

# Determinants of the inequalities in early childcare enrolment: a mixed-methods randomized controlled trial

Access to **early childcare** during early childhood is a **good lever for reducing inequalities**. When it is high quality, it fosters both low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) children's **development** and **mothers' employment**. However, **early childcare access is unequal: low-SES households and households with a migration background have the least access to early childcare**. **France is one of the most unequal countries**, and the causes of **these inequalities are under-studied**. Some studies document **supply-side mechanisms**, but very few studies address **demand-side factors**.

Educational policies research group

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Laudine is currently a fourth Ph. D. student at Sciences Po (CRIS – LIEPP), and at the ENS. After graduating from the ENS Master's program in cognitive science, she is doing her doctoral research under the supervision of Carlo Barone, sociologist (Sciences Po), and Coralie Chevallier, cognitive psychologist (ENS – PSL).

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## Related publication

- NEW!** Laudine Carbuccia, Arthur Heim, Carlo Barone & Coralie Chevallier (2025) Investigating how administrative burden and information costs affect social inequalities in early childcare access, a randomised controlled trial, Revised & Resubmitted, Nature Human Behaviour [https://osf.io/preprints/osf/w2ey7\\_v3](https://osf.io/preprints/osf/w2ey7_v3)
- Laudine Carbuccia, Carlo Barone, Coralie Chevallier, Valentin Thouzeau (2023) Unequal access to early childcare : What role do demand-side factors play ? A PRISMA systematic review LIEPP Working Paper n° 138, 2023



Preprint

## Main objectives of the project

### Objective 1

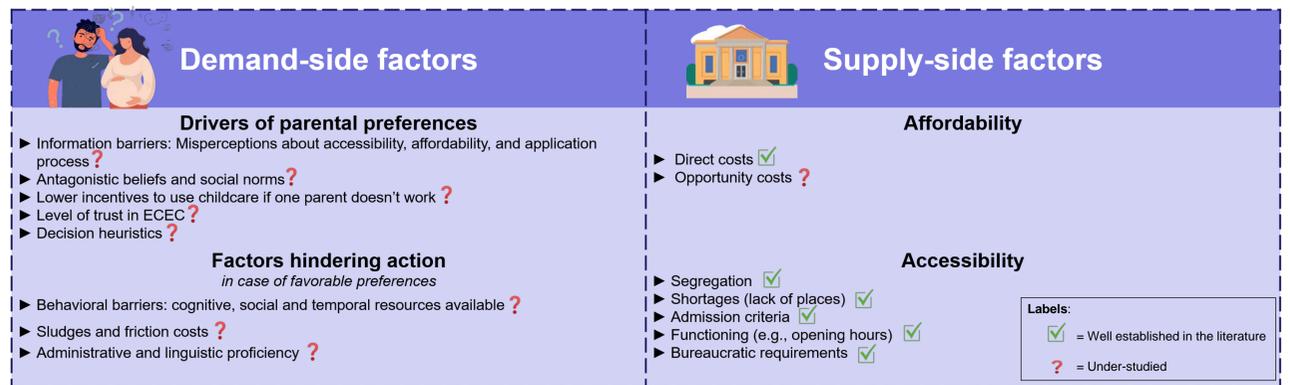
To identify the **determinants of the unequal access to early childcare** (e.g. daycare centers) according to SES and migration background

### Objective 2

To design and test a **low-cost, easily scalable intervention** to reduce the gaps in early childcare enrolment

## Step 1: Building an interdisciplinary theoretical framework – This enrolment gap potentially stems from multiple causes

Our interdisciplinary theoretical framework incorporates a **diversity of potential factors**:

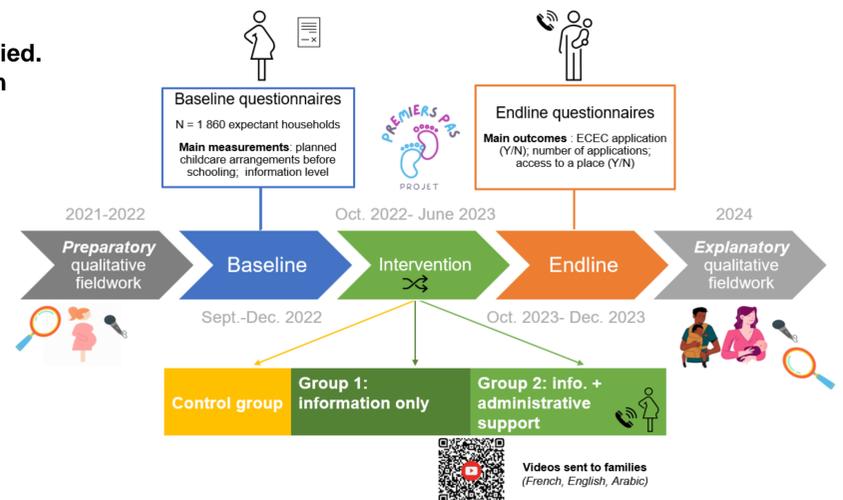


Despite demand-side factors potentially playing a significant role in this gap, they remain understudied. Therefore, we decided to explore them in the French context :

## Step 2: Preparatory qualitative fieldwork

### Methodology (Fall 2021 – Spring 2022)

- 61 semi-directed interviews with stakeholders
- 71 interviews with future parents various SES.



## Step 3: the Randomized Controlled Trial

Based on step 2 (preparatory qualitative fieldwork), we implemented a **3-arm randomized controlled trial** in Seine-Saint-Denis, Paris, and Val-de-Marne. To alleviate **information barriers**, one arm was provided with information identified as lacking to **low-SES and immigrant HH** in step 2 through **text messages and videos**. The second arm received the same information along with **personalized administrative support** to apply for early childcare, addressing both **information and administrative barriers**.

**Main results**

- Information barriers:** Low-SES and immigrant households (HH) have a reduced awareness of how the system works, leading to **fewer and delayed applications**, not distrust.
- High administrative burden and digital disparities** prevent low-SES and immigrant HH from applying.
- Facilities often **discourage** low-SES and immigrant HH from applying, creating a feeling of **illegitimacy**.

## Step 4: Explanatory qualitative fieldwork

We are conducting 5 focus groups and 30 semi-directed interviews with participants to better understand:

- the reception of this intervention by participants
- the mechanisms behind the observed effects.

**Main results**

- No effect of the information-only treatment  
 → **Information is not enough**
- The **information + support treatment closed the application gaps** by SES and migration background.
- Limited effects on access**, except for some subgroups.  
 → **Addressing both supply-side and demand-side barriers is crucial.**