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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

Early childhood workforce profiles across Europe

33 country reports with key contextual data

SEEPRO editors

Pamela Oberhuemer and **Inge Schreyer**

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Foreword

Throughout Europe, early childhood education and care systems are currently subject to constant shifts, undergoing both expansion and consolidation. Reform strategies and innovations characterise the situation in many countries. The staff working in ECEC settings are the key contributing factor in terms of the quality of daily interactions with the children and the quality of their learning environments as well as in terms of supporting their wellbeing and learning. At the same time, a major issue in many countries is the growing shortage of staff, in some cases an acute shortage. In addition, demographic changes and EU funded exchange programmes are influencing the mobility of the ECEC workforce in Europe. This has brought the qualification, competence and task profiles of early childhood staff – leaders, pedagogues and assistants – perhaps more than ever before to the forefront of professional interest and makes it necessary to continuously update the available data.

The **SEEPRO-3** study presented here is the fourth in a series of research projects based at the State Institute for Early Childhood Research and Media Literacy (IFP) in Munich and funded by the German Federal Ministry for Family and Youth Affairs (*Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend*). The new SEEPRO-3 study focuses on the 27 European Union states and six non-EU countries – a total of 33 countries. Reports on the early childhood workforce and the ECEC systems in Norway, Serbia and Switzerland are presented for the first time in this context.

In this complete edition, the results of the SEEPRO-3 project, conducted between March 2021 and February 2024, are presented in 33 country chapters, each with two parts.

ECEC Workforce Profiles (country reports) present information on the status quo regarding qualification requirements for ECEC professionals, the composition of the workforce, the systems of initial professional education and continuing professional development, current reform initiatives and research projects, selected working conditions of staff and current challenges relating to staffing issues. Building on a network of longstanding contacts with European universities and research and policy institutes, cooperation partners were recruited through international collegial networks. The initial reports were drafted according to a detailed research specification which the cooperation partners received for comment before compilation of the data. The final versions are based on close and continuous collaboration between the editors and the authors.

Key Contextual Data – a synopsis of the main features of the ECEC system and relevant demographic data. These synopses were compiled by the project team (with the exception of the contextual data for the Russian Federation), reviewed by our cooperation partners and often supplemented with additional data. Main data sources were international reports and European and national statistical sites, using a triangulation approach for cross-checking data.

This publication appears in English and in German, thus providing a resource for a wide audience in Europe and beyond: early childhood teacher educators in higher and vocational education, national and local government administrations, employers and service providers in the ECEC field, researchers, ECEC staff and other interested persons.

The country-specific documents are identical to the individual online documents which can be accessed under www.seepro.eu/English/Country_Reports.htm on the webpage www.seepro.eu

Pamela Oberhuemer, Inge Schreyer
Munich, February 2024

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

AUSTRIA

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

Marisa Krenn-Wache, Director of the Federal College for Early Childhood Pedagogy in Klagenfurt until September 2022. During her professional career she was involved in various national and international activities. These included being a national delegate in the OECD ECEC network and the European Commission ECEC working group and being a consultant for Eurydice. She also worked as a lecturer at the University of Applied Sciences “FH Campus Wien”.

1. ECEC governance in Austria

Austria is a federal republic. According to the Federal Constitutional Law, the legislation and regulatory frameworks for early childhood and out-of-school education and care fall within the competence of the nine federal states or provinces (*Länder*). These are responsible for specifying the general conditions for ECEC institutions. In each federal state, independent structures have been established, some with different names.

Further responsibilities are held by the municipalities, which in many cases also act as legal entities of public institutions, and by private legal entities. This distribution of competences leads to different salary and service regulations as well as to non-uniform structural conditions (e.g. group size, staff to child ratios, non-contact time) for the pedagogical work in the *Länder*.

The federal states and municipalities bear the main burden of funding. In all federal states, there are both age-integrated (up to under 6 years) and age-differentiated settings (separate for under 3 year-olds and 3 to 5 year-olds). These facilities include crèches (also known as toddler centres or toddler groups) for 0 to 2 year-olds, kindergartens for 3 to 5 year-olds[1] and extended-age facilities, which are usually open for children aged from 18 months to 10 or 15 years. In official sources, ECEC settings in Austria are also referred to as "children's day homes" (*Kindertagesheime)*. It is only for kindergartens that the employment requirements for core professionals are standardised by a federal basic law (BGBl I No. 185/2021).

According to Statistics Austria (2023a, 5), there were a total of 9,717 institutional ECEC facilities in the reporting year 2022/23, of which 4,602 were kindergartens, 2,650 crèches and toddler care facilities, 898 out-of-school care centres and 1,567 mixed-age care facilities (whereby a five-year comparison shows that the number of crèches and toddler care facilities has increased significantly by 24.9%, while the number of kindergartens has remained stable since 2017).

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Personnel with direct everyday contact to children can be categorised as follows: Core pedagogues, assistant staff, support staff and special educational needs/inclusive support staff. All of these professionals and assistants can work in all types of ECEC centres.

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6 (as in Austria): **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds.

Table 1
Austria: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
Early Childhood Pedagogue / Kindergarten Pedagogue *Elementar-pädagoge/ -pädagogin* *Kindergarten-pädagoge/ -pädagogin* *Profile*: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	All forms of ECEC settings 1–5 years	Core professional with group responsibility	1–5 years	5 years at a vocational college specialising in early childhood education (*Bildungsanstalt für Elementarpädagogik - BAfEP*) = short cycle tertiary education *Awards:* University entrance requirement and professional diploma in early childhood education ***or*** School leaving certificate (university entrance requirement) plus a 2-year post-secondary collegiate course in early childhood education *Award*: Professional diploma in early childhood education ECTS credits: n/a[2] EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5 ***or*** **NEW since 2020/21**: 2-semester higher education study programme "Early Childhood Education" at a University of Teacher Education for persons with a relevant Bachelor's degree (Primary School Education or a teaching qualification for Special Education or a Bachelor in Education

[2] n/a = not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
				NEW since 2023 (summer semester) 4-semester higher education study programme for persons with a non-specialist Bachelor's degree (lateral entry) *Award:* University degree certificate combined with a professional qualification for the occupational field of early childhood education ECTS credits: 60 *in relation to the previous training, but not to the university course certificate:* EQF level: 6 or 7* ISCED 2011: 6 or 7*
Out-of-school Pedagogue *Kindergarten- und Hortpädagoge/ -pädagogin* *Profile*: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional	All kinds of out-of-school settings (*Horte*) for school-age children 6–14 years	Core professional with group responsibility	6–14 years	5 years at vocational college specialising in early childhood education with supplementary qualifying course for work in out-of-school settings ***or*** 5 years at vocational college specialising in social pedagogy *Award*: General university entrance qualification and professional diploma in early childhood and out-of-school pedagogy ***or*** 2-year post-secondary collegiate course specialising in early childhood and out-of-school pedagogy or in social pedagogy *Award*: Professional

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
				diploma in early childhood and out-of-school pedagogy or professional diploma in social pedagogy ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5
Inclusive Early Childhood Pedagogue **Special Needs Kindergarten Pedagogue** **Early Intervention Specialist** *Inklusive Elementarpädagoge/ -pädagogin/ Sonderkindergarten-pädagoge/ -pädagogin* *Frühförderungsfachkraft* *Profile*: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional with specialisation in special needs	All kinds of ECEC settings 1–5 years Spezifische Förder-einrichtungen 1–5 Jahre	Core professional with group responsibility Individuelle Arbeit mit einzelnen Kindern	1–5 years	***Up to 2022/23:*** 4-semester post-secondary collegiate course in Inclusive Early Childhood Education at a vocational college specialising in early childhood education *Award*: Professional Diploma in inclusive early childhood education ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5 This qualification route has been discontinued. ***Since 2022/23:*** 4-semester higher education study programme in Inclusive Early Childhood Education at a University of Teacher Education *Target group*: Persons with a completed vocational college qualification as Early Childhood Pedagogue or with a completed higher education course in early childhood education *Award*:

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
				University degree combined with a professional qualification for the early childhood field ECTS credits: 90 EQF level: n/a* ISCED 2011: n/a*
Pedagogical Assistant *Pädagogischer Assistent/ pädagogische Assistentin*	All kinds of ECEC settings 1–5 years	Qualified co-worker	1–5 years	Since 2019/20: 3 years at vocational secondary school ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 3 ISCED 2011: 3

** The formal classification of both higher education courses in early childhood education has not yet taken place.*

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Due to the federal structure of the ECEC system in Austria, the legal regulations regarding the professional conditions of employment and the administrative requirements for Centre Leaders differ from state to state. To summarise, it can be stated that all nine federal states have specific employment requirements and job descriptions for ECEC Centre Leaders and that corresponding training courses are offered in different formats. In all federal states, however, several years of relevant professional experience are required. For example, the Viennese Kindergarten Act (LGBl 35/2019) requires management training comprising 110 teaching units of theory, at least 12 hours of peer group meetings and 60 units of self-study to ensure the organisational and pedagogical quality of an ECEC facility. The content of this training covers topics such as quality management, personnel management, team development and team leadership, personality skills, conflict management and complaints management, communication, the legal and business

management framework for running an ECEC centre, cooperation with parents and public relations. Similar training programmes for Centre Leaders are held in all federal states.

ECEC Centre Leaders are responsible for the entire staff, the support staff and the housekeeping and cleaning staff. Depending on the state law, time is available for management activities, depending on the number of groups of children. In Upper Austria (Merkblatt 2021, Educational Directorate Upper Austria 2021), for example, for the management of a three-group facility with an employment level of 40 hours, it is stipulated under employment law that seven hours are to be worked as non-group work time (preparation time), six hours as management time and 27 hours as group work time. The tasks of the management are divided into pedagogical and administrative tasks such as the organisation and steering of quality assurance and quality development measures, team development, personnel development, team coordination, monitoring compliance with general official duties, cooperation with the service provider, cooperation with parents and external partners, coordination of work shadowing and the support of students from vocational colleges who are on field practice. Centre Leaders who do not lead a children's group have to deputise for pedagogical staff in the event of absence due to continuing professional development, illness, etc.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Apart from the position of Centre Leader and deputy Centre Leader, other positions for pedagogical tasks are not common. In multi-group centres, subject specialists (see under *Chapter **2.5***) such as pedagogues for inclusive education are responsible for specific activities, depending on the federal state. Their areas of responsibility include, for example, the planning, implementation and documentation of support measures for children with disabilities, supporting the socialisation of children with disabilities in the children's group, the planning and implementation of language assessments and language support programmes in cooperation with the group leader, as well as participation in planning and implementation with regard to cooperation with parents. In the case of appropriate additional qualifications, this activity is remunerated with a salary supplement.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

The positions of specialist advisory and supervisory staff is also regulated at federal state level. Depending on the federal state, the supervisory function takes centre stage more than the advisory function. In general, responsibilities include advising on pedagogical, organisational, personnel, financial and legal issues, the further development of staff professionalism, individual counselling of professionals and teams, the support of young professionals and communication and conflict management in the ECEC settings. There is no standardised, specific training for this role. The requirement profile usually includes a completed training as an Early Childhood Pedagogue, several years of relevant professional experience and additional specialist training.

2.5 Specialist support staff

The most frequently encountered support staff in ECEC centres are Special Needs Kindergarten Pedagogues or Inclusive Early Childhood Pedagogues. Depending on the size of the centre, these specialists work across different groups or with several groups at different locations. The lack of a legal entitlement to inclusion, the partial lack of places for children with disabilities and the often inadequate structural framework conditions are among the criticisms levelled at the Austrian system.

Since the 2019/20 kindergarten year, a standardised nationwide instrument for assessing language skills in German has been mandatory throughout Austria (FMESC 2022). The language

assessments must be carried out by specialists who have completed a six ECTS course in "Early language support" at a university college of teacher education (see, for example University College of Teacher Education Upper Austria 2022a; University College of Teacher Education Styria 2022a). In most cases, speech therapy sessions must be organised externally by the parents.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

In the 2022/23 kindergarten year, a total of 67,319 people were employed in ECEC centres (Statistics Austria 2023a, 97). The annual survey does not show whether the professionals have completed a five-year secondary vocational training programme at a vocational college for early childhood education, a two-year post-secondary *Kolleg* for early childhood education or a university degree programme. The high percentage of staff with other, non-relevant or low qualifications (42.4%) is striking.

Table 2
Austria: Structural composition of the workforce in ECEC centres, 2022/23

Staff	Total	Percentage of workforce overall
All staff in ECEC settings*	67,319	
Of these: Male staff (without differentiation by qualification)	2,014	**3.0**
Staff with a relevant higher education degree BA/MA	-	No data available
Staff with relevant vocational (short cycle tertiary) qualification	33,308	**49.5**
Staff with an additional qualification in inclusive/special needs education, support staff	947	**1.4**
Staff with a non-specialised qualification	4,503	**6.7**
Staff with no or low-level qualification – varies according to federal state	28,561	**42.4**
Staff with a migration background	-	No data available

Source: Statistics Austria 2023a, 101, 104 and own calculations

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

Vocational College for Early Childhood Pedagogue Professions

The initial professional education of core specialists (Early Childhood Pedagogues) continues to take place for the most part at the vocational colleges specialising in early childhood pedagogy (*Bildungsanstalten für Elementarpädagogik – BAfEP*). This type of school comes under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and belongs to the group of "vocational secondary schools" (BHS). Attendance starts after completing the 8th grade and concludes with a school-leaving examination and diploma.

Persons who already have a school-leaving certificate or an equivalent qualification such as a general or subject-related university entrance qualification can attend this programme at a *Kolleg* for early childhood education and complete it with a diploma examination. The programme lasts four semesters and can be extended to five to six semesters in part-time form. *Kolleg* courses can be set up at *BAfEP* institutions.

In 2016, a new curriculum came into force (BGBl II No. 204/2016) and the school name was changed from Vocational College for Kindergarten Pedagogues to Vocational College for Early Childhood Pedagogy. The term "early childhood pedagogy" emphasises the focus on children aged 1 to under 6 years. Whereas the previous official curriculum (BGBl II No. 327/2004) focussed on kindergarten children aged 3 to under 6 years, early childhood education for under 3 year-olds is now included in the standard professional training for all.

In accordance with European Directive 2005/36/EC, Article 11c (European Parliament 2005) and Directive 2013/55/EU (European Parliament 2013), the school-leaving certificate and diploma from a vocational secondary school also open up access to the respective regulated professions in those Member States for which a higher education or university degree of (up to) four years is required in the respective country.

Since 2020, a "Vocational School for Pedagogical Assistant Occupations" can be integrated into the *BAfEP* structures and run 3-year courses for prospective Pedagogical Assistants.

In the 2021/22 school year, there were a total of 33 "Vocational Colleges for Early Childhood Pedagogy Professions" in the nine federal states, of which 17 were run by the federal government, two by municipalities, 12 by the Catholic church and two by other legal entities. Nine locations offered "Vocational Schools for Pedagogical Assistant Professions" and 28 locations offered collegiate courses for early childhood education and care (Statistics Austria 2023b, 84, 86).

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

The following outlines the initial professional education options for core pedagogical staff, assistant pedagogical staff and the qualifying routes for out-of-school pedagogues and inclusion specialists.

Table 3

Austria: Early Childhood Pedagogue / Kindergarten Pedagogue

Job title in German: Elementarpädagogin/-pädagoge, Kindergartenpädagogin/-pädagoge **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Route 1 (regular qualifying route): **Entry requirements:** Successful completion of the 8th school grade ***plus*** aptitude test at the *BAfEP* in the field of contact and communication skills (from January 2024) **Professional studies:** 5 years at a vocational college specialising in early childhood education (*BAfEP*) **Award:** School-leaving certificate (general university entrance requirement) and diploma in early childhood education /professional license **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011**: 5 **Main fields of work:** All ECEC settings for 1 to 5 year olds *Route 2 (collegiate course - Kolleg):* **Entry requirements:** General or subject-related university entrance requirement ***plus*** aptitude test at the BAfEP in the field of contact and communication skills (from January 2024) **Professional studies:** 2-year post-secondary collegiate course (*Kolleg für Elementarpädagogik*)

Job title in German: Elementarpädagogin/-pädagoge, Kindergartenpädagogin/-pädagoge **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Award: Diploma in early childhood education/professional license **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011**: 5 **Main fields of work:** All ECEC settings for 1 to 5 year-olds *Route 3 (postgraduate studies for Bachelor graduates with relevant specialism):* **Entry requirements:** Bachelor's degree in primary school teaching (240 ECTS credits) or in special needs education (180 ECTS) or in pedagogy/educational science; completion of a self-evaluation assessment at the relevant university/university of teacher education; language skills at reference level C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) **Professional studies:** 2-semester higher education study programme (continuing education) **Award**: Higher education degree and professional license authorisation for the occupational field of early childhood education **ECTS credits:** 60 **EQF level:** 6 or 7* **ISCED 2011**: 6 or 7* **Main fields of work:** All ECEC settings for 1 to 5 year-olds *Route 4 (lateral entry for Bachelor graduates with non-relevant degree):* **Entry requirements:** A Bachelor's degree (at least 180 ECTS credits); assessment by the relevant higher education institution; language skills at reference level C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) **Professional studies:** 4-semester higher education study programme "lateral entry early childhood education" **Award**: Higher education degree with professional license authorisation for the occupational field of early childhood education **ECTS credits:** 120 **EQF level:** 6 or 7* **ISCED 2011**: 6 or 7* **Main fields of work:** All ECEC settings for 1 to 5 year-olds

* The formal classification of both higher education courses in early childhood education has not yet taken place.

Table 4

Austria: Out-of-school Pedagogue

Job title in German: Hortpädagogin/-pädagoge **Profile:** Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Route 1: **Entry requirements:** Successful completion of the 8th school grade ***plus*** aptitude test **Professional studies:** 5 years at a vocational college specialising in early childhood education (*BAfEP*) with a supplementary course in out-of-school education **Award:** General university entrance requirement and occupational diploma in early childhood education and out-of-school pedagogy **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011**: 5 **Main fields of work:** All out-of-school childcare settings for 6 to 14 year-olds

Job title in German: Hortpädagogin/-pädagoge **Profile:** Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Route 2: **Entry requirements:** Successful completion of the 8th school grade ***plus*** aptitude test **Professional studies:** 5 years at a vocational college specialising in social pedagogy **Award:** General university entrance requirement and diploma in out-of-school pedagogy/professional license **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011**: 5 **Main fields of work:** All out-of-school childcare settings for 6 to 14 year-olds *Route 3:* **Entry requirements:** General or subject-related university entrance requirement ***plus*** aptitude test at the *BAfEP* in the field of contact and communication skills (from January 2024) **Professional studies:** 2-year post-secondary collegiate course (*Kolleg für Elementarpädagogik und Horterziehung*) **Award**: Diploma with professional license authorisation **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011**: 5 **Main fields of work:** All out-of-school childcare settings for 6 to 14 year-olds *Route 4:* **Entry requirements:** General or subject-related university entrance requirement ***plus*** aptitude test **Professional studies:** 2-year post-secondary collegiate course, vocational college for social pedagogy (*Kolleg für Sozialpädagogik*) **Award**: Diploma with professional license authorisation **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011**: 5 **Main fields of work:** All out-of-school childcare settings for 6 to 14 year-olds

Table 5

Austria: Inclusive Early Childhood Pedagogue

Job title in German: Inklusive Elementarpädagogin/-pädagoge **Profile:** Early childhood pedagogy professional with specialisation in special needs
Entry requirements: Completed initial professional education as Early Childhood Pedagogue at a vocational college for early childhood pedagogy (*BAfEP*) or a completed higher education study programme in early childhood education (60 ECTS credits) **Professional studies:** 4-semester higher education study programme **Award**: Higher education degree with professional license authorisation as Inclusive Early Childhood Pedagogue **ECTS credits:** 90 **EQF level:** n/a **ISCED 2011**: n/a **Main fields of work:** All ECEC settings for 1 to 5 year-olds

Table 6

Austria: Pedagogical Assistant

Job title in German: Pädagogische Assistenzkraft
Entry requirements: Successful completion of the 8th school grade ***plus*** aptitude test in the field of contact and communication skills (from January 2024) **Professional studies:** 3 years at a vocational secondary school for early childhood pedagogical assistants **Award:** School-leaving examination with occupational license **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 3 **ISCED 2011**: 3 **Main fields of work:** All ECEC settings for 1 to 5 year-olds

Vocational school for pedagogical assistant occupations

The 2017 Education Reform Act (BGBl I No. 138/2017) enabled the opening of three-year "vocational schools for pedagogical assistant occupations" as a new type of school, opening for the first time in the 2019/20 school year. From an educational policy perspective, one of the aims of this is to specify the job profile of "Pedagogical Assistant", as there have been very different structures for the qualification of assistant personnel in the federal states.

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Early Childhood Pedagogue

Route 1: Vocational College for Early Childhood Education (*BAfEP*)

With the amendment to the School Education Act (BGBl I No. 117/2008), "educational standards" (i.e. specifically formulated learning outcomes that relate to the content of the curriculum of the respective type of school) were enshrined in Austrian school laws. For the vocational education system, the focus is on application-based, action-orientated learning, whereby knowledge, cognitive abilities and skills are to be related to the real world of life and work. In Austria, educational standards are formulated as regulatory standards (medium requirement level) and differentiate between general and subject-related competences (FIERID 2017).

With the Federal Law Gazette II No. 204/2016 of 27 July 2016, the updated curriculum for the IPE institutions for early childhood education from September 2016 basically enables two competence profiles: (1) the qualification as an Early Childhood/Kindergarten Pedagogue (children from 1–5 years) and (2) additionally, from the 3rd grade of the *BAfEP*, the qualification as an Out-of-school Pedagogue (children from 6–14 years, which is not discussed further in this chapter). The optional opportunity to specialise in working with children aged 1 to under 3 in the 2004 curriculum has been replaced by additional compulsory lessons and practical hours for all students with a focus on qualification for work in the field of early education for under 3 year-olds.

Competences

According to the current curriculum, vocational institutions for early childhood education "have the task of providing students with the professional attitude and the professional knowledge and skills required to fulfil the educational tasks in kindergartens as early childhood educational

institutions for children from the age of one until they start school and to lead them to university entrance".

The curriculum has a comprehensive catalogue of skills; accordingly, the initial professional education must impart general, job-specific, social and personal skills.

Box 2

Austria: Competence specifications – Vocational College for Early Childhood Pedagogy (*BAfEP*)

Diploma holders are in a position to:

- Address the question of the meaning of life and deal with ethical and social values as well as with the religious dimension
- Be sensitive and open towards philosophical, existential and religious questions, particularly those of the children (and young people) in their care
- Act in a socially responsible, respectful and appreciative manner
- Handle culturally, gender and diversity relevant aspects of upbringing and education sensitively
- Be open for innovations, flexibility and mobility
- Apply a broad spectrum of communication forms (verbal and non-verbal)
- Guide and supervise working and learning contexts in which non-predictable situations occur
- Examine and further develop both their own abilities and those of other persons, particularly of the children (and young people) in their care
- Communicate correctly in speaking and writing both in the language of instruction and in everyday life and, according to the requirements of the situation, also in a foreign language
- Participate in creating culture and in cultural life
- Analyse everyday and professional issues with the help of mathematical procedures, retrieve data and present them in a systematic way; acquire, interpret and present findings with the use of contemporary computer-based information technology
- Address in a critical manner current and relevant societal issues on the basis of a thorough knowledge in the areas of science, technology and entrepreneurship education, as well as knowledge in the arts and social science disciplines
- Review political processes at the national, European and international levels and be sensitive for democratic processes and peaceful cohabitation under consideration of interculturality and diversity, the environment and ecological sustainability
- Use their comprehensive and networked (pedagogical) knowledge in a reflective way in the context of practical experiences in their work and in their personal life situation
- Make full use of their knowledge of occupation-related legislation, particularly in the areas of safety, liability, hygiene, equipment, first aid, traffic education and (sexual) violence, in a manner appropriate to the situation
- Deal with conflicts in a problem-solving and self-controlled way and avoid violence
- Act in a self-critical and cooperative way in teamwork
- View lifelong learning as an intrinsic component of their own life course and career planning and promote appropriate attitudes and competencies in the children and young people under their guidance
- Handle physical and health-related aspects of education and upbringing in a sensitive way
- Handle the area of tension between normative standards and the individual development of learners
- Base their actions on the foundations of 'scientific evidence' and 'reflective tacit knowledge'
- Plan educational processes appropriately on the basis of an inclusive attitude towards children's individual developmental needs

- Implement a diverse repertoire of situation-appropriate didactic approaches which include various ways of working, communication and presentation
- Initiate situation-appropriate educational partnerships in their professional work and use them in a responsible way
- Assess and select centre-based childcare settings, taking into account ecological and economical aspects, the use of modern technology and methods of quality management (quality development and quality assurance).

Source: Syllabus – Vocational College for Early Childhood Pedagogy (BGBl II Nr. 204/2016)

Curricular areas and pedagogic-didactic approaches

The curricular areas 'pedagogy', 'didactics' and 'practice' are the main subjects for transmitting the core competences needed for independent and autonomous professional work. The curriculum is conceptualised as a spiral model of learning, during which core content is handled and repeated in increasing detail and growing complexity during the five years of initial professional education.

A particular characteristic of the Austrian approach to IPE for work in ECEC settings is the emphasis placed on the creative arts and on movement education. Subject teaching in 'visual arts education', 'handicraft education', 'textile design', 'music education', 'voice training and elocution' and 'playing the guitar' (or piano), 'rhythm and music education' and 'movement education' takes place throughout the five years and includes both general and occupation-related content and competences.

Beyond these profession-specific areas, general subjects required for completion of the school-leaving examination (university entrance qualification) are also included, such as 'German', 'English', 'history, social and political studies', 'geography and economics', 'applied mathematics', 'physics', 'chemistry', 'biology and ecology'.

Didactic principles specified in the curriculum include learning outcome orientation, systematic and networked competence building, cooperation and coordination between all tutors in any one year in terms of planning, implementation and evaluation of the teaching process; this is considered essential for interdisciplinary thinking and understanding, maintaining an optimal transfer between theory and practice and connecting the content with the real-life situations of the learners.

It is difficult to weight the various curricular areas since, for example, creative arts and movement education include both general education and profession-specific content. Also, subjects such as German (e.g. including children's literature), English (e.g. including specialist terminology) and mathematics (e.g. with examples related to the occupational field) contribute to the professional goals of the IPE programme.

Table 7

Austria: IPE curriculum Vocational College for Early Childhood Pedagogy (*Bildungsanstalt für Elementarpädagogik*) **– curricular areas and distribution**

Main curricular components 5-year initial education programme (excluding supplementary course for out-of-school pedagogy)	**Estimated share of total hours**
General education studies (excluding religion) German (including elocution, children's literature) English History, social studies, political education Geography and economics Applied mathematics	**40%**

Main curricular components 5-year initial education programme (excluding supplementary course for out-of-school pedagogy)	**Estimated share of total hours**
Physics Chemistry Biology and ecology (including physiological foundations, health, nutrition) Applied sciences Nutrition with hands-on practice Basics of computer science	
Theoretical and field-based studies Pedagogy (including psychology and philosophy) Inclusive education Didactics Practice (15%) Organisation, management and legislation (including scientific work) Communication practice and group dynamics	**33%**
Creative arts and sport Visual arts education Handicraft education Textile design Music education, voice training, elocution Instrumental studies Music and movement Movement education and sport	**27%**

Source: Adapted from curricular framework for vocational colleges specialising in early childhood education (*BAfEP*) (BGBl II Nr. 204/2016)

Route 2: Collegiate course (*Kolleg*) – Vocational College for Early Childhood Pedagogy

Collegiate courses have been offered at all vocational colleges since 1994/95 and the demand for them is increasing. In the 2021/22 school year, collegiate courses in early childhood education were offered at 28 of the relevant vocational colleges throughout Austria (Statistics Austria 2023b, 86). The curriculum was updated in 2017 and the course was renamed "Collegiate course in early childhood education", corresponding to the changed names for the vocational colleges.

This post-secondary qualifying route lasts four semesters: it can also be offered as a part-time option and then lasts for five or a maximum of six semesters. The course leads to the same professional qualifications as the vocational college course through a so-called "diploma examination".

Competences

In a course lasting four semesters and according to the general educational goals of the collegiate curriculum (BGBl II Nr. 239/2017), the collegiate course in early childhood education aims to transmit the following general and occupation-specific social and personal competences:

Box 3

Austria: Competence specifications – collegiate courses (*Kolleg*)

Diploma holders are in a position to:

- Address the question of the meaning of life and to deal with ethical and social values as well as with the religious dimension
- Be sensitive and open towards philosophical, existential and religious questions, particularly those of the children (and young people) in their care
- Act in a socially responsible, respectful and appreciative manner

- Handle culturally, gender and diversity relevant aspects of upbringing and education sensitively
- Be open for innovations, flexibility and mobility
- Apply a broad spectrum of communication forms (verbal and non-verbal)
- Guide and supervise working and learning contexts in which non-predictable situations occur
- Systematically observe and support developmental processes
- Communicate correctly in speaking and writing both in the language of instruction and in everyday life and, according to the requirements of the situation, also in a foreign language
- Participate in creating culture and in cultural life
- Keep informed about political processes at the national, European and international levels and be sensitive for democratic processes and peaceful cohabitation under consideration of interculturality and diversity, the environment and ecological sustainability
- Use their comprehensive and networked (pedagogical) knowledge in a reflective way in the context of practical experiences in their work and in their personal life situation
- Make use of their knowledge of occupation-related legislation, particularly in the areas of safety, liability, hygiene, equipment, first aid, traffic education and (sexual) violence, in a manner appropriate to the situation
- Deal with conflicts in a problem-solving and self-controlled way and avoid violence
- Act in a self-critical and cooperative way in teamwork
- View lifelong learning as an intrinsic component of their own life course and career planning and promote appropriate attitudes and competencies in the children and young people under their guidance
- Deal sensitively with physical and health-related aspects of education and upbringing
- Review and further develop their own performance and that of the persons they support
- Organise educational processes on the basis of an inclusive attitude according to each child's individual developmental situation
- Use a diverse and situation-appropriate repertoire of methods, including different didactic and communicative approaches
- Initiate situation-appropriate educational partnerships in their professional work and conduct them responsibly
- Assess and select centre-based childcare facilities, taking into account ecological and economic aspects, the use of modern technology and methods of quality management (quality development and quality assurance).

In addition, the course should lead to a responsible attitude in dealing with people, with one's own and other cultures and with multicultural societies, as well as to gender and diversity competence.

Source: Adapted from the collegiate curricular framework (BGBl II Nr. 239/2017)

Table 8

Austria: IPE curricular framework of collegiate course (*Kolleg*), vocational college for early childhood pedagogy

Main curricular components 4 semesters, excluding the supplementary course in out-of-school pedagogy	**Estimated share of total hours**
Religion/Ethics **Early childhood education** (from under 1 to under 6 years of age) – **Theory and practical application** Pedagogy (including psychology and sociology) Inclusive education Didactics Field practice (ca. 19%) German (including children's literature)	**63%**

Main curricular components 4 semesters, excluding the supplementary course in out-of-school pedagogy	**Estimated share of total hours**
German as an additional language Organisation, management und legislation, academic work Health and nutrition, physiological foundations Media education Communication practices and group dynamics Subject-specific seminar	
Expression, design and movement - artistic-creative domains Art education Arts and crafts education Textile design Music education and voice training Instrumental lessons Rhythmic-musical education Physical education and sport	**33%**
School-specific areas of free choice English conversation Nature and technology Supervisory support Specialisation in media education Intercultural education Specialisation in early education Gender and diversity Theatre education Voice training Psychomotor skills: specialisation in expression, design	**4%**

Source: Adapted from the collegiate course curricular framework (BGBl II Nr. 239/2017), own estimations

According to the curriculum, the *Fachschule für Pädagogische Assistenzberufe* (BGBl II 127/2019) has the task of providing students with the professional attitudes, knowledge and skills required to support pedagogical work in kindergartens as early childhood educational institutions for children from the age of 1 until they start school. The curriculum sets out the following general, occupation-specific, social and personal competences:

Box 4

Austria: Pedagogical Assistant Occupations – Competence specifications

Certificate holders are in a position to…

- Address questions of the meaning of life, ethical and social values and religious dimensions
- Act in a socially responsible, respectful and appreciative way
- Deal sensitively with cultural, gender-related and diversity-relevant aspects of upbringing and education
- Apply a broad spectrum of verbal and non-verbal forms of communication
- Guide working and learning contexts
- Utilise their own potential and support that of the children (and young people) in their care
- Communicate correctly in speaking and writing in everyday and work-related life and communicate in a situation-appropriate way
- Participate in creating culture and cultural life
- Reflect on political processes and be sensitive for democratic practices, for peaceful cohabitation in a context of interculturality and diversity as well as for environmental and ecological sustainability
- Use acquired (pedagogical) knowledge combined with practical work experiences in a situation-appropriate way

– Act in a resource-conscious and responsible manner, taking into account social, economic and ecological aspects – Apply knowledge of professional legal principles, especially in the areas of safety, liability, hygiene, equipment, first aid, road safety education and (sexual) violence, as appropriate to the situation – Deal with conflicts in a solution-orientated and self-controlled manner and avoid violence – Recognise the need for development and further training as well as on-the-job learning to continue learning independently – Act in a self-critical and co-operative way in teamwork – Deal sensitively with movement and health-related aspects of education and upbringing – Approach the tension between normative standards and the individual development of learners in a sensitive way – Have the basic ability to reflect and assess their own performance and act accordingly – Utilise a diverse and situation-appropriate repertoire of methods, including various forms of work, social and presentation skills – Support educational partnerships in a responsible way appropriate to the situation.

Source: Adapted from the Vocational School for Pedagogical Assistant Occupations curriculum (BGBl I Nr. 138/2017)

Table 9

Austria: IPE curriculum Vocational school for pedagogical assistant occupations – curricular areas and distribution

Main curricular components	Estimated share of total hours
General subjects (excluding religion) German (including speech training, children's literature) English Geography and economics, history and social affairs, political education, profession-related legal aspects Mathematics and mathematical foundations Information technology and media basics Applied natural sciences	**33%**
Early childhood education – theory and practice Pedagogy (including psychology and inclusive education) Didactics Practice and care of toddlers Household and safety management Out-of-school care Language acquisition and early language education Communication and group dynamics Intercultural project School subject of choice	**45%**
Musical-creative areas and sport Creative activities Musical education, voice training and speech techniques Learning an instrument Rhythmic-musical education Physical education, movement and sport	**22%**

Source: Adapted from curricular framework for Vocational Schools for Pedagogical Assistant Occupations (BGBl I Nr. 138/2017), own calculations

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Higher education study programme in early childhood education

Since the 2020/21 academic year, an alternative route has been provided for acquiring a professional qualification as a core specialist for the early childhood sector. With the "University course in early childhood education", which can be offered by the university colleges of teacher education, a lateral entry option into the professional field of ECEC has been opened up for groups of people with relevant prior training. This makes it possible for the first time to qualify as a "group-leading Early Childhood Pedagogue" in accordance with the Federal Act on the "Professional Employment Requirements for Kindergarten Teachers" (BGBl I No. 185/2021) for specialists employed in the public sector beyond institutions for early childhood education. Access to the university degree programme is possible via a completed Bachelor's degree in primary education, a teaching degree for special schools or a Bachelor's degree (180 ECTS credits) in pedagogy or educational science. This degree programme is classified as continuing education at universities of teacher education.

The university course is divided into 12 modules with a duration of two semesters, providing theoretical-didactic foundations and practical pedagogical studies. The course comprises a workload of 60 ECTS.

The framework curriculum is specified by the Ministry of Education and can be adapted by the individual universities. The qualifications and entitlements achieved by completing the programme are formulated in the following way:

“The university course builds on a relevant Bachelor's degree and offers a professional, scientific and practice-oriented qualification as an Early Childhood Pedagogue. The aim is to enable graduates to support and guide children from the age of 1 to 7 in their learning and development processes in early childhood settings in a competent way, to shape educational cooperation in a professional way and to make high-quality contributions to organisational development in the respective setting (University College of Teacher Education Styria/Church University College of Teacher Education Graz/Carinthia University College of Teacher Education 2021).

Higher education study programme “Lateral entry – early childhood education”

Since the summer semester of 2023, a further university course has been available. This is designed as a lateral entry opportunity into the occupational field of early childhood education for all graduates of non-subject-related studies. The university course comprises 120 ECTS credits and, building on a completed degree programme of at least 180 ECTS credits, offers a "professional, academic and practice oriented qualification for Kindergarten Teachers, leading to a professional qualification" (BMBWK 2023a).

Career advancement possibilities

The structure of the professional field in early childhood education offers only limited opportunities for advancement. In principle, a field specialist can take over the management of an ECEC centre without any further formal qualifications. However, a variety of further training programmes are offered in all federal states as formal prerequisites for taking on a management role. In some cases, working in one of the "*Praxiskindergärten*" affiliated to all vocational schools for early childhood education is seen as a step up. These kindergartens are a legal part of the IPE institutions and are subject to the school timetable. They serve primarily as a practical training centre for prospective Early Childhood Pedagogues.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Field practice is integrated into the initial professional education programmes. It is part of the studies in all five years of the vocational school courses and in all four semesters of the vocational college courses (*Kolleg*). The practical training is organised in kindergartens, children's groups, crèches and the like (in the case of supplementary training in out-of-school care) as day-long practice or as block practice. Duration and content are laid down in the respective national curricular frameworks and comprise between 15 and 17% of the overall IPE course. The practical sessions can take place weekly or be offered in block form.

The tasks for the practical training are set within the teaching subject ‘didactics’. They vary in scope and requirements depending on the year group, and must be prepared and followed up in writing by the students. The group leaders responsible for the trainees in the centres are informed about the requirements and tasks set by the school and assume responsibility for carrying out the practical training in their group of children. An assigned teacher at the vocational school/college is responsible for supervising the trainees.

The curricular frameworks of the vocational school/college define areas of competence for each subject area, which, with increasing requirements in terms of specific practical activities, aim to lead to the acquisition of competences that enable independent work as an Early Childhood Pedagogue. For the subject area ‘Field practice’, these are: "Orientation towards values and norms, self-management and professional socialisation, communication and language, organisation of development and educational processes".

The trainees are prepared for the requirements of the respective work placements in the various practical subjects. The content requirements are formulated in class as specific work assignments, which the trainees must prepare and follow up in writing. The ECEC centres are informed of these requirements and are expected to support the trainees in achieving the competences to be acquired.

Teachers of the subject "Field practice" visit and advise the trainees on site. They are therefore in direct contact and exchange information with the responsible staff in the ECEC settings and are responsible for the assessment of the trainees. The selection and use of assessment and evaluation tools is the responsibility of the individual school. Individual assessment forms are created in line with the respective requirements of the curriculum. These are completed on site by the specialist staff responsible for the trainees and form the basis for the assessment of the trainees alongside the personal records of the pedagogue accompanying the traineeship.

In most cases, field practice teachers at the vocational school are qualified core pedagogues who come from the occupational field, have often completed a relevant degree programme and also work as teachers of didactics at the vocational schools/colleges. Since the 2019/20 academic year, a Bachelor's degree in a relevant subject is the requirement for teaching didactics and field practice. Depending on the region, these teachers may also have an additional qualification as a mentor.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Regulations on the requirements and recognition of participation in CPD activities also vary at the federal state level and provider level. They range from 20 hours to two or three days of mandatory training during working hours up to a maximum of five days during holidays. Requirements for assistant staff are regulated by the individual organisations. In most federal states, further training is provided within working hours. The recognition of further training, e.g. when taking over a position, is regulated differently depending on the federal state. There are no standardised regulations for taking over costs. However, many courses are offered free of charge or for a small fee by the relevant CPD organisations in the federal states. These main providers are, for example, the further and continuing education centres of the federal states of Carinthia, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Styria and Tyrol. These centres have drawn up a joint working paper on quality aspects in close cooperation and provide a considerable amount of information online (FWB-Stellen 2013).

The federal state of Upper Austria offers a wide range of over 400 seminars and courses for the kindergarten year 2022/23 as well as in-house CPD courses. Seminar registrations can be made online by Centre Leaders for employees via a dedicated portal.

KIWI (Children in Vienna 2022a), a large private provider in Vienna, organises a very good CPD programme for its professionals. The "KIWI Academy" (Children in Vienna 2022b) offers extensive programmes for managers, educational professionals and assistants in kindergartens and out-of-school care centres. Centre Leaders employed by KIWI are supported over six years through various management courses. Contents include the following areas of expertise: Quality management; personnel management; team development and personal skills; communication, conflict and complaints; legal and business frameworks; work with parent; public relations.

The Styrian state government is offering a university course for "Management and Leadership in Early Childhood Education" (13 ECTS) in the 2022/23 CPD programme (University College of Teacher Education Styria 2022b). The course provides professionally oriented further education for managers and their deputies. In addition to deepening knowledge and expertise in the areas of quality development, quality management, administration and legal principles, the programme also reflects on one's own understanding of leadership and leadership behaviour and develops suitable methods for the respective location by expanding knowledge about focused personnel and team development. All training programmes offered by the Styrian Government are free of charge.

In general, participation in continuing education programmes is voluntary and is not financially supported. However, under certain conditions, students have the opportunity to apply for scholarships from the "*Studienbeihilfenbehörde*", a federal authority under the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (Stipendium.at 2022).

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

The minimum wage rate for employees in private ECEC centres with a regular working week of 40 hours is €2,473 gross for an **Early Childhood Pedagogue** in the 1st and 2nd year of employment, €2,695 gross in the 10th year of employment, €2,989 gross in the 20th year of employment and €3,418 gross in the 40th year of employment.

Certified **Special Needs Kindergarten Teachers** in special educational institutions or groups receive a monthly hardship allowance of €218.30. Kindergarten managers receive a monthly management allowance of €114.00 gross for one group. For each additional group, the allowance increases by €48.80 (BGBl II No. 546/2021).

In comparison, the income of **Primary School Teachers** is significantly higher. The following shows the salary of teachers who are subject to the new service law (BGBl I No. 211/2013, Pedagogical Service). This has been in force since the 2019/20 school year and is the first standardised employment law for teachers at all schools. This employment law is also associated with a changed salary scheme comprising seven levels and higher starting salaries with lower increases up to career grade. In 2023, the starting salary at level 1 was €3,116.10 with a retention period of 3.5 years; at level 2, €3,546.00 with a retention period of 5 years; at level 4, the salary is €4,408.20 with a retention period of 6 years and at level 7, the salary is €5,537.10 (Public Service Trade Union 2023).

The employment requirement under the new employment law requires a teaching qualification from a Bachelor's degree programme (240 ECTS) and a Master's degree programme of 60 ECTS building on this Bachelor's degree. Teachers who have completed a Bachelor's degree programme can be employed if they undertake to complete the Master's degree programme within five years while working, otherwise this is a ground for dismissal. From 2029, completion of the Master's degree programme before taking up employment will be mandatory.

One major difference to the early childhood profession is the extent of the weekly teaching commitment. This amounts to 24 hours per week for school teachers under the new employment law, of which 22 hours are for direct teaching and 2 hours per week for school-specific activities (e.g. as head of class, quality management, counselling, and so on). Compared to this, the average working time of a core pedagogical specialist of 35 hours per week in direct contact with children is very high.

The holiday regulations in most federal states are also clearly to the disadvantage of early childhood education employees, who are entitled to five weeks' paid leave per year, and six weeks from the 26th year of service (Labour Market Directive 2022). However, according to the Civil Service Act (BGBl No. 362/1991), teachers have the opportunity to "leave the place of their teaching activity" during the main summer holidays and during other holidays. This results in an average of at least 13 weeks off teaching per school year: nine weeks in summer, two weeks at Christmas, one week after the winter term, one week at Easter. Since 2019/20, there has been a slight restriction for teachers under the new employment law: for them, the summer holidays end one week before the start of the next school year. This means that teachers under the new employment law still have around 12 weeks of teaching-free time per year in contrast to the five weeks of holiday entitlement for Early Childhood Pedagogues. One exception is the employment law in Lower Austria, in which the kindergarten holidays correspond to the main school holidays. Kindergarten Teachers are subject to state law and are entitled to six weeks' holiday leave during the "kindergarten holidays" in summer, as well as during the closing days in accordance with the

Lower Austrian Kindergarten Act during the Christmas, Easter and Whitsun holidays (LGBl No. 5060-0/2006).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

The legally regulated working time for full-time employment is 40 hours per week. In the 2022/23 kindergarten year, 39.9% of staff in ECEC centres were in full-time employment. According to statistics, core pedagogues work an average of 30.5 hours per week (Statistics Austria 2023a, 103).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

There are no generally regulated measures to support staff and for quality assurance. These are regulated individually at provider level or in the individual facilities. However, there are offers for quality improvement in this area, such as the university course for "Management and Leadership in Early Childhood Education" (13 ECTS) run by the University College of Teacher Education and the Styrian government (University College of Teacher Education Styria 2022b). The federal state of Upper Austria is offering support for 60 career starters in the form of mentoring by experienced educators in the 2022/2023 working year (Educational Directorate Upper Austria 2022).

7.4 Non-contact time

The time for indirect pedagogical work of professionals in ECEC centres is regulated by state law and varies from no legally prescribed time for planning, teamwork etc. to up to ten hours per week. It is up to the providers to set the child-free working hours higher than prescribed in the respective state law. For example, the "group-free working time" in the Upper Austrian Child Education and Care Act is set at seven hours for a full-time employee. At least half of this time must be spent at the centre (Educational Directorate Upper Austria 2019). The Styrian government offers the most extensive preparation time. With a weekly working time of 40 hours, specialists are entitled to ten hours per week for the necessary preparation work, of which at least five hours must be completed at the centre (LGBl No. 45/2007).

7.5 Current staffing issues

Of the total of 67,319 ECEC staff across Austria in the 2022/23 kindergarten year, 17,418 (25.9%) were over 50 years of age (Statistics Austria 2023a, 97). Staff shortages have been a recurring theme in recent years. However, the need for skilled labour varies depending on the federal state and region. For example, according to media reports, there was a shortage of 30 qualified staff in Upper Austria in September 2021. As a result, groups were run without core professionals and closed in the afternoons in some municipalities. Four large private provider organisations in Vienna (Diakonie Bildung, Kinderfreunde Wien, KIWI-Kinder in Wien, St. Nikolausstiftung) announced in a press release in July 2022 that there was already a shortage of more than 300 ECEC professionals for the start in September 2022 (APA 2022).

This contrasts with the number of students who complete their training through a collegiate course (*Kolleg*) for early childhood pedagogy. In July 2021, a total of 2,424 persons in Austria successfully completed an IPE course to become a core professional in ECEC, 721 of them at a *Kolleg* (Statistics Austria 2023b, 327f).

This rate would be labour market-friendly if all graduates were to enter the profession. Although there is no reliable data on this, experience shows that many graduates of the 5-year training

programme, which they complete at an average age of 19-20, do not opt for the profession but for further education, time abroad, etc.

The picture is different for graduates of collegiate courses. They register for the course only after completing A-levels, a degree programme or some form of vocational training. Experience shows that almost all of this group enter the labour market on completion of the course. For this reason, the Ministry of Education is very much in favour of opening new collegiate courses.

The alternative access via the "Higher Education Programme in Early Childhood Education" (see *Chapter **4.3***) also serves as a measure against the staff shortage. In addition, lateral entrants with non-specialist Bachelor's degrees can acquire the authorisation to work in ECEC settings in four semesters. These measures show that the explosive nature of the childcare shortage predicted by many experts has not been adequately recognised by those responsible for education policy.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Changes in the admission procedure for the various qualification routes

Aimed to make the qualification for the ECEC sector more attractive, the aptitude test at vocational colleges specialising in early childhood pedagogy, at *Kollegs* for early childhood pedagogy, at vocational schools for pedagogic assistant occupations and at advanced training courses for early childhood education was changed from January 2024 (Federal Law Gazette II No. 9/2024).

The previous four areas (music, creativity, movement and physical resilience, communication, swimming) were replaced by a two- to four-hour examination of contact and communication skills.

New qualifying programme “Elementar+"

The "Elementar+" qualification measure, offered by the University of Graz (2023) and scheduled to start in autumn 2023, is currently undergoing the necessary approval by the Senate of the University of Graz. It aims to attract students from across Austria. 50 places are planned for the first round. Completion of the course is free of charge for participants. The Ministry of Education will cover the costs of the programme in full.

This federal initiative opens up new ways for those already working in ECEC institutions to obtain a fully-fledged qualification as a group-leading pedagogue. It is aimed in particular at those who already work in kindergartens and nurseries as assistants and maybe even lead a group.

The three-year university degree course is conceptualised as a part-time programme, carried out in regional groups. This makes it possible to combine work in an ECEC setting with participation in the qualifying programme. Participants without a *matura* take the university entrance qualification examination in the first year and can thus complete the university course as a qualified Early Childhood Pedagogue.

Language support

For several years now, the federal government has focussed on promoting German (as the language of education) in early childhood. Ideally, targeted and individualised support for children

with insufficient knowledge of German needs to begin before they start attending an ECEC setting. At the latest, it should take place during the last two years before they start compulsory schooling so that they will have mastered relevant language skills by the time they start school (FMESC 2022).

The Federal Institute for Educational Research, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System (FIERID) has developed a standardised instrument to assess language skills in German as a language of education. This has been mandatory in ECEC settings nationwide since the 2019/20 kindergarten year (FMESC 2022). This observation instrument comprises two options which can be used to determine the language competence in German (a) of children with German as their first language and (b) of children with German as an additional language.

In addition, a mandatory handover sheet from kindergarten to primary school is used which, based on the results of the language assessment, provides information on a child's strengths and areas that can be supported and offers a specific starting point for further planning of support in Year 1. It must be sent to the primary schools by the beginning of September at the latest after the end of the school holidays.

Courses on "Early language support" totalling 6 ECTS have been set up at university colleges of teacher education to qualify early childhood specialists for language assessments. The courses, which are based on findings from linguistics, developmental psychology and early childhood education research, serve to acquire the skills to carry out speech and language assessments and to implement targeted language support measures (FMESC 2022).

Further information on the university course "Early language support" can be found on the homepages of the various teacher education colleges (e.g. University College of Teacher Education Styria 2022a).

Introduction of a higher education course in Inclusive Early Childhood Education – changing the qualification route for inclusive education in the early years

Since 1985, it has been possible to attend a four-semester "Course for Special Kindergarten Education" - since 2016 "Course for Inclusive Early Childhood Education" - at vocational colleges for early childhood education. From the 2022/23 school year, this further training option for Early Childhood Pedagogues will no longer be offered at *BAfEP* institutions, but as a four-semester "University course in inclusive early childhood education" with 90 ECTS credits at university colleges of teacher education. Building on training as an ECEC Pedagogue, it represents a professionally, academically and practice-oriented qualification that leads to professional authorisation as an "Inclusive Early Childhood Pedagogue". Further information can be found on the homepages of the teacher education colleges (e.g. University College of Teacher Education Upper Austria 2022b).

Introduction of an advanced training course following the vocational school for pedagogical assistant occupations

Since the 2019/20 school year, three-year "vocational schools for pedagogical assistant occupations" can be offered at vocational colleges for early childhood pedagogy. After successfully completing this vocational school, as from the 2023/24 school year graduates will have the chance to attend a further three-year "advanced training course" (AUL) which concludes with a school-leaving certificate and diploma examination. This qualification is equivalent to the regular awards from a *BAfEP* institution (BMBWK 2023c).

Amendment to the 15a agreement on the financing of kindergartens

In accordance with Art. 15a of the Federal Constitution Act (B-VG, Republic of Austria 2022), the federal government and individual or all federal states may conclude agreements on matters within their respective spheres of activity. These so-called 15a agreements (federal-state agreements) bind both the federal government and the federal states with regard to the agreements reached.

With this amendment, an annual sum of €200 million in special-purpose grants from the federal government to the federal states is to be made for the kindergarten years 2022/23 to 2026/27. The allocation of funds to the federal states is calculated based on the proportion of under 6 year-olds per federal state in relation to the total population of the same age. The distribution of funds between the federal states and municipalities is the responsibility of the local authorities. Attendance at an ECEC centre in the year before the child enters primary school is still compulsory. As before, attendance is to be offered free of charge for 20 hours, which the federal government intends to co-finance with €80 million per kindergarten year until 2026/27 as part of the special-purpose grants. According to the proposal, the remaining €120 million is to be largely earmarked by the federal states, namely at least 51% for the expansion of ECEC facilities and at least 19% for early language support. For these two areas, the federal states are also to provide additional co-financing of €63 million per year. The remaining 30% of the federal subsidy can be used flexibly depending on the needs of the respective state. In order to expand the quality of early childhood education services, the aim is to further develop staff qualifications nationwide in a standardised manner (Republic of Austria 2022).

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Calculation of costs for the expansion of ECEC

***Source*:** Neuwirth, N. 2021 (see *References* for full details)

***Aims*:** Current demographic scenarios for the period up to 2030 were the background to this study, as well as the need to develop access to ECEC services. The study aims to present the cost development in connection with specific recommendations for action for the ECEC sector (increase in employer costs as a result of tariff adjustments, taking over parental contributions for 4 year-olds, additional costs for tertiary-level initial professional education of core professionals.

***Procedures*:** Varying data sources are placed in an analytical context and used as a basis for the calculations. Main data sources are the current population forecast based on three scenarios, the ECEC centre statistics, the EU-SILC Austria, the micro-censuses of the last ten years and other statistical working tables from the Austrian Institute of Family Research and Statistics Austria.

***Findings and implications*:** Taking into account the three cost items of the draft reform (increase in employer costs as a result of tariff adjustments, taking over parental contributions for 4 year-olds, additional training costs for early childhood pedagogy professionals in the tertiary sector), costs totalling €344 million can be expected by 2030. However, around 56% of this expenditure will flow back as increased government revenue within 12 months. The additional costs of the draft reform will be largely self-financed in the first round through tax returns. Overall, it can be assumed that there will be strong positive economic effects in the long term, primarily due to the increased educational and later labour market opportunities for children.

European Quality Seal for ECEC settings

Source: Walter-Laager, C., C. Bachner, C. Geißler, L. Eichen and Quality Seal project group QUALIEPAED 2019. (see *References* for full details)

***Aims*:** For the first time, a standardised "European Seal of Quality for ECEC settings" was to be developed in various European countries (in the Alps-Adriatic region) to record and ensure pedagogical quality in early childhood education and care settings, to which all EU countries will have free access. This can make an EU-wide contribution to the improvement, maintenance and visualisation of quality in ECEC settings.

***Procedures*:** The development of reliable and valid criteria for determining educational quality formed the basis for the definition of quality and the development of the joint seal of approval. These quality criteria were validated by means of a quantitative survey of parents (N=1,908) and ECEC professionals (N=358). The quantitative part of the survey was supplemented by open, qualitative questions in order to be able to include any previously unconsidered but relevant quality criteria from the perspective of parents and professionals.

***Findings and implications*:** Based on the results, a set of quality assessment tools was developed and piloted in ten audits in each country. The resulting handbook on the European Quality Label for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres summarises all the criteria developed, presents the respective measurement methods and describes the process of assessing educational quality in detail.

Policy Paper: Since political decision-making and implementation are of central importance for the sustainable establishment of the quality seal and for the general expansion and professionalisation of centre-based ECEC, a policy paper was developed that summarises the experience gained in the project and the findings of the criteria validation with specific recommendations for policy makers (Walter-Laager et al. 2019; Tietze et al. 2019)

10 steps to reflective language education integrated into everyday contexts

***Source*:** Walter-Laager, C., E. Pölzl-Stefanec, C. Bachner, K. Rettenbacher, F. Vogt, und S. Grassmann 2018 (see *References* for full details)

***Aims*:** Based on numerous studies in the field of early language education, a wide variety of strategies can be deduced for supporting children's language acquisition. The project summarises the most important strategies for promoting language education in everyday kindergarten life and prepares them for practical use.

***Findings and implications*:** The project "10 steps to reflective everyday integrated education" encourages ECEC professionals to reflect on strategies for language education integrated into everyday activities using short specialised texts, guided tasks to try out, checklists and video examples. In this context, the quality of interaction in groups can also be improved. Practical ideas for trialling the respective strategy in practice are also presented. A checklist is provided for regular reflections on everyday practices.

Working material for initial and continuing professional education, team meetings and parents' evenings: Various strategies for language education are presented using specialist texts, film material and opportunities for reflection. In addition to the accompanying booklet, six films are available online, in which scenes from everyday pedagogical life are shown and the various language strategies are made visible.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

The shortage of staff in early childhood education and care, which varies from region to region throughout Austria, is a challenge that has been exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis in 2020-2021. In the last three government programmes, the importance of ECEC was clearly emphasised. Currently, under the motto of "strengthening ECEC", some aspects related to quality improvement and the expansion of facilities are mentioned, but little in the way of structural improvements (staff to child ratio, more working hours for planning and reflection...) can be expected (Die neue Volkspartei/Die Grünen - Die Grüne Alternative 2020).

Qualifications

What does the ECEC system in Austria stand for? On what theoretical and sociological basis are decisions relevant to education and social policy made and measures adopted? There is little or no public discourse on these questions.

Until 2020/21, there was no fundamental opportunity for acquiring a professional qualification at tertiary level that fulfilled the legal employment requirements for core professionals in public institutions beyond the IPE provided by vocational colleges for early childhood education (*BAfeP*). This situation has changed with the introduction of the two-semester university course "Early Childhood Education" (60 ECTS) at university colleges of teacher education from September 2021 (see *Chapter **4.3***). Since September 2021, a four-semester course (120 ECTS) is also offered for graduates of all subjects at university colleges and universities (FMESC 2023).

A comparison of the curricula of the vocational colleges for early childhood education and higher education courses highlights the very different educational and professionalisation concepts which form the starting point. The change in IPE structures and the content of curricula are de facto fundamental socio-political decisions. The impending shortage of skilled labour has created a qualifications dynamic that lacks a theory-based inclusion of early childhood education and care as a fundamental, structural and curricular part of the education system.

Inclusion

With the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008 at the latest, a commitment was made to establish and implement an inclusive education system for all age groups. This process is supported by a "National Action Plan on Disability (NAP)" (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection 2022). However, the evaluation of the measures defined in the NAP 2012-2021 (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection 2019) by the "Independent Monitoring Committee for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" (Monitoring Committee 2022) shows inadequate results and an urgent need for action, as there are no suitable places available for many children with disabilities. According to BIZEPS (2022), the current 15a federal-state agreements and the National Disability Action Plan 2022-2030 also failed to fundamentally address the issue of inclusion in kindergarten. Strong criticism is voiced in the shadow report (Monitoring Committee 2020) on the occasion of the state review by the UN Committee of Experts: "In Austria, a distinction is made between children with and children without disabilities. This means that different (better) quality standards apply to children and young people without disabilities than to children with disabilities. This is contrary to equality and contradicts the goals of the UN CRPD (ibid., 7). The reorganisation of facilities into inclusive facilities, an

adjustment of the staff to child ratio, the reduction of the maximum number of children, a needs-based provision of resources for inclusive facilities, as well as an adequate number of Inclusive Early Childhood Pedagogue professionals represent major challenges. The further development of IPE for specialised core professionals is also unclear. It remains to be seen whether the introduction of the four-semester "Inclusive early childhood education" course at universities of teacher education from the 2022/23 school year will contribute to the recruitment of urgently needed specialist staff.

Federal responsibility and framework conditions

As mentioned at the beginning of this report, the entire field of early childhood education in Austria is federally regulated, which means that the legal frameworks differ from federal state to federal state. In addition to the clear demands from the professional field for better working conditions (at least 25% of working time as preparation time), a lower ratio of core professionals to children and greater support from specialised support staff, the declining entry rate of graduates from vocational colleges of early childhood education (*BAfEP*) into the profession can presumably also be attributed to these unfavourable framework conditions. For example, the NeceA association (2022) and the Educare platform (2022) are calling for, among other things, a standardised federal framework law for the ECEC sector throughout Austria under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. This would at least make it easier to implement nationwide structural changes.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

AUSTRIA

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC provision are **childcare centre** (*Kinderkrippe*, 0–2) and **kindergarten** (*Kindergarten*, 3–5)[1]**.** Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Austria

1830	First custodial institution (*Bewahranstalt*) established in Vienna for children from families in need of support.
1832	State regulation assigns the supervision and control of all *Bewahranstalten* to the Catholic church – as private charities without any state financing and not linked to schools.
1863	First kindergarten founded with an explicitly educational orientation (based on Comenius, Oberlin, Pestalozzi, Froebel).
1869	Imperial School Act – liberalisation of education; church loses supervision rights over kindergartens.
1871	A professional organisation for kindergarten educators is founded.
1872	– First kindergarten legislation with general country-wide standards – the decree promotes a Froebelian approach to early childhood education. – A framework plan for the training of kindergarten educators is included in the decree.
After 1879	Liberalism loses its momentum.
1896/97	40% of kindergartens are run by public agencies, 25% by humanitarian associations, 8.5% by religious orders or the church and 25.6% by private individuals, such as factory owners. The relative share of public institutions continues to grow over the years.
1900	Educational institutions for children before compulsory schooling come under the supervision of school authorities.
1914	Wartime Kindergarten Act transfers responsibility for kindergartens from the education sector to the social welfare sector, with youth offices in charge of supervision.
Up to 1939	Expansion of kindergartens takes place, mostly in Vienna, where innovative pedagogical approaches are developed, e.g. along psychoanalytical lines under the influence of Anna Freud and Erik Erikson.
1939–1945	Under the national socialist regime, these reform-oriented movements are suppressed and the pedagogical programme is changed to include goals such as “obedience” and “heroism”.
1962	Legislative competence for kindergartens is transferred to the nine Austrian provinces; responsibility for the professional education of kindergarten staff remains at the federal level.
1965-1975	Focus of early childhood education is primarily on cognitive development.
From 1975	Social-emotional learning becomes more important, play and learning are on an equal footing; promotion of the child's overall personality becomes the basis for early childhood education goals.
ab 1980	Increased expansion of kindergartens and stronger scientific foundation of approaches to learning
1990	Legal regulations to increase the compatibility of family and work in the 1990s

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for pre-primary settings in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years.

1994	Introduction of 4-semester courses ("College for Kindergarten Pedagogy") as a training opportunity for persons with advanced school-leaving certificate
1995	70% of 3 to 5 year-olds are enrolled in a kindergarten.
1997	Increased investment in the expansion of childcare facilities as a family policy issue for better reconciliation of work and family life
2000	Entitlement to paternity allowance for fathers is introduced.
2002	Federal Government funded projects focus on intercultural education and language enhancement.
2004	Promoting giftedness as a key indicator for the quality of education is also discussed for the ECEC sector.
2008	Introduction of a framework plan for early childhood settings valid across the country (further guidance follows in subsequent years)
2008	Agreement between the federal and regional governments to expand early childhood provision with an emphasis on the under 3 year olds and language support
2009	– Agreement between federal and regional governments to introduce a free and compulsory kindergarten year for 5 and 6 year-olds – Tax relief for childcare costs for all under 10 year olds is introduced.
2011	– Agreement between federal and regional governments to further expand childcare provision for under 3 year-olds and to extend opening hours
2012	– Ministerial Council Decision on language assessment (children in need of language support are given specific tuition) – In April 2012, the section "Early Childhood Education" is founded within the ÖFEB (Austrian Society for Research and Development in Education).
2013	Act on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF): Classification of training for kindergarten educators at Level 5: Short Cycle Tertiary Education (ISCED 2011)
2016	Ministerial Council Decision on the reorganisation of the transition from kindergarten to school, including passing on information in the context of school enrolment
2016	Revision of the nation-wide curriculum for the professional education/training of early childhood staff (including a stronger emphasis on under 3 year-olds) and a renaming of the professional training institutions as *Bildungsanstalten für Elementarpädagogik* - Educational Institutions for Early Childhood Pedagogy (replacing the term Kindergarten Pedagogy)
2018	Consolidated Federation-*Länder* Agreement on the expansion of early childhood education and care comes into force.
2019	Introduction of 3-year vocational training schools for Pedagogical Assistants
2020	Introduction of study programmes in early childhood education at higher education institutions specialising in pedagogy (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*) as a lateral entry option into the profession
2022	Introduction of 4-semester study programmes in inclusive early childhood education at higher education institutions specialising in pedagogy (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*) for the continuing qualification of kindergarten educators.

Sources: Berger 2005; FMESC 2005; Krenn-Wache 2018; Willekens and Scheiwe 2020

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Austria is a federal state comprising nine autonomous *Länder* (Burgenland, Carinthia, Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Styria, Tirol, Vorarlberg and Vienna), each with its own legislative

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Austria provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

and executive competences. In accordance with the federal state structure, responsibility for early childhood education and care lies primarily with the *Länder*, and regulations vary considerably. Therefore, despite recent Federation-Länder Agreements, the ECEC system cannot be described as fully integrated but rather as "partially integrated".

Since 2018, the Department of Early Childhood Education, Social Pedagogy and Preschool Integration in the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (FMESR) has been responsible for the coordination and implementation of the Federal-*Länder* Agreements (FMESR 2021a) as well as for the professional education and training of pedagogical staff and the curricular framework for ECEC institutions (see section on *Curricular framework*).

Since February 2021, the Department of Family and Youth in the Federal Ministry of Labour, Family and Youth has been assigned to the Federal Chancellery. According to the 2021 amendment to the Federal Ministries Act, which came into force in 2022, the Federal Chancellery is now responsible for "general family policy matters, including the coordination of family policy and family support, as well as population policy in family and youth matters" (Federal Chancellery 2021a).

The nine *Länder*, through their own legislation, have overall responsibility for the ECEC sector as well as for supporting the municipalities in the building of ECEC provision. The *municipalities* are responsible for establishing and maintaining the running of kindergartens for 3 to 6 year-olds and childcare centres for under 3 year-olds.

General objectives and legislative framework

Pursuant to § 15a of the Federal Constitutional Act, a consolidated Agreement on Early Childhood Education between the Federal Government and the nine federal states came into force in October 2021, bringing together previous agreements into one legal provision (FLIS 2021). The Agreement was updated for the kindergarten years 2022/23 to 2026/27 (FLIS 2023), with the following overall goals:

- Strengthening early childhood educational institutions in their role as the first educational institution in a child's life
- Promoting children's holistic development in alignment with the nationwide curricular framework plan, especially in German as the language of instruction as well as mathematical, technical and scientific competences; promoting children's psychosocial and physical development in an age-appropriate way and relating to artistic, musical, creative and emotional competence
- Facilitating the entry into primary school (Austrian: *Volksschule*) in the sense of transition management and increasing equal opportunities for educational and professional pathways, regardless of the children's socio-economic and cultural background
- Supporting the education and upbringing of children according to nationally agreed and empirically proven pedagogical concepts, taking into account their respective age, individual abilities and individual needs
- Improving the compatibility of family and work and gender equality
- Recognising and transmitting fundamental values of Austrian society in early childhood educational institutions and through home-based ECEC providers.

Among the specific measures to be taken are:

- Implementing a standardised, compact language proficiency assessment tool (BESK-DaZ KOMPAKT, FMESR 2021d)

- Increasing support for language development in 4 year-olds
- Driving forward training for kindergarten pedagogues and language support staff
- Binding transmission of fundamental values
- Clear definition of the objectives of education and care through the specification of key educational documents
- Increased focus on the transition from kindergarten to school
- Increased monitoring and cooperation between the Federal Government and federal states
- Constant and efficient (impact) evaluation
- Continuation of the mandatory free kindergarten year for 5 year-olds
- Focus on the expansion of early childhood education programmes for children under 3 years of age
- Ensure more flexible and longer opening hours; improve working conditions and childcare ratio
- Promotion of home-based ECEC providers as an alternative to early childhood education institutions.

The legislative framework at the federal level for early childhood education and care is the Youth Welfare Act (1989) with subsequent amendments; each of the nine *Länder* has its own Kindergarten Act.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

In Austria, there is no universal entitlement to a place in a kindergarten or childcare centre. However, since the *Länder* have been obliged since September 2009 to provide a kindergarten place for children who have turned 5 by the end of August in the year before starting school, children are guaranteed a place during this year. Since 2018, attendance is **compulsory** for at least 20 hours a week, which are free of charge for parents and known as the 'free kindergarten year' (Federal Chancellery 2021a). In addition to the regular holiday periods and a number of 'school-free' days, parents are permitted to take a three-week holiday. An exemption from compulsory attendance may be granted under certain conditions (e.g. illness, severe physical or mental impairment, medical reasons, remote place of residence) at the request of the parent or guardian.

For children under 5 years of age, enrolment in an ECEC setting is voluntary.

Compulsory primary schooling begins in the September following the child's 6th birthday and lasts for nine years.

Main types of provision

Childcare centres (*Kinderkrippen, Krabbelstuben, Kleinkindbetreuungseinrichtungen*) provide places for infants and toddlers under 3 years of age. In 2022/23, there were 2,650 such childcare settings in Austria.

Kindergartens (*Kindergärten*) are the traditional form of provision for children aged 2½ to 3 years up to school entry at the age of 6. In 2022/23, the number of kindergartens totalled 4,602.

Mixed-age groups (*altersgemischte Gruppen*), a relatively new form of provision for 1 to 5/6 year-olds, are also available (1,557 in 2022/23). They are mostly located in kindergartens and to be found in areas where there are not enough children to establish same-age settings. Some of

the mixed-age groups are **parent-managed children's groups** (*elternverwaltete Kindergruppen*), characterised through a high level of parental responsibility and decision-making.

In 2022/23, there were a total of 9,717 ECEC and school-age settings comprising 21,888 groups attended by 388,256 children. The majority of these facilities were open all day (Statistics Austria 2023).

Home-based ECEC provision is primarily for very young children. In most of the nine *Länder* providers are expected to have some kind of pedagogical training (Federal Ministry for Digitalisation and Economic Location 2021a). In 2022/23, approximately 2.2% of children under 3 years of age and 0.7% of 3 to under 6 year-olds across the country were cared for by 2,011 home-based providers (Statistics Austria 2023, own calculations).

According to the Federation-*Länder* Agreement, ECEC settings should be open at least 45 hours per week (at least 9½ hours per day on at least four days) and for at least 47 weeks per year (Eurydice 2023). Exact opening hours vary according to region, state and provider. However, most are open at least six hours a day and almost all (99%) are open over lunch. Most open around 7:00/7:30 and close around 17:00/18:00. On average, ECEC settings have 21.9 closing days per year. In general, the trend towards longer opening hours continues (Statistics Austria 2023).

Over the past 15 years or so there has been a significant expansion in the number of early childhood settings, particularly of childcare centres and mixed-age provision. Between 2005 and 2022/23 the number nearly tripled. At the same time, the number of kindergartens sunk over the past seven years although the number of children enrolled in them increased slightly.

Table 1

Austria: Number of centre-based ECEC settings by type and children enrolled at different time points, 2005 to 2022/23

Year	Childcare centres		Kindergartens		Mixed-age settings		Total	
	Settings	Children	Settings	Children	Settings	Children	Settings	Children
2005/06	889	16,037	4,482	195,176	554	18,307	5,371	229,520
2015/16	1,760	33,500	4,664	217,952	1,663	45,673	8,087	297,125
2022/23	2,650	53,529	4,602	235,222	1.,67	48,692	9,717	337,443

Source: Statistics Austria 2023

Provider structures

The distribution of provider types differs considerably from province to province. While, for example, about 86.3% of the childcare centres in Carinthia have a private provider, this is only the case for 4.7% in Burgenland. Private mixed-age settings are found most frequently (87.2%) in Vienna, and least frequently in Burgenland (8%). In Lower Austria almost all kindergartens (97.3%) are public, but in Vienna only 44.5% (Statistics Austria 2023).

In Austria, slightly more than half of the childcare centres and almost three quarters of mixed-age facilities are privately run, whereas almost three quarters of the kindergartens are publicly run. These ratios are also reflected in the number of children enrolled.

Table 2

Austria: Number of settings and children by provider type, 2022/23

ECEC setting type	Provider type					
	Public			Private		
	Number of settings	Share, in %	Number of children	Number of settings	Share, in %	Number of children
Childcare centres	1,322	49.9	25,259	1,328	50.1	28.270
Kindergartens	3,353	72.9	180,969	1,249	27.1	54.253
Mixed-age settings	414	26.4	12,161	1,153	73.6	36.531
	5,089		218,389	3,730		119.054

Source: Statistics Austria 2023

Participation rates in regulated provision

Participation rates, particularly for the under-threes, vary considerably between urban and rural areas and from federal state to federal state: e.g. in 2022/23 the attendance rate for under-threes was 19.9% in Styria and 42% in Vienna. Across the country, 29.9% of under 3 year-olds and 94.4% of 3 to under 6 year-olds attend an ECEC setting. At the beginning of September 2022, 388,256 children were enrolled in a centre-based setting (including school-age childcare facilities). Most attended a kindergarten (235,222), 53,529 a childcare centre and 48,692 a mixed-age setting (Statistics Austria 2023).

Table 3

Austria: Number of children in ECEC settings (excluding school-age childcare facilities) and enrolment rates by age, 2022/23

Age group	Childcare centres	Kinder-gartens	In mixed-age settings	Number of children	Enrolment rates, in %
Up to 1 year	1,295	3	310	1,608	2.0
1 year-olds	19,958	189	3,264	23,411	27.1
2 year-olds	28,580	14,322	8,444	51,346	59.4
Up to 3 years	**49,833**	**14,514**	**12,018**	76,365	**29.9**
3 year-olds	3,003	63,408	11,045	77,456	88.8
4 year-olds	347	75,908	10,148	86,403	96.0
5 year-olds	255	79,964	9,348	89,567	98.0
3 to under 6 year-olds	**3,605**	**219,280**	**30,541**	253,426	**94.4**
Up to 6 years	53,438	233,794	42,559	329,791	n.d.

Source: Statistics Austria 2023

In 2022/23, roughly half (52.8%) of the children attended kindergarten full time, 70.8% a mixed-aged setting full time and 57.6% were in a full-day childcare centre (Statistics Austria 2023).

According to Eurostat data, the proportion of children under 3 years of age in ECEC settings has increased significantly since 2005: while in 2005 only 4% of these children were cared for in centre-based settings, by 2022 the proportion had grown to 23%. The proportion of children aged 3 up to primary school entry attending a centre-based setting had also increased, from 69% in 2005 to 91.9% in 2022 (see *Table 4*).

Table 4

Austria: Enrolment rates by age and weekly hours of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29	4	53
	Over 30	0	16
	No enrolment in ECEC	96	31
2010	1 to 29	6	57
	Over 30	3	26
	No enrolment in ECEC	91	17
2015	1 to 29	13.7	57.7
	Over 30	8.6	27.6
	No enrolment in ECEC	77.8	14.7
2022	1 to 29	14.6	54.6
	Over 30	8.4	37.3
	No enrolment in ECEC	77.0	8.1

Source: Eurostat 2023b, differences in the totals due to rounding

Financing and costs for parents

According to OECD data, total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 0.55% of GDP in 2019 (OECD 2023).

Early childhood education and care in Austria is mainly publicly funded. According to Austrian constitutional law, the financing of ECEC facilities is primarily the responsibility of the *Länder* and the municipalities.

From 2019 to 2021, the federal government made €142.5 million available as special-purpose subsidies and €70 million for the 'free' kindergarten year. Annually, €47 million are earmarked for the expansion of childcare provision and €18 million for language support; the difference can be spent flexibly by the *Länder*, which co-finance around €38 million (Federal Chancellery 2021c).

Through the 2021 Federation-*Länder* Agreement on Early Childhood Education between the Federal Government and the nine federal states, both levels are committed to enhanced investment in ECEC. The Agreement regulates the procedures and the conditions/obligations related to the receipt by the *Länder* of additional financial resources (subsidies) from the federal government (FMESR 2021).

Since 2010, part-time kindergarten attendance has been free of charge for parents in the year before starting primary school ('free kindergarten year'). In some *Länder* this also applies to full-day enrolment. In Vienna, for example, attendance at a public ECEC setting is free of charge for parents of 0 to 6 year-olds. Otherwise, costs vary depending on the province and are partly income-related. Job-seekers or parents whose gross monthly income does not exceed €2,300 can apply for (income-dependent) childcare assistance (Federal Ministry for Digitalisation and Economic Location 2021a).

Monthly fees in public ECEC settings can vary between €100 to €440. Up to €2,300 per year can be claimed against tax for childcare costs (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 58).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 2% of net household income on childcare costs[3] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Staff-child ratios and group size

Staff-child ratios are regulated by the *Länder* (Bundeskanzleramt 2021, 953ff) and can vary considerably.

Group size in **childcare centres** ranges from 7 to 15 children per group, in **kindergartens** from 20 to 25 children. In **mixed-age settings** both group size and the number of staff are dependent on the ages of the children attending. They range in size from 5 to 10 children.

As a rule, one fully qualified pedagogue is present in each group, but the number of assistants varies greatly in the federal states according to the size of the group, the age of the children or the time allocated to educational activities in the setting.

Across all *Länder* and child groups, staff-child ratios range between 10:1 in Carinthia and Tirol and 16:1 in Vorarlberg (Federal Chancellery 2021b, 9154).

Table 5

Austria: Group size and number of staff per group by *Länder*

Federal states/ *Länder*	**Childcare centre 0–2** (per group)			**Kindergarten 3–5** (per group)			**Mixed-age settings** (per group)		
	Max. number of children	Profes-sional	Assistant staff	Max. number of children	Profes-sional	Assistant staff	Max. number of children	Profes-sional	Assistant staff
Burgen-land	15	1	1	25	1	1[1]	25	1	1[1]
Carinthia	15	1	variable	25	1	1	20-25	1	1
Lower Austria	n/s	n/s	n/s	25	1	1[2]	10-15	1	1[3]
Upper Austria	10	1	1[4]	23	1	'necessary number'	18-23	1	'necessary number'
Salzburg	8	1	0.5-1	22	1	0.5-1	22	0,5	0.5-1
Styria	14	1	0.5	25	1	1	20	1	1
Tirol	7	1	1	20	1	1	12-20	1	1
Vorarlberg	9	1 person per 5 children under 2[5]		23	1	1 from 17 children upwards	12	1	2-3 depending on age con-stellation
Vienna	15	1	1	25	1	1	10-14	1	1[6]

[1]Only for half of the opening time, [2]only in the morning, [3]only if children under 1 year present, [4]from 6 children, [5]no distinction between professional and assistant, [6]if 1 child under 3 years present.

Source: Federal Chancellery 2021b, Tabellenband, 246-251

[3] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

Curricular framework

A Nationwide Framework Curriculum for Austrian ECEC Services (*Bundeslandübergreifender BildungsRahmenPlan für elementare Bildungseinrichtungen*) for work with 0 to 6 year-olds was issued in 2009 (FMESR 2021b). The play-based framework formulates 12 learning principles (e.g. integrated learning, inclusion, gender sensitivity, participation, transparency) and six learning areas (emotions and social relationships; ethics and society; language and communication; movement and health; aesthetics and design; nature and technology).

Two additional sections focus on (1) language and communication and (2) the final year in kindergarten. The pedagogical staff select content and didactic approaches that are appropriate to the situation, context and age. They seek a balance between activities initiated by the child and those guided by the staff; these include theme-based project work as well as individual and group activities.

Guidelines were published in 2016 to support ECEC settings in implementing the mandatory framework (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 108).

Digital education

In the curricular framework, "Information and Communication Technologies (digital media)" is subsumed under the learning area “Language and Communication”. The importance of promoting children's media competence is emphasised: Children should be enabled to use media critically but also creatively and thus to express themselves and also to create their own products (FMESR 2021b, 38).

To support ECEC staff, the Charlotte Bühler Institute was commissioned by the FMESR to develop guidelines for digital media education in ECEC settings (Charlotte Bühler Institute 2020). The promotion of media literacy is seen here as a cross-curricular task and complementary learning area. It is considered important that children - based on their individual experiences, their age and their development - can build up media competences in a co-constructive educational process. The use of digital media is recommended from the age of 3 for a maximum of 30 minutes per day and in the company of an adult. Children should gain experience in dealing with media, use them for their own needs, reflect on their own use of them and generally learn to think about the function of media. However, a learning environment without digital devices is also suggested, especially as a means of reflection and for acquiring basic knowledge. Data protection and the right to one's own image are further topics that are dealt with. The guidance also includes practical examples for involving parents or using digital media in every day kindergarten life (e.g. selection criteria for apps).

Monitoring – evaluation

Quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation procedures in early childhood education and care are the responsibility of the federal states.

In terms of quality assurance, the Federation-*Länder* Agreement 2021 (with amendments in 2023) states that the following guidelines, among others, apply throughout Austria (FMESR 2021c): Nationwide Framework Curriculum for Austrian ECEC Services; Guidelines for language support at the transition from kindergarten to primary school; Module for the final year in ECEC settings; and the Guidelines for the development of values in kindergarten.

Child-related assessment

Since 2005, language assessment tools have been used in kindergartens to detect possible support needs 15 months before school entry (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 113). Since 2019/20, the nationwide standardised instruments "BESK KOMPAKT" (for children with German as a first language) and "BESK-DaZ KOMPAKT" (for children with German as an additional language), developed by the Federal Institute for Educational Research, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System (BIFIE), are used for language assessment (FMESR 2021d).

Based on the results of the language assessment, which must be carried out at least once from the age of 3, an obligatory transfer sheet mapping the developmental status of the child in the year preceding school entry is passed on from the ECEC setting to the primary school.

Centre-level internal evaluation

There is no general obligation to carry out internal evaluations, this is decided by the *Länder* (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 126). Upper Austria, for example, has developed its own self-evaluation tool (Directorate of Education Upper Austria 2021), which is used once a year by all ECEC settings in the region. The Charlotte Bühler Institute (Charlotte Bühler Institute 2021a) recommends the use of the German-language versions of the Infant Toddler Environment Scale - Revised (KRIPS-R) and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Revised (KES-R) to determine and support pedagogical quality in early childhood education centres. However, it is emphasised that they should not be used as pure assessment and control instruments. The Charlotte Bühler Institute therefore offers various training courses on the use of the scales.

External evaluation

In all *Länder* there are kindergarten supervisors/inspectors who are responsible for ensuring the pedagogical quality in ECEC settings (Eurydice 2023). They visit each setting at least once a year. The size and organisation of rooms and equipment are checked, and also the suitability of the staff. The BMBWF reserves the right to make unannounced visits. How the results are used in each case is decided by the *Länder* (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 134).

Evaluations of the process quality in individual ECEC settings are also carried out by certified evaluators of the Charlotte Bühler Institute.

Evaluation studies

At the University of Graz Institute for Educational Research and Teacher Education (University of Graz 2021), a project on the implementation of quality development processes in ECEC settings was conducted from 2019 to 2021.

The Charlotte Bühler Institute, a research and development institute in Vienna established in 1992, carries out evaluation projects in the ECEC sector, for example: accompanying process quality assessment on educational cooperation in the border regions, including multilingual education (an EU project) (Charlotte Bühler Institute 2021b).

Evidence-based research and impact analyses on a variety of topics related to childcare, family and society are provided by the University of Vienna "Austrian Family Institute" (University of Vienna 2021).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

Children with disabilities have the option of attending a regular kindergarten, a facility with integrative groups or a special needs kindergarten (Federal Ministry for Digitalisation and Economic Location 2021b). In an integrative group, an average of four children with disabilities and 16 children without disabilities are cared for together - by one kindergarten pedagogue, one special needs teacher and two kindergarten assistants. In therapeutic education groups, a maximum of twelve children with severe disabilities are cared for (Agency for Education and Internationalisation 2022).

The tasks, goals and frameworks of these settings are regulated by the federal states. If there are more than two children with special needs in a regular ECEC setting, an additional full-time, fully qualified member of staff must be employed. Children with special needs in integrative settings count as two children. There may not be more than four such children in an integrative group.

The number of children under 6 years of age with (impending) disabilities or children with special needs is not statistically recorded at the federal level. Due to the federal regulations, there is also considerable heterogeneity between the *Länder* with regard to integrative or inclusive regulations. There is no legal entitlement to inclusive settings in the elementary education sector. There are also no data on the share of inclusive or special needs settings.

Children with a migration background

At the beginning of 2023, approximately a quarter (26.4%) of the total population had a migration background and 19% held a non-Austrian citizenship. Most came from Germany, followed by persons from Romania, Serbia, Turkey, and Croatia; there was a particularly marked increase in persons from Ukraine (Federal Chancellery 2023, 7).

In 2022/23, about one third (32.5%) of all children in ECEC settings had a home language other than German, with large differences between the federal states (data without Styria), varying from 14.7% in Tyrol to 58.7% in Vienna. The differences between the age groups of under 3 year-olds and 3 to 5 year-olds are relatively small (30.9% vs. 32.4%) (Statistics Austria 2023).

More than three quarters (77.9%, data without Styria) of the children in ECEC settings have Austrian citizenship. Just under 3% come from Asian countries, about 3% from Romania, 1.5% from Germany, 1.4% from Serbia and 1.3% from Hungary (Statistik Austria 2023). In 2022/23, the share of foreign children was highest in mixed-age settings at 34.2% and lowest in childcare centres at 17.6% (Statistics Austria 2023, own calculations).

For some years, differences in the enrolment rates of children aged 1 to 5 with a migration background and those without have been decreasing: 76% vs. 70% (2022). Larger differences exist with regard to the enrolment rates of younger children: While 63% of 2 year-olds and 92% of 3 year-old Austrian children attend an ECEC setting, the figures for non-Austrian children are 52% and 83% respectively. From the age of 4, the enrolment rates are very high, regardless of citizenship: 97% of 4 year-old Austrian and 94% of non-Austrian children are cared for outside the household, in the obligatory last year of kindergarten this proportion rises to 98% vs. 97% (Federal Chancellery 2023, 42).

Children whose home language is not German are offered support in the kindergarten with regard to language development as well as assessments of their language competence. Since the kindergarten year 2019/20, language assessment for children with German as an additional language has been carried out nationwide through a standardised instrument called "BESK-DaZ KOMPAKT" (BMBWF 2021d). At the beginning of 2021/22, it revealed a need for support in the

German language for 28% of 4 and 5 year-old children (regardless of their first language), which decreased to 21% by the end of the year (Federal Chancellery 2023, 42).

In addition to German, some languages of minority groups are also spoken in Austria: Burgenland-Croatian, Hungarian and Romany in Burgenland; Slovene in Carinthia and Styria; Hungarian, Czech and Slovak in Vienna. In order to promote the respective home language in kindergarten, there are bilingual kindergartens in some federal states or the children are taught in their home language (Federal Chancellery 2015).

Parental leave arrangements[4]

Mandatory **Maternity leave** (*Mutterschaftskarenz*) starts eight weeks before the birth date and continues for eight weeks afterwards. Payment is 100% of average income during the three months preceding the beginning of maternity leave.

Fathers living in the same household as the mother and child are entitled to a month of **Paternity leave** (*Papamonat / Väterfrühkarenz*); This *family time bonus* is remunerated with €23.91 per calendar day. The month can be taken within 91 days after the birth.

Parental leave (*Elternkarenz*) is a family entitlement and can be taken until the child is 2 years old. A childcare benefit (*Kinderbetreuungsgeld*) is available to all families whether or not parents take Parental leave. Parents can choose from two options:

1) Flexible lump sum option (*Kinderbetreuungsgeldkonto*): Parents receive a sum of €13,085 (if only one parent receives it) or €16,389 (if both parents receive it), which they can spread over a certain period of time: between 365 days (i.e. €35.85 per day) and 851 days (i.e. €15.38 per day) for one parent and between 456 and 1,063 days for both parents.
2) Income-dependent option (*einkommensabhängiges Kinderbetreuungsgeld*): Here, 80% of the net income of the last six months is paid for 365 days (for one parent recipient) and up to 426 days (for two parent recipients). A maximum of €69.83 per day or €2,100 per month is paid. Up to €7,800 per year can be earned in addition.

With both variants, both parents can take only one month of Parental leave at the same time, in which case the total length is reduced by one month. If parents share their childcare benefit for at least 124 days, they receive a partnership bonus of €500 each. Since January 2019, working parents receive an additional family bonus as a tax-free amount of up to €2,000 (2022) per child until the child's 18th birthday.

Almost all those entitled make use of Parental leave (93-96%). As a rule, these are women. Statistics on option 1) mentioned above show that this was chosen by about two thirds of parents and that 36% of these parents applied for 28 months or more; 89% of these parents were mothers. 35% of parents chose option 2) for 12 to 14 months; here 30% of applicants were fathers. However, on average, fathers only claimed about 4.5% of all days allocated for childcare in Austria.

[4] The brief summary in this section is based on the country note for Austria by Eva-Maria Schmidt and Andrea E. Schmidt in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Austria

*Country expert assessment by **Marisa Krenn-Wache***

Academic-level IPE programmes for early childhood education and new professorial chairs

Since 2018, Bachelor's degree programmes (180 ECTS) in early childhood education have been offered at higher education institutions specialising in pedagogy (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*). These courses are primarily designed for the further qualification of Early Childhood Pedagogues already working in the field.

From the academic year 2020/21 onwards, for the first time – alongside the regular and long-established vocational qualifying courses for Early Childhood Pedagogues – undergraduate study programmes will be offered at the *Pädagogische Hochschulen*. With the higher education course in "Early Childhood Education" (60 ECTS), a lateral entry option into the field has been created for persons with relevant prior initial professional education. From the summer semester 2023 onwards, another higher education course (120 ECTS) will offer graduates of non-relevant disciplines with a minimum of 180 ECTS a qualification with a professional licence.

Research and teaching in the field of early childhood pedagogy are underrepresented in Austria. It was not until 2010 that the first chair for early childhood pedagogy was established at the University of Graz (2021). Then, in 2015, a joint chair for early childhood education and upbringing was established at the University of Innsbruck (2021) and the University of Teacher Education Vorarlberg. Three Master's degree programmes started in 2014 in Salzburg (university course) and Vienna (BA programmes) (2021). In 2012, a section for Early Childhood Pedagogy was founded by the professional association for educational sciences "ÖFEB". A significant expansion of basic and applied research is urgently needed.

Further expansion initiatives and staff recruitment measures

According to national statistics and the Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning, a growth of approximately 8% is expected in the population group of 0 to 5 year-olds. During the past ten years, the participation rates of 0 to 2 year-olds have doubled and it can be assumed that this development will continue. If population growth continues up to 2025, it has been estimated that a related 11,100 places will need to be made available in early childhood settings and an additional 3,600 places related to the increased enrolment rates. Targeted measures to ensure provision of places and to raise the attractiveness of the occupational field are needed across the country (Neuwirt 2016).

In 2022, the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research won an award for an EU project on "Improving the framework conditions for staff to increase quality in early childhood education and care in Austria" (FMESR 2022). Within the framework of this project (duration 2022-2024), instruments are to be developed together with the federal provinces and with the involvement of other relevant stakeholders which will lead to improvements in the quality of early childhood education, in the availability and stability of pedagogical staff and in reducing staff shortages.

Transferring responsibility for early childhood education to the federal level

Since 1962, legislative and executive powers for the early childhood sector have come under the auspices of the nine federal states. There has long been a demand on the part of the relevant professional association for a transfer of responsibility for early childhood education and care to the federal government level. Federal framework legislation is seen as the way forward in order to improve and unify the very disparate conditions and terms of employment to be found

in the individual *Länder* and offered by the various ECEC providers. However, a solution to change this legal situation, which would require a two-thirds majority in parliament, is not in sight.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the population of Austria totalled 8,978,929. Over the past two decades it has increased steadily – 2000: 8,002,186; 2010: 8.351.643; 2020: 8,901,864 (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27(2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries (EU27+6) was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.48, Austria is slightly below the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023c[5]).

Children under 6 years of age

Table 6

Austria: Number of under 6 year olds by age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Up to 1 year	84,551
1 year-olds	84,286
2 year-olds	85,852
3 year-olds	87,503
4 year-olds	89,593
5 year-olds	90,231
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**522,016**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

The proportion of children under 3 years of age in the total population was 2.8% in 2022, and that of children under 6 years of age was 5.8%. While these shares were slightly above the then EU15 average in 2000, they had fallen slightly below it by 2015. In 2022, they were again slightly above the respective EU averages (see *Table 7*).

[5] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Table 7

Austria: Relative share of under 6 year-olds in population compared with EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %

Year	Comparison Austria/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Austria	3.1	3.4	6.5
	∅ EU15[6]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Austria	2.9	2.9	5.8
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Austria	2.8	2.8	5.7
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Austria	2.8	3.0	5.8
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under 6 years of age

In 2022, more than three quarters (78.6%) of households with children under 6 years of age were couple households. Households with single parents accounted for only 2.6% - usually single mothers, the share of single fathers is very low at 0.1%.

Table 8

Austria: Households with children under 6 years of age, 2022

Household type	Number	Share of total households, in %*
Households – total	849,900	
Couple households	668,400	78.6
Other types of households	159,400	18.7
Single households, total	22,400	2.6
Single households, women	21,100	2.5
Single households, men	1,300**	0.1

Source: Eurostat 2023e, * Own calculations, ** data computed.

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Austria in 2022, the employment rate (15-64 years) of men as a whole was 82.1%, that of women 73.4% (Eurostat 2023g).

In 2022, 70,7% of women and 90.9% of men with children under 6 were in employment (18-64 years). The shares of employed fathers were thus above the average (87.2%) of the 27(2020) EU countries, those of mothers were significantly higher than the EU average (63.6%) (Eurostat 2023d).

[6] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Table 9a

Austria: Employment rates of parents with children below age 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Austria	61.7	79.5
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[7]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 32.7	Latvia: 74.8
	2022	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Austria	70.7	90.9
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU- countries [8]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023d

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 9b.*

Table 9b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023d, 2023g

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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[7] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[9]

In 2022, 21.1% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was below the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. Also, the share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was at 17.5% below the European average of 21.6%. In 2020, 2.8% of children under 6 and 3% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023e, f).

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[9] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

BELGIUM

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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Introduction

Belgium is a federal, multilingual state comprising three autonomous Regions (Flemish Region, Walloon Region, Brussels-Capital Region), three language Communities (Flemish, French, German-speaking), and four language areas (Dutch, French, German and in the Brussels-Capital Region bilingual, French/Dutch). Of a total population of 11.5 million in 2021, 6.65 million were Dutch-speaking and lived in the Flemish Region and 3.56 million were French-speaking, living in the Walloon Region. In the bilingual Brussels Region (1.2 million inhabitants) a large majority is French-speaking. The German-speaking Community accounts for 0.7 percent of the total population (78,497 inhabitants in 2021).

Wherever possible, separate accounts are given in this report for the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community. Otherwise, unless specifically stated, the data presented refer to the whole country. It should be noted that the Workforce challenges (see Section **10**) represent a common country expert assessment drafted together by all the authors of this report.

1. ECEC governance in Belgium

Early childhood education and care in the three language Communities is organised as a multi-sectoral system. Belgium is historically characterised by an ECEC split system since the 19th century. This implies that childcare services for children up to 3 years of age (*kinderopvang*) are under the auspices of the Minister for Welfare, whereas pre-primary institutions (preschools – *kleuterschool*) for children from 2½ to compulsory school age (6 years) are under the auspices of the Minister for Education (OECD 2006). The two types of institutions have distinct curricula, professional profiles and staff to child ratios. The day-to-day running of childcare centres is the responsibility of the childcare service providers (local authorities, non-profit organisations, and also private for-profit providers). In March 2019, the Belgian Federal Parliament passed a law to lower the starting age of compulsory education from 6 to 5 years, thus including the last year of ECEC. The law came into force on 1st September 2020.

In the **Flemish Community**, preschools (pre-primary education, *kleuterscholen*) for children from 2½ years up to school entry come under the general auspices of the Ministry for Education and Training (*Vlaams ministerie van onderwijs en vorming*). Schools enjoy a high degree of autonomy, which is part of the Belgian Constitution. There is 'Freedom of education'. and 'Freedom of organisation', which gives the right to any natural or legal person to start a school. Moreover, this degree of autonomy also allows each school to develop its own educational policies, including its own pedagogical plan, teaching methods, curriculum and timetables, as well as to appoint its own staff. Although schools receiving public funding are required to operate within a regulatory framework, they still enjoy 'considerable autonomy'. School boards are distributed over three 'educational networks' (GO! education of the Flemish Community; municipal schools; publicly funded and privately run schools, mostly Catholic) and may belong to an 'umbrella organisation', that is, a representative association of school boards that acts as a partner for schools in policy discussions with the Flemish government. In the case of childcare provision for younger children (*groepsopvang & gezinsopvang voor baby's en peuters)* and out-of-school provision for school children (*buitenschoolse opvang)*, the Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family (*Department Welzijn Volksgezondheid en Gezin*) delegates supervisory duties to a governmental

agency called The Upbringing Agency (*Agentschap Opgroeien*, formerly *Kind en Gezin, Child & Family).* The Upbringing Agency is responsible for regulations, allocation of places, funding, quality standards and quality management. The day-to-day running of childcare centres is the responsibility of the service providers (local authorities, non-profit organisations, and also private for-profit providers). All childcare services must be registered with the Upbringing Agency.

In the **French Community** (Wallonia-Brussels Federation - WBF), the *écoles maternelles* (pre-primary education) for 2½–6 year-olds come under the general auspices of the Minister for Education (*Ministre de l'Éducation*) and, more specifically, under three provider umbrellas: the State, local authorities or subsidised organisations. In the case of provision for younger children and out-of-school provision for school children, the Minister for Childhood, Health, Culture, Media and Women's Rights (*Ministre de l'Enfance, de la Santé, la Culture, des Médias et des Droits des Femmes*) delegates responsibility to a government agency called ONE (*Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance - Birth and Childhood Office*). ONE is responsible for regulations, allocation of places, funding, accompaniment and monitoring of both childcare services, and the continuing professional development system in WBF.

In the **German-speaking Community**, the Minister for Education and Scientific Research (*Minister für Bildung, Forschung und Erziehung*) is responsible for both ECEC for children under the age of 3 and pre-primary education for children aged 3–6. Pre-primary education is currently accessible for children from the age of 3 but will be accessible for 2½ year-olds from 1st September 2024.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

The administrative split in services for 0–6 year-olds between 'childcare' for the under-threes and 'education' for children aged 2½ years up to school entry is also reflected in the qualifications required for work in these two different sectors. In 2022, core pedagogues in pre-primary education follow their professional Bachelor's education/training alongside teachers in the school system. Practitioners working with children in services for the under-threes are mostly Infant Care Workers (vocational secondary level).

Flemish Community

Childcare sector

In the Flemish Community of Belgium, childcare (*kinderopvang*) for children from 0–3 is organised in two settings: *groepsopvang* ('group-based childcare') and *gezinsopvang* ('home-based care'). For the purpose of this report, we will only focus on group-based childcare, unless otherwise stated. The core practitioners working in group-based childcare are called *kinderbegeleider groepsopvang* ('childcare worker group-based childcare') or just '*kinderbegeleider*' ('childcare worker'). There are no 'assistants' but some childcare services work with volunteers for supportive tasks.

The adult to child ratio is set at 1 adult per 8 children, but there are no regulations regarding group size or age range of the children in a group. All childcare services are free to choose how they arrange the groups. When there are two *kinderbegeleiders* in a group, the maximum group size is 18 children (so in this case, the adult to child ratio is even less favourable at 1:9.)

In the 2014 Decree on childcare for the 0 to 3 year-olds (*Decreet houdende de organisatie van kinderopvang van baby's en peuters*) it was stipulated that every childcare worker should have a qualification by 2024. There is a list of possible certificates of qualification from different fields of study eligible to do the job. The minimum qualification requirement is the same for *kinderbegeleiders groepsopvang* as for *kinderbegeleiders gezinsopvang* and is set at level 4 of the European Qualifications Framework (also ISCED 4).

Pre-primary education

In pre-primary education in the Flemish Community of Belgium, the core pedagogues are called *kleuterleerkracht* ('Toddler Teacher') or *kleuterleider* ('Toddler Leader'). They work in a *kleuterklas* ('toddler class') within a *kleuterschool* ('toddler school' = pre-primary) that is mostly situated at the same site as the school for children from 6 to 12 years old (*lagere school* or 'lower school' = primary) with one Principal for both the pre-primary and the primary school.

All Pre-primary School Teachers hold a Bachelor's degree in pre-primary education (EQF level 6; ISCED 6, 180 ECTS credits). They often have additional support from a Childcare Worker (*kinderverzorgster,* 'child carer') for a few hours per week, depending on the number and socio-economic situation of the toddlers. Schools with less than 35 toddlers receive funding for four hours 'childcare' in the week. The Childcare Workers usually have a secondary vocational degree in childcare (*kinderzorg*) (ISCED 4). The deployment of these assisting practitioners is mostly framed as a support for the core teachers or as a means to unburden the core teacher. Childcare Workers in pre-primary schools in the Flemish Community of Belgium are typically responsible for caring tasks for the youngest children (e.g. potty training and toilet moments, guidance during meals and snack time, supervising midday naps) while the Teachers are responsible for the learning activities.

Many pre-primary schools collaborate with after-school care services either within or outside of the school building. After-school care workers organise the leisure time of children after school and may also supervise the children in between educational activities and during the lunch break. Many hold a secondary vocational degree in childcare (ISCED 4). In addition, many staff members without any specific pedagogical or educational qualification can be responsible for the supervision of playtime outside and lunchtime.

French Community (WBF)

Childcare sector

In both the childcare and pre-primary education sectors the initial professional study requirements are currently undergoing a series of reforms. A new law on childcare for the 0 to 3 year-olds has come into force (*Arrêté* 2-05-2019, MB 09-10-2019), requiring every Childcare Worker to graduate at least at upper secondary level and giving the possibility of acquiring higher qualifications. The main staff working directly with children are currently '*puériculteurs/puéricultrices*' (Childcare Workers), but people with other qualifications can also be employed (e.g. *auxiliaires de l'enfance*).

However, since September 2020, official working groups set up by the SFMQ (*Service Francophone des Métiers et* Qualifications, French-speaking service of profession and qualifications) have elaborated a new job profile (*accueillant/accueillante d'enfants*) which should become the official common profiles for the multiple former initial training programmes (see *Chapter* ***4.2***). Another working group in the ARES (*Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement supérieur*, Academy of Research and Higher Education) made up of the heads of all the university colleges and adult education institutes in WBF, has studied the opportunity of creating together a higher level initial training as recommended by research reports commissioned by the *ONE* (César et al.

2012; Pirard et al. 2015), which were the product of a broad consultation process with stakeholders in the childcare sector. In 2022, the creation of a new Bachelor's degree in childcare and education in September 2023 is decided and a new job profile (*référentiel métier et de compétences, Bachelier en accueil et en éducation du jeune enfant*) has been set up.

Pre-primary education

At the same time other reforms are ongoing in education as a consequence of the *Pacte pour un enseignement d'excellence* (Pact for a teaching of excellence) which invests in preschool as the first step of the whole system. A new law defines a new common job profile for all the teachers (from preschool – "section 1" to secondary school) (*Décret* D. 07-02-2019, MB 05-03-2019; 02-12-2021, MB 02-02-2022). This law comes into force in 2023. A Master's degree (EQF: level 7, 60 ECTS) for all Teachers (including Pre-primary Teachers who will registered to work in pre-primary and primary settings with 2½/3 to 8 year-olds) is to be set up by university colleges and universities. More Childcare Workers (*puériculteurs/puéricultrices*) considered as qualified auxiliary staff, are to be registered to work in pre-primary settings, mostly with 2 and 3 year-olds.

German-speaking Community

Early childhood education and care in the German-speaking Community is divided into two domains: childcare for children under 3 years and pre-primary education for children over 3 years.

Childcare sector

In March 2014, a new decree on childcare for the 0 to 3 year-olds was implemented (*Dekret über die Kinderbetreuung*). In addition, in May 2014 two edicts came into effect: Government Decree Services and Other Forms of Childcare (*Erlass der Regierung über die Dienste und andere Formen der Kinderbetreuung)* and Government Decree on Self-employed Childminders (*Erlass der Regierung über die selbstständigen Tagesmütter/-väter).* Amongst other things, they contain and regulate the conditions for the accreditation and subsidisation of childcare institutions and home-based ECEC services.

Childcare is organised for children from birth until they enter pre-primary education. Childcare in the German-speaking Community also comprises after-school care and out-of-school care during holidays for children in primary education. The Regional Centre for the care of small children ("Regionalzentrum für Kleinkindbetreuung", RZKB) is the focal point for the establishment, organisation, and attendance of childcare facilities. It has the legal status of a non-profit organisation and works in cooperation with the local public institutions.

There are different forms of childcare in the German-speaking Community.

- **Up to the age of 3**, children often attend regulated home-based care, which is provided by childminders (*Tagesmütter/-väter*). Childminders either work independently (*selbstständige Tagesmütter/-väter*), thus determining the contractual details of the care themselves, or they are affiliated to the RZKB in the so-called childminder service (*Tagesmütter/-väterdienst*, *konventionierte Tagesmütter/-väter*). In both cases, home-based childcare providers care for the children in their own home or in external premises working together as *Co-Tagesmütter/-väter* (two or three childminders).
- There are also organisations in which several childminders work together under one roof. They are called "childminder houses" (*Tagesmütter/-väterhäuser*). The childminders themselves determine the contractual details of the care. They do this in the form of a company or association.
- There is also a centre-based setting known as *Kinderkrippe*. Two *Kinderkrippen* have a capacity of 24 places and one has a capacity for 36 places for children from 0–3 years.

– *Kinderhorte* offers the possibility for occasional childcare.

Currently, the childcare sector is undergoing a reform with the goal of transforming the RZKB into an institution of public interest. As part of the process, legal frameworks, including qualification and education requirements, are being reconsidered. At the moment, there are no minimum qualification requirements for all types of childminders, whereas for working in a *Kinderkrippe* a certificate as Childcare Worker ("Kinderbetreuer:in") is a prerequisite.

Pre-primary education

From the age of 3, children are entitled to free early childhood education in a **kindergarten**. Early childhood education together with primary education constitutes 'elementary education'. Primary education starts at the age of 6.

Childcare and pre-primary education for children under the age of 5 is not obligatory in the German-speaking Community. Compulsory education starts at age 5, when children are required to attend pre-primary education full-time.

Table 1 shows ECEC staff working in direct contact with children in centre-based settings and also categorises the core professionals (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at end of this section).

Table 1
Belgium: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Childcare sector (0–2[1] years)				
Flemish Community				
Childcare Worker *Kinderbegeleid(st)er* *Profile:* Social Care/Health Care Professional	*Kinderdagverblijf* **Childcare Centre / Nursery** *Groepsopvang* **Group-based Childcare**	Core practitioner with group responsibility	0–6 years	3 years at upper secondary level plus 1 year specialisation *Award*: Vocational Certificate in Childcare ***or*** Certificate as Childcare Worker (through Adult Education) – Babies and Toddlers ECTS credits: n/a [2] EQF: level 4 ISCED 2011: 4

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6 (as also in Belgium): **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds.

[2] n/a= not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
French Community				
Childcare Worker *Puériculteur/ puéricultrice* *Auxiliaire de l'enfance* *Profile:* Social Care/Health Care Professional	*Crèche* **Childcare Centre**	Core practi-tioner with group respon-sibility	0–6 years	3 years at upper sec-ondary level plus 1 year specialisiation *Award*: Childcare Cer-tificate **or** through Adult Edu-cation – only for the *Auxiliaires de l'enfance* ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 4
German-speaking Community				
Childcare Worker *Kinderbetreuer/in* *Profile:* Social Care /Health Care Professional	*Kinderkrippe* *Mini-Krippe* *Kinderhort* **Childcare Centres**	Core practi-tioner with group respon-sibility	0–6 years	3 years at upper secondary level plus 1 year specialisiation *Award*: Diploma 'Kinderbetreuer:in /Childcare Worker' or equivalent ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 4
Pre-primary education (2½–5 years)				
Flemish Community				
Pre-primary Teacher *Kleuterleid(st)er,* or *Kleuteronderwijzer*, **or** *Kleuterleerkracht,* **or** *Leraar Kleuteronder-wijs* *Profile*: Pre-primary Educa-tion Professional	*Kleuterschool* **Pre-primary school**	Core practi-tioner with group respon-sibility	2½–6 years	3 years at University College *Award*: Bachelor's Degree in Pre-primary Education ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Auxiliary Worker *Kinderbegeleid(st)er,* **or** *Kinderverzorg(st)er*	*Kleuterschool* **Pre-primary school**	Qualified Aux-iliary Worker in pre-primary settings, mostly with 2 and 3 year-olds		3 years at upper secondary level plus 1 year specialisation *Award*: Vocational Cer-tificate in Childcare ECTS credits: n/a

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 4
French Community				
Pre-primary Teacher *Instituteur/ Institutrice Maternelle* *Profile*: Pre-primary Education Professional	*École maternelle* **Pre-primary school**	Core pedagogue with group responsibility	2½–6 years From 2023: 2½–7 years	3 years at University College *Award*: Bachelor's Degree in Preschool Education (from 2023: Master's degree) ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 (7 from 2023) ISCED 2011: 6
Auxiliary Worker *Puériculteur/ puéricultrice*	*École maternelle* **Pre-primary school**	Qualified auxiliary worker in pre-primary settings, mostly with 2 and 3 year-olds		3 years at upper secondary level plus 1 year specialisation *Award*: Vocational certificate ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 4
German-speaking Community				
Pre-Primary Teacher *Kindergärtner:in* *Profile*: Pre-primary Education Professional	*Kindergarten* ***Pre-primary school***	Core practitioner with group responsibility	3–6 years	3 years University College *Award*: Bachelor Degree in Preschool Education. ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Auxiliary Worker *Kindergarten-assistent:in*	*Kindergarten* ***Pre-primary school***	Assistant to the core practitioner without group responsibility	3-6 years	3 years at upper secondary level plus 1 year specialisation *Award*: Vocational certificate in Childcare ***or*** Certificate as Childcare Worker (through Adult Education) ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 for both ISCED 2011: 4

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Nowadays a Director or a Centre Leader is a required position both in childcare services and in the pre-primary schools in the three language Communities of Belgium. In Belgium, there is one director, or principal, often responsible for both pre-primary and primary school together. Legislation defines their general profile, but the more accurate job characteristics and the understanding of leadership depend on the context.

Flemish Community

Childcare sector

In the childcare sector in the Flemish Community of Belgium, the Centre Leader is called a *verantwoordelijke* ('responsible person'). According to the 2014 Decree on childcare for the 0 to 3 year- olds, a Centre Leader is 'the person appointed by the service provider to take care of the quality of the daily operation of the childcare centre'. Centre Leaders are also the main contact persons for parents, for the inspectorate and for the government agency responsible for childcare (*Agentschap Opgroeien*). They mainly have administrative tasks, but sometimes Centre Leaders are also in charge of pedagogical support for their teams. In smaller childcare services, it often happens that Centre Leaders also work directly with children on a regular basis.

As far as qualification requirements go, a distinction is made between services up to 18 full-time child places and services with at least 19 full-time child places. Centre Leaders of childcare services up to 18 children are required to have at least the same level of qualification as the core pedagogues. There is a list of possible certificates of qualification from different fields of study eligible to perform the job. The minimum qualification requirement is set at level 4 of the European Qualifications Framework (also ISCED 4). Centre Leaders of childcare services with at least 19 full-time child places are required to have at least a Bachelor's degree (EQF level 6, ISCED 6). There is a list of possible certificates of qualification from different fields of study eligible to perform the job.

Pre-primary education

In the education sector, Directors of pre-primary and primary school education are in charge of the pre-primary and primary schools. They need to have a Bachelor's degree initial qualification. In order to be tenured and thus receive a higher salary, they need to have a 'pedagogical certificate of competence'. Directors of pre-primary and primary school education do not have to take additional training, although most school boards expect them to. Umbrella organisations have their own training programmes for directors which can last between one and three years. Each school board provides a job description and makes agreements with respect to the assessment

of staff members (in a promotion position) in accordance with the provisions laid down by the Flemish decree on how to evaluate school staff members.

French Community (WBF)

Childcare sector

In the French Community, a new law on childcare for 0 to under 3 year-olds (*Arrêté* 2-05-2019, MB 09-10-2019) recognises the position of Director for the first time, as recommended in research studies (César et al. 2012; Pirard et al. 2015). Six main functions are defined: (1) administrative and organisational management; (2) team management and human resources (recruitment, integration, evaluation, training plan, organisation of the teamwork/schedules); (3) change support in teams (orientation of practices...); (4) ensuring, participating and coordinating the implementation of the educational project, its evaluation and its evolution, including its social and health dimensions; (5) establishing a relational approach with parents and children which promotes the accessibility for all of them and the support for parenthood; (6) playing an interface role with families, partners, local stakeholders and developing actions with the local community. Currently the Director, who does not work directly with children, is often a medical, social or, more recently, a pedagogical worker. Depending on the size of the childcare service (at least 14 children according to the new law) and the management options of the institution, he or she can work alone or in a multidisciplinary team where some tasks can be shared or delegated. He or she has at least a Bachelor's level degree, but rarely an orientation related to childcare when first employed. According to the new law, a relevant experience is required, or an additional qualification recognised by *ONE* (list to be established) has to be taken within the first two years in office. This additional qualification has been set up as a modular multidisciplinary certificate (25 ECTS) with five parts especially focused on childcare: (1) psycho-educational approach, (2) communicational and relational attitudes and strategies, (3) institutional management /leadership (4) team support, (5) health promotion. This programme has been adapted to the candidate's profile and is made accessible (through a shifted schedule, relocation…). A 10% salary increase has been planned. Two challenges for the near future can be underlined. Firstly, a pedagogical view has been increasingly expected according to the pedagogical curriculum implemented since 2002 in WBF, even if the initial training programmes and the qualification requirements of the staff (Director included) do not yet sufficiently reflect this new approach. Secondly, too many administrative tasks make pedagogical leadership difficult.

Pre-primary education

In the education sector, the missions of all school Directors have been officially defined since 2007 (*Décret* 2-02-2007, MB 15-05-2007) and were reviewed in 2019 (*Décret* 14-03-2019, MB 16-04-2019, Erratum MB 20-05-2019) according to the general reform of schools (*Pacte pour un enseignement d'excellence*, Pact for a Teaching of Excellence). The Directors are promoted teachers (possibly Pre-primary Teachers) with a relevant experience (at least three years) and an additional qualification. They are in charge of both the management and the organisation of their establishment. They are considered as pedagogical and educational leaders in charge of the action plan (*plan de pilotage*) of their establishment. An official typical profile identifies seven areas of responsibility (*Circulaire* n° 8198, 19-07-2021): (1) production of meaning according to values; (2) overall strategic and operational management of the school, which includes the responsibility of the pedagogical and educational projects; (3) leading educational actions and projects where a shared pedagogical leadership is expected; (4) management resources and human relations to develop a collective dynamic with the educational staff and supporting col-

laborative work; (5) internal and external communication; (6) administrative, financial and material management of the establishment; (7) planning and active management of their own professional development. The profile is common for the whole educational system (not specific to preschool). According to the law (*Arrêtés* 22-05-2019, MB 1-10-2019 and MB 8-10-2019) an additional qualification is required to develop relational, pedagogical, administrative, material, financial and organisational general competences (not specific to pre-primary school Directors). This initial training programme is free and combines two parts: (1) a first common part for all candidates dedicated to administrative (12 hours) and steering (*pilotage*) (78 hours) tasks; (2) a second part organised by each of the educational umbrella organisations with their own specific modules on administrative, material and financial topics (30 hours), educative and pedagogical issues (60 hours). This initial training programme also includes an internship and a support to reflexive competences development (30 hours) during the period of integration. In WBF the profile and the initial training programme for the Directors are included in the global reform of the whole education system. They do not take into account specific ECEC issues. In 2020–2021, only 12.89% (251/1,947) of Directors in schools were designated pre-primary Directors (without also being in charge of a primary school) and in June 2021, only 16.25% (331/2,037) had an initial qualification as Pre-primary Teacher (Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles 2020). So the directors are often Primary Teachers with an additional general qualification without specific skills, knowledge or views about pre-primary issues. They are responsible for both a primary and pre-primary school which may be implemented in different places. The Directors often work in an office (usually in the primary school) and do not work directly with children on a regular basis, although they maintain contacts through visits to classes.

German-speaking Community

Childcare sector

Within the Regional Centre for Early Childcare (RZKB), there are different leadership functions.

The Director is not directly involved in childcare but rather concerned with administrative and financial tasks. His/her role includes e.g. responsibility for the whole service, ensuring compliance with the management contract, the strategic orientation of the RZKB in cooperation with the administrative board and the government and the execution of the decisions of the administrative board.

Second, there is the Head of Service for Childcare (*Dienstleitung Kleinkindbetreuung*) and the Head of Service for Out-of-school Care for children up to the age of 12 (*Dienstleitung Außerschulische Betreuung*). The tasks of the Head of Service for Childcare consist of quality development, strategic decisions, staff management, compliance with regulations, work rules, and so on (FASNK 2022), as well as promoting the development of the service and of the mission statement. The tasks of the Head of Service for Out-of-school Care consist of recruiting staff and staff management, including supervision, management of trainings and education programmes, and the preparation and organisation of projects taking place during the school holidays.

Third, there are the social-pedagogical specialist staff (*Sozialpädagogisches Fachpersonal*), responsible for the management of the crèches */Kinderkrippen.* Their tasks include the recruitment of childcare workers and team leading, ensuring compliance with the rules and regulations, observing pedagogical processes and the children's development, deployment in case of shortage of childcare workers, contact with parents (allocation of places, contracts, etc.), calculation of fees, management of buildings and material and on-site supervision of trainee childcare workers.

Each childminder house appoints a main person in charge. He/she is available every day and is also active in childcare. His/her tasks consist in particular of the implementation of the pedagogical concept with the team, the supervision and guidance of the childminders, the day-to-day management and the contact to legal guardians and authorities.

Pre-primary education

Pre-primary schools can only be created in attachment to a primary school. In consequence, the leader of the pre-primary school is also the leader of the primary school. The Directors are usually promoted Primary or Pre-primary Teachers, but a qualification in teacher education or relevant experience are not required by law. Any higher education degree is acceptable, along with the proof of a thorough knowledge of the German and French languages (see Royal decree of 22 April 1969; decree of 31 August 1998 and decree of 19 April 2004). Directors must undergo a special training for school leaders within five years of taking up their post. Should they fail to do so, then the designation as Director would be terminated ex officio after five years.

Depending on the number of pupils, the Director is fully or partially relieved of teaching duties. In schools with 50 to 99 pupils, the Headteacher teaches a three-quarter timetable, in schools with 100 to 149 pupils a half timetable, and in schools with 150 to 179 a quarter timetable. In schools with 180 pupils or more as well as in school centres which have at least 125 pupils and are composed of at least three school sites, the Director is exempted from teaching altogether.

The official tasks of the school leaders in the German-speaking Community are the following (article 96 of the decree of 26th April 1999): (1) the pedagogical and organisational management of the school on behalf of the school authority; (2) the implementation of social, educational and school-related objectives; (3) the management and supervision of the school staff; (4) representing the school externally; (5) ensuring that lessons are taught; (6) chairing class councils and other school conferences; (7) the distribution of lessons; (8) drawing up the weekly and annual timetables; (9) admitting and dismissing pupils on behalf of the school authority; (10) organising supervision and substitutes; (11) monitoring compliance with statutory and regulatory provisions and the school rules; (12) cooperation with the staff members, the pedagogical council and the other representative bodies of the school; (13) cooperation with the psycho-medical-social centres; (14) the counselling of pupils and their guardians; (15) cooperation with the school authorities; (16) the organisation of in-service and further training events; (17) personal continuing education and training; (18) tasks contributing to the implementation of the school project and the school's internal curriculum; (19) the coordination of special needs education; (20) The tasks that contribute to driving school development in line with the mission statement and school development goals for continuous quality improvement; (21) the assignment of middle managers in relation to operational tasks of management in the school organisation and in relation to strategic tasks in school and teaching development.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

The view on the posts of responsibility allocated within the centre for pedagogical tasks across the centre depends on the Community (French, Flemish or German-speaking Community), on the sector (childcare services/pre-primary school) and on local projects. In the **French Community**, Pre-primary Teachers can also become mentors and are granted remuneration for this role. Pre-primary and Primary Teachers can also become specialised in supporting the French Language learning (*FLA*) of migrant children or the integration of children with special needs. But in these cases they can also be considered as specialist staff (see *Chapter **2.5***) even if some reforms aim at giving them more responsibility within the centre in the immediate future.

Generally speaking, however, it is not common practice in Belgium to assign one of the regular centre team to a designated and remunerated post of responsibility regarding a specific pedagogical task.

Some local authorities (in cities like Gent, Aalst, Oostende, Sint-Niklaas, …) deploy in pre-primary schools staff members (*brugfiguren)* who act as a 'bridge' between the school and parents, with a focus on socially disadvantaged families. Although some of these 'bridging persons' may have a teaching background, this is not a requirement, as their selection is based on social, communication, and organisational skills as well as their experience within the local communities.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

In Belgium, Pedagogical Coordinators and supervisory staff are employed in a few cities such as Gand, Liege, Seraing, Arlon…, but their role is not generalised as in some other countries such as France or Italy, where for many years coordinators have combined professional support and guidance, administrative and coordinating functions aimed at improving children's educational experiences in early childhood services. Pedagogical coordination can also be exercised by pedagogical advisers employed by private associations or public administrations over a large area. This is an emerging function.

Flemish Community

Childcare sector

Since the implementation of the 2014 Decree on childcare for 0 to 3 year-olds, every provider of childcare has to guarantee pedagogical support for all employed Childcare Workers. The government has provided financial resources to realise this right to pedagogical support and allocates them according to the scale of childcare services:

- Income related childcare services (where parents pay a fee according to their income) with more than 18 full-time child places receive a subsidy with which they can choose how they want to organise the pedagogical support. They can either employ or hire a Pedagogical Coach themselves, or make use of the existing training offer provided by different pedagogical support centres and training centres.
- Income-related childcare services with less than 18 full-time child places and childcare services that are not income related can access a support network called *Mentes*. This support network is made up of about 20 support organisations that are active in the entire Flemish Community. Childcare services get support from *Mentes* through a Regional Counsellor (*regionale ondersteuner*) or through a Pedagogical Coach (*pedagogisch coach*). The Regional Counsellor is the first point of contact for a childcare service and works on the policy-making capacity (*beleidsvoerend vermogen*) of the childcare service. One FTE (full-time equivalent) Regional Counsellor supports about 45 childcare services and sees them in an annual cycle. They mainly coach the service provider or the Centre Leader. The Pedagogical Coach offers support on the ground, cooperates in the childcare service and from that position looks for solutions to pedagogic issues that are present. One FTE Pedagogical Coach supports about 33 childcare services in total and sees about 17 of them per year. They mainly coach Childcare Workers.

With the Flemish Intersectoral Agreement (*VIA6*) that was reached in 2021 (Vlaamse Regering 2021b), financial resources were made available to recruit 264 FTE Pedagogical Coaches for the whole childcare sector in the Flemish Community of Belgium.

There is no qualification list that enumerates the possible diplomas a Pedagogical Coach must have. However, a Pedagogical Coach must: (1) have at least a Bachelor's degree (EQF 6, ISCED

6); and (2) have demonstrable competences or sufficient relevant experience in the pedagogical field of childcare. The support must be based on (1) the legally defined competences for the profession of a childcare worker (*15 Beroepscompetenties Kinderopvang*); (2) the Pedagogical Framework MeMoQ (Kind en Gezin 2016). It is expected that the Coach knows and applies these well.

Pre-primary education

Every pre-primary and primary school has a Care Coordinator (*zorgcoördinator)* and sometimes care teacher (*zorgleerkracht)* who is responsible to develop a 'care' policy with the aim of increasing the educational opportunities of all children. Care Coordinators can work on different themes such as parental involvement, etc. Most of them do pupil guidance (embedded in a care concept of remedial teaching a sort of learning delay). This group consists of teachers, Speech Therapists, Special Needs Educators or other persons with a social or educational bachelor degree. Here there is thus an overlap here with the specialist support staff (*Chapter **2.5***).

In the pre-primary education sector, each umbrella organisation has its own Pedagogical Advisory Service (PBD, *Pedagogische begeleidingsdienst*), which ensures professional internal support to schools and pupil guidance centres. The School Advisers (*pedagogische begeleiders/onderwijsondersteuners)* offer support to different schools within their network, including professional development, support for self-evaluation and quality assurance (including student assessment and teacher appraisal). They are mostly former teachers, directors and care coordinators. The Pedagogical Advisory Services (PBD) also play a role in external school evaluation. In the case that inspectors give a school a negative evaluation, the inspectors may determine whether or not that school has sufficient policy-making capacity to implement a successful improvement plan. If the inspectors judge that this is not the case, the school will be obliged to accept support from the PBD.

French Community (WBF)

Childcare sector

While most municipalities have created a coordination position for the out-of-school provision for children from 3–11 years of age (*coordinateurs, coordinatrices* ATL, social, pedagogical and psychological workers with a Bachelor's degree acquired through three years at university college), few municipalities envisage such support for the childcare services or pre-primary schools. Indeed, coordination is only legally provided for in these specific (out-of-school) services and includes a great deal of administrative work (to make inventories and monitor the provision, to improve accessibility) alongside the pedagogical support (to sustain and develop the quality of services, to accompany the elaboration of educational projects). In some municipalities (very often cities, no official data), some coordinators for childcare services may be employed, but without official guidelines.

However, pedagogical coordination and supervision have been developed since 2001 by the governmental administration ONE, which has employed 62.8 FTE Care Coordinators (*coordinateurs*, *coordinatrices accueil* – social or medical workers with a Bachelor's degree following three years at university college) and 10 FTE Pedagogical Advisers (*conseiller/conseillères pédagogiques* – pedagogical and psychological workers with a Master's degree after five years at university) to support and accompany childcare services beyond its traditional controlling/monitoring role (Pirard, Camus, and Barbier 2018). While these *ONE* coordinators have combined controlling, evaluating and supporting roles with an extended multidisciplinary approach since 2001, Pedagogical Advisers only have a support and guidance role focused on their disciplinary

specialism. Nowadays Coordinators and Pedagogical Advisers must collaborate to support the educational function of the childcare services.

Pre-primary education

In the education sector, some actors can also be considered to be Pedagogical Counsellors. They are employed by the educational umbrella organisations (*conseillers pédagogiques des réseaux ou d'organes de représentation et de coordination*, pedagogical advisers of networks or representative and coordinating bodies, *Décret* 28-03-2019, MB 09-10-2019). According to the reform pact, their role is to change. They not only have to work on the action plan of schools with the DCO (*Délégués aux Contrats d'Objectifs*, Delegates to Contracts of Objectives) to assure a diagnostic mission with the general service of inspection (*SGI, Service Général d'Inspection*) or to support some innovation such as the development of an integrated digital approach, but also to support Directors to create collaborative working among staff, to accompany staff in carrying out their plan according to educational project of their network. They sustain innovation and work to improve the quality of the children's education. These overarching missions concern the whole educational system and are not focused on pre-primary school issues.

German-speaking Community

Childcare sector

Every childminder affiliated to the RZKB is licensed by the RZKB. Social-pedagogical specialists of the RZKB accompany them. These Social Assistants carry out the same tasks as the pedagogical staff working at a *crèche* (see *Chapter **2.2***). Additionally, they are the immediate contact person for all childminders and assess the suitability of potential new childminders before recognition. Moreover, they organise pedagogical consultations.

Every self-employed childminder must be recognised by the German-speaking Community. They are accompanied by socio-educational specialists from Kaleido Ostbelgien (2022). Consultants from the Ministry's "Service for Children and Families" supervise them and control compliance with current regulations.

2.5 Specialist support staff

Flemish Community

Childcare sector

In the childcare sector, there are no specialist staff who work with individual children within the centre. However, childcare services that provide childcare for children with specific support needs / disabilities can turn to a 'Centre for Inclusive Childcare' (*Centrum voor Inclusieve Kinderopvang*, or, '*CIK*') for free support. A Centre for Inclusive Childcare either takes care of children itself or puts parents in contact with other childcare services that offer inclusive childcare. Childcare services may receive support and subsidies from the Inclusive Childcare Centre. Depending on its needs, a childcare service receives long-term support or support through a network of professionals. The Centre for Inclusive Childcare provides customised support: thinking about organising care for a specific child, reflecting on the accessibility of care, training on inclusive policy and the pedagogical role of the service, coaching on communication with parents. The goal of the support provided by a Centre for Inclusive Childcare is to increase accessibility for families and children with specific support needs and to develop qualitative childcare. In the Flemish Community of Belgium there are 16 of these Centres for Inclusive Childcare.

Pre-primary education

Every accredited school in Flanders works together with a centre for pupil guidance (CLB *Centrum voor Leerlingenbegeleiding*). A CLB can help with questions about: (1) Learning and studying: problems with reading, writing, arithmetic, learning ... (2) The educational career: questions about study choice, courses of study, certificates and diplomas ... (3) Psychological and social functioning: depressive feelings, stress, fear of failure, bullying problems, transgressive behaviour, a difficult home situation ... (4) Preventive health care: health problems, vaccinations, growth disorders, drug use, obesity. Parents, students, teachers and administrators can contact a team of doctors, nurses, psychologists, educators and social workers free of charge. The M-decree on measures for pupils with specific educational needs (M-Decreet, 2014) states that inclusive education is the first option for children and parents. The aim is to allow more pupils to attend school in mainstream education and thus to refer fewer pupils to schools for special education. A school builds a continuum of care and, together with the teacher or teachers, the parents and the centre for pupil guidance (CLB), considers what reasonable adjustments or measures a pupil with special educational needs may need in order to attend classes.

The Flemish Government will replace the M-decree for pupils with specific educational needs by the learning support decree. In the learning support decree, a new model for supporting pupils with specific educational needs in ordinary education will be elaborated: the learning support model. The decree on learning support and the learning support model will be phased in from 1 September 2023 (Vlaamse Regering 2021a). Learning support staff will have their own status, in line with that of a care coordinator and with retention of seniority. In consultation with the educational field, a competence profile will also be developed, including the expertise that a 'learning support worker' must have. To develop this expertise, cross-network consultation between the learning support centres is envisaged.

French Community (WBF)

Childcare sector

According to the law, the childcare services must guarantee the preventive medical and health surveillance of each child and draw up a contract with a general practitioner (sometimes a paediatrician) who also supports the staff (collective health promotion) and/or collaborate with a children's consultation bureau of the *ONE*.

A pedagogically qualified candidate can be employed complementarity to the Social and Health workers (*Arrêté* 2-05-2019, MB 09-10-2019) to support the staff and the pedagogical programme, which can include working with children and families (e.g. a *Pédagogue*, a Psychologist, a Psychomotor Specialist). So a pedagogical role can be integrated, but without specific additional public funds. Indeed, hiring a pedagogical worker in the staff instead of exclusively Social and Health Workers is an innovative choice, not a requirement. Step by step networks supported by the Pedagogical Counsellors of the *ONE* have been set up to share pedagogical views and experience.

Other specialists such as physical therapists can also work within the centre when they are required. But in the field, few specialists regularly work with individual children within the centre. As explained in *Chapter **2.3***, the inclusive approach favours a collective support and the reinforcement of the staff in the childcare services rather than the multiplication of specialists. That's the point of the inclusion support provided by the teams of the *mobile inclusion support device* (*dispositif mobile de soutien à l'inclusion* see 2.2), made up by multidisciplinary experts and childcare workers who reinforce the in-service staff without replacing them or focusing their work on the only child(ren) with special needs. These specialised teams are also supported by

the *ONE* which has set up a team aiming at developing a transverse inclusive approach. In all these supports, also working with families, not only with the child is required according to their rights, but also to the parenthood support framework (*ONE* 2012).

Finally, an inclusive approach is required from all the practitioners in all the childcare services, but no specific post of responsibility is dedicated to this development. However, nine external specialist teams (eight in Wallonia, funded by the Agency for a Quality of Life - AVIQ, *Agence pour une qualité de vie* and one in Brussels funded by the service PHARE) can support the staff when one or several children with special needs is/are included in the childcare service. These teams (*dispositif mobile de soutien à l'inclusion*, *mobile inclusion support device*) made up by multidisciplinary experts (psychologists included) support the in-service staff reflexion about the needs of the child(ren) and their own. Some of these support teams include childcare workers who reinforce the in-service staff without focusing their work on the child(ren) with special needs. These specialised teams and services collaborate with the *ONE*.

Pre-primary education

In the education sector several specialists work on site to support the integration of children with special needs. Until now integration agents who are teachers (often Primary Teachers) attached to a specialised school or a Speech Therapist enrolled by a psycho-medico social centre (PMS), depending on the diagnostic and the agreement with the staff, are granted around four periods of time per child with special needs (number of periods of time decreasing each year down to two). Their guidance is more focused on the primary than the pre-primary level. According to a new law (*Décret* 17-06-2021, MB 06-08-2021) these agents should progressively be replaced by a pool of resource people allocated to each territorial area (*pole territorial*) and distributed according to the number of children at school in the area, no longer depending on the number of children with special needs. Even if some children with special needs still need support, their function is extended to support teachers (Pre-primary Teachers included) and help them to define reasonable arrangements. In 2019, the Minister of Education decided to employ 170 additional Speech Therapy Assistants especially allocated to pre-primary settings and integrated in the PMS teams. They are expected to support and advise staff or Pre-primary Teachers (reasonable arrangements, learning strategies, and so on) rather than work with individual children, but they can observe them and therefore interact with them. Moreover, from 2019, additional periods of time for teachers are dedicated to a new support called *FLA* (*Français Langue d'apprentissage*; French as an additional language) focused on newcomers (at least 4 years old) who have not yet mastered the language of instruction (French) to successfully adapt to the activities of their age group (*Décret* D. 07-02-2019, MB 18-03-2019). When a school has at least eight newly arrived or already settled children with a migration background, an educational service called a *DASPA* (*Dispositif d'Accueil et de Scolarisation des élèves Primo-Arrivants et Assimilés*; Reception and Schooling System for Newcomers and Already Settled Pupils) can be set up and granted. A *DASPA* is aimed at welcoming, schooling and integrating newcomers and other immigrant children into regular education from the third year of pre-primary education to secondary school. In 2021 (15th January), only 0.07% of the children in the *DAPSA* were young children registered in a pre-primary. In 2019, the granting of these additional periods under the new system FLA generated an increase of 2% working in preschool education, despite a 1.5% drop in the school population (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles 2020). Complementary in-service training sessions for teachers working or wishing to work in the *DASPA* or the devices *FLA* support are organised and have become compulsory (see section **6**), but not specialised in pre-primary issues.

German-speaking Community

The Centre for the Healthy Development of Children and Adolescents, *Kaleido Ostbelgien*, is responsible for all children and adolescents from 0–20 years of age and has the following general objectives: to promote optimal physical and mental health of children and adolescents, including pregnancy counselling; to support the optimal development of the educational potential and inclusion in education and training of children and young people; promoting a safe environment for children and young people to protect them from accidents and deliberate harm; promoting economic security and a decent standard of living for children and young people as a basis for healthy development; to promote children and young people as part of a developmentally supportive network of family, friends, neighbours and community; promoting the inclusion of children and young people in the community; promoting the ability of children and young people to make a positive contribution to society.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Flemish Community

Childcare sector

In the childcare sector, a large proportion of the core practitioners are still not qualified, despite the Decree requirement to do so by 2024. 8.8% of Childcare Workers in group-based childcare and 31.8% in home-based ECEC provision affiliated with a larger childcare provider do not have the required qualification (Agentschap Opgroeien n.d.). In group-based childcare, 71.7% of staff have a post-secondary vocational degree (EQF 4), compared to 21.6% of staff in home-based childcare services.

On 01.01.2022, a total of 357 men (2.4%) were working in childcare, of whom 164 (1.1%) were core practitioners, 98 (0.7%) had a supportive function and 95 (0.6%) were centre leaders.

Pre-primary education

In the Flemish Community, over 90% of staff working in pre-primary settings during the official teaching hours (*lestijden*) with 2½ to 6 year-olds have a Bachelor level qualification; around 10% of the workforce in the *Kleuterscholen* are Assistants qualified at upper secondary vocational level. In the school year of 2020/2021, a total of 21,437 'hours of childcare' (*uren kinderzorg)* were allocated to 2,268 *Kleuterschools* (AGODI 2021). In the school year 2020/2021, 23,850 teachers were employed in pre-primary education, of which 630 (2.6%) were male (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming 2021b). Staff members or volunteers without a specific educational qualification can be responsible for the supervision of numerous groups of children during the lunch break as well as before and after school. No specific data are available on their number. There are however exceptions as in the city of Ghent where qualified out-of-school care staff support the children during these extracurricular times. The out-of-school care staff have a minimum of three months of training and many hold a secondary vocational degree in childcare (ISCED 4).

Table 2:
Belgium - Flemish Community: Structural composition of ECEC workforce

Staff categories	Year / Proportion of workforce in %	
Staff with a specialist three-year (or longer) higher education degree	*Pre-primary education,* 01.10.2022:	
	Bachelor's degree (EQF 6): 19,854	**98.0**
	Master's degree (EQF 7): 123	**0.6**
	Group-based childcare, 01.01.2022:	
	Bachelor's degree (EQF 6): 551	**5.3**
	Master's degree (EQF 7): 21	**0.2**
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary, post-secondary)	*Pre-primary education*, 01.10.2022:	
	- Post-Secondary vocational degree (EQF 4)[1]: 2,325	**11.7**
	- Higher vocational qualification (EQF 5): 278	**1.4**
	Group-based childcare, 01.01.2022:	
	– Post-Secondary vocational degree (EQF 4): 7,451	**71.7**
	– Higher vocational qualification (EQF 5): 157	**1.5**
Staff with a non-relevant qualification	*Pre-primary education,* 2019/2020:	
	– Among tenured teachers	**0.01**
	– Among temporary staff	**7.7**
	(Data only available on pre-primary and primary school staff combined.)	
	Group-based childcare, 01.01.2022:	
	– Secondary vocational degree (EQF 3): 582	**5.6**
	– General secondary degree (EQF 4): 212	**2.0**
	– Technical secondary degree (EQF 4): 1,166	**11.2**
	– Arts secondary degree (EQF 4): 19	**0.2**
	– Bachelor's degree (EQF 6): 135	**1.3**
	– Master's degree (EQF 7): 23	**0.2**
Trainee staff (not counted in staff to child ratios)	No data available	
Unqualified staff	*Pre-primary education:* No unqualified staff	
	Group-based childcare, 01.01.2022*:*	
	– No required qualification: 900 (701.27 FTE[2])	**8.83**
	– Currently qualifying: 994 (853.12 FTE[2])	**9.25**
Male practitioners *(disaggregated according to: centre leaders, core pedagogues, auxiliary staff/assistants)*	*Pre-primary education,* 2020/21:	
	630 out of 23,850	**2.6**
	(Departement Onderwijs en Vorming, 2021b)	
	Childcare sector, 01.01.2022	
	357 men total out of 14,967	**2.4**
	– 164 core practitioners	**1.1**
	– 98 support staff	**0.7**
	– 95 centre leaders	**0.6**
Staff with a minority ethnic background or a 'background of migration'	*Pre-primary education,* 2019	
	Proportion of teachers of foreign origin	**5.4**
	(Departement Onderwijs en Vorming 2021a)	

Staff categories	Year / Proportion of workforce in %
(definitions will vary from country to country)	*Childcare sector* No systematically compiled data

Note: The data for the childcare sector in the Flemish Community was provided by *Agentschap Opgroeien* (non-public database, 2022) and is based on a sample of 93% of all childcare services. The data for pre-primary education was provided by *Agentschap Voor Onderwijsdiensten AGODI* (non-public database, 2022).

[1]: In pre-primary education, staff with a post-secondary vocational degree (EQF 4) are childcare workers, working as assistants of the teacher. They are not counted as teaching staff.

[2]: Full-time equivalent

French Community (WBF)

Childcare sector

In the childcare sector, data collections on qualifications have only taken place since 2020 and only in subsidised childcare facilities (*crèches*), but not in non-subsidised settings, revealing a lack of reliable data across settings. The data is therefore partial but underlines some trends which need to be confirmed: 97% of staff working with children in subsidised childcare facilities (*crèches*) have an upper secondary vocational level (92% *puériculteurs-puéricultrices*; 8% *auxiliaires de l'enfance*); 3% have a Bachelor level qualification *(instituteurs-institutrices maternelles, éducateurs/éducatrices en accompagnement spécialisés, assistant-e-s sociales, infirmiers-infirmières*). 97% of the staff who carry out psycho-medico-social supervision have a higher education degree (48% *infirmiers-infirmières,* 37% *assistant-e-s sociales,* 1% *éducateurs/éducatrices en accompagnement spécialisés,* 0,5% *instituteurs-institutrices maternelles*, 13,5% unspecified). There are only a small number of male workers in the childcare centres for under-threes and no reliable data. Research results emphasise that the current professional education/training needs to focus more on gender-neutral competences (Pirard, Schoenmaeckers, and Camus 2015). No data is collected on staff characteristics relating to minority ethnic background or a 'background of migration'.

Pre-primary education

In 2020, over 89% of staff working in **pre-primary settings** with 2½–5 year-olds had at least a Bachelor level qualification; around 11% of the workforce were Assistants who graduated from upper secondary vocational level to support teachers in the first year of the *école maternelle* (*classe d'accueil)* with 2 and 3 year-olds. Nearly 100% of Pre-primary Teachers (*instituteurs-institutrices maternelles*) were qualified: 95.3% with a specialised Bachelor's degree in pre-primary education (*bachelier instituteurs/institutrices maternelles*), 2.4% with a Bachelor's degree in primary education (*bachelier instituteurs/institutrices primaires*), 0.8% with a general Bachelor's degree and an additional specialisation (AESI, *Agrégation de l'Enseignement Secondaire Inférieur*), 1.2% with a Master's degree in Educational Sciences complementary to their Bachelor's degree in pre-primary education (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles 2020). In October 2020, in addition to these Pre-primary Teachers (10,355 full-time equivalent - FTE), 79.1% of the staff), there were 1,469.74 FTE *puériculteurs/puéricultrices (*11.2%) employed as auxiliary workers in *écoles maternelles* financed by the WBF, others were employed and paid directly by the School Heads (no data available). Assistants without any formal qualification may also be part of the staff (no data), although it should be noted that not every *école maternelle* employs an Assistant or an auxiliary worker. The fairly low number of specialist support staff tend to be mostly *maîtres/maîtresses de psychomotricité* (812.04 FTE, 6.2% of the staff) and more recently teachers

for French as a foreign Language (*FLA, Français Langue d'apprentissage*, 449.58 FTE, 3.4% of the staff). No data are available about the integration agents working in pre-primary schools (see *Chapter **2.5***). 97% of Pre-primary Teachers (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles 2020), 98.24% of auxiliary workers, 76.51% of *maîtres/maîtresses de psychomotricité* and 98% of FLA are female. 96.4% of the specifically Pre-primary directors (compared to 66.6% of the total number of Pre-primary and Primary directors) are female.

Table 3

Belgium - French Community: Structural composition of ECEC workforce - *Pre-primary education*

Staff categories	**2020 / Proportion of workforce, in %**
Staff with specialist higher education degree	(corresponds to 10,355 FTE *instituteurs / institutrices maternelles* of 13,085 total **79.1** 79.1% composed by: Bachelor's degree (pre-primary) **95.3** Bachelor's degree (primary) **2.4** Bachelor's degree (general + specialisation) **0.8** Master's degree **1.2**
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary	n/a
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	*puériculteurs/puéricultrices* as auxiliary workers – 1,469 FTE of 13,085 total at least **11.2**
Staff with non-specialist qualification	n/a
Staff without formal IPS	Assistant (no current data available)
Specialist support staff	*Maîtres/maîtresses de psychomotricité* 812 FTE of 13,085 total **6.2** *Français Langue d'apprentissage* 449,58 FTE of 13,085 total **3.4**
Male staff	– Share of total staff **3.0** – Share of pre-primary directors **3.6**
Staff with a background of migration	No data available

Source: Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles 2020 and Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles – *Administration générale de l'Enseignement* (unpublished)

German-speaking Community

No statistical data are compiled in the German-speaking Community about the workforce composition in *Kinderkrippen* or in the pre-primary section of primary schools.

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

For a long time, the administrative split in services into 'childcare' for the under-threes and 'education' for the 2½ to under 6 year-olds has been reflected in the qualifications required to work in these two different sectors. On the one hand, core practitioners in childcare settings have either a vocational qualification or no formal IPE at all. This upper-secondary vocational qualification route takes place in secondary schools or adult education courses. On the other hand, core pedagogues in pre-primary education predominantly have at least a Bachelor's degree. In 2021, the IPE at Bachelor level takes place at higher education institutions – university colleges – specialising in teacher education or pedagogy of the young child (*Hogeschool, Department Onderwijs – Institut Supérieur de Pédagogie – Autonome Hochschule*).

In pre-primary education a growing number of Childcare Workers now work as an Auxiliary Worker (Teacher's Assistant).

Flemish Community

Childcare sector

To obtain a qualification as Childcare Worker, courses are offered in secondary vocational education, adult education, higher education or in a specialised training centre.

Route 1: *Secondary vocational education: '7th year childcare'*

The vocational track 'Childcare' is a specialisation year in the third grade of vocational secondary education. It is therefore called a 'seventh year'. In a linear, full-time track, the training takes one school year, at the rate of 32 to 36 hours per week. The programme can also be followed in modular form.

To start this training, a certificate of the basic training 'Care' is required (third degree of vocational secondary education). It is also possible to enter from other training courses, but then permission is needed from a class council. The class council is the only body within the school that is responsible for the admission, formation, evaluation and deliberation of pupils. It is composed of the principal of the school or her/his delegate and all teaching staff providing education to the pupil. The principal chairs the class council and may invite additional members if necessary.

After completing the specialisation year in Childcare, students are awarded the diploma of secondary education and a 'Certificate of Childcare' if they have passed the modules. This qualification is classified at level 4 of the EQF. After the specialisation year, students can work as a Childcare Worker in group-based childcare, home-based ECEC provision, after-school care or in pre-primary education. It is also possible to choose to continue studying.

There is no enrolment fee in post-secondary education, but schools may charge extra.

Route 2: *Adult education: 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers'*

Various Centres for Adult Education in the Flemish Community of Belgium offer the course 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers'. In a linear, full-time track, the training takes two semesters, at the rate of two teaching days or evenings per week. The training consists of 720 50-minute lessons, so 600 hours in total. Those who already work in childcare can also follow the training on Saturdays.

After the training, students obtain either a certificate of 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers' (for those who have not yet obtained a diploma of secondary education) or a diploma of 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers' (for those who have already obtained a diploma of secondary education. Both the certificate and the diploma count as a recognised professional qualification for Childcare Workers and Centre Leader in group-based childcare settings for up to 18 children. This qualification is classified at level 4 of the EQF.

The government has fixed the standard registration fee at €1.50 per lesson hour. Without any additional costs, participants therefore pay €1,080 for this course. However, since the profession of a Childcare Worker has been officially recognised as a 'bottleneck profession' (*knelpuntberoep*), one can follow the training completely free of charge.

Route 3: *Specialised training centre (Syntra): 'Childcare Worker'*

Syntra is a network of training centres that offer profession-oriented training courses. They also have a course that focuses on the childcare sector: '*Childcare Worker*'. In a linear, full-time track, the training takes one year, at the rate of three teaching days per week. The course lasts 610 hours in total. It is also possible to take the course in evening classes at the rate of two evenings per week. In that case, the training lasts two years.

To be eligible for this programme, students must be at least 18 years old. In addition, they must have either a secondary school diploma, a vocational secondary school certificate or demonstrable experience. They must also have a certificate of good behaviour and morals and a certificate of medical fitness.

After the training, students obtain a diploma of 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers', which is recognised as the professional qualification for Childcare Workers and Centre Leader in group-based childcare settings for up to 18 children. This qualification is classified at level 4 of the EQF.

The full-time, one-year course costs €999.

Route 4: *Higher Education: 'Bachelor – Pedagogy of the Young Child'*

Although a Bachelor's degree is not expected from the core practitioners in childcare, we consider the programme 'Pedagogy of the Young Child' as one of the initial qualifying routes. This Bachelor's programme has been offered at three University Colleges (*hogescholen*) in Flanders (Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent) since 2011. The first students graduated in 2014. These graduates take up a post as Pedagogical Coach or Adviser, designing the pedagogical policy of the childcare centre with the core practitioners and the centre leaders. They are also trained to work with children and their parents. Some of these Bachelor graduates also work as part of the management staff in childcare centres, and it is envisaged that they will gradually replace the Nurses and Social Care Workers currently working in childcare centres.

In a linear, full-time track, the training takes three years (20 teaching hours per week). The total programme amounts to 180 ECTS credits.

A diploma of secondary education is required to start this Professional Bachelor programme. After the training, students obtain a Bachelor's degree in 'Pedagogy of the Young Child'. This qualification is classified at level 6 of the EQF.

The price for a full-time programme of 60 credits is €979.60. For the full programme (180 credits), students therefore pay €2,938.80 without any additional costs.

Pre-primary education

A Bachelor's Degree is required to work as a Pre-primary Teacher (*kleuterleerkracht*). The full name of the programme is 'Bachelor in Education: Pre-primary Education' (also 'Bachelor in Pre-

school Education') (*Bachelor in het Onderwijs: Kleuteronderwijs,* also *Educatieve Bachelor Kleuteronderwijs*). In a linear, full-time track, the training takes three years (about 20 teaching hours per week). The total programme amounts to 180 ECTS credits.

A diploma of secondary education is required to start this Professional Bachelor programme. From the academic year 2017/2018, there is also an entry test. All prospective students are required to take this test, but the result is not binding. Hence, although the test is mandatory, candidates who fail can still start the course. The aim is to give students an indication of their skills in certain starting competences for the programme. The test consists of a Dutch language test and a test on motivation and study skills. This entry test is the same for all University Colleges in the Flemish Community of Belgium that offer teacher training programmes (*lerarenopleiding*).

The price for a full-time programme of 60 credits is €979.60. For the full programme (180 credits, students therefore pay €2,938.80€ without any additional costs.

French Community (WBF)

Childcare sector

Some similar qualifying routes to Flanders are organised in WBF: secondary vocational education with a 'seventh year' (the main core workforce), possibly Adult education in the childcare services and Professional Bachelor programme after a diploma of secondary education in pre-primary education. As explained above, in both the childcare and pre-primary education sectors the initial professional education requirements are currently undergoing a series of reforms.

German-speaking Community

Childcare sector

To obtain a qualification as Childcare Worker, courses are offered in secondary vocational education or in adult education.

Pre-primary education

Pre-primary Teachers complete a Bachelor-level degree at the Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien, the only higher education institution in the German-speaking Community. Initial professional studies combine professional basic knowledge, scientific approaches, generic and subject-specific as well as didactic training, and links between theory and practice. The total course comprises 180 ECTS points (60 credits per year), with one credit representing a work load of 25 to 30 hours.

Tables 4 and 5 give an overview of the core practitioners (Childcare Workers and Pre-primary Teachers) in all three language Communities.

Table 4

Belgium: Childcare Worker

Job title in Flemish Community: *Begeleid(st)er Kinderopvang/ Kinderzorg* **Job title in French Community**: *Puéricultrice/puériculteur* **Job title in German-speaking Community**: *Kinderbetreuer:in* **Profile**: Social Care/Health Care Professional
Entry requirements: 9 years of schooling **Professional studies:** 3 years upper secondary level (vocational branch) plus 1 year specialisation **Award: (1)** Diploma (vocational secondary education) ***Flemish Community***: *Kinderzorg* ***French Community***: *Puéricultrice/teur* ***German-speaking Community***: *Kinderbetreuer:in* **ECTS credits**: n/a **EQF level**: 4 **ISCED 2011**:4 **Award (2):** Certificate (adult education) ***Flemish Community*: *Begeleid(st)er in de kinderopvang*** ***French Community***: *Auxiliaire de l'enfance* ***German-speaking Community***: *Kinderbetreuer:in* **ECTS credits**: n/a **EQF level**: 4 **ISCED 2011**: 4 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Childcare centres (0–2 years), extra-curricular activities in childcare and out-of-school centres (3–11 years). A few also work in pre-primary education and youth activity centres. In both the Flemish and French Communities also as Auxiliary Worker in pre-primary education (*Kleuterschool, École maternelle*), mostly with 2 and 3 year-olds.

Table 5

Belgium: Pre-primary Teacher

Job title in Flemish Community: *Kleuterleid(st)er, Kleuteronderwijzer,Leraar Kleuteronderwijs* **Job title in French Community**: *Instituteur/institutrice maternelle* **Job title in German-speaking Community**: *Kindergärtner:in* **Profile**: Pre-primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: 12 years of schooling (general or vocational), upper secondary education school-leaving certificate. Applicants with vocational certificate: 1 extra year or equivalent qualification. **Professional studies:** ***Flemish Community:*** 3 years at higher education institution affiliated to a University College (*Hogeschool*) ***French Community*:** 3 years at higher education institution affiliated to a University College (*Institut Supérieur d'Enseignement Pédagogique* or *Haute école*). From 2023, 4 years co-organised by higher education institution affiliated to a University College and a University. ***German-speaking Community:*** 3 years at higher education institution (*Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien*) **Award:** ***Flemish Community*: *Bachelor in het onderwijs: kleuteronderwijs*** ***French Community*: *Bachelier instituteur/ institutrice maternelle*** (from 2023, *Master en enseignement de section,* EQF level 7) ***German-speaking Community***: *Bachelor Kindergärtner:in* **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main ECEC workplace:** Pre-primary settings *Kleuterschool, École maternelle, Kindergarten* (2½–5 years, in DG: 3–5 years). A few also work in childcare centres (0–2 years) or in primary education (6–11 years)

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Flemish Community

Childcare Worker (*Begeleid(st)er Kinderopvang/ Kinderzorg*)

***Competences*:** In 2018, 15 competences for the profession of a Childcare Worker (*15 Beroepscompetenties Kinderopvang*) were legally defined as the professional qualification for a childcare worker (*Beroepskwalificatie Kinderbegeleider Baby's en Peuters)* (Vlaams ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2019).

A Childcare Worker …

- Interacts in a positive, constructive manner with all babies and toddlers, parents, colleagues and others.
- Observes the behaviour of the baby/toddler, individually and in groups, reflects on it and adapts his/her actions accordingly
- Stimulates each baby/toddler in their development, uses the child's talents and entrepreneurial spirit
- Supports the baby/toddler in all their activities
- Encourages positive contacts between babies and toddlers and sets boundaries
- Recognises and responds to the social-emotional needs of the baby/toddler
- Provides a stimulating, safe, hygienic and healthy play environment for babies and toddlers
- Works with parents and recognises them as primary educators
- Cooperates with others in the care of the baby/toddler
- Cooperates, gives feedback and makes agreements
- Reflects on the organisation and contributes to the improvement of childcare
- Accompanies babies and toddlers at their arrival and pick-up time
- Prepares baby and toddler meals, organises and supervises mealtimes
- Organises sessions of rest and exercise
- Cares for the baby/toddler according to their needs.

***Curriculum*:** This vocational qualification forms the basis of the curriculum within both the Centres for Adult Education and the Syntra Specialised Training Centres.

