

Determinants of the SES-based gap in ECEC enrolment: a mixed-methods randomized controlled trial

Access to **early childcare education and care (ECEC)** during early childhood is a **good lever for reducing inequalities**: it promotes both the **cognitive development of children** from low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) backgrounds and the **employment of their mothers**. However, there is a **socioeconomic gap in ECEC enrolment**: low-SES households access ECEC the least. **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

Principal investigator
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Currently a third-year Ph. D. student at Sciences Po (CRIS – LIEPP), Laudine is interested in the structural and cognitive determinants of inequalities in access to early childhood health and care facilities.

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).

Associate members

Carlo BARONE Sociologist
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Related publication

- 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
- Carbuccia & Barone (2022) *Les politiques d'accompagnement au développement des capacités des jeunes enfants*, 206, Caisse nationale des allocations familiales.
- Carbuccia, Barone, Borst, Angela Greulich, Panico, et Tô. (2020) *Revue de littérature sur les politiques d'accompagnement au développement des capacités des jeunes enfants*, LIEPP, pp.195.

Main objectives of the project

Objective 1

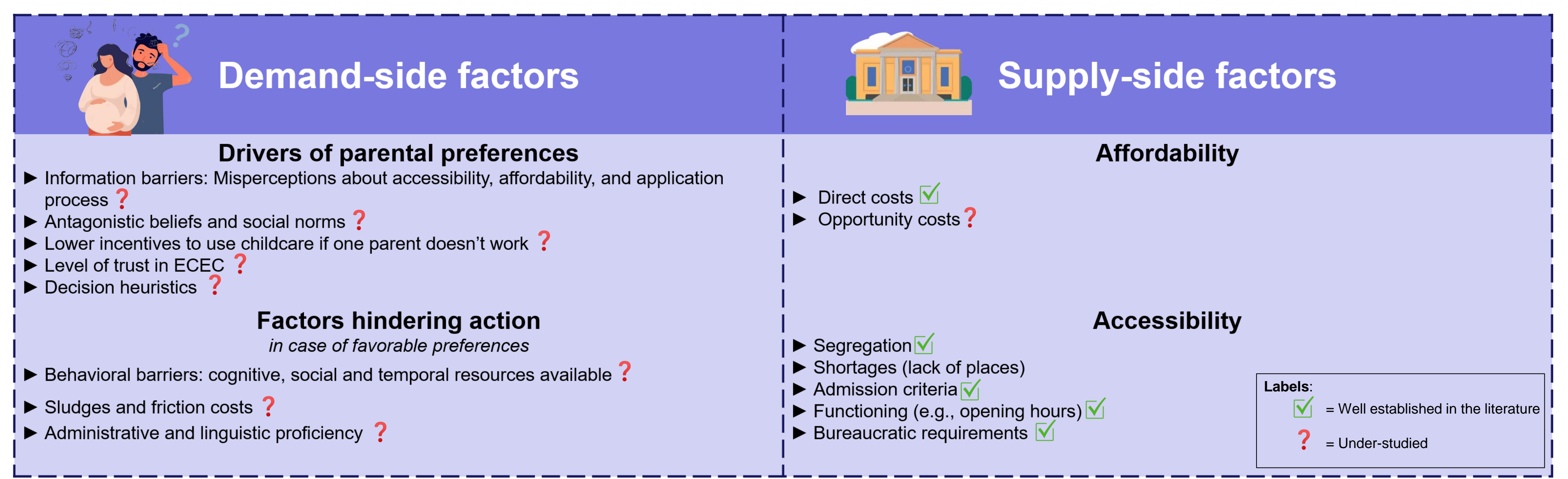
To identify the **determinants of ECEC application and access** (e.g. daycare centers) according to SES

Objective 2

To design and test a **low-cost, easily scalable intervention** to reduce SES-based gap in ECEC enrolment

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

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



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

Step 2: Preparatory qualitative fieldwork

Methodology
(Fall 2021 – Spring 2022)

