECD 2020)
- Gender-equality concerns (with nuanced evidence emerging) → increased pressure on working mothers & fathers



**National ECEC/school closure
'strategies' playing a vital role**

Pandemic childcare-policy responses?



Striking cross-country variation in immediate crisis responses
(Capano et al. 2020; Yerkes et al. 2020)

ECEC/primary schools (up to age 12)

- variety goes far beyond 'closure' (e.g. Italy) vs. 'no-closure' (e.g. Sweden) (UNESCO, 2020; OECD, 2020)
- hybrid approaches', varying from **lenient to strict**, but also from **universal to selective** closures/re-openings (i.e. allowing certain groups to keep access or re-enter earlier)



A conceptual framework that allows to unpack and classify variations in the design of the *immediate pandemic childcare-policy responses*

- Focus on education- and care-services up to age 12 approximately (parent's care & home-schooling more intensive)
- Theoretically-informed, yet informed by the variety of empirical realities in 28 EEA countries (FRA 2020; OECD 2020; UNESCO 2020; Hale et al., 2020)



Argument: Childcare-policy responses result from country-specific combination of pandemic prevention strategy and childcare policy concerns



Strong ambiguity in chosen responses, and they are contentious *either way*



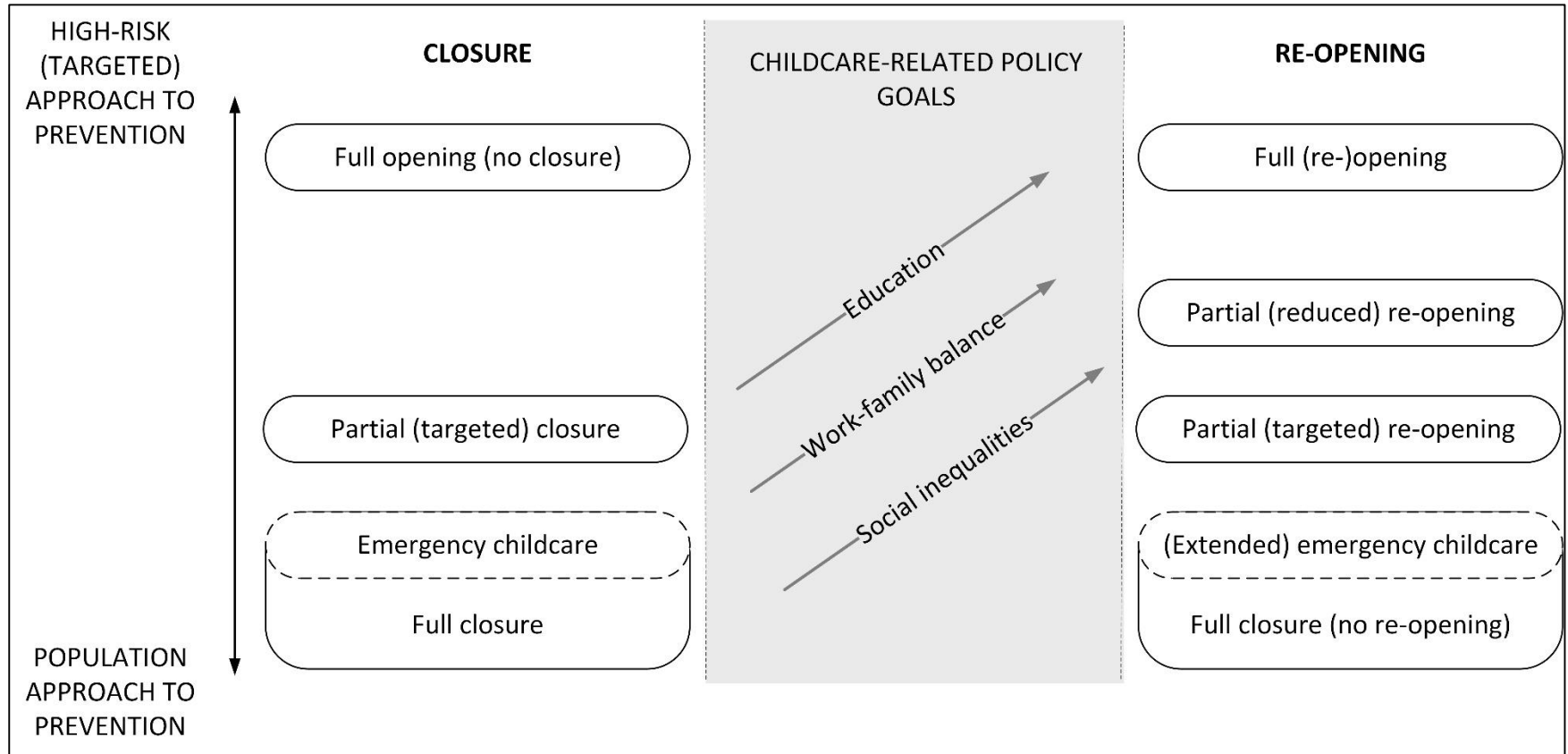
High-risk (i.e. targeted) vs. population-approach to prevention (Rose 2001) → regarding ECEC/school closures:

→ Population approach: likely to translate into full closure

→ High-risk approach: likely to keep these services open

In between: room for **hybrid approaches** that aim at balancing public-health and core education/childcare concerns (e.g., work-care reconciliation, enabling graduation)

Figure: The pandemic childcare-policy responses

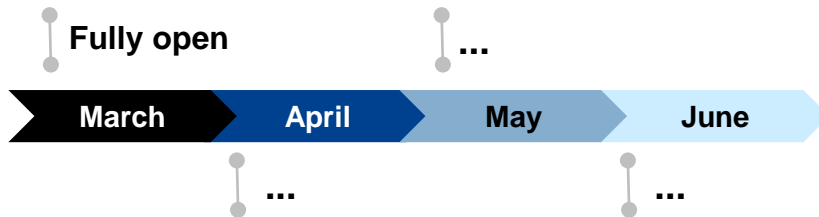


Source: own figure, Dobrotić and Blum 2020

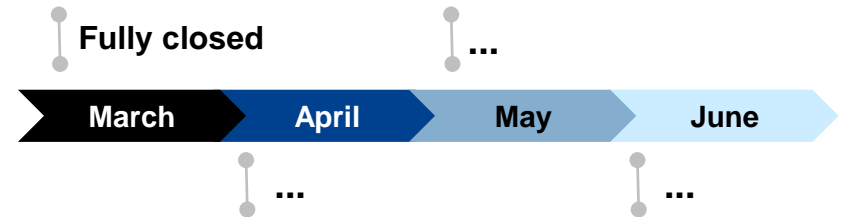
Modes of closure/re-opening in selected European countries I.

(preliminary data; FRA 2020; OECD 2020; UNESCO 2020)

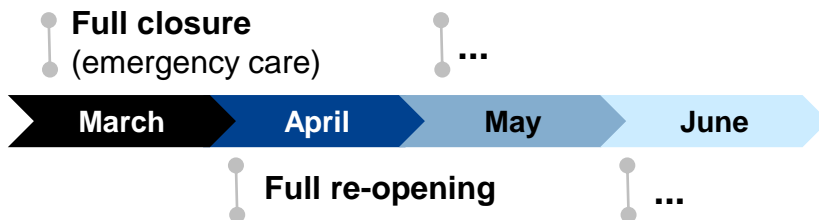
Sweden



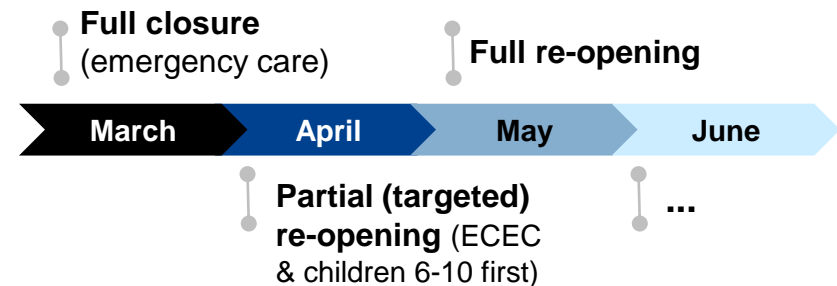
Italy



Denmark



Norway



Modes of closure/re-opening in selected European countries II.

(preliminary data; FRA 2020; OECD 2020; UNESCO 2020)

Austria

Targeted closure
(open for key workers & working parents)

ECEC: Targeted re-opening (e.g., dual-earners, pre-school year)
PS: Two weeks later
Reduced re-opening (part-time for all children)



Czechia

ECEC: No (ordered) closure
PS: Full closure

PS: Targeted re-opening (ages 6-11; optional attendance); graduate years earlier



Germany (with local variation)

Full closure
(emergency care)

Targeted re-opening
(e.g. last pre-school year)



Reduced re-opening
(reduced hours, closed groups)

UK (with variations)

Full closure
(emergency care)

...



e.g., England → **Targeted re-opening**
(„transitional years”)

Outlook: A view at the empirical side



Hybrid policy approaches – will require a further ‘unpacking’ through developing detailed indicators able to grasp their **prevalance and sequencing** across countries

→ Work in progress, database construction

→ Data on modes of closure/re-opening in 28 European countries



Childcare policy responses – coherence (or not) with pandemic leaves/benefits?



Drivers and effects of different childcare policy responses (e.g., education-focused vs work-care balance focused)

Thank you for your attention!



Source: www.pixabay.com