Route 1: Secondary vocational education: '7th year Childcare'

In contrast to the initial training courses within the Syntra Centres and the Centres for Adult Education centres, the curriculum of the initial training course 'Childcare' within secondary vocational education is not based on the legally defined professional qualification 'Childcare Worker'. There is no legally defined educational qualification either. As a result, teaching content and timetables differ from school to school. Schools have great freedom in organising the curriculum.

Globally, students go through two modules: 'Guidance for young children' and 'Guidance for school-age children'. They have to pass both modules. The theoretical part of these modules consists of 'General Education' and 'Vocational Training':

- 'General Education' is mainly offered at school. It consists of the general subjects such as French or English, Physical Education, Cross-curricular Secondary Education Attainment Targets and Ideology classes....

- In 'Vocational Training' students learn what they need to be able to do as a beginner Child-care Worker. Vocational training is partly covered during the internships and partly at school.

Route 2: Adult education: 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers'

***Curriculum*:** The training focuses on pedagogical skills needed to guide and stimulate babies and toddlers in childcare. A very large part of the training is spent at a workplace. In terms of content, the MeMoQ pedagogical framework guides the curriculum. Most Centres for Adult Education use the same structure for the training of 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers'. The full programme consists of 18 modules:

Table 6

Belgium, Flemish Community: Curriculum areas and number of teaching hours in Adult Education

Curricular areas	Number of teaching hours
Childcare and me	20
First aid and life-saving treatment	20
Basic principles of pedagogical work	40
Communication skills in childcare	20
Dealing with diversity in childcare	60
Working with families and their contexts	60
Teamwork and interdisciplinary work	30
Basic care/nurturing	30
Quality work in childcare	60
Babies' and toddlers' play	80
Care for babies and toddlers	60
Feeding babies and toddlers	40
Pedagogical work with babies and toddlers	60
Time and space planning for babies and toddlers	30
Supervised intervision 1	10
Supervised intervision 2	10
Supervised intervision 3	10
Internship	80

Route 3: Specialised training centre (Syntra): 'Childcare Worker'

Just like the Centres for Adult Education, most Syntra centres also follow the same structure for the 'Childcare Worker' course. This structure is very similar to that of the training 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers' within Adult Education. The programme consists of **16 content areas**:

Table 7

Belgium, Flemish Community: Curriculum areas and number of teaching hours in specialised training centres

Curriculum areas	Number of teaching hours
Orientation in childcare	32
First aid and life-saving treatment	20
General communication	20

Curriculum areas	Number of teaching hours
Working with families and their context	28
Working with the team and working interdisciplinary	20
Quality work in childcare	20
Pedagogical work with babies and toddlers	56
Diversity and inclusion in childcare	24
Pedagogic observation of babies and toddlers	20
Feeding babies and toddlers	20
Caring for babies and toddlers	52
Time and space planning	20
Babies' and toddlers' play	40
Internship	150
Organisational management of a childcare facility	44 + 1 (final test)
Manager of a childcare facility up to 18 places	44

Route 4: Higher Education: 'Bachelor Pedagogy of the Young Child'

For the Bachelor 'Pedagogy of the Young Child' there is a legally defined educational qualification (*onderwijskwalificatie*). This means that the Flemish Government (Department of Education and Training) officially acknowledges the domain-specific learning outcomes of the Bachelor programme. For the Bachelor 'Pedagogy of the Young Child' there are 10 distinct learning outcomes divided according to different fields of responsibility. The program consists of four competence areas:

Table 8

Belgium, Flemish Community: Competence areas in Higher Education

1. **Responsibility for the children in the service**	– Creating a positive, safe, healthy, hygienic and structured living environment of care for every baby and every child in the group; creating basic trust with each child by being sensitive and focused on fulfilling basic needs. – Supporting the whole personality development of every baby and every child by means of stimulating interaction in a rich environment and by guiding an offer based on observation of their living environment and developmental needs.
2. Responsibility towards families	– Maximising continuity between the home and the care environment by designing vision-based childcare together with the team and in such a way that parents recognise themselves in it – Building a relationship of trust with the parents in the best interests of the child, and links his/her own professional expertise to the experiential expertise of the parent.
3. Responsibility towards one's own team and the facility	– Stimulating and motivating diversely educated staff to professional development in the areas of 'educating children', 'supporting children's development' and 'being a partner to the children's families', by fulfilling a model role, by giving and receiving feedback in an open manner and by creating a favourable professional development context for the staff – Taking responsibility, together with a team of diversely educated colleagues for the common socio-pedagogical project of the facility and actively creating the preconditions for this.

4. Responsibility towards the childcare sector and towards society at large	– Working proactively in the local social context and taking the initiative to cooperate with external partners to this end – Actively following relevant developments in society, government policy, the field of study/expertise, and the international context to interpret the social relevance of his/her professional activity.

Two learning outcomes transcend these four competence areas and are important for each one:

- Building up new pedagogical knowledge and integrating this into the policy of the facility. Together with the team, she/he collects, analyses and interprets relevant complex situations in professional practice, uses the results of research, and takes the initiative and responsibility to innovate the existing pedagogical practice.
- Acting from an awareness of her/his own frame of reference with respect for identity of others (children, parents, team, external partners) and supporting the identity development of children and their families.

The three University Colleges that offer this Bachelor programme each have their own emphases and accents with regard to the curriculum, but there is regular consultation and exchange between the different institutions. It is noticeable that the role of Pedagogical Coach is getting more and more emphasis in the curricula of the different University Colleges that offer the Bachelor 'Pedagogy of the Young Child'.

Pre-Primary Teacher *(Leraar Kleuteronderwijs)*

The integrated teacher training programmes combine subject-specific, didactical and pedagogical/teaching components throughout the entire three-year study route for Pre-primary Teachers. They also focus on building capacity and experience in practice through extensive internships in authentic learning environments. The pre-primary route leads to a professional Bachelor's degree in Education (*Bachelor in het onderwijs: kleuteronderwijs*). The total course comprises 180 ECTS credits (60 credits per year), with one credit representing a work load of 25 to 30 hours. The practical component accounts for at least 45 credits.

***Competences*:** In 1998, and again in 2007, the first official professional profiles for Pre-primary Teachers and basic competences for new teachers were established which assigned the profession ten specific roles, including an instructional role (*lerende)* and an educational role *(opvoedende)*. The basic competencies for teachers set out the requirements that education and society place on newly qualified teachers. They are both a frame of reference for the curriculum development of teacher education programmes, which-have autonomy in this area, and an individual assessment framework for each student in teacher education. The government sets the minimum quality criteria so that parents and outsiders know what to expect from teachers. By specifically defining the basic competences, the government makes it clear that a newly graduated teacher cannot be expected to perform at the same level of professional practice as a teacher with some experience. This indicates that `being a teacher' is a process of lifelong learning

These basic competences for a beginning teacher start from the following premises: 'In the future, more than ever, a teacher will become a team player. Cooperation with other teachers and other actors in a school team is essential to ensure quality education. To participate fully in this, each individual teacher must possess certain competencies. They must be able to use both individually and together with colleagues.'

Table 9

Belgium, Flemish Community: Functional roles for a beginning teacher

Functional roles	
As a facilitator of learning and development processes	The teacher can: – Identify the initial situation of the learner and the group – Adapt his/her didactic approach to the objectives on the one hand and the environment, motivation, initial situation and needs of the learner(s) on the other hand, taking into account the diversity of the group – Choose and formulate objectives for the level of education in question, taking into account the starting situation of the learners and the validated objectives framework, curriculum... – Select, structure and translate learning and development opportunities, learning experiences or learning content into a coherent educational offer, shaping and monitoring the horizontal and vertical coherence between learning content and learning areas. – Determine and use appropriate forms of work and grouping – Select, use and adapt developmental materials and teaching aids – Create a powerful learning environment with attention to group heterogeneity – Can prepare and carry out observation and evaluation with a view to adjustment and remediation as part of the learning process of a learner(s) and can use those observation and evaluation data to question his/her own didactic actions and adjust them where necessary – Contribute to the organisation of inclusive education for each learner within the framework of the care and equal educational opportunities policy of the educational institution – Contribute to the learner(s) being sensitive to language and open to other languages – Set up learning and development processes, both from the content of the learning areas or subject areas of his/her expertise, and from a learning area or cross-curricular perspective.
As an educator	The teacher can: – Create a positive climate for the learner(s) in the group and in the educational institution – Promote the empowerment of the learner(s) by encouraging them to become empowered, independent, self-initiative, responsible and participative – Support the learner(s) in their individual development and social participation by paying attention to their attitude formation, social-emotional formation and value development of the learner(s) – Monitor current social events and trends and translate them into an educational context – Adequately deal with learner(s) with specific educational and pedagogical needs. – Pay attention to the physical and mental health of the learner(s) – Communicate with learner(s) from diverse language backgrounds in a variety of linguistic situations.
As a content expert	The teacher … – Masters the knowledge and skills related to the learning areas or subject areas of his/her expertise, which are relevant to his teaching level. He can update, broaden and deepen these – Is able to use the knowledge and skills acquired in relation to the learning areas or subject areas. In primary education this is done in an integrated way, in the other levels this is done in an integrated way where relevant – Masters the knowledge and skills related to the (subject) didactics of his/her teaching assignment. He/she can update, broaden and deepen these – Can situate his/her own offer in the whole of the educational provision with a view to educational career guidance – Can use appropriate and correct teaching language.

As an organiser	The teacher can: – Promote a structured play, living, working or learning environment – Create a smooth and efficient teaching and daily routine that fits into short- and long-term planning – Plan his/her own work in view of his/her teaching assignment and can perform relevant administrative tasks – Create a stimulating, workable and safe living, working or learning space.
As an innovator and researcher	The teacher can: – Further develop the quality of his/her teaching. The teacher can question and adjust (improve) his/her own teaching practice and his/her own functioning – Share and discuss new insights and experiences with colleagues – Identify his/her professionalisation needs and turn them into actions.
As a partner of parents or carers	The teacher can: – Inform himself/herself about and exercise discretion with data about the learner(s) and their context – Communicate with parents or carers about the learner(s) in the educational setting, based on consultation with colleagues or external parties as appropriate – Inform and involve parents or carers in teaching, taking into account diversity – Engage with parents or carers on issues relating to parenting and education – Communicate with parents and carers from diverse language backgrounds in a variety of linguistic situations, and can develop strategies for doing so.
As a member of an educational team	The teacher can – Collaborate and consult within the educational team on issues such as curricula and educational vision – Discuss his/her own pedagogical and didactic task in the team, reflect on it in the team and take feedback into account in his/her own actions – Reflect on the joint functioning of the educational team in consultation with colleagues.
As a partner of external parties	The teacher can: – Establish and maintain contacts, communicate and cooperate with external bodies or actors. These include, for example, internship or employment sites, the broad socio-cultural sector, teacher training programs, higher education, the labour market, and childcare facilities.
As a member of the educational community	The teacher … – Is aware of their social role and his potential influence on the wider society – Can take a reasoned position on educational issues – Can engage in conversation about their profession and their place in society – Can document their own legal status and that of learners.
As a cultural participant	– The teacher, from their professional position, can recognise and critically approach current social issues and developments in the socio-political domain, the socio-economic domain, the ideological domain, the cultural-aesthetic domain and the cultural-scientific domain.

The following dispositions and attitudes apply to all functional roles:

- *Decision-making ability*: daring to take a position or to proceed to an action, and also to take responsibility for it
- *Relational orientation*: showing characteristics of authenticity, acceptance, empathy and respect in contacts with others
- *Critical attitude*: be prepared to question oneself and one's environment, to verify the value of an assertion or a fact and the desirability and feasibility of a proposed goal, before taking a stand
- *Eagerness to learn*: actively seeking situations to broaden and deepen one's competence

- *Organisational ability*: aiming to plan, coordinate and delegate tasks in such a way that the intended goal can be achieved in an efficient way
- *Sense of cooperation*: being willing to work collectively on the same task
- Sense of responsibility: feeling responsible for the school as a whole and making the commitment to promote positive development of the learner(s)
- Flexibility: being prepared to adapt to changing circumstances, such as resources, goals, people and procedures.

As with the Bachelor Pedagogy of the Young Child (see above), the same applies for the Bachelor in Pre-primary Education: there is an official educational qualification with a framework of domain-specific learning outcomes. There are 10 distinct learning outcomes related to the following ***competence areas***:

- Supporting toddlers in their learning and development in complex school and classroom contexts. Taking into account the starting situation of the class group and the perception of the individual child, he/she provides appropriate guidance, formulates general and concrete goals, selects appropriate learning content and learning experiences, adapted development materials, forms of work and grouping. He/she functions autonomously and uses Standard Dutch.
- Creating a pleasant and challenging playing, learning and living climate in the classroom and at school, with an eye for the social-emotional development and the physical wellbeing of the class group and the individual child. He/she uses a care wide approach and responds positively to the social, cultural and linguistic diversity within the class group. She/he promotes emancipation, individual development and social participation.
- Having a thorough insight into the broad development of the pre-school child and masters the basic knowledge – including at least the developmental objectives – regarding contents and skills from the learning areas Dutch, mathematical initiation, world orientation, music education and physical education, and cross-curricular themes. She/he uses an integrated and media-minded approach and follows recent developments critically.
- Creating a safe, workable and stimulating playing, learning and living environment. She/he provides goal-oriented and child-oriented planning. She/he handles administrative tasks correctly.
- Adjusting and renewing her/his professional role on the basis of a systematic, critical reflection on her/his own professional practice from relevant theoretical frameworks and insights from educational research
- Communicating discreetly and in Standard Dutch or if necessary in another appropriate register with parents/carers about the child, the school, upbringing and education. She/he involves parents/carers in class and school events.
- Working in a team-oriented way and taking responsibility in the school team for the implementation of school policy
- Establishing contacts and cooperating with providers of educational initiatives and other external partners
- Taking part in the social debate on educational themes and on the profession of the teacher and his/her place in society, also in an international perspective
- Thinking critically and with an open mind about developments in the socio-political, socio-economic, philosophical, cultural-aesthetic and cultural-scientific fields.

16 institutions throughout the Flemish Community of Belgium offer the Bachelor programme.

French Community (WBF)

Childcare Worker (*puériculteur/puéricultrice*)

Competences: The new law related to the childcare services in the French Community defines competence specifications for all Childcare Workers (*Arrêté* 2-05-2019, MB 09-10-2019):

- Taking care of children according to their daily needs and providing them rich conditions for their development at the physical, psychological, cognitive, emotional and social levels
- Ensuring the hygiene in the childcare service
- Contributing to the preparation of appropriate meals and to the practical organisation of the childcare service
- Putting into action the educational project and contributing to its evaluation and development
- Welcoming families and children, ensuring daily relations with parents in a spirit of partnership
- Providing support for trainees.

The main initial training for *puériculteurs/puéricultrices* consists in a three-year upper secondary course, followed by a year of specialisation in working with infants and toddlers. They are then expected to display the following competences: Guaranteeing care, hygiene and health

- Organising meals
- Organising sleeping
- Guaranteeing the children's safety and taking the right measures in cases of child abuse
- Planning and organising activities according to the individuality of each child
- Organising appropriate interventions towards children and parents
- Supporting children in toilet-training
- Developing a warm relationship with the child
- Planning and documenting professional practice for parents or colleagues
- Working in teams
- Communicating and building a professional relationship with parents
- Respecting ethical values.

In 2021, a new profile for Childcare Workers for children from (*accueillant, accueillante d'enfants*) was approved and the following **competence specifications** should become official in the near future.

- Welcoming and establishing a relationship of reciprocal trust adapted to the child
- Ensuring a socio-educational role in the childcare service promoting the physical and psychological well-being of each and all children
- Taking care of a group of children taking into account the diversity of their needs and interests
- Proposing arrangements for space and time and activities in order to promote the psychomotor, sensory, cognitive and socio-emotional development of the child and of all children
- Communicating with the child and his/her family using verbal, non-verbal, para-verbal communication techniques and the most appropriate supports to dialogue
- Putting into action the educational project of the childcare service and participating in its development through open and proactive collaboration with families and other professionals
- Establishing and developing a partnership with the family, the child's environment, the multidisciplinary team and external services for the socio-educational well-being of the child
- Taking care of the logistical tasks related to the organisation of the childcare service

- Applying and monitoring changes in regulations and recommendations relating to the childcare services.

The initial training of the Childcare Workers who work as an Auxiliary Worker (Teacher's Assistant) in pre-primary settings is the same as that for the Childcare Worker in childcare services.

In 2022, a new profile for Bachelor-level Childcare Workers for children from 0–6 years (*Bachelier en accueil et education du jeune enfant*) was approved and is to become official in 2023.

Pre-primary Teacher (*Instituteur/institutrice maternelle)*

The IPE of Pre-Primary Teachers in the French Community combines academic subjects, professional studies and social context studies. There is a common competence profile for pre-primary, primary and secondary teachers. The total course comprises 180 ECTS credits (60 credits per year), with one credit representing a workload of 25 to 30 hours. Ongoing reforms should generate some changes (see **2.1**).

Competence specifications for all teachers in the education system are defined in a 2019 Decree of 2019 (*Décret* 07-02-2019, MB 05-03-2019) and include **15 competence areas:**

- The ability to act as an educational, social and cultural actor within school and society, including in their transformation, to integrate the diversity and develop civic practices for greater social cohesion
- The willingness to position oneself in the face of ethical issues and to respect the ethical and regulatory frameworks of the profession in a democratic and accountability perspective
- The ability to invest in the collaborative work of an educational team, in order to increase its professionalism and expertise through the rallying/mobilisation of collective intelligence, particularly during consultations
- The ability to analyse the organisational environment and institutionalisation of the education system and to act within it, in particular by interacting with colleagues, parents and other stakeholders in order to: (1) be part of the establishment's quality approach and participate in steps to improve the French Community's educational system; (2) make the classroom and the school a place where students learn, grow and are trained in a positive climate, not a place of selection
- The ability to draw on various subjects in the human sciences to analyse and act in a professional setting
- French language proficiency to teach and communicate optimally in the various contexts and the different disciplines related to the profession
- Mastery of disciplinary content, including the concepts to be taught, their epistemological foundations, their didactics and the methodology of their teaching, as well as the development of a critical and autonomous relation with scientific knowledge
- The ability to critically read scientific research results in education and didactics and to be inspired by them for teaching action
- The ability to act as a pedagogue within the classroom and, in a collective perspective, within the school, particularly: (1) through the design and implementation of a teaching approach including varied and differentiated practices, in particular digital practices, and ensuring motivation and promotion of students' self-confidence, creativity and a spirit of initiative and cooperation in the concern for the general interest; (2) through the design, choice and use of teaching aids, tools and manuals; (3) through the construction and use of observation supports and specifically diagnostic and formative assessment promoting empowerment and students' participation in their learning

- The ability to lead, individually and with peers, an observation as well a critical and rigorous analysis of their own practices and of their impact on students in order to regulate their teaching and make the strategies and conditions of implementation evolve in a perspective of efficiency and equity. This analysis integrates the gender dimension.
- Development of relational capacity with pupils and students, including their own family circle, and with regard to colleagues; group management in educational and pedagogical setting
- The ability to identify individual training needs and participate in the identification of the training needs of the educational team
- The ability to develop personal skills related to professional requirements, including requirements related to the management of the class
- The ability to integrate into the education system respecting the codes and its functioning, in particular hierarchical functioning
- The control of their administrative situation and the follow-up.

A more recent Decree redefines four main roles for all teachers (*master de l'enseignement section 1*), including Pre-primary Teachers:
Teachers as

- Institutional, social and cultural actors
- Actors of a learning organisation in a collective dynamic
- Organisers and coaches of learning in an evolving dynamic and as
- Reflective practitioners (Décret 02-12-2021, MB 02-02-2022).

German-speaking Community

According to Article 6 of the Decree on childcare (Dekret 31-03-2014), any service provider concerned by the Decree and offering childcare for children aged 0–3 years must be recognised before commencing activities.

In order to be recognised, the providers of childcare have to comply with the conditions of recognition of the Decree and the Edicts. Each recognised provider of childcare is obliged to guarantee the quality of care in accordance with the relevant provisions.

Childcare Worker (*Kinderbetreuer:in*)

***Curriculum*:** The one-year qualifying adult education course for Childcare Workers of the KPVDB (2022) includes theoretical and practical content as well as internships in the different fields of work. The students attend classes in the following modules:

- Domestic economy: cooking, infant and child nutrition dietetics
- Psychology and pedagogy: health education, psychology, developmental psychology, professional handling of problems in families, care of children with impairments, psycho-pedagogy, didactics, Pikler pedagogy, child-friendly play, conversational skills
- Care: Caring for healthy and sick children, back-friendly lifting, general hygiene, first aid
- Vocational skills: deontology, ethics, social organisations, social and labour legislation
- Methodological guidance: Learning techniques, supervision, organisation, seminars on current topics.

In addition, the education includes 480 hours of internships in different childcare structures/settings.

Pre-primary Teacher *(Kindergärtner:in)*

Pre-primary Teachers complete a Bachelor-level degree at the Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien, the only higher education institution in the German-speaking Community. Initial professional studies combine professional basic knowledge, scientific approaches, generic and subject-specific as well as didactic training, and links between theory and practice. The total course comprises 180 ECTS points (60 credits per year), with one credit representing a work load of 25 to 30 hours.

The initial professional education as a Pre-primary Teacher is organised in such a way as to enable the student to develop the following 10 specific competences.

***Competence specifications*:**

Pre-primary Teachers should be able to…

- Communicate clearly and correctly in the language of instruction, both orally and in writing
- Include both cultural/intellectual heritage as well as a critical examination and interpretation of facts and cultural assets in their professional approach and foster openness for cultural and linguistic diversity
- Listen to and observe the children and accept them as a person by consciously discerning their holistic educational needs as well as their socio-cultural needs in order to foster their search for identity, their independence and their sense of responsibility
- Consistently extend and deepen fundamental knowledge acquired within the subject areas, including the historical, scientific and health-promoting aspects
- Design the educational process as an active learning experience of discovery, while at the same time making clear decisions in relation to aims, fields of knowledge, learning and teaching methods, evaluation and certification within the framework of legal requirements
- Pursue one's own activities in close cooperation with the families, school authorities, education and cultural institutions as well as the community's interest groups within the framework of legal requirements
- While respecting the individuality of the children, complete tasks related to the achievement and evaluation of developmental goals and competencies, both individually and together as a team
- Use information and communication technologies and integrate them into the preparation and managing of teaching and learning activities in the classroom as well as in their own professional development
- Develop a professional identity, handle complexity, uncertainty, conflicts, and setbacks professionally as well as understanding group dynamics and the functioning of organisations
- Reflect both individually and as a team on professional development needs both in terms of individual advancement and institutional innovation and assessing the ethical challenges related to the profession.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Flemish Community

Childcare sector

According to the Decree of 2014, everyone working in childcare in the Flemish Community should be qualified by 2024. In 2022, however, a large part of the sector still had no qualification and there are still a considerable number of Childcare Workers who enter the job unqualified. For these unqualified staff, most training institutions provide the possibility of combining work

and training. For example, the Syntra training centres and the Centres for Adult Education (see above) offer training programmes in which students can follow the training in the evenings or during weekend days. This usually implies that it takes students twice as long to complete the entire training programme.

Unqualified Childcare Workers who consider that they have sufficient competences to be equal to qualified Childcare Workers can participate in an assessment organised by a recognised test centre or by a Centre for Adult Education. In the assessment, the assessors use the legally defined professional qualification of a Childcare Worker as a framework to test previously acquired competences (*Eerder Verworven Competenties*) in an attempt to validate non-formal and informal learning experiences of the applicant. The results of the test procedure should make clear which of the 15 competences the Childcare Worker already has and which still need to be learned. For the missing competences, a customised programme is then designed consisting of the different modules that the Childcare Worker can follow at the Centre for Adult Education.

Additionally, there is a special training programme called 'Childcare Worker – Dual work-integrated route' (*Kinderbegeleider Duaal*). This programme is organised as a specialisation year in the third year of the third cycle of secondary vocational education, so it follows the same curriculum as the '7th Year Childcare' (see above). However, this dual learning programme combines a school component with a work component. This means that students are properly employed in a childcare service and that they spend at least 20 hours a week at their workplace during the training. The training programme lasts for one year and can be followed by young adults (between 16–25 years old) who have fulfilled their full-time compulsory education. After completing this training, students are awarded the diploma of secondary education and a 'Certificate of Childcare' if they have passed the modules. This qualification is classified at level 4 of the EQF.

Careers within Flemish Childcare are flat, i.e. there is no system permeability in this sector. There is no offer of different job profiles to which people can move on, nor is there a 'learning ladder' to enable Childcare Workers to grow in their job. For the job of Pedagogical Coach and of Centre Leader of a facility with more than 18 places, a Bachelor's degree is required. However, it appears that the transition from post-secondary vocational level (EQF 4) to Bachelor (EQF 6) is very difficult. Many students do not succeed or have a great deal of difficulty in succeeding in the higher education programme.

Pre-primary education

Flemish policy makers have major concerns in finding sufficient teaching staff to work in pre- and primary school education. Enabling alternative qualifying trajectories for assisting staff to become Pre-primary Teachers could be a future pathway for the ECEC and broader primary school sector. Two newly developed alternative pathways are:

- The Baobab Project: this is a small-scale project in Brussels, initiated by the NGO EVA (EVA bxl 2022) and supported by the Flemish Community Commission (VGC). Motivated Brussels inhabitants (with diverse migration backgrounds) are working as assisting practitioners with experienced Pre-primary Teachers while following a qualifying trajectory to become a Pre-primary Teacher themselves (in the Erasmus University College). For four years they receive intense support in order to find a job as a Pre-primary Teacher in the city of Brussels.
- In order to counter the growing teacher shortage, the University Colleges have special training programmes for students in pre-primary education who combine work and study. Especially assisting staff in pre-primary education make use of the opportunity of getting an official qualification whilst continuing their job.

French Community (WBF)

The system is characterised by little permeability and there are only a few alternative entry and qualification routes at the vocational qualification (upper secondary) level. The candidate's previously acquired competences are not taken into account when studying to become a *puériculteur/puéricultrice*. A VAE (*Valorisation des Acquis de l'Expérience*) pilot project to promote access to the adult education programme for childminders (*Auxiliaire de l'enfance*) is currently being tested. In terms of the higher education study programmes, some measures have been developed to relax the entry requirements of IPE (for example to become a Pre-primary Teacher). Staff at the IPE institutions can examine the former experiences of the student and in some cases give extra credits so that the student can follow a shorter track. This system of previously acquired competences (*VAE*) was implemented in universities at the end of 2009.

German-speaking Community

The German-speaking Nursing Care Union in Belgium (Deutschsprachige Krankenpflegevereinigung Belgiens, KPVDB 2022) offers one-year qualifying adult education courses for Childcare Workers. There are no formal entry requirements. Participants are selected on the basis of an interview.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Flemish Community

Childcare Worker (*Begeleid(st)er Kinderopvang/ Kinderzorg*)

Practica or workplace-based learning (*stage*) play an important role in the four IPE programmes of core practitioners in childcare in the Flemish Community. The Government Agency *Opgroeien* does not allow trainees to count towards the required adult-child ratio. All trainees need a certificate of medical aptitude and an excerpt from the criminal records to prove good behaviour and morals.

The internships in each of the four qualifying routes are organised as follows:

Route 1: Secondary vocational education: '7th year Childcare'

As the schools offering a 7th year Childcare have great freedom in organising the curriculum, the lesson content and timetables differ from school to school. In most schools, the work placement takes up about one third of a school year. This means that students in this programme have an internship of about 10 to 12 weeks in total. The internship is usually offered in blocks and takes place in group-based childcare, after-school care and in pre-primary education.

Route 2: Adult education: 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers'

Half of this IPE programme is spent at a workplace. In this guided workplace learning, students are coached by a mentor from the workplace and by a coach from the study programme. The experience gained in the workplace is actively integrated into the lessons and vice versa. In other words, there is a strong interaction between theory and practice. The internships take place in home-based provision, group-based childcare and out-of-school care settings. Although workplace learning is integrated in all modules within the entire programme, four modules are explicitly aimed at the internship: 'Internship childcare worker babies and toddlers 1' (80 teaching

hours), 'Supervised intervision babies and toddlers 1' (10 teaching hours), 'Supervised intervision babies and toddlers 2' (10 teaching hours) and 'Supervised intervision babies and toddlers 3' (10 teaching hours).

Route 3: Specialised training centre (Syntra): 'Childcare Worker'

In the Syntra IPE programme, 150 of the 610 hours are allocated to the internship of the students. This internship is spread over several internship periods throughout the year, when fewer lessons are scheduled.

Route 4: Higher Education: 'Bachelor – Pedagogy of the Young Child'

Although the three University Colleges that offer this Bachelor programme have their own emphases and accents with regard to the curriculum, internship is integrated in each of the three years in each of the three programmes and follows more or less the same structure. In the first year, the internship is explicitly focused on getting to know the childcare sector. Across the three University Colleges, the number of ECTS in this first year varies from 5 to 11. In the second year, students are stimulated to discover neighbouring sectors in which they can experiment with their role as coach. Here, the number of ECTS varies from 11 to 14. In the final year, the internship comprises almost half of the programme with ECTS ranging from 20 to 24. In this final year, students are free to choose an internship in childcare or in another sector. The students are expected to adopt a reflective attitude and to monitor their own learning process by means of a portfolio. In addition, a mentor or supervisor from the University College is always appointed, as well as a mentor or coach at the work placement site.

Pre-primary Teacher *(Leraar Kleuteronderwijs)*

According to guidelines of the Flemish Department of Education, the field-based component in the IPE of prospective Pre-primary Teachers consists of at least 45 ECTS credits. These 45 credits (usually more) are spread across the curriculum, and are progressive in volume and complexity. The work experience can be structured as a ribbon placement throughout the semesters (one day weekly) or in blocks of one, two or five weeks. University Colleges are free to implement their own system. These placements are mentored and evaluated by an experienced teacher in the pre-primary setting and by tutors at the university college. This mentoring role is taken on by motivated Pre-primary Teachers who coach students voluntarily, i.e. without additional payment.

French Community (WBF)

Childcare Worker *(Puéricultrice/Puériculteur)*

According to the relevant legislation (*Arrêté* 6-09-2001, MB 22-11-2001), 1,000 periods of 50 minutes (approx. 833 hours) must be dedicated to practical training in the field and focused on working with young children (up to 6 years). A further 1,000 periods should be dedicated to general teaching and 1,700 periods (approx. 1,416 hours) to technical and professional practice training at school – organised within three years. The law specifies different workplaces: childcare services, pre-primary schools, also maternity hospitals. At least 500 periods (approx. 416 hours) must be spent in a childcare service. Forthcoming reforms could generate some organisational changes.

According to an official guideline (*Circulaire* n°6718 du 28-06-2018), three types of internship must be organised: (1) discovery and initiation, (2) supported practice, (3) responsible practice. The head of the IPE institution appoints a tutor (*maître de stage*) for each student. This tutor is responsible for the preparation, pedagogical coaching and assessment of the practical training in the field. The tutor cooperates with a mentor (specified practitioner) in the ECEC setting

where the student is doing internship. External evaluation is conducted both by the tutor and the supervising practitioner; and there is a self-evaluation of the student. A contract must be signed by the IPE institution, the ECEC service and the student; this specifies the competences and skills to be acquired. The student is required to maintain a regular written journal/portfolio (*carnet de stage*) with information and observations collected in the field (for example, observations about the learning environment, activities with children, children's behaviour).

Mentoring has been gradually getting organised. According to the law, a mentor (specified practitioner) who can be a Childcare Worker or another staff member (Director included) in the services where a student is doing internship must be appointed. However, no additional funds are granted, time periods are not specified and there are no measures for providing substitute staff. The mentoring practitioner is not trained specifically to accompany students. Since 2014, more and more projects (four in 2014, 47 in 2021) have been financed by firstly the APEF association (*Association Paritaire pour l'Emploi et la Formation, Joint association for employment and training*) and then also by the ONE and the Minister of Education, to provide a framework which sustains cooperation between initial training institutes and childcare services in WBF, with a view to improving tutoring and mentoring practices (François and Noël 2015; Pirard, François, and Noël 2019).

In these projects both tutors and mentors have been accompanied by researchers (University of Liège) to evaluate their own tutoring and mentoring practices, to conduct specific projects which can improve these and to analyse their effects on the student's learning, the pedagogical coaching of the mentor and the tutor, and on the collaboration between IPE institutions and ECEC services. This analysis can draw on the student's or mentor's written observation and sometimes on video documentation to support the reflective competences of students in the field. However, this documented process analysis is not easy for childcare practitioners and can only be used to give normative advice (Alonso Vilches and Pirard 2016; Alonso Vilches and Pirard 2018). Several focus groups and study day conferences are organised each year, where tutors and mentors have the opportunity to present and share their experience and analysis. Attention has also been paid to contextualised practice and meaning making rather than the concept of 'best practice' (Pirard, François, and Noël 2019). An open website with all the resources has been set up. In 2022, a new improved framework for sustained cooperation between IPE institutions and childcare services (services admitting children from 0–12 years) in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation has been introduced following the analysis of these professional experiences, with a view to also improve tutoring and mentoring practices (Pirard, François, and Noel 2022). This framework was written in collaboration with tutors and mentors who have taken part in these pilot projects aiming at broadening the mentoring/tutoring learning network. It is supported by the APEF association, the ONE and the Minister of Education.

Mentoring time is granted in these projects and free training seminars, focus groups, study workshops have been organised every year. Despite a positive evaluation of all the stakeholders (students, mentors, childcare directors, teachers, school directors, ONE), the financial means are currently lacking to generalise the experience and ensure its sustainability.

Pre-primary Teacher (*Instituteur/Institutrice maternelle*)

A third of the ECTS credits in the IPE of Pre-primary Teachers are dedicated to field-based studies and analyses of practice. At least 26 ECTS credits throughout the IPE are dedicated to placements in pre-primary settings: two weeks in the first year (2 ECTS credits each), four weeks in the second year (3 ECTS credits each) and ten weeks in the final year (10 ECTS credits). Students must be accompanied by tutors employed by the University College: at least one visit per week during placement periods from the second year onwards. They also have a mentoring teacher (*maître*

de stage) who signs an agreement with the IPE institution that sets out a variety of partnerships in a range of professional settings.

The University Colleges also organise professional workshops (10 ECTS credits) to strengthen the link between practice and theory. These workshops are guided not only by University College tutors, but also by tutors who spend at least half of their working time in a pre-primary setting. Each University College can organise the field-based component of IPE according to specified guidelines (Decree focused on IPE of teachers, 12-12-2000, MB 19-01-2001). Forthcoming reforms could generate some organisational changes for the new *master enseignement section 1* in 2023.

German-speaking Community

In the German-speaking Community, the field-based component in the IPE of prospective Pre-primary Teachers consists of at least 43 ECTS credits. These 43 credits are spread across the curriculum, and are progressive in volume and complexity. The work experience is structured in blocks. These placements are mentored and evaluated by an experienced teacher in the ECE setting and by tutors at the University College. This mentoring role is taken on by motivated Pre-primary Teachers who coach students voluntarily, i.e. without additional payment.

The field-based component of prospective Child Workers of the adult education course of the KPVDB consists of 480 hours. It includes six weeks spent in a crèche/*Kinderkrippe* and two weeks in each of the following institutions: out-of-school-care during the holidays, out-of-school-care (AUBE), special school (*Förderschule*), home-based provision and kindergarten.

The vocational education programme offered by secondary schools also includes the completion of practical training in a childcare institution.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

In Belgium there is an established tradition of pedagogical coaching to raise the level of professionalism in low qualified Childcare Workers. Such experimental approaches started in the 1980s and were supported by grants from the Bernard van Leer Foundation (BVLF). In Flanders, the first coaching projects were set up in the 1990s in Ghent (Peeters 1993). These pedagogical counselling projects focus on practitioners as active actors in their own professionalisation process, which has a motivating effect on the learners (Peeters and Vandenbroeck 2011). In the French Community, several action research projects sustained by BVLF or the *ONE* were also carried out in Liège, Mons, and other towns. One of them aimed at setting up a publicly funded CPD which could support counselling projects elaborated by childcare services from the analysis of their local needs (bottom-up process). A law was voted in 1983 but never came into force. It was not until sixteen years later that a subsidised system of continuing professional development was put in place by the Childhood Minister. Since 1999, the funds dedicated to CPD and the number of training providers have continued to increase. In 2001, a new Pedagogical Adviser position was introduced in the *ONE* to sustain local projects according to a logic of both innovation and reform (Pirard 2011).

In the education sector, no specific reform focusing on CPD for Pre-primary Teachers has been implemented, but global reforms for all teachers in schools. Across the country, Childcare Workers, Pre-primary Teachers, Centre Leaders and members of the educational teams have many

opportunities to participate in CPD activities. Specialised training centres offer a broad range of courses. The regional governments view the provision of professional development activities as part of their quality policy.

Flemish Community

Childcare sector

Since the Decree of 2014, organisers of childcare are obliged to provide Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for their staff. However, they are free to choose how they wish to organise this in terms of content, delivery mode (training courses, coaching, learning networks...), quantity and duration. Before the introduction of the Decree, there was a requirement that Childcare Workers had to follow 12 hours of training per year, but this expectation has been abandoned, without providing another. Consequently, there is no fixed amount of days per year granted for CPD activities during working hours, nor is there a system of childfree hours to be used for CPD activities. Moreover, there is no monitoring of CPD across Flanders. This means that there is no reliable data that would allow an indication of what is common for CPD of Flemish Childcare in terms of main forms, access, and key content.

The government has allocated financial resources to provide CPD and allocates them according to the scale of childcare services:

- Income related childcare services (where parents pay a fee according to their income) with more than 18 full-time child places receive a subsidy with which they can choose how they want to organise CPD. They can either employ or hire a pedagogical coach themselves, or make use of the existing training offer provided by different pedagogical support centres and training centres.
- The funds for income related childcare services with less than 18 full-time child places and childcare services that are not income related go to a support network, which is called *Mentes*. This support network is made up of about 20 support organisations that are active in the entire Flemish Community. Childcare services get support from *Mentes* through a Regional Counsellor (*regionale ondersteuner*) or through a Pedagogical Coach (*pedagogisch coach*). Because *Mentes* receives subsidies from the government, the government also has a say in the priority topics to be addressed in the CPD. For example, 'enforcement' and 'policy-making capacity' are currently high on the agenda as a result of malpractices that have recently come to light in Flemish childcare.

With the Flemish Intersectoral Agreement VIA 6 (Vlaamse Regering 2021b) that was reached in 2021, financial resources were made available to recruit 264 FTE Pedagogical Coaches for the whole childcare sector in the Flemish Community of Belgium.

Besides the funds that are made available by the Flemish Government, childcare services are of course free to use their own resources for extra CPD offered by pedagogical support centres and training centres. There is, however, no data available on whether or not childcare services do this and under what circumstances.

Pre-primary education

In the Flemish Community, continuing professional development courses for Pre-primary Teachers (*Kleuteronderwijzers*) are provided mostly by the state recognised and subsidised educational guidance services (PBD – *Pedagogische begeleidingsdienst*). Each of the three educational umbrella organisations (private Catholic education, Flemish state-maintained education (Go!) and municipal education) has its own educational guidance service, which ensures professional

on-site support to schools and centres. Schools can call on them for educational and methodological advisory services (innovation projects, self-evaluation projects, support initiatives in the classroom). Beyond this, private organisations can provide specialised courses in pedagogy, didactics, arts education, and so on. CPD and support for the core pedagogues (i.e. the Pre-primary Teachers) is structurally provided since schools receive funds for this. Each pre-primary and primary school has to develop a training plan for the teachers. Assisting Childcare Workers are hardly included in these plans. Schools need to follow-up on this plan, otherwise they may lose their CPD budget. Notwithstanding, schools decide autonomously how to organise the plan. Consequently, no minimum number of CPD hours are specified for the Pre-primary Teachers or Childcare Workers. Only one collective pedagogical training day per year for all the teachers is obligatory.

French Community (WBF)

Since 2003, two public offices have been responsible for the regulating and funding of CPD provision: one focused especially on the continuing professional development for staff in the childcare services (*ONE – Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance*) and the other on the education sector (IFPC *Institut Inter-réseaux de Formation Professionnelle Continue, 'Inter-network Professional Training Institute', formely IFC, Institut de Formation en cours de Carrière Inter-réseaux, 'Inter-network career training institute'*). *ONE* and IFPC work separately, even if they have a collaboration contract for some specific common activities. None of them can refer to large-scale research projects on the CPD of ECEC personal funding over the past five years.

Childcare sector

In the childcare sector, the governmental organisation *ONE* provides an annual continuing development plan for all childcare practitioners according to a new official five-year programme from 2021 to 2026 approved by the government (*Arrêté* 11-02-2021, MB 2-03-2021). Public funds are used for different kinds of financially accessible in-service training, based on an offer from official training providers according to the governmental programme: specified sessions (often one or two days focused on a predefined topic); nomadic sessions (often one or two days focused on a topic and organised in a space negotiated with the participants); and pedagogical coaching in teams (one to five days in childcare services or a network of services where both the topic and the organisation can be negotiated with the training centre).

Fourteen focus areas classified by their funding rates are defined in the early childhood CPD public programme that takes into account both the priorities defined by childcare staff in their quality plans, the opinions of the trainers, Pedagogical Advisers and other *ONE* staff:

- Child development (20.8% of allocated funding)
- Family partners (9.2%)
- Health global approach (8.3%)
- Artistic and cultural activities and projects (8.3%)
- Attitudes, roles and tasks (7.7%)
- Environment (6.3%)
- Active role (5.7%)
- Diversity approach (4.4%)
- Group dynamics (3.6%)
- Activities practice (3.5%)
- Observation: practice and children (3.2%)

- Educational project (2.7%)
- Children's rights (2.4%) and
- Institution management (2%).

Four of these focus areas directly concern centre leaders: (1) attitudes, roles and functions; (2) group dynamics; (3) educational project; (4) institution management. The remaining 11% of funds are dedicated to pedagogical coaching without any predefined topic. Complementary to these offers supported by specialised training centres, a team of ten Pedagogical Advisers (*conseillers pédagogiques*) enrolled by *ONE* organises some pedagogical support frameworks for childcare practitioners and their leaders grounded on an analysis of local needs in WFB: educational continuity, caregiving, outdoor, artistic and cultural awakening or speech development. Some of these topics can be integrated in the official two-year *ONE* campaign such as the outdoor investment planned in 2022. One of the Pedagogical Advisers coordinates a group of staff dedicated to the development of an inclusive approach which recognises diversity as a resource and the rule (not the exception) (Camus 2019). Pedagogical advisers and trainers can collaborate or work on common issues such as coaching new teams in creating a childcare service. From 2022 onwards, a process of twenty-hour training sessions could also be proposed two times directly by Centre Leaders every five years. This measure aims at improving the accessibility of the offer and responding to local needs of childcare services. It could provide a framework for experimenting in new forms of CPD such as blended learning or professional trips (Pirard, Rayna, and Brougère 2021).

Thus a large part of the training process is viewed as a specialised space, where new knowledge, skills and abilities can be acquired in a limited period of time, in order to be applied or transferred to childcare services. Nevertheless, the emergence of another culture of education is confirmed: a culture of professionalisation that views competence as the central theme in educational work, based on the hypothesis that action and actors can be jointly and simultaneously transformed (Pirard and Barbier 2012; Pirard, Camus, and Barbier 2018). Since 2019, CPD has become compulsory for all Childcare Workers (two days per year, *Arrêté* 2-05-2019, MB 09-10-2019), but there are no measures in place for providing substitute staff while a colleague pursues CPD. Moreover, participation in specific forms of CPD is not formally recognised in terms of promotion and career advancement.

Pre-primary education

In the education sector, the IFPC *(Institut Inter-réseaux de Formation Professionnelle Continue* according to the Decree on Book 6 of the Code of Primary and Secondary Education entered into force on August 29, 2022), formely the IFC (*Décret* 11-07-2002, MB 31-08-2002), offers an annual general programme with specified sessions for all teachers, including Pre-primary Teachers and Centre Leaders from a global analysis of the needs in the field. The IFPC collaborates with University Colleges, Universities and specialised training centres, but has also registered trainers (mostly teachers, directors, staff from schools). All of them must meet the standards required by the IFPC.

Alongside the IFPC, each of the three educational umbrella organisations (service provider organisations) also has its own educational guidance service for providing on-site CPD activities. For the past five years sessions for twenty participants from different institutions have taken place out of school (sometimes in a museum). The topics have been rarely focused on the specific pre-primary staff needs, which have not been accurately analysed. They often concern general learning issues with a disciplinary approach for not only Pre-primary Teachers, but also primary school staff. Some topics relevant to preschool include: oral and written communication; pleasure in reading; learning to learn; observation of children; 'better verbal communication';

children's literature; memorisation tools for pre-primary classes; music education; identifying and analysing learning difficulties from the start of kindergarten;-a social skills development programme; stimulating the prerequisites for learning; transition to pre-primary school, and so on. Supporting language and communication and supporting children with special needs are topics often chosen by pre-primary staff. There is no specific focus on pre-primary leadership or mentoring.

Some sessions are also organised for Speech Therapists who have recently been enrolled by the psycho-medico-social centres to collaborate with Pre-primary Teachers, but there are no specific CPD offers dedicated to the Teachers' Assistants.

In 2020–2021, a new specific CPD course with experienced pre-primary trainers was set up to support the implementation of the new pre-primary curriculum (*référentiel des compétences initiales*). All Pre-primary Teachers had to take part in two-day sessions and an additional funded six-hour session organised out of school. Another specific parallel session was organised for the leaders and for the first time, especially for the pre-primary Teachers' Assistants (*puériculteurs/puéricutrices*). This last session was focused on sustaining the child's independence, language teaching, the communication with parents, emotional and physiological needs, verbalisation, observing play, the child's rhythm and development, creating a positive and benevolent climate, the child statute, the scholar culture. This session was not compulsory and not funded for the Assistants, but 639 '*puériculteurs/puéricultrices*' (34% of the auxiliary workers hired by the WBF and 62 other *puériculteurs/puéricultrices*) took part in this first session that can be considered as a success and underlines their motivation to learn. This training process highlights the necessary complementarity of their work and that of Pre-primary Teachers in the interests of children's development. Moreover, the IFC (IFPC) is taking part in a partnership project between the FRB (*Fondation Roi Baudouin*, King Baudouin Foundation) and the WFB to provide pre-primary trainers with quality training tools focused on the special needs of children and families living in poverty and for all stakeholders in pre-primary education.

Nowadays, continuing professional development is free and mandatory (six half days per year) for all teachers, including Pre-primary Teachers (additional periods possible on a voluntary basis) but for their Assistants (Childcare Workers) who do not have any period of time dedicated to CPD nor any substitute staff, it remains voluntary. The participation in some forms of CPD is not formally recognised in terms of promotion and career advancement. From September 1, 2022 all teachers (Pre-primary Teachers included) enrolled in the French Language Learning coaching (FLA or DASPA) will have to take part in some specific course on French as an additional language and on intercultural mediation, but without promotion or career advancement.

According to a new law (*Décret* 17-06-2021, MB 30-07-2021), professional development activities should be planned in a six-year programme to promote longer and long-term training, alternating with work in the field and more appropriation of learning outcomes in context, according to the action plan of each school. These action plans will include the training plans for their staff next to the research recommendations and the institutional reforms or priorities. Mixed groups gathering Pre-primary Teachers and other stakeholders could be organised around common topics (e.g. partnership with libraries, artistic and cultural education). Some of them could integrate Childcare Workers such as those dedicated to smooth transitions at the start of pre-primary school, one of the priorities of the Government (*Déclaration de Politique Communautaire de la FWB*, Community Policy Statement, 2019–2024) and the topic of a three-year research project funded by the Minister of Education (Housen and Royen 2019; Housen, Royen, and Pirard 2020; Housen et al. 2022). Bridges between staff in pre-primary schools, leisure centres and childcare centres have been recommended. A quality chart is being elaborated by stakeholders

from pre-primary schools and a *ONE* Pedagogical Adviser drawing on research results and should be implemented in the near future.

In conclusion, reforms of CPD are underway in both the childcare and the education sectors. They can be focused on childcare challenges or more generally linked to goals for school. They aim at better meeting local needs according to quality plans of childcare services on the one hand, in school (pre-primary school included) on the other hand. In this context, how can a holistic approach towards children as recommended in the ECEC services be developed? How could a CPD programme dedicated to pre-primary school be better grounded on resources produced in the childcare services and not only directed toward turning children into pupils and making them ready for school (schoolification trends)? The quality charta about the first transition when starting pre-primary school can be considered as an important step in the emergence of an *educare* approach.

German-speaking Community

In the German-speaking Community, it is stipulated by law that regular participation in continuing professional learning is part of a teacher's job. During the career entry period, Pre-primary Teachers can take part in meetings with staff of the Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien, experienced Pre-primary Teachers, and other young professionals. The topics discussed in these meetings are chosen by the newly-qualified professionals. In the context of peer-group mentoring, they can bring forward specific cases they struggle with or ask more general questions on teaching and education.

In ECEC, recognised and subsidised childcare services are legally bound to offer at least 10 hours per year of complementary further training to their staff (Erlass der Regierung vom 22. Mai 2014 über die Dienste und andere Formen der Kinderbetreuung). The RZKB and Kaleido Ostbelgien provide trainings and coaching projects on diverse topics ranging from first aid over nutrition to pedagogical contents. Those trainings are not compulsory. However, home-based childcare providers are granted a subsidy for participation.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

The following information applies to all three Communities unless otherwise stated.

7.1 Remuneration

Pre-primary Teachers in Belgium receive salaries equivalent to those of primary and lower secondary teachers (OECD 2012; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2022). The salaries are comparable to other jobs that require a Bachelor's degree and are sufficient for living as a single parent in a major city. In WBF, teachers with a mentoring position are granted a higher salary whereas teachers designated for FLA or integration (integration agent) are paid like other teachers. Centre Leaders are paid more than teachers when they are promoted.

The salaries of Childcare Workers in the childcare services or those who work as an auxiliary in pre-primary settings are lower but still decent enough for living on as a single parent. In WBF, the salary of staff in childcare centres with a Bachelor-level qualification is comparable to that of a Pre-primary Teacher if they are in charge of a social, health or pedagogical specific role, but not if they work directly with the children. Mentoring is not funded. According to legislation

passed in 2019, the salaries of the Centre Leader were to be increased by 10% (*Arrêté* 2-05-2019, MB 09-10-2019).

In the Flemish Community, a tenured and non-tenured Pre-primary Teacher can earn a gross monthly salary between €2,754 (beginner) and €4,944 (36 years of experience). A tenured and non-tenured Childcare Worker can earn a gross monthly salary between €2,270 (beginner) and €4,213 (36 years of experience). A tenured and non-tenured School Director can earn a gross monthly salary between €4,108 (0 years of experience) and €6,329 (36 years of experience) (Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming 2022). The average gross monthly salary in Belgium is €3,758 and the minimum wage is €1,626.

It should be noted that during the COVID-19 health crisis, Pre-primary Teachers continued to be paid by the Flemish Department of Education, whereas many Childcare Workers faced being technically unemployed. When the financial compensation measures for public and private childcare were installed by the Flemish Minister of Welfare, this meant for the staff that their salaries continued to be paid (Van Laere et al. 2021).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

In Flanders and in WBF (not in the German-speaking Community), a full-time job in pre-primary settings comprises 26 hours per week of teaching, including six hours of non-contact time, whereas in childcare services a full-time week comprises 38 hours, with no specified non-contact time.

Flemish Community

In group based childcare, 47% of staff working with children and 68.2% of centre leaders work full time. In pre-primary education, 83.1% of teachers work full time as well as 20.9% of childcare workers working as assistants of the teachers.

French Community (WBF)

In 2020, 68.45% of teachers in pre-primary settings worked full time compared to 37% of staff working (full time) with children in subsidised childcare facilities (crèches) (no reliable data in non-subsidised childcare facilities).

German-speaking Community

In the German-speaking Community, a full-time job in pre-primary settings comprises 28 hours per week of teaching. The weekly working time of the Kindergarten Assistant is 36 hours at 60 minutes for full-time employment.

On 1st January 2021, 46.64% of teachers in pre-primary settings in the German-speaking Community worked full time. 16.14% worked 70–89% and 34.53% worked 50–69% of a full time equivalent. There is no data available for the Kindergarten Assistants.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Flemish Community

Childcare sector

There is no official support procedure or requirement for newly qualified and newly appointed staff in the childcare sector. It depends on the context, the childcare service and its management.

Pre-primary education

In 2006, the Flemish government took measures to support young teachers and introduced the so-called 'mentoring hours' (*mentor-uren*). Due to these mentoring hours, schools could guide and support student teachers and novice teachers in their new job. However, in 2010 these mentor hours were abolished. Hence, supporting student and novice teachers has become an issue of the individual school policy: it depends on the school making capacity. In 2013, the Flemish inspectorate focussed on this issue, and came to the conclusion that in most schools supporting novice teachers (*aanvangsbegeleiding*) is carried out well. A recent evaluation report of the educational guidance services recommends that cross-network collaboration for beginners should be further developed in order to prevent novice teachers quitting the job. It is also up to the individual school to take care of this for the assisting childcare staff. Although there are no data, this is estimated from anecdotal data to be very low.

The Flemish government is well aware that since the outbreak of the corona crisis, school directors must, more than ever, be open to change and flexibility and, in doing so, must regularly seek new directions, including educational ones. The corona crisis thus reinforces the need for a strong school leader. At the same time, the job of school director - like that of teacher - is increasingly perceived as a bottleneck profession in education. There is a growing outflow of school directors during their career. Moreover, a lot of potential candidates for the position of school director doubt whether they would effectively take up the offer to become a principal or to apply for a vacancy. One of the possible reasons for this is that a starting school director often only really experiences what the job is all about after he or she has already taken up the position. In many cases, such a practical shock leads to a swift exit, permanently or otherwise. Many directors also indicate that if they had had more insight into the profession of school leader beforehand, they might not have started. In order to take away or at least alleviate this doubt or having cold feet, the government are making it financially possible for an organising power or school board to offer a candidate director – both an already selected candidate and a potential or interested candidate – the opportunity to shadow one or more experienced school directors for a certain period of time. Through this shadowing process, the staff member involved can watch, observe, and ask questions about the job of director. The staff member can see "in real life" what the job of school director entails and experience what the work requires and how the experienced director deals with it.

French Community (WBF)

Although there is no official support procedure or requirement for newly qualified and newly appointed staff in the childcare sector, some teams decide to set up a support framework, drawing on the mentoring tools developed for the internships (i.e. those funded by APEF, *ONE* and the Minister of Education, see section **5**). Some CPD sessions funded by *ONE* are dedicated to the support of staff in newly established childcare services alongside the support offered by the

Pedagogical Advisers (see section **6**). Moreover, introductory events dedicated to candidates who would like to set up a new childcare service has been organised locally every month since September 2020: four compulsory meetings before the creation of the childcare service focused on legal, social pedagogical and health topics focusing on a quality perspective. They help applicants realise what is required and some of them subsequently drop or change their initial projects.

Since 2016–2017, welcoming and mentoring new teachers at school (preschool, primary and secondary) has become compulsory (*Circulaire* 5388, 28-08-2015). Different support actions are envisaged: (1) an interview with the director, (2) a visit to the premises, (3) communication of working hours, (4) provision and explanation of the school mission, of the regulations, work, standards and curricular programmes in force, to which the staff member is appointed, (5) introduction to the educational team, (6) designation of a mentor among the members of the teaching staff with an educational qualification and having at least 15 years of work experience. This mentor is considered as a key person for assisting and advising new teachers in their socio-professional integration and work tasks (only if the new teacher is employed for more than 15 weeks). Their task may be part of the collective missions of the schools which can obtain additional resources (Decree 14-03-2019, MB 27-03-2019). Some guidelines for directors and mentors (*Accueillir les enseignants débutants, guide de la Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles* – Welcoming beginner teachers, WBF guidebook) as well as some continuing training actions have been proposed but they are not specifically focused on pre-primary education. In the field, Pre-primary and Primary Teachers are less concerned than the secondary teachers by the shortage and drop outs at the start of their careers. Their working conditions (more often full time) are considered better (Goethals 2019) without being good in terms of the necessary rapid immersion of new teachers in new classes, new schools, new teams.

German-speaking Community

No data available.

7.4 Non-contact time

Flemish Community

In the childcare sector, there is no specified non-contact time**.** The government established for teaching staff, through performance denominators, the basic number of hours or teaching periods that comprise a full-time assignment, by level of education and by position. For Pre-primary Teachers these are 24/26 teaching periods of 50 minutes (*lestijden).* But the number of hours or class time that appears on the teachers' pay check does not equal the number of hours they are actually required to perform. Their assignment includes other tasks such as meetings, report writing, supervision, CPD, …. These tasks are part of their full assignment. There is no systematically compiled data available that allows for an estimation of the proportion of full working time allocated to these other tasks.

French Community (WBF)

In the *écoles maternelles*, a required 26 periods of 50 minutes per week are dedicated to teaching; 1,560 minutes maximum per week or 962 hours maximum per year are dedicated not only to teaching, but also to collaborative working which can include staff meetings, cooperation with parents, networking in the community and other activities according to the organisation and the

action plan (Decree 14-03-2019, MB 16-04-2019, Erratum MB 20-05-2019). There are no regulations for time allocated to preparation work: it depends on the personal organisation of the practitioner.

Puéricultrices/teurs who work as auxiliary staff in pre-primary settings work 36 periods of 50 minutes per week (1,800 minutes) or a 30-hour working week. These periods include (1) 1,400 minutes with teachers and children in the classroom (teaching periods), (2) 300 minutes alone with the children to help them eat or to supervise their free time and (3) at least 100 minutes or 60 periods per year dedicated to collaborative working or, without children, to taking part in meetings with parents (decree 14-03-2019, MB 16-04-2019, Erratum MB 20-05-2019). In the childcare sector, there is no specified non-contact time.

German-speaking Community

In the German-speaking Community, there is no regulation of paid non-contact hours in either pre-primary education or in childcare centres.

7.5 Current staffing issues

Flemish Community

The COVID-19 health crisis created some debates on the position of ECEC staff in society (Van Laere et al. 2021). One of the common themes in all discussions with stakeholders in the childcare sector was that childcare workers are the invisible heroes of this corona crisis in the wider public and political debate. According to the stakeholders, this health crisis has once again made it clear that society cannot function without high-quality childcare, including the three functions (economic, social, pedagogical). The general tendency among Childcare Workers is that respect and appreciation have been sorely missed. Many stakeholders in the media and parliament have stressed the societal importance of the childcare sector and called for attention to better working conditions, better wages, better qualifications. If you consider the societal importance that has been placed on keeping the schools open even in lockdown, one could think that teachers are highly needed and appreciated in society at large. According to both testimonies of school directors in the corona commissions and teacher trade unions, the jobs of Pre-primary and Primary School Teachers are still not appreciated enough in society and should feel the confidence of their minister and their government. When schools needed to close, schools and teachers still needed to provide childcare. This raised some questions and even frustration amongst teachers. According to the teacher trade union their core task is teaching, providing lessons (*'lesgeven')* and not providing childcare. Applied to pre-primary education, there is a difference between Pre-primary Teachers who should organise purposeful playful learning activities and childcarers who organise free play for children. Pre-primary Teachers should be considered to be more than providers of childcare and accordingly they need to be acknowledged in their professionalism.

In the case of Childcare Workers in out-of-school care, the decision of the Minister of Education to offer the teachers an extra week of autumn holiday upset many Childcare Workers, since they had to provide childcare for the children. They stated that they had worked full time since the beginning of the crisis. This situation showed the difference in recognition and appreciation between these professional groups, present in the political and public discourse, a consequence of the split system. Because education determined the measures for childcare/emergency care on school days, it had an impact on how the cooperation worked at the local level. In the absence of a common framework in various places, this led to tensions between the staff of the two

facilities. An often-heard message is that childcare workers did not feel valued in their professional role. Childcare should be in charge of 'care' and teachers in charge of 'learning'. Respondents signalled that a different 'sense of value' was assigned to these tasks, which led to tensions (Van Laere et al. 2021).

There is a major shortage of Childcare Workers in the Flemish Community of Belgium. Many childcare centres have open vacancies, also intensified in the COVID-19 health crisis. For example, 96% of local authorities organising childcare state having problems filling vacancies for Childcare Workers. A small minority of secondary education students in childcare want to continue to work in ECEC. As the pre-primary schools received more hours of childcare (*kinderzorg*), some Childcare Workers now prefer a job in the educational sector (better salary, working conditions and longer holidays) There is now a sense of urgency at the policy level, which means that initiatives are being taken or initiated at different levels:

- The profession of Childcare Worker has been recognised as a bottleneck profession due to the large staff shortage in childcare. As a result, job-seekers can follow a training with a special contract that offers a number of financial benefits. The Flemish Public Employment Service ('VDAB') pays, amongst other things, the costs of the initial training in some Centres for Adult Education.
- Within the aforementioned intersectoral VIA6 agreements (see above), thought was also given to campaigning and branding in order to promote the profession more attractively.
- The government agency *Opgroeien* has set up an 'Action Plan Workforce' with an accompanying working group. This working group consists of all the main social partners within the sector. They mainly focus on short-term actions in the areas of inflow, advancement and retention.
- Since 2014, data relating to workforce has been monitored more closely by the Agency *Opgroeien*. For instance, it keeps track of the number of unqualified people entering the profession.

There is also a major shortage of teachers in the Flemish Community of Belgium. Many pre-primary schools have open vacancies for teachers, intensified during the COVID-19 health crisis. In pre-primary and primary schools, a quarter of beginner teachers give up their profession within five years. Initial training programmes for Pre-primary Teachers are attracting fewer and fewer people. Suggested solutions/actions in the public educational debate are: invest in higher societal appreciation of the job as teacher and as childcare worker, stimulate more lateral entrants, improve working conditions including the staff-to-child ratio, introduce more lifelong learning opportunities and job mobility… Alternative pathways on long term should be explored as well in order to raise the attractiveness of the ECEC sector: Besides the usual solutions, how can the expansion of innovative ECEC projects with staff of more diverse backgrounds attract more potential students or lateral entrants to work with young children, families and local communities? To change the image of the job, the image of the ECEC centres themselves has to change.

French Community (WBF)

Currently, there is not any official staff shortage in the French Community, neither in the pre-primary nor in the childcare sector, except in Brussels. However, observations in the field indicate a major shortage of Childcare Workers, particularly in the childcare services.

German-speaking Community

In the German-speaking Community, minor staff shortages in both in the pre-primary and the childcare sectors may occur if staff resign in the near future. However, the after-school care services for 3–12 year-olds face major staff shortages. This has resulted in hiring unqualified staff in after school care services.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Flemish Community

Childcare sector

In the Flemish Community of Belgium, no significant reforms have taken place over the past five years in both childcare and pre-primary schools. However, it is important for the childcare sector to refer to the aforementioned intersectional VIA6 (Vlaamse Regering 2021) agreements that were made in 2021 and that succeeded in mobilising resources to realise pedagogical support. Although they are not sufficient to support the whole sector in a qualitative way, they can be seen as an important resource for the decretal obligation of pedagogical support. Especially in combination with the *Mentes* network in which the most important organisations in the field of pedagogical and language support for babies and toddlers have joined forces since 2019.

In the field of initial professional education, several working groups have been set up to reflect on the curricula of the IPE programmes across the umbrella organisations. For example, the aim is to make the training trajectory within the Centres for Adult Education even more flexible and more in line with the legally defined professional qualification of a Childcare Worker. Today, the link between the competences from that qualification profile and the modules within the qualifying route is not straightforward. In this vein, also the assessment of previously acquired competences will be evaluated.

Furthermore, there is consensus that the '*7th year of childcare*' qualifying route should be evaluated and adapted. For example, the curriculum is not aligned with the 15 competences from the professional qualification profile and an often-heard complaint from the sector is that students are inadequately trained and prepared for the job. From the school year 2022/2023, an educational reform will be implemented in secondary education, which will allow students from technical secondary education to work directly in childcare after graduation. They will also be qualified at EQF level 4. Pupils from vocational secondary education will still have to complete a seventh year to be allowed to work in childcare, but that extra year will be given a different name. The substantive implications of this structural reform are currently unclear.

There are also calls to set up an initial training at EQF level 5 ('*HBO-5*'), but there is no consensus on this within the sector.

French Community (WBF)

In WBF, a series of reforms, more than those announced in the previous SEEPRO report (Peeters and Pirard et al. 2018) have been under way during the past five years. Pre-primary education, which has become compulsory for 5 year-olds, has been reformed, as has the whole educational system according to the Pact for a Teaching of Excellence (*Pacte pour un enseignement d'excellence*): (1) a new curriculum; (2) a new job profile for teachers (Pre-primary Teachers included);

(3) a forthcoming Master's degree in teacher education at EQF level 7 (Pre-primary Teachers included) devised by University Colleges and Universities; (4) a new job profile for Directors; (5) a new induction training programme for Directors; (6) a new specialist support staff system (employment of Speech Therapists, integration support for children with special needs and newcomers who do not master the language of instruction); (6) a reformed continuing professional development system. Few of those reforms are specifically dedicated to the pre-primary level.

In the childcare sector, reforms have also been under way: (1) a new common job profile for all practitioners with a vocational secondary qualification working with children; (2) a new initial training profile is currently being defined; (3) a new professional Bachelor study programme dedicated to childhood education; (4) a new initial training certificate for Directors combined with a salary rise.

German-speaking Community

Within the framework of the reform of the RZKB into an institution of public interest, a lot of consideration is currently being given to reforming Childcare Worker education. The aim is to enable permeability of education programmes and diplomas so that all professionals working in childcare have acquired the same competences and prerequisites and can work in the different childcare settings. The concept and implementation is to be developed together with the various actors of the childcare sector as well as the different training providers.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Flemish Community

Research supporting the collaboration between ECEC core and assisting practitioners (2018-2020)

Sources: Rutar et al. 2019; Hulpia et al. 2020; Jensen et al. (2020); Van der Mespel et al. (2020) VALUE 2020 (see *References* for further details)

Aims and methods: For the VALUE Erasmus+ project on the collaboration between ECEC core and assisting practitioners, a literature study and action research was developed. The aim of the literature review was to explore sustainable solutions in the professional development of assisting practitioners, but beyond their sole individual responsibility. More specifically, the aim was to gain a more detailed understanding of the position and the working conditions of ECEC assisting and core practitioners in the Flemish community of Belgium and three other countries (Denmark, Portugal and Slovenia.) An analysis of relevant literature and methods on how to support the collaboration between ECEC core and assisting practitioners was also made.

The aim of the action research was to examine how collaborative learning between ECEC core and assisting practitioners in pre-primary schools can be supported as part of a sustainable CPD (continuing professional development) pathway in two pilots in the context of the Flemish community of Belgium. The views of the schools on the VALUE learning path were collected from (in)formal evaluation moments during the process of the VALUE learning path, focus groups with the school teams and interviews with the school principals.

Selected findings: Although each pilot school had a different way of working and a tailor-made process, they both showed that it is imperative that a CPD path is simultaneously focused on an

educare approach; professional identity and collaboration. The learning path raised awareness of the importance of inter-professional collaboration in order to overcome the artificial divide between care and learning of young children.

Some crucial conditions for the learning path and its impact on individuals and teams could be identified:

- Leadership as a precondition for success: school leaders should provide the organisational and structural environment to strengthen collaboration between all professionals, such as child-free hours.
- The role of the facilitator (coach) and an open and safe environment are crucial to enable shared reflection and action.
- Structural conditions such as limited working hours of a Childcare Worker in one school, lack of child-free hours, high staff-to-child ratio, hinder a collaborative and *educare* approach.

Implications: Based on the literature review, Flemish VALUE pilots and discussions with the stakeholder group, overall recommendations for regional Flemish policy, local policy and school policies were developed aiming to answer the following question. How can a smart deployment of Childcare Workers in pre-primary education lead to effective quality improvement for children and families and sustainable jobs for all ECEC staff?

Some wider implications, which go beyond the two studies, are to:

- Create visibility for childcare workers as important educators for preschool children
- Introduce an *educare* approach in which Childcare Workers and Pre-primary Teachers collaborate on an equal footing
- Invest in sustainable professional development initiatives, close to the workplace and giving Childcare Workers and Pre-primary Teachers the opportunity to participate in shared reflection on everyday practice
- Invest in structural conditions: a lower staff to child ratio, appropriate care infrastructure and continuing deployment (more hours and full-time positions) of Childcare Workers in pre-primary schools.

Job experience of childcare workers in infant and toddler care (2020-2022)

Source: Karel de Grote Hogeschool (2022) (see *References* for further details)

Aims and Methods: This research project aimed to gain insight 'from the inside' into the job experience of Childcare Workers and develop ways to make this experience visible at different levels. A further aim was to identify ways of taking the job experience into account in their daily work and, if possible, to influence it positively. Finally, it was hoped to contribute to the social discussion on the profession of Childcare Worker.

The design of this research was critical-participatory. First, through participatory research, insight was gained into the job perception of Childcare Workers. In a second part, the perspectives of other actors who can have a direct influence on the job experience were taken into account. The analysis and development of the research material was also participatory: Childcare Workers actively participated in the analysis process.

Selected findings: From the narratives we see that overall, Childcare Workers have a negative job perception and appreciation. This is a distressing finding in a sector that has an outspoken focus on child well-being and involvement. Moreover, this low well-being constitutes a risk: for the daily operation, for the retention of employees and for the willingness to deal with innovations and changes.

Implications: These narratives make an essential contribution to the practice of caring for infants and toddlers and to the public debate on child care in the Flemish community of Belgium. Of

course, this requires converting these narratives into appropriate measures, such as policy recommendations.

Pedagogical coaches in Flemish Childcare (2021-2023)

Source: Devlieghere et al. 2023 (see *References* for further details)

Aims and methods: This study set out to explore the perspectives of childcare workers, centre leaders and pedagogical coaches on the employment of pedagogical coaches in group based childcare services. In 2019, the Flemish government agreed to allocate funds to the employment of pedagogical coaches to support childcare workers in their practices and to further professionalise the childcare sector. These pedagogical coaches have a bachelor's degree and are thus more highly qualified than the childcare workers. Considering the scientific literature, there is little to no doubt about the need and importance of highly qualified childcare staff. What remains unclear, however, are the conditions necessary to realise the use of highly qualified staff. In other words, to date, we have little insight into the conditions that can encourage or inhibit the successful deployment of highly qualified staff in childcare. To explore this, a total of nine focus groups were organised, four of which were with pedagogical coaches (n=21), three with centre leaders (n=13) and two with childcare workers (n=8).

Selected findings: Throughout the interviews, a number of conditions emerge to consider when deploying pedagogical coaches.

1. A first element relates to the pedagogical coach's job description: where it is less tightly defined, there is often greater ambiguity about what exactly the role of the pedagogical coach is.
2. A second element refers to the (un)conscious installation of a hierarchical expert relationship between the pedagogical coaches and other actors, in particular the child supervisors.
3. A third element refers to affinity with and experience in the workplace. All participants agree that, as a coach, it is important to have or be able to develop affinity with actual childcare practice. When this affinity is not there and there is no room to develop it, this can cause resentment and resistance among both centre leaders and childcare workers. In this case, coaches make attempts to get involved on the work floor. They do this to build trust with the child supervisors.
4. A fourth element refers to the centre leader, who is regarded as an important 'bridging figure' between childcare workers and the pedagogical coach.
5. A fifth element relates to the systemic conditions in which the pedagogical coaches are employed: the constellation in which they have to work is not ideal. Their arrival is sometimes perceived by the childcare workers as extra work. In addition, the current staff shortage in Flemish childcare and the lack of staff continuity in some facilities leads to a high deployment of the pedagogical coaches on the work floor, with no room left to exercise their role as coaches. The question arises whether in the job of childcare worker there is any time and space at all to be coached in the workplace.
6. A sixth and final element refers to the lack of advancement opportunities for childcare workers. The use of pedagogical coaches with a bachelor's degree makes this even more acute.

Implications:

1. Work needs to be done to assure child-free hours so that time can go to coaching and guided reflection.
2. At least two organisational elements need to be considered, namely (i) at what level are pedagogical coaches best aggregated organisationally: at organisation or site level; and (ii) how

are pedagogical coaches best deployed organisationally: at different sites, or assigned to a specific site.
3. There is a need for a clear guiding framework on the mandate of coaches.
4. Pedagogical coaches should be given the opportunity to develop affinity with the job content of childcare worker.
5. There is a need for career perspectives and advancement opportunities for childcare workers.

Governing quality Early Childhood Education and Care in a global crisis: first lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic (2021)

***Source*:** Van Laere et al. (2021) (see *References* for further details)

Aims and methods: This report explores the different ways in which European Union Member States have attempted to ensure high-quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) for children and families in the era of COVID-19. The Flemish Community of Belgium is one of the in-depth case studies of this report (together with Croatia, Germany, Italy and Sweden). Through a review of key research and policy documents, together with interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders of the ECEC sector, the researchers collected and analysed data concerning the five areas of the European Quality Framework, and drew policy recommendations related to each area: accessibility, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, governance. On all these areas, the COVID-19 situation represents an opportunity for the ECEC sector to revisit its identity and evaluate the lessons learned, both in terms of its daily practice after the emergency, and as a possible preparation for future crises.

Selected findings: Concerning workforce in the Flemish Community of Belgium, the report underlines that the recognition and support accorded to ECEC staff have varied, and mainly professionals of childcare and out of school care provision have felt undervalued, when compared to those working in pre-primary schools. The data underline the need to invest in recognising the value of this profession at a structural level. Valuing the profession means also investing in good working conditions, good adult-child ratio, child-free hours to reflect. The role of pedagogical coaches and (democratic) leaders has also been found crucial in supporting ECEC staff during crisis times and beyond. Within this framework, ECEC staff appreciated the 'supportive' elements of monitoring processes (as opposed to 'controlling' ones). Continuous CPD activities focused on regular reflection aimed ad adapting daily practice and pedagogical vision have been found crucial.

Implications: The report formulates policy recommendations for each area of the EQF. Concerning the workforce, the report underlines that providing job security and adequate compensation to ensure the motivation and retention of staff is key to the sustainability of high-quality ECEC in times of crisis and beyond. Although the crisis has highlighted the importance of ECEC centres, the overall social recognition of ECEC professionals remains low, and in the Flemish Community of Belgium this is even worse in the childcare sector (0-3). Meanwhile, the pedagogical and policy-making capacity of ECEC leaders has proved crucial in supporting ECEC professionals to deal effectively with the COVID-19 crisis. Accordingly, both the working conditions of ECEC staff and the pedagogical and policy capacity of ECEC leaders should be strengthened.

More specifically the following policy recommendations are formulated: 1) Structural measures should be considered to address shortages in the ECEC workforce, in order to avoid overworking the existing staff; 2) Given the importance of maintaining contacts with children and families during prolonged periods of closure of ECEC settings, continuity of salary for ECEC staff should be guaranteed; 3) Pedagogical coaching, collegial reflectivity and planning should not be discon-

tinued during crisis periods and beyond; 4) Staff conditions and concerns should be acknowledged and taken seriously into account through the provision of pedagogical guidance and professional development opportunities. Consideration should be also given to the possibility of including them among priority groups for vaccination during a pandemic crisis; 5) ECEC leaders play a key role in providing organisational, pedagogical and emotional support to their educational teams. It is crucial that an adequate decision-making infrastructure, operating in accordance with the principles of distributed leadership, is in place at the level of each institution and that leaders have the opportunity to systematically engage in peer-learning initiatives and advocacy processes within locally established professional networks, umbrella organisations or trade unions; 6) Investments should be made towards improving ICT infrastructure, as ECEC staff have been highly appreciative of the opportunities offered by digital tools to document children's experiences, carry out meetings and conduct exchanges with parents.

French Community (WBF)

Improving the quality of the initial professional education of Pre-Primary Teachers

Source: Degraef et al. 2019 (see *References* for further details)

Aims and methods*:* The main aim of this three-year action research study was to define core competences to be acquired by Pre-Primary Teachers (*instituteurs/intitutrices maternelles*) to improve their welcoming and support practices with children, especially those from immigration and/or precarious backgrounds. This project received financial and organisational support from the King Baudouin Foundation and from the Minister of Higher Education for the development of concrete collaborative projects by the 13 University Colleges (*Hautes Écoles*) which organise the IPE of Pre-primary Teachers in WBF with a view to reinforcing the quality of these teacher education programmes.

Selected findings**:** Seven key competences were identified:

1. Deep awareness of the social responsibility of pre-primary schools (*école maternelles*). Refusing fatalism, Pre-primary Teachers are aware of their capacity for action to prevent social inequalities from turning into educational inequalities. They have a positive image of their profession and of social diversity.
2. Ability to approach the child as a whole person. Children are considered and respected in all aspects of their personality in line with an "*educare*" perspective. Their potentialities are valued, the class is a reassuring living environment where children learn to live together. It is under these conditions that children can gradually enter the learning process and become pupils.
3. Attention given to the development of language skills of all children. Having acquired a good command of French and being aware of the specificities of the 'language of instruction' (*langue d'enseignement*), Pre-primary Teachers aim to stimulate the linguistic development of all children, in particular, those whose home language is not French and/or those who are more culturally distant from the language of instruction.
4. Use of learning methods that help all children learn. The meaning of learning is not always clear to all children, especially if they come from a cultural environment distant from the school culture. Pre-primary Teachers are therefore careful to explain the meaning of the proposed activities and sets up active and well-designed teaching devices, which appeal to the full range of children's skills.
5. Development of quality relationships with parents: these are recognised and welcomed at school as full and competent educational partners. Pre-primary Teachers have analytical

tools to decode attitudes which are unfamiliar to them or which may seem disturbing to them at first glance.

6. Teamwork: Pre-primary Teachers do not have a solitary vision of their job, but collaborate with colleagues as well as other teaching professionals and local partners outside school. This dialogue makes it possible to exchange perspectives on the child and to establish a coherent and comprehensive educational approach.
7. Analytical skills, i.e. Pre-Primary Teachers are able to step back to observe themselves and take a reflective and critical look at their practices, preferably as a team, in order to adjust them.

Implications: The practices to be implemented at the initial professional teacher training level to promote the acquisition of these competences by students are highlighted. Firstly, a cross-cutting and concerted approach to poverty and diversity issues in University Colleges is advocated, i.e. a better coordination of teaching content between teaching teams, a strengthening of the professional training of Teacher Educators in this field. Secondly, the establishment of close collaborations with the Pre-Primary Teachers also constitute the essential basis for the development of each and all of the seven competences. Finally, recommendations are addressed to the stakeholders concerned: those responsible for the education departments of the University College and their University partners, but also all those in charge of the implementation of the reform of the initial professional training of teachers, as well as the active policy-makers on education, early childhood and the fight against poverty.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

The main workforce challenges in the three Communities of Belgium are outlined below.

Qualifications and initial/continuing professional education

In the French community of Belgium, the qualifications of Childcare Workers and Pre-primary Teachers should improve in parallel in 2023: on the one hand, a new Master (EQF: level 7) for Pre-primary Teachers on the other hand and a new professional Bachelor training dedicated to childcare and education (EQF: level 6). The reformed vocational secondary level (EQF: level 4) for the majority of the practitioners working with children in services for the under-threes is also in progress. However, the connections between these different training reforms remain to be established. Also, in the Flemish Community of Belgium, investment is needed on the level of qualification for ECEC professionals, which is now at EQF level 4 for childcare professionals and at EQF level 6 for Pre-primary Teachers. Besides, the contents of the curricula should also be revised, with a clearer focus on an *educare* approach in the three communities of Belgium. The problem is also emphasised in the different qualification requirements between Pre-primary Teachers and the qualified auxiliary workers in pre-primary settings working mostly with 2 and 3 year-olds.

Concerning continuing professional development, the options are different for Childcare Workers, Assistants and Pre-primary Teachers. In the Flemish Community, although childcare services are obliged to provide pedagogical support for their staff since the Decree of 2014, the resources made available by the government for this purpose are not sufficient to speak of quality CPD. If the facilities want extra support, they have to finance it themselves. However, the support on

offer is very fragmented and mainly consists of short-term courses or training sessions. Long-term coaching trajectories in which, for example, a team participates intensively in a group reflection process, are rare, although we know from research that such processes are more likely to have an impact on quality. Also in pre-primary education, the pedagogical guidance services tend to offer short-term courses rather than longer-term CPD processes. The same trends can be observed in the French Community, despite the growing investment in the CPD sector. Moreover, in the two sectors, childcare and pre-primary education, the directors' qualifications reforms aim at developing a better leadership but attention needs to be paid to a holistic educational view in the ECEC services. The lack of educational competences amongst childcare practitioners and directors in the childcare services on the one hand and the generalist approach of the Pact for a Teaching of Excellence ("*Pacte pour un enseignement d'excellence*") aiming at the academic success on the other hand, could reinforce two trends: (1) a focus on care and a lack of the educational approach expected by the pedagogical curriculum dedicated to the childcare services; (2) a schoolification of pre-primary education, focused on learning, without paying enough attention to emotional and physical care.

Working conditions

Structural conditions are needed to be able to work within an *educare* perspective. For example, the adult-child ratio should not be too high. In the Flemish Community of Belgium, the ratio of 1 adult to 8 children in childcare (1 adult to 7 children in WBF) does not allow professionals to offer good pedagogical quality to babies and toddlers. In pre-primary schools, there are no official guidelines on the staff to child ratio. Groups can comprise 27 or more children with one teacher, which affects the quality of the pedagogical practice. Besides, child-free hours are needed in order for professionals to meet and reflect together on their practice. At the moment, child-free hours are not officially foreseen in the childcare sector, and they are not sufficient in the pre-primary school sector. This means that when wanting to reflect on their practice, ECEC leaders and professionals are often obliged to look for 'creative ways' to adjust their hours, with consequences that weigh on the daily experiences of children, families and professionals. When reflecting on practice, all professionals (for example, Pre-primary Teachers and Assistants) should be involved. In the Flemish and French Communities, the fact that Pre-primary Teachers and Assistants working with the same children and families have different contracts and working conditions makes it challenging to align their pedagogical offer. The lack of child-free hours to reflect together on their practice contributes to the challenge of working towards a common vision on education and care. On top of this, the working conditions and the social image of the Childcare Workers (traditionally seen as an assisting job, socially not recognised, especially when referring to the 0–2 sector) has created a very challenging staff-shortage issue in ECEC, which has an impact on the quality of the work, because of the continuous staff turnover and (over)workload required. However, the governmental answer to this challenge seems to go in the direction of lowering the entrance qualification level to work in ECEC, which would of course impact the quality of the offer for children and families. Recently, in order to attract more professionals into the sector, the Flemish ministry proposed to create positions for Childcare Workers (*kinderbegeleiders*) in the pre-primary school classes, under the working conditions of the Education Department. This is experienced by the childcare sector as a controversial measure, because it might make the already problematic staff shortage issue in childcare even worse. Besides, this measure risks confirming the split between education and care, traditionally already characterising ECEC in Belgium: teachers in pre-primary school have mainly so-called educational-teaching tasks; childcare workers-assistants have mainly so-called caring tasks. Having Childcare Workers as Assistants in pre-primary school classes, without this being accompanied

by an *educare* vision, might just reinforce this division of tasks, hence the hierarchic traditional vision on education and care.

Professional continuity, diverse teams and collaboration

One of the challenges faced at the workforce level in all the three Communities is the lack of diversity, especially among pre-primary school staff, considering gender, language or socio-economic and cultural background. This represents a major challenge, especially when thinking about the cities, where there is a significant socio-economic and cultural diversity among children and families. Besides, more bridges need to be established between the working groups on reforms in the ECEC field and professionals from both childcare services and pre-primary schools. The challenges are multi-level: to develop a global and coherent view; to give opportunities to improve the quality of the workforce in all the services; to be able to develop an *educare* approach grounded in children and families' participation. In WBF, some relationships between key actors in the childcare and education sectors have been set up on the topic of transitions to pre-primary school, which has become one of the priorities of the Government (*Déclaration de Politique Communautaire de la FWB*, WBF Community Policy Statement, 2019–2024). This topic can become an important issue of professionalisation which encourages professionals from different sectors to work and learn together and to develop a more shared educational culture. The same challenge characterises the ECEC system in the Flemish Community, where more collaboration between childcare and pre-primary school is needed on a structural level. As a rule, not many common reflection moments are foreseen for different professionals working with the same children and families (e.g. Assistants and Pre-primary Teachers). This makes the enactment of an *educare* approach quite challenging. The role of leaders is a crucial one in this discourse, because of their mandate in promoting and supporting shared reflection on practice. In this sense, the lack of a professional profile for ECEC leaders represents an extra challenge.

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Dekret 31-08-1998 *über den Auftrag an die Schulträger und das Schulpersonal sowie über die allgemeinen pädagogischen und organisatorischen Bestimmungen für die Regel- und Förderschulen* [Decree concerned with the responsibilities entrusted to school providers and staff members and with general provisions of an educational nature for pre-primary, primary, and secondary mainstream and special needs education], 31-08-1998 (MB 24-11-1998)

Dekret 26-04-1999 *über das Regelgrundschulwesen* [Decree on mainstream basic education], (MB 06-10-1999)

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Décret D. 14-03-2019 *modifiant diverses dispositions relatives aux fonctions de directeur et directrice, aux autres fonctions de promotion et aux fonctions de sélection* [Decree Amending Various Provisions Related to the Functions of Director, Other Promotion Functions and Selection Functions], (MB 16-04-2019, Erratum MB 20-05-2019).

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Arrêté 11-02-2021 *du Gouvernement de la Communauté française fixant le programme de formation continue des professionnels et volontaires en fonction dans les secteurs de l'accueil de la petite enfance et de l'accueil temps libre, les professionnels de promotion de la santé à l'école, les volontaires dans les consultations pour enfants, les accueillants dans les services spécifiques de soutien à la parentalité* [Government Order of the French Community Setting the Continuous Training Programme for Professionals and Volunteers in the Early Childhood and Free Time Care Sectors, Professionals

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

BELGIUM

Key contextual data

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Belgium is a federal and multilingual country comprising

- Three autonomous Regions (Flemish Region, Walloon Region, Brussels Capital Region)
- Three language Communities (Flemish, French, German-speaking), and
- Four language Areas (Dutch, French, German, and French-Dutch in the Brussels Capital Region).

Each Region and language Community has its own system of early childhood education and care. While some contextual data apply for the country as a whole, most vary according to the Region/Community and where this is the case, each language Community will be presented separately.

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the general terms used in this report for the main forms of ECEC provision are: **childcare centre** (*kinderopvang; crèche; Kinderkrippe*, 0–2) and **pre-primary school** (*kleuteronderwijs; école maternelle; Kindergarten*, 2½–5)[1]. Any additional specific forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Belgium

The table describes milestones at the national level only. After 1989 policies became the chief responsibility of the Belgian Communities

1827	First educational institution for young children (3-5) established alongside the more custodial institutions founded by philanthropists, municipal administrations and factories.
1831	Establishment of Belgium as a nation state: Freedom of organising education is formalised – soon interpreted broadly as a right to education.
1843	In the first Belgian law on public education, educational institutions for 3 to 5 year-olds are officially recognised and state subsidies are introduced for municipal settings.
1857	First Froebel kindergarten established in Elsene, a Brussels suburb
1858	First professional training courses for women working in kindergartens and primary schools
Since 1880	State-run and publicly funded ECE institutions for 3 to 5 year-olds
1890	First early childhood curriculum issued, based largely on Froebel's ideas
Since 1927	Three-year higher education studies a requirement for working with 3 to 5 year-olds
1950	Almost all 3, 4, and 5 year-olds attend a centre-based setting.
1965	First admission of 2½ year-olds into centre-based settings
1989	Responsibility for Education is devolved to the three Communities.
2020	Attending pre-primary education becomes obligatory for 5 year-olds.

Sources: Peeters et al. 2018; Willekens and Scheiwe 2020.

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for settings for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In Belgium the corresponding formats are **0–2** and **2½–5**.

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Overall, Belgium's early childhood education and care system is a 'split' system with different responsibilities for children under 2½ years of age and children between 2½ years of age and primary school entry at 6.

Since the 1988-1989 constitutional reform, responsibility for education in Belgium has been assigned to the three Communities (Belgium.be 2021). Only the decisions on of the beginning and end of compulsory schooling and the minimum requirements for the award of diplomas are still federal matters. Accordingly, the federal government has only very limited rights with regard to education.

Flemish Community

Childcare for children under 2½ years of age is the responsibility of the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Health and Family (*Departement Welzijn, Volksgezondheid en Cultuur*). Since 2019, the former Agency Child and Family (*Kind en Gezin*), together with a department of the Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities, now forms the new Agency for Growing Up (*Opgroeien*). This has the task of creating as many support services as possible for all children and their families in Flanders and Brussels, including childcare. The new agency is no longer responsible for organising childcare, but mainly for implementing the Flemish government's strategies.

Pre-primary education institutions (*kleuteronderwijs*) for children from 2½ to 6 years old are the responsibility of the Flemish Minister of Education and Training (*Departement Onderwijs*).

French Community

Childcare centres for children under 2½ years of age are supervised by the Office of Birth and Childhood (*Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance - ONE*), which operates under the responsibility of the Minister for Childhood, Health, Culture, Media and Women's Rights (*Ministre de l'Enfance, de la Santé, la Culture, des Médias et des Droits des Femmes*). All non-school childcare settings for children up to age 12 must be approved by ONE, which is also responsible for supervision and inspection. Together with the Community, the regional administrations ensure the management of the buildings.

Overall responsibility for pre-primary education institutions (*écoles maternelles*), primary school and secondary education lies with the Minister of Education of the French Community. For the *écoles maternelles* for children between 2½ and 6 years of age, the Department of Education and Scientific Research (*Administration générale de l'Enseignement et de la Recherche scientifique)* of the Ministry of the French Community of Belgium is responsible. According to a Decree issued in 2019, its tasks are the implementation of general educational policy and the administrative and financial management of the staff (FWB 2022a).

German-speaking Community

The Department of Family and Social Affairs of the Ministry of the German-speaking Community is responsible for the supervision of childcare provision, the issuing of licenses, subsidies and quality assurance. The agency "Service for Child and Family" (DKF) is responsible for the implementation of these tasks (Eurydice 2021). The organisation and monitoring of the facilities is the responsibility of the Regional Centre for Childcare (RZKB).

[2] The Eurydice country reports on ECEC in Belgium provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are indicated within the text and in the references section.

The Department of Education, Training and Employment of the Ministry of the German-speaking Community is responsible for pre-primary education (kindergartens) for children between the ages of 3 and 6 years.

General objectives and legislative framework

The overarching legal framework is the Constitution, which enshrines freedom of education and the principle of equal opportunity, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or religion.

Flemish Community

In April 2014, a government Decree (*Decreet opvang van baby's en peuters*) on the organisation of **childcare** services came into force. According to this legislation, all settings for children under 3 years of age must have a license. The responsible agency (*Opgroeien*), a new agency which includes the service provider *Kind en Gezin* among others (Opgroeien 2023a), regularly checks whether the criteria and legal conditions are met.

With regard to **education** and therefore also pre-primary settings, the Decree on Basic Education (*Decreet basisonderwijs*, 1997 with amendments until 2020) forms the legal basis (Vlaanderen is onderwijs & vorming 2021).

Since 2019, the strategy paper "Education 2019-2024" of the Flemish Parliament aims mainly at achieving ‘top quality’ in education, giving professionals the acknowledgement they deserve, giving every child the support they need, and investing in learning and working environments.

French Community

Legal foundations for **childcare** include the Quality Code (*Arrêté du Gouvernement de la Communauté française fixant le code de qualité et de l'accueil,* 2003), which sets out principles and quality standards, and the Decree of 2019, which addresses improving accessibility to early childhood care services (ONE 2019, 2021).

In addition to the Constitution, the "Schools Pact", which came into force in 1959, applies by law to all educational institutions, including **pre-primary education**. It organises and standardises relations between the different users. Changes in the school system were laid down in the new law *Décret du Code de l'enseignement* (FWB 2020).

German-speaking Community

The legal basis for **childcare** in the German-speaking Community is the Decree on Childcare (2014, with amendments from 2020) and the Government Decree (2014) on services and other forms of childcare.

For **education** and therefore also for pre-primary institutions (kindergartens), the law of the so-called "Schools Pact" (1959) applies.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

In Belgium, children between the ages of 2½ and 6 have a legal right to a free place in a pre-primary educational institution (*kleuteronderwijs, école maternelle, Kindergarten*). The number

of hours varies according to the language community. As of September 2020, the last year before school enrolment is compulsory in all Communities (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 10, 54). Primary school begins at age 6.

Flemish Community

In Flanders, children aged 2½ to 6 years are entitled to a free place in a pre-primary setting (*kleuteronderwijs*) for 23 to 33 hours a week. This right does not exist for under 2½-year-olds. However, the municipalities are obliged to offer a place in a childcare setting, which is allocated according to priority criteria. The institutions receive subsidies from the government for this. No child under the age of 5 is obliged to attend an ECEC setting.

250 half days of attendance in the compulsory pre-primary year (when children are 5 years old) are required to transfer to primary school. If this attendance standard has not been met, the school council makes a decision on the transfer to primary school.

French Community

Children from 2½ years of age are entitled to 23 free hours per week in an *école maternelle*.

German-speaking Community

There is no legal entitlement to a place in childcare for under 2½ year-olds. There is currently a waiting list because demand is greater than supply.

All 3 to 5 year-olds are entitled to a place in kindergarten.

Main types of provision

Flemish Community

Childcare sector

Since April 2014, **childcare centres** (*kinderopvang*) for under 2½ year-olds and also all registered **home-based childcare** workers have to have a permit. This is issued when various requirements have been met regarding infra-structure, hygiene, safety and fire protection measures and staff training quality, with a confirmation from the respective municipality. The licences are reviewed annually by the authorities; childcare centres that do not have such a licence have to close. Childcare centres have to be open for 220 days per year and guarantee daily opening times of at least 11 hours between 6:00 and 20:00.

In 2022, 68.3% of the total number of places for babies and toddlers in Flanders were covered by centre-based settings. In total, 2,051 centre-based settings offered 63,622 places and 3,459 home-based settings offered 22,680 places. In addition, 479 multi-age centres provided 6,826 places (Opgroeien 2023b).

Table 1

Belgium–Flemish Community: Number of settings and places for babies and toddlers, 2022

	Number of settings	Number of places
Home-based childcare settings	3,459	22,680
Centre-based childcare settings	2,051	63,622
Combined models	479	6,826
Total	**5,989**	**93,128**

Source: Opgroeien 2023b

Education sector

Since 2003, **pre-primary education settings** (*kleuteronderwijs*) have to be linked to a school (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 110). From the age of 2½ years, children can start attending the institution on several fixed dates during the year. *Kleuteronderwijs* are open from 7:00 to 18:00 for at least 220 days a year and have a one-hour lunch break. They are generally closed on Wednesday afternoons.

In 2020/21, there were a total of 161 stand-alone pre-primary centres and 2,293 integrated facilities (*kleuteronderwijs* and primary school). A total of 257,625 children were enrolled in 2,454 regular pre-primary settings (DET 2022, 6f) and 2,406 in 123 special education settings (DET 2022, 13f).

Table 2

Belgium–Flemish Community: Number of pre-primary settings and children enrolled, 2020/21

	Settings	Children enrolled
Self-contained *kleuteronderwijs*	161	
Primary schools with integrated *kleuteronderwijs*	2,293	
Total	**2,454**	**257,625**

Source: DET 2022, 6f

French Community

Childcare sector

The main types of care for children between 3 months and 3 years are **childcare centres** (*crèches*) and registered home-based childcare workers (*accueillantes d'enfants*).

All must have a licence issued by *ONE*. Childcare centres for under 2½ year-olds are open at least 220 days a year, usually at least 10 hours a day from 6:00 to 19:00.

At the end of 2021, there were a total of 46,222 childcare places (including home-based childcare) for 51,561 children, of which 34,422 places for 37,432 children were subsidised by *ONE*, and 12,800 places for 14,129 children were not subsidised by *ONE* (ONE 2022, 26, 28). *Table 3* provides an overview.

Table 3

Belgium–French Community: Number of places and children in the childcare sector for under 2½ year-olds by setting type, December 2021

	Number of children	Number of places
Childcare settings subsidised by ONE		
Childcare settings (*accueil collectif*)		25,814
Home-based settings *(accueil familial)*		8,608
Total	**37,432**	**34,422**
Childcare settings not subsidised by ONE		
Childcare settings (*accueil collectif*)		9,718
Home-based settings *(accueil familial)*		2,082
Total	**14,129**	**11,800**
Total (subsidised and not subsidised by ONE)	**51,561**	**46,222**

Source: ONE 2022, 26ff, 30

Education sector

Pre-primary education settings (*écoles maternelles*) are attended by children between 2½ and 6 years of age and are open 182 days a year, spread over 37 weeks. As a rule, this means nine half days (Wednesday afternoon is closed) from 8:30 at the earliest until 16:00 at the latest, with at least one hour for lunch. As from 2023, the summer break lasts between seven and eight weeks.

Sometimes *école maternelle* classes for the year before school entry are located in primary schools (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 110). In many *écoles maternelles*, childcare services are provided before and/or after regular opening hours or during the lunch break.

Currently (FWB n.d., 9.11.2023), there are 1,750 *écoles maternelles* in the French Community. 1,082 of these are publicly funded settings, 147 of which are organised by the Community. 668 *école maternelles* are privately run but state subsidised settings, of which 648 are denominational.

German-speaking Community

Childcare sector

Children under 3 years of age can attend a setting run by the non-profit Regional Centre for Early Childcare (*Regionalzentrum für Kleinkinderbetreuung - RZKB*). There are currently three **childcare centres** in the German-speaking Community providing 84 places for 186 children in 2022 (Familienportal 2023 bzw. Statistikportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens 2023a). They are open from 7:30 to 17:30 and closed for four weeks a year.

Most under 3 year-olds are looked after in **home-based childcare** settings, overall 477 children in 2022. With a maximum staff to child ratio of 1:4, these are either organised by the RZKB or the providers are self-employed (in 2022 those cared for 429 under 3 year-olds), providing 10 hours of care for 220 days a year (Statistikportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens 2023a).

In 2022, 2,017 children aged 3-12 years were enrolled in out-of-school childcare settings (before and after primary school and on Wednesday afternoons) (Statistikportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens 2023a).

Education sector

In 2018/19 there were 27 kindergartens and primary schools in the German-speaking Community, 3 public and 24 subsidised private institutions. Kindergartens are attended by 3 to 5 or 6 year-old children. The youngest children are 2 years 8 months old. Kindergartens are always attached to primary schools. Opening hours are the same as at school: usually 5 mornings (mostly 8:30 to 12:00) and 4 afternoons (mostly 13:30 to 15:30). Younger children often attend mornings only. In 2022, 2,637 children were enrolled in a kindergarten (Statistikportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens 2023a).

Provider structures

In the three **childcare** sectors, providers differ in each Community. In the French and Flemish Communities, children under 3 years of age usually attend privately run childcare settings (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 41).

In the **Flemish Community**, there are several large 'umbrella organisations' that operate as childcare providers/organisers. They are non-profit organisations that mainly offer childcare

places in home-based ECEC provision and out-of-school care, but also group-based settings, albeit to a lesser extent. They also offer other support services besides childcare to families such as maternity care, domestic help and home nursing. Some of these large umbrella organisations date back to the period of pillarisation (early 20th century) and have a history/culture of safeguarding working conditions and providing support for their childcare services. In the past decade, several of these organisations have undergone fusions, making the link with the original pillar less prominent. In addition to these large umbrella organisations, several small non-profit bodies are active in organising childcare. The scale of these smaller organisations varies from one to several childcare services. Besides private childcare providers, also the municipalities organise childcare. In the Flemish Community there is an umbrella organisation (VVSG - *Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten)* that supports cities and municipalities in doing so. They count as an equivalent childcare provider to the aforementioned large umbrella organisations. Because the 2014 Decree equalised the subsidy regulations for all childcare in the Flemish Community, the distinction between private and public providers is now less relevant than before the introduction of the Decree.

The situation in the **French Community** is similar to the one described for Flanders. Besides the public sector (childcare services organised by a municipality or by a municipal social public centre *CPAS - Centres Publics d'Action Sociale*), there are large umbrella organisations in the 'non-market' sector: the UNESSA (*Union En Soins de Santé*, health care union) which covers regional branches and services active in the reception, support, assistance and care of people in the voluntary sector, particularly in the childcare services in Wallonia and Brussels; the FILE (*Fédération des Initiatives Locales pour l'Enfance,* Federation of Local Initiatives for Children) also federates secular organising authorities (non-profit organisations and public authorities) in the childcare and child protection sector, throughout the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. The *Cosege* (*Coordination des services d'accueil d'enfants de la fédération Wallonie Bruxelles*) and FSMI (*Fédération des Services Maternels et Infantiles*, Federation of Maternal and Child Services) bring together home-based services. The public (municipality, CPAS) and non-market (ASBL - *Association sans but lucratif*, non-profit association) sectors correspond for the most part to subsidised childcare facilities (70%). The private sector which corresponds to a maximum of 30% of the facilities covers non-subsidised childcare services or independent childminders.

Education sector

Flemish Community

In Belgium, **pre-primary schools** for children aged 2½ years up to the beginning of primary school are state-subsidised. There are three providers of pre-primary settings in the Flemish Community: (1) pre-primary schools fully funded by the Flemish Community; (2) publicly-subsidised *kleuteronderwijs*, which are established by municipal authorities and receive state subsidies; and (3) private *kleuteronderwijs* subsidised by the state. In 2020/21, 61.3% of children in *kleuteronderwijs* attended private state-subsidised institutions, 22.4% municipal state-subsidised and 16.3% Flemish Community institutions (DET 2022, 13).

French Community

The vast majority of pre-primary settings are public. There are three types of provider of *écoles maternelles*: (1) organised, managed and fully funded by the French Community; (2) managed by municipality and subsidised by the Community; and (3) managed by private or legal entities but subsidised by the Community. Private, non-subsidised facilities are almost non-existent.

Table 4

Belgium–French Community: Number and share of children in pre-primary settings by provider, 2020/21

Provider	Number of children	Share of enrolments, in %
Écoles maternelles Fully funded by the French Community	11,454	6.8
Publicly-subsidised *écoles maternelles* run by municipalities	89,918	53.1
Private state-subsidised *écoles maternelles*	67,927	40.1
Total	169,299	

Source: FWB 2022a

In 2020/21, slightly more than half of the children in *écoles maternelles* (53%) attended a publicly-subsidised institution run by the municipality (*officiel subventionné*), approximately 40% a private state-subsidised setting *(libre subventionné)* and 7% an institution fully funded by the Walloon Federation of Brussels (FWB 2022a).

German-speaking Community

Childcare for children under 3 years of age is mostly provided by private individuals or non-profit organisations. The Regional Centre for Early Childcare (RZKB) is responsible for the establishment and organisation of such facilities.

In 2018/19, the majority of kindergartens (24 out of 27) were private state-subsidised settings; there are no fully private kindergartens.

Participation rates in regulated provision

According to Eurostat data, there has been a significant increase in the attendance rates of children **under 3** years of age in childcare settings over the last 17 years. While in 2005 only 42% of children in this age group attended a childcare centre, by 2022 this figure was already over 52%. As early as 2013, it was noted that Belgium was one of the six countries that had achieved both Barcelona targets (33% of children under 3 and 90% of children between 3 and school entry in institutional childcare).

In 2022, almost all **3 to 5 year-olds** are enrolled in a pre-primary setting; almost 80% attending for more than 30 hours a week (see *Table 5*).

Table 5

Belgium: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years, in %	3 years to compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	23	50
	Over 30 hours	19	48
	No enrolment in ECEC	59	2
2010	1 to 29 hours	17	36
	Over 30 hours	19	63
	No enrolment in ECEC	65	1
2015	1 to 29 hours	23.3	21.7
	Over 30 hours	26.8	77.1

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years, in %	3 years to compulsory school age, in %
	No enrolment in ECEC	49.9	1.3
2022	1 to 29 hours	17.9	19.7
	Over 30 hours	34.8	78.7
	No enrolment in ECEC	47.3	1.7

Source: Eurostat 2023b, differences in the sums due to rounding

In 2021, for the whole of Belgium, almost all over 3 year-olds attended a pre-primary setting in the education sector, as well as half of the 2 year-olds (see *Table 6*). Eurostat does not provide similar statistics for the childcare sector.

Table 6

Belgium: Number and enrolment rates of children in pre-primary settings in the education sector by age, 2021

Age	Number of children	Enrolment rates
Under 2 years	3	
2 year-olds	61,828	51.4
3 year-olds	118,532	97.1
4 year-olds	122,904	98.2
5 year-olds	123,628	97.6

Source: Eurostat 2023f, g

The information for the three language Communities is as follows:

Flemish Community

In September 2022, 53.3% of children between the ages of 2 months and 3 years were in centre-based settings. The slight decrease from 55% in 2019 could be due to an improved calculation method on the one hand, but also to the Corona pandemic on the other. At the end of 2022, there were 93,128 licensed places for babies and toddlers in 5,989 facilities; 22,680 places with childminders (Opgroeien 2023a, b).

The relative shares by age group are as follows:

Table7

Belgium–Flemish Community: Enrolment rates in formally licensed childcare settings for babies and toddlers by age, 2022

Age	Enrolment rates, in %
2–5 months	26.1
6–11 months	62.7
12–17 months	68.9
18–23 months	69.0
24–29 months	69.8
30–35 months (most of this age-group are already enrolled in a kindergarten)	**12.7**

Source: Opgroeien 2023a

French Community

At the end of 2021, the enrolment rate of the under 3 year-olds in a centre- or home-based setting was 37.4%. More than three quarter (76.9% see *Table 8*) of the available places are in centre-based settings.

In 2021, there were 1.16 enrolled children for each place in a childcare setting subsidised by ONE (ONE 2022, 30).

In **pre-primary education**, particularly in the year before school enrolment, the demand for places is higher than the supply (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 13).

Table 8

Belgium–French Community: Number of places and children under 3 years of age in centre-based and home-based ECEC settings, end of 2021

Setting type	Number of available places	Number of children
Centre-based	**35,532**	
Subsidised by ONE	25,814	
Not subsidised by ONE	9,718	
Home-based	**10,690**	
Subsidised by ONE	8,608	
Not subsidised by ONE	2,082	
TOTAL centre-based and home-based	**46,222**	**51,561**
Subsidised by ONE	34,422	37,432
Not subsidised by ONE	11,800	14,129

Source: ONE 2022, 26f, 30

In 2020/21, 169,299 children aged 2½ to 6 years attended an *école maternelle*, more than half (53.1%) were in a publicly subsidised setting. 1,297 children attended a special education institution (*l'énseignement spécialisé)* (FWB 2022a).

By age group, attendance rates at the *école maternelle* in 2020/21 were 42% for 2 year-olds, 92% for 3 year-olds, 95% for 4 year-olds and 94% for 5 year-olds. Overall, 92% of 3 to 5 year-olds attended an *école maternelle* (FWB 2022a).

German-speaking community

In 2022, 477 children under 3 years of age (altogether 751) were registered in home-based settings of the RZKB, 429 (467 altogether) in private home-based settings by self-employed childminders. 168 under 3 year-olds attended a nursery. The attendance rate of under 3 year-olds was 46.6% in 2022 (Statistikportal der deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens 2023a).

In 2021, 2,559 of 3 to 5/6 year-olds attended a kindergarten, the majority (2,023) a publicly-subsidised kindergarten, 366 attended one in the community education system and 170 attended one in the freely-subsidised education system (Ministerium der deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens 2022, 16).

Although kindergarten attendance is not compulsory, statistical surveys show that around 98% of 3 year-old children regularly attend. Thus, it can be assumed that almost all children attend kindergarten for an average of three years (Bildungsportal der deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens 2022).

Financing and costs for parents

In 2019, 0.81% of GDP was spent on the ECEC sector as a whole: 0.1% on provision for under 3 year-olds and 0.7% on provision for 3 to under 6 year-olds (OECD 2023).

In all three Communities, parents of under 3 year-olds have to pay for a place at a childcare setting, whereas attending a pre-primary education setting is free of charge, with parents paying only for meals.

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 14% of net household income on childcare costs[3] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Flemish Community

For roughly three-quarters of places in subsidised facilities for young children, parents pay an income-related amount. Childcare settings which do not receive subsidies or with only basic subsidies can set their own fees.

The *kleuteronderwijs* is free of charge, as are the necessary materials. Contributions may, however, be required for extra-curricular activities.

French Community

Childcare sector

Some of the childcare centres approved by ONE are fully funded by the authority and in these, parental fees are income-dependent. In 2022, parents paid an average of €17.82 per day per child under the age of 3, less for siblings or children with disabilities (ONE 2022, 28).

In childcare settings that do not receive subsidies, the setting itself decides on the parental contributions. Subsidies usually depend on staffing levels, enrolment rates of children and health issues. In 2022, 74.5% of childcare places (see *Table 3*) were subsidised by ONE (ONE 2022, 27, own calculations).

Education sector

Attending an *école maternelle* is free for parents of children over 2½ years old. Meals and certain extracurricular activities usually have to be paid for.

German-speaking Community

Self-employed carers in home-based settings set their own fees. For centre-based settings, fees are income-based.

Kindergartens are subsidised by the German-speaking Community and are free of charge for parents.

Staff to child ratios and group size

Flemish Community

In childcare centres for children under 3 years of age, there are usually a minimum of nine and a maximum of 18 children in a group at any one time. A qualified professional is responsible for

[3] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

a maximum of eight children. If more than one professional is present, each one may be responsible for nine children. During rest periods, a ratio of 1:14 is also permitted for a maximum of two hours.

In *kleuteronderwijs*, children are usually grouped by age: 2½ to 3 years, 3 to 4 years, 4 to 5 years, and 5 to 6 years. However, settings can also decide on the group composition themselves. Decisions about group size are also a matter for the pre-primary setting: there are no formal regulations regarding group size.

French Community

In childcare centres, one qualified member of staff is responsible for seven children. Depending on the setting, groups can be same-age or mixed-age. Home-based carers are responsible for up to five children at a time.

In the *école maternelle*, one qualified member of staff is responsible for 20 children; a maximum group size is not specified. As a rule, two or three same-age groups are formed. Mixed-age groups are mostly found in rural areas where there are too few children to form same-age groups.

German-speaking Community

Centre-based childcare settings for under 3 year-olds have a capacity of 24 places. The children are divided into three groups based less on age and more on developmental aspects. There must be three childcare workers for 18 infants (i.e. a ratio of 1:6) as well as socio-educational staff.

In the **home-based childcare** settings (a maximum of three full-time childminders), 12 children can be cared for at the same time. A maximum of four children under 3 years of age and two children up to the age of 12, including the childminder's own children, are cared for at the same time. Self-employed home-based carers are responsible for a maximum of four children under 3 years of age and two children up to the age of 12, including their own children up to 6 years. Exceptions can be made under specific conditions.

There are no regulations regarding the formation of groups in **kindergartens.** Both same-age and mixed-age groups exist. The size of the groups depends on the staffing plan, which in turn depends on the total number of children. For six to 19 children, one specialist post is allocated, for 20 to 25 children 1.5 and for 26 to 32 children two posts are provided. From 33 children onwards, a quarter of a post is added for each additional group of five, six or seven.

Curricular frameworks

In all three Communities, children in pre-primary education are given 28 learning units of 50 minutes each per week (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 49).

Flemish Community

Childcare sector

A pedagogical framework for childcare settings for under 2½-year-olds was introduced in 2014 by the Flemish Ministry of Welfare, Health and the Family. This framework was commissioned by the professional supervisory authority *Kind en Gezin* and drawn up by Ghent University and the Catholic University of Leuven. It describes in detail what is meant by pedagogical quality and how it can be implemented. So far there is no obligation to disclose how the framework is used,

but it is expected that an institution is able to show how it implements the different dimensions of the framework.

Since 2017, there has been a so-called action plan to facilitate the transition from a childcare setting to pre-primary education. For this purpose, a working group consisting of the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Education was formed with four objectives: (1) structural continuity (ensuring cooperation between the different services at regional and local level, paying special attention to vulnerable groups); (2) pedagogical continuity (aligning pedagogical frameworks); (3) professional continuity (sharing responsibilities between all professionals involved in the transition); (4) continuity in terms of the family, neighbourhood and community through partnerships between professionals, parents and community (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 38).

Education sector

In the Decree on Elementary Education (*Decreet Basisonderwijs*, B.S.25/06/2018) the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training defined 'developmental goals' (*ontwikkelingsdoelen*) for pre-primary education. Developmental goals are the minimum goals in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that the school should strive for in its pupils. They refer to a number of basic competences which pre-schoolers are expected to be able to acquire in everyday school activities. The developmental goals are formulated in six different domains: physical education, people and society, musical education, Dutch, science and technology, and mathematics. Schools are expected to make efforts to achieve these goals but the children are not tested by the independent inspectorate.

Each *kleuterschool* develops its own educational plan with corresponding goals which has to be approved by the government. The different age groups of the children are also taken into account. The curriculum is compulsory and only applies to institutions recognised by the authorities (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 96).

French Community

Childcare sector

Based on the Care Quality Code of 2003 (*code de qualité de l'accueil*), curricular frameworks have been developed for working with children under 2½ years of age, both in centre-based and home-based settings. These are essentially based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and recommendations of the European Commission. Based on these principles and with the help of various brochures produced for this purpose, each childcare centre develops its own plan (Pirard 2011). In doing so, a focus is placed on the best conditions for child development, the quality of interaction between professional and child, the development of self-confidence and autonomy, and the support of age-appropriate socialisation.

Education sector

Curricula apply only to public and private-subsidised institutions (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 96).

The Pact for Excellence in Education (*pacte pour un enseignement d'excellence*) applies to all educational institutions, including pre-primary education. In its revised version this now defines a new "common core" based on eight areas of learning and knowledge. In September 2020 a new framework for pre-primary education was adopted by Parliament. The Guide to Initial Competences (*référentiel des compétences initiales*) defines the skills a child must have acquired by the end of the pre-primary period and on which the setting's educational plan must be based. The guidelines refer to various learning areas such as the development of autonomy, creativity

and thinking; knowledge of language and culture; beginnings of reading and various artistic activities; experimenting and exploring the world. The developmental appropriateness of the provision is considered particularly important.

German-speaking community

No curricular framework exists for the pedagogical work in childcare settings for under 3 year-olds.

For kindergartens, the Activity Plan of 2004 applies, which is based on development goals in the following learning areas: German language; foreign language (between 50 and 200 minutes per week in the first foreign language French); psychomotor development; world orientation; music education; development of mathematical thinking. There is no strict time allocation for the individual areas. In addition, the Activity Plan emphasises the importance of age-appropriate projects that are adapted to the interests and needs of the children. Play is at the centre of the pedagogical activities.

Digital education

Flemish Community

In the curriculum for childcare the use of digital tools is not mentioned. However, a recent NESET report on high-quality ECEC in the era of COVID-19 (Van Laere et al. 2021) acknowledges that digital tools can support the communication with families and provide alternative discussion and training platforms for ECEC staff. Consequently, the report highlights the importance of investing in this direction. Concerning the use of digital tools with children, the report underlines that they are an important support, but cannot replace face-to-face relationships, especially when in the case of young children. As far as professional development is concerned, a Flemish initiative called 'BLINK' ("Blended Learning in Childcare") was launched in the summer of 2022. The goal of BLINK is to provide an online learning platform to support childcare workers. BLINK was developed as a collaboration of five umbrella organisations of Flemish childcare providers. Currently, the platform is still being finalised, but it is already operational. BLINK comprises e-modules, inspiring practices and videos that should become accessible for the whole childcare sector.

French Community

In the curricula for childcare services and pre-primary schools, digital education is not mentioned. The use of digital tools is integrated in the curriculum from the primary school onwards. As in the Flemish Community, this use is developing in communication with parents alongside face-to-face relationships. It raises ethical issues and is becoming a topic for initial and continuing professional education. It is also becoming a support for professional development programmes. Following the pandemic, some training courses have switched to distance learning sessions and several webinars have been organised. An online training offer is being considered through pilot projects. New trainings focused on the childcare service leaders (leader certificate) will provide work platforms and some of them propose a distance learning component. In addition, the "notreplandeformation.be" platform (APEF, *Association Paritaire pour l'Emploi et la Formation*) - *ONE* collaboration - accessible to all public and associative organisations supports the development and monitoring of training plans for the 0–12 childcare sector. Finally, a *ONE* "digital resource centre" project for trainers in the childcare sector will be operational in March 2023.

German-speaking Community

In the curricula for childcare services, digital education is not mentioned.

In 2018, the municipalities concluded a framework agreement with the government to promote information and media literacy in the municipal schools. In this agreement, the municipalities, as the responsible bodies for most of the pre-primary schools in the German-speaking Community, have committed themselves, among other things, to ensuring that the teaching of information and media literacy at their schools is or becomes part of the school project of each school. It also states that information and media literacy must already be taught in pre-primary education in an age-appropriate manner.

Monitoring – evaluation

Flemish Community

Child-related assessment

All 5 year-olds must take a uniform Dutch language proficiency test ('KOALA-test'); if they have a weak score on this test, teachers are expected to intensify their Dutch language programme towards these children.

To transfer to primary school, children must have been registered for at least 250 half-days in the last year of *kleuteronderwijs*. As a rule, parents have a say in whether or not the child transfers to primary school (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 105f). The school board, however, makes the final recommendation based on the attendance of an individual child as well as on the estimated Dutch language proficiency.

Centre-level internal evaluation

Since 2017, a self-evaluation tool for **childcare centres** enables them to assess their own quality. Even though not mandatory, its use (every five years) is recommended,-as it refers to the same dimensions as those looked at by the health inspectorate (Eurydice 2022a). How results from internal evaluations are used is up to the setting (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 128).

The parents' council has the right to participate in the internal evaluation process in both childcare centres and pre-primary settings (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 130).

According to the Inspectorate of Educational Quality (*onderwijsinspectie*) reference framework, pre-primary education institutions are expected to develop and systematically and regularly evaluate quality assurance measures, and also to examine the effect on children (European Commission etc. 2019, 128). It is assessed whether developmental goals have been achieved in the following learning areas: sport; people and society; music; Dutch; science and technology; mathematical literacy.

External evaluation

The Flemish Health Inspectorate is responsible for the supervision and inspection of all childcare settings for babies and toddlers. It makes on-site visits to ensure that the facilities adhere to rules, but also tries to improve the pedagogical quality by evaluating learning processes (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 125). Since 2017, a monitoring tool has been in place to assess six dimensions (child well-being, child involvement/concentration, emotional support, developmental support, environment, respect for diversity and family cooperation). This instrument was developed in the MeMoQ project (Measuring and Monitoring the Quality of Childcare for Babies and Toddlers - 2013 to 2016). Following the evaluation, a report is prepared to which

the childcare centre has to respond within 14 days and which also contains suggestions for improvement. A final report is then sent to *Opgroeien*, which is then also responsible for making any changes/improvements. As a rule, such visits take place once or twice a year.

Since 2019, each pre-primary setting is obliged to draw up a steering concept, which is then adopted together as a target agreement with the General Education Administration for six years. It is evaluated every year by the institution and at irregular intervals by the. Following the evaluation, an evaluation report is produced, a so-called Education Mirror (*De Onderwijsspiegel*), which summarises the results of the inspection (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 133).

French Community

Child-related assessment

For children under 3 years of age, assessments of child learning outcomes are not the main focus, mainly medical data and language and psychomotor development are recorded. Generally, children (including older children) are assessed through observation, and staff have a choice about how the results are reported (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 103). Results are discussed with parents two to three times a year.

A project called *'Décollage!* ("Start!") was introduced in 2012, which aims, among other things, not to leave children unnecessarily longer in the *école maternelle*, but instead to ensure a good transition to primary school. After consultation with the Centre for Psychological, Medical and Social Services (*Centre des services psychologiques, médicaux et sociaux*), children can repeat the third year in the *école maternelle* if necessary.

Centre-based internal evaluation

Internal evaluations are carried out throughout the childcare sector and evaluation frameworks are in place. Every three years, childcare settings must evaluate the implementation of their improvement plan in order to renew their quality certificate. In pre-primary settings, the parents' board has the right to participate in the process of internal evaluation (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 128ff).

External evaluation

In the childcare sector, centres and staff are reviewed by ONE. As a rule, the focus is on the implementation of the centre-specific programme. As part of the legislation that has been in force since 2019, general assessment tools have been made available for all childcare settings. ONE has appointed coordinators to analyse and evaluate the programmes of new childcare facilities and has appointed pedagogical advisers to work on improving the quality of care and support for staff.

All childcare facilities must comply with the *Code de qualité de l'Accueil* (Quality code for childcare), as set out in the 2003 decree, draw up a programme and carry out specific educational projects within a time-span of three years. These are evaluated by *ONE* through supervisory services that are independent of the settings, and the childcare provision then receives a certificate if the quality objectives have been achieved. Since 2021, a new type of quality improvement process with operational assessments has been in place. The education projects last five years with an evaluation at mid-term and another at the end.

The quality criteria against which institutions for over 3 year-olds are evaluated are set annually by the Inspectorate and the Ministry of Education. An advisory board (*Conseil de participation*)

also evaluates the management every year with regard to the centre-specific programme, which may then need to be adjusted (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 126, 128).

German-speaking Community

Child-related assessment

Children under 3 years of age are not assessed. In kindergartens, information on the developmental status of children is collected mostly through ongoing observation. The basis of this formative evaluation are the developmental goals (see *Curricular Frameworks*). The information is recorded in writing and also communicated to the parents. Some kindergartens, especially if children have not attended the last year of kindergarten, also assess 'school readiness' (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019 105f).

Centre-based internal evaluation

ECEC settings for children under 3 years of age are not required to conduct internal or external evaluations.

The supervisory authority in charge of the external evaluation of the kindergartens also coordinates the internal evaluation. It is carried out by the educational council of the institution, which checks whether methods and results are in line with the objectives and creates a scientific basis for future development through self-evaluation. It is carried out at least every three years (Eurydice 2020). The parents' council has the right to participate in the process of internal evaluation in kindergartens (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 130).

External evaluation

The Autonomous University in the German-speaking Community is responsible for the mandatory external evaluations of kindergartens. The evaluations take place at least once every five years and result in a written report.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

In Belgium, the Act on Special and Inclusive Education (1970, amendments in 1986) states that all children should attend mainstream institutions whenever possible. Enrolment in a separate special education setting should only take place if the regular setting cannot provide the individual support needed. In 1997, all regulations from this Act were integrated into the Primary Education Act (EASNIE 2021).

Flemish Community

In the Flemish Community, the policy of equal opportunities in education (GOK) also applies, particularly for disadvantaged and ethnic minority children. For children who need more support, additional hours are granted in mainstream settings. These can decide how to use these hours (individual support, coaching specialists, etc.). Settings which include a child with special needs can also apply for additional funding (European Commission 2021, 34). In Ghent, there is also a professional network of 40 "bridge specialists" who establish contacts between institutions and families to support disadvantaged families (ibid., 62). Two recent projects aim to (1) make students in training institutions more aware of diversity, poverty and social inequalities

and (2) establish cooperation between different services that support disadvantaged children and families (ibid., 70).

In separate facilities, individual education plans are drawn up for each child. However, children must be 2½ years old and have a medical certificate before they can attend a support facility. In 2020/21, 2,406 children attended 123 special education centres (DET 2022, 13f).

French Community

The French Community is currently preparing on new legislation to replace the current system of integrating children with special educational needs (about 11,000 children) into mainstream provision. From September 2022, special centres will support regular settings at school (FWB 2022b). *Écoles maternelles* and also primary schools can facilitate the integration of children through special materials and also receive pedagogical support (Phare 2021).

Children with special needs can also receive support from specialised staff in regular settings in the childcare and family daycare services. In addition, there are support facilities, especially for physically disabled children. AViQ (*l'Agence pour une Vie de Qualité*) is responsible for the support of children with disabilities in cooperation with ONE for the Walloon Region and PHARE for Brussels. In particular, teams are to be supported (Eurydice 2022b). AViQ aims to contribute to identifying developmental difficulties as early as possible on the basis of 13 strategic objectives (AViQ 2017) and to involve all stakeholders in a transparent way, thus providing needs-based support. Through PHARE, mobile teams can support childcare centres that are approved by ONE. For children under 3, the Care Quality Code also emphasises support for with special educational needs.

At the end of 2021, there were 15 support services authorised by ONE for children aged 0 to 7 (*Services d'accueil spécialisé de la petite enfance - SASPE*) with 415 places, and one non-subsidised service with 56 places (ONE 2022, 35f).

German-speaking community

According to the 1998 Decree, every child has the right to appropriate school support and should be integrated into a regular institution if possible. An evaluation of abilities and impairments is a prerequisite for support. Children with special needs who have been diagnosed by the Centre for Special Needs Education can take part in special education measures if required. An individual support plan is drawn up for each child (Eurydice 2022c).

Children with a migration background – Children from Roma communities

In 2022, 12.8% of the total population had a non-Belgian citizenship. 8.3% came from other EU countries, 4.5% from non-EU countries (ibsa 2023b, own calculations). In the age group of children up to 5 years, 13.9% held no Belgian citizenship, roughly a half (50.8%) came from EU countries (Eurostat 2023c).

0.3% of the non-Belgian population are Roma, mostly living in Flanders and the Brussels area. The Europe-wide network REYN (Romani Early Years Network), an initiative of the International Step-by-Step Association ISSA, aims to improve access to early childhood education and care and enrolment rates of Roma children. Among other things, the Network organises workshops and seminars with all stakeholders and tries to recruit staff from the Roma population for ECEC through campaigns (REYN 2021).

Flemish Community

With support from the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the Flemish government launched a pilot project (2017-18) to improve attendance rates of migrant children from developing countries. The project relied on network cooperation between institutions, migrant organisations and municipalities, in addition to parental involvement, which improved relations between all stakeholders (European Commission 2021, 119f).

French Community

Since 2012, a resolution in the French Community has aimed to optimise the integration of immigrant children aged 2½ to 18. Language problems are to be improved with the help of special language programmes. Children with an immigrant background or with a different first language may receive support in preparatory groups (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 113) and also in their mother tongue (ibid, 116). In 2018/19, new guidelines were issued recommending that staff also use books and songs in their languages for under 3 year-olds and encourage parents to speak to their children in their mother tongue so that they can form their cultural identity (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 117).

German-speaking Community

On 1st January 2023, 22% of the population of the German-speaking Community held a non-Belgian citizenship, 81% of them came from other EU countries (the majority from Germany), 19% from non-EU countries (Statistik-Portal der Deutschen Gemeinschaft 2023b).

Children of refugees or asylum seekers or children of non-Belgian origin between the ages of 3 and 18 learn the language in the first two years of kindergarten using the immersion principle. Funding for language courses is only provided for children in the year before they start school.

Parental leave arrangements[4]

Maternity leave (*Moederschapsverlof, congé de maternité, Mutterschutz*):
For employees and the unemployed, maternity leave is 15 weeks, of which up to six weeks can be taken before the birth. One week before and nine weeks after the birth are compulsory. Employees in the private sector receive 82% of their salary in the first month, then 75% for the following weeks - with a cap of €170.69 per day. Public sector employees continue to receive their full salary. This is financed by the Federal Health Insurance, i.e. by employees and employers.

Birth leave (*Geboorteverlof / Congé de naissance, Geburtsurlaub*):
Employees are entitled to 20 working days, three of which are compulsory and fully paid; the other seven are compensated at 82% of salary (capped at €170.69 per day). These days can be taken in the first four months after birth.

Parental leave (*Ouderschapsverlof, congé parental, Elternzeit*):
Each parent can take four months of parental leave, which is remunerated with €978.24 net per month. Parental leave can be taken very flexibly, either full time or part time (50% over eight months, 20% over 20 months or 10% over 40 months). In total, parental leave can be taken until the child's 12th birthday and also by both parents at the same time.

[4] The brief summary in this section is based on the country note for Belgium by Bernard Fusulier and Dimitri Mortelmans in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

In 2021, 51,366 fathers took four or more days of paternity leave, an average of 13.63 days. In 2022, 86,310 persons made use of parental leave (79,008 in 2021). Most people were mothers (55,908 in 2022 compared to 38,053 in 2010), but the proportion of fathers also increased from 13,891 in 2010 to 30,402 in 2022. Part-time options are most preferred by fathers, with only 10% using full-time parental leave compared to 17% of mothers.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Belgium

Country expert assessment by

Florence Pirard, Brecht Peleman, Nima Sharmahd, Catherine Reinertz** and **Katrien Van Laere

Several challenges characterise the Belgian ECEC system. A crucial one is the abrupt and unequal transition to pre-primary school (2½–5 years), based on a **misalignment between the concepts of 'care' and 'education'**. This makes the start of pre-primary schooling hard for all children, but especially for the ones who have not attended childcare (who have a higher chance of being in a societally vulnerable position) and who are considered less 'ready for school'. It needs to be noted that smooth transitions are included as a quality criterion in the Flemish toddler participation policy (policies to increase the enrolment and attendance in pre-primary schools) and are a priority of the French Community government. Currently, experimental practices are being developed in Flanders to work on smooth transitions and the concept/approach of educare to challenge this split system. In the French Community, an official charta is to support the implementation of transitional practices and familiarisation procedures by those involved at the start of pre-primary school. In 2022, *ONE* published a document aimed at clarifying the notion of educare (Genette 2022), which is little known on the ground.

The implementation of an educare approach is also hindered by **challenging adult-child ratios** both in both childcare and pre-primary education. In Flanders, the adult-child ratio in childcare is 1:8 (without additional rules that take into account, for example, the age of the children and group size). No official ratio is specified for pre-primary schools; however, the average ratio is around 1:24. In the French Community the adult-child ratio is 1:7 in the childcare services but as in Flanders, there is no official required ratio for pre-primary classrooms. In 2018, one third of the school professionals participating in a survey of a representative sample of schools working with the youngest children said that they had no more than 20 2½–3 year-olds in their class, whereas two thirds had at least 21; a quarter of the professionals said they had more than 30 children in their class (Housen and Royen 2019). Attention also needs to be paid to the ratio in out-of-school childcare settings with a proposal to revise the calculation of childcare standards for 2½ to 3 year-olds.

The **staff shortage issue** makes it more difficult to challenge the large number of children assigned to one professional. Many ECEC centres have vacancies for Pre-primary Teachers and Childcare Workers, intensified during the COVID-19 crisis. Never before was the impact of staff shortage so problematic in terms of availability and quality of ECEC, especially in Flanders and in Brussels according to official statistics. The shortage is largely related to the challenging working conditions of ECEC professionals (e.g. salary, lack of child-free hours, problematic adult-child ratios). Recent Master's thesis research at the University of Ghent showed that one in three newly graduated Childcare Workers in Flanders say they do not wish to work in the sector.

In addition, the **qualification level of ECEC professionals** represents a challenge. Childcare Workers in Belgium hold a low initial qualification compared to other EU countries. At the same time, there is a lack of resources and culture to create good quality continuing professional development paths for ECEC professionals. Reforms are currently underway in the French Community.

For Flanders, these challenges are put under additional pressure by the Flemish Government's limited financial investment in childcare.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Belgium was 11,617,623. A steady increase can be observed since the beginning of the century (2000:10,239,085; 2010: 10,839,905; 2020: 11,522,440) (Eurostat 2023a).

For the individual Communities, national statistics give the following data:

Table 10

Belgium: Population development between 2000-2022

	2000	2010	2020	2022
Brussels Capital Region	959.318	1.089.538	1.218.255	1,222,637
Flanders Region	5.940.251	6.251.983	6.629.143	6,698,876
Walloon Region	3.339.516	3.498.384	3.645.243	3,662,495
Belgium, total	**10.239.085**	**10.839.905**	**11.492.641**	**11,584,008**

Source: ibsa 2023a

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total birth rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total birth rate among the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.60, Belgium is slightly above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[5].

Children under 6 years of age

Table 11

Belgium: Number of children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year-olds	118,483
1 year-olds	115,549
2 year-olds	119,365

[5] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Age	Number of children
3 year-olds	121,146
4 year-olds	122,925
5 year-olds	125,935
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**723,403**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

The proportion of children under 3 years of age in the total population was 3.0% in 2022, and that of children under 6 years of age was 6.2%. These shares were well above the EU average in 2000, though they fell slightly during the last two decades (see *Table 12*).

Table 12

Belgium: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population from 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Belgium/EU	Under 3 year- olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Belgium	3.4	3.4	6.8
	Ø EU15[6]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Belgium	3.3	3.3	6.6
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Belgium	3.4	3.5	6.9
	Ø EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Belgium	3.0	3.2	6.2
	Ø EU27	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations, deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under 6 years of age

More than three quarters (78.8%) of households with children under 6 were couple households in 2022. Households with single parents accounted for 5.6% - as a rule, these are single mothers. The proportion of single fathers is very low at 0.5% in total.

Table 13

Belgium: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Total households, in %*
All households	1,145,300	
Couple households	902,700	78.8
Other household type	178,000	15.5
Single households, total	64,600	5.6
Single households, women	58,900	5.1
Single households, men	5,700	0.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e, *Own calculation

[6] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Belgium, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 74.2% and for women 66.8% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 68.7% of women and 86.4% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers thus were slightly below the EU-average (87.2%) and those of mothers were above the EU-average (63.6%) (Eurostat 2023e).

Table 14a

Belgium: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Belgium	68,7	87,5
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[7]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Belgium	68.7	86.4
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[8]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 14b:*

Table 14b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023j

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[7] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[9]

In 2022, 18.1% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was below the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 18.7% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 3.8% of children under 6 and 2.3% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023h, i).

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[9] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

BULGARIA

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

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1. ECEC governance in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, early childhood education and care is organised as a split system: Pre-primary education is regulated by the Ministry of Education and Science (*Ministerstvo na obrazovanieto i naukata*) and takes place in kindergartens where children aged 2/3 up to 7 years "receive care, upbringing, socialisation and education" (Law on Preschool and School Education, Art. 24). Traditionally, ECEC settings for children under 3 years of age are regulated by the Ministry of Health. Regional and local authorities provide maintenance of the buildings and guarantee compliance with health and safety regulations. Currently there are policy discussions taking place regarding the integration of the two sectors into a unified ECEC system.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Table 1 gives an overview of the staff working directly with children and categorises the core practitioners (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at end of this section).

Table 1

Bulgaria: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Education sector				
Pre-primary / Kindergarten Teacher *Detski uchitel* *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional ***or*** Pre-primary and	*Detska gradina* **Kindergarten** (2)3 to 6/7 year-olds[1] *Podgotvitelna grupa/klas 5-6-godishni* **Transition group** in kindergarten or **Transition class** in primary school	Core practitioner with group responsibility Centre head/ Kindergarten principal	0–6/7 years or 3–11 years	Bachelor, 4 years ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6 *Occasionally:* Professional Bachelor, 3 years ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In Bulgaria the relevant formats are **0–3** and **3–6/7**, since children start school when they are 7 years old.

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Primary Education Professional	5 to 6 year-olds *Podgotvitelna grupa/klas 6-7-godishni* **Transition group** in kindergarten or **Transition class** in primary school 6–7 year-olds			ISCED 2011: 6
Teacher's Assistant *Pomoshtnik-vazpitatel*	*Detska gradina* **Kindergarten** (2)3–6/7 year-olds *Podgotvitelna grupa* *5-6-godishni* **Transition group** in kindergarten 5–6 year-olds *Podgotvitelna grupa* *6-7-godischni* **Transition group** in kindergarten 6–7 year-olds	Non-qualified co-worker	n/a[2]	No required qualifica-tion
Music Teacher *Muzikalen pedagog*	*Detska gradina,* **Kindergarten** (2)3–6/7 year-olds *Podgotvitelna grupa* **Transition group** in kindergarten *5-6-godishni* 5 to 6 year-olds *Podgotvitelna grupa* *6-7-godishni* **Transition group** in kindergarten 6 to 7 year-olds	Directly inter-acts with chil-dren two or three times a week, organ-ising activities and working towards goals in the educa-tional area of music; often is attached as a concurrent member of the regular staff in two kindergar-tens.	3–19 years	Bachelor, 4 years ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Childcare sector				
Nursery Teacher	*Detska yasla* **Crèche/nursery**	Appointed to several	0–6/7 years	Bachelor, 4 years

[2] n/a = not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Pedagog na detska yasla *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	**Infant/toddler group** 3 months–2/3 years	nursery groups; re-sponsibilities include ar-ranging, plan-ning and managing the educational activities for the children.		ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Medical Nurse *Medicinska sestra* *Profile:* Social Care/Health Care Professional	*Detska yasla* **Crèche/nursery Infant/toddler centre** 3 months–2/3 years *Yasleni grupi kym detska gradina* **Infant-toddler groups in kinder-garten** 3 months–2/3 years *Domove za medico-socialni grizhi za detsa* **Health and social care home** 3 months–2/3 years	Core practi-tioner with group respon-sibility	All ages	Bachelor, 4 years ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6

In most **kindergartens** a Children's Nurse is on the premises all day; a Paediatrician and Speech Therapist pay weekly visits. The centre director (Principal) can work directly with the children if staff members are absent for one reason or another; at the same time, according to Directive № 4 (2017), the principal is required to work a minimum of 72 hours per year with children. Principals have the same initial professional education as the group leaders, but are required to complete an additional course in management and leadership issues. Non-qualified Assistants are present in the room; they do not usually work directly with the children, but are expected mainly to perform custodial tasks such as clearing up and cleaning the room or distributing meals (Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010, 59).

Since budgets now come under the responsibility of the kindergarten principals, some, particu-larly those in larger cities, manage to fund a full-time position for specialist support staff, e.g. Speech Therapists, Psychologists, Special Pedagogues, even Physical Education Teachers (most often men), who work on site on a regular basis, and are on the kindergarten payroll.

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

The full-time position of **Municipal Kindergarten Principal** *(Direktor na obshtinska detska gradina)* is listed in the National Classification of Professions and Occupations (2011). Hierarchically, it is under the supervision of the Municipal Directorate of Education. As per Directive № 15 (2019), the main functions of the Kindergarten Principal are to apply state policy in the area of preschool and primary school education, to manage and bear responsibility for the entirety of the institution's activities, to plan, organise, control and bear responsibility for the educational process, as well as the acquisition of key competencies by the children, among others.

According to Directive № 15 (2019), the requirements and qualifications for the position of Kindergarten Principal are:

Minimum requirements: Bachelor's or Master's degree in Education; 5 years of professional teaching experience

Additional requirements: Professional area: Pedagogical Sciences; professional qualification as "Educator" or "Preschool Teacher"

To fulfil the responsibilities of the position, the Kindergarten Principal must possess strategic, leadership and managerial competences, be results-oriented and competent in negotiation and motivation. The Principal must be able to work in a team, but also to be client-focused. Finally, a degree of digital competence is required.

The Principal is responsible for the following areas:

- Administration and management
- Organisation, coordination and control
- Education and upbringing
- Health and sanitation
- Social and humanitarian activities
- Financial matters.

The Kindergarten Principal is also the Chairman of the Educational Council and is responsible for the implementation of its decisions.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Kindergartens sometimes work on micro-projects with various themes that are assigned to one or more teachers and staff as part of their continuing education, but this is considered part of the usual work responsibilities and is not rewarded with additional pay.

With regard to the practical training of students in a real educational environment, universities have contractual agreements with specially selected nurseries, kindergartens and teach-

ers/mentors. Most of the mentoring/supervising staff in partnership institutions are compensated with symbolic sums – according to the regulations of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts, they may work no more than 16 hours per month on mentorship tasks and they are paid a symbolic amount (around 4 EUR per hour). However, there are also kindergartens where the supervision of students takes place on a voluntary basis (i.e. without pay).

The contracted ECEC mentors are highly-qualified pedagogues with experience in activities related to the practical application of innovations and the creation and practical testing of innovative practices. Most of them also have a degree for conducting in-service training (according to the Bulgarian national five-level qualification scale), most often attained in the Department of Information and In-Service Training of Teachers or the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts of the Sofia University, or in other universities. Some of the ECEC mentors have attained the highest professional qualification level, which involves the promotion of innovations introduced by the teacher through publications (Engels-Kritidis 2020a).

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

The positions of **Senior Teacher** *(Starshi uchitel)* and **Head Teacher** *(Glaven uchitel)* are assigned to Kindergarten Teachers who fulfil the necessary requirements. In addition to the standard teacher functions, the Senior Teacher and the Head Teacher are also responsible for (Directive № 15, 2019):

- Planning, organising and reporting on the staff qualifications
- Analysing staff qualification activities
- Coordinating the participation in professional communities, the exchange of good pedagogical practices, including teaching activities for the acquisition of key competences by children
- Assisting newly appointed teachers and trainee teachers in cases where they have been appointed as mentors
- Methodological support – Senior Teachers support other teachers, while the Head Teacher supports Senior Teachers
- Development of kindergarten curricula, as well as innovative and original educational programmes.

According to Directive № 15 (2019), the requirements for the positions of Senior Teacher and Head Teacher are the following:

Senior Teacher	Head Teacher
– 10 years of professional experience – A post as "Teacher"* The 5th or 4th Professional Qualification Level – At least 3 qualification credits during the last attestation period – An assessment of no less than "meets expectations" during the most recent performance/attestation review.	– Master's degree in Education – A post as "Senior Teacher" – The 3rd, 2nd, or 1st Professional Qualification Level – At least 3 qualification credits during the last attestation period – An assessment of "exceptional performance" during the most recent performance/attestation review.

**** Note:** If the Teacher has attained a Professional Qualification Level higher than 4th, has attained more than the minimum of 3 qualification credits and has been evaluated as "exceeds expectations" or "exceptional performance" during the latest review, the Teacher can be assigned as a Senior Teacher regardless of the length of professional experience*

2.5 Specialist support staff

Directive № 15 (2019) defines the specialist teacher position of **Resource Teacher** *(Resursen uchitel).* In addition to the standard teacher duties, the Resource Teacher is responsible for organising or adapting the educational environment for children with special educational needs (SEN), designing and implementing educational activities aimed at children with SEN, assisting teachers and parents in identifying individual children's needs and progress, as well as other activities and responsibilities related to children with SEN.

Additionally, kindergartens can engage the services of part-time specialist teachers for specific activities, e.g. Speech Therapists, Psychologists, Special Pedagogues, Dance/choreography Teachers, Sports Instructors, Foreign Language Teachers, etc. These teachers are most often in addition to the standard curriculum and their fees are covered by additional payments by the children's parents.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Traditionally, Kindergarten Teachers in Bulgaria have always been highly qualified. As far back as 2003/2004, according to Kusheva et al. (2006), looking at the entire teacher workforce in the education system, including early childhood education, teachers with higher education accounted for about 90%.

The data on gender ratios in pre-primary education show that the overwhelming majority of staff is female. Even though each year several men graduate as Pre-primary Teachers with Foreign Language or as Pre-primary and Primary School Teachers, most of them do not take up work in this job mainly because of the low remuneration and the traditional feminisation of the profession. Although there are no statistical data that show the gender distribution of Pre-primary Teachers in Bulgaria, recent observations and some (few) publications show that, during recent years (perhaps due to the significant increase in teachers' salaries) there have been a number of men working in kindergartens, mainly (but not only) in private settings. For example, according to Omaynikova (2022) in Kindergarten № 29 in Sofia there are two male Kindergarten Teachers and one male Music teacher, while in "Detelina" Kindergarten in the city of Vidin there was a male Kindergarten Teacher as far back as 2015 (BNR 2015). Additionally, in kindergartens that manage to ensure the relevant positions and the budget for them, there are male Physical Education Teachers (Uchiteli.bg 2015).

While over half of Kindergarten Teachers were over 50 years old in 2015 (Kusheva et al. 2006), more recent NSI data for 2022/2023 (see *Table 2)* show a clear tendency of reversal in this trend. The percentage of Pre-primary Teachers over 50 has dropped to 37.7% while the second-largest group (32.2%) are teachers aged 25-39 years old. This can be attributed to the significant increase in teachers' salaries (see *Table 7)*, as well as increased interest from graduates of other fields to acquire the qualification of Pre-primary Teacher (as a Master's degree) and pursue a career in the early childhood education system.

Table 2
Bulgaria*:* Age distribution of teachers in kindergartens during 2022/2023 school year

Age group	Number of teachers	Totals/age groups	Percentage
Under 25 years	556	6,366	32.2
25-29 years	1,256		
30-34 years	2,057		
35-39 years	2,497		
40-44 years	2,982	5,939	30.1
45-49 years	2,957		
50-54 years	2,455	7,442	37.7
55-59 years	2,650		
60 years and older	2,337		
Total number of teachers	19,747		

Source: NSI 2023a

There are no recent national statistics about the overall composition of the ECEC workforce in Bulgaria that show the proportion of qualifications, gender or ethnicity.

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

The teaching positions in **pre-primary education** in Bulgaria are usually held by personnel who have completed the traditional university degree of *Pre-school Pedagogy* (a four-year university programme, started in 1984 and available until 1996), as well as one of the more recent four-year degree programmes of *Pre-school Pedagogy with a Foreign Language* and *Pre-school and Primary School Pedagogy* (available since 1996). The first of the new degrees reflects the current need for qualified Pre-primary Teachers who, in addition to the mainstream pedagogical work, are proficient in early foreign language teaching. Graduates of this programme are eligible to teach preschool children in state, private, specialised and profiled children's institutions, as well as to conduct foreign language teaching in English, German, French, Spanish, Italian or Russian (currently only English).

The basic premise of the second degree, the 'hybrid' specialisation in *Pre-school and Primary School Pedagogy,* is the idea of facilitating the transition of children from kindergarten to primary school by providing teaching professionals with a broad spectrum of competence and who are well-acquainted with the specifics of working with children of both preschool and primary school age. Graduates of the programme can organise and conduct instructional, educational, methodological, organisational-managerial, expert, advising, diagnostic-prognostic and cultural activities in the educational system, in administrative-managerial and cultural institutions, as well as in social and sport organisations for children of pre-school and primary school age.

According to the entry requirements for prospective Pre-primary and Primary School Teachers in the Candidate Student's Handbook of the Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski for 2022/2023 (Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski 2022a), there is an entrance exam in one of the following subjects, chosen by the candidate student: Bulgarian Language and Literature, Bulgarian History,

Geography, Philosophy, English, German, French, Spanish, Italian or Russian Language. For enrolling in a programme of *Pre-Primary Education with a Foreign Language*, the entrance exam is in English, German, French, Spanish, Italian or Russian. For both specialisms, the Bulgarian Language and Literature marks from the high school diploma also count towards each candidate's overall score.

The university study programme ends with written state exams. Students of *Pre-school Pedagogy with a Foreign Language* are additionally tested on the respective foreign language, while the students of the hybrid *Pre-school and Primary School Pedagogy* specialisation are tested in a state exam on a pooled questionnaire – one part on preschool education and second part on primary education.

After completing the four-year Bachelor's degree, students can continue for two full-time semesters (one year) or three part-time semesters for a Master's degree programme in the field of pre-primary education or in another area. Furthermore, a three-year full-time or a four year part-time course of doctoral studies for a PhD degree in pre-primary education is available.

It is important to note that there are still two Pedagogical Colleges in Bulgaria where, after three years (six semesters) of study, students can be awarded the acknowledged educational degree of Professional Bachelor in Pre-school Education with a Foreign Language (only English).

One is the Pedagogical College in Dobrich, affiliated to the University of Shumen; the other one is the Pedagogical College in Pleven, affiliated to the University of Veliko Turnovo. According to a recent ministerial decision (Decision № 441 dd. 22 June 2023), 90 students will be accepted in 2023/2024 for the Professional Bachelor degree in the field of Pedagogy of the Pedagogical College in Dobrich and 70 students in Pleven; however, the numbers for both colleges include students from three pedagogical specialties, so it can be assumed that around one third of them will be enrolled in Pre-school Pedagogy with English Language. Almost all graduates of these colleges continue in a Master's degree programme specifically created for these cases.

In several Bulgarian universities there are special curriculum plans for the Master's degree programme in preschool education (four semesters) for those who have graduated from a college and have a "Professional Bachelor" degree and the qualification of Pre-school Pedagogy. One of the beneficial ideas supporting the existence of such colleges is that they allow the respective universities to reach people from smaller towns and also increase their enrolment quotas.

The low percentage of Professional Bachelor degree holders among the teachers in the general field of pedagogy in Bulgaria can be seen in the data on tertiary education graduates in 2022 (NSI 2023b). For the general sector "Education", 139 people graduated with a Professional Bachelor's degree; 2,976 with a Bachelor's degree; 4,497 with a Master's degree and 78 with a Doctoral degree (unfortunately there is no separate statistics for Kindergarten Teachers).

Teachers' Assistants who work in kindergartens graduate from high school (ISCED 3). They do not receive specific training. There is one exception: graduates of the 135th High School 'Jan Amos Comenius' in Sofia gain a special qualification. This is due to the vocational education/training with a 'pedagogical profile' that its students have been receiving since the 1980s during the four years following their eighth class; since 2012, those leaving school receive a certificate as *Assistant Educator in Children's Upbringing and Education*.

There are also various courses offered specifically for Teachers' Assistants. Some of the public and private centres for vocational education organise qualification courses in this area.

Table 3
Bulgaria: Pre-primary / Kindergarten Teacher

Job title in Bulgarian: *Detski uchitel* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional (specialist focus 0–7 years) ***or*** Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: Higher school leaving certificate, university entrance exam
Professional studies: Since 1996: 4-year degree programme *Pre-school Pedagogy with a Foreign Language* or *Pre-primary and Primary School Pedagogy*; a subsequent 1-year Master's study is possible.
Award: State exam**,** Bachelor (= official requirement for core pedagogues in kindergarten); although optional, it is common for Kindergarten Teachers to have a Master's degree (ISCED/EQF level 7).
ECTS credits: 240 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011**: 6
Main ECEC workplace: Kindergarten (2/3–6/7 years), transitions groups in kindergarten or primary schools (5–6 and 6–7 years), crèche, nursery, infant/toddler centre (3 months to 3 years)

Table 4
Bulgaria: Nursery Teacher

Job title in Bulgarian: *Pedagog na detska yasla* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional (specialist focus 0–7 years) ***or*** Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: Higher school leaving certificate, university entrance exam
Professional studies: Since 1996: 4-year degree programme Preschool Pedagogy with a Foreign Language or Pre-primary and Primary School Pedagogy; a subsequent 1-year Master's study is possible.
Award: State exam**,** Bachelor (=official requirement for core practitioners in kindergarten); although optional, it is common for Nursery Teachers to have a Master's degree (ISCED/EQF level 7).
ECTS credits: 240 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6
Main ECEC workplace: Kindergarten (2/3–6/7 years), transitions groups in kindergarten or primary schools (5–6 and 6–7 years), crèche, nursery, infant/toddler centre (3 months to 3 years)

Table 5
Bulgaria: Medical Nurse

Job title in Bulgarian: *Medicinska sestra* **Profile**: Social/Health Care Professional
Entry requirements: Higher school leaving certificate, university entrance exam
Professional studies: 4 years at a university/faculty specialising in medical studies
Award: Bachelor
ECTS credits: 240 **EQF Level**: 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6
Main ECEC workplace: Crèche, nursery, infant/toddler centre (3 month to 3 years), nursery groups in kindergarten (3 month to 3 years), health and social care homes (3 month to 3 years)

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Kindergarten Teacher (*Detski uchitel*)

Competence specifications

According to the Sofia University Study Curriculum for Pre-school Pedagogy with a Foreign Language specialty (Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, 2021b), effective as of the 2021/2022 academic year, the students are required to attain the following professional competences:

- Application of acquired knowledge and abilities in pedagogical practice
- Utilisation of creative approaches during the realisation of the educational aspects in the curricula for each respective age
- Utilisation of modern and innovative formats and methods for interaction and education
- Ability to transfer knowledge and techniques, to integrate current theoretical achievements in practice
- Ability to communicate, to manage and overcome conflict, and to develop and manage pedagogically-relevant projects
- Ability to create conditions and prerequisites for learning (definition of goals, process organisation, execution, self-control and self-assessment)
- Ability to select approaches, forms of organisation, methods, equipment and pedagogical activities for educational work as appropriate for specific circumstances
- Ability to stimulate and assist children with cognitive activities, intellectual creativity, a positive attitude to learning, research, discovery and self-knowledge of the world
- Ability to help children develop their national, social, ethnic, religious, etc. identity, their self-esteem, their self-respect and respect towards others, tolerance
- Development of individual qualities such as tolerance, outgoing character, self-control, empathy, ability for taking initiative, creativity, etc. which are necessary for the conduct of effective educational and social interactions.

Curricular areas

The basic requirements for attaining the professional qualification of 'Teacher' (including 'Pre-primary/Kindergarten Teacher') are defined in the government Directive for State Requirements for Attainment of the Professional Qualification of "Teacher", dated 11.11.2016 and last updated on 05.02.2021.

The directive stipulates that the theoretical preparation should include mandatory, elective mandatory and elective courses (art. 5), and defines the minimum of mandatory academic courses (art. 6 and Appendix № 5, amended in 2021) and their minimum duration in academic hours, as follows:

Table 6

Bulgaria: Mandatory courses for qualifying as a Pre-primary/Kindergarten Teacher:

	Academic course	Minimum duration in academic hours
1	Pedagogy	60 (min. 30 hours of lectures)
2	Main specialisation course: preschool pedagogy	45 (min. 15 hours of lectures)
3	Psychology	60 (min. 30 hours of lectures)
4	Didactics/tuition methodology	120 (min. 30 hours of lectures)
5	Inclusive education	30
6	Information and communication technology in education; working in a digital environment	30

According to the Directive (articles 9-12), "the practical preparation is conducted in kindergartens and schools that are part of the system for pre-school and school education and is realized in the following formats of tuition with a minimum duration in academic hours":

1. *Observational lesson* (observing and analysing pedagogical situations in kindergartens and schools, conducted under the direct supervision of a university lecturer): 30 hours
2. *Ongoing pedagogical practice* (practicum preparation through observing and conducting pedagogical situations in kindergartens and schools in collaboration with a mentor-teacher under the supervision of a university lecturer): 60 hours
3. *Internship practice* ("independent participation of the students in the educational process via realisation of various kinds of pedagogical activities in kindergartens and schools, conducted under the supervision of a mentor-teacher and an tutor from the higher-education institution"): 90 hours.

Each Bulgarian university which has a pedagogical faculty and is accredited to train students in the field of Pre-school Pedagogy develops its own curriculum, based on the aforementioned minimum requirements.

As an example, according to the 2021/2022 curriculum of the Faculty of Primary and Pre-school Education of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, the study programme *Pre-school and Primary School Pedagogy,* which qualifies for work with 3- to 11-year olds in kindergartens and primary schools, comprises 2,850 academic hours in 58 curricular areas and students are awarded 240 ECTS credits on completion (Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski 2021a). In the same university, the other study programme for work in kindergartens – *Pre-school Pedagogy with a Foreign Language* – comprises 2,475 hours of study, 45 curricular areas and 240 ECTS credits. Both study programmes include subjects such as Basics of Education; Didactics; History of Pedagogy and Bulgarian Education; Pedagogical Psychology; Pre-school Pedagogy; Pedagogy of Early Childhood (0-3 years); Pedagogy of Playing Games in Early Childhood; Pedagogical Diagnosis; Basics of Primary School Education; Children's Literature; Pedagogy of Language Use and Speech Development; Pedagogy of Child-Environment Interaction; Pedagogy of Mathematics; Pedagogy of Music; Pedagogy of Art; Pedagogy of Movement. The theoretical studies end with written state exams. Both study routes lead to a Bachelor's degree.

The curriculum of the study route *Pre-school Education with a Foreign Language* is organised into four content areas: (1) theoretical foundations; (2) psychology and pedagogy; (3) practical application/methods; (4) optional subjects. Students are additionally tested on the respective foreign language (only English currently; German, French, Spanish, Italian, and Russian used to be options in the past); the foreign language component comprises 360 hours of auditorium study.

Most of the curricular areas mentioned above include separate hours for practical training, but parallel to this there is a main workplace-based cycle, focusing on the development of kindergarten teachers' practical skills (see *chapter 5*). For the aforementioned courses, especially for the specific methodological ones, a common theoretical background has been created that enables students to gain a more holistic understanding of the interconnections between theoretical knowledge and didactic strategies, thus helping them to develop professional competences (Engels-Kritidis, Kikušová, and Osaďan 2013).

Nursery Teacher (*Pedagog na detska yasla*)

Competence specifications and curricular areas required for prospective Nursery Teachers are exactly the same as those for Kindergarten Teachers. Graduates of the two previously mentioned Bachelor's degree programmes can also work as Nursery Teachers.

Medical Nurse (*Medicinska sestra*)

Competence specifications

According to the Directive for Unified State Requirements for the Attainment of Higher Education in the specialisms of 'Medical Nurse' and 'Midwife Nurse' at Bachelor level (introduced in 2005, with amendments and additions in 2006 and 2010), the study programme provides: (1) Appropriate knowledge of disciplines that are the basis of nursing, including adequate knowledge of the human organism, the psychological functions and the behaviour of healthy and diseased people, as well as the human social environment; (2) Adequate knowledge of the essence and the ethics of the profession and the general principles connected with health and nursing; (3) Appropriate practical clinical experience; (4) Ability to participate in the practical tuition of health personnel and work experience with this personnel; (5) Experience in collaboration with other medical specialists.

Curricular areas

Candidate students are required to have completed secondary education and to pass a written examination, determined by the higher education institute. The study programme for a Bachelor's degree in Medical Nursing takes four academic years (eight semesters) to complete and comprises 4,600 academic hours. Tuition includes theoretical and practical preparation. The theoretical preparation is conducted via mandatory, elective mandatory and elective courses delivered as lectures, seminars and practical exercises with a total duration of at least six semesters. The practical component of IPE takes place through educational (clinical) practice and internship. The mandatory courses (and their minimum duration in academic hours) more closely associated with the nurses' work in nurseries and infant-toddler centres include the following: Practical Basis of Nursing (660 hours); Nursing in Paediatrics (45 hours); Nursing of Women in Labour and Newborns (30 hours); Nursing of Children and Adults with Disabilities (60 hours); Hygiene and Ecology (30 hours); Therapeutic Feeding and Nutrition (15 hours); Pathology – Knowledge of Diseases (405 hours); Infectious Diseases and Epidemiology (30 hours); Paediatrics and Neonatology (45 hours); Ear, Nose and Throat Diseases (15 hours); Health Promotion (15 hours); Children's Pedagogy and Children's Psychology (30 hours); Medical Safety in Emergency Situations (30 hours); Principles and Methodology of Teaching (45 hours), etc. The ratio between theory-based and practice-based IPE is determined by the higher education institution, but the proportion of academic hours allocated to practical experience in work placements should be no less than 50% of the total hours.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

The study route *Pre-school and Primary School Pedagogy* is available on a full-time and a part-time basis. Part-time studies are for those in employment while studying. Having in mind the low salaries in the educational sector, some students work in completely different areas, but a large number work as Teachers' Assistants in kindergartens or as part-time Pre-primary Teachers until they take their final exams.

Candidates who have completed a Bachelor programme in another humanitarian discipline are also given the opportunity to take an extended two-year (four semesters) Master's programme in order to acquire the qualification for working as a Pre-primary Teacher (see Sofia University

St. Kliment Ohridski 2022b). An admission score is assessed, comprising average results from state examinations and average results from semester examinations during their Bachelor's degree course; the overall entry requirement is a score of at least 7.00. The interest in this Master's programme is very high – during recent years, each autumn more than a hundred people apply and enter this programme. Since the 2015/2016 academic year, a new curriculum has been approved by Sofia University; for candidates with a Bachelor's degree with a pedagogical qualification (regardless of the specific area), a shorter two-semester (instead of four) course of study has been launched. In order to put the scale of interest in these programmes into perspective, it should be mentioned that in the 2021/2022 academic year, 167 people enrolled for the regular four-semester programme, while 128 entered the Master's degree programme for candidates with a pedagogical qualification (Sofia University St. Kliment Ohrdski 2021c). The tendency for an increased interest by graduates of other areas in attaining the qualification of preschool teacher has continued throughout the last 6 academic years, during which the courses of these two Master degree programs comprise of over 100 people each.

On the other hand, Bachelor's degree students who graduated with the *Pre-school and Primary School* or the *Pre-school Education with a Foreign Language* specialisms can continue their Master's degree in a different area, giving them an additional pedagogical qualification in order to expand their expertise and field of competence, e.g. a Master's degree in Speech Therapy, in Special Education, in the Pedagogy of the Aesthetics of Mass Communication and others.

The field-based studies component of IPE accentuates a form of training that allows Pre-primary Teachers to adapt to the constantly changing educational needs of children. In this respect, increasing the number and quality of exchange programmes for students and teachers-as-mentors will be essential for ensuring that they are always up-to-date with good pedagogical practices developed by other European countries and worldwide.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Pre-primary / Kindergarten Teachers (*Detski uchitel*)

The practical element of the study route *Pre-school and Primary School* also entails work placements of 780 hours out of a total of 2,850 hours, i.e. comprises over 27% of the overall study programme. The number of hours spent in kindergarten or school increases per semester, and the final, eighth semester comprises a practical placement only, split equally between a kindergarten and a primary school. Each part ends with a state exam, and the final mark is an average of both separate marks – one for the kindergarten and another for the primary school. In the study route *Pre-school Education with a Foreign Language* the curriculum comprises 780 hours in practical placements out of a total of 2,475 hours, i.e. approx. 31%. The eighth semester is spent entirely in a kindergarten placement.

Students need to be able to transfer their acquired theoretical knowledge into the kindergarten's educational context. The whole system of field-based studies ensures that students gradually move from observation and analysis of teaching situations e.g. by carrying out small projects and research studies (during the first several semesters of their study), to enacting pedagogical situations (during the following semesters, usually in pairs) and finally, during the seventh and eighth semesters, to independent performance in everyday pedagogical conditions (Roussinova and Angelov 2008).

The practical element of initial professional education is regulated in the Directive for State Requirements for Attainment of the Professional Qualification of "Teacher". For the placements in a real-life educational environment, universities have contractual agreements with specially selected nurseries, kindergartens and teachers/mentors. The mentoring/supervising staff in partnership institutions receive a symbolic monetary compensation. There are also kindergartens with ECEC mentors who work in placement settings on a voluntary basis, subject to a special contract.

The contracted teacher trainers/mentors are highly-qualified pedagogues with experience in activities related to the development, application and evaluation of innovative practices. Most of them have also attained a qualification level (according to the Bulgarian national five-level qualification scale – see also *Chapter **6***), most often acquired through courses at the Department of Information and In-Service Training of Teachers or the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts of Sofia University, or at other universities. Some of the teacher trainers/mentors have attained the highest professional qualification level, which involves the presentation of innovations introduced by the teacher through publications.

The organisation, realisation and evaluation of field-based studies is part of the overall evaluation of each study programme by the relevant university tutor. These depend on conditions defined by each particular university tutor for his/her subject.

The overall aim for all types of field-based studies is for the student to obtain a comprehensive view of the educational process, to gain professional and organisational competences connected with the role of the teacher, as well as competencies related to the realisation of educational activities in kindergartens.

The student has the chance to understand and verify the realisation of modern didactic strategies in a real-life educational context and thus to acquire key competencies such as: implementing educational projects at the level of kindergarten; orienting himself/herself in the programme systems for pedagogical interaction of kindergartens; realising general methods of education and general didactic of teaching in kindergarten; diagnosing the reasons for children's problems and preparing appropriate pedagogical intervention to resolve them; communicating his/her knowledge with specialist educational and psychological services; preparing methodically educational sessions related to particular educational content (Engels-Kritidis, Kikušová, and Osaďan 2013).

As a form of student self-evaluation and also external evaluation, students are required to prepare a portfolio – a summary of necessary documents which give evidence of their educational activities. At Sofia University, this is called a *pedagogical diary*. This diary (or *portfolio*) has to contain all proposed and realised curricular projects, didactical approaches and other documents, including self-assessment by the student. The content of each project and the relevant preparations have to be discussed with the tutors responsible for the teaching of didactics in the relevant courses.

In most universities in Bulgaria, some of the students win competitions for participation in student exchange programmes such as Erasmus+, DAAD, etc. They spend various periods of time (usually a semester) in another European country mainly for improvement and exchange of knowledge and skills in the field of practical training.

The project *Student Internship* (2014-2015 – www.praktiki.mon.bg) realised with the financial support of the Operative Programme 'Human Resources Development' and co-financed by the European Social Fund of the European Union) offered an opportunity to students specialising in pedagogy/education to conduct their field-based studies (paid internship – one-time payment of 246 EUR (480 BGN) for 240 hours in kindergartens, schools, etc. in another country. The project was realised in partnership with all 51 higher education institutions in Bulgaria. The practical

education was attended by over 60,000 students in total, including a large number of students placed in preschool institutions. The project budget included funding for the compensation of academic mentors from the universities, as well as mentors assigned by the employers. The second phase of the same project was underway across the country until the end of 2023.

Nursery Teachers (*Pedagog na detska yasla*)

Prospective Nursery Teachers undergo the same format of workplace-based learning as prospective Kindergarten Teachers.

Medical Nurses (*Medicinska sestra*)

As previously mentioned, the ratio between theoretical and practical preparation in the curriculum for Medical Nurses is determined by the higher education institution, but the academic hours allocated to practical preparation should be no less than 50% of the total hours. The practical preparation during IPE is realised via educational (clinical) practice and internship; this is organised and conducted in faculties and/or affiliates of higher education institutions, as well as clinical settings that have been accredited for student education.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

According to the national system for in-service training, all Bulgarian teachers (including Kindergarten Teachers) can develop their qualifications on a five-level qualification scale. The first two levels involve education on contextual and technological innovation, as well as the sharing of the teachers' individual experiences and pedagogical practices, while the latter three levels focus on activities related to the practical application of innovations and the creation and practical testing of individual innovative practices. The highest professional qualification level represents the dissemination of innovations introduced by the teacher through publications (Kusheva et al. 2006).

In the Law on Preschool and School Education of 2015, there is a separate section 4, titled 'Career development of pedagogical specialists' (National programme development of pedagogical specialists 2016), which defines different teaching levels – Teacher, Senior Teacher, and Head Teacher – also applicable for young children's teachers. As foundations for the career development of pedagogical specialists, the document mentions acquired qualification credits, acquired professional qualification level, as well as results of performance appraisals; a larger number of qualification credits and a higher professional qualification level are bases for a faster career development of pedagogical specialists, regardless of their years of service. The requirements and the procedure for acquiring teaching levels are defined by the State Educational Standard for the Status and Development of Teachers, Head Teachers and other Pedagogical Specialists (Directive № 15 dated 22.07.2019).

The Collective Labour Agreement applicable for the public education system (Art. 8, 2022) states that the budget for educational staff qualifications is defined at the start of each calendar year and should amount to no less than 1.2% of the annual salary of pedagogical staff. The budget is used for the enrolment of pedagogical staff in qualification courses after discussion in the educational committee and approval by the Centre Head. Some of the courses are optional, while others may be obligatory. Therefore, ECEC employers cover the costs of attending continuing

professional development activities in the size of the expenditures according to the mentioned budget, divided between members of the pedagogical team. If the cost of qualification is higher, the teachers have to cover the difference themselves.

The main providers of continuing professional development across the country are university departments of information and in-service training of teachers; the National Institute for Education and Qualification in the Educational System; some pedagogical faculties; educational inspectorates; non-governmental organisations; foundations, and other public and private providers at national, regional and local level.

The options for paid absence for education of full-time employees in Bulgaria (including Pre-primary Teachers and Teachers' Assistants) are defined in the Labour Codex (last amended in February 2023). According to the codex, Teachers and Teachers' Assistants who are studying at university while in employment can be granted 25 days of paid leave per year; additionally, they are entitled to 30 days of paid leave for preparing and taking matriculation or state exams, or the preparation and defence of a thesis, graduation project or dissertation. For preparation of a PhD thesis, the students can request six months of paid leave, subject to approval by the employer. For taking an entrance exam for a university or PhD course, students can request 12 days of paid leave.

The Collective Labour Agreement applicable for public education (Art. 46, 2022) states that the employer "can approve paid leave for qualification development, acquisition of new and/or additional qualifications" of pedagogical staff, "as long as the acquired knowledge, skills and competences will contribute to the improvement of the quality of the educational process in the educational institute". Usually, there are no problems regarding access opportunities to CPD – Centre Heads approve and generally encourage such leaves and they organise internal staff substitutes for the period of the paid leave (substitute teachers working overtime are compensated accordingly).

Participation in specific forms of CPD is **formally recognised** in terms of **career advancement**.

According to the Rules for organising calls for candidates for the post of Principal/Centre Head in public kindergartens in the Municipality of Sofia (2015), candidates for kindergartens (with or without nursery groups) have to meet the following main criteria: to have a Bachelor's or Master's degree with a professional qualification as Pre-primary Teacher and at least five years of full-time pedagogical experience, to not have a criminal record, and to have not been stripped of the right to work as a teacher. The call for candidates is published and the assessment is performed in two stages: part one comprises a 25-question test with questions related to application of the legal framework relevant to the educational system; the second part is an interview.

For the qualification of school or kindergarten heads/principals and teachers, the National Institute for Education and Qualification in the Educational System (2023) was founded in 2006. The aims of the National Institute are to organise educational activities for administrative staff of Bulgarian schools and kindergartens, to develop educational programmes and to participate in international projects. During the last 4 years (2020-2023), approximately 4,500 head teachers and 17,000 teachers have participated in different educational activities. Topics include Kindergarten Management – a basic programme for newly-appointed Head Teachers, Financial Management of Kindergartens – management of delegated budgets, Project Management, Management of Educational Processes, Human Resources Management in Schools, Control and Assessment of Teachers' Work, Assessment and Self-assessment of School Management, Working with Interested Parties – models of interaction between school/kindergarten and parents, Leadership Programmes – education of national or regional leaders, Mentorship Education, Development

and Improvement of Specific Professional Competences for Teachers – entrepreneurship, application of information technologies in the educational process, integration of pupils with special educational needs.

Some (relatively few) private kindergartens cover tuition costs for the university studies of their Teachers' Assistants or part-time substitute teachers to become qualified teachers, or for their teachers to be awarded a Master's Degree.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Staff in kindergartens and primary schools receive the same salaries as all teachers in Bulgaria and have a relatively similar professional status. In both cases they are not civil servants. According to the most-recent available data of the National Statistical Institute (NSI 2023c) as of Q3 2023 the average gross salary of a teacher in Bulgaria (regardless of whether they are beginners, experienced or work in a city or rural area) is 1,015 EUR/ 1,985 BGN per month. *Table 7* shows the minimum starting salary (before taxes) according to the Collective Labour Agreement for the system of Preschool and School Education from 06.12.2022 (Art. 27, as updated by Annex dated 11.08.2023) regarding the salaries of employees in the public education sector. While the high inflation due to the geopolitical situation in the area should be taken into account, several updates of teachers' salaries in recent years have made it possible for teachers to feel they are starting to receive a more dignified salary, even though there is still room for improvement.

As per the Collective Labour Agreement applicable for public education (Art. 28, 2022), Teachers' Assistants in kindergartens receive at least 105% of the national minimum wage, which currently amounts to 419 EUR/819 BGN per month.

Table 7
Bulgaria: **Minimum starting salary (before taxes) of employees in the public education sector***

Group	Position	Minimum salary/month (01.01.2023)
I. Pedagogical staff with management functions	Head Teacher (principal)	1,065 EUR/2,082 BGN
	Assistant Head Teacher	985 EUR/1,926 BGN
II. Pedagogical staff	Teacher	874 EUR/1,709 BGN
	Senior Teacher	901 EUR/1,763 BGN
	Mentor	936 EUR/1,831 BGN

* Collective Labour Agreement for the system of Preschool and School Education 2022 and Annex to the Collective Labour Agreement 2023.

According to the Collective Labour Agreement applicable for public education (Art. 33, 2022), for attained professional qualification levels teachers are entitled to a minimum additional payment of between 15 EUR/30 BGN (for the 5th level) and 46 EUR/90 BGN (for the 1st level). Teachers with a PhD receive an additional 66 EUR/130 BGN, while for those with a DSc the amount is 82 EUR/160 BGN.

Regarding remuneration of Medical Nurses who work in ECE, according to the Collective Labour Agreement applicable for the healthcare sector (Art. 47, 2022), the minimum starting salary in Bulgaria is 741 EUR/1,450 BGN.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

All staff in kindergartens are employed on a full-time basis (40 hours per week).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

In terms of staff support measures in the workplace, Centre Heads usually arrange pairs of teachers so that a newly qualified teacher is paired with a Senior Teacher, the second acting as a mentor for the first one. Kindergartens from the same municipality often exchange observational sessions, aiming at the exchange of "good practices".

7.4 Non-contact time

Six hours daily are spent in direct contact with the children, so two hours a day are non-contact time (preparation work, staff meetings, cooperation with parents, networking in the community and other activities). The working times of the two members of staff responsible for any one group overlap during the midday break for one hour. Teaching staff in both kindergartens and primary schools are entitled to 48 days of paid annual leave.

7.5 Current staffing issues

It is a positive fact during recent years is that there are no shortages of candidates for Kindergarten Teacher positions. This can be attributed not only to the increased teachers' salaries, but also to the large number of higher education degree holders who choose to study for the additional qualification of Kindergarten Teachers and then enter the labour market in addition to the traditional preschool-education degree holders.

Moreover, it is often the case that Kindergarten Principals recruit retired Kindergarten Teachers (as well as Teachers' Assistants), especially when someone from the staff is temporarily absent from work (maternity leave, illness, etc.).

Also, there is a practice of kindergartens with a mentorship contract with a university recruiting students in their final year and attracting them for a future full-time employment contract.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

According to an amendment to the Early Education and Schools Act in 2020, as of the 2023/2024 school year, compulsory attendance at kindergarten is extended to three years; kindergarten will be mandatory for children turning 4 years old during the school year. State and municipalities have a duty to ensure that the conditions for this are in place by 2023/2024 at the latest.

As per Directive № 26 (2008) on the organisation and operation of nurseries, a **Nurse** is required as part of the nursery staff, but a recent change in the Directive (applicable since 01 January 2023) allows for exceptions in cases when a nurse cannot be allocated to a nursery group – in such cases, the group can be assigned at least one pedagogue who has undergone training on early childhood development, complex application of healthcare and first aid, and one Teacher's Assistant who is responsible for hygiene. However, this exception is only applicable if there is at least one medical specialist allocated to the nursery.

An interesting initiative of the Bulgarian provisional government in 2022 was a planned but ultimately not implemented amendment to the Law for Preschool and Primary Education (Parliament of the Republic of Bulgaria 2022), which included a clause that transferred state nurseries under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science (from the Ministry of Health). There were debates with arguments both for and against this proposal, with supporters hailing it as an interesting idea worth pursuing in the future.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Enhancement of intercultural competence of prospective Pre-primary Teachers

Source: Spiridonova 2021a, 2021b, 2021c (see *References* for full details)

Aims: Spiridonova presents a model for the enhancement of intercultural competence of prospective Pre-primary Teachers based on the concept of intercultural competence as a construct with three aspects – cognitive, affective and behavioural.

Procedure: 230 Master degree students preparing to become Pre-primary Teachers participated in the evaluation of an innovative model for the education of tolerance in preschool children as part of a Kindergarten Teacher's intercultural competence.

Findings: The results show that the three aspects of the teacher's intercultural competence are well-advocated in the theoretical and practical training of the students who are prospective Kindergarten Teachers. *Cognitive* aspects encompass intercultural knowledge through pedagogical reflection on the broad spectrum of specific manifestations of culture. *Affective* aspects refer to the intercultural sensitivity of the teacher and *behavioural* aspects are expressed in skills for implementing intercultural pedagogical technologies within educational institutions.

Implications: The results of this research were taken into account when updating the educational content of the following disciplines in the curricula of the *Pre-school Pedagogy with a Foreign Language* and *Pre-school and Primary School Pedagogy* courses at Sofia University: "Intercultural education", "Games and Intercultural competences", and "Pedagogical Interaction in a multicultural environment" (Sofia University 2021a, 2021b).

Attitudes of teachers in public inclusive kindergartens relating to work with children with special education needs

Source: Trosheva-Asenova 2022 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: To investigate the attitudes and preparedness of kindergarten teachers in public kindergartens regarding the inclusion of children with special educational needs.

Procedure: 102 preschool teachers in Bulgarian kindergartens across the country participated in the research via completion of a questionnaire.

Findings: The results show positive attitudes towards the inclusion of children with SEN and the willingness of teachers to work with them and provide them with additional individual support. At the same time, more than half of the participating teachers do not have any qualifications for working with children with SEN and their practical experience is minimal or absent entirely.

Implications: Such content needs to be included more effectively in the university curricula for Bachelor's degrees in preschool pedagogy and more CPD opportunities offered that focus on

building competences for working with children with SEN. The results of this research will be taken into account in upcoming curricula updates of the *Pre-school Pedagogy with a Foreign Language* and *Pre-school and Primary School Pedagogy* courses at Sofia University.

Contemporary aspects in the preparation of preschool pedagogues from the perspective of students, preschool teachers, directors of educational institutions and university lecturers

Source: Spiridonova et al. 2023 (unpublished project proposal) (see *References* for full details)

Background: At the end of 2023, a scientific team from the Department of Preschool and Media Pedagogy at the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" under the direction of Associate Professor Lora Spiridonova, PhD started work on a two-year project on the above-named topic.

Aims: The aim of the research is to study the current state, as well as to outline the trends and prospects for the educational process in the Bachelor's programs of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" that prepare preschool teachers (i.e. specialties "Preschool Pedagogy and Foreign Language", "Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy" and "Media Pedagogy and Artistic Communication") from the point of view of students as future teachers in preschool educational institutions, of directors as employers, of university lecturers as experts and of ECEC mentors in kindergartens who work in collaboration with them.

Procedure/method: Questionnaires measuring students', teachers', head teachers', and lecturers' levels of satisfaction and their evaluation of the educational process and its practical and theoretical results are being developed.

Results/implications: The results are expected to provide the foundation for a discussion about improvement of the educational process regarding the preparation of future preschool teachers.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

While incorporating a desire for learning from relevant European practices and legislation in the ECEC field, the Bulgarian educational system constantly looks for ways of preserving and promoting positive national traditions in education (Engels-Kritidis 2012). Building upon a solid historical and theoretical basis and encompassing the overall transformation of social life in the country, early childhood education and care in Bulgaria is now being further reformed in order to adapt to the constantly changing educational needs of children and demands of the educational system. Children and their needs are firmly established as the core focus of contemporary early childhood pedagogy. With the Law on Preschool and School Education (2015), in which pre-school education is seen on an equal footing with school education, a significant success has been achieved for the sector. On the other hand, this shift is also producing new challenges: Bulgarian Kindergarten Teachers need to be aware of possible negative effects which could occur. These include countering the early onset of strictly didactical methodologies which may develop through the recently introduced compulsory attendance for 4 year-olds, and being able to keep the idea of the 'preciousness' of childhood at the core of their practice.

Related challenges include focusing more strongly on the following priorities, and while they are connected mainly to improving the quality of the ECEC workforce in Bulgaria, they also define the scope and potential of improving and enhancing the ECEC system in its entirety.

- Providing CPD opportunities to develop an individualised and differentiated approach to working with each child (not only with those with a background of migration or SEN/D) during the organised group activities, even in large classes (see also Engels-Kritidis 2015)
- Expanding the opportunities of Kindergarten Teachers to work in nurseries instead of medical nurses and bringing the nurseries under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science (currently they are under the Ministry of Health)
- Establishing a national programme for the mentoring of newly-appointed teachers in the pre-school education system
- Continuing the national policy of taking measures to raise the social status and the salaries of pre-school teachers via initiatives for improving their qualifications and creating models for career development, including a new remuneration system.

On a positive note, the challenge of increasing the number of young staff in the ECEC system is gradually improving. Due to the recent increase in teacher salaries as well as improvement of the professional status, there is increased interest in the pre-primary study routes and more of the graduates pursue a career working in kindergartens. Additionally, many people with different Bachelor degree backgrounds apply for a Master's degree in *Pre-primary Education*; these candidates are highly motivated to stay in the profession and to pursue continuing professional development. As a result, as mentioned previously, the age distribution of Kindergarten Teachers has now begun to shift towards younger professionals.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

BULGARIA

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms chosen in this report for the main form of centre-based ECEC settings are **nursery** (*detski yasli,* 0–2/3) and **kindergarten** (*detski gradini,* 3–6)[1]. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Bulgaria

1882	First early childhood institution established
1934	Official integration of kindergartens into the education sector
1935	First day nurseries for under 3 year-olds established
1991	Pre-primary groups for 6 year-olds established during the Socialist era are continued.
1993	Modern programmes for preschool education developed: *Educational Programme for Children Aged 2-7 Years* and *Children's Kindergarten Activities*
2000	State Educational Requirements for early childhood education and preparation of children for primary school were established by the content of Decree № 4, issued by the Ministry of Education and Science, with further additions published in 2005.
2002	Pre-primary groups for 6 year-olds are made obligatory.
2010	Obligatory pre-primary education is extended to 5 year-olds.
2014	Standards for development and learning in early childhood: from birth to three years published
2015	Early Education and Schools Act (*Zakon za preduchilishtnoto i uchilishtnoto obrazovanie*); comes into force 2016 (amendments 2017, 2020)
2016	National standards for early childhood education established through Decree № 5 for Early Education (2016), issued by the Ministry of Education and Science.
2020	Legislative amendment: Pre-primary education in kindergartens is to be made compulsory for 4 to 6 year-olds (three years) by 2023/24.
2021	Parental fees for 4 to 6 year-olds are to be completely abolished

Sources: Atanasova-Trifonova et al. 2014; Engels-Kritidis 2012, 2018; Volen and de Laat 2021.

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

In Bulgaria, the system of early childhood education and care is organised in two separate sectors, although there have been plans to work towards an integration of the two sectors for some time. At the national level, the Ministry of Education and Science (*Ministerstvo na obrazovanieto i naukata*) is responsible for kindergartens for 2/3 to 6/7 year-olds; it is also responsible for the implementation of curricular frameworks and educational reforms. The Ministry of Health is responsible for nurseries for under 3 year-olds (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 168).

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In the case of Bulgaria, the relevant format is **0–2/3** years and **3–6/7** years, since children usually start school when they are 7 years old.

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Bulgaria provided orientation for data on legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

At the regional level, 28 supervisory authorities are responsible for administration and management. Regions and municipalities are responsible for buildings, maintenance and equipment, as well as for compliance with health and safety regulations, catering and the transport of children.

General objectives and legislative framework

Basic overall principles of the Bulgarian education system are: (1) quality of education; (2) active partnerships between all stakeholders (staff, parents, employers, unions, NGOs); (3) competitiveness between settings in striving for quality; (4) system transparency and flexibility; (5) equal access for all children, with an emphasis on integrating socially disadvantaged groups.

The overall goal of ECEC is to create the necessary conditions for children to be able to develop their potential, to ease their transition into school and providing the chance for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to develop a positive attitude towards learning. Improving the quality of education is also emphasised as well as achieving equality of access. The concept of lifelong learning is given high priority.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education established an early education strategy, which aims, among other things, to reform the care system for under 3 year-olds. This is to include certain standards regarding health, education, interventions, support and training for professionals working with 0 to 6/7 year-olds, as well as piloting alternative forms of care. This strategy was adopted as part of the new child protection strategy and is currently under discussion by the State Agency for Child Protection (Bogdanov and Zahariev 2018).

Another national programme called “Successful Together” initiated by the Ministry of Education (2019) aims to ensure the comprehensive development of children and to enable a good transition from family to kindergarten and from kindergarten to school.

In August 2016, the Early Education and Schools Act (*Zakon za preduchilishtnoto i uchilishtnoto obrazovanie*) came into force (amendments in 2017 and 2020), the main objectives of which are to promote inclusive education and to develop standards for the early education sector. In the regulations implementing the Act, kindergartens are defined as pre-primary institutions that provide care and education for children from (2)3 years of age until they start school. Framework conditions for the education, care and upbringing of children under 3 years of age are laid down in the Health Act of 2004, revised in 2016.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

As from 2023/24, attendance at kindergarten is compulsory for three years. This requirement was laid down in an amendment to the Early Education and Schools Act in 2020. Kindergarten will be mandatory for children turning 4 during any one school year and free of charge for parents. State and municipalities have a duty to ensure that the conditions for this are in place by 2023/24 at the latest.

There is no legal entitlement to a place in an ECEC setting for children under 4 years of age.

As a rule, statutory schooling in primary schools starts at 7 years of age.

Main types of provision

Nurseries (*detski yasli*) admit children from 3 months up to 3 years. These may be stand-alone settings, or a unit attached to a full-day kindergarten. The Early Education and Schools Act defines the appropriate age range as 10 months to 3 years. Staff in these settings have a recognised nursing qualification; they are supported by staff with a non-medical qualification (NSI 2022b).

Kindergartens (*detski gradini*) are the core institutions of early childhood education and care for 3 to 6/7 year-olds. According to the Early Education and Schools Act, 2 year-olds can also be admitted to kindergartens since 2015. Kindergartens are compulsory from the age of 4 until primary schooling at 7, i.e. for three years. Although the former term "compulsory pre-primary groups" (*podgotvitelna grupa*) remains in use, these do not exist as separate institutions; some are located in schools. The total weekly number of pedagogical sessions for 5–6 year-olds is at least 15, for 6–7 year-olds 17, with a duration of 20-30 minutes each.

A kindergarten consists of at least four groups; in large cities like Sofia, there may be ten or more. Children are divided into same-age groups: from (2)3 to 4 years, 4 to 5 years, 5 to 6 years, and 6 to 7 years. Occasionally (in smaller towns) there are mixed-age groups.

As a rule, children attend a full-day kindergarten (NSI 2023a), which is open from 7:00 to 19:00. There are also some half-day kindergartens that close at noon (see *Table 1*). Free transportation to the nearest facility is provided for children from remote areas.

There continues to be a considerable insufficiency of kindergarten places in Bulgaria, particularly in the larger cities. It has been calculated that more than 60,000 additional places would be needed to meet the demand (OSI 2020, 15). In 2018, only about 17% of kindergartens and nurseries had available places (ibid, 88); long waiting lists are common, particularly in large cities.

Kindergartens with nursery groups are a less common form of provision, catering for children aged 10 months up to 7 years.

Table 1
Bulgaria: **Number of children in different kindergarten types (including preparatory groups at schools), 2022/23**

Kindergarten type	Number of places	Number of children
Full-day kindergarten	232,813	205,476
Half-day kindergarten	14,634	11,005
– of these, in private kindergartens	8,091	5,977
Total	**247,447**	**216,481**

Sources: NSI 2023a

Provider structures

Nursery services are offered by both public and private providers, as well as nursery groups that are provided in some public and private kindergartens. Consolidated statistics for the number of private nurseries and nursery groups are hard to find as official statistics from the Ministry of Health only state the total number of nurseries and nursery groups which at the end of 2022 totalled 835 (NSI 2023b).

Most **kindergartens** are run by local authorities. However, during recent years the proportion of privately-run settings rose slightly from 5.3% in 2017 to 6.5% in 2022/23. Most of these private kindergartens are run on a for-profit basis and are generally too expensive for the greater majority of parents.

Table 2
Bulgaria: Number of kindergartens according to provider, 2017-2022/23

Provider	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2021/22	2022/23
Public/municipal	1,736	1,733	1,734	1,700	1,698
Private (mostly for-profit)	98	101	106	117	119
Total	1,834	1,834	1,840	1,817	1,817
Share of private kindergartens, in %*	**5.3**	**5.5**	**5.8**	**6.4**	**6.5**

Source: NSI 2023d, *own calculations

Only 3.3% of all kindergarten places were provided in private facilities in 2022/23 (8,091 of 247,447). In the same year, 2.8% of children attended a private kindergarten, whereas the share was only 0,5% in 2005 (see *Table 3*).

Table 3
Bulgaria: Number of children in kindergartens according to provider, 2005–2022/23

	2005	2015	2022
Public kindergartens*	205,291	228,692	210,504
Private kindergartens	952	3,333	5,977
Total number of children	206,243	232,025	216,481

Source: NSI 2023a, *own calculations

Private kindergartens are characterised by a significantly lower average number of children than municipal facilities: in 2022/23, there was an average of 50 children in a private kindergarten compared to 124 children in a municipal kindergarten. Also, the private kindergartens have less children in each group (roughly 15) compared with publicly-run kindergartens (approx. 23) (NSI 2023a, own calculations).

Participation rates in regulated provision

According to national statistics, at the end of 2022 there were 835 nurseries (stand-alone nurseries and nursery groups in kindergartens) in Bulgaria, attended by 30,544 children, which corresponds to an enrolment rate of approximately 17% of the under-threes (Eurostat 2023a). Most of the children were 2 years old. Out of 33,193 places, 44.4% were in stand-alone nurseries (14,743) (NSI 2023b).

Table 4
Bulgaria: Number of nurseries and number of children enrolled by age, end of 2022

	2010	2015	2022
Nurseries (including groups in kindergartens)	731	812	835
Children enrolled	29,507	32,124	30,544
of these:			
1 year-olds	6,059	5,621	5,394
2 year-olds	22,513	22,081	24,884

Source: NSI 2023b

Whereas in both 2010 and 2020/21, the majority of children under 3 years of age were not enrolled in an ECEC setting, the proportion of 3 to 6/7 year-olds in ECEC settings increased from about half of the age group (54%) to 94.6% during this period. Despite the overall low enrolment

rates, the proportion of children under 3 years of age in nurseries also more than doubled, from 7% to 17.4%.

Table 5
Bulgaria: Participation rates according to duration of attendance in centre-based settings by age, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year olds, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2010	1 to 29	1	4
	Over 30	6	50
	No enrolment in ECEC	93	46
2015	1 to 29	0.5	3.3
	Over 30	8.4	68.2
	No enrolment in ECEC	91.0	28.5
2022	1 to 29	11.4	19.1
	Over 30	6.0	75.5
	No enrolment in ECEC	82.6	5.4

Source: Eurostat 2023b

In 2022/23, according to national statistics, a total of 216,481 children attended kindergarten, corresponding to an attendance rate of 87.3% of the 3–6/7 year-olds (NSI 2023a).

Table 6
Bulgaria: Children in kindergartens (including preparatory groups in schools) by age, 2022/23

Age	Number of children
Under 3 years	8,438
3 year-olds	46,412
4 year-olds	50,350
5 year-olds	55,941
6 year-olds	54,666
7 year-olds	634
Over 7 years	40
Total	**216,481**

Source: NSI 2023a

Financing and costs for parents

Almost 87% of the Bulgarian education system is state funded. Public **kindergartens**, which are mostly run by municipalities, are primarily funded through municipal budgets (Eurydice 2023). Private kindergartens are not funded by the state or municipal budgets. However, they can receive state subsidies for educational activities if they are registered as an institution in the education system.

Nurseries that are part of a kindergarten are financed from the budgets of the municipalities and the Ministry of Education; stand-alone nurseries are financed by the municipalities and the Ministry of Health.

A recent change in the Law for Regional Taxes and Fees means that from 1 April 2022 fees have been abolished in all public kindergartens and nurseries while fees for private nurseries and kindergartens can vary from 375 to 850€/month (Ilieva 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

Childcare sector

Infant nursery groups comprise between 6 and 8 children aged between 3 and 10 months; the same number applies to groups including children with disabilities. Regular nursery groups for children between 3 months and 3 years comprise between 8 and 16 children.

Nursery groups in kindergartens can include between 8 and 18 children from the age of 10 months up to 3 years. Group size is reduced to between 6/8 and 11 children if children with disabilities attend.

At least one qualified teacher must be employed for up to 60 children, and another teacher for every 20 children. In each nursery group, the children are cared for by at least one qualified member of staff, usually a nurse, and a non-qualified assistant in rotation.

In the study "Bulgaria grows with its children" (For Our Children Foundation 2020, 57), the staff to child ratio was reported to be between 1:5 and 1:8.

Education sector (ISCED 02)

Half-day or full-day **kindergarten** groups are attended by 12 to 23 children. The children are grouped into four age groups: 2/3 to 4 year-olds, 4 to 5 year-olds, 5 to 6 year-olds and 6 to 7 year-olds. For any one kindergarten group, at least two professionals are responsible, who overlap for one hour, and one assistant. The number of children per group can be increased by up to two above the maximum of 23 children if there is a continuous shortage of kindergarten places in the municipality, or may even reach a maximum size of 28 children per group in exceptional circumstances.

The above-mentioned study reports that especially in major cities the maximum number of children in a group is often exceeded and can be more than 30 children. Moreover, there should be no more than three children with special educational needs in a group, for whom a resource teacher must then be present (For Our Children Foundation 2020, 42, 81ff).

Table 7

Bulgaria: Maximum group size and number of children in kindergartens with nursery groups per staff by age, 2021

Age of children	Maximum number of children per group	Maximum number of children per staff member	Maximum number of children per teacher
3 – 10 months	8	3	4
3 months – 3 years	20	7	20
3–4 years	28	14	23
4–5 years	28	14	23
5–6 years	28	14	23
6–7 years	28	14	23

Source: Eurydice 2023

Curricular frameworks

Childcare sector

The "Standards for development and learning in early childhood: from birth to three years" (Atanasova-Trifonova et al. 2014) act as a guideline for the development of programmes for working with children up to 3 years of age. Additionally, several curricular programmes have been published specifically for working with this age group, including "Impact through interaction:

Programme for educational work with children up to 3 years of age" (Tatyozov 1995), "Little Fairytale Trail" (Peneva and Mitkova 2018), as well as others.

Education sector (ISCED 02)

The first state educational guidelines for early childhood and pre-primary education (3 to 6 years) were issued by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2000. Since then, a number of statutes and regulations have contributed to updating them, most recently Regulation No. 5/03.06.2016 for Early Childhood Education (Official Gazette 2016). The curricular framework is mandatory (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 168).

Seven learning areas are defined: Bulgarian language and literature; mathematics; social environment; art; music; construction and technology; and sport. General aims of early education focus on the children's intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, moral and physical development as well as age- and needs-appropriate support.

Since 2016, national educational standards set down in the Early Education and Schools Act have applied to all age groups in kindergartens (Decision 5/2016, Official Gazette 46). These define knowledge, skills and attitudes of children to be achieved at a certain age and for different learning areas.

Pedagogical units are defined by the kindergarten teacher and last approx. 15-20 minutes for 3 to 5 year-olds, or approx. 20-30 minutes for 5 to 7 year-olds. There should be at least 11 to 17 such sessions per week. During pedagogical sessions, Kindergarten Teachers follow the educational programme approved by the Ministry of Education. Teachers are free to choose between alternative programmes, e.g. "Hand by Hand", "Wonder World", "Little Golden Key" and others (Engels-Kritidis 2020 and personal communication, 14.07.2021). The rest of the day is spent in free play, outdoor activities and learning a foreign language.

Digital education

The educational guidelines in Bulgaria emphasise the pedagogical benefits of digital technologies, especially to support learning processes. However, no specific digital skills are mentioned. The recommended activities include, for example, reading e-books, exploring nature and science with digital devices such as webcams or GPS, also experiencing digital forms of expression or making computer games (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 100). However, digital aspects are not explicitly addressed in the 'construction and technology' section of the early education curriculum, except that the two older groups of children learn to recognise differences between information and communication tools and become familiar with their use (Georgieva 2018).

However, in the context of contemporary Bulgarian pedagogy, digital education is seen as strongly connected to media education, an area where research has notable traditions in a national scope, starting from preschool age (Angelov 2016; Danov 2020, Stoyanova 2022, and others).

Monitoring – evaluation

A National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care has been created (including four key principles, ten statements and 27 indicators) based on the European Quality Framework and adapted to the Bulgarian context through a broad consultative process (Ministry of Education and Science 2022).

It is important to note that since 2014 there have been Bulgarian *Standards for development and learning in early childhood: from birth to three years* (Atanasova-Trifonova et al. 2014). Additionally, at the end of 2023, authors from the same team developed and published guidelines for early screening assessment and developmental stimulation of 3 year-olds (Atanasova-Trifonova, Peneva, and Stoyanova 2023).

Child-related assessment

How children develop in various areas of learning is continually assessed by the kindergarten teachers through observations. Parents are informed regularly about their child's progress. Self-assessment procedures include the children's views and encourages them to take an active part in their own learning. For some learning areas, standardised tests are also carried out (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 104).

Particular value is placed on an assessment at the beginning and end of the child's time in kindergarten. 14 days before the end of the final kindergarten year, the teacher assesses each child's "school readiness" in terms of their physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development. A certificate is prepared which also gives suggestions as to how the child can be best motivated and supported. Parents are obliged to hand over this certificate to the class teacher when their child starts school.

Centre-based internal evaluation

The kindergarten heads are responsible for ensuring that assessments and quality improvement measures approved by the Educational Board are carried out. Internal evaluations should take place at least once every five years. Kindergartens use their own assessment criteria for self-evaluation measures. Parents can also be included in the internal self-assessments (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 131).

External evaluation

External evaluations of kindergarten settings and staff are obligatory and are carried out both at the national and regional levels.

At the national level, the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible, together with the national education inspectorate within the Council of Ministers. At the regional level, 28 education inspection authorities and also the municipalities carry out inspections.

According to the Act on the Inspection of Kindergartens and Schools (2016), an inspection system has been put in place which focuses both on educational processes as well as compliance with regulations (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 122).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

In 2003, the Education Act was amended to ensure that children and young people with special needs or disabilities are integrated into mainstream institutions as far as possible. In 2017, regulations on inclusive education came into force which define the national education standards for inclusive education. The regulations control the public relations of settings that offer inclusive education and support children in the early education and school system in their personal development. For children with special educational needs or disabilities, appropriate conditions should be created so that they can attend regular institutions (materials, structural access, support staff). A team consisting of the centre head, support staff, psychologists or therapists makes

an initial assessment and follows the child's development. An individual plan, which is closely based on the curricular framework, focuses on the acquisition of skills and abilities so that the child can live as independently and socially integrated as possible.

In general, the diagnosing of developmental delays as early as possible is emphasised so that successful inclusion can take place. Psychologists and other support professionals work with regular professionals to adapt educational strategies for children with special needs.

At the end of 2022, there were four facilities for medico-social care for children with chronic illnesses or social problems, attended by 368 children, 341 of them under 1 years of age (NSI 2023c).

Under the responsibility of three Ministries (Education and Science, Labour and Social Affairs, Health), a national plan for children with special needs is revised annually. The ministries work together with the Child Protection Agency, municipalities and non-profit organisations.

From 2019 to 2021, the Ministry of Education and Science (2020) launched the project "Active inclusion in pre-primary education" which aims to facilitate access for children from disadvantaged environments and children living in poverty. The following measures in particular are used for this purpose:

- Children with a home language other than Bulgarian receive additional language training so that they can better integrate into their peer group. A specific method for this is being developed within the framework of the project; furthermore, it is being considered to hire additional staff.
- Fees are to be adjusted to the economic possibilities of the parents.
- Parents will be motivated to actively cooperate with the kindergarten through two national campaigns.
- Kindergarten staff will receive training in how to use screening tests to identify children with learning difficulties at an early stage (European Commission 2020.).

Children with a migration background – children from Roma communities

In 2022, only 2% of the total population and only 0.3% of children under 5 had a non-Bulgarian citizenship; the majority of these were from non-EU27 countries (76.2% of the total population and 90.2% of children under 5 years) (Eurostat 2023d). Nevertheless, the most recent data from the 2011 Census reported just under 5% Roma, who are the second largest ethnic minority in Bulgaria after people from Turkey, and over 12% Roma children under the age of 10 (OSI 2020, 34), though most of these are believed to be of Bulgarian background.

The available data indicate that the share of Roma children in the age group from four to six years who do not attend kindergarten is high (between 25% and 45% in different age cohorts) (Eurochild 2021).

With regard to the integration of ethnic minority children, the *National Strategy for Roma Integration* (2012-2020) emphasises everyone's right to education (NCCEII 2021). The *Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils of Ethnic Minorities* (2015-2020) tries to dissolve Roma-only kindergartens and instead promote the development of integrated early education institutions and schools. Especially in rural areas, there are facilities attended only by ethnic minorities (OSI 2020, 93). Special education in Bulgarian is provided for children with a family language other than Bulgarian. In the Bulgarian report on the inclusion of Roma children in early education (RECI+ report, OSI 2020), measures recommended include family visits or incentives to ensure that services are also used by Roma. In 2020, the Bulgarian Parliament passed amendments to the law which – by abolishing or reducing parental fees in kindergarten – should make it possible for children from ethnic minorities in particular to attend kindergarten (Volen and de Laat 2021).

However, data on the attendance of children from ethnic minorities at pre-school institutions cannot be reported, as such data are not collected nationwide – but it can be assumed that their attendance rate is much lower (OSI 2020, 106f).

Parental leave arrangements[3]

Maternity leave (*otpusk poradi bremennost i razhdane*) lasts 410 days in Bulgaria, 45 of which must be taken before birth. The first 135 days are compulsory for mothers and are divided into three parts: (1) 45 days before birth, (2) 42 days after birth and (3) 48 days until the 135th day. Mothers who have previously worked at least 24 months with compulsory social insurance receive 90% of their gross salary during the 410 days, up to a maximum of BGN 3,400 (€1,738.42), with a minimum of BGN 710 (€363.02) (as of end of 2022). After the child is 6 months old, the entitlement for the remaining time can also be transferred to the father under the same conditions.

Fathers have 15 obligatory days of **Paternity leave** (*otpusk po bashtinstvo*) which are paid under the same conditions as Maternity leave. Since August 2022, a further two months are available under certain conditions.

After maternity leave, there is a (family) right to **Parental leave** (*otpusk za otglegdane na dete do 2 godishna vazrast*) until the child is 2 years old. This can also be transferred to the father or a grandparent. During Parental leave, a lump sum of 710 BGN (€363.02) is paid. A partial financial compensation of 355 BGN (€181.51) per month is paid after the 135th day if the mother does not take the rest of the parental leave or does not take all of it.

In 2022, 22,039 fathers took paternity leave – this is equivalent from about one third of all children born that year. The new two months paternity leave which was introduced in August 2022 was taken by 1,370 fathers. Of the 85,072 eligible persons who took parental leave in 2022, only 1% were fathers. 17.6% of those entitled returned to work early and received 50% of the compensation.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Bulgaria

*Country expert assessment by **Rozalina Engels-Kritidis***

Currently, the biggest challenge for the ECEC system in Bulgaria is the process of **prioritising early childhood education for children aged 0 to 3 years**. Significant effort has been put into the goal of nurseries becoming a proper part of the educational system by bringing them under the control of the Ministry of Education and Science rather than the Ministry of Health where they currently placed. Related to this issue is the debate concerning the core professionals working in nurseries. On the one hand, this refers to looking at measures for expanding the opportunities of Kindergarten Teachers to work in nurseries instead of medical Nurses. On the other hand, an interdepartmental working group has been established, including experts from the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. An important aim, as stated by the current Minister of Education, Prof. Galin Tsokov, is to ensure that persons with a medical education have opportunities for acquiring additional

[3] The information in this section is based on the country report for Bulgaria by Elitsa Dimitrova and colleagues in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

qualifications to become early childhood development specialists. In connection to this, a discussion has started with universities to create Bachelor and Master degree programmes focused on early childhood development, which presents another challenge. According to the Minister, it is very important to ensure strong pedagogical support for children, but also for them to have access to specialists such as Speech Therapists and Psychologists. In parallel, there is work being done on specific regulatory and legislative amendments that can ensure the integration of the early childhood education and care cycle (Ministry of Education and Science 2023a).

Early childhood development is also a matter of priority in the 2021-2030 Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in Bulgaria (Ministry of Education and Science 2023b).

Another system-related challenge is the ongoing **shortage of places** for children in kindergartens, mostly in larger cities; this issue requires measures to be taken by the government in cooperation with the municipalities to ensure adequate coverage.

An upcoming challenge for the university education system, in which future Kindergarten Teachers are prepared, is related to the 2021-2024 Three-Year Plan for the **Implementation of the 2021-2030 Strategy for Development of Higher Education in Bulgaria**, in which there are plans for the introduction of legislation that will include provisions for regular and remote-based education in Bachelor's degrees with a total duration of three academic years instead of the current four years, with opportunity for continuing to a state-sponsored 2-year Master's degree course in the same professional area. Relevant discussions between universities in Bulgaria are currently underway.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the population in Bulgaria totalled 6,838,937. Over the past 20 years the total population has sunk significantly (2000: 8,198,876; 2010: 7,421,766; 2020: 6,951,482; Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate in the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). With 1.58, Bulgaria is slightly above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023c)[4].

[4] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Children under 6 years of age

Table 7

Bulgaria: Number of under 6 year-olds by age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Up to 1 year	58,593
1 year-olds	59,518
2 year-olds	62,040
3 year-olds	63,103
4 year-olds	65,120
5 year-olds	66,127
0 to under 6 year-olds	374,501

Source: Eurostat 2023a

The share of children under 3 in the total population in 2022 was 2.6%, that of children under 6 5.5%. These proportions have been below the EU averages for 20 years.

Table 8

Bulgaria: Distribution of under 6 year-olds in population by age compared with EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Bulgaria/EU	Under 3 year- olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Bulgaria	2.4	2.7	5.2
	∅ EU15[5]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Bulgaria	2.5	2.5	5.0
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.0	6.2
2015	Bulgaria	2.8	2.9	5.7
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Bulgaria	2.6	2.8	5.5
	∅ EU27	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Single households with children under 6 years of age

In 2022, 41.5% of all households with children under the age of 6 years were couple households. Households with single parents account for only 1.6% and are usually single mother households; the proportion of single fathers is very low at 0.2%.

Table 9

Bulgaria: Households with children under 6 years old, 2022

Household type	Number of households	Households in per cent
Households total	388,900	
Couple households	161,500	41.5
Other types of households	221,000	56.8
Single parent households, total	6,400	1.6

[5] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Household type	Number of households	Households in per cent
Single parent households, women	5,600	1.4
Single parent households, men	800**	0.2

Source: Eurostat 2023k, *own calculation, **data computed

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Bulgaria, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 77.3% and for women 69.7% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 59.6% of women and 81.5% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were among the lowest rates in the EU (EU-average 87.2%); those of mothers were also well below the EU-average (63.6%) (Eurostat 2023g, own calculations).

Table 10a

Bulgaria: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Bulgaria:	48.4	76.4
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[6]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2021	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Bulgaria:	59.6	81.5
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[7]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Rep. 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023g

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 10b.*

Table 10b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023

[6] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[7] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023g, 2023j

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[8]

In 2022, more than a third (35.7%) of children under 6 year of age were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was significantly above the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 32.2% (EU: 21.6%) (Eurostat 2023h). 8.6% of the total population and 16.7% of children under 6 years of age suffered from severe material deprivation in 2020 (EU averages 4.3% and 6.1% respectively) (Eurostat 2023i).

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[8] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

CROATIA

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

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1. ECEC governance in Croatia

In Croatia, ECEC is regulated by the Preschool Education Act[1] (Official Gazette, No. 10/1997, 107/2007, 94/2013, 98/2019, 57/2022, 101/23), by the National Curriculum for ECEC (Official Gazette, No. 5/2015), and by the State Pedagogical Standard of ECEC (Official Gazette, No. 63/2008, 90/2010). ECEC is provided by kindergartens and other legal entities that have established education programmes for children aged from 6 months to primary school age (under age 7). It is implemented through education, healthcare, nutrition and social care agencies for children from the age of six months until the start of primary school. ECEC is divided into three educational cycles, based on the age of children: from 6 months to one year of age, from 1 to 3 years, from 3 years of age to the start of primary education (age 7). Provision for children under 3 years is classified as ISCED 010 and as ISCED 020 for children aged 3 years and over.

A kindergarten (ECEC institution) can be established by the authorities of the Republic of Croatia, local and regional units of self-government, religious communities, and other legal and natural persons. All ECEC programmes are supervised by the Ministry of Science and Education (*Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja*). The dominant providers of ECEC are public institutions established by local government authorities. In addition to regular kindergartens, children can also participate in other pre-primary and early childhood programmes provided by other legally recognised institutions – in primary schools, playgroups in libraries, or in other health, social, cultural and sports organisations. Their provision focuses on various short-duration programmes (Eurydice 2023).

ECEC represents the initial level of the education system. However, there is no universal legal guarantee to a place in ECEC for children under age 6. For 6 year-olds, a one-year pre-primary programme prior to starting school is compulsory. Pre-primary programmes last 250 hours in total. The responsibility for financing and developing ECEC capacities is set at the local level (towns and municipality). The territorial fragmentation of Croatia's public administration and differences in levels of administrative capacity and financial resources hinder the expansion and availability of ECEC. Croatia's funding model – 99% of ECEC costs are decentralised to the municipality level – is viewed as the primary obstacle to increasing ECEC coverage in the country (The World Bank 2019).

It can be concluded that Croatian ECEC is integrated in the educational system and significantly decentralised. The establishment and funding of ECEC programmes falls under the jurisdiction of local authorities (counties, cities, and municipalities), under the supervision of the Ministry of Science and Education.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

The professional staff specifically qualified for educational work with children up to 7 years of age in Croatia are **ECEC Teachers** (*odgojitelj/odgojiteljica djece rane i predškolske dobi*). The role

[1] The Preschool Education Act is a literal translation of the title of the Act which refers to ECEC.

of ECEC Teachers is to plan, programme and evaluate educational work and to support the development of every child according to their abilities, while cooperating with peers, parents and the local community.

According to the Preschool Education Act (Official Gazette, No. 10/1997, 107/2007, 94/2013, 98/2019; 57/2022), ECEC institutions employ various **specialist support staff** who also work with children and members of their families, regardless of their developmental, social or family status, as well as a **Nurse** as a health manager. Qualified **Primary School Teachers** can also work in pre-primary programmes located in primary schools in the place of ECEC Teachers. In cases of staff shortages, they may also be employed as 'unqualified staff' in other ECEC programmes, but they are then required to complete the ECEC Teacher qualification within two years.

Table 1 gives an overview of these professionals. The core practitioner (ECEC Teacher) and the qualified co-worker (Nurse) are also categorised according to one of five profiles adapted from the original **SEEPRO** study (see *Box 1* at the end of this chapter).

Table 1
Croatia: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main position/s	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Odgojitelj/odgojiteljica djece rane i predškolske dobi **ECEC Teacher** (sometimes called Kindergarten or Preschool Teacher) *Profile*: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	*Predškolske ustanove i programi* **Kindergarten** and other licensed ECEC institutions 6 months – 6 years[2]	Core pedagogue with group responsibility	6 months – 6 years	Bachelor's degree, 3 years university ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Stručni suradnik – pedagog *Stručna suradnica – pedagoginja* **Pedagogue**	*Predškolske ustanove i programi* **Kindergarten** and other licensed ECEC institutions 6 months – 6 years	Specialist support staff	Broad focus (children and adults)	Master's degree (3 +2 years university) ECTS credits: 300 EQF Level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Stručni suradnik – psiholog *Stručna suradnica - psihologinja* **Psychologist**	*Predškolske ustanove i programi* **Kindergarten** and other licensed ECEC provision 6 months – 6 years	Specialist support staff	Broad focus (children and adults)	Master's degree (3+2 years university) ECTS credits: 300 EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7

[2] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In the case of Croatia the corresponding format is **0–6**, because children start school between the ages 6 and 7 years.

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main position/s	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Stručni suradnik – edukacijski rehabilitator, logoped, socijalni pedagog *Stručna suradnica – edukacijska rehabilitatorica, logopetkinja, socijalna pedagoginja* **Educational and rehabilitation professionals** (Curative Educator, Speech Therapist, Social Pedagogue)	*Predškolske ustanove i programi* **Kindergarten** and other licensed ECEC institutions 6 months – 6 years	Specialist support staff	Broad focus (children and adults)	Master's degree (3+2 years university) ECTS credits: 300 EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Viša medicinska sestra/Viši medicinski brat **Nurse** *Profile*: Social Care/Health Care Professional	*Predškolske ustanove i programi* **Kindergarten** and other licensed ECEC institutions 6 months – 6 years	Qualified co-worker, particularly in health issues	Broad focus (children and adults)	Bachelor's degree 3 years university ECTS credits: 180 EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Učitelj/Učiteljica razredne nastave **Primary School Teacher**	*Program predškole* **Pre-primary provision in schools**	Core pedagogue with group responsibility	6 – 6 years	Master's degree (5 years university) ECTS credits: 300 EQF Level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Pomoćnik/pomoćnica za djecu s teškoćama u razvoju or Stručni komunikacijski posrednik/posrednica **Assistant** for children with developmental disabilities *or* **Communication Mediator**	*Predškolske ustanove i programi* **Kindergarten** and other licensed ECEC institutions 6 months – 6 years	Support co-workers in the education and upbringing of children with developmental disabilities	6 months – 6 years	Completed secondary school education **plus** completion of a further education programme for working with children with developmental disabilities ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 4

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

In Croatia, the principal is the administrative and professional manager of a kindergarten. The institution is governed by a steering council consisting of 5 to 7 members. At least half of the members of the council are appointed by the founder/provider from the ranks of public workers, one member is elected by the parents of the enrolled children, and the other members of the council are elected via secret vote amongst the ECEC Teachers or specialist support staff.

A person who meets the job requirements for the post of ECEC Teacher or specialist support staff, and has at least 5 years of work experience in ECEC, can be appointed Principal. The Principal is selected on the basis of a public tender announced by the governing council of the institution, and appointed and dismissed by the founder of the institution. The term of office of the principal is 5 years, with the possibility of re-election (Preschool Education Act, Official Gazette, No. 10/1997, 107/2007, 94/2013, 98/2019, 57/2022, 101/2023). Principals generally do not work directly with children, and their role is pedagogical guidance and administration.

According to the Croatian Qualifications Framework Act (Official Gazette, No. 22/2013, 41/2016, 64/2018, 47/2020, 20/2021), the expected sets of competences for Principals of educational institutions, including kindergartens are:

- Planning and programming the work of the educational institution
- Analysis of the learning environment
- Quality assurance
- Workplace organisation
- Advisory work
- Communication and presentation skills
- Human resources management
- Implementation of legal regulations.

However, accredited education programmes for Principals in Croatia have not yet been developed. This gap is being filled by some civil society organisations that implement programmes for Principals as part of lifelong learning (e.g. Step by Step, Forum of Freedom in Education), but they are not licensed and are not available to all Principals.

There is also no adequate system for attracting individuals who are interested in the position of ECEC Principal which would encourage a selection of higher-quality candidates. Obtaining a license is not prescribed by law. There are no suitable criteria for determining the pedagogical and management competences of candidates. None of the important elements related to assuming the position of ECEC Principal, to the performance of his/her duties, or to leaving office, has been appropriately regulated. This means that ECEC Principals are not adequately prepared for the management of ECEC institutions (Strategy for education, science and technology, Official Gazette, No. 124/2014).

Even though the Strategy predicts a definition of competence standards and the institutionalisation of the education of future Principals, and despite the fact that the Principal's role was introduced into the register of professions by the ministry, Croatia is still waiting for changes in the professionalisation of Kindergarten Principals.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Beyond the post of Centre Leader, the only designated post of responsibility in Croatia relating to pedagogical tasks which require a co-ordinating focus across the ECEC setting is that of Supervisor or Mentor during field practice within students' initial professional education courses.

According to the Ordinance on kindergartens as professional development centres (Official Gazette, No. 49/2004), higher educational institutions (HEI) and kindergartens enter into an agreement which, among other things, defines the obligations of the HEI to pay for the work of Mentors and other individuals involved in the organisation and implementation of work programmes with students.

In some kindergartens Principals appoint a shift manager from the ranks of ECEC Teachers. This ECEC Teacher performs duties such as scheduling of ECEC Teachers' shifts, weekly recording of working hours of ECEC Teachers or other tasks ordered by the principal. These duties generally are not paid additionally and are not defined by legislation.

2.4 Pedagogical co-ordinators and supervisory staff

Croatian legislation does not provide for special positions regarding coordination or supervision of pedagogical work. If it is a kindergarten with regional facilities, facility managers are appointed from the ranks of ECEC Teachers or specialist support staff.

Professional and pedagogical supervision of kindergartens is performed by the Education and Teacher Training Agency, which also organises the professional development of staff (Act on the Agency for Education, Official Gazette, No. 85/2006).

Professional work in the Agency is performed by Advisers and Senior Advisers. A person with a university degree and 3 years of work experience in education may be elected as an Adviser, while a person with a university degree and 7 years of work experience in education may be elected as a Senior Adviser. Other conditions are defined by the statute or other general acts of the Agency.

2.5 Specialist support staff

The specialist support staff (*stručni suradnik, stručna suradnica*) in a kindergarten include a Pedagogue, a Psychologist and an educational rehabilitation expert such as a Speech Therapist, Social Pedagogue or a Curative Educator (State Pedagogical Standard of ECEC, Official Gazette, No. 63/2008, 90/2010).

A **Pedagogue** (*stručni suradnik – pedagog/stručna suradnica – pedagoginja*) monitors the realisation of educational activities, gives expert contribution to the achievement of educational goals and improves the overall educational process by:

- Proposing innovations, contemporary methods and forms of work
- Proposing, participating and assisting ECEC Teachers in the realisation of professional development programmes and their lifelong learning
- Cooperating with parents and helping them in the upbringing and education of children and tackling educational problems
- Cooperating with other educational actors
- Contributing to the development of teamwork in the ECEC institution
- Publicly presenting the educational work of the ECEC institution.

A **Psychologist** (*stručni suradnik – psiholog/stručna suradnica -psihologinja*) monitors the psychosocial development and progress of each child, sets developmental tasks and takes care of the mental health of children. Psychologists contribute to the development of teamwork in the kindergarten and participate in creating a framework for realising children's rights. The role of Psychologists is especially important in the work with children with special educational needs (e.g. children with disabilities and gifted children) and in devising developmental tasks which

facilitate the strengthening of the child's abilities. A Psychologist also works on the emotional and psychological strengthening of the family in order to better support the child's conditions of growing up. He/she collaborates with ECEC Teachers, parents and the local community and improves the overall work of the kindergarten. Further professional tasks include establishing connections with health and social care institutions, using supervisory assistance, participating in continuing education and research programmes, and publicly presenting the results of the work of the kindergarten.

Curative professionals (Curative Educators, Speech Therapists, Social Pedagogues) work on recognising, alleviating and eliminating children's difficulties. They identify the specific needs of children with disabilities and inform ECEC Teachers, other co-workers and parents about them. They create conditions for the inclusion of children in special and regular ECEC programmes.

In cooperation with ECEC Teachers, the specialist support staff (and parents) determine the most appropriate methods for each individual child and apply them in their work. They cooperate with health and social care institutions and others in the prevention of developmental disorders in children. They monitor, study and check in practice scientific and theoretical knowledge in the field of educational and rehabilitation sciences. They improve their own work and the whole process of inclusion of children with disabilities in the community.

Specialist support staff are obliged to spend 25 working hours per week in direct pedagogical work with children, ECEC Teachers and parents, and other tasks within the hourly rate up to full working hours (40 hours).

The number of specialist support staff with regard to the number of educational groups or the total number of children is as follows (State Pedagogical Standard of ECEC, Official Gazette, No. 63/2008, 90/2010):

- For 10 educational groups or 200 children, one full-time specialist support staff member
- For 11 to 20 educational groups or up to 400 children, two full-time specialist support staff (of different profiles)
- For 21 to 30 educational groups or up to 600 children, three full-time specialist support staff (of different profiles).

If educational groups with a special programme for children with disabilities or programmes for gifted children are established in the kindergarten, the number of specialist support staff is increased by 0.10 working hours per educational group per week. The number of specialist support staff can be increased due to special educational needs of children, dislocation of facilities and the diversity of programmes implemented in the kindergarten.

The profile of the specialist support staff is selected by the kindergarten based on the needs of the children and the programmes it implements. In the selection of specialist support staff, it is necessary to respect the multidisciplinarity of the team of specialist support staff (Pedagogue, Psychologist and experts in the field of curative education: a Speech Therapist, a Social Pedagogue or a Curative Educator). If the kindergarten does not employ any specialist support staff members, resources in the local community are used. However, such cooperation is not specifically defined by law.

The regulation outlined above means that kindergartens with less than 200 children are not obliged to employ specialist support staff. Since approximately 40% of all kindergartens belong to this group of ECEC institutions, many children and kindergartens in Croatia have to manage without specialist support.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

According to national data (CBS 2023a, Tab.1), at the beginning of the year 2022/2023 there were 673 kindergartens (with 910 units) and 144 other institutions (e.g. primary schools, libraries) implementing ECEC programmes in Croatia. 384 were self-contained kindergartens, whereas 289 were kindergartens with affiliated units/departments in various locations.

The data on the overall composition of the ECEC workforce are shown in *Table 2*. National data about the ethnicity and migrant status of employees are not available because they are not systematically compiled. However, according to the last census held in 2021 (CBS 2022), the majority of the population are Croats (91.63%), meaning that predominantly Croatian staff work in Croatian ECEC institutions.

Table 2

Croatia: Structural composition of ECEC workforce (kindergartens), 2022/2023

Staff categories	ECEC Teachers	Nurses	Specialist support staff	Administrative and other staff (including Assistants)	Total	Proportion of workforce, in %
Staff with specialist higher education degree (BA)	11,977	353	49	515	12,894	51.64
Staff with specialist higher education degree (MA)	2,522	113	1,123	685	4,443	17.79
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	660	110	-	5,304	6,074	24.33
Staff with non-specialist qualification	-	-	-	1,556	1,556	6.24
Total	**15,159**	**576**	**1,172**	**8,060**	**24,976**	**100**
Including: Men	165	20	36	876	1,097	4.4
Staff with a background of migration	No sytematically compiled national data					

Source: CBS 2023a, own calculations

Differences in the educational levels of individual employees mostly stem from changes in the system of education of ECEC Teachers, which enables the acquisition of a Master's degree in early and preschool education. This level of education is not a mandatory condition for performing the duties of an ECEC Teacher. Employees who were educated before the implementation of the Bologna Process, and who have retained the right to qualify according to previous regulations, have lower levels of education.

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes – higher education and vocational

Since 2005, professional studies for prospective ECEC Teachers in Croatia have been transformed significantly through the implementation of the Bologna Process. The major change was raising all initial ECEC Teacher education programmes to the tertiary level. Today, all studies for ECEC Teachers are conceptualised as university studies lasting three years (Bachelor's degree).

After completion of a three-year undergraduate study programme (six semesters), the specialist **Bachelor's degree in Early and Preschool Education** prepares the ECEC Teachers for duties and tasks related to the education and care of young children up to compulsory school age (from 6 months to under 7 years of age), caring for them and educating them in different ECEC settings. They can then continue to follow a graduate two-year university study programme (four semesters) for a **Master's degree in Early and Preschool Education**, qualifying them to perform highly professional, research and developmental work in the field of ECEC.

Other professionals who work as specialist support staff in ECEC settings have followed different university study programmes (pedagogy, psychology, curative education, speech therapy, social pedagogy) and working in ECEC settings is just one aspect of their professional interest. They are qualified to work in a variety of settings, with different populations (young children, school pupils, teenagers, and adults). If they work in kindergartens, their main role is to support the ECEC Teachers, children and parents in the educational process.

The condition for enrolment in higher education in Croatia is the completion of a high school (gymnasium or vocational secondary school) and passing the Final State Exam. In addition to these two conditions, some higher education institutions may accept the results of competitions during high school and other achievements (eg. completed music school, the status of a categorised athlete, etc.).

Many universities offer initial ECEC education study programmes in Croatia. Their programmes are not uniform, and the procedures for enrolment differ. Thus, in some higher education institutions, additional tests of specific knowledge, skills and abilities are conducted, while in others they are not.

For enrolment in the undergraduate university study programme, psychological testing of abilities and motivation is conducted, but also artistic abilities, musical abilities and basic motor skills are assessed.

For enrolment in the undergraduate university study of **curative education**, an oral assessment of general knowledge, aptitude and motivation for the field of study is conducted, as well as an additional check of the specific abilities and skills required. For enrolment in the undergraduate university study of **speech therapy**, an assessment of language-speech-voice status (interview) is performed, and the exclusion criterion is the presence of language-speech-voice difficulties of the candidate. For enrolment in the undergraduate university study of **social pedagogy**, an oral assessment of knowledge, inclination and motivation for study is performed, and a health certificate from a school doctor is required.

For the study of **pedagogy and psychology**, a test of abstract thinking and an initial interview with candidates are conducted (although due to epidemiological circumstances, this was omitted in the academic year 2020/21).

The specifics of IPE in Croatia are:

Table 3

ECEC Teacher / Kindergarten Teacher

Job title in Croatian: *Odgojitelj/odgojiteljica djece rane i predškolske dobi* **Profile**: Early childhood pedagogy professional
Entry requirements: completion of 4 years at a gymnasium or vocational secondary school and Final State Exam (= university entrance exam) **Professional studies:** 3 years at university level **Award:** Bachelor – Early and Preschool Education **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED** 2011: 6 **Main ECEC workplace:** ECEC settings, 6 months – 6 years

Table 4

Croatia: Specialist support staff (Pedagogue, Psychologist, Rehabilitation Specialists, Speech Therapists, Social Pedagogues)

Job titles in Croatian: *Stručni suradnik – pedagog/stručna suradnica – pedagoginja* *Stručni suradnik – psiholog/stručna suradnica -psihologinja* *Edukacijski rehabilitator/edukacijska rehabilitatorica* *Logoped/logopetkinja* *Socijalni pedagog/socijalna pedagoginja*
Entry requirements: completion of 4 years gymnasium or vocational secondary school and Final State Exam **Professional studies:** 5 years study at a university (undergraduate and graduate study programme in Pedagogy, Psychology or Education and Rehabilitation Sciences) **Award:** Master's degree **Total ECTS credits:** 300 (180+120) **EQF level:** 7 **ISCED 2011**: 7 **Main ECEC workplaces:** As Pedagogues, Psychologists**,** experts in inclusive education and rehabilitation, social pedagogy or Speech Therapists in ECEC settings, 6 months – 6 years old. Graduates also may work in schools, public sector services, state institutions and local and regional self-governing institutions (with children, adolescents and adults).

Table 5

Croatia: Nurse

Job title in Croatian: *Viša medicinska sestra/Viši medicinski tehičar, Zdravstveni voditelj* (lit. "senior nurse") **Profile**: Social and Health Care Professional
Entry requirements: completion of 4 years gymnasium or vocational secondary school and Final State Exam (= university entrance exam) **Professional studies:** 3 years study at a university of applied sciences **Award:** Bachelor **Total ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011**: 6 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Working with children, parents and professionals in the field of protection of children's health and a healthy environment in ECEC settings. Graduates also may work in different health and social welfare institutions.

Primary School Teachers are employed in ECEC only as an exception, in cases of a shortage of ECEC Teachers.

4.2 Competences, curriculum, and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

According to the Croatian Qualifications Framework Act (Official Gazette, No. 22/2013, 41/2016, 64/2018, 47/2020, 20/2021), all qualifications and related learning outcomes should be harmonised with the *Croatian Qualifications Framework* and entered in the *Register of Croatian Qualifications*. In the field of ECEC, the occupational standard for ECEC Teacher was entered in the register of the Croatian Qualifications Framework on 15 May 2023.

Occupational standards for the Bachelor ECEC qualification (level 6) are:

1. Participation in preparing the annual plan and programme of ECEC curricula
2. Planning and evaluating the education process
3. Designing spatial, material, time, and other conditions for the implementation of the education process
4. Implementation of the education process (direct work, individual, and group access)
5. Implementation of specific educational programmes
6. Conducting prescribed pedagogical documentation
7. Communication and cooperation within the ECEC institution (parents, colleauges, specialist support staff, others)
8. Planning and implementation of continuing individual and institutional development
9. Evaluation and self-evaluation of individual and institutional work
10. Care for the safety and well-being of children.

The most important tasks of the ECEC Teachers are:

- Participation in the preparation of the annual work plan and the programme and curriculum of the kindergarten or other ECEC setting
- Planning and preparing direct educational work with the children
- Preparing and organising incentives, activities, and environments for educational work
- Carrying out the educational process through direct work and an individual and group approach
- Implementation of special educational programmes
- Keeping the prescribed educational documentation
- Collaboration and professional communication with parents, work colleagues and other stakeholders
- Implementation of the personal CPD and development plan
- Assessing and self-evaluating their own work and the work of the centre
- Concern for the safety and well-being of the children.

On the basis of the occupational standard drawn up, a qualification standard is created that defines the learning outcomes that a person must acquire in order to be able to fulfil the key tasks of ECEC Teachers and to acquire this qualification. This is documented with a diploma. The learing outcomes form the basis for the creation of study programmes that train specialists for the profession.

It is important to emphasise that qualification standards have not yet been adopted and implemented in the initial education programmes of ECEC Teachers, so they continue to study according to different study programmes, depending on which university and higher education institution they study at. It means that the curriculum of each higher education institution for each study programme is defined at the institutional level. Before the approval of study programmes, all higher education institutions have to undergo an accreditation process by the Agency for Science and Higher Education. *The Scientific Activity and Higher Education Act* (Official Gazette, No. 23/2003, 198/2003, 105/2004, 174/2004, 02/2007, 46/2007, 45/2009, 63/2011, 94/2013, 139/2013, 101/2014, 60/2015, 131/2017) stipulates that curricula should be in line with the latest scientific achievements, national priorities, and professional demands and be comparable to EU curricula. However, there are no compulsory or core subjects defined at the national or regional level. A common feature of all programmes is their university level, which means that ECEC vocational studies no longer exist in Croatia.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Formal opportunities for moving up and across qualifications frameworks, as well as alternative pathways of entry into ECEC work, are not developed in Croatia. ECEC workers can continue their professional development by entering advanced formal education study routes or through continuing professional development activities, without the possibility of changing their professional position or workplace. Even though the Croatian Government has adopted many different strategies and laws that focus on informal learning, these initiatives are still waiting to be implemented.

The only formal possibility to change the level of qualification is enrolment in a graduate ECEC study-as-you-work programme. However, ECEC Teachers who acquire the Master of ECEC qualification remain in the same job, with the possibility of a salary increase (depending on decisions made by the founders of the kindergarten).

5. Guided work experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Learning in the ECEC workplace is incorporated in the curricula of each faculty that provides a study programme for ECEC. These practica are conducted in kindergartens that have the status of a training centre. This status is determined by the Ministry of Science and Education, based on the requirement of the faculty that organises the students' placements (Ordinance on kindergartens as professional development centres, Official Gazette, No. 49/2004). Mutual obligations of the training centre and the faculty are regulated through a signed contract which is renewable on an annual basis. This contract includes a plan of the work with students, as well as regulations for the financial support for mentors and the ECEC institutions where the placement will be arranged. This financial support is provided by higher education faculties and is based on the number of students who decide to spend their practicum in each institution.

According to the relevant Ordinance (Official Gazette, No. 49/2004), the mentorship of students is performed by ECEC Teachers or specialist support staff with at least five years of experience. The mentor in the practicum class is initially appointed by the principal of the kindergarten or ECEC Teachers' council for a period of one year. After one year of successful mentoring, the

ministry appoints a mentor for a period of four years at the suggestion of the cooperating institutions. A mentor in the practicum class:

- Plans, prepares and evaluates the student's work
- Collaborates with the university teacher who is responsible for the methodology courses
- Collaborates with other mentors in the kindergarten
- Participates in the analysis of students' educational work
- If needed, participates in the sessions of professional bodies of the higher education institution when discussing issues in the field of methodology and professional-pedagogical practice of students
- Keeps written documentation.

Another possibility is that the students themselves choose kindergartens for work-based learning; however, these institutions are not required to have the status of training centres. Practica in the study programmes of different higher education institutions may have different organisational forms, timetables and allocation of ECTS credits (see *Table 6*).

All students are obliged to keep a diary of work, as well as other documentation defined in the course syllabus. The mentor is obliged to evaluate the quality of the student's practice through a written report. At the end of the practicum, the student hands in the various forms of documentation to the responsible university tutor, who checks whether all obligations have been fulfilled. This is the only formalised procedure of self-evaluation and evaluation of student's practice. However, each university tutor can give the students special assignments connected with specific lectures or courses. In such cases, students evaluate their work within the framework of these courses and reflect on their work together with their university tutors.

Table 6

Croatia: Practical courses within the ECEC study programmes

University (HEI)	Bachelor's degree		Master's degree	
	Hours	ECTS	Hours	ECTS
Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Faculty of Educational Sciences	280	7	-	-[3]
University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences	150	5	-	-
Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Educational Sciences	120	9	90	6
University of Rijeka, Faculty of Teacher Education	60	6	-	-
University of Zadar, Department of Teacher and Preschool Teacher Education	120	8	90	6
University of Zagreb, Faculty of Teacher Education	120	6	160	6

Source: Study programmes of higher education institutions 2022

The placements in ECEC settings are organised as a separate course. During the time they spend at the workplace, students receive support from a Mentor, who should have at least five years

[3] Some study programmes are offered exclusively in the format of in-service professional development and additional practica are not included in the study programme.

of working experience. This is the only requirement for taking on the role as Mentor. Specific qualifications or working conditions for this position have not been developed. The mentor is expected to support the work of the student through planning, preparing and evaluating the student's activities. The 'Student Mentor' position is awarded 3 points in the process of the professional promotion of ECEC Teachers (Ordinance on the manner and conditions for the promotion in the profession of ECEC Teachers and other professionals in kindergartens, Official Gazette, No. 133/1997; 20/2005).

During the practicum period, students are expected to become familiar with the organisational, legal and pedagogical aspects of kindergartens, as well as with all aspects of their future work.

Learning outcomes are defined in the course syllabus. For example, the Department of Teacher and Preschool Teacher Education of the University of Zadar, at the undergraduate level, envisages the following learning outcomes of student practice:

- Develop the skills of a reflective practitioner who continuously evaluates the effects of his or her achievements
- Demonstrate the ability to adapt to new and unexpected situations by actively applying the acquired knowledge, skills and abilities
- Recognise and evaluate the concepts of lifelong learning by advocating for personal professional development
- Explain the latest scientific knowledge about children's learning in early childhood and ways of supporting it
- Independently construct, implement and evaluate an integrated curriculum in the totality of all developmental areas (kinesiological, music, art, language-communication and research-cognitive) using activities and materials in accordance with modern development theories that interpret child development.

The learning outcomes of student internship at the graduate level are:

- Devise and examine new strategies in designing an integrated curriculum that will be a response to current knowledge about the developmental effects of extrafamilial ECEC as a child-friendly environment
- Identify opportunities to improve the quality of educational work and organise and manage research projects by selecting appropriate research paradigms (methods and techniques), as well as analyse and interpret research results
- Compare and critically evaluate the relationship between knowledge and its application in specific educational practices and assess the possible impacts on the quality of centre-based ECEC
- Develop the ability to lead at the level of independent action and teamwork in interdisciplinary teams of experts working in the field of ECEC.

It can be concluded that workplace-based learning in the IPE of core pedagogues in Croatia is not coordinated and in some aspects not sufficiently defined. This can be deduced from differences in the number of ECTS credits allocated for this part of IPE at different HEI, from the lack of formal procedures for organising and evaluating these processes, and from the lack of qualification requirements for field-based Mentors, who are not well recognised and supported.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

The following regulations are relevant for CPD:

- the **Preschool Education Act** (Official Gazette, No. 10/1997, 107/2007, 94/2013, 98/2019; 57/2022), which stipulates the obligation of ECEC Teachers and specialist support staff in terms of CPD and the related possibility of promotion, according to the *Ordinance on the manner and conditions for promotion in the ECEC Teacher profession and for other professionals in kindergartens* (Official Gazette, No. 133/1997; 20/2005)
- the **Act on the Education and Teacher Training Agency** (Official Gazette, No. 85/2006) which prescribes that the Agency organises and conducts professional training of educational workers and principals.

CDP is one of the three criteria for the promotion of ECEC Teachers and specialist support staff in their professional advancement. It includes participation in (a) professional development sessions organised by the Ministry of Science and Education, and (b) CPD conducted by professional institutions and associations.

CPD is planned by the principal of the kindergarten on an annual basis. It includes formal seminars and courses, as well as center-based CPD activities, and depends on the capabilities and priorities of individual institutions and their contractors.

Professional development of ECEC Teachers and specialist support staff is one of the many obligations that are implemented during the non-contact time, but the exact share of professional development is not defined (State Pedagogical Standard of ECEC, Official Gazette, No. 63/2008, 90/2010).

Professional training organised by the Education and Teacher Training Agency is free of charge for participants, while other forms of CPD are paid for – either through project funds or by the institutions, or by the participants themselves. In addition to the Agency, ECEC professional development courses are offered by civil society organisations (e.g. Step by Step) and the lifelong learning centres of various university faculties. The Agency planned to hold 187 professional sessions in 2021, and around 50 meetings were related to ECEC (Education and Teacher Training Agency 2021).

The topics of professional development are diverse, and most often focus on general pedagogical topics related to curricula (Bouillet 2018a). In terms of quality, the programmes implemented by *Step by Step* stand out, such as: ''Interculturalism and living diversity'', ''The right to an appropriate upbringing and education'', ''Developmentally appropriate practices'' and ''Quality and development''. They are, however, only available to a small number of ECEC Teachers and are not part of the regular programme offered of the Education and Teacher Training Agency.

During their professional career, ECEC Teachers can advance to the status of a **Mentor**, **Counsellor** or **Superior Counsellor**[4], dependent to a certain extent on their participation in CPD courses. Precise criteria on the content, manner and forms of professional training have not been determined yet.

Such a situation leads to the conclusion that CPD depends on the individual aspirations of individuals and the capacities and willingness of the kindergarten to organise CPD activities at the institutional level. This is indicated by the results of a recent national survey (Matković et al.

[4] The status of superior counsellor is an innovation based on the amendments of the Preschool Education Act from the year 2022.

2020) which showed in a representative sample for Croatia (N=2,023 qualified ECEC staff) that the most common form of professional development is training at work (colloquia, learning communities, etc.), with 82.5% of respondents referring to such a form of CDP. In second place were professional training courses or sessions organised by the Education and Teacher Training Agency, in which 52.3% of respondents participated during the year. In third place comes advanced professional training paid or provided by the employer (50.2% of respondents), and the lowest number of respondents participated in professional training funded by themselves (27.0%).

Approximately a quarter of the professional staff had not participated in any form of CPD during the previous year. This indicates that although two complementary mechanisms of professional development are provided (by the state or the employer), this joint coverage still does not reach a quarter of professionals employed in kindergartens (Matković et al. 2020).

Most ECEC Teachers participate in CPD only for one day or less a year. Centre Leaders and special support staff are more likely to participate in CPD than ECEC Teachers. Staff in ECEC settings in rural communities and temporary employees are less likely to engage in professional development activities than their contemporaries in urban areas. Obstacles to access are diverse: from lack of capacity in existing CPD options in terms of cost, distance, lack of time, lack of employer support and non-transparent training allocation practices, to inadequacy of the form or content of training (Matković et al. 2020).

The findings presented here come from the research project "Working in kindergartens: results of the research on working conditions in early and preschool education", conducted in 2019 by the research team (Matković et al. 2020) as part of the activities of the Trade Union of Education, Media and Culture. The research was funded by the European Social Fund. This is the only extensive research on CDP in ECEC that has recently been conducted in Croatia.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Salaries in ECEC, as elsewhere in the public sector, are largely determined by the level of education and length of service of employees. However, the ECEC system is significantly more decentralised than the rest of the public sector. Thus, defining the amount of salaries is in the domain of the setting providers, i.e. individual local self-government units in the case of public kindergartens, otherwise private and church-affiliated ECEC programme providers.

Seniority is a relevant salary factor because a salary supplement of 0.5% is allocated for each completed year of service. Staff also receive a higher salary for posts of responsibility (e.g. as Centre Leader, Deputy Leader, Student Mentor/Supervisor), as well as for the formal level of professional status (e.g. Mentor; Counsellor). Some founders of ECEC institutions (e.g. the City of Zagreb) provide 15% higher salaries to ECEC Teachers who have earned a Master's degree in ECEC.

Most ECEC Teachers earn a net salary of between €660 and €1,250 per month[5]. The monthly salary for the entry level is between €650 and €997. After five years of professional experience, their net salary increases to between €753 and €1,110 per month.

[5] Croatia adopted the euro as its currency in January 2023.

The average salaries of employees in kindergartens in the City of Zagreb are higher than in the rest of Croatia, regardless of the category of job. The average salaries of ECEC Teachers are about €134-160 higher and in the rest of Croatia they differ relatively little. The lowest average salary outside the City of Zagreb was around €753, and the highest around €1099 (MojaPlaća 2023). The same is true for other staff: the average salary of other staff in the City of Zagreb is about €107-120 higher than the rest of Croatia, and the average salaries of other staff in the rest of Croatia are almost the same. In public kindergartens, the possibility of different salaries is legally open depending on the local self-government in which the kindergarten is located, although the application of regulations on salaries for primary school teachers is determined if they are more favourable for ECEC Teachers.

The average monthly net salary per employee in the legal entities of the Republic of Croatia was €1,178 in October 2023, which was 1.9% higher in nominal terms and 1.4% higher in real terms compared to September 2023 (CBS 2023b).

In the fourth quarter of 2021, the average monthly payment in Education was €1,047 (CBS 2022).

Matković et al. (2020) did not find differences in the reported difficulties in "making ends meet" on a household level, compared to all ECEC employees and all public sector employees.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment

According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2023a), in 2022/23, 25,380 persons were working in ECEC settings in total. Among them, 23,545 or 92.8% are full-time employees.

Most part-time employees work in shorter programmes that are conducted outside kindergartens (preschool programmes, shorter preschool programmes, sports programmes, etc.). Thus, in kindergartens 1.08% of employees work part-time, while of those employed by other providers of ECEC programmes, 65.3% work full-time and 34.7% part-time. ECEC Teachers in kindergartens generally work full time, which is 40 hours per week. Some specialist support staff work part-time in one kindergarten and part-time in another.

A precarious form of employment in the ECEC system is temporary employment. According to the Labour Act (Official Gazette, No. 93/2014; 127/2017; 98/2019), an employment contract may exceptionally be concluded for a definite period of time, for the establishment of an employment relationship whose termination is determined in advance by a deadline, performance of a certain job or performance of a certain events. This form of employment includes 20% of all ECEC Teachers (Matković et al., 2020), which is significantly higher compared to the representation of such employment in the public sector, which amounts to 7%.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified staff

Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified staff (probationers) are prescribed by the Ordinance on the manner and conditions of taking the professional exam of ECEC Teachers and other professionals in preschool institutions (Official Gazette, No. 133/1997). According to that ordinance, a probationer's internship lasts for 12 months and is completed by passing a professional exam.

Completion of the professional exam is a prerequisite for independent work in the ECEC setting, and is taken before the state exam committee. The exam is taken by all employees in ECEC institutions who are qualified for educational work (ECEC Teachers and specialist support staff).

The internship of trainees is realised based on a programme proposed by the internship committee, and adopted by the authorised professional body of the kindergarten (educational council). The task of the committee is to draft a proposal for an internship programme, provide the

trainee with pedagogical, methodological and any other assistance, and monitor his/her progress. The internship committee consists of the Centre Principal (as president of the Committee), a specified mentor, and one specialist (e.g. Pedagogue, Psychologist, experts in the field of education and rehabilitation). The committee is appointed by the Principal of the kindergarten.

Mandatory contents of the internship programme are:

- The legal framework of their work (the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, Preschool Education Act, National Curriculum for Early Childhood and Preschool Education, as well as other legislation and regulations)
- General and profession-related regulations
- Specific characteristics, needs and dynamics of a child's development up to compulsory school age
- Aims and procedures of the care, education and upbringing of young children
- Organising resources for educational processes with young children
- Relationships and communication among professional staff, children and parents
- Planning, programming, preparation, realisation and evaluation of educational programmes
- Pedagogical documentation.

7.4 Non-contact time

Out of the 40 working hours per week, only 12.5 hours are allocated to non-contact time. These tasks include planning, programming and evaluation of work, preparation of the environment, co-operation and counselling work with parents and others, and professional development tasks (State Pedagogical Standard of ECEC, Official Gazette, No. 63/2008, 90/2010).

7.5 Current staffing issues

ECEC Teachers and specialist support staff belong to the group of occupations in Croatia with a surplus of vacant posts. For example, in Croatia in 2010 there were 975 vacancies for ECEC Teachers, in 2011 this number increased to 1,364, in 2020 to 4,140, and in 2021 the total number share dropped to 2,195. Therefore, ECEC Teachers have no difficulty in finding work, but there is a problem of ensuring compliance with the State Pedagogical Standard of ECEC (Official Gazette, No. 63/2008, 90/2010) because many kindergartens cannot recruit the required number of ECEC Teachers, so the maximum number of children in educational groups is exceeded or the number of children who remain not enrolled in ECEC increases.

The ministry is trying to overcome this problem by expanding the possibilities of employing primary school teachers in ECEC settings. The founders/providers of ECEC institutions do not have the opportunity to actively contribute to solving this problem because it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Science and Education and higher educational institutions.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to ECEC staffing and professionalisation issues

The continuing professional development of those directly involved in educational work, professional co-workers and principals is one of the goals of the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030 (Official Gazzette, No. 30/2021). The basis of a sustainable future

is a system of upbringing and education that will provide every child with a systematic education, acquisition of basic competencies for lifelong learning, acquisition of vocational and higher education qualifications in quality educational institutions and provide employees with career paths in accordance with the needs of the economy, labour market and personal preferences and abilities. ECEC is the basis of lifelong learning, so the accessibility of ECEC is among the important goals of the Strategy.

The availability of quality ECEC to every child presupposes the reduction of regional differences in the quality and costs of ECEC, a sufficient number of ECEC Teachers and their further professional development, upgrading existing and building new kindergartens, as well as developing standards to ensure high-quality education for every child in Croatia from an early age, and helped families raise and educate their children in an increasingly demanding living environment.

The National Strategy is the most important document that builds on previously defined strategic documents, such as the Strategy of Education, Science and Technology (Official Gazette, No. 124/2014) and represents a framework for the development of Croatian society in the coming period. However, the goals of the National Development Strategy have not yet been codified by law: the latest amendments of the Preschool Education Act do not prescribe the conditions needed for their implementation.

Croatia is participating in the Child Guarantee initiative of the European Parliament and European Commission. The Child Guarantee programme in Croatia aims to increase the participation of children in ECEC, in cooperation with UNICEF's Office for Croatia, national and sub-national authorities and a selection of civil society organisations.

High expectations are placed on Croatia's Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021-2026) (Croatian Government 2021) which foresees investments in the ECEC system with the objective of improving enrolment rates. This implies investments in capacities, including an increasing number of available services and qualified staff. It is a demanding process that cannot be achieved without a complex reform of the whole educational system in Croatia.

For this reason, the Government of the Republic of Croatia has adopted the National Development Plan for the Education System for the period up to 2027 (Croatian Government 2023, 9) in March 2023, which stipulates the following:

"Initial training of ECEC and opportunities for professional development are considered to be advantages of the Croatian ECEC system. However, ... it is necessary to develop strategies for replacing and increasing the number of ECEC Teachers. An increasing number of pedagogical professionals is needed (ECEC Teachers and professional staff such as Psychologists, Rehabilitators, Speech Therapists, Social Pedagogues, Pedagogues) and health personnel in the areas where new kindergartens are to be opened, which are often rural, less developed local and regional self-government units... Newly qualified ECEC Teachers need more intensive training and more support to ensure the highest possible quality of pedagogical work with children according to their needs and differences. It will be particularly important to ensure that educators and professionals have the skills to work with disadvantaged children. The success rate that the government will achieve in training and employing new educators in the required areas in a timely manner will be critical to increasing the number of children participating in ECEC."

The realisation of this plan is expected in the near future.

9. Recent country-specific research studies focusing on ECEC staff

During recent years, a number of representative research studies within ECEC have been carried out in Croatia. Some examples are:

- *First Steps towards Quality.*
  Zagreb: National Centre for External Evaluation of Education, 2017, authors S. Antulić Majcen and S. Pribela-Hodap
- *An Analysis of the Accessibility, Quality, Capacities and Financing of the ECEC System in Croatia*.
  Zagreb: Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy, 2018, authors: I. Dobrotić, T. Matković, and V. Menger
- *Another Site of Inclusion of Children in Early and Preschool Age: Report on Analysis on Equity Issues regarding Access to Quality Early and Preschool Education to Children in Vulnerable Situations in Croatia.*
  Zagreb: UNICEF Office for Croatia, 2018, author: D. Bouillet
- *How to get a kindergarten for everyone? ECEC funding opportunities.*
  Zagreb: UNICEF Office for Croatia, 2020. Editor: I. Ćosić, head of the education program, UNICEF

These studies provide an analysis of ECEC in general and ECEC staff are included but are not the main focus.

Here are the most important research studies which focus on ECEC staff.

Working in kindergartens: research findings into working conditions in ECEC

Source: Matković, T., J. Ostojić, M. Lucić, K. Jaklin, and I. Ivšić 2020 (for more details see *References*)

Aims: The aim of the research was to gain insight into the situation within the system with regard to the basic dimensions of the quality of working conditions: physical environment, work intensity, working hours, work environment, skills and autonomy (with emphasis on training availability and worker participation), career prospects and salary.

Methods: The research was conducted during 2019 with a nationally representative sample of kindergartens in two phases. During the first phase, quantitative data were compiled, for which ECEC employees filled out a survey questionnaire, and in the second phase qualitative data were obtained through a semi-structured interview with those participants who expressed interest in participating in the interview. The final sample included 79 kindergartens and 2,023 ECEC staff.

Selected findings: One of the key problems pointed out by employees in kindergartens in recent years is non-compliance with the criteria prescribed by the State Pedagogical Standard regarding the number of children allowed in groups and adequate materials, personnel and space conditions for the operation of kindergartens. Work in kindergartens is characterised by a higher intensity of work than in the rest of the public sector, and employees in kindergartens on average report almost twice as many health problems compared to employees in other public sector occupations. 49% of employees in kindergartens said that their work has a negative impact on their health. Likewise, less than half of employees say they will be able to do the same or similar work until they are 60 years old.

Implications: This research contributes to existing analyses with the aim of approaching future system development planning based on comprehensive, comparable and evidence-based knowledge of working conditions in ECEC system. The development of the system should enable dignified work, sustainable for current employees and attractive for future employees, and provide a quality start in educating future generations. Improving working conditions in ECEC is also crucial for the expansion of the number of employees needed so that all children of kindergarten age can realise their right to high-quality ECEC.

Improvement of inclusion focus in initial teacher education for early childhood education and care in Croatia

Source: Bouillet, D., D. Hren, T. Maglica, and E. Sunko 2021 (for more details see *References*)

Aims: The aim of the analysis is to determine the level and content of inclusiveness of ECEC study programmes at higher education institutions in Croatia.

Methods: Interviews were conducted with students, ECEC Teachers and university professors, and in all study programmes (6 undergraduate and 5 graduate) for the initial education of ECEC Teachers that were offered in 2019/2020 at Croatian higher education institutions (in Osijek, Pula, Rijeka, Split, Zadar and Zagreb). Study programmes were thematically analysed with regard to the level to which they contribute to the development of sets of competences related to inclusive education.

Selected findings: The results of the analysis show that despite the focus of all study programmes on achieving the same number of ECTS credits (180 at undergraduate and 120 at graduate level) and striving to develop competences for the same qualification (ECEC Teachers), they are very diverse in the number and content in terms of defined learning outcomes. All analysed sets of competences are in some way represented in study programmes and their subjects, but with a large inconsistency in the connection of learning outcomes at the level of programmes and individual subjects, as well as inconsistency of descriptions of individual subjects, which indicates insufficient constructive alignment of study programmes and their subjects. This situation adversely affects the competences of ECEC Teachers for the practical implementation of inclusive education in professional work. This is confirmed by the analysis of interviews with students, ECEC Teachers and university professors. The results of the analysis point to the conclusion that there is a need to improve the inclusiveness of study programmes for the initial education of ECEC Teachers. Measures and activities to achieve this goal are formulated in the recommendations that form an integral part of this analysis.

Implications: Providing an analytical basis for the harmonisation of ECEC study programmes with the Croatian Qualifications Framework and other relevant documents that frame the European system of higher education.

Additionally, the programme **"Improvement of inclusivity of initial teacher education for early childhood education and care in Croatia"** was realised in 2020 and 2021, in cooperation with UNICEF's office for Croatia and five higher education institutions: University of Zagreb; Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek; University of Split; University of Rijeka; Juraj Dobrila University of Pula. This programme is designed to address teachers' competences for inclusive practice during their initial professional education because inadequate staff education for implementing inclusive educational practices is recognised as an important obstacle to inclusive ECEC. The main results of the programme are:

- University teachers from 5 HEIs providing initial teacher education for ECEC have increased capacities for delivering educational inclusion (conceptually and in practice) to their students.
- All university teachers at 5 HEIs who teach initial ECEC have access to inclusive learning resources and inclusive learning environments.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

The main strengths of the Croatian ECEC system are:

- ECEC is an integral and fundamental part of the education system.
- The required qualification level for ECEC Teachers is at Bachelor level across the entire ECEC system 0-6 years.
- The number of Master's study programmes for ECEC Teachers is increasing.
- The inumber of national research studies in the field of ECEC is growing.

The most important ECEC workforce challenges in Croatia are:

- The lack of standardisation of the qualification of the ECEC Teacher profession at the national level, a consequence of significant differences between study programmes of various higher education institutions for ECEC Teachers (the plan is to overcome this challenge through entering the qualifications in the Croatian registry of qualifications, and through improved coordination of study programmes).
- The lack of co-ordinated forms, programmes and topics of in-service CPD (the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of in-service training and the development of mechanisms that will ensure that all ECEC staff are required to participate in CPD activities throughout their career is needed).
- The lack of comprehensive reforms of the ECEC system which would provide an accessible and quality ECEC for all children (the goal is to overcome this challenge through the realisation of the National Development Plan for the Education System for the period up to 2027).
- A high level of ECEC system decentralisation, leading to significant differences and inequalities within all aspects of ECEC. This is why the less developed towns and municipalities are not able to secure appropriate conditions for the staff or children in ECEC, with some parts of Croatia severely lacking in ECEC accessibility (the plan is to overcome this challenge through the realisation of Croatia's Recovery and Resilience Plan).

It can be concluded that the ECEC system in Croatia has become a national policy priority. However, the significant changes needed to improve the quality and availability of ECEC still remain to be achieved.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

CROATIA

Key contextual data

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the term chosen in this report for the main form of centre-based ECEC settings is **kindergarten** (*dječji vrtić*, 0–6/7)[1], sometimes referred to as **ECEC centre**. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Croatia

1432	First recorded institution for the care of abandoned and (later) illegitimate children opened in Dubrovnic.
1842	First custodial institution established in Karlovac for the children (3 to 7 years old) of factory workers – sometimes claimed to be the first kindergarten in Croatia.
1855	First pedagogically oriented institution for poor children opened in Zagreb.
1869	First institution with specifically educational aims established by Antonia Cvijić in Zagreb.
1880/81	First professional course for the training of pre-school teachers established in Zagreb.
1882	Opening of a kindergarten in Zagreb funded by the municipality – considered to be the start of public early childhood education and care in Croatia.
1945	– Up to 1955 no significant number of kindergarten-type centres for children. – First regulation for the establishment of ECEC institutions for children aged from 3 to 7 years old
1949	Ordinance on the organisation and work of kindergartens adopted.
1951	Regulation on the financing of preschool institutions adopted.
1958	Gradual expansion begins. Provision is mostly half-day and although kindergartens are officially seen as educational institutions, in reality they remain institutions for social care.
1962	According to the Law on financing education, parents should pay more for the ECEC of their children.
1967	Kindergartens regulated through further legislation. Local funds for preschool education are established.
1968	First university-level course of studies for prospective kindergarten teachers introduced, but not compulsory.
1974	– ECEC is allocated from national to local/regional level and the municipalities start participating in the cost of ECEC. – The first preschool programmes for children who have not participated in ECEC established.
1980	The tasks of ECEC are defined by law.
1990	The right to access ECEC from an early age is defined by law, but is not a legal entitlement to a place in kindergarten beyond the compulsory hours.
1993	The regional and local communities are responsible for financing the ECEC.
1997	First Croatian Early Childhood Education Act adopted.
2005	Colleges for the education/training of ECEC Teachers become part of universities (Bachelor degree).

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In the case of Croatia, the relevant format is **0–5**, since children start school when they are 6 years old.

2007	Amendments to the Act on Early Childhood Education adopted.
2008	National standards for ECEC adopted.
2013	– Further amendments on the Early Childhood Education Act adopted. – Preschool education one year before entering primary education becomes obligatory (250 hours). – First generation of students of Bachelor and Master university programmes for ECEC Teachers begin their studies.
2015	National Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care adopted
2019	Amendments to the Act on Early Childhood Education adopted
2021	National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030 adopted, including goals to increase the accessibility of a high-quality ECEC system and to secure related quality standards
2022	Further amendments to the Act on Early Childhood Education adopted
2023	The occupational standard for ECEC Teachers was entered in the register of the Croatian Qualifications Framework on 15 May 2023

Sources: Baran, Dobrotić, and Matković 2011; Strugar 2011; Bacalya, Zrilić, and Kisovar-Ivanda 2014

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Since 1997, early childhood education and care in the Republic of Croatia is an integral part of the education system, providing services for children from 6 months to school entry at 6/7 years. It is a unitary system and comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Science and Education (*Ministartsvo znanosti i obrazovanja*). The ministry sets the objectives at the national level and provides a framework for accreditation and monitoring of educational institutions. The ECEC system is decentralised, and the financing and management of early childhood provision are the responsibility of municipalities.

Only a small number of children are cared for in home-based settings, which are the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Pension System, Family and Social Policy.

General objectives and legislative framework

The system of early childhood education and care in Croatia, which includes 250 hours of compulsory early education in the year before school entry, is governed by the Early Childhood Education Act (*Zakon o predskolskom odgoju i obrazovanju*) of 1997, amended in 2007, 2013, 2019, 2022, and 2023. The compulsory requirement was prescribed by the ECE Act in 2013.

Principles of the ECEC system include: high quality education for all; equal educational opportunities for all; compulsory general education and acquisition of key competencies; horizontal and vertical mobility between educational institutions; inclusion of all; scientific foundations; respect for human rights and children's rights; implementation of educational activities with a high level of expertise; democratic decision-making, involvement of all stakeholders; independence of institutions in the application of programmes and materials: pedagogical pluralism; education in the European context (EASNIE 2021).

In 2008, the National Early Childhood Education and Care Standard was introduced. It is the steering instrument for the minimum infrastructure requirements for both public and private

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Croatia provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

ECEC services, including financial, material and human resources. Steering measures relate to opening hours, the education and care of children from ethnic minorities, criteria for group size and number of professionals, and basic equipment. The content, duration and implementation of the compulsory preschool year were legally regulated in 2014 by the Ordinance on the content and duration of the preschool programme (Official Gazette 2014, No. 107).

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

There is no universal entitlement to a place in ECEC. However, since 2014, a free place is guaranteed for obligatory attendance for 250 hours during the year before school enrolment. In areas where the full programme cannot be offered for organisational reasons, a reduced programme of 150 hours may be provided (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 48). The compulsory programme is usually located in the kindergarten, sometimes (mostly in rural areas) in a primary school. It is funded by the state, regions, and municipalities.

Children born in January-March start school in the calendar year in which they turn 6; all others, in the year in which they turn 7 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 177).

Main types of provision

In 2022/23, there were 1,727 kindergarten units offering early childhood education and care in Croatia. These included 384 self-contained kindergartens and 289 multi-unit kindergartens in different locations as well as 144 units in accredited institutions such as primary schools, play rooms in libraries or other organisations (see *Table 1*). Compared to the previous year, the number of children enrolled increased by 3.8% (CBS 2023a, 100ff). Table 1 shows the facilities implementing early childhood education programmes.

Table 1
Croatia: Kindergarten units and other kinds of accredited ECEC provision, 2022/23

Kindergartens (6 months – 6 years)			**Other accredited forms of provision**			**Total number of kindergarten units**
Self-contained kindergartens	**Kindergartens with several units**	**Total number of units**	**Primary schools**	**Play rooms in libraries**	**Other**	
384	289	910	101	6	37	1,727
1,583			144			

Source: CBS 2023a, 102

Kindergarten: According to the Early Childhood Education Act (1997), a kindergarten (*dječji vrtić*) is an institution that provides an organised type of non-familial education and care for children between 6 months and school age.

Kindergartens provide both half-day (4 to 6 hours) and full-day programmes (7 to 10 hours). They are usually open from Monday to Friday from 7:00 to 17:00, although opening hours can also be adapted to the needs of parents. It is expected that children will not attend kindergarten for more than 10 hours a day. They are usually divided into three age groups: 6 months to 1 year, 1 to 3 years, and 3 years to school entry. They consist of at least one group with a maximum of 25 children; usually there are about 200 children in any one setting. In larger cities, such as Zagreb, there are settings which admit up to 500 children, employ up to 50 professionals and

are housed in more than one building. The distance to the children's homes should not be more than one kilometre.

Five kindergartens work exclusively according to the Montessori approach, eleven others work partly with this approach. Some private kindergartens work according to Steiner education (Waldorf) or follow the approach of the Agazzi sisters. The Ministry of Education supports these alternative approaches, as well as cooperation with non-governmental initiatives such as the international organisation Step by Step (ISSA).

In addition, children can also attend a **playgroup** (*igraonica*). These are run by cultural organisations such as libraries and must be approved by the Ministry of Science and Education.

In 2013, the Act on Childminders attempted to address the shortage of places in institutions and the grey market of childcare. A **home-based childcare** worker must be registered and can care for a maximum of six children up to the age of 14. As a rule, they are paid through parental contributions; in some cases, the municipality also finances such care. The Ministry of Demography, Families, Youth and Social Welfare) is responsible for the supervision (ILO 2021).

Provider structures

In 2022/23, more than three quarters (76%) of early childhood education and care services were operated by public providers. Of the privately-run kindergartens (24%), which must be accredited by the Ministry of Education, 86% were managed by individuals/legal entities and 14% by religious communities (CBS 2023a, 102, own calculations).

Table 2

Croatia: Number of kindergartens (0-6) and other kinds of accredited ECEC provision by provider type, 2022/23

		Kindergartens (6 months – 6 years)			**Other accredited forms of provision**		
Service provider	**Total**	**Self-contained**	**Multi-unit**	**Total number of units**	**Primary schools**	**Play rooms in libraries**	**Other**
State	5	1	0	0	2	1	1
		1					
Local authority and self-governed	1,308	205	219	770	95	5	14
		1308					
Other legal entities[3]	356	163	56	111	4	0	22
		356					
Religious communities	58	15	14	29	0	0	0
		58					
Total number of kindergarten units	**1,727**	**384**	**289**	**910**	**101**	**6**	**37**
		1,583					

Source: CBS 2023a, 102

In 2022/23, the majority of children of all age groups (more than 80%) attending ECEC settings) were enrolled in public facilities (see *Table 3*).

[3] Private organisations, social and health care settings

Table 3

Croatia: Number of children in ECEC settings by provider type and age-group, 2022/23

Provider type	Under 3 years	3 to 5 years	Over 5 years	Total
Public (state, local authority and self-governed)	26,146	44,615	49,276	120,037
Private	5,756	9,087	9,306	24,149
Church-affiliated	676	1,548	1,478	3,702
Total	**32,578**	**55,250**	**60,060**	**147,888**

Source: CBS 2023a, 108

Participation rates in regulated provision

From 2010 to 2022, the proportion of children under 3 years of age not enrolled in an ECEC setting fell from 89% to 72.5%. In the group of 3 to 6 year-olds, almost 20% more children were enrolled in ECEC settings in 2022 than in 2010.

Table 4

Croatia: Enrolment rates in centre-based settings by age-group distribution and duration of attendance, 2010-2022

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2010	1 to 29 hours	0	14
	Over 30 hours	10	34
	No enrolment in ECEC	89	53
2015	1 to 29 hours	2.3	6.5
	Over 30 hours	9.5	46.4
	No enrolment in ECEC	88.2	47.1
2022	1 to 29 hours	1.8	12.1
	Over 30 hours	25.7	54.1
	No enrolment in ECEC	72.5	33.9

Source: Eurostat 2023b, differences in the sums due to rounding

According to national statistics, in 2022/23 over three-quarters of children (118,918, 80.4%) attended a full-day setting (over eight hours), with only 9.7% (14,348) attending a half-day setting for less than five hours a week and about the same proportion (9.8%, 14,622) were in an ECEC setting between five and eight hours a day. Of the 147,888 children enrolled, most (135,252, 91.5%) attended a regular programme, 8,487 (5.7%) the compulsory programme and 4,149 (2.8%) a short-term programme (CBS 2023a, 102f, own calculations).

According to national statistics, 27.5% of all children under 3 years of age attended an ECEC setting in 2022/23. Whereas the enrolment rate of 2 to 3 year-olds was 46.5%, that of under 2 year-olds was only about 18.1%. In contrast, more than three quarters of 3 to 5 year-olds and more than 84.5% of 5 to 7 year-olds are enrolled in kindergartens (see *Table 5*).

Table 5

Croatia: Enrolment rates in kindergartens by age, 2022/23

Age	Number of children in total population (estimated data)*	Number of children in kindergartens	Calculated enrolment rate, in %**
0 to 1 year	35,441	164	0.5
1 to 2 years	35,268	12,656	35.9
Total under 2 year-olds	70,709	12,820	18.1
2 to 3 years	35,123	16,321	46.5
Total under 3 year-olds	**105,832**	**29,141**	**27.5**
3 to 4 years	35,384		
4 to 5 years	35,190		
Total 3 to under 5 year-olds	**70,574**	**55,250**	**78.3**
5 to 6 years	35,246		
6 to 7 years	34,439		
Total 5 to under 7 year-olds	**69,685**	**58,670**	**84.2**

Source: CBS 2023a, 103, 107; *CBS 2023c, own calculations, **calculated enrolment rates approximate values

According to national statistics, the age distribution in kindergarten nursery groups (*Table 6*) and kindergartens (*Table 7*) is as follows:

Table 6

Croatia: Children in kindergarten nursery groups by age-group, 2022/23

Under 1 year	1 to 2 years	2 to 3 years	Over 3 years	**Total**
164	12,656	16,321	3,069	32,210

Source: CBS 2023a, 107

Table 7

Croatia: Children in kindergartens by age group, 2018/19–2022/23

	Under 3 years	3–5 years	5–7 years	Over 7 years	**Total**
2018/19	26,422	50,934	61,140	882	139,378
2022/23	32,578	55,250	58,670	1,390	147,888

Source: CBS 2023a, 100

In nursery groups in kindergartens, slightly more than half (50.7%) of children between 2 and 3 years old, very few under 1 year-olds attend such groups and most of the over 3 year-olds are enrolled in kindergartens.

Financing and costs for parents

Early childhood education and care is primarily financed through the budget of local and regional self-governments, which cover 99% of public expenditure on early childhood education. In 2016, public expenditure on early education in Croatia amounted to 0.61% of the gross domestic product, or 8.1 to 10.6% of the total budget of self-governing institutions. In 2015, public expenditure per child was (€2,218) (EASNIE 2021).

Programmes for children with disabilities and children from ethnic minorities are co-financed by the state. For Roma children, ECEC enrolment is usually free of charge (EASNIE 2021). Local and regional self-governments determine the criteria according to which funding is provided. In co-ordination with the National Early Childhood Education and Care Standard, the providers determine the amount of the parents' fees. Overall, however, around 75% of the ECEC sector is financed by government funds (Eurydice 2023, 3).

Parents also have to pay for the year before school enrolment, despite compulsory attendance (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 56). However, parental fees are only a part of the total economic amount of (€200 to €333) – in most municipalities or cities not more than (€73. The amounts for Roma children's attendance are fully subsidised, and the Ministry of Education pays parental contributions for the two years before school enrolment. For children living in poverty, children with many siblings, children of single parents or children with disabilities, fees are reduced (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 61). Children who have not attended kindergarten spend the year before enrolment in a pre-primary unit at primary school, which is free of charge for parents. In 2017/18, this applied to approximately 12,000 children, about 30% of the age group (EACEA/ Eurydice 2019, 62, 177).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 5% of net household income on childcare costs[4] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

As a rule, children are divided into three age-groups: (1) from 6 months to 1 year, (2) from 1 to 3 years and (3) from 3 years to school entry. A typical kindergarten consists of 17 to 20 educational groups (340 to 400 children) in the regular programme. The maximum number of children per group is 25. If there is a disabled child in the group, the total number of children is reduced by two. If this child has a severe disability, it is reduced by four. *Tables 8* and *9* show the maximum permitted number of children in same-age and mixed-age groups as required by the National Early Childhood Education and Care Standard.

In 2022/23, national statistics report an average of 10 children per kindergarten teacher in kindergartens (CBS 2023a, 101).

The maximum numbers per group presented in *Tables 8 and 9* are from the State Pedagogical Standards of Early Childhood Education and Care (2008). The reality is that only a fifth of educators work in groups that are within the size range required. With the exception of ECEC for children aged six, the average number of children enrolled in each group or class exceeds the limits set by the pedagogical standard. In nursery groups, the average size is higher than the limit allowed under that standard (between 4.1 and 8.0 children). This means that up to twice as many children are often enrolled in nursery groups as envisioned by the standard (Matković et al. 2020, cited in UNICEF 2021b, 20).

Table 8

Croatia: Maximum permitted number of children in same-age groups

Age	Max. number of children
6 to 12 months	5
13 to 18 months	8
19 to 24 months	12

[4] The calculation is based on the following fictitious model: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

Age	Max. number of children
2 year-olds	14
3 year-olds	18
4 year-olds	20
5 year-olds	23
6 year-olds	25

Source: State Pedagogical Standards of Early Childhood Education and Care (2008), cited in Eurydice 2023, 4.2

Table 9

Croatia: Maximum permitted number of children in mixed-age groups

Age-group	Max. number of children
1 to 2 year-olds	10
1 to 3 year-olds	12
3 to 6 year-olds	20
4 to 6 year-olds	22

Source: State Pedagogical Standards of Early Childhood Education and Care (2008), cited in Eurydice 2023, 4.2

The number of staff present at any one time depends on the duration of the programme: In programmes up to 6 hours, one qualified member of staff must be present, in those from 7 to 10 hours, two. If a child with a disability is in a group, an additional qualified teacher is required. The number of support staff such as pedagogues, psychologists, etc. depends on the number of groups and children: for up to 10 groups and 200 children, one full-time member of staff is required, for 11 to 20 groups and 400 children, two, and for 21 to 30 groups and 600 children, three (Eurydice 2022, 4.2 – no longer accessible). Kindergartens of optimal size have 17–20 educational groups in standard programmes or 340–400 children in total. Kindergartens comprising several local units may have 30 educational groups or 600 children.

However, these standards cannot always be met because the demand for places is greater than the number of available places, especially in larger towns. In large kindergartens, two professionals are assigned to a group in two shifts, but these shifts only overlap by one hour, i.e. for children aged 3 and above, there are 30 children per qualified professional.

Experts think that the large groups are partly compensated by the special programmes and the generous number of additional support staff working in and with the kindergarten. In Zagreb, 300 special education staff work daily with the 10,000 children who have special needs (disabilities, autism, allergies, diabetes, language problems, etc.) (SEEPRO research visit to Zagreb in 2015).

In separate specialised settings for children with disabilities, group size is regulated at up to three children between 1 and 2 years, up to five children between 2 and 4 years or between 3 and 7 years or up to seven children between 4 and 7 years. If the children have different disabilities or if the groups are mixed-age, the groups are usually smaller.

Curricular framework

The National Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care came into force in 2014 after a long pilot phase (Official Gazette, Nr. 5/2015). It is part of a comprehensive curricular reform of the education system within the national *Strategy on Education, Science and Technology* (2014)

and forms the pedagogical framework both for regular ECEC programmes and the compulsory pre-primary year.

The National Curriculum places the child at the centre of the educational process and emphasis each child's individuality, which needs to be understood and respected. It is based on four guiding principles: (1) flexibility in the educational work in kindergarten; (2) partnership with parents and the broader community; (3) ensuring continuity in education: (4) openness for continuing learning and readiness to improve practices. Explicit core values are: knowledge; identity; humanism and tolerance; responsibility; autonomy: and creativity. On this basis, the following goals are to be achieved in early education: Ensuring the well-being of the child, stimulating the overall development of the child, developing competencies and ensuring equal opportunities for all – within the framework of democratic principles. Children should be accepted in their uniqueness, their rights should be implemented without any discrimination, their dignity should be respected at all times in the educational process and the development of their positive identity should be continuously developed.

Early childhood education institutions are expected to guarantee the realisation of equal rights for all. The educational approach is based on empathy, acceptance and mutual support, but also on children learning to understand their rights, obligations and responsibilities, as well as the rights, obligations and responsibilities of others.

Within the framework specifications, each kindergarten designs its own centre-specific programme according to the local context. These programmes, which include the goals for working with parents, have to be approved by the Ministry of Education and are reviewed annually by the administrative board of the kindergarten.

Everyday practices in the kindergarten include both teacher-initiated and child-initiated activities which take into account the individual needs of the children.

The contents of the compulsory programme in the year before school enrolment (250 hours, 10% of which are outdoor activities) are intended to lay the foundations for school readiness: Communication skills in the home language; elementary communication in a foreign language; mathematical competences; basic competences in science and technology; digital competences; learning to learn, social and civic competences; initiative and entrepreneurship; cultural awareness and expression; and motor skills appropriate to the child's age.

Many kindergartens integrate 'special programmes' into their curriculum at additional costs for the parents, e.g. learning a foreign language, music, drama, art, healthy eating, IT programmes, environment education and sustainable development.

Digital education

In Croatian kindergartens, digital media serve as a tool for planning, documenting, implementing and evaluating educational processes. However, not only adults, but also children should have access to digital media (MSES 2015). The National Curriculum for ECEC states that children develop digital competences by being introduced to diverse uses through various activities.

The acquisition of digital competencies as part of the mandatory preschool programme is regulated by the ordinance on the "Content and Duration of Preschool Educational Programmes" (MSES 2014).

Monitoring – evaluation

The framework for quality assurance in the Croatian education system provides for external evaluation, self-evaluation and evaluation of educational outcomes (EASNIE 2021).

Child-related assessment

Observations are the preferred method of assessing children. Staff can decide how to report the results. 'School readiness' is an entry criterion for primary schools, but the decision ultimately rests with the school, which makes its own assessment. To ensure the smoothest possible transition, the respective institutions discuss and familiarise themselves with each other's learning environments (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 22, 103, 106, 111).

Centre-level self-evaluation

Since 2012/13, the National Centre for External Educational Evaluation (*Nacionalni centar za vanjsko vrednovanje obrazovanja*) has annually called for institutions to self-evaluate according to a standardised process in the Handbook for Self-Evaluation in Early Education. This includes a self-evaluation report and the implementation of a development plan prepared with the help of the Centre (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 127).

At the setting level, a 'quality team' consisting of management, professionals, but also parents, support professionals, board members and the community, is responsible for self-evaluation.

In daily practice, the institution makes long-term plans (throughout the year), structures the orientation programme into a three-month plan and works on development tasks according to developmental areas (motor skills, social and emotional development, cognition and communication). The three-month plan is evaluated in terms of the number of children in the groups, financial and organisational changes as well as the acceptance of the activities by the children and the cooperation with the parents.

External evaluation

The National Centre for External Educational Evaluation offers numerous support materials for the external and internal evaluation of educational institutions. It provides guidelines, methods and instruments for monitoring different quality areas (e.g. management, equipment, working conditions, safety, staff) of ECEC settings.

In settings for children under 3 years of age, structural and process quality are checked by an inspection team, which comes to the facility if there is a suspicion that the facility is not working according to the law or that the pedagogical standards are not being followed (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 124, 126). Health inspections are carried out by the health authority.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

The Constitution of Croatia (Articles 3, 14, 65) states that all persons must have equal educational opportunities according to their abilities. Whenever possible, children with disabilities attend regular kindergartens in Croatia. Additional support staff with annual contracts are employed for this purpose. Inclusion measures are fully funded by the state at €100 per month per child.

Individual education plans for children with disabilities and for children from national minorities are drawn up within the framework of the National Curriculum according to the respective specific needs (EASNIE 2021). Separate facilities exist for children who cannot attend a regular kindergarten despite additional support.

The compulsory pre-primary programme for children with disabilities lasts two years instead of one. In addition, certain other programmes are offered – also for children from ethnic minorities – e.g. health care, religion, early language programmes.

Municipally subsidised kindergartens can apply for additional staff. These staff receive training from the Agency for Education and Teacher Training; their tasks are based on the respective disabilities of the children (European Commission 2021, 103).

The Ministry of Science and Education ensures additional funds if special ECEC programmes are organised for children with disabilities, gifted children, and children belonging to national minorities. Funding is calculated on a pro capita basis of the children involved, but staff salaries are not included.

Children with a migration background – Children from Roma communities

In 2022, only 0.9% of the total population had a non-Croatian citizenship, most of them (68.1%) came from non-EU27 countries. Similarly, 0.5% of children under the age of 5 are of a non-Croatian origin, of which 72.2% came from non-EU27 countries (Eurostat 2023g).

National statistics for 2021 report 800 children under 4 years of age as immigrants (CBS 2023b).

In general, ECEC programmes exist for national minorities in the respective languages and in bilingual form to promote cultural identity and culture (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 115).

In 2022/23, 264 groups offered the preschool programme in a language other than Croatian: 2,640 children attended an English programme, 1,270 an Italian, 543 a Serbian, 224 a German, 196 a Czech, 117 a Hungarian and 6 a Hebrew programme (CBS 2023a, 104).

The “TOY for inclusion” project (European Commission 2021, 92) targets children from migrant families and ethnic minorities. Local action teams with representatives from Roma and non-Roma communities, municipalities and professionals run centres as meeting points that offer young children and their families new opportunities for exchange. In addition, the pilot programme "Testing the Child Guarantee" is being implemented in Croatia together with UNICEF, the Step by Step organisation and the EU, in which – also with the creation of new meeting places – social inequalities are to be compensated, especially for Roma children (UNICEF 2021a).

A fully subsidised 2-year integrated programme in mainstream institutions is offered for Roma children. The National Roma Inclusion Strategy (2013-2020) and the Action Plan for its implementation aim, among other things, to increase the attendance rate of Roma children in preschool institutions and to improve their quality (EASNIE 2021).

The overall attendance rate of Roma children in kindergartens was 32%, compared to 72% of non-Roma children (Roma Education Fund 2020). It is estimated that 69% of Roma children do not attend any ECEC setting at all. The Europe-wide Romani Early Years Network (REYN), an initiative of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), aims to improve access to early childhood services and attendance rates for Roma children. Among other things, they try to fight prejudice and discrimination through campaigns (REYN 2021).

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Maternity leave ***(****rodiljni dopust)*: If health insurance contributions have been paid during the six months before the birth, the full salary (without upper limit) is paid starting 28 days before the birth until the child is 6 months old. A parent who does not meet the condition of insurance contributions receives 125% of the 'budgetary base rate' of €441.44 per month. 98 uninterrupted days (28 before and 70 after the birth) must be taken by the mother, the remaining days can also be taken part-time or by the father.

Paternity leave *(očinski dopust)* lasts ten working days, which can be taken until the child is six months old; they are remunerated under the same conditions as Maternity leave.

Parental leave (*roditeljski dopust*) begins after the child is 6 months old and lasts four months per parent for the first and second child, of which two months can be transferred to the other parent. For the first six months, 100% of average earnings are paid, up to a maximum of 225.5% of the 'budgetary base rate' per month. If both parents take Parental leave, eight months are paid.

Parental leave may be taken either by both parents simultaneously or consecutively: (1) in one block, (2) in several blocks (no more than twice a year and no less than one month at a time) or (3) part-time, in which case the length is doubled and 70% of the basic rate is paid. In total, parental leave can be taken until the child is 8 years old.

In 2022, only 4.05% of fathers made use of the Parental leave which is predominantly taken by mothers. Also, only 0.23% of fathers used the transferable Maternity leave period in 2022.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Croatia

Country expert assessment by ***Dejana Bouillet***

Taking into account the critical role that early childhood plays in the individual's lifelong development, well-being and success, universal and unbiased access to ECEC has been defined as a crucial strategic goal within contemporary education policies. Even though Croatia has adopted several important national strategies for improving the availability and quality of ECEC in recent years, problems remain. Among them, the most important challenges are:

- The lack in the number of ECEC institutions and available places, resulting in great regional disparities in the coverage and quality of child participation in ECEC
- The lack of ECEC Teachers, jeopardising the universal availability of high-quality ECEC programmes
- The lack of affordable ECEC programmes for children in disadvantaged situations, resulting in their low levels of enrolment in ECEC
- The decentralisation of ECEC, which has exacerbated regional differences in ECEC availability and is considered to be one of the main sources of educational inequality in Croatia
- The lack of an ECEC quality assurance system, contributing to suboptimal system performance.

The Croatian National Development Strategy 2030 (2021) states that its main development goal is to guarantee every child's access to quality ECEC as a way of ensuring every child's right to quality education. It is necessary to improve the determinants of structural and process quality to ensure greater accessibility, higher staff competence, an inclusive curriculum and a system of management and financing which will diminish regional disparities in terms of accessibility and

[5] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Croatia by Ivana Dobrotić in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

quality of ECEC in Croatia. A complex process of this kind calls for decision-making at the national education policy level, but also entails a shift in pedagogical practices. This goal cannot be reached without huge political changes in the complete educational system, including financing, organisation and monitoring of ECEC. That is why the new Early Childhood Education Law needs to be adopted. Much needed innovations include the prescription of structural and process indicators of high-quality ECEC programmes, ensuring conditions for their fulfilment and widening possibilities for employment of different professionals in ECEC settings (specialised staff, assistants to ECEC Teachers, etc.). The adoption of the new Act must be followed by ensuring national-level conditions which will guarantee every child a place in high-quality ECEC, regardless of the level of development and population of the local community in which they live.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Croatia was 3,862,305. A slight decrease in population numbers has been observed over the last 20 years (2000: 4,497,735; 2010: 4,302,847; 2020: 4,058,165) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total birth rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total birth rate of the 33 SEEPRo-3 countries was in France (1.84), and the lowest in Malta (1.13)[6]. At 1.58, Croatia is slightly above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d).

Children under age 6

Table 10

Croatia: Number of children under age 6 in the total population by age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year	35,717
1 year-olds	34,771
2 year-olds	34,953
3 year-olds	35,545
4 year-olds	34,779
5 year-olds	35,282
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**211,047**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

[6] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

In 2022, 2.7% of the total population were children under 3 years of age and 5.5% were children under 6 years of age. These shares increased slightly from 2005 to 2015; however, in 2022, they are – except for those of the under 3s – slightly below the respective EU averages. The proportion of the under 3s corresponded with the EU average.

Table 11

Croatia: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population compared with EU averages from 2000 to 2022, in %

Year	Comparison Croatia/EU	Under 3 year- olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	**Croatia**	n/a	n/a	n/a
	∅ EU15[7]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	**Croatia**	2.8	3.0	5.7
	∅ EU25	3.1	3,1	6.2
2015	**Croatia**	2.9	3.0	5.9
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	**Croatia**	2.7	2.7	5.5
	∅ EU27	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Single households with children under age 6

39.5% of all households with children under 6 were couple households in 2022. Single parent households accounted for only 0.79% – almost all were single mothers.

Table 12

Croatia: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Relative share of households, in %*
All households	365,500	
Couple households	144,200	39.5
Other household type	218,400	59.8
Single households, total	2,900	0.79
Single households, women	2,800	0.77
Single households, men	100**	0.03

Source: Eurostat 2023k; * own calculations; ** number calculated

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Croatia, in 2022, the overall employment rate (15–64 years) for men was 74.1% and for women 65.6% (Eurostat 2023j).

[7] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

In 2022, 64.7% of women and 80.7% of men (18–64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were below the EU (EU-average 87.2%) and those of mothers slightly above the EU-average (63.6%) (Eurostat 2023g).

Table 13a

Croatia: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 and 2022

	2010	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Croatia	61.7	79.5
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[8]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Croatia	64.7	80.7
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[9]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023g

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 13b*

Table 13b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023g, 2023j

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

***Rosstat. 2022. *Statistical annex SDG in Russia 2022.* https://eng.rosstat.gov.ru/sdg/report/document/70355;
BRICS. 2023. *Joint Statistical Publication 2023.* https://brics2023.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/BRICS-2023-JSP_Final_Web.pdf

[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

[+][SSSU] State Statistics Service of Ukraine. 2022. *Employed population in 2021, by age group, sex and place of residence.* https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2017/rp/eans/eanse/Archznsmve.htm

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[+++]Office for National Statistics. 2023. *Families and the labour market, UK: 2021.* https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2021

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[10]

In 2022, 16.4 % of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was below the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 19.9% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 6% of children under 6 and 5.1% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023h, i).

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[10] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

CYPRUS

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

Eleni Loizou, PhD, is a professor of Early Childhood Education and Care at the Department of Education of the University of Cyprus. Her research focus includes children's humour, play pedagogy, early childhood curricula, infancy pedagogy, and teacher education. In 2009 she was the scientific coordinator of the revised early childhood education curriculum in Cyprus. She is also currently a member of the Board of Trustees of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA).

1. ECEC governance in Cyprus

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Cyprus is organised as a split-sector and partly parallel system divided between two ministries: the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (*Ypurgeio Ergasias, Pronoias kai Koinonikon Asphaliseon*) and the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (*Ypourgeíou Paideías, Athlitismoú kai Neolaías*). Specifically, the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (MLWS) has sole responsibility for provision for children under 3 years of age, whereas the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (MoESY) is responsible for state-maintained, community and private kindergartens for 3 to under 6 year-olds. Children aged 3 to under 6 fall under the jurisdiction of either ministry, depending on whether they attend a preschool/kindergarten or a childcare centre. It is important to note that the year preceding primary school in a pre-primary class (*prodimotiki*) is compulsory and free of charge for parents (MoESY 2022a). Primary school enrolment is compulsory for all children who have turned 5 years and 10 months before the 1st September.

Currently, there is an attempt by the MoESY, supported by all parties, to change the starting age of compulsory education to 4 years instead of 5, but this has not as yet been voted on by the House of Representatives.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

The early years workforce includes a number of adults who work directly with children in childcare and preschool/kindergarten settings for 3 months to under 6 year olds. Alongside the regular Nursery and Childcare Teachers for younger children (3 months–2[1]), the Preschool/Kindergarten Teachers and Centre Heads/principals for older children (3–5/6), there is a Teacher's Assistant and there may also be special education staff who, according to the children's needs, can be a Speech Therapist, an Occupational Therapist, a Psychologist, as well as a Child Personal Assistant ('accompanier' – an adult who accompanies and supports children with special needs in the classroom). Teachers' Assistants are responsible for cleaning the classrooms, tidying materials and toys, helping with the preparation of activities, being responsible for the children's safety when the teacher is out of the room, and other similar activities.

Table 1 provides details of each staff category working in the two sectors of ECEC. It also categorises the core practitioners (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at end of this chapter).

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6 (as in Cyprus): **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds.

Table 1

Cyprus: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
Childcare sector				
Nursery and Childcare Teacher *Vrefokomos/ Vrefonipiagogos* *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	*Vrefikos stathmos* **Nursery centre** 3 months–2 years *Vrefokomikoi/paidokomikoi stathmoi* **Childcare centre** 3 months–4 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility	3 months–2 years	Minimum requirement when working with children under 3 years: Certificate or diploma from a higher education institution in relation to the care, socioemotional and spiritual education of the child ECTS credits: 90-120 EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 4 or 5
			3 months–4 years	Minimum requirement when working with children from 3 years of age: 4-year degree at a higher education Institution (HEI) ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6 (645/655)
Teacher's Assistant *Sxoliki Voithos*	*Vrefikos stathmos* **Nursery centre** 3 months–2 years *Vrefokomikoi/paidokomikoi stathmoi* **Childcare centre** 3 months– 4 years *Nipiagogeio* **Kindergarten/ preschool** 3–4 years *Prodimotiki* **Pre-primary class** 5–6 years	Co-worker with no formal IPE	n/a[2]	Compulsory school leaving certificate ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 3 (344/354)
Education sector				

[2] n/a = not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
Kindergarten/Pre-primary Teacher *Nipiagogos* *Profile:* Pre-primary Education Professional	*Nipiagogeio* **Kindergarten/ preschool** 3–4 years *Prodimotiki* **Pre-primary class** 5–6 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility	3–6 years	4-year degree at university *Award:* Bachelor's degree in ECEC ECTS: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Teacher's Assistant *Sxoliki Voithos*	*Vrefikos stathmos* **Nursery centre** 3 months–2 years *Vrefokomikoi/ paidokomikoi stathmoi* **Childcare centre** 3 months– 4 years *Nipiagogeio* **Kindergarten/ preschool** 3–4 years *Prodimotiki* **Pre-primary class** 5–6 years	Co-worker with no formal IPE	n/a	Compulsory school leaving certificate ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 3 (344/354)
Child Support Practitioner *Synodos*	*Nipiagogeio* **Kindergarten/ preschool** 3–4 years *Prodimotiki* **Pre-primary class** 5–6 years	Co-worker with no formal IPE Supports core practitioner for individual children with special needs	n/a	Compulsory school leaving certificate ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 3 (344/354)

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Each centre is directed by a head or principal, who has the day-to-day responsibility for running the ECEC setting. Leadership is quite hierarchical as the head/principal is the one who guides the centre's staff pedagogically and administratively. In the case of public and community schools these persons also work directly with the children depending on the number of required hours and years of work experience. In the case of private ECEC centres, if the head/principal has an early years' degree they might work directly with the children, if not, then they only direct the centre and focus on administrative work.

Table 2

Cyprus: Centre Leaders

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
Director *Diefthinon prosopo* **Owner/Provider** *Idioktitria*	*Vrefikos stathmos* **Nursery centre** 3 months–2 years *Vrefokomikoi/ paidokomikoi stathmoi* **Childcare centre** 3 months–4 years *Nipiagogeio* **Kindergarten/ preschool** 3–4 years *Prodimotiki* **Pre-primary class** 5–6 years	Centre owner	n/a	The director of an infant-toddler centre or childcare centre needs to have a certificate or a diploma from a higher education institution specialising in infancy, child care, social work, psychology or pedagogy. ECTS credits: 90-120 EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5 The owner of a pre-school or kindergarten may or may not have a relevant degree as long as the ECEC setting employs a person who has a 4-year university degree in ECE
Assistant Principal (in public ECEC settings) *Voithos Diefthintria* **Principal** (in public ECEC settings) *Diefthintria*	*Nipiagogeio* **Kindergarten/ preschool** 3–4 years *Prodimotiki* **Pre-primary class** 5–6 years	Centre head	3–6 years	4-year degree at university Bachelor's degree in ECEC ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6/7 ISCED 2011: 7 ***plus*** a Master's degree in Education ECTS credits: 60-120

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
				EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7 ***plus*** a specified number of years working in the field

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

There are no legal provisions for centre-based posts of responsibility in Cyprus. In all types of ECEC setting posts of responsibility for pedagogical tasks (e.g. working with migrant families) are not allocated within the centre. The Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance is responsible for providing the necessary allowances each person/family has been evaluated for and are allowed to receive. In addition, there is the "School and Social Integration Actions (DRASE)" programme that is co-financed by the European Social Fund. In this programme there is a small number of kindergartens that offer (1) Free remedial teaching programmes and creative activities for children and parents, in the morning and afternoon; (2) Additional psychosocial support services for children and parents, through the creation and operation of Information and Psychosocial Support Centres; (3) Support / technological equipment in kindergartens.

In the case of pre-service ECEC student mentoring, this is the responsibility of the Childcare Teacher or Pre-primary Teacher (see *Chapter 2.1*), depending on the students' needs. In the case of public pre-primary settings mentoring is compensated with one teaching hour (40 minutes). In other words, the teaching load of teachers who act as a mentor is reduced by one period (40 minutes) per week.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

There are differing types of co-ordinating staff who are responsible for a number of centres and are responsible for teacher evaluation, professional development or co-ordination of the different services children might need. These are mainly in the public ECEC settings and are employed by the government. In the case of the private settings the owners or the principals of the setting might have this responsibility and be involved in evaluating the work of the teachers. In the case of private settings which have the approval of the MoESY to run a *prodimotiki*-pre-primary class, they are supervised by experienced public ECEC principals who allocate a portion of their time to visiting these settings in order to evaluate the quality of their work and services. In the case of childcare centres, a social services officer is the person who supervises the implementation of the childcare regulations.

Table 3

Cyprus: Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
Pre-primary Education Supervisor *Epitheoritria*	*Nipiagogeio* **Kindergarten/ preschool** 3–4 years *Prodimotiki* **Pre-primary class** 5–6 years	Visits the set-tings to assess the work of the Kindergar-ten Teachers	3–6 years	Bachelor's degree in ECEC ***plus*** Master's degree in Education ECTS credits: 60-120 EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7 ***plus*** a specified num-ber of years working in the field and a specified number of years work-ing in the positions of Assistant Principal and Principal.
Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator *Syndetikos letourgos*	*Nipiagogeio* **Kindergarten/ preschool** 3–4 years *Prodimotiki* **Pre-primary class** 5–6 years	Collaborates with all the teaching staff related with the child's special needs as well as the parents and offers guidance on developing an individualised education programme for the child.	Broad age range – children and adults	Bachelor's degree in Special Education ***plus*** 5 years of experience as a Special Educator ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6/7 ISCED 2011: 6/7 (645/655/747)
Social Services Officer *Letourgos koinoni-kon ypiresion*	*Vrefikos stathmos* **Nursery centre** 3 months–2 years *Vrefokomikoi/ paidokomikoi stathmoi* **Childcare centre** 3 months–4 years	Coordinates and assesses childcare centres based on the imple-mentation of the childcare laws and regu-lations	Broad age range – children and adults	Bachelor's degree in Social Work, Sociology, Psychology, Social Pol-icy, Social Administra-tion, Public Administra-tion or Economics ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6/7 ISCED 2011: 6/7 (645/655/747)

2.5 Specialist support staff

A range of specialist support staff work with individual children in ECEC settings. They include an educational psychologist, a special educator, and a speech and occupational therapist. All of these specialists visit different public kindergartens during the day depending on the hours allocated to each centre. They are not based at the ECEC settings. These specialists work with children who attend public pre-primary classes, as they are employed by the MoESY. In the case of private settings parents are responsible for finding these specialists in the private sector.

Table 4

Cyprus: Specialist support staff

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
Educational Psychologist *Ekpaideytikos psychologos* (for children with special learning needs – cognitive, auditory, visual impairments)	*Nipiagogeio* **Kindergarten/ preschool** 3–4 years *Prodimotiki* **Pre-primary class** 5–6 years	Responds to referrals for psychological assessment and recommendations	Broad age range – children and adults	Bachelor's degree in Psychology ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6/7 ISCED 2011: 6/7 (645/655/747)
Special Education Teacher *Eidikos Ekpaideytikos / Paidogogos*	*Nipiagogeio* **Kindergarten/ preschool** 3–4 years *Prodimotiki* **Pre-primary class** 5–6 years	Responds to referrals for special education based on a diagnostic evaluation of child's special needs	Broad age range – children and adults	Bachelor's degree in Special Education ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6/7 ISCED 2011: 6/7 (645/655/747)
Speech Therapist *Logotherapeytis*	*Nipiagogeio* **Kindergarten/ preschool** 3–4 years *Prodimotiki* **Pre-primary class** 5–6 years	Assesses and works with children with communication disorders	Broad age range – children and adults	Bachelor's degree in Speech Therapy ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6/7 ISCED 2011: 6/7
Occupational Therapist *Ergotherapeytis*	*Nipiagogeio* **Kindergarten/ preschool** 3–4 years *Prodimotiki* **Pre-primary class** 5–6 years	Supports and enhances everyday skills: motor, social, mental	Broad age range – children and adults	Bachelor's degree in Occupational Therapy ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6/7 ISCED 2011: 6/7

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

There are no systematically compiled national data in general regarding the proportion of different staff categories in the workforce. Statistics do not differentiate between qualification categories of staff working with children of several age groups. It is also important to note that in terms of teaching personnel and type of ECEC institution, the data do not necessarily describe the age of children served. This is because a kindergarten can be approved by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth because it runs a classroom for children aged from 5 to 6 years (*prodimotiki*). However, such settings can also serve children from 1 years old upwards if they have the necessary licence from the Social Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance.

Education sector (3 to 5 years)

Data suggest that ECEC personnel in all types of kindergartens/preschools are mainly women. *Table* 5 shows the number of kindergartens, children and teachers from 2015 to 2020/21. Compared to 2019/20, both the number of settings and the number of children decreased slightly, while the number of teachers increased slightly.

Table 5
Cyprus: Number of kindergartens, children, teachers, and type of provision, 2015/16 to 2020/21

	Number of …	2015-2016	2017-2018	2019-2020*	2020/21*
Public Kindergartens	Settings	269	269	277	
	Children	12,241	12,107	12,37	
	Teachers	790	789	867	
Community kindergartens	Settings	83	77	466	
	Children	2,138	2,034	21,92	
	Teachers	131	134	1,745	
Private kindergartens	Settings	179	176		
	Children	9,758	10,310		
	Teachers	868	865		
Total	Settings	531	522	743	734
	Children	24,137	24,451	33,329	32,958
	Teachers	1,789	1,788	2,612	2,705

Sources: CYSTAT 2021a, b; CYSTAT 2023, 3;
* no further data available at the time of reporting

Table 6 shows the teaching personnel (teachers and principals), full time and part time, as well as the gender of the personnel working in different types of kindergartens/preschools in 2018/19 (CYSTAT 2021a). In 2018/19, only 0.76% of the workforce in kindergartens and only 2.07% of centre heads (kindergartens) were men. The majority of teaching staff (95.98%) and principals/centre heads (95.84%) worked full time.

Table 6

Cyprus: Full- and part-time teaching and management personnel in kindergartens/preschools, 2018-2019

Provider type	Teaching personnel			
	Full time		Part time	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Public	4	614	0	0
Community	0	114	0	11
Private	5	648	2	45
Total	**9**	**1,376**	**2**	**56**
	Kindergarten Principals/Centre Heads			
Public	0	170	0	0
Community	0	8	0	3
Private	6	139	1	10
Total	**6**	**317**	**1**	**13**

Childcare sector (6 weeks to 5 years)

Table 7 shows the teaching personnel (teachers and principals), full-time and part-time, as well as the gender of the personnel working in different types of childcare settings during the year 2018/19 (CYSTAT 2021a). In comparison, it can be seen that childcare services for infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers (6 weeks to 5 years) are mainly provided by the community and private sector.

The distributions in the childcare sector regarding gender and working time are very similar to the pre-primary education sector: In 2018/19, 0.3% of teaching personnel were men and 3.8% of management personnel were also men. The greater majority of both teaching staff (88.8%) and principals (95.6%) worked full-time.

Table 7

Cyprus: **Full-time and part-time teaching and management personnel in childcare sector provision**

Provider type	Teaching personnel			
	Full time		Part time	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Public	0	21	0	0
Community	0	164	0	22
Private	0	394	2	49
Total	**0**	**579**	**2**	**71**
	Centre Heads/Management personnel			
Public	0	3	0	0
Community	0	41	0	3
Private	6	125	1	4
Total	**6**	**169**	**1**	**7**

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

In Cyprus, there are four higher education institutions which offer programmes of study for people wishing to work in kindergartens/preschools (from 3 up to 6 years). These are the public University of Cyprus and three private universities: European University, Nicosia University and Frederick University. The Department of Education at the University of Cyprus offers two degrees: Bachelor's degree in Primary School Teaching and a Bachelor's degree in Pre-Primary School Teaching. The department of psychology offers a Bachelor's degree in Educational Psychology. The European University offers a BA in Early Childhood Education and a BSc in Psychology. The University of Nicosia offers a BA in Pre-Primary Education and BA in Primary Education and a BSc in Psychology and in Social Work. Finally, Frederick University offers, a BEd in Pre-Primary Education and a BEd in Primary Education, a BSc in Psychology and a BA in Social Work. The Frederick Institute of Technology offers a diploma in Nursery Education.

Prospective Childcare Teachers (3 months to 5 years) have to attend one of the three Departments of Early Childhood Education at a Higher Technological Educational Institute (ATEI) in Greece in order to obtain a degree or attend the Frederick Institute of Technology for a 2year Diploma in Nursery Education. The ATEIs offer 4-year degrees in early childhood education. But in order to work with children between 3 months and 3 years they only need to have a diploma or a certificate in relation to the care, socioemotional and spiritual education of the child. *Tables 8a* to *8d* provides details of the IPE requirements of Kindergarten/Pre-primary Teachers, for Childcare Teachers, Special Education Teachers and Educational Psychologists.

Table 8a

Cyprus: Kindergarten Teacher

Job title in Greek: *Nipiagogos* **Profile**: Pre-primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: General university entrance certificate (for the University of Cyprus and private universities in Cyprus and Greek universities) and success at the Pan-Cyprian Examination organised by the MoESY (only for the University of Cyprus) **Professional studies:** 4 years at university **Award:** Bachelor's degree in Pre-Primary School Teaching **ECTS credits:** 240 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 645/655 **Main ECEC workplace:** Kindergarten/pre-primary education (3 to 5 years)

Table 8b

Cyprus: Nursery and Childcare Teacher

Job title in Greek: *Vrefonipiagogos* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
For work with children up to primary school entry: **Entry requirements:** General higher education entrance certificate and success at the Pan-Cyprian Examination organised by the MoESY. **Professional studies:** 4 years at university of applied sciences; degrees only provided by Greek public Higher Technological Educational Institutes (HTEI – ATEI) (Athens, Thessaloniki, Ioannina

Job title in Greek: *Vrefonipiagogos* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Award: Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Studies **ECTS credits:** 240 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 645/655 **Main ECEC workplace:** Childcare centre (3 months to 5 years) *For work with children under 3 years of age:* **Professional studies:** 2 years at Frederick Institute of Technology (private HEI) **Award:** Diploma in Nursery **ECTS credits:** 120 **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011:** 5 (550) **Main ECEC workplace:** Childcare centre (3 months to 3½ years)

Table 8c

Cyprus: Special Education Teacher

Job title in Greek: *Eidikos Paidagogos Eidikos Ekpaideytikos*
Entry requirements: General higher education entrance certificate **Professional studies:** 4 years at university of applied sciences; degrees only provided by Greek public Higher Technological Educational Institutes (HTEI) (Athens, Thessaloniki, Ioannina); general higher education entrance certificate and success at the Pan-Cyprian Examination organised by the MoESY. **Award:** Bachelor's degree in Special Education **ECTS credits:** 240 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 645/655 **Main ECEC workplace:** Specialist support staff work mostly offsite for kindergartens/pre-primary settings (3–5/6 years) and in primary schools.

Table 8d

Cyprus: Educational Psychologist

Job title in Greek: *Ekpaideytikos Psychologos*
Entry requirements: General university entrance certificate (for the University of Cyprus and private universities in Cyprus and Greek universities) and success at the Pan-Cyprian Examination organised by the MoESY. **Professional studies:** 4 years at university **Award:** Bachelor's degree in Special Education **ECTS credits:** 240 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 645/655 **Main ECEC workplace:** They work mostly offsite for kindergartens/pre-primary education (3–5/6 years) and in primary schools.

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

All universities in Cyprus offering early childhood studies, both public and private, have the same course framework. In April 2016 the University of Cyprus, Frederick University, European and Nicosia University stated on their websites that the framework for these studies includes compulsory, compulsory optional and general education courses covering the following areas: educational science (e.g. early childhood pedagogy), teaching methodology (e.g. creative drama), content area courses (e.g. pre-mathematical concepts), foreign language instruction and field experience courses.

Some of the universities give students the option to replace two courses (e.g. compulsory or optional courses) with a course titled 'Independent study' that involves the writing of a dissertation in the field of education (e.g. University of Cyprus, Frederick University).

The goal of these studies is to prepare prospective Kindergarten/Pre-primary Teachers for work in private, community or public pre-primary settings. There are no specified competence requirements but students are prepared to be able to implement the national curricula.

The Greek HTEIs providing Early Childhood Education and Care studies have a similar framework with compulsory and compulsory optional courses.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

There are no alternative entry routes for working in public and community settings in Cyprus. Regarding the private sector for both childcare and pre-primary settings, the owners of provision can employ people from other disciplines, for example a psychologist to work with under 3 year-olds or a biologist to work with pre-schoolers. Also, in the case of childcare provision, the official requirement, as explained earlier, is a certificate or a diploma, thus service providers tend not to employ people with higher education degrees.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Quality teaching is not only based on the knowledge acquired but during field practice, the guided workplace experience that students experience during their degree. This experience assumes that students understand how learning takes place and how they can practise teaching to succeed learning, thus putting theory into practice. The field practice programmes aim to offer pre-service students the necessary experience to exercise their teaching skills in the different subject areas (e.g. Language, Mathematics, Music, Arts, Social Studies). All of the higher education institutions that offer a degree in ECEC have similar field practice programmes. *Tables 9a* to *9d* provide the key elements of each type of practicum along with the ECTS and the expectations for each one, at one public and three private universities.

Table 9a

Cyprus: Key elements of field practice in university IPE programmes – University of Cyprus (2021)

University of Cyprus **IPE degree: Early Childhood Education (4 years)**	
Practicum Elements	
1st Level	2nd year of studies ECTS: 6 Duration: 13 weeks (24 lectures and 5-day visits at a public preschool)
2nd Level	3rd year of studies ECTS: 6 Duration: 13 weeks (24 lectures and 5-day visits at a public preschool)
3rd Level	4th year of studies ECTS: 20 Duration: 13 weeks (10 weeks of field experience at a public school, visiting daily, and 3 weeks of seminars at the university)
Programme Requirements and Learning Outcomes	
1st Level	**The students are expected to:** – Know the history and developments of early years in Cyprus. – Gather information in reference to the timetable and regulations of pre-schools and the regulations (e.g. planning, administration, environment and material organisation) as well as the different types of ECEC settings. – Develop professional attitudes and values that will support their professional identity. – Observe, collect and analyse data from their school visits. – Identify the characteristics of an effective preschool teacher. – Learn to communicate with children effectively and the rest of the school staff.
2nd Level	**The students are expected to:** – Observe and implement the different obligations and take on the roles of the preschool teacher (e.g. teaching, play). – Implement different teaching strategies based on current pedagogical principles. – Prepare a long-term activity play (using the project approach) and a short-term activity plan (lesson plans). – Plan and implement lesson plans effectively (content area and play) – Communicate effectively with a group of children, the whole class and use individualised ways of working with children. – Observe, record and analyse the teacher's teaching based on pedagogical principles.
3rd Level	**The students are expected to:** – Systematically observe and analyse the relationships and interactions that take place within the classroom and the school. ✓ Plan and lead the teaching process of the different content areas (Language, Mathematics, Science, Arts, Music, Social Studies, Physical Education as well as Play Activities) – Plan and implement lesson plans for the different content areas and plan play activities. – Observe and take on the different roles expected by the teacher (e.g. teaching, planning, managing, playing). – Analyse the teaching process critically. – Develop the following attitudes: ✓ Interest in the teaching outcomes

University of Cyprus IPE degree: Early Childhood Education (4 years)	
	✓ Acknowledge other people's point of view ✓ Willingness to learn new strategies and ideas ✓ Reflective and critical stance ✓ Develop confidentiality stance ✓ Be responsible for own choices
Assessment	
1st Level	Assignment 1 (10%): Planning and organisation of a classroom Assignment 2 (15%): Planning and implementation of play activities, Assignment 3 (20%): Portfolio Final Exam (40%) Attendance and Participation (5%)
2nd Level	Assignment 1 (20%): plan a theme using the PROJECT approach Assignment 2 (15%): Write 3 Lesson Plans Assignment 3 (20%): Presentation of Free and Structured Play activity planning Assignment 4 (25%): Presentation of Lesson Implementation Assignment 5 (10%): Observation of the teaching of a 4th year student with a supervisor and filling out a feedback form Attendance and Participation (10%)
3rd Level	Evaluation of lesson plans in the different subject areas 70% Professionalism 5% Implementation of the project approach 15% Implementation of a free and/or structured play activity for 45 minutes and a critical analysis of the experience 10%

Table 9b

Cyprus: Key elements of field practice in university IPE programmes – European University (2021)

European University IPE degree: Early Childhood Education (4 years)	
Practicum Elements	
1st Level	2nd year of studies ECTS: 6 Duration: Lectures at the University (18 hours) and field experience in a pre-school (40 hours) 1 day spent at an ECEC setting (public or private) for a period of 8 weeks
2nd Level	3rd year of studies ECTS: 12 Duration: Lectures at the University: 15 hours Field experience at a preschool: 75 hours (15 days spent at a preschool over a period of 8 weeks)
3rd Level	4th year of studies ECTS: 12 Duration: Lectures at the University (12 hours) and field experience in a preschool (200 hours), 8 consecutive weeks
Programme Requirements and Learning Outcomes	
1st Level	**The students are expected to:** – Observe, document and analyse – (a) the children, the programme and the environment of a preschool, (b) the daily life at the preschool (e.g. outdoor play, routines, activities), (c) the different teaching approaches (e.g. project approach), (d) the different ways of planning learning and activities (e.g. play, work in teams, collaborative work, thematic approach)

European University IPE degree: Early Childhood Education (4 years)	
	and € the content areas as taught in preschool (Language, Mathematics, Physical education, Social studies, Science, Arts, Music). – Get to know the timetable and the curriculum of preschool. – Develop the skill of observing and planning individual observations. – Learn different observation methods and know their pros and cons. – Interact with the children and explore the uniqueness of the early years period.
2nd Level	**The students are expected to:** – Develop observation, analysis, self-evaluation and reflection skills. – Develop skills to enhance communication, differentiation, planning and managing the classroom. – Plan, implement, and assess activities in the different content areas of the curriculum. – Critically observe and assess different pedagogical models, teaching approaches, ways of organising learning through the collection and analysis of data in real life learning environments. – Participate in group activities of the preschool and value the meaning of collaboration and collective effort. – Construct a personal philosophy and attitude towards early years education.
3rd Level	**The students are expected to:** – Be responsible for a preschool classroom and deal with (a) the planning and implementation of activities, (b) the problems and issues that arise and (c) planning of different school activities. – Participate in different collective activities and value collaboration and collective efforts. – Develop critical and reflective skills in assessing their own or other people's teaching as a means of continuously improving their own practical and theoretical knowledge. – Experiment and discover new approaches. – Report, analyse and implement new teaching approaches for effective learning, classroom planning and management. – Plan rich learning environments that respond to the individual needs of each child and enrich their learning potential. – Plan, implement and assess activities in the different content areas considering the epistemological framework of each one. – Cope with potential difficulties in the pedagogical process while focusing on finding solutions to problems.
Assessment	
1st Level 2nd Level 3rd Level	Field experience 90% Participation – professionalism 10%

Table 9c

Cyprus: Key elements of field practice in university IPE programmes – University of Nicosia (2021)

University of Nicosia **IPE degree: Early Childhood Education (4 years)**	
Practica Elements	
1st Level	2nd year of studies ECTS: 5 Duration: one semester
2nd Level	3rd year of studies ECTS: 5 Duration: one semester
3rd Level	4th year of studies ECTS: 10 Duration: one semester
Programme Requirements and Learning Outcomes	
1st Level	**The students are expected to**: – Judge and find positive and negative elements of didactic methods. – Develop basic teaching skills. – Know the basic elements of a lesson plan and be able to implement them smoothly. – Plan, organise and implement a lesson plan. – Explore the ability of self-evaluation, presenting the effectiveness of the work with critical reflection
2nd Level	– The students are expected to: – Plan teaching and implement it smoothly and effectively. – Implement didactic strategies and techniques that draw on the students' interest and active participation in the learning process. – Use multiple didactic methods and approaches for effective teaching and learning. – Deepen the pedagogical dimensions of specific teaching episodes during their own and other people's teaching.
3rd Level	**The students are expected to:** – Implement autonomous teaching: plan and implement a weekly teaching programme based on current strategies (e.g. thematic strategy, individual learning, project approach) – Implement teaching strategies and techniques that draw on the students' interest and active participation in the learning process. – Plan and implement weekly teaching programmes. – Plan and control a team of children outside the classroom with responsibility (e.g. playground, day trip, school activities). – Develop respect, collaboration and flexibility attitudes towards the people in the school (teachers, children, principal, assistants and parents).
Assessment	
1st Level	Written examination, activity development, micro-teaching, reflective journal.
2nd Level	Written examination, activity development, observations, reflection and assessment for two lesson implementations at preschool, portfolio (lesson plans, self-evaluation).

University of Nicosia IPE degree: Early Childhood Education (4 years)	
3rd Level	Individual Assignment/Portfolio, Feedback and evaluation of 3 lesson implementations at preschool, assessment by the classroom teacher and the university supervisors, assessment from the student's mentor

Table 9d

Cyprus: Key elements of field practice in IPE diploma and university programmes – Frederick Institute of Technology (2022) and Frederick University (2021)

Frederick Institute of Technology Diploma in Nursery (2 years)	
Practica Elements	
1st Level	Practical Experience I ECTS: 4 Duration 3 weeks
2nd Level	Practical Experience II ECTS: 4 Duration: 3 weeks
Programme Requirements and Learning Outcomes (these refer to the programme in general)	
The students are expected to: – Possess the knowledge and skills of oral, written and technological communication, so as to communicate and co-operate efficiently with their peers, children, parents, and others. – Organise activities which will help children to acquire mathematical concepts and experiences from natural sciences, and cultivate their problem solving thinking and their initiative. – Handle successfully not only routine problems in the pre-school institution, but also to solve any problems arising in their working environment.	

Frederick University IPE degree: Early Childhood Education (4 years)	
Practicum Elements	
1st Level	2nd year of studies ECTS: 5 Duration: 1 semester
2nd Level	3rd year of studies ECTS: 5 Duration: 1 semester
3rd Level	4th year of studies ECTS: 6 Duration: 1 semester
4th Level	4th year of studies ECTS: 12 Duration: 1 semester
Programme Requirements and Learning Outcomes	
1st Level	**The students are expected to**: – Discuss about teaching and learning in preschool using terms that relate to the pedagogical principles, the teaching-learning participants, the elements that impact teaching, the pedagogical climate of the teaching, the teaching-learning planning and assessment. – Note the elements that comprise the pedagogical climate of teaching and learning.

Frederick University IPE degree: Early Childhood Education (4 years)	
	– Analyse the role of the teacher, the student, the environment and the content areas in the teaching-learning process. – Problematise issues such as the curriculum, differentiation, technology, environmental education, parental involvement. – Explain the meaning of planning teaching and learning using webs for the analysis of a theme into specific subthemes. – Study the curriculum and describe elements that need to be taken into consideration for the planning of teaching-learning, such as the choice of content to teach, the process of teaching, the goals set, the methods employed and assessment.
2nd Level	– The students are expected to: – Describe and analyse areas of development for the child based on the early childhood curriculum and discuss goals and activities based on these. – Discuss the way content areas are structured in education, focusing in the early years as these are presented in the curricula. – Set goals which are simple, clear, differentiated and evaluative. – Study and develop lesson plans taking into consideration the interconnection of goals, materials, activities and assessment. – Develop work plans based on the project approach. – Observe and document important episodes from the preschool based on different focus areas, and analyse these.
3rd Level	**The students are expected to**: – Plan and implement appropriate work plans. – Develop and implement teaching skills in practice. – Develop interrelationship skills, guidance skills, problem solving skills. – Be informed about the quality and needs of the students. – Deal with expected and unexpected issues and behaviour problems. – Use appropriately the materials and different strategies to satisfy students' differing needs. – Analyse, judge and assess educational problems. – Assess their own behaviour and improve their work. – Appropriately handle the children's time and know what they are expected to teach. – Develop initiative and a flexible and innovative stance.
4th Level	**The students are expected to**: – Analyse and examine educational terms, theories and issues. – Plan and organise lessons with appropriate goals, the necessary teaching materials and through multiple activities. – Develop a series of teaching and learning material based on implemented strategies that make the process of teaching and learning easier. – Implement the teaching and learning processes, taking into consideration the goals of each content area and the special characteristics of the classroom. – Effectively deal with problems and collaborate with all those involved in the implementation of the programmes in the school. – Develop intercommunication with the people and teams in the school. – Develop guidance skills and appropriately guide people and teams.

Frederick University IPE degree: Early Childhood Education (4 years)	
	– Develop an encouraging environment for learning and positively face the different needs of the children and the individualities of the classroom. – Increase the experiences of children in reference to knowledge, emotionally and psychosocially. – Use techniques and strategies that develop higher order thinking. – Analyse and evaluate their accomplishments and learn to strive for continuous progress. – Develop an independent, flexible and innovative stance.
Assessment	
1st Level	Participation – Classroom assignment 10% Team presentation 10% Written Assignments 40% Final Exam 40%
2nd Level	Portfolio with Lesson Plans 20% Project Development 20% Observation notes from preschool visits 50% Evaluation by the preschool's principal 10%
3rd Level	University supervisors' grading 60% Portfolio 15% Seminar attendance 5% Principal's evaluation 5% Total of lesson plans 15%
4th Level	University supervisors' grading 60% Portfolio 10% Seminar attendance 5% Principal's evaluation 5% Monthly planning 5% Total of lesson plans 15%

The Pre-primary Teachers and Childcare Teachers who mentor preservice student/trainee teachers in private preschools and childcare centres are not paid in any form and do not have any time release like the public school mentors described earlier.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Continuing professional development for staff in ECEC provision in both the public and private sector is undertaken mainly by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth through the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus (C.P.I.). These programs are offered every year and are addressed to all current teachers of all levels. However, a closer look at the choice of themes for these seminars reveal that the options for focused CPD for Childcare Teachers are limited. In addition, all higher education institutions in Cyprus offer professional development seminars, workshops and conferences. These are optional for all staff in ECEC provision and take place during their own time

and at their own cost. Depending on the research interests and expertise of the university teaching staff, there may be some focused opportunities for CPD for Childcare Teachers.

The C.P.I. is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth and is responsible, among other services, for providing professional development activities for serving teachers in all sectors and at all levels of education by offering compulsory and optional seminars.

The C.P.I. has developed a Teacher's Professional Learning Programme (PLP) (Eracleous *et al* 2022) that covers many of the ways it provides professional development for teachers. Specifically, this programme involves extensive activities in the school unit, as it includes a year-round systematic support from the Pedagogical Institute for the professional learning of teachers. Officers of the Pedagogical Institute, as Supporters, collaborate throughout the school year with the school to promote professional learning within the school, with actions and practices that are selected and interpreted based on the needs of teachers and the context (school and classroom). The aim is to meet the professional / learning needs of teachers and to improve professional practices. The PLP utilises a variety of methodologies, such as Action-Research methodology, Lesson Study methodologies, Quality Circles for Teachers and others, which are in line with the needs of teachers and the specifics of each school.

The PLP is structured on the basis of effectiveness elements related to teachers' professional learning programs:

1. Active involvement
2. Reflection
3. Teacher's dynamic professional identity
4. School based context
5. Collaboration and professional learning communities.

So, this type of professional development offered by the C.P. I. is one that entails teachers' active involvement, with continuous reflection and highlights the importance of developing a learning community.

Moreover, the C.P.I. offers other forms of seminars and workshops which include the following:

1. Optional Seminars which are free of charge and take place in the afternoons (i.e. after kindergartens/preschools have closed) and may include general pedagogical or specific themes for every level of education and/or content area. The seminars comprise five sessions lasting 2½ hours once a year.
2. School-based seminars take place in kindergartens/preschools where groups of teachers within the same or nearby public kindergartens who are interested in participating in such seminars meet together in one institution.
3. Seminars for kindergarten/preschool heads which aim to improve management strategies and to help them cope with current challenges focusing on modernising the Cypriot system in relation to EU policies. (C.P.I. 2022)

Regarding the *private* sector, the kindergarten owners are responsible for providing their staff with professional development but they can also participate in the optional seminars offered by the C.P.I.

The only obligatory CPD programme for teachers in *public* kindergartens/preschools takes place during the first week of September before school starts. Teachers attend one-day seminars either at their kindergarten/preschool or in large teams based on themes that the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth considers necessary. For example, over the past five years, teachers have attended various professional development seminars on the new Early Childhood Curriculum (e.g. on play, music, language, mathematics) which was revised during the recent Educa-

tional Reform. In addition, two periods weekly (80 minutes altogether) are dedicated to professional development, during which the principal/centre head organises planning activities, or teachers who have participated in other types of professional development share their experience, knowledge and skills with their colleagues.

Moreover, during the academic year the Early Childhood Supervisors (*Epitheoritries*) organise seminars or conferences according to what they consider is important for the field. During these seminars, teacher representatives from the larger kindergartens (e.g. with two and more classrooms) attend and they are then required to share the information of the seminar with the other teachers in their team. These seminars take place during working hours.

The C.P.I. offers an in-service programme for newly appointed principals. During the year in which they take up their position, principals attend a weekly professional development session during their working hours. They are supported in developing leadership, managerial/ administrative and organisational abilities and skills. In addition, there are several optional seminars offered by the C.P.I. over the course of each year and other conferences organised by higher education institutions which they can attend during their own free time and at their own cost.

Kindergarten/Pre-primary Teachers may participate in optional workshops during their own time, sometimes covering the costs in order to have these documented in their assessment file. Attendance is considered for a teacher's annual assessment but there is no direct impact on remuneration. Career advancement is mainly accomplished through years of experience and post-graduate degrees.

Being part of the European Union provides early childhood teachers opportunities to participate in different programmes and seminars. For example, the optional seminars organised and provided by the C.P.I. are co-funded by the European Social Fund of the EU. In addition, early childhood teachers have the opportunity to participate and visit other European countries to enrich their own professional development. Two examples of such programmes include: (1) *MENETEP-Mentoring technology-based pedagogy*, which aims at developing teachers' digital skills, and (2) *DiDeSu- Differentiation of instruction for teacher professional Development and students' Success,* which aspires to make a substantial contribution to the field of teaching methodology and effective differentiated teaching, utilising the opportunities for collaboration at European level as provided through Erasmus +, and to create learning communities within schools.

There are no specific professional development options for Teachers' Assistants, and employers do not expect them to participate in CPD activities. The Child Personal Assistants ('accompaniers') decide for themselves whether to participate in different optional seminars or conferences to enrich their knowledge and skills. Finally, the Special Educators, Speech Therapists, Occupational Therapists, and Psychologists who visit the kindergartens to provide special assistance to the children who need it follow the same scheme of professional development provided by the C.P.I. or their department at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

In the **childcare sector**, Nursery and Childcare Teachers work full-time and are paid as little as €600–€750, lower than the minimum wage. Also, they are often laid off at the end of the year so that they do not have to be paid during the summer holidays and the providers do not have

to raise their salary. There is no set regulation in terms of working and salary conditions in the private sector and, regardless of the teacher's qualifications, the providers offer the same salary.

In the **education sector**, all teachers working in the public sector, regardless of the level of education or specialisation, earn the same amount. Therefore, Kindergarten/Pre-primary Teachers earn the same as primary school teachers. The public sector has a yearly average increase based on inflation and tax index.

The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth has issued regulations in terms of the functioning of (non-profit) community kindergartens along with the remuneration of the Kindergarten Teachers in these settings. An ECEC Teacher working in a community kindergarten earns less than one working in the public sector but it is still considered to be a fair/good wage.

In the private sector, remuneration is the lowest and working hours are the longest. There have been cases where someone is forced to be absent from work and as a result their employer deducts a certain amount from their salary. There is no agency to control what the private sector offers in terms of working conditions and salaries. People working in the private sector do not earn enough to support themselves (e.g. to rent their own apartment) or a family because they usually earn the minimum wage or close to that. *Table 10* shows the remuneration of Kindergarten Teachers according to the setting they work in.

Table 10
Cyprus: Remuneration of Kindergarten/Pre-primary Teachers, 2022

Type of ECEC provision	Remuneration
Public kindergartens	A8-A11 or combined (based on years of service) A8: €17,946 – €27,593 per annum A10: €25,112 – €34,720 per annum A11: €29,684 – €39,292 per annum
Community kindergartens	€1.068,73 per month and an annual increase of €24,96
Private kindergartens	Depends on the owner of the setting. Usually they offer the lowest average wage. The lowest average wage per month (before taxes) in Cyprus is currently €870 and after six months of work €924.

Source: MoESY 2022b

The Teachers' Assistants in public and community schools, who do not have a higher education degree, earn €870 monthly and within six months their wage is raised to €924 through the regulations applying to the public school system.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

The working hours in community kindergartens differ from those in public kindergartens and the private sector. Staff in community kindergartens work 36 hours per week with a daily schedule between 7:30 and 14:45 and they do not have as much annual leave or as many sick leave days as staff in the public school system. Teachers who work in the private sector always work one or two afternoons (at the most until 18:00) and have no sick leave days.

Staff in preschool/kindergarten settings

In the public sector, Kindergarten Teachers usually work on a full-time basis. In general, only those who substitute for other teachers due to health issues or maternity leave work part time. In the private sector, however, there tend to be more teachers working on a part-time basis, since the wages are then lower – a benefit for the owner of the setting only – and the practitioners have fewer benefits.

As already shown in *Table 6*, for the academic year 2018/2019, full-time work is predominant among teaching and management personnel in kindergartens. Overall, only 4.08% of teaching staff and 4.15% of management staff work part-time, with a percentage below the average of teaching staff (3.25%) and management staff (3.26%) working part-time in the private sector.

Staff in the childcare sector

Table 11 provides information which refers to the number of full-time and part-time teaching and management personnel (teachers and principals respectively) working at the different types of childcare centres during the academic year 2018/2019 (CYSTAT 2021a).

The majority of both teaching and management personnel work full time. Part-time workers are most likely to be found in the private sector.

Table 11

Cyprus: Full-time and part-time teaching and management personnel in childcare centres, 2018-2019

Type of school	Teaching personnel		Management personnel		Total
	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	
Public	618	0	170	0	788
Community	114	11	8	3	136
Private	653	47	145	11	856
Total	**1385**	**58**	**323**	**14**	**1780**

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

The newly qualified and appointed staff can choose from the different forms of seminars offered by the C.P. I. as described on *Chapter 6*. So, they basically participate in the compulsory one-day seminars offered for all teachers in September or they choose form the other voluntary seminars offered in the afternoons based on the themes that interest them. Additionally, in the case where their school demands in service professional development, they take part in the activities which are usually based on the needs of the school, as assessed by the head and supported by the C. P. I. officers.

7.4 Non-contact time

Table 14 illustrates the number of teaching periods (40 minutes) and non-teaching activities undertaken by each type of personnel in the public sector (MoESY 2021a).

Table 12

Cyprus: Number of weekly working hours and activities undertaken by personnel in the public sector

Personnel	Teaching time periods (40 minutes)	Non-teaching activities within the school	Staff meeting	Educational seminars
Principals in kindergartens depending on the number of teachers in the setting	11 to 21	14 to 24	1	2
Assistant Principals	23	12	1	2
Primary School, Pre-primary and Special Teachers depending on the years of teaching	25 to 29	6 to 10	1	2

Principals teach fewer hours than assistant principals and teachers; the higher the number of teachers in a setting, the lower the number of hours the principal has to teach. With increasing years of teaching experience, teachers spend less time teaching. Regarding the private and community sectors it is up to the providers and principals of the school to arrange non-contact time but it is generally uncommon.

All teachers, regardless of the number of their teaching periods, are obliged to stay at pre-school/kindergarten for the whole day. After teaching they have time to cooperate with parents and attend staff meetings that usually start at 13:15 after the pre-school/kindergarten day ends. Finally, all teachers have two periods a week to attend educational seminars/conferences.

7.5 Current staffing issues

In the field of ECEC there are more teachers than needed since there is no direct correspondence between the number of people studying and graduating as ECEC teachers and the actual number of teachers needed in the public, community and private sector. This can often mean that over-qualified people work with age groups for which they were not trained, and are poorly paid.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

New teacher appointment system

The Educational Service Commission of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth considers the appointment of new teachers in public kindergartens/schools to be one of the main problems facing the public education system since most teacher candidates are appointed for the first time many years after they graduate. Because of the fact that there is no immediate need to employ teachers in the public-school system, whoever graduates with a BA in Education is signed up on the public-school system list of educators. Thus, a graduate may not be employed in the public system until five to ten years after completing their initial professional education since this is the time it can take for a position to become available in public kindergartens or schools. In the meantime, this person may have been teaching in the private sector or may have been engaged in an entirely different profession all these years.

Therefore, following the guidelines of UNESCO 1997 and those of the committee for Educational Reform in Cyprus, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth prepared a proposal in 2014 for a new process of appointing new teachers in the public education sector. In 2015, the Greek-Cypriot Parliament passed a specific bill in accordance with the Ministry's proposal and a new teacher appointment system has been in place since 2017.

The criteria taken into consideration for including teacher candidates in the Appointments List include the following:

1. Written examination (45 credits)
2. Additional academic qualifications (up to 20 credits – 15 for a Master's degree and 20 for a Doctorate)
3. Educational experience (25 credits)
4. Year of graduation (first degree) (5 credits)
5. Average grade of first degree (3 credits for Excellent, 2 credits for Very Good and 1 point for Good or when there is no grade on the degree)
6. Service with the National Guard (2 credits)

The written examination takes place every two years and is open to new applicants and those already on the Appointments List wishing to improve their overall score. The examination score of each candidate is valid for ten years. To stay on the list, they have to take the exam again within two years before the end of the tenth year.

Candidates who fulfil all the requirements and are on the Appointments List have to follow an assessment programme during which their pedagogical and methodological abilities are assessed. If they are assessed as inadequate they will be obliged to participate in a special course offered by the C.P.I. with the aim of enhancing the necessary skills to be effective in their teaching. If the teachers who participated in the special programme are still assessed as inadequate when they return to the teaching position, they will be removed from the list (MoESY 2021b).

New assessment system

In January 2019, the MoESY developed the new system for the formative assessment of teachers and of school evaluation (public education), including kindergartens. The main purpose of the proposal was to develop an evaluation plan which helps to enhance the quality of the education provided.

The evaluation maintains a pedagogical character and aims at the feedback of all those involved in the learning process: students, teachers, parents, guardians and the educational system in general, with the main aim of giving feedback on the effectiveness of the educational practices and setting priorities for future action.

The basic principles of the assessment system include:

- Support processes for teachers and kindergartens through formative assessment and school project evaluation
- Provisions to support new teachers, contractors and substitutes
- Transparency and dialogue between all stakeholders
- A meta-assessment process, with the aim of gathering information for the continuous improvement of the evaluation criteria, the forms and the procedures used in the evaluation.

Based on the new assessment system, the following are evaluated:

- Substitutes and special contract teachers
- Teachers on probation
- Permanent teachers, senior teachers, assistant principals
- Principals
- Inspectors / Supervisors
- First Education Officers

The objectives of the assessment system are defined as:

- Providing schools and teachers with constructive feedback on the effectiveness of their educational practices and definition of their future priorities
- Establishing standards for efficient and continuous processes of internal evaluation and improvement
- The evaluation of the kindergarten's ability to carry out effective and continuous internal improvement
- Ensuring ongoing professional training and support for all involved
- Monitoring the practices of the kindergarten and all involved to achieve high quality standards and ensure accountability.

Finally, the system is unified and includes two types of evaluation:

1. Internal evaluation (self-evaluation): Internal evaluation, as a process of self-assessment, will be developed by the school as an internal process with initial needs detection, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of actions.
2. External evaluation (feedback): External evaluation will follow and support self-assessment and will provide feedback to the kindergarten so that the process of re-designing can then be documented by an external assessment panel to strengthen and support the self-assessment process (MoESY 2021c).

Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth with the Ministry of Social Welfare Services are involved in a project with UNICEF funded by the Next Generation EU which aims to develop the EU Quality Framework for ECEC in Cyprus. A working group of experts from both ministries and the ECEC field have been meeting to unfold, define and describe the elements of high quality ECEC for all children and provide suggestions for their development and implementation. The framework is guided by five elements: access, staff, evaluation and monitoring, governance and funding, and curriculum. After several meetings the working group has prepared the elements of the Quality Framework for ECEC taking into consideration the Greek-Cypriot context. The document will be presented to the two ministries for considering their own actions during the following months.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

There are limited research projects which focus on ECEC professionalisation and staffing issues. Nevertheless, the following research examples provide a general picture of professionalisation issues in the field. These include three studies that (1) focus on the role of the practicum/work placement in initial professional education at the time of COVID, (2) elaborate on infant practices for initial teacher education programmes and (3) discuss continuing professional development for digital skills enhancement.

School practicum experiences at the time of COVID-19: Focusing on the implementation of play practices

***Source**:* Loizou and Theodosiou 2022 (see *References* for further details).

Aims: The study describes the experiences of fourth year Early Childhood Education (ECE) preservice teachers during their school practicum at the time of COVID-19 in Cyprus. The authors aimed to see how capable pre-service students felt in surpassing difficulties, such as COVID-19, when implementing play practices, and how their interaction with others (e.g., supervisors, peers, and mentors) made them stronger to cope with COVID-19 related stress.

Methods/Procedures: The participants were 28 fourth-year preservice female students who completed their practicum experience at public preschools. The data collection included the completed reflective journals at the beginning, the middle and at the end of the practicum that the students had to complete. These journals included open-ended questions guiding the student teachers to reflect on their play practice, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the health protocol on their planning and implementation of play, their teaching abilities, as well as the support they received during their school practicum.

Findings: The findings focus on the play practices of preschool teachers during their practicum in COVID-19 period, and are presented in three sections: 1. Emotions and challenges expressed at the beginning of the internship at the kindergarten, 2. Play practices and teacher involvement in play during the COVID-19 pandemic and 3. Solutions found in the implementation of practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings suggest that preschool teachers not only experienced this in different ways, but that there were constructive discussions that contributed to the implementation of their play ideas.

***Implications*:** Play as a practice, which is often discussed as crucial for children's learning and development, can be "vulnerable" in adverse situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, but teachers can be creative enough to turn this vulnerability into potentiality.

Infancy pedagogy and praxis

***Source**:* Loizou and Demetriou 2019 (see *References* for further details)

Aims: Through an examination of the reflective comments of 42 preservice Early Childhood Education Teachers (PS-ECETs), this study describes how an infancy course within an Early Childhood Education programme used four different ways of organising learning to unravel details of infant pedagogy, focusing on the role of the teacher.

Methods/Procedures: The participants of this study were 42 female pre service ECE Teachers in their second year of studies who were registered for the course 'EDU102: Infancy and Practice (0–3 years)'. The data collection included the reflective assignments of 42 students focusing on visits 5 and 6 which involved the implementation of the four ways of organising learning. For these reflective assignments they were provided guidelines to focus on their actions, children's and teachers' actions, as well as their emotions in reference to their caregiving role.

Findings: Findings suggest that the way PS-ECETs describe their roles and the goals they set for the infants differ according to the specific way of organising learning (routines, structured play, quiet time observation, and purposeful playful intervention). The level of teacher involvement changes according to the way of organising learning, being more active during structured play and less active during quiet time observation.

***Implications*:** Findings allow conclusions to be drawn about infant teachers' practices (appropriate ways of interacting with infants to provide education and care), teacher education programmes that educate infant teachers along with professional development programmes for in-service infant teachers.

A teacher professional development programme for digital skills enhancement

***Source**:* Papasolomontos 2021 (see *References* for further details)

Aims: Considering that digital technologies constitute a most integral part of our lives and at the same time offer opportunities for effective teaching and learning, the Pedagogical Institute offered a Training Programme aiming to enhance the development of teachers' digital skills. The Programme was completed by 47 teachers from all levels, including kindergarten. The purpose of this study is the presentation of the programme and the views of the teachers who completed the programme.

Methods: A PD Programme was offered remotely, utilising the Online Learning Environment (OLE) of the C.P.I. It consists of an Introductory Module and 10 other Learning Modules with themes defined through a process of diagnosing the needs of teachers but also taking into account European and national directions. All 47 participants completed a questionnaire electronically at the end of the programme.

Findings: Findings show that the purpose and the expected results of the Programme were clear and unambiguous (61%), the general content, which was also described as "innovative" by the trainees, met its purpose and objectives Programme (61%). Also, the Programme was described as clear and understandable (63%), responding to the expected results (63%) and was useful for the development of their digital skills (76%). As far as the Programme met their expectations, one (1) person said little, 18 (39%) people said enough and 27 (59%) people a lot.

***Implications*:** The findings have implications for the revision and improvement of the programme. It is suggested that the time period for which the programme is offered needs to be reconsidered to avoid time pressure and additional workload. A reduction of the theoretical component of the programme is also proposed.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

There are specific issues within the ECEC field in Cyprus which are directly related to quality and have an impact on the educational system and specifically on the effectiveness of the experiences we provide for children and thus their learning and development.

Quality issue 1: Salaries in the ECEC field

The field of early childhood education has always been underestimated by society and the government in terms of the importance of early education and care. This is reflected in the fact that people working with children aged 3 months to 3 years do not need to have a degree; a school leaving certificate is considered sufficient. In addition, in the private sector, which is the largest provider of places for children from birth up to 4 years 8 months, Nursery and Childcare Teachers are rarely acknowledged by their employers and are mostly underpaid (see *Chapter 8*). Since there are many early childhood teachers with a degree in ECEC, the providers are always in the safe position to find someone when the need arises. This affects the quality of education and care offered to children and will continue to do so in the near future. Teachers will be less and less motivated to work with children and this will definitely have an impact on children, their development and learning and finally an impact on society.

Quality issue 2: Teacher assessment and evaluation

The evaluation of teachers and the educational work of a preschool (public and private) is or rather should be a continuous dynamic process integrated in the daily operation of the setting. Unfortunately, the small number of Early Childhood Education officials and supervisors in Cyprus in combination with the procedures followed by the two ministries do not fully cover this need. The evaluation process should, in addition to assessing the educational work of the kindergarten, be linked to the general educational planning and the development of action plans of the Ministries. The ultimate goal should be to improve the quality of the educational work and the teachers who provide it. The ECEC system of Cyprus needs to be revised and adjusted so that the goal mentioned above is achieved to the maximum extent possible. This achievement will provide feedback on the teaching and administrative work of teachers, teaching practices, training programmes, while contributing to the creation of awareness, motivation, efficiency and enhancing individual responsibility without cancelling scientific training. These procedures

should include support for teachers and kindergartens, as well as provisions to support new teachers, contractors and substitutes. In addition, they should rely on transparency and dialogue between all the stakeholders. In addition, since Nursery and Childcare Teachers are expected to focus on care, they are not evaluated in reference to the education part of their work. It is imperative that education becomes part of their work and they get to be evaluated by both Ministries.

Quality issue 3: The role of Teacher's Assistant

In ECEC, the staffing of kindergartens with properly trained staff is constantly emphasised in order to ensure quality education. The kindergartens in Cyprus, public, private and community settings employ Teachers' Assistants, who mainly support the teacher in reference to the cleanliness of the classroom, morning welcoming of children, preparation of art materials, etc. It is imperative to staff preschool classrooms with more than one trained adult so that the needs of all children are fully and adequately met. In Cyprus each preschool has 25 children without the provision or possibility of supporting the teacher's pedagogical work either by another teacher (co-teacher) or someone who is partially trained in ECEC. At the time of COVID-19 it was even more evident that if classrooms were staffed with two ECEC teachers, then provision of quality education would have been possible.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

CYPRUS

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms chosen in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC settings are **nursery** (*vrefikos stathmos*, 0–2), **childcare centre** (*vrefokomikoi/paidokomikoi stathmoi*, 0–4) and **pre-primary school** (*nipiagogeio* – formerly kindergarten 3–5)[1]. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Cyprus

1880	Founding of first establishment for young children in Larnaca, shortly after the onset of British dominance
1898	First curricular guidelines for early childhood education issued, following the example of Greece
1920–1930	44 pre-primary groups attached to primary schools are set up and subsidised by the (colonial) government (39 for the Greek community, four for the Turkish and one for the Armenian community).
1933	Following an uprising on the island, only 15 of the centres survive.
1933–1960	– All public institutions lose government subsidies and are transferred to the private sector – By 1960 there are 48 centres for 3 to 6 year-olds, mostly unlicensed and staffed by professionally unqualified persons.
1960	Cyprus gained independence from the United Kingdom.
1960s to 1973	Only 10% of children aged 3 years 8 months to 5 years 8 months attend the existing 13 public and 37 private centres.
1974–1979	Following the Turkish invasion, 55 of 133 primary schools and public kindergartens are demolished and only 89 of 121 private institutions remain undamaged.
1975–1976	An Early Childhood Education Department is established at the Pedagogical Academy.
1977	First community kindergarten opened
1979	Government expansion plan to increase number of public sector ECEC centres to 300.
1987–1988	The number of students attending the Pedagogical Academy to become Early Childhood Teachers increases from 30 to 60.
1994	Publication of a pre-primary curriculum part of the elementary school curriculum
1996	Number of community kindergartens reaches 166.
2004	Compulsory and free of charge attendance in an ECEC setting (*prodimotiki*) accredited by the Ministry of Education and Culture
2008	The official Educational Reform at the Ministry of Education and Culture begins and includes early childhood education.
2013/14	The majority of kindergartens (265/515) are state-maintained, whereas the majority of nurseries and age-integrated childcare centres (108/172) are private for-profit facilities.
2014	The second phase of the Educational Reform begins.
2018	Council of Ministers decides to gradually raise the school entry age
2020/21	School entry age is raised to 5 years 10 months
2021/22	School entry age is raised to 6 years

Sources: Loizou 2018; Eurydice 2023, 4

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. The relevant formats for Cyprus are **0–2**, **0–4** and **3–5** years.

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

In Cyprus, the system of early childhood education and care is organised separately and partly in parallel. Nurseries for children under 3 years of age are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (*Ypurgeio Ergasias, Pronoias kai Koinonikon Asphalis-eon*). Kindergartens for 3 to under 6 year-olds come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (MOESY – *Ypourgeíou Paideías, Athlitismoú kai Neolaías*). Age-integrated centres for children up to the age of 5 years and 8 months fall under the responsibility of both ministries, each of which oversees the corresponding age group.

General objectives and legislative framework

The government "National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020" (*Ethnikä Stratägikä gia tä Dia Biu Mathäsä*) sets out reform goals with regard to all forms of learning (formal, informal, non-formal). These include: Access for all; improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training; promoting research and development activities; improving labour market opportunities.

Since 2014, there has been an action plan for the reform of the education system, which also partially includes the system of early childhood education, upbringing and care (especially with regard to demands for further training and education of staff).

In nurseries for under 3 year-olds (*vrefikos stathmos*) the focus is more on care than on education. For childcare centres for children up to the age of 5 (*vrefokomikoi/paidokomikoi stathmoi*), the Children's Act applies (*O Peri Paidion Nomos tu* 1993, amended in 2011). State kindergartens are regulated by primary education regulations (*O peri Stoicheiodus Ekpaideusäs Nomos* 2012), private and municipal kindergartens by the Law on Private Schools and Institutions (*O peri Idiotikon Scholeion kai Phrontistärion Nomos tu* 2012).

The Special Education Act (*O Peri Agogäs kai Ekpaideusäs Paidion me Eidikes Anankes*, 1999, amended in 2001) stipulates that children with special educational needs are to attend mainstream institutions, which must be equipped with the necessary infrastructure and support measures.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

There is no legal entitlement to a place in an ECEC setting for under 3 year-olds.

Following a decision of the Council of Ministers in January 2018, the maximum age of children attending childcare centres is to be gradually increased from 4 years and 8 months to 5 years. Similarly, the starting age for primary school is to be increased gradually from the current age of 5 years and 8 months to the age of 6 (MOESY 2022a, 2023).

Pre-primary school (formerly kindergarten) is compulsory for children aged 5 and over and free for 26 hours per week. Attendance is voluntary for younger children.

Currently, there is an attempt by the MOESY, supported by all parties, to change the starting age of compulsory pre-primary education to 4 years instead of 5, but this has not as yet been voted on by the House of Representatives (Loizou 2024).

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Cyprus provided the main orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are indicated within the text and in the references section.

Main types of provision

Nurseries (*vrefikos stathmos*) for children aged 6 weeks to 3 years and **childcare centres** (*vrefokomikoi/paidokomikoi stathmoi*) for children up to the age of 5 years are either independent settings or they are integrated into kindergartens and are then multi-age settings. They are open from 1 September to 30 July; they are closed in August and on 12 public holidays. As a rule, they are open from 7:00 to 17:00. ECEC settings are available in all places where more than 10 children live. Children from places with fewer than 10 children are transported free of charge to the nearest facility. In 2018/19, there were 229 nurseries for children under 3 years of age (CYSTAT 2021, no newer data available at the time of reporting).

Pre-primary schools / kindergartens (*nipiagogeio*) accept children from 3 to 6 years. State-run pre-primary settings, which are open from around mid-September to the end of June, usually have opening hours from 7:45 to 13:05; only a few are open until 16:00. In municipal/community pre-primary settings, the opening hours are usually agreed with the parents' council so that the parents' working hours can be taken into account. Most private settings are open in the afternoon.

In 2022/23, there were 347 pre-primary schools/kindergartens in Cyprus (272 public, 75 community schools) (MOESY 2022b).

Provider structures

There are three kinds of provider of ECEC settings: (1) Public/state-maintained institutions which are established and fully funded by the state; (2) non-profit private institutions which are organised by voluntary initiatives or associations and receive state subsidies; (3) private commercial settings which are founded and financed by a legal entity.

State-maintained **nurseries** are established by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and state-maintained **pre-primary schools**/kindergartens by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (MoESY). Both are run in cooperation with local authorities. The operation of both private non-profit and private for-profit facilities must be approved by the MoESY. Places in state-run nurseries are limited, since there are few of them compared to private non-profit and private for-profit facilities. Parents have to apply for a place, and these are then allocated according to certain criteria such as the employment of both parents or the number of children in the family. The larger majority of children aged 0–2 years who attend a nursery are in private-commercial settings – 68% in 2018/19 (CYSTAT 2021, no newer data available at the time of reporting). In the same year, just under 3% of children enrolled were in a state-maintained nursery, whereas nearly half of children aged 3 and above were enrolled in a state-run pre-primary school/kindergarten. In the national statistics for 2019/20, there was no breakdown of the ECEC setting types or the types of private settings. Almost two thirds of the children were enrolled in private ECEC settings (see *Table 1*). One year later (2020/21), both the number of settings (734) and the number of children (32,958) decreased slightly (CYSTAT 2023).

Table 1

Cyprus: Number of children enrolled in ECEC settings (nurseries, childcare centres and pre-primary schools) according to provider type, 2019/20

	Public	Private non-profit and for-profit	Total
Number of ECEC settings	277	466	**743**
Number of children	12,137	21,192	**33,329**
Share of children, in %*	**36.4**	**63.6**	

Source: CYSTAT 2021 (no newer data available at the time of reporting), *own calculations

Participation rates in regulated provision

The majority of under 3 year-olds are not enrolled in institutions (see *Table 2*), although the proportion fell from 81% to approximately 70% between 2005 and 2019. This is partly due to the fact that informal care provided by grandparents and other relatives is still very common in Cyprus. In contrast, by 2022, three quarters (74.5%) of children between the ages of 3 and school entry were enrolled in institutions. While this proportion rose from 2005 to 2015, it had fallen slightly by 2022.

Table 2

Cyprus: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	7	40
	Over 30 hours	12	38
	No enrolment in ECEC	81	22
2010	1 to 29 hours	10	34
	Over 30 hours	16	45
	No enrolment in ECEC	75	21
2015	1 to 29 hours	9.4	49.4
	Over 30 hours	11.4	32.0
	No enrolment in ECEC	79.2	18.6
2022	1 to 29 hours	5.8	19.6
	Over 30 hours	23.7	54.9
	No enrolment in ECEC	70.5	25.4

Source: Eurostat 2023b

According to national statistics, 24.7% of 0 to 2 year-olds attended an ECEC setting in 2018, and 90% of 3 to 5-year olds (CYSTAT 2021, no newer data available at the time of reporting). In 2021, Eurostat reported that two thirds of 4 year-olds (67.8%) and almost all (97.1%) 5 year-olds attended a kindergarten/childcare centre (see *Table 4*).

Table 3

Cyprus: Number of children in ECEC settings by age, 2018/19

Children's age	Number of children
Under 1 year	501
1 year-olds	1,681
2 year-olds	5,007
Under 3 year-olds	**7,189**
3 year-olds	7,087
4 year-olds	8,637
5 year-olds	9,442
3 to under 6 year-olds	**25,166**
0 to under 6 year-olds	**32,355**

Source: CYSTAT 2021 (no newer data available at the time of reporting)

Table 4

Cyprus: Number and enrolment rates of children in ECEC settings, by age, 2021

Age	Number of children in nurseries/ childcare centres	Enrolment rates in nurseries/ childcare centres in %	Number of children in kindergartens/ childcare centres	Enrolment rates in kindergartens/ childcare centres in %
Under 2 years	1,448	7.5	536	2.8
2 year-olds	2,282	24.5	1,859	19.9
3 year-olds	2,589	27.7	3,784	40.5
4 year-olds	1,893	19.9	6,450	67.8
5 year-olds	313	3.3	9,189	97.1
6 year-olds	81	0.8	2,434	25.5

Source: Eurostat 2023h, i

Financing and costs for parents

In 2020, the government spent 13.4% of its budget on education as a whole, which corresponded to 6% of GDP (CYSTAT 2023, 2). For each child in the early childhood and pre-primary sector, €5,204 were spent during the same year.

State-maintained nurseries and kindergartens are primarily funded by the government – either directly or through local school authorities. Public institutions are not allowed to accept any other funds.

While kindergarten attendance in a public setting has been free of charge since 2021 for children aged 5 years and older for 26 hours a week, parents of younger children in public kindergartens must pay a monthly flat fee of €42. In nurseries or childcare centres, parental fees are income-related. Under certain circumstances, depending on the criteria of the institution, a reduced amount may also be charged. Private commercial kindergartens do not receive subsidies from the government and set their own fees, which can vary considerably.

2022 gab ein Paar mit zwei Kindern für die Betreuungskosten etwa 16% des Netto-Haushaltseinkommens für die Kinderbetreuung aus[3] (OECD.Stat 2023).

The government, through the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, is proposing to subsidise the families with a sum of €100–350 for every child under 4 years of age who is attending a nursery/child care or pre-primary setting, starting in 2022-2023. This subsidy depends on the family's wages, children's ages and the number of children in the family. The money will go directly to the ECEC setting the child is attending (Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance 2022).

Staff to child ratios and group size

The heads of **nurseries** and **childcare centres** decide on the group structure; legally binding regulations do not exist. However, the following are recommendations regarding the maximum number of children per qualified staff member (see *Table 5*).

[3] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

Table 5

Cyprus: Maximum staff to child ratios in nurseries and childcare centres by age

Age	Staff to child ratio
Under 2 years	1 : 6
2 to 3 years	1 : 16
3 to 4 years	1 : 24
Over 4 years	1 : 28

Source: Eurydice 2023, 4.2

In both public and private **kindergartens**, there should be no more than 25 children in a group or the number should correspond to the room size (Eurydice 2023).

In 2018/19, the average staffing ratio in nurseries and childcare centres was 1: 10.9 (9.4 in public, 11.6 in private non-profit and 10.7 in private for-profit). In kindergartens the average ratio was 1: 14.2 (15.5 in public, 16.5 in private-non-profit and 12.5 in private for profit (CYSTAT 2021, no newer data available at the time of reporting). In 2019/20, the overall staffing ratio in the early childhood and pre-primary sector was 1:12.8 – a slight improvement compared to the previous year (1:13.4) (CYSTAT 2023).

Curricular frameworks

There is no official educational plan for the work in **nursery** settings for children under 3 years of age. The activities are usually planned by the centre head and the staff choose the appropriate didactic-methodical approaches. The main goals are the safety of the children and age-appropriate activities.

The curricular framework (*Analytika Programmata*) for **kindergartens** is mandatory for all state and municipal kindergartens and is part of an overarching curriculum for primary and secondary education. In 2020 it was revised, but has been implemented since 2011.

There are four developmental areas: (1) personal and social understanding, (2) emotional empowerment, (3) motor skills, and (4) mental strengthening. In addition to planned structured activities, there is also room for spontaneous activities and play. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on cultural, linguistic and religious pluralism (European Commission 2020, 76).

The curriculum follows the philosophy that every child is unique and should be involved in a democratic way in the decisions that affect them. Learning should be holistic, cross-cutting and based on individual potential. It is child-centred, play-based and emphasises problem-solving skills as well as the development of social skills. The professionals are free to choose how they translate the curricular goals into practice.

In state kindergartens, there is a fixed daily schedule by the state but the teacher is free to revise it based on the children's needs. Private and private non-profit institutions develop their own schedules, which has to be approved by the Ministry of Education, or they can follow the curriculum of the public institutions.

Digital education

The kindergarten curriculum emphasises the pedagogical benefits of digital technologies as a support for learning without specifying the digital competences to be developed (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 100). "Technology" is seen as an integral part of the learning process and as a tool for both professionals and children. Digital media should be integrated

"appropriately" in kindergartens and used in an age-related way. It is pointed out that this should not replace real-life experiences, but rather strengthen and enrich them. It is up to the professionals to decide when and how to use which tools. However, professionals should continuously educate themselves so that they are able to offer children experiences with current technologies.

Monitoring – evaluation

Overall, the evaluation of the education system has not yet been regulated. However, the newly established Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation (CERE) is expected to conduct evaluation studies of the entire system.

Child-related assessment

In **nursery** settings, a personal file is kept for each child, in which the professionals record the child's progress. The first documentation takes place 15 days after entry into the setting and is updated at least every three months.

The assessment of children in **kindergarten**, which is considered an integral part of the curriculum, is done by means of portfolios, photographs, first efforts at writing, etc. At the beginning of the kindergarten year, the child is closely observed and both a diagnostic report (regarding cognitive, emotional and psychomotor development) and an informal report (describing the child's behaviour) are written.

Formative evaluations take place throughout the year through random or planned observations of the child's behaviour. A summative evaluation at the end of the kindergarten year provides the professionals with information for their own self-evaluation as well as for the evaluation and further development of the kindergarten-specific educational programme.

In terms of the transition to school, kindergartens work together with the primary schools. For this purpose, mutual visits take place and information about the children is exchanged. In addition, emphasis is also placed on cooperation with the parents.

The School Progress Report (*Sxoliki Ekthesi Proodou*) should be completed by the teacher for each child twice a year, in January and in June. It is considered to be a useful tool for evaluating progress across the school year and assessing the degree of success of the basic intended outcomes per class and child (MOESY 2019). Nevertheless, it can be restrictive, as it narrows down elements assessed for each child, sometimes losing the bigger picture of the child's overall abilities and potential.

Centre-level internal assessment

Internal assessments usually consist of a report on work of the institution. This is prepared by the kindergarten head, together with the team, and determines whether the self-imposed goals have been achieved.

The Ministry of Education recommends an annual informal report for kindergartens, which is submitted to the Inspector General at the end of the school year.

External evaluation

Quality assurance in **nurseries** and **home-based settings** is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance. Both the facilities and the professionals are inspected by inspectors from the Ministry's Social Welfare Service.

The responsibility for quality assurance in public **kindergartens** lies with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth which inspects the quality of education as well as the professionals. Professionals are usually observed at work and evaluated once a year for their first three years of work and once every three years thereafter. Three supervisors are responsible for the evaluations. In addition, administrative and training aspects, equipment and rooms are evaluated. All observations result in a comprehensive report.

Inclusion agenda

There is no clear inclusion agenda, although the majority of children with special needs and disabilities attend mainstream institutions where care is taken to ensure that they receive appropriate support. Also, there is dual system where some children with disabilities attend special schools. Even though the MOESY initiated a reform for special education starting in 2018, it is still nevertheless considered as distinct and children with disabilities tend to end up being segregated (Symeonidou 2022).

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

Children with specific support needs are either placed in a separate room of a mainstream institution, where a maximum of six children are supervised by a specialist support worker, or they attend a separate institution for children with disabilities (only 5 to 6% attend the latter). An Individualised Education Programme (IEP) is designed by specialists for each child, emphasising psychological, social and other areas of education. The IEP is approved by the Ministry of Education.

Children from deprived socio-economic backgrounds are given priority for admission to public kindergartens (European Commission 2020, 43).

For the school year 2020/2021, 6,836 children with disabilities attended public pre-primary and primary settings, specifically 657 attended 116 special units located in the settings. For the same school year, 498 children attended separate special schools (MOESY 2021).

Children with a migration background – Children from Roma communities

There are no regulatory procedures regarding the enrolment of children with a migrant background in an ECEC setting. According to the "Strategy Report of the Ministry of Education for Multi-Cultural Education", the languages and cultures of children who do not speak Greek as their first language should be taken into account and the children should receive special support, such as learning Greek through intensive courses or materials in other languages.

In 2018/19, there were also (private-commercial) institutions where the language of instruction was not Greek: 1,398 children attended English-speaking, 58 French-speaking and 13 Armenian-speaking kindergartens. 824 under 3 year-olds were enrolled in English-speaking, 220 in Russian-speaking and 49 in Armenian-speaking nurseries. Out of a total of 33,108 children in ECEC settings, 3,195 were from EU countries and 2,250 from non-EU countries, i.e. 16.4% of under 6 year-olds had a non-Cypriot background (CYSTAT 2021, no newer data available at the time of reporting).

2019/20 a total number of 5.798 children with a non-Cypriot background attended an ECEC setting (CYSTAT 2023).

Eurostat data indicate that in 2022, 18.8% of the total population had a non-Cypriot citizenship, more than half of them (55.4%) were from other EU27(2020) countries. In the under 5 age-group, these shares were 9.6% and 63.1% respectively (Eurostat 2023c).

As the Roma population in Cyprus is very small (Council of Europe estimates 0.15% of the population), policies are integrated in the strategy for social inclusion of disadvantaged groups (European Commission 2021).

There is a specific guide (published in 2020) that supports children whose language is not Greek through a list of proposed activities and materials to support them to communicate and develop relationships. It is called "The Guide to welcoming children with an immigrant background" (MOESY 2020).

Parental leave arrangements[4]

Maternity leave lasts 18 weeks, including two weeks before the birth. These two and nine weeks after birth are compulsory. Employed mothers receive 72% of their salary (without upper limit), Employees of the public sector receive their full salary for the first 12 weeks and later 72%.

Fathers receive two consecutive weeks of **Paternity leave**, which is remunerated in the same way as Maternity leave.

Working parents (both parents) can also take an additional 18 weeks of **Parental leave,** two weeks of which can be transferred to the other parent. However, no more than five weeks can be taken in a calendar year. Six weeks (or eight in the case of a transfer) are remunerated at 72% of salary, the rest of the time is unpaid. Parental leave can be taken until the child is 8 years old.

There is no systematically compiled statistical data on the take-up of parental leave.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Cyprus

*Country expert assessment by **Eleni Loizou***

Lack of staff due to the low paid salaries in the private sector

In the light of current economic changes and the increase in the cost of living in Cyprus, it has been hard for ECEC teachers to keep a job that provides for their living expenses. Most of the ECEC graduates end up working for many years in private childcare and pre-primary settings before they get the chance to be considered for a post in the public sector. The wages in most of these private settings range from €650-850 per month. Thus, due to this low pay and the long hours they have to work, it is often the case that ECEC teachers change jobs or they leave the field completely to do something else that provides a better salary.

Lack of governmental support of public pre-primary schools

The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth recently introduced a proposal for compulsory pre-primary education to start at 4 years of age. In order to provide and accommodate for all 4 year-olds, the MOESY proposed to subsidise private pre-primary settings instead of building new public pre-primary schools to respond to the demand needs. It is evident that the provision of public ECEC is not a priority for the government, but instead aims to support private schools.

[4] The brief summary in this section is based on the country note for Cyprus by Maria Angeli in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023*

A limited number of early childhood education supervisors and policy makers with no ECEC specialist knowledge

It is a fact that ECE is under-represented in the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth. There are only three ECEC Supervisors for the whole island, whose duties are to supervise, assess and support teachers in all public and community settings. This ratio is inappropriate and does not allow for quality support. Moreover, policy makers are often politicians who are not informed about ECEC and do not seem to have a vision for the field, thus their decision making is based on economic and other political variables only.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the population in Cyprus totalled 904,705 This represents a steady rise over the past 20 years (2000: 690.497; 2005: 733.067; 2020: 819.140; 2015: 847.008; 2020: 888.005) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.39, Cyprus was significantly below the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[5].

Children under 6 years of age

Table 6
Cyprus: Number of children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age	Number of children
under 1 year-olds	10,275
1 year-olds	9,874
2 year-olds	9,522
3 year-olds	9,313
4 year-olds	9,327
5 year-olds	9,648
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**57,959**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 3.3% of the total population were children under the age of 3, and 6.4% were children under 6 years of age. As in the last 20 years, these shares were above the respective EU averages

[5] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Table 7

Cyprus: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population from 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Cyprus/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Cyprus	4.0	4.4	8.4
	∅ EU15[6]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Cyprus	3.3	3.5	6.9
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Cyprus	3.4	3.5	6.8
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Cyprus	3.3	3.1	6.4
	∅ EU27	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Single households with children under age 6

More than two thirds (69.7%) of all households with children under 6 are couple households. Single parent households accounted for only 2.2% of all households in Cyprus in 2022 – the statistical data show almost only single mothers (2.1%).

Table 8

Cyprus: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Total households, in %*
All households	101,500	
Couple households	70,700	69.7
Other household type	28,600	28.2
Single households, total	2,200	2.2
Single households, women	2,100	2.1
Single households, men	100**	0.1

Source: Eurostat 2023k, *own calculations, **data computed

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Cyprus, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 83.7% and for women 73.0% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 71.3% of women and 92.7% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were above the EU-average (87.2%) as were those of mothers (EU-average 63.6%) (Eurostat 2023e, own calculations).

[6] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Table 9a

Cyprus: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2021

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Cyprus	72.3	91.1
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[7]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Cyprus	71.3	92.7
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[8]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 9b.*

Table 9b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023j

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[7] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[9]

In 2022, 18.8% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was well below the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 16.7% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 1.9% of children under 6 and 1.6% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023f, g).

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

CZECH REPUBLIC

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

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1. ECEC governance in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the system of early childhood education and care is organised in separate sectors. Kindergartens (*mateřské školy*) for 2/3 to 6/7 year-olds and preparatory classes (*přípravné třídy*) for 5 to 7 year-olds[1] come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, while "Children's Groups" (*dětské skupiny*) – a new type of setting for 6 months to 6 year-olds – come under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The majority of children aged 3 to 6 years attend a kindergarten. Children under 3 years of age are cared for either in a nursery or in a Children's Group. The former crèches no longer exist in their original form. However, some of them continue to operate as care facilities under the sponsorship of municipalities or as commercial facilities under the responsibility of the Ministry of Industry and Trade. They are usually used by parents who have not been able to get a place for their children in a public kindergarten.

Overall, the steering system is organised centrally by the state. However, for kindergartens and preparatory classes, which are part of the school education system, responsibility has been partly transferred to the regions or municipalities.

Responsibilities are divided among the three ministries, considered less than optimal in the long term by early childhood education experts. Even the Czech school inspectorate in its 2015/2016 report viewed centre-based education, upbringing and care in early childhood (0-6 years) as complex and recommended that it be included in the framework of inter-ministerial cooperation (CSI 2016, 31). Some years later, the *Long-Term Plan for Education and Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic for 2019-2023* (MŠMT 2019c) formulated the goal of creating an effective model of care for preschool children together with the Ministry of Social Affairs. Even the long-term plan states that "the system of education and care for children up to three years of age is still not systemically clarified due to unclear responsibilities and concepts for the care of preschool children" (MŠMT 2019c, 32). While some changes have been made in this area, a comprehensive and coherent model for the care and education of children aged 1-6 years has not been elaborated. The current provision of care for children under the age of 3 has systemic deficiencies that create financial problems for parents and do not compensate for the social barriers to accessing care and education, especially when the legal entitlement to a place in a public kindergarten for their 3 years old child cannot be met.

The current policy objective focuses on the provision of places for 1-3 year-olds in childcare centres and kindergartens, on supporting the kindergarten attendance of 5 year-olds from socially disadvantaged families as well as on the integration of Ukrainian refugee children in public kindergartens. The provision of childcare for children under 3 or 2 years of age is considered part of the social sector's responsibility, and the Czech Republic's Education Policy Strategy 2030+ does not include targets for children under 2 years of age. The 2030+ strategy emphasises the need to ensure greater participation of children aged 3 to 4 in pre-primary education in kindergartens (MŠMT 2021a, 20). Inter-agency collaboration currently focuses on supporting vulnerable children and their families[2]. Cooperation between the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education focuses particularly on ensuring compulsory pre-primary education for 5 year-

[1] Children deferred from compulsory school are given priority for admission.

[2] Collaboration of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health under the project Support for Systemic Change in Services for Children, Youth and Families at Risk in the Czech Republic (2018-2022). https://www.mpsv.cz/podpora-systemovych-zmen-v-oblasti-sluzeb-pece-o-ohrozene-deti-mlade-lidi-a-rodiny-v-ceske-republice

old children who do not comply with this obligation and on supporting families at risk of social exclusion.

Between 2018–2021, a research project reviewing the impact of introducing a compulsory last year of pre-primary education was conducted and funded by the Ministry of Education. The research has shown a partial benefit of the introduction of compulsory pre-primary attendance in kindergartens on the frequency of children's attendance. For example, the regularity of children's attendance has improved as a result of the introduction of compulsory notification of non-attendance. "While 92% of children without social disadvantages attend kindergarten every day, according to the directors this is the case for only two thirds of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (64%). Sixteen per cent attend several times a week, 15% several times a month and 5% do not attend at all." (Greger et al. 2022, 142)

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

In ECEC settings, the qualifications of core pedagogues and other personnel depend on the type of workplace. There are fundamental differences in the qualification requirements for staff in educational institutions (kindergartens, preparatory classes) and in settings that provide childcare without explicit educational goals (Playgroups, Children's Groups, Toddler Crèches and other forms of childcare).

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Education sector

Staff in kindergartens and preparatory classes

According to the law, "pedagogues" or "pedagogical employees" work in kindergartens (*mateřské školy*) and preparatory classes (*přípravné třídy*). In everyday terms these are usually called **Kindergarten Teachers** (*učitelka/učitel*) and this is the terminology used in this report.

In both kindergartens and preparatory classes in schools, different kinds of **pedagogical support staff**, most of them qualified, may also work at times alongside the Kindergarten Teacher to provide support measures for individual children. Since September 2016, the supplementary support staff have included Teachers' Assistants, School Assistants, Bilingual Assistants, Social Care or Special Needs Teachers and Kindergarten Psychologists[3]. Between 2016 and 2022, kindergartens which worked in groups with at least two 2 year-olds had the opportunity to co-finance their work through a support programme of the Ministry of Education. As of the school year 2022/2023, this funding will no longer be granted. The care of 2 year-olds can still be supported by School Assistants, for whom a new funding programme provides subsidies to the kindergartens. However, the scope of work of the School Assistants is broader.

The Ministry of Education has launched several funding programmes in recent years which provide kindergartens with simplified access to funding for support staff. Systematic changes in the staffing of groups with 2 year-olds were ultimately not implemented. The main focus in the area of supplementary staff is the support of children with special educational needs and their integration into regular kindergarten groups.

[3] Information from the Ministry of Education, MŠMT, 01.09.2016

Childcare sector

Staff in Children's Groups and social care settings

The persons who work with children in children's groups and other childcare facilities are referred to by the umbrella term **Caregivers**. In fact, persons with very **heterogeneous** qualifications may work in Children's Groups.

Since October 2021, new qualification requirements for staff in Children's Groups have been in force (MPSV 2021a). The range and type of professional qualifications (education, health, social care) remain unchanged. The new job titles are: **Caregiver for pre-school age children** and **Caregiver for children in Children's Groups**. Since July 2022, persons without a higher education entrance qualification (subject-related or general) are no longer allowed to carry out this work. For persons employed by existing providers who do not meet the new requirement, an exemption has been introduced with the obligation that staff complete their training by 1 October 2024. In addition to the above qualifications, the following persons may also work in children's centres: Kindergarten Teachers, Primary School Teachers, Educators, general nursing and care personnel, Midwives, Health Care Assistants, social services employees, Medical Doctors, health care workers, (Clinical) Psychologists.

Since 01.07.2022, the following new provisions apply to the profile of professionals working in Children`s Groups ("Caregivers"):

(1) Care is provided by at least one person with a professional qualification in health care or a professional qualification as a Caregiver in a Children's Group.

(2) If a child who is 3 years or older on 1st September is present in the group, at least one Caregiver with a professional qualification in education will carry out the work for at least 20 hours per week in the Children's Group (MPSV 2021a).

Table 1 gives an overview of the staff in both the education and childcare sectors who are in daily contact with the children. For core pedagogues, a reference to the professional profile according to the SEEPRO categories is added (see Box at the end of this Chapter).

Table 1

Czech Republic: Regular staff in ECEC settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range[4]	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Education sector				
Kindergarten Teacher *Učitelka/Učitel* *Profile:* Pre-primary Education Professional	*Mateřská škola* **Kindergarten** 2/3–6 years (up to enrolment in primary school) *Speciální mateřská škola*	Core pedagogue with group responsibility Centre leader (following compulsory course of	Primarily 3–6 years, although IPE programmes increasingly include content on working with children under age 3	4 years upper secondary education *Award:* Subject-linked (pedagogy) higher education entrance qualification

[4] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6 (as in the Czech Republic): **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In the Czech Republic, school entry may in justified and professionally assessed cases be deferred to 7 years of age.

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range[4]	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
	Special needs kindergarten 2/3–6 years *Přípravná třída Základní škola* **Preparatory class in primary school** for 5 to 7 year-olds with additional support needs *Dětská skupina* **Children's Group** 6 months–5/6 years (up to enrolment in primary school)	management training)		ECTS credits: n/a[5] EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 354 **Further options:** 3 years higher education institution (tertiary-level professional school, *vyšší odborné školy*), *Award:* Diploma ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 655 ***or*** 3 years university *Award:* Bachelor's degree ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 645
Teacher's Assistant *Asistent pedagoga*	*Mateřská škola* **Kindergarten** 2/3–6 years (up to enrolment in primary school) *Speciální mateřská škola* **Special needs kindergarten** 2/3–6 years *Přípravná třída (Základní škola)* **Preparatory class in primary school** For 5 to 7 year-olds with additional support needs	As a rule, qualified co-workers, mainly for supporting children with special educational needs	Supporting children with special educational needs from early childhood through to secondary education (depending on the provider, the qualification programme may have a specialisation, e.g. support of multilingual children, etc.)	4 years upper secondary vocational education with a specialisation in pedagogy; subject-specific university entrance qualification ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 354 ***or*** diverse other qualifications – see *Table 5*
Childcare sector				
Caregiver *Pečující osoba*	*Dětská skupina* **Children's Group** 6 months–5/6 years (up to enrolment in primary school)	Core professional with group responsibility	Varies according to the study route specialisation	4 years upper secondary education specialising in pedagogy/ health care/ social care

[5] n/a = not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range[4]	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Profile: No clear profile because of the variety of professionals working in Children's Groups (see *Table 6*)				*Award:* Subject-linked higher education entrance qualification ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 354 ***or*** many other possible qualifications – see *Table 6*

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Requirements for Centre Leaders vary according to the type of ECEC setting.

Childcare sector

Children's Group leaders

The Children's Group Act No. 247/2014 does not distinguish between managerial and support staff. In general, providers are subject to the qualification requirements described above (see *Table 1*). Although in practice a specific person is responsible for the management of a Children's Group, the law does not prescribe additional qualification requirements. There is no official job description for the position of director, which is a matter for the provider. However, from October 2021, it is mandatory for at least one person to have a health care degree if there are children under 3 in the group, or an educational degree if there are children over 3 in the group. These persons are expected to provide quality assurance as set out in the Quality Standards for Children's Groups (criteria for the standards are set out in Decree No. 350/2021 Coll.) (MPSV 2021b).

Kindergarten Head

The qualification requirements for a Kindergarten Head are described in the Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel (No. 563/2004 Coll., §5). A head is appointed by the provider. For a management position in a kindergarten, at least three years of practice are required: (1) as a Kindergarten Teacher or (2) practice in activities that require knowledge of a similar specialisation or (3) another management activity or (4) at least three years of activity in research and development.

A Kindergarten Teacher may follow a "course for school management" (further education for pedagogical specialists according to the Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel No. 563/2004 Coll., §24, par.4 a), which must be completed no later than three years after starting as a Kindergarten Head. The qualification in management of an ECEC setting can also be acquired within the framework of a Bachelor's or Master's degree programme.

Leadership tends to be understood as hierarchical, although the transformation of the Czech school system in recent decades has increasingly emphasised collegial leadership. The leadership positions are distributed among the so-called director and their deputy. On the third level of the management hierarchy are Kindergarten Teachers as core pedagogues and below them come the supplementary pedagogical staff and non-educational kindergarten personnel. The current government has prepared an amendment to the Teaching Personnel Act, which went through the approval procedure in 2022–2023. The new version provides for a differentiation of roles within the group of core pedagogues (e.g. as a mentor specialist for trainees).

The Kindergarten Head also works directly with children on a regular basis, whereby the hourly amount of direct pedagogical work with children is reduced depending on the number of groups (classes) (Government Ordinance No. 75/2005 Coll.; MŠMT 2019a). The kindergarten management is appointed by the provider. Since 2012, the term of office of the Kindergarten Head has been six years in accordance with Section 166(2) of the Education Act (MŠMT 2016, most recent amendment 2023). After six years, the service provider can re-advertise the post.

The kindergarten management bears full responsibility for the personnel, financial and pedagogical management of the kindergarten. The high level of autonomy and responsibility of the head at all levels of the school system place considerable demands on the office. One of the consequences of this is the general shortage of management staff and the low interest in this position in the Czech Republic, which is reflected in the low number of applicants for this position following advertisements. The high administrative burden for Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary school heads has long been criticised (Simonová et al. 2017; Federičová 2019; MŠMT 2020a). As research has shown, the workload that is the potentially most demanding for heads is that related to the organisation of the pedagogical staff and communication with them (Smetáčková et al. 2018).

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

In the Czech Republic, there are no designated posts of responsibility for specific pedagogical tasks across the entire ECEC setting (e.g. with a focus on work with migrant families), neither in the childcare sector nor the education sector.

Kindergartens can apply for funding under the MŠMT funding programme for School Assistants, Social Pedagogues and Bilingual Assistants. Such posts are expected to promote social cohesion, working with a heterogeneous group of children and cooperating with the children's families. This includes support for multilingual children and children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. families with a migration background).

There is currently a **new formal specification** of posts between trainee teachers, experienced teachers and mentors for students, resp. newly-qualified professionals in the amended version of the Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel No. 563/2004 Coll., §24 from September 2023 (valid from 1.1.2024). The employer's obligation to provide induction for trainee teachers is explicitly stated in the legislation for the first two years of pedagogical practice:

> "The **induction teacher** in particular guides the novice teacher methodically during their adaptation period, continuously and regularly evaluates with them their direct teaching activities and the performance of work related to their direct teaching activities and familiarises them with the school's activities and documentation." (Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel No. 563/2004 Coll., § 24b)
>
> (1) The **accompanying teacher** shall methodically guide a student of another school or college or a participant in the further education of teaching staff referred to in § 22 (1) (a) preparing for the profession of teacher in the context of practical teaching, practical training or practice.
>
> (2) The accompanying teacher may be a person … who has acquired experience consisting in the performance of direct teaching activity of 5 years." (Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel No. 563/2004 Coll., § 24c)"

The Labour Code requires employers to provide all school leavers (within two years of leaving school) with appropriate work experience to enable them to acquire the practical experience and skills required for their work. In practice, mentoring is a specific role in kindergartens as well as in primary and secondary schools. However, until 2023, there was no centrally specified system for the induction of Kindergarten Teachers. The specific form was left up to the centre leader, as was any financial remuneration for the mentor. In a new step, however, the forthcoming legal amendment on teaching staff and their training, provides for the introduction of the position of **induction teachers**, mentors for student teachers and novice teachers (**accompanying teacher)**. From January 2024, the work of the mentor will be financially rewarded, and the mentor will be granted a reduction in the hours of direct pedagogical activities in order to support new colleagues.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

There are no legally regulated qualification requirements for educational counsellors. In the Czech Republic, there is no single counselling centre that provides comprehensive counselling for kindergartens or actively engages in pedagogical practice itself. The counselling function is performed by several institutions of different types, which can be used directly by kindergartens or individual professionals and parents:

- **School counselling centres** (pedagogical-psychological counselling centres and special needs education centres): they carry out assessments and offer support and counselling to schools, including kindergartens, and parents, especially in the area of support for children with special educational needs.
- The **National Pedagogical Institute** provides training for pedagogical staff and teachers, develops support platforms and methodological advice,
- **NGOs** and non-profit organisations.

The staff of the above-mentioned institutions must have adequate training and practical experience in the field. However, the requirements for their qualifications are determined by the individual institutions. An exception are the professionals of the school counselling centres, whose qualifications are enshrined in the Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel (MŠMT 2023a).

Inspection activities in the field of pedagogical work are carried out on a broad basis only in kindergartens. They are carried out by employees of the Czech School Inspectorate. The qualification for the function of inspector is the legally required education for this position (§ 25(1)(e) of the School Act), i.e. a university degree in pedagogy, psychology or another related field and usually five years of pedagogical or pedagogical-psychological practice (MŠMT 2022a).

2.5 Specialist support staff

Childcare sector

Support for children with special educational needs is not provided for in the legal regulations for **Children's Groups**. This is due to the nature of the institution, as Children's Groups are settings for the care of children, which are not obliged to offer support measures and ensure the education of children. For children with special needs, there are usually no specialists available as support staff.

Education sector

In **kindergartens** and **preparatory classes**, in addition to the Kindergarten Teacher, a mostly qualified **Teacher's Assistant** (*asistent pedagoga*) may also work in the group from time to time to provide possible support measures for individual children (see **2.1**). The number of working hours of the support staff is determined by the school counselling centres and depends on the assessment made of each individual child.

The Teachers' Assistants can also be assigned to several children in a group (as a so-called joint supplementary assistant), so that the kindergarten can coordinate and vary the workload of the staff depending on the number of children with recognised special educational needs and the changes in the support measures that occur during the child's attendance in kindergarten. Since 2020, there is no maximum number of children per Teacher's Assistant (MŠMT 2019b). The personnel management in this area represents a considerable administrative burden for the Kindergarten Head.

The presence of two Teachers' Assistants in a group is currently an exception, as an amendment to the 2021 regulation on the education and upbringing of children with special educational needs has increased the maximum number of staff in a group to three (MŠMT 2020b). The vast majority of kindergartens therefore have two Kindergarten Teachers and one Teacher's Assistant. In the school year 2020/2021, the most frequently used support measure in groups of children with special educational needs was support by a Teacher's Assistant (63.9%). On average, the number of kindergartens in the Czech Republic enrolling children with special educational needs is increasing; in the school year 2020/2021, more than one fifth of all kindergarten groups belonged to this category (CSI 2022).

The support can take place within the framework of joint educational activities for all children or separately in specially equipped rooms. This work of the Teachers' Assistants is determined in their job description by the Kindergarten Head and in relation to the specific conditions of each individual setting.

Kindergartens can also be supported by an external staff member from the school counselling office. However, this is an exceptional measure for regular kindergartens. The presence of special education staff is only typical for special kindergartens. If a child needs sessions with a Speech Therapist, this is usually carried out outside kindergarten hours and accompanied by the parents. Before 1989, Speech Therapists were part of the kindergarten staff in many kindergartens and speech therapy was offered to children directly in the kindergarten (Opravilová and Uhlířová 2021).

3. Structural composition of the ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Since early childhood education and care in the Czech Republic is organised as a split-sector system, statistical data are compiled and structured in different ways. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs does not carry out any statistical compilation of the qualification, gender or age structure of employees in Children's Groups. There is no statistical data on the qualification structures of staff in Children's Groups and institutions subject to the Trade Act – they can therefore not be included in this overview. The personnel statistics of the Ministry of Education only take into account kindergartens and preparatory classes.

Table 2

Czech Republic: Staffing structures in kindergartens and preparatory classes in schools (2–6 years), 2020

Personal	Proportion of workforce in %
Kindergarten Teachers with a relevant higher education degree – Ph.D.	**0.1**
Kindergarten Teachers with a relevant higher education degree – Master	**9.3**
Kindergarten Teachers with a relevant higher education degree – Bachelor	**14.6**
Kindergarten Teachers with a relevant award from a tertiary professional school	**5.9**
Kindergarten staff with a relevant upper secondary qualification	**69.1**
Kindergarten staff with other, non-specialist qualification	**1.1**
Staff with no formal IPE	**6.1*** (converted to full-time employees, the proportion is 5.8%*)
Specialist support staff (see **2.5**)	Mostly not on-site; may be employed as supplementary staff in cases of need
Male staff	In kindergartens: **0.74**
Kindergarten staff with a migration background	No national data available. Staff with a migration background work primarily in areas with a high proportion of minority languages (mostly in larger towns and industrial areas).

Sources: MŠMT 2022b; *CSI 2022

The proportion of qualified Kindergarten Teachers in the pre-primary workforce has steadily decreased nationwide since 2017/2018 and was 93.9% in 2020/2021. Converted to full-time employees, the share of unqualified staff is 5.8% (MŠMT 2022b). The qualification rate of staff is significantly lower in the economically richer regions, especially in Prague and in Central and Western Bohemia. This may be related to the higher cost of living, which is not easily covered by the salary of a Kindergarten Teacher. In addition, due to the shortage of skilled workers, many unqualified people are hired, especially in larger cities. However, they are only allowed to take on the work if their qualifications are supplemented on the job. By way of contrast, in the economically weaker regions (south-east Bohemia and south-east Moravia), the teaching profession in kindergartens and schools is a stable job. An exception are remote regions with a complicated socio-cultural situation (e.g. north-west Silesia), where unemployment is high and there is a long-term shortage of qualified workers.

At the same time, the proportion of people with **higher education** is increasing significantly (the Ministry of Education takes only core pedagogical staff into account in the statistics). In the last ten years, the number has more than doubled (see Annex 1 in the Appendix). In the age group of core pedagogues between 26 and 35 years, university degrees even slightly outweigh upper secondary awards. This can be seen as a very positive development (CSI 2022) (see *Table 3*).

Table 3
Czech Republic: Kindergarten Teachers with a relevant higher education degree – BA, MA, PhD

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Percentage	11.8%	13.5%	15.1%	17.2%	18.9%	20.3%	21.1%	21.8%	22.7%	24.0%

Until 1989, there were no **male professionals** working in kindergartens at all. Their percentage is now increasing every year, especially in the big cities (in the school year 2021/2022 there were 1.5% men in kindergartens in Prague). In the Czech Republic, the pre-school education sector has long been characterised by a high proportion of women (Bendl 2002; Fárová 2015; 2018). The proportion of males, at 0.74%, has long been well below the average for European countries (Loudová Stralczynská et al. 2022). 99.28% of teachers in kindergartens are female, and in preparatory classes 97.85% (MŠMT 2021c). In an international comparison, the Czech Republic is below the European average with 0,5% men in pre-school education and 5,8% in primary school (Eurostat 2021).

In the Czech Republic, there are no official data on **staff with a migrant background** in the pre-primary education sector. In larger cities, some kindergartens appear to employ Teachers' Assistants or School Assistants with a migrant background. The aim is to help children and families from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. children with a different family language) to integrate into the education system. While it is a legal requirement for these teachers to pass a language test (MŠMT 2016), they do not have to be native speakers of the language of instruction. Against the background of the conflict in Ukraine and the high number of refugees from Ukraine, the Ministry of Education is also trying to increase the number of Bilingual Assistants. To this end, it also offers kindergartens and schools simplified funding for these teachers.

Statistical data regarding the qualification structure of the active supplementary pedagogical staff such as **Teachers' Assistants** in kindergartens and preparatory classes are very limited. They are only available as proportions among all active supplementary teachers, but not in relation to the respective levels of the education system and the educational institutions[6].

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

This Chapter focuses on the initial professional education options for three staff categories:

– **Kindergarten Teacher** (core professional in kindergartens for 2 to 5/6 year-olds)

[6] Statistical data are only available for the highest level of training of the supplementary pedagogical staff, but not for the qualification pathways and the form of training programmes. Therefore, no statements can be made about the most frequent qualification paths or number of lateral entrants.

- **Teacher's Assistant** (supplementary support staff in kindergartens with responsibility for children with special educational needs)
- **Caregiver** (an umbrella term for the staff with diverse IPE qualifications working in Children's Groups (6 months to 6 years), micro nurseries (for 6 months to 4 years) and institutions subject to the Trade Act for children up to 6 years of age.

The educational pathways are presented in three tables.

4.1.1 Kindergarten Teacher (*učitelka/ucitel*)

There are currently three qualification routes available for prospective Kindergarten Teachers. However, until now, only the first option (see below) is the minimum *requirement* for taking up a post in a kindergarten.

The qualification requirements in the Czech Republic for all teachers in the education system (including core pedagogues and supplementary pedagogical staff in kindergartens and preparatory classes) are laid down in Act 563/2004 Coll. on Pedagogical Staff, last amended on 1 September 2023 (MŠMT 2023a). Besides the qualification requirements, the Act defines working hours, continuing professional development and the career system. The pedagogical staff are required to have a professional qualification for the specific educational activity they perform; they must also be fully competent, of good character, in good health and have knowledge of the Czech language, unless otherwise specified. The Act is supplemented by two regulations (No. 1/2006 Coll. and No. 317/2005 Coll.), which lay down the conditions for the further training (CPD) of pedagogical specialists, the accreditation commission and the career system.

Kindergarten Teacher – qualifying option 1 (minimum qualification requirement)

Upper secondary vocational school – specialisation in pre-primary and out-of-school pedagogy

After nine years of compulsory schooling and following the completion of a personal eligibility test and demonstration of proven skills in music, sports and the arts, it is possible to enrol at a vocational school with a pedagogical specialisation. Good general health and a standard pronunciation in the Czech language are prerequisites for admission[7]. The initial professional education usually lasts four years and ends with a subject-related (pedagogy) higher education entrance qualification (ISCED 2011: 354; EQF level: 4).

A total of 44 vocational schools (including four denominational schools and twenty public schools) offer this specialised training (MŠMT 2022d). The classical form is accredited as a four-year face-to-face course or a one to two-year course for students with a university entrance requirement in another subject. The majority of vocational schools also offer a distance learning programme of varying length (three to five years or one to two years for applicants with a university entrance requirement in another subject – depending on previous course content, their aptitude and previously acquired training levels and orientation). This form of study (so-called combined[8] or evening option of ten to 18 hours per week) may last a maximum of one year longer than the regular IPE programme. The individual VET schools can decide independently on the opening of the training programme and its forms in each year. They usually do so on the basis of demand from applicants and the agreement with the school provider (MŠMT 2009b).

[7] The same applies to the professional qualifying institutions and to the study of early childhood education at the universities. As a rule, confirmation is required from the general practitioner and the speech therapist by all profession-qualifying institutions.

[8] The combined form of education comprises in-person and distance forms of education – students have both traditional classes and tasks that they perform individually.

The initial professional studies in pre-primary and out-of-school pedagogy qualify the vocational school leavers for a broad field of work. As fully qualified pedagogues they may occupy the following posts:

- **Teacher** in a kindergarten (Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel No. 563/2004, compendium of laws, § 6) or pedagogical employee in other kinds of ECEC setting (MŠMT 2023a)
- **Educator** (Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel No. 563/2004, compendium of laws, § 16) and Out-of-school Pedagogue (Act on Educational Staff 563/2004, compendium of laws, § 17) in outside-school-hours provision (child-care settings, children's and young people's centres, children's centres)
- **Teacher's Assistant** (Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel 563/2004, compendium of laws, § 20)
- **Caregiver** for children under three years of age (in social care institutions regulated by the Trade Licensing Act) or in groups for older children (commercial enterprises).

Kindergarten Teacher – qualifying option 2

Tertiary professional schools – study programmes in pre-primary and out-of-school pedagogy

The second qualification option for prospective Kindergarten Teachers is the study programme in pre-primary and out-of-school pedagogy at one of the ten tertiary professional schools in the Czech Republic which offer qualification programmes specialising in early childhood education. Completion of studies is awarded with a Diploma (EQF level 6, ISCED 2011: 655).

The tertiary professional schools are a relatively new form of higher education providing initial professional education – they were established as part of the Czech education system in 1991. In the meantime, there are now four public, one church-affiliated and five private professional schools. Right from the early days these higher education institutions offered both regular courses of studies and distance learning options.

The admission requirements differ to some extent among the tertiary professional schools. In principle, the requirements include a general or subject-linked higher education entrance qualification and an entrance examination (test in aesthetic disciplines, pedagogy, psychology, often also a personality test or an individual interview with the applicant). The standard IPE lasts three years (distance learning four years). Completion of an upper secondary school award with a pedagogical orientation is not required for admission to the tertiary professional schools; the result of the entrance examination is what counts. The regular study programme is divided into winter and summer semesters (16 teaching weeks and three examination weeks). The distance learning course consists of 22 consultation meetings (200 hours) in the school year and three weeks for examinations. The consultations take place on a specific day of the week, about nine hours of block teaching, approximately twice a month (Rýdl and Šmelová 2012, 115).

The study programme qualifies for similar professional positions as the upper secondary programme (i.e. Teacher in kindergartens and other early childhood education institutions, Teacher in a preparatory class, Educator in after-school care centres and social services institutions, Recreational Educator in after-school care and Teacher's Assistant in all types of schools).

Kindergarten Teacher – qualifying option 3

University studies in early childhood education

Since the time of the First Republic, Kindergarten Teachers have been trying to open up university education for kindergarten staff. However, this was never implemented before the Second World War. In the short term, the training of Kindergarten Teachers was carried out at university

level in the years 1946-1950 (a two-year course and later a one-year course). Due to the shortage of teachers, it was then reduced to the secondary level. From 1970 it was then possible to study early childhood education at two universities in the Czech Republic (in Prague and Olomouc). The study programme was aimed at teachers who were to take on more demanding pedagogical, methodological and management tasks in practice. It was organised as a full-time programme as well as a distance learning programme. The first accredited Bachelor's degree programme was offered in Prague (Charles University) in the academic year 1992/1993, later also at other universities (Opravilová and Uhlířová 2021).

Currently, all degree programmes are structured into a Bachelor's and Master's programme within the framework of the Bologna Process. At ten universities (usually at faculties of education) in the Czech Republic, three-year Bachelor's programmes (180 ECTS) and at four universities also subsequent two-year Master's programmes (120 ECTS) can be taken (both as regular studies and as part-time studies, so-called combined studies).

The Bachelor's programme is called "Pedagogy for kindergartens" (literally: "Teaching profession for kindergartens", *Učitelství pro mateřské školy*) and the Master's programme is called "Pedagogy of early childhood".

Entrance requirements are the general or subject-linked university entrance qualification and a successfully passed entrance examination (often a practical or theoretical test, e.g. in aesthetic subjects or the Czech language, an oral examination in the subject areas of pedagogy, psychology, children's literature, a personality test or a test of the applicants' general study requirements, etc.). The conditions differ depending on the university and are adjusted from year to year. In the long term, there are more interested persons than places for the Bachelor's degree programme. In Prague, from around 240 applicants, about 30 are usually accepted for a regular programme and 30 for a part-time programme. However, many school-leavers apply to more than one university or to other educational courses (e.g. primary education, special and remedial education).

Both intensive practical and theoretical elements are included in the three-year programme. The Ministry of Education guidelines specify the percentage, credits and hours of each component (see *Table 4*). The Bachelor programmes are designed to prepare kindergarten professionals with regard to the framework curriculum for preschool education (MŠMT 2021b). However, detailed specifications of the objectives and contents of the bachelor's degree programmes are not prescribed by the state and are within the university's scope of decision. The Bachelor's and Master's programmes are divided into compulsory, compulsory elective and elective courses. These are intended to promote general, subject-related, didactic and pedagogical-psychological knowledge, skills and abilities of the students (an example of curricular areas in the Bachelor's programme at the faculty of education of Charles University is listed in Annex 2 in the Appendix).

The Bachelor's and Master's programmes are divided into compulsory, compulsory elective and elective courses. These are intended to promote general, subject-related, didactic and pedagogical-psychological knowledge, skills and abilities of the students (an example of curricular areas in the Bachelor's programme at the faculty of education of Charles University is listed in Annex 2 in the Appendix).

A uniform professional standard for the Bachelor's and Master's programmes did not exist until 2023. In October 2023, a *general Competence Framework for Teacher Education Graduates* (MŠMT 2023c) was published, an orientation framework for all teacher education programmes. Based on this general competence framework, specific competence frameworks, including the competence framework for Pre-primary Education Teacher graduates, should be developed in 2024.

Table 4
Czech Republic: Qualification routes for Kindergarten Teachers (*učitelka/učitel*)

Job title in Czech: *Učitelka/Učitel* ("Teacher") **Profile**: Pre-primary Education Professional
Route 1 (= the only *requirement* for occupational practice): **Entry requirements:** 9 years of compulsory schooling; entrance examination; competence test (e.g. music, sports, the arts etc.) **Professional education**: 4 years upper secondary vocational, specialist field pre-primary and out-of-school pedagogy. Field placement of at least 10 weeks and teaching practice of at least 7 hours per week throughout the four years **Award**: Subject-linked university entrance qualification (*maturita*) ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 354 **Main ECEC workplaces**: Kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years); preparatory class in primary school for 5 to 7 year-olds . Work in age-integrated Children's Groups, in micro nurseries or workplace nurseries is also possible. *Route 2*: **Entry requirements:** General or subject-linked university entrance qualification; entrance examination and competence test (e.g. aesthetic-artistic field, pedagogy, psychology) **Professional education**: 3 years at a tertiary professional school, either specialising in pre-primary and out-of-school pedagogy or in IPE for Educators who have successfully passed an examination in early childhood education as part of their university entrance qualification **Award**: Diploma **ECTS credits**: n/a **EQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011**: 655 **Main ECEC workplaces**: Kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years); preparatory class in primary school for 5 to 7 year-olds. Work in age-integrated Children's Groups (6 months–6 years), in micro nurseries or workplace nurseries is also possible. *Route 3:* **Entry requirements**: General or subject-linked university entrance qualification; entrance examination and competence test (e.g. aesthetic-artistic field, pedagogy, psychology – varies according to university); it is possible to enrol for a subsequent two-year Master's degree full-time or distance learning programme. **Professional education**: 3-year Bachelor study programme specialising in pre-primary education **Award**: Bachelor's degree/Pre-primary education **ECTS credits**: 180 **EQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011**: 645 **Main ECEC workplaces**: Kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years); preparatory class in primary school for 5 to 7 year olds. Work in age-integrated Children's Groups (0–6 years), in micro nurseries or workplace nurseries is also possible.

In addition to these three qualifying routes, alternative qualification paths have also been opened up. Since 2005, Special Educators with a university degree can also be employed as fully qualified core pedagogues in kindergartens; since 2012, persons with a university degree as an Educator, Primary School Teacher, Recreational Educator or graduates of the study programme in pedagogy after completing the continuing professional development programme for Kindergarten Teachers (within the framework of lifelong learning programmes at the universities).

4.1.2 Teacher's Assistant (*asistent pedagoga*)

Since 1993, Teachers' Assistants have been working as supplementary staff in groups for children with social disadvantages (in regular kindergartens, special needs kindergartens or preparatory classes at primary schools) and since 1997 in groups for children with health impairments (in integrative regular kindergartens or special needs kindergartens).

The legal basis for competences, training and work content was anchored in the years 2004 to 2005. However, no specific initial professional education path was defined.

After the amendment of the Schools Act in 2016, pedagogical support staff became an integral part of the workforce in all types of schools and their number has doubled since 2016. Teachers' Assistants are one of the most important assets in the promotion of inclusion in kindergartens and primary/secondary schools. The position of Teacher's Assistant is still more of an alternative employment opportunity – very often for mothers of pre-school and younger school-age children – but with the gradual improvement of salaries, this position is changing. Currently, however, there is a great shortage of supplementary Teachers' Assistants throughout the Czech school system.

The requirements for professional qualifications of supplementary specialists are laid down in Act No. 563/2004 Coll. on Pedagogical Personnel (amended by Act No. 183/2023, § 20). The Act provides for **two types** of Teachers' Assistants:

1) According to §20, para. 1, a Teacher's Assistant who performs **direct pedagogical activities in a classroom** where children or pupils with special educational needs are taught or in a school that teaches children and pupils in the form of individual integration.
   The minimum qualification for this position is a subject-linked higher education entrance qualification (*maturita*) in the pedagogical field or a higher education entrance qualification and a further training course *Study Programme in Pedagogy* for supplementary staff.
2) According to §20, para. 2, a Teacher's Assistant who performs **direct pedagogical activities in the form of pedagogical support activities** in a school, in a school-based facility for recreational pedagogy, in a school-based educational and accommodation facility, in a school-based facility for the implementation of home or protective education or in a school-based facility for preventive pedagogical care.
   For this position, even lower minimum requirements apply, namely basic training and studies for Teachers' Assistants (completion of lower secondary education and a qualifying course). This is viewed negatively in professional circles and is also a reason for the low remuneration.

The qualifying routes described below are equivalent, heterogeneous and characterised by high permeability possibilities. In general, all persons with initial pedagogical education at upper secondary level and pedagogical or psychological education at tertiary level can perform the work of a Teacher's Assistant without taking a further qualifying course. Such a qualifying course (so-called study programme in pedagogy or study programme for Teachers' Assistants[9]) is only obligatory for persons with a degree in a non-educational subject. In the meantime, however, there are a large number of institutions that have accredited such a 120-hour qualifying course for supplementary staff with the Ministry of Education. This great variety raises the question of the real quality of these courses with regard to some providers. Experts also point out that the qualification of Assistants who have completed only one such course is insufficient if they are to provide highly specific support to children with special needs (Hájková 2018; Němec et al. 2014).

[9] According to the law, the "study of pedagogy" is a general designation for qualification/continuing education programmes of pedagogical orientation without further specification.

The following qualifying routes directly address the professional preparation of supplementary pedagogical staff.

Teacher's Assistant – qualifying option 1

Study programmes for Teachers' Assistants

The first way to obtain the minimum qualification for the work of Teachers' Assistants of both types is the so-called ***Study Programme in Pedagogy***. This qualifying course is also offered by various universities and further education institutions. It is intended for persons who have completed upper secondary education or have a (specialist) university degree in a non-educational subject. Until 2023, it comprised at least 80 hours; since 01.09.2023 it comprises at least 120 hours. This study of pedagogy forms the new pathway for professionals to the qualification of a Teachers' Assistant (**1st and 2nd type**), who carries out direct pedagogical activities in a classroom.

The ***Study Programme for Teachers' Assistants***[10] is the second way to obtain the minimum qualification for Teacher's Assistant (**2nd type**), who carry out direct pedagogical activities in the form of pedagogical support activities. As from September 2023, the programme is called: *Studies for Teaching Assistants who carry out direct teaching activities in auxiliary educational work*. The programme is offered by various universities and further education institutions (53 providers), whose number has more than doubled in the last 5 years. Each of these educational institutions must have its own programme accredited. Depending on the specialisation, the contents differ: e.g. preparation mainly for work with children with a migration background, with socially disadvantaged or bilingual children, with children with ADHD, etc. The courses can usually be completed within one year. Great emphasis is placed not only on theoretical but also on practical preparation. This full-time training programme consists of at least 120 hours (80 hours of theory and 40 hours of practice).

A third way to obtain the minimum qualification for the work of a Teacher's Assistant of both types is to study within the framework of further education courses of higher education institutions and universities.

Teacher's Assistant – qualifying option 2

Upper secondary vocational school programme for Teachers' Assistants

Since September 2023, this programme is the second way to obtain the minimum qualification for Teacher's Assistant (**2nd type**), who carry out direct pedagogical activities in the form of pedagogical support activities. Currently, only five vocational schools have a designated and accredited qualifying programme in Pedagogy for Assistants in Education (*Pedagogika pro asistenty ve školství*). The course is offered by only two vocational schools and only in distance learning format (5-year training for trainees with completed lower secondary education in combined or evening form and 1- or 2-year regular training for persons with completed upper secondary education in another subject) (MŠMT 2022d, own research). The qualifying course, which was created in 2008, is intended to enable these persons to obtain upper secondary education and is therefore offered on a part-time basis[11]. However, this qualifying option plays a less significant

[10] In accordance with legislative provisions in Act No. 563/2004 Coll., §20 and Regulation No. 317/2005 Coll., §4.

[11] Personal communication from PhDr. Jana Kašparová, National Institute of Education, 23.09.2016.

role, as the Teachers' Assistants of both types are recruited either from persons with other pedagogical qualifications or from persons who have completed the qualifying course (see qualifying option 2).

This IPE route (similar to all accredited IPE routes at upper secondary level) is based on a national framework programme for vocational schools. In addition to the general education subjects (525 teaching hours), 310 teaching hours are devoted to pedagogical-psychological preparation and 150 teaching hours to the pedagogical work of the Teacher's Assistant. The minimum amount of practical training is 100 hours. The study programme is intended to prepare learners for supporting children with special needs in general, not only specifically for work in primary schools or kindergartens (MŠMT 2009a).

Table 5 gives an overview of the different qualifying routes for the profession of Teacher's Assistant.

Table 5
Czech Republic: Routes for qualifying as a Teacher's Assistant (*asistent pedagoga*)

Job title in Czech: *Asistent pedagoga* (lit. "Teaching Assistant")
Type 1: Teachers' Assistants who carry out direct teaching activities in the classroom There are currently seven qualification routes for Type 1 Teachers' Assistants in kindergartens and preparatory classes. These professionals can also work in Children's Groups and social care settings outside the education sector.
Route 1.1 **Entry requirements:** 9 years compulsory schooling; entrance examination **Professional education:** 4 years upper secondary vocational with specialisation in pedagogy **Award:** Subject-related university entrance qualification (*maturita*) **ECTS credits**: n/a **EQF level**: 4 **ISCED 2011:** 354 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Kindergarten (2/3 to 5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; special needs/special education kindergarten (2/3 to 5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; preparatory class in primary school for 5 to 7 year-olds, together with a core pedagogue (in each case – focus on children in need of special support). *Route 1.2* **Entry requirements:** General or subject-related university entrance qualification with a *non*-pedagogical specialisation **Professional education:** Completion of the *Study Programme in Pedagogy* within the further education **Award:** Certificate **Main ECEC workplaces:** Kindergarten (2/3–5/6years), together with a core pedagogue; special needs/special education kindergarten (2/3 to 5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; preparatory class in primary school for 5 to 7 year-olds, together with a core pedagogue (in each case – focus on children in need of special support). *Route 1.3* **Entry requirements**: General or subject-related university entrance qualification; entrance examination **Professional education:** 3-year tertiary professional school programme with a specialisation in pedagogy **Award**: Diploma/degree*

Job title in Czech: *Asistent pedagoga* (lit. "Teaching Assistant")

ECTS credits: n/a for Diploma awards
EQF level: 6
ISCED 2011: 655

Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; special needs/special education kindergarten (2/3 to 5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; preparatory class in primary school for 5 to 7 year-olds, together with a core pedagogue (in each case – focus on children in need of special support).

*The tertiary professional schools are not yet integrated into the Bachelor/Master system, although according to ISCED (2011) their awards are placed at level 655 and in the EQF at level 6. Permeability of these professional studies is limited – only a few universities accept a selection of the examinations in their Bachelor study programmes, otherwise the tertiary professional school graduates have to complete the full course of studies.

Route 1.4

Entry requirements: Diploma/degree from a tertiary professional school with a *non*-pedagogical specialisation (3-year professional education programme)

Professional education: Completion of the *Study Programme in Pedagogy* within the further education

Award: Programme certificate

Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; special needs/special education kindergarten (2/3 to 5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; preparatory class in primary school for 5 to 7 year-olds, together with a core pedagogue (in each case – focus on children in need of special support).

Route 1.5

Entry requirements: General or subject-related university entrance qualification**;** entrance exam

Professional education: 3 years university, Bachelor study programme with a specialisation in Educational Science; enrolment for a subsequent 2-year Master's degree programme possible.

Award: Bachelor

ECTS credits: 180
EQF level: 6
ISCED 2011: 645

Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; special needs/remedial therapy kindergarten (2/3 to 5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; preparatory class in primary school for 5 to 7 year-olds, together with a core pedagogue (in each case – focus on children in need of special support).

Route 1.6

Entry requirements: Completed Bachelor study programme in a *non*-pedagogical specialisation

Professional education: Completion of the *Study Programme in Pedagogy* within the further education

Award: Certificate

Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; special needs/remedial therapy kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years, together with a core pedagogue; preparatory class in primary school for 5 to 7 year-olds, together with a core pedagogue (in each case – focus on children in need of special support).

Since 01.09.2023 there is an additional qualifying option:

Route 1.7

Entry requirements: 9 years compulsory schooling; entrance examination

Job title in Czech: *Asistent pedagoga* (lit. "Teaching Assistant")

Professional education: 8 or 6 years of secondary technical school (conservatoire). Conservatoires provide art education through two types of programmes:

- "Six-year programmes focused on music, singing, music and drama for pupils who have completed compulsory schooling; these programmes include upper secondary and tertiary level of education (ISCED 354+554)
- An eight-year programme specialising in dance for pupils who have completed the 5th year of the basic school; the programme includes lower secondary, upper secondary and tertiary level of education (ISCED 244+354+554).

It is possible to achieve the tertiary professional education in conservatoires by passing the graduate examination (absolutorium) after completing the whole educational programme." (Eurydice 2023b)

Award: Diploma

ECTS credits: n/a
EQF level: 6
ISCED 2011: 554

Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergarten (2/3 to 5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; special needs/special education kindergarten (2/3 to 5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; preparatory class in primary school for 5 to 7 year-olds, together with a core pedagogue (in each case – focus on children in need of special support).

Type 2: Teachers' Assistants who perform direct teaching activities consisting of auxiliary educational work in the school

There are currently four qualification routes for Type 2 Teachers' Assistants in kindergartens and preparatory classes.

Route 2.1

Entry requirements: 9 years compulsory schooling

Professional education: Accredited supplementary qualifying programme (*Study Programme for Teachers' Assistants*) of at least 120 hours' duration which is offered by further education institutions

Award: Certificate

Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; special needs/remedial therapy kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years, together with a core pedagogue; preparatory class in primary school for 5 to 7 year-olds, together with a core pedagogue (in each case – focus on children in need of special support).

Up to 01.07.2022, these persons were also allowed to work in Children's Groups, but it is now no longer possible, as the minimum qualification level has been raised to university entrance qualification (there is a transition period for existing providers) (MPSV 2021a).

Route 2.2

Entry requirements: 9 years compulsory schooling; entrance exam

Professional education: Upper secondary vocational programme offering a specialism for Teachers' Assistants (in the case of a subject-related university entrance qualification in a non-pedagogical subject the course can be completed within 1 to 2 years or as a distance learning programme within 1 to 3 years)

Award: Subject-related university entrance qualification (*maturita*)

ECTS credits: n/a
EQF level: 4
ISCED 2011: 354

Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; special needs/remedial therapy kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years, together with a core pedagogue; preparatory class in primary school for 5 to 7 year-olds, together with a core pedagogue (in each case – focus on children in need of special support).

Route 2.3

Entry requirements: Skilled worker certificate

Job title in Czech: *Asistent pedagoga* (lit. “Teaching Assistant”)
Professional education: Completion of the *Study Programme in Pedagogy* or *Study Programme for Teachers’ Assistants*, both within the further education. **Award:** Certificate **Main ECEC workplaces:** Kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; special needs/remedial therapy kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years, together with a core pedagogue; preparatory class in primary school for 5 to 7 year-olds, together with a core pedagogue (in each case – focus on children in need of special support). *Route 2.4* **Entry requirements**: General or subject-related university entrance qualification in a *non*-pedagogical discipline **Professional education**: Completion of the *Study Programme for Teachers’ Assistants* within the further education. **Award:** Certificate **Main ECEC workplaces:** Kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years), together with a core pedagogue; special needs/remedial therapy kindergarten (2/3–5/6 years, together with a core pedagogue; preparatory class in primary school for 5 to 7 year-olds, together with a core pedagogue (in each case – focus on children in need of special support). *Possible additional routes:* All further qualifying options for Type 1 Teachers’ Assistants (see Routes 1.1 to 1.7)

4.1.3 Caregiver (*pečující osoba*)

Caregivers are core pedagogues in Children's Groups and micro-crèches. Since 2021, there has been a specific qualification for these personnel prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the graduates of which are designated as a "Caregiver for children in a Children's Group" (§ 5 of the Children's Groups Act, MPSV 2021a). Since 1 July 2022, it is obligatory for providers of Children’s Groups to employ at least one Caregiver with a healthcare degree or one with the new professional qualification.

Since 1 July 2022, the provider is also obliged to employ a Caregiver with a pedagogical qualification for at least 20 hours per week if children are admitted to the Children's Group from 1 September after their third birthday. A “pedagogical qualification” refers to Kindergarten Teachers, Primary School Teachers, Special Education Pedagogues, Educators or a Teacher’s Assistant in accordance with §20 para. 1 of the Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel (MŠMT 2023a).

Since September 2016, persons who have completed an IPE course with a pedagogical, social or health focus (ISCED 2011 354) or with a Caregiver qualification (see Route 11) can also work as an Assistant (*chůva* – “nanny”) in kindergartens that have admitted 2 year-olds. However, this position has not been included in the Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel (MŠMT 2023a). The Ministry of Education provided funding for their salary costs through special subsidy programmes, but the kindergartens had to make a specific and repeated application. Their inclusion is a considerable help in supporting 2 year-old children, but systematisation remains a challenge for future legislation. Moreover, the programme to fund them expired with the school year 2021/2022.

Table 6 gives an overview of the qualifying routes of the 13 different professional awards that are considered prerequisites for employment as a core pedagogue in the Children's Groups and micro-crèches.

Table 6
Czech Republic: Qualifying routes for core pedagogues (Caregivers) in Children's Groups (*pečující osoba*)

Job title in Czech: *Pečující osoba* **Profiles**: Diverse
1. Kindergarten Teacher For the three qualifying routes, see *Table 4*. *2. Primary School Teacher* **Entry requirements:** General or subject-related university entrance qualification; entrance exam **Professional education: 5**-year Master study programme with specialisation in Primary Education **Award:** Master's degree **ECTS credits**: 300 **EQF level**: 7 **ISCED 2011:** 746 **Main (ECEC) workplaces**: Primary school, out-of-school provision, Children's Group (*dětská skupina*) (6 months–5(6) Jahre), as core pedagogue, micro-crèche (6 months–4 years, social care settings, etc. *3. Educator* *3.1 Educator (higher education route)* **Entry requirements:** General or subject-related university entrance qualification; entrance exam **Professional education:** 3-year tertiary professional school or Bachelor study programme for Educators (literally: *Study Programme in Educational Science*, i.e. specialisation for work with 7 to 18 year-olds in schools and out-of-school settings) **Award:** Diploma or Bachelor`s degree (Master's study programme possible following Bachelor award) **ECTS credits**: n/a (Diploma), 180 (Bachelor) **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 645/655 **Main (ECEC) workplaces**: Out-of-school provision, Children's Group (*dětská skupina*) (6 months–5(6) Jahre), as core pedagogue, micro-crèche (6 months–4 years, social care settings, etc. *3.2 Educator (upper secondary vocational route)* **Entry requirements:** 9 years compulsory schooling: entrance exam **Professional education:** 4 years upper secondary vocational with specialisation in *Professional Studies for Educators* **Award:** Subject-related university entrance qualification (*maturita*) **ECTS credits**: n/a **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011:** 354 **Main ECEC workplaces**: Out-of-school provision, Children's Group (*dětská skupina*) (6 months –5(6) years, as core pedagogue, micro-crèche (6 months–4 years), out-of-school settings *4. General Nurse* **Entry requirements:** General or subject-related university entrance qualification; entrance exam **Professional education:** 3-year tertiary professional school or Bachelor study programme **Award:** Diploma or Bachelor's degree **ECTS credits**: n/a (Diploma), 180 (Bachelor) **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 645/655 **Main ECEC workplaces**: Children's Group (*dětská skupina*) (6 months –5(6) years, as core pedagogue, micro-crèche (6 months–4 years)

Job title in Czech: *Pečující osoba*
Profiles: Diverse

5. Midwife
Entry requirements: General or subject-related university entrance qualification; entrance exam
Professional education: 3-year Bachelor study programme
Award: Bachelor's degree
ECTS credits: 180
EQF level: 6
ISCED 2011: 645
Main ECEC workplaces: Children's Group (*dětská skupina*) (6 months –5(6) years, as core pedagogue, micro-crèche (6 months–4 years)

6. Paramedic
Entry requirements: General or subject-related university entrance qualification; entrance exam
Professional education: 3-year tertiary professional school or Bachelor study programme
Award: Diploma or Bachelor's degree
ECTS credits: n/a (Diploma), 180 (Bachelor)
EQF level: 6
ISCED 2011: 645/655
Main ECEC workplaces: Children's Group (*dětská skupina*) (6 months –5(6) years, as core pedagogue, micro-crèche (6 months–4 years)

7. Healthcare Assistant
Entry requirements: 9 years compulsory schooling; entrance exam
Professional education: 4 years upper secondary vocational programme with a relevant (*non*-pedagogical) orientation
Award: Subject-related university entrance qualification (*maturita*)
ECTS credits: n/a
EQF level: 4
ISCED 2011: 354
Main ECEC workplaces: Children's Group (*dětská skupina*) (6 months –5(6) years, as core pedagogue, micro-crèche (6 months–4 years)

8. Social Worker
Entry requirements: General or subject-related university entrance qualification; entrance exam
Professional education: 3-year tertiary professional school or Bachelor study programme
Award: Diploma or Bachelor's degree, subsequent Master's/Doctoral study programme possible
ECTS credits: n/a (Diploma), 180 (Bachelor)
EQF level: 6
ISCED 2011: 645/746/747/844/655
Main ECEC workplaces: Children's Group (*dětská skupina*) (6 months –5(6) years, as core pedagogue, micro-crèche (6 months–4 years) and other settings

9. Caregiver – early years (lit.:"*Carer for children up to compulsory school age*")
Entry requirements: General or subject-related university entrance qualification
Professional education: (1) None, just an examination without a previous formal qualification; (2) Further education programme for lateral entrants of 160 hours' duration (including 60 hours of field-based studies)
Award: Certificate
ECTS credits: n/a
EQF level: 4
ISCED 2011: 344/354
Main ECEC workplaces: Children's Group (*dětská skupina*) (6 months –5(6) years, as core pedagogue,

Job title in Czech: *Pečující osoba*
Profiles: Diverse

micro-crèche (6 months–4 years) and other settings

10. Caregiver – Children's Group (lit. "*Carer for children in a Children's Group*")
Entry requirements: General or subject-related university entrance qualification
Professional education: None, just exam without a previous formal qualification
Award: Certificate
ECTS credits: n/a
EQF level: 4
ISCED 2011: 344/354
Main ECEC workplaces: Children's Group (*dětská skupina*) (6 months –5(6) years, as core pedagogue, micro-crèche (6 months–4 years) and other settings

11. Health and Social Services employee
Entry requirements: General or subject-related university entrance qualification; entrance exam
Professional education: 3-year tertiary professional school or Bachelor study programme
Award: Diploma or Bachelor's degree, subsequent Master's study programme possible
ECTS credits: n/a (Diploma), 180 (Bachelor)
EQF level: 6
ISCED 2011: 645/746/655/746
Main ECEC workplaces: Children's Group (*dětská skupina*) (6 months –5(6) years, as core pedagogue, micro-crèche (6 months–4 years) and other settings

12. Medical doctor
Entry requirements: General or subject-related university entrance qualification; entrance exam
Professional education: 6-year university study programme
Award: MUDr. (*Medicinae Universae Doctor* – General Practitioner in the Czech Republic)
ECTS credits: 360
EQF level: 7
ISCED 2011: 747
Main ECEC workplaces: Children's Group (*dětská skupina*) (6 months –5(6) years, as core pedagogue, micro-crèche (6 months–4 years) and other settings

13. (Clinical) Psychologist
Entry requirements: General or subject-related university entrance qualification; entrance exam
Professional education: 3-year Bachelor studies followed by a 2-year Master's degree programme
Award: Bachelor's degree and Master's degree
ECTS credits: 300 (180 plus 120)
EQF level: 7
ISCED 2011: 746
Main ECEC workplaces: Children's Group (*dětská skupina*) (6 months –5(6) years, as core pedagogue, micro-crèche (6 months–4 years) and other settings

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

4.2.1 Kindergarten Teacher (*Učitelka/Učitel*)

Kindergarten Teacher – qualifying option 1

Upper secondary vocational school – specialisation in pre-primary and out-of-school pedagogy

The content for this qualifying route is anchored in the *Framework Education Programme for the subject pre-primary and out-of-school pedagogy* (2009), which is a binding framework for all vocational schools with this orientation. This document defines not only the general basic competences, but also subject-specific competences. Educational content is based on the four goals of Lifelong Learning for the 21st Century (the "four-pillar model"[12] in the Delors Report[13]). The vocational course aims to develop skills and abilities in the form of key and subject-specific competences, which are linked to the curriculum for the uniform nine-year primary school (Framework Education Programme for primary and lower secondary education):

- **Key competences** are divided into: Learning competence, problem-solving competence, communicative competence, personal and social competence, civic competence and cultural awareness, work and business competence, mathematical competence and competence in the use of information and communication technologies.
- **Subject-related competences** concern the preparation, realisation and evaluation of pedagogical, educational and recreational activities of young and school-age children. Graduates should also be enabled to observe occupational safety and health protection at work, to strive for the highest quality in their own work and to act economically, in accordance with the strategy of lifelong learning. Each vocational school develops its own school education programme, which is structured either by subjects or in modules.

Table 7

Czech Republic: Key curricular areas of the vocational school qualifying programme for pre-primary and out-of-school pedagogy

Areas of learning	Minimum number of hours during the vocational school programme	
	Weekly	Total number of hours
Language education: Czech	5	160
Language education: foreign language	10	320
Societal education	5	160
Science education	4	128
Mathematical education	8	256
Aesthetic education (Music, Art, Drama)	5	160
Health education	8	256
Education in Information and Communication Technologies	4	128
Economic education	2	64
Pedagogic-psychological education	**21**	**672**
Pedagogical didactics	**30**	**960**

[12] Learning to live together; learning to acquire knowledge; learning to act; learning for life.

[13] Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission, Ed. 1997. *Lernfähigkeit: Unser verborgener Reichtum. UNESCO-Bericht zur Bildung für das 21. Jahrhundert* [Capacity to learn: our hidden wealth. UNESCO Report on Education for the 21st Century]. Neuwied; Kriftel; Berlin: Luchterhand. See also: https://www.unesco.de/infothek/publikationen/publikationsverzeichnis/delors-bericht.html.

Areas of learning	Minimum number of hours during the vocational school programme	
	Weekly	Total number of hours
Disposable hours	26	832
Total	**128**	**4096**

Source: MŠMT, Framework Plan for Pre-primary and Out-of-school Pedagogy 2009b, 58

Kindergarten Teacher – qualifying route 2

Tertiary professional school – study programmes in pre-primary and out-of-school pedagogy

The qualifying courses include both theoretical and practical subjects and are primarily oriented towards pedagogical work with 3 to 6 year-old children in kindergartens, but also towards other educational situations. The specification of the curricular areas is designed individually by the higher education institution. Each higher education institution has its own accredited programme – although the programmes have a common basis in terms of content, they differ in terms of the design, scope and orientation of the subjects. As a rule, both general (foreign language, ICT, etc.) and subject-related subjects are covered, i.e. content from pedagogy, psychology, didactics, school law and school management and subjects that promote specific competences (communicative, musical or motor skills). Students also have other elective subjects at their disposal that are, for example, linked to current pedagogical topics (intercultural education/education, second/foreign language acquisition, environmental education, dealing with media, digital education) or that deepen their subject knowledge in a specific area (e.g. in an aesthetic discipline). The professional schools structure the training programmes into modules (compulsory, compulsory elective and elective subjects). Practical training is structured as weekly internships, mainly in the first and second year of study, both during the school year and in the holiday period.

The study programme ends with a diploma examination, which consists of three partial examinations: an oral examination in a foreign language, a theoretical or practical examination in subject-related subjects and the defence of the diploma thesis.

Kindergarten Teacher – qualifying option 3

University study programme in Early Childhood Education

The curriculum of the Bachelor's degree programmes emphasises the following professional competences (Opravilová 2007; 2016): Respect for children, children's development, creating an atmosphere of trust, safety and understanding. Observations of the children form the basis of the educational activities, which are then adapted to their needs and abilities. The methods and pedagogical activities should be chosen with the specific characteristics and developmental nuances of the children in mind, and decisions should be analysed and justified accordingly. Activities should be planned, and conditions created that benefit the development of the individual and the group – including children with special needs. The use of music, art and drama should reflect the needs of the early childhood environment and the children's individual abilities. Learning how to adapt the pedagogical work to the children's individual needs has a high priority.

The study programme **curricula** are beginning to respond to current societal problems in their educational content and increasingly taking into account challenges that arise for the pedagogical work: The education of children with special needs; inclusive education; support of children with a migration background and children with social disadvantages; transitions (especially in connection with school enrolment); at some universities also foreign language acquisition for young children.

The **content** of the study programme is intended to prepare students for competence-oriented pedagogical work in the current educational and upbringing concept of early educational institutions (especially kindergartens) and for the increased importance of special needs education. Societal developments emphasise the importance of preparation in these areas and are leading to more innovation in the faculty study programmes in order to take more account of these issues – which are rather new in the general pedagogical discourse in the Czech Republic compared to Germany and other Western European countries. The study content areas are exclusively oriented towards work with young children (mainly between 3 and 6 years of age). Increasingly, courses/modules or topics on the upbringing and education of under 3 year-olds are also being incorporated into the study programmes[14]. From a disciplinary point of view, the main curricular focus is on educational and psychological subject areas. Social topics and an orientation towards socio-pedagogical and out-of-school activities tend to be of less significance.

The study programmes at the ten universities differ greatly from each other in terms of programme content, especially in the electives. The diversity of options available to applicants is a positive feature which enables the choice of a programme that matches an applicant's personal professional interests. Electives relate to a component of the statutory requirements or to the focus of the programme. The number of credits for compulsory subjects together with the minimum number of credits for electives usually amounts to about 90% of the total number of credits.

All faculties have included foreign language learning in the compulsory or elective subjects. Some faculties offer only English, while others also offer German, French, Spanish or Russian and offer both language learning for students and foreign language didactics in kindergarten. Early foreign language teaching in kindergarten is a controversial topic in the Czech Republic, with much of the professional community raising questions related to the introduction of (mainly) English in mainstream kindergartens. As the number of multilingual children in kindergartens has doubled in the last ten years, more and more emphasis is being placed on the didactics of Czech as a second language. The consequences of the conflict in Ukraine and the high level of migration present a very particular context. Universities have responded to the new situation by setting up elective courses for students who want to further their education on this issue, or by recognising support for refugees as part of their practice, etc.

The practicum component of the study programmes is organised differently at each university (see *Chapter **5***). The universities often have faculty kindergartens, i.e. regular kindergartens and also kindergartens with alternative/innovative pedagogical approaches (Montessori and Waldorf pedagogy, Dalton Plan, Reggio pedagogy, forest kindergartens, the Step by Step approach or the innovative pedagogical concept "health supporting kindergarten"[15]), which cooperate with the respective faculty chair in the long term and ensure the practical placements in cooperation with the university lecturers. Students acquire theoretical knowledge and practical experience with alternative pedagogical programmes and with other forms of early childhood education institutions during their studies.

[14] For example, at the Faculty of Education of Charles University in Prague, there is a specialisation/profiling in the Master's programme oriented to work with children up to 3 years of age (so-called study of early childhood).

[15] This is an innovative pedagogical concept of Czech origin that emerged in the early 1990s as a response to the holistic and humanistic-oriented approach. It was particularly influential during the second half of the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century. Today, elements of this approach are already an integral part of most education programmes in kindergartens and primary schools.

The Bachelor's degree is completed with a written thesis and an oral examination, which usually consist of partial examinations in the subject areas of education and psychology, in a specialisation subject or children's literature and the defence of the Bachelor's thesis. This can be followed by a two-year Master's programme.

Graduates acquire qualifications for work as a core professional/lead pedagogue or manager in regular and special/ remedial kindergartens, in other early childhood education institutions, in kindergartens with alternative educational programmes and in kindergartens attached to hospitals, therapeutic institutions and sanatoriums.

Graduates should be prepared to perform the following tasks and professional requirements: designing and implementing the curriculum at class and institution level, consulting with other teachers, diagnosing and evaluating structural, organisational and qualitative processes at different levels. The graduates are prepared for teamwork with the family and the various educational providers in the pre-primary sector. They have basic competences in the management and leadership of kindergartens and have the ambition to further develop their own conceptual understanding. The study programmes focus on the students' personal and professional development and prepare them for an inclusive approach to working with a mixed group of pre-school age children.

Table 8 summarises the proportion of each study component set by the Ministry of Education as the uniform orientation framework for the newly accredited early childhood education programmes in 2017.

Table 8

Czech Republic: National Framework for determining the scope of individual components of initial professional education in the BA programme for educators

Curricular components	Proportion of programme, in %	Credits	Number of hours during the study programme
Propaedeutics: Educational psychology and special education subjects, e.g. general education, psychology and didactics, history, school education, educational psychology, developmental psychology, Inclusion didactics, methodology, medical propaedeutics, foreign languages and ICT in connection with teaching for kindergartens or studying.	23–30	41–54	1.230–1.620
Subject-specific components with didactics: Czech language and literature, communication, mathematics, nature and environmental education, physical education, music education, art education, drama education, dance education, etc.	45–50	81–90	2.430–2.700
Teaching practice: Guided and reflected practice (observation, practice in the form of selected days or sections of the week during the semester, continuous practice during the semester)	10–15	18–27	540–810
Preparation of the Bachelor thesis	510	9–18	270–540

Source: MŠMT 2017

A challenge for the current university study programmes is the danger of fragmentation of educational content with a large number of subjects. Pre-primary and primary education programmes should adopt an integrated approach to education, which some university faculties are beginning to consider not only in the content of their programmes but also in their structure.

The tradition of subject-specific segmented education is still very much rooted in current degree programmes and reflects the problems with pedagogical practice in many pre-primary settings (Syslová 2016a, 2017; Koželuhová, Loudová Stralczynská, and Lipnická 2020).

4.2.2. Teacher's Assistant (*Asistent pedagoga*)

Qualifying option 1

Supplementary training for Teachers' Assistants

The CPD programme includes topics from general and social pedagogy, psychology, educational theory, pedagogical diagnostics. Each training provider accredits its own programme and specifies the content (also in connection with the regional needs of the schools). However, there is a standard for the accreditation of this CPD programme issued by the Ministry of Education (MŠMT 2020c).

In total, the training programme should comprise at least 120 hours of teaching. This includes 80 hours of direct teaching (lectures and seminars) and 40 hours of teaching practice in schools, educational institutions and cooperating institutions. The standard formulates the competences and contents of the Teacher's Assistant for the entire field of education, without specialisation for a certain level such as kindergarten.

The programme is expected to cover the following topics:

Theoretical background and current trends in special education; relevant legislation; families and children with special educational needs; ways of educating pupils with special educational needs; types of disabilities; approaches towards educating and providing an appropriate environment for the development of children with special educational needs; mechanisms of development and support; models of inclusion of children with special educational needs in the educational process.

Development of abilities, skills, knowledge and personality traits in childhood and adolescence; formation of the psyche in a phase of relative stability in adulthood; developmentally relevant social relationships.

Thematic areas of the standard for the continuing education programme of study for Teachers' Assistants:

I. School, schoolwork and the role of the Teacher's Assistant
II. Pupil support
III. System of pupil support
IV. Pedagogical-psychological and cultural specifics in the work of the Teacher's Assistant (MŠMT 2020c).

Qualifying option 2

Vocational school route

The curriculum of the training programme at the few vocational schools includes the following topics: Czech school system; basic pedagogical concepts and methods for work in early childhood education and other school institutions; special education topics (support of children with disabilities, socially disadvantaged children and their families); family living conditions and child rearing; bullying in the children's group; addiction problems in families; communication with parents; behaviour and individuality of the child, etc. The practical training prepares learners mainly for effective cooperation with the lead pedagogue in the group and individual support of the child, taking into account his or her needs.

4.2.3 Caregivers (*Pečující osoba*) in Children's Groups and social care settings

Diverse qualifying options

Children's Groups (*dětské skupiny*) have been a new form of early childhood education since 2014. They are intended to partially replace the former work of the nurseries/crèches and to help reduce the temporary lack of space in kindergartens due to the high birth rate.

The staff in Children's Groups are usually not teachers, as is the case in kindergartens and preparatory classes. They can be people with different pedagogical, social or health qualifications (13 options in total, see *Table 6*). The following text mainly illustrates the lowest level of qualification and the new specialised training programme for future professionals.

The lowest level of qualification is held by two kinds of childcare staff: the **Caregiver for preschool age children** (*Chůva pro děti do zahájení povinné školní docházky*, 2012) and the **Caregiver for Children's Groups** (*Chůva pro děti v dětské skupině,* 2021), see *Tables 6, 9* and *10*). These new professional qualifications were introduced in 2012 and 2021 respectively. Both qualifications have qualification and assessment standards that overlap in content and form the basis for the vocational qualification examination. The examination can be taken without prior training. Some CPD providers provide short-term preparation courses (e.g. amounting to 28 teaching hours). These persons may also provide childcare services within the scope of the Trade Act (e.g. in the child's family home, as a caregiver in a children's group, etc.).

The examination for *Childcare Workers for children in Children's Groups* is to include the following contents: Compliance with safety and accident prevention regulations; first aid for the child/children; common childhood diseases, epidemiology and hygiene; human somatology with a focus on childhood; safe handling of the infant from the age of 6 months; instruction of the child in hygienic habits; application of the principles of a healthy lifestyle according to the age of the child; application of methods and forms of pedagogical work with regard to the age of the child/children; dealing with unfavourable educational situations from a pedagogical and psychological point of view; application of knowledge about the stages of development and support of social-emotional development of the child at an early age; observance of ethical principles when working with children and guiding the child towards moral values; conditions of providing childcare services in a Children's Group; operational and hygienic rules when working with children in a Children's Group (MPSV 2021c).

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Kindergarten Teacher – Alternative qualification routes

The three described standard qualification paths for professionals in kindergartens are offered in the regular form and in the form of a combined training/study. This combined form represents **Option 1** of the alternative qualification paths and often takes longer than the standard forms of initial professional education.

Option 2: A second alternative qualification route was opened in 2005 for Special Needs Educators[16] who can now be employed as fully qualified core professional in kindergartens without further examinations or certification.

Option 3: Since 2012, other pedagogical professionals (persons who have completed studies in primary school pedagogy, pedagogy, leisure pedagogy or the study programme for Educators) can also acquire the required qualification at a university within the framework of the so-called lifelong training programme, which specialises in kindergarten pedagogy, and then work as fully

[16] Since 2005 for special educators with a university degree in special/remedial education; since 2012 also for graduates of this field from tertiary professional schools.

qualified core pedagogues in kindergartens. Students of this further education programme write a thesis and take an oral examination at the end of their studies.

Option 4: Persons with the secondary school leaving certificate in the study programme for Educators can acquire the relevant qualification if they also take the baccalaureate examination section in early childhood education.

Option 5: Persons who do not have a relevant education may carry out pedagogical work in kindergartens or preparatory classes in the following cases:

1) If they were at least 55 years old as of 01.01.2015 and could show at least 20 years of practice in the relevant type of school (in kindergarten or in a preparatory class).
2) If the educational institution proves it is unable to find a suitably qualified person. The non-qualified person may only carry out the pedagogical work until someone qualified is found.

Teachers' Assistants in kindergartens and preparatory classes – Alternative qualification routes

The qualification routes of Teachers' Assistants in kindergartens and preparatory classes are not shown in the statistics and in inspection reports. The frequency of individual qualification routes of these qualified co-workers is therefore not known.

The high diversity of qualification routes also enables adequate system permeability.

Kindergarten Teacher – Formal connectivity and career advancement possibilities

- Kindergarten specialists who have acquired the relevant initial professional education within the framework of a university degree programme in special education may also work as teachers in higher levels of the education system.
- Kindergarten Teachers who have received the relevant training within the framework of a Master's degree in early childhood education can then work as Primary School Teachers if they extend their qualifications in the Lifelong Education Programme, a further training programme that is oriented towards the preparation of Primary School Teachers. It is usually a three-year distance learning programme at a faculty of education, which is combined with a final examination and the defence of a thesis. These persons do not receive another independent diploma, but only extend their qualification.
- Additionally, persons who have completed the primary school education programme may also work in kindergartens if they broaden their qualification in a Lifelong Education Programme oriented towards the preparation of kindergarten professionals[17].

Pedagogical staff at all school levels (including kindergartens at ISCED 02 level) have **two career paths** – by (1) carrying out specialised activities in the institution or (2) taking on management tasks (administrative positions).

As of 1 January 2024, two new positions will be introduced, the **induction teacher** and the **accompanying teacher** (see *Chapter **2.3***).

The Education Act (No. 561/2004 Coll., §131) determines the competences and the appointment procedure for managers (MŠMT 2019d (see *Chapter **2.2***). For managers who have completed a "School Management" course in a higher or further education programme at a higher education

[17] A draft for the career and mentoring system was developed by the Ministry of Education within a national project in 2017. However, due to a change of government, this model was no longer implemented. One of the goals of the current government is to create a new career system in education.

institution/university, this qualification is recognised in place of the further education programme "Study for School Managers" (Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel No. 563/2004 Coll., §25, para. 3). Thus, a university degree is not obligatory for Kindergarten Heads.

Experienced professionals (often former head teachers) can apply for the position of **school inspector** at the Czech School Inspectorate (*Česká školní inspekce*). School inspectors are not pedagogical specialists, but state employees. Requirements include a Bachelor's or Master's degree and at least five years of practical experience in the education sector (20 years for those with upper secondary education).

Entry options for persons with non-relevant qualifications – career changers

The entry options for persons without relevant qualifications have already been described. The Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel (No. 563/2004, Coll.) or laws specifying the qualification options for other professionals in early childhood education do not distinguish between alternative entry options and entry options for lateral entrants.

System permeability

The tertiary professional schools still have a relatively difficult position in the IPE system of early childhood education staff: On the one hand they provide initial professional education at tertiary level, on the other hand there exists very little permeability in terms of studying for a Bachelor's degree at a university and little acknowledgment or recognition of this qualification. The professional schools are still not integrated into the Bachelor-Master system. Although the diploma award is placed at level 655 of ISCED (2011) and level 6 in the European Qualifications Framework, the diploma qualification is considered to be at a lower level than the Bachelor's degree. Only a few professional schools recognise part of the diploma studies for their study programme in out-of-school pedagogy (the three-year course of studies can be completed within a year and graduates may go on to study for a Master's degree). Other universities do not recognise the diploma qualification and diploma holders have to complete all modules of the Bachelor study programme.

Studying at a tertiary professional school is for many school leavers with the university entrance qualification an alternative, second way (besides studying early childhood education at a university) of acquiring a tertiary-level qualification. Compared with the university studies in early childhood education for the Bachelor's degree, the tertiary professional schools study programmes are relatively broad, without an in-depth specialisation in pedagogical work with young children.

Employment of specialist staff from other European Union countries

All persons who apply for a post as a core professional or support worker in kindergartens and preparatory classes (support workers are excluded for the time being) have to fulfil the following legislative requirements (Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel 563/2004, paragraphs 3, 4 and 6):

- The general conditions for Pedagogical Teaching Personnel, who in the Czech Republic belong to the so-called regulated professions, are: legal capacity, qualification (recognition according to Law No. 18/2004, paragraph 6), integrity, state of good health, proficiency in the Czech language.
- All applicants who have acquired the relevant qualification in a language other than Czech are required to take a *proficiency exam in the Czech language*. The assessment is conducted by university faculties of education, by language school accredited to hold examinations in the Czech language and by CPD institutions for educational staff. The amendment to the

Teaching Personnel Act (MŠMT 2023a) sets the required language level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – CEFR – namely at least level B2 for Teachers' Assistants. A level of at least C1 is then required for Kindergarten Teachers. The required level of knowledge of the Czech language can now also be proven by passing an individual matriculation examination, which in its content and form corresponds to the examination of the common part of the matriculation examination in Czech language and literature.

This examination of competence in the Czech language is **not** required by the following per-sons:

- Persons who will work in an educational institution with a language of instruction other than Czech
- Persons who have passed an exam in the Czech language as part of their university entrance qualification
- Persons who teach in another language (also applies to staff in kindergartens and preparatory classes) or give conversation classes.

Kindergarten Teachers and Primary School Teachers are not permitted to submit proof of their competence in the Czech language if the examination was taken in another country – in these cases the examination must take place in the Czech Republic.

The necessary recognition of specialist qualifications for persons from other EU countries, EEA countries (Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway) and Switzerland is undertaken according to Act No. 18/2004 on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications.

Staff in kindergartens and preparatory classes who are recognised as qualified in another EU country and may practise their profession there (i.e. mostly those who have a qualification as Educator (*Erzieher:in*) or Childhood Pedagogue (*Kindheitspädagoge/-pädagogin*), are also recognised by the Ministry of Education as qualified for the work in kindergartens or other ECEC settings in the Czech Republic. During the recognition procedures, not only the formal initial professional education is taken into account but also the applicant's non-formal competences and previous work experience as well as further acquired competences (e.g. through CPD activities). What is crucial for the recognition procedure is whether the applicant possesses a relevant qualification and permission to practise the profession in the country of origin. In such cases the qualification is then recognised in the Czech Republic and if the person fulfils further legislative requirements, then he or she can work as an early childhood specialist.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

The practicum is an integral part of all initial professional education programmes for core pedagogues in **kindergartens** and preparatory classes. For professionals in **Children's Groups** and social care settings, the situation is more heterogeneous, as not all IPE routes are Education-based and not all programmes focus on young children. Therefore, professionals in Children's Groups often do an internship in other pedagogical, social or healthcare institutions which does not always focus on pedagogical work with children under 6.

The guided workplace element of the IPE routes for working in kindergartens and preparatory classes is not regulated by regional or institution guidelines in general. However, there are national regulations of different kinds that refer to individual IPE programmes or education/training institutions.

For **vocational schools** at upper secondary level, there is a national framework programme for pre-school and out-of-school pedagogy (75-31-M/01; MŠMT 2009b). Practical training is organised individually by each vocational school. A so-called specialist internship (*odborná praxe*) lasts at least ten weeks during the whole IPE programme (often organised in block times in a kindergarten). The so-called teaching internship (*učební praxe*) comprises at least seven hours per week within the duration of the IPE programme (organised throughout the school year in a certain number of hours). The practical training may also be completed during the holidays, but not for more than three weeks altogether. Each vocational school formulates its own specific practicum programme. Therefore, it is not possible to make a general statement about the organisation of guided workplace experience.

The vocational schools cooperate with kindergartens in their vicinity where the practical training takes place. Each institution determines its internal rules (recruitment, payment, participation of the pedagogues in the internship etc.) and also the placements for their practical training. Before 2023, there were no national specifications for the cooperation between IPE institutions and the ECEC settings. The amendment of the Act on Pedagogical Teaching Personnel 563/2004 from 2023 regulates new positions of teachers who participate in the teaching practice (**accompanying teacher**) and initial support for the graduates of the IPE programmes (**induction teacher**) (see *Chapter **4.3***). The vocational schools ensure the quality of the internships by setting up a network of cooperating institutions and organising training sessions for mentoring professionals. Nevertheless, there are partial efforts to coordinate the internships within the regions[18].

Tertiary professional schools accredit their training or study programmes with the Ministry of Education (according to Act No. 563/2004 Coll.). The programmes also include all practical parts, which are structured differently: as continuous practice on certain weekdays during the whole semester (individual subject-related hours/(half)days with a more general orientation towards direct pedagogical work) or as block periods (one to three-week internship in a kindergarten during the semester or holidays). In addition, smaller development projects are often realised.

In the Czech Republic, a similar model of guided workplace experience is used at all ten **universities**. Students complete a kind of motivational internship in a kindergarten during their first year; in the following semesters they progress from observing to working as a teaching assistant to leading teaching activities. The aim is to experience all the activities of a Kindergarten Teacher and the full range of time demands, especially in the final semesters of the programme when there are more contiguous blocks of weekly practice of full-time teaching. Students have the opportunity to experience not only practice in mainstream kindergartens, but also alternative and innovative pedagogical concepts such as Montessori, Forest School or Healthy Kindergartens. According to the regulation (MŠMT 2017), the practice within the study programme should have a share of 10-15%, 18-27 ECTS credits and comprise 540 to 810 teaching hours. The universities therefore have a relatively broad scope for decision-making.

A clear trend is the effort to combine theoretical and practical teaching. In the Czech Republic, there is no semester at any university so far in which students only work in an ECEC setting.

[18] For example, in 2021-2023 the Municipality of Prague implemented a project entitled "Programme to increase the quality of practicum experiences for pedagogy students in kindergartens", which tried to coordinate and exchange experiences between vocational schools, vocationally qualifying higher education institutions and individual kindergartens.

Theoretical, didactic and practical seminars always stand side by side. However, it is clear from the individual university curricula that care is taken to ensure that students can complete practical and also elective placements during all semesters of study.

The internships are consistently adapted by the training institutions so that they meet the practical requirements. As a rule, students also have the opportunity to get to know different early education institutions (including the new Children's Groups and care institutions, family centres, etc.) and alternative and innovative pedagogical concepts. Some universities even offer students study trips to early education institutions abroad. This is not a national reform, but a trend to introduce students to new forms of early childhood education institutions.

Pedagogical portfolios have become an integral part of professional practice training at Faculties of Education in the Czech Republic. They take different forms at different faculties, with some also using them for state examination questions. They allow students to demonstrate their professional competences and thus link the theoretical examination with practice (Rodová and Syslová 2021; Syslová and Horňáčková 2014; Syslová 2016a, 2016b). Work with the pedagogical portfolio aims to include teaching students how to use the portfolio for self-reflection and professional growth. The current practice of portfolio work in some faculties anticipates the wider use of a professional portfolio envisaged in the proposals for teachers' professional development and promotion recently announced by the Ministry of Education.

Qualification of the mentoring staff

Until January 2024, no specified qualification was required for the staff in charge of mentoring students in kindergartens. They were usually selected on the basis of their practical knowledge and their professional and individual competences. Each IPE institution selects the cooperating kindergartens and the mentoring staff themselves and often have their own selection criteria. They also usually prepare the mentoring staff on how to accompany the students.

The amended Act No. 563/2004 Coll. on Pedagogical Personnel (MŠMT 2023a) for all teaching staff, including Kindergarten Teachers, provides for a position of two **mentoring specialists: an accompanying and an induction teacher**. The amendment enshrines the positions and specifies their activities in order to improve the quality of pedagogical practice of future teachers and to link initial teacher education with schools in the regional education system. The system of support for mentoring specialists and teaching practices is currently being piloted as an experimental validation; from 2026 onwards, to be funded on the basis of a specific normative enshrined in the Education Act (MŠMT 2023b). The Kindergarten Head decides on the time allocation of the mentoring specialists in early education institutions.

Current reforms related to guided workplace experience

The Ministry of Education is currently piloting a new system of teacher education that will also significantly affect the practical component of IPE programmes. Kindergartens and schools are to become places of practical training and a new national system for financing apprenticeships is to be introduced (MŠMT 2022e) (see *Chapter **8**)*.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Every employer is obliged under the Labour Code (Act No. 262/2006 Coll.) to support the professional development of its employees. As a rule, there are **two main forms** of Continuing Professional Development:

(1) **Supplementary qualifications** (seminars/courses, in-house CPD): The employer can order the employee to attend training courses to deepen qualifications (also outside working hours, as overtime). The deepening of qualifications means their continuing enrichment, enabling the employee to perform the agreed work. It is therefore compulsory CPD that all workers should follow (core skilled workers, supplementary (skilled) workers and facility management). The employer is obliged to cover the costs of the training (Act No. 262/2006 Coll., § 230).

(2) **Additional specialist qualifications:** This type of CPD is usually more time-consuming and may involve studying for a new (academic) degree or a new specialisation.

According to Act No. 563/2004 Coll, self-study is also part of CPD.

6.1 CPD for staff in commercial childcare centres

For professionals of commercial childcare institutions under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, there are no further requirements outside the Labour Code (Act No. 262/2006 Coll.).

6.2 CPD for staff in Children's Groups

For the Caregivers working in Children's Groups (childcare institutions under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs), according to the amendment of the Children's Groups Act (MPSV 2021a), a new regulation regarding CPD (type 1, supplementary qualification) applies. From 2022, the provider is obliged to provide the Caregiver with further education in the field of child care in the scope of at least 8 hours per calendar year, including at least once every two years a first aid course focused on childhood. The provider, together with the professionals, can choose such courses that support and motivate workers to continue working with children. Conditions for further training are:

- *Scope*: at least eight hours per calendar year
- *Content*: training in childcare, including a first aid course at least every two years with a focus on childhood
- *Form*: Course in an educational institution or at the employer's workplace, internship on the basis of a written contract between the provider and the educational institution
- *Format*: CPD sessions can be full-time or followed through distance learning (e.g. e-learning); for a first aid course, a full-time course including practical training preferable for qualification reasons (§ 5c, Act No. 247/2014 Coll.).

Various courses and workshops are offered, e.g. within the framework of the project *Support for the Management of Children's Groups*[19].

[19] http://www.dsmpsv.cz/cs/

6.3 CPD for staff in kindergartens and preparatory classes

For pedagogical staff in public education institutions, the CPD requirements are laid down in the Act on Pedagogical Teaching Staff (No. 563/2004 Coll.) and the Decree on the Further Training of Pedagogical Staff (No. 317/2005 Coll.). CPD is provided institutionally (1) at universities, (2) at institutions for teacher CPD and other institutions on the basis of accreditation granted by the Ministry of Education, and (3) through self-study. However, an amendment to the Act on Pedagogical Workers (which came into force on 01.09.2023) specifies that no accreditation is required for short CPD programmes.

The kindergarten management draws up a CPD plan for the teachers. This plan may also include provider-specific requirements.

The Decree on the CPD of Pedagogical Specialists (No. 317/2005 Coll.) provides for three forms of in-service and further training:

1) **CPD to fulfil the qualification requirements for the job**: this includes, for example, qualifying courses for kindergarten and school heads (100 teaching hours) or for co-workers (Teachers' Assistants, with 120 teaching hours), which qualifies them to perform these job positions. This form of CPD also includes a qualification that leads to a supplement to the required qualification – this mainly concerns pedagogical staff without a relevant qualification. This further training is usually completed with an examination before an examination committee and with the defence of a written paper. The costs are borne by the professional, but the employer may cover part of the costs.
2) Additional training to meet **further qualification requirements** for the job: This includes, for example, CPD for pedagogical leaders (350 teaching hours). Here, too, the further training is concluded with an examination before an examination committee and with the defence of a written paper. The costs are borne by the educational specialist, but the employer can pay part of the costs.
3) Further training to **deepen the qualification** concerns the ongoing enrichment of the qualification. CPD is oriented towards current theoretical and practical problems of education and is usually obtained through courses and seminars of at least four hours' duration. The costs are usually covered by the employer. However, the professionals may cover part of the costs if they request a more financially demanding CPD session.

There are no national regulations for in-house CPD; the respective management decides whether such trainings are organised for the team and, if necessary, also the topics. These usually take place at the beginning of a school or kindergarten year.

6.3.1 Entitlement to days off for further education and training for ECEC professionals

The entitlement to days off depends on the kind of CPD:

1) **Self-study**: There is an entitlement to 12 paid days per year if the operating conditions of the institution do not contradict this.

2) **Attending CPD courses**: Kindergarten staff in particular have problems obtaining days off for the more time-consuming forms of CPD and often have to complete the course during their vacation time.

The following days off may be granted for further education leading to a higher qualification:

- All teaching days of the study programme
- Two working days for each examination in CPD programmes of colleges, universities and tertiary professional schools
- Five working days for preparation for and taking of a final examination or the baccalaureate

- Ten working days for preparation and defence of a final examination, Bachelor's, Diploma or Doctoral thesis
- 40 working days for preparing and taking the state examination or doctoral state examination.

Time off for CPD sessions on a small scale (about two to five days a year) is not problematic. However, in the case of more time-consuming further education, it becomes more difficult. The legal right to days off cannot be granted for "operational reasons" either.

6.4 Main providers of CPD

The main provider of CPD for educational staff is the **National Pedagogical Institute** of the Czech Republic (NPI CR), an organisation directly administered by the Ministry of Education. At the beginning of 2020, a merger took place between the National Institute of Continuing Education and the National Institute for Education. The newly established Institute (NPI CR) aims to ensure the transfer of educational innovations from the central conceptual level to the educational institutions in the regions. It develops pedagogical framework programmes for the individual school types, including kindergartens, and offers methodological support to schools and teachers and targeted training to teaching staff. The 13 regional offices of the NPI CR play an important role in supporting schools in the regions.

The NPI CR takes on the patronage for planning and organising CPD programmes and prepares the national programmes. In addition, it implements so-called government priorities in the CPD offers for pedagogical professionals, including management and framework education programmes.

The courses are mostly financed by the European Social Fund and by development programmes of the Ministry of Education and are therefore free of charge or cost only a small fee for the pedagogical staff. In this case, the institutions only have to reimburse a few costs for the CPD of their professionals.

Other important providers are colleges and universities, which are the exclusive providers of some FWB programmes within lifelong learning training programmes (Decree No. 317/2005 Coll., MŠMT 2005).

Other important providers are the **higher education institutions and universities**, which are the exclusive providers of some continuing education programmes[20] within Lifelong Learning training programmes (Decree No. 317/2005 Coll., MŠMT 2005).

CPD is also offered by schools, non-profit societies, private CPD providers whose programmes have been accredited by the Ministry of Education (in July 2022, 61 such providers were registered in the School Register) and who often finance their courses within the framework of European projects, so that participants only have to bear low costs.

6.5 CPD for Kindergarten Heads

Kindergarten Heads must (in addition to their initial professional education) have completed a headship course within three years of assuming the leadership position. An exception are those managers who have acquired the management expertise within the framework of a university degree in school management or within the framework of further training within the Lifelong Learning programmes at an HEI/university in the field of school management and organisation

[20] These are longer CPD programmes: Studies in the field of educational sciences with 250 teaching hours (supplementing the pedagogical qualification), studies to expand the qualification (e.g. for another school level, performing remedial and special educational tasks for children with disabilities outside the qualification of pedagogues), studies for pedagogical managers, etc.

as well as persons who have ten years of experience in a management position. The managers of other ECEC settings (Children's Groups, childcare facilities) are not obliged to complete certain CPD courses or modules that focus on the acquisition of specific management and leadership competences.

The professionals are obliged to undergo CPD. However, because until 2023, there were no other institution-specific positions in kindergartens and other early childhood education institutions beyond the position of head (from 2024, new positions are the **induction** and the **accompanying** teacher), further training in the sense of an additional qualification was not obligatory. However, a wide range of optional thematic CPD courses is available to regular staff in ECEC settings. The choice of courses and their thematic orientation is made in accordance with the interests of the professionals and the needs of the institution (Act on Pedagogical Teaching Staff No. 563/2004 Coll., Regulation on Further Training of Pedagogical Staff No. 317/2005 Coll.).

6.6 Main topics in the CPD of ECEC staff

Topics related to current problems and issues in practice represent a contemporary trend in CPD. Since 2016, as a result of the new Education Act, inclusion has been strongly promoted in the entire school system and at all levels (curricula, staff recruitment, CPD of professionals, new funding possibilities, etc.). Therefore, most of the programme offers are in line with this need: Supporting children with special educational needs (especially language support, supporting children from socially disadvantaged families, children with ADHD, etc.), inclusion, school management, 2 year-olds in kindergarten, further education for Teachers' Assistants.

The educators/teachers decide on topics that interest them personally in consultation with their employer. Sometimes the Kindergarten Heads choose courses for several or all teachers if they are dealing with a specific problem in the kindergarten and have specific pedagogical needs.

New topics include promoting science literacy, digital learning and assessment. There is currently particularly strong demand for courses that focus on the language development of multilingual children. This is due to the increasing number of non-Czech-speaking children in kindergartens (and in the Czech school system in general), as well as the need to integrate refugee children from Ukraine, more than 50,000 of whom have been admitted to kindergartens and schools since spring 2022. Currently, it is the promotion of multilingual children and the specifics of work with traumatised children – either as a result of the measures occurring in connection with the COVID pandemic or specifically in relation to the support for refugee children from war conflicts.

Of particular significance were training offers for teachers in kindergartens and preparatory classes in the field of online education, especially in the second half of 2020 and in 2021. The kindergartens were obliged to offer education activities online to children who had reached the age of 5 and had completed a compulsory pre-school year in their kindergarten in spring 2021, at the time of the general long-term closure of the schools during the pandemic (this obligation also applied to the preparatory classes).

The Czech School Inspectorate (CSI) continuously monitors the professional development in the monitored kindergartens. The CSI report (2022) states that "the professional development of teachers is organised by 85.5% of school heads according to the professional development plan". Only some principals (48.6%) are meticulous in developing CPD plans, i.e. they monitor and assess teachers' needs and tailor them to the needs of the school. Probably due to the anti-epidemiological measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the percentage of teachers who attended courses and seminars (70.6%) to deepen their professional development decreased in 2020/2021 compared to 2019/2020. The percentage of teachers who did not participate in any

kind of CPD was 16.5% (CSI 2022, 30-31). These were the majority of topics chosen by core pedagogues for CPD courses in the school year 2020/2021:

- Knowledge and skills in early childhood education and care
- Supporting the development of literacy and methods of key competences, and approaches towards of education, new and alternative pedagogical directions
- School readiness, enrolment of children in primary school
- Education of children with deferment of compulsory education
- Individualisation of education and pedagogical diagnostics (including portfolio management)
- Speech therapy, speech therapy prevention
- Education of children with special educational needs (methods, forms, support)
- Inclusion (legal aspects, curriculum change, etc.)
- Education in a multicultural or multilingual environment (CSI 2022, 32).

6.7 Research projects related to CPD in ECEC

No major national research projects have been funded over the past five years that deal with the CPD of early childhood educators. However, CPD institutes offer a relatively large number of projects which are linked to smaller research activities. Smaller research projects have also been realised at the faculties of education (for example, with a focus on the evaluation and development of own programmes).

However, within the framework of an extensive ESF project – *Systemic Support of Inclusive Education in the Czech Republic* -, a lot of space was devoted to the training and further education of support workers in 2013-2015: among other things, a standard for the work of Teachers' Assistants; guidelines for working with children with different special educational needs and further guidelines on specific topics in the work pedagogical specialists were developed. Several drafts on the system of initial and continuing professional development itself were also drafted, focussing on systemic development.

6.8 Current issues related to CPD

In the Czech Republic, there is **no credit system** for the recognition of CPD for professionals of all types of ECEC settings. Participation in CPD is not yet formally recognised (see *Chapter **8***).

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

7.1.1 Core pedagogues and educational support staff

The payment of early childhood staff differs depending on the type of institution. "For remuneration in the non-commercial sector and in companies where no collective agreement has been concluded, there is the so-called guaranteed wage, i.e. the employer cannot set a lower wage (salary) for an employee than the lowest level of the guaranteed wage. The guaranteed wage is graded in eight groups according to the complexity, responsibility and difficulty of the work performed. In public schools. Teachers' salaries are currently higher than the corresponding guaranteed minimum wage, so this decree is particularly important for public schools (and Children's

Groups and childcare facilities for children under 3), as well as for the remuneration of non-educational staff" (Eurydice 2023a).

Kindergarten Teachers are paid as pedagogical employees in the school system under the collective bargaining system (11 salary grades in total). Kindergarten staff fall into the lowest salary grades (8 to 10) of the pay scale system. Each pay grade is further divided into 7 levels. The specialists are assigned to the respective level by the facility management based on the nature of their work (core professional, core professional with a post of responsibility, length of work experience, etc.). If the professional acquires an additional qualification (e.g. within the framework of further training courses), this does not usually affect the pay grade. An exception is the leadership position, which requires an additional headship qualification and is therefore also linked to a promotion in the pay scale system. Kindergarten professionals are generally entitled to remuneration for overtime and extra work in the context of direct pedagogical work. They may also receive other non-tariff supplements (e.g. for guiding other persons, for specialised work such as the planning of the institution's training programme, for long-term high-quality work or the performance of specific tasks).

Table 9

Czech Republic: Tariff classification and gross salary of Kindergarten Teachers, Teachers' Assistants and Primary School Teachers in the school system

Profile	Salary grade	Minimum gross salary per annum	Maximum gross salary per annum
Kindergarten and out-of-school pedagogues	8–10	CZK 300,480[21] EUR 2,665	CZK 444,720 EUR 18,745
Primary School Teachers, Secondary School Teachers I and II, Special Educators, Psychologists	11–13	CZK 38 ,440 EUR 16,246	CZK 554,640 EUR 23,378
Support staff	4–9	CZK 186,480 EUR 7,860	CZK 433,560 EUR 18,274

Source: Eurydice 2023a

The salaries of early childhood core pedagogues are lower than those of Primary School Teachers. The salaries of supplementary co-workers are significantly lower. For them, the content of their work depends to a large extent on how the management determines it and thus places them in the appropriate salary bracket (see *Table 9*). With this pay, earning a living, e.g. as a single parent with one child in the capital city, is rather difficult, even though the pay scales have been increased substantially for kindergarten professionals across the board in recent years. The average gross monthly wage of a Kindergarten Teacher is CZK 33,861 (€1,427) (as of 2023).

The salaries are generally slightly higher for teachers in public kindergartens (€1,384) than in private (€1,179) and church institutions (€1,215; as of 2022; MŠMT 2022c). Over the last five years, salaries have increased by about one third. At the same time, however, the cost of living has increased considerably. The government's current goal is to raise the average teacher's salary to 130% of the average wage in the Czech Republic. Admittedly, this is a success in terms of average teacher salaries. However, professionals in kindergartens and pre-primary classes do not reach this salary level.

Specific positions of responsibility (i.e. head, deputy head, mentoring specialist) are paid additionally within the framework of the supplements. The supplement is 5 to 50% of the pay scale

[21] Conversion rate July 2023

salary for the highest level in the respective pay grade; for management staff, the supplement can be 15 to 60%. The Kindergarten Head is paid according to the pay scale system (10th salary grade) just like other pedagogical staff. The specific conditions of payment in public institutions are determined by the authority that appointed the head.

The remuneration of all teachers consists of: (1) the pay scale part and (2) a non-pay scale part. The extra pay can be as follows:

- **Supplement**: Kindergarten Teachers are legally entitled to this if they perform one or more assignments (e.g. leading other teachers, working in schools and classes for children with special educational needs) for which this entitlement is enshrined in law.
- **Staff bonus**: There is no legal entitlement to this; it is the subjective decision of the Kindergarten Head to allocate this bonus to a teacher, e.g. for very good work performance in the long term or additional tasks (support of other teachers, children with special educational needs, etc.). This is a permanent supplement that cannot be withdrawn as long as the conditions are met. The supplement can be up to 50% of the salary (in some cases even up to 100%).
- **Award or so-called reward**: This is a one-time allowance for exceptional work, without legal entitlement.

7.1.2 Staff in other ECEC settings (Children's Groups, social care settings for children under 3 years of age)

The remuneration of regular and managerial staff is the same in these institutions and is governed by the Labour Code. As of 1 January 2022, they are included in the catalogue of professions in public service and administration, where they are classified in grades 6 to 9 depending on the difficulty of the work. They are also entitled to certain allowances.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

A full-time staff member in a public kindergarten works 40 hours per week (of which 31 hours are for direct pedagogical work with the children). The working hours are the same for all kindergarten core staff. In the case of management staff, the workload for direct pedagogical work is reduced depending on the size of the institution. The working time of a full-time employee in other ECEC facilities (Children's Groups, social care settings for children under 3 years of age) is also 40 hours per week. The employer determines the work content of each worker; there are no central regulations. Full-time employment is characteristic for managers and core pedagogues in kindergartens. Supplementary co-workers are more often employed on a part-time basis, which very often depends on the amount of support provided to a child with special educational needs in the respective group.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Specific induction measures for novice staff in early childhood education institutions have not existed and were not enshrined in legislation until 2023. The general basic conditions for new entrants to the profession were only defined in the Labour Code (entitlement to adequate introductory practice during the first two years in the profession). The concrete form of implementation depends on the school management. The weekly direct pedagogical activity of a trainee teacher must not be reduced. In addition, a trainee teacher may receive advice, information or suggestions from the school management, benefit from discussions in the classroom, etc. The school management may appoint an induction teacher for a new core professional. The

management decides at its own discretion whether to reward the greater extent of the induction teacher's activity, e.g. with a personal allowance.

A new system of support measures in the workplace has been created and piloted since September 2023 (MŠMT 2023a). As of 1 January 2024, the adaptation period of the beginning teachers and the position of the Accompanying Teacher will be established. “The teacher's adaptation period is the period from the start of the teacher's first employment until the end of two years’ employment with the legal entity carrying out the school's activities (MŠMT 2023b).

The Czech School Inspectorate continuously monitors how the management of kindergartens and schools deal with the introduction of newly qualified teachers. In the annual reports 2018/2019 and 2019/2020, the CSI (2020) evaluated the methodological support for prospective or new teachers; this was described by the school management as insufficient and unsystematic. According to the last inspection report (2022), there have been no significant improvements in this area. For the further development of Kindergarten Teachers, the Czech School Inspectorate recommends in particular the creation of a professional portfolio or cooperation with other kindergartens (CSI 2022, 35-36).

Table 10

Czech Republic: Support measures for novice core pedagogues – proportion of kindergartens with newly qualified staff in %

Formal induction programme (the new staff member is familiarised with respective school procedures)	53.2
Assignment of a mentor (induction teacher)	70.3
Reciprocal job shadowing of core pedagogues	58.2
Consultations with the Kindergarten Head	75.9
CPD courses	54.4
Other forms	54.4

Source: CSI 2022, 33.

7.4 Non-contact time

The working hours of full-time **kindergarten core pedagogues** are divided into so-called direct and indirect pedagogical work. Nine hours per week are set aside for indirect pedagogical work. This includes work with parents, team meetings, networking, material preparation, planning, follow-up, evaluations and documentation and other activities. For Kindergarten Heads, the direct pedagogical work can be reduced depending on the size of the institution (to 13 to 24 hours per week, or 5 to 16 hours per week in boarding kindergartens). In public kindergartens, the number of released hours for the Kindergarten Head is set nationally, but practice shows that they often "step in" when staff shortages occur (MŠMT 2019a).

In the case of full-time **Teachers’ Assistants**, the management decides on the number of hours of indirect pedagogical work depending on the specific work content of the specialist. Out of 40 working hours, up to 20 hours can be devoted to indirect pedagogical work (MŠMT 2019a).

The child-free working hours of a full-time employee in other ECEC settings (care facilities for children under 3, Children's Groups) are not determined by law (only the total 40-hour working week). The institution owner determines the work content of each worker. They can therefore also determine some working hours for indirect pedagogical work.

7.5 Current staffing issues

Since 2016, there has been a widespread **shortage of staff** in kindergartens in the Czech Republic, especially of Teachers' Assistants. This is related to the introduction of support measures for children with special needs (MŠMT 2016, resp. 2020b, 2022b), which has enabled a significant increase in the number of assistant co-workers in kindergartens and schools. In all regions there is currently a significant shortage of qualified co-workers, but in recent years also of core pedagogues, because the number of children and kindergarten classes is increasing every year.

A high proportion of **older professionals** has for many years also been a distinct feature of the ECEC system; at the same time, the number of professionals in the two lower age groups increased slightly recently:

Table 11
Czech Republic: Age structure of core pedagogues in kindergartens, in %

Age	Distribution
Up to 20 years	1.7
21–30 years	22.3
31–40 years	18.4
41–50 years	26.3
51–60 years	25.4
61–70 years	5.6
71–80 years	0.3

Source: CSI 2022.

Staff recruitment strategies in recent years have included **significant pay increases** (across the board for all pre-primary staff) and the opening of new qualification pathways and lateral entry opportunities: this is especially true for other early education/care providers (Children's Groups and social care facilities for under 3 year-olds).

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

8.1 Education sector – kindergartens and preparatory classes

The current policy reforms are related to the **implementation of the Education Strategy 2030+** and the development of the Czech education system.

- In recent years, efforts have been made to amend the **Act on Pedagogical Personnel** to enable the recruitment of new teachers (especially **lateral entrants**). However, due to a change of government, the law was presented and accepted in 2023 in an amended form and did not include this issue.-The key reform is the introduction of a teacher adaptation period of two years from the time of entry into practice and the introduction of the position of the so-called Accompanying Teacher from January 2024.
- One of the most important policy initiatives of the last five years has been the active effort to **gradually increase teachers' salaries** (including those of Kindergarten Teachers). The current government has set a target of maintaining average teacher salaries at 130% of the average salary in the Czech Republic, despite the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war crisis in Ukraine.

Further, in 2021, the Ministry of Education identified **six areas** where innovation in teacher development is needed, the first three of which are closely related to the initial professional education of pre-primary teachers:

"1. **Building a culture of continuous quality improvement based on a shared vision**. There is a lack of an explicitly articulated common vision of the goal of teacher preparation; mistrust exists between the main actors (universities and other IPE institutions – Ministry of Education) and information about the quality of graduates is missing. The available information shows that Czech graduates clearly lag behind their European counterparts, especially in terms of motivation to learn and critical thinking.

2. **Close links between university faculties and practice**. The proportion of practicum experience in teacher education has increased significantly but is still among the lowest in the European countries studied. However, the quality of practice and its conditions are crucial: professionals are not adequately remunerated for their work, there is insufficient training and support, and practice does not focus on the best professionals. Faculties have a wide network of practice nurseries and kindergartens, but the intensity of collaboration with them and the involvement of trainers with active teaching experience in teacher training are insufficient.

3. **Promoting innovations in teacher education and supporting regulation**. The Ministry of Education's framework "guarantees a minimum standard in teacher education, but significantly limits the scope for innovation." (MŠMT 2021c, 4, 16).

The Ministry of Education therefore included among its goals until 2023, for example, the creation of a **competence profile for university graduates** (published in October 2023[22]), closer cooperation between the faculties with a reduced network of seminar schools, a professional standard and appropriate funding of mentors, etc.

These steps can be seen as positive in terms of the university preparation of teachers. However, the plan does not address the qualification level of professionals in kindergartens, for whom upper secondary education is still the minimum qualification level. On the one hand, this is understandable, as the education system is currently under great strain due to the economic crisis and the influx of refugees. On the other hand, a one-year compulsory kindergarten was introduced in 2017, and the Act on Pedagogical Personnel (MŠMT 2016) requires a Master's level degree for all other teachers providing compulsory education. Therefore, there seems to be still a considerable need for improvement in this point.

8.2 Childcare sector – Children's Groups

An important positive reform is the change in the requirements for Children's Group Caregivers, which is foreseen in the amending law of autumn 2021: Since July 2022, all Children's Group Caregivers must have a training in health care. At the same time, an education professional must be in the group for at least 20 hours per week if a 3-year-old child is present (MPSV 2021a, b). This is undoubtedly a positive measure. On the other hand, the pay conditions in Children's groups are still worse than in kindergartens and the work with young children in these settings does not have to follow the national educational programme applicable to work in kindergartens; also, the requirements for pedagogical quality are lower in Children's Groups than in kindergartens.

[22] For Pre-primary Teachers, a self-assessment tool describing the development of teacher competences in different areas has been developed as a tool for the development of professional competences (Koželuhová, Koželuh, and Podpera 2023).

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Programme PROGRES Q17: Teacher education and the teaching profession in the context of science and research (2017–2021)

Source: Charles University, Faculty of Education 2021 (see *References* for full details)

Aims and procedures: Thematic areas of the research programme were: 1. School theory and the teaching profession (paedeutics), 2. Literacy and education, 3. Pupils, 4. Inclusion, 5. Teacher preparation. Faculty researchers addressed sub-themes within the above topics. The Chair of Preschool and Primary Education dealt, among other things, with the content of professional training for teachers working in kindergartens and primary schools. All Bachelor's degree programmes in pre-primary education established under the new accreditation conditions at universities in the Czech Republic were compared. In response to the ongoing pandemic, the topic of "teacher training as remote learning" was also included in the study.

Selected findings and implications: The result at the implementation level was the development of a new accreditation document for the Bachelor's degree programme in Early Childhood Education, which takes into account the existing tradition and at the same time aims to introduce new models and topical issues into the initial professional education of educators. The research results are professional articles and an English-language monograph that provide insights into the concepts and contents of pre-primary and primary school teacher education.

Project: Early childhood education and care in ECEC settings in the Czech Republic (2019–2022)

Source: [TACR] Technology Agency of the Czech Republic 2022 (see *References* for full details)

Aims and procedures: The project focused on innovative research that will contribute to the development of early childhood research in the Czech pedagogical discourse: It captures the experiences of key actors in different types of childcare facilities for children under 3 years of age using different research tools and analyses them together with current discussions on early care and education in broader sociological, pedagogical and historical contexts.

Selected findings and implications: With the help of the research findings, the topic of early care and education will be implemented in the professional education of education professions both at the level of higher education and at the level of Lifelong Learning at the Faculty of education of Masaryk University. The inclusion of the topic in the curricula of vocational education secondary schools will be actively supported.

Project: A model of teacher education for diversity (2019–2021)

Source: FPE ZČU – Faculty of Education, University of West Bohemia, Pilsen 2022 (see *References* for full details)

Aims and procedures: The main aim of the project was to contribute to the adaptation of teacher education to the new challenges associated with the education and upbringing of multilingual children and to create a model for school education under intercultural conditions, which would then be disseminated among teachers and, above all, used in an appropriate way to adapt IPE programmes for pre-primary and primary education. Since October 2019, a team of Polish researchers from the Faculty of Humanities and Computer Science and their Czech colleagues from the Faculty of education at ZČU have been working on the theoretical background

of education of migrant pupils and conducting surveys among school administrators, teachers and parents of these children in both countries.

Selected findings and implications: The data was then analysed and conclusions and resulting recommendations were formulated for the necessary changes in the support of these pupils and teachers in mainstream schools as well as for changes in the university study programmes for teachers to prepare them for working with migrant pupils. The main outcome is an electronic publication available in English, Polish and Czech. From the perspective of the professional education of educators, the specific recommendations for systematic support of pedagogy students regarding the education of migrant children and the intercultural context of our society are particularly interesting.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

The following aspects can be described as **immediate challenges** with regard to the qualification, recruitment and support of early childhood education staff:

(1) **New career system**: A complex system of qualification and promotion possibilities (so-called qualification order) for pedagogues in the education system (beginners, mentoring staff, experienced pedagogues with supervisory tasks, etc.) shall be developed and implemented during the coming years. In future, advancement in the career system might be linked to further training, better pay and competence development. A provisional career system was completed in 2017, however a new version is now being prepared, which should be integrated into a reform of the faculties of education from 2024.

(2) **Ongoing innovation of the IPE programmes** to include current societal issues to a greater extent: Particularly important are the topics of inclusion; working with heterogeneous groups of children; alternative and innovative approaches in pedagogy; individualisation and differentiation; second/foreign language education in kindergarten; effective cooperation with parents; support for children under 3 years of age; transitions; socio-pedagogical tasks of professionals in cooperation with families, etc. At present, these topics are even less represented in the current vocational school upper secondary programmes and at the tertiary professional schools than is the case in other Western European and Scandinavian countries. University curricula have changed a lot in these areas in recent years, but faculties still have important work in terms of innovation.

(3) **Lack of support staff in kindergartens**: As a rule, two core pedagogues are responsible for a group/class with 24 children (or often with 28 children), whereby their working hours usually overlap for only 2½ hours per day. This leads to an excessive workload and the possibility to adequately support children with special needs might be limited. Since September 2016, additional supplementary staff (Teachers' Assistants) can be employed in all groups that are also attended by children with special needs. It is currently very difficult for both kindergartens and primary schools to find qualified co-workers as there is an acute shortage of them on the labour market[23].

[23] Until the reform of the Education Act (September 2016), the kindergarten management had to apply for the employment of supplementary pedagogical staff every year, which meant an enormous amount of time and personal uncertainty. If support for a child with special needs is recommended by the school

Long-term challenges with regard to the qualification, recruitment and support of early childhood education staff include the following:

(1) **Introducing a higher education qualification requirement for kindergarten core pedagogues**: This measure needs to be linked to further changes (increase in pay, etc.). Compulsory higher education has been planned for a long time (MŠMT 2001), but has not yet been introduced.

(2) **Redefining the qualification profiles for core pedagogues in Children's Groups and social care settings for under 3 year-olds:** The current qualification requirements are too diverse. Most of the routes followed do not specialise in early childhood education and care. The broad spectrum of qualification paths makes it possible to recruit skilled workers from other fields. This solves the problem of recruiting staff, but does not guarantee quality. The challenges therefore include an increase in the level of training and a deeper specialisation in the education and upbringing of young children for people who work as core pedagogues in ECEC settings for children under 3 years of age. This is also the aim of the amendment of the Children's Groups Act (2021), which introduced a new qualification for Caregivers in Children's Groups. However, this, is not linked to initial professional education but only to an examination which, in comparison to the requirements for employees in comparable facilities in other European countries, is to be seen as problematic in terms of quality assurance. A general issue is that these workers seem to do a relatively similar job to the Kindergarten Workers, but often have a much lower education or even no basic pedagogical training.

(3) **Redefining the qualification routes for Teachers' Assistants:** The qualifications of those working in this role are also very diverse and the required qualification level very low. Expert discussions in recent years have underlined the fact that the Teachers' Assistants should be educated and trained at a higher formal level.

Diverse quality in IPE qualification programmes in early childhood education: The difference between the good quality university Bachelor programmes at universities and the high competence level of degree holders and the often questionably shortened qualification programmes offered as a distance learning option by some of the private vocational schools are nowadays assessed as problematic. These differences in qualification routes and the efforts required to complete them contrast negatively with the pay, which is more or less the same for all Kindergarten Teachers, regardless of their qualification route (Wiegerová et al. 2015; Syslová 2016a; Loudová Stralczynská et al. 2022).

An interesting phenomenon is that some graduates of secondary vocational schools who are fully qualified according to the legal provisions nevertheless choose one of the forms of tertiary education. At the same time, some choose to study part-time while working. Some applicants for a Bachelor's degree have even completed both lower levels of education (ISCED 354 and 655) and still decide to continue with a Bachelor's degree (or even a subsequent Master's degree in early childhood education). The inadequacy of secondary education and the demand for a minimum Bachelor's degree is a long-recognised fact, not only in the European Union but also in the Czech Republic (Syslová 2016a).

Professional discourse on these issues has been asking whether the vocational schools should

counselling centre, the management can employ a supplementary teacher on the basis of this recommendation, claim the resources for their remuneration and is no longer dependent on the decision of the regional administration.

focus more on preparing staff for home-based childcare provision with lower qualification requirements and whether Kindergarten Teachers should be educated and trained exclusively through a Bachelor level study programme. Also linked to these issues is the position of the tertiary professional schools and their IPE programmes, since in most cases there is no possibility of permeability when wishing to study for a university degree course.

- **Recruitment of male ECEC staff** (combined with status and pay rise).
- The relatively **resistant attitude in some kindergarten teams regarding inclusive approaches and pro-inclusive measures** is a challenge connected to the political and social developments in the second half of the 20th century. Such a resistant attitude used to be a general trend in the Czech Republic which also impacted the education system. Nowadays, Czech society and teachers appear to be increasingly open towards an inclusive approach. An important goal is therefore to positively influence the attitudes of pedagogues in terms of working towards a child-oriented approach, reflecting on their own attitudes (stereotypes, prejudice) and promoting the individual potential of all children in the best way possible. This can be supported, for example, through continuing professional development for kindergarten teams. Such CPD provision is currently offered in the larger towns by non-governmental organisations and is funded through EU projects in the context of municipal integration strategies.
- The key challenge for the initial professional education of pre-primary and kindergarten professionals is to innovate the content and methods of professional training in such a way that it prepares students to **respect the individuality and personality of the child,** to empathise with the child and find an **open and positive approach**. In the practice of Czech kindergartens, we still very often find approaches that do not as yet correspond to the concept of child-centred early education; traditional methods that were characteristic of the pre-1989 education system persist. This is one of the most important challenges in the transformation and reforms of early childhood education and care and the education system in the Czech Republic in general.

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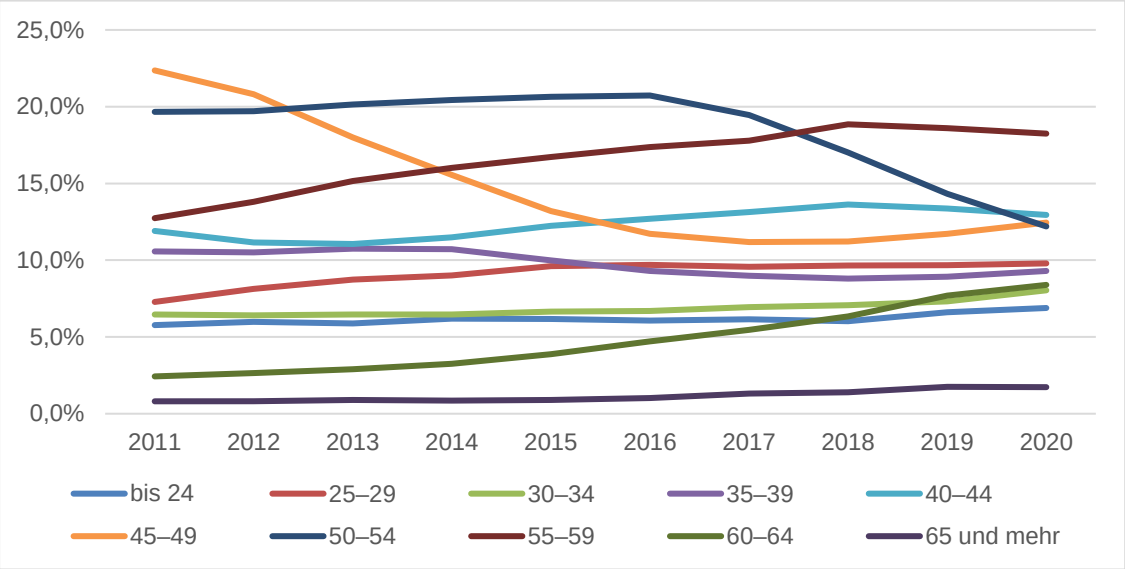
Appendix

Annex 1:

Czech Republic: Age of core professionals (excluding Centre Leaders and deputy Centre Leaders) from 2011 to 2020



Source: CSI, 2022, table sent as response to a data query

Annex 2:

Czech Republic: Curricular structure of the Bachelor study programme in pre-primary education at Charles University, Faculty of Education

Subject areas – structure of the fields of learning	Semester	ECTS	Professional components	Subject-specific didactics	Pedagogical psychology components	Field-based learning
Pedagogy, pre-primary pedagogy and didactics	1/2/3/4	19	X	X	X	
Professional self-reflection	1	2			X	
Psychology	1//32	10	X		X	
Science education	1/2	7	X	X		
Mathematics education	3/4	6	X	X		
Sports education	1/2/3/4	12	X	X		
Music education	1/2/3/4	12	X	X		
Visual arts education	1/2/3/4	12	X	X		
Drama education	3/4	12	X	X		
Specialisation	5	7		X		
Language, communication and literacy	1/2	9	X	X		
Special education	3/4/6	11			X	
Healthcare competence	4	1	X	X		
Diagnostics and counselling	5	7	X		X	
Social sciences	5	3		X		
Digital technologies in pre-primary education	5	3		X		

Subject areas – structure of the fields of learning	Semester	ECTS	Professional components	Subject-specific didactics	Pedagogical psychology components	Field-based learning
Managing and designing the setting-specific education programme	6	4	X			
Field-based learning (practicum)	1/2/3/ 4/5/6	23				X
Optional subjects	6	9	X	X	X	
Seminar for Bachelor thesis	5/6	11				

Source: Author

seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

CZECH REPUBLIC

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note:

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms chosen in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC settings are: **Children's Group** (*dětská skupina*, 6 months–5 years), **nursery** (*zařízení pro péči o děti do 3 let,* 0–2[1]), **kindergarten** (*mateřská škola*, 2/3–5) and **preparatory class** (*přípravná třída,* 5–6/7). Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in the Czech Republic

1832	The first early childhood institutions are established in Prague with an upbringing, educational and care mission. The Czech childcare institutions (so-called *opatrovny*) had an educational mission from the very beginning. In this aspect, these institutions differed from most of the time, because the triad of education, upbringing and care was always present.
1869	The organisational conditions and regulations for the establishment and operation of day-care centres in the Czech lands were established. Until 1872, these settings focused on reading, writing and arithmetic. They were abolished following the ministerial decree of 1872 (see below).
1872	The Ministry of Education distinguishes systematically between educational institutions (*mateřská škola*) for 4 to 6 year-olds and social care institutions (crèches).
1948	Kindergartens are recognised as the first stage of the education system.
1948	The first compulsory curriculum documents for kindergartens are issued. In the 1950s these had the character of a syllabus, describing the contents in detail.
1960	Provision for under 3 year-olds comes under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and kindergartens for 3 to 6 year-olds under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Both kindergartens and crèches are integrated into the unified school system.
1967	A unified curricular framework is issued both for crèches and kindergartens. Only now are specific goals for crèches also defined. This document is obligatory for kindergartens, for crèches it is considered a recommendation and orientation with the aim of continuously implementing the pedagogical approach throughout the early years. In the following curricular documents, the concept of the curriculum was taken up again in the form of a syllabus which explained the work with children in crèches and kindergartens in great detail.
Post-1989	– The compulsory framework is no longer applicable; kindergartens start developing their own curricular approaches, ones that respect humanist and democratic values and principles. Both classical concepts (Montessori, Waldorf) and contemporary programmes (Step by Step; health-promoting kindergartens, forest kindergartens) find their way into kindergartens. – Massive cuts lead to the closing of almost all crèches and the dismantling or merging of many kindergartens.
2001	– A National Curriculum is issued (the so-called White Book) which defines reforms for all stages of the education system, including kindergartens.

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6 (as usually in the Czech Republic): **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In the Czech Republic, school entry may in justified and professionally assessed cases be deferred to 7 years of age.

	– A new national curricular framework for kindergartens is published (2001 (pilot), 2004, 2016, 2017, 2021). – Preparatory classes were originally set up for children from socially disadvantaged families at primary schools. Currently, they are intended for children whose admission to preparatory classes will balance their development. Priority is given to children who have been deferred from school and to children who will reach the age of 5 by the end of August of the current year.
2007	All state-maintained kindergartens are required to develop their own 'educational plan' in alignment with the national curricular framework.
2014	Multi-age Children's Groups (*dětská skupina*) are established for 1 to under 7 year-olds under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (currently for children from 6 months)
2015	Preparatory classes are opened up for all children with special support needs.
2016	Establishment of so-called "mini crèches" (*mikrojesle*) for children from 6 months to 4 years under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.
2017	Since September 2017, kindergarten enrolment is obligatory for all children who turn 5 at the end of August for four hours per day. A further option is individual teaching, mostly in the child's home.
2018	Children from the age of 3 have a legal entitlement to a place in a municipal kindergarten.
2022	Compulsory language support in kindergartens for children with a non-Czech nationality in the obligatory kindergarten year (amendment of the Education Act, amendment of the education framework programme for pre-primary education). A more child-centred approach now focuses to better meet the interests and needs of the children.
2023	– Fundamental innovation of the curricular framework for early childhood education towards a more open and child-centred pedagogy that protects the child from too much pressure in preparing for school; focus on promoting pre-literacy activities and active learning and exploration. – Amendment of the law on pedagogical staff.

Sources: Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010; Loudová Stralczynská 2018; Opravilová und Uhlířová 2021; Eurydice 2023

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

The system of early childhood education and care in the Czech Republic is not a unitary system. Multi-age facilities for children from 6 months to school entry come under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (*Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí*). For childcare facilities exclusively for under 3 year-olds, the Ministry of Industry and Trade (*Ministerstvo průmyslu a obchodu*) is responsible; providers of such settings must comply with the provisions of the Trade Licensing Act (e.g. qualifications and hygiene regulations).

Kindergartens (*mateřské školy*) that admit children aged 2–6 years since September 2016 (Education Act 178/2016), and also preparatory classes for 5 to 7 year-olds, mostly deferred from compulsory schooling, come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (*Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy*). The Ministry of Education is also responsible for the curricular frameworks. Various expert groups (academics, experts and managers from the field) are responsible for developing the content. A completely new curriculum is currently

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in the Czech Republic provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are indicated within the text and in the references section.

being developed within the framework of this dialogue between practice and theory, coordinated by the National Pedagogical Institute.

General objectives and legislative framework

Overarching government goals for early childhood education and care are to reconcile family life and work and to improve women's labour market opportunities through more flexible parental leave arrangements and working time models. These goals were pursued, among others, within the framework of a 2014–2020 government strategy for gender equality. Other important documents are the "Strategy for Education Policy until 2020" and the "Long-term Plan for Education and Development of the Education System in the period 2019 to 2023".

Goals for 2020–2023 include improving the quality of pre-primary education and integration of more and more children, as well as transforming the content of education to a focus on key competencies, teacher support and individual work with children.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports prepares a long-term plan for education and development of the education system in the Czech Republic. This implementation document of the 2030+ strategy will define the tasks and goals for the Czech education system between 2023 and 2027. The material will be submitted to the Czech government for approval and will influence the development of long-term concepts in the regions. Regions could comment on the already prepared document until 15 May 2023, before inter-ministerial and public comments took place during the summer months (information on the website www.edu.cz). In October 2023, the long-term plan was submitted to the government for approval. The 2030+ strategy is a key document for the development of the Czech education system in the decade 2020-2030+ (MŠMT 2020, 2022).

Overarching goals specifically for kindergartens for (2)3 to 5 year-olds are set out in the Education Act (*Zákon o předškolním, základním, středním, vyšším odborném a jiném vzdělávání*, 2004 with amendments 2016, 2020, 2022, 2023), which emphasises the learning process and lifelong learning. The 2016 amendment focused mainly on strengthening inclusion, the 2020 amendment on funding aspect, and the 2022 amendment on language support for 5 year-olds in compulsory kindergarten. Among other things, the amendment anchored the obligation of kindergartens to provide language support for children with a non-Czech nationality under this Act. Previously, the children with special educational needs and insufficient language skills were entitled to support only within the framework of support measures of Decree 24/2016 Coll. However, this legal regulation only applies to 5 year-old children with a non-Czech citizenship and not to all children with insufficient Czech language skills, which is rated poorly by experts and NGOs. Nevertheless, this regulation remains in place for the time being.

The focus of the new Children's Groups established in 2014 for children aged 6 months up to school entry is mainly on identifying children's needs, developing age-appropriate skills and hygiene education. Since November 2014, the Children's Groups Act (*Zákon o poskytování služby péče o dítě v dětské skupině a o změně souvisejících zákonů*, 2014), the Decree No 350/2021 Coll., on the implementation of certain provisions of the Act on the provision of childcare services in a children's group and the Decree No. 410/2005 Coll., on hygiene requirements for premises and operations of establishments and services for the upbringing and education of children and adolescents – for groups of more than 12 children have been the legal basis.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Children from 3 years are entitled to a place in a municipal kindergarten.

Since September 2017, attendance at a kindergarten for children who will be 5 years old by September has been compulsory; for children who have been deferred from school attendance, attendance is compulsory for two years. Participation in educational activities in the morning for four hours per day (20 hours per week in total) is compulsory.

Primary school starts at the age of 6 (cut-off date is 31 August).

Main types of provision

Childcare sector

Multi-age **Children's Groups** (*dětská skupina)* have existed since November 2014 for children between 6 months and school entry. However, children from the age of 5 attend these only in exceptional cases. If a child is 5 years old by 31 August, they may continue to attend a Children's Group, but must also be officially enrolled in a kindergarten for "individual preschool education" and come at least every three months for a so-called methodical consultation in which the child's development is assessed. The Children's Groups are run by employers or non-profit providers and are the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. These settings must offer at least six hours of care per day, and parents can decide for themselves on the amount of care. The organisation is usually agreed with the parents.

In total, there were more than 1,400 children's groups with almost 20,000 places at the end of 2022. However, no statistics are available on the use of these places (MPSV 2023).

Nurseries for under 3 year-olds (*zařízení pro péči o děti do 3 let)* are mostly operated by private individuals according to the Trade Regulation Act; however, there are also some public institutions. Registration is carried out by the trade offices in the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

Children's Groups have expanded greatly in recent years, offering care that is finally affordable also for middle-income families. Private commercial settings are usually the last choice for parents who are unable to care for their children. Such facilities, which are subject to trade law, exist only in large cities, they are very expensive and pedagogical processes are not controlled. Especially in big cities, individual care is an option for wealthy families during the summer holidays when kindergartens are closed (e.g. in August).

Also, since 2016, so-called **mini-nurseries** (*mikrojesle*) for children aged 6 months to 4 years have been administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, in which a maximum of four children are cared for.

Education sector

Kindergartens (*mateřské školy*) for 2 to under 6 year-olds are mostly run by the municipalities, but legally they are part of the school education system. As a rule, primary school begins when a child has turned 6 by the end of August. Children who turn 6 until after that date continue to go to kindergarten, which explains the relatively high number of 6 year-olds in kindergartens. For children over 3 years of age, municipalities have a duty to provide places. Although kindergartens are part of the school system, the annual opening hours are designed in such a way that parents can be sure that their children will be looked after during the holidays. Nevertheless, in July or August, operating hours are often reduced or the setting may close. In this case, children

can be admitted to other kindergartens; however, provision of alternative forms of care is usually only available in larger cities. There are full-day kindergartens with opening hours to 12 hours a day, with some groups opening only in the mornings. In the afternoon children will be grouped so that fewer staff is required. In some settings children can stay overnight. The children are organised into same-age or mixed-age groups. Educational activities during the final compulsory year comprise four hours daily and start between 8:00 and 9:00; in addition, two hours are set aside for outdoor activities.

The compulsory year before starting school can be spent either in a kindergarten or in a preparatory class. All these institutions must adhere to the framework plan for pre-school education.

Preparatory classes (*přípravné třídy*) in primary schools are attended by 6 year-old children who are deferred from school attendance and also by some 5 year-olds. In 2022/23 there were 418 schools with 507 preparatory classes attended by 6,463 children (STATIS 2023, Tab. B 2.1.1). In 2021/2022, 210 children were enrolled in 34 preparatory classes located in special needs schools (Czech Statistical Office 2022, 657).

In addition to church kindergartens, there are also Waldorf, forest kindergartens, Montessori, Step by Step and more rarely Dalton, Reggio, Parentes, facilities. Almost all alternative kindergartens have their own associations controlling quality and all can be registered in the register of schools and school institutions and then provide pre-school education. They are subject to the same regulations as kindergartens.

In 2022/23, there were 5,374 kindergartens in the Czech Republic and 112 special kindergartens attended by 3,018 children (STATIS 2023, Tab. B 1.1.2).

Provider structures

Providers of the multi-age **Children's Groups** (*dětské skupiny*), which have been approved since the end of 2014, can be employers (private, public and state companies and organisations) or non-profit providers (municipalities, regional authorities, church or philanthropic associations).

Most **kindergartens** for 2 to under 6 year-olds are publicly funded institutions run by the Ministry of Education and operated by municipalities and school authorities. Church-affiliated and private institutions are not very common. In 2022/23, they accounted for only 9.2% (0.9% church, 8.3% private) of all kindergartens and were attended by only 4.6% of the age group (see *Table 1*).

Table 1

Czech Republic: Number of kindergartens and distribution of enrolment rates by provider, 2022/23

Provider	Number of kindergartens	Share of kindergartens, in %*	Number of children	Share of children, in %*
Public/state	7	0.1	167	0.05
Public/municipal	4,785	89.4	349,402	94.6
Private	447	8.3	14,782	4.0
Church-affiliated	84	1.6	2,717	0.7
Regional	1	0.02	36	0.01
Other	50	0.9	2,101	0.6
Total	**5,374**		**369,205**	

Source: STATIS 2023, Table B 1.1.2, *own calculations

In 2022/23, 369,205 children (including 32,714 children under 3 years of age in 2021/22, Czech Statistical Office 2022, 657) attended 5,374 kindergartens (including 498 church or private non-profit); only 20 of the 112 special needs kindergartens (2022/23) were private (STATIS 2023, Tab. B 1.1.2).

Participation rates in regulated provision

There are no data available for the participation rates of children in settings outside the education system.

Traditionally, children under 2 years of age were rarely cared for in institutional settings. In the last 20 years, however, the proportion of 2 year-olds **in kindergartens** rose to about 40% of the age group. However, due to preferential admission of older children, it has now dropped to about one third of the age group; this can partly be compensated by places in **Children's Groups**. In 2022/23, of all children (360,205) in kindergartens, most were 5 year-olds (30.23%), followed by 4 year-olds (28.99%) and 3 year-olds (26.10%). 8.7% were children under 3 years, 5.99% were 6 years and older. Except for the proportion of under-3s, which has been steadily decreasing for about five years (from 12.3% in 2016/17 to 8.7% in 2022/23), the ratios are relatively stable (STATIS 2023, Tab. B 1.4.1, own calculations).

Table 2

Czech Republic: Children in kindergartens according to age, 2022/23

Age of children	Number of children	Share of children in Kindergartens
Under 2 years	214	0.06%
2 to 3 year-olds	10,809	8.64%
3 to 4 year-olds	96,361	26.10%
4 to 5 year-olds	107,031	28.99%
5 to 6 year-olds	111,603	30.23%
6 year-olds and older	22,102	5.99%
3 to 6 year-olds	337,097	91.27%
0 years to school entry	**360,205**	**100.00%**

Quelle. STATIS 2023, Tab. B 1.4.1

In 2022/23, 6,463 children attended a preparatory class (5 year-olds: 1,695; 6-year-olds: 4,718; 7 year-olds: 50) (STATIS 2023, Tab. B 2.3.1).

Financing and costs for parents

According to OECD data, total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 0.48% of GDP in 2019 (OECD 2023).

Multi-age Children's Groups are currently partly funded by the state, and newly established ones can also benefit from grant programmes from the European Social Fund. Since 2022, funding conditions have changed. In particular, it is stipulated that from 2023, parental contributions for children under 3 years of age may not exceed CZK 4,720 (approx. € 200[3]) per month; the contribution must always be lower than the state contribution for this childcare place (MPSV

[3] Conversion rate 25 April 2023

2023). Thus, the majority of the Children's Groups are used by younger children, for whom there are no other options due to their age and the lack of kindergarten places.

Public kindergartens/ Preparatory classes, which are registered in the so-called school register (*Rejstřík škol a školských zařízení*) and meet all legislatively established requirements (spatial, hygienic, staffing, etc.), receive funds from the state and municipalities and can also generate their own funds.

The financing of kindergartens changed in 2020 (Education Act 2020). The so-called "standardised cost-based financing" is now in effect, which re-centralises decision-making powers to the Ministry of Education. Since 2020 it has been implemented in two steps: (1) the Ministry of Education uses most of the state funds for direct education expenditures (e.g., salaries of professionals, learning materials, continuing education, quality development), which are determined for each individual institution; (2) the municipalities in turn distribute these funds in regional per capita amounts. In this new system, the per-capita amount per child is converted into a per-capita amount per specialist member of staff, which is better suited to fund the actual extent of "teaching". In practice, this means that in kindergartens the amount of funding is based on the number of pedagogical specialists and their salary groupings and no longer on the size of the institution. Each facility also receives funding for the salaries of "non-teaching" staff. The operating costs are borne by the respective institution.

In the public settings, the kindergarten heads set the monthly parental fees, which are mostly regulated by ordinances. They do not exceed 50% of the average non-investment monthly expenditure per child (salaries, insurances, materials, etc. excluded). Parental fees for a kindergarten place were highest in Prague in 2018/19 (CZK 712, €30), and lowest in the Vysočina area (CZK 244, €10). Private kindergartens are far more expensive than public ones (see *Table 3*). Often, smaller municipalities try to keep (or recruit) children into their settings by charging low fees. If an ECEC setting is located more than four kilometres from the child's home, the municipality must arrange transportation, but this is not free of charge. In 2023, tax relief of a maximum of CZK 17,300 (€692) could also be claimed for attendance at a kindergarten.

For children aged 5 and over or children in preparatory classes, attendance is free of charge, although this only applies to the four hours of educational activities.

Table 3

Czech Republic: Estimated average parental fees in kindergartens by provider, 2021/22

Kindergarten provider	Monthly fees	
	CZK	€
Public, state-maintained (established by the Regions)	217	9.23
Public, municipal (established by the muncipalities)	387	16.46
Private not-for-profit kindergartens	6,259	266.25
Church-affiliated kindergartens	750	31.90
Average overall	938	39.90

Source: Eurydice 2023, 3.1 (Data provided by the Czech Schools Inspectorate)

In private kindergartens, direct educational expenses (e.g., running operating costs, development programmes) are covered by the state budget through per capita funding. If private institutions are registered in the school register and meet other administrative criteria, they can receive a basic subsidy (60%). If they meet other conditions (they have already been subsidised for one year, the last evaluation was at least average, they invest all profits in education, etc.), they can apply for extended subsidies.

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 16% of net household income on childcare costs[4] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

Regulations on staff to child ratios and group size vary according to the kind of institution.

Multi-age **Children's Groups** (*dětské skupiny*): Since the amendment of the Children's Group Act 2021 (MPSV 2021), children aged between 6 and 12 months can also be included. At least one professional for a maximum of six children, at least two professionals for seven to 12 children and at least three professionals for 13 to 24 children. There is a maximum of four children under the age of 4 in a group.

In **nurseries** for under 3 year-olds (*zařízení pro péči o děti do 3 let*), neither the group size nor the staffing ratio is prescribed.

Kindergartens (*mateřské školy*): The maximum number of children per group is 24. The maximum number may be exceeded by four children in exceptional cases. Single-group kindergartens must be attended by at least 13 children (MŠMT 2021a).

Each day, both professionals must be present for at least 2.5 hours, with a maximum of 12 children per professional, otherwise one professional is responsible for a maximum of 24 (in exceptional cases 28) children. For outdoor activities, one qualified staff member may only be responsible for 20 children. If children under 3 years of age or children with disabilities are present, the number can be reduced and a pedagogical assistant can be employed. Generally, the number in a group is reduced by two children for each child under 3, however, to no less than 19 children. As a rule, there may not be more than five children with special needs in a group (MŠMT 2021b).

In 2021/22, the average number of children per group was 21.5, and the average staffing ratio 1:10.7 (Eurydice 2023, 4.3).

Curricular framework

Childcare sector

Neither multi-age **children's groups** nor **nurseries** for under 3 year-olds have an official curricular framework. However, since October 2021, the **children's groups** are required to comply with certain quality standards (child-appropriate care, staffing, operational procedures) which are laid down in Decree 350/2021 (MPSV 2021). According to the Children's Groups Act, amended in 2021, some basic areas are mentioned, e.g., the development of cognitive and linguistic skills; movement; artistic and cultural competences; health and safety. Providers are required to develop an age-appropriate programme.

Education sector (ISCED 02)

Kindergartens are obliged to follow the national curricular framework (*Rámcový vzdělávací program pro předškolní vzdělávání,* 2004, 2021), which is currently managed by the National Pedagogical Institute. Based on this framework, kindergartens draw up their own school education programme. Professionals in the groups work out a class programme that is continuously developed and adapted to the situation and the children during the year. Some curricula documents are also required by the state and are evaluated by the Czech school inspectorate.

[4] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

In addition to the description of the main objectives and methods, the framework education programme also contains five content areas and describes tasks of the professionals and provisions for evaluation procedures. Key competences are stated as: Learning and problem-solving competences; communication and social/personal competences; civic competences. In terms of content, five learning areas are mentioned: (1) biological (the child and their body); (2) psychological (language, cognitive abilities, imagination and fantasy, thinking and self-concept, emotions and temperament); (3) interpersonal (the child and others); (4) socio-cultural (the child and society); (5) ecological (the child and the world/environment).

Currently (2023), a new amendment to the supplementary guidance is being prepared. The aim is to encourage pedagogues and kindergartens to follow a child-centred pedagogy more closely and to use methods that activate the children and enable them to learn actively, discover the world and build independence and autonomy in the context of democratic and humanistic values. The amended framework education programme is scheduled to be published in 2024.

Digital education

Digital literacy is not a designated learning area in the national kindergarten curriculum, although the use of information and communication technologies is included in the skills related to communication and the targeted promotion of the development of digital and information skills ("literacy") is also part of the newly elaborated programme (see above). A revision of the concept of digital education in the existing curricular framework is currently under preparation. In particular, the development of critical thinking, problem solving, data handling, and security will be emphasised (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019b).

Monitoring – evaluation

Children´s Groups have been obliged since October 2021 to comply with certain quality standards (child-appropriate care, staffing, operational procedures), which are laid down in Decree 350/2021 (MPSV 2021), but they are not inspected by the Czech School Inspectorate.

Evaluations of kindergartens are generally the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, regional local authorities and the Czech School Inspectorate.

Child-related assessment

In kindergartens, when assessing children, no particular emphasis should be placed on comparing children's performance. The traditional notion of "school readiness" is increasingly being questioned in the professional community and preference is being given to a new concept based on mutual dialogue between kindergarten and primary school (EDUin 2022).

Professionals are required to continuously observe and assess children in order to better support their individual development and to identify potential problems at an early stage. Each professional can use their own system of assessment. According to data from the Czech Schools Inspectorate, professionals mostly (84%) assess children individually, keep portfolios (70,2%) or so-called progress cards (19,8%). Written reports on individual children, in which the progress of educational activities is recorded, are confidential; however, observations about children are shared with parents on a regular basis (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019a, 119; CSI 2022, 49).

Kindergartens are not authorised to assess a child's "readiness for school." This is reserved for school counselling centres, at the request of parents when a child is to be deferred from school attendance or enrolled earlier.

There are no specific guidelines or materials for easing the transition to primary school; at present, the trend is moving away from "schoolification". Particularly where kindergartens and primary schools form a unit, this is not a prominent topic (EDUin 2022).

Centre-level internal assessment

Multi-age **Children's Groups** are not obliged to conduct internal evaluations apart of the development according to the quality standards.

In **kindergartens**, too, internal assessments do not follow a predetermined form and are not regulated by law. Nevertheless, kindergartens are expected to carry out the self-evaluations specified in the framework programme according to an individually developed evaluation system, which is then also evaluated by the school inspectorate. They usually form the basis for the annual report that the kindergarten head must prepare. Important points are e.g., staff satisfaction, cooperation with the centre head and with parents, compliance with regulations, the quality of pedagogical work and working conditions. Freely chosen methods include questionnaires, checklists and interviews. The National Pedagogical Institute also organises training courses on this topic.

External evaluation

Multi-age **Children's Groups** are inspected by the National Labour Inspectorate and regional supervisory boards in terms of compliance with the conditions and obligations laid down by law. The regional health authority is responsible for the monitoring of hygiene requirements for facilities, catering and overall management. Children's Groups can voluntarily apply for a so-called quality seal audit. Specific quality standards were introduced in the amended Children's Groups Act (2021).

At the national level, the Czech Schools Inspectorate (*Česká školní inspekce, CSI*) is responsible for the external evaluation of **kindergartens** of all provider types through 14 regional school inspectorates. The inspections are based on two key documents: (1) the basic task plan of the CSI and (2) the evaluation criteria, which are set for one school year at a time. Both documents are approved by the Ministry of Education. The activities of the kindergartens are evaluated; the conditions, processes and outcomes according to the respective education plans; the content of these plans and their compliance with the national curricular framework; the compliance with legal regulations and finances; the equipment; and personal assessments. The evaluations result in inspection and thematic reports that list the strengths and weaknesses of an institution as well as set deadlines for possible improvements. In the case of evaluations of private institutions, the report may also have an impact on state subsidies. The reports are published on the CSI homepage.

Inspection visits take place at least once every six years, lasting two to five days – depending on whether the inspection only relates to partial areas or whether it is a total inspection. In addition to the data from the documentation carried out by the kindergarten, they include observations, interviews with the centre head, children and parents, the inspection of the buildings and the data from the internal assessments (CSI 2021).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

The National Plan for the Promotion of Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2015-2020 contains the main goals, objectives and principles for putting the policy of inclusion into practice (EASNIE 2021). In the Education Act (§ 16), the term "children with special educational needs" is used as a collective term for different groups of children with disabilities and disadvantages; further categorisation is intentionally avoided, as the focus is on the individual support of a child. The special educational needs of children are divided into five levels. Depending on the level and the type of disadvantage, the child has a right to certain support measures. Whenever possible, children with special education needs should attend mainstream settings, where they also receive the additional educational and psychological support.

In addition, there are special kindergartens (*speciální mateřské školy*) or special classes in regular kindergartens specifically for children with special education needs who cannot be adequately supported in inclusive kindergarten groups. Some remedial kindergartens also have inclusive classes, which are attended jointly by children with and without special education needs and open up opportunities for transition and further integration into a mainstream setting. In 2022/23, there were 112 kindergartens exclusively for children with special educational needs (STATIS 2023, Tab. B 1.1.2), with groups of six to 14 children. Preparatory classes also include children with disabilities, where they can be better prepared for the transition to elementary school.

In 2022, 18,925 children with special educational needs attended kindergarten (STATIS 2023, Tab. B 1.17.1), 17,853 of whom attended a municipal kindergarten (ibid. Tab. B 1.17.2). Significantly more children with disabilities attended special groups (6,779) than regular groups (6,252) (ibid. Tab B 1.2.1).

The curricular framework programme also applies to children with disabilities. Many kindergartens have integrated inclusive measures in their respective educational programmes. In recent years, educational professionals who support the institutions in the inclusive process have been offered further training from various (non-governmental) organisations. The number of so-called Pedagogical Assistants has increased significantly since 2016 – as a result of the new School Act and Ordinance on the Education of Children with Special Educational Needs 27/2016 Coll.

The state offers kindergartens a range of options for children in need of support: for example, a support plan or an individual education plan can be drawn up for the child; the kindergarten management can employ an additional pedagogical specialist (assistant); the group size is reduced to a maximum of 19 children per group or the children receive special support in certain developmental and educational areas, etc.

Since 2006, the non-governmental organisation "People in Need" has opened 14 "pre-school clubs" throughout the country. These are mainly aimed at children between 3 and 6 years of age from disadvantaged areas and children who do not attend kindergarten. The aim is to support them in attending a regular institution and to facilitate the transition to primary school (People in Need n.d.).

Children with a migration background – Children from Roma communities

Currently, there are 14 officially recognised ethnic minorities in the Czech Republic – including persons from Slovakia, Ukraine or Poland, as well as the Roma population. Recognised ethnic minorities have the right by law to be taught in their language and receive support to preserve

their culture. If more than eight children of an ethnic minority attend a kindergarten, the municipality or even the Ministry of Education ensures that they can also be taught in special language groups. Kindergartens attended only by ethnic minority children must consist of at least 12 children. Currently (2022/23), there are 24 kindergartens for the Polish minority only, attended by 845 children.

In the last census in 2011, 5,135 people reported being Roma. The Council of Europe, on the other hand, estimates that there are approximately 250,000 Roma (about 2% of the population) living in the Czech Republic (European Commission 2021).

However, there are not enough reliable data or research studies on Roma throughout the country. Back in 2015, the "Roma Strategy 2020" (European Commission 2015) emphasised the importance of Roma inclusion in social life, which as a bilateral process should aim to preserve their cultural and linguistic identity. Above all, the attendance rate of Roma children at ECEC settings should be improved in order to create good conditions for aligning the educational level of Roma with that of the population as a whole. The aim is to prevent Roma children from being segregated or excluded. To this end, support should also be offered to parents. In order to provide incentives to attend ECEC settings, it was suggested that fees be reduced or waived, that space capacities be increased and that teachers be specially trained in the integration of Roma children.

The new "Roma Integration Strategy 2021-2030" of the Office of the Government Council for Roma Minority Affairs and other experts is now intended to create a framework for action to reinforce positive changes achieved under the 2020 strategy with regard to Roma integration and to counteract negative trends (Vláda České Republiky 2021).

After February 2022, the Ministry of Education created a system to support the integration of Ukrainian refugees into the Czech education system. A recent letter from the Minister of Education to schools included material on the “Education of Ukrainian Children in the Czech Republic”, which focuses on the specific procedures for integrating children and pupils into the community and the rules for their admission to schools. Also included is useful advice on dealing with language barriers and educating pupils of non-Czech origin, as well as important contacts (MŠMT 2023a).

In 2022, there was also a general call to all kindergartens and schools to help Ukrainian children to settle in and to support their socialisation (3–15 years old), to support the development of their language skills, especially their ability to speak in Czech, to prepare the children for entry into Czech schools, and to support the mental well-being and mental health of the children (MŠMT 2023b).

At the end of 2021, 6.3% of the population were of non-Czech origin, 2.1% were from other EU countries (more than half of them (51.6%) had a Slovak citizenship), and 4.1% were from non-EU countries, mainly from Ukraine (45.1%) (Czech Statistical Office 2022, 138, 156 and own calculations).

In 2022/23, out of 369,205 children in kindergartens, 94.7% had a Czech citizenship, 0.6% (2,181) were from Slovakia, 0.4% (1,452) were from other EU27- countries, 3.2% (11,988) from other European states, and 1.1% (3,946) were from other countries (STATIS 2023, Tab. B 1.5.1, own calculations).

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Maternity leave (*mateřská dovolená*) is 28 weeks: six to eight weeks before birth and 20 to 22 weeks afterwards. These periods are remunerated at 70% of daily earnings, up to a maximum of CZK 47,700 (€2,00.92) per month, provided the mother has paid into a health insurance scheme for at least 270 days during the last two years. From the seventh week after the birth, the father can also take this leave for at least seven days. During Maternity leave, mothers (or fathers) can also continue to work – but not in the job from which they are taking Maternity leave.

Fathers who are officially registered as the father of the child are entitled to 14 calendar days of **Paternity leave**, which is paid at 70% of daily earnings, up to a maximum of CZK 22,260 (€933,76) for seven days. These days can be taken for six weeks at a stretch after the birth of the child.

Both parents can take **Parental leave** (*rodičovská dovolená*). Regardless of whether Parental leave is taken or whether the parents work full-time or part-time, the parent caring for the child receives parental allowance: up to the child's fourth birthday, a total of CZK 300,000 (€12,584.42), usually in monthly payments (new from 1/2024: CZK 350,000 and only up to the child's 3rd birthday). Parents on leave can work without limitation. For children under 2 years of age, publicly funded childcare may be used for a maximum of 92 hours per month.

In 2021, 43% of fathers took Paternity leave. It is still very rare (currently just under 2% – no recent data) for men to claim the parental leave allowance. Statistical data on the length of parental leave claimed do not exist, but it can be assumed that most return to work on the child's third birthday so that they do not lose their job.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in the Czech Republic

*Country expert assessment by **Barbora Loudová Stralczynská***

Translating the inclusion agenda into practice

In 2016, new regulations were issued for all schools and school institutions (i.e. also kindergartens). Through current legislative conditions individual support and inclusion in schools could be strengthened. However, a persistent problem is the lack of qualified pedagogical assistants who are appropriately trained to support children with special educational needs. The differentiation of training opportunities at secondary and higher education level according to the work position and content and the creation of a new training system for pedagogical assistants is a challenge for the further development of early childhood education and care in the Czech Republic.

The Ministry of Education recently prepared new legislation that will limit the number of assistants to a certain extent. This proposal has been criticised, especially by institutions and schools attended by many children with special educational needs, that employ many assistants in their groups (classes).

Inclusion is always a controversial and prejudice-laden topic in the general public. However, the experiences of the war in Ukraine and the influx of refugees have positively influenced the general social discourse[6].

[5] The brief summary in this section is based on the country note for the Czech Republic by Jirina Kocourková in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

[6] Czech society in 2022 was clearly united in its efforts to help refugees on many levels. The experience of the Soviet occupation in 1968 is still a strong historical moment, updated in the context of the war in Ukraine.

As a result of the migration wave (2022), half a million Ukrainian refugees arrived in the Czech Republic, a third of whom are children. The integration of Ukrainian children into the education and care system is a major challenge for the education and social sector. The Czech Republic has created special legislation to enable children from Ukraine to benefit from adaptation groups in various forms and to be integrated into early childhood education. Statistical data show that in June 2022, 33% of Ukrainian children were participating in pre-school education in kindergartens, and by the end of 2022 this figure had risen to 65% (PAQ 2023). Thus, the ECEC system has succeeded to a certain extent in caring for Ukrainian children, although the system is struggling with a shortage of places in childcare facilities, especially in larger cities. Many kindergartens and schools have enrolled Ukrainian children beyond their normal maximum capacity. Many women from Ukraine have also been integrated into the education system, working as assistants for Ukrainian children or taking on non-educational tasks in schools. The Ministry of Education provides financial resources for this purpose.

Expansion of places in kindergartens (or other appropriate forms of provision) for 2 and 3 year-olds

The ECEC system has experienced a number of positive developments in recent years. Although many parents take advantage of the 2-year parental leave and the accompanying parental allowances, there is still a lack of financially affordable childcare places for children under 3 years of age. In recent years, there has also been an increasing lack of kindergarten places for 3 year-olds as well, even though there is a legal entitlement to a kindergarten place for children from the age of 2 and municipalities are obliged to provide such places. Therefore, the Czech Republic is a kind of paradox in this respect. Although parents have a legal entitlement, the state is unable to ensure its fulfilment, but at the same time it does not offer an adequate alternative with the same level of quality and similar financial burden for families.

According to the demographic scenarios, the number of children will decrease in the next few years, so the shortage of kindergarten places might not be as pronounced in the future. However, if one takes into account the development of migration and the wave of refugees within Europe, the expected decline in the number of children in the future cannot be relied upon.

A systemic solution for ECEC of children up to 6 years of age within the framework of social, family, economic and educational policy is still a challenge, although the care situation for children under 3 years of age has improved greatly in recent years. However, it is not only a question of quantitative, but also qualitative expansion and ensuring quality and continuity in the educational careers of children. In large cities, the focus is no longer on the number of places, but rather on the cost for families and the quality of educational processes.

However, with regard to the recommendations of the Council of Europe to promote the quality of childcare, the Czech ECEC system for children under 6 years faces a number of challenges. Current childcare in Children's Groups and childcare facilities for children under 3 years of age is usually not available to children from socially disadvantaged families for financial reasons. In most regions of the Czech Republic, there is no low-threshold support for these children that would enable them to achieve equal opportunities in education. The financial demands of childcare in institutions other than kindergartens are also difficult for single parents to cope with. This hinders their return to the labour market and their ability to overcome social problems. The guarantee of generally available and accessible care for children under the age of 3 therefore still needs to be developed.

Introduction of compulsory attendance for the final kindergarten year and supporting transition processes

Since 2017, all children are required to attend kindergarten for at least one year (compulsory pre-primary education). Home-based education remains an option, but parents must apply for approval and agree to send their child to regular tests at a prescribed kindergarten during the compulsory year. It was assumed that this compulsory year would help to increase the attendance of children from socially disadvantaged families. As statistics show, these expectations have not been fulfilled. The overall share of kindergarten attendance in the population of 5 year-olds has actually been declining since 2018. Even though pedagogical practice has become accustomed to compulsory pre-primary education, some doubts remain about its effectiveness. The compulsory pre-school year was supposed to ease the transition from kindergarten to the first grade of primary school. Transition *i*n particular is a very topical issue in the current public debate. The compulsory pre-school year has not proven to be a very effective measure. At present, the need to relax the requirements for pupils in the first grade and to intensify cooperation between kindergarten and primary school is in focus. The Czech Republic is at the top of the EU countries in terms of the number of deferrals from school. The creation of systemic conditions for a successful start to school is one of the central themes of current education policy.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the population in the Czech Republic totalled 10,516,707. From 2000 to 2005, a slight decline could be observed; between 2005 and 2020, the population figures increased (2000: 10,278,098; 2005: 10,198,855; 2010: 10,462,088; 2015: 10,538,275; 2020: 10,693,939). After a drop in 2021, they are rising again (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13) (Eurostat 2023d). At 1.83, the Czech Republic had the second highest rate in the EU27 (Eurostat 2023d)[7].

[7] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Children under 6 years of age

Table 4

Czech Republic: Number of children under 6, disaggregated by age, 2022

Age	Number
under 1 year-olds	111,659
1-year-olds	108,020
2-year-olds	110,900
3-year-olds	113,326
4-year-olds	114,193
5-year-olds	113,464
Total 0 to under 6-year-olds	**671,562**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 3.1% of the total population were children under the age of 3, and 6.4% were children under 6 years of age. These shares were well above the EU27 average.

Table 5

Czech Republic: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population from 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Czech Republic/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Czech Republic	2.6	2.8	5.5
	∅ EU15[8]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Czech Republic	2.8	2.6	5.4
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Czech Republic	3.1	3.3	6.4
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Czech Republic	3.1	3.2	6.4
	∅ EU27	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * own calculations; deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, more than three quarters (79,6%) of all households with children under 6 were couple households. Single-parent households accounted for only 4.8% of all households in the Czech Republic, mostly single mothers (4.5%).

Table 7

Czech Republic: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Total households, in %*
All households	1,117,200	
Couple households	889,400	79.6
Other household type	174,400	15.6
Single households, total	53,400	4.8

[8] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Household type	Total households	Total households, in %*
Single households, women	49,800	4.5
Single households, men	3,600	0.3

Source: Eurostat 2023j

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In the Czech Republic, the overall employment rate for men (aged 15-64) was 83.7% in 2022, and for women 70.4% (Eurostat 2023i).

In 2022, 42.5% of women and 95% of men with children under 6 were in employment. Compared with the EU27(2020) countries, the proportion of working fathers were among the highest (average 87.2%), while those of mothers were the lowest (average: 63.6%) (Eurostat 2023d).

Table 7a

Czech Republic: Employment rates of parents with children below age 6 compared with seepro3-countries, 2010 and 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Czech Republic	36.3	93.1
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[9]	Denmark: 82.7	Switzerland: 98.6
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 32.7	Latvia: 74.8
	2022	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Czech Republic	42.5	95.0
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU- countries [10]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023f

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 7b.*

Table 7b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
+Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9

[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[10] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

+++United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	++72.3 ++72.1 (2023)	++79.2 ++79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023f, 2023i

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[11]

In 2022, 13.2% of children under 6 in the Czech Republic were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was below the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 11.8% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 4% of children under 6 and 2% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023g, h).

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[11] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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B1.1.2 *Mateřské školy – školy, třídy, děti, z toho dívky – podle* zřizovatele [Kindergartens – schools, classes, children, of which girls – by founder]

B1.4.1 *Mateřské školy – věková struktura dětí – podle území* [Kindergartens – age structure of children – by territory]

B1.2.1 *Mateřské školy – děti se ZP podle formy integrace, z toho dívky – podle území* [Kindergartens – children with disabilities by form of integration, of which girls – by territory]

B1.5.1 *Mateřské školy – děti podle státního občanství – podle území.* [Kindergartens – children by nationality – by territory].

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B1.17.2 *Mateřské školy – děti se SVP, nadané a děti s přiznaným PO s kódem NFN, z toho dívky – podle zřizovatele* [Kindergartens – children with special needs, gifted and children with a support measure, of which girls – by founder]

B2.1.1 *Přípravné třídy ZŠ – školy, třídy, děti, z toho dívky – podle území* [preparatory classes – schools, classes, children, of which girls – by territory]

B2.3.1 *Přípravné třídy ZŠ – věková struktura dětí – podle území* [preparatory classes – age structure of children – by territory]

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seepro3

Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

DENMARK

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report authors

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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1. ECEC governance in Denmark

Denmark has a unitary system of early childhood education and care for children up to age 6 which includes family day care. ECEC provision at the national level, since June 2019, comes under the responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Education *(Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet).* Traditionally, ECEC services were located within the social welfare system rather than within the education system, but during the last decade this affiliation has been challenged and the responsibility for the area has shifted, depending on government formation.

Currently, the Ministry of Children and Education provides the overall curricular requirements and general regulations. The funding and organisation of ECEC provision as well as details of regulatory practices are the responsibility of the 98 local municipal authorities.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Pedagogues (*pædagoger*) are the core pedagogues in Danish centre-based ECEC provision and account for almost 60%[1] of the staff. The remaining staff are mainly Pedagogue Co-helpers, for which no formal qualification is required. Most of these co-workers are young people between 19 to 25 years with an upper secondary leaving certificate who want to spend a year or two in a workplace before they begin to study. The job is quite popular and it is not unusual to have between 200 to 300 applicants for one Co-helper post, even in small cities and rural areas (EPOS and EVA 2013, 28; EVA 2020). The reasons for this popularity are, among other things, that it is a well-paid and responsible job which offers the opportunity to work with children. Some of the Pedagogue Co-helpers go on to take the Pedagogue education/study route.

Table 1 shows ECEC staff working in direct contact with children in centre-based settings and also categorises the core pedagogues (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at end of this chapter).

Table 1
Denmark: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Pedagogue (Social Educator) *Pædagog*	*Aldersintegrerede institutioner*	Core pedagogue with group responsibility	Broad age range (children and adults) during first	3½ years university college, specialising in Social Education

[1] Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut 2020

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional *Up to 2014:* Social and Child-hood Pedagogy Professional	**Age-integrated centres** 0–5 years[2] *Børnehaver* **Kindergartens** 3–5 years *Vuggestuer* **Nurseries** 0–2 years	Pedagogical leader Centre leader	year of stud-ies, then spe-cialisation focus on 0–5 years	*Award:* Bachelor's de-gree in Social Education ECTS credits: 210 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Pedagogical Assistant/ Education *PAU – pædagogisk assistent uddan-nelse*	See above	Qualified co-worker	Broad-based pedagogical approach 0 to 100 years in-cluding special education, el-der care and family day care	2 years post-secondary vocational education[3] *Award:* Certificate as Pedagogical Assistant ECTS credits: n/a[4] EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 3
Pedagogue Co-helper *Pædagog-medhjælper*	See above	Non-qualified co-worker	n/a	n/a

Box 1

SEEPRO Profile Categories for ECEC Core Professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neu-man 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

[2] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children en-rolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6 (as in Denmark): **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds.

[3] Students under 25 years of age study for 2 years plus 6 weeks. Students above 25 with two years of rel-evant work experience study for 42 weeks.

[4] n/a = not applicable

2.2 Centre leader

In Danish ECEC, leaders operate at different levels, depending on local decisions in each municipality / by the centre owner. In general, Pedagogical Leaders have the day-to-day responsibility for the running of a local institutional setting, but in addition, some municipalities / owners operate with Centre Directors responsible for a group of more ECEC settings located in the same geographical area. All leaders are qualified Pedagogues with substantial experience. Further qualification is not a national/general requirement, but an advantage in terms of acquiring and succeeding in the positions. All formal management training takes place as continuing professional development (CPD). Most leaders are encouraged to engage in a theoretical management education after employment if they do not already hold a CPD qualification, e.g. Diploma study programmes in leadership or the equivalent. The understanding of leadership in Danish ECEC is predominantly collective, based on dialogue and with a flat leadership structure. The main leadership tasks are both pedagogical and administrative. Many Pedagogical Leaders prioritise working directly with children on a regular basis.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

As mentioned in *Chapter **2.2***, each local centre has a Pedagogical Leader, who receives a higher salary based on the collective agreements. Other centre-based posts of responsibility are established decentrally by each local authority in cooperation with the ECEC centre. These may include a special responsibility for language guidance, for physical activities or for student mentoring. The special responsibilities are rewarded with a salary bonus.

A 'professional beacon' initiative was introduced in reference to the national competence initiatives in ECEC in 2018 (Ministry of Children and Social Affairs 2018). Within this initiative, local centre units apply for funding of the continuing professional development (CPD) of one or more staff members. These are then trained for a post termed 'professional beacon' by participating in a three-day course or by taking a diploma-module (Jensen and Preus 2020). The idea of the 'professional beacon' post is one of resource building in the organisation through special resource persons leading and inspiring colleagues.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

The organisation of co-ordinating and supervisory staff to ECEC centres is established decentrally by each local authority. Pedagogic Consultants are employed by the municipalities, with the primary task of advising and supervising the ECEC institutions. The consultants are Pedagogues with a CPD qualification, and usually have a university degree in pedagogy or similar. Their role is to support the ECEC centre's pedagogical mandate as formulated in the curriculum, to provide supervision and to support the centre leader in personnel management, cooperation and conflict resolution. The consultants' duties also include pedagogical advice for the staff in relation to children with special needs. In relation to the administrative level, pedagogical consultants might participate in the development and organisation of pedagogical activities. They may carry out case processing for the administrative management and lead projects relating to policy and administrative initiatives.

2.5 Specialist support staff

Specialist support staff are located off-site and allocated in individual cases by the local authority's Pedagogical-Psychological Counselling Service (*Pædagogisk Psykologisk Rådgivning* – PPR).

Specialist staff who work with individual children in the centres on demand are typically Psychologists, Pedagogical Consultants, Speech Therapists, Language Coaches, Motor Skills Supervisors and Special Needs staff. The range of specialist support staff available depends on the organisation of the PPR in each local municipality and therefore varies across municipalities.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

As *Table 2* shows, Pedagogues are the main staff category in ECEC in Denmark, making up more than half of the workforce. The proportion varies according to the type of provision. The majority of the remaining staff are non-qualified Pedagogue Co-helpers (35.6%) and only 6% of all staff are Pedagogical Assistants with a post-secondary vocational qualification.

Table 2 also shows the percentage of male staff in ECEC centres, proportions that compare favourably with the situation in other countries. 15.6% of all staff and 9.5% of qualified Pedagogues are male workers. Most male workers are unqualified, thus 16% of those working as Pedagogue Co-helpers are men.

With regard to ethnicity, the larger majority (91,7%) of all staff have a Danish ethnic background.

Table 2

Denmark: Structural composition of ECEC workforce in Denmark: qualifications, gender, ethnicity, 2021

Staff categories	**Year / Proportion of workforce, in %** All centres (municipal and independent)	
Staff with specialist higher education degree (Pedagogues)		**54.61**
Staff with specialist post-secondary vocational qualification (Pedagogical Assistants – PAU)		**5.99**
Staff with no formal IPE (Pedagogue Co-helpers)		**35.60**
Staff with other pedagogical education		**1.27**
Trainee pedagogical staff		**1.70**
Trainee pedagogical assistants		**0.83**
Specialist support staff (e.g., Pedagogical Consultants, Speech Therapists, Psychologists)	Mostly off-site	
Male staff	Proportion among all staff Proportion of all Pedagogues in ECEC**	**15.6** **9.5**
Staff with a Danish ethnic background	Proportion among all staff Proportion among all Pedagogues in ECEC	**91.7** **93.8**

Source: Denmark Statistik, via email, July 2023

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Pedagogue/Social Educator *(Pædagog)*

Applicants for this study route are admitted to a specialist university college according to a quota system. Quota 1 comprises candidates with the highest grades in the upper secondary examination; Quota 2 comprises those admitted following an assessment of competences and qualifications. There is a third possibility for applicants who do not fulfil the demands of either Quota 1 or 2. They can undergo a competence assessment related to prior experiences and skills. This competence assessment of the applicants' suitability, merits and prior experience may include: general personal qualifications and experience, e.g., work experience, vocational training, work abroad; special qualifications and experiences relevant to the Pedagogue training, e.g., work in social services for children, young people and adults, work in leisure time facilities, in civil society organisations etc.; relevant professional qualifications, e.g. single subject at a higher level exam; local authority, trade union or evening courses.

The Pedagogue study courses are free of charge. During study time at the colleges as well as during their first and fourth practicum the students receive a national student grant and can take out a loan. In 2022, the grant amounted to DDK 6,397 (€ 860) per month and the loan to DDK 4,910 (€60) per month. Most students also work some hours per week, for example as substitute staff in pedagogical settings, in order to have a reasonable standard of living. During the second and third practicum, each lasting six months, the students receive a practicum salary of around DDK 11,745 (€ 1,575) per month.

Table 3
Denmark: Pedagogue / Social Educator

Job title in Danish: *Pædagog* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: *Quota 1* Minimum age of entry: 18 years; one of the following upper secondary leaving certificates: – *Studentereksamen* (STX) (12 years of upper secondary school) – *Højere forberedelseseksamen* (HF) (examination award of equivalent institution) – *Højere handelseksamen* (HHX) (higher vocational) – *Højere teknisk eksamen* (HTX) (higher technical) – *Særligt hf-forløb for fremmedsprogede* (GIF) (special course for foreign language people) – *Gymnasial eksamen fra Duborg skolen i Flensborg* (upper secondary from Duborg school in Flensburg, Germany) – *Gymnasial erhvervsuddannelse* (EUX) (upper secondary vocational) *Quota 2* A variety of entry routes: – For those with one of the above upper secondary leaving certificates but do not have the entry grade in Quota 1 – Social and Health Assistant with specific levels in some upper secondary subjects – Pedagogical Assistant with specific levels in some upper secondary subjects – Examination award in four upper secondary subjects (Danish, English, social studies and an optional subject) with specific levels

Job title in Danish: *Pædagog* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
– Leaving certificate from a preparing course for immigrants and refugees (FIF) based at some university colleges – An approved upper secondary examination of another country and adequate language skills – An IB-Diploma (International Baccalaureate) and adequate language skills **Professional studies:** Higher education, 3½ years at a specialist university college **Award:** (since 2001) Bachelor's degree in Social Education **ECTS credits:** 210 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Age-integrated centres *(Aldersintegrerede institutioner*), 0–5 years; kindergartens *(Børnehaver*), 3–5 years; nurseries *(Vuggestuer)*, 0–2 years; other pedagogical fields of work

Pedagogical Assistant (*Pædagogisk Assistent)*

The qualifying courses take place either at a vocational school or a university college. Candidates can either be school leavers, or may take the course as an adult if they are over 25. Before starting the qualifying course, an applicant must have a training agreement with their employer, which may be a local authority, a region or a private pedagogical centre. For the duration of the course, the students receive a monthly salary from their employer of DDK 9,000–12,000 (€1,200-1,600); the relevant salary as an adult learner is around DDK 22,000–25,000 (€3,000-3,350) per month. The studies are free of charge.

Table 4
Denmark: Pedagogical Assistant

Job title in Danish: *Pædagogisk Assistent*
Entry requirements: 10 years of compulsory schooling; also available as adult education for persons over 25 years **Professional studies:** Post-secondary/vocational; *Foundation course*: ½ to 1 year dependent on if the applicant has more schooling or/and relevant employment; *Main course*: usually 2 years and 1½ months full time, but if the applicant has 2 years of relevant employment and is over 25 years of age, they can omit the foundation course and the practicum periods in the main course. **Award:** Certificate as Pedagogical Assistant **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011:** 3 **Main ECEC workplace:** Age-integrated centres *(Aldersintegrerede institutioner*), 0–5 years; kindergartens *(Børnehaver*), 3–5 years; nurseries *(Vuggestuer)*, 0–2 years; other pedagogical fields of work

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Pedagogue/Social Educator *(Pædagog)*

Course structure and competence specifications

The 2017 ministerial decree (Bekendtgørelse 2017) on the study programme for the award of the Bachelor's degree in Social Education regulates the qualification of Pedagogues in Denmark and is supplemented by each university college's specific course syllabus. The decree specifies

the purpose, duration, exams, syllabus, the merit education as Pedagogue[5] and the competence goals for the different areas of the programme.

The study programme consists of two parts: a common part focusing on basic professional competences (70 ECTS credits, including one practicum period) and a specialisation part (140 ECTS credits). There are three specialisations: (1) early childhood pedagogy, (2) school and leisure pedagogy, (3) social and special pedagogy.

The specialisation course also consists of an inter-professional course, an optional subject area, a bachelor project and four practicum periods.

The generic competences of all three specialisation areas are linked to the Danish welfare state institutions, the aims of which are laid down in different acts. As in §1 in the ministerial decree of the Pedagogue study programme, it addresses the whole pedagogical field of work and not just early childhood:

> *The purpose of the education is that the student acquires relevant professional competences, knowledge and skills, to be able to manage, develop and convey development, learning and care assignments in a social perspective, both independently and in collaboration with others* (Bekendtgørelse 2017).

The Bachelor's degree is on a par with other professional Bachelor programmes, such as those for school teachers, social workers and nurses.

Curriculum and didactic approaches

The decree states for all education elements the areas and the competence goals, as well as knowledge and skills goals. Since 2014, the decree has formulated competence goals which describe what the students must know and be able to do. The decree does not prescribe curricular areas.

Pedagogues specialised in early childhood pedagogy

> *…have particular competences to create and develop pedagogical environments and activities, in which optimal conditions are created on the basis of a professional, pedagogical foundation for a stimulating and safe life for children* (Bekendtgørelse 2017, Appendix 2).

The designated areas of competence are:

1. Childhood, culture and learning
2. Profession and organisation
3. Professional relations and communications – 2nd practicum
4. Cooperation and development – 3rd practicum

Beyond specific academic knowledge, learning to be a 'competent Pedagogue' is also based on personal qualities. "These include own life experiences, engagement and corporeality, feelings and own values and morals" (Jensen 2016, 24). Personal education formation (*Dannelse* in Danish, *Bildung* in German) takes place throughout the entire study programme; for example, through aesthetic expressions and participating in pedagogical practice (not only through observing) where the students "must dare to invest their own personality" (Jensen 2016, 24).

Understanding pedagogical practice is built on learning to make judgements in a specific situation by drawing simultaneously on multiple sources of knowledge and skills. This needs to be reflected in the didactic approaches used in the Pedagogue education: class teaching, lectures for larger groups of students combined with discussions with students and group work, teaching themes, project work based on students' own selection of subjects and themes with supervision,

[5] The Merit Education/qualification route is a specific study route for experienced Pedagogue Co-helpers and Pedagogical Assistants wishing to work towards gaining a full qualification as Pedagogue, i.e. a Bachelor's degree.

and so on. Since pedagogical practice is relational, it is important that this is reflected in the didactics.

The alternation between practicum periods and university college periods as two learning places is used didactically. Here it is important to emphasise that the practicum is not only 'practice' but also 'theory'. Likewise, learning in the college environment also comprises both elements. For example: Students need to practise skills in aesthetical forms of expression in pedagogical activities and this happens not only during the practicum periods but also at the university colleges.

> *"This is a different type of learning process than the cognitive one. The student must achieve skills in, for example, playing an instrument, telling a story, balancing a ball, playing in a sandbox, lighting a bonfire, climbing a tree, and so on"* (Jensen 2016, 23).

A **reform** of the Pedagogue IPE is underway, based on a recent evaluation (Agency for Higher Education and Science 2021). The evaluation points to high learning outcomes, but a great variation in the competences of the new graduates, as the study programme includes a broad variation of students. The link between the practicum parts and teaching needs to be more closely connected, and the structure of the study programme with its many goals and short modules needs reconsideration in order to ensure coherent learning processes. Digital education is not mentioned in the 2017 decree, but the area is expected to be included in a future decree.

Pedagogical Assistants *(Pædagogisk Assistent)*

Competence specifications and curricular areas

The ministerial decree (Bekendtgørelse 2022) which specifies details about the Pedagogical Assistant Education (*Pædagogisk assistentuddannelse* – PAU) states the objectives, duration, as well as competence specifications for different stages of the study programme. The course award is a Certificate as Pedagogical Assistant.

During the study programme students acquire the skills required of a Pedagogical Assistant within five designated areas of competence:

1. Practical pedagogical tasks, efforts and activities
2. Pedagogical care and relationship work that supports and strengthens the target group's well-being and development
3. Practical pedagogical work that strengthens the target group's quality of life and motivation for a healthy and active life, through health-promoting and preventive activities
4. Practical pedagogical work with welfare technology, social and digital media that support technological understanding and digital culture
5. Evaluation, documentation, collaboration and communication in relation to the area's organisation in order to develop the pedagogical practice.

Course structure

The study programme consists of a basic course and a specialisation that altogether lasts between three years and six weeks up to four years. The specialisation lasts two years and six weeks full time, with 47 weeks spent in the IPE institution and 52 weeks in different workplace settings.

Practicum periods: At the practicum centre, students are allocated a practicum supervisor who ensures that they work according to the required goals and tasks stated in the training programme.

School periods: The main course comprises both basic subjects such as Danish, community, English (optional) and specific subjects such as pedagogy, nature and outdoor life, digital culture,

movement and sport, health, cultural and aesthetic expressions and activities, pedagogical psychology, communication in the group, work environment and ergonomics. The study programme also has different optional studies.

Pedagogic didactic approaches

The course alternates between practicum and school periods. Through teaching at the IPE institution and the work placement periods, students acquire knowledge, skills and competences to carry out pedagogical care and relational work at an Assistant level. They acquire knowledge about the pedagogical sector and learn about the context for the practical pedagogical work. A mix of pedagogic-didactic approaches is utilised, such as lectures, group work, teaching themes, projects, role play, practical subjects.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Below three types of inclusive approaches for becoming a Pedagogue or Pedagogical Assistant are presented: (1) the Merit qualification route as Pedagogue, (2) the Pedagogic Assistant training (PAU), and (3) the preparatory course for immigrants and refugees (FIF).

Merit qualification route for experienced Pedagogue Co-helpers

The Merit qualification route as Pedagogue is a special study programme for experienced Pedagogue Co-helpers and Pedagogical Assistants, leading to the award of the Bachelor's degree in Social Education. The Merit route is described in chapter 6 of the 2017 ministerial decree (Bekendtgørelse 2017) and follows the same course regulation as the ordinary study route.

The entry requirements are twofold: first, applicants must fulfil the same admissions criteria as for the regular Pedagogue IPE programme; second, they must have at least two years of experience working as co-helpers in the pedagogic field, including ECEC centres. Work experience is defined as either two years of working a minimum of 30 hours per week or working to a total of 3,120 hours during an unspecified number of years in either classical pedagogical institutions or in other profession-related fields such as schools, social work, psychological care, physiotherapy etc.

If the applicants do not meet these requirements, they can ask for a 'real competence assessment' to see if dispensation can be given.

The Merit qualification route considers the students' previous practical experience in pedagogical settings in the form of credits. They do not have to participate in the two six-month placements which are required for the regular study route. This means that they study for three years at a university college, one-year full time and two years part time. This IPE programme is organised under the Open Education Act (Bekendtgørelse af lov om åben uddannelse 2019). Students pay a fee of around DDK 60,000 (€ 8,100) for the full course, which can also be covered by the employer or the Municipal Competence Fund established by a number of trade unions in Denmark. During the first year of full-time study the student may receive a student adult grant (SVU). During the remaining time needed to complete their studies, they often work and may be given (some) time off for studies by their employer.

Merit qualification route for academics (the track change model)

A trial qualification route was initiated in 2021, running until 2027, to help recruit more Pedagogues at a time of shortages of qualified staff in ECEC, schools and other pedagogical institutions. The track change model started at the University College Copenhagen in 2021, at VIA University College Aarhus in 2022, and one more of the five Danish University Colleges will follow.

It is a special study programme aimed at academics who wish to change career. The track change model is aimed at applicants with a higher education degree, at a minimum bachelor's level, who are awarded credits for their previous theoretical qualification level.

If the applicants do not meet these requirements, they can ask for a 'real competence assessment' to see if dispensation can be given.

The qualifying course lasts 2½ years – one year less than the traditional Pedagogue education. It gives students the opportunity to gain practical experience by working 30 paid hours a week in, for example, nurseries, kindergartens or leisure time institutions.

Pedagogical Assistant Education (PAU) route for school leavers and adults

The Pedagogical Assistant Education (PAU) is a *direct admission criterion* for the Pedagogue study route. As a study route for young people, it is mostly attended by school leavers. As an adult further education course for people over 25 years, it comprises three different groups: former Pedagogue Co-helpers, Family Day Carers (the largest group) and people not in regular employment.

The foremost rationale behind this study programme was to attract non-qualified people and, in this way, raise the general educational level in society. Another aim set forward by FOA, the trade union for Pedagogical Assistants and Pedagogue Co-helpers, is that it is a way of raising the qualification level of the Pedagogue Co-helpers. There is a political interest in the field against the background of the government's aim that 95% of a youth cohort must have a qualifying education.

The demand in ECEC centres for people with a Pedagogical Assistant qualification has not been high, so they constitute overall only a small percentage of staff (see *Table 2*). The employment of staff is devolved to the individual ECEC centres and the current pedagogical culture prioritises young male persons with an upper secondary examination (they are around 19 years or older). On the whole, ECEC centres tend to prefer a short-term contract for Pedagogue Co-helpers of one or two years.

The salary of a Pedagogical Assistant is higher than that of the untrained Pedagogue Co-helpers and their terminal salary is the same as the starting salary of a Pedagogue. This means that some ECEC centres prefer either a qualified Pedagogue or a young, cheaper, non-qualified (male) Pedagogue Co-helper.

Preparatory course for immigrants and refugees (FIF)

The preparatory course for immigrants and refugees, called FIF, has been available for a wide range of qualification routes. The first course addressing the Pedagogue study programme started in 1991 and was called the 'building bridges course'. Since 2019, only refugees and immigrants from non-western countries can be omitted due to a new course. This excludes students from Eastern Europe, who earlier were some of those who greatly benefitted from the courses.

The entry requirement to FIF is an upper secondary leaving certificate. The course runs for 12 months at a university college. For the duration of the course, the students receive a national student grant which may be supplemented by a loan. The aim of the course is to qualify the participants for admittance to the initial professional education route for Pedagogues. Around 80% of the students go on to take further studies, with a majority choosing the Pedagogue route. To be admitted to the Pedagogue study programme they have to complete a 'real competence assessment'. If they are accepted, the graduation rate is just as high among bilingual students as among other Pedagogue students.

The course is for people with a minority ethnic background, "… who because of their language, culture and so on are not … ready to seek entrance to the Pedagogue education by way of the formal route" (Jørgensen 2010, 203). The course is based on preparing this group of students for learning about Danish educational culture and introducing them to Danish pedagogy.

It is only possible to join FIF with a foreign high school diploma. Some students are refugees with a professional qualification. Some families are reunited and plan to settle in Denmark. Some are women who have lived isolated lives in Denmark and want to explore the society in which they must bring up their children so that they can manage better. And some are men who have acknowledged the necessity of getting involved in pedagogical work with, for example, young people from their own culture. Jørgensen (2010, 204) points out that many ethnic minority students do not have the same notion of the Pedagogue occupation as a female occupation, which could be explained on the one hand through the fact that pedagogy generally speaking is not seen as an occupation in many of their countries of origin, and on the other hand through the fact that many students see an obvious need for male Pedagogues with an ethnic background.

The course has two main objectives. One relates to personal and social aspects, helping the students to become aware of and describe their own identity and integration process and to view themselves as active participants in the current Danish environment. The second objective is to learn about the educational culture at a Danish Pedagogue university college. Thus, the individual students need to be introduced to methods and study techniques that are applied in these colleges. Moreover, students should understand the past and current views of children and childhood that characterise Danish pedagogy.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Regulations for the practicum (*praktik*) during the Pedagogue study programme are stipulated in the relevant ministerial decree (Bekendtgørelse 2017) and implemented by the university colleges and individual ECEC centres.

According to the decree, the practicum consists of four periods totalling 75 ECTS credits, meaning that it takes up more than one third of the total course duration. The first practicum takes place in the second semester during the common course attended by all students and comprises 32 working days of six hours per day on average (10 ECTS credits). The second and third placements start in the third and fifth semesters, each lasting for six months (30 ECTS credits each). The students work on average 32½ hours per week. The fourth practicum takes place in the seventh semester in connection with the student's bachelor thesis and consists of 16 working days of six hours (5 ECTS credits). The decree also stipulates three study days during the first practicum and ten study days during each of the second and third practicum periods. Study days are organised by the university colleges. The decree says that the "purpose of the study days at the university college is to support the student's acquisition of the competence goals" (Bekendtgørelse 2017, § 8). The decree also states the possibility for students to take their second or third practicum abroad.

The ministerial decree has two detailed paragraphs (one on the role of the hosting ECEC centre and another on the role of university colleges) quoted in full below.

Role of the ECEC centre

The practicum centre devises a practicum description, which must contain the following elements:

1) Description of the centre, including purpose, user group description and standard methods

2) Education plan for the practicum periods. The plan must comply with the competence goals for the relevant practicum period, including suggestions for relevant literature, organisation of practicum guidance and collaboration with the university college. The education plan is devised in joint cooperation with the university college.

Sec.2. The practicum centre is responsible for the student receiving supervision during the practicum in accordance with the competence goals for the practicum period.

Sec.3. No later than upon 2/3 completion of the first, second and third practicum periods, the practicum centre must conduct a meeting with the university college and the student, after which the centre must make a statement declaring how the student may fulfil the competence goals for the practicum period in question (Bekendtgørelse 2017, § 9).

Role of the university college

Prior to each practicum period, the university college must prepare the students for the upcoming practicum period, including methods of study and relevant competence goals.

Sec. 2. During the study days of the practicum period, the student receives formal training and supervision at the university college.

Sec.3. After completing the practicum period, the university college must continually include the students' practicum experiences in the education. Furthermore, the university college must include the statement from the practicum centre in the student's further supervision process (Bekendtgørelse 2017, § 10).

The university colleges appoint a supervisor, who provides information for the student about the choice of practicum, the competence goals, the relevant literature, etc.

The students' skills and competences

The decree states the competence goals of each practicum as well as the knowledge and skills specifications. For example, the following are the competence goals for the 2nd and 3rd practicum within the specialisation in early childhood studies (see also *Chapter **4.2***):

Competence Area 3: Professional relations and communication – 2nd practicum period
This area focuses on relational work, interaction and communication in pedagogical practice with 0 to 5 year-old children, including the significance of children's diverse life conditions with respect to well-being, relations and communication.

Competence goals: The student knows how to create relations with individual children and with the whole group, can support the children when they interact with each other, can support the development of children's communicative competences, master professional communication and reflect on their own abilities to communicate and to initiate and sustain relations.

Competence Area 4: Cooperation and development – 3rd practicum period
Here the focus is on systematic and knowledge-based reflection and contributing towards development and innovation within pedagogical practice.

Competence goals: The student is able to plan, implement, document and evaluate activities and learning processes in a focused way that supports the child's wellbeing, learning, intellectual growth and development. In the context, the student must be able to challenge existing practice in professional terms, to look for and assess alternative options and to contribute to the development of pedagogical practice (Bekendtgørelse 2017, appendix 2).

Forms of student self-evaluation and external evaluation

The 2017 decree does not specify details of the students' self-evaluation during their practicum. Each university college includes practicum regulations in their syllabus and in a written practicum booklet which describes in detail the decree, regulations, practicalities and so on.

Before the practicum, the students write down their own competence goals and the knowledge and skills they wish to achieve during the practicum period. The goals are discussed with and approved by both the supervisor teacher at college and the practicum supervisor/mentor. During the practicum period the student keeps a daily diary or portfolio, and uses this at the practicum supervisor meetings during the study days and also later on in their studies.

The aim of the fourth practicum, added with the 2014 reform, is to do fieldwork research and produce data from their work in the ECEC centres for use in their bachelor thesis. Here students are encouraged to use different research methods.

The three other practicum periods end with an examination. For the first and second, the examination is conducted internally by the practicum supervisor in the ECEC setting and the practicum supervisor from the university college; for the third practicum an external examiner is also required (Bekendtgørelse 2017).

The **supervising staff at the ECEC centres** are qualified Pedagogues. The competences required for this position are not nationally regulated. All practicum supervisors receive a practicum bonus based on collective agreements between trade unions and local municipalities. It is possible, but not mandatory, to attend relevant short-term courses, a higher education diploma course (introduced in 2013) or a Master's degree course in Pedagogical Supervision. Field experts estimate that many attend the short courses but few take a diploma and even fewer a Master's degree (Jensen 2015).

A practicum supervisor who works directly with the children, i.e. is a regular member of staff, is appointed by the Centre Head. It is estimated that planned meetings between the supervisor and the student take place (during regular working hours) for an average of one hour per week. Supervision is also part of the daily work and other Pedagogues can give supervision in a more situated and informal way than in a planned meeting (Jensen 2015).

Reforms, trends and debates

There is an ongoing debate about the specific roles of learning in the workplace (practicum) and learning at the university college and about the cooperation strategies between the two learning places. There are two prevailing major discourses: a learning discourse (focusing on learning in the workplace) and an academic discourse (focusing on the learning at the university college) and there is a continuing effort to integrate the two (see Jensen 2015 for different understandings of practicum).

Since 2014, the decrees have placed more responsibility on the practicum centres regarding student evaluation, which can be seen as a strengthening of the learning discourse. The ECEC practicum centres play an important role as a learning space and there is an ongoing debate about whether they have enough resources and competencies to fulfil that role – not only concerning student evaluation but in general.

The 2014 decree added a fourth practicum where the students are required to produce data during their work in the centre and analyse and integrate these into their bachelor thesis. This can be seen as a step towards integrating the tasks of practicum centres and university colleges and as a strengthening of the academic discourse.

An earlier recurrent theme of debate was about whether students should receive payment during their practicum. Currently, students receive a practicum salary paid by the employer during the two six-month practicum periods (i.e. the second and third). The paid practicum was introduced following the former generalist study programme reform in 1992. "For the students this means a double role: on the one hand being a student, on the other hand an employee and a regular member of staff" (Jensen 2015, 160). Some argue that the students are not allowed to

be students; fewer argue that they really learn the conditions of work. For the first and fourth practicum periods, students receive student grants.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

A national framework exists in terms of recognised courses and awards relating to the continuing professional development of ECEC staff, but not in terms of a general CPD entitlement or of an annual allocation in terms of the number of days to be spent on CPD activities. Nevertheless, some CPD activities may be obligatory, e.g. those for the centre team as a whole, or some courses provided by municipalities regarding current reform initiatives.

In terms of career development, a profession is dependent on both vertical and horizontal possibilities of mobility. Formal strategies of further training/professional development for Pedagogues have a relatively short history. This has something to do with the traditional 'flat structure' (non-hierarchical) in the ECEC centres and the presence of a large number of non-qualified staff. An informal estimate is that around 25% of Pedagogues participate in formal CPD activities, whereas the remaining 75% get through their career with only a few days of competence development per year.

One of the reforms initiating increased further training from the early 1990s onwards was the Open Education Act (Bekendtgørelse af lov om åben uddannelse 2019). The Merit qualification route to become a Pedagogue as well as the Diploma studies and Master's degrees (see below) are provided for under this Act. The Act aims to help adults combine work with further related studies. Students are granted a degree or an education certificate and have to pay a fee for the study programme.

Before the early 1990s, CPD tended to be initiated by the ECEC Centre Leader or staff. Today, many initiatives come from central and local authorities and – as budgets are low – do not leave much space for centres' or individual staff's needs or wishes for CPD. Field experts talk about a centralisation and standardisation of CPD and not all Pedagogues find that they benefit from some of the courses on offer (Ahrenkiel et al. 2012).

Overall, the leader of a centre is responsible for the staff's professional development. CPD can be discussed during the obligatory annual appraisal reviews (*MUS-samtaler*). The Centre Leader, in collaboration with the team in the setting, may also compile a competence development plan for all staff. Furthermore, local authorities sometimes provide professional development courses for the entire staff team in an ECEC centre, for part of the team, or for individual staff members who need to strengthen competences in specific areas, e.g. language or inclusion.

CPD for Pedagogues/Social Educators

The main providers of CPD are university colleges (*professionshøjskoler*) and the municipalities, but may also be vocational schools and private firms/organisations (Hjorth-Weber 2012).

A distinction can be made between (1) short-term courses of between one to seven weeks' duration and (2) a long-term study route over a period of two or three years. They include various diploma studies as well as Master's degrees.

Short-term courses

Short-term courses primarily serve as an improvement strategy for the work in pedagogical settings. The competences in focus are linked to everyday work routines. BUPL, the trade union for early childhood staff, argues that both the course fee and the time needed to attend the course must be covered by the employer. The trade union recommends two weeks of CPD per year for all Pedagogues.

Course topics are diverse: outdoor life, music, storytelling, movement and language, environmental assessment by children, etc. The main providers of such short-term courses are university colleges, local authorities, and private organisations. No formal academic credits are given for short-term courses. If Pedagogues participate in more than six weeks of full-time studies over a period of two years, they have the possibility of having a 'real competence assessment' in order to apply for Merit points for enrolment in a Diploma study course (see the following paragraph for details of Diploma studies).

Long-term further studies

Long-term further studies have a double purpose: to enhance the pedagogical work in general and to give the Pedagogue in question new career opportunities.

Diploma study programmes

Diploma studies are for adults with a short-cycle or further higher education degree and are primarily an additional qualification for a specialised area of work in pedagogical settings, e.g., a Diploma in Public Management (Hjorth-Weber 2012). Typically, Pedagogues choose one of the available pedagogical diploma qualifying courses, which have in common:

- A duration of two to three years of part-time study, which sometimes can also be taken full time in one year (60 ECTS credits)
- A relevant qualification and at least two years of work experience as admission criteria
- A course fee ranging between DDK 59,000 – 110,000 (€8,000–15,000) in 2022
- In most cases, a possibility to combine studies with employment. The fee may be covered by the employer and they may get (some) time off from work to study.

Around 30 different pedagogical diploma study courses exist in different subjects or subject areas relevant to the pedagogical working field. Diploma studies are also followed by other Bachelor-level professionals such as school teachers and social workers. The providers of these professional development courses are university colleges and universities.

Centre Leaders

A trend, also pushed forward by a tendency to have one leader for several centres, is that Centre Leaders are more likely to study for a diploma or take courses for other types of competence development. There are no national/general requirements for leaders of ECEC centres. Most leaders are experienced Pedagogues. During recent years, however, national initiatives including the national government, municipal authorities and trade unions, have funded diploma study programmes in leadership for the whole public sector in order to raise the quality of the welfare institutions.

Two diploma courses exist for leaders in welfare institutions: Diploma in Leadership (DIL) and the public diploma in Leadership Education (DOL). The difference between these two is that the first is provided by university colleges; the second by both university colleges and private providers. Both diplomas are awarded with 60 ECTS credits and consist of different modules.

Master's degree/PhD

In Denmark there are two types of Master degrees: Continuing Higher Education and Ordinary Higher Education (EQF/ISCED Level 7).

Most Pedagogues who take a Master's degree do this as Continuing Higher Education. Entry requirements are a Bachelor's degree and at least two years of relevant job experience. A Master's degree comprises one year of full-time study (60 ECTS credits) and is followed on a part-time basis, since the students are working at the same time. The students have to pay a fee. The Master's study programme has to be completed within six years. Studies are research-based but also include the students' experiences from their daily work. Fees are sometimes covered by the employer, either partly or fully, and students may be given time off for studying. The main provider is DPU – the Danish School of Education, University of Aarhus, which offers a range of Master's degrees in the field of pedagogy and education. DPU is also a research centre in education and pedagogy in Denmark. Other universities also provide relevant Master's courses for pedagogues.

The other type of Master's degree, a Candidate degree in Ordinary Higher Education (120 ECTS credits), lasts two years and is often taken soon after completion of the Bachelor's degree. DPU and other universities provide a range of Master's degrees relevant for Pedagogues. The admission criteria are a Bachelor's degree and very good grades. Many Pedagogues apply for a Candidate degree course, but there are few places for this. The students are not required to pay a fee and they can apply for a State Education support grant (*Statens Uddannelsesstøtte, SU*) while studying.

Master's studies can be followed by a PhD course.

CPD for Pedagogue Co-helpers *(Pædagogmedhjælper)*

The non-qualified Pedagogue Co-helpers have various CPD possibilities. The initiative to participate may come from the Pedagogue Co-helper, the Centre Leader or from the local authority as part of a competence drive among all non-qualified employees. They can apply for the following options:

- The IPE for prospective Pedagogues
- If they have more than five years of work experience, the Merit qualification as Pedagogue
- The Pedagogical Assistant qualification
- Short-term AMU-courses. AMU (Danish Adult Vocational Training Programmes) is the vocational education system that provides many different courses: a pedagogical basic course (three weeks), children and nature (five days), play and learning with digital media in early childhood centres (five days), parent cooperation (five days) and so on. Here the non-qualified can acquire skills to be used directly in pedagogical work and are awarded a certificate. The providers of the courses are vocational schools and university colleges. The studies are free of charge. The leader must approve participation. The Pedagogue Co-helpers take the course during their working time and often continue to draw their regular salary. The centre may apply for economic compensation to be used for a substitute worker (FOA and KI 2014).

Key content focus of CPD

Thematically, CPD is offered in a myriad of different fields encouraging ECEC staff to excel within a wide range of topics. Popular topics currently in focus in CPD activities are themes related to the strengthened pedagogical curriculum adopted by the Danish Government in 2018 – for example play, outdoor activities, early intervention or a CPD course to qualify as a special resource

person ('professional beacon') to cooperate with the management in the implementation of the strengthened pedagogical curriculum in daily ECEC pedagogy and practice.

Research projects on CPD

Two large-scale research projects on CPD were carried out in 2012 and 2013, one focusing on Pedagogues (Ahrenkiel et. al. 2012), aiming to explain why a large part of the workforce does not attend CPD. The other on the Pedagogue Co-helpers (EPOS and EVA 2013) explored a potential need for development of existing qualification pathways for Pedagogue Co-helpers and Pedagogical Assistants.

Additionally, in 2020 a Danish study was published on the CPD of ECEC personnel (Jensen and Preus 2020). They examine the ways in which the position of 'professional beacon', introduced in the context of national competence initiatives in ECEC in 2018, was constructed in practice by centre leaders, employees and the professional beacons themselves, in order to identify challenges, possibilities, and dilemmas related to the position. Based on several interviews from professional beacons, leaders and colleagues, the article shows that the professional beacons are constructed in specific and multifarious ways, closely connected to the context and the negotiated positions in which they participate in the local collaboration: professional beacons as light-casters, experts, facilitators and change enforcers.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Nearly all Pedagogues are members of BUPL, the Danish Union of Early Childhood and Youth Educators, and many Pedagogical Assistants and Pedagogue Co-helpers are members of FOA, the trade union for Pedagogical Assistants and Pedagogue Co-helpers. Benefits include six weeks of annual holiday leave, one year paid maternity and parental leave. All staff groups pay for an obligatory occupational pension.

Average monthly salaries for full-time staff in different job positions in early childhood centres are as follows (BUPL 2021):

- Non-qualified staff: DDK 27,000 (€ 3,600)
- Pedagogues: DDK 32,000 (€ 4,300)
- Department leader / deputy leader: DDK 36,000 (€ 4,800) and
- Centre leaders: DDK 44,000 (€ 6,000).

Posts of responsibility such as the Centre Leader, Deputy Leader, or Pedagogical Leader of a smaller unit receive a higher salary based on the collective agreements. The practicum supervisor receives a bonus.

A qualified Pedagogue earns only minimally less than a school teacher. The salary increases with seniority. It is possible to live on this salary without additional support, e.g. living as a single parent with one child in a major city, but the living standard very much depends on the cost of housing.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

According to collective agreements, full-time staff work 37 hours per week.

In 2020, 40% of Pedagogues and 38% of Pedagogical Assistants in ECEC worked full time. 59% and 60% worked part time and 1% and 3% were hourly employees. Pedagogue Co-helpers stand out markedly in that 21% are employed by the hour. This is partly due to the fact that no formal education is required to work as a Pedagogue Co-helper and that Co-helpers are widely used as substitute staff (Indenrigs- og Boligministeriets Benchmarkingsenhed 2021).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

The 98 local municipalities, the funders and providers of ECEC have an organised system that supports the staff to improve and monitor the quality of their work. This may take place through on-site mentoring, meetings, and consultancy as well as through off-site experts, for example Speech Therapists, Language experts and Psychologists. Municipalities employ Pedagogic Consultants who are mostly experienced Pedagogues with additional training (see also *chapter 2.4*). They are used by the centres when staff conflicts arise, to support children with special needs and other difficulties, and much more. Newly qualified staff are included in the general support to introduce them to the work.

7.4 Non-contact time

Pedagogues do not have any official preparation time, but the issue is often debated in a trade union policy context. The current debate is primarily concerned with the fact that new tasks and increasing documentation requirements lead to fewer quality hours with the children. Time for staff meetings, cooperation with parents, networking etc. is locally decided. An increasing number of administrative tasks are taken care of while being together with the children.

In general, the increased requirements and new tasks in pedagogical work have led to a deterioration in staff-child ratios in Danish ECEC institutions, more time where one qualified member of staff is alone with a large group of children, and less time in general to provide care for the children (Pade and Glavind 2017; 2018; 2021).

One particular research study problematises the fact that even though Pedagogues spent 78,5% of their time together with children in 2017 compared to 72% in 1973, this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that child-staff contact has improved between 1973 to 2017. Rather, it points to the fact that administrative work has been decentralised, so that Pedagogues no longer *only* spend time together with the children, but rather tend to constantly multi-task to a high extent (Pade and Glavind 2021). The multi-tasking compromises close contact and pedagogical attentiveness towards the children.

7.5 Current staffing issues

The Pedagogue study route is the largest study programme in Denmark: 4,781 applicants were fully enrolled in 2021. In comparison, the School Teacher Education enrolled 2,556 applicants, 4.112 were enrolled at the Danish Nursing Education and 2,226 were enrolled to study Social Work. Nevertheless, the popularity for all welfare study programmes has decreased over the last five years, and Denmark is facing a situation of shortage of qualified ECEC staff.

In the period June–November 2021, 3,500 (30%) of Pedagogue posts advertised were not occupied and 700 (20%) of jobs for Co-Helpers remained vacant (Styrelsen for Arbejdsmarked og Rekruttering 2022).

The full coverage in early childhood services, the political adoption of minimum standards for staff-child ratios and a prospect of more than 45,000 additional children aged 0–5 in 2030 has led to an urgent need for new recruitment strategies.

General recruitment strategies

Trade unions call for national recruitment strategies, in combination with better working conditions and higher wages. A working time survey from 2019 shows that part-time Pedagogues are willing to work more hours if standards improve. A large proportion of part-time employees mention a harsh working environment as a reason for their part-time employment (BUPL 2019).

Since 2017, there has been an elevated awareness of how the increased requirements in pedagogical work (for documentation, for example) have led to less favourable staff-child ratios, more time with one adult alone with a large group of children, and less time in general to provide care for the children (Pade and Glavind 2017; 2018; 2021).

In December 2021, an amendment on staff-child ratio minimum standards was included in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (Lov om ændring af dagtilbudsloven 2021). As from 2024, there must be a minimum of one adult for three children 0–2 and for six children 3–5 years of age (Dagtilbudsloven 2022).

Municipalities are encouraging all their experienced Pedagogical Co-workers to enrol in the merit qualification route. Recently, a merit qualification route for academics (the track change model) was initiated as a trial qualification route from 2021–2027 to help recruit more Pedagogues at a time of acute shortage (see *Chapter **4.3***).

Recruitment of male pedagogues in ECEC

The Pedagogue study programme has been able to attract a relatively large number of male students, 26% of the total intake currently (in 2021). In 2000, the relative share was 17%. However, as shown in *Table 2*, the share of them working in early childhood centres is not that high; mostly they prefer to work in other kinds of pedagogical settings.

The recruitment of male Pedagogues for ECEC centres has been on the agenda for years and related strategies have been carried out. The 2014 Pedagogue education reform did put gender on the agenda and all students must learn about gender issues. A variety of recruitment initiatives have been taking place, and the experiences are compiled in a handbook for inspiration (Wohlgemuth and Hviid 2016). In 2016, the ministry launched a campaign for recruiting more male Pedagogues into early childhood centres (Ministry of Children, Education and Equality 2016), but the efforts have yet to be evaluated. A qualitative study from 2021 points to five factors that are important to male pedagogical staff, which need to be at the centre of efforts to recruit male employees: focus on the core task; high professionalism, focus on diversity; special fields of interest (outdoor life and movement); presence of other male employees (Rambøll 2021).

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Strengthening ECEC through a revised curricular framework and competence development initiative

In June 2017, a political agreement "Strong day care – all children need to join the community" was adopted by the Ministry of Children and Social Affairs (Ministry of Children and Social Affairs 2017), and subsequently a revised Act on Early Childhood Education and Care came into force in July 2018. The amendments were accompanied by a strengthening of the legal requirements to work with a strengthened pedagogical curriculum (Ministry of Children and Education 2020).

These include a much more detailed description of the content of the curriculum, which has not previously been seen in the Danish ECEC arena (Aabro 2019). As part of the realisation, the Ministry of Children and Social Affairs allocated extra funds for a national competence development initiative.

Staff from both municipal and private institutions could apply for the funding in a model where one or more Pedagogues in an ECEC centre were to be trained for a function that was categorised as a 'professional beacon', through either three learning days or a pedagogical diploma module (Jensen and Preus 2020). The new phenomenon is based on an idea that some management tasks are delegated to special resource persons as organisational intermediaries in the sense of distributed management (Spring and Spring 2020). Pedagogues can qualify as a professional beacon on the basis of a completed CPD course. The function is remunerated with a salary supplement – see also *chapter 6*.

The 2018 amendments to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care are solidly based on the Danish ECEC tradition, so most ECEC settings were familiar with many of the initiatives in the strengthened pedagogical curriculum, whereas some were entirely new. Central elements are:

- A common pedagogical foundation with key elements (e.g. play, communities of children and a broad concept of learning) constituting the understanding and approach to work on children's wellbeing, learning, development and formation in ECEC
- Establishing a pedagogical learning environment throughout the day, including in routine situations, planned activities and child-initiated play
- Detailed descriptions of the six curriculum themes as well as new, broad pedagogical objectives for the relationship between the learning environment and children's learning for each theme
- The pedagogical curriculum should relate to vulnerable children, cooperation with parents on children's learning, transition to school as well as cooperation with the surrounding community.
- An evaluation culture has to be established in all local ECEC settings (Ministry of Children and Education 2020).

In December 2021, an amendment on minimum standards for the staff to child ratio and strengthened inspection was included in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. Fully implemented by 2024, there must be a minimum of one adult for three children 0–2 and for six children 3–5 years of age (Dagtilbudsloven 2022). The amendment to the law was adopted together with the release of financial resources that could be applied for the implementation of minimum standards over a number of years. The amendment intends to maintain quality in ECEC and ensure that staff-child ratios are not aggravated due to elevated costs of ECEC in the municipalities with an increasing number of children attending ECEC in the future.

Evaluating the initial professional education of Pedagogues

In 2020, the Danish Government initiated an evaluation of the Pedagogue Education, published in 2021 as a part of an overall quality plan for Danish ECEC to make the pedagogues even more skilled and even better able to practise and develop their practices. The evaluation is a follow-up on the reform of the pedagogue education from 2013. Four themes were evaluated: learning culture and study environment; knowledge base; practicum; and the competences of newly qualified staff. The main findings indicated:

- A great variation in student backgrounds and biographies
- Potentials for more graduates to be better qualified for practical pedagogical work

- High study intensity and number of classes but low level of feedback
- An emphasis on profession-oriented knowledge
- Internship (practicum) is seen as a central feature of learning but links between the university colleges and practicum institutions are not sufficiently close
- Study programmes with too many goals and an insufficient number of in-depth modules
- Students are not adequately qualified to work in social and special education
- Female and male students thrive equally well, but choose different areas of specialisation (Agency for Higher Education and Science 2021).

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

An increase in research in ECEC has taken place during the last 25 years or so. Research takes place at universities, at university colleges, or in various research centres. ECEC stakeholders commission research.

Many research projects relating to ECEC professionalisation and staffing issues have been conducted over the past five years and the three presented are selected examples. One is published only in Danish language, two are in English – one of which has been carried out since the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

Effective pedagogical work in ECEC settings

Source: Charlotte Ringsmose, and Lone Svinth 2019 (see *References*).

***Background*:** Research points to a number of well-documented suggestions on pedagogy that are effective in promoting the well-being and development of children in vulnerable positions. However, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the translation of these suggestions into pedagogical practice in ECEC. Also, a knowledge gap exists on how big a role the administration might play in the development of effective ECEC services – especially for children in vulnerable positions.

Aims and methods: The study investigates how Danish ECEC institutions located in so-called socially disadvantaged residential areas with a relatively high number of children living in vulnerable conditions create an environment that reduces inequality among children. The project is based on observations of pedagogical work and interviews with leaders and staff in five home-based settings, 15 ECEC institutions and 10 municipal administration departments.

Selected findings: The project points to a number of factors that seem to increase all children's well-being and development opportunities in ECEC. Effective ECEC is characterised by a strong leadership, with leaders who set a clear direction without being too dominant, and who believe in the staff. Leaders who have a plan and are good at engaging, create a safe and humorous atmosphere and offer support and respect when needed.

Moreover, in effective ECEC institutions the pedagogical staff are very sensitive towards individual children's needs, professionalism in the staff group is high, employees are proud of their work and eager to join new initiatives and professional dialogues. Also, effective ECEC settings are characterised by an awareness of not lowering the expectations of the children in spite of their vulnerable positions, creating participation chances for all children, a sense of openness

and competences in dealing with behavioural issues and conflicts arising through physical closeness, touching and soothing, and friendly recognition of the child by addressing unwanted behaviours with respect and acknowledgement.

Implications: The study points to a challenge in the development of effective ECEC in institutions with many children in vulnerable positions. When the need is greatest, it seems to require an extra effort to develop quality. Even if effective ECEC institutions are located next door to less effective ones, transfer does not seem to occur in spite of visits, courses and/or observations. More knowledge is needed on how to work on developing quality in less effective institutions.

'Academics' as play and the social as discipline: school readiness in Denmark

Source: Bjørg Kjær, Dil Bach, and Karen Ida Dannesboe 2020 (see *References*).

***Background*:** Denmark has a tradition of kindergarten pedagogy focused on children's play, sociality and individual interests. Political emphasis on global competition, however, has led to reforms in early childhood education and care (ECEC) since 2004.

Aims and methods: Based on ethnographic fieldwork in three kindergartens, the study analyses how ECEC reforms have affected the priorities of parents and pedagogues regarding school readiness. To understand how this is negotiated, researchers draw upon Lareau's distinction between childrearing as 'concerted cultivation' or as 'the accomplishment of natural growth'.

Selected findings: The study shows that parents and staff consider the social as the most important thing for kindergarten children to learn and as something that the adults must cultivate – often in a strict manner. Moreover, both parents and pedagogues state that academic competences are not important to cultivate because an interest in academics will grow naturally. Adults just have to support academic activities through play when the children choose to engage in them. However, academic competences are actively cultivated in practice.

Implications: The political focus on formal learning from 2004 onwards is not incompatible with the emphasis on the social in Danish ECEC, but occurs in the practices of everyday life, in more organised activities and specially themed activities. Despite a strong conviction that a child's interest in academic skills will develop on its own, adult-initiated work to cultivate this also takes place in ECEC. Here, a dominant discourse regarding enjoyment is activated, particularly when pedagogues and parents talk about including the academic in play. Thus, demonstrating motivation for school in conjunction with conforming socially seems to be the culturally enacted definition of school readiness in a Danish kindergarten context.

Child well-being in early childhood education and care during COVID-19: Child sensitivity in small, fixed groups

Source: Anette Boye Koch 2022 (see *References*)

***Background*:** Child well-being in Danish ECEC provision has been intensively studied and debated since 2007, when well-being was incorporated into the Danish Act on Early Childhood Education and Care as an overall aim. During the COVID-19 pandemic, all usual pedagogical routines and practices were set on standby. A great concern was whether pedagogues would be able to ensure the children's subjective well-being during a pandemic, or if the children would suffer harm either due to the risk of infection or to the human consequences of the strict regulations.

Aims and methods: The study explored subjective child wellbeing in Danish ECEC during the time of COVID-19. It was initiated to follow the reopening in 2020 until 2021. Two ECEC institutions were followed first-hand to observe the impact of the pandemic on pedagogy and child well-being. Observations and qualitative interviews were conducted with follow-up interviews and an online survey a year later.

Selected findings: The uncertainty and increased external control during COVID-19 did not appear to negatively affect either the pedagogy or child wellbeing. The pandemic caused pedagogues to work in a more child-sensitive way with elevated staff-child ratios and children in small, fixed groups. Pedagogues experienced more peace in their work from the fact that the parents did not enter the institution. Grouping the children into small units resulted in more concentration and retention of children with a tendency to outward attention. Many learning activities took place in an outdoor environment. Excursions were more frequent, more informal and in smaller groups of children, with plenty of time to stop and talk and include children's perspectives. The non-negotiable COVID-19 structure provided more predictability and a greater sense of security for many children.

Implications: The COVID-19 study speaks to an ongoing public debate in Denmark about ECEC quality, pedagogue professionalism and politically defined standards for a minimum number of staff members per child. It manifests how the core values of Danish early childhood pedagogy remain deeply rooted in a pedagogical culture. In spite of strong political efforts to impose a learning regime on Danish ECEC settings during the last two decades, the values that imperceptibly characterise the Danish Pedagogue profession persist and trump the school logic and preoccupation with academic skills during an acute situation.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Increasing challenges for ECEC personnel

Over the last ten years, staff in early childhood centres have been required to take on more and more tasks, arising from the realisation of the national government's policies, such as producing learning plans, the strengthened pedagogical curriculum and the resulting implementation policies in the municipalities. According to ECEC staff, parents also tend to demand more and politicians call for the early detection of children with special affordances and a higher quality pedagogical work in general. A paradox is that the staff-child ratio has deteriorated and also the proportion of qualified pedagogues has decreased among staff. Both are key factors for quality in early childhood centres and key factors to be able to live up to the required policies.

Many of the new tasks demand highly educated staff. One example (from the 2020 Act) is the new construction outlined earlier in this report, where management tasks are delegated to special resource persons (professional beacons) as distributed management. The post of responsibility is awarded on basis of a successfully completed CPD course and remunerated with a salary supplement.

The strengthened pedagogical curriculum requires among other things new efforts and more documentation than ever before. Systematic evaluations are demanded. Language assessment and stimulation are high on the agenda. Collaboration with parents has always had a high priority, and parents demand it even more. New organisational changes and development of the learning environment by inclusion of children's perspectives, etc. – all these demands require time and a high professionalism among the staff.

A response from politicians is to demand higher quality in the Pedagogue Education. An evaluation of the pedagogue education from 2021 (see *Chapter **8***) calls for, among other things, higher levels of feedback, better cohesion in the educational programme and a stronger connection

between practicum settings and the IPE institutions. The responses from trade unions and pedagogues are to demand better working conditions, higher wages and improved staff-child ratios.

A critical response from many pedagogues to governmental and educational efforts to provide better knowledge, new methods and concepts of how to reach higher quality ECEC is: We are already sufficiently qualified, and we do know how to practise good pedagogy. But it does not help, if we do not have sufficient time and working conditions to practise what is needed!

Staff to child ratios

A comprehensive workforce challenge is to deal with the fact that increased requirements and new tasks in pedagogical work have led to a deterioration of staff-child ratios in Danish ECEC institutions, more time where one pedagogical staff is alone with a large group of children, and less time in general to provide care for the children (Pade and Glavind 2017; 2018; 2021).

After heavy debates for years, a law on staff-child ratio minimum standards was finally included in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care in December 2021. Fully implemented by 2024, there must be a minimum of one adult for three children 0–2 and for six children 3–5 years of age (Dagtilbudsloven 2022). Although the number of staffs has increased overall, there is still a large proportion of pedagogues who feel that they are not able to provide the needed care to all children (Pade and Glavind 2021). 63% of all pedagogical staff experience on a daily basis that they either do not have time to comfort, solve a conflict, support a child in play or discuss problematic issues regarding a child with a colleague (Glavind and Pade 2022).

In a 2019 survey based on a representative sample on everyday life in early childhood centres, 20% of almost 700 Centre Leaders report that no more than two adults are present at the same time all through the day both in a *vuggestue* (0–2 years) group of ten, or in a *børnehave* (3–5 years) group of 20 children. Staff are also alone with the group during certain times of the day (Glavind and Pade 2019b).

Between 1972 and 2018, the staff-child ratio in early childhood centres deteriorated markedly. In 2018, the number of children per the adult was around 10–11 in kindergartens and just over 5 in nurseries, if looking at the number of adults and children present. If deducting the time during which the adults solve other tasks, while at the same time keeping an eye on the children, the figures are more likely to be 13 children per adult in kindergartens and 6–7 children per adult in nurseries. The main reasons for the increased number of children per adult in ECEC settings include the implementation of economic austerity measures, new management methods, and unrealistic assumptions about how this will affect everyday life in ECEC settings (Glavind and Pade 2019a).

Dalsgaard, Jordan, and Petersen (2016) analysed the 2014 staff-child ratios in the 98 local municipalities. Their study shows huge differences between municipalities: in one municipality among those with the best ratios, the ratio was 1:3 for children under 3 years of age and 1:5.2 for children aged 3 to 6 years; in another among those with the best ratios, the ratios were 1:5.4 (0–2 years) and 1:9.4 (3–5 years).

Recruitment challenges

The increasing number of children means that the number of places in ECEC institutions needs to be increased by approximately 60,000 over the next ten years. As the adult-child ratio must also be improved, the number of pedagogical staffs must be increased by more than 12,000 full-time employees compared to the present. In 15 years, there will be approximately 80,000 more children in care than now (Glavind and Pade 2022). The increased need for pedagogical staff means that it may be difficult to secure trained staff. A large number of municipalities seek to

counteract this by supporting merit educations or by focusing on more students for the pedagogical basic education.

The popularity of the Pedagogue Education is not as high as it used to be. Once again in 2022, the education was the most popular in Denmark with 4,608 applicants as their first priority in quota 1 (see *Chapter **4.1***), but this is 18% fewer than the year before, and 23% fewer than in 2019. The decrease in the number of applicants is problematic at a time when society is screaming for more educated staff in ECEC institutions. The Trade Union BUPL warns that society is facing a welfare catastrophe if the Pedagogue Education does not become an attractive choice for more potential students: "In many ECEC settings, only half of the staff are educated pedagogues, and the municipalities simply cannot find enough pedagogical staff for the vacancies," says BUPL chairman Elisa Rimpler, referring to the fact that more than one in four pedagogue positions advertised from September 2021 to February 2022 was not occupied (BUPL 2022).

The trade unions call for national recruitment strategies, in combination with better working conditions and higher wages. A working time survey from 2019 shows that part-time pedagogues are willing to work more hours if the standards improve. A large proportion of part-time employees mention a harsh working environment as a reason for their choice to work part time (BUPL 2019).

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

DENMARK

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms chosen in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC settings are **ECEC centre** (*aldersintegrerede institution*, 0–5), **nursery** (*vuggestue,* 0–2) and **kindergarten** (*børnehave,* 3–6)[1]. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Denmark

1829	First philanthropic day nursery opens for working-class children, inspired by Robert Owen.
1870	First part-time Froebel-inspired kindergarten is established.
From 1900	The two strands of provision (care/education) gradually merge into a people's kindergarten (*børnehave*) along Froebelian lines, mostly for poor children.
1919	Allocation of first state subsidy to institutions with a social purpose. Childcare for the poor was now seen as a public responsibility. 50% of the costs of establishing kindergartens are subsidised, but two-thirds of the children must be from poor families.
1933	The legal regulation of childcare was moved from the Ministry of Education to the newly established Ministry of Social Affairs.
1949	State subsidy extended to include institutions for non-disadvantaged children.
From 1951	Introduction of legal obligation for the municipalities to support universal access to all public services
1964	The Child and Youth Care Act states that it is a public task to provide universal access for all children.
1987	Full delegation of financial administration of ECEC provision to the municipalities
2004	– Day Care Facilities Act, updating the responsibilities and the overall goals of the day care system – Responsibility for ECEC shifts from the Ministry of Social Affairs to the Ministry for Family and Consumers' Affairs
2007	Re-Transfer of ECEC to the Ministry of Social Affairs, now called Ministry for Welfare (including health)
2009	Compulsory school entry age lowered to age 6 instead of previous age 7
2010–2011	Transfer of responsibility for ECEC back to Ministry of Social and Domestic Affairs and subsequently to the Ministry for Social Affairs and Integration
2011–2013	First transfer of national responsibility for ECEC to the *Education* Ministry (Ministry of Children and Education), followed by re-transfer to the Social Affairs domain two years later under the Ministry for Children, Gender Equality, Integration and Social Affairs.
2015	Second transfer of national responsibility for ECEC to the Education sector, now under the Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality.
2016	Re-transfer to the Social Affairs domain in late 2016; ECEC now under the auspices of the Ministry for Children and Social Affairs.

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4, and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. An additional relevant format for Denmark is **0–5** years, referring to the age-integrated ECEC centres.

2018	Amendments to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (*Dagtilbudsloven* – previously Day Care Facilities Act) are adopted, to be fully implemented by 2020. The amendments include additional specifications in terms of the pedagogical foundations of ECEC (play, concept of learning, view of the child, etc.). A revised version of the curricular framework for ECEC (*The strengthened pedagogical curriculum*) is issued.
2020	Following a change of government, ECEC is re-allocated to the new Ministry of Children and Education.
2021	A ministerial decree on staff-child ratio minimum standards and strengthened monitoring of ECEC was included in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (*Dagtilbudsloven*). Fully implemented by 2024, there must be a minimum of one adult for three children 0–2 and for six children 3–5 years of age.

Sources: Borchorst 2009; Naumann et al. 2013; Willekens und Scheiwe 2020.

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Denmark has a unitary system of early childhood education and care for children aged 6 months (26 weeks) up to 6 years. Traditionally under the jurisdiction of Social Welfare, since 2020 the responsible authority at the national level is the Ministry of Children and Education (*Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet*). The funding, organisation and regulation of early childhood provision is the responsibility of the 98 municipalities. Early childhood services include both age-integrated ECEC centres (0–5 years) and age-separated settings (0–2 years, 3–5 years), as well as regulated home-based provision.

General objectives and legislative framework

The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (*Dagtilbudsloven*), last amended in 2022, regulates early childhood services, including home-based childcare, and also school-age childcare and other forms of socio-pedagogic provision for young people. It specifies that the local municipal authorities are responsible for formulating the targets and creating an administrative framework for services for young children, including children with disabilities or with other support needs.

According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the general purposes of early childhood services are to create – in cooperation with parents – a setting that benefits the well-being, development and learning of children; to provide families with flexibility and choice of provision so that they can organise their family and working lives according to their needs and wishes; to integrate preventive and supportive services for children with special needs and disabilities; and to create coherence and continuity in transitioning from one form of provision to another. One of the requirements for service providers is to ensure that children have opportunities of joint influence and responsibility in the ECEC setting in order to gain understanding and experience of democracy. ECEC settings are expected to support children's independence and their ability to participate in a rule-based community, thus strengthening their integration into Danish society (Ministry of Children and Education 2022).

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Denmark provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are indicated within the text and in the references section.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Denmark has a system of universal entitlement to a fee-paying, full-time place in publicly subsidised early childhood provision, starting when the children are 26 weeks old. Municipalities have a duty to provide ECEC services for all children between the age of six months and the start of primary school. Attendance is not compulsory.

Statutory schooling begins at age 6.

Main types of provision

ECEC settings (*daginstitutioner* – 'day institutions') may be age-integrated, from 26 weeks up to compulsory school age (6), or age-separated for the younger (0–2) and older (3–5) children. Typical opening hours on weekdays are from 6:30 to 17:00, which tend to cover parents' full-time working hours (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 50). Specific types of setting are:

ECEC centres (*aldersintegrerede institutioner*) for children aged just over 6 months up to school entry are the most common type of provision. Some also provide school-age childcare. In 2014, age-integrated centres accounted for just over 63% of all centre-based settings, while kindergartens account for approximately 31% and nurseries for nearly 6% (Statistics Denmark 2017). Since 2018, however, no separate national statistics are compiled for the age-integrated centres.

Nurseries (*vuggestuer* – 'cradle room') provide places for children up to age 3.

Kindergartens (*børnehaver* – 'children's garden') are settings for 3 to under 6 year-olds.

Home-based childcare (*dagpleje*) provision is mostly organised, funded and regulated by the local authority. In general, it is for children up to age 3, but can also include children up to age 6. Up to five children are allocated to one home-based provider. Private home-based care arrangements operate according to an agreement with the local authority, which provides a per capita subsidy and also supervision.

Provider structures

The majority of ECEC settings in Denmark are provided and run by the municipalities. Some are independent and self-governing but still run in close co-operation with the municipality. However, a growing number of ECEC centres (13.8% in 2022) are now privately owned and are run by parents, associations, or businesses, with subsidies from the local authorities.

In 2022, 2,266 ECEC providers managed a total of 3,910 centre-based settings. Since 2017, both the number of providers (from 2,199 in 2017) and the number of settings (from 3,964 in 2017) have increased (Statistics Denmark 2017, 2023a, BOERN 4).

In 2022, well over half of ECEC providers (57.1%) were public/municipal, almost one fifth (17.7%) were independent and one quarter (25.1%) were private persons or entities. All forms of private settings are subsidised by the state, although the amount can differ between those classified as independent and those classified as private. The greater majority of settings (72.8%) are run by municipalities; just over one quarter of all settings are run by independent or private providers.

Table 1

Denmark: Number and distribution of ECEC settings by centre type and ownership, 2022

Ownership/Provider	Number of settings 'at parental committee level'*	Share, in %	Number of settings 'at unit level'*	Share, in %
Public/municipal	1,295	57.1	2,846	72.8
Private non-profit, some self-governing ('independent')	401	17.7	484	12.4
Privately governed and publicly subsidised	569	25.1	580	14.8
Total	**2,266**		**3,910**	

Source: Statistics Denmark 2023a, BOERN 4, own calculations

* In the Danish ECEC register, a distinction is made between ECEC institution (corresponding to the parental committee level) and local ECEC settings (corresponding to unit level). All local ECEC settings are linked to and managed by an ECEC institution with a parental committee.

In 2021, the majority both of children under 3 years of age and over 3 years of age were enrolled in publicly funded ECEC provision (see *Table 2*).

Table 2

Denmark: Number of children in centre-based settings by age and provider, 2021

Provider type	Under 3 year-olds		3 years to school entry age	
	Number of children	In per cent	Number of children	In per cent
Public	86,572	85	140,940	78
Private, state subsidised	15,237	15	39,810	22
Total	**101,809**		**180,750**	

Source: Eurostat 2023f

Participation rates in regulated provision

Overall, 75,297 children under 2 years of age and 160,080 from 3 to 5 years were enrolled in centre-based ECEC settings in 2022. 25,732 children were cared for in a home-based setting (Statistics Denmark 2023a, BOERN2, own calculations). In the same year, 6,232 children under age 3 and 18,673 of the 3- to 5 year-olds attended a private setting (Statistics Denmark 2023a, PBOERN2).

According to Eurostat data, the participation rates of children under 3 years of age in centre-based settings remained almost the same from 2005 to 2022 (74% and 74.3%), as were those of children aged 3 to 6 (94% and 93.4%). The majority of both age groups spent more than 30 hours per week in an ECEC setting in 2022 (see *Table 3*).

Table 3

Denmark: Participation rates in centre-based ECEC provision according to age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	13	15
	Over 30 hours	60	79

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age in %
	No enrolment in ECEC	27	5
2010	1 to 29 hours	10	15
	Over 30 hours	68	75
	No enrolment in ECEC	23	10
2015	1 to 29 hours	7.7	9.2
	Over 30 hours	69.6	88.0
	No enrolment in ECEC	22.7	2.7
2022	1 to 29 hours	6.8	5.5
	Over 30 hours	67.9	87.9
	No enrolment in ECEC	25.3	6.6

Source: Eurostat 2023d, Slight deviations from 100% due to rounding

Across Europe, Denmark has the highest participation rates of under 3 year-olds in publicly subsidised ECEC provision (Jensen 2018). In 2021, 86.5% of 2 year-olds and over 97% of the over 3 year-olds attended an ECEC setting (see *Table 4*).

Table 4
Denmark: Number and enrolment rates of children in centre-based ECEC settings, by age, 2021

Age	Number of children in ISCED-01 settings	Enrolment rates in ISCED 01 settings, in %	Number of children in ISCED-02 settings	Enrolment rates in ISCED 02 settings, in %
Under 2 years	46,747	38.1		
2 year-olds	53,624	86.5		
3 year-olds	1,424	2.3	58,060	93.4
4 year-olds	11		61,212	97.4
5 year-olds	3		57,942	97.0
6 year-olds			3,518	6.0

Source: Eurostat 2023b, l

Financing and costs for parents

According to OECD data, total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 1.24% of GDP in 2019, 0.8% was allocated to provision for under 3 year-olds and 0.4% for 3 to 5 year-olds (OECD 2023).

ECEC settings in Denmark are fee-paying. The local authorities receive block grants funded by the state. A place in a municipal ECEC setting is funded primarily through a municipal, tax-funded subsidy (per capita funding), and the parents pay the remainder. However, the parental fee is not allowed to exceed 25% of the gross operating costs. The subsidies are paid directly to the ECEC centre and are reviewed annually. At least 75% of funding is therefore public, excluding rent and maintenance.

Fees in ECEC settings (both centre-based and home-based) are income-related and also vary according to the child's age. The parents pay lower fees or no fees if their income is below a certain limit – and the local authority pays an additional aided place subsidy in such cases. Two other reasons for reduced fees are if the child already has siblings in an ECEC centre and/or school-age childcare provision or if the child is deemed to have special educational and support

needs. In 2023, the average monthly fee charged for children aged 0 to 2 years was €465 in *daginstitutioner,* for children aged 3 to 6 years €259 (see *Table 5*), slightly higher if lunch was included. Parents receive financial support if they enrol their children in private settings; in 2022, 9,723 children and 9,635 families were affected (Statistics Denmark 2023a, DAGTIL4).

Table 5
Denmark: Average fees in centre-based municipal ECEC settings, 2023

Type of setting	DKK	€/year[3]	€/month
Nursery (0–2 years)	41,582	5,577	465
Kindergarten (3–5 years)	23,214	3,113	259

Note: The yearly rates are the rates decided by the municipalities. The figures have been corrected in cases where one or more months are free of payment. The actual fees paid are often lower than the monthly rates shown, since families with more than one child, low-income families, etc., are eligible for reduced rates.

Source: Statistics Denmark 2023a, RES88, own calculations

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 8% of net household income on childcare costs[4] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Private ECEC centres can fix the charges made to parents, and consequently these may be higher than the fees for a place in a local authority centre. The subsidy granted by the local council for a place in a private ECEC centre consists of an operating subsidy, a building subsidy and an administration contribution. The total subsidy is paid to the centre and not to the parents. Municipalities are obliged to publish the costs for a place in ECEC.

Staff to child ratios and group size

Denmark is one of the few European countries which have no national regulations on either the number of children per staff member or on the maximum group size. Even so, staff to child ratios on average compare favourably with many other European countries. Local authorities and ECEC centres decide on staff deployment and group size according to the local situation. The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 2020 explicitly states that when preparing the pedagogical curriculum "… the composition of the group of children shall be taken into consideration".

In December 2021, an amendment on minimum standards for the staff to child ratio was included in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. As from 2024, at least one adult must be present for every three children aged 0 to 2 years and for every six children aged 3 to 5 years (Ministry of Children and Education 2022, Ministry of Employment 2023).

Usually, there are 12 children in nursery groups and 24 in kindergarten groups. In family day care, one person cares for three to five children (Juhl 2018).

In 2022, the staff to child ratio was on average 2.9 children (0–2 years) per full-time staff member and for children aged 3 to 5 years 5.6 children and 3.3 children in home-based provision (Statistics Denmark 2023a, BOERN3). After a period of higher numbers of children to one member of staff through personnel shortages, ratios have improved slightly over the last five years.

[3] Conversion rate December 2023
[4] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

Curricular framework

As in many European countries, the underlying principles of Danish kindergarten philosophy can be traced back to the ideas and theories of Froebel and also Montessori, with adaptations to Scandinavian culture (Jensen and Langsted 2010). A major educational goal is to help children become aware that they can actively influence what happens in their immediate surroundings.

Denmark was the last of the Nordic countries to take the step of introducing a formal curricular framework (*pædagogisk læreplan*). In 2018, commissioned by the top-level ministry, the original curricular framework (2004) was revised by a group of experts, stakeholders and practitioners within the pedagogical field. It is now called "The strengthened pedagogical curriculum" (Ministry of Children and Education 2020). Since 2004, all ECEC settings are required to prepare a centre-specific pedagogical learning plan. In this way, each ECEC setting can take into account the specific context such as the composition of the child group (age, gender, disabilities, cultural differences, family backgrounds, etc.) as well as the specific location and physical facilities. ECEC settings are also required to document the learning and development of 0 to under 6 year-olds.

Certain basic principles form a common pedagogical foundation. These include: an image of the child as unique; listening to and taking into account the child's perspective; viewing play as an integral part of ECEC activities; having a broad understanding of learning through play, relationships, planned activities and exploration of nature – and by being challenged; viewing the group as a learning community; creating a safe and stimulating pedagogical learning environment; co-operating with parents with a focus on enhancing the child's well-being and learning; providing for vulnerable children; and ensuring continuity with school by supporting children's social skills, confidence in their own ability, and curiosity.

Staff are required to relate their pedagogy to six main themes: (1) comprehensive personal development; (2) social development; (3) communication and language; (4) body, senses and motion; (5) nature, outdoor life and natural phenomena (science); (6) culture, aesthetics and community (Ministry of Children and Education 2020). It is interesting to note that neither reading literacy nor mathematics are explicitly included as learning areas in this framework. At the same time, it is stated that "…the pedagogical learning environment for the oldest children should also introduce and allow the children to develop their curiosity towards, letters, numbers, patterns, shapes" (Ministry of Children and Education 2020, 27).

The ECEC centre head is responsible for preparing the centre-specific pedagogical plan, which has to be approved by the local council. It is also the centre head's responsibility to make the curricular framework known publicly, e.g. on the centre's website, and for evaluating it annually. At the centre management level, both in public and private settings, a bi-annual review is required which includes the parent board in the evaluation and includes their suggestions for follow-up.

Digital education

In the home environment, Danish children are given access to digital media and technologies at a very early age. More than 90% of children under the age of 7 have access to a tablet in the home. Although ICT use is encouraged by government policies, in ECEC settings there are large differences in use and implementation (Chaudron et al. 2018, 117ff).

The revised pedagogical curriculum (2018) states that ECEC activities should be meaningful and challenging and provide a basis for how children understand and act in a digital and global world. However, no specific digital competences are elaborated. The curriculum refers to the use of

digital tools, but in a general way. GPS, digital scales, webcams, etc. are mentioned as possibilities for supporting children to develop a creative, productive and critical approach to the use of digital technologies (Ministry of Children and Education 2020).

Monitoring – evaluation

The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care stipulates that the municipalities are responsible for carrying out evaluations in ECEC and ensuring that content and pedagogical activities are carried out in accordance with the law (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 123). However, they have different approaches and traditions in terms of monitoring and evaluation.

Moreover, policy perspectives and those of research contexts tend to differ. For example, policy-related discussions on quality pay only little attention to children's play and participation – in favour of promoting academic skills through structured learning activities that can be measured (Juhl 2018).

Child-related assessment

Denmark does not have a long tradition of formal child-related assessment. However, since 2007, the municipalities are required to conduct language assessments of 3 year-old children in ECEC to assess whether a child needs additional language stimulation. Assessments are also required for children not attending an ECEC service and the municipalities are obliged to provide language support if this is considered necessary. Completing a form to assess vocabulary and sentence construction is mandatory for staff and parents when children are 3 years old, sometimes when they are 2 years old (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019).

Centre-level assessment

The centre leader is responsible for establishing a culture of evaluation in the setting and has a duty to carry out a centre-level assessment at least every other year (Ministry of Children and Education 2020). The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care specifies that parents must be involved in the development, evaluation and follow up of the setting's curriculum, but it is up to the municipalities and ECEC settings to decide how this should be carried out. The way the internal evaluations are used is a matter for the individual ECEC setting

The revised curricular framework (2018) states that the learning environment in the ECEC centre is to be evaluated from a child's perspective, and that the children's experiences of their environment should be taken into account (Ministry of Children and Education 2020).

External evaluation

The national institute for educational evaluation, *Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut – EVA*, compiles, analyses and disseminates knowledge about early childhood education and care. The general focus is on evaluation studies of topics of nationwide importance, such as quality management, children's perspectives, evaluation culture, and transitions. Currently (2021), EVA is providing ECEC settings with online guidance for assessing the centre-level implementation of the curriculum with a document on “Questions you can use to evaluate the work with the pedagogical learning plan” (EVA 2021).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

The guiding principle in Denmark for young children with disabilities and additional educational needs is to make it possible for them to attend mainstream ECEC settings. The local authorities are responsible for ensuring that ECEC centres provide the supports necessary for enhancing the children's integration. Sometimes children with disabilities are placed in a separate group, in which the staff-child ratios are high and the pedagogues have access to specialised support staff. Across the education system, special needs education includes additional staffing for individualised support and personal assistance, counselling and technical aid.

Children with a migration background – Children from Roma communities

According to Eurostat data, 9.6% of the population in 2022 had a non-Danish citizenship and 41.9% of this group came from another EU country. In the under-fives age-group, these shares were 10.2% and 38.9% respectively (Eurostat 2023c).

At the beginning of 2023, national statistics report 12.7% of children under 6 years as having a non-Danish background. Of these, 33.5% came from other EU countries. Overall, most of the non-Danish children were from Syria (12.6%), followed by Romania and Ukraine (10.1% each).

Table 6

Denmark: Children under age 6 with a non-Danish background by country of origin, sorted by frequency, 2023

Country of origin	Number of children under age 6 with a non-Danish background	Share of children's countries of origin among non-Danish population under 6 years of age
Syria	5,094	12.6
Romania	4,114	10.1
Ukraine	4,081	10.1
Poland	2,904	7.2
India	1,796	4.4
Eritrea	1,563	3.9
Lithuania	1,161	2.9
Turkey	1,147	2.8
Germany	1,128	2.8
Pakistan	1,044	2.6
Other countries	**16,528**	40.7
Total	**40,560**	

Source: Statistics Denmark 2023b, own calculations

For children with a background of migration the local authorities are obliged to offer language stimulation training from the age of 3 upwards. Since August 2004, this language support is compulsory. For children who do not attend some kind of ECEC provision, 15 hours per week of Danish language contact may be provided to families in their own home. Children attending an ECEC centre receive additional language support determined by a local evaluation.

Statistical data on Roma are not available, as the ethnic origin of persons is not registered in Denmark. The Council of Europe estimates that there are approximately 5,500 Roma living in Denmark (0.1% of the population). Denmark's policy on the Roma is based on equal treatment, to ensure that the Roma and Travellers have access to all mainstream services. Goals for active

inclusion, education level, employment rate and health in Denmark apply to Roma as well as to other groups with a minority ethnic background in Denmark.

Parental leave arrangements[5]

A new leave model was introduced for anyone who has given birth or adopted children on or after 2nd of August 2022 in order to support equality between men and women. Now, each parent is entitled to 24 weeks of leave after the birth of the child. Some of the weeks are earmarked and non-transferable (Ministry of Employment 2023).

Pregnancy and Maternity leave (*Graviditets og fødselsorlov*) is provided for 4 weeks before birth and 10 weeks after the child's birth. The first two weeks following birth are compulsory. The income-related remuneration has an upper limit of DKK 4,550 (€ 610.15). Eligibility for employees is dependent on having worked for at least 160 hours in the four months preceding the paid leave. Adapted regulations apply to self-employed persons, persons on a work placement following vocational training, unemployed persons, students and persons on sickness leave.

Fathers (and same-sex co-parents) are entitled to ten compulsory weeks **Paternity leave** *(Fædre/medmoderorlov)* under the same conditions, eight weeks of which are transferable.

Each parent is entitled to 14 weeks of **Parental leave** (*Forældreorlov*), which can be taken by both parents, also at the same time; nine weeks are non-transferable. Between eight and 13 weeks can also be taken at a later date. The 28 weeks can also be extended for reduced cash benefits. During this period, it is possible to work part time.

During Maternity, Paternity and Parental leave parents are protected against dismissal.

In terms of leave uptake, there are no disaggregated statistics on the proportion of parents using either Maternity, Paternity or Parental leave. The mother's formal education level and her position in the labour market are central to the way leave is divided between parents. Well-educated mothers take the shortest leave, whereas well-educated fathers take the longest leave. In 2021, 83% of mothers made use of leave with benefit: in 79% of cases both took leave (not necessarily at the same time. In 2021, mothers made use of 279.1 days on average.

The proportion of fathers taking leave has not changed since 2015. In 2021, 78% of eligible fathers took leave with benefit. Fathers who are on Parental leave together with their partner, took 35.6 days on average in 2021 (vs. 29.7 days in 2015).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Denmark

*Country expert assessment by **Anette Boye Koch***

The ambition of Danish ECEC to ensure the well-being and participation of all children in strong child communities is challenged. In the context of the inclusion agenda, an increasing number of children in vulnerable situations in need of social or special pedagogical support are participating in general ECEC institutions (Baes-Jørgensen 2021). The municipalities aim to develop inclusive child environments in ECEC settings, but the task is found to have educational, governance and financial consequences that are demanding to meet under the current conditions.

ECEC managers estimate that the proportion of children in need of social and special pedagogical support in or outside general ECEC is greater today compared to five years ago. They also find

[5] The brief information in this section is based mainly on the country note for Denmark by Tine Rostgaard and Anders Ejrnæs in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

that the complexity of the special support has increased, and that the proportion of children in vulnerable situations due to impaired mental or psychological functioning has grown. The rise is partly due to an extended focus on inclusion of children in vulnerable situations in general ECEC settings, but also that child professionals have become more effective in diagnosing children (Baes-Jørgensen 2021). Until recently, Danish ECEC practices were designed to deal with a high degree of homogeneity in the group of children. With the inclusion of children in need of social and special pedagogical support, a rethink of ordinary pedagogical practices is required, as the ECEC communities need to become more flexible with increased room for diversity (Baes-Jørgensen 2021; Petersen 2022).

Pedagogues are experiencing a shortage of both resources and special pedagogical expertise and knowledge to carry out the task alongside aggravated staff-child ratios, having to produce learning plans and carrying out systematic evaluations. Consequently, they experience difficulties in offering children sufficient direct contact with adults in general. It is also arduous to get the needed help for children in vulnerable situations, as economical resources are tight and the time to write applications for extra support has to be taken out of the daily quota (Baes-Jørgensen 2021).

When asked, Pedagogues say they lack the time and specific skills to detect and investigate the children they are concerned about, and to initiate the needed cooperation with parents and interdisciplinary experts. Consequently, they end up working at the individual level and detect challenges in individual children rather than to ideally work purposefully with the child community (Baes-Jørgensen 2021).

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the population in Denmark totalled 5,873,420, representing a gradual increase since 2000 (2000: 5,330,020; 2010: 5,534,738; 2020: 5,822,763) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.72, Denmark was well above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023e)[6].

[6] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Children under age 6

Table 7
Denmark: Number of children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age	Number of children
under 1 year-olds	63,602
1 year-olds	61,514
2 year-olds	61,864
3 year-olds	62,135
4 year-olds	62,297
5 year-olds	62,893
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**374,305**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 3.2% of the total population were children under age 3 and 6.4% children under age 6. Compared to the respective EU averages, these proportions have always been higher than average since 2000 (*Table 8*).

Table 8
Denmark: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population from 2000 to 2022

Year	Comparison Denmark/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Denmark	3.8	4.0	7.7
	Ø EU15[7]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Denmark	3.6	3.7	7.3
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Denmark	3.1	3.4	6.4
	Ø EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Denmark	3.2	3.2	6.4
	Ø EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, more than half (51.8%) of households with children under 6 years of age are couple households. 12.3% of all households are single households, whereby the proportion of single mother households (8.6%) is significantly higher than of single father households (3.8%).

Table 9
Denmark: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Total households, in %*
All households	447,100	
Couple households	231,600	51.8
Other household type	160,200	35.8
Single households, total	55,200	12.3

[7] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Household type	Total households	Total households, in %*
Single households, women	38,300	8.6
Single households, men	16,900	3.8

Source: Eurostat 2023k, *own calculation

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Denmark, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 82.7% and for women 78.1% (Eurostat 2023j).
In 2022, 79.5% of women and 88.6% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), both the shares of employed mothers and fathers were above the EU-average, especially that of mothers (63.6% and 87.2% respectively) (Eurostat 2023i, own calculations).

Table 10a

Denmark: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %
Denmark	82.7	90.2
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[8]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %
Denmark	79.5	88.6
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[9]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023i, own calculations

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 10b.*

Table 10b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023

[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023i, 2023j

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[10]

In 2022, 12.3% of the children under age 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, a considerably lower proportion compared with the EU28 average of 23.3%. Overall, 17.1% of the total population in Denmark are categorised as being at risk of poverty or social exclusion (average: 21.6%). 6.4% of the children under 6 years suffered from severe material deprivation in 2020, compared to 2.8% of the total population (EU averages 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023g, h).

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[10] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or (severely) materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

ESTONIA

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the authors

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1. ECEC governance in Estonia

Estonia has a unitary system of early childhood education and care. According to the draft Early Childhood Education and Care Act 2022, not only the ECEC centres/kindergartens (*koolieelne lasteasutus /lasteaed*) for children aged 1 year 6 months up to 7 years, but also childcare services now come under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research (*Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium*) at the national level. Governance and system management are distributed between the national and regional levels, reflecting a multi-level governance model. At the local level, education and social affairs authorities are responsible for ECEC provision and management.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Staff qualifications, professional education/training and remuneration are regulated. There are three main categories of staff: ECEC Teacher (*koolieelse lasteasutuse/lasteaiaõpetaja*), ECEC Assistant Teacher (*abiõpetaja*) and Childcarer/Nurse (*lapsehoidja*). Setting leaders are categorised as: Director (*direktor*) and Lead Teacher (*õppealajuhataja*). Assistants are required to have an ISCED level 3 qualification, Nurses/Childcarers an ISCED level 4 qualification, and ECEC Teachers ISCED level 6, Directors ISCED level 7 (Master's degree) and Lead Teachers an ISCED level 6 or 7 qualification.

According to the Early Childhood Education and Care Act (draft, Official Gazette 2022) teachers should create conditions for the growth and development of children in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding with the children and their parents and take care of the life and health of the children at the ECEC centre. Teachers are required to provide advice on issues of learning and teaching to the parents of children, who attend the ECEC setting, and also to the parents of children not attending the centre but who live in the catchment area if the parents so request.

Table 1
Estonia: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
ECEC Teacher / Kindergarten Teacher *Koolieelse lasteasutuse õpetaja* **or**	*Koolieelne lasteasutus/ Lasteaed*	Core practitioner with group responsibility Centre Head (*Direktor*)	1½–7 years	Bachelor's degree 3 years university ECTS credits: 180 EQF: level 6 ISCED 2011: 6

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Alushariduse peda-goog *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Profes-sional	**ECEC centre/ kindergarten** 1½–6 years[1]			**or** (Centre Head/Director) ECTS credits: 300 EQF: level 7 ISCED 2011: 7
ECEC Assistant Teacher *Abiõpetaja*	*Koolieelne lasteasutus* **ECEC centre/ kindergarten** 1½– 6 years	Qualified co-worker	1½–6/7 years	Compulsory school leaving certificate and 1 year of studies at a Health Care College ECTS credits: n/a[2] EQF: level 4 ISCED 2011: 4 (level 5 for work in pre-paratory classes)
Childcarer / Nurse *Lapsehoidja*	*Lapsehoiuteenus* **Childcare service** 1½–2 years	Qualified co-worker	0–18 years	Compulsory school leaving certificate and 1 year of studies at a Health Care College ECTS credits**:** 60 EQF: Level 4 ISCED 2011: 4 (level 5 for work with children with special needs and parents)

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neu-man 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children en-rolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In the case of Estonia, the relevant format is **1½–6** years, since children usually start school when they are 7 years old.

[2] n/a: not applicable

2.2 Centre leader

According to the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act (Official Gazette 1999) the duty of the Director is to ensure the effective operation and to direct the activities of the ECEC institution in co-operation with the teachers' council and the board of trustees. The Director is the legal representative of the ECEC institution during the period of validity of their contract of employment.

- To perform the duties provided for in this Act, the Director has the right to conclude transactions with the assets of the ECEC institution pursuant to the procedure established by legislation.
- The Director is responsible for the development of the ECEC institution and for the purposeful and expedient use of its financial resources.
- The Director shall submit a written overview of the learning and teaching provided at the ECEC institution and the financial situation and use of funds to the rural municipality or city government and the board of trustees once a year and shall give written notice of any material deterioration of the economic state of the ECEC institution and of any regulations issued by a supervisory agency.
- In order to fill a vacant position of a Director, a public competition shall be organised. The rural municipality or city government shall announce the competition and establish the procedure for its conduct. The person who wins the competition shall be appointed to office by the rural municipality or city government.
- The contract of employment with the Director shall be entered, amended and cancelled by the rural municipality or city mayor or an official authorised by him or her.

According to the draft Early Childhood Education and Care Act (Parliament of Estonia 2022), the qualifications required for the position of Director are a Master's degree or equivalent. The pedagogical, managerial and leadership competence requirements of a Centre Director are described in the Professional Standard for Teachers. Management and leadership competences are assessed by the employer in the following areas: organisational development; design of the learning environment; human resources management; general resource management; management of the learning process; and self-management.

The competency and career model of educational leaders prepared in 2023 (Good Deed Foundation et al. 2023) describes what high performing educational leaders do and know, and how the development of leaders in the field of education should take place. This tool can be used by educational leaders themselves in planning their own development and career, as well as in the recruitment, development, and future planning for Centre Directors and Head Teachers in ECEC institutions as places of employment. In addition, the competence model provides state institutions and universities with a good basis for the development of programmes and advanced training courses for educational leaders. Coping with today's challenges requires educational leaders to apply high-level leadership skills in supporting and managing their teams.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

In Estonia, there are no specifically designated positions for specialised pedagogical work across the ECEC centre (e.g. with a focus on working with the parents of migrant children or on students completing a practicum). The qualification requirements for a teacher working in a group of children with intensified support and a group of children with special support are higher education and a teaching qualification or higher education and pedagogical and special pedagogical competences.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Each ECEC centre has a **board of trustees.** According to the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act (Official Gazette 1999), the co-ordinating and supervisory tasks of the board are the following:

1) The board of trustees is a permanent body whose function is to make sure that the learning and teaching provided at the ECEC centre corresponds to the development and interests of the children and to co-operate in this field with the centre staff.
2) The board of trustees shall include a representative of teachers, representatives of parents of each group and a representative of the rural municipality or city.
3) The board of trustees shall:
   - Hear the report of the Director on the learning and teaching provided and the management of the ECEC centre.
   - Make recommendations to the Director and the rural municipality or city government for the preparation of the budget of the ECEC centre and for the expedient use of the budget funds.
   - Submit proposals to the Director and the rural municipality or city government to ensure a favourable environment for development for children.
   - Through a representative (representatives), participate in the work of the committee of a competition organised to fill the vacant position of Director.
   - Decide the daily cost of catering for children.
   - Decide on other issues placed within the competence of the board of trustees by this Act or a resolution of the rural municipality or city council.
4) The board of trustees has the right to obtain information necessary for its work from the director and from the rural municipality or city government.
5) To organise its activities, the board of trustees shall elect a chairperson and deputy chairperson from among its members.
6) The work format of the board of trustees shall be a meeting, which is to be held at least once a quarter on the proposal of the chairperson of the board of trustees or the director.

2.5 Specialist support staff

A **Health Care Professional**, who is employed daily at an ECEC centre, is required to carry out the following tasks:

1) Monitor the health of the children based on the health protection and health promotion requirements for children established by a regulation of the Minister of Social Affairs and by a regulation of the Government of the Republic and inform the parents and the doctor of a child of any health disorders the child may have.
2) Prepare the daily schedule of the ECEC centre, which complies with the requirements for the daily schedules established by a regulation of the Minister of Social Affairs and approved by the director.
3) Verify whether the catering for the children meets the requirements for catering for children as established by a regulation of the Minister of Social Affairs.
4) Advise parents and teachers on issues related to children's health.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

In 2021/2022, a total of 8,012 teachers were working in Estonian kindergartens/ECEC centres (IMO 2023). Among these were 6,678 ECEC Teachers/Kindergarten Teachers, 581 Music Teachers, 477 Physical Education Teachers, 185 Special Education Teachers working with children with special needs, 171 Estonian Language Teachers, and 47 Swimming Instructors. One regular ECEC Teacher and two Assistant Teachers are assigned to each group of children.

The age distribution of the ECEC Teachers was as follows:

763 teachers were below the age of 30; 1,667 between 30–39 years; 1841 between 40–49 years; 2,277 between 50–59 years; and 1,507 teachers were over 60 years of age.

Most teachers are women. Only 62 men work in ECEC centres.

Table 2

Estonia: Structural composition of ECEC workforce, 2021/22

Staff categories	ECEC Teachers	Child-carers	Specialist support staff	Administrative staff	Total	Proportion of workforce
Staff with specialist higher education degree (BA)	4,114	466	151	330	5,061	**49%**
Staff with specialist higher education degree (MA)	1,630	-	439	646	2,715	**26%**
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	898	351	6	6	1,261	**12%**
Staff with non-specialist qualification	1,296	-	11	9	1,316	**13%**
Men	62 (under 1%) (including male administrative staff; no systematically complied data by qualifications and workplace)					
Staff with a background of migration	No systematically compiled national data					

Source: IMO 2023

Since 2015, all ECEC Teachers are required to have a higher education degree. Higher education in early childhood education has been available at Tallinn University since 1967 and at Tartu University and its affiliated Narva College since 2004. Whereas in 1995 the proportion of ECEC Teachers with higher education was only 20.9%, by 2001 it had risen to 25.6% (Torm 2002, 465), by 2016 to 66% and by 2022 to 72% – a remarkable rise over a period of less than 30 years (IMO 2023). Currently, 20% of ECEC Teachers, well over half of Lead Teachers (58%) and 67% of Directors have a Master's degree (see *Table 3*).

Table 3

Estonia: Directors and ECEC Teachers according to qualification, 2021/22

Education level	Directors (*direktor*) N=592	%	Lead Teachers (*õppealaju-hataja*) N=436	%	ECEC Teacher N=8,150	%
Doctoral degree	4	0.7	2	0.5	3	0.04
Between MA and PhD	22	3.7	7	1.6	39	0.5
Master's degree	397	**67**	253	**58**	1,630	**20**
Bachelor's degree / Bachelor professional (*rakenduskõrgharidus*)	162	**27**	169	**38**	4,114	**51**
Between secondary and higher education	3	0.5	6	1.4	898	11
Secondary education, with long years of work experience	3	0.5	3	0.7	1,296	16

Source: IMO 2023

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Historical developments: On 1 September 1967, the Tallinn Pedagogical Institute (renamed Tallinn University in 2005) opened the first specialist degree course for early childhood education and psychology; students were admitted for both full-time and part-time learning. Between 1993 and 1997 a four-year common degree was introduced for Pre-Primary and Primary School Teachers was established and between 1994 and 1998 this was extended to include a child psychology specialisation (a four-year bachelor's degree course).

Between 1995–2002, the Pre-primary and Primary School Teacher education lasted five years. Between 1998–2005, it was possible to receive a four-year degree in Educational Sciences, specialising as a Pre-primary and Primary School Teacher. The education of students who graduated in those years has currently been equalised with a Master's degree. The new 3+2 curricula for ECEC Teachers were compiled in 2001 and the first students both for Bachelor's and Master's levels were admitted in the academic year 2002/2003. Since 2002, the ECEC Teacher Bachelor study programme has a duration of three years. The following Master's programmes have been available since 2002.

- 2002–2004: ECEC Teacher-Counsellor studies (one year, 40 ECTS credits). The first Master's students graduated in 2003.
- 2003–2010: ECEC Teacher-Counsellor Master's studies (two years, according to the new curriculum 120 ECTS credits).
- Starting in 2010 and up to the present, the nominal study period for the MA in Early Childhood Education (*Alushariduse pedagoog*) is two years (120 ECTS credits) (Veisson et al 2011).

– Since 2015, Early Childhood Education BA and MA study programmes have been administered by the teacher education and educational science department at Tallinn University School of Educational Science. Other study programmes in this department include primary education, general education, vocational education, and adult education.

Current context:

The goal of teacher education is to support the preparation of teachers who are professionally competent and able to participate in the development of educational institutions as organisations. The activities in the field of teacher education and educational sciences are also supported by the Centre for Innovation in Education.

The study programme of early childhood education of Tallinn University gives a contemporary scientific preparation at either the Bachelor's (180 ECTS credits) or the Master's level (120 ECTS credits). These degree qualifications guarantee students' professional competencies and skills of self-reflection as ECEC Teachers. The courses also prepare students to become early childhood education experts who understand educational-political processes. They provide graduates with qualifications to become ECEC Teachers (*alushariduse pedagoog*) who can direct children's development, create a favourable learning environment and to cooperate with other adults including parents, other teachers, and specialist support staff in the community network. The bachelor's degree also supports each learner's personal development and enables them to continue their studies at the Master's level.

Bachelor level studies

The study programme of early childhood education at BA level comprises 180 ECTS credits. It mainly includes in-depth courses in the principal subjects:

– Teaching the first (home) language and Estonian as an additional language– *emakeele didaktika ja eesti keel teise keelena*
– Mathematics and teaching mathematics – *matemaatika ja matemaatika didaktika*
– Nature studies and teaching about nature – *loodusteadus ja loodusteaduse didaktika*
– Art in early childhood education – *kunst koolieelses eas*
– Music and movement education– *muusika ja liikumine koolieelses eas*
– Educational science
– Psychology and
– A pedagogical traineeship (practicum).

According to the goals of the programme structure, the role of in-depth studies supports the future ECEC Teachers to form a general, cultural, social, communicative, ethical, and professional set of skills and to be prepared for pedagogical work with children aged birth up to 7 years in diverse ECEC settings.

The university bases its activities on the needs of Estonian society, relying on historical experiences and educational research, and cooperating with universities and educational institutions in Estonia and in other countries. Since 1967 we have educated over 2,500 specialists in early childhood education, in different time periods either following the four years, the five-year or 3+2 years' curriculum, and all of them have now been equalised by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Science with the currently valid Master's curricula.

Master's level studies

The curriculum of the Master's study programme enables students to acquire a scientific education qualification at Master's level, to deepen ECEC Teachers' competences, to complement

scientific knowledge in early childhood education, to acquire additional knowledge in the management of children's institutions and to learn how to support a child's smooth transition from kindergarten to school. Work on the Master's thesis allows students to continue in-depth scientific studies towards the level of Doctoral studies. Studies take place in the form of lectures, seminars, independent works, practical work, and traineeships.

Former Masters students can work in managerial positions, e.g. in the Estonian Ministry of Education and Science, in the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre and at university colleges, as trainers of teachers in further education, in education departments, as Directors or Lead Teachers in kindergartens and as ECEC Teachers.

Table 4
Estonia: ECEC Teacher

Job title in Estonian: *Koolieelse lasteasutuse õpetaja (Tartu University)* *Alushariduse pedagoog (Tallinn University)* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: 12 years compulsory schooling with school leaving certificate; written test and oral examination.
Professional studies: Three-year study route at university, including at least 18 weeks' work placement.
Award: bachelor's degree/Early childhood education *Alushariduse pedagoog* at Tallinn University and ECEC Teacher qualification at Tartu University
ECTS credits: 180 – Qualified Teacher Status (Teacher Professional Standard – *Õpetaja kutsestandard*)
EQF level: 6, 7 or 8 **ISCED 2011**: 6, 7 or 8
Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergarten (*Lasteaed*), 1½–6 years; nurseries (*Lastesõim*), 0–2 years.

Table 5
Estonia: Childcarer/Nurse

Job title in Estonian: *lapsehoidja/abiõpetaja* **Profile**: Social Care/Health Care Professional
Entry requirements: 12 years compulsory schooling with school leaving certificate
Professional studies: One-year study route at a Health Care College
Award: Qualified Childcarer Status (Childcarer Professional Standard – *Lapsehoidja kutsestandard*)
ECTS credits: 60
EQF-level: 4 (or 5 for work with children with special needs and parents)
ISCED 2011: 4 (or 5, see above)
Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergarten (*Lasteaed*), 1½–6 years; nursery (*Lastesõim*), 0–2 years; child care service, 0–18 years

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

An important document which regulates work in kindergartens is the Teacher Professional Standard (Estonian Qualification Authority 2020), classified at level 6 in the Estonian and European Qualifications Frameworks.

The Professional Standard is a document which describes professional activities and provides the set of skills, knowledge and attitudes or competency requirements needed for successful conduction of professional activities. The profession of teacher (level 6) includes the following parts of work and duties: planning of learning and teaching activities, development of learning

environment, supporting of learning and development, reflection and professional self-development, counselling of learner and parent. Main tools of a teacher are learning and playing equipment. Personal qualities needed for work are self-management, cooperativeness, initiative, responsibility, self-confidence, creativity, tolerance, empathy, integrity and a positive attitude.

Universities are free to put together curricula according to the new National Curriculum for Preschool Child Care Institutions (*Koolieelse lasteasutuse riiklik õppekava)* (Official Gazette 2008) and the draft Early Childhood Education and Childcare Act (*Alushariduse ja lapsehoiu seadus)*, (Parliament of Estonia 2022).

Box 2

Estonia: Bachelor study programmes at Tallinn University (2022a) and Tartu University (2022)

Tallinn University
Objectives
– To create opportunities for the acquisition of broad education in Educational Sciences in the area of early childhood education – To support the formation of skills to work in jobs that require an ECEC Teacher's knowledge – To create opportunities for the continuation of studies in early childhood education at Master's level.
Outcomes
The BA graduate… – has basic knowledge in educational sciences, systematic knowledge in early childhood education, knows the principles of child development, subject didactics, and methods of scientific research. – knows how to integrate theoretical knowledge into practical work with children and adults. – knows how to create a favourable intellectual and physical environment for child development. – knows how to plan, integrate, analyse critically, and evaluate pedagogical processes. – can search information by using various information sources in early childhood education and to seek answers to specific questions and problems of the field. – knows how to conduct empirical research, write and formalise a Bachelor thesis. – knows how to reflect upon one's own activities, to evaluate personal needs for self-education and further training, as well as being aware of the possibilities to continue at a post-graduate (Master´s) level.
Tartu University
Obligatory Basic Modules
Module 1.1 – Inclusive Education – Communication and Feedback in early years settings – Research Methods in Education – Teacher's Identity and Agency – Learning Environment and Teaching Resources – Basics of Learning – Teaching for Learning Module 1.2 – Basics of Academic Writing – Modern Estonian – The Child in Estonian Cultural History – Seminar Paper – Planning Research and Writing Report Module 1.3: – English for Early Years Teachers (B1) – English for Early Years Teachers (B2) Module 2: In-depth field modules

Module 2.1 – Ongoing field studies in Early Childhood Education – Main Pedagogical Traineeship in Early Childhood Education
Outcomes
The BA graduate will… – have an overview of child development as well as factors influencing children's behaviour; be able to notice and consider children's special educational needs. – be able to organise learning activities according to children's age and abilities, considering cross-curricular links and integrating theoretical knowledge with practical skills. – be able to provide a safe and motivating learning environment. – have knowledge of different cultures and consider the specific characteristics of a multicultural learning environment. – be able to co-operate and communicate effectively with parents, colleagues, and other specialists. – be able to analyse and evaluate their work as well as the needs for continuing professional development. – have knowledge of research methods and be able to conduct research under supervision. – know the curriculum of early years education. – be aware of the role and ethical aspects of their work. – be able to use information-communication technology in their everyday practices. – understand subject-related terminology in Estonian. – understand and communicate in at least one foreign language. After completion of the programme students can continue their studies toward a Master's degree in education.

Box 3

Estonia: Master's study programme at Tallinn University (2022b)

Objectives
– To create opportunities for broad analysis of international trends in early childhood education in the context of educational sciences and educational policy – To support the development of readiness for analysis of theoretical concepts of management and counselling in ECEC establishments – To support the development of professionalism as an ECEC Teacher in activities of early childhood settings, management of learning and educational activities and in guiding personal development – To create preconditions for continuing studies at Doctoral level.
Outcomes
The MA graduate… – is familiar with local and international trends in educational sciences and educational policies and has a systematic overview of leadership and counselling theories. – knows how to manage activities in early childhood educational establishments, plan organisational development and evaluate the effectiveness of these activities. – knows how to evaluate ECEC quality in the context of children, teachers, and organisational development. – knows how to create a favorable environment for child development according to individual or special needs of the child. – can counsel parents and colleagues in teaching and educational matters. – is familiar with international scientific research in the area of early childhood education, is able to conduct professional educational scientific research and formulate it into a scientific thesis. – can plan, analyse and reflect upon professional development needs as an ECEC Teacher – is able to continue studies at Doctoral level.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Currently, the only possibility to become an ECEC Teacher is either to study early childhood education (*alushariduse pedagoog*) at Tallinn University or to register for the early years' teacher

programme (*koolieelse lasteasutuse õpetaja*) at Tartu University and its affiliated Narva college. ECEC Assistant Teachers are required to follow only one year of training, which is organised by Health Care Colleges in Tallinn and Tartu.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Practicum periods in ECEC settings are an integral part of all **BA study programmes**. Students undertake several placements to consolidate what they have learnt and to develop and test their skills and knowledge in a holistic way.

Guided workplace experience at Tallinn University

The traineeship takes place in five block periods over five semesters. The general aim is to give students the chance to familiarise themselves with the work in a variety of ECEC settings and the values and agreed rules within them. This includes learning about the specialised competences and role of an ECEC Teacher, setting goals for their professional development and analysing the importance and feasibility of cooperation with colleagues.

Structure

Teaching Practice I (3 ECTS) and *Teaching Practice II* (3 ECTS) aim to create opportunities for the practical application of theoretical knowledge in work with children up to 7 years of age, with a focus on toddlers (1½ to 3 years) in the second practicum; to support awareness of the links between acquired knowledge and educational activities; to enhance students' skills in supporting children's development; and how to communicate with colleagues as a teacher and organiser of educational activities.

Teaching Practice III (3 ECTS) includes a focus on children from multilingual backgrounds. Students learn about ways of transmitting Estonian as a second language and organising activities for multilingual learning among children with different family languages (including immersion approaches) and learn about the principles of monitoring children's language development.

Teaching Practice IV (3 ECTS) includes supporting the students' skills in terms of planning, conducting and analysing learning and educational activities based on the level of development of the group or the group of special children; supporting the development of individual children; implementing digital technologies and IT tools to make learning and teaching more visible; reflecting on and analysing one's own practices.

Teaching Practice V (6 ECTS) aims to consolidate all the goals of the previous teaching practices and supporting the student in planning professional development and forming a comprehensive picture of the role of the profession.

In the **Master's study programme**, teaching practice takes place twice during the course and is awarded 6 ECTS.

Teaching practice I (3 ECTS) aims to create opportunities for students to become familiar with planning, organising and leading an ECEC institution's educational activities; to support the students' skill of analysing the leadership of educational activities; to support the formation of connections between the students' analysis of leadership competences and acquired knowledge; to enable the student to acquire teamwork experience.

Teaching practice II (3 ECTS) aims to create opportunities for students to learn about the management of educational activities, the guidance of teamwork and the different forms of working

procedures; to try out the implementation of different forms of work organisation, to use different methods and suitable ICT tools in educational activities; to assess the teacher's actions and teamwork.

Courses and traineeships can also be undertaken abroad, with Erasmus+ placements abroad and other mobility schemes for undergraduate students; 15 ECTS are awarded on the BA programme and 9 ECTS on the MA programme.

Methods: Pedagogical traineeship includes both observation and practical activities in the assessment of children's development and activities, as well as in the planning and implementation of teaching and educational activities in ECEC institutions. Reflection on and analysis of the student's own development is a key focus.

Mentoring: One supervisor from the kindergarten and one from the university evaluate the student's practicum. At the end of all teaching practice session students are required to present a report in eDidaktikum and make an oral presentation.

Guided workplace experience at Tartu University (BA programme)

The university provides three courses and one main practicum in ECEC:

Course 1: Continuous traineeship in ECEC (3 ECTS)

The course has two main goals, to be achieved jointly with the domain- and subject-didactics:

- To support student's learning to be a teacher by creating opportunities to associate studies of domain- and subject-didactics with teachers' activities in an educational institution
- To give students an opportunity to perform traineeship tasks in different educational institutions at different age levels and with children with special educational needs.

Main Pedagogical Practicum in ECEC (11 ECTS)

The course has three main goals to support prospective teachers based on previously completed university studies and the course in continuous pedagogical traineeship. It aims to create opportunities for:

- Integrating acquired knowledge with practical teaching activities in an ECEC institution
- Exploring the educational process as a whole and teaching during a complete educational period in an ECEC institution
- Practising principles related to subject-didactics in an ECEC institution.

Course 2: Pedagogical Practice (4 ECTS)

The main goal of the course is to support students in becoming a teacher by creating opportunities to practice knowledge acquired from different basic module courses and domain- and subject-didactics courses before starting corresponding teaching practice in an ECEC setting.

Course 3: Ongoing Pedagogical Traineeship in ECEC (6 ECTS)

The course has three main goals to be achieved jointly with the basic module courses:

- Creating ongoing opportunities to associate theoretical knowledge with a teacher's activities in an educational institution.
- Developing skills and a habitus of reflecting on other teachers' and students' activities in order to support their own development as a teacher.

– Defining themselves as a member of the school personnel who collaborates, according to the type of the educational institution, with children, different teachers, administration, support specialists.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Regulatory framework: In Estonia there are binding frameworks at the national, regional and provider levels for regulating the CPD of ECEC workers. CPD is organised according to the Professional Standard of ECEC Teachers. In the Adult Education Act (2019), the Continuing Education Standard sets out the curricular requirements for continuing education, for the documents certifying the successful completion and participation in continuing education and a list of key curricular areas to be provided for.

Organisation, obligation, and funding: Continuing professional development for ECEC Teachers is organised either at the national or the municipality level as well as by the ECEC settings themselves. Based on national priorities and orders, universities organise CPD courses for kindergartens staff, including heads, teachers, assistants, and support specialists. CPD activities are obligatory. The Government of the Republic supports local governments in providing professional development for kindergarten teams (Ministry of Education and Research 2023). The funds are to be used to facilitate teaching in the Estonian language, to support a modern learning approach and the digital literacy of teachers and managers, and to promote collaboration and sharing experiences among professionals.

On the one hand, Centre Directors must direct their own professional development, and on the other hand, both the school administrator and the state must support them throughout their career. The updated competency and career model is a necessary tool for this. Next steps for the Ministry of Education are to implement the models: to create an implementation plan for providing the necessary support in recruiting leaders, supporting their professional development, and evaluating work results (Good Deed Foundation, Ministry of Education and Research, Fontes, Estonian Principals' Association 2023).

Main forms: Main forms of CPD are formal seminars/courses; centre based CPD activities (sharing of inspiring practices in the local, regional, and national level), open programmes for the cooperation of different ECEC institutions, webinars, and conferences (national and international).

Providers and certification: The main providers of CPD in Estonia are Tallinn University, University of Tartu, Estonian Kindergarten Teachers Association, Association of Estonian Early Childhood Education Principals and Hea Algus (NGO). The certification awarded by any one CPD provider is also recognised across the entire early childhood sector and by different employers. Certification requirements are set out in the Adult Education Act (2019) – noted above.

Formal career advancement: Beyond the regular profession of teacher (ISCED level 6), ECEC Teachers may gain a level 7 qualification through successful completion of a Master's programme. **Senior Teachers**, also at level 7, additionally support the development of other teachers and of the organisation and develop field methodology. A **Master Teacher**, at level 8, additionally instructs colleagues and leads development activities within the organisation.

Leave entitlement: To participate in formal education or continuing education, study leave shall be granted to employees on the basis of an application and a notice from the education institution for up to 30 calendar days in a year. In case of a training based on the interests of an employer, the Employment Contracts Act and Civil Service Act. Study leave shall also be granted for participating in formal education or continuing education of an equal foreign educational institution (Official Gazette 2019).

During the study leave granted for participation in formal education and continuing education with the purpose of professional development, an employee shall be paid the average study leave pay based on a calendar day for twenty calendar days pursuant to the procedure provided in the Employment Contracts Act. ECEC staff have similar access opportunities to CPD.

Content: In recent years, the focus in the CPD courses for ECEC Teachers has been on supporting children's language and speech, Estonian language, supporting children with special needs and using child-centered learning strategies, including digital pedagogy.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Staff remuneration is independent of the age of the children.

At the same time, social guarantees for ECEC Teachers (pedagogues) are important. ECEC Teachers were the first in the educational system to feel the inequity in salaries due to the transfer of kindergartens/ECEC centres to municipal ownership. The remuneration issue of early childhood education teachers is defined by the local authorities and so far, it has not been regulated by the State. That means that wages depend on the decisions of local governments. Only the minimum wage is regulated.

Although the remuneration level of ECEC Teachers has been raised substantially, the differences between counties have remained. In 2023, salaries ranged from €1,574 to €1,749 per month for a teacher with a Master's degree or equivalent. This is an indicator of society's attitudes and low value of an ECEC Teacher's work, and this can, in turn, influence the education of the next generation of citizens.

ECEC Teachers' salaries are equal to those of Primary School Teachers in the two biggest cities, Tallinn, and Tartu, and in a few smaller municipalities. It is a decision of the municipal authorities. In most municipalities ECEC Teachers' salaries are lower compared to those of Primary School Teachers (roughly 10% less). But the aim is to pay Early Childhood and Primary Teachers equal salaries in all local governments.

Directors' and Lead Teachers' salaries are higher according to the posts of responsibility. Teachers' salaries are related to the level of education and work experience.

It is possible to live on this salary, but remuneration for teachers with a qualification below Master's level is only somewhat above the minimum wage – which amounted to €725 in January 2023 (WageIndicator.org 2023).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

In 2022, 95% of ECEC teachers worked full time (35 hours/week and above). Only 5% of ECEC teachers worked part time (Estonian Education Information System 2022).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Novice teachers are provided with mentorship during their first year at work. The probationary year programmes are based on the Estonian Education Strategy 2021–2035 (Ministry of Education and Research 2021). The aim of the Probationary Year programme is to support newly qualified teachers in their transition to work and in coping with professional challenges. The trainee teacher is supported by a mentor in the workplace. After completing the probationary year, teachers are not left on their own but are welcome to participate in a supervision group for teachers.

7.4 Non-contact time

There is no officially specified non-contact time in kindergartens in Estonia. A full week comprises 35 hours and teachers spend all this time working with the children. Children sleep after lunch and teachers can use this time for documentation. Individual decisions about the allocation of non-contact time are made by the Director of the kindergarten.

7.5 Current staffing issues

In smaller municipalities there are sometimes shortages of teachers. Usually, the teacher is required to have at least a bachelor's degree. In cases of staff shortage, however, an exception is sometimes made, and students of the early childhood education teacher's specialisation are hired. This decision is usually made by the director of the kindergarten and a contract with the student is usually signed for one year only.

To fill vacant positions of teachers, the Lead Teacher or other persons employed in the field of learning and teaching, or the Director of the kindergarten is required to organise a competition, the procedure for which should be approved by the board of trustees. If a teacher who meets the qualification requirements is not found, the director must organise a public competition within a year.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Estonian Education Strategy 2021–2035

A fundamental policy initiative for the education system in Estonia is the Estonian Education Strategy 2021–2035 (Ministry of Education and Research 2021. The Strategy sets out principles, goals, indicators, and targets for all levels of the education system. Specifically related to the ECEC sector, these are the following:

Strategic goals: To have competent and motivated ECEC Teachers and ECEC Heads, a diverse learning environment and a learner centred approach to learning and teaching.

Action trajectories: A contemporary approach to learning and teaching curricula; smart learning resources and methodology based on the principles of contemporary approaches to teaching and learning; shared space of culture and values; high-quality Estonian-language instruction and learning of Estonian; next generation of teachers and support specialists and next generation of leaders of educational institutions.

Indicators:

- Subjective well-being of children and teachers
- Proficiency in the Estonian language
- 95% participation of children from 3 years old to school age in early childhood education (compared with 92% in 2021).

General targets for ECEC settings for 2035

Language proficiency: A plan for the development of Estonian-language education has been developed, starting from the early childhood level, that provides sufficient language proficiency to continue studies in Estonian at the following levels of education.

A new generation of qualified ECEC Teachers and ECEC Heads is ensured. The teaching profession is highly valued and prestigious. Preschool teaching staff has a strong identity and safeguards the reputation and dignity of the teaching profession. The sector provides good opportunities for professional development and self-fulfilment, involving changes in ECEC and the professional development of teachers and heads. The role of a teacher as coach and mentor is becoming more important.

The organisational culture of early childhood educational institutions is caring, collaborative and democratic, supports the development of general competences and the well-being of all, including better physical and mental health, diversity of views and constructive resolution of disagreements and crises.

Specific targets for the ECEC system for 2035

- The ECEC setting is child-friendly, learning takes place through play, in teaching and learning and everyday activities.
- There is a clear legal framework for ECEC, which is the part of the general education system.
- Teachers assess the development of children to identify the special needs of children and plan teaching and learning activities based on the child's individuality.
- The child-centred approach to learning is followed, focusing on the child's general skills, including play, cognitive and learning skills, social and self-regulation skills.
- Different fields of teaching and learning are integrated, e.g. language and speech, mathematics, environment, art, music, and movement.
- The initial education and in-service training of teachers is based on state standards. The current qualification levels are maintained and strengthened[3]. The aim is that all ECEC Teachers possess at least a BA degree and all ECEC Directors an MA degree.
- The state supports local governments in the organisation of continuing professional development.
- The salary of ECEC Teachers is equal to the salary of Primary School Teachers.
- The ratios of teachers to assistants per child make it possible to carry out teaching and learning activities in smaller groups and individually.
- There is a strong drive towards promoting inclusive education and supporting networking for children with special needs.
- Support specialists and services are more involved in ECEC settings. The learning opportunities of speech therapists, special education teachers and psychologists at university have also been increased for this purpose.

[3] Currently in Estonia, 51% of ECEC Teachers have a bachelor's degree and 20% a Master's degree, 72% of ECEC Directors have a Master's level degree and 28% a Bachelor's degree (IMO 2023)

– The Estonian system of initial professional education will improve in accordance with research evidence. Based on the Estonian Strategy 2021–2035, it will be necessary to promote the professionalism of ECEC Teachers, ECEC Teacher Assistants and ECEC Directors through the development of scientific activities and continuing professional development. ECEC Teachers are key actors in planning, providing feedback, and supporting the teaching and learning process in ECEC institutions. ECEC Directors should create a learning culture and environment that supports learning and well-being, skilfully managing and implementing changes, and upgrading ECEC Teachers' cooperation with support specialists (Ministry of Education and Research 2021; Peterson 2022).

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

ECEC Teachers' views on professionalism, teacher education and sustainability

Source: Veisson and Kabadayi 2018 (*see References for further details*)

Aims: Since education is a dynamic process and open to contemporary changes, professionalism which is vitally important for the sustainability of teacher education, has gained importance. Recent studies have emphasised the relations between professionalism, the quality of teacher education and sustainability. The aim of the current study was to interview preschool teachers and to explore their views and understandings about professionalism, quality of preschool education and sustainability in Estonian and Turkish cultural contexts.

Procedure: In this study qualitative research methods were used to analyse the data obtained from the participants. 15 preschool teachers from Estonia and 36 preschool teachers currently working in different parts of Turkey participated in the study. They were asked to respond to 15 open-ended questions about professionalism and the quality of teacher education and sustainability. Content analysis techniques were used for coding, finding the themes, and arranging the sub-themes for interpreting the data obtained.

Selected results: The result of the study put forward that the participants were intrinsically motivated with their job; and they admitted they had some strong and weak sides in their teaching profession. It was also seen that they had a lack of defining the terms of professionalism, quality of preschool education and sustainability. For example, they defined professionalism in teaching in an ego-centric way, mostly the proficiency of the teachers in action rather than a comprehensive definition including teaching learning processes, parents, environmental conditions, school atmosphere, needs of the students and the society etc.

Implications: Some suggestions were made to the teachers and educational policy makers related to the research findings. Estonian teachers expressed in the interviews that cultural sustainability is most important because Estonia is very small country, and this is a reason why we must keep our culture and language.

ECEC Teachers' views on initial professional education

Source: Mikser, Tuul, Veisson, and Goodson 2018 (*see References for further details*)

Aims: Educational requirements for early years professionals are increasing across the world. This is associated with the neoliberal reform policies of raising the status of early education professionals while regulating the field more tightly and increasing its accountability. The quality of pre-school professionals' education, and particularly the professionals' own perceptions of it,

substantially determine whether reform initiatives succeed and whether professionals are able and motivated to critically appraise and to influence reform policies.

Procedure: This paper introduces the results of a written survey conducted among Estonian preschool teachers (n=576). The respondents were asked to rate the pre-service programmes for preschool teachers in Estonia, specifically focusing on the relationship between theory and practice.

Selected results: It appeared that whereas the respondents rated the amount of time spent on theoretical studies as disproportionately large at the expense of field practice, they rated the quality of the theoretical studies the highest and the field practice the lowest.

Implications: A discussion point was that the mechanisms by which this contradiction threatens to decouple the practitioners from broader conceptual and contextual concerns in the field and to evoke 'policy evasion' rather than stimulating an active critical stance, as should be inherent in the notion of professionalism in its extended meaning.

ECEC Teachers' views and expectations of professionalism

Source: Mikser, Niglas, Tuul, Veisson, and Goodson 2019 (*see References for further details*)

Aims: Around the world, preschool education policy reforms have raised the qualification requirements for teachers. University preparation, research-based practice and high-quality in-service education have become important ingredients of preschool teachers' professionalism. However, teachers' views are often disconnected from or contradict these reform initiatives.

Procedure: This paper introduces the results of a written survey conducted among Estonian preschool teachers (n=576). We asked the respondents' views and expectations of reform policies concerning preschool teachers' professionalism. A cluster analysis enabled us to distinguish between five clusters of teachers.

Selected results: It emerged that whereas teachers from different clusters espoused different views and expectations on most aspects, the respondents from all clusters attributed little value to university-based preparation, scientific and research-based practice, and engagement in research activity.

Implications: The possible social-political and personal reasons for this phenomenon were discussed.

Recent and future issues in professionalising ECEC staff – a discussion paper

Source: Peterson, Õun, and Ugaste 2019 (*see References for further details*)

In Estonia, preschool education is ensured to most of children aged 3–6 years, and there are requirements established concerning the education of kindergarten teachers as well as a national curriculum to ensure the quality of primary education. At the same time, studies have revealed several aspects that more attention needs to be paid to in the organisation of preschool education in Estonia, in the work of the staff and in the content of pedagogical activities. The Assistant Teachers and Childcarers in kindergarten and childcare institutions need better training in supporting the general skills of children. The professionalism of preschool teachers needs more support regarding the avoidance of cultural stereotypes in learning and educational activities, enabling children to take personal responsibility for creating a caring growth environment and enabling the children's smooth transition from kindergarten to school. Teachers and principals need more support to enhance their competence in addressing pedagogical leadership and human resource management issues. Family involvement is a challenge in the development of the quality of preschool education. Teachers need more knowledge and skills in how to encourage family members to participate in learning and in educational activities, create possibilities

for families to learn and to support one another, and promote family involvement in the community.

The professionalism and the professional development of teachers were priorities of the Estonian teacher policy for 2014–2020. Programmes at Estonian universities have undergone significant changes in the recent past, and these changes seem to be of a positive nature. The universities have a common platform that unites the effort across the university and provides the opportunity for an interdisciplinary approach.

The methods and forms of preschool teachers' initial training are modern and multifaceted, with an emphasis on student-centred approaches, and teaching and learning are supported by current technologies.

Better integration of pre-primary and primary education is important in improving the national curriculum of preschool childcare institutions so that the transition from kindergarten to school is smooth. Ensuring a smooth transition is also a challenge for the initial and in-service training of preschool teachers and primary teachers. According to the Estonian Education Strategy 2021–2035 (Ministry of Education and Research 2021) the role of preschool teachers is of key importance in carrying out changes. Their image in society needs to change as well: salaries must be more competitive and work organisation must be such that working as a preschool teacher would be highly valued in society. The objective in Estonian educational strategy is to make the evaluation and compensation of teachers and leaders in early childhood education proportional to their professional qualifications and their effectiveness in performing their tasks.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Over the last five years there have been significant policy changes in the areas of curriculum, staff qualifications and child assessments in Estonia and further changes are planned in expenditure, staff to child ratios, quality inspection and monitoring, and teacher education and development. Despite these positive steps, several challenges remain.

A major challenge is to guarantee a **place in kindergarten for all children** who need it. This means that, since 2022, the Ministry of Education and Research together with local municipalities will be responsible and must offer sufficient places in kindergartens.

Providing for **research in early childhood education** is another challenge. Researchers need more research grants from the Estonian Science Agency and Ministry of Education and Research. Both the Ministry and the Science Agency have decided to give more responsibility to the universities to make decisions on how to use research money and on which studies should be granted.

A further challenge is to raise the **status of ECEC Teachers** in society and find finances to pay them the same salary as all other teachers.

The status of ECEC Teachers in society depends on all of us, but also on the quality of the legislative policies and legal acts concerning the work of early childhood education teachers. Decision-makers must understand and become aware of the influence of their decisions in examining various links in the chain of responsibilities for children's education and care. Although all political parties declare the importance of early childhood education in general educational policy, their understanding of the content of early childhood education is another matter. Over time,

the prevailing majority of ECEC Teachers have carried out their professional job in the best possible way; they have been keen to learn and have valued education and erudition. However, ECEC centres have a more meaningful role to fulfil in society today than we have previously thought.

The challenge is to enact **child-centred and play-based learning** and teaching in kindergarten. To reach these goals all universities and CPD programmes must offer these topics. Our study results showed that younger teachers work more according to these principles compared with more experienced teachers who received their education during the Soviet period. In those days, early childhood education was much more teacher centred (Mikser et al. 2020).

A further important challenge is, from 2024 onwards, to organise work in the kindergartens for children aged 3 up to school entry in the **Estonian language**. This decision was made in 2022 by the Estonian Parliament and current Government. All children with other native languages must have at least 50% of learning activities in the Estonian language. Directors can decide whether to support the use of other languages such as Russian or Ukrainian in the other 50% of learning activities.

Providing for **Ukrainian children** has been a major challenge since the Russian invasion in February 2022. Due to the difference between the start of the compulsory school age of children in Estonia and Ukraine (in Estonia at 7 years of age, in Ukraine at 6 years of age respectively) and the short-term stay of children in Estonia, kindergartens started to refer Ukrainian children to an out-of-school counselling team for routine assessment of development and school readiness. However, this is not considered justified in an ECEC institution, as the assessment of a child's development and school readiness is the obligation of the ECEC centre. Counselling centres (*Rajaleidja*) provide the necessary support for children with special needs and advice for local governments, parents, and kindergartens. ECEC Teachers have benefited from the guidelines elaborated and training programmes initiated by the Ministry of Education and Research and the Education and Youth Board. The training programmes (on site and online) on „how to better support a non-Estonian speaking child" are considered highly useful for Kindergarten Teachers. Regional methodological centres have been set up to support early childcare organisations with assistance. Teachers are offered thematic counselling, training courses, practical workshops, and study visits by these centres. Diverse guidelines and learning materials on how to support a refugee child not only for learning but also for mental health have been elaborated and disseminated to educational institutions.

Meetings are also held for families by local government representatives and kindergartens to introduce the setup and values of the education system in Estonia as well as to build relationship for future cooperation with families. Several events have been organised by the communities for fundraising to support children with everything that is needed for their well-being and learning.

Two major challenges arising from or accelerated by the crisis in Ukraine are:

- The need to change the legislation to ensure sufficient nursery places for children of 1½–3 years
- The sustainability of financial subsidies for social services; the financial resources available to support access to services for refugee children are considered of crucial importance by the local governments (United Nations Children's Fund 2023).

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

ESTONIA

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms chosen in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC settings are: **ECEC centre** (*koolieelne lasteasutus,* 1½–6), also called **kindergartens**, and **pre-primary group** *(koolieelikute ettevalmistusrühm*, 6–7)[1]. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Estonia

1839	First kindergarten established based on Froebel's principles of pedagogy
1840	Baroness Uexküll founds the first childcare institution in Tallinn for 2 and 3 year-olds from families living in poverty.
1862	The Estonian Welfare Society founds its first 'kindergarten'.
1905	First kindergarten with Estonian as the language of instruction opens (previously mostly German and Russian)
1919 -1940	Estonia becomes an independent state for the first time.
1921	First curricular programme developed by C.H. Niggol based on Froebel's principles.
Up to 1940	Kindergartens the responsibility either of municipalities or private founders – no state legislation
1944	Statutory age for beginning school is lowered from 8 to 7 years.
1950s to 1970s	– Care and supervision are the main aspects in the institutions, cognitive stimulation comes later. – Working mothers have only 2 months of paid maternity leave, but there is a well-functioning state system of ECEC.
1968	First state curricular framework based on Communist principles, with an emphasis on moral education.
Early 1980s	Statutory age for beginning school is lowered from 7 to 6 years.
1987	Second state curricular framework based on Soviet programmes for same-age groups
1989	747 ECEC institutions exist, with approximately 83.000 children enrolled.
1991	– Estonia once again becomes an autonomous state. – Reform of the education system following independence – State-maintained provision comes under the responsibility of the municipalities. – Compulsory schooling age raised from 6 to 7 years
Post-1991	Economic crises and sinking birth rates lead to the closing of many kindergartens (100 between 1990 and 1994).
1999	*Preschool Child Care Institutions Act* comes into force.
Up to 2004	Continuing expansion of ECEC facilities, also because parental leave pay is not sufficient to care for a child at home.
2004	'21st Century Education Programme' emphasises the creation of high quality education related to children's needs.
2008	Introduction of a National ECEC Curriculum

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In the case of Estonia, the relevant format is **1½–6** years, since children usually start school when they are 7 years old.

2014	– Political strategy of lifelong learning launched – Introduction of legal entitlement to a place in ECEC provision for children aged 1½ to 7 years
2015/2016	634 ECEC institutions exist, with 68.331 children enrolled.
2017/2018	Amendments to the *Preschool Child Care Institutions Act* with focus on better support for children with special educational needs
2020	– A "Development Plan for Education 2035" is launched. – A Parliamentary Bill sets out the integration of the education and care sectors for children under and over 3 years of age.
2022	– Responsibility for all ECEC settings for children ages 1½ to 7 years now lies with the Ministry of Education and Research. – A draft Early Childhood Education and Care Act is issued and will be submitted to Parliament in March 2024.

Sources: Ugaste and Őun 2008; Veisson 2018

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Age-integrated ECEC centres/kindergartens (*koolieelne lasteasutus* – 'preschool child care institutions') for children aged 1½ years to school entry at 7 are the main form of provision, coming under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Research (*Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium*). Moreover, the draft *Early Childhood Education and Care Act* states that not only the ECEC centres/kindergartens, but also former childcare services such as playgroups or other facilities housed in institutional spaces as well as home-based ECEC provision will all come under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research.

Consequently, the system of ECEC in Estonia is to be fully integrated under Education.

The education system is the responsibility of Parliament (*Riigikogu*) and the Estonian government. Parliament decides on the design and development of the system and the government ensures the implementation of educational programmes. The Ministry of Education is responsible for research and management in the field of education as well as for quality assurance, financial planning, the development of national curricula, and the professional education of the teaching staff. At the local level, the district government is responsible for the technical supervision of teaching and educational activities, and the municipalities for providing and organising ECEC.

General objectives and legislative framework

Overarching goals of early childhood education and care include the right of all children to education, the development of their individual potential and the reduction of social inequalities. Of particular importance is an integrated view of education and care. This includes, on the one hand, the support of parents in reconciling family and working life, and on the other hand, the promotion of children's skills that prepare them for school and life in general.

In 2014, the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (*Eesti elukestva õppe strateegia 2020*) was introduced, which serves as the government's cornerstone for all changes in the education system. Important goals are (1) respecting the individuality of the learner; (2) improving the competences and motivation of professionals and teachers; (3) linking lifelong learning to the needs

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Estonia provided orientation for data on legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

of the labour market; (4) using modern digital technologies and creating a good infrastructure for this; (5) ensuring equal opportunities for all. The Ministry of Education is responsible for coordinating the implementation. In addition, the Ministry of Education has initiated a 'Development Plan for Education 2035"' which is to contribute to the further optimisation of equal opportunities in education (European Commission 2020, 27).

Tending towards decentralisation, the organisation and principles of the education system are guided by the Estonian Education Act (*Eesti Vabariigi haridusseadus*, 1992 with amendments until 2004), the Preschool Child Care Institution Act (*Koolieelse lasteasutuse seadus*, 1999 with amendments until 2023), the Child Protection Act (*Eesti Vabariigi lastekaitse seadus*, 1993 with amendments from 2016), and the Estonian Constitution (*Eesti Vabariigi põhiseadus*, 1992).

In 2015, the Estonian Minister of Education and Research approved an integrated early childhood education concept (Decision No. 1.1-2/15/455). This aims to provide high quality education and care, ensure access for all children between 1½ years of age and school entry, create a safe and supportive learning environment and improve preparation for school. A new *Early Childhood Education and Care Act* is therefore under preparation which aims to provide high quality early childhood education and care for all children and to support pre-primary education by making the system of ECEC more coherent. The new law harmonises the requirements for ECEC centres/kindergartens and childcare facilities as well as for municipal and private kindergartens. Both rural municipalities and city governments shall, at the parents' request, provide children from 18 months to 7 years of age residing in their territory and whose residence coincides with that of at least one parent the opportunity to attend an early childhood centre ('preschool'). According to the action plan of the Estonian Government, a new draft of the Early Childhood Education and Care Act will be submitted to Parliament in March 2024.

Based on amendments made to the Preschool Child Care Institution Act (2022), the transition to Estonian-medium teaching and education in early childhood education must be completed by 1 September 2024. Instruction and educational activities in kindergartens will be conducted only in Estonian. The aim is to ensure that children whose home language is not Estonian have the opportunity to acquire primary education in Estonian and to reach a level of language proficiency sufficient for them to cope in an Estonian-speaking environment, to continue their education in Estonian and to integrate themselves into the Estonian cultural and value system. Estonian-medium learning in kindergartens is carried out by integrating language learning with other activities or by additional language activities. The transition will be supported by a training and motivation programme for teachers, while the overall increase in teachers' salaries will also be a key objective.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Since 2014, all children between the ages of 1½ and 7 years have been entitled to a free place in an ECEC setting (see *chapter Financing and costs for parents*). If in some cases the municipalities cannot guarantee this, they may provide a place for under 3 year-olds in a centre-based childcare service in lieu.

There is no obligation to attend an ECEC setting. However, local authorities have a duty to provide a place at the request of parents for all children between 1½ and 7 years of age, irrespective of special educational needs.

Compulsory education begins at age 7.

Main types of provision

According to national Statistics in 2022, there were a total of 586 ECEC centres/kindergartens ('preschool institutions' – *koolieelne lasteasutus*) in Estonia in which 68,623 children were enrolled (Statistics Estonia 2023a).

ECEC centres (still called 'preschool child care institutions') for children aged 1½ to under 7 years are the most common form of provision and local authorities are responsible for their management. 'Integrated' in this sense means both age-integrated across the early childhood period (1–6 years) as well as in terms of providing a combination of nursery and kindergarten facilities and also pre-primary education for 6 to 7 year-olds under one roof. Integrative groups comprising children with and without disabilities can be set up in the centres, as can mixed-age groups. The ECEC centres are open all the year round. The municipalities decide on the specific opening times in consultation with parents. If the demand for places exceeds the number available, the municipalities offer half-day places. The opening hours of most centres are from 07:00/08:00 to 18:00/19:00.

In 2022, 447 kindergartens served 62,589 children, and 5,962 children attended one of 132 preschool groups (Statistics Estonia 2023a).

Childcare services (*lapsehoiuteenus)*, including centre-based and home-based provision, come under the auspices of the Ministry for Social Affairs. Based to the Social Welfare Act, the objective of childcare services is to support the ability of a person raising a child to cope or work or to reduce the care burden arising from the special needs of the child. 10% of under 3 year-old children are enrolled in childcare services (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 172). According to the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act, a rural municipality or city government may, with the parents' consent, substitute the guaranteed place of a child from 18 months to 3 years of age in a public ECEC centre with a place in a childcare service or a private kindergarten, the financing of which shall be based on the provisions of the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act.

In 2022, there were five childcare services attended by 253 children (Statistics Estonia 2023a).

Provider structures

The majority of ECEC settings are public and run by the municipalities. In 2022/23, only 60 (10,4%) settings from a total of 589 were owned by private providers (Estonian Education Information System 2022). According to Eurostat data, only 4.4% of children over 3 years attended private ECEC settings in 2021; no data are available on children under 3 years of age (Eurostat 2023j).

Participation rates in regulated provision

In 2022, 92.5% of children aged 3–6 years, 34.1% of children aged 1 year and 76.4% of children aged 2 years attended an ECEC institution (Statistics Estonia 2023d).

The share of children under 3 years of age who are cared for in ECEC settings has increased since 2005 from 12% to 33.7% in 2022. The proportion of children between the ages of 3 and 6 also increased significantly - 93.9% of these children attended a facility in 2022 (see *Table 1*).

Table 1

Estonia: Participation rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years in %**	3 years to minimum compulsory school age in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	3	9
	Over 30 hours	9	69
	No enrolment in ECEC	89	22
2010	1 to 29 hours	2	6
	Over 30 hours	19	86
	No enrolment in ECEC	79	8
2015	1 to 29 hours	3.6	6.8
	Over 30 hours	17.8	86.1
	No enrolment in ECEC	78.5	7.1
2022	1 to 29 hours	12.3	11.9
	Over 30 hours	21.4	82.0
	No enrolment in ECEC	66.3	6.2

Source: Eurostat 2023b, deviations in the sums due to rounding

Table 2

Estonia: Number of children in ECEC settings by age-group and enrolment rate, 2022 (excluding child-care services)

Age	Number of children enrolled in ECEC	Number of children in the total population	Enrolment rate
Under 1 year	34	13,312	0.3*
1 year-olds	4,654	13,343	34.1
2 year-olds	10,708	14,255	76.4
Under 3 year-olds	**15,396**	**40,910**	**37.6***
3 year-olds	13,407	14,607	90.7
4 year-olds	14,179	14,017	95.6
5 year-olds	13,484	14,439	92.3
6 year-olds	12,157	14,460	81.4
3 to under 7 year-olds	**53,227**	**57,523**	**92.5***
Under 7 year-olds	**68,623**	**98,433**	**69.7***

Source: Statistics Estonia 2023b, c, d; * own calculations

Since the late 1980s, due to demographic changes and lower birth rates, there have been significant changes in the number of ECEC settings and enrolment rates. Moreover, over time, these have always been significantly lower in rural areas than in urban areas. In general, enrolment rates increased again after the turn of the millennium (Veisson 2018). From 2000 to 2015, the number of children in settings increased up to 2021, when they fell, as did the number of settings. While the number of settings continued to decline in 2022, the number of children increased. Overall, however, enrolment rates for under 7 year-olds increased steadily between 2000 and 2022 increased steadily (see *Table 3*).

Table 3
Estonia: ECEC settings, children and enrolment rates between 2000 and 2022

Year	Number of settings	Number of children	Enrolment rates, 1 to 7 year-olds, in %*
2000	646	50,247	56.7
2005	609	54,560	61.7
2010	638	64,259	62.3
2015	634	68,331	65.2
2020	612	66,375	66.7
2021	601	66,626	67.5
2022	586	68,623	69.7

*Calculated on the basis of the rates for each age group, see *Table 2*
Source: Statistics Estonia 2023a

Demand and supply of ECEC places are balanced (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 63). Municipalities are cooperating with private providers to provide places for under 3 year-olds (European Commission 2020, 39).

Financing and costs for parents

According to the Estonian Educational Information System (2022), the total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 1,3% of GDP in 2020.

Public/municipal ECEC centres, which comprise the majority of settings, are financed through municipal budgets. Staff salaries, teaching/learning materials and the professional development activities of ECEC staff, as well as language courses for children with Estonian as an additional language, are subsidised by the government. Privately-run settings also receive these subsidies. The four special ECEC centres for children with multiple disabilities are fully state-funded. Financing from the European Social Fund is also available.

Parents always have to pay for meals. Sometimes, however, their fees may contribute both towards staff salaries and materials/equipment. This varies from municipality to municipality. What is regulated by law is the maximum fee, which may not exceed more than 20% of the minimum wage. The fees vary depending on the region and are also partly income-dependent: The average amount paid is €37 (Estonian Education Information System 2022).

In the case of privately-run ECEC settings, it is mostly the provider who is responsible for the running costs. However, in certain circumstances they may be supported through state and municipal budgets, particularly regarding salaries and staff professional development. Parental fees are determined by the service provider.

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 2% of net household income on childcare costs[3] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

Groups in both the ECEC centres as well as the childcare centres may be organised in same-age or mixed-age groups.

[3] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

In centre-based settings the maximum group size is 14 children, in a pre-primary group 20 and in a mixed-age group 18. Integrative groups which include children with disabilities have a maximum size of 12 children per group.

One qualified member of staff *or* an assistant is responsible for up to 7 under 3 year-olds, up to 9 children in a mixed-age group, up to 10 children in a pre-school group, and up to 8 children in an integrative group or 2 to 6 children with special educational needs, depending on their specific support needs.

The staff to child ratio is set by law: 1:7 for under 3 year-olds, 1:10 for children aged 3 and above.

Curricular framework

The educational programmes of the **ECEC centres** are obliged to comply with the National ECEC Curriculum (*Koolieelse lasteasutuse riiklik õppekava*, 2008, most recently amended in 2011). Based on this framework, each setting develops its own educational programme which is essentially play-based and takes into account the individual needs of children. Curricular guidelines are available to support staff. Particular emphasis is placed on the co-operation between families and the ECEC setting. The national curricular framework also sets out learning goals appropriate for the 6 and 7 year-olds in pre-school groups and includes principles for the evaluation of children's progress. A smooth transition to school is also foregrounded.

Early childhood education is understood as supporting the children's emotional, moral, social, intellectual and physical development as well as respecting their individual needs. The aim is to support the acquisition of playing, learning, social and personal, reflective skills. The curricular framework is organised around the following learning areas: Self and environment; language and speech; Estonian as an additional language; mathematics; the arts; music; and movement. Between the ages of 3 and 7 children also start learning a foreign language. Materials are currently being developed to support the acquisition of a foreign language.

Staff are free to choose the methods and materials they consider appropriate. Group activities relating to the national curricular framework do not have to be followed in detail. Some ECEC centres may prefer to work according to alternative pedagogical approaches such as Step-by-Step, Reggio Emilia or Waldorf.

Childcare services are still regulated by the Social Welfare Act and obliged to guarantee the care, development and safety of the child. There are no specific curricular guidelines for these services. This is likely to change when the new Early Childhood Education and Care Act comes into force.

Digital education

As early as 2000, the Estonian government declared access to the internet a human right. The Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 emphasises digital literacy as a key competence. All levels of education are expected to develop a digital culture. However, the National ECEC Curriculum (current version 2011) does not include the terms 'digital literacy' or 'computers'.

The "ProgeTiger" programme, a public-private partnership with the Ministry of Education, has been aiming since 2012 to integrate digital technologies in ECEC centres and to equip them with programmable devices. Over five years, 44% of ECEC settings in Estonia participated and received over €830,000 worth of equipment, for example for programming or multimedia devices (NESTA 2019). Staff in ECEC settings use different types of robots such as Qobo, mTiny, Blue-Bot, Matata Lab, LEGO WeDo set and tablets with coding games or animation apps. Children are

expected to acquire basic knowledge about coding and digital media at an early age through playful activities and learning through trial and error (education estonia 2021).

However, studies suggest that staff in ECEC settings still need more knowledge about how children can use digital technologies and how to teach them these skills (Õun et al. 2018).

Monitoring – evaluation

Child-related assessment

Assessing child development is one of the daily tasks of an early childhood educator and is seen as cooperation between staff and parents. Children are observed during various activities according to a specific plan. Notes are made in accordance with data protection regulations and at least once a year there is a discussion with the parents. The ongoing assessments of the children are only known to the respective institution and the parents and are not passed on to others. They are mainly used for the optimal support of the children. Parental satisfaction with the setting is also surveyed. While children under 3 are primarily observed by the professionals, standardised tests are also used for children over 3 years of age. Special assessment instruments have been developed to determine the developmental level of children between the ages of 1 and 7.

Before the transfer to compulsory school, parents receive a 'school readiness confirmation', which they hand over to the corresponding primary school. This confirmation is usually made at the ECEC centre, but sometimes also externally. The exact procedure is regulated by criteria from the Ministry of Education. This confirmation documents the child's cognitive, physical and social abilities with regard to the areas of the National Curriculum, and also his or her particular strengths and areas in which further support is needed.

Centre-level self-evaluation

ECEC centres/kindergartens are obliged to carry out internal evaluations. The aim is to establish a quality assurance system and to improve the management of the settings. The centre leader can choose the preferred method. Centres can also ask for advice from the Ministry of Education. A final report lists the strengths and weaknesses of the ECEC centre. Such a development plan must be drawn up at least every three years. Children and parents are also encouraged to share their own experiences and views and thus play an active role (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 104, 127, 130).

The focus of such internal evaluations should be on leadership and management, cooperation with stake-holders and educational processes (Õun et al. 2018).

External evaluation

The review of the efficiency of a municipal institution is carried out by the local authority. In the case of a state institution, this is conducted by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education compiles an annual overview of external evaluations in the education system, which also includes data from self-evaluations (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 134) and publishes it on its website. Criteria include the spatial conditions, equipment and compliance with safety and health regulations, as well as compliance with regulations, the curriculum, leadership qualities and management, and finances. The results are made available to all stakeholders (facilities, providers, parents, authorities) and form the basis for further planning.

External evaluations are carried out annually in about 10% of early learning institutions based on thematic priorities (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 126).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and with disabilities

The 2017/18 amendments to the Early Childhood Education and Care Act focused on better support for children with special educational needs and their access to specialist support workers. In 2019/20, 19% of children attending ECEC centres could benefit from this (European Commission 2020, 27).

Children with a migration background

In 2023, 12.6% of the total population held a non-Estonian citizenship, 8.1% in the group of 0 to 4 year-olds and 9.6% in the group of the 5-9 year-olds. Of the persons of non-Estonian origin, 13.3% came from other EU countries, 86.7% from non-EU countries. Of the under 4 year-olds, 10.8% had another European citizenship as well as 8.2% of the 5 to 9 year-olds; 89.2% of the children under 4 years and 91.8% of the 5 to 9 year-olds one of non-EU countries. In the total population as well as in the groups of under 4 year-olds and 5 to 9 year-olds, most persons of non-Estonian origin came from Latvia and from Finland (EU countries). In terms of non-EU countries, most people in the total population came from Russia, followed by people from Ukraine, and the younger age groups there were more persons with Ukrainian citizenship followed by those with a Russian one (Statistics Estonia 2023e, own calculations).

Language training is provided for children with a first language other than Estonian in groups for 3 to 7 year-olds. In addition, the Ministry of Education also provides funds to teach children in one of the languages of the 17 different ethnic minorities in 'Sunday schools' (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 115).

Since 2000, the language immersion programme has been used in ECEC settings, in particular for Russian-speaking children. During the two years before starting school, children are thus given the opportunity to develop good skills in both their family language and Estonian (Õun et al. 2018).

Five specialist centres across the country provide support for professionals working with children with a non-Estonian family language.

By August 2022, 50,347 war refugees from Ukraine had arrived in Estonia, of whom 27% were minors (ERR 2022a). In 2023, additional funding was allocated from the national budget for the temporary protection of Ukrainian refugee children in nurseries and kindergartens. The per child contribution per calendar month was €465. The data for children in private childcare centres were calculated on the basis of data provided and verified by the municipality. The subsidy for children attending private childcare and nursery settings was allocated to municipalities. Ukrainian children are supported on the basis of principles developed by the municipality. These include ensuring that the subsidy allocated to the municipality is used for the intended purpose of providing Ukrainian children with childcare and kindergarten places within the municipality or in cooperation with the private sector. An additional subsidy was paid for the period January-February 2023. State support for Ukrainian children continued until the end of the school year 2022/23.

Looking at all school-age children, 70% were enrolled in Estonian-language institutions, 20% in Russian-language institutions and 10% in institutions with language immersion programmes (ERR 2022b).

Parental leave arrangements[4]

Maternity leave *(emapuhkus)* is granted for 100 calendar days; 70 of which may be taken before the expected birth date and 30 after the birth. The latter are obligatory. During this time mothers receive 100% of their average earnings based on the previous calendar year. Mothers who have not worked receive the basic minimum wage of €654 per month.

Paternity leave *(isapuhkus)* is granted for 30 working days which can be taken during 30 days before the expected birth up to the time the child reaches 3 years of age. Fathers receive a fully paid benefit calculated in the same way as the Parental leave allowance. This option is not available for same-sex couples.

Parental leave *(vanemapuhkus)* is a family entitlement and can be taken up to the child's 3rd birthday and can also be taken in several parts, up to 60 days can be taken by both parents at the same time. The shared Parental benefit *(vanemahüvitis)* is a full payment of average earnings during the previous 12 months (up to €4,291.29 per month, minimum €725) for 475 days after the end of Maternity leave. Parents who are not working receive a lump sum of €654 per month. The allowances are only reduced if the income of simultaneous employment exceeds 50% of the upper limit of the benefit (€2,154.65).

In 2021, 74.7% of fathers took Paternity leave; data regarding Maternity leave or the take-up of Parental leave does not exist. 16.2% of the recipients of Parental leave allowances in 2021 were men. Of these, 72% were also at least partially employed at the same time.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Estonia

Marika Veisson and Tiina Peterson

The foremost challenge for the ECEC system in Estonia is the imminent integration of all ECEC institutions under the Ministry of Education and Research. Related staffing challenges include ensuring that all teachers in ECEC institutions have a higher education qualification, as stipulated by law, and raising the salaries and status of ECEC Teachers.

To continue improving the quality of ECEC both at the structural and process level, providing the framework for collaborations with researchers in Europe and beyond is essential, and at the same time a challenge. In order to participate actively in a knowledge based society, Estonian researchers need partners in other countries to conduct cross-cultural research studies. Tallinn University, for example, already cooperates with a number of universities in Finland, Norway, Denmark, Malta, the UK, and the USA on ECEC issues. Such international collaborations need to be extended and supported.

[4] The brief summary in this section is based on the country note for Germany by Katre Pall in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the population in Estonia totalled 1,331,796. Up until 2015, the population gradually sank, but has been increasing slightly since then (2000: 1,401,250, 2005: 1,358,850, 2010: 1,333,290, 2015: 1,314,870, 2020: 1,328,976) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total birth rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), and the lowest in Malta (1.13). With a total fertility rate of 1.61, Estonia is above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[5].

Children under age 6

Table 4

Estonia: Distribution of children under age 6 by age in the total population, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year	13,312
1 year-olds	13,343
2 year-olds	14,255
3 year-olds	14,607
4 year-olds	14,017
5 year-olds	14,439
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**83,973**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 3.1% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, 6.3% were children up to 6 years of age. Since 2015, these shares are well above the respective EU averages.

Table 5

Estonia: Relative share of children under 6 in total population compared with respective EU average, 2000 to 2022, in %*

		Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Estonia	2.6	2.8	5.5
	∅ EU15[6]	3.2	3.2	6.4

[5] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

[6] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

		Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2005	Estonia	3.0	2.8	5.7
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Estonia	3.2	3.5	6.7
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022/3	Estonia	3.1	3.2	6.3
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a; *own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, the majority of all households (73.2%) with children under age 6 were couple households. Single households in Estonia comprise 16.7% - most of them single mothers (10.1%). However, in European comparison, the proportion of single father households is relatively high at 6.7%.

Table 6
Estonia: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Total households, in %
All households	133,800	
Couple households	97,900	73.2
Other household type	13,500	10.1
Single households, total	22,400	16.7
Single households, women	13,500	10.1
Single households, men	8,900	6.7

Source: Eurostat 2023i; * own calculations

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Estonia, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 82.7% and for women 79.6% (Eurostat 2023h).

In 2022, 72.1% of women and 90.7% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), both shares were thus above the average (87.2% and 63.6% respectively) (Eurostat 2023e).

Table 7a
Estonia: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Estonia	51.4	80.8
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[7]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7

[7] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

	2022	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Estonia	72.1	90.7
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[8]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 7b:*

Table 7b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023h

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[9]

In 2022, 13.8% of children under 6 years were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was well below the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 25.2% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 1,8% of children under 6 years and 2,1% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (EU average 6,1% and 4,3% respectively) (Eurostat 2021f, g).

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[9] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

FINLAND

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report author

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

Heidi Chydenius works as a university teacher at the University of Helsinki and is a doctoral researcher at the University of Eastern Finland. In her dissertation she is examining collaborative approaches towards guiding and supporting students during supervised field practice within a multi-professional ECEC team. Further interests lie in a socio-historical approach towards researching the ECEC teaching profession and team practices.

1. ECEC governance in Finland

Over the past ten years, the system of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Finland has been undergoing a period of unprecedented change. In 2013, responsibility for ECEC was transferred from the administration of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture (*opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö*). The new Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, which emphasises the best interests of the child and the pedagogy of early childhood education, was passed in 2015. The law assigned the Finnish National Agency for Education (*Opetushallitus*) the task of drawing up a National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 580/2015). The Act on ECEC was thoroughly revised in 2018. The law defines ECEC as "a systematic and goal-oriented entity that consists of upbringing, education and care, with a special emphasis on pedagogy". New personnel titles and personnel structures were entered into the Act, and the assessment of the quality of ECEC was defined as mandatory (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 540/2018). The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre FINEEC (*Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus Karvi*, n.d.) is responsible for the national evaluation of ECEC, teaching and training.

Changes in the administrative sector have initiated a paradigm shift in Finnish early childhood education and care which has been further accelerated by development projects and experiments launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. Nationwide, the education system has been developed with the help of the *Right to Learn* project in 2020-2022 included in the government programme. The aim of the €313 million project has been the sustainable and effective development of ECEC, pre-primary and primary education through the reform of structures and legislation. Several smaller projects aiming to secure an equal start for learning by improving quality and equality in ECEC and comprehensive school education have been linked to this larger project by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Ministry of Education and Culture n.d.). The latest version of the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care was introduced in August 2022, with inclusive early childhood education as its overarching principle (Finnish National Agency for Education 2022).

After all the changes, Finland has a unitary system of early childhood education and care, organised in two stages. Both ECEC provision for children up to age 5–6 (*varhaiskasvatus)* and pre-primary education for 6 to 7 year-olds (*esiopetus*) come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture, but with different curricular frameworks. The Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for drawing up curricula for both stages of ECEC. In addition, two different laws govern ECEC and pre-primary education (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 540/2018; Basic Education Act 628/1998).

Pre-primary education is most commonly provided in ECEC centres and sometimes in transition classes in primary schools for at least 700 hours per year, i.e. for about four hours a day (Basic Education Decree 852/1998). In August 2021, the Ministry of Education and Culture launched an experiment of two-year pre-primary education, which is to last until the end of May 2024. This extension to two years is currently a topic of widespread debate.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care was amended in 2018 and the amendments targeted, among other things, ECEC personnel. The pedagogical quality of ECEC was strengthened by increasing the overall proportion of staff members with a tertiary level education and by increasing the number of people who have completed teacher education at university. With regard to changes in the staffing structure, the law will raise the level of staff education so that from 2030 onwards two thirds of the staff in ECEC centres will have a tertiary level education. At least half of those with a tertiary level degree must have a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education completed at a university. The Finnish ECEC system is thus going through a transition period (01.09.2018–01.01.2030) concerning the eligibility requirements for staff in ECEC and staffing structures. The law defined the new professional titles as:

- Teacher in ECEC (*varhaiskasvatuksen opettaja*)
- Childcarer in ECEC (*varhaiskasvatuksen lastenhoitaja*)
- Social Pedagogue in ECEC (*varhaiskasvatuksen sosionomi*) and
- Special Education Teacher in ECEC (*varhaiskasvatuksen erityisopettaja*)
  (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 580/2015).

The changes relating to eligibility concern in particular the qualification requirements of the Teacher in ECEC as well as the new Social Pedagogue in ECEC. Previously, it was possible to gain the professional title of Teacher in ECEC along two different routes, either through a teacher education study programme at a university (Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education) or through a social pedagogue training at a university of applied sciences, formerly polytechnics (Bachelor's Degree in Social Services). Since 31 July 2023, the Teacher in ECEC qualification can only be achieved through a teacher education study route. The law codifies the title of Social Pedagogue in ECEC for those with a Bachelor's degree in Social Services, but the competences required and the job description for the position are still undefined.

To support the implementation of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018) and the new personnel structure, the Ministry of Education and Culture set up an ECEC Training Development Forum (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019, *Varhaiskasvatuksen koulutusten kehittämisfoorumi*). The first phase of the forum's work in 2019–2020 included among other things structuring the competences generated in different IPE programmes. However, this was a challenging task. In particular, describing the specialist competences of a Social Pedagogue proved challenging and highlighted different views within the working groups. It should also be noted that Finnish society is strongly corporatist, which also brings its own challenges to the professionalisation of the ECEC workforce.

In this report, we consider **Teachers in ECEC** as core professionals. According to the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, the Teacher in ECEC has overall responsibility for the group of children.

Social Pedagogues (Bachelor's Degree in Social Services) in ECEC also have a tertiary level education, but their job description is currently undefined and therefore their role in groups of children is unclear. The need for Social Pedagogues is not the same in all groups of children and within the framework of the law, municipalities can allocate vacancies for Social Pedagogues where there is a need for child protection and family work. Some municipalities have developed

the role of a Social Pedagogue into a regional and consultative one. In general, few posts for Social Pedagogues have as yet been established.

Special Education Teachers in ECEC are also tertiary level educated, but the role of a Special Education Teacher in ECEC is primarily regional and consultative, without group responsibility, and is therefore not counted as a core professional. Especially during recent decades, municipalities have interpreted the principle of inclusion in such a way that children in need of support have been placed in ordinary groups and integrated special groups have been abolished, which has reduced the continuity of support for children and changed the job description of Special Education Teachers (Pihlaja and Neitola 2017).

Table 1 outlines the profiles and minimum qualification requirements of staff who will be working directly with children in ECEC provision after the transition period, which ends in 2030.

Table 1
Finland: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Teacher in ECEC *Varhaiskasvatuksen opettaja* *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	*Päiväkoti* ('day home') **ECEC centre** 0–6 years[1] *Esiopetus* **Pre-primary education** (organised in ECEC centres or schools) 6–7 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility	0–7 years	3 years of university studies with specialism in early childhood education *Award*: Bachelor's degree ECTS credits: 180 EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Childcarer in ECEC *Varhaiskasvatuksen lastenhoitaja* *Route 1:* **ECEC Nurse** *Lähihoitaja*	*Päiväkoti* **ECEC centre** 0–6 years Complete range of social and health care services, e.g. children's homes, hospital units, youth centres, services for senior citizens etc.	Qualified co-worker	All ages	Approximately 3 years of upper secondary vocational education in social welfare and health care ECTS credits: n/a[2] EQF: level 4 ISCED 2011: 3

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In the case of Finland, the relevant format is **0–6** years, since pre-primary education is part of ECEC and children start school when they are 7 years old.

[2] n/a = not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Route 2: **Children's Instructor/ Childcare Worker** *Lastenohjaaja*	*Päiväkoti* **ECEC centre** 0–6 years Also work in: playgroups run by the Lutheran church parishes, open ECEC services and family services, out-of-school provision	Qualified co-worker	0–7 years	Approximately 3 years of upper secondary vocational education in childcare, education and family welfare. ECTS credits: n/a EQF: level 4 ISCED 2011: 3
Social Pedagogue in ECEC *Varhaiskasvatuksen sosionomi* *Profile:* Social Care/ Welfare Professional	*Päiväkoti* **ECEC centre** 0–6 years Complete range of social services, including ECEC centres, but also family guidance, work with senior citizens, rehabilitation for drug users, etc.	The job description is undefined.	All ages	3½ years at a higher education institution (university of applied sciences) with a specialism in social services *Award:* Bachelor's degree ECTS credits: 210 EQF: level 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Special Education Teacher in ECEC *Varhaiskasvatuksen erityisopettaja*	*Päiväkoti* **ECEC centre** 0–6 years and other settings/groups for young children with special needs	Focus on children with special needs in several ECEC centres ***or*** Focus on children with special needs in an ECEC group ***or*** (less often) Core practitioner with group responsibility	0–7 years	*Route 1:* 1-year postgraduate university study route in special needs education following a qualification as Teacher in ECEC and 2 years' work experience as Teacher in ECEC. ECTS credits: 240 (180 + 60) EQF: level 6 ISCED 2011: 6 *Route 2:* Master's degree 5 years of university studies with specialism in early childhood special education

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				ECTS credits: 300 (180 + 120 EQF: Level 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Special Needs Assistant *Avustaja*	Personal or group assistant for children with special needs in various settings	(Non-qualified) co-worker (although qualification recommended)		No IPE required; recommended: 1–2 years vocational training ECTS credits: n/a EQF: Level 4 ISCED 2011: 3

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (580/2015), every ECEC centre must have a head in charge and responsible for operations. The revised Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018) defined the eligibility conditions for the head of an ECEC centre. The qualification criteria for the role of head responsible for the operations of centre-based early education are at least a Master's degree in Education and a qualification as Teacher in ECEC or as Social Pedagogue in ECEC, as well as sufficient leadership skills.

The National Core Curriculum for ECEC 2022 states that the starting point of management and leadership should be the promotion of the wellbeing and learning of each child. The curriculum further states that the development of the organisational culture and inclusiveness in ECEC requires a pedagogical leadership which is goal-oriented, planned and evaluative. Pedagogical leadership is not only a task of the Centre Leader, but can be distributed among other personnel according to the work tasks (Fonsén et al. 2021). However, only the Centre Head has the right to manage the overall organisation of the ECEC centre. In addition, the head's duties include managing the personnel and the centre's budget, and ensuring safety precautions and providing guidance for the families using the ECEC centre. In large cities, early childhood education unit managers are often administrative managers and do not work directly with children. However,

the management and leadership structures and thus the head's job descriptions vary widely among different ECEC service providers.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

One of the challenges of organising ECEC in Finland is the regional differences, especially between big cities and small rural towns. With the help of legislation and other guidelines efforts have been made to align the organisation of ECEC, but the variation in the quality of ECEC shows that the organisation is still left too much to local consideration. Also, the centre-specific pedagogical tasks vary widely and are defined locally. In larger municipalities, specific tasks vary according to the size of the ECEC centres, the number of children and the diversity of families. In an annual meeting the ECEC centre personnel discuss the responsibilities within the centre under the guidance of the Centre Head and agree on a conceptual plan for the next year. For certain tasks, such as that of the Teacher in charge of pre-primary education, a small compensation may be paid which is agreed locally.

The institution providing initial professional education (e.g. university or university of applied sciences) pays a small fee to the supervisor or the ECEC centre for supervising students. Acting as a supervisor usually requires the completion of supervisor training and a cooperation agreement between the educational institution and the ECEC centre.

2.4 Coordinating and supervisory staff

In Finland, the municipality must ensure that the services of the local child welfare team, which includes healthcare, psychological and remedial services, are available in pre-primary education (Act on Pupil and Student Welfare 1287/2013). In other respects, the posts and tasks of the cooperation staff in ECEC are decided on locally. There are more such posts in larger municipalities than in smaller ones. Regional positions include, for example, the positions of an ECEC Special Education Teacher and a Finnish Language Teacher (see *Chapter **2.5***). Locally, regional positions for Social Pedagogues in ECEC are beginning to be created. The role of the regional Social Pedagogue in ECEC is to act as a support for parents. They cooperate closely with, for example, counselling centres, social work services, and the child welfare team of pre-primary education.

2.5 Specialist support staff

In Finland, with the strengthening of the principle of inclusive ECEC and the clarification of special support, children have the right to a so-called three-level support, i.e. general, enhanced and special support (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 540/2018). Specialist support staff working with individual children within the ECEC centre are usually the Special Education Teacher and the Special Needs Assistant. The intensity of the support a child receives depends on the amount of support needed. This may be continuous or occasional support directly from the Special Education Teacher or Special Needs Assistant, or the ECEC centre staff can receive consultative support to ensure the necessary measures within the centre. For example, a regional or centre-specific Special Education Teacher or a Finnish Language Teacher in ECEC may offer such consultative support.

Other specialist support staff, such as a Speech Therapist or an Occupational Therapist, are not part of the ECEC staff. These services are part of social and health services but can be implemented in an ECEC centre.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

In Finland, compiling statistics on and monitoring developments within the ECEC workforce have not been satisfactory. No systematically collected database is available for labour and training needs (Karila, Kosonen, and Järvenkallas 2017, 91–92). In order to remedy these shortcomings, the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018) provided for the establishment of a data storage system called Varda (*Varhaiskasvatuksen tietovaranto*). The purpose of the data repository is to produce commensurate, up-to-date, comparable and high-quality information that is utilised in national and international planning, guidance and development work in ECEC and in the activities of public authorities. In addition, the data can be used for scientific research. The Finnish National Agency for Education maintains Varda, and ECEC service providers are obligated to store the information about the service provider, locations, children, guardians and staff (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021, 57). The full implementation of the system and the recording of data have been delayed and, as a result, information on ECEC staff is still incomplete.

During the period when ECEC services were administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (until 2013), the proportion of staff with social welfare and health care qualifications was on the increase in the field of ECEC (Onnismaa, Kalliala, and Tahkokallio 2017). In the early childhood education curricula drawn up by the social administration, a mention of teaching was avoided and the teacher's role and tasks were only vaguely presented (Chydenius et al. 2023). The number of students in university ECEC teacher education study programmes was kept very low and a significant number of students graduated with a degree as Social Pedagogue with an additional teaching qualification (Onnismaa et al. 2017). This has not prevented a shortage of Teachers in ECEC, which has been made visible by the eligibility conditions of the new Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. By 2030, the share of Teachers in ECEC is planned to be at least 30% and the share of those with tertiary level education at least 60% of the staff in ECEC. Due to the increase in the number of students at university and the multiple forms of IPE, the proportion of Teachers in ECEC is slowly growing. In 2012, approximately 18% of ECEC staff had a Teacher qualification and approximately 30% of staff were educated at tertiary level (Onnismaa 2018). At present, approximately 20% of the ECEC staff have a qualification as Teacher in ECEC and approximately 39% altogether have a tertiary level education (see *Table 2*).

Nationwide, more than 45% of ECEC jobs are defined as Teacher in ECEC positions. However, according to an analysis prepared by Finland's largest pension provider Keva (2021), there is a shortage of more than 4,000 Teachers in ECEC in Finland. Because of the shortage of Teachers, often an under-qualified person, most commonly a Childcarer, fills the position. In large cities, in up to 30-40% of cases an under-qualified person performs a Teacher's job. As Childcarers are transferred to Teacher positions, there is a shortage of Childcarers in some places. There is also a shortage of Special Education Teachers (Keva 2021). A non-specialist applicant, often a Teacher in ECEC, fills some of these jobs but sometimes the post is left vacant. Nevertheless, according to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018), ECEC service providers must ensure Special Education Teacher consultation and instruction for the children needing support. In ECEC services for linguistic minorities (Sámi and Swedish), staffing challenges are equally prevalent.

Table 2 provides an overview of selected aspects of the structural composition of the ECEC workforce in Finland. Assistants do not belong to these categories[3].

Table 2

Finland: Structural composition of workforce in ECEC provision, 2021

Staff categories	Year / Proportion of workforce
Staff with specialist higher education degree	Approx. **39%** – 20% with Teacher in ECEC degree – 17% with Social Pedagogue degree – 1.8% with Special Needs Teacher degree **46%** of staff are required to have a tertiary level qualification: however, up to **15%** work as under-qualified staff (often a Childcarer as a Teacher substitute).
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	n/a
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	Approx. **52%**
Staff with non-specialist qualification	Small numbers, only as substitute staff
Staff without formal initial professional studies	n/a
Specialist support staff (e.g. speech therapists)	Mostly off-site
Male staff (all ECEC services)	**2.9%** **6.0%** of male employees work in ECEC administration, e.g. as Centre Leaders.
Staff with a background of migration	No systematically compiled national data.

Source: Kuusikko-työryhmä 2021; Statistics Finland 2022

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Teacher in ECEC (*Varhaiskasvatuksen opettaja*)

Initial professional education is provided at universities governed by the Universities Act (*Yliopistolaki* 558/2009). The law defines Finnish universities and their tasks. The Government Decree on University Degrees and Professional Specialisation Programmes (*Valtioneuvoston asetus yliopistojen tutkinnoista ja erikoistumiskoulutuksista* 794/2004) defines the scope and structure of teacher education. In addition, the regulation defines the institutions providing teacher education. Study programmes for prospective Teachers in ECEC are provided by seven universities in Finland, and in all of them, it is possible to continue studies up to a Master's degree in ECEC. Åbo Akademi and the University of Helsinki also offer IPE in Swedish (Swedish is the second official language in Finland). Two universities also provide the option of studying in English (University of Tampere and University of Turku).

Finnish universities enjoy a high degree of autonomy regarding the statutes regulating the teacher education programmes. The goal descriptions of education at different universities vary

[3] Personal or group assistants for children with special needs work in ECEC centres. Usually a child must have a diagnostic statement in order to be granted a personal assistant.

somewhat, but their basic ideas are quite similar (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021). The education provided at Finnish universities is based on research, including the contents and teaching methods and the evaluation and development of education. Conducting research and studying research methods are also part of teacher education (Toom, and Pyhältö 2020). University education in ECEC is carried out in close co-operation with other teacher education programmes, such as those for primary level class teachers or secondary level subject teachers.

Table 3

Finland: Teacher in ECEC

Job title in Finnish: *Varhaiskasvatuksen opettaja* **Profile:** Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: 12 years schooling + matriculation **Professional studies:** 3 years at university, degree course in (early) education **Award:** Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education **ECTS credits**: 180 **EQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main ECEC workplaces:** ECEC centre, 0–6 years; pre-primary transition class, 6–7 years; ECEC planning and administration

Childcarer in ECEC (*Varhaiskasvatuksen lastenhoitaja*)

The qualifying courses to become a Childcarer in ECEC are part of vocational education/training regulated by the Act on Vocational Education and Training (*Laki ammatillisesta koulutuksesta* 531/2017). The law determines, among other things, the structure of awards. The Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for drawing up vocational education curricula. There are two main ways to qualify as a Childcarer in ECEC:

1) A vocational upper secondary qualification in healthcare and social services (ECEC Nurse)
2) A vocational upper secondary qualification in education and guidance (Children's Instructor).

It is also possible to fulfil the requirements through some other suitable qualification that includes or has been supplemented with adequately extensive study modules on the care, upbringing and education of children. The IPE of ECEC Nurses and Children's Instructors (and Special Needs Assistants) can also be organised as an apprenticeship and in some cases, the first year of studies, e.g. in the IPE of ECEC Nurses, may consist entirely of workplace-based learning.

Table 4

Finland: Childcarer in ECEC

Job title in Finnish: *Varhaiskasvatuksen lastenhoitaja*
***Route 1* – ECEC Nurse** (when working in ECEC centre: *Lähihoitaja)* **Entry requirements:** 9 years comprehensive school **Professional studies:** Approximately 3 years upper secondary vocational training in social welfare and health care (ECEC Nurse) **Award:** Vocational Qualification in Social and Health Care **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011:** 3 **Main ECEC workplace:** ECEC centre (0–6 years)

Job title in Finnish: *Varhaiskasvatuksen lastenhoitaja*
***Route 2* – Children's Instructor** (*Lastenohjaaja*) **Entry requirements:** 9 years comprehensive school **Professional studies:** 3 years upper secondary vocational training at The Church Training College or corresponding training institution in Childcare and Education and Family Welfare. **Award:** Vocational Qualification in Child Care and Education and Family Welfare **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level**: 4 **ISCED 2011:** 3 **Main ECEC workplace:** ECEC centre (0–6 years)

Social Pedagogue in ECEC (*Varhaiskasvatuksen sosionomi*)

The Social Pedagogy qualification route prepares for work in different areas of the social welfare sector and with different job titles, one of which is Social Pedagogue in ECEC. Social Pedagogue training is provided in higher education institutions governed by the Universities of Applied Sciences Act (*Ammattikorkeakoululaki 932/2014*). The Government decree on universities of applied sciences (*Valtioneuvoston asetus ammattikorkeakouluista* 1129/2014) defines the scope and structure of studies. In Finland, there are 20 universities of applied sciences, 18 Finnish-language and 2 Swedish-language institutions, with study programmes for the Social Pedagogue degree (Bachelor's Degree in Social Services). The contents of the education can be structured in different ways depending on the focus areas of the universities of applied sciences.

According to law, the degree course for Social Pedagogue in ECEC must include 60 ECTS credits that qualify for early childhood education and care (Act on Early Childhood Education 540/2018). Both the quantity and the content of ECEC studies vary considerably. The Network of Universities of Applied Sciences for Social Work in Early Childhood Education and Care has given its own recommendations on the content of the study programme (*Ammattikorkeakoulujen sosiaalialan varhaiskasvatusverkosto* 29.09.2021).

Table 5

Finland: Social Pedagogue in ECEC

Job title in Finnish: *Varhaiskasvatuksen sosionomi* **Profile:** Social Care/Welfare Professional
Entry requirements: 12 years schooling + matriculation **Professional studies:** 3½ years at a university of applied sciences, degree course in social services **Award:** Bachelor's degree in Social Services **ECTS credits**: 210 **EQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main ECEC workplace:** ECEC centre, 0–6 years

Special Education Teacher in ECEC (*Varhaiskasvatuksen erityisopettaja*)

There are two ways to qualify as a Special Education Teacher in ECEC:

1) Eligibility for the position of Teacher in ECEC, plus studies providing professional skills in special education, available at five universities as a one-year postgraduate course of study
2) Master's degree programme in Early Childhood Special Education, available at one university.

Table 6

Finland: Special Education Teacher in ECEC

Job title in Finnish: *Varhaiskasvatuksen erityisopettaja*
Route 1 – Bachelor's degree in early childhood education + postgraduate award in special education
Entry requirements: 3 years of undergraduate studies (Bachelor's degree in early childhood education) and 2 years of work experience as a Teacher in ECEC
Professional studies: 1-year postgraduate university study route in special education in early childhood
Award: Postgraduate award in special education
ECTS credits: 240 (180+60)
EQF level: 6
ISCED 2011: 6
Main ECEC workplaces: Segregated (exclusively for children with special needs) and integrated (children with special needs integrated in mainstream ECEC settings)[4] groups in ECEC centres or posts in mainstream groups in ECEC centres, consultative work in ECEC services; ECEC administration and planning.
***Route 2* – Master's Degree Programme in Early Childhood Special Education**
Entry requirements: 3 years of undergraduate studies
Professional studies: 2 years at university, Master's degree course in (early childhood) special education
Award: Master's degree, Special Education in ECEC
ECTS credits: 300 (180+120)
EQF level: 7
ISCED 2011: 7
Main ECEC workplaces: Segregated (exclusively for children with special needs) and integrated (children with special needs integrated in mainstream ECEC settings) groups in ECEC centres or posts in mainstream groups in ECEC centres, consultative work in ECEC services; ECEC administration and planning.

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Teacher in ECEC (*Varhaiskasvatuksen opettaja*)

Competency specifications:

At the end of the study programme students are expected to:

- Understand childhood as part of cultural diversity
- Understand the growth and development of children as a holistic social and cultural process
- Be able to look at children's growth, development and learning from several different perspectives
- Be able to look at the holistic learning environment of children and make use of new technology
- Be familiar with the aims, contents and methods of public early childhood education and pre-school education

[4] Early education for children with special needs is mainly provided in mainstream settings (inclusive education)

– Be able to analyse, evaluate and develop phenomena related to early childhood education on a research basis.

Curricular areas: (1) Language and communication studies; (2) Basic studies in education; (3) Intermediate studies in education; (4) Content/subject areas in early childhood education; (5) Optional subjects (see *Box 2* for details). Through bilateral contracts, students can study for part of the degree at a university in another country, e.g. through the ERASMUS programme or the NORDPLUS student exchange programmes (University of Helsinki 2022a).

For the preparation of the Teacher in ECEC study programme at the University of Helsinki (see *Box 2*); representatives of municipalities, as the largest employers in the ECEC sector, were consulted (University of Helsinki 2022b).

Box 2

Finland: Curricular areas, Teacher in ECEC study programme, University of Helsinki (2022b[5])

(1) **Language and communication studies (15 ECTS credits)**
Native language, usually:
Academic writing (Finnish)(2 ECTS credits)
Communication and interpersonal skills (Finnish) (1 ECTS credit)
Other national language, usually:
Oral skills in the second national language, Swedish (CEFR B1[6]) (2 ECTS credits)
Written skills in the second national language, Swedish (CEFR B1) (1 ECTS credit)
Foreign language, usually:
Academic and professional communication in English 1 & 2 (CEFR B2) (4 ECTS credits)
Student's digital skills (3 ECTS credits)
Teacherhood and communication (2 ECTS credits)
Personal study plan (0 ECTS credits)

(2) **Education, basic studies (25 ECTS credits)**
Social, cultural and philosophical foundations of education (5 ECTS credits)*
Psychology of learning and development (5 ECTS credits)*
Planning, implementation and assessment of teaching I (2 ECTS credits)*
Planning, implementation and assessment of teaching in ECEC I (3 ECTS credits)*
Toddler pedagogy (5 ECTS credits)

(3) **Education, intermediate studies (45 ECTS credits)**
Support for learning and wellbeing (5 ECTS credits)*
Planning, implementation and assessment of teaching II (5 ECTS credits)*
Integrated practice (8 ECTS credits)*
Advanced practice period (7 ECTS credits)*
Qualitative research methods I (5 ECTS credits)
Quantitative research methods I (5 ECTS credits)
Bachelor's thesis (10 ECTS credits)
Maturity test (in Finnish), Bachelor's degree (0 ECTS credits)

(4) **Studies providing professional readiness for work in institutional early childhood education and preschool education (60 ECTS credits)**
Preschool and elementary education (5 ECTS credits)
Activity learning in early childhood education (5 ECTS credits)
The diversity of development and early childhood special education (5 ECTS credits)
Mathematics pedagogy (5 ECTS credits)
Environmental education and primary science (5 ECTS credits)
Pedagogy of language and interaction (5 ECTS credits)

[5] Curriculum for Early Education Teacher training (180 ECTS) in 2020–2023. The new curriculum came into effect in the fall of 2023.
[6] CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, levels of language proficiency

Moral education and worldview education (5 ECTS credits)
Children's literature and drama (5 ECTS credits)
Visual arts education (5 ECTS credits)
Music education (5 ECTS credits)
Pedagogy of craft (5 ECTS credits)
Pedagogy of physical education (5 ECTS credits)

(5) **Optional study modules 35 ECTS credits** (e.g. special education or pre-primary and early primary years education)

*PST = Pedagogical Studies for Teachers (35 ECTS credits)[7]

Childcarer in ECEC (*Varhaiskasvatuksen lastenhoitaja*)

A Childcarer in ECEC is qualified in the vocational training sector, most commonly as either an ECEC Nurse or a Children's Instructor. Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for guiding the content of these qualification routes (Act on Vocational Education and Training 531/2017).

A special feature of vocational training is the individualisation of studies. A competence development plan is prepared for the student, which takes into account, among other things, the previously acquired competence. Completion of vocational training is based on the skills demonstrated in practical work situations. It is also characteristic of vocational education to complete studies as an apprenticeship training, in which case the student acquires competence in the workplace in connection with practical work tasks and the training provider is responsible for other possible training content (Act on Vocational Education and Training 531/2017).

In vocational training, the scope and depth of studies are described in terms of competence points. If the internationally used ECTS credit equals approximately 27 hours of work input, a competency point equals approximately 15 hours of input. The scope of the vocational award at upper secondary level is 180 competence points. The duration of the training is individual, with a maximum duration of approximately 3 years.

- **ECEC Nurse** (*Lähihoitaja*)

An ECEC Nurse who has graduated in the field of education and care of children and young people is able to promote the child's growth, wellbeing and learning, as well as the health and wellbeing of children, adolescents and families. The ECEC Nurse award consists of common parts of the course (5 competence points) and professional parts of the course (145 competence points). The student must include optional modules to the extent of 15 competence points. The common parts of the course are: (1) Communication and Interaction Competence, (2) Mathematical Science Competence, and (3) Social and Working Life Competence. The professional parts of the degree are: (1) Promoting Growth and Participation, (2) Promoting Wellbeing and Functional Capacity, (3) Promoting the Child's Growth, Wellbeing and Learning, and 4) Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of the Child, Adolescent and Family. In addition, the award includes optional modules (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018a).

- **Children's Instructor** (*Lastenohjaaja*)

The Children's Instructor has acquired the versatile skills required for guidance, education and communication tasks, as well as good communication skills. The Children's Instructor has the

[7] Teachers working in comprehensive (primary/secondary) schools, as well as in other educational institutions, are required to have 60 ECTS points in *Pedagogical Studies for Teachers* of which 35 ECTS points can be taken in the Bachelor's degree course for Teacher in ECEC.

ability to take into account the guidance and support needs of people from different backgrounds and ages. The course consists of four compulsory modules (105–110 competence points) and optional degree modules (35–40 competence points). The compulsory parts of the degree are: (1) Professional Encounter, Education and Guidance, (2) Promotion of the Child's Growth, Wellbeing and Learning, (3) Implementation of Pedagogical Activities in ECEC, and (4) Working with Families and Multidisciplinary Cooperation (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018b).

Social Pedagogue in ECEC (*Varhaiskasvatuksen sosionomi*)

Competency specifications:

The study programme is based on the following principles:

- Empowering citizens
- Preventing marginalisation and promoting inclusion and social pluralism
- Promoting social participation, equality and wellbeing in society.

Curricular areas:

The following study units at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (2020) form the early childhood education track in the Social Pedagogue IPE programme (60 ECTS credits):

- Childhood growth and development (5 ECTS credits)
- Everyday life of families and children in Finnish society (5 ECTS credits)
- Individual and community counselling (5 ECTS credits)
- Supporting daily life through socio-pedagogical work plus first internship (15 ECTS credits)
- Child protection (5 ECTS credits)
- Special needs support in early education (5 ECTS credits)
- Early education (20 ECTS credits)
- Work placement in ECEC setting (20 ECTS credits)
- Thesis (15 ECTS credits).

Special Education Teacher in ECEC (*Varhaiskasvatuksen erityisopettaja*)

Competency specifications:

Psychosocial factors such as learning how to utilise play, how to support peer interaction and how to recognise children's needs and respond to them as well as pedagogical sensitivity are abilities that are achieved in the Special Education Teacher's education programme at the University of Helsinki. Studies are based on an ecological framework of early interventions which are considered to be not only individual support for the child with special needs, but also impact on every child's action and behaviour by boosting children's strengths and finding new courses of action in unfamiliar or challenging situations. Furthermore, after graduating, the students are expected to understand the considerable impact of physical environmental factors in ECEC (play materials, schedules, daily structuring of the programme) on children`s development and learning.

Curricular areas:

The postgraduate course in Special Education (early childhood) at the University of Helsinki focuses on basic studies in special education (25 ECTS credits), Children's behaviour, wellbeing and interaction (10 ECTS credits), Learning support (20 ECTS credits), and Professional growth (10 ECTS credits) (see *Box 3* for details) (University of Helsinki 2022c).

Box 3

Finland: Curricular areas, Special Needs Teacher Education, University of Helsinki (2022c)

Basic studies in special education (25 ECTS credits)[8]
Introduction to Finnish special education
Marginalisation and mental health
Special educational needs
Learning disabilities
Scientific thinking in the context of education
Theme 1. Behaviour, wellbeing and interaction (10 ECTS credits)
Communication and perception
Challenges in behaviour
Theme 2. Learning support (20 ECTS credits)
Brain and learning
In-depth special education
Reading skills and reading difficulties
Mathematical learning difficulties
Theme 3. Professional growth (10 ECTS credits)
Special Needs Teacher as a researcher
Special education practice

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

In Finland, competence requirements are based on formal qualifications. Legislation defines eligibility requirements for all ECEC professional titles with the exception of the Special Needs Assistant. On the other hand, the Assistant is not included in the ratio of children to staff. However, in upper secondary level vocational training (here referring to ECEC Nurses, Children's Instructors and Special Needs Assistants), there is an alternative qualification route, i.e. a fully competence-based qualification system. This offers the possibility of completing a vocational qualification partially or wholly through a demonstration of vocational skills which are then considered equal to the regular qualification.

There are no formal barriers between vocational training and tertiary level education. For example, after completing the qualification route to become an ECEC Nurse it is possible to apply for a place in tertiary level education. However, the training programmes of vocational schools and universities of applied sciences, such as that for the registered ECEC Nurse or the Social Pedagogue in ECEC, are more general than university degree programmes. For example, a graduate Social Pedagogue can work in family work, child protection, youth work, school welfare work, adult social work, criminal sanctions, substance abuse and mental health work, disability work, special upbringing, elderly work, multicultural work – or in ECEC.

[8] Basic studies in special education (25 ECTS credits) must be completed before entering the Special Education Teacher's study programme. However, only 20 ECTS credits are counted. Thus, the sum total of ECTS credits of the whole study programme is 60 ECTS credits.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Teacher in ECEC (*Varhaiskasvatuksen opettaja*)

Time allocated to field-based studies: Field-based studies refer to practical placement periods in ECEC settings, including pre-primary classes. The term refers to structured and supervised studies and is preferred to the term 'workplace-based learning', which could be interpreted as just being in an authentic workplace setting and assisting centre staff. The time allocated to field-based studies in the Teacher in ECEC degree programmes at Finnish universities varies between 7% and 11%, which amounts to between 12 and 20 ECTS credits out of a total of 180 ECTS credits. Most commonly, the field-based element accounts for 15 ECTS credits (Onnismaa, Tahkokallio, and Kalliala 2015).

Content focus in field-based studies: At the University of Helsinki[9], each field-based period has its own character and goals. *Integrative practice* (8 ECTS credits) focuses on the planning, implementing and evaluation of early childhood education, in particular on developing skills and reflective competences in the core content areas of early childhood education (e.g. drama and physical education, music, nature and mathematics). *Final practice* (7 ECTS credits) aims at developing the holistic responsibility of the student with respect to planning, implementing and evaluating work in the ECEC centre, including working with parents. In addition, the student becomes acquainted with administration and working as a member of multi-professional teams and networks. Field-based periods are carried out in collaboration between two students, in which case the student receives peer feedback in addition to the supervising Teacher in ECEC and university lecturer.

Alongside the field-based periods in ECEC settings, students plan, carry out and observe different kinds of pedagogical sessions with children in a campus-based classroom that has been constructed especially for visiting groups of children at the University of Helsinki. Students also visit ECEC centres beyond the placement periods, e.g. during physical education courses, and organise various activities for children. Students also receive supervision from university lecturers when carrying out these activities. The professional identity of the Teacher in ECEC (including eight hours of observation in ECEC centres) is treated as a part of *Planning, Implementation and Assessment of Teaching I* course during the first academic year. The students spend two mornings (three hours each) and one whole day (six hours) in ECEC settings observing the pedagogical activities carried out by the Teacher in ECEC and their professional role. The observation is reported and discussed with other students and the university lecturer.

Structure of field-based studies and mentoring support: The Teacher in ECEC supervisor has a key position in helping students to develop their skills and construct their theory-in-use. It is also considered important that the university lecturer be very familiar with the field of ECEC. Consequently, in ideal cases, the educational background of the university lecturer who supervises student teachers should include an ECEC teaching qualification (Onnismaa, Tahkokallio, and Kalliala 2015).

Close cooperation with municipalities (ECEC administration) is exercised, particularly in the case of the field-based study periods. At the University of Helsinki, a network of placement centres

[9] The University of Helsinki has been used here as an example because it has the largest Teacher Education Department in Finland, taking in 140 Teacher in ECEC students each academic year (exceptional years: 2020: 200 students; 2021: 220 students; 2022: 260 students, 2023: 200 students.

was established in 1996 based on officially ratified contracts between municipalities in the metropolitan area. The consistent and goal-oriented education of field supervisors (5 ECTS credits), conducted by the University of Helsinki, has been an essential part of strengthening the coherence of the network. Furthermore, Teacher supervisors/mentors are invited to the university at the beginning of each field-based period. Once a year, a symposium on field-based studies brings together participants from the entire teacher education department (i.e. including the study programme for school teachers), the cooperating schools and ECEC centres, to reflect on current developments.

The 'double supervision model' – where the student receives feedback and guidance from both an experienced teacher in the field and from a university lecturer – depends on there being a sufficient number of motivated supervisors. The aim of collaboration between ECEC centres and the university is to create a new kind of learning community (Onnismaa, Tahkokallio, and Kalliala 2015).

Recent reforms, trends and debates: In Finland, co-operation has been launched between six universities offering Teacher in ECEC education with a focus on developing teaching practice guidance in changing learning environments in Early Childhood Teacher Education. The OHOSKE (2022) network is supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and it develops the supervisory competences of teacher education in ECEC and brings together national and international research data on supervisory competences and their development in changing learning environments, besides clarifying the goals and contents. The network organises supervisory training and seminars, and produces supervision materials for use in teacher education programmes. The network develops supervisory skills related to early childhood teacher education in the initial and continuing professional education of early childhood education teachers and teacher educators. The network includes local development groups and covers early childhood teacher students, teachers in kindergartens, teacher educators, municipal actors and researchers in the field.

Childcarer in ECEC (*Varhaiskasvatuksen lastenhoitaja*)

The vocational education and training of a Childcarer in ECEC always includes on-the-job learning in Finland or abroad, and competence is usually assessed in working life. The length and extent of workplace periods vary according to the student's personal study plan, averaging 30 competence points out of 120 competence points. It is also possible to complete the studies in a workplace-based learning manner in the form of apprenticeship training.

Social Pedagogue in ECEC (*Varhaiskasvatuksen sosionomi*)

Workplace-based learning (*internship*) within the IPE of Social Pedagogues is allocated at least 45 ECTS credits. At the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, for example, students who have decided that they want to work in ECEC conduct their first (5 ECTS credits) and third internship (20 ECTS credits) in an ECEC setting. Quality is enhanced by developing the guidelines and support for theory-based professional reflection, which is conducted by tutors and Teachers supervising students during their internships. There is an ECEC centre internship network in the metropolitan area of Helsinki for the students of Metropolia and the supervisors are trained twice a year. Either a Teacher or a Social Pedagogue in the ECEC centre guides students in their internship. One challenge is that many of the students choose to do the internship working as supply staff, without a supervising teacher in the same team. That limits the possibilities of peer learning and pedagogical reflection. Tutors at Metropolia are working to solve this challenge and recommend internship as a student, not as a staff member. Since there are approximately 20

institutions offering study programmes for Social Pedagogues, duration and content of the field-based learning element of IPE vary considerably.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

The CPD of ECEC staff is included in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018). The organiser or provider of ECEC must ensure that the ECEC staff participate sufficiently in CPD activities that maintain and develop their professional skills. In addition, the implementation and effectiveness of CPD are to be monitored and evaluated. The Ministry of Education and Culture regularly issues detailed instructions on the content, amount, organisation, monitoring and evaluation of continuing professional development (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 540/2018).

The Finnish National Agency for Education organises state-funded CPD for staff through the acquisition of training offers from municipalities, associations of municipalities, registered communities and foundations, universities and universities of applied sciences. In cooperation with the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC), the Finnish National Agency for Education collects information on the CPD needs of staff and determines the content to be offered. According to the summary of the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC 2021), the needs for education in ECEC focus on art education, toddler pedagogy, leadership of pedagogy, assessment skills and curriculum knowledge. In 2019, slightly more than 15% of ECEC staff participated in CPD offers organised by the Finnish National Agency for Education. The number of participants decreased by almost 10% from the previous year due to the pandemic (Finnish National Agency for Education n.d.).

In addition to CPD courses provided by Finnish National Agency for Education, many other courses are available for ECEC staff. The Development Forum of ECEC Training programme for 2021–2023 identifies challenges related to continuing professional learning. Finding out the training needs of ECEC personnel needs to be enhanced and the organisation and planning of CPD strengthened. There are also many different providers of CPD, and there are no nationally agreed criteria for the quality of training, which makes it difficult to assess the quality of the offers. In addition, staff access to CPD is limited in terms of lack of resources and suitable offers. The Development Forum therefore proposes the development of a comprehensive system of CPD in terms of funding, quality, providers, planning and evaluation. Development work is also required to ensure availability and participation. In addition, the development programme recommends strengthening the continuity between pre-service and in-service training (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021).

Changes in Finnish ECEC have increased the need for CPD. According to the FINEEC report (Repo et al. 2019), more than 40% of ECEC professionals and ECEC Centre Heads felt that they needed further training to implement the ECEC curriculum and pedagogy. About 70% of the staff had already participated in CPD related to the ECEC curriculum or pedagogy during the years 2016–2018. More than 50% of the respondents (n=1,642) found participation in CPD useful from the point of view of implementing the ECEC curriculum (Repo et al. 2019).

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

In Finland, salaries for Teachers in ECEC (ISCED 01 and ISCED 02) are about 9% below the OECD average. In contrast, salaries in primary and secondary education are higher than the OECD average. Although the salary level of teachers everywhere typically improves the higher the level of education, in Finland the change from one stage to another is greater than the average. In OECD countries, the average salary level for upper secondary school teachers is about 17% higher after 15 years of work than in ECEC, whereas it is almost 50% higher in Finland (Haapamäki et al. 2021, 17).

Part of the reason for the unfavourable salary development of Teachers as well as Special Education Teachers in ECEC has been in the bargaining sector, which was unsuitable for teachers. The Teachers' salary has traditionally been agreed in a collective agreement with the rest of the municipal sector. After years of contract negotiations, all Teachers in ECEC were transferred to the collective agreement in the field of education as of September 1, 2021 (Local Government and County Employers KT 2021). From the perspective of the Teachers in ECEC profession, this can be seen as the ultimate integration of early childhood education into the education system. The working conditions of other personnel in ECEC are agreed in connection with a collective agreement with the rest of the municipal sector.

In the spring of 2022, a significant collective agreement was reached in the municipal sector, including the education sector, on the basis of which the salary level of ECEC staff will be increased by a total of about 5% between 2022 and 2025. In addition, the duties of the Centre Leader and the Deputy Leader were clarified and the remuneration was increased (OAJ 2022a). The salary programme includes all teachers, which is why the salary gap between Teachers in ECEC and other groups of teachers will continue to grow in the future.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

The regular working time of ECEC personnel is a maximum of 9 hours a day, and in the municipal sector 38 hours 15 minutes a week or in private ECEC centres 38 hours 20 minutes a week. Less than 8% of ECEC personnel work part-time.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Collegial support has proved to be vital for teachers who have full teaching responsibility from the very beginning of their career (Onnismaa et al. 2016). Various forms of induction support in the field of education have been discussed and induction training for both Teachers and Centre Leaders has been recommended in reports (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021; Siippainen et al. 2021).

A peer-group mentoring project for recently graduated Teachers in ECEC started in collaboration between the City of Helsinki and the University of Helsinki in 2014. In the first phase of the project, university lecturers trained 25 peer mentors and the first mentoring groups started in autumn 2014. Teachers in ECEC and Social Pedagogues working as teachers participated in peer-mentoring groups, which have been adopted as a regular working method in ECEC services in the city of Helsinki. Teachers' peer group mentoring draws on the ideas developed in the *Finnish*

Network for Teacher Induction (2016)[10] (Onnismaa et al. 2016) and is described here as an example. There are various forms of induction support and orientation to work in municipalities but no common policy so far.

The city of Helsinki continues to invest in mentoring and aims to alleviate the acute shortage of teachers. The mentoring system has also been extended to Centre Leaders and Deputy Leaders in Helsinki. Since many Centre Leaders will retire in the near future, peer group mentoring is expected to be an efficient way to support younger staff in leadership positions when they start working in their new post. Other municipalities have also developed induction measures for recently qualified Teachers as a measure to increase job commitment and improve occupational health.

7.4 Non-contact time

According to the nationwide collective agreement, approximately 13% (about five hours per week) of a Teacher in ECEC's working time should be allocated for non-contact time. This time is devoted to the planning, evaluation and development of pedagogical activities, the preparation of pedagogical plans and the evaluation and development of the pedagogical work of a multi-professional work community. In addition to this so-called planning, assessment and development time, the Teacher in ECEC must be given sufficient non-contact time for cooperative tasks such as cooperating with parents or other professionals. Team discussions and staff meetings require some non-contact time for all team members, including Social Pedagogues, Childcarers and Assistants (Local Government and County Employers KT 2022). In 2021, the Trade Union of Education in Finland (*Opetusalan ammattijärjestö,* OAJ 2022b) collected data on the implementation of non-contact time in ECEC. Teachers had an average of only four hours to plan, evaluate and develop ECEC; meaning that the five hours specified in the agreement are often not met. On the other hand, the amount of time devoted to other forms of cooperation had increased (OAJ 2022b).

7.5 Current staffing issues

In Finland, there is a nationwide shortage of Teachers in ECEC. According to a report by Keva (2021), there is currently a shortage of more than 4,000 Teachers. The retirement rate will be high over the next 10 years, with 26.4% of Teachers in ECEC working in municipalities retiring. The Ministry of Education and Culture has supported universities in increasing the number of students in Teacher in ECEC training and in launching development projects related to teacher education. These initiatives aim to reach the level of more than 1,000 new Teachers in ECEC students per year (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021, 92, 99). The calculations in the Government's proposal on the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018) estimate that

[10] *Osaava Verme* is a collaborative network between the Finnish teacher education institutions, including the vocational teacher education institutions and teacher education departments of universities. The main goal is to develop and disseminate the peer-group mentoring model (PGM) to support new teachers. Peer-group mentoring (PGM), known in Finland by the acronym *verme*, is a Finnish approach to supporting new teachers in their early career. PGM brings new teachers together to share and reflect on their experiences and to discuss the day-to-day problems and challenges they face. The method was piloted by the funding of the Finnish Work Environmental Fund in 2008–10 and is being continuously developed by The Finnish Network for Teacher Induction 'Osaava Verme'. PGM groups usually meet once a month to discuss work-related issues. The PGM approach draws on the constructivist view of learning, which maintains constructing knowledge is based on prior knowledge, experiences, and beliefs. Peer discussion is therefore an essential element in creating shared understanding of the work of teachers (Finnish Network for Teacher Induction 'Osaava Verme' 2016).

by 2030 the number of Teachers in ECEC in training will be sufficient, if the enrolment in universities is about 1,000 new entrants per year and the rate of completion is 80%. From 2022 onwards, no separate budget has been allocated for funding the raising of degree targets for Teachers in ECEC, but the increase for education will be implemented as part of the basic funding model for universities (Government's proposal 40/2018).

The challenges of attraction and retention are generally recognised in public sector jobs in Finland. Concerning the ECEC workforce, this has been highlighted in research and has provoked a lot of discussion in the media. The challenge is to keep ECEC personnel in their jobs, but especially to recruit recently graduated Teachers to commit to their work. Research shows that a high proportion of ECEC staff consider quitting the ECEC profession (44–62%), and Teachers' intentions to leave profession are higher (62%) than in other personnel groups (Heilala et al. 2022). Based on the research, according to the Teachers' perceptions the main reasons for the challenges of the sector's attraction and retention power are in salary and human resources. Remuneration is attached to the idea of valuing work. Personnel resources, on the other hand, are a result of the Teacher shortage and the ripple effect it creates. As an equation, these raise the question of the economic intensification of ECEC services (Kangas et al. 2022). Efforts have been made to raise wages through local agreements, and in the spring of 2022, the national wage negotiations guaranteed public sector personnel a salary increase of about 5% in the years 2022–2025 (OAJ 2022a). At the end of 2021, the Minister of Education started a report on the challenges of ECEC staffing and, based on the report, to guarantee adequate staffing by improving the legislation. The most significant of these are the notification obligation of the staff regarding non-compliance with the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and refinements to early childhood education personnel sizing (540/2018).

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

In order to support the implementation of the transition phase of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, an ECEC Training Development Forum (*Varhaiskasvatuksen koulutusten kehittämisfoorumi*) was established in the spring of 2019 by the Minister of Education and Culture. The first term of the Forum lasted up to the end of 2020. At that time, the aim was to develop cooperation between ECEC settings, IPE institutions and training courses and to draw up a development programme at the national level for 2021–2030 (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021).

The second term of the Development Forum began in the autumn of 2021 and continued until the end of 2023. The objectives of the second term are to:

- Promote co-operation between different levels of professional education and training for ECEC staff and ECEC providers
- Monitor the implementation, development and change processes of ECEC
- Monitor and promote national and international educational research
- Support the implementation of the Act on Early Childhood Education Care in matters related to professional education and promote the implementation of the personnel structure specified in the Act
- Improve the attractiveness of ECEC and the whole field of work among students and applicants for education through active information. (Ministry of Education and Culture n.d.)

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on ECEC staff

Source: Gillberg, Susanna, and Inkeri Ruokonen 2022 (see *References* for further details)

Aims: The aim of this study is to provide information on how ECEC staff perceived the measures taken in ECEC centres in March–June 2020, especially from the perspective of the work community and changes in work tasks.

***Methods*:** The research data were collected through an online survey by the Helsinki Kindergarten Museum. In addition to background information, it was possible to answer ten open-ended questions in the survey, of which five were selected for analysis in the study. 587 ECEC employees from different parts of Finland answered the survey between March 26 and June 30, 2020. The collected data were analysed using the principles of data-driven qualitative content analysis.

Results: The experiences of ECEC staff about the exceptional period varied. In some work communities the unprecedented situation was dealt with mainly through the distribution of official bulletins, while in other work communities a joint discussion was felt to be important. During this exceptional period, ECEC staff had more time to focus, for example, on recording ECEC plans and organising the learning environment. Changes were also reported in pedagogy, and some ECEC centres began to provide so-called distant ECEC, although there were no general guidelines or tools for it. The exceptional circumstances caused by the COVID-19 virus can be seen as a crisis for the work community in ECEC centres. Centre heads play a key role in dealing with such crises, and the research highlights the issues and measures staff would have needed in terms of support.

Implications: Seen positively, a time of crisis may highlight the opportunities and challenges of ECEC. In this study the need to develop operating methods related to ECEC pedagogy and steering in times of crisis came up and need also to be considered at the administrative level.

Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on heads of ECEC units

***Source*:** Nurhonen, Linda, Heidi Chydenius, and Lasse Lipponen 2021 (see *References* for further details)

***Aims*:** The aim of the report was to provide information on the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on ECEC for three groups: heads of ECEC units, children and guardians. The heads of the ECEC units were a particular focus of the study. Previous research on the management of ECEC in times of crisis is scarce. Therefore, the study sought to highlight the views of the heads of ECEC units about the support they needed and received, as well as the potential burden of the exceptional period.

***Methods*:** The research data consisted of a survey and interviews with the heads of the ECEC units. The survey was prepared and carried out in cooperation with the University of Helsinki's Centre for Educational Assessment (CEA). The response period for the survey was from 1 February 2021 to 28 February 2021. 679 people from 120 municipalities responded to the survey. Interviews with heads of ECEC units were conducted in November-December 2020 via remote connections. 23 heads of ECEC units participated in the interview.

***Results*:** The results of the study showed that the workload of heads of ECEC units increased during a pandemic and the job image changed. In the work of the head, more emphasis was placed on personnel management, work organisation and work related to COVID-19 instructions. The workload for heads of ECEC units increased so that there was not enough time left for

pedagogical leadership. According to the results, well-functioning and well-established leadership structures supported managers' resilience, job absorption and developmental work.

***Implications*:** The crisis brought out the importance of management structures and the possibilities and competence needs of using digital devices in ECEC as well as need to better prepare for future crises at the administrative level.

Staff structure and expertise in ECEC

Source: Ukkonen-Mikkola, Tuulikki, Raija Yliniemi, and Outi Wallin 2020 (see *References* for further details)

Aims: The aim of the research was to find out the significance of the change in the expertise of ECEC personnel and to identify the expertise of different professional groups in the teams piloting the new personnel structure.

Methods: Second-year ECEC student teachers (n = 19), supervising Teachers in ECEC (n = 14) and education teachers (n = 7) took part in the study. The qualitative action research data consisted of staff diaries, development plans and group interviews. Discourse analysis was utilised in the analysis of the data.

Results: Three discourses related to the change in expertise were identified: discourses of powerlessness, development, and the best interests of the child. In addition, Teachers positioned themselves responsible for the team's pedagogical activities and promoting children's learning. Compared to Teachers, the position of Social Pedagogues was based more on shared responsibility for team action. In addition, the Social Pedagogues' expertise focused on taking care of the child's overall wellbeing and interests. The expertise of a third professional group, Childcarers as team members, was built on caring and looking after children.

Implications: It can be concluded that relational expertise and common knowledge is built in the context of initial professional education. Recognising relational expertise strengthens the collaborative work of different professional groups and should be taken into account in the IPE programmes.

Challenges and opportunities in ECEC

Source: Kangas, Jonna, Tuulikki Ukkonen-Mikkola, Katja Sirvio, Hanna Hjelt, and Elina Fonsén 2022 (*see References* for further details)

Aims: The aim of the research is to find out what kind of challenges Teachers face in ECEC work and what kind of development proposals Teachers present to their work.

Methods: The research was carried out as a survey and targeted Teachers who have made the decision to change careers or who are considering it. 469 Teachers who work or have worked as Teachers in ECEC answered the survey. The data was analysed with a multi-method approach. Factor analysis was used to summarise the most important work challenges, such as the lack of appreciation and the decrease in the meaning of work. Development possibilities were examined through both societal and unit-specific factors.

Results: The Teachers in ECEC felt that they were in control of the new requirements of the job, but the unit-specific working conditions were felt to make the implementation of the work challenging. From a societal point of view, improving pay emerged as the most critical job development target.

Implications: The organisers of ECEC services have woken up to the challenges arising from the shortage of ECEC professionals and are striving at least to some extent to improve issues related to the attractiveness of the profession. Research supports the identification of these factors.

Conceptual changes in multi-professional teamwork in Finnish ECEC over time (2002-2022)

Source: Karila, Kirsti, and Päivi Kupila 2023 (*see References* for further details)

Aims: The article analyses the theoretical, practical, and political interpretations of multi-professional teamwork in Finnish ECEC during the years 2002–2022.

Methods: The research was carried out using a semi-systematic approach to provide an overview of teams, teamwork, team composition, and multi-professionalism in Finnish ECEC. The data consisted of 1) key policy documents that regulate or guide multi-professional teamwork and 2) a systematic literature review of multi-professional teamwork in Finnish research studies. The analysis was conducted using thematic analysis.

Results: The results were constructed in a narrative timeline, which indicates two main themes regarding multi-professional teamwork in Finnish ECEC: 1) an emphasis on multi-professional teamwork as a resource combined with the challenges in implementing it, and 2) an emphasis on pedagogy and the clarification of professional profiles.

Implications: The research indicates that the discussion around multi-professional teamwork in Finnish ECEC should move in the direction of building a shared understanding about the responsibilities and division of labour of different professional groups. The researchers consider that more development projects and studies are needed to develop the practices of a multi-professional team that enable the team members to use their own competences and qualifications for the benefit of children attending ECEC.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Massive changes have been taking place in the Finnish ECEC system over the past ten years. Prior to that, the development of ECEC had been limited and, as an example, the same law guided the Finnish ECEC system for about 40 years. Since 2013, the Ministry of Education and Culture has turned the development direction of ECEC away from social welfare towards the education system. The significant challenge for the workforce is the **change in the paradigm of ECEC** and its effects on the staff structure and the operating culture of ECEC. The inclusion of ECEC in the education system requires the reconstruction and reorganisation of the entire system. ECEC development work has been carried out systematically at the administrative level, but the implementation of change in ECEC practices is slow and challenging. It seems that there is a strong effort to develop the quality of ECEC, but the practical implementation of ECEC is not developing at the same pace. The development work is met with both acceptance as well as resistance and fears among various occupational groups of ECEC.

The biggest challenge in changing the ECEC system is the **lack of trained Teachers in ECEC**. Under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finnish ECEC personnel focused on staff members with a qualification in social and health care. In addition, the number of teacher trainees was not monitored and the training capacities were insufficient. As a result, about half of those working with the job title of Teacher in ECEC have completed a degree in social work. According to Statistics Finland, in the past ten years (2010–2021), the number of people who have received a "Teacher in ECEC" qualification with a Bachelor in Social Services has doubled in ECEC (n= approx. 3,000 → 6,000). At the same time, the number of teachers with a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education has remained the same (n= approx. 6,500) (Statistics Finland 2023).

The number of people trained in the social sector has not been able to prevent the teacher shortage in ECEC. However, the course of development has led to shortcomings in pedagogical quality, which is stated in FINEEC's report (Repo et al. 2019).

The shortage of Teachers in ECEC has been addressed through, among other things, increased university student intake as well as the provision of various forms of multiform teacher training. However, the challenges of recruitment and retention in the ECEC sector reduce the motivation to engage with the field and the professionals' commitment to the work.

The job description of Social Pedagogues is also unresolved in the field of ECEC. Due to ambiguities related to the division of labour, the **struggle between professional groups** and their unions continues.

Finnish ECEC has been purposefully developed in the direction indicated by the OECD, among others, during recent years, and it seems that the Finnish ECEC system is now strongly connected to the education system. However, this direction of development is not complete in all respects. The skills gap in ECEC is slowing down and challenging the **implementation of change**, and a certain group of policy makers sees the loosening of eligibility criteria as a quick solution to the trouble. There is a particularly strong lobbying for the restoration of the qualification of Social Pedagogues to work as Teachers in ECEC. However, Social Pedagogues are educated in the social welfare field, so from the point of view of the development of the education system, teacher education provides a stronger foundation for a Teacher's work. Global crises, which are weakening Finland's economic situation, also challenge political decision-making and produce pressure to cut costs, which brings its own challenges to the national development of ECEC.

Finland needs to stick to the direction of development it has chosen regarding ECEC. It is disquieting to note that the 2023-2027 government programme includes a proposal to relax the eligibility criteria for ECEC Centre Leaders. The state administration should not choose quick solutions to solve problems that weaken the quality of ECEC. In order to further develop ECEC in Finnish society, the need to reform the legislation in such a way that early childhood education and care and pre-primary education would be legislatively linked together is being increasingly discussed. Along with a law reform, changing pre-primary education from one to two years is seen as the next step in the development of Finnish ECEC.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

FINLAND

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms chosen in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC settings are: **ECEC centre** (*päiväkoti* 1–5) and **pre-primary class** *(esiopetus* 6–7)[1]. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Finland

1863	First kindergarten with a nursery founded near Jyväskylä.
1888	First Froebel-inspired kindergarten established in Helsinki.
1927	First framework issued for the public funding of ECEC provision.
1960s	Expansion of ECEC settings due to increasing employment of women
1973	Children's Day Care Act comes into force; Municipalities have a duty to provide places for children below school age.
1983	Children's Act: "All children are equal before the law".
1985	Legal entitlement to a place in early childhood provision for all under 3 year-olds, implemented gradually up to 1990.
1990	Parents of under 3 year-olds can choose between a place in a municipal facility or a childcare allowance for caring for their child at home.
1996	Legal entitlement to a place in early childhood provision from the age of one up to school starting age established.
2000	Pre-primary education reform implemented (law approved in Parliament in 1998): the year preceding school entry free of charge for all 6 year-olds. First *National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education* announced.
2001	Municipalities have a duty to provide a free place for 6 year-olds.
2003	First National curricular framework for early childhood education and care is issued.
2005	Revision of the 2003 *National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland*
2013	Transfer of responsibility for ECEC up to school entry at age 7 from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture
2015	Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (*Varhaiskasvatuslaki)* is passed. Due to budget cuts, the right to a place in ECEC is reduced to 20 hours per week. Parents and guardians are expected to enrol their child in a pre-school class, but there are no sanctions if they do not comply.
2016	A new normative curriculum for ECEC (*Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet)* is prepared by the Finnish National Agency for Education and comes into effect in 2017.
2018	Amendments to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (*Varhaiskasvatuslaki*) come into force and changes are updated in the National Curriculum Guidelines for ECEC.
2020	Each child's subjective right to ECEC is restored in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (*Varhaiskasvatuslaki*).
2021	Deviations from ECEC ratios are specified in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. The staff are obliged to report any problems regarding the organisation of the ECEC setting.

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. The SEEPRO-3 editors have chosen the following age-inclusive format: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6. In the case of Finland, the relevant format is **0–6** years, since pre-primary education is part of ECEC and children start school when they are 7 years old.

2022	The inclusive principles and the specifications regarding special support are recorded as part of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (*Varhaiskasvatuslaki*).
2023	The requirement for a license for private service organisers is recorded in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (*Varhaiskasvatuslaki*).

Sources: Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010; Turunen et al. 2012; Ministry of Education and Culture and Finnish National Agency of Education 2016; Salminen 2017; Kumpulainen 2018

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Finland has a unitary and decentralised system of early childhood education and care for children up to primary school age (7 years). It is an integral part of the education system. The Ministry of Education and Culture *(Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö*, OKM) is responsible for all public education, including ECEC. The Finnish National Education Agency (*Opetushallitus*) works closely with the Ministry of Education on the development of educational goals and their implementation, the creation of curricula and the organisation of funding allocations and expenditures. At the regional level, various authorities are responsible for education; municipalities or private providers are responsible for the on-site organisation and financing of early childhood services.

General objectives and legislative framework

Education policy emphasises above all the right to equal opportunities for all. Education is considered a fundamental right of all citizens, regardless of age, place of residence, financial status, gender, family language or religion.

In 2018, a new Early Childhood Education and Care Act (*Varhaiskasvatuslaki*) came into force. Other legal provisions are the Government Decree on Early Childhood Education, Care and Upbringing (*Valtioneuvoston asetus varhaiskasvatuksesta,* 2018) and the Basic Education Act (*Perusopetuslak*i, 1998, with amendments), which regulates compulsory pre-primary education for 6 to 7 year-olds.

Further goals and principles are set out in the revised National Curricular Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (*Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet*), which came into force in August 2016 and is legally binding both or public and private providers, and in the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (*Esiopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet,* 2014).

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Since 1996, all children up to the age of 6 have been entitled to a place in an ECEC setting. Each of the 309 (2023) municipalities is obliged to provide the appropriate number of places. If the extent of municipal provision is not sufficient, vouchers for settings run by private providers can be issued by the municipalities.

An amendment to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care in 2016 restricted the individual entitlement to early childhood education and care to 20 hours per week where one of the parents was unemployed or on maternity, paternity or parental leave, whereas parents in em-

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Finland provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are indicated within the text and in the references section.

ployment or studying still had the right to a full-day place (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 62). However, in alignment with a decision adopted by the European Committee of Social Rights (Council of Europe 2019), each child's subjective right to early childhood education and care was restored in 2020.

Since August 2015, attendance at one-year, free preschool classes has been mandatory for 6 to 7 year-olds. Municipalities must provide at least 700 hours of educational activities. Currently (2021), a pilot project is still underway to provide a free year of pre-primary education (for 20 hours per week) for 5 year-olds as well (European Commission 2020, 49). This is taking place in selected ECEC settings only.

Compulsory primary education starts at age 7.

Main types of provision

At the end of parental leave, when the child is usually 9 to 10 months old, parents can choose whether their child attends a municipal or private centre-based ECEC setting. Alternatively, they may prefer to register their child with a municipal or private home-based childcare setting or care for their child themselves. In the latter case, parents receive a childcare allowance until the child is 3 years old.

The Finnish Act on Early Childhood Education and Care recognises three different forms of ECEC: 1) centre-based ECEC, 2) home-based childcare and 3) sessional ECEC, such as playgroups, all of which follow the same framework curriculum.

Municipalities provide **ECEC centres** *(päiväkoti)* for children between 0 and 6 years of age. Enrolment is possible on a full-day (maximum ten hours) or on a half-day basis (maximum five hours).

Children whose mother tongue is Swedish or Sami can also attend facilities in their respective family language. The opening hours of ECEC centres (usually from 6:15 to 17:30) are adapted to local needs, including shift workers. However, it is recommended that attendance should not be longer than 10 hours a day. There are about 20 Sámi-language ECEC centres in Finland (Aurola 2020) and about 380 Swedish-language ECEC centres (Oker-Blom 2021).

Pre-primary education (*esiopetus*) is part of ECEC. Municipalities have been required to provide free, compulsory pre-primary classes for 6 year-old children since August 2015. Pre-primary education is typically offered for 4 hours daily (or 700 hours annually), and most children are also enrolled for additional hours in an ECEC centre to ensure full-time coverage. This means that the children come under two different curricula and legislative regimes during their day in ECEC. The pre-primary education group must be staffed by a teacher who has completed a university-based initial professional education. Most commonly, children attend a pre-primary group in an ECEC centre from 8:00–12:00, 8:30–12:30 or 9:00-13:00. In some cases, pre-primary education can take place in primary school (see *Table 4* for the current distribution) and be held either by a primary education teacher or an ECEC teacher. In the fall of 2021, the Ministry of Education and Culture launched a two-year pre-primary education pilot phase, which is scheduled to end in the spring of 2024. It is estimated that approximately 10,000 children will have participated by then. It includes an extensive research project that is evaluating the organisation in the municipalities, the effects of two-year pre-primary education on children, and the experiences of the staff and the children and their parents or guardians (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021c).

Free transportation is provided for children who live further than 5 km from the nearest facility. In 2021, there were 2,856 such classes, of which only 44 were private independent and 2,812 private subsidised.

Children aged 10 months to school age can also be cared for in a regulated **home-based childcare** setting (*perhepäivähoito*). This is offered either by municipalities (also as group childcare) or by private providers for parents who receive the childcare allowance.

In addition, some church (e.g., the Lutheran Church) and non-profit organisations offer open-door short-term sessions for children and parents such as **playgroups** (*päiväkerho*).

Many municipalities also began to organise playgroup activities for children who do not meet the criteria for a full-day place in ECEC. Nevertheless, the pedagogical standards (e.g. education and training of staff) in playgroups cannot be compared with the standards in regular institutions. Moreover, in many municipalities playgroups are offered only a few days per week and only for three hours per day (Kumpulainen 2018).

Provider structures

Early childhood education and care is offered by municipal and private providers. Municipalities have a statutory duty to ensure that they can offer families with children appropriate childcare options. If there are not enough places in municipal facilities to meet demand, municipalities can also arrange places with private providers. According to the amended Early Childhood Education and Care Act in 2023, private ECEC providers must be licensed by the Regional State Administrative Agency (2023) before starting operation.

Private ECEC provision can also be commercially run, but the providers must meet the criteria required of public services. Both the Early Childhood Education and Care Act and the National Curriculum are binding for private providers. Especially in urban areas, private-commercial providers have increased recently, but this sector is still relatively small (6 to 8%, Kumpulainen 2018).

In 2021, 81% of all children in early childhood education and care attended municipal institutions, 6% were cared for in municipal home-based settings, and 19% in private ECEC centre-based and home-based settings. Altogether, 16.2% of under 3 year-olds and 83.8% of children aged 3 up to statutory school age were enrolled in ECEC settings, see *Table 1* (Eurostat 2023l).

Only 6% 2.5% of the children in pre-primary classes in primary schools were enrolled in private settings in 2021 (see *Table 2*).

Table 1

Finland: Number of children in early years settings by provider type, 2021

Provider type	Under 3 year-olds	Share in %	3 years to statutory school age	Share in %
Private for-profit and Private non-profit	12,428	23.9	28,806	14.2
Public	39,621	76.1	173,373	85.8
Total	52,049		**202,179**	

Source: Eurostat 2023l

Table 2

Finland: Number and share of children in pre-primary classes in primary schools by provider, 2021

Provider	Number of children	Share of children, in %*
Municipal and 5 joint municipal authorities	8,859	97.5
Private	223	2.5
Total	**9,082**	

Source: Statistics Finland 2023b, *own calculations

Participation rates in regulated provision

Table 3 shows the development of enrolment rates since 2005. More than half (56.4%) of children under 3 years of age in Finland did not attend a centre-based setting in 2022, which can be explained at least in part by the generous parental leave and the childcare allowance. In contrast, 92.8% of children between the ages of 3 and school entry attended a centre-based setting. Since 2005, both rates have increased significantly.

Table 3

Finland: Participation rates in centre-based ECEC provision by age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	8	25
	Over 30 hours	19	51
	No enrolment in ECEC	74	24
2010	1 to 29 hours	8	21
	Over 30 hours	20	56
	No enrolment in ECEC	72	23
2015	1 to 29 hours	7.9	23.2
	Over 30 hours	24.6	59.6
	No enrolment in ECEC	67.4	17.2
2022	1 to 29 hours	9.3	19.6
	Over 30 hours	34.3	73.2
	No enrolment in ECEC	56.4	7.1

Source: Eurostat 2023b, Slight deviations from 100% due to roundings

Broken down by age, more than two-thirds of 2 year-olds and between 84-92% of 3 to 5 year-olds were enrolled in an ECEC setting in 2021. Almost all 6 year-olds (96.3%) attended the compulsory pre-primary class (see *Table 4*).

Table 4

Finland: Number and enrolment rates of children in centre-based ECEC settings, by age, 2021

Age	Number of children in ISCED-01 settings	Enrolment rates in ISCED-01 settings, in %	Number of children in ISCED-02 settings	Enrolment rates in ISCED-02 settings, in %
Under 2 years	17,396	18.8		
2 year-olds	34,653	71.6		
3 year-olds			43,455	84.3
4 year-olds			48,813	88.8
5 year-olds			52,322	91.8
6 year-olds			57,176	96.3

Source: Eurostat 2023e, h

In 2019, 63% of children under 3 years were cared for at home or attended open door ECEC services such as playgroups. Because of the Covid pandemic the share of children under 6 years attending ECEC centres decreased to 22% (Eurochild 2021).

In 2019, the overall attendance rate in ECEC centres was 77%, only 1% of the 1 to 6 year-olds were enrolled in a private setting.

In 2022, only a relatively small proportion of children (about 16%) attended pre-primary classes located in schools (Statistics Finland 2023a):

Table 5

Finland: Number and relative share of children in pre-primary classes by institution, 2022

Age	Total	Located in ECEC centres	Share in %*	Located in schools	Share in %*
Up to and including 5 year-olds	6,915	6,811	11.2	104	0.2
6 to 7 year-olds	53,058	43,718	71.8	9,340	15.3
Over 7 years old	899	589	1.0	310	0.5
Total	**60,872**	**51,118**	84.0	**9,754**	**16.0**

Quelle: Statistics Finland 2023a, *own calculations

Financing and costs for parents

In 2019, a total of 1.13% of GDP was allocated to the early education sector, 0.5% on the childcare sector for under 3 year-olds and 0.6% on the 3–6 sector (OECD 2023).

ECEC settings are financed by state funds (30%), municipal funds (56%) and income-based parental fees (14%). The maximum monthly fee (including meals) for a full-time place in a public setting is €295 (2023). The municipalities decide on criteria for reduced fees. Since 2018, fees have been lowered overall to enable children from low-income families to attend an ECEC setting. For a 20-hour visit, parents pay a maximum of 60% of the cost of a full-time place, depending on income. The ceilings are adjusted every two years. In August 2021, parental contributions were reduced by 31% through an increase in the income limits, as were contributions for siblings (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021a).

700 hours per year (20 hours per week) of pre-primary education for 6 to 7 year-olds is free of charge. For additional hours, an income-related fee is charged. The fees for private ECEC settings are decided by the provider. As a rule, the fees in private facilities are higher than in municipal settings.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education launched a pilot project that provides for free attendance for 20 hours per week for 5 year-olds, which has already been extended twice; a total of 61 municipalities and 48,253 children have participated so far. The state compensated about 79% of the loss of fee income. It was found that the attendance rate of 5 year-olds increased compared to reference municipalities, as did the participation of low-income families (European Commission 2020, 49).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 11% of net household income on childcare costs[3] (OECD.Stat 2023).

[3] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

Staff to child ratios and group size

As a rule, children in **ECEC centres** are grouped into three age groups: 0 to 2 years, 3 to 6 years and 6 to 7 years. However, in some cases, so-called sibling groups include all ages together. As stated by law, there may not be more children in a group than are allowed for three professionals and each group must have its own designated space.

The ratio of qualified staff to children is prescribed by law: One qualified professional for 4 children under 3 years or for 7 children over 3 years. If there are children in the group attending for less than 5 hours, the staffing ratio can also be 1:13.

Pre-primary classes as separate groups can also be attended by younger children and are then subject to the same staffing ratio as other ECEC groups. For pre-primary classes that are integrated into a primary school, the legal requirements of the primary school apply, in which the group size is not regulated. However, according to a recommendation by the Ministry of Education, there should be no more than 13 children in a pre-primary group, regardless of where it is located.

Curricular frameworks

Since 2018, the revised National Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (*Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet* 2018 and *Esiopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet* 2014) has been in force for **ECEC centres**, on the basis of which the providers draw up local curricula and individual plans for each child. The central aim is to strengthen children's transversal competences as well as knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and volition. Play and outdoor activities are considered a prerequisite for development, learning and well-being.

The revised version of the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (*Esiopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet* 2014), which was introduced in local curricula from 2016, applies to **pre-primary classes**. The latest edition states that it mainly emphasises principles related to children's individuality, the importance of active learning and the importance of acting as members of a group. The emphasis is on play-based and child-centred learning and on a positive view of life. A separate curriculum has been drawn up for the pilot phase of the two-year pre-primary education (Finnish National Agency of Education 2023).

While the frameworks define specific content areas, these are intended only as a guide for professionals to ensure the balanced development of children. Centre-specific educational programmes are expected to adhere to the main areas of the curriculum, including cooperation between professionals and parents.

The same five overarching competence areas apply to both curricula: (1) thinking and learning, (2) cultural competences, interaction and expression, (3) management of daily life, (4) multiliteracy and competences in information technology, and (5) participation and involvement (Finnish National Agency for Education 2021). Five learning areas are the basis of the pedagogical work, which are combined and applied according to age: (1) the world of languages, (2) diverse forms of expression, (3) me and our community, (4) exploring my environment, and (5) I grow up, move and develop. Curricula are legally binding for both public and private providers.

Professionals in both settings have the freedom to choose their own methods and create appropriate learning environments.

To ensure a smooth transition to primary school, the curricula of early childhood education and care, pre-primary and primary school are aligned (European Commission 2019 et al., 108).

Digital education

In both curricula, "multiliteracy and competences in information technology" are listed as areas of learning. Although multiliteracy can be defined in very different ways, in Finnish research in the field of early childhood education it is also understood as becoming familiar with and working with digital media (cf. Valkonen et al. 2020). The Finnish National Agency for Education also considers the increasing role of digital competences in the lives of young children to be important and sees helping children to find their way in different digital environments as one of the tasks of early childhood education (Finnish National Agency for Education 2021).

Local curricula may define "digital competences" in more concrete terms: For example, according to the curriculum of the City of Helsinki, children should be encouraged to acquire competences in the use of digital media and understand them as a support for learning, creativity, self-expression and interaction. They have the opportunity to do this in a protected environment and under the guidance of professionals. They should assist the children in dealing with digital media and use them together with them. Digital games can, for example, contribute to learning problem-solving strategies (City of Helsinki 2019).

Monitoring – evaluation

In Finland, quality assessments (of settings, staff, curriculum implementation and children's developmental progress) are regulated at the local level and financed through municipal budgets. At the national level, the Finnish Centre for Educational Evaluation is responsible for evaluations. Regional state administrative authorities, the National Inspectorate of Social Affairs and Health and (in the case of private providers) municipalities are also involved in the supervision of ECEC provision.

Child-related assessment

An individual development plan (IDP) is drawn up for each child in cooperation with the parents. According to the Early Childhood Education and Care Act (2018), this is obligatory and it is the responsibility of the professionals to draw up such a plan as part of the pedagogical documentation with the help of interviews with the parents or guardians. In addition, the child's opinions must be heard and taken into account. The individual plan takes into account the child's experiences, well-being, interests and strengths, but also the need for support and guidance. The goals defined in the plan refer to the pedagogical activities and supports. They are not competence requirements for the child. The implementation of the plan must be evaluated and the plan must be revised regularly.

Centre-level assessment

Internal centre-based assessments do not focus on children's learning outcomes, but mainly on pedagogical activities, so that the quality of the ECEC centre as a whole, including the conditions for children's development and learning, can be improved.

Self-evaluation procedures are decided at local level, but they are mandatory for all levels of education. The Finnish Centre for Educational Evaluation supports providers by providing training and quality assurance materials. Guidelines and recommendations for the self-evaluation of ECEC settings were published in 2019 (Finnish Education Evaluation Centre 2019). How the results of a self-evaluation are used is up to the individual settings (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 128).

External evaluation

The providers of ECEC are required by law to carry out external evaluations of the quality of their settings as well as their own provider quality. These are carried out in particular by the Finnish Centre for Educational Evaluation and cover mainly structural and process-related factors, the latter also being directly linked to children's activities and experiences.

Despite the obligation to evaluate, there are no detailed guidelines on how this should be done. However, providers must ensure that both children and parents can participate in the evaluation (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 132).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

According to the principles of inclusion, children are offered the necessary support. Children with special educational needs are integrated into mainstream institutions close to their home wherever possible. According to the Education Act (2018), every child should receive the support they need. The national curricula also apply to children with special educational needs, but these are adapted where necessary – and for each individual case. Children receive the support they need as soon as possible in order to initiate improvements as early as possible (European Commission 2020, 58f). In addition, the Right to Learn Programme 2020-2022 aims to enable even more children to access early childhood services through improved quality (ibid., 26).

If necessary, ECEC is carried out in a Special group (6 to 8 children with special educational needs), a Special integrated group (5 children with special educational needs and 7 without) or another group reduced in size due to the need for support.

The number of integrated special groups has decreased since the turn of the millennium, and some Finnish municipalities no longer have integrated special groups (Pihlaja and Neitola 2017). This means that not all children have the opportunity to be taught by a group-specific early special education teacher in a special group. The authors suggest that the background could be the municipalities' cost-saving efforts to improve efficiency.

Children with a migration background

For children of non-Finnish origin, the use of the respective family language is recommended throughout the ECEC sector (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 116f).

In Finland, Finnish and Swedish are the two official languages. Finnish is spoken by 86.9% (2020) of the population and Swedish by 5.2%. As a rule, there are institutions where one or the other language is predominantly spoken. In addition, municipalities in areas where Sami is spoken are also required to provide settings in this language. At the end of 2022, people from Russia were the largest group of non-Finnish speakers, followed by people from Estonia, Arab countries, England and Somali (Statistics Finland 2024).

In 2022, a total of 5.3% of the population had a non-Finnish citizenship, of which 34.7% came from other EU27 countries. In the age group of children up to 5 years, 6.2% had a non-Finnish background, of which 29.1% came from other EU countries (Eurostat 2023c).

According to national statistics, in 2022, 93.2% of the children in pre-primary classes were instructed in Finnish, 6.8% in Swedish (Statistics Finland 2023c, own calculations).

There are also support services for parents of children with a migrant background who care for their children at home. They can, for example, receive language tuition in an institution where their children are cared for at the same time (European Commission 2020, 120).

Parental leave arrangements[4]

Following a new leave scheme from August 2022, the former Maternity leave has been replaced with "Pregnancy leave". Paternity leave was abolished as Parental leave now is divided evenly between parents.

Pregnancy leave (*raskausvapaa*) lasts 40 working days (about four months), of which two weeks before and two weeks after the birth are compulsory. The allowance depends on income and amounts to 90% of annual income between €10,665 and €64,048. Above an annual income of €64,048, 32.5% are paid; below an annual income of €10,665, a minimum lump sum of €800 per month is paid. Pregnancy allowance is paid only to the pregnant/birthing parent, it cannot be transferred to the other parent.

There is no longer a statutory entitlement to a **Paternity leave** (*isyysvapaa*).

Parental leave (*vanhempainvapaa*) lasts 160 working days per parent. It is an individual entitlement, 63 days of which are transferable to the other parent. For the first 16 days 90% of the earnings are paid; for the remaining days, benefit is paid at 70% of the individual's annual earnings between €13,713 and €41,629, with a lower percentage for earnings above this level and a minimum flat-rate of €800 per month below this level. If parents work while on parental leave, they receive only the minimum flat-rate. Parents can be granted parental allowance at the same time for a maximum of 18 days. Parental allowance can be used flexibly in several longer or shorter parts and the leave can be taken for the same period of time.

After the end of Parental leave, parents can take **Home-care leave** (*hoitovapaa*) up to the child's 3rd birthday in two parts with a minimum length of one month. They receive a basic lump sum of €377.68 per month and €113.07 for each additional child under the age of 3, plus an income-related payment of up to €202.12 per month. In addition, in 2022, 21% of municipalities paid a supplement to the home-care allowance.

Parents can also reduce their working hours after the end of parental leave until the end of the second school year. Parents with children under the age of 3 who work a maximum of 80% of their normal full-time hours receive approximately €179.49 per month, and €269.24 for a maximum of 60%.

Data on the uptake of the new leave scheme are not yet available. In 2021, 79% of fathers took up to 18 days of paternity leave. The 158 days of parental leave are usually taken by mothers. In 2021, about 7% of fathers took an average of 58 days of parental leave. A very large number of families (87% in 2020), usually mothers, take advantage of the childcare allowance. In 2021, only 8.1% were fathers. However, the overall popularity of this measure has declined in recent years, and many children under 3 years of age are now cared for in ECEC settings – one reason for this is also the improved labour market situation for women.

Country expert assessment by Heidi Chydenius

In Finland, the participation rate of children in ECEC has historically been low, and **increasing the participation rate** has been a Finnish educational policy goal for years. Efforts have been made to promote children's participation in ECEC, for example by experimenting with free ECEC for 5 year-old children and by experimenting with two years of pre-primary education instead of one. Results have been achieved, as the number of children participating in ECEC has doubled over the past few decades. When examining the participation rate, it should be noted that in

[4] The brief information in this section is based mainly on the country note for Finland by Johanna Lammi-Taskula and colleagues in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Finland, family day care is included in the scope of ECEC, which internationally is usually excluded from ECEC. However, the share of home-based ECEC provision has decreased nationally (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021b). According to the Education at a Glance report (OECD 2022, 163), in 2020, 88% of 3–5 year-olds participated in ECEC, which is at the same level as the EU average and above the OECD average (83%). The participation rate of children under the age of 3 in early childhood education has also increased. The participation rate was 37% in 2020, compared to 28% in 2015. However, the participation rate of children under 3 years old is still below the average of other Nordic countries, which is around 50% (OECD 2022). It seems that increasing the participation rate in ECEC for toddlers should be given more attention. The goal may turn out to be challenging, as Finnish culture is characterised by a strong familistic ideology, which has been strengthened by the long history of ECEC under social welfare.

The most acute challenge in Finnish ECEC is the **educational skills gap**. ECEC came under the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2013, after which efforts have been made to make the ECEC system a part of the education system. The skills gap has gradually emerged in the context of the social sector administration since the 1980s, when a new personnel regulation made it possible to reduce the number of teachers in ECEC groups. While teachers had previously comprised two thirds of the staff and childcarers one third, the situation gradually reversed during the 1990s. With the change, the organisers of ECEC aimed for cost savings, which were not significant. At the same time, the personnel structure of ECEC began to focus more and more on those trained in social and health care. The training needs of teachers in ECEC were not investigated during the period when the sector came under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The extent of teacher training in universities was too low, and there was no basis for information about the need for teachers or the changes ahead. The available information on the personnel structure in ECEC is still indicative. According to the estimate, currently around 80% of ECEC staff have completed social and health education and only around 20% have completed teacher education. About 40% of the ECEC personnel have a tertiary level education. The majority of the staff are practical nurses who have completed secondary vocational education.

The temporal connection between the change in personnel structure and the quality problem is obvious. The evaluation report published by FINEEC in 2019 contains alarming **signs of quality deterioration**. The educational backgrounds of the employees who participated in the evaluation corresponded to the shares of different educational and professional groups in the personnel throughout the country. According to the report, the goals set by the mandatory curriculum for ECEC were not universally understood and implemented in accordance with the curriculum. There were particularly worrying deficiencies in the use of handicraft and art education and children's literature in the activities of ECEC centres. Based on the assessment, an understanding of ECEC for children under 3 years old also appeared to be lacking.

The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018) elevates the best interest of the child to become the guiding principle of ECEC and emphasises the importance of pedagogy and pedagogical competence. In connection with the reform of the law, increasing the **proportion of staff with tertiary education**, and especially those with teacher education, was a major goal. By 2030, more than 60% of the staff in ECEC will have completed tertiary level education and at least 33% will be qualified teachers.-Data collection on ECEC professional education and the need for it has also been developed. To support the implementation of the law reform and to curb the teacher shortage, the intake numbers for IPE at universities have been increased. Qualifying programmes have been implemented for the time being, whereby those who work as childcarers are offered the opportunity to complete a tertiary level teacher education alongside their work. The childcarers who participate in these study programmes often act as substitutes for the teacher and receive the teacher's qualification based on the education.

Increasing the competence level of ECEC personnel is possible with the support of sufficient **education funding** and by improving the sector's attraction and retention power. Since the teacher shortage has developed over a long period of time, it will not be solved quickly. We are currently in a situation where there is a **shortage of teachers** and ECEC organisers struggle with the challenges of organising the service. Sometimes the decision-makers would like to solve the situation in the short term, such as by lowering the eligibility criteria or thinning out the personnel structure. In other words, they want to abandon the development goals set by The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018). As an alternative solution, it may be necessary to rely on the extension of the transition period after 2030, in addition to which it could be necessary to draw up a development plan that supports the goals of the law. The development of early childhood education requires a long-term commitment to the goal set by the law.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Finland was 5,548,241. It had been increasing slightly, but steadily over the last 20 years (2000: 5,171,382; 2010: 5,351,427; 2020: 5,525,292) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total birth rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total birth rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.46, Finland is below the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[5].

Children under 6 years of age

Table 6
Finland: Number of children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year	49,592
1 year-olds	46,833
2 year-olds	46,400
3 year-olds	48,655
4 year-olds	51,810
5 year-olds	54,671
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**297,961**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

[5] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

In 2022, 2.6% of the total population were children under 3, 5.4% children under 6 years. Until 2015, these proportions were above the respective EU averages. In 2022, they are slightly below the EU average.

Table 7

Finland: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population from 2000 to 2022

Year	Comparison Finland/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Finland	3.4	3.7	7.0
	∅ EU15[6]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Finland	3.3	3.3	6.5
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Finland	3.2	3.4	6.6
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Finland	2.6	2.8	5.4
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, own calculations, deviations are due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

The vast majority of households (89.4%) with children under 6 were couple households in Finland in 2022. Single parent households accounted for only 4.7% – almost exclusively single mothers.

Table 8

Finland: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Total households, in %*
All households	419,600	
Couple households	375,100	89.4
Other household type	24,700	5.9
Single households, total	19,800	4.7
Single households, women	17,200	4.1
Single households, men	2,600	0.6

Source: Eurostat 2023k, *own calculations

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Finland, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 80.6% and for women 79.0% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 69.5% of women and 91.7% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), both shares were above EU-average (63.6% and 87.2% respectively) (Eurostat 2023i).

[6] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Table 9a

Finland: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Finland	61.2	91.9
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[7]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Finland	69.5	91.7
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[8]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023i

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 9b.*

Table 9b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023i, 2023j

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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[7] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[9]

In 2022, 15.6% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This share was significantly lower than the EU average 23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 16.3% (EU: 21.6%) (Eurostat 2023f).

In 2020, 1.3% of children under 6 years of age – this share has doubled since 2017 (0.6%) – and 1% of the whole population suffered from severe material deprivation still a relatively low figure compared to European average (6.1% and 4.3% respectively). In particular, single parents and parents with three or more children are at greater risk of poverty (2019: 21.4% and 12.7% respectively) (Eurochild 2021; Eurostat 2021g).

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[9] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or (severely) materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

FRANCE

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*
Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.
https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*
A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education.
https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*
An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.
http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

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1. ECEC governance in France

The system of early childhood education and care in France is bi-sectoral, split between a childcare sector (0–2 years[1]) and an education sector (2–5 years). 2 year-olds may attend a childcare setting or a pre-primary[2] school (*école maternelle*).

During lunch breaks, out-of-school hours and holidays, most children attending the *école maternelle* are also supervised by a third sector: the pre-primary leisure-time sector (*accueil périscolaire*), with services in the schools or near them.

Since September 2019, compulsory schooling in the *école maternelle* begins when the children are 3 years old. They start primary school (*école élémentaire*) when they are 6 years old.

1.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0–2 years)

During President Macron's first term (2017–2022), provision for the under-threes (both centre-based and home-based) was under the joint responsibility of the Ministry of Solidarity and Health (*Ministère des Solidarités et de la Santé*) and local authorities. At the beginning of his second term in June 2022, this Ministry was split into two. The new ministries are called the Ministry for Health and Prevention (*Ministère de la santé et de la prévention*) and the Ministry of Solidarity, Autonomy and Persons with Disabilities (*Ministère des solidarités, de l'autonomie et des personnes handicapées*).

The new Minister of Solidarity stated the following: "I am, and I want to tell you this very clearly, the Minister for Early Childhood and Families". At the same time, a State Secretary for Childhood has been directly linked to the new Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne (before this, the relevant State Secretary was linked to the Ministry of Solidarity and Health). Moreover, the Minister in charge of equality between women and men, diversity and equal opportunities who has to ensure "the improvement of the consideration of maternity and paternity in professional careers and the development of childcare, in particular childcare centres", is also delegated to the Prime Minister. There is therefore a certain amount of overlapping in terms of responsibility for ECEC.

At the beginning of E. Macron's first term, linked to the National Strategy for preventing and fighting poverty launched in October 2018 (Jeantet 2022), a commission of specialists in early childhood (but without representatives from the social sciences and education) had made recommendations for family and childhood policy (prenatal–2 years, the 'first thousand days'), which have been piloted by the Ministry of Solidarity and Health since 2021 (Ministry of Solidarity and Health 2020).

In 2021, a Childcare Sector Committee *(Comité de Filière Petite Enfance*) was created to cope with the significant lack of available places and, according to the previous Minister, to "respond to the professionals' feeling of lack of recognition and the need to reaffirm the meaning of their activity". In June 2022, this committee made some propositions, after having asked the CNAF

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds.In the case of France, where children start the *école élémentaire* at age 6, the relevant formats are **0–2** and **2/3–5** years.

[2] To establish a degree of comparability between the country reports, the term 'pre-primary' is used in this report when describing the *écoles maternelles*. However, the *école maternelle* and the *école élémentaire* jointly form the *école primaire* for children aged 2–11 years.

(*Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales*/National Family Allowance Fund) to quantify the shortage in *crèches collectives* in the spring of 2022.

The Decree n° 2021-1131 30 (2021) on childcare had introduced, for the first time, common regulations for both home-based and centre-based care. *Crèches collectives* are categorised according to their size: *micro-crèches* (12 places maximum), *petites crèches* (13–24 places), *crèches* (25–39 places), *grandes crèches* (40–59 places). Also for the first time, a curriculum was launched in the childcare sector, the *Charte nationale d'accueil pour les jeunes enfants* (National Charter for Childcare, Ministry of Solidarity and Health 2021a) – It is inspired by the "Giampino report" – a report commissioned by the Minister of Families, Childhood and Women's Rights under F. Hollande's presidency (Giampino 2016); this report was the product of a broad consultation process with stakeholders in the childcare sector and the *Charte* has been available since 2017 (Ministry for Families, Children and Women's Rights 2017). It is interesting to note that in the Decree, *crèches familiales* – a marginal setting grouping home-based childcare providers employed by the *crèche familiale* (which organises activities for them and the children under their care) – are placed in the same category as the *crèches*. A more recent setting which is on the increase, the *maisons d'assistantes maternelles (MAM)*, is placed in the same category as independent home-based provision. The *MAM* are settings where several independent home-based providers work together entirely outside their own homes, thus creating a group of children (Garnier, Bouve, and Janner-Raimondi 2022). Independent home-based childcare providers also have the possibility of joining a *Relais assistants maternelles RAM* for shared activities and training. From 2021, the *RAM* became *Relais petite enfance RPE,* with extended missons towards families (Decree 2021-115).

Centre-based settings for children up to 3 years of age include **full-time** provision and **part-time** sessional care (*haltes-garderies*). The **all-day settings** are:

- *crèches collectives* – mostly *établissements multi-accueils* (they can include some places for part-time, home-based or emergency situations), which accounted for more than 80% of the places in childcare centres in 2019 (National Early Childhood Observatory 2021);
- *micro-crèches* (i.e. limited to 12 children maximum), accounting for more than 12% of the places in 2019; and
- *jardins d'enfants* for 2 and 3 year-olds. Now that school is compulsory from age 3 (since September 2019), these are now a minority setting, existing in some cities only; they are to be disbanded by 2024 or transformed into *crèches*

All these full-day settings can be publicly run, associative, parent-run, or private. The private sector continues to increase in number. Private *micro-crèches* in particular appear to be a "promising market": in 2020, annual revenue amounted to more than 1.7 billion euros (Xerfi 2021).

To be able to open and then operate, all *crèches* must be approved and then controlled by the departmental services of the *Protection maternelle et Infantile – PMI* (Maternal and Child Protection), but a new Decree n°2022-856, highly criticised, aims to transfer this responsibility to the CAF (Family allowance fund), starting with an experiment with the CAF in the Haute-Savoie *department*.

In 2019, there were a total number of 60 childcare places for 100 children under 3 years of age, 30 of these in childcare centres (National Early Childhood Observatory 2021). There are significant regional disparities. The COVID pandemic has not impacted the choices of parents of babies (6 months to 1 year): in 2021, according to a survey with 9,000 families, the *crèche* remained the most desired form of childcare (34%), although only 24% said they currently use it (Crépin and Boyer 2022). Faced with the massive shortage of childcare professionals, the new Prime

Minister Elisabeth Borne announced, in July 2022, the wish of her government to build “a real public service for early childhood", with the creation of 600,000 new places in *crèches*.
This public service (*service public de la petite enfance- SPPE*) was part of President Macron's campaign commitments (at the crossroads of the policies of supporting the birth rate, of full employment, of equality between women and men and of equal opportunities from an early age). In December 2022 – after a consultation phase about the *SPPE* with mayors and presidents of intermunicipal authorities, presidents and directors of family allowance funds, professionals in the early childhood sector through the Early Childhood Sector Committee and the National Union of Associations families (UNAF) –, Jean-Christophe Combe, Minister of Solidarity, Autonomy and Persons with Disabilities, had organised the National Council for the “Refoundation” of Early Childhood (*conseil national de refondation sur la petite enfance – CNR*). While, in March 2023, a report by the General Inspectorate of Social Affairs (Bohic et al. 2023) was published on the quality of care and prevention of abuse in crèches (after the death of a baby in a private *crèche* in Lyon in summer2022), three reports by the Supreme Council for the Family, Childhood and Age (SCFCA 2023a, b, c) provided quantitative and qualitative recommandations for the *SPPE* project. However, an enforceable right is not yet envisaged.
On June 1st 2023, Prime Minister E. Borne launched the *SPPE* with 5.5 billion euros for 100,000 places in *crèches* by 2027 (target: 200,000 places in 2030) (see the Key Contextual Data document for France for more details).

1.2 Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

Pre-primary education settings (*écoles maternelles*) for 2 to 5 year-olds fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs (*Ministère de l’éducation nationale et de la jeunesse)* and, since 1989, are part of the primary school system. Teachers undergo the same training in university institutes for pre-primary and primary teachers, with the professional title *professeurs des écoles* and a curriculum based on 3 cycles of learning from 2 to 12. The first of these focuses on pre-primary education (Ministry of National Education, Youth Affairs and Sports 2015, 2021b).

In 2020/2021, 84% of all school Teachers worked in the public sector and 16% in private schools under contract with the State (Department of Evaluation, Prospective and Performance 2021).

Although most 3 year-olds customarily attended the *école maternelle*, instruction became compulsory in September 2019 through the Law n° 2019-791 on the *école de la confiance* (school of trust). This change increases the cultural gap with the childcare sector.

Around 12% of 2 year-olds also currently attend an *école maternelle* (often only during the morning), whereas in the 1990s about a third of the age group were enrolled. Due to national policies they are more likely to attend schools situated in disadvantaged areas, or in some regions (West and North of France) may attend according to local traditional choices.

Auxiliary staff, buildings, equipment and the organisation of the lunch break and leisure-time during out-of-school hours and holidays come under the responsibility of local authorities.

Children with disabilities have been individually supported (full time or part time) since 2003 by *auxiliaires de vie scolaire AVS* (school life assistants) from pre-primary school to secondary school, and not by an additional teacher as is the case in some other countries. The parents must make a request for an *AVS*, the procedure is complex, the provision is insufficient, the results are questionable. In 2014, their job description was changed to *accompagnante/accompagnante d’élève en situation de handicap AESH* (support staff for students with disabilities). The are recruited by the rectorates or departmental services of the the Ministry of National Education (level Baccalaureat or equivalent, but no specialist training). They operate during school

hours in the classrooms, they may also work during lunch breaks and leisure-time activities but, in 2020, the municipalities had to take charge these out-of-school hours. Debates are ongoing…

The new Minister of National Education and Youth Affairs, Pap Ndiaye, will be responsible for a "School reform", announced President Macron, having first to solve for 2022–2023 the problem of the increasing teacher shortage.

Local disparities exist: variations in funding between cities are considerable. The funding level varies: according to a teachers' union (SNUIpp-FSU 2021), schools, in some cities, can be funded up to 10 times more than in other cities. A former Children's Advocate has noted: "The priority budgetary item of the State, National Education, is nonetheless an impoverished domain in many towns, villages, districts" and called for "true transparency" on the distribution and use of resources, i.e. on the choices made (Brisset 2021, 9).

Concerning the lowering of compulsory instruction age to 3, parents' associations tend to be in favour of this early instruction, which is assumed to reduce school inequalities. This is not so in the case of teachers' unions who are, together with some researchers (Garnier and Brougère 2017; Garnier 2019) and other specialists (Association Spirale 2021), very critical about this measure as well as about the general educational policy approach of the Minister Jean Michel Blanquer, which is very focused on children's evaluations and evidenced-based approaches. During President Macron's first term, for the first time, a panel evaluated "incoming" children (around 35,000 3 year-olds) to assess achievements of the pupils. Data were collected in January, March and May 2022; grids of observation were focused on the behaviour of children, recalling the proposal for early detection to prevent delinquency by President Sarkozy in 2005; the draft Law evoked "a behaviour book" on the children, to be documented by the teachers.

1.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

Leisure-time facilities during out-of-school hours and holidays (called *accueils périscolaires* or *centres de loisirs*) in both pre-primary and primary school settings (or near them), come under (since 2022) the auspices of the Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs and are organised by local authorities. They provide for children aged 2–11 years during a substantial lunch break and leisure-time periods before and after school hours and on Wednesday afternoons, as well during holidays. Since President Macron's first term (2017), cities are free to continue or discontinue the changes introduced by the School Rhythm Reform (introduced in 2013 by the previous Minister of Education, Vincent Peillon, under F. Hollande's presidency), which includes school finishing at 15:00 on two days, followed by a *temps d'activité périscolaire (TAP)* (leisure-time periods including Leisure-time Facilitators but also various associations). The latter sector has increased since this reform (Foirien 2018). In 2020–2021, one in two municipalities have a school *accueil périscolaire* (1.7 million places) (Foirien 2021).

"Professionalisation issues" of the "marginalised professional world" of leisure-time work are just beginning to surface (Divert and Lebon 2019). Through strikes, they are currently demanding better working conditions.

The positive role of the *accueils périscolaires* during the pandemic has been officially recognised in a report by the General Inspectorate of Education, Sport and Research (Mansuy et al. 2021), which highlights the following: the low recognition and precariousness of jobs and the problems of acquiring relevant professional diplomas; a lack of coordination at the local authority level; a discontinuity in education between school and out-of-school hours. The report recommends not only an appropriate professional qualification which takes into account the specificities of these leisure-time sessions and a reinforcement of the further training of Leisure-time Facilitators, but also the integration of out-of-school hours' issues in the initial professional education of teachers. It also recommends, at the local level, improved coordination and a greater continuity in

public policies. It was followed, in 2022, by the Plan "*Pour un renouveau de l'animation en accueils collectifs de mineurs*" (For a renewal of animation in centres for minors), which intended to counteract the lack of *animateurs/animatrices* with 25 measures (short and long term), but also to decompartmentalise school hours and out-of-school hours towards a better complementarity (Ministry of National Education, Youth Affairs 2022a). A *Comité de Filière Animation* (Leisure-time Sector Committee) has been created.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

The ECEC workforce is characterised by hierarchical structures.

- In the centre-based childcare sector, a considerable proportion of staff has a paramedical background (*puériculteurs/puéricultrices* and *auxiliaires de puériculture,* who can also work in hospitals).
- In the *écoles maternelles*, teachers are not early childhood specialists; *professeurs/professeures des écoles* can teach to 2 to 11 year-olds.
- Leisure-time settings linked to *écoles maternelles* (and often in the same building) are staffed by *animation* personnel (who can work with 2–18 year-olds).

The three sectors constitute three distinct cultural universes.

In childcare, educational staff are a minority (*éducateur/ éducatrice de jeunes enfants – EJE*) (MHP and MSADP 2022a). There is weak recognition of the educational role of the *accompagnant éducatif/accompagnante éducative petite enfance – AEPE* (Ministry of National Education 2017a), as well as, in *écoles maternelles*, of the auxiliary staff (who have also the *AEPE* diploma) and of the Leisure-time Facilitators working in out-of-school hours.

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

2.1.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0–2 years)

40% of personnel in childcare centres are required to be qualified. No precise statistics are available about the composition of the staff, but the main professionals in direct contact with children under 3 are the auxiliary personnel: *auxiliaires de puériculture* and *accompagnant éducatif/accompagnante éducative petite enfance (AEPE).* According to the new Decree on Childcare (2021-1131), a full-time *EJE* is not required in *micro-crèches*; in larger *crèches,* one *EJE* is required for working with the children; some of these *crèches* may have two *EJEs.* The heads, generally a *puériculteur/puéricultrice* or an *EJE,* may or may not participate in activities with the children.

If they are employed by municipalities, all these workers become local municipal civil servants after having passed an exam. *Puéricultrices, EJE*, *auxiliaires de puériculture* are supported by their own professional associations, which organise local and national conferences.

All these workers are "under tension" (Odena 2009): the heterogeneity of professions makes teamwork difficult, the various initial training courses do not sufficiently prepare for work in childcare centres (Odena 2019). This tension was exacerbated during the pandemic. Studies on the hardship of work in *crèches* (Meuret-Campfort 2014) and its disrepute (Mozère and Jonas 2011) have been supplemented by studies of suffering at work (Moisset 2022) that affects both centre leaders and the staff in direct contact with children.

During the pandemic, a survey launched by an information site for childcare professionals[3] gave voice to 1,270 of this group, 60% of them are staff working in *crèches*. Results indicate a strong feeling of being underpaid by 88% of them, mostly among the staff in direct contact with the children and in private *micro-crèches*, and a lack of recognition, by their hierarchy, of their acquired skills (a better recognition is noted in associative *crèches*). The wishes of *crèche* staff are: a salary increase of 25% (considered "realistic" and corresponding to an additional expenditure of 1,157 million euros, i.e. 7.6% of the Family Policy budget devoted to childcare); additional further training (CPD); smaller *crèches* (for 88%, the ideal size is considered to be 30 places or less); a better staff to child ratio in the work with infants (pre-walking), with 68% suggesting 1:3; and better support by the hierarchy (APEMA 2022).

The main categories of staff working in centre-based settings for under-threes appear below.

Paediatric Nurse (*puéricultrice/puériculteur*)

The 1983 initial professional education curriculum (consolidated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration (2017/1983) prepares these professionals for working in hospitals (0–16 years), in medical consultations with mothers (prenatal to 6 years in *PMI*), as well as in childcare settings (under 3 year-olds) as a Centre Head in a *crèche collective* or open-door centre for home-based childcare providers (*relais petite enfance – RPE* – previously called *relais assistantes maternelles – RAM)* (Albérola and Olm 2011; Vérité 2008). They can then become Early Childhood Coordinators/coordinators of *crèches* (Baudelot and Rayna 2000).

The initial professional education in a public or private *école de puériculture* (3 years as a nurse, plus 1 year of specialisation as a Paediatric Nurse) for work with children 0–16 years old, is not yet recognised as an equivalent of a Master's degree but nevertheless as a Bachelor's degree. Their association (*ANDPE*[4]) continues to demand recognition at the level of a Master's degree.

In *crèches*, increasing administrative tasks of heads have impacted the presence of Paediatric Nurses among the children. Initiation and/or participation in certain activities or projects with children – such as cultural or artistic projects (Rayna 2016), or bridging activities between *crèche* and *école maternelle* or leisure-time settings (Péralès, Chandon Coq and Rayna 2021) – can vary from one *crèche* to another.

Early Childhood Educator (*éducatrice/éducateur de jeunes enfants – EJE*)

The curricular requirements of the *EJE* initial professional education were updated in 2005 and for the childcare sector now include: working in direct contact with children or as a Centre Head in a *crèche collective* or in open door centres for home-based childcare providers (*relais assistantes maternelles – RAM* – renamed *relais petite enfance – RPE),* and sometimes with 2 year-old children in bridge classes in *écoles maternelles* (Dupraz 1995; Villain and Gossot 2000), as well as in *PMI* consultations. The minimum requirement was changed in 2011 from a post-secondary qualification to a Bachelor's degree for working with 0–7 year-olds. The training reform of 2018 required a mandatory agreement between the public or private IPE institution (*école d'éducateurs de jeunes enfants*) and a university for the approval of the ECEC centres; their pedagogical committee must be chaired by an academic, and the examination boards for obtaining the final diploma must include a trainer or an academic and a state-recognised professional in the sector (Ministry of Solidarity and Health 2018).

[3] This survey by the site *Les pros de la petite enfance* was conducted with P. Moisset who has published the analysis in several articles (on this site).

[4] Association Nationale des Puériculteurs/puéricultrices Diplômée.e.s et Etudiant.e.s (National Association of qualified paediatric nurses and students)

Auxiliary Paediatric Nurse (*auxiliaire de puériculture*)

These professionals work in hospitals, childcare settings and *PMI* consultations. The 2006 curricular requirements for this qualification have been consolidated by the recent training reform which provided for two months of additional training (currently from 10 to 12 months) (Ministry of Solidarity and Health 2021b). Since 2020, there are no more entrance exams to public or private *écoles d'auxiliaires de puériculture* (minimum age: 17 years), the candidates have to provide a presentation file ("dossier"). The diploma obtained is now higher than the *CAP-AEPE*. This upgrading, welcomed by the National Association of Childcare Auxiliaries (*ANAP*), has not reduced the shortage.

Early Childhood Educational Support Person (*Accompagnant éducatif/accompagnante éducative petite enfance: AEPE*)

Another kind of auxiliary staff, holders of an early childhood certificate following a 2-year vocational secondary school course in a public or private vocational school (*lycée professionnel*), are also allowed to work in *crèches* and become local civil servants (after having passed the required examination). This *CAP petite enfance* (*CAP PE)* certificate[5] – created in 1991 for the workers who support teachers in schools (*ATSEM – agent territorial spécialisé des écoles maternelles* in public schools or *ASEM* in private schools and schools in Paris) – was upgraded and replaced in 2019 by the *CAP Accompagnant éducatif petite enfance* certificate. Minimum age is 18 years (on the day of passing the *CAP*). This first step towards another diploma in childcare now permits work in home-based and centre-based care, *écoles maternelles* and leisure-time settings. The new *CAP* aims to revalorise these less recognised (often unnamed) professionals (Ulmann *et al*. 2011).

Table 1
France: ECEC staff in centre-based settings – childcare sector

Job title	**Main ECEC workplace settings and age range**	**Main roles and positions**	**Main age-range focus of initial professional education**	**Minimum qualification requirement** **ECTS credits** **EQF level** **ISCED level**
Paediatric Nurse *Puériculteur/ puéricultrice* *Profile*: Health/Social Care Professional	All kinds of *crèches* **Nurseries** 0–2 years They can also work in: *Relais assistantes maternelles – RAM, renamed Relais petite enfance RPE* **Open door centres for home-based childcare providers** 0–2 years As well as in:	Centre Head Early Childhood Coordinator	Intra utero–16 years	3-year post-secondary qualification National diploma/ Nurse *(Diplôme d'État d'infirmière)* ***PLUS*** 1-year course at private or public *école de puériculture* National diploma/ Paediatric Nurse (*Diplôme d'État de puériculture)* ECTS credits: not (yet) applicable EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6

[5] CAP = *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (Certificate of professional competence)

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
	medical consultations at *Protection maternelle et Infantile – PMI* **Mother and child protection centres** for babies and older children 0–5 years and **Hospitals** (maternity, padiatric services) 0–16 years			
Early Childhood Educator *Éducateur/éducatrice de jeunes enfants – EJE* *Profile*: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	All kinds of *crèches* **Nurseries** 0–2 years They also can work in: *Jardins d'enfants* **Kindergartens** 2–3 years (very few kindergartens now and they will soon be disbanded) *Relais assistantes maternelles – RAM, renamed Relais petite enfance RPE* **Open door centres for home-based childcare providers** and the children in their care 0–2 years *Classes passerelles* in *écoles maternelles* **Bridge classes** in pre-primary settings 2 year-olds	Core practitioner with group responsibility, specialist in early childhood education Centre Head Early Childhood Coordinator	0–6 years	3-year post-secondary qualification at a private or public specialist IPE centre (*école d'éducateurs de jeunes enfants*), which can be part of a broader School of Social Work National diploma as Early Childhood Educator (*Diplôme d'État d'éducateurs de jeunes enfants*) A mandatory agreement with a university for the approval of the IPE centre is required. ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
	Other services: *PMI* Remedial centres 0–16 years Children's wards in hospitals Mother-child clinics Centres for psy-chosocial care			
Auxiliary Paediatric Nurse *Auxiliaire de puéri-culture* *Profile:* Health/Social Care Professional	All kinds of *crèches* **Nurseries** 0–2 years They can also work in *PMI* (0–5 years) or maternity and paediatric hospi-tals (0–16 years)	Core practi-tioner in *crèches* Co-worker in *crèches*	0–16 years	Minimum entry age 17 years in a private or public specialist train-ing centre (*école d'aux-iliaires de puériculture*), followed by a 12-month professional training. National Diploma as Auxiliary Paediatric Nurse (*Diplôme d'État d'auxiliaire de puéricul-ture)* ECTS credits: n/a[6] EQF level: 3 ISCED 2011: 3
Early Childhood Educational Support Person *Accompagnant éducatif/accompa-gnante educative petite enfance (AEPE)* As **ATSEM/ASEM in pre-primary school**	All kinds of *crèches* **Nurseries** 0–2 years They can now also work in **Home-based childcare settings** 0–2 years and in **Leisure-time setting** 2–5 years *Écoles maternelle* 2–5 years	Co-worker, in *crèches* Co-worker or worker, in home-based childcare set-tings Co-worker in leisure-time settings Teacher's assistant in *écoles mater-nelles*	0-6 years	2-year vocational sec-ondary school course (*lycée professionnel)* Minimum age: 18 years when passing *the CAP)* Award: *CAP AEPE*-Cer-tificate (early child-hood) ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 3 ISCED 2011: 3

[6] n/a not applicable

2.1.2 Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

The Law *pour une école de la confiance* (for a school of trust) (2019-791), which lowered compulsory instruction age to 3 years in September 2019, has revised the initial professional education for school teachers. The *INSPE* (*Instituts Nationaux Supérieurs du Professorat* – National Higher Institutes of Teaching) have replaced the *ESPE* (*Ecoles Supérieures du Professorat et de l'Education* – University Colleges of Teaching and Education). They are attached to a university (Ministry of Higher Education and Research 2020). There are *32 INSPE* situated in the 30 school districts (*académies*) in France. They are public – with a few exceptions such as the Catholic University of Lyon or the Catholic Institute of Paris. The district rector organises the recruitment examination (*CRPE – concours de recrutement de professeurs des écoles*) for the area and the students' workplace-based learning.

The new award for becoming an *Agent (territorial) Spécialisé des Écoles Maternelles* (*ATSEM/ASEM*) is the certificate as an *Accompagnant éducatif/accompagnate éducative petite enfance (CAP AEPE)* which replaced the *CAP PE* in 2019. In municipal schools, a recruitment examination is required for becoming an ATSEM and municipal civil servant. In the private sector, ASEM are recruited by the heads of the schools and paid by the private school provider.

Pre-primary Teacher (*professeur/ professeure des écoles*)

The qualification route for Pre-primary and Primary School Teachers (*professeurs/professeures des écoles*), who are national civil servants qualified to work with children (2–12) both in *écoles maternelles* and *écoles élémentaires,* takes place after the completion of a Bachelor's degree in a chosen discipline. Successful candidates are awarded a Master's degree in "Professions of teaching, education and training" (*MEEF – métiers de l'enseignement, de l'éducation et de la formation*).

The studies are discipline-oriented. The *professeur* is an "expert in the content taught" (Ministry of Higher Education and Research 2020). At the beginning of the Master's degree course, students choose between a range of different options which can be proposed by the universities associated with the *INSPE,* where they then attend courses in these key areas and receive mentoring support throughout the two years of study and during the preparation of their Master's thesis.

During the first year of the Master's degree course, they not only have to pass the exams of the *MEEF* itself but also a required specific academic recruitment examination (*CRPE– concours de recrutement des professeurs des écoles*). During the second year, if they have passed the exam, they are paid (€1,827 per month gross = €1400 net corresponding to the first step of a teacher remuneration) to work half-time as a teacher while they continue studying. The reform of the *MEEF* (Ministry of National Education, Youth Affairs and Sports 2021b) stated that the *CFPE* will now take place at the end of the second year. From 2022-2023, students will be paid only after their studies (at the second step) (Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs 2022b, 2022c). Work-study training will however allow a small remuneration (€ 865 per month gross = €722 net) planned for a certain number of selected students (Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs 2022b).

The *INSPE* are also open to parents with three children and high-level athletes without a Bachelor's degree.

Auxiliary staff (*ATSEM/ASEM*)

In *écoles maternelles,* Pre-primary Teachers are supported by auxiliary staff specialised in working with pre-primary age children: *Agents (territoriaux) Spécialisés des Écoles Maternelles*

A(T)SEM. They are recruited by the municipalities (and can become municipal civil servants) or by heads of private schools.

Each class for 2 to 3 year-olds (*toute petite section*, *TPS*) and for 3 to 4 year-olds (*petite section*, *PS*) generally has its own *ATSEM/ASEM*, who helps the teacher, cleans the room, cares for the children (Garnier 2010) and is in charge of them during out-of-school hours. They mediate between the pre-primary institutions and families (Garnier 2008). According to a report by the General Inspection of National Education (Bouysse, Claus, and Szymankiewicz 2011), there are significant disparities between municipalities, with some providing support for greater educational involvement and others continuing to regard *ATSEM* as the former *dames de service* whose only tasks were cleaning the classroom and helping children in the bathroom. Some cities have one *ATSEM* in each pre-primary class. In some settings, teachers and *ATSEM* can cooperate as complementary members of a team (Vasse 2008).

Since 2016, an *ATSEM* group has been created. The *ATSEM* now have an annual event. In 2017, the report on "The missions of the *ATSEM*" by the General Inspectorate of National Education and the General Inspectorate of Administration (Debrosse et al. 2017) recognised their educational role and pedagogical assistance to teachers. In 2018, the Decree n° 2018-152 stated that they "belong" to the "educational community", they can assist teachers with children with special educational needs.

Table 2

France: ECEC staff in centre-based settings – pre-primary education sector (*écoles maternelles*)

Job title	**Main ECEC workplace settings and age range**	**Main roles and positions**	**Main age-range focus of initial professional education**	**Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level**
Pre-primary and Primary School Teacher *Professeur/professeure des écoles* *Profile:* Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional	*Écoles maternelles* **Pre-primary schools** 2–5 years *Écoles élémentaires* **Primary schools** 6–11 years	Core pedagogue with group responsibility Centre Head	2-11 years	2-year Master's degree (*MEEF*) at a higher education institute (*INSPE)* **plus** passing the *CRPE* examination (Entry requirement for INSPE = Bachelor's degree (3-year *licence* in any subject) ECTS credits: 120 (total including Bachelor requirement = 300) EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Municipal auxiliary staff *ATSEM/ASEM – agents (territoriaux) spécialisés des écoles maternelles*	*Écoles maternelles* **Pre-primary schools** 2–5 years working alongside the teacher or during lunchtime and out-of-school hours	Co-worker with specialist qualification	2-6 years	2 years at a vocational secondary school (*lycées professionnel*s) to acquire a *CAP AEPE*/Early Childhood Educational Support Person certificate ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 3 ISCED 2011: 3

2.1.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

50% of staff in leisure-time settings have to be qualified. Staff (*animateurs périscolaires*) employed by the municipalities (or associations) complement the work of the *écoles maternelles* in out-of-school hours: before 8:30 and after 16:30, during the two-hour lunch break, on Wednesday afternoons and during the school holidays. If cities (such as Paris) continue to apply the School Rhythm Reform (Law 2013–595), school finishes at 15:00 on two days per week and is followed by a *temps d'activité périscolaire (TAP)* (a leisure-time period).

In the public sector, the Leisure-time Facilitators can be tenured or contractual workers within the territorial public function (*fonction publique territoriale*) after passing a recruitment examination as *animateur territorial d'animation.*

Leisure-time activities usually take place in the building and grounds of the *écoles maternelles*. The staff in this sector comprise out-of-school care Leisure-time Facilitators (*animateurs/ animatrices périscolaires*), led by a Head of the leisure-time setting (*directeur, directrice de centre de loisirs*). They cooperate with *ATSEM /ASEM* staff during the lunch break and, if there are *TAP*, with cultural associations (professionals for reading with young children, artists, sport educators, etc.). The offer of leisure-time activities is highly variable, depending on the particular city (Divert and Lebon 2017; Lebon and Simonet 2017).

The minimum and most frequent award in this leisure-time sector for both pre-primary and primary school children is the 'Skills for the Leisure-time Facilitator Occupation' certificate (*BAFA – brevet d'aptitude aux fonctions d'animateur)*, acquired after one month's training (in three sessions) in a training centre and on site). The requirement for heads is the 'Skills for the function of directors of leisure-time settings' certificate (*BAFD – brevet d'aptitude aux fonctions de directeur de centres de vacances et de loisirs*). The *BAFD* is obtained after 10 days' training, 14 days of practical placement, 6 days of course attendance and again 14 days of placement (Ministry of City, Youth Affairs and Sports 2017). *BAFA* and *BAFD* are non-professional diplomas. They characterise the so-called "voluntary" animation sector (a majority) as opposed to the so-called "professional" animation sector which comes under a series of other diplomas, infrequently issued despite the motivations of some of the "voluntary" Leisure-time Facilitators (Bacou, Dansac, Gontier and Vachée 2014).

The requirements for entering the *BAFA* training have been lowered to 16 years old in July 2022; for the *BAFD*: having the *BAFA* and being 18 years old continue to be required. These diplomas were awarded by adult education centres[7] – most of them are related to *éducation populaire* movements which were the founders, before the State, of the training in the animation jobs –, recognised by the Ministry of City, Youth Affairs and Sports and since 1st January 2021, by the Ministry of National Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, which became in July 2022 Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs (*Ministère de l'Education Nationale et de la Jeunesse*).

Staff may work full time but more frequently part time. Most of them are students. Turnover is therefore significant.

[7] The list is available at: https://www.bafa-bafd.jeunes.gouv.fr/coms/listeOfn.aspx

Table 3
France: ECEC staff in centre-based settings – out-of-school leisure-time sector

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Leisure-time Facilitator *Animateur/animatrice (BAFA)*	*Accueil périscolaire* **Out-of-school care provision** 2–11 years *Colonies de vacances* **Holiday centres** 2–17 years	Core practitioner	2–12/17 years	*BAFA* One month of training in three sessions at a training centre recognised by the Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs, including work placements – within a maximum period of 30 months ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 3 ISCED 2011: 3
Lead Playworker/ Leisure-Time Facilitator *Directeur de centres de loisirs (BAFD)*	*Accueil périscolaire* **Out-of-school care provision** 2–11 years *Colonies de vacances* **Holiday centres** 2–17 years	Lead member of staff in leisure-time facilities	2–12/17 years	*BAFD* *(BAFA* or equivalent is required) Around 45 days of training (courses and placements) at a training centre recognised by the Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs. ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 4

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

2.2.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0–2 years)

Generally, the Head of a *crèche* is either a *puériculteur/puéricultrice* or an *EJE.* They can take on the position of *directeur/directrice* after three years of experience. Other professionals can also

become a Head, such as a medical doctor. In large *crèches,* heads are generally helped by a Deputy Head. Requirements vary according to the size of the *crèches*. According to the Decree of August 2021-1131, a full-time Head is required for *grandes crèches* and a half-time Head for *petites crèches*. For *micro-crèches,* only a *Référent Technique* (technical adviser) is required, who can be part of the staff in contact with children; however, for managing several *micro-crèches*, a Head is required. Since this Decree, Psychologists, Psychomotor Therapists, Teachers, Social Workers may also work as Deputy Heads.

Heads have hierarchical power over staff, but with variations according to the type of *crèche* format, with more vertical organisation in the municipal *crèches* of large cities, a more horizontal organisation in associative *crèches*, and a more vertical organisation with aims focused on profitability in private *crèches* (Odena 2019). Heads themselves are part of a very hierarchical system.

Their missions include: recruiting staff; supervising their work; developing and implementing the educational and social project; managing the pedagogical, educational, logistical and financial aspects of the *crèche*; welcoming parents and their children; ensuring health and safety.

They may be actively involved themselves, with the staff, the children and the families in projects such as those with artists (Rayna 2016) or in bridging activities with *écoles maternelles, centres de loisirs* and other institutions or associations (Péralès et al. 2021; Pourcelot 2021).

2.2.2 Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

Pre-primary (and Primary) School Teachers (*professeurs/ professeures des écoles*) are qualified to work with children both in *écoles maternelles* and *écoles élémentaires.* They can become Heads after three years in the job. A short training is planned once their application has been accepted by the departmental authorities. In large schools, Heads are full time, with pedagogical (school projects) and administrative tasks (solving the problems of teacher replacements, canteen registrations, etc.); small schools may have a half-time Head who teaches a class during the other half time (Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs 2014). They have no hierarchical power over the teachers. The Heads see themselves as an in-between – "… neither a real peer, nor a real superior" (Glomeron 2015, 3). However, they are in charge of the *ATSEM*s during school time, even if the *ATSEM*s come under the overall hierarchy of the municipality.

Unlike Heads of institutions for older children (12+), before 2021 they did not have any status benefits, despite the similarity of their missions (Roaux 2019a, 2019b). However, the Law n° 2021-1716 has created a recognised status as Head, giving them material and administrative help. With this law, Heads enjoy greater autonomy in the day-to-day management of their school. In 2022, one or more *référents direction d'école* (School Heads Advisers) will be created in each Directorate of the Departmental Services of National Education to support School Heads. The Decree no. 2022-724 specifies the missions and methods of recruitment of these Advisers who must already have been a Head of school. They will have to respond to Heads' requests for advice and support as well as facilitating exchanges among them. They will be appointed for three years (renewable once).

2.2.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

The tasks of Heads of out-of-school care settings in pre-primary and primary schools are both educational (responsible for the educational project, links with families) and administrative (registration of children, partnerships, etc.). They welcome and train students preparing for a *BAFA.* They are in a hierarchical position but try to build projects with the Leisure-time Facilitators.

They take part in some activities in direct contact with the children. They can develop partnerships with the Schoolteachers, although collaboration is often difficult due to their different professional cultures, and with other partners (such as museums).

From 2013, educational complementarity/continuity is the aim of local projects that municipalities had to develop within schools and around. Very few of these *Projets Educatifs De Territoire* (Local Educational Project) (*PEDT)* include childcare settings. In Paris, significant common activities are developing between municipal *crèches*, *écoles maternelles* and leisure-time settings in *écoles maternelles* (Péralès, Chandon-Coq, and Rayna 2021).

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

In France, there are no designated posts with an agreed remuneration in schools or childcare centres for specific pedagogical projects (such as, for example, being responsible for working with migrant parents across the school/centre). However, there are a number of non-paid posts of responsibility. For example, Centre Heads contribute towards selecting and evaluating the staff, except in schools where they have no hierarchical position. In all sectors, they can supervise students, together with selected staff. Some schools may have a remunerated position as *maître formateur*, a Tutor Teacher. These teachers receive an annual allowance (€1,250 in 2021).

Heads (and staff), in all sectors, develop various kinds of projects without extra pay, although in the education sector Heads and Teachers working in schools situated in disadvantaged areas receive an annual allowance of €1.733 and in very disadvantaged areas €4.646.

In the childcare sector particularly, the role of Centre Heads (as well as municipal Early Childhood Coordinators) is pivotal. They can sustain professional development activities which provide a rich informal learning context for the low qualified workers and contribute towards motivating staff to progress in their career in terms of within-sector possibilities (Galtier 2013).

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

2.4.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0–2 years)

In France, the Early Childhood Coordinator (*coordinateur/coordinatrice de la petite enfance*), a post created in 1981, cannot be compared to the *pedagogisti* in Italy who work in both the childcare and education sectors, thus contributing to a culture of early childhood (Galardini et al. 2020). French Coordinators work only within the childcare sector – sometimes only with *crèches*; they are mostly former Centre Heads. No specific qualification for the job is required. However, the National Centre for Territorial Public Services (*Centre National de la Fonction Publique Territoriale CNFPT*) offers a training cycle (7 modules over 27 days). Their overall mission is to participate in the development and application of a comprehensive early childhood policy (Baudelot and Rayna 2000; Baudelot et al. 2003).

They can support the implementation of the educational plans of *crèches*, such as those developed with local artists and parents (Rayna 2016) or with Leisure-time Facilitators and Teachers in the frame of municipal educational projects (*PEDT)* (Péralès, Chandon-coq, and Rayna 2021).

They help to create and co-ordinate networks of *crèches*, but their primary task is to supervise the staff, to evaluate them together with the Heads, to evaluate the Heads, and to check the proper functioning of the settings. This part of their job devoted to steering and control seems to have increased in recent years; sometimes it can have a limiting effect on staff creativity.

Heads of *crèches* (and other professionals) can have other posts of responsibilities in municipal early childhood departments. The CAFERUIS training (*certificat d'aptitude aux fonctions d'encadrement et de responsable d'unité d'intervention sociale* – certificate of aptitude for manage-

ment functions and heading a social intervention unit) can be useful. Created in 2004, this certificate for middle managers in social and medico-social organisations is based on 400 hours (four theorical units: project design and management; technical expertise; team management; administrative and budgetary management), plus work-based training (420 hours), plus a dissertation.

2.4.2 Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

Professeurs/ professeures des écoles are inspected and evaluated by national education Inspectors (*inspecteurs/ inspectrices de l'éducation nationales – IEN*) who are in charge of a *circonscription* (a district including 30-50 schools). A recent report (Cour des comptes 2022) noted inequalities in their distribution. Large *académies* are less favoured: in 2020, in the poorest *département* (Seine-Saint-Denis, in the North of Paris), there was one *IEN* for 307 Teachers while there was one *IEN* for 209 Teachers at the national level. The individual inspections represent 30% of their work (they are also in charge of the organisation of examinations, administration of schools, etc. *IEN* work towards the implementation of national initiatives, within the framework of the plan of their *académies*. They work with both pre-primary and primary schools. As with the teachers, they have lost the specificity of working in *écoles maternelles*; little room is given to pre-primary schools in their training; they are generally more oriented towards the primary school and beyond than to early childhood. A study of 600 *IENs* indicates that their morale is deteriorating (too many meetings, etc.). Two-thirds of them say they have little room for initiative and feel dissatisfied with the listening and support from their superiors (Fotinos and Horenstein 2016). A considerable fragmentation of their tasks is estimated and recommendations have been made to the Ministry of National Education to refocus their job on the pedagogical support of teachers and staff.

Pedagogical Advisers (*conseillers/conseillères pédagogiques*), who work closely with the *IEN*, accompany novice Teachers and organise local pedagogical support, contributing to the initial and continuing professional education of the Teachers. However, the attractivity of this job is declining.

Professeurs/professeures des écoles working in *écoles maternelles* continue to have their own association (*Association Générale des Enseignants d'Ecole Maternelle* – AGEEM – created in 1921) and conferences, despite the integration of the *école maternelle* into the primary school.

2.4.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

Leisure-time Facilitators work under the responsibility of their Head. The staff of the leisure-time settings are supervised by the municipal service in charge of school affairs. As with Early Childhood Coordinators, municipalities can have coordinators for *accueils périscolaires*. There is no legal framework for the supervision. In this sector there is no association nor national network, but some Leisure-time Facilitators attend popular education federations (League of Education, *Francas*, Léo Lagrange, etc.).

2.5 Specialist support staff

2.5.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0 –2 years)

Medical supervision of children is compulsory in all *crèches* with more than 10 children, but not therapy. Until recently, it was provided by a paediatrician or general practitioner, in cooperation with the *Protection maternelle et Infantile* (*PMI,* Maternal and Child Protection Service). According to the recent Decree on childcare (2021-1131), this medical doctor was replaced in 2021 by a *référent santé et accueil inclusif* (Health and Inclusive Care Adviser): ten hours per year for *micro-crèches* and up to 50 hours per year for *crèches* with 60 places. Due to the shortage of

doctors (also severe in the *PMI* centres), this function is now open to Paediatric Nurses or general nurses with three years of professional experience with young children. They will not be recruited to carry out the medical follow-up of the children, but to contribute to the dissemination of a health-related culture among the teams (administration of medicines; adaptations for children suffering from chronic illness or in a situation of disability; identification of abuse or situations presenting a danger to the child, etc.).

Other paramedical staff can intervene, at the request of the *crèches*, on a regular basis: Psychologists, Psychomotor Therapists, more recently Speech Therapists or Occupational Therapists, but not for therapy, even if children with disabilities are present.

All these medical and paramedical professionals work part time or full time, with varying status. Other external professionals (artists, musicians, storytellers, etc.) intervene occasionally to develop certain activities and enrich the work of the staff.

In recent years, compensatory programmes (language, play) targeting certain children and families have developed in some cities, following recommendations on social investment in early childhood (Terra Nova 2017). Highly criticised (Ben Soussan and Rayna 2018) but supported at the national level, these costly programmes which have not shown their effectiveness (Chaisemartin, Daviot, Gurgand, and Kern 2021), are still recommended in poor neighbourhoods – where the number of *crèches* is six times lower than the national average and 68% of children from the richest 20% families have access to childcare compared to only 9% for the poorest (Institut Montaigne 2022).

2.5.2 Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

The *médecins* and *infirmiers/infirmières de l'Education Nationale* (school doctors and nurses) have a preventive role. Their tasks increased during the pandemic, while at the same time shortages in the entire field of school medicine are significant (including secondary school). A report by the National Academy of Medicine (2017) warned of this deficiency and about the territorial disparities (one doctor for 2,000 to 46,000 pupils). The Cour des Comptes (2020) also made a critical communication to the Finance, General Economy and Budgetary Control Committee of the National Assembly. Currently, the national average is one Nurse for 2,000 pupils (the government's goal in the early 2000s was to have one nurse for 500 pupils).

The *RASED* (*Réseau d'aides spécialisées aux élèves en difficulté,* Network of specialised support for pupils in difficulty), established in France in 1990, brings together *psychologues scolaires* (School Psychologists) and *rééducateurs/rééducatrices de l'Éducation nationale* who are both specialised teachers. They are full members of the teaching staff of the schools where they work. These positions decreased between 2007 and 2012, under the presidency of N. Sarkozy, and again since 2017 despite the creation in 2017 of the body of School Psychologists (recruited into the body of Teachers, with a national diploma in school psychology obtained at university, they remained before 2017 Teachers by statute). The *rééducateurs/rééducatrices* have a one-year training at an *INSPE*.

Since 2019, Speech Therapists can work in schools with children with disabilities, under certain conditions (e.g. with children who are not already in speech therapy outside school).

A short-term training of 60 hours only is organised by the Ministry of National Education for recruiting *accompagnant/accompagnante d'élève en situation de handicap AESH* (Support staff for pupils with disabilities). The *AESH* work part time or full time.

2.5.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

There are no specialist support staff allocated to leisure-time settings, including the ones which receive children with disabilities. However, during *TAP* (*temps d'activité périscolaire)* in some cities, cultural or sport associations can continue to provide intervention.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

3.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0–2 years)

Qualifications

In 2011, *crèches* employed on average 11 staff: eight to ten of them were civil servants or had a secure job; one to three worked on a part-time basis with a non-permanent contract. Most were low-qualified staff, and turnover was frequent. 90% of the *crèches* employed at least one educator; 87% at least one auxiliary Paediatric Nurse, and 71% employed someone with the *CAP petite enfance* qualification. 50% of Centre Heads were qualified educators (Albérola and Jauneau 2012). More recent data are not available, even in the most recent CNAF or SCFCA reports. Following the Decree 2010-613 on childcare services, during N. Sarkozy presidency, the proportion of required staff with a diploma in the childcare sector decreased to 40% (*CAP PE* not included). This Decree provoked strong protests in the field (Ben Soussan 2011). This measure has been maintained while the increase in the private sector and the shortage of qualified staff have led to an overall drop in qualified staff in the *crèches* and especially in private *micro-crèches.* Deregulation aggravated the situation (Decree 2021-1131; Ministry of Solidarity, Autonomy and disabled persons 2022). One of the recent SCFCA reports (2023a) raises the question of strengthening the regulation of private *micro crèches* whose profitability has been increased by these recent measures.

Gender

In France, 49.8% of the jobs occupied by women are concentrated in only 12 of the total of 87 professional categories (Ministry of Women's Rights 2016). Inequalities between women and men persist at all levels of society; the reduction of gender inequalities progresses very sliowly; the negative consequences of the pandemic crisis were stronger for women (Ministry for Equality between Women and Men, Diversity and Equal Opportunities 2022; Roussel 2022).

Projects have been carried out with the aim of changing attitudes towards an increasing balance such as *Les métiers n'ont pas de sexe* ('Jobs have no sex') (State Secretariat for Equality between Women and Men 2017) including projects located in the under-threes childcare sector (Dhorain and Stefan 2014).

Childcare professions – open to men since 1973 for *EJE* and since 1983 for all other professions (Paediatric Nurses, Auxiliary Paediatric Nurses, etc.) – remain female-dominated despite the Law for equality between women and men (2014-873) and various initiatives for gender mix in childcare. In the childcare sector, ten years ago, men represented only 1% of the *auxiliaires de puériculture*, 1.5% of the *puéricultures/puéricultrices* and 2.7% of the *EJEs* (Grenat and Nahon 2011, Albérola and Olm 2011). Men themselves tended to avoid working directly with children and

generally seek jobs with greater responsibilities (Grenat and Marquier 2009). Nowadays the percentages remain very low, they are lower still for personnel in direct contact with children (Forment and Vidalec 2020).

Professional experiences of the rare men in childcare and in *écoles maternelles* shed light on the gender obstacles that run through the attempts at mixing – gender pressure on men being less clear in *école maternelle* than in *crèches* or home-based settings (Devineau, Félieu, Valentin, and Clémence 2020).

Ethnicity

Statistics regarding the ethnicity of staff are not authorised in France. However, auxiliary staff (*auxiliaires de puériculture, CAP AEPE)* often have a background of migration, which is more common in particular among unqualified staff.

Table 4

France: Structural composition of ECEC workforce – Childcare sector (0–2 years)

Staff categories	Year/proportion of workforce
Staff with a specialist three-year (or longer) early years higher education degree	**2011***: *Puéricultrices/puériculteurs*: **4%** *Éducatrices/éducateurs* – as Heads): **16%**
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	Not applicable
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary) (regional variations)	**2011*:** *Auxiliaires de puériculture:* **36%** *Accompagnant éducatif / accompagnante éducative petite enfance:* No data
Non-qualified or minimally qualified staff (Variations among municipalities, public and private sectors)	Approx. **50%**
Specialist support staff who work on site on a regular basis: *Paediatrician*: (one half day/week, compulsory) who examines the babies on entry and follows them up. Since 2021 they have been replaced by a Health and Inclusive Care Adviser (Paediatrician or Paediatric Nurse) *Psychologist and/or Psychomotor therapist:* (one half day/week, non-compulsory, but frequently requested) Since 2019, *speech therapist* (under certain conditions)	No data
Male practitioners	2011*, 2012**, 2019***: *Puériculteurs:* **1.5%** *Éducateurs de jeunes enfants:* **2.7%** *Auxiliaires de puériculture:* **1.0%** *Accompagnants éducatifs:* **1.0%**
Staff with a minority ethnic background	No national statistical data available. Estimated share of staff from Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa relatively high***.

Sources: *Gresy and Georges 2012; **Naves and Visnia-Weill 2014; ***Forment and Vidalec 2020

3.2 Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

There are twice as many Teachers in primary than in pre-primary education. 12% are Heads of public schools (9% of private schools), 36% of public school Heads continue to teach while leading the school, 8% are totally discharged from teaching. 24% of Teachers are assigned to priority education (in the public sector), where 53% complete at least their 4th year in the same school – excluding priority education, they amount to 61% (Department of Evaluation, Prospective and Performance 2021).

Around 50,000 municipal auxiliary workers (*ATSEM/ASEM)* (1 for 50 children) work in pre-primary and primary education (Debrosse et al. 2017).

Qualifications

Teachers in the *écoles maternelles* (Ministry of National Education 2017b) must be fully qualified, apart from those working part time during the second year of their Master's degree programme (*MEEF*). Since 2021, the Master's students have to pass the *CRPE* not at the end of the first year but at the end of the second year – at the same time as their Master's exams and thesis; they are therefore no longer paid during their second year of their Master's studies, as was the case previously.

Contractual teachers may also be recruited: these are persons who have obtained the Master's degree but have not passed the *CRPE*, which is required for tenure, or even persons who have only a Bachelor's degree or with other profiles. They were numerous in the past; after a decrease in numbers, the last ten years have seen a renewed increase in the context of Teacher shortages. 24% of staff in schools are contractual staff (5% of the teachers in public schools, 19% in private schools) according to the *Social report on school education 2020-2021* by the Department of Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance of the Ministry of Education (2021). Despite the precariousness of employment, being a contract teacher seems to be becoming a more a deliberate choice (Bertron et al. 2021), while the institutionalisation of contractual workers suggests a quiet neo-liberalisation of education (Pons 2021). The resignation rate has also increased, especially among new fully-qualified teachers.

Concerning the *ATSEM* – 90% of them are territorial civil servants in the public sector –, there are disparities, and thus inequalities, between rich and poor municipalities which can employ more or less *ATSEM* per school (Garnier 2008, 2016). In previous official texts, the *ATSEM* only "participated" in the educational community but, since the Decree No. 2018-152 of March 1, 2018, they "belong" to the educational community. This Decree also gives them access to territorial Leisure-time Facilitators' jobs.

Auxiliaires de vie scolaire AVS (school life assistants), who supported children with disabilities since 2003, becoming in 2014 *accompagnant/accompagnante d'élève en situation de handicap AESH* (support staff for children with disabilities), are lacking. Recruited by the rectorates or departmental services of the Ministry of National Education after 60 hours of training provided by Ministry of Education, they receive around the minimum wage, with little upgrading taking place in 2022, Trouver un Métier 2022a; Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs 2022d).

Gender

Up until 1974, men were not permitted to work in *écoles maternelles*. While they remained a minority among teachers, they held the majority of the positions at higher hierarchy levels such as the inspectorate (Ferrier 1997). In the *école maternelle* and *école élémentaire* together, there were 80% women in public schools and 98% in private schools. Gender stereotypes, fear of paedophile accusations and the relatively low status of this job may explain the lack of men (Fillod

2001; Jaboin 2010). Considering the education system as a whole, about 70% of the jobs were held by women while 70% of men occupy the administrative and management posts.

Nowadays the feminisation of the sector is confirmed (Department of Evaluation, Prospective and Performance 2021). Women represent 84% of the teaching force in public pre-primary and primary schools and 92% in private schools. 10% of Teachers, mainly women, in the public pre-primary and primary sector work part time (mainly to care for a child). Feminisation varies according to the hierarchical category, but the presence of women is increasing in the hierarchy: in 2020, 69% of Heads were women; 71% of *inspecteurs, inspectrices de l'éducation nationales (IEN)*; and 53% as *inspecteurs, inspectrices d'académie* (*IA*).

Among the *ATSEM*, the rate of feminisation is 98% (Forment and Vidalec 2020).

Ethnicity

Statistics regarding the ethnicity of staff are not authorised in France. However, auxiliary staff in both the *écoles maternelles* (*ATSEM*) and the *écoles élémentaires,* often have a background of migration.

Table 5

France: Structural composition of ECEC workforce – Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years

Staff categories	Year/proportion of workforce
Staff with a pre-primary and primary education higher education teaching degree	2014/15 (no more recent data available): with a Master's degree (*Professeurs/professeures des écoles*) **97%***
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary, post-secondary)	*ATSEM* (paid by municipalities): ranging from one per class to none (big variations between cities)
Unqualified staff	None
Specialist support staff (e.g. speech therapists) who work on site on a regular basis Further specialists (psychologists, specialized teachers) are requested if necessary through the *RASED*. Since 2019 speech therapists can work in schools under certain conditions.	School doctors and school nurses work in several *écoles maternelles* and *écoles élémentaires* at the same time (health promotion, early detection of developmental difficulties, promoting inclusive work). They visit settings regularly. But their numbers continue to decrease sharply: 2006: **1,400** medical doctors 2017:** **990** medical doctors
Male practitioners	In pre-primary settings *and* elementary schools Public sector: 16%*** Private sector: 8%***
Staff with minority ethnic background	No national statistics available – staff with a background of migration tend to work in areas with a high minority language population.

Sources: *Ministry of National Education 2017b. ** National Academy of Medicine 2017. ***Department of Evaluation, Prospective and Performance 2021.

3.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

Qualifications

The "voluntary" Leisure-time Facilitators in *accueils périscolaires*, who usually work between 15 and 20 hours per "school week" and are in a precarious employment position (Mansuy et al. 2021), have a non-professional diploma (*BAFA*) (one month in a training centre and placements).

Some of them become “professional” Leisure-time Facilitators thanks to a *certificat de qualification professionnelle (CQP) animateur périscolaire* (professional certificate as a qualified Leisure-time Facilitator) which can be acquired by training of three months alternating between the training centre and the professional field. Few *animateurs/animatrices* have this certificate or other professional diplomas, such as the CPJEPS – *certificat professionnel de la jeunesse, de l’éducation populaire et du sport* (professional certificate – youth, popular education and sport).

The majority of Heads of *accueils périscolaires* have the *BAFD*, another non-professional diploma obtained after the *BAfA* (around 45 hours of courses and placements).

To become a professional Head, another diploma is required, the *BPJEPS – brevet professionnel de la Jeunesse, de l’éducation populaire et du sport* (professional diploma – youth, popular education and sport). This baccalaureate level diploma then opens access to the DE JEPS (*diplôme d’Etat de la jeunesse, de l’éducation populaire et du sport,* national diploma – youth, popular education and sport) or to the DES JEPS (*diplôme d’Etat supérieur de la jeunesse, de l’éducation populaire et du sport spécialité "animation socio-éducative et culturelle",* higher national diploma – youth, popular education and sport specialty "socio-educational and cultural animation"). This *Baccalauréa*t plus the 3-year diploma allows higher positions in other sectors, such as head of social centres.

Gender

In 1982, over half (56%) of Leisure-time Facilitators were women. The feminisation of the sector has increased sharply since the mid-1990s. Nowadays the animation sector is highly feminised: In 2019, more than two-thirds of *BAFA* graduates (68%) and *BAFD* (72%) were women (Foirien 2020), but still less than in the childcare sector and the pre-primary education sector.

Ethnicity

Statistics regarding the ethnicity of staff are not authorised in France. However, “the ethno-racial dimension of workers in the animation sector appears to be strong”, especially in the Paris region (Divert and Lebon 2019).

Table 6

France: Structural composition of ECEC workforce – Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

Staff categories	Year/proportion of workforce
Staff with a specialist three-year (or longer) early years higher education degree	None
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary, post-secondary)	No national statistics available
Unqualified staff	No national statistics available
Specialist support staff (e.g. speech therapists) who work on site on a regular basis	None
Male practitioners	No national statistics available, but it is estimated that more male staff work in the leisure-time sector than in the childcare and pre-primary education sectors. In **2019,** 32% of *BAFA* graduates were male and 28% of *BAFD* *.
Staff with a BME (black and minority ethnic) background or a ‘background of migration’	No national statistics available, but it is estimated that more staff with a BME/migration background work in the leisure-time sector than in the childcare and pre-primary education sector

Source: Foirien 2020

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Diversity is the main characteristic of the different job categories in ECEC, both regarding the duration of IPE (ranging from a few weeks to a Master's degree) and the content (from a para-medical to an educational/instruction orientation). IPE takes place in various kinds of centres: vocational training centres (for *puériculteurs/puéricultrices*, *auxiliaires de puericulture),* centres linked to a university (for *EJEs*), university affiliations (for Teachers) or a vocational secondary school (for *AEPE*). IPE can follow classical qualifying routes but also apprenticeship routes. Validation of acquired experience (*VAE*) may be used (except for *puériculteurs/puéricultrices*). For workers and job seekers, all the diplomas can be also acquired as part of continuing professional development.

4.1.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0–2 years)

The care sector comprises a majority of workers with low-level IPE.

The medical history of this sector remains visible through the presence of *puériculteurs/puéricultrices* (Heads of *crèches)* and of *auxiliaires de puériculture* working in direct contact with the children (since 2018, the level of their diploma has been upgraded). The place and recognition of the other auxiliary staff, the a*ccompagnants éducatifs /accompagnantes éducatives petite enfance* (*AEPE),* has increased but the level of their diploma remains the same (now below the level of *auxiliaires de puéricultures*). Early Childhood Educators (*EJE*), who have always been in the minority as far as contact with children is concerned, are increasingly becoming Heads of *crèches*; nowadays they have a Bachelor's degree.

Paediatric Nurse

A *Diplôme d'État d'infirmière* (national diploma /Nurse, 3 years) or *Diplôme d'État de sage-femme* (national diploma /Midwife, 4 years), obtained after the *Baccalauréat*, is needed to enter a vocational training centre for prospective Paediatric Nurses (plus an entrance examination). The professional education consists of 1 year of studies in a public or private specialist training centre (*école, institut de puériculture*). The award is the National diploma in paediatric nursing (*Diplôme d'État de puériculture).* The Master's degree is not yet a requirement, but is one of the demands made by the profession.

Table 7
France: Paediatric Nurse

Job title in French: *Puéricultrice/puériculteur* **Profile**: Health/Social Care Professional
Entry requirements: University entrance requirement (*Baccalauréat*); *Diplôme d'État d'infirmière* (National diploma – Nurse, 3 years) or *Diplôme d'État de sage-femme* (National diploma – Midwife, 4 years) ***plus*** entrance examination **Professional studies:** 1 year at a specialised vocational private or public training centre (*école/institut de puériculture*) **Award:** National diploma – paediatric nursing (*Diplôme d'État de puériculture)* **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011**: 6

Job title in French: *Puéricultrice/puériculteur* **Profile**: Health/Social Care Professional
Main (ECEC) workplaces: *crèches*; registered family day care networks; mother and child protection centres (*PMI – Protection maternelle et infantile*, 0–16 years); maternity and paediatric hospitals (0–16 years)

Early Childhood Educator

The university entrance requirement (*Baccalauréat* or equivalent) plus entrance examination, or qualification as *auxiliaire de puériculture, CAP petite enfance* and 3 years of work experience plus entrance examination, are required for being accepted at a vocational Early Childhood Educator training centre. Professional education consists of 3 years of post-secondary studies (equivalent to a Bachelor's degree) at a private or public vocational training centre (*école, institut, centre de formation d'éducateurs de jeunes enfants*) – which may be part of a more general School of Social Work, nowadays linked with universities. The award is the national dipoma – Early Childhood Educator (*Diplôme d'État d'éducateur de jeunes enfants)*.

Table 8
France: Early Childhood Educator

Job title in French: *Éducatrice/Éducateur de jeunes enfants – EJE* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: University entrance requirement (*Baccalauréat*) or equivalent + entrance examination ***or*** qualification as *auxiliaire de puériculture, CAP petite enfance* and 3 years' work experience ***plus*** entrance examination **Professional studies:** 3 years at a specialist training centre (*école/institut/centre de formation d'éducateurs de jeunes enfants*) – which may be private or public and can be part of a more general School of Social Work and linked with a university. **Award:** National diploma /Early Childhood Educator (*Diplôme d'État d'éducateur de jeunes enfants)* **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011**: 6 **Main (ECEC) workplaces:** *crèches*; Kindergartens (*jardins d'enfants*, 2–4/6 years); family day care networks (*RAM – relais assistantes maternelles, renamed RPE – relais petite enfance*; mother and child protection centres (*PMI – Protection maternelle et infantile*, 0–16 years); bridge classes in pre-primary institutions (*classes passerelles,* 2–3 years)

Auxiliary Paediactric Nurse

The requirements for entering a private or public vocational training centre (*école/institut de formation d'auxiliaires de puériculture*) are: minimum age 17 years and completion of the first 4 years of secondary school. Since 2020, in order to increase recruitment, the entrance examination has been cancelled. The professional education consists of 12-month professional training. The award is the National diploma /Auxiliary Paediactric Nurse (*Diplome d'État d'auxiliaire de puériculture*).

Table 9
France: Auxiliary Paediatric Nurse

Job title in French: *Auxiliaire de puericulture* **Profile**: Health/Social Care Professional
Entry requirements: Minimum age 17 years following completion of the first 4 years of secondary school **Professional studies:** 12 months at a private or public specialist training centre (*école de formation d'auxiliaires de puériculture*)

Job title in French: *Auxiliaire de puericulture* **Profile**: Health/Social Care Professional
Award: National diploma /Auxiliary Paediatric Nurse (*Diplôme d' État d'auxiliaire de puériculture*) **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level**: 4 **ISCED 2011**: 3 **Main (ECEC) workplaces:** *crèches;* mother and child protection centres (*PMI – Protection maternelle et infantile*, 0–15/16 years); maternity and paediatric hospitals (0–15/16 years)

Early Childhood Educational Support Person

The requirements for initial professional education leading to a certificate in early childhood education (*CAP AEPE accompagnant éducatif petite enfance)* are: having completed the first four years of secondary school and to be at least 16 years old. This professional training consists of two years at a private or public vocational secondary school (*lycée professionnel*) or similar organisations. The *CAP AEPE*, awarded by the Ministry of Education, replaced the *CAP PE* (EQF/ISCED level 3) in 2017. It gives an official name to these workers: Early Childhood Educational Support Person (*accompagnant éducatif/accompagnante éducative petite enfance).*

Table 10
France: Early Childhood Educational Support Person

Job title in French: *Accompagnant éducatif/accompagnante éducative petite enfance – AEPE*
Entry requirements: Minimum age 16 years, having completed the first 4 years of secondary school **Professional studies:** 2 years at a vocational secondary school (*lycée professionnel*) or similar organisation **Award:** Certificate in Early Childhood Education (*CAP AEPE accompagnant éducatif petite enfance)* **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level**: 3 **ISCED 2011**: 3 **Main ECEC workplaces:** all kinds of *crèches* (0–2 years) (and *écoles maternelles* as *ATSEM/ASEM)*

4.1.2. Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

Since the inclusion of *écoles maternelles* into primary school education, Pre-primary Teachers were renamed *professeurs/professeures des écoles*; they no longer have a specialist qualification for working with children under 6 years of age. The curriculum for the Master's study programme covers both pre-primary and primary education, whereby the orientation is strongly didactic and instructional. In its report on Leisure-time Facilitators, the General Inspectorate of the Ministry of Education (Mansuy et al. 2021) recommended that the initial training of Teachers include more about the issue of out-of-school hours and the relevant staff.

Auxiliary staff (*ATSEM/ASEM*) have a much lower level of qualification, from a vocational secondary school (*CAP-AEPE*).

Pre-primary Teachers

The entry requirements for attending an *Institut national supérieur du professorat et de l'éducation (INSPE)* are: a 3-year university degree course award in any subject area (*licence*). These higher education colleges for teachers with university status as "university components attached to one university" (Ministry of Higher Education and Research 2020) are also open to parents with three children and high-level athletes without a Bachelor's degree, evaluated through a specific validation process (*VAPP – Validation des Acquis Professionnels et Personnels*).

The training consists of 2-year course of Masters' studies. The award is a Master's degree (*Métiers de l'enseignement, de l'éducation et de la formation, MEEF*) (see *Table 11*).

The training includes a recruitment examination (*Concours de recrutement des professeurs des écoles – CRPE*). Success at the *CRPE* is required to become a national civil servant. Holders of *MEEF* + *CRPE* then start their traineeship. After one year they are tenured.

Table 11
France: Pre-primary and Primary School Teacher

Job title in French: *Professeur/ professeure des écoles* **Profile**: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: 3-year university degree course award in any subject area (*licence*) **Professional studies:** 2-year course of studies, including a recruitment examination (*CRPE*), at a higher education college for Teachers with university status (*INSPE – Institut national supérieur du professorat et de l'éducation*) **Award:** Master's degree *MEEF* (*Métiers de l'enseignement, de l'éducation et de la formation*) **ECTS credits:** 300 (including 180 for the BA level degree as entry requirement) **EQF level**: 7 **ISCED 2011**: 7 **Main ECEC workplace:** Pre-primary education (*école maternelle*, 2–5 years); elementary school (*école élémentaire*, 6–11 years)

Auxiliary worker

The *CAP AEPE accompagnant éducatif petite enfance* is the required qualification for becoming an auxiliary worker in pre-primary and primary education. Entry requirements are a minimum age of 16 years and completion of the first four years of secondary school. The professional education consists of 2 years at a vocational secondary school in a *lycée professionnel*or similar organisations.

Holders of this certificate in early childhood education can work in *crèches* or gain a qualified *ATSEM* status obtained after having passed an exam of Territorial Public Services (*Fonction Publique Territoriale*), for working in public *écoles maternelles,* 2 to 6 years, during school and out-of-school hours and becoming a territorial civil servant. *CAP AEPE* is not required for parents of three children and high-level athletes.

Table 12
France: Pre-primary Auxiliary Worker – *ATSEM/ASEM*

Job title in French: *A(T)SEM – agents (territoriaux) spécialisés des écoles maternelles*
Entry requirements: Minimum age 16 years, having completed the first 4 years of secondary school **Professional studies:** 2 years at a vocational secondary school in a *lycée professionnel* (or other organisation) **Award:** Certificate in Early Childhood Education (*CAP AEPE accompagnant éducatif petite enfance)* and qualified *ATSEM* status **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level**: 3 **ISCED 2011**: 3 **Main ECEC workplace:** Pre-primary education (*écoles maternelles,* 2–5 years) during school and out-of-school hours.

4.1.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

In this sector, only limited preparation is required, *BAFA,* a non-professional diploma for *animateurs/animatrices périscolaires*, called *"animateurs/animatrices volontaires".* The equivalent for the heads is the *BAFD.* For becoming "professional" Leisure-time Facilitators or Heads, other diplomas are required.

Leisure-time Facilitators

The "entry requirement" is a minimum age of 16 years; heads need to be at least 18 years old and the holder of a *BAFD.* For the Leisure-time Facilitators, the training consists of three sessions at a centre recognised by the Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs, including work placement (within a maximum period of 30 months); for the Heads, it consists of four sessions: two theoretical sessions and two placements. The awards are: Leisure-time Facilitator Certificate (*BAFA -brevet d'aptitude aux fonctions d'animateur*); and the Leisure-time Leader Certificate (*BAFD – brevet d'aptitude aux fonctions de directeur de centres de vacances et de loisirs)*.

Table 13
France: Leisure-time Facilitator

Job title in French: *Animateur/animatrice*
Entry requirements: Minimum age 16 years (Heads: 18 years). **Studies:** 3 sessions (around 30 hours, within a maximum of 30 months), including work placement, at a training centre recognised by the Ministry of City and Youth Affairs; for the Heads: 2 theoretical sessions and 2 work placements (around 45 hours within a maximum of 4 years) **Award:** Certificate to practice as a Leisure-time Facilitator (*BAFA -brevet d'aptitude aux fonctions d'animateur*); Certificate to lead a leisure-time setting (*BAFD – brevet d'aptitude aux fonctions de directeur de centres de vacances et de loisirs)* **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level**: 3 **ISCED 2011**: 3 **Main ECEC workplace:** Out-of-school leisure time setting (2–11 years); holiday centres (4–17 years)

Very few Leisure-time Facilitators are "professionals". Becoming a "professional" Leisure-time Facilitator has now become possible thanks to a *Certificat de Qualification Professionnelle* (*CQP*) *animateur périscolaire* (Professional Qualification Certificate Leisure-time Facilitator). The training is carried out by authorised organisations. The requirements are: minimum age 18 years; having completed the first four years of secondary school; experience in leisure-time work desired; having developed a project in leisure-time work.

The professionnal diploma for heads is the *BPJEPS (Brevet professionnel de la Jeunesse, de l'Education Populaire et du Sport, spécialités Loisirs tous publics ou Animation sociale*) (Professional diploma in Youth, Popular Education and Sport, leisure-time facilities for all ages or social animation): one year in a recognised training centre. The requirements are: minimum 18 years, the *BAFA* or other diplomas or 200 hours of experience in leisure-time work; holders of the *CQP* are granted a shorter length training. Very few heads of leisure-time settings have this baccalaureate level diploma.

However *BPJEPS* opens access to the level III DE JEPS (*diplôme d'Etat de la jeunesse, de l'éducation populaire et du sport*)(national diploma of youth, popular education and sport) and to the level II DES JEPS (*diplôme d'Etat supérieur de la jeunesse, de l'éducation populaire et du sport spécialité "animation socio-éducative et Culturelle",* higher national diploma of youth, popular education and sport specialty "socio-educational and cultural animation").

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Diverse competences are required for each profession, linked to the specificities of the different occupations and professions in the childcare sector. Giampino's report (2016) recommended maintaining the different job categories but raising the quality of the lowest IPE levels (auxiliary staff), naming the unnamed professionals (holders of *CAP petite enfance*) and working towards a more coherent and holistic system with a common core in the IPE of the diverse professionals. The report by an advisory body attached to the Prime Minister (the Supreme Council of Family, Childhood and Age) about managing quality in early childhood (SCFCA 2019) has continued in this way, recommending a common foundation in training within the childcare sector and continuity with education and leisure-time sectors.

4.2.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0–2 years)

Paediatric Nurses

The professional diploma was created in 1947. Initial education takes place in a training centre linked to a hospital (39 in France). Qualified Nurses who want to become a Paediatric Nurse must pass an exam for entering these public or private training centres. The content of the training (1,500 hours) lasting one, sometimes two years, has not changed since 1990. It includes theoretical and practical teaching units and five placements in hospitals, childcare centres and other settings which have an agreement with the training centre. The assessments relate to 10 competences (see *Table 14* below). Obtaining this national diploma is based on the successful evaluation of the placement periods and on three written tests (solving a care problem in the field, in the hospital or extra-hospital sector; information action on health education; oral presentation of a professional project).

These professionals continue to demand a revalorisation of their diploma at Master's level. Their national association *(ANDPE*) is waiting for the concrete consequences of O. Veran's (previous Minister of Solidarity and Health) declarations, in 2022, towards a two-year diploma (Master's degree) awarded by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research.

Early Childhood Educators

The reform of *EJE* training (Ministry of Solidarity and Health 2018) has maintained the previous length:1,500 hours theoretical training, plus 2,100 hours of placements, as well as the four *domaines de competence (DC*) (curricular areas), each including two (written, oral) exams, of the *Diplôme d'Etat d'éducateurs de jeunes enfants DEEJE*. New content related to digital technology and a foreign language have been introduced. For each competence domain, the jury is now composed of a trainer or an academic, and a qualified professional. A training booklet is provided to the jury with very precise rubrics for the evaluation of the different areas of competence and each placement (evaluation by supervising trainer, the supervising professional and the student). The part of reflexivity and initiation into research have been slightly reinforced.

Competence domain 1 (400 hours) – supporting young children and families – includes a situation analysis and a memorandum of practice.

Competence domain 2 (600 hours) – educational work with young children – includes a presentation by the student and reflective analysis of their training experience, and an analysis of a health and prevention setting (transmitted by the centre).

Competence domain 3 (250 hours) – multi-professional teamwork and professional communication – includes a presentation of professional communication and a file on teamwork and institutional dynamics.

Competence domain 4 (250 hours) – interindividual dynamic, partnerships and networks – includes a dossier based on a field experience and knowledge checks.

The four placement periods (the 1st placement: at least eight weeks during the first year) are no longer linked to curricular areas but must achieve the predefined objectives.

Auxiliary Paediatric Nurses

Recent changes concern the training of *auxiliaires de puériculture* (Ministry of Solidarity and Health 2021b) who remain "health professionals" under the responsibility of a Nurse or a Paediatric Nurse. They "carry out stimulating activities and care adapted to the evolution of the clinical condition aimed at the well-being, autonomy and development of the child". Their role is "part of a global approach to the child and takes into account the relational dimension of care as well as communication with the family in the context of parenting support, other professionals, learners and caregivers". They "participate in the reception and social integration of children with disabilities, suffering from chronic pathologies or at risk of exclusion or abuse". The training lasts 1,540 hours (over a maximum period of two years), with 770 hours of theoretical and practical teaching in a public or private specialist training centre or as remote learning (limited to 70%), and 700 hours in a professional environment. This national diploma corresponds to *Baccalauréat* level.

The courses are organised in five competence blocks:

1. Support and care of the children in the activities of their daily life and social life
2. Evaluation of the state of health and implementation of appropriate care
3. Information and support of the persons and their context
4. Maintenance of the immediate environment of the person and the materials related to the activities
5. Work in a multi-professional team and processing of information related to care activities, quality/risk management.

They correspond to ten modules (see *Table 14* for the number of hours for each one**).** Students must be provided with individualised pedagogical support (7 hours), guided personal work and individualised pedagogical monitoring. Courses or practical work (35 hours) always aim to teach "the body language techniques necessary for the acquisition of skills". "Health simulation tools" continue to be favoured in order "to promote practical and body language learning".

Work-based training includes four placement periods (hospital, childcare, etc.), one at least with children with physical or mental disabilities and one at least with night work and weekend work experience: The first three placements have a duration of 5 weeks each, the final one: seven weeks. The evaluation of the placements must be taken into account for the validation of each block of competences.

Early Childhood Educational Support Person (*AEPE*)

The *Accompagnant éducatif/accompagnante éducative petite enfance* (AEPE) is a childcare professional for children under 6 years old. Since 2017, the *CAP Accompagnant éducatif petite enfance* (CAP AEPE) replaces the *CAP Petite enfance* (Ministry of National Education 2017a). This certificate (maintained at the same level) has been revised in order to strengthen the skills and the employability of AEPE (by public employers in particular) and to facilitate mobility within the 0–6 sector (between: school, *crèches*, leisure-time centres, as well as the home-based care sector). This CAP is acquired following four years of secondary school, as a two-year course at a *lycée professionnel* (or a growing number of other organisations) – some of them propose one year if the student has another CAP or a Baccalaureat.

Care, hygiene, food and safety of the child remain on the training curriculum but stimulating the child, child development and the relationship with the family have been expanded. This content is organised into **three professional units**:

- Supporting the development of young children
- Working in a collective setting
- Working in an individual setting together with the Health and Environment Prevention unit.

There are also **three general education units**, common to all CAPs (1. French, history, geography, moral and civic education; 2. mathematics, physics-chemistry; 3. physical and sports education, environmental health prevention, plus an optional foreign language test).

Linked to the two first professional units, the placements (14 weeks) must be carried out in two types of setting (0–2 years/2–5 years): *crèches*, family childcare, *écoles maternelles*, *accueils périscolaires*. After 1,169 hours of training (609 hours of courses + 560 hours of placements), the exam includes: one written and oral test (professional unit 1), one written test (professional unit 2) and an oral test (professional unit 3 setting). The other tests concern the general education units.

Table 14

France: Competence specifications and curricular areas in the childcare sector

Job title	Competence specifications	Curricular areas
Puéricultrices/ puériculteurs*	– To know how to care for children and guarantee conditions for their health and safety in a variety of settings – To promote children's health through preventative approaches – To support parents and care professionals – To lead *crèches* with a multi-professional staff team 10 abilities: to communicate; to solve a problem; to work in a group; to facilitate; pedagogical ability; to situate oneself professionally and participate in the management and organisation of a service; to solve a nursing care problem with a child or a group of children; to supervise students during their placements); to situate oneself in the service; to enhance one's professional attitudes.	After an entry examination, the content of the training is: – The child from intra utero to 15 years (150 h) – Illness and medico-socio-educational prevention (150 h) – Social and familial environment (150 h) – Professional expertise, regulations, management (90 h) – Workplace-based training (hospital, *crèches, PMI*) (710 h) – Pedagogical reflection about workplace training (100 h) – Individual studies (150 h) A mixture of coursework, practical placement, analyses of placement experiences **Total** = 1,500 hours (1 year)
Éducateurs/ éducatrices de jeunes enfants, EJE	– To care for children in a holistic way – To act as an agent of the child's socialisation, requiring ethics, knowledge, techniques and articulation within the social and cultural context of the families	After an entry examination, the training follows a curriculum (2005) (focused on the child), but each training centre interprets it in a different way. Some focus more on psychoanalytic approaches, some on parents and diversity, etc., whereas others also begin to include new issues, such as gender issues. The new national diploma (2018) maintains 1,500 hours theorical training, including digital

Job title	Competence specifications	Curricular areas
	– To assume a specific position as a specialist of early childhood within social work: to fight risks of exclusion, prevent difficulties, facilitate construction of social links and parental support – To assume an educational and social expertise function for early childhood as a participant in local policies: to formulate families' needs, develop partnerships These actions require skills to work in a team, to elaborate, implement and evaluate educational and social plans, to develop partnerships with actors in the social and health sectors as well as with schools. *Year 1:* Identity construction in progress (observe, understand, adapt) *Year 2:* Appropriation and responsibility (analysis and planning of educational strategies) *Year 3:* Affirmation and confirmation (professionalism as a complex construct)	technology and a foreign language, and 2,100 hours practical training, as well as courses structured in 4 main curricular areas: – Supporting the young children and their families (500 h) – Educational activities with young children (500 h) – Multi-professional teamwork and professional communication (250 h) – Institutional and inter-institutional dynamics and partnerships (250 h) For evaluation of each area, the jury is composed of a trainer or an academic, and a qualified professional. Placement areas are no longer linked to curricular areas. The 4 placement periods must achieve predefined objectives **Total** = 3,600 hours (3 years)
Auxiliaires de puériculture***	10 competencies corresponding to 10 modules (*see next column*). Their training is shared with *aides soignantes* (nursing assistants). Modules 1, 1bis, 2, 3, 4 are specific for the Auxiliary Paediatric Nurses training. 3 main missions: – To support the child in the activities of his daily and social life – To collaborate in personalised care projects in their field of competence – To contribute to risk prevention and interprofessional clinical inter-professional reasoning	Since 2020, the entry examination is no longer required. Since 2021, the training includes 2 more months but less placements (no longer 6 but only 4). The modules have been changed, two modules have been added. *Module 1+1bis:* Daily activities with a young child (175 h) Activities of stimulation, leisure, education and support (28 h) *Module 2:* Identification and prevention of risky situations (21 h) *Module 3:* Assessment of the clinical state of a person (77 h) *Module 4:* Implementation of adapted care, evaluation and readjustment (154 h) *Module 5:* Support for the mobility of the person being cared for (35 h) *Module 6:* Relationship and communication with people and their environment (70 h)

Job title	Competence specifications	Curricular areas
		Module 7: Supporting people in training and communication with peers (21 h) *Module 8:* Maintenance of premises and equipment and prevention of associated risks (35 h) *Module 9:* Processing of information (35 h) *Module 10:* Multiteam work, quality and risk management (70h) ***plus:*** 4 placements (5 weeks each, except the final one: 7 weeks) in hospitals (maternity, paediatric), *crèches,* services with children with special needs and disabilities (1 placement with these children is mandatory and no longer the placement in maternity hospital) *Courses:* 770 h~~,~~ *Placements:* 770 h **Total = 1,540 hours** (12 months)
Accompagnant éducatif/ accompagnante éducative petite enfance (AEPE) ****	– Being able to ensure young children's well-being, care, body hygiene, nutrition, safety – Contributing to their education and socialisation – Being responsible for the cleaning of the premises Developing common and specific competences, related to three contexts: – Pre-primary school – Centre-based childcare – Home-based childcare.	In 2017, the *CAP AEPE* replaced the *CAP PE* (2 years in a *lycée professionnel* or other organisations, after 4 years of secondary school). Care, hygiene, food and safety of the child as well as stimulating the child, child development and the relationship with the family have been expanded and are organised into 3 **professional units**: – Supporting the development of young children – Working in a collective setting – Working in an individual setting **plus** – Health and Environment Prevention unit – 3 other units, general education units, are common to all *CAPs*. Placements (14 weeks) are mandatory in two types of setting (0–2 years) and (2–5 years) *Coursework:* 609 hours *Placements:* 560 hours **Total= 1,169 hours**

Sources: *Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration 2017; ** Ministry of Solidarity and Health 2018; *** Ministry of Solidarity and Health 2021b; **** Ministry of National Education 2017a

4.2.2. Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

Pre-primary Teachers

Since 2020, the *MEEF* for teaching in both *écoles maternelles* and primary schools continues to give little room to early childhood education and continues to be focused on didactics and disciples.

Competences to be acquired during the two years of this Master's degree diploma are always defined according to the 2013 Law (2013–595). Teachers – "actors in the educational community and the public service of national education" – are "multi-subject teachers, effective in the trans-

mission of fundamental knowledge and the construction of learning" and "reflective practitioners, agents of their own professional development". They must be able to: master disciplinary knowledge and its didactics; master the French language as part of their teaching; build, implement and initiate effective teaching and learning situations that take into account the diversity of pupils; organise and ensure a mode of operation of the group that promotes learning and socialisation; assess pupil progress and learning. They also sharing common competences with all teachers throughout the education system (see *Table 15*).

Each *INSPE* and university attached to it compose their own course programme according to the national regulations (minimum of 800 hours, without the placements): at least 55% of the hours for teaching of fundamental knowledge at school, at least 20% for *polyvalence* and general pedagogy and at least 15% for initiation into research. The five areas defined nationally are:

- Disciplinary area
- Didactics (including digital training and teaching with digital technology)
- Job practice context
- Professional situation (with observation placement during year 1 and placement with class responsibility under supervision during year 2)
- Initiation into research (including thesis).

Plus: 1 observation placement during year 1 (6 weeks) and 1 placement in accompanied responsibility during year 2 (12 weeks). Placements are supervised both by the teacher from the school and by the teacher educator at *INSPE*. The *MEEF* also includes some common courses for teachers (pre-primary, primary, secondary) and educational counsellors (secondary schools): secularism and republican values, professionalism, combatting discrimination, etc. For their research dissertation, students must choose between several options for in-depth study (such as the inclusion of children with disabilities, literature for children, etc.) and are guided at university by a university professor.

During the two years, students have also to prepare for the recruitment examination (*CRPE*) which enables them to become a civil servant.

In each area of the *MEEF*, all units are assessed by continuous evaluation and/or a final exam. The *CRPE* includes written eligibility tests and oral disciplinary tests.

Year 1: 500 hours minimum of training (60 ECTS credits), plus a six-week placement

Year 2: 300 hours minimum of training (60 ECTS); plus a 12-week placement.

A variety of lecturers teach in *INSPE*: experienced Teachers, Heads, Teacher Educators, Inspectors, University Professors. The overall approach includes course work, placements with guidance and supervision, research, coaching.

Municipal auxiliary staff (*ATSEM/ASEM*)

The auxiliary staff of *écoles maternelles* must be able to: identify the children' needs (from 2 years of age upwards), support children's autonomy; apply rules of safety and hygiene, prepare pedagogical support following the teacher's instructions; participate in class activities under the guidance of the teachers; ensure that cleaning rules are followed. Since 2017, with the *CAP AEPE*, they must acquire common competences and specific competences according to the context: pre-primary school; centre-based childcare; home-based childcare. The placements (14 weeks) must be carried out in two types of setting (0–2 years and 2–5 years). After 1,169 hours of training (609 hours of courses + 560 hours of placements), the exam includes: 1 written and oral test (professional unit 1), one written test (professional unit 2) and one oral test (professional unit 3 setting). The other tests concern the common general education units.

To become an ATSEM/ASEM, the holder of a CAP AEPE must pass an exam organised by a centre (*départemental de gestion*), which organises the exams for all territorial jobs. These include: one written eligibility test (multiple-choice questions) and an oral eligibility test. An internal exam (oral eligibility test) also exists for persons working in the public sector with at least two years of contact with 2–5 year-old children (limited to 30% of the vacancies). A third modality concerns persons with at least four years of contact with young children or as a leader of an association (one written and one oral eligibility test).

Table 15

France: Competence specifications and curricular areas in the pre-primary education sector

Job title	Competence specifications	Curricular areas
Professeurs, professeures des écoles	– Mastering disciplinary knowledge and its didactics – Mastering the French language as part of his teaching – Building, implementing and animating effective teaching and learning situations that take into account the diversity of pupils – Organising and ensuring a mode of operation of the group that promotes the learning and socialisation of pupils – Assessing pupils' progress and learning. ***Plus*** common competence specifications for all teachers throughout the education system: – Sharing republican values – Acting according to the main principles of the French education system and rules of the school – Knowing each pupil and their learning processes – Taking into account pupils' diversity – Supporting pupils in their learning – Acting as a responsible educator according to ethical principles – Mastering the French language – Using another language – Using elements of the digital culture – Co-operating within a team – Contributing to the activities of the educational community – Co-operating with pupils' parents – Co-operating with the school's partners – Involving oneself in an individual and collective process of professional development.	**Master *MEEF*:** Each *INSPE* and university compose their own course programme according to the national regulations (55% of the hours for teaching of basic knowledge at school, at least 20% for *polyvalence* and general pedagogy and at least 15% for initiation into research) and the 5 defined areas: – Disciplinary area – Didactics (including digital training and teaching with digital technology) – Context of professional practice – Professional situation (with placements) – Initiation into research (with dissertation). For their research dissertation, students have to choose between a number of options for in-depth study; they are guided at university by a university professor. During the 2 years, students have also to prepare for the recruitment examination (*CRPE*). A variety of lecturers teach in *INSPE*: experienced teachers, teacher educators, inspectors, university professors. The overall approach includes course work, placements with guidance and supervision, research, coaching. The MEEF also includes common courses for teachers (pre-primary, primary, secondary) and educational counsellors (secondary schools): secularism and Republican values, professionalism, combating discrimination, etc. *Year 1* (around 500 hours) (60 ECTS credits) ***plus*** a 6-week placement in a school (observation and guided practices) *Year 2* (around 300 hours) (60 ECTS credits) ***plus*** a 12-week placement under supervision ***Total*** = 800 hours minimum, plus 18 weeks (placements)

Job title	Competence specifications	Curricular areas
ATSEM /ASEM- *agent-(territorial) – specialisé des écoles maternelles*	In *écoles maternelles*: – Identifying children needs (from 2 years of age upwards) – Supporting children's autonomy – Applying rules of safety and hygiene – Preparing pedagogical support following the teacher's instructions – Participating in class activities under the guidance of the teacher – Ensuring that cleaning rules are followed. Developing, with *CAP AEPE*, common competences and specific competencies according to the context: – Pre-primary school – Centre-based childcare – Home-based childcare	***CAP AEPE*** (2 years in a *lycée professionnel* or other organisations, after 4 years of secondary school). Care, hygiene, food and safety of the child as well stimulating the child, child development and relationship with the family have been expanded abd are organised into 3 professional units: – Supporting the development of young children, – Working in a collective setting – Working in an individual setting) ***plus*** – A Health and Environment Prevention unit – 3 general education units common to all *CAPs.* Placements (14 weeks) in two types of setting: 0–2 years and 2–5 years ***plus*** a local recruitment examination for becoming an *ATSEM* *Coursework*: 609 hours *Placements*: 560 hours **Total = 1,169 hours**

4.2.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

Leisure-time Facilitators

The *BAFA* for "voluntary" Leisure-time Facilitators consists of a general training session on the basics of leisure-time work (eight days minimum), a practical placement (holiday centre or a *centre de loisirs* experiment (14 days minimum), and an in-depth session (minimum six days) or qualifying session (minimum eight days).

The professional certificate *CQP* is obtained after three months of training shared between a centre and a workplace. The content is based on three components: welcoming children and families during out of school hours; designing animation projects for children; conducting out-of-school activities for children. The evaluation is based on a report of leisure-time activities and an observation of the workplace, followed by an interview with the jury.

Heads

To obtain the *BAFD* diploma, the training consists of two theoretical training sessions and two workplace sessions in the following order: general training session (basic concepts of leadership and building a personal training project: nine or ten days); placement as head or deputy head (14 days); improvement session (to develop skills: six days); placement as Head to polish skills: 14 days).

The professional diploma, *BPJEPS* (two specialisations: leisure-time work or sport) consists of around one year in a recognised training centre (around 620 hours in the centre/1,150 hours in workplaces). The content of the training consists of four competence units:

– To supervise any persons in any place and any setting
– To implement a leisure-time project as part of the setting's programme
– To lead a leisure-time work activity and

– To mobilise the *éducation populaire* approach.

This diploma opens access to higher diplomas, *DE JEPS* and *DES JEPS*.

Table 16

France: Competence specifications and curricular areas in the pre-primary leisure-time sector

Job title	Competence specifications	Curricular areas
Animateur/ animatrice volontaire ***Animateur professionnel/ animatrice professionnelle***	For carrying out activities in both *écoles maternelles* and *écoles élémentaires:* – Ensuring physical and moral safety – Participating in the implementation of the pedagogical plan organised by the head of the *accueil périscolaire* – Establishing trusting relationships with the children – Developing welcoming relationships among children, families and staff	*BAFA*: Training with 3 sessions (during school holidays): – Basic training (8-9 days) – Work-based learning (14 days) – Reflexion session (minimum 6 days) **Total:** 1 month *CQP:* 5 months shared between a centre and a workplace around: – Welcoming children and families during out of school hours – Designing animation projects for children – Conducting out-of-school activities for children. **Total** = approx. 400 hours
Directeur/ directrice de centre de loisirs, volontaire ***Directeur/ directrice de centre de loisirs, professionnel/ professionnelle***	– Developing the skills needed to lead a centre and to prepare a pedagogical plan – Learning to assume responsibility for a centre (staff motivation, organisational and management tasks).	*BAFD*: 2 theoretical training sessions and 2 workplace sessions in the following: – General training session (9 or 10 days) – Placement as head or deputy head (14 days) – Improvement session (6 days) – Placement as head (14 days) **Total** = 1 month and a half *BPJEPS:* Around 1 year in the training centre and workplaces - Supervising any groups of persons in any place and any setting - Implementing an animation project as part of the setting's programme - Leading a leisure-time activity - Mobilising the *éducation populaire* approach *Coursework:* 620 hours (approx.) *Placements:* 1150 hours (approx.) **Total** = around 1 year of training

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Numerous unqualified auxiliary staff are employed in the childcare, education and leisure-time sectors, as well as less qualified contractual teachers in schools. An increase in numbers is currently particularly strong in the context of increasing staff shortages.

A few years of acquired experience in the ECEC field allows access to training to acquire certain diplomas without necessarily having the prerequisite levels of study. Work experience also contributes towards a reduction in the length of training. Small changes in the entry modalities to training have been introduced to facilitate access to some diplomas.

In terms of IPE, validation of acquired experience (*VAE)* can be also used (except for the Paediatric Nurse diploma). Alternative pathways exist in all the sectors, such as apprenticeships. In this case the student must also be registered in an apprentice training centre *(centre de formation d'apprentis – CFA)*. Most training courses are not free of charge and costs vary (they can be expensive in the childcare sector). The apprenticeship route is a way of reducing the costs while earning money. Funding and new funding initiatives linked to the shortage are diverse (by employers, regions, *Pôle employ* (job centre), etc.)

All qualified staff progress within their own category. Possibilities of system permeability are limited, both within each sector as well as between sectors, which are "separate universes" (Galtier 2013). In the childcare sector, any procedures aimed to support movement within the sectors depend mostly on the municipality's training policy and demand high individual motivation and perseverance – private sector staff have even fewer opportunities. However new diplomas for auxiliary staff (Auxiliary Paediatric Nurses, *AEPE*) are opening up slightly more mobility perspectives.

4.3.1 Centre-based childcare sector (2–5 years)

Paediatric Nurses

The training costs vary from one training centre to another (up to more than €9,000 per year). Within the childcare sector, Paediatric Nurses with several years of experience as Centre Heads can apply to become municipal coordinators of *crèches* or municipal Early Childhood Coordinators and assume other responsibility in municipality's early childhood departments. The national certificate of aptitude for management functions and heading a social intervention unit – *CAREFUiS* (*certificat d'aptitude aux fonctions d'encadrement et de responsable d'unité d'intervention sociale,* 400 hours) which can be obtained through *VAE*, can be useful.

Early Childhood Educators

The national Early Childhood Educator diploma costs are also varied (up to €5,000 annually). To become an *EJE,* acquired experience in childcare (at least 1 year) can be validated. The apprenticeship pathway is possible for less qualified persons working in the childcare sector (Thollon Behar and Mony 2016).

Within the childcare sector, with several years of experience as Centre Head, *EJEs* can also apply to become municipal coordinators of *crèches* or municipal Early Childhood Coordinators as well as for other responsibilities in municipal early childhood departments. The *CAREFUiS* can be useful.

Auxiliary Paediatric Nurses

The costs of their national diplomas vary from one training centre to another (up to more than €4,500 annually). Equivalence of modules or blocks of competences are given to holders of certain diplomas or titles (*CAP AEPE*; vocational Baccalaureate Services to people; life assistants for

families; etc.). The diploma can be obtained by validating the acquired experience (18 years old and a minimum of 1 year's experience). For *AEPE* or non-qualified workers, the apprenticeship pathway is possible (for an 18-month period maximum)

The holders of this diploma can then begin an *EJE* training as an apprentice.

Early Childhood Educational Support Person (*AEPE*)

Non-qualified workers can follow the training towards the *CAP AEPE* in a training centre or at the national centre for distance education *(CNED – centre national d'enseignement à distance*). The costs also vary (up to €2,500 per year). The *CAP* can be obtained through *VAE* (for home-based care providers, *BAFA* holders, etc.). The apprenticeship pathway is possible (from a minimum age of 16 years or being a job seeker).

Holders of the *CAP* are eligible to register for the qualification routes as Auxiliary Paediatric Nurse. They can become *ATSEM/ASEM* in *écoles maternelles* or enter the leisure-work sector.

4.3.2 Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

Pre-primary Teachers

Fees are around €250 for each year of the *MEEF*. State assistance for studies is given to students under certain social conditions. Parents of three children and high-level athletes can begin the Master's studies without a Bachelor's degree. The Master's degree can be obtained following a pre-professional course during the *licence* (year 2), including paid working time in the school of 8 hours per week. Students selected by rectorates, can be contractual teachers during the *MEEF* studies: with full responsibility, on a part-time basis (one third of the working hours) and €865 monthly earnings.

Holders of *MEEF* + *CRPE* can become Heads of schools, specialised Teachers, or pass examinations towards becoming *maîtres formateurs*, *conseillers d'éducation* or Inspectors.

Auxiliary staff (*ATSEM/ASEM*)

The *ATSEM* recruitment examination is accessible to holders of the *CAP AEPE* (cost of the *CAP AEPE* up to €2500), but also to parents of three children, high-level athletes, persons with two years of public service with children aged 2–5 years, or 4 years of experience in some other sectors. *VAE* allows ATSEM/ASEM to follow the Auxiliary Paediatric Nurse or *EJE* training. Since 2018, access to recruitment examinations for Leisure-time Facilitators is also open to *ATSEM* and access to *ATSEM* recruitment examinations is open for Leisure-time Facilitators.

4.3.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

BAFA costs vary according to the training centres (up to €1,000 annually). Various financial aids (including from *CAFs,* family allowance funds) are possible under certain conditions. To face the increasing shortage of Leisure-time Facilitators (10%) several *BAFA* training sessions were cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID crisis. Financial aid (€4 million) of €200 per student was granted in 2022 for acquiring the *BAFA* more quickly (Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs 2022e). For the *CQP,* an exceptional funding assistance of €1,600 per Leisure-time Facilitator has been given to 2,500 practising *animateurs* with at least three years of work experience (unqualified or just with the *BAFA*) (Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs 2022a).

Holders of *BAFA* can go on within the pre-primary leisure-time sector and beyond (sport, culture, social… sectors) with the professional diploma, *BPJEPS* (animation or sport) which open access to higher diplomas (*DE JEPS* and *DES JEPS)* and responsibilities, such as municipal coordinator of *accueils périscolaires,* head of a social centre, etc.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

All the initial training programmes are based on both courses and placements, but their proportion varies according to each kind of professional education. This element of IPE is regulated by national guidelines. Placement agreements are mandatory for all courses and study programmes. Their content can vary according to the specific diploma or to the training centre. The modalities of supervision of the students as well as the modalities of collaboration between the training centres and the ECEC settings also vary. There is no additional remuneration for the guidance and supervision of students – except the *maîtres formateurs.* These Tutor Teachers, who both teach in their schools and train *MEEF* students in their classroom as well as at the *INSPE,* receive an annual allowance of €1,250 (in 2021).

5.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0–2 years)

Paediatric Nurse

The placements of the students represent 710 total hours of the 1-year national training of paediatric nursing (1,500 hours). There are five placements (four weeks each) in hospitals, childcare centres, *PMI* and other settings. The placements are evaluated by the trainer tutoring the student and the head of the placement setting.

100 hours of reflection on the work placement experience are included in the 660 hours dedicated to theoretical and practical courses; 140 hours are spent in the IPE institution and are specifically related to their workplace experiences (Thollon-Behar and Mony 2016).

Early Childhood Educator

Placements represent the largest part of the 3-year national training of *EJEs*: 2,100 hours (60 weeks, total training: 3,600 hours). According to the reform in 2018, the four placements must achieve predefined objectives. The 1st placement (at least eight weeks during year 1) with an *EJE* mentor, aims to "understand the missions of a service, an establishment, an institution; identify the functions and activities of the *EJE*; identify the characteristics of a territory and its actors; identify the specificities of the target group; confirm the professional project". Then, the 2nd, 3rd and 4th placements (total: 52 weeks; at least two-thirds with an *EJE* mentor) aim to implement "the acquisition of skills in connection with the professional reference system and the construction of an identity and professional position". "By mobilising theoretical knowledge", they have: to implement "a process of welcoming and supporting the child and their family; to be part of a multi-professional and multi-disciplinary teamwork; to analyse the institutional environment, the inter-institutional and partnership issues of cooperation and inclusion in networks of socio-professional actors; to create the conditions for the reception of young children and their families; to establish a daily personalised relationship with the young child and their family; to implement an educational project with the young child, in conjunction with the family; to create and lead individual or collective activities promoting play, expression, autonomy and socialisation; to develop professional writing within the framework of ethical rules and the rights of persons; to search, analyse and share information; to be part of a reflective approach" (Ministry of Solidarity and Health 2018, Annex III).

For each placement, the agreement required between the training centre, the student and the head of the recognised site has to specify the procedures for carrying out the practicum, its objectives, particularly in terms of professional learning, the evaluation procedures, the names

and qualifications of the supervising EJE, the procedures for organising tutoring, and the reciprocal commitments of the signatories. A supervisor from the training centre must monitor the students and the head of the host setting must appoint a local tutor/mentor. At the end of each placement, the local tutor (or/and head) assesses the competences acquired by the student on the criteria of a portfolio (in accordance with a detailed model). This evaluation must be taken into account for the validation of each block of competences of this diploma.

Auxiliary Paediatric Nurse

The new one-year national training of prospective Auxiliary Paediatric Nurses (2021) includes the same number of hours (770 hours: 22 weeks) for both courses and placements. Four placements (five weeks each, except the final one: seven weeks) are made in hospitals (maternity, paediatric), *crèches,* services with children with special needs and disabilities (at least one placement with these children is mandatory, whereas a placement in a maternity hospital is no longer mandatory). During these placements, the experience of night work and week-end work is required. The first three placements aim to explore three missions of Auxiliary Paediatric Nurses: "supporting the children in the activities of their daily and social life; collaborating in personalised care projects in their field of competence; contributing to risk prevention and interprofessional clinical reasoning". The final placement aims at "the consolidation of the professional project and the strengthening of skills in order to validate all the skills areas". The head of the host setting is supposed to appoint a tutor/mentor who supervises the student while a supervisory tutor at the training institution ensures the follow-up of the student. A portfolio approach is recommended for following and evaluating the student's progress. An evaluation sheet template is provided for each placement (to be filled in and given to the student during an interview). These evaluations must be taken into account for the validation of each block of competences.

5.2 Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

Pre-primary Teacher

The *MEEF* includes 18 weeks in schools. During year 1, the 6-week placement consists of observation and progressive accompanied practice with the *maître formateur* or a voluntary host teacher designated by an Inspector and a tutor from the *INSPE*. The workplace activities must be prepared before the placement, then analysed during the training at the *INSPE*. During year 2, a 12-week placement of guided responsibility takes place. When the *CRPE* used to take place at the end of year 1, successful students worked (mid-time = 312 hours) under guided responsibility (and paid full time); the students who failed the *CRPE* continued to be supervised by their tutor. Since 2022, the *CRPE* takes place at the end of year 2 and the placement is now no longer paid. Students will receive only €1,260 gross for the school year, €126 paid each month for 10 months. However, some students selected by the rectorates can become a contractual teacher with full responsibility, on a part-time basis (one third of the working hours) and €865 monthly earnings). This is also possible from year 1, as well as from a professional *licence* level (Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs 2022c).

5.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

For the Leisure-time Facilitators, *BAFA* placements constitute the second of the three sessions of this training and half of the training hours *(*14 days minimum), under the responsibility of the head of the *accueil périscolaire* or the municipal hierarchy. Each of the three sessions of the *BAFA* is evaluated by the Director of the session and by the tutor of the placement. These three

written evaluations are then examined by the jury (comprising members of the regional delegation of youth and sport).

Placements for *CQP* (200 hours) also come under the responsibility of the Head of the *accueil périscolaire* or the municipal hierarchy. For the exam, an observation of the workplace is required, followed by an interview with the jury (alongside a report of leisure-time work).

For the heads, the *BAFD* diploma requires two workplace sessions (14 days) following two theoretical training sessions (10 then 6 days): the first placement as Head or Deputy Head, and the second placement as Head, to polish skills. The evaluation procedures are the same as for the *BAFA*.

The *BPJEPS* consists of around one year at a recognised training centre (around 620 hours in the centre/1,150 hours in workplaces).

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Continuing education is a right for any actively employed or job-seeking person: it is free and remunerated. Access to continuing training can be at the initiative of the employer or at the initiative of the worker. Within the framework of the professional training reform (2015), continuing education is provided through a personal training account (*compte personnel de formation* – CPF). CPF, mainly financed by the employers, can be opened with the first job and consists of up to 24 hours of training during the first five years, then up to 12 hours during the next three years. This personal account is granted to anyone over the age of 16 who works, full or part time, in the public or private sector, as an employee or self-employed, but also who is looking for a job. Since 2019, the supply to the account is no longer calculated in days but in euros: €500 per year (€800 for employees with little or no qualifications). Eligible trainings are ones that are certified; they also include the supervision of validation of acquired experience, as well as trainings on specific content proposed by the certified training providers (public, associative, private). There is no minimum nor maximum duration of continuing education per year. CPD can take place during working hours with the agreement of the employer and with continued remuneration, or outside working hours, with a training grant. In addition, every two years, a professional interview with the employer is devoted to the prospects for professional development of each worker, and every six years an inventory is made of his/her professional career.

Access to all diplomas in ECEC is possible not only for students (IPE) but also for workers in the field (or those not currently working) and job seekers (CPF). Beyond access to certified training, the CPF above all allows access to training activities aimed at improving knowledge and skills. CPD can take very varied forms (formal courses; centre-based activities; increasing online training since the COVID-19 crisis). Training offers tend to be marketed in the childcare sector; private providers are beginning to develop in the leisure-time sector, but not yet in the education sector.

The most qualified professionals continue to have the most favourable access to CPD.

6.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0–2 years)

The qualifying diplomas for *puériculteur/puéricultrice, auxiliaire de puériculture, EJE* and *AEPE* can also be acquired through CPD courses. These may vary in duration, contents (communication, play, cultural activities, practice analyses, etc.); specific modalities depend on the provider's options.

A recent inquiry showed that when childcare professionals demand more CPD sessions, they wish for more offers focusing on the observation of children, i.e. on a central aspect of their expertise (APEMA 2022).

As part of the E. Macron strategy for preventing and combatting poverty, a national annual training plan for all childcare staff (*plan "Ambition Enfance-Egalité"*) was launched in 2021 (Gouvernement 2021; Feufeu 2021) around seven themes, partly taken from the *Charte nationale de l'accueil du jeune enfant* (National Charta for Childcare): language; food and nature, art and culture, occasional care, prevention of stereotypes, parental care, digital technology. A national component promotes access to training, while a local component, piloted by the departmental Commissioners for the fight against poverty, encourages the emergence of local projects: municipalities, associations, training centres, etc. are eligible to participate in this call for projects to set up specific partnerships (for instance: artistic workshops in the *crèches* of the Centre-Val de Loire; or the training of 130 staff in Tourcoing).

Studies on CPD in the childcare sector are lacking.

6.2 Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

Pre-primary Teachers

The *MEEF* is accessible through *VAE*, *VAPP* and Validation of Higher Education (*VES – Validation des études supérieures*). The *INSPE*s also offer teachers a certificate for specialist support, adapted teaching and the education of pupils with disabilities: the *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle aux pratiques de l'école inclusive – CAPA-SH*, including several options for becoming a specialised teacher. Teachers' professional experience is taken into account. The *INSPE*s also offer a certificate for becoming a Tutor Teacher (*maître formateur*). Moreover, the *INSPE*s offer training modules as part of the local academic training plan (*plan académique de formation – PAF)*. This plan modifies the national priorities detailed in the national training plan *(plan national de formation – PNF)* according to local issues and challenges. Teachers either apply to participate in this training and/or are selected.

All teachers participate in CPD (face-to-face or online) provided by Ministry of Education. 18 hours per year are compulsory. Of the 18 hours of educational activities integrated into the teachers' service, nine hours are devoted to hybrid training actions. *M@gistère* is an online or face-to-face continuing education system that offers hybrid, interactive training modules. The contents of the courses are: analyses of teaching sequences, videos, virtual classes, collective preparations of teaching sequences and self-assessment exercises. It brings together MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) and online training offered by universities. Another site, Eduscol, is a national portal for all teachers (resources and materials "scientifically and pedagogically validated") and links to expert sites developed with the *Écoles Normales Supérieures (ENS*). A Ministry of Education portal brings together national and academic resources (Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs 2023). In addition, the *Canopé* network proposes educational resources in an innovative way (example: in Paris, a training course on bridge activities between écoles *maternelles* and *crèches* was carried out in 2021-2022 and continued in 2022-2023).

A national evaluation by the General Inspectorates indicates an inappropriate and inefficient „top down" teachers' CPD (Cristofari, Lepivert, and Lussania 2017). A survey (2014-2018) by questionnaire and interview with more than 600 Paris Teachers, Teacher Educators and Inspectors (Barrère, Broccolichi, Corrège, Joigneaux, and Roditi 2018) focusing on experiences, (dis)satisfactions and expectations regarding the CPD of these professionals, indicates a dominant dissatisfaction: complaints by the oldest teachers, frustration of the most recent in the profession (limited access to CPD) and the desire to self-train through other channels made difficult through

lack of time. Among the reasons for dissatisfaction: the significant training needs were confronted with a limited institutional provision, or the share of training dedicated to new regulations was too low. If the training sessions are often described as useless or even discouraging, those that are appreciated are described as: in phase with the situations and/or the projects of the participants; provided by trainers mastering the theoretical and practical dimensions of the issues and taking into account the experiences and questions of the participants.

A recent synthesis of several reports and an international conference (Mons, Chesné, and Piedfer-Quêney 2021) confirms and questions the quality and access of the CPD organised by the Ministry of Education: it is still more accessible to Inspectors (97%) than to Teachers (71%) and Heads (76%); while participation in CPD has increased, its effects on teaching practices are limited (38% of school teachers consider that it has not had a positive impact). The CPD model is questioned as to the lack of consideration of the expression of needs (for 52% of teachers in 2018-2019, training content was imposed. These often short training courses are ex cathedra courses (only 7% of teachers had follow-up activities in the field) and there is too little focus on learning communities (only 38% of school teachers took part in training set up specifically for their school); the follow-up of CPD is not valued in the careers of staff (only 47% of Teachers had discussed training issues during their meeting with an Inspector); evaluations of the quality of CPD are not systematic (no means of evaluating their satisfaction for 45% of Primary School Teachers). So, whereas half of the Teachers attend courses outside the mainstream CPD provision "an ecosystem of informal continuing education has been formed in parallel", and the lucrative private sector is still absent. The five axes of the 15 recommendations of this synthesis are:

- Encouraging staff to train, with training time credit and support for stimulating learning communities
- Strengthening the institutional ecosystem of the Ministry's training
- Including research in National Education training, with the possibility of obtaining a diploma
- Support, through mentoring and tutoring, new teachers, contractual teachers and professionals who are retraining in teaching without initial professional education in the field
- Valuing the investment of staff in their continuing education (discussion time in staff evaluations; compensation for taking on collective missions within schools on skills acquired during training, etc.).

Auxiliary staff (ATSEM/ASEM)

For the *CAP AEPE*, CPD is possible in centres like *GRETA (GRoupements d'ETAblissements*), depending on the Ministry of Education for providing adult training, or other authorised public or private organisations.

6.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

Through CPD, it is possible to prepare for the *BAFA* exams needed to become a "voluntary" or a professional Leisure-time Facilitator as well as for the *BAFD* for the heads. The growth of private offers in the CPD of professional Leisure-time Facilitators, alongside of the traditional public provision and associations' offers, is challenging the relationship between the process of professionalisation and the structuring of the professional Leisure-time Facilitators' training market – a comparison of three local markets indicates specific characteristics, differentiated and chaotic modes of regulation (Bock 2022).

In front of the insufficiency or difficult access to existing diplomas, the Education Inspectorate (Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs 2020) recommended strengthening CPD (with

more clarification of the methods of organising CPD and the responsibilities of the various actors), systematising coordination times and the designation of territorial Advisers. The *Comité de filère* (Steering Committee), created in 2022, will be commissioned to find the ways and means of a commitment by all private and public employers, to leave no Leisure-time Facilitator without training after three years of professional practice.

Among the 25 measures of the recent plan of the Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs (2022a), a one-off grant (4 million euros) was pledged in 2022 to train for the professional qualification certificate (*CQP*) for 2,500 Leisure-time Facilitators in practice for at least three years without qualification or with only the *BAFA* (support granted to the professional branch, up to €1,600 per Leisure-time Facilitator, to cover the teaching costs of training). This plan also facilitates the access of *ATSEM* to leisure-time professions and, more generally, provides better information on employment and training opportunities.

No studies are available on CPD in this sector.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

Working conditions are problematic in all the three sectors: low salaries, few career prospects, hardship at work, particularly among auxiliary staff. Remunerations are lower in the childcare and leisure-time sector than in the education sector. Single parenthood and the more generally worrying situation of poverty mean that some auxiliary staff are living in precarious conditions (Zaouche Gaudron 2021).

7.1 Remuneration

7.1.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0–2 years)

All workers in the public sector may have the status of a contractual worker or a local civil servant or, in the private sector, of an employee. In the public sector of childcare, the salaries of territorial civil servants depend on a national index grid, defined according to their rank and evolving every two to four years by changing levels.

The salaries vary according to the position in the hierarchy. The heads have the highest remuneration. Among the auxiliary staff, Auxiliary Paediatric Nurses have a better salary than the *AEPE*. Salaries tend to be higher in the private than in the public sector.

Paediatric Nurses

Their salary is lower if they work in *crèches* than in hospitals. However Paediatric Nurses find the work conditions better in *crèches* (they are Heads) than in hospitals, according to an enquiry of their national association which led to a *White Book* with 92 recommendations (ANPDE 2018). The average remuneration in the private sector seems to be a little bit better than in the public sector.

In the public sector, the gross monthly remuneration, according to their grade (each one includes several steps) was, in 2022 (Trouver un Métier 2022b):

- Grade 1: from €1,977 gross per month to €2,638 gross
- Grade 2: from €2,225 gross per month to €2,938 gross
- Grade 3: from €2,043 gross per month to €3,083 gross.

Paediatric Nurses receive bonuses and allowances, common to all civil servants, according to their status and personal situation. They can work up to 220 hours of overtime per year. In Paris, where flats are very expensive, some *crèches* have a free apartment for the Head (the other Heads receive a little compensation).

In the private sector, salaries are not fixed by a national index scale, they depend on the national collective agreement for their sector of activity. The average remuneration of beginning Paediatric Nurses is €2,200 gross per month (€1,716 net) and for experienced Paediatric Nurses, it is €2,800 gross per month (€2,184 net). They may receive conventional bonuses and allowances.

Early Childhood Educator

The remuneration of a municipal civil servant *EJE* depends also on their grade. In 2022 (Trouver un Métier 2022c), these were:

- Grade 1: from €1,710 to €2,516 gross per month
- Grade 2: from €1,879 to €2,765 gross per month
- Grade 3: from €1,907 to €2,849 gross per month.

In addition to this basic salary, there are also bonuses and allowances.

The *EJE* employed in the private sector earns on average €200 net more than the *EJE* who works in the public sector. As Heads of *crèches*, they receive a little additional compensation.

The salary is a little lower than that of a Paediatric Nurse. Example: in the region Ile-de-France, a Head with *EJE* training receives an average of €2,108 net per month, and Heads with a Paediatric Nurse training €2,357. Since some years, some *EJE* can access, as Heads, one of the Parisian *crèches* with a free apartment; the others receive a little additional compensation (like the Paediatric Nurses).

Auxiliary Paediatric Nurses

In 2022, the salaries (also a little bit better in hospitals) for those working in municipal *crèches* were (Trouver un Métier 2022d):

- Grade 1: Auxiliary Paediatric Nurse: €1,556 gross per month to €1,968
- Grade 2: Principal Auxiliary Paediatric Nurse: €1,640 gross per month to €2,216.

In addition to this remuneration, they receive a certain number of bonuses and allowances.

In the private sector, the salary varies according to the type of setting, region, etc. but it is generally lower.

AEPE

The salary of the holder of a *CAP AEPE,* who are all contractual workers, is around the level of the minimum wage. This remuneration, around €1,800 gross per month, does not increase very much. It is a little lower in the private sector.

7.1.2 Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

Pre-primary Teachers

Lower than teachers' average remuneration in Europe, the salaries of *professeurs /professeures des écoles* are the same for working both in *écoles maternelles* and in *écoles élémentaires* (but lower than that of Teachers in secondary education). In 2019, in the public sector, the estimated average net salary was €2,550 per month (gross salary: €3,160). Bonuses constitute 9% of the gross salary (less than in secondary education). Remuneration is 51% higher at the end of their

career (less than in secondary education). Salaries are lower in private schools, where the average net salary is €2,160 per month (gross: €2,760) in private schools under contract with the State (Department of Evaluation, Prospective and Performance 2021).

In 2022, according to their grades, public school Teachers earned (Emploi-Collectivites.fr 2022):

- Grade 1: €1,890 gross per month to €3,264
- Grade 2: €3.370 gross per month to €4,025
- Grade 3: €3,370 gross per month to €4,256.

Heads receive an additional sum of €108 per month, plus €42 (small schools), €59 (4 to 9 classes) or €75 (10 classes and more)

An annual allowance is provided in disadvantaged areas (2021): €1.733; and in very disadvantaged areas: €4.646. A Headteacher's bonus varies not only according to the size of the school but also to its location (disadvantaged area: between €600 and €1,880 per year; very disadvantaged areas: between €750 and €1350 per year).

The annual allowance for Tutor Teachers (*maîtres formateurs*) was €1,250.00, in 2021.

Auxiliary staff (*ATSEM/ASEM*)

As municipal civil servants, the salary of *ATSEM* (*ASEM* in Parisian schools), defined according to an index grid, evolves according to their seniority (level) and the notation by the municipality (Trouver un Métier 2022e):

- Grade 1: €1,556 gross per month to €1,968
- Grade 2: €1,640 gross per month to €2,216.

In addition, these civil servants also receive bonuses and allowances according to their professional and personal situation.

7.1.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years).

The remuneration of Leisure-time Facilitators is generally at the minimum wage level, or just above, and bonuses are rare. The basic full-time gross monthly salary of Leisure-time Facilitators is €1,435. The gross monthly salary for a 20-hour part-time job is €820. Full-time appointments are rare: they generally work 15-20 hours per week. Disparities can be observed depending on the city and on the type of contract (short-term or permanent, part time or full time). Tenured or contractual workers in/with the municipal *écoles maternelles* have a remuneration, fixed by the index grid, which depends on their grade and evolves, like the other workers, every two years on average through changing levels: from €1,607 gross per month to €2,357 gross per month (indications for a full-time job). There are bonuses and allowances which depend on the personal and professional situation (Trouver un Métier 2022f).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

In France, the legal working time is 35 hours per week, according to the labour code (*code du travail*) (Labour Code 2016a), and a maximum of: 10 hours per day, 48 hours per week (Labour Code 2016b). Overtime (either payable or recoverable and increased in both cases by 25% for the first eight hours and 50% beyond) is not taxable. It is possible in the childcare sector, but not for teachers in the *école maternelle* (rare in the *école élémentaire* but frequent in secondary education). In the leisure-time sector, there is a maximum of 140 hours per year.

Part-time work has increased since the 1970s in France, being progressively used to fight unemployment. Flexible working hours are primarily an issue concerning women employed in poorly protected sectors. Currently, women occupy eight out of ten part-time jobs (generally low-

skilled and low-paid positions). A recent study (Briard 2020) showed that for the 45 predominantly male professions (64% of men), part-time work concerns 3% of men and 16% of women; for the 24 predominantly female professions (70% of women), part-time work concerns 33% of women and 9% of men. Women with a Baccalaureate plus a 2-year diploma are those who make use of part-time work the most. Forced part-time work is over-represented in feminised professions. Moreover, chosen part-time work is more common among women, and among non-managerial staff in predominantly female occupations. It responds to family motivations for women and professional motivations for men (other parallel employment, training, studies). Women resort more to part-time work if they have young children and a spouse (especially a manager).

In France, single parenthood has increased in all categories, so also among ECEC staff.

7.2.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0–2 years)

In *crèches*, professionals work full time or part time, overtime is possible (13 hours per week) (no precise date available).

7.2.2 Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

It is possible to work part time in schools: half-time (50%) or one day less per week (75%) or 80% under certain conditions. The authorisation is given for one year (renewable over three years). Then, the Teacher is automatically admitted to full-time employment (Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs 2020). In 2020–2021, 10%-11% of Teachers (public-private) worked part time; more women (11%) work part time than men (3% in both sectors) as well as more tenured teachers (8.8%) than contractual teachers (0.8%). In public schools, 3% teachers work at 50%, 9% in private schools. Teachers working at 80% account for 7% in both public and private schools (Department of Evaluation, Prospective and Performance 2021).

No overtime is given to Pre-primary Teachers (very few to Primary Teachers, more frequent at the secondary level).

ATSEM/ASEM can work full-time or part-time and also overtime.

7.2.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

Full time employment in this field is rare. However, employers can ask Leisure-time Facilitators to work up to 140 hours of overtime per year.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

7.3.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0–2 years)

To become a Head of a *crèche*, 3 years of experience as *EJE* or Paediatric Nurse are required. Being a Deputy Head in a large *crèche* is a way to gradually enter the position. Coordinators of Early Childhood have a role (unspecified) in supporting new Heads, particularly to promote the sustainability of ongoing projects (too often ephemeral). The staff, depending on its cohesion, and/or the *EJE* in the staff, can also provide support.

Concerning the procedures for welcoming new staff, there is no legal requirement for introductory measures. They vary from one *crèche* to another. On their arrival, the *EJE* and the auxiliary staff are accompanied by the Head and the colleagues. Placements carried out during their IPE, with support by a tutor at the training centre and a tutor/mentor in the *crèche,* are fundamental.

During their placements, in France or other countries, *EJE* or auxiliary staff may experience innovative practices; they may then transfer them in the *crèches* where they will work if their Head and staff are sufficiently open to innovation.

7.3.2 Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

The support of young teachers begins during their placements as students (year 1 and year 2 of *MEEF*) with the guidance of a Tutor Teacher (*maître formateur*, who works both in the classroom and in the *INSPE*) and/or a voluntary host teacher (selected by the Inspector); also involved is the *conseiller pédagogique* who continues to support novice teachers, both as trainees, and before being tenured.

Linked to the recent recognition of the Headteacher's position, in 2022, the *référents direction d'école* (School Headship Advisers) in each Directorate of the Departmental Services of National Education, are required to support new school Heads. According to the Decree no. 2022-724, these Advisers, appointed for three years, are to give them advice and support and facilitate exchanges among heads.

7.3.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

The Heads continue to support students who start working. The team of Leisure-time Facilitators also plays a significant role. Specific support for young Leisure-time Facilitators is one of the 25 measures included in the plan *Pour un renouveau de l'animation en accueils collectifs de mineurs* (Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs 2022a).

7.4 Non-contact time

The working time of all ECEC professionals includes non-contact time (preparation work, documentation, staff meetings, cooperation with parents, networking in the community, etc.), which varies according to the local needs, the decisions taken by Heads, the setting provider, the nature of the projects in progress (with or without the families, partners, etc.), the involvement of each one. Only Teachers have precise service obligations. In all sectors, many professionals complain about lack of time and having to use their personal time.

7.4.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0–2 years)

There are no legal regulations for non-contact work, which vary according: to the *crèches*, their plans and dynamics; to the Coordinators' approach towards their work; to the orientations of the municipalities or private providers, and so on. However, in the public sector *crèches*, "pedagogical days" (with closure of the *crèche*) have become widespread (one to three days per year, as in Paris). Local authorities (like the *Département de Seine-Saint-Denis*) may provide an annual pedagogical day for all *crèches* in their area. Non-contact time in the private sector appears to be lower than in the public sector.

The recent Decree (2021-1131) provided for six hours per year for "practice analysis" with "an internal or external competent person".

7.4.2 Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

In addition to longer holidays (school holidays), teachers do not work the legally required 35 hours per week in their workplace. According to the national regulations, they have 24 weekly hours of teaching with the pupils, plus 108 hours per year for: educational activities (36 hours); CPD (18 hours), including 9 hours of distance sessions on digital media; school councils (6 hours); and 48 hours devoted to teamwork, relations with parents, monitoring of pupils with disabilities, etc.

Teachers working in disadvantaged areas benefit from a reduction in their service with the children of 18 half-days per school year for teamwork.

The obligations for the *maîtres formateurs* are: 16 hours per week with the children; eight hours per week for students' training and support in the classroom and at the *INSPE*; plus 36 hours a

year to work on team consultation, relations with parents, developing and monitoring of projects.

There is no regulation for the *ATSEM*, who share their time, during the school hours and out of school hours, between the work with children, cleaning the classrooms, plus participating in meetings if they are included in the school projects.

7.4.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

There is no regulation about non-contact time in this sector. Within the 25 measures of the plan *Pour un renouveau de l'animation en accueils collectifs de mineurs* (Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs 2022a), one proposal recommends extra pay for preparation.

7.5 Current staffing issues

The three sectors, unattractive for a long time, are experiencing unprecedented staff shortages. With the COVID-19 crisis, the situation has worsened everywhere. The concern, shared at all levels (parents, professionals, providers, etc.), is reinforced in the childcare sector where many workers are about to retire. The "Giampino report" (2016) formulated a set of recommendations which have inspired certain measures in recent years. New measures were announced in July 2022 by the new government.

7.5.1 Centre-based childcare sector (0–2 years)

To cope with the historical shortage of childcare staff – their aging is stronger than in the two other sectors –, the Childcare Sector Committee *(Comité de Filière Petite Enfance*) – created in 2021 by the Ministry of Solidarity and Health and presided by the early childhood Advisers at the association of Mayors of France and members of the college for the defence and promotion of children's rights and which includes union and association representatives of professionals in public and private childcare – made 22 recommendations. They are based on a precise quantification of the shortage in *crèches collectives* in the spring of 2022 conducted by the National Family Allowance Fund (*Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales, CNAF*). The results (based on 15,986 *crèches collectives*) showed that the recruitment crisis affects 50% of *crèches*, especially in Paris and the Paris region, where some existing places can no longer be granted due to lack of staff. Even if the shortage is less severe for heads (although one *crèche* in ten is affected) than for the auxiliary staff in contact with children, this crisis severely impacts the conditions of work of the staff and thus quality of care. The shortage of *EJEs* is 17%, 45% of *Paediatric Nurse* posts are not covered, *AEPEs* are also lacking, although no precise percentage is available (CNAF 2022). Among its requests, the Childcare Sector Committee has demanded more places in training for all diplomas, and a Paediatric Nurse diploma was mentioned which restricts employment to childcare.

In July 2022, the new Minister of Solidarity announced short-term measures for 2022: a ministerial order (immediately published) which formalises previous derogations granted "on an exceptional basis" from 2022-2023. This states that if the search for a qualified employee lasts longer than three weeks, then an unqualified candidate can be recruited, up to a maximum of 15% of the workforce, who must be supported by in-house training, i.e. an "integration course" of 120 hours then by qualifying training within a maximum period of one year (MHP & MSADP 2022b). €500,000 have been pledged in support of the Childcare Sector Committee over 18 months, towards the construction of an Observatory on the quality of life at work in early childhood; a doubling of the local funding (an additional €3 million) of the plan *Ambition Enfance-Egalité* (for "the analysis of practices in all settings", said the Minister) and €2 million for a campaign to promote the early childhood professions. He announced that he will work with the

Minister of Education (on the *CAP AEPE*), with the regions (on the places available in the training of *EJEs* and Auxiliary Paediatric Nurses) and with the Departments about quantifying staff needs. In September, some measures were announced by the Minister but they concern only home-based providers. In May, following the General Inspectorate of Social Affairs's report (Bohic et al. 2023), the Childcare Sector Comitee pleaded for a salary increase from 2023. Professionals are waiting for its propositions regarding pay.

7.5.2 Pre-primary education sector (2–5 years)

Pre-primary Teachers

The average age of Teachers in 2020 was 44 years (Department of Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance 2021). The average age of those admitted to the *CRPE* increased from 27.8 years in 2013 to 29 years in 2020. The absenteeism of registrants for passing the *CRPE* exam was high in 2020, 61% of registrants gave up. Success rates vary according to the academies: 14% (Toulouse) to 81% (Versailles, where the shortage is very high). In 2022, the results of the competitions confirm the staffing shortages for pre-primary and primary schools (particularly in the most vulnerable areas of the Paris region, where a second session was organised to recruit more Teachers in the academies of Versailles and Créteil). The long-standing decline in attractiveness for this profession is combined with an economic recovery which also puts it in competition with other professions. At the beginning of July 2022, the new Minister of Education, Pap Ndiaye, declared the need for a "shock of attractiveness" in order to no longer have recourse to contractual teachers. However, faced with the emergency, the academies have renewed and hired more contractual teachers for the 2022-2023 school year from Bachelor's degree holders. From 2023, remuneration will increase, said the Minister: at least €2000 net at the beginning for every teacher; and a bonus for those with some specific tasks (to be specified with the unions).

Auxiliary staff (*ATSEM/ASEM*)

The average age of auxiliary staff can be estimated at around 45 years.

The municipalities lack *ATSEM*, who protested during 2022 for better conditions, supported by parents. Relying on some reports which suggest that professional development opportunities are insufficient, the Government has introduced little changes towards a quicker progression within their career pathway and opened up access routes to this profession (internal exam or internal promotion to diverse municipal employees, including Leisure-time Facilitators) and allowances.

7.5.3 Pre-primary leisure-time sector (2–5 years)

The average age of the Leisure-time Facilitators is estimated at 25 years.

The shortage of Leisure-time Facilitators is increasing: in 2020, *Pôle emploi* recorded 94,180 recruitment intentions in this sector. Many municipalities (estimate: 80% in 2021) have great difficulties recruiting because the job offers only low pay, fragmented days and a significant workload. Job precarity is strong, as well as the lack of recognition and the costs of training for the certificate (*BAFA*). With the COVID-19 crisis, many people preferred to reorient themselves towards other sectors of activity. In 2022, the State Secretary for Youth and Engagement, together with around fifty organisations, employers and funders, launched the Plan "*Pour un renouveau de l'animation en accueils collectifs de mineurs*" (For a renewal of animation in centres for minors). Some of the 25 short and long-term measures are oriented towards more continuity in the child's day – Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs 2022a). A *Comité de Filière Animation* (Animation Sector Committee), including representatives of the actors, the State, municipalities, the unions, etc., has been created. The mission of the Committee is articulated with

that of the Early Childhood Sector Committee. Among the short-term measures: a financial help to municipalities to increase leisure time activities on Wednesday afternoon (€53 million), as well as for the students, not only the age lowered to 16 years for beginning the *BAFA,* but also the "exceptional help" (€4 million) for paying and finishing the *BAFA* quickly (€120 each), and the support for *CQP* for 2,500 Leisure-time Facilitators who have been practising for at least 3 years (€1,600 each). The training, open to *ATSEM*, will include new modules of civic interest (citizen projects, sustainable development, inclusion/handicap...) – an experiment will be launched in 2022 for 200 training courses for deepening civic engagement (€100 each). A plan will propose paid hours for the preparation of the activities to Leisure-time Facilitators working at 80%. The Committee is called on to rethink the *BAFA* (reinforcement of public and free initial training, with associations more focused on continuing training; simplification of existing professional certification procedures by structuring them at infra-baccalaureate, baccalaureate, post-baccalaureate levels, corresponding to the levels of skills expected – coordination, team management and management – and articulated between them thanks to progressiveness via blocks of skills). It must also restructure the professional training; and find ways and means of a commitment by all employers, not to leave any Leisure-time Facilitator without CPD after three years of professional practice.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Over the past five years and currently, policy reforms and initiatives were/are aiming at the reduction of the severe shortage in all sectors, as detailed above, by a series of measures (Decrees and Orders) concerning the training (lowering of entry ages or requirements into training); expanding the group of potential candidates; providing financial support to students or salaries; facilitating measures for passing exams) as well as a few qualitative measures towards a more appropriate content of the training to make the job more recognised and more attractive. However, lowering the requirements threatens to reduce the quality of ECEC settings. And financial attractivity remains a big challenge.

Small advances have been noted to give more coherence within the childcare sector: introducing the same regulations for both centre-based and home-based provision (Decree 2021-1131); moving towards a common basis in the initial training; reforming the training of Auxiliary Paediatric Nurses. These are beginnings.

The renewal of the cultural and artistic policy in early childhood, in 2017 at the end of F. Hollande's presidency, led to an agreement between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Solidarity and Health to introduce or strengthen both kinds of training (initial and continuing) in cultural/artistic stimulation for childcare staff and training in early childhood for arts and culture professionals (MCC and MFCWR 2017). Currently the changes are mainly on the side of the training of childcare professionals.

Very small advances have been made to decompartmentalise jobs, although much remains to be done in the French divided system.

Part of the professionalisation issues, particularly in the childcare sector, have been oriented by and included as part of the Plan against poverty launched by E. Macron in 2017 (14.2% of the population in France are affected, the overseas departments in particular. An inter-ministerial delegation was created to develop a National Strategy from 2018 and among the measures concerning early childhood, a training plan (*Ambition Enfance-Egalité*) inspired by the National

Charta (2019) and some recommendations of a report about Piloting quality in early childhood by the Supreme Council of Family, Childhood and Age (SCFCA 2019). Another report, *Les 1000 premiers jours* (Ministry of Solidarity and Health 2020), commissioned by E. Macron, is part of this Strategy and inspired the training plan; the Ministry of Culture is involved. The recent assessment of the four years and 35 measures of the National Strategy carried out by the evaluation committee (France Stratégie 2022) indicates the absence of improvement in inequalities in early childhood, despite the increase in the overall budget initially planned. The target of training 600,000 professionals (plan *Ambition Enfance-Egalité*) was not achieved (only 12%). In addition, the very diverse content and modalities of the funded trainings were questioned. Whereas some of them focus on early artistic and cultural training, others are linked to contested compensatory programmes, which continue to be supported (Institute Montaigne 2022). The evaluation committee addressed its recommendations to the new government, for 2023-2027, the first being to "continue or even amplify the measures whose effectiveness has been proven, and to abandon or reconfigure the measures which have not produced the expected effects". The new Minister has announced a doubling of the local funding (an additional €3 million) of this training plan.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Two recent edited volumes (Ulmann and Garnier 2020; Moisset 2019a) have brought together studies using different methodologies that shed light on the different characteristics of ECEC staff's work, its representations and its experiences. They have probably contributed to reforms of training in the childcare sector and towards sustaining prospects for openness between sectors. Another edited volume (Péralès et al. 2021)-was written during the first lockdown by Parisian staff from the three sectors (childcare, education, leisure-time facilitation). It documents ongoing experiments of bridging activities in the context of the Paris' territorial educational project (*PEDT*), showing the important roles of Early Childhood Coordinators as well as constructions of common repertoires of practices among practitioners in the three sectors. It contributed towards sustaining and extending the bridging process in the field.

The volume on the "invisible but nevertheless overinvested in social issues" work of ECEC staff (and students) (Ulmann and Garnier 2020) focuses on everyday practices, where they are played out, to better understand professionalism as a process emerging from the practices themselves and, beyond the myth of complementarity, socio-professional competition linked to the diversity of professionals and their statutory hierarchy. Among the seven contributions, where the researchers analyse what the professionals experience, think, mobilise or invent, three are reported here:

What images of work are conveyed in the initial professional education of Auxiliary Paediatric Nurses?

Source: Rodriguez and Ulmann 2020 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: To explore the links between training of *auxiliaires de puériculture* and their work in *crèches*.

Procedure: The data come from a previous ethnographic study conducted in two types of field: childcare centres and training centres (observations and interviews with students and trainers,

who are former *puéricultrices* in hospitals or *crèches*, and some co-analysis with them) (Ulmann, Rodriguez, and Guyon 2015). The authors focus on the "practical work" part of the 17-week training (+ 17 weeks of placement) offered to students over 17 who have passed an entrance examination (recognised as difficult). This practical work gives a large part to simulation: situations which reproduce professional situations by simplifying them (e.g. use of a doll to learn body care skills).

Selected findings: The results indicate that the representations of work transmitted by the trainers are based on the adequacy of technical skills, acquired by "capable" students, who have learned to hide their feelings in the relationship with children.

Implications: The authors question this rationalisation of practices compared to the flexibility required to act in a variety of contexts and to the opportunity to explore the subjective dimensions inherent in this work of caring for very young children. The co-analysis "opens the way to the co-construction of a reflection on work which, gradually, can lead to the design of pedagogical settings based on professional situations, not only to impose rational knowledge but also to question the obstacles to its implementation". For the authors, "it is also necessary to think that training can be an instance for learning a profession but also for making it evolve. It would be a question of better knowing the real practice of *auxiliaires de puériculture* in order to identify the corpus of knowledge which is specific to it and which is in no way reducible to the medical knowledge which is provided to them in training".

Surveys of care and education practices in work with young children

Source: Ulmann 2020 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: To analyse the links between organisations of activity in *crèches* and professional competence.

Procedure: This ethnographic study is based on participants and external observations in four *crèches*, during several weeks each (two municipal, one associative and one parental *crèche),* interviews with their heads and deputies, and discussions with the team.

Selected findings: The author notices a blind spot concerning organisational work, which is almost absent from the various training courses (*auxiliaires de puériculture*, *EJE*…) and tends to be delegated to the *crèche*, or to the personal choices of the heads. She notes the lesser autonomy of heads of municipal *crèches* compared with the parental *crèches*, the weight of managerial logic on the quality of work and the professional fatigue of heads and teams. She questions the procedure of requiring *crèches* to provide written documentation: Designed and used in very different ways, could it be an ersatz to the visibility of organisational work? She observes the importance of the place of heads in the organisation of the *crèche*, with different "styles of governance" based on their educational understandings and social and political ideologies: the staff of all *crèches* reported that they stay or leave depending on the work initiated by the head.

Implications: The author notes that training, referring to medical knowledge (for *auxiliaires de puériculture*), does not always make it possible to cope with the complexity of working with young children. Organisational work would seem to offer more resources to make their job better recognised. For the author, it is not the intrinsic complexity of the work that often produces fatigue or even the bitterness of a lack of recognition, but the lack of time reserved for collective work to reflect and experiment. Also, the training must "contribute to the development of thought in the professional space, as in the training space. Work can thus become a resource for training and the latter an opportunity to set this thought in motion, particulary by opening up new ways of seeing, acting and developing one's skills in, by and for work."

Observing and talking about the quality of work with young children

Source: Garnier 2020 (see *References* for full details)

Aim: To better understand professionalism as a process emerging from everyday practices.

Procedure: The study is based on previous comparative research (with G. Brougère, S. Rayna, and P. Rupin 2016) using a visual methodology. The author focuses on the ways of verbalising and the words used by the different professionals to describe their work with children aged 2–3 years in one centre in the childcare sector (one *crèche* for 0–3 year-olds) and two classes for 2 year-olds in the education sector, in *écoles maternelles* (one bridging class and a classical *toute petite section* class*)*. Participants: were one *EJE* and four *auxiliaires de puériculture* (staff of the 2-3 years old group, *crèche*); two part-time teachers and one *ATSEM (*staff of the *toute petite section class*, *école maternelle*); one teacher, one *EJE* and one *ATSEM* (staff of the the bridge class, *école maternelle*).

Selected findings: The study suggests what childcare teams and teachers do (or do not do), and what is (or is not) worth saying, to emphasise their work's importance or criticise it. The confrontation with the video concerning their settings and with the videos of the other settings shows differentiated relationships to the visibility and invisibility of work. For example, the visibility of the work with the teacher of the *toute petite section* consists in explaining what was done to get there (in the video) with the 2 year-olds and what is "behind" what children do (the teacher's "goals"); in the *crèches*, the teams insist on the quality of their professional "presence" at work. The diversity of terms rejected/chosen according to the categories of professionals marks the place of a specific "language culture". Words are more than a simple vocabulary used to label things, words are "action programmes", as argued by the author.

The edited volume compiled by Pierre Moisset (2019a) also explores different facets of the various professions and professionals of childcare: How do they enter the profession? What does childcare consist of? How do they live their occupation? The authors (researchers, trainers and professionals) discuss their important place in society and conditions for a better situation. Here are two examples which, among others, echo the contributions in the volume presented above:

The unique position of Auxiliary Paediatric Nurses

Source: Moisset 2019b (see *References* for full details)

Aims: To present the voices of *auxiliaire de puéricultures'* on their work in *crèches.*

Procedure: The study is based on a comparative research concerning the various professionals working in *crèches.* Using a questionnaire survey (939 participants, working in mostly public settings in 138 cities, with one half consisting of *puéricultrices* and the other half *EJE* and *auxiliaires de puériculture*) the author asked the professionals to describe the way they experienced their work, on the one hand with the children in the *crèches* and on the other hand with the team, the hierarchy, the parents.

Selected findings: Even though all the professionals express their fatigue and difficulties, the study shows that the *auxiliaires de puériculture* have a more disenchanted view of these two aspects of their work and their profession than the heads (*puériculteurs/puéricultrices* or *EJE*) and other qualified staff members. Thus, they more frequently describe their work as routine, boring and unrewarding, while declaring themselves more frequently stressed. Surprisingly, they are more pessimistic than professionals holding a *CAP PE*, for whom working in a *crèche* is a form of promotion and a way of accessing higher qualifications and, therefore, greater recognition. The author speaks of "the basin effect" among *auxiliaires de puériculture*, who come up

against a "glass ceiling", whereas with their experience, they feel competent to claim more responsibilities and latitude of action.

Implications: Rather than looking for alternative pathways such as the validation of acquired experience, allowing them to move towards the status of *EJE*, and so on, the author invites the participants to think about the recognition of their experience "without this going through new diplomas but by taking greater (and financially recognised...) responsibility within the *crèches*". He asks: "How to change the management of teams in *crèches* to give more possibilities and freedom of exercise to *auxiliaires de puericulture* and get them out of a position of exhausting and discriminating work routines in the long run".

Work organisation and working conditions in crèches

Source: Odena 2019 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: To identify the impact of three types of organisation on professionalisation, professional development prospects and/or the possibility of integration and participation in the team.

Procedure: The author draws on previous studies of the views of various qualified members of staff, mostly from 12 monographs on private *crèches* (with A.-M. Daune-Richard and F. Petrella 2007; Odena 2012) and 32 interviews in eight *crèches* – three associative, three private and two municipal – (Odena 2009).

Selected findings: In cases where the organisation of *crèches* is vertical and centralised (especially in the public or private sector), access to training is more hierarchical (easier for the most qualified personnel: *puériculteurs/puéricultrices, EJE*) and more fragmented (specific content for each category of staff), which is a source of frustration. In the private sector, training is more standardised, professionals suffer from not meeting other professionals. The associative sector, with a more horizontal organisation, is distinguished by training through projects, where all members of the team participate. These organisations impact the "making sense" of work organisation.

Creating bridges across sectors – quite an art!

Source*:* Péralès, Chandon-Coq, and Rayna (eds.) 2021 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: This edited volume, based on a shared process of practices analysis by voluntary staff (all categories), sustained by one researcher and two Early Childhood Coordinators (0–2 years) in charge of the municipal *crèches* of two Parisian *arrondissement*s, plus one Coordinator of the leisure-time sector, document the emergence and development of experiments of bridging activities launched by these coordinators in the context of the Paris' *PEDT (Paris territorial Educational Project)*.

Procedure: After making a picture of the history of shared activities, mixing children from *crèches, accueils périscolaires* and *écoles maternelles* (mainly the 2 and 3 year-olds) and their staff, in each *arrondissement* as well in the previous experience of the Coordinators, a series of multivocal stories constitute the essence of the book, making visible the collaborative procedures between staff, the evolutive and unique process and experience of each pair of settings, the whole dynamics and the supportive role of the Coordinators as well as staff from the culture sector in such often fragile and ephemeral projects, the creativity of the field, the rich experience of children, parents and professionals.

Selected findings: The collective writing experience, which required detailed observations, interviews with parents, as well as reflexive teamwork and partnership, and which helped to sustain the local network of ECEC settings and to valorise this field of work and its actors, contributed towards supporting and extending the process during and after the pandemic towards

more continuity and coherence in the life of the children attending ECEC collective settings in Paris simultaneously or successively.

Implications: New data continue to be provided concerning a smooth entry to school for 3 year-olds and reciprocal enrichment of professional practices, some of them are published in a professional journal (Benamer 2021; Jalet and Perez 2022; Soutra and Doucoure 2022; Benamer and Quémar 2023) as well as new experimentations in other *arrondissements* (Watanabe-Vermorel *et al.* 2022; Beauvois 2023), since the signature, including the Directorate in charge of the *crèches*, of the new *PEDT*.

Based on the same approach of documenting innovative experiences, another publication gives voice to both professionals of childcare and professionals of French museums which begin to open their doors to the under 3 year-olds, showing other ways of professionalisation of both kinds of staff as well as new ways for fighting the increasing cultural inequalities (Rayna 2022).

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

The French ECEC system, which suffers from old problems that the pandemic has aggravated, is facing many challenges. The tensions present among childcare professionals (Odena 2009) and others are indeed redoubled in the context of staff shortages and in the face of the tensions existing at the level of the policies and the paradigmatic choices which underlie them, within the overall developing process of the marketisation of early childhood.

The **first** and immediate challenge concerns reducing the shortage of personnel in all the three sectors, thus linking it to the **second** challenge, that of the quality of ECEC provision, which in turn is associated with the **third** challenge, the permeability between the three sectors.

These linked challenges require taking quantitative and qualitative measures: a substantial increase in remuneration, more appropriate initial and continuing training, an improvement in working conditions which, together, should help to upgrade the status of the work and the professions concerned. In a training market with training that is intermittent (therefore ineffective) and increasingly provided by the private sector (with questionable proposals), other forms of training should be taken into consideration. These would include a long-term approach, based on methods of action research, with recognised and competent trainers or partners from other sectors, such as artists; they would also include the form of study travel (Pirard, Rayna, and Brougère 2020) to broaden perspectives and strengthen the agency of professionals and thus the quality of ECEC, where too many staff are above all operative workers.

Shared training and activities between the three sectors need to be expanded. The task is immense in a country which continues to think of reform on a sectoral basis and not (yet) for the whole 0–6 period. Real progress should, in fact, go through a grouping and therefore a reduction in the number of professions, with a vision crossing and really unifying the three sectors. The new Prime Minister has recognised a childcare system out of breath and deeply unequal, the difficulties of schools and of the municipalities (for the out-of-school leisure-time periods). The Early Childhood Coordinators need to be (better) trained in their tasks. Teachers need to be provided with more knowledge of early childhood and appropriate practices for working with young children, their parents, professionals of the care sectors, with ways of coping with diversity (Garnier 2016), with ways of moving towards more social justice (Joigneaux 2009).

Huge efforts need to be made in bringing about a common and consistent training, especially in relation to welcoming diversities and disabilities, to bridging activities between the three sectors, or to achieving equality between girls and boys[8] which is lacking everywhere. The training of the trainers in each sector needs to be consolidated and include international perspectives. More research needs to be done on ECEC in order to inform policy makers more precisely, particularly about the necessity of CPD, as well as about innovative professionalising experiences or about the very invisible professionals such as those in charge of the individual support of children with disabilities, or about new and increasing collective settings still categorised as home-based provision (*Maisons d'assistances maternelles – MAM*).

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

FRANCE

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms chosen in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC settings are: **childcare centre** (*crèche collective*, 3 months–2 years)[1] and **pre-primary school** (*école maternelle,* 2–5)[2]. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in France

1770	Founding of the first centres for young children: the *écoles à tricoter* by Pastor Oberlin in Ban-de-la-Roche (Vosges)
1844	Establishment of the first *crèche* (childcare centre) in Paris by Firmin Marbeau
1826	The first *salles d'asile,* the forerunners of *écoles maternelles,* are founded in Paris for poor children. Ten years later there were 34 in Paris, and by 1935, 102 in the whole of France.
1848	Marie Pape Carpentier introduces a first separation from primary learning. After being director of a *salle d'asile* (in La Flèche, then Le Mans), she becomes the first director of a specific training centre for the heads of the *salles d'asile.*
1881	– *Salles d'asile,* renamed *écoles maternelles,* are integrated into the education system. Jules Ferry (Minister of Public Instruction) defines them as free of charge, secular and non- compulsory institutions. – Primary school teachers (trained in *Écoles normales d'institutrices*) replace the previous personnel in the *salles d'asile*. – *Écoles maternelles* continue to take in children from low social classes. – Pauline Kergomard, a general inspector of *écoles maternelles*, strongly defends play and the specificities of early learning.
1887	The training centres for teachers (*Écoles normales d'institutrices*) also include teachers for the *écoles maternelles.*
1905	With the development of the French Republican School (*l'École de la République*), private religious schools decline. Following the Law defining the separation between State and churches (Catholic and others), the State no longer pays for churches, priests etc., but private (mainly religious) schools continue to receive public funding if they have a contract with the State. Other private initiatives continue, but without public funding. Public *écoles maternelles* are free of charge (except for lunch and out-of-school hours).
1908	First curriculum introduced specifically for the *écoles maternelles.*
1910	Introduction of the first specialist inspectors for the *écoles maternelles* in each Département
1921	– Staff in *écoles maternelles* are given the same professional status as primary school teachers. – Creation of AGIEM (Association Générale des *Instituteurs d'École Maternelle*), the professional association of preschool teachers. – Revision of the preschool curriculum (the last until 1977)

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In the case of France, the relevant formats are **0–2** and **2/3–5** years, since children start the *école élémentaire* when they are 6 years old.

[2] To establish a degree of comparability between the SEEPRO-3 key contextual data reports, the term **pre-primary education** is used when referring in general to the *écoles maternelles* (2–5). In France, however, the *école maternelle* is integrated into the primary school for 2 to 11 year-olds (*école maternelle + école élémentaire = école primaire*).

Post 1945	Crèches, previously run by charitable organisations, are included in the state health system.
1975	– Entitlement to a place in pre-primary provision for 5 year-olds – Elected parents' committees are created in each *école maternelle.* – New regulations under the Minister of Health (Simone Veil) now allow parents, who were not authorised to enter *crèches'* rooms for hygienic reasons, to be admitted.
1977	New curricular objectives and methods are issued for the *école maternelle* and its three roles (education, early learning and care).
1980-83	Decentralisation moves – municipalities (*communes*) take over responsibility for crèche settings in cooperation with the state through the CAFs (*Caisses des allocations familiales*).
1986	*Contrat enfance* – state funding to provide diversification of crèche settings to meet family needs
1986	Orientations for the *école maternelle:* socialisation and early learning
1989	– Inclusion of the *écoles maternelles* in the 'primary school' *(école maternelle + école élémentaire)* – Definition of 3 cycles of learning from 2 to 12 (early learning cycle for pre-primary education) – Same training in university institutes for pre-primary and primary teachers, who are now called *professeurs des écoles* – Entitlement to a place in pre-primary provision extended to cover 3 and 4 year-olds, with priority of inclusion of 2 year-olds in disadvantaged zones – An inter-ministerial policy (Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Solidarities and Health) is launched to develop art and culture from birth (aims: democratisation of culture, fight against inequalities and exclusion, parental support, improvement of quality in care settings) through the collaboration of artists and practitioners of the culture sector with ECEC professionals and parents, with notably successful implementation.
1991	Another inter-ministerial policy (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Solidarities) launches classes and *actions passerelles* for bridging the care and education sectors. In reality this was not supported by the Ministry of Education, since its priorities at the time were the integration of *écoles maternelles* in the *école primaire*, the new school curriculum (2–12) with the implementation of the cycles of learning, assessments of children, the new common initial professional education/training for teachers of both schools.
1995	Curriculum for 'primary school' *(école maternelle + école élémentaire).* The *école maternelle* is presented as the foundation stage of the education system and as preparing for school.
2000	A new Decree recognises the educational role of crèches and parental participation.
2002	New curriculum for the *école maternelle* (within primary school): focus on language acquisition Assessment of children's learning (according to the curriculum)
2008	Revised national curriculum for *écoles maternelles*
2010	A new decree introduces flexibility in the care sector.
2013	Revised version of the 2008 curriculum for *écoles maternelles.* Play reappears as well as parents' participation and specific attention is given to 2 year-olds. Since 2013 municipalities are obliged to develop a local educational plan *(Projet Educatif De Territoire – PEDT*) towards more continuity in the diverse educational experiences of children and young people, during school hours and out of school hours, including children in *écoles maternelles.* Some municipalities (for instance Paris) also include children under 3 and support the development of *actions passerelles* (shared experiences) between *crèches* and *écoles maternelles.*
2016	Sylviane Giampino's report (*Développement du jeune enfant, modes d'accueil, formation des professionnels*) (Child development, care services, professionals' training) proposes 108 recommendations for the care sector.

2017	Based on Giampino's report: – The Ministry of Families, Childhood and Women's Right launches a *Cadre national pour l'accueil du jeune enfant,* with 10 principles. – The inter-ministerial policy on art and culture for young children was re-launched by the Ministry of Culture and Communication and the Ministry of Families, Childhood and Women's Rights.
2019	Law endorsing compulsory attendance for 3 to 5 year-olds in the *école maternelle* comes into force.
2020	– From 2020, Ministry of Culture and Ministries of Solidarities and Health participate in the National Strategy of Prevention and the Fight Against Poverty, launched in 2019, by stimulating and supporting actions, training etc. – Linked to the National Strategy (Poverty), the three ministries also participate in promting actions within the framework of the "chantier des 1000 premiers jours", which includes care services.
2021	The Decree on care settings (August 2021) regulates both *crèches* and home-based providers and adopts the *Charte nationale pour l'accueil du jeune enfant* as first curricular orientation for both. The decree introduces some deregulation in the staffing ratios, depending on the size of crèches.
2022	A "public service for early childhood" (*service public de la petite enfance- SPPE*) is one of President Macron's campaign commitments. After a consultation phase with key stakeholders, a National Council for the Refoundation of Early Childhood (*conseil national de refondation sur la petite enfance – CNR)* is established by the Ministry of Solidarity, Autonomy and Disabled Persons.
2023	– January: Ministry of National Education and Youth affairs launches a new plan for the *école maternelle* (*Plan maternelle*) aiming for children's "success" and "flourishing" based on training, more continuity in ECEC, relationships with parents and the transition to primary school. – June: Prime Minister E. Borne announces the SPPE: 5.5 billion euros for 100,000 places in *crèches* by 2027 (target: 200,000 places in 2030): confirmation of municipalities and intermunicipalities as organising authorities within the framework of "a national strategy set by order of the Minister for the Family which determines in particular the priorities and multi-annual national objectives in terms of the quantitative and qualitative development of ECEC provision and training for early childhood professionals", with Departmental Family Services Committees (CDSF) responsible for monitoring the multi-year plan for the reception offer of the municipalities.

Sources: Luc 1994; Bennett and Moss 2010; Bouve 2010; Garnier 2016; Willekens and Scheiwe 2020

ECEC system type and auspices[3]

Early childhood education and care in France for children up to school entry at the age of 6 years is a so-called 'split' system, regulated by different jurisdictions. The centralised French education system, of which pre-primary education (*écoles maternelles*) for (2)3 to under 6 year-olds is a part, comes under the auspices of the Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs (*Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, MENJ*).

Educational institutions, both pre-primary and primary, are state-maintained, i.e. publicly funded and organised. Government responsibilities include provision for the continuing professional development of ECEC staff, curriculum content and inspections regarding quality and administration.

[3] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in France provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are indicated within the text and in the references section.

ECEC provision for children under 2/3 years of age (*l'accueil du jeune enfant*) is not part of the education system and, since 2022, comes under the jurisdiction of two ministries: the Ministry of Health and Prevention (*Ministère de la Santé et de la Prévention, MSP)* and the Ministry of Solidarity, Autonomy and Disabled Persons (*Ministère des Solidarités, de l'Autonomie et des Personnes handicapées, MSAP)*. Decentralisation moves in the early 1980s led to the municipalities (*communes*) taking over local responsibility for the provision for under 3 year-olds, in cooperation with the state through the CAFs (*Caisses des Allocations familiales*). This was followed by a diversification of the traditional centre-based childcare settings (see section on *Main types of provision*).

General objectives and legislative framework

The overall system of early childhood education and care has been strongly influenced by two divergent philosophies: that of child protection and paramedical care in the provision for under 3 year-olds, and school dominance in the pre-primary education for 3 to 6 year-olds. These traditions still permeate the system, although more educational and family-related approaches have been finding their way into the various forms of provision for under 3 year-olds.

The Preamble to the French Constitution of 1946 states that it is a duty of the state to organise free, public and secular education at all levels (§13). The main aim of pre-primary education in the *écoles maternelles* is to support children in realising their full potential and to prepare them for school. A strong emphasis is placed on language acquisition and development and it is seen as the first stage in the process of mastering the basic skills of reading, writing, counting and respecting others (Ministry of National Education, Youth Affairs and Sport 2021).

Each child's entitlement to early childhood education and the duties of pre-primary institutions are to be found in the Education Act (*Loi d'orientation sur l'éducation*, 1989, with amendments), in the Law on the Restructuring of the School System (*Loi d'orientation et de programmation pour la refondation de l'École de la République,* 2013*)* and in the Law for a School of Trust (*Loi pour une école de la confiance,* 2019). A recent *Plan maternelle* (Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs 2023) aiming for children's 'success' and 'blossoming' places a focus on training (all levels), continuity within ECEC, relationships with parents and the transition to primary school.

Childcare centres *(crèches collectives)* were legally bound by the 2010 Decree on Facilities and Care Services for Children under 6 years of age, which focused primarily on health and safety standards. The 2022 Decree (31 August; Ministry of Health and Prevention and Ministry of Solidarity, Autonomy and Disabled persons 2022 currently regulates both childcare centres and home-based childcare providers. Some deregulation (due to the lack of personnel) coexists with the introduction of the first curricular orientations (*Charte Nationale pour l'accueil du jeune enfant*), including eight principles concerning the children's well-being and two others concerning personal well-being, proposed as curricular framework since 2017 (Ministry for Families, Children and Women's Rights 2017), as well as the support of artistic and cultural education (MCC & MFCWR 2017). From 2020, Ministry of Culture and Ministries of Solidarities and Health participate in the National Strategy of Prevention and the Fight Against Poverty, launched in 2019, by stimulating and supporting actions, training etc. Linked to the National Strategy (Poverty), the three ministries also participate in prompting actions within the framework of the "*chantier des 1000 premiers jours"* [construction site of the first 1000 days], which includes care services (Ministry of Solidarities and Health 2020).

After a consultation phase, Prime Minister E. Borne announces on June 1st 2023, the creation of a public service for early childhood (*service public de la petite enfance- SPPE*), which was part of

President Macron's campaign commitments – at the crossroads of policies supporting the birth rate, of full employment, of equality between women and men and of equal opportunities from an early age. This project takes into account recommendations of SCFCA's three reports (2023 a, b, c), and from a General Inspectorate of Social Affairs report (Bohic et al 2023) on quality of care and prevention of abuse in crèches.

The announced SPPE pledges 5.5 billion euros for 100,000 places in crèches for 2027 (target: 200,000 places in 2030).

- The municipalities and inter-municipalities are confirmed as organising authorities, within the framework of "a national strategy set by order of the Minister for the Family which determines in particular the priorities and multi-annual national objectives in terms of the quantitative and qualitative development of ECEC provision and training for early childhood professionals".
- Departmental Family Services Committees (CDSF) are to be responsible for monitoring the multi-year plan for the services offered by the municipalities.
- In the event of difficulties, the CAFs can intervene to guarantee the opening of new places.

Further policy goals are

- To increase the number (and tasks) of *Relais Petite Enfance RPE* (one per municipality of more than 10,000 inhabitants) and *crèches* supporting the target of integrating 1,000 settings
- Support for local initiatives against the non-use of childcare facilities
- The development of various flexible facilities for child early socialisation before *école maternelle*.

The four axes to improve quality are:

(1) Staff training (a common basis); a national research programme on child development to "enrich training"; increase in hours of practice analyses; obligation of pedagogical days

(2) Micro-crèches: increase in the number of professionals and financing of quality-improvement projects

(3) Increased quality controls

(4) To increase the attractiveness of the professions and reduce staff shortages; creating an observatory of professions and the quality of life at work; increasing the training offer (involvement of the Regions); increasing wages.

Discussions are under way about the new law on full employment which includes an article with the above-mentioned measures for childcare and about the 2023-2027 agreement regarding the management of State objectives by the CNAFs.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Since the Law for a School of Trust came into force in July 2019, attending an *école maternelle* has been compulsory from the age of 3. This means children not only have a right but a duty to receive "instruction". In the official text it is "instruction" which is compulsory, not attendance, although home schooling is rare; parents have to be granted permission and very few children experience home instruction.

Children under 3 years of age do not have an entitlement to ECEC and enrolment is voluntary. Primary school (*école élémentaire*) starts at age 6.

Main types of provision

Childcare sector

Childcare centres (*crèches*) in both public and private ownership accept children from the age of 2–3 months up to the age of 3. In order to open a facility for under-threes, approval is needed by the regional Maternal and Child Protection services (*Protection maternelle et Infantile, PMI*) based on meeting the required standards regarding health and safety. The recent report of the General Inspection of Social Affairs (Bohic et al. 2023) recommends the creation of posts of Pedagogical Counsellors in PMI (as well in municipalities).

Also included are the non-profit childcare settings founded by parent initiatives (***crèches parentales***) where parents take it in turn to care for up to 20 children under the age of 3. The most recent Decree (Ministry of Solidarity and Health 2021, 31 August) categorises *crèches collectives* according to their size: *micro-crèches* (max. 12 places), *petites crèches* (13–24 places), *crèches* (25–39 places), *grandes crèches* (40–59 places) and *très grandes crèches*.

These various forms of provision for under-threes are generally open from the beginning of September till the beginning of August (in a number of cities, some groups remain open during August). Daily opening hours are decided by the provider and services are usually available from 8:00 till 19:00.

Kindergartens (*jardins enfants*) are a kind of complementary facility to the *écoles maternelles*. They take up to 80 children aged 2 to 6 years. Although there are some municipal centres, these are mostly non-profit private centres (*jardins d'enfants associatifs*) which offer long opening hours similar to those of the childcare centres. They are staffed by qualified *éducatrices/éducateurs*, who introduce the children to educational activities. This type of institution, which exists only in some cities, will be abolished in 2024, due to the compulsory instruction. After that they can be transformed into *crèches*.

Multi-functional centres (*structures/établissements multi-accueil*) are *crèches* which provide more flexible care arrangements: alongside regular full-day places these can also be part-time or sessional arrangements within the same setting. They aim to accommodate the diverse needs of families, and to meet more specifically the needs of single parents, of parents looking for a job, and of parents working atypical hours.

Sessional care facilities (*halte-garderies*) for children up to age 3 are organised by local authorities or non-profit service providers. They are mostly used on a short-term basis by working parents, more rarely on an hourly basis by parents not working in the labour market. They can be linked with the *multi-accueil* settings.

Home-based childcare settings are the main form of ECEC provision for a maximum of four under 3 year-olds. They are provided by approved Childcare Workers (*assistant(e)s maternel(le)s agréé(e)s*) who are registered with the district authorities. Their employers are the parents. They can work alone, group themselves in associations and participate to activities with the children proposed by ***Relais petite enfance (RPE)*** (previous name: *Relais assistante maternelle),* a kind of resource hub which offers support and *accompagnement* (as well providing families with information about the various care settings in the area). Recently, a new form of full-time collective care arrangement known as *MAM* (*Maisons d'assistantes maternelles*) has been established, whereby two to four Childcare Workers are authorised to work together and care for "their" four children in accommodation outside their own homes, which they can rent or buy or which may be allocated by the municipality in the smaller cities.

Family crèche networks (*crèches familiales*) comprise several approved childcare workers and take up to a maximum of 150 children. The *crèches familiales* employ approved home-based childcare providers who welcome children to their home for part of the day and make regular

use of a centre-based setting for different activities. This type of setting is supervised and managed in the same way as *crèches collectives* (Eurydice 2022).

Open-door services (*lieux d'accueil enfants parents* – LAEP), which are similar to the *lieux de rencontre* in Belgium or the *CBF (centro bambini e famiglie*) in Italy, are municipal or associative settings for parents and children – and sometimes home-based Childcare Workers (if there is no RPE in the area). They are open on certain days of the week and admit under 3 year-olds together with a parent or guardian, aiming to support parents in the socialisation of young children before they enter the *écoles maternelle.* They are attended mainly by children who are not enrolled in a regular care setting.

In some sparsely populated areas there are **mobile services** (*services itinerants*) which provide materials for smaller settings.

Education sector

Pre-primary schools (*écoles maternelles*) are the main form of provision for children between 3 and 6 years of age and since September 2019 instruction has been mandatory for this age group. The children are usually organised into same-age classes divided into *la petite section* (2 and 3 year-olds), *la moyenne section* (4 year-olds) and *la grande section* (5 year-olds). A *toute petite section* (2 year-olds) may exist in some cities.

The school year starts at the beginning of September and ends at the beginning of July. The *écoles maternelles* are open for 24 hours a week: either 6 hours a day on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays or for nine half-days (including Wednesday mornings).

In 2022, the number of pre-primary settings in France totalled 12,881 (RERS 2023, 27).

Bridge classes in pre-primary schools (*classes passerelles in écoles maternelles*) for 2 year-olds are not the *toutes petites sections* mentioned above. In a *classe passerelle* three adults work together: an Educator (*EJE*), a Primary Teacher and a Classroom Assistant (*agent territorial spécialisé des écoles maternelles – ATSEM*). The group size is lower than in the *toutes petites sections*. This kind of provision has been established in disadvantaged areas for children who have not previously attended a care setting.

The idea behind this early schooling for 2 year-olds (*scolarisation précoce*) is to offer a publicly maintained and accessible service in order to pursue the objective of promoting equal opportunities from the earliest age. In 2016, the government launched an information campaign for families, mobilising the CAFs, to accelerate the education of children under 3 years of age, the various partners concerned (local education authorities, municipalities, PMI, family allowance funds, associations) having to co-operate regularly in order to raise awareness among the most vulnerable families of the benefits of early schooling and to inform them of places available near their homes (Gouvernement 2016).

Children's groups in primary schools are available for 5 year-olds in rural areas. If there are enough places, 4 year-olds may also attend. Sometimes these children's groups cooperate to enable the founding of an *école maternelle* and the children are transported there.

Provider structures

The greater majority of ECEC provision in France for children aged 0 to 5 years is state-maintained or state-subsidised. In terms of provision for 3 to 5 year-olds, a total of 12,881 *écoles maternelles* were publicly run in 2022, whereas only 43 were private, most of which were state subsidised. Overall, only 13.3% of children attended a private institution in 2022; at 26.2%, the

share of 2 year-olds was the largest (see *Table 1*). Only 0.9% of children were enrolled in non-subsidised private institutions in 2020 (RERS 2023, 29, 75, 84).

Table 1

France: Number of children in pre-primary schools (*pré-élémentaire*) by age and provider, 2022

	Public	Private	Share of children in private (total) settings in %*	Total
2 year-olds	53,692	19,076	26.2	72,768
3 year-olds	639,175	94,535	12.9	733,710
4 year-olds	656,056	97,682	13.0	753,738
5 year-olds	670,718	99,579	12.9	770,297
Total	**2,019,641**	**310,872**	**13.3**	**2,330,513**

Source: RERS 2023, 75, *own calculations

Participation rates in regulated provision

Childcare sector

Home-based ECEC provided by approved childcare providers remained the predominant form of provision (54% of the provision). Institutional settings (childcare centres, micro-crèches, family crèches and parental crèches) are the second largest contributor, providing places for 35% of children under 3 years of age (+19 %-points compared to 2013). *Écoles maternelles* are the third largest contributor, providing places for 5% of under 3 year-olds (SCFCA 2023, 63).

Table 2

France: Places for children under 3 years of age in regulated ECEC provision, 2020

Setting	Number of places
External home-based childcare provision	710,500
Childcare provision in parental home	46,900
Childcare centre (*crèche collectif/familial/parental, micro-crèche*)	479,000
Pre-primary school (*école maternelle*)	71,200
Total	**1,307,600**

Source: SCFCA 2023, 63

According to Eurostat data, the enrolment rates of under 3 year-olds attending a centre-based ECEC setting increased considerably between 2005 and 2022 – from 32% to 56.2%. The high participation rate of children aged 3 up to school entry remained at the high level of more than 90% (see *Table 3*).

Table 3

France: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	16	56
	Over 30 hours	16	39
	No enrolment in ECEC	68	5
2010	1 to 29 hours	17	47
	Over 30 hours	26	47

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
	No enrolment in ECEC	58	6
2015	1 to 29 hours	16.0	36.9
	Over 30 hours	25.7	56.7
	No enrolment in ECEC	58.2	6.4
2022	1 to 29 hours	18.7	32.3
	Over 30 hours	37.5	61.4
	No enrolment in ECEC	43.7	6.3

Source: Eurostat 2023b, deviations in the sums due to rounding

Education sector (ISCED 02)

In 2022, 2,231,383 children aged 3 to under 6 years attended a pre-primary education setting. According to national statistics, 9.9% of 2 year-olds attended an *école maternelle*, whereas nearly all 3- to under 6-year olds were enrolled (see *Table 4*).

Table 4

France: Number and enrolment rates of children attending *écoles maternelles* by age, 2022

Age groups	Number of children	Enrolment rate, in %
2 year-olds	69,978	9.9
3 year-olds	726,257	98.0
4 year-olds	746,007	100.0
5 year-olds	759,119	100.0
3 to 5 year-olds	**2,231,383**	**99.7**

Source: RERS 2023, 73, 75

Financing and costs for parents

According to OECD data, total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 1.29% of GDP in 2020, 0.6% allocated to childcare and 0.7% to pre-primary education (OECD 2023).

Centre-based **childcare** settings generally receive subsidies from the Family Allowance Fund (*Caisse d'Allocations familiales*) which partly cover running costs. Additionally, parents pay income-related monthly fees. In 2017, for example, a dual-income family earning two minimum wages paid a monthly fee of €133 for a place in a crèche (Eurydice 2023).