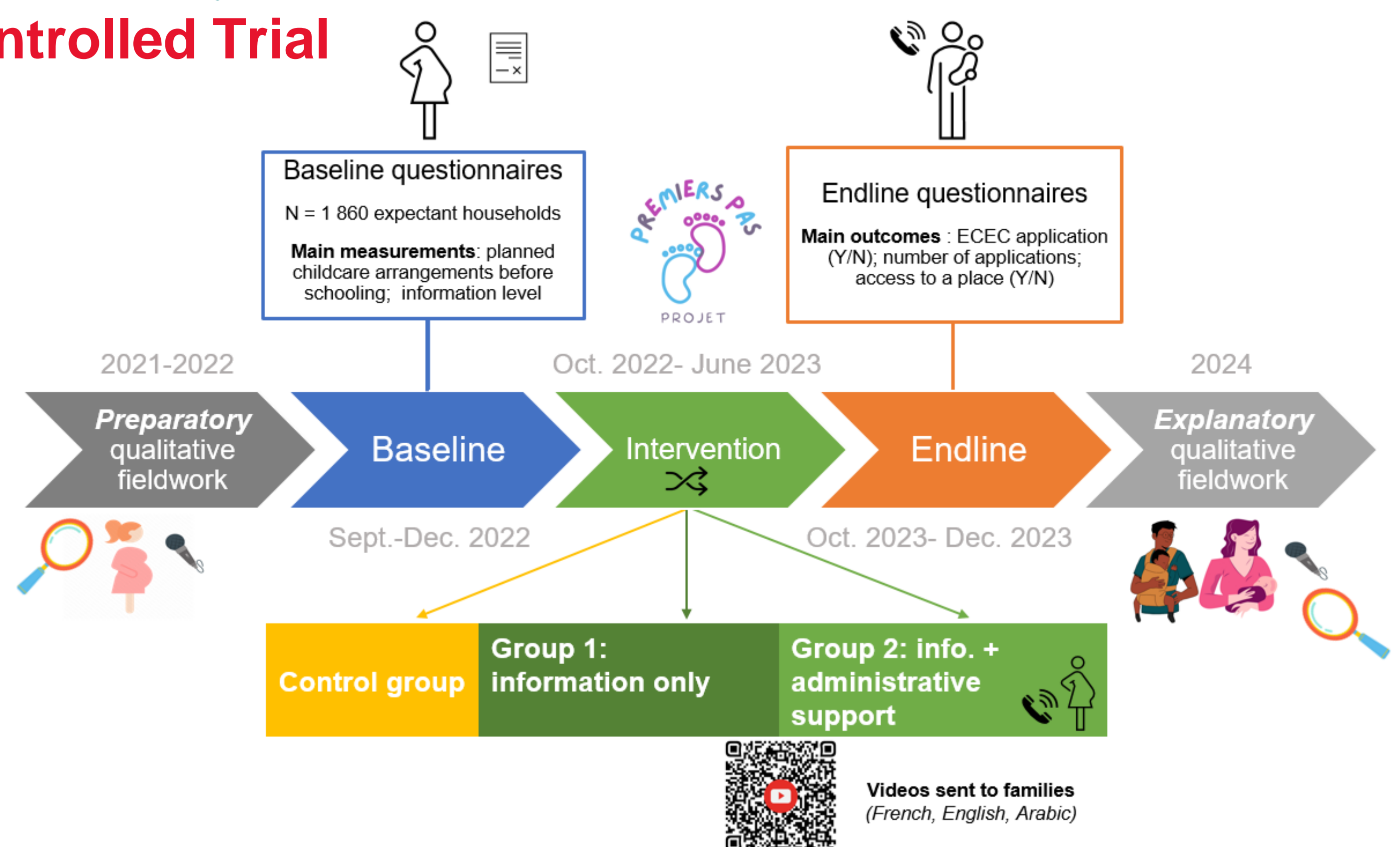
61 semi-directed interviews with stakeholders and 71 interviews with future parents various SES.

Main results

- Information barriers:** Low-SES parents' reduced awareness of how the system works leads **to fewer and delayed applications** to ECEC, not distrust.
- Behavioral barriers:** **Cognitive overload** and **digital disparities** hinder low-SES families' application.
- Digital divide** can prevent low-SES parents from applying.

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 in step 2. To alleviate **information barriers**, one arm was provided with information identified as lacking among **low-SES families** in step 2 through **text messages and videos**. The second arm received the same information along with **personalized administrative support** to apply to ECEC, addressing both **information and behavioral barriers**.



Main results

Both treatments increase the likelihood that low-educated mothers who are born abroad access ECEC (about 50% increase). Administrative support increases the likelihood that families who had never used ECEC before access ECEC.

Step 4: Explanatory qualitative fieldwork

In 2024, we conduct focus groups and semi-directed interviews with participants to better understand 1) the reception of this intervention by participants and 2) the mechanisms behind the observed effects.