The running costs of the ***écoles maternelles*** are generally covered by the municipalities, which are primarily responsible for buildings and equipment, whereas the State, the Ministry of Education, is responsible for staff salaries. Attendance is free of charge, but meals or additional childcare arrangements have to be paid by the parents. Municipalities may apply income-related sliding fee scales. The fees are minimal in private subsidised pre-primary settings.

Parents who choose family day care as their preferred form of provision receive a monthly child care allowance which varies according to the status of the family day carer, the child's age and the parents' disposable income.

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 10% of net household income on childcare costs (OECD.Stat 2023).[4]

Staff to child ratios and group size

The maximum number of children in any one form of provision in the childcare sector is regulated according to the specific setting. *Crèches* generally have no more than 60 places, *micro-crèches* a maximum of 9 places, parental crèches a maximum of 20 places which can be expanded to 25 in exceptional conditions, kindergartens a maximum of 80 places, and family crèche networks a maximum of 150 places (Eurydice 2023).

The trend towards smaller classes also continued in the 2022 school year: the national average was 22 children per class in public settings and 24.9 in private settings (overall: 22.4) (DEPP 2023, 48).

Curricular frameworks

Childcare sector

In 2017, a "National Framework for the Care of Young Children" (*Cadre national pour l'accueil du jeune enfant* was published by the Ministry for Families, Children and Women's Rights (Ministry for Families, Children and Women's Rights 2017). It provides guidelines for working with under 3 year-olds, both in home-based and centre-based childcare settings. This first curricular framework was introduced in the national regulation in 2021 (Decree 31 August 2021, Ministry of Solidarity and Health 2021). Based on the principles in the guidelines, each childcare setting develops its own pedagogical programme which has to be approved by the *département* authorities for maternal and child protection. The *PMI* is required to verify the process through compulsory visits to the setting.

In order to facilitate the transition for 2 or 3 year-olds to the *école maternelle*, collaboration between families, childcare staff and teachers in the *école maternelle* at the local level is recommended in the recent action plan published by the Ministry of National Education and Youth Affairs (2023).

Education sector

The first official curriculum for the *école maternelle* was published in 1908 – decades before most other European countries. In recent years, the mandatory guidelines have been regularly revised, the last edition of the new curriculum being published in 2021 (Ministry of National Education, Youth Affairs and Sport 2015, 2021).

The French primary school curriculum is organised around three cycles – the 'cycle of early learning' (*cycle des apprentissages premiers*) for pre-primary education and the two other cycles for primary education.

The 'cycle of early learning' includes five specific areas of learning: (1) mobilising language in all its dimensions – oral and written; (2) acting, expressing oneself, understanding through physical activity; (3) acting, expressing oneself, understanding through artistic activities; (4) learning to think in a structured way; (5) exploring the world. For each of these learning areas the curriculum

[4] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

provides a general definition and educational objectives in order to support effective progress in learning.

Expected outcomes at the end of the *école maternelle* are formulated for each of the five dimensions. For example, for the first dimension (oral and written language), it is expected that each child is able to (Ministry of National Education, Youth Affairs and Sport 2021):

- Communicate with adults and other children through language, making themselves understood
- Express themselves in syntactically correct and precise language and rephrase to be better understood
- Practise various uses of oral language: telling, describing, evoking, explaining, ask questions, suggest solutions, discuss a point of view
- Recite several rhymes and poems from memory and in an expressive way
- Understand written texts with no other help than the language heard
- Demonstrate curiosity about the written word. Be able to repeat the words of a written sentence after being read by an adult, the words of the known title of a book or text
- Participate verbally in the production of a written document. Know that writing is not the same as speaking
- Identify regularities in oral language in French (possibly in another language),
- Manipulate syllables
- Discriminate between sounds (syllables, vowel sounds)
- Recognise the letters of the alphabet and know the correspondences between the three ways of writing them: cursive, script, block capitals. Copy using a keyboard
- Write their first name in cursive, without a model
- Write a word on their own using letters or groups of letters borrowed from known words.

Digital education

There are indications in the national pre-primary curriculum that digital technology should be integrated into the children's learning experiences. For example, in the 'language' dimension of the curriculum it is recommended that children contact each other using digital tools (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 100).

Since 2015, children are thus required to know how to use digital media which, "like other media, have their place in the *école maternelle* provided that the objectives and their methods of use are supporting a learning activity" (Ministry of National Education, Youth Affairs and Sport 2015) For the cycle of early learning, this includes the learning areas of language (practice transcribing known words, sentences, short texts and entering them on the computer) and digital arts as well as exploration of the world (learning to manipulate a computer mouse, using a digital tablet, etc.).

Documents accompanying the curriculum, for example those issued by the Rennes Academy (2015), offer some guidelines and indicate the potentials and precautions, e.g. "Real and concrete manipulations are essential"; "Digital should never replace the relationship"; "Handling digital tools allows children to acquire work habits that they can transfer".

Monitoring – evaluation

Child-related assessment

There are no national regulations for the assessment of children under the age of 3. Ongoing observations are loosely based on the National Framework for the Reception of Young Children (2017) and the staff team meets regularly to discuss practices.

In the *écoles maternelles*, teaching staff monitor each child's progress against the expected outcomes in each of the five learning dimensions of the pre-primary curriculum. Observations are documented in written form (and are passed on to other settings if the child changes school). A report for each child has to be produced annually, accompanied by a kind of school report (*livret scolaire)* which follows the child through to the end of primary school. At the end of the final year in pre-primary education, a summary of each child's achievements is made according to a national framework of criteria set out in a decree from December 2015. Competences in each of the five learning areas are assessed according to three categories: no success as yet; on the way to success; often succeeds.

Centre-level assessment

There are no regulations or recommendations for centre-level assessment in childcare services for the under 3 year-olds. However, they make take place and focus on topics such as teamwork, the quality of leadership, staff satisfaction with working conditions, and parental satisfaction.

In the *écoles maternelles*, staff are expected to evaluate their own setting-specific programme aligned to the national curriculum for pre-primary education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 126).

External evaluation

The Ministry for Solidarity and Health is responsible for the inspection of **childcare settings** for under 3 year-olds, which is delegated to the local child protection services. Besides assessments of the buildings, equipment and hygiene and safety requirements, staff qualifications are also checked as well as the specific working conditions. Evaluations are conducted primarily through visits.

In the French education system, external evaluations are compulsory The Ministry of Education is responsible for the inspection of the ***écoles maternelles,*** which is organised by local educational authorities. Inspections fall under the responsibility of two inspectorates: the General Inspectorate of National Education (*Inspection Générale de l'Education Nationale,* IGEN) and the General Inspectorate of Educational Administration and Research (IGAENR). The Directorate of Evaluation, Prospective Planning and Performance (*Direction de l'Evaluation, de la Prospective et de la Performance, DEPP)* is responsible for educational statistics, conducting evaluations of school achievements and developing criteria for staff self-assessment.

Evaluations focus on curriculum content, teaching methods and learning. Management and staff are also assessed. The heads of the *écoles maternelles* are responsible for producing an annual report which is submitted to the local authorities. The frequency of inspections is not generally regulated, but they usually take place every two or three years. The results are rarely publicised. There is no standardised protocol for the external evaluation of pre-primary education, although the Ministry of Education provides indicators (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 126).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

– *Childcare sector*

Children under 3 years of age with disabilities can access mainstream childcare services (Decree 2005-1752). There is no legal obstacle to admitting a child with disabilities into *crèches*. Refusal to do so can constitute discrimination or a breach of equality in the delivery of public services (EASNIE 2021). If necessary, the admission of a young child with disabilities can be supported by a medical-educational service, the child and maternal protection service (PMI) or even by a hospital service. When a child's health requires specific or serious medical care, it is also possible to admit them to a childcare centre offering medical services (EASNIE 2021).

Regional centres for persons with disabilities (*Maisons départementales des personnes handicapées, MDPH*) were founded in 2005. A multi-disciplinary team (medical doctors, therapists, etc.) assesses the specific needs of the child in question and proposes an individual educational plan in close collaboration with the parents.

Since 2019, all childcare settings caring for at least one child with a recognised disability are eligible for the 'disability inclusion bonus'. The bonus is capped at 1,300 € per place. It is intended to cover extra costs such as staff training or special equipment. About a quarter of places in crèches benefited from this bonus in 2019 (European Commission 2021, 107).

In 2020, the association *Ebullescence* launched a network of specially designed and equipped inclusive ECEC settings to cater for the special needs of children aged 18 months to 6 years old with neurodevelopmental disorders (cerebral palsy, autism, motor or language disorder). A special focus will be given to daily meetings between the specialist staff involved, as well as close co-operation with the parents (European Commission 2021, 112).

– *Education sector (ISCED 02)*

In the education sector, children under 6 years of age with (special educational needs and) disabilities are mostly included in mainstream settings, or may have a place in an 'inclusion class' (*Unité localisée pour l'inclusion scolaire, ULIS*). Children with disabilities are enrolled in public or private pre-primary settings as a priority. Help from external support services can be arranged. The law also provides for enrolment in specialised settings, either for a specific length of time or through the education process (EASNIE 2021).

In 2022/23, a total of 30,372 children under 6 years with disabilities attended a mainstream pre-primary class and only 157 an inclusion class. The number of children in the inclusion classes increases significantly according to the age of the children. The majority of ULIS-groups (94%) are located in publicly run *écoles maternelles* and schools.

Table 5

France: Number of children under 6 years *(premier degré)* **with (special educational needs and) disabilities according to age and type of ECEC provision, 2022/23**

	Regular class	Inclusion class
	Number of children	Number of children
2 and 3 year-olds	4,056	16
4 year-olds	10,270	64
5 year-olds	16,046	77
Total number of children	**30,372**	**157**

Source: RERS 2023, 81

Children with a migration background

In 2022, over 7.8% of the total population in France were of non-French origin of whom roughly two thirds (72%) came from countries outside the EU27. In the age group of the under-fives there were 9.7% children with a non-French citizenship, of whom a good 80% came from non-EU27 countries (Eurostat 2023c).

Children who are new arrivals to France are included in mainstream classes in *écoles maternelles* and schools. No special language tuition is provided for children with a background of migration but the pre-primary curriculum has a strong focus on language enhancement and development in general.

A 2014 study on access to *crèches* briefly mentions: "collective childcare facilities for young children seem to favour a mix of migratory origins", although this criterion is not elaborated on. The children of mothers of non-French nationality who are not cared for at home are more likely to be enrolled in a *crèche* than those born to French parents. This is also the case for the children of immigrant mothers. This could also be due to a stronger desire on the part of the latter to use this type of structure. The migratory origin of the father seems to matter less, showing that the characteristics of the mother seem more decisive than those of the father for the granting of a place in a *crèche* (Le Bouteillec et al. 2014). Since schooling is compulsory from the age of 3, children with a migration background are obliged to attend an *école maternelle* (or be taught at home) from that age, as are all other children in France.

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Compulsory **Maternity leave** *(congé de maternité)* is fully paid for 16 weeks up to a monthly limit of €3,666. At least two weeks must be taken before the expected date of birth.

Paternity leave *(congé d'accueil à l'enfant)* is granted for 25 fully paid working days under the same conditions as maternity leave; these must be taken within the six months following the child's birth. Only 60% of fathers took paternity leave, although the figure is as high as 98% in the middle income brackets.

Parental leave *(congé parental)* can be taken up by both parents – also at the same time – up to the child's third birthday. A monthly allowance (*PreParE*) is paid of €422.21 if the parent is not working, €272.94 if working less than 50% and €157.45 if working 50 to 80%. A monthly income and working hours related tax-free allowance (*PreParE*) is paid. *PreParE* is paid up to a maximum of six months per parent of a single child following maternity leave, with two or more children it is paid until the child is 3 years old, for a maximum of 24 months. When taking Parental leave, parents may work for 16 to 32 hours per week. Parents can take part-time Parental leave simultaneously and receive benefit at the same time from the *PreParE*, but the total amount of payment cannot exceed €398,79.

There are no national statistical data about the uptake of parental leave. However, research studies suggest that in 2021 approximately 98-99% of those taking parental leave are mothers. 52% of recipients of *PreParE* did not work at all, 48% worked part time.

[5] The brief summary in this section is based on the country note for France by Danielle Boyer and Jeanne Fagnini in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in France

*Country expert assessment by **Sylvie Rayna***

Challenges facing the ECEC system in France remain similar to those documented in the previous SEEPRO study (Rayna 2018). A central issue is the strong division between the care and education systems. It remains to be seen whether the new recent 'light-touch' attempts towards more continuity (e.g. through the initiatives and *classes passerelles*) will be further developed in the coming years.

Another continuing challenge is the absence of an early years specialisation in the initial professional education (IPE) of Pre-primary Teachers. There is currently no sign of a change to amend this. Some progress is being made regarding the IPE of the diverse practitioners in the care sector, but this still remains limited. There are no signs of introducing a specialist training for Early Childhood Coordinators.

Equality issues concerning access to care provision also remain significant as well as the ongoing privatisation tendencies (linked with less quality).

The discourse of 'social investment' in early childhood and 'evidenced based' rhetoric have penetrated recent policies of the *CNAF: Caisses nationales d'Allocations familiales*, linked to the aim of developing parental support, social cohesion, and the fight against poverty. Current debates are highlighting the tensions underlying such trends.

Demographic data

***Please note:** For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the population in France totalled 67,871,925. This represents a steady rise over the past 20 years (2000: 60,545,022; 2010: 64,658,856; 2020: 67,320,216) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13) (Eurostat 2023d)[6].

[6] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Children under 6 years of age

Table 6
France: Number of children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age	Number of children
under 1 year-olds	696,229
1 year-olds	695,404
2 year-olds	715,241
3 year-olds	725,778
4 year-olds	743,186
5 year-olds	766,394
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**4,342,232**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 3.1% of the total population were children under the age of 3, and 6.4% were children under 6 years of age. The share of young children in the total population has been significantly above the EU average for more than 20 years.

Table 7
France: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population from 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison France/EU	Under 3 year- olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	**France**	3.7	3.7	7.4
	∅ EU15[7]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	**France**	3.7	3.8	7.5
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	**France**	3.5	3.7	7.3
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	**France**	3.1	3.3	6.4
	∅ EU27	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, the greater majority of households in France (84.2%) with children under 6 years of age were couple households. Households headed by a single parent accounted for 6.9% of all households, the larger majority being single mother households (5.9%).

Table 8
France: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Total households, in %*
All households	6,246,400	
Couple households	5,260,300	84.2

[7] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Other household type	553,200	8.9
Single households, total	432,900	6.9
Single households, women	365,800	5.9
Single households, men	67,100	1.1

Source: Eurostat 2023i, *own calculation, slight deviations in the sums due to rounding

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In France, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 76.6% and for women 70.6% (Eurostat 2023e).

In 2022, 68.4% of women and 88.9% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were slightly above the EU-average (87.2%) and those of mothers were more clearly above the EU-average (63.6%) (Eurostat 2023h, own calculations).

Table 9a

France: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
France	65,0	88,3
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[8]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
France	68.4	88.9
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[9]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech. Rep.: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023h

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 9b.*

Table 9b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023

[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023h

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[10]

In 2022, 28.3% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was significantly above the EU27 average (23,3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 21% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 6.8% of children under 6 and 3.8% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023 f, g). Single parent families (41%) and families with three or more children (29.1%) were particularly affected (Eurochild 2021).

In 2021, a national training plan was launched as part of the national poverty strategy, which is primarily intended to improve the qualifications of ECEC professionals.

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[10] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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GERMANY

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the authors

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1. (E)CEC[1] governance in Germany

In the Federal Republic of Germany, early childhood education and care settings for children up to compulsory schooling at age 6 are part of the child and youth welfare system. The decision to exclude kindergartens from the public education system was made some 100 years ago, when the Imperial Youth Welfare Act 1922 (*Reichsjugendwohlfahrtsgesetz*) assigned them to the welfare sector (Franke-Meyer 2024). With the exception of the 40-year post-war era, when kindergartens in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) were part of the public education system, this decision has been maintained up to the present day.

Federalism and subsidiarity are core political and organisational concepts underpinning the structures, legislation, regulation and funding of early childhood education and care in Germany. The subsidiarity principle evolved over time from the traditional provider structures in the social welfare sector. According to this principle, public authorities are only obliged to provide social services if non-governmental agencies are unable to do so, and this is still the case today for roughly two-thirds of ECEC provision. Childhood care and education services (*Kindertagesbetreuung*) in Germany comprises not only centre-based *early childhood* settings (nurseries, kindergartens, mixed-age centres) and home-based ECEC provision, but also out-of-school education and care services for school-age children. Collectively, centre-based services are called *Kindertageseinrichtungen*[2].

In the context of federal and decentralised administrative structures, responsibilities for the ECEC system are shared between the federal government (*Bund*), the regional parliaments of the 16 federal states (*Länder*) and local government bodies – in partnership with voluntary, non-governmental child and youth welfare provider organisations (*Freie Träger der Jugendhilfe*), which receive state subsidies in order to carry out their function independently.

At the **federal level** the main responsibility lies with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (*Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend*), which by law has a 'stimulatory competence'. At the **regional level**, youth authorities (*Landesjugendbehörden*) in the 16 federal states (*Länder*), which are usually located within the respective Ministry of Social Affairs or Ministry of Education, implement federal legislative requirements and regulate issues not included in the federal law. At the **local level** the municipalities (districts, towns, boroughs) are responsible for the organisation, provision and funding of ECEC services in cooperation with various provider agencies, mainly with welfare associations and church affiliated organisations. This multi-level policy-making often results in considerable regional differences.

[1] Throughout this report, we will refer to "ECEC" in most cases as **(E)CEC**. The brackets signalise that the early childhood sector in Germany is integrated into the broader field of child and youth welfare, which also includes childhood care and education services for children up to the age of 14.

[2] Literally translated, *Kindertageseinrichtungen* are 'children's day centres'. *Kita* (pronounced 'keeta') is an abbreviated and commonly used form in Germany.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in (E)CEC provision

The (E)CEC workforce in Germany consists of two main occupational groups: (Early Childhood) Educators and (E)CEC Co-workers/Assistants. Childhood Pedagogues are a third, much smaller but nevertheless forward-looking professional group. Staff with a professional qualification from a vocational technical college[3] specialising in social pedagogy (Educators) represent the largest group overall.

(Early Childhood) Educators (*Erzieher:innen*)

As in previous years, state-certified Educators were the largest group of staff (63.1%, not including administrative staff[4]) in childhood care and education facilities in 2023. In the eastern federal states and Berlin the proportion was higher (75.2%) than in the western federal states (60.1%) (Destatis/Genesis 2023, own calculations)[5].

Educators are core professionals in the system of early childhood education and care and are employed mainly as group leaders, but also as centre leaders/managers. Entry requirements for their initial professional education (IPE) at a vocational technical college specialising in social pedagogy are an intermediate secondary school leaving certificate, or an educational qualification recognised as equivalent, or a completed relevant vocational qualification. In most cases the course of studies lasts three years in full-time form. Although *Fachschulen* (in Bavaria: *Fachakademien*) are located in the tertiary education sector (if the duration of training is more than 2,400 hours), they are not part of the higher education system.

Childhood Pedagogues (*Kindheitspädagoginnen, Kindheitspädagogen*)

Childhood Pedagogy study programmes leading to a degree at Bachelor level are a comparatively recent development in Germany, as is the ongoing construction of a professional self-image as academics in the (E)CEC field (Schneider 2016). Since 2003-2004, study programmes have been offered by higher education institutions across the country, mostly by universities of applied sciences (*Hochschulen für angewandte Wissenschaften* or *Fachhochschulen*). However, around 20 years later, in 2023, among the 5.7% staff in (E)CEC settings with a higher education degree only 1.5% were Childhood Pedagogues (Destatis/Genesis 2023).

ECEC Co-workers/ Assistants (*Sozialpädagogische Assistenzkräfte*)

Three types of qualified co-workers are employed as supplementary staff in ECEC settings: Childcarers (*Kinderpfleger:innen*), Social Assistants (*Sozialassistentinnen/Sozialassistenten*), and Socio-pedagogical Assistants (*Sozialpädagogische Assistentinnen/Assistenten*). Together with other staff in social services (3.3%), they make up 13.5% of the total workforce (FKB 2023, 178f, own calculations).

[3] Strictly speaking, the term in German is "school". However, in the international context this can be misleading and we have therefore chosen the term "vocational technical college" for *Fachschulen/ Fachakademien*, also in order to distinguish them from "vocational schools" (*Berufsfachschulen*).

[4] In this report, administrative, housekeeping and technical staff are not included in the data from Destatis/Genesis 2023.

[5] The cut-off date for all Federal Statistical Office figures (Destatis/Genesis 2023) is 01.03.2023. However, at the time of reporting, some of the more detailed data were only available in the 2022 edition (Destatis 2023), with a cut-off date of 01.03.2022.

As a rule, the entry requirement for initial professional education programmes is a lower secondary school leaving certificate, with courses lasting between two and three years on a full-time basis - depending on federal state regulations (see FKB 2023; WIFF 2018).

Other personnel

In addition to the two largest occupational groups (Educators and ECEC Co-workers/ Assistants) and the numerically marginal group of Childhood Pedagogues, a number of other types of personnel with varying professional qualifications also work in (E)CEC settings. These are, for example, persons with a university degree in social pedagogy/social work or educational science; or persons with a vocational technical college qualification (e.g. in curative education) (see also *Chapter **3**, Table 2*). Depending on the size and the respective provider of the (E)CEC setting, administrative staff, technical staff or staff responsible for preparing meals may also be employed.

Table 1 provides an overview of the main occupational groups in (E)CEC centres and categorises the **core professionals**, i.e. those with group or centre responsibility, according to one of five professional profiles (see *Box 1* at the end of this chapter).

Table 1
Germany: (E)CEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main (E)CEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
(Early Childhood) Educator *Erzieherin, Erzieher* *Profile*: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional	**Nursery** 0–2[6] years **Kindergarten** 2/3–5 years **Age-integrated centres** 0–5 or 3–9 or 0–12/14 years **Out-of-school education and care services** 6–14 years	Core professional Group leader Centre leader	0–12/14 years up to 27 years	***Route 1*** Usually 3 years full-time at a tertiary-level vocational technical college (*Fachschule/ Fachakademie*) specialising in social pedagogy – specific length varies between federal states ***Route 2 (****since 2012)* *Dualised model:* 3-4 years divided between a specialist vocational technical college and a paid work placement in a socio-pedagogical institution (see *Chapter **4.3***)

[6] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years, as in Germany.

Job title	Main (E)CEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				ECTS credits: n/a[7] EQF/DQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 655
Childhood Pedagogue *Kindheits-pädagogin, Kindheits-pädagoge* *Profile*: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional	**Nursery** 0–2 years **Kindergarten** 2/3–5 years **Age-integrated centres** 0–5 or 3–9 or 0–12/14 years **Out-of-school education and care services** 6–14 years	Core professional Group leader Centre leader	0–12 years	3 to 3½ years at a higher education institution (usually university of applied sciences, sometimes university) *Award:* Bachelor ECTS credits: 180 or 210 EQF/GQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Childcarer *Kinderpflegerin, Kinderpfleger* **Social Assistant** *Sozialassistentin, Sozialassistent* **Socio-pedagogical Assistant** *Sozialpädagogische Assistentin, Sozialpädagogischer Assistent*	**Nursery** 0–2 years **Kindergarten** 2/3–5 years **Age-integrated centres** 0–5 or 3–9 or 0–12/14 years **Out-of-school education and care services** 6–14 years	Qualified assistant / co-worker	0–10 years (*Childcare Assistants*) and beyond (*Social/Socio-pedagogical Assistants*)	***Route 1*** 2 or 3 years at vocational school (*Berufsfachschule)*, length may vary between federal states and according to previous education ***Route 2*** (recent) Also possible as dualised model in some *Länder*, alternating between vocational school and socio-pedagogical institution ECTS credits: n/a EQF/GQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 354

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including (E)CEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)

[7] n/a not applicable

- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre Leader

A qualification beyond the regular initial professional education (IPE) is not generally required for the responsible position as head of an (E)CEC setting in Germany. Professional requirements on the part of the federal state or the service provider are not only different, but also often not very specific. In some federal states, for example, the position of Centre Leader is to be filled by a "suitable person", although the criteria for this are not precisely described and the decision is left to the respective provider (Strehmel und Ulber 2012; Strehmel 2017).[8]

At the same time, the range of responsibilities of a Centre Leader is very demanding and involves both pedagogically-oriented and administrative tasks. These include the implementation of the respective federal state curricular framework, quality development, operational and organisational management and development, staff management and cooperating with the service provider, the legal guardians and with all other partners in the neighbourhood and region. Despite this, the role of *Kita* management is neither defined uniformly nor in detail (Anders et al. 2021). Moreover, the division of tasks between the provider and the Centre Leader is rarely clarified in a binding manner. However, the representative AQUA study showed that Centre Leaders are more satisfied with their work and feel less burdened if this is clearly regulated (Schreyer et al. 2014).

Not all Centre Leaders are able to devote themselves fully to management tasks: in 2022, just over half (55.7%) were partially released from pedagogical work, 44.3% were fully released (FKB 2023, 202).

"Strong leadership" is one of the seven core fields of action prescribed in the new *Act on the Enhancement of Quality and Participation in (E)CEC - KiQuTG* (2023)[9] – known as the *KiTa Quality Act* – which the federal states can select for improvement measures with additional funding from the federal government. This field of action was selected as a priority by half of the 16 federal states under the *Good Childcare Act* (BMFSFJ 2020a). With further funding from the federal government (around 530 million euros for the "Strong leadership" field of action), the work previously started will be continued in 2023 and 2024 (BMFSFJ 2023a).

Although there is no universally agreed framework for the position of Centre Leader in German (E)CEC settings, the concept of distributed leadership is seen in professional circles as fitting the governance structure and tradition of early childhood education and care in Germany. Distributed leadership does not necessarily mean the functional distribution of tasks (see *Chapter **2.3***), but an ongoing process of dialogue and of developing a common vision in the team (Anders et al. 2021, 76).

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

The establishment of designated posts of responsibility in (E)CEC settings has not been common practice in Germany so far. At most, the position of deputy leader is fairly common in larger facilities. However, due to the expanding field of work and the associated need not only for well-

[8] In Bavaria, since July 2023, a change in the law means that it is no longer necessary to be trained as an Educator to work as an ECEC Centre Leader. While the Ministry of Social Affairs sees this as a flexible option for providers, professional associations such as the Verband Kita-Fachkräfte Bayern e.V. (2023) fear a downgrading of established quality standards.

[9] Amendments to the *Good Childcare Act* (KiQuTG 2019)

qualified but also highly motivated professionals, the idea is gaining in importance. There is widespread agreement nationally and internationally that ECEC occupations need to be made more attractive (BMFSFJ 2018; OECD 2019). This attractiveness includes promotion grades, career advancement opportunities and corresponding remuneration mechanisms. In addition to the management of (E)CEC settings, a dossier by the German Youth Institute (Deutsches Jugendinstitut) based on results of the *Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte, WiFF* (see *Chapter **8*** for more details) elaborates the following fields of activity as potential designated posts (Kalicki et al 2019, 1): language education; inclusion of children with disabilities; intercultural education and multilingualism; children in poverty; and cooperation with families.

The German Association for Public and Private Welfare also recommends not only horizontal, theme-oriented designated posts of responsibility with higher remuneration, but also possibilities for increased vertical differentiation, e.g. positions as deputy leader, pedagogical quality officer, practical guidance for trainees or child protection officers. All these posts should require a "certified qualification" (Deutscher Verein 2022).

The implementation of these ideas requires close cooperation between the responsible decision-makers (relevant authorities, employers, collective bargaining partners) as well as the qualifying support systems (initial and continuing professional education and training institutions and organisations).

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

ECEC counsellors have a supporting, coordinating and, to some extent, controlling role in the German (E)CEC system. However, specialist counselling is currently structured very differently across the federal states and ECEC service providers in terms of mandate and licence (Kaiser und Fuchs-Rechlin 2020, 12).

As a rule, ECEC counsellors are employed by and act on behalf of the providers of (E)CEC settings, occasionally they are also employed by the Youth Welfare Office. Although their contributions to the field in terms of professional pedagogical support, advising centre leaders and service providers, staff development and quality enhancement as well as in a steering capacity are undisputed in professional circles (cf. Deutscher Verein 2012; Preissing et al. 2017), a specified job description at the level of professional policy is rather rare and the legal frameworks in the federal states vary greatly.

According to a survey commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth of 367 ECEC counsellors, the five most common professional tasks are: Quality assurance and development (84%); pedagogical and professional advice (82%); organisation of continuing professional development (57%); giving advice to the provider (57%); knowledge transfer between research and professional practice (51%). From their own perspective, ECEC counsellors currently need support measures themselves, such as: the opportunity for more collegial dialogue, a reduction in the number of ECEC centres to be supervised, as well as more time and opportunities for their own professional development (BMFSFJ 2017).

For years, a controversial issue and repeated demand has concerned the need for a clear division of tasks between advisory and supervisory roles. In some federal states and in some larger municipal (E)CEC centres, both are in the hands of the same person. Moreover, the advisory role of the federal state Youth Welfare Office with regard to management and operating licences is also referred to as "specialist counselling", although this is clearly a supervisory task.

The system of ECEC counselling can successfully support both providers and settings in their development of quality, personnel and organisation. However, the great heterogeneity of the specialist counselling system also harbours obstacles: For example, only two federal states (Thuringia and Saxony) have regulations regarding the qualification of specialist counsellors. There is

also great variation in terms of the qualifications themselves - these range from further training courses lasting several days to a university education as a prerequisite; the scope of the specialist counselling services offered is also rarely specified (cf. Kaiser und Fuchs-Rechlin 2020; Kaiser, Lipowski und Fuchs-Rechlin 2022).

2.5 Specialist support staff

Cooperation with specialist support services is an integral part of an inclusive concept of (E)CEC. Such services include psychological, child psychiatric, medical and speech therapy diagnostics (Heimlich und Ueffing 2018). Depending on the need, specialised support staff can come to the (E)CEC setting according to a plan agreed with setting and parents. Specialists from early intervention centres for children with disabilities or children at risk of becoming disabled are key cooperation partners who either visit the (E)CEC setting or offer therapy sessions to the children concerned on their own premises. Specialists from the migration social services and general social services can also be important contacts. As a rule, cooperation takes place on an off-site basis.

3. Structural composition of (E)CEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

In general, the rapid expansion in the childcare and education field, particularly in ECEC, has been accompanied by a steady growth in the workforce. In 2022, 587,536 persons (full-time equivalent) were employed in (E)CEC centres. Since 2018, an additional 83,710 staff have joined the workforce (FKB 2023, 165). Despite the increase and the shortage of qualified staff (see *Chapter **8.5***), there has been no increase in the employment of unqualified, non-specialist staff (i.e. people with no professional qualifications or with qualifications from non-related fields).

Persons with an award from a tertiary-level specialist vocational technical college comprise almost two thirds of staff working in (E)CEC settings and are thus by far the largest group of professionals. Staff with a higher education degree account for only a small part of the workforce at roughly 5.7%, whereas the share of staff with an upper secondary vocational award is more than double that at 13.3%, as indicated in *Table 2* (FKB 2023, 178f).

Academics with a relevant qualification worked in 40.3% of *Kitas* in 2022, while Educators were employed in 99% of (E)CEC centres (FKB 2023, 58, 201). However, the distribution varies considerably across the federal states. 19.3% of Centre Leaders had a higher education degree in 2022 (31.8% in the eastern *Bundesländer*; 16.0% in the western federal states (FKB 2023, 204).

The proportion of male staff in the workforce remains relatively low at 7.9%; a higher proportion (approximately 20%) work in out-of-school settings than in early childhood settings. The proportion of male staff in leadership positions is slightly lower at 7.3% than the overall share among ECEC staff (FKB 2023, 172, 227).

Data on the proportion of persons with a background of migration are not systematically compiled. According to the Early Education Staffing Barometer (see *Chapter **8***), around 17.7% of the early childhood workforce were persons with a migration background compared with 24% of all persons in the employment market (FKB 2023, 102, 228). According to data from the Federal Statistical Office, there are 21.2 million people in Germany who meet the definition of "persons with a migration background" (Destatis 2021), including 11.4 million who have a non-German nationality. This corresponds to around a quarter of the total population (Friederich und Gisdakis 2021).

Table 2

Germany: Structural composition of the workforce in (E)CEC settings, 2022, 2023

Staff categories	Overall distribution in workforce, in %
2023: Staff with a relevant higher education degree	
– Childhood Pedagogues (no disaggregated data on the proportion of Bachelor/Master degrees)	1.5
– Social Pedagogues/Social Workers (University of Applied Sciences degree)	2.6
– Social Pedagogues; Pedagogues (University degree)	1.2
– Remedial/Special Needs Pedagogues (University of Applied Sciences degree)	0.4
Total	**5.7**
2023: Staff with a relevant post-secondary qualification (specialist vocational technical college)	
– Educators	63.1
– Other post-secondary award (e.g Curative/Remedial Educators)	3.0
Total	**66.1**
2023: Staff with a relevant upper secondary qualification (vocational school)	
– Childcarers	10.2
– Social/Socio-pedagogical Assistants	3.3
Total	**13.5**
2023: Staff with other, non-specialist qualification (including short qualification routes in the social and health care services)	5.4
2023: Trainees	5.4
2023: Staff with no formal IPE	2.4
Specialist support staff (e.g. Language Therapist or Special Needs Educators)	Mostly off-site, no systematically compiled data available
2023: Proportion of male staff in (E)CEC centres	**7.9***
2022: in *Kitas* without school children	7.0*
2022: in *Kitas* with school children and other children	9.2*
2022: in *Kitas* with only school children (*Horte*)	20.5*
2022: Proportion of male staff as Centre Leaders	7.3*
2022: Proportion of male staff among persons with a higher education degree	9.3*
2022: Proportion of male staff among persons with a tertiary-level vocational qualification as Educator	6.7*
2022: Proportion of male staff among persons with an upper secondary vocational qualification	
2022: Childcarers	4.1*
2022: Social/Socio-pedagogical Assistants	11.2*
(E)CEC staff with a migration background	17.7** (2019)

Sources: FKB 2023, 172, 178f, 205, 227f; *Destatis/Genesis 2023, **Destatis 2021, own calculations. Federal Statistical Office definition: "A person has a background of migration if he/she or at least one parent does not possess German nationality at birth".

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

(Early Childhood) Educator (*Erzieherin, Erzieher*)

The initial professional education pathway to become a state-certified **Educator** is not a field-specific, specialised training for the age group 0 to 6 years, but a generalist route for work in settings in the entire child and youth welfare sector. This covers the age group 0 to 27 years and includes children's homes, residential youth groups, facilities for persons with special educational needs, youth work facilities and complementary childcare services in all-day schools. This vocational programme is classified in Germany as "further vocational training", which leads to a federal state certified post-secondary vocational qualification. Key documents issued by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs are the framework agreement on *Fachschulen* (KMK 2002/2021), the Competence-oriented Qualification Profile (KMK 2011/2017) and the Curriculum for *Fachschulen* for Social Pedagogy (KMK 2020a).

State-certified Educators represent by far the largest occupational group in the (E)CEC workfield, accounting for almost 63.1% of the staff in (E)CEC settings. About half (46%) of the Educators work as group leaders, 6.3% have a position as Centre Leader (Destatis/Genesis 2023, own calculations).

The IPE institutions providing courses for this profession – *Fachschulen für Sozialpädagogik*, in Bavaria *Fachakademien* – officially belong to the **tertiary** education system, but not to the **higher** education system. In the school year 2021/2022, there were 693 *Fachschulen/ Fachakademien* specialising in social pedagogy in Germany, of which just under half (47.5%) were public and 52.5% private institutions (FKB 2023, 239).

Due to the sovereignty of the *Länder* in educational affairs, the IPE admission criteria vary considerably between federal states. However, the basic requirement for attending a *Fachschule* is always an intermediate school leaving certificate or a completed relevant vocational training, from which the required duration of the IPE course is calculated. Thus, a **full-time IPE course** for persons with an intermediate school leaving certificate usually lasts three years (including one year of work experience).

In 2011, the traditional post-secondary VET qualification was classified in the German Qualifications Framework (DQR) at the same level as the Bachelor's degree from higher education institutions - at level 6. Among field experts in Germany, this was seen as a backward step with regard to the professionalisation of the early childhood education field (see e.g. Stieve und Kägi 2012). It was also argued that academic studies should be seen as a necessary requirement for systematic and critical thinking, which is also important for the profession of early childhood educators (Rauschenbach 2013).

Since 2012, an additional pathway into the profession of state-certified Educator has been introduced: a **dualised work-integrated and remunerated** model called 'practice-integrated training' (PiA), during which students are paid for the time spent in an (E)CEC work placement (see also *Chapter **4.3***).

Since the end of 2020, according to a resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (2020a), the *Länder* can "provide for" the term "Bachelor Professional in Social Services" to be used in addition to the occupational title "State-certified Educator". The application procedure is regulated by the federal states.

Table 3
Germany: (Early Childhood) Educator

Title in German: *Staatlich anerkannte Erzieherin, staatlich anerkannter Erzieher* (Bachelor Professional in Social Services) **Profile**: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: Intermediate school-leaving certificate or a completed and relevant vocational training (considerable differences between the *Länder*) **Initial professional education:** The IPE course at a post-secondary specialist vocational technical college for social pedagogy comprises at least 2,400 hours of teaching and at least 1,200 hours of college-supported practical experience. It usually lasts three years in the full-time form and correspondingly longer in the part-time form. The practical training takes place in various socio-pedagogical fields of work (KMK as amended in 2021, 26)**.** **Award:** State-certified Educator; in some cases: Bachelor Professional in Social Services (at the discretion of the federal state). Usually regarded as a general university entrance certificate or specialist university entrance certificate. **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF/DQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011**: 655 **Main (E)CEC workplaces:** Nursery (0–2 years), kindergarten (2/3–5 years), age-integrated centre (0–5, 3–10, 10–12/14 years), out-of-school care and education setting (*Hort*, 6–14 years) ***Recent dualised practice-integrated and remunerated qualification routes:*** Introduced in Baden-Württemberg in 2012; by 2020 in varying formats at least as a pilot project in all federal states except Mecklenburg-Pomerania (Weltzien et al. 2021, 7). **Entry requirements:** As a rule, intermediate school leaving certificate **Initial professional education:** 3 to 4 years (depending on *Land* and previous experience) at a *Fachschule/Fachakademie* for Social Pedagogy and simultaneously in an early childhood setting in an employment relationship subject to social security contributions **Award:** State-certified Educator (*staatlich anerkannte Erzieherin/staatlich anerkannter Erzieher*) **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF/DQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011**: 655 **Main (E)CEC workplaces:** see above

Childhood Pedagogue (*Kindheitspädagogin/ Kindheitspädagoge*)

Two major triggers leading to a demand for more (E)CEC personnel with an academic degree were on the one hand Germany's mediocre rankings in international comparisons of educational achievement (e.g. the OECD PISA studies) and on the other hand the fact that the required initial professional education in the majority of European countries, at least for staff working in pre-primary education (3–5/6 years) and increasingly for those working with under 3 year-olds (Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010) was a Bachelor's degree. With the reform of higher education in Europe through the Bologna process, BA and MA structures were also introduced in Germany. Beginning in 2003/2004, Bachelor programmes in childhood pedagogy and early childhood education were established at German higher education institutions, followed in a number of cases by Master's degree programmes (see Hechler et al. 2021).

In 2021, there were a total of 76 Childhood Pedagogy Bachelor's and 14 Master's degree programmes at 61 locations (FKB 2023, 122, 125, 247). 57.9% of the study programmes were offered at public universities of applied sciences, 21.1% at private higher education institutions. Half (51%) of all Bachelor's degree programmes in childhood pedagogy were designed as full-time programmes in 2021, while the other half were offered in dualised or part-time form.

Nearly all (95%) focus on early childhood or childhood pedagogy, 55% focus in particular on management and leadership (FKB 2023, 122, 125, 247).

Full-time studies usually take 3 to 3½ years (6 or 7 semesters).

Admission requirements, specialisations and the duration of studies vary depending on the federal state and the higher education institution. Most HEI's require a general higher education entrance qualification for the Bachelor's programme, although this can also be achieved by completing lower secondary education with four to five years of professional experience in a similar subject or by passing an aptitude test.

A Bachelor's and/or Master's degree in (Early) Childhood Pedagogy opens up broad fields of work. Childhood Pedagogues are often employed in areas of child and youth welfare such as: family counselling, integration initiatives, immigration authority, adult education, research. In 2023, among the 5.7% of staff in (E)CEC settings with a higher education degree, only 1.5% were Childhood Pedagogues (Destatis/Genesis 2023; own calculations).

Table 4
Germany: Childhood Pedagogue

Title in German: *Staatliche anerkannte Kindheitspädagogin / staatlich anerkannter Kindheitspädagoge* **Profile**: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: General or vocational university access eligibility, in some cases also a successfully completed Educator IPE programme
Professional education: 3 to 3½ years at a University of Applied Sciences, University of Teacher Education[10], Professional Academy (Dual HEI)[11], or in some case at a University
Award: State-certified Childhood Pedagogue (Bachelor, title varies according to federal state and higher education institution) – a subsequent 2-year Master's study programme can be followed.
ECTS credits: 180 or 210 (120 ECTS credits for a Master's degree) **EQF/DQF level:** 6 (or 7 - Master) **ISCED 2011**: 6 (or 7 - Master) **Main (E)CEC workplaces:** Nursery (0–2), kindergarten (2/3–5 year), age-integrated centre (0–5, 3–10, 10–12/14 years), out-of-school care and education setting (*Hort*, 6–14 years)
Additional fields of work: Child and youth welfare, family counselling, integration initiatives, immigration authority, adult education, research

(E)CEC Co-workers/ Assistants (*Childcarer, Social Assistant, Socio-pedagogical Assistant*)

Childcarers, Socio-pedagogical Assistants and Social Assistants together accounted for 13.5% of the total staff in (E)CEC in 2023 (Destatis/Genesis 2023). The training programmes completed at vocational schools are regulated by state law. In the 2021/2022 school year, there were 234 vocational schools for childcare and 467 vocational schools for social assistance in Germany. IPE courses for prospective Childcarers were offered in eight federal states in 2022, while vocational routes for future Social Assistant staff were offered in 13 federal states (FKB 2023, 234).

The usual entry qualification for the mostly two- or three-year training is a basic secondary school leaving certificate (*Hauptschulabschluß*). In some *Länder* the courses are designed in such a way that, after completion, the student can immediately enrol for a qualifying course to become an Educator. In some cases, an intermediate or higher school leaving certificate is awarded on completion.

[10] Only in Baden-Württemberg
[11] Only in Baden-Württemberg, Hesse and Saxony

Table 5
Germany: Childcarer, Social Assistant, Socio-pedagogical Assistant

Titles in German: *Staatlich geprüfte*[12] *Kinderpflegerin, staatlich geprüfter Kinderpfleger* *Staatlich geprüfte Sozialassistentin, staatlich geprüfter Sozialassistent* *Staatlich geprüfte Sozialpädagogische Assistentin,* *staatlich geprüfter Sozialpädagogischer Assistent*
Entry requirements: 9 years compulsory schooling with basic secondary school leaving certificate or intermediate school certificate; some *Länder* also require an interview and/or a written entry examination. **Initial professional education:** 1–3 years upper secondary vocational school (depending on federal state regulations and previous experience) **Award:** State-certified (or state-recognised) Childcarer or Social Assistant or Socio-pedagogical Assistant. In some *Länder* it is possible to complete the course with an intermediate school certificate (Childcarer) or secondary school certificate (Social Assistant). **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF/DQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011**: 354 **Main (E)CEC workplaces:** Nursery (0–2), kindergarten (2/3–5), age-integrated centre (0–5, 3–10, 10–12/14), outside-school-hours care and education setting (*Hort*, 6–14). Social Assistants also work in social care institutions with persons of all ages, e.g. in hospitals or in mobile care services.

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

(Early Childhood) Educator *(Erzieherin/Erzieher)*

Since 2011, IPE courses leading to the award of state-certified Educator at tertiary-level colleges specialising in social pedagogy have been based on a "Competence-oriented Qualification Profile" (KMK 2011/2017). The profile defines professional standards, knowledge and includes the competence categories (social competence, independence, knowledge, skills) of the German Qualifications Framework (DQR 2014).

Table 6
Germany: Competence-oriented Qualification Profile in IPE leading to the award of State-certified Educator (see KMK 2011/2017, 15-28, *adapted*)

Knowledge areas (selection)	**Competences and skills** (selection)
1. Understanding children, adolescents and young adults in their living environments and forming pedagogical relationships with them	
Leaving certificate holders possess – Broad and integrated knowledge about different methods of observation – In-depth specialist knowledge about the influence of socio-economic circumstances on the life worlds of children, adolescents and young adults – Thorough knowledge about the mandate of the complementary and compensatory role of settings in relation to the family.	*Leaving certificate holders possess skills related to* – Analysing and assessing developmental trajectories and socialisation processes in children, adolescents and young adults and – taking into consideration the key determining factors of behaviour, experiences and learning – to independently plan and organise developmental and educational stimulation – Identifying one's own role as Educator in the developmental and educational processes of

[12] In Baden-Württemberg and Saarland the occupational title is „State recognised Childcarer".

Knowledge areas (selection)	**Competences and skills** (selection)
	children, adolescents and young adults, reflecting on this role and drawing consequences for pedagogical procedures – Conceptualising, planning and organising pedagogical programmes independently which are linked to the life worlds of children, adolescents and young adults.
2. Stimulating, supporting and guiding developmental and educational processes	
Leaving certificate holders possess – An in-depth understanding of education and development as part of an individual, lifelong process within the framework of their social-pedagogical mandate of 'education, upbringing and care' – Broad and integrated knowledge which provides them with a complex understanding of developmental, learning, educational and socialisation processes – In-depth knowledge about didactic approaches for the competent guidance of children, adolescents and young adults in specific learning areas.	*Leaving certificate holders possess skills related to* – Reflecting on and developing further their own educational experiences and competencies in different areas of education and learning – Organising the inside and outdoor spaces in socio-pedagogical settings with the aim of creating a stimulating learning environment – Using a wide range of tools and approaches from the various educational and learning areas in a targeted way and evaluating their effectiveness.
3. Guiding pedagogical work in groups	
Leaving certificate holders possess – Broad and integrated knowledge about group psychology and about group work as a classical approach in social pedagogy – In-depth specialist knowledge in selected areas about didactic and conceptual approaches to education, upbringing and care in small groups in the classical fields of work in child and youth welfare – Thorough knowledge of the legislation frameworks relevant for socio-pedagogical work.	*Leaving certificate holders possess skills related to* – Systematically observing, analysing and assessing group behaviours, group processes, group relations and their own professional action – Conceptually embedding participation strategies for children, adolescents and young adults – Recognising conflicts and supporting children, adolescents and young people in solving them in an independent way.
4. Building educational partnerships with parents and caregivers	
Leaving certificate holders possess – Broad and integrated professional knowledge about various models, approaches and forms of partnership in education and upbringing – Specialist knowledge about community support and counselling systems for families and caregivers – Relevant knowledge about forms and methods of public relations work in social services.	*Leaving certificate holders possess skills related to* – Identifying the individually different needs and resources of families and caregivers, assessing them in a systematic way and reviewing framework structures and provision accordingly – Planning and organising needs-based parental education and counselling activities together with other field specialists – developing, carrying out and evaluating public relations strategies for social service settings.
5. Developing organisations and teams	
Leaving certificate holders possess – Broad and integrated professional knowledge about structures and forms of team work and about other elements of organisation development	*Leaving certificate holders possess skills related to* – Participating in needs and status analyses for the socio-pedagogical institution in order to include these in programme planning

Knowledge areas (selection)	**Competences and skills** (selection)
– Integrated specialist knowledge about relevant legislation and the funding and provider structures of settings in the field of social pedagogy as well as about current developments – Thorough knowledge about the links between employment, tariff and contract legislation in the field of social-pedagogical work.	– Analysing their own team situation according to specific criteria in order to develop this further and, if necessary, to organise support – Reflecting on the sustainability of processes in team and organisation development.
6. Cooperating in networks and organising transitions	
Leaving certificate holders possess – Broad and integrated professional knowledge about child and youth welfare institutions and other specialist services and educational institutions – Broad and integrated professional knowledge about support systems and networks – Research-based knowledge about attachment patterns and their meaning for transition procedures.	*Leaving certificate holders possess skills related to* – Investigating relevant resources in the community for the target group – Coordinating goals for cooperation with network partners and integrating them into their own workplace procedures – Organising transitions systematically on the basis of research evidence and conceptual frameworks.

The following basic principles are considered to be defining for all social pedagogy occupations:

– *Participation* (including age-appropriate decision-making by children)
– *Inclusion* (as a multidimensional concept of heterogeneity and diversity and also as a basis for planning educational activities)
– *Prevention* (supporting children, adolescents and young adults to cope with different life phases)
– *Language enhancement* (ongoing support of language development), and
– *Values transmission* (guidance in the development of personal values based on the Basic Law/Constitution and the constitutions of the *Länder*).

Each federal state implements the Qualification Profile in accordance with state law. The orientation for this is a cross-state curriculum (see *Table 7*). The competences described in the curriculum of the respective federal state are mandatory for the work of the vocational technical colleges and academies in the field of social pedagogy. The curriculum is also structured into six learning fields, which are based on the competence-oriented Qualification Profile (see also Autorengruppe Fachschulwesen 2011).

Table 7
Germany: Curricular framework for initial professional education leading to the award of state-certified Educator (KMK 2020a, 18, 25-42)

Fields of learning and content	**Number of teaching hours**
General education/non-specialist subjects	Minimum 360
Occupation-related areas of learning	Minimum 1800
1. *Ongoing development of professional identity and professional perspectives* – Biographical work, motive for occupational choice, methods of self-assessment – Professionalisation history of the Educator profession – Fields of work and provider system in child and youth welfare – Education, upbringing and care as mandates of child and youth welfare in a changing society – Societal and legislative context of expectations and requirements regarding the professional role, cross-curricular tasks of social pedagogy work – Requirements, organisation and places of learning in IPS	Minimum 80

Fields of learning and content	Number of teaching hours
– Learning and working strategies in self-organised learning – Self-management and health prevention in professional work – Employment and tariff framework legislation – Professional organisations and trade unions – Professional prospects, continuing professional development	
2. *The pedagogy of relationships and working with groups* – Image of human being, image of the child, pedagogical values – Explanatory models for educational guidance – Attachment theory – Pedagogy of building relationships – Foundations of group pedagogy – Observation and documentation of group processes – Didactic principles and approaches of working in groups in the field of child and youth welfare, e.g. Froebel, Montessori, Reggio, contextual approach (*Situationsansatz*), Social Group Work – Chances for shaping the life worlds and everyday lives of groups in child and youth welfare fields of work – Models and approaches towards a participatory pedagogy – Communication and leading discussions – Conflicts and conflict solutions in everyday pedagogy – Legislative framework for social pedagogical group work such as supervision, child and youth protection, health protection, data protection.	Minimum 240
3. *Living environments and diversity – awareness, understanding, inclusive approaches* – Changing conditions and influences on socialisation – Diversity of life worlds and living conditions and their significance for pedagogical work – Explanatory theoretical models for human experiences and behaviours, such as behavioural and learning theories, psychoanalytical models, systemic approaches, resilience concept – Special developmental needs in children, adolescents and young adults, such as physical and intellectual impairments, giftedness – Basic ethical principles of human life – Basic issues in educational anthropology, such as educational goals, consent and emancipation, normality and abnormality – Pedagogical approaches towards promoting and managing inclusion in selected child and youth welfare settings, such as diversity pedagogy, anti-bias education – Resource-oriented support and guidance of children, adolescents and young adults who are in need of special education, support and opportunities – Observation and documentation strategies in resource-oriented processes of guidance and educational support – Legal frameworks relating to inclusion, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, German Social Code Book VIII, German Social Code Book X – Planning support according to German Social Code Book IX	Minimum 240
4. *Professional organisation of a social pedagogical approach to education in different learning areas* – Explanatory models for (self-) education, development and learning – Developmental domains and developmental tasks in different life phases (childhood, adolescence, young adulthood) – Aspects of diversity in developmental and educational processes – Education mandate of the German Social Code Book VIII	Minimum 600

Fields of learning and content	Number of teaching hours
– Curricular frameworks for childhood education and care in the *Länder* – Instruments for the observation and recording of developmental and educational processes – The role of Educators in the areas of education – Domain-specific and didactical knowledge of the areas of learning – Meaning of the areas of learning for the development of children, adolescents and young adults – Organising learning environments and identifying educational chances for different target audiences – Planning, implementation and evaluation of resilience-oriented and resources-based educational activities in different fields of work.	
5. *Organising educational partnerships with parents and caregivers and supporting transitions* – Social transformation of the family – Diversity in family life worlds and living conditions – Rights and duties of parents – Models, approaches and forms of educational and childrearing partnerships – Forms of work with families – Methods of leading discussions and consultations with parents and caregivers – Presentation and moderating techniques – Supporting family upbringing – Support in upbringing – Endangerment of children's welfare and protection mandate – Support and consultancy systems in the neighbourhood – Family education provision – Concept and organisation of the family centre – Life course transitions/ transitions theory – Models and approaches towards organising transitions in the child and youth welfare field.	Minimum 80
6. *Developing institution and team, networking* – Provider structures, funding and legislative frameworks of social pedagogical institutions – Organisational models and development – Quality development – Programme development – Conceptual frameworks for organising everyday life in child and youth welfare settings – Teamwork and team development – Role and functions in teams/ leadership tasks – Multi-professional teams – Conflict solutions and support models for teams – Public relations work – Networking in the neighbourhood – Networks in child and youth welfare fields of work and with other educational institutions.	Minimum 80
Elective modules	Minimum 120
Total hours/areas of learning	**Minimum 2.400**
Placements (practica) in child and youth welfare settings	Minimum 1.200

Childhood Pedagogue *(Kindheitspädagogin / Kindheitspädagoge)*

Both the target competences and the curricula in degree programmes leading to the award of Childhood Pedagogue differ between higher education institutions[13]. With a view to the competence requirements specifically for working in the early childhood field, a "typical" catalogue was developed by a research team in Freiburg on the basis of HEI curricula, research on normative guidelines, secondary analyses, and their own case studies (Fröhlich-Gildhoff et al. 2014).

In 2022, an informal core curriculum for the childhood pedagogy study programmes was developed by an expert group (*Studiengangstag Pädagogik der Kindheit*). Ten study units are outlined, each assigned with a minimum number of credits (FBTS 2022).

Despite the fact that the number of degree programmes has been expanding for around 20 years or so, (there are now also Master's programmes at 20 university locations), a detailed analysis of the study programme development, the support offered for young academics, the research topics and resources and the professional background of university professors suggests that the systematic status of childhood pedagogy within the educational sciences cannot yet be considered as complete (Hechler et al. 2021).

In this chapter, four Bachelor's and two Master's programmes in (early) childhood pedagogy are presented as examples.

Table 8

Germany: Four full-time Bachelor programmes specialising in (Early) Childhood Pedagogy

Higher Education Institution	Federal state	Provider	ECTS credits
(1) University of Applied Sciences and Art, Hildesheim	Lower Saxony	Public	180
(2) Catholic University of Applied Sciences, Berlin	Berlin	Private (Catholic)	210
(3) Protestant University of Applied Sciences, Rheinland-Westfalen-Lippe, Bochum	North Rhine-Westphalia	Private (Protestant)	180
(4) University of Applied Sciences, Magdeburg-Stendal	Saxony-Anhalt	Public	180

1) University of Applied Sciences and Art, Hildesheim
Bachelor programme: Childhood Pedagogy

The degree programme focuses on competences primarily for working in the fields of pedagogy, psychology and health, communication and counselling, social and childhood research as well as law and child protection. Guided field practice is integrated into the course and close links exist to local (E)CEC providers.

The course programme is organised in six study areas composing different numbers of modules:

1. General foundations
2. Pedagogy
3. Psychology and health
4. Scientific work
5. Professional orientation
6. Specialisation/in-depth focus

[13] An overview of the study programmes in Germany can be found in the study programme database of the WiFF Professional development initiative for early childhood staff. For each degree programme there is a brief overview of the contents as well as access to the respective module handbook (WiFF 2023a).

The standard period of study of six semesters can be shortened by two semesters if the applicant is a state-certified Educator; the course can also be completed part time.

Further information: https://www.hawk.de/de/studium/studiengaenge/ba-kindheitspaedagogik-hildesheim

2) Catholic University of Applied Sciences, Berlin
Bachelor programme: Childhood Pedagogy (B.A.) – curricular outline

Fields of study
Theoretical and empirical foundations of childhood pedagogy
- History, theory and understanding of the childhood pedagogy profession
- Propaedeutics and empirical research in the social sciences
- Child development, socialisation research and discourses of difference

Specific approaches in childhood pedagogy
- Practice, didactics and methods in childhood pedagogy
- Focal topics of study and practical projects (elective)
- Key skills, foreign language competence

Disciplines related to childhood pedagogy
- Educational sciences, psychology
- Sociology. social policy, law
- Anthropology, ethics

Target competences
- To professionally advocate for good and equitable living conditions for all children and their families, as well as for child- and family-friendly institutions and living spaces
- To protect the rights of children and to counteract all threats to the best interests of the child as well as all forms of discrimination and disadvantage
- To work in partnership with parents, to advise families, to develop support for families and to contribute to a better work-life balance
- To critically reflect social and political developments, to stand up for human/children's rights, social justice, the appreciation of diversity, the realisation of inclusion and principles of sustainability
- To contribute to the generation of knowledge and quality development in fields of childhood pedagogy through basic, empirical and evaluative research

Further information: https://www.khsb-berlin.de/de/node/67044

3) Protestant University of Applied Sciences, Rheinland-Westfalen-Lippe (Bochum)
Bachelor programme: Early Childhood Education (B.A.) – curricular outline

Brief portrait
The course content is designed to help students develop a personal pedagogical profile and a professional pedagogical attitude. The degree programme therefore provides opportunities for acquiring theoretical and practice-related knowledge on the one hand, and offers space for theory-based reflection on the other.

Course content
- Basic knowledge of early childhood education and related disciplines
- Research work
- Diversity/inclusion
- Focus on a specific educational area (visual arts and media, music, language, psycho-motor skills)

- Political, legal and administrative framework, community networking, everyday work, professional theory and personal professionalism
- Basics of centre management
- Practical research project and methods of empirical research
- Bachelor's thesis

The programme qualifies students for management positions in the early childhood sector, e.g.

- Group management/management of (E)CEC settings for children (kindergartens, family centres, etc.)
- Work in welfare associations or in local authorities and state institutions (e.g. specialist counselling, offering continuing professional development)
- Working in projects (e.g. inclusive education, intercultural work)
- Supporting and qualifying professionals providing home-based (E)CEC services

Further information: https://www.evh-bochum.de/ba_elementarpaedagogik.html

4) University of Applied Sciences, Magdeburg-Stendal
Bachelor programme: Childhood Pedagogy – Praxis, Leadership, Research (B.A.)

Aims of study programme

The study programme is geared towards the acquisition of theoretically and empirically based competence to work in fields of employment related to childhood education. Students are prepared for direct pedagogical work with children from the time they enter an (E)CEC centre until the end of out-of-school care. In addition, they are qualified for work with families, counselling and the promotion of community networking.

Leadership competences are acquired during the study programme. These enable students to take on challenging tasks in multidisciplinary teams. Students possess comprehensive skills in the field of research. These enable them to provide a scientific backing for educational practices. The specialist knowledge gained can be transferred to new practical issues and thus applied to the professional development of practice in the (E)CEC setting. In addition, students acquire the ability to reflect on their own professional self-development.

Course content

Knowledge acquisition is interdisciplinary and based on critical reflection of the theory-practice relationship as well as on a broad understanding of methods. Current research findings from all disciplines and subject areas relevant to childhood development and its support by public institutions are used. These include the educational and social sciences as well as basics of developmental psychology, exemplary in-depth knowledge of educational processes and didactics as well as systematic knowledge of key tasks of (E)CEC practices such as group dynamics, conflict resolution, methods of participation, quality development or early support.

A basic understanding of the social, political, structural, legal and institutional frameworks of education, upbringing and care in childhood is important as a basis for an academically qualified and thus innovation-open and flexible practice. The main focus of the study programme is on conceptual work and action research.

Two **field-based practica** are integrated into the degree programme. The first (15 days in full-time employment) takes place during the lecture-free period between the 1st and 2nd semesters. Within the framework of the module "Fields of work and professional identity", the content focuses on exploring a professional field relevant to childhood education. The second internship (30 days in full-time employment) takes place in the lecture-free period between the 4th and 5th semester. The module "Observation and documentation" focuses on the application and testing of instruments of observation and documentation in everyday practice.

Further information: https://www.hs-magdeburg.de/studium/bachelor/kindheitspaedagogik-praxis-leitung-forschung.html

Table 9

Germany: Two Master's study programmes in (Early) Childhood Education and Upbringing

Higher education institution	Federal state	Provider	ECTS credits
1) University of Education, Ludwigsburg	Baden-Württemberg	Public	120
2) University of Leipzig	Saxony	Public	120

1) University of Education, Ludwigsburg

Master's programme: Early Childhood Education and Upbringing (M.A.) – curricular outline

Course content

The Master's study programme in Early Childhood Education and Upbringing has two main focal points: leadership/management and educational research. The programme is a research-oriented, consecutive Master's degree course which builds on a completed initial relevant professional qualification.

A. Management: Leadership, counselling and development	**B. Educational research: Research, counselling and development**
Educational and social science theories	Educational and social sciences
Management, research, counselling and development	Developing and organising educational institutions: Management
	Counselling, leadership and coaching
Educational research and development in pedagogical institutions	Foundations and methods of educational research
	Perspectives on educational research
Research-based learning: project and research workshop with study-related electives	Research workshop: Developing research questions, supervising projects

Elective course profiles

Course Profile A Management, Research, Counselling and Development	Course Profile B Educational Research, Leadership, Counselling and Development
Modules only for students with a focus on Management Strategy and Management Procedures	*Modules only for students with a focus on Educational Research and Development of childhood educational institutions*
Management procedures in early childhood education settings	Didactics research and development
Staff and organisational management	Consolidation of subject-specific knowledge and didactics in 1-2 compulsory areas (language; art, visual culture; music; natural sciences and technology; social sciences; mathematics; religion, ethics)

Further information: http://www.ph-ludwigsburg.de/11652.html

2) University of Leipzig

Master's programme: Professionalising Early Childhood Education (M.A.) – curricular outline

Structure and content

The study programme includes four semesters of on-site studies in full-time or part-time format. Students possess 120 ECTS credits during the course of studies in 13 compulsory modules, one elective module and the Master's thesis. Two field-based **compulsory practica** of at least 240 hours are required.

Course content is structured into three areas:
1. Professionalisation
    Professionalism
    Leading a conversation and counselling
    Management and leadership
    Learning and teaching in the life course
2. Early childhood education
    Teaching methods in the early years
    Pedagogical quality
    Interdisciplinary perspectives on health and illness in the life course
    Interdisciplinary consolidation (elective module)
3. Theory, empiricism and practice
    Praxeological research
    Supporting module for the practica phases
    Supporting module for the Master's thesis phase

Further information: https://www.uni-leipzig.de/fileadmin/studiengangsdatenbank/dokumente/Studienfuehrer_Professionalisierung_fruehkindlicher_Bildung_M.A.pdf

Childcarers, Social Assistants, Socio-pedagogical Assistants (*Sozialpädagogische Assistenzkräfte*)

Competences

A *Competence-oriented Qualification Profile for the IPE of (E)CEC staff working as Assistants* was published for the first time in 2020 (KMK 2020b). It sets out the professional standards and fields of action for the occupational groups of Childcarers, Social Assistants and Socio-pedagogical Assistants. The competences described in the qualification profile are binding for implementation in the *Länder*. The fundamental dimension of "professional attitude" is presented here, along with a selection of the knowledge and skills areas for the six fields of action of the competence profile.

Table 10

Germany: Competence-oriented Qualification Profile for IPE leading to (E)CEC Assistant staff awards (KMK 2020b, extracts)

Professional attitude
Leaving certificate holders – Are open, curious, attentive and tolerant towards the world, themselves and other people – Show empathy for children, their families and their different circumstances – Take into account the importance of emotional bonds and social relationships in their educational work – Behave democratically – Communicate appropriately – Build pedagogical relationships and manage them professionally – Develop a pedagogical ethos, take responsibility for their own actions – See themselves as role models in their actions – Understand the children as subjects of their development – Respect and observe cultural backgrounds and the diversity of goals and values in the education, upbringing and care of children – Reflect critically on what they have experienced – Reflect on the biographical aspects of their own actions and are able to perceive their own and other people's needs – Inform themselves about unknown facts and find their own ways of learning – Reflect on their own professional development process and understand the development of their professionalism as a lifelong process

– Work responsibly in a team and contribute their own ideas
– Support the core professionals in planning and managing projects
– Cooperate with all participants in the field of work
– Take joint responsibility for the development and support of children
– Deal with open work processes and uncertainties in professional action in a way appropriate to the situation.

Knowledge areas (selection)	**Competences and skills** (selection)
1. Perceive children in their living environments and develop pedagogical relationships to them	
Award holders possess – Basic professional knowledge from relevant disciplines – Consolidated professional knowledge about the influence of culture, religion, living conditions, social and institutional norms and rules on the behaviour and experiences of children – Consolidated professional knowledge about bonding theories and the shaping of pedagogical relationships which are supportive for their development.	*Award holders* – Regard children in their individuality and personality as subjects of pedagogical work and support their desire to learn new competences – Build up and shape relationships to children which support their development and bonding on the basis of perceptions and observations – Use verbal and non-verbal forms of communication with children in a targeted and situation-appropriate way and reflect on the influence of these on the children.
2. Support developmental and educational processes	
Award holders possess – Consolidated subject knowledge of educational areas (e.g. language education, music education, mathematics and science education, physical activity and health, ecological and sustainable education, media education) on the basis of the respective curricular framework – Consolidated knowledge about observation and documentation procedures relating to the developmental status and processes of children – Consolidated didactic-methodical knowledge for the planning, implementation and reflection of pedagogical activities.	*Award holders* – Take into account the variety and diversity of cultural, religious and personal educational needs in their pedagogical work – Assist in the analysis of the living and learning environments of children and in the derivation of action goals for the socio-pedagogical work – Design an environment conducive to development, taking into account the living environments and the resulting individual needs and group interests of children.
3. Support groups in a pedagogical way	
Award holders possess – Consolidated subject knowledge of group dynamics and consider these when shaping educational activities – Consolidated subject knowledge of inclusive and diversity-conscious and gender-sensitive pedagogy in the context of current developments in the field – Consolidated subject knowledge of didactic-methodical approaches to education, care and upbringing in small groups in the field of social pedagogy.	*Award holders* – Plan and shape activities that enable equal and equitable experiences in mixed-sex and same-sex groups – Assist in the planning of stimulating learning environments and consider the respective composition of the group – Recognise conflicts between children and support them in solving these independently, using the conflict as a chance.
4. Co-operate with parents and caregivers	
Award holders possess – Consolidated knowledge about family life situations in their socio-spatial contexts as well	*Award holders*

as the influences of cultural and religious environments and ethnic affiliation – Consolidated knowledge of different models, methods and forms of cooperation with parents and caregivers – Consolidated knowledge of legal and institutional frameworks for the cooperation with parents and other caregivers.	– Describe areas of responsibility as a social pedagogy assistant in the context of cooperation with parents and caregivers – Participate in the identification and assessment of individually different needs and resources of families and caregivers – Reflect on their own professional and personal competences in relation to working with parents and other caregivers and derive consequences for their own further knowledge-building.
5. Assist in supporting transitions	
Award holders possess – Consolidated professional knowledge about designing transitions – Consolidated knowledge about legislation for early childhood settings and child and youth welfare services in Germany – Basic professional knowledge about child and youth welfare institutions and support systems.	*Award holders* – Assist the team in the development of centre-specific strategies for the design of transitions – Assist in the co-operation with other settings and services – Reflect on the implementation and quality of transition practices according to specific criteria.
6. Carry out care and support measures	
Award holders possess – Basic knowledge about legislation and documentation requirements regarding assessments on the endangerment of child welfare according to Book VIII of the Social Code – Consolidated knowledge of age-appropriate and healthy nutrition for children as well as the effect of different influences on the nutritional behaviour of children – Consolidated knowledge of hygiene measures and control systems with regard to hygiene regulations (food hygiene, workplace hygiene).	*Award holders* – Participate in the implementation of measures in the context of child protection, safety, health and hygiene on the basis of observation and documentation as well as legal regulations and check their compliance – Guide children towards healthy, ecological and sustainable behaviour – Carry out care measures and activities in such a way that the emotional, social, cognitive and motor development of the child is supported.

Curricular content

The curricula for the professional training of state-certified Assistants differ depending on the federal state, the type of vocational school (*Berufsschule* or *Berufsfachschule*) and the specific course focus.

This is illustrated in the following three examples.

Bavaria

The curriculum for the *Berufsfachschule für Kinderpflege* (2010) for Childcarers is divided into six learning areas: (1) Perceiving persons and situations, observing and explaining behaviour; (2) Recognising and meeting everyday needs; (3) Planning, implementing and reflecting on educational activities; (4) Stimulating and accompanying educational processes; (5) Shaping relationships and communication; (6) Cooperating with all those involved in the educational process (StMUK 2010). The training qualifies students for pedagogical work in various socio-pedagogical fields of work, especially in the care, education and upbringing of children from infancy to early school age (StMBW and StMAS 2014).

Rheinland-Palatinate

The subject-related teaching of the curriculum for the *Höhere Berufsfachschule* specialising in Social Assistance (2019) comprises seven learning fields: (1) Finding their way and engaging in professional situations (approx. 80 teaching hours); (2) Observing, understanding and stimulating children's educational and developmental processes (200 teaching hours); (3) Perceiving, understanding and stimulating educational and developmental processes of people with disabilities (120 teaching hours); (4) Using play, movement and nature experiences for educational processes; (5) Enabling musical and creative educational processes; (6) Supporting healthy eating and conducting, guiding and supporting domestic activities; (7) Conducting, guiding and accompanying health-promoting and care activities. Part of the training is a 12 to 16-week practicum in a socio-pedagogical institution. Award holders can work in (E)CEC centres and special education institutions (Ministerium für Bildung Rheinland-Pfalz 2019).

Saxony-Anhalt

The curriculum of the *Berufsfachschule – Sozialassistenz* (2017) for trainee Social Assistants is structured according to eight learning areas: (1) Developing professional identity and perspectives (60 to 80 teaching hours); (2) Applying different learning and working techniques (40 to 60 teaching hours); (3) Understanding pedagogical and psychological processes and applying them in a professional way (240 to 280 teaching hours); (4) Helping to shape needs-oriented support for people in the areas of health and care in selected life situations (180 to 200 teaching hours); (5) Helping to design needs-oriented support for people in the areas of nutrition and food preparation (200 to 220 teaching hours); (6) Structuring, reflecting on and participating in educational, upbringing and care processes (260 to 300 teaching hours); (7) Designing musical-creative activities and using media for pedagogical purposes (160 to 200 teaching hours); (8) Assisting in quality assurance measures and conceptual tasks (40 to 60 teaching hours). Award holders can work in a variety of socio-pedagogical settings: (E)CEC centres, after-school and extended, all-day schools, residential homes for children and young people, psychiatric clinics for young people, convalescent homes, outpatient family care, care homes for the elderly and disabled and children's wards in hospitals (Ministerium für Bildung Sachsen-Anhalt 2017).

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Diversification of initial professional education formats

Due to the shortage of qualified staff for the constantly expanding field of early childhood education and care, which has been the case for more than ten years, new IPE formats have emerged which are offered alongside the traditional qualifying routes in this field. A trend can be observed in the federal states to offer as many qualification paths as possible in parallel. In general, a pluralisation of IPE formats can be observed (BMFSFJ 2021a; FKB 2023, 132).

Dualised work-integrated qualification pathways for (E)CEC trainees

Since 2012, a new qualification pathway for trainee **Educators** has been developing. The "practice-integrated and remunerated training" (PiA) was launched in Baden-Württemberg with the aim of creating more training places and at the same time attracting new target groups to train for work in (E)CEC (Ministerium für Kultus, Jugend und Sport Baden-Württemberg 2012). By 2017, the pilot project had become part of the regular programmes on offer.

By the end of 2020, this IPE format existed in all 16 federal states except Saxony-Anhalt, either as a pilot model or as a regular offer (Weltzien et al. 2021, 7). The entry requirement is usually a secondary school leaving certificate or an equivalent qualification as well as one year of prac-

tical work in a socio-pedagogical institution. Students conclude a three-year training employment contract with the service provider of the (E)CEC setting and receive a monthly remuneration – since 2019, €1,140 in the first year of training, €1,202 in the second year and €1,303 in the third year (Erzieherin-ausbildung.de 2023). In 2018, a milestone was reached, when this training format was included in the scope of the collective agreement for public service trainees (König et al. 2018, 49).

In Bavaria, a similar model has been on offer since 2016/2017, known as "Educator training with an optimised work component" (OptiPrax; Bayerische Staatsregierung 2017). The pilot project is intended to raise the attractiveness of the Educator profession. The students conclude a training contract with the (E)CEC provider agency, which also pays them. The minimum entry requirement is an intermediate school leaving certificate. In three different training variants (all with at least 2,400 hours), the title of "state-certified Educator" or “Bachelor Professional in Social Services” can be awarded within three to four years, depending on the trainee’s previous education.

In Baden-Württemberg, since the school year 2020/2021, the classic **Childcarer** qualifying route will also be supplemented by a practice-integrated and remunerated training format, initially as a pilot project at two vocational schools (Ministerium für Kultus, Jugend und Sport Baden-Württemberg 2020). The job title awarded will be changed to "state-certified Social Pedagogy Assistant". The education/training lasts three years and is divided into a theoretical component at the vocational school (3 days per week) and a practical component in an (E)CEC setting (2 days per week). The students enter into a training contract with an (E)CEC centre and receive an allowance paid by the centre provider.

Part-time options for trainee Educators

Another alternative route to become a state-certified Educator is to study part time at a vocational technical college for social pedagogy. This is possible in all federal states. The number of hours remains the same and the duration is extended accordingly (KMK 2002/2021). The college-based part of the IPE then lasts between three and four years, the work placement between one and two years. The same admission requirements apply as for a full-time college-based training.

System permeability

*Chapter **4.1*** illustrated that existing qualification routes for work in (E)CEC settings range from vocational school pathways (Assistant Co-workers) over specialised tertiary-level college courses (Educators) to higher education degree programmes (Childhood Pedagogues). They are thus located at all levels of the vocational education and training (VET) system (Fuchs-Rechlin and Rauschenbach 2020, 5).

Whereas in the past, changing from one level of the system to the next was more or less impossible, this has improved in recent years. In some higher education programmes, a completed IPE as a state-certified Educator is credited as part of a higher education degree. At the University of Lüneburg, for example, 40 ECTS credits are taken into account for participation in the Social Work degree programme, shortening the study programme by two semesters. The Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences also offers 30 ECTS credits to Educators wishing to study for a Bachelor’s degree in Social Work (ErzieherIn.de 2015). These examples can be viewed as a new form of system permeability which makes it possible for interested persons to obtain a formally higher qualification.

Upskilling courses for work as a "Pedagogical Specialist in (E)CEC centres"

In Bavaria an extensive development programme has been introduced – alongside the classical IPE routes – for a step-by-step qualifying pathway into work in the ECEC field (see IFP/StMAS 2024). An initial part of this programme was an upskilling module for working as a "Pedagogical Specialist in (E)CEC centres" introduced in 2017.

The target groups of this upskilling course are Childcarers, Curative/Remedial Educators, Primary School Teachers, persons seeking career changes and applicants from other countries with a relevant academic degree. Entry requirements are an award as state-certified Childcarer or support worker, a minimum age of 25 years and, depending on the previous qualification, three years of work experience (in a post at least 50% of a full-time post). Primary School Teachers who have successfully completed the First State Examination or lateral entrants with a relevant academic degree only need to have had two years of work experience; for Primary School Teachers with the Second State Examination, no teaching experience is required. The course comprises a nine-month extra-occupational module phase ending in a theoretical examination and a six-month supervised internship in an (E)CEC centre. Those who pass the Certificate are awarded the title of "Pedagogical Specialist in (E)CEC centres", which is included in the "Professions Register for (E)CEC centres" (*Kita Berufeliste*) administered by the Bavarian State Youth Office (Zentrum Bayern Familie und Soziales 2022).

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

(E)CEC settings as a "site of learning" (*Lernort Praxis*) have not traditionally had a clear profile in the IPE of Educators, the largest group of core professionals in Germany. Even though the Conference of Ministers for Youth Affairs drew attention in the late 1990s to the significant role of the workplace component in IPE (JMK 1998) and three years later potentially strengthened the status of this learning site (JMK 2001), establishing a formal guarantee of the joint and equal responsibility of college and (E)CEC centre as sites of learning has been slow in getting off the ground, although the topic has featured in the professional literature for some time (Ebert 2002; Oberhuemer 2015; Flämig et al. 2015; Ebert et al. 2018).

The focus of this chapter is primarily on the work based component of the initial professional education of (Early Childhood) Educators. This will be followed by a brief reference to the work based phases in Childhood Pedagogy degree programmes.

(Early Childhood) Educator (*Erzieherin / Erzieher*)

The relevant framework agreement of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK 2020b) stipulates a minimum of 1,200 hours of field practice in socio-pedagogical working environments for the traditional full-time college-based training of Educators at the *Fachschule*. This corresponds to one third of the total course length.

A variety of organisational models can be observed both in full-time, part-time and practice-integrated IPE formats (König et al. 2018). Despite the different regional and institution-specific framework conditions, there are basically two basic forms of full-time college-based training for Educators (cf. also Janssen 2010). About half of the *Länder* prefer an **additive** training model, i.e. a two-year primarily theoretical component at the *Fachschule*/*Fachakademie* followed by a

one-year work placement in an (E)CEC centre or other socio-pedagogical field of activity. Otherwise, within the framework of an **integrated** training model, the work based component is incorporated in specific phases over a period of three years.

In the additive model, the practicum takes place in an (E)CEC setting chosen by the trainee. Here they work full time and conclude a corresponding employment contract with the service provider as the employing organisation. The host setting usually also has a contract with the relevant vocational technical college. In some federal states, the internship, which usually lasts one year, can be shortened to six months if the trainee Educator already possesses relevant practical experience. Some *Länder* waive the internship altogether if the person has already completed a relevant course of training, such as the Childcarer qualifying route.

The trainees are professionally supervised in the (E)CEC setting by a core professional (often called 'practice guidance'), and also receive support from the vocational technical college providing the IPE. In most cases, further theoretical knowledge is provided on one day per week or alternatively in compact courses.

Up to now, there has been no agreed position title[14] for the professionals who take on the practical support in the (E)CEC setting. Until fairly recently, there was no qualification requirement, task profile or remuneration for these professionals (Oberhuemer 2014). In the meantime, however, all federal states require a certified professional training as a basic qualification for this activity. In 12 federal states, further requirements are also placed on the mentor in the form of professional experience (between 'two' and 'several' years) and in four federal states, proof of specific further training is required (König et al. 2018, 47f). In Rhineland-Palatinate, a framework agreement on practical guidance has applied to all service providers since 2006.

In the (E)CEC setting, the trainee Educators participate in practical projects and gather experience in guided activities. Together with the professional supporting them, they reflect on these and their own role. Teachers from the vocational technical college visit the students and observe and evaluate their practice. The grades given for the practicum help decide on admission to the final examination.

Childhood Pedagogue (*Kindheitspädagogin / Kindheitspädagoge*)

In the case of higher education degree programmes for prospective Childhood Pedagogues, the decision on the weighting of the practice component lies with the respective higher education institution. In a joint resolution of the Ministers of Education and the Ministers of Youth and Family Affairs of the *Länder* (KMK/JFMK 2010), an accompanying practical component of at least 30 ECTS credits is recommended for a study programme of 180 ECTS credits. As a rule, this minimum recommendation is a requirement for the state recognition of the professional title "*Kindheitspädagogin, Kindheitspädagoge*" (Stieve et al. 2014, 81). However, some higher education institutions give more weight to this practical component. For example, at the Emden University of Applied Sciences in Lower Saxony (Hochschule Emden-Leer 2019), a total of 45 ECTS credits are allocated to this part of the programme. It consists of two internships (9 and 12 ECTS credits respectively), a practical project (11 ECTS credits) and a six-week internship abroad with preparatory and follow-up seminars (13 ECTS credits).

[14] Examples include training leader or training supervisor, practice mentor or mentor (König et al. 2018, 44).

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

A number of European studies indicate that continuing professional development (CPD) is more effective when it is oriented towards the current competence needs of staff and when it is provided on a regular, supervised and long-term basis (CARE 2015; Eurofound 2015; Sharmahd et al. 2017; Jensen and Iannone 2018). Furthermore, a systematic review of the international literature on the effectiveness of different approaches to CPD in early childhood education has shown that training approaches which combine coaching with new knowledge and opportunities to reflect on practice are most likely to improve quality in early childhood settings (Rogers, Brown, and Poblete 2017).

Continuing professional development in Germany may be theme-oriented or competency-oriented, course-based or setting-based, provide specialist training for a specific designated role, or focus on a specific target group.

This chapter will foreground general aspects relating to the framework conditions for CPD for those working in (E)CEC centres rather than referring to specific occupational groups. In general, however, it can be stated that in comparison to (Early Childhood) Educators, the other relevant occupational groups (Childcarers, Social Assistants, Socio-pedagogical Assistants, also Childhood Pedagogues) have so far been the focus of relatively few CPD providers (see e.g. Buschle und Gruber 2018).

Legislation and regulation

In accordance with the federal structures in Germany, there is no nation-wide framework setting out specifications for the continuing professional development of staff working in early childhood settings, but there are recommendations issued by the Conference of Ministers for Family and Youth Affairs (see e.g. JFMK/KMK 2010). Continuing professional development is anchored in relevant legislation of the *Länder* as a funding-worthy instrument of quality improvement, although views regarding the scope and intensity of steering procedures vary considerably. Beyond this, the non-governmental provider organisations in the non-profit sector, which in Germany have a dual role as employer and CPD provider, have their own provider-specific requirements and conditions regarding the CPD of early childhood personnel.

Main forms

A comparative study on the continuing professional development systems in six European countries (Oberhuemer 2012) differentiates between non-formal and formal professional development.

In Germany, the main forms identified in three nationwide WiFF studies (Beher und Walter 2010; Baumeister und Grieser 2011; Buschle und Gruber 2018) are mostly **non-formal** professional development activities. These mainly aim to deepen professional and personal competences within the workplace and the field in general; they are not conceptualised as cumulative and credit-becaring qualifications with formal certification for the purpose of career advancement.

Both Beher und Walter (2010) and Baumeister und Grieser (2011) have found that the vast majority of CPD seminars for Educators are short-term events of up to three days. Other, less frequently occurring formats are: team-based or in-house seminars; seminars lasting three to five days; training series that extend over a period of around twelve days and are sometimes offered

on a modular basis; supervision offers; quality circles; distance learning courses or e- or blended learning offers; excursions and study trips; specialist conferences.

Due to the predominant participation in short-term events, a recent study (Gessler und Gruber 2022) therefore investigated the question of whether the knowledge acquired by early education managers and specialists in continuing education is sustainable in the sense of knowledge transfer (see *Chapter **9*** for a project description).

Forms of **formal CPD** include courses for which a provider-specific certificate is awarded (e.g. leadership competence) which can be important for career progression within the practitioner's employer structures; in some cases, a state-recognised certificate may be awarded. In Rhineland-Palatinate, for example, in the context of the introduction of official curricular guidance in early childhood education, a cooperation initiative established by the relevant Ministry for employers/providers, municipal umbrella organisations, the state-wide parent committee and the trade unions led to a mutually agreed professional development series (of at least 15 days). For some years now, a series of linked qualification modules has also been offered for providers of (E)CEC facilities. The current offer is called: "Management and quality development of (E)CEC settings – Tandem training for (E)CEC providers and centre leaders in 4 modules - with certification option" (KitaAkademie Rheinland-Pfalz e.V. 2024).

Advanced courses of study with an early childhood specialisation which can be carried out alongside work, or Master's study programmes, are also formal categories of CPD. However, a nationwide framework system of modules for which agreed credits are awarded and which lead to career progression, or an accredited system of cross-provider modules which are recognised as an entry point to advanced studies, have not as yet been established – at least not as a visible system (Oberhuemer 2012, 77). There are as yet no binding quality standards for competence-oriented CPD (Meyer 2018).

In recent years, there have been repeated calls in the professional policy debate for further and advanced training which, in addition to increasing permeability within the ECEC system, also enable career advancement and are better remunerated. For horizontal differentiation, the German Association for Public and Private Welfare (2022) recommends the creation of positions, e.g. as "Specialist Educators", who support and advise the team and management on various topics (inclusion, language) (see also *Chapter **2.3***). Functional positions with more responsibility and also higher pay (e.g. as quality officer, practicum guidance mentor) would promote *vertical* differentiation. These positions should be linked to a "certified qualification". Although these proposals are discussed positively in the professional community, their financing and implementation still depends very much on the specific circumstances of the *Länder* and the providers (Deutscher Verein 2022).

CPD providers

In general, the continuing professional development market for the ECEC sector in Germany is rather confusing and is characterised by a great variety of continuing education and training (CET) providers. Alongside public providers (federal government, *Länder*, municipalities) and private commercial providers, it is primarily the non-profit providers (church organisations, political parties, trade unions, employers' associations, professional associations and welfare organisations) that offer further training for staff in ECEC settings or maintain CET institutions (Buschle und Gruber 2018). According to the nationwide survey by Beher and Walter (2010, see above), the heterogeneous group of non-profit providers is by far the largest group providing CPD for (Early Childhood) Educators in Germany.

The individual CET institutions in Germany are also diverse. They include one-person companies, welfare organisations, educational institutes/academies, adult education centres, public authorities, scientific academies/institutes, church and religious communities, vocational schools, business enterprises, universities, professional or trade associations and business-related CET providers (Beher und Walter 2010, 9). In some *Länder*, vocational technical colleges are also recognised as official CET providers.

Leave entitlement

Leave entitlement for participation in professional development activities is regulated in different ways in each *Land* – both for core practitioners and assistant staff. In most *Länder* it is possible for employees to apply for educational leave. Employees are generally entitled to five days of fully paid leave per year. According to a link posted on the German Education Portal (*Deutscher Bildungsserver*), these entitlements do not apply in Bavaria and Saxony (cf. InfoWeb-Weiterbildung 2024). In a representative survey of 1430 ECEC settings, 67% reported a specified number of days for participation in CPD (Geiger 2019, 81). However, the current staff shortages in the sector are a barrier towards making use of leave entitlement (Buschle und Gruber 2018, 62).

Obligatory or optional?

As a rule, CPD is not a compulsory requirement for ECEC staff in Germany. Only a few federal states have a regulation in this regard (e.g. in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania a training obligation of five days and in Thuringia of two days per year is enshrined in law).

In general, an employer is neither obliged to offer nor to arrange CPD activities. This excludes agreements that are set out in the employment contract (Advocard 2023).

Funding support

With regard to the coverage of costs for CPD, this usually depends on the agreements between employee and employer. The employer is not automatically obliged to bear the costs. The modalities for CPD are often stipulated in the employment contract. If the employer makes attendance mandatory, they must also bear the costs (Personalwissen 2023).

In the early childhood education and care sector, this means that the willingness of providers to cover the costs can vary greatly. A representative survey of 1,430 childcare facilities revealed that 65% of childcare facilities have a budget for further training (Geiger 2019, 81). In two thirds (66%) of the facilities surveyed, the costs of training are covered in full and in 39% in part (Geiger 2019, 82).

Access to CPD

Overall, the pedagogical staff in ECEC show a high willingness and motivation for further professional development (Buschle und Gruber 2018). Unfortunately, they are not infrequently prevented from participating by high workloads, lack of time, high costs of events and staff shortages in the institution (König und Buschle 2020). According to the estimates of the CPD providers in the nationwide WiFF survey (Beher und Walter 2010, 30), almost half (46%) were "completely" of the opinion that work pressures are a considerable barrier to participation in CPD. Between 43% and 47% of the respondents said that paid time off was far too rare and that participation fees and other costs were not met adequately by the employers of early childhood staff.

Supporting the CPD of (E)CEC Assistants is a matter for the individual employer, i.e. service provider.

CPD and career advancement

Until now, no coherent system of career advancement through continuing education and training has been established in Germany, not even for Centre Leaders in ECEC. Nevertheless, the growing complexity and ever widening fields of responsibility of Centre Leaders are recognised by those responsible for ECEC settings and an increasing number of CPD options focusing on management and leadership are being provided (see below).

Within the framework of the study "Career paths in ECEC" (Weßler-Poßberg et al. 2022), commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Family and Youth Affairs, a modular concept for different specialist careers in the ECEC professions is presented. Proposals for longer-term development opportunities that build on initial professional education and experience are based primarily on the fact that a lack of development opportunities is the most common reason for dissatisfaction among ECEC professionals. **Horizontal** career paths (in the field of language, digital or inclusive education), **diagonal c**areer paths (positions in student practicum guidance, quality development) and **vertical** career paths (management of childcare facilities, extracurricular all-day care) are mentioned as examples. Curricula are available for the qualifications (ten 2-day blocks, half of which are self-study), but also exemplary cost calculations. A final certificate of achievement (20-30 ECTS credits) can facilitate credit transfer to a university degree programme.

Key content focus of CPD for core professionals

In principle, the setting of topics in the CPD market is fast-moving (König und Buschle 2020). Compared to the “hot topics” identified by Baumeister und Grieser (2011) in an analysis of 96 CPD programmes of the larger providers, only a few years later a number of shifts and new priorities could be identified (Buschle und Gruber 2018). 15 topic areas appeared particularly often in the programmes: Developmental, educational and learning processes (696); reflection, attitude, self-image, role (560); communication, holding conversations, conflict management (528); cooperation with parents, families (412); music, dance, creativity, art, culture (388); children up to three years, crèches (376); leadership, management (328); methods of pedagogical work (321); inclusion, integration, participation (301); stress management, self-management, time management (288); language education, multilingualism (279); religion, philosophy, mourning (245); personnel development, team development (223); observation, documentation (221); body, movement, sport (214). It was found that compared to earlier studies, topics such as ‘documentation and observation’ had moved more into the background, whereas ‘reflection’, for example, had gained in importance. ‘Cooperation with parents and families’ continued to be highly ranked. The focus on pedagogical work with children under 3 years of age and current education policy topics such as inclusion have increased in importance. It was noticeable that there were comparatively few offers on the topics of ‘digital education’ or ‘education for sustainable development’.

Research on CPD

Key findings of the aforementioned study by Buschle und Gruber (2018) included the following: The professionals perceive CPD as an important factor for high quality in ECEC. This is also reflected in the high level of participation - even if often only in terms of shorter courses. Above all, responding to constantly changing challenges cannot (only) be taught in the context of initial professional education. The motives for participation are listed as: own interest, suggestion of

the Centre Leader, obligation. In most cases, however, participants do not attend CPD primarily because they expect a career advancement or a better salary (Friederich und Buschle 2021).

Cooperation initiatives

In some federal states, regular inter-agency cooperation in the field of CPD for Educators and ECEC Assistants has been established. An example from Bavaria: The *FORUM Fortbildung* convened by the State Institute for Early Childhood Research and Media Literacy (IFP) was founded as early as 2001 as a working group including representatives of continuing education and training provision, initial professional education, and research. It can be seen as a special example of continuous and state-wide cooperation to promote the conceptual and organisational advancement of CPD opportunities for the (E)CEC field. Since 2010, all offers of the participating associations and organisations can also be viewed as a CPD database on the IFP website (www.ifp.bayern.de). This enhances the state-wide and cross-agency transparency for ECEC professionals considerably. The idea and concept of the database originated in *FORUM Fortbildung* and is financed by the Bavarian State Ministry for Family, Labour and Social Affairs (StMAS).

Current policy debates

In recent years, the CPD of early childhood education staff has been a consistent topic in professional policy discussions in Germany. This is emphasised in a number of studies dedicated to the upgrading of social professions in general and the career advancement of Early Childhood Educators in particular. For example, a study by prognos AG on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Family and Youth Affairs (Weßler-Poßberg et al. 2022) presented a modular concept for various specialist careers in the socio-pedagogical professions. In the Sinus Youth Survey (2020), young people were asked about their views on the occupational field of early childhood education and care. They considered it to be varied but not very attractive in terms of career opportunities. Also, a brochure published by the Federal Ministry of Family and Youth Affairs on the systemic relevance of the ECEC occupational field and also a project called "Mehr-Wert" (More Value) of the Fraunhofer Institute for Labour Economics and Organisation (cf. BMFSFJ 2021c). deal with the upgrading of ECEC occupations, stressing the need to strengthen their attractiveness.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

The pay of staff in (E)CEC centres varies according to the service provider they are employed by. Whereas in the private, mostly non-profit sector it is generally the providers who decide on the level of earnings, in the public sector pay is usually bound by collective bargaining agreements. Private ECEC service providers are not bound by these agreements, so the salary is a matter of negotiation. The same applies to the number of days granted for holiday leave, special payments and more (Schuhmacher 2023). However, many private providers base staff salaries on the public sector agreements (TVöD) – and the current high demand provides the pedagogical staff with a good basis for negotiation.

The public sector (TVöD) pay grades are based on job characteristics, such as “Educator with demanding tasks” (e.g. Educators who work with children with special needs), “Group Leader” or “Centre Leader in a setting with more than 100 places”). Depending on the length of service,

increments are added to the basic salary. After one year of service on the first scale point, a person advances to scale point 2; after three years, to scale point 3; after four years each, to scale points 4 and 5; and after five years, to scale point 6. This means that ECEC staff do not reach the highest seniority scale point until 17 years after starting their career (Infoportal öffentlicher Dienst 2023b). In most cases, employees also receive a Christmas bonus and staff may be paid extra for living in specific cities/locations.

After the most recent public sector collective bargaining round at the end of 2023 for the year 2024, the basic starting salary of a **Childcarer** with demanding tasks is now €3,091.81 gross per month, and that of an **Educator** with demanding tasks is €3,371.39 (compared to €2,599.20 in 2017). In the highest salary scale for each occupation the gross basic salaries increase to €3,925.36 and €4,902.44 respectively. The **Centre Leader** of a setting with more than 180 places has a starting salary of €4,458.20; in the highest salary scale the respective amount is €6.576,36 (compared with €5,446.34 in 2017) (Infoportal öffentlicher Dienst 2023a, see *Table 11*).

Table 11

Germany: Salaries of ECEC staff, 2022/23 (valid from 01.03.2024 until 31.12.2024)

Staff categories	Salary Scale 1 / Scale 6
Childcarer	
S 2/3 (regular)	€ 2,719.14 / € 3,237.95
S 4 (with demanding tasks)	€ 3,091.81 / € 3,925.36
Educator	
S 8a (regular)	€ 3,303.85 / € 4,409.39
S 8b (with demanding tasks)	€ 3,371.39 / € 4,902.44
Centre Leader	
S 13 (in settings with 40–70 places)	€ 3,756.97 / € 5,169.65
S 18 (in settings with over 180 places)	€ 4,458.20 / € 6,576.36

Source: Infoportal öffentlicher Dienst 2023a

Since **Childhood Pedagogues** do not as yet have an agreed job classification, the collectively agreed classification for "other employees" who "perform corresponding activities based on equivalent skills and experience" is used for these Bachelor graduates. This means that grouping is often a matter of negotiation and is often done in the same way as for Educators with (particularly) demanding tasks. In general, a university degree does not have a great impact on the salary of (Early Childhood) Educators. Persons with degree-level qualifications earn significantly more in business or research (Infoportal öffentlicher Dienst 2023b).

However, compared to the salaries of Primary School Teachers (most of whom are civil servants), the pay of professionals in ECEC centres is still significantly lower, with the differences between the western and eastern *Länder* decreasing overall. In 2022/23, a civil servant teacher (entry-level salary A12) earned between €3,619.23 gross (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) and €4,107.37 (Brandenburg) per month (Infoportal öffentlicher Dienst 2023c, valid until 30.09.2023).

Teachers in salaried employment are rather rare (mostly in temporary positions) and are paid nationwide (except in Hesse, where a separate collective bargaining agreement applies) according to the collective bargaining agreement of the federal states (TV-L, in municipalities TVöD). The starting gross salary averages €3,990.46 (EG11, January 2023) (GEW 2023). Both civil servants and salaried teachers are paid according to activity and level of professional experience between €3,520.65 gross (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) and €3,979.84 (Bavaria) per month (Infoportal Öffentlicher Dienst 2022c).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in (E)CEC provision

According to the Early Education Staffing Barometer, a total of 722,043 persons worked in (E)CEC facilities in 2021 (FKB 2023), including out-of-school settings. Full-time employees work 38.5 hours per week or more, part-time employees work less than 38.5 hours per week. There are virtually no differences between the public and independent provider sectors. The decision to work full time or part time is agreed between the provider and the professional.

In 2022, very large regional differences were recorded: in the western federal states, 32.9% worked full time, in the eastern states (including Berlin) only 21.6%. One possible reason for this could be that many staff in the eastern federal states reduced their working hours to part time a few years ago in order to retain their jobs. On average, 34.1% of early childhood education professionals (excluding administrative staff) worked full time in 2023 (Destatis/Genesis 2023). If all employees in (E)CEC settings are taken into account (not only educational professionals, but also administrative, housekeeping and technical staff), 30.1% of staff were in full-time employment in 2023 (Destatis/Genesis 2023). The proportion varied considerably in 2022: from 15.6% in Brandenburg to 42.2% in North Rhine-Westphalia, including administrative staff (Destatis 2023, own calculations).

Table 12

Germany: **Pedagogical staff – full-time and part-time employment in (E)CEC centres, 2023**

Number of working hours	Number of employees (excluding administrative personnel)	Proportion in %
38.5 and more	253,755	34.1
32 to under 38.5	144,353	19.4
21 to under 31	213,810	28.7
10 to under 21	109,318	14.7
under 10	23,657	3.2
Total	**744,893**	

Source: Destatis/Genesis 2023

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

There is no binding system of mentoring, coaching or supervision for newly qualified or newly employed (Early Childhood) Educators in Germany. Induction concepts and measures are the responsibility of the setting providers. In principle, specialist advisers/counsellors employed by the provider organisation offer support measures in the workplace in the broadest sense. On the one hand, these counselling staff are an integral part of the staff in the system of early childhood education and care in Germany, on the other hand, there is no legal protection, no binding task profile across all providers and no binding qualification requirements for this coordinating area of responsibility (see also *Chapter **2.3***).

7.4 Non-contact time

Non-contact time varies considerably across the federal states and may also be regulated by the individual service providers. A survey by the trade union ver.di of 19,250 ECEC professionals in 2021 showed that only slightly more than half (58.6%) have fixed availability times in the duty roster, and 28.9% have no hours set aside for preparation and follow-up. There are significant

differences between the federal states: for example, in Bremen and Hamburg there are no regulations on non-contact time, in Baden-Württemberg they are very clearly specified with at least ten hours per group/week (Ver.di 2021, 13; KVJS 2021).

7.5 Current staffing issues (e.g. staff shortages, recruitment, age composition of workforce)

There has been a considerable shortage of staff in the German ECEC system for years. There are many reasons for this: on the one hand, the expansion of places since 2013 after the introduction of the legal entitlement for one year-olds to a place in centre-based or home-based provision led to a higher demand for qualified workers. In addition - especially in the eastern federal states - a large group of professionals will soon retire and for whom no adequate replacement is available. Dissatisfaction with the working conditions, mainly with the pay, has led to many graduates of the Childhood Pedagogy Bachelor's degree course only staying in the ECEC sector for a short time and, where possible, looking for a job in higher education teaching or research.

In the last 15 years, around 800,000 new places in (E)CEC have been created in Germany. Nevertheless, evaluations by the German Youth Institute as part of the National Education Report 2022 found that the biggest gap in terms of staff shortages is expected to be in 2025: There will then be a shortage of up to 73,000 specialist workers, particularly in western Germany (Rauschenbach et al. 2022).

The Bertelsmann Foundation's current monitoring report shows that there will be a shortage of up to 383,600 places in 2023: far more in the western federal states (362,400) than in the eastern part of the country (21,200) and especially places for under 3 year-olds (271,000 in total). To cover this need, 98,600 people would have to be recruited (Bock-Famulla et al. 2023).

In addition, the relatively constant average age since 2012 and rather high average age in 2023 of both E()CEC staff (40.8 years) and Centre Leaders (47 years) means that many specialist staff will retire in the coming years for reasons of age (Destatis/Genesis 2023, own calculations, excluding administrative staff).

The lack of staff is particularly noticeable in urban conurbations, whereas in rural areas it can happen that groups have to be closed because too few children attend the settings.

In order to further increase IPE capacities, an urgent priority would be to increase the number of teaching staff in the *Fachschulen* for social pedagogy, as intended in North Rhine-Westphalia. The shortage of qualified ECEC personnel has thus also reached the level of initial professional education (Fuchs-Rechlin und Rauschenbach 2021).

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Professional Development Initiative for Early Childhood Educators (WiFF)

In 2008, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Robert Bosch Foundation in cooperation with the German Youth Institute launched a comprehensive professional development initiative for early childhood educators called WiFF (*Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte*). With the new *WiFF-Transfer* line of action, the initiative has been extended until the end of 2026. This makes it one of the most far-reaching – if not the most far-reaching – professionalisation initiative for early childhood personnel in Europe (Oberhuemer 2014, 22).

The professional development initiative supports the professionalisation both of ECEC staff as well as the ECEC system as a whole in a number of ways (WiFF 2023b). These include specialist reports, field evaluations and research studies providing up-to-date knowledge on current topics in ECEC as well as promoting competence-oriented CPD by observing and analysing the ongoing professionalisation process. In addition, the initiative is committed to improving the links between vocational and higher education skills acquisition so that educational pathways can be better connected. Specialists from initial and continuing education, policy development, provider associations and academia are involved in order to keep the discourse on quality in ECEC alive.

Through specialist conferences and workshops, WiFF also acts as a professional network for the growing number of stakeholders in the field of early childhood education and care. Moreover, WiFF exchanges ideas twice a year in an open-door group with representatives from the social and education ministries of the federal states as well as with staff and heads of the vocational technical colleges for social pedagogy (WiFF 2023d).

Staff monitoring – The Early Education Staffing Barometer

A sub-project of the Professional Development Initiative for Early Childhood Educators (WiFF) is The Early Education Staffing Barometer (FKB 2023). The first edition of this comprehensive compilation of data was published in 2014; the fifth edition became available in October 2023. The Barometer provides detailed information on staff in ECEC settings and their qualification structures, on ECEC teams, on the employment market, on IPE pathways into ECEC, diversity in staff composition and future staffing requirements. There is also a comprehensive appendix of tables with data, some of which are also broken down by federal state.

The data sources include employment, earnings and higher education statistics, as well as child and youth welfare and education statistics.

Federal programme “Staffing Campaign”

As already reported, there has been a significant shortage of staff in the ECEC sector in Germany for some time now. In order to recruit new staff and retain existing professionals, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth funded a "Staffing Campaign" from 2019 to 2021 (BMFSFJ 2023b). Three programme priorities were developed: (1) paid practice-integrated training, (2) practicum guidance and (3) promotion bonus. The evaluation through representative online-supported written surveys as well as focus groups and telephone interviews included 500 providers per programme area and resulted in recommendations for action (Weltzien et al. 2021 – see *Chapter **9*** for details of the research findings).

State by state monitoring – a Bertelsmann Foundation initiative

The private monitoring initiative by the Bertelsmann Foundation, which has been published every two years since 2008, is based on data from official child and youth welfare statistics and surveys of the responsible state ministries. The status quo of the ECEC systems in the 16 federal states is analysed according to three key areas: "Ensuring participation", "Using investments effectively" and "Promoting education - ensuring quality" (cf. Bock-Famulla et al. 2023). Online, it is also possible to compile individual comparisons across the *Länder*. Furthermore, data on the personnel working in ECEC are also presented and supplemented by analyses of staff-related topics, such as the “Staffing Radar for Kita and Primary School” (*Fachkräfte-Radar*), which was launched in 2021 and will be published bi-annually, detailing staffing trends and predicting staffing needs.

Federal programme "Language Kitas" ("*Sprach-Kitas*")

The core themes of the federal programme "Language Kitas: Because language is the key to the world" (2016 to mid-2023) are language education integrated into everyday life, inclusive education and cooperation with families. Since July 2023, responsibility for the programme is now in the hands of the federal states, which aim to continue it mostly from their own funds or from funds from the fields of action set out in the Kita Quality Act (Das Portal der Kinder und Jugendhilfe 2023).

Since 2021, there has been a new focus within these fields of action on the use of digital media and on media pedagogical issues - especially in ECEC settings attended by an above-average proportion of children with language support needs. In addition, digital education and digital communication formats are to be enhanced in the qualification of professionals. In each "Sprach-Kita", an additional professional is employed who is accompanied by external specialist advisers. In 2020, 6,360 additional professionals in "Sprach-Kitas" and 503 accompanying expert advisers, each with a half-time position, were funded (BMFSFJ 2021b). The Free University of Berlin and the University of Bamberg examined the implementation and effects of the programme in an accompanying evaluation. 1,069 Centre Leaders, 1,018 Educators and 102 specialist advisers were included. In 2021, a further 77 specialist Counsellors/advisers, 576 Centre Leaders and 547 additional Educators took part in an online survey. Recommendations for successful implementation emphasised the cooperation in tandems between ECEC teams and specialist counsellors (*Fachberatung*), the provision of CPD courses on digitalisation issues and intensive preparation of Educators for their supporting and advisory role. At the same time, it was pointed out that further efforts are needed in terms of improving the digital infrastructure of ECEC settings (BMFSFJ 2021d).

Overall strategy for the continuing professionalisation of socio-pedagogical staff

In a joint meeting in October 2023, the Conference of Ministers of Youth and Family Affairs (JFMK) and the Conference of Ministers of Education and Culture (KMK) viewed the recruitment, long-term retention and personnel development of a sufficient number of qualified staff for child and youth welfare as the greatest challenge for the near future. A joint working group will focus on the following priorities (MBJS Brandenburg 2023):

- Initial professional education
- Continuing professional development
- Higher education qualifying pathways
- Professional fields of employment
- Development and career opportunities
- Attracting new target groups
- Recognition of staff with non-German qualifications
- Shortening the duration of IPE while maintaining quality standards
- Modularisation and digitalisation of IPE
- Permeability of IPE programmes

"In order to make optimum use of the potential options for recruiting and retaining pedagogical staff, training and qualification options must be considered in addition to quantitative issues, particularly with a focus on child and youth welfare. In view of the increasing heterogeneity of staff, there is also a need for agreement on the necessary quality assurance measures. In addition, it is important to establish continuing learning opportunities through targeted CPD offers for pedagogical staff in order to retain qualified staff" (MBJS Brandenburg 2023).

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on (E)CEC staff

TALIS Starting Strong Survey

Source: DJI 2023 (see *References* for further details)

Background and aims: Germany is participating in this international study for the second time. The TALIS study is led by the OECD and the OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care. Sixteen countries from five continents are participating; seven, including Germany, are focussing not only on professionals who work with 3 to 6 year-olds, but also with under 3 year-olds. For Germany, the study is being conducted by the International Centre for Early Childhood Education and Care (ICEC) at the German Youth Institute (DJI). Funding comes from the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and the European Union (EU). The first survey took place in 2018, with evaluations of 520 Centre Leaders and 2,572 ECEC professionals (see Turani et al. 2022) and will be supplemented by a second study in 2024, which will enable an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses and special features of the ECEC systems.

Procedure: For Germany, the relevance of the OECD questionnaires was tested in 2023 in a pilot study with 60 ECEC centres and 350 Educators and Centre Leaders. In spring 2024, a total of around 500 randomly selected ECEC centres with 3,000 staff and centre managers will be surveyed nationwide. Topics include working conditions and stress, aspects of initial and continuing education, pedagogical practices and settings, diversity in the ECEC centre, digitalisation in ECEC, learning environment, work organisation and climate, and pedagogical management tasks.

Selected findings: Results are not yet available; they are expected from 2025 onwards.

Implications: As with the 2018 study, it can be assumed that the findings of the new study will also contribute to keeping an eye on and further developing the importance of everyday practice, diversity, leadership and the recruitment and retention of pedagogical staff in the field of early childhood education and thus improving quality in order to adequately meet the existing challenges in Germany.

Evaluation of the federal programme "Staffing Campaign"

Source: Weltzien, Hohagen, Kassel, Pasquale und Wirth et al. 2022 (see *References* for further details).

Background and aims: Against the background of the acute shortage of qualified staff in the field of early education and care, a federal programme "Staffing Campaign" (2019-2021) was launched. The aim was to promote the recruitment and retention of staff.

Procedure: The evaluation of the campaign focused on three programme areas: the recently introduced remunerated practice-integrated training (PiA); professional practice guidance; and a promotion bonus as a means of retaining existing staff. A mixed-methods design was developed which gave equal weighting to various qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches. In the quantitative part, the experiences and assessments of PiA trainees, practice supervisors, college lecturers, centre leaders, and ECEC providers were combined in statistical analyses. The initial sample was 500 ECEC providers per programme area. Qualitative methods were used during the process to deepen the findings and included the reconstruction of perspectives. Results were combined and triangulated and an overall evaluation of the federal programme conducted.

Selected findings: Key findings are as follows: (1) The remunerated practice-integrated model of training proved to be a successful strategy for recruiting young talent and was rated very positively by trainees, centre managers and college staff. Binding agreements between vocational technical colleges and the workplace learning location are seen as an important aspect of this. However, the Centre Leaders were particularly critical of the pro-rata crediting of trainees to the staffing ratio and the ECEC providers were critical of the unclear funding situation at the end of the programme. (2) Professional guidance and supervision increased the quality of the training practice, especially if the mentors were appropriately qualified and released for two hours per week for these activities. Challenges arose here due to staff shortages or turnover, unclear task allocations and – depending on the specific framework conditions of the institution - correspondingly adapted personnel development measures or financial structures. (3) All participants considered a promotion bonus for existing professionals to be an effective method of retaining professionals, which increases appreciation and job satisfaction. On the provider side, however, it was pointed out that a bonus could also lead to team conflicts if there are no transparent criteria for allocation. In addition, the collective bargaining system, which does not provide for bonus payments, is likely to stand in the way of continuity.

Initial education and training of Educators: “a permanent construction site"

Source: Mende und Fuchs-Rechlin 2022 (see *References* for further details)

Background and aims: Due to inconsistent federal and state statistics, there is little data available on changes in the vocational technical college landscape and the initial education and training of prospective Educators. The data generated in the study aim to give these key aspects more visibility.

Procedure: A total of 293 vocational technical colleges (56% of which are publicly funded) took part in an online survey in 2021. The questionnaire was answered in roughly equal parts by college and department heads (41.9% and 40.4% respectively), heads of educational programmes and deputy college heads. Among other things, the survey asked for information on the college structure and organisation; on the teaching staff; on the training to become an Educator; on capacities and entry requirements; on costs and funding; on cooperation between learning locations; on forms of organisation and on assessments of the education and training to become an Educator.

Selected findings: The number of publicly funded institutions is currently decreasing and only accounts for 46% of all training colleges for EC Educators. They are more frequently located in the western federal states and in rural areas and are more inclined to participate in pilot projects or offer examinations for external applicants than the private vocational colleges. Due to expanded access opportunities to education, an increased diversity of students can be observed: the proportion of beginners with a higher education entrance qualification has increased.

Offers of different IPE options are distributed differently across the vocational colleges, with more options being available in public institutions. Nationwide, there are four main types of IPE: 1) full-time IPE (51%), 2) practice-integrated training (PiA, 22%), 3) part-time IPE alongside work (19%) and 4) part-time IPE (4%) - 4% could not be allocated. Even though overall responsibility lies with the vocational technical colleges, numerous institutionalised forms of cooperation between college and (E)CEC settings can now be observed, and thus also active, structural cooperation between learning locations. Colleges providing full-time and PiA training are the most satisfied with this type of cooperation.

Implications: The four IPE formats identified appeal to different groups of people and each offers advantages and disadvantages. It would be desirable to standardise these formats nationwide, to formulate orientation standards and to include them in the KMK framework agreement.

It would be important to define what a specific format should stand for, which would, however, require common terminology and cross-state agreements. Since, unlike other dual professions, the professional preparation of prospective Educators is not subject to ongoing monitoring, and also due to heterogeneity and federalism, it is difficult to observe and analyse developments in a continuous way.

International ECEC professionals and team-oriented centre development

Source: Robert Bosch Foundation 2023; Faas et al. 2021 (see *References* for further details)

Background and aims: The aim of the project was to raise awareness and improve the way ECEC centres handle diversity. Specifically, it involved, among other things, the targeted qualification of professionals from other countries, the creation of a cross-centre network on migration-specific topics and the removal of barriers to the recognition of equivalence of qualifications.

The "Diversity Welcome" project was initially implemented in Baden-Württemberg (BBQ - Bildung und Berufliche Qualifizierung gGmbH) and has also been running in Thuringia since 2023.

The scientific monitoring of the first project run focussed on the investigation of conditions for the successful implementation of the project, such as reaching ECEC professionals with a migration background who have obtained a pedagogical qualification abroad; the willingness of providers and ECEC centres to employ such staff; the comparison with IPE structures and job profiles in other countries; and the on-site activities in the early education field in terms of integrating professionals with a migration background with educators, children and parents in ECEC centres.

Procedure: A multi-perspective and multi-method research design was adopted. In addition to literature research, online research and expert interviews, standardised online questionnaires were used as evaluation instruments. In sub-project A, all 23 authorities for the recognition of non-German qualifications were contacted for a standardised survey, but only eight of them agreed to participate. In sub-project B, between January and June 2020, 12 ECEC centre managers and 65 professionals were surveyed using online questionnaires, and guided interviews were conducted with 11 professionals undergoing the recognition process, 12 centre leaders and 7 field trainers.

Selected findings: The programme addresses relevant social, labour market and education policy issues and problems and is seen as innovative and conceptually sustainable. Nevertheless, the recognition procedure is seen as a complex process and specific hurdles continue to arise, especially for professionals from countries outside the EU – even after the Immigration of Skilled Workers Act was introduced in 2020.

The equivalence assessment and the associated concept of “substantial differences” introduced by the EU are viewed critically. Above all, the rather deficient view of qualifications acquired abroad further exacerbates the problem of different educational and professional systems as well as the different organisation of ECEC systems and associated professional profiles. There is also a lack of transparency for all stakeholders, as different authorities are responsible for equivalence assessment throughout Germany.

It should be noted that causal relationships between the analysed variables cannot be verified and the small sample sizes also represent a limitation of the study.

Implications: Although the question of the impact of a measure is important, it does not do justice to the “Diversity welcome” programme or its complexity if it is assessed solely in terms of its effects. For the most part, the programme has succeeded in conceptually anchoring aspects of culturally sensitive and prejudice-conscious pedagogy in the participating ECEC centres and in raising awareness of the opportunities for the integration of professionals with a migration background in the centre teams. It is recommended that further training measures continue

to be provided for the professionals in the recognition process and that parallel further training and process support be provided to support organisational and team development in the participating ECEC centres. At the same time, however, more specific options and methods should also be made available to the centre teams in order to be able to provide even more targeted guidance and support to the professionals in the accreditation process in their day-to-day work.

Licence for multi-professionalism in times of staffing shortages?

Source: Grgic und Friederich 2023 (see *References f*or further details)

Background and aims: Against the background of the prevailing shortage of qualified staff in ECEC centres, the loosening of the so-called “skilled worker catalogues” of the federal states for occupational groups without a specifically (socio-)pedagogical qualification is examined. The question of whether and under what conditions multi-professional teams can promote professionalisation in early education is investigated. The definition of the term "multiprofessionalism" is analysed: On the one hand, in the sense of interdisciplinarity, people from other professional groups can take on specifically designated positions in the ECEC centre; on the other hand, people with different professional qualifications can also carry out the same tasks in the ECEC setting. It was investigated how these professionals can be integrated into the respective team and what added value they represent for ECEC centres.

Procedure: Using a multi-stage qualitative content analysis, the licensing laws of the federal states and their legal basis were examined and categories were formed with regard to authorised occupational groups and professional positions.

Selected results: Professional theory and also professional policy arguments may speak in favour of different professions working together in teams, but attention must be paid to the specific implementation, as the term "multiprofessional" is variously used: as cooperation between different professional groups with different qualification levels from the same professional field, or from different professional fields.

Three types of staff catalogues could be distinguished in the federal states: 1) narrowly defined, socio-pedagogically oriented (Bremen and Saarland); 2) academically extended, pedagogically oriented (Bavaria, Brandenburg, Hesse, Lower Saxony, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein, Thuringia); and 3) multi-professionally oriented, with further vocational technical college qualifications (Baden-Württemberg, Berlin, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Rheinland-Palatinate, North Rhein-Westphalia).

The highest rates of ECEC staff with a higher education degree (9-11%) are to be found in states with an academically extended, pedagogically oriented specialist staff catalogue (Saxony, Thuringia, Hesse). In federal states with a multi-professionally oriented catalogue of skilled workers, there is also an "downward opening". These persons (e.g. with therapeutic or healthcare qualifications) are sometimes limited in their deployment or are required to be re-qualified with regard to the pedagogical content knowledge they bring with them (compared to the minimum 1,000 hours of pedagogical content in the initial professional education of Educators, only between 50 and 300 hours) and subsequently supported by the ECEC Centre Leader and the team.

It was not possible to establish clear advantages or disadvantages for the deployment of people with "non-specialist" qualifications in ECEC centres, as a wide range of conditions need to be met for this to happen.

Implications: Multi-professional teams cannot therefore contribute to solving the shortage of qualified staff or to improving quality or professionalisation per se, as the resources required for successful integration into the team are generally not available in the ECEC centres – particularly in the face of acute staff shortages.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

*Country expert assessment by **Sigrid Ebert***

Changing demands on the professional education and upbringing of children in early childhood settings, mostly a women's task, have been part of social modernisation processes in Germany for over 100 years. The *Conference of Ministers for Youth and Family Affairs* of the 16 federal states, the body responsible for child and youth welfare, has repeatedly positioned itself in terms of social change. One example: "In (E)CEC facilities, the education of young children needs to be challenging at a complex level, enhanced through everyday practices and supported through a caring environment. This represents a new interpretation of bringing up children. It recognises children as the subject of their education and at the same time makes demands on adults to ensure that sustainable and legitimate cultural experiences are made available to children for their own self-education" (JMK 2001a).

In the course of successive **legal entitlements** for the institutional support of children in (E)CEC services (nurseries, kindergartens, out-of-school care services), this system of "supervised childhood" as a public responsibility underpinning family upbringing is assessed in educational and social science discourses from the point of view of effectiveness. Support encompasses the upbringing, education and care of the child, it relates to the child's social, emotional, physical and intellectual development and it starts with the child (Federal Ministry of Justice 1990, SGB VIII, §22, para. 3). From a child policy perspective, this is about the child's right to a "good childhood". Beyond this, the coronavirus pandemic has revealed that childhood education and care settings in Germany must also be measured against whether they are perceived as a visible and socially significant part of a satisfying childhood (BJK 2008).

The current high demand for qualified staff in childhood education and care settings can be attributed on the one hand to the fact that more and more children from the age of two are spending an increasing amount of time in ECEC settings and that young schoolchildren are also increasingly attending various forms of all-day care outside school hours (König 2021). At the same time, the diverse lifestyles of children and their families place new demands on the pedagogical work of professionals which they need to encounter through a pedagogy designed to reflect children's real-life situations. The well-being of children is the "starting point and goal of pedagogical quality" (Reker und Spiekermann 2021). In the 16 federal states, curricular frameworks are available to support professionals in shaping this everyday informal learning culture. However, the **density of interaction quality** is the deciding factor and challenge in providing individual support for each child (Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Verband 2023). In turn, this pedagogical quality depends on the number of children for whom an Educator is responsible (staff to child ratio), and this varies considerably across the federal states. The extent to which the "knowledge and skills" of an Educator come into play is a question of time with and proximity to the individual child and of co-operation within the team.

In the context of centre-based ECEC, the concept of care tends to have a custodial connotation: "The care and upbringing of children are the natural right of parents and their primary duty" (Federal Ministry of Justice 1990, SGB VIII §1, 2). Nevertheless, in addition to education and upbringing, the responsibility for children's well-being in the sense of "care", is part of the professional identity of Educators. They observe and experience in their pedagogical interactions with children that the more children are enabled to be self-effective on an everyday basis and the more they are enabled to help shape their living and learning environment, the greater their

wellbeing. It is crucial that they feel respected and recognised as a valuable member of the community of people who learn, live, play and work in the ECEC centre in a context of secure relationships. This **concept of agency** is the "key to a successful educational biography" (Schleicher 2019) and also applies without restriction to children under the age of 3 as well as to children of primary school age ("good all-day care").

The societal significance of the social professions, to which the Educator profession belongs, is undisputed (Deutscher Verein 2020). Educators represent the strongest occupational group within the qualifications pyramid of social professions. However, parallel to the current expansion of places in ECEC, the field is facing an **acute shortage of qualified staff**, especially in the western German federal states. There is even talk of a "dramatically worsening skills gap" (Rauschenbach et al. 2022). According to forecasts, this staffing shortage of Educators could reach a peak of up to 73,000 by 2025.

In particular, the shortages are experienced most strongly in ECEC settings for children under 3 years of age, meaning that the quality standards achieved to date can hardly be maintained under the given conditions, especially with regard to the staff to child ratio (FKB 2023). Moreover, the curricular framework programmes include little guidance in terms of the specific pedagogical competences needed by staff when working with nursery-age children (Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Verband 2023), despite the fact that more and more parents with under 3 year-olds wish to see them attend an ECEC centre (FKB 2023).[15]

However, when it comes to the **conflicting demands of professionalism and staffing shortages**, it is the federal structures of the system of professional education and training which pose the greatest challenge to quality control for ECEC system. The newer "dualised" training formats, which combine time in a vocational technical college with a paid workplace in an ECEC setting, aim to ensure that as many people as possible are recruited for the Educator profession. These prospective professionals are counted towards the staffing ratio with the aim of retaining them in the centre in the long term.

There is also currently a broad debate in Germany as to whether the current **vocational programme of professional education/training** actually imparts or can impart the professional skills in the necessary breadth and depth that are required in the context of the increased and still rising expectations of the quality of socio-pedagogical work in ECEC settings (Ebert et al. 2018; Kalicki et al. 2019). A recent survey conducted by the Paritätischer Gesamtverband shows that the confidence of service providers in the quality of the outcomes of the vocational education/training route is only middling (Der Paritätische Gesamtverband 2022). This is the case despite the fact that with the framework specifications of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* significant steps have been taken to sharpen the competence profile and professional profile of Educators (KMK 2017; KMK 2020b).

The current aim of the federal government is to re-evaluate the social professions in terms of their professional expertise and social significance. Through "performance-related remuneration and career options ... female and male professionals are to be recruited and retained in this occupational field in the long term and gender-specific attributions are to be replaced by a widely perceived professionalism and a modern understanding of the profession" (BMFSFJ 2020b, 15ff). A broad alliance of experts under the leadership of the Federal Ministry for Youth Affairs is now to develop an **overall strategy for professionals in ECEC and all-day childhood care and education for school-age children** as part of a participatory and consecutive process.

[15] The revised version of the *Common Framework of the Federal States for Early Education in ECEC Centres* now includes a separate section on "Pedagogical focus areas for children under three" (KMK 2022, 21-22).

A standardised national framework for initial, continuing and further education/training is envisaged to enable coherent management of the system and, as a result, help to secure the supply of qualified staff. The success of such an "overall strategy" will depend not least on whether it is possible to overcome the stumbling blocks and hurdles of the German Qualifications Framework (Ebert 2012; Rauschenbach 2013) in line with the guiding principle of "lifelong learning". It is hoped that a strategic concept that takes into account the interactive type of work demanded in the person-related health and social care professions will enable tailor-made specialist and project careers on the basis of a coordinated organisational and personnel development concept in ECEC settings and all-day care and education provision for school children (FKB 2023).

The effects of the pandemic as well as the current political discussion about a "basic child support programme" are challenging child and youth welfare services to become more open to children and families affected by poverty. This is not just about the child's right to a place in ECEC, but also about the fact that, in order to realise the children's right of support in their development, childhood education and care settings contribute to "creating positive living conditions for young people and their families (...)" (Federal Ministry of Justice 1990, SGB VIII, § 1, (3)). However, such a task requires additional qualifications, such as a "specialist for working with children in poverty and cooperation with families" (Kalicki et al. 2019); this in turn would require closer cooperation between ECEC providers and higher education institutions.

In conclusion, it must be stated that it was only in the wake of the post-PISA debate that Germany began to take a long-term look at its public early childhood education and care services and – associated with this – to consider qualification requirements beyond the current generalist profile of professionals. The Daycare Expansion Act, which came into force in 2005, also changed the focus to the quality of childhood education and care settings and to the need for strengthening initial and continuing education and training for professionals. To date, however, the vocational education and training system in Germany has not succeeded in providing graduates with a professional profile that corresponds to their professional tasks and requirements (Janssen 2010). For this reason, a **renewed "National Quality Initiative"** in the system of (early) childhood education and care, such as the one which was launched over 20 years ago, is arguably an urgent priority.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

GERMANY

Key contextual data

Compiled by

Inge Schreyer and Pamela Oberhuemer

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the general term used in this synopsis for the main forms of provision is **ECEC centre** (*Kindertageseinrichtung, Kita* 0–5[1]). The term **nursery** (*Kinderkrippe*) is used for settings specifically for under 3 year-olds and **kindergarten** for settings for children aged 2/3–5 years. Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Germany

1802	Founding of the first custodial institution (*Kleinkinderbewahranstalt*) for children up to the age of four in Detmold by Princess Pauline zu Lippe-Detmold
First half of 19th century	Institutions (also known as *Kleinkinderschulen*) are founded along confessional lines and by philanthropic associations for neglected children of the poor.
1840	Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) founds the first "kindergarten" in Blankenburg (Thüringia) with a comprehensive approach towards early childhood education – intentionally open for children of all social classes, but fees in effect excluded poor families.
1848	Public discussion of Froebel's proposal to integrate the kindergarten into the general education system. There is no state financial support for either confessional *Kleinkinderschulen* or non-confessional kindergartens.
1851-1860	Kindergartens are banned by the Prussian government until 1860.
Late 19th century	There is still virtually no financial support for kindergartens from the state.
1910	Around 13% of 3 to 5 year-olds attend a kindergarten, with marked regional variations.
1920	The Reich Schools Conference (*Reichsschulkonferenz*) debates whether kindergartens should be part of the school system or assigned to social welfare.
1922	National Youth Welfare Act (*Reichsjugendwohlfahrtgesetz*) assigns kindergartens to the social welfare sector and provides a prerogative for private (confessional) provision. ECEC settings come under the responsibility of the youth office as part of the municipal welfare authorities and are thus excluded from public education. To this day, the majority of child and youth welfare services are provided by non-governmental organisations.
1933	With the onset of the Nazi regime, progressive approaches in kindergartens (*Reformpädagogik*) come to an abrupt halt. Kindergartens are gradually appropriated by the National Socialist Welfare Organisation and come under the influence of Nazi ideology.
Post WW2 – 1990	In the socialist and centralised *German Democratic Republic (GDR)* the participation of women in the labour market is a declared political goal, supported by the development of a system of full-day kindergartens and nurseries, both of which have an explicitly educational mission. The decentralised *Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)* follows a distinctly different policy agenda. Expansion is slow and provision levels are much lower than in the GDR. Kindergartens for 3 to 6 year-olds are open on a predominantly part-time basis only.

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years, as in Germany.

1990	Following the unification of the two German states, a new federal-level law, the Child and Youth Services Act (Book Eight of the Social Code), comes into force (1990 in the eastern and 1991 in the western *Länder*).
1996	Legal entitlement to a kindergarten place for 3 to 6 year-olds is introduced, leading to a steady expansion of kindergartens. The level of services for under 3 year-olds improves only minimally during this time. By 2002, the overall level of provision has risen to 9%, but differences between the eastern *Länder* (37%) and the western *Länder* (3%) remain significant.
2002	Early childhood education starts to move up the policy agenda. Two strategies in particular mark a significant change of direction in the history of ECEC in Germany. One is the decision to introduce official curricular guidelines for the early childhood sector, which are successively issued between 2003 and 2008 in all 16 *Länder*; the other is a government commitment to expand places for under 3 year-olds to provide coverage for 35% of this age group by 2013 and guaranteeing entitlement to a place for children aged 1 and 2 years.
2004	Inter-ministerial (Youth Affairs/Education) agreement at federal level on a (non-mandatory) *Common Framework for Early Education in ECEC centres*. The Childcare Expansion Act comes into force.
2008	The Childcare Funding Act (*KiFög)* comes into force.
2013	All children in Germany from the age of 13 months are entitled to a place in centre-based or home-based ECEC provision.
2013 - 2018	Increased federal funding leads to a rapid expansion of ECEC settings, especially of places for under 3 year-olds. By 2018, the enrolment rate for this age group has risen to 33.6% (compared to 9% in 2002).
2019	A "Law for the advancement of quality and participation in ECEC" (*Gute-Kita-Gesetz*) comes into force, aiming to improve quality in 10 areas through written contracts between the federal government (*Bund*) and the 16 regional governments (*Länder*) and to introduce new monitoring and evaluation measures.
2019	From 2019 to 2022 the federal government funds a comprehensive "Staffing Campaign" programme to help towards easing the shortage of staff in the ECEC sector.
2021	The Act on All-Day Provision for Children of Primary School Age (GaFöG) of 2 October establishes a legal entitlement to all-day education and care provision for primary school-age children on a staggered basis up to 2029.
2022	Revised version of the 2004 (non-mandatory) *Common Framework for Early Education in ECEC centres*
2023	The KiTa Quality Act comes into force on 1 January. In 2023 and 2024, the federal government is supporting the *Länder* in the implementation of quality enhancement measures and improving participation in ECEC with a total of around 4 billion euros.

Sources: Erning 1987; Ebert 2006, 2021; BMFSFJ 2013; Franke-Meyer 2016, 2024; Destatis 2019; Willekens and Scheiwe 2020; BMFSFJ 2023a

ECEC system type and auspices

In the Federal Republic of Germany, ECEC settings for the years before compulsory schooling starts are part of the child and youth welfare system. Over 100 years ago, the Reich Youth Welfare Act (1922) established that kindergartens were not part of the public education system (Franke-Meyer 2024). This decision remains valid up to the present day and was only overturned during the 40-year existence of the German Democratic Republic.

The system of early childhood education and care in Germany comprises not only centre-based ECEC settings (nurseries, kindergartens, multi-age centres), but also home-based childcare provision as well as complementary education and care services for school-age children. Federalism

and subsidiarity are the underlying political and organisational principles with regard to the legislation, regulation and funding of these different types of setting.

In a system of multi-level governance, responsibilities are shared between the federal government, the 16 *Länder* and the local authorities – in partnership with non-governmental, voluntary child and youth welfare agencies.

At the **federal level** (*Bund*), the main responsibility lies with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, which has "stimulatory competence" (*Anregungskompetenz*) regarding ECEC. At the **regional level** (*Länder*), the federal states implement the federal-level requirements through the supreme state youth authorities, which are usually a unit within the social affairs ministry or (less common) the ministry of education. They are responsible for regulating the issues not determined by federal law. At the **local level** (*Kommunen*), the municipalities (districts, towns, boroughs) are in charge of organising and securing funding for early education and childcare provision. To this end, they work together with non-governmental agencies, mainly voluntary youth welfare associations and church organisations. The public youth welfare authority has the basic overall responsibility for ensuring the implementation of child and youth welfare policies. This multi-level policy-making can lead to considerable regional differences (Diskowski 2006; Oberhuemer 2014; ICEC 2023).

General objectives and legislative framework

The overarching goals at federal level are set out in Book Eight of the Social Code (*Sozialgesetzbuch VIII, Kinder- und Jugendhilfe*) (BMFSFJ 2020a) - also known as the Child and Youth Services Act (KJHG 1990, with amendments). These include supporting children in their individual and social development; complementing family upbringing practices; and supporting parents in balancing employment and family duties. The overall approach combines three interlinked dimensions: education (*Bildung*), care (*Betreuung*) and upbringing (*Erziehung*). ECEC settings are to be adapted to the needs of the children and their families in terms of pedagogy and organisation. Parents are to be included in key decision-making processes.

The principles and requirements of Book Eight of the Social Code (SGB VIII) are transposed into regional legislation by the parliaments of the 16 federal states (*Länder*) and implemented by the state ministries/state youth welfare offices. A significant amendment made to the Child and Youth Services Act in 1996 was the provision of a legal entitlement to a kindergarten place for children between the ages of 3 and school entry. Some *Länder* had already established legal entitlements by this time. Further changes in federal-level legislation include the 2005 Day Care Expansion Act (TAG), the 2005 Child and Youth Welfare Development Act (KICK), and the 2009 Childcare Funding Act (KiFög).

In 2019, the Act on the Further Development of Quality and Participation in ECEC (KiQuTG) – known as the *Gute-KiTa-Gesetz* – came into force (BMFSFJ 2020b). The goals are (1) to improve quality in 10 fields of action[2] through written agreements between the federal government and the 16 state governments, and (2) to introduce new monitoring and evaluation measures. Up to 2022, the federal government invested 5.5 billion euros in this project.

The subsequent KiTa Quality Act (1.1.2023) has extended the provisions of the *Gute-KiTa-Gesetz* beyond 2022 until the end of 2024. In 2023 and 2024, the federal government is supporting the *Länder* with a total of around 4 billion euros in measures to further develop quality and improve

[2] The 10 fields of action are: needs-based services; good child to staff ratios; qualified professionals; strong ECEC management; child-friendly spaces; growing up healthy; language education; good home-based provision; networks for more quality; diverse educational services.

participation in ECEC (BMFSFJ 2023a). The *Länder* can decide for themselves on which fields of action[3] to focus.

In addition, the Act on All-Day Provision for Children of Primary School Age (*Ganztagsförderungsgesetz* - GaFöG) was passed in October 2021. For the first time, children of primary school age will be granted a legal entitlement to a place in an all-day education and care programme. The entitlement begins in 2026 for children in the first grade and will apply to all grades on a staggered basis up to 2029.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

In Germany, there has been a federally defined legal entitlement since August 2013, as well as relevant regulations in the individual *Länder* for a place either in a centre-based or home-based ECEC setting for children from their 1st birthday until they start school (BMFSFJ 2018).

When children aged 3 years and upwards were granted this right under federal law (1996), the guaranteed "place" was not further defined in hours or days. In the meantime, ten of the 16 *Länder* have specifications which range from a guaranteed place between four to 10 hours a day. The higher levels tend to be found in eastern *Länder*. In five western *Länder* and one eastern federal state there are no specifications regarding the hourly duration of a guaranteed place. In the city state of Berlin, the guaranteed hours are extended for children who are in a facility for the homeless. In the city state of Hamburg, the total amount of guaranteed enrolment is limited to 60 hours per week (Bock-Famulla et al. 2023).

Attending an ECEC setting is not obligatory in Germany. Compulsory schooling begins at around 6 years of age. However, some *Länder* have provisions in school education legislation for compulsory language assessments; these may specify attending an ECEC setting prior to school enrolment (see also *Monitoring* section).

Main types of provision

On 1st March 2023, there were 60,045 (E)CEC facilities in Germany, with various organisational structures (Destatis/Genesis 2023[4]).

(E)CEC centres (*Kindertageseinrichtungen* – literally 'day centres for children' and increasingly referred to as *Kitas*) is an umbrella term for a broad spectrum of centre-based education and care settings, both for young children and school children up to age 12. In addition to the classic forms of nurseries and kindergartens, multi-age facilities for 0 to 6 year-olds or 0 to 14 year-olds are increasingly common, as are, for example, parent-child groups in various forms, in-company childcare services, cooperation networks between ECEC centres and other services in the neighbourhood, and foreign-language kindergartens. The number of centres which offer ECEC exclusively for children from the age of three until they start school has decreased, whereas more and more multi-age settings cater for both under 3 year-olds and 3 to under 6 year-olds. As a

[3] In the KiTa Quality Act (2023), the previous 10 fields of action have been reduced to 7 core fields of action: needs-based provision; staff to child ratio; recruiting and maintaining qualified staff; strong management; language education; measures for child development, health, nutrition and movement; strengthening home-based provision.

[4] The cut-off date for all Federal Statistical Office figures (Destatis/Genesis 2023) used in this report is 01.03.2023. However, at the time of reporting, some more differentiated data were only available in the 2022 edition (Destatis 2023a), with a cut-off date of 01.03.2022.

rule, they open between 7:00/7:30 (70.4%) and close between 16:30/18:00 (61%) (Destatis/Genesis 2023, own calculations).

The opening hours of (E)CEC centres vary considerably; 70.4% open between 7:00/7:30 and 61% close between 16:30/18:00 (Destatis/Genesis 2023, own calculations).

Nurseries (*Kinderkrippen*) are ECEC settings for children under 3 years of age. The difference in the relative proportion of available places for under 3 year-olds as well as their participation rates in the eastern and western *Länder* continues, although a strong expansion of places in western Germany has helped to mitigate these disparities (see section on *Participation rates*).

Kindergartens were traditionally the classic and predominant form of institutional care for children from the age of 3 until they started school in the western federal states. In recent years, as a result of the extension of legal entitlement in 2013, admission procedures increasingly include 2 year-olds. The opening times of kindergartens vary considerably.

Centres for children and families (known mostly as *Kinder- und Familienzentren*, but with a variety of local names), provide both education/care services for children and family support for parents. This relatively new form of integrated provision in Germany has been expanding over recent years. Such centres have now been established in most federal states, either with statewide funding or targeted funding at the municipal level (Schlevogt 2021). Profiles vary considerably; however, a key aim of all such settings is to provide accessible and reliable childcare services for families and to network with relevant agencies and organisations in the community (Rauschenbach 2008).

Deferred school-entry provision known as *Schulkindergarten* or *Vorklasse*, is available in some *Länder* or municipalities as a specific type of institutional setting provided for 6 year-old children considered not yet ready for school. In some federal states these come under the responsibility of the school sector (e.g. since 2018 in Hesse), in others under child and youth welfare. According to Statista data (2024a, b), in 2022/23 there are 1,207 *Schulkindergärten* and *Vorklassen* in Germany in which 10,205 children are enrolled.

Home-based ECEC provision (*Kindertagespflege*) is an integral part of the child and youth welfare services for young children and has the same legal status at the federal level as centre-based ECEC provision. Four main forms are available: (1) as a service in the parents' own home; the parents are the employers, and no operational license is required; (2) as a service in the child carer's house: up to five children are allowed to participate at the same time (regulations differ in some *Bundesländer*); the Childcare Funding Act 2009 (*Kinderförderungsgesetz*) stipulates that if more than five children are enrolled, a pedagogical qualification is necessary. For this type of home-based provision, a local authority license is required which has to be renewed every five years; (3) a service located in third-party rooms: local authorities decide on the room suitability; (4) as a family child care network (*Großtagespflege*): In some regions several child carers may join up to provide a service for more than five children. Sometimes special regulations exist for this kind of setting, since it is sometimes difficult to distinguish it from a regular ECEC centre (BMFSFJ 2010, 10ff; Bundesverband für Kindertagespflege 2021).

Provider structures

In Germany, the child and youth welfare services, including ECEC, have traditionally been provided by non-governmental, non-profit providers (mainly the welfare associations and the Protestant and Catholic churches). Even today, they play a prominent role in the provision and organisation of early childhood education and care facilities, especially in the western *Länder*, where in 2021 there were 25,768 ECEC centres (excluding out-of-school provision) run by non-

profit providers compared to 5,960 ECEC centres in the eastern *Länder* (Bock-Famulla et al. 2023).

These responsibility structures are based on the principle of subsidiarity, under which the public sector is obliged to support non-governmental agencies and only provide social services if the NGOs are not in a position to do so. In former East Germany (GDR), public and employer-based ECEC settings were the norm. In the meantime, the number of settings in the eastern *Länder* run by independent organisations is increasing.

Currently, a further diversification of the provider landscape can be observed (Fuchs-Rechlin and Riedel 2021). In the last two decades, since about 2000, the number of "other" non-profit providers (besides the welfare and church organisations) has increased significantly. These are often smaller providers which are not members of any umbrella organisation. The share of private commercial providers is also growing, although this still makes up a small part of the overall picture (3.0%, see *Table 1*).

In 2023, there were a total of 60,045 (E)CEC centres, of which 19,930 were run by the public sector (33.2%) and 40.115 by independent providers (66.8%). The latter are divided in roughly equal parts into church and non-church providers. Overall, there is a threefold division into approximately one-third public, one-third church and one-third non-church settings, i.e. two-thirds of all (E)CEC settings are run by non-profit child and youth welfare organisations (Destatis/Genesis 2023, own calculations).

Table 1
Germany: (E)CEC provider distribution, centre-based provision, 2023

Provider type		**Distribution in %**	
Public			33.2
Church affiliated, non-profit	Protestant (*Diakonie*)	15.6	31.7
	Catholic (*Caritas*)	15.	
	Other church affiliated	0.4	
Non-church affiliated, non-profit	The *Paritätische* (non-governmental welfare association)	9.1	32.1
	Workers‘ Welfare Association (*Arbeiterwohlfahrt*)	4.6	
	German Red Cross (*Deutsches Rotes Kreuz*)	3.2	
	Other non-profit (e.g. parent initiatives)	15.2	
Commercial, for-profit			3.0

Source: Destatis/Genesis 2023, own calculations

In 2022, 220,539 under 3 year-olds and 1,020,875 children aged 3 up to school entry[5] were enrolled in **public** sector *Kitas*. In the same year, 485,254 of under 3 year-olds and 1,800,251 children aged 3 up to school entry, were attending **private**, mainly publicly subsidised non-profit ECEC centres (Destatis 2023a). In 2022, 28,963 (4%) of the 0–2 year-olds were enrolled in parent initiatives as were 95,007 children (4%) over 3 years of age (Bock-Famulla et al. 2023).

In 2023, a total of 721,551 children under 3 years of age and 2,670,366 children aged 3 up to school entry were enrolled in an ECEC centre. 1,441,101 were in public and 2,485,322 in private non-profit ECEC centres (Destatis/Genesis 2023).

[5] Including some children under 8 years of age not yet attending primary school.

Participation rates in regulated ECEC provision

Table 2 shows the overall participation rates across the country broken down into single age-groups for 2022, whereas *Table 3* indicates the distribution patterns across the western and eastern *Länder*. While there are still considerable differences in enrolment levels in centre-based settings in the western and eastern *Länder* for children up to age 3, participation rates even out for children aged 3 up to school entry. Overall, participation rates have risen over the past few years in Germany, particularly in the case of children under age 3[6].

Table 2
Germany: Enrolment rates (in %) in centre-based settings by age, 2009-2022

Age group	2009	2015	2022
Under 1 year	1.5	1.8	1.3
1 year-olds	16.1	28.8	30.8
2 year-olds	34.8	54.7	57.7
3 year-olds	83.1	90.0	85.3
4 year-olds	94.3	96.0	93.1
5 year-olds	97.1	96.5	95.3

Source: Bock-Famulla et al. 2023

Table 3
Germany: Participation rates (in %) in centre-based and home-based settings, 2009–2022

Year	Regional distribution	Under 3 years in %	3 to under 6 years in %
2009	Western *Länder,* without Berlin	12.0	91.1
	Eastern *Länder*, including Berlin	41.3	94.6
	Germany, total	**17.4**	**91.7**
2015	Western *Länder,* without Berlin	23.6	94.4
	Eastern *Länder*, including Berlin	46.8	96.0
	Germany, total	**28.2**	**94.7**
2022	Western *Länder,* without Berlin	25.8	90.8
	Eastern *Länder*, including Berlin	49.4	93.3
	Germany, total	**29.9**	**91.3**

Source: Bock-Famulla et al. 2023

In 2022, more than one third of children from age 3 up to school entry (39%) spent between 25 to 35 hours weekly in centre-based ECEC provision, slightly more than half (52.5%) spent more than 35 hours and 8.5% less than 25 hours. In the same year, 11.2% of under 3 year-olds spent less than 25 hours, 33% between 25 and 35 hours and 55.8% more than 35 hours per week in an ECEC setting (Destatis 2023a). Across both age groups, most children (38%) attended an ECEC setting for 25 to 35 hours per week in 2023, 30% spent more than 45 hours there and just under 16% attended for less than 25 hours (Destatis/Genesis 2023).

For both age groups, in 2021, the amount of time was markedly higher in the eastern federal states (including Berlin) than in the western part of the country: Of the children who spent over 45 hours in an ECEC centre, the respective proportions were 60% and 27% for the under 3 year-olds and 63% and 28% for children from age 3 up to school entry (Bock-Famulla et al. 2023).

[6] Following a data correction, the national statistics report that in 2023, a total of 856,600 children under age 3 (36.4%) and 2,821,126 children between age 3 and school entry (90.9%) were enrolled in ECEC centres (Destatis 2023c).

Financing and costs for parents

The ECEC system in Germany is mainly publicly funded (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2018). Funding procedures are regulated by state-level legislation and vary considerably across the country. Primarily, the municipalities and the federal states are involved in financing ECEC; providers and parents also contribute to the costs. In addition, the federal government is increasingly financing special investment programmes.

In 2022, federal, state and local government spending on education totalled €176 billion. The planned expenditure for 2023 totals €181 billion or 4.6% of gross domestic product (Statista 2023). Public expenditure on (E)CEC in 2022 amounted to €43.5 billion, 6.4% more than in the previous year (Destatis 2023d).

Nationwide, the **municipalities** bore slightly more than half of the expenditure for ECEC in 2021 (51.1%) and the *Länder* 47.6% (Destatis 2022, 48f). However, there are considerable regional disparities in municipal budgets with regard to tax revenues from trade tax, which accounts for about half of the financial capital and is dependent on the presence of industry and economic fluctuations. In addition, further tax revenues are redistributed from the federal government and the *Länder* to the municipalities. This leads to regional differences in municipal budgets and thus also in the provision of ECEC (Scholz et al. 2019).

At the level of the ***Länder*,** significantly more funds have been made available for ECEC in recent years. Between 2010 and 2022, expenditure on ECEC more than tripled in three federal states and at least doubled in 13 *Länder* (Destatis 2022, 127). However, there are still considerable differences, not least in the expenditure per child expenditure. At the end of 2020, this varied between €9,469 in Berlin and €6.550 in Bayern (Bock-Famulla et al. 2023).

Although the **federal government** has a legally limited role with regard to ECEC financing, the factual importance of the *Bund* in this regard has increased in recent years. Since 2008, the *Länder* have been supported with grants via a "special fund for the expansion of childcare". These programmes provide financial incentives for specific reform initiatives of nationwide significance. After considerable investment in the expansion of places for under 3 year-olds, the federal government funded a comprehensive "Staffing Campaign: Recruiting Young Talent, Retaining Professionals" from 2019 to 2022 (Evaluation Report: Weltzien et al. 2022). From 2022 to 2024, the federal government is funding the implementation of the KiTa Quality Act in the *Länder* with approximately 4 billion euros (BMFSFJ 2023a).

Parental contributions vary considerably depending on the provider, municipality and federal state. The *Gute-KiTa-Gesetz* specified an obligatory income-related adjustment of parental contributions and extended the criteria for fee exemption. Municipalities have a statutory duty to provide advice on the possibility of applying for a fee exemption. Nevertheless, parental contributions vary greatly across Germany at the municipal level (Mühleib et al. 2021). Even in the case of settings offering the same service for the same age range of children and where parental income levels are similar, the costs for parents can sometimes differ by several hundred euros per month. In 2020, for example, the monthly parental contributions for a full-day place (more than 35 hours) for children under the age of 3 varied – with a wide range within the federal states – between an average of €0 (in Berlin, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Rhineland-Palatinate) and €360 (North Rhine-Westphalia) or €335 (Baden-Württemberg) (Klinkhammer et al. 2022, 227).

With the extended fee exemption in the course of the amendment of the Child and Youth Welfare Act (§ 90 SGB VIII), significantly more families have become eligible for fee exemption. However, in August 2022, there were only three federal states with full exemption from fees: Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and the city state of Berlin; in three *Länder* (Baden-Württemberg, Saarland and Saxony) there is no exemption at all and in the remaining ten *Länder*

there is a partial exemption linked to certain criteria (e.g. age of the child or length of attendance at the facility) or a subsidy system (Bock-Famulla et al. 2023).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 1% of net household income on childcare costs[7] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

In Germany, it is not possible to calculate a specific staff to child ratio or current group size through the official child and youth welfare statistics. This is because the pedagogical work with children is not separated from other work tasks (e.g. planning, cooperation with parents). Instead, a staffing ratio can be calculated, which relates the contractually agreed weekly working hours of the educational staff to the contractually agreed weekly hours of childcare in a *Kita*.[8] In this respect, the differences between the federal states are considerable.

The staffing ratio calculation in ECEC settings is carried out at group level, i.e. only settings with a fixed group structure are taken in account.

In 2021, one staff member in Germany was responsible for an average of 3.9 children under 3 years of age, but there are marked differences between the federal states, ranging from 2.9 children per qualified staff member in Baden-Württemberg to 5.8 children in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

There were similar differences for children between 3 years and school entry: overall, a staffing ratio of 1:8.4 applied here, ranging from 6.5 children per specialist in Baden-Württemberg to 12.9 children in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. In mixed-age groups from 0 years onwards, the national average staffing ratio was 1:6.3 (from 1:5.2 in Baden-Württemberg to 1:10.5 in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania). Overall, the staffing ratio in the eastern *Länder* is less favourable than in the western *Länder* (Bock-Famulla et al. 2023).

Table 4

Germany: Average staffing ratio by region and age of children, 2021

	1 qualified staff member for … children		
	0 to under 3 years	**3 years to school entry**	**Mixed-age groups**
Western *Länder*	3.3	7.8	5.9
Eastern *Länder (*including Berlin)	5.3	10.7	8.3
Total average	**3.9**	**8.4**	**6.3**

Quelle: Bock-Famulla et al. 2023

Curricular frameworks

Traditionally, unlike the situation during the German Democratic Republic (GDR) era, there were no official curricular frameworks for the pedagogical work in ECEC settings in former West Germany. This was primarily a matter for the providers, even if guiding principles were set out in the few *Länder* with specific kindergarten legislation. However, after the so-called "PISA shock"

[7] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

[8] The calculation of staffing ratios in ECEC settings is based on a standardised calculation of full-time equivalents of the children enrolled (full-time care equivalent) and the pedagogical staff in the setting (full-time employment equivalent) for the different types of groups (Bock-Famulla et al. 2023).

in 2001, when Germany performed worse than expected in the OECD tests for 15 year-olds, the urgency of "laying firm foundations" through early childhood education became a hot topic across the country. Gradually, from 2004 onwards, the first early education frameworks were introduced. In the meantime, these have been revised at least once in most of the *Länder*.

These 16 curricular frameworks see children as agents of their own learning – in a co-constructive process with adults and other children. They are not prescriptive catalogues of learning goals, but rather descriptive accounts of varying aspects of pedagogy, based on research literature. They differ in length and the degree of obligation. Most *Länder* regard these framework plans as a guiding orientation for ECEC centres. In Bavaria, Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia, ECEC settings are obliged by law to integrate the main principles into their centre-specific programmes. The implementation of the principles and goals is the responsibility of the respective provider. All curricular frameworks specifically cover the age group up to school entry; in some *Länder* they also include guidelines for out-of-school education and care for children up to age 10 (Berlin, Brandenburg, Bremen, Hesse, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, North Rhine-Westphalia, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt), in Thuringia even up to age 18 (Bock-Famulla et al. 2023; Deutscher Bildungsserver 2023; see *Appendix 1* for links to the individual curricular frameworks – in German).

Meanwhile, all curricular frameworks contain areas on language, mathematics or science education; more than half also on health, music, movement and sport, technology, body, religion and values, media, environment, as well as art/presentation and design. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of comprehensive data on how the theoretical educational concepts are implemented and evaluated in the everyday life of ECEC settings (Autor:innengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2022, 98).

In addition to these state-level curricular documents, the 16 Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and the 16 Ministers of Youth Affairs also agreed in 2004 on a *Common Framework for Early Education in ECEC centres*, which was updated in 2022 (JMK 2004; KMK 2022). The basic principles of this non-binding common framework include a holistic approach to learning, the participation of children in decision-making processes, intercultural pedagogy, gender-sensitive practices, and targeted support for children with developmental risks or impending disabilities as well as for highly gifted children. Areas of learning include language, literacy and communication; personal and social development; values education/religious education; mathematics, natural sciences, technology; music education and media; physical development, movement, health; nature and culture. These areas of learning are to be embedded in an integrated and holistically organised approach in the ECEC setting. In addition, special emphasis is placed on the transition between kindergarten and primary school. In this respect, a significant challenge for the future is to strengthen cooperation at all levels: the steering level, the local and institutional level and the curricular level.

Digital education

Although digital media are omnipresent in children's lives from a very early age, the way they are handled both in families and in ECEC settings varies considerably. Experts and pedagogical staff see aspects of digital media that on the one hand promote education (cf. Blossfeld et al. 2018; Knauf 2018; Reichert-Garschhammer 2018) and on the other hand impair child development (Fröhlich-Gildhoff and Fröhlich-Gildhoff 2018). Overall, the acceptance of digital media in ECEC environments is still rather hesitant from the perspectives of all stakeholders involved, i.e. providers, educational professionals and also parents (cf. Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2020).

Digital media have become established in most ECEC settings as a support and facilitator for organisational tasks or for communication within the team and with parents - as the Corona pandemic in particular has shown. However, it is still rather uncommon for them to be available as a tool for children in the same way as pens and paper are. No one is born a “digital native”. However, it is still not widely acknowledged that children have to learn how to use digital media, and ECEC centres face the challenge of finding an appropriate approach towards supporting children’s digital competence.

In the curricular frameworks of the 16 *Länder* (see *Appendix 1* for links in German), the terms "digital education" or "digital media" have been included in very different ways (see, e.g., Lienau and van Roessel 2019). Only four of the 16 curricular documents explicitly refer to "digital media” or “digital education" in a separate section. In all others, there are only general references to "media" – either unspecifically or only mentioning analogue media. Mostly they are subsumed under another section, such as "language" or "communication". A definition of media literacy and a differentiation of objectives of media education are provided by ten of the curricular frameworks. While some highlight the dangers and disadvantages of "excessive media use", others emphasise the constructive coexistence of analogue and digital experiences or postulate very specifically that it "makes no sense to exclude children's media experiences... they must become the subject of pedagogical work..." (Bildungsplan Saarland 2018, 84). Twelve of the 16 *Länder* emphasise the importance of an age-appropriate or critical accompaniment of the children's media experiences by the professionals.

In order to strengthen the presence of “digital education” in the early childhood field on the basis of knowledge and experience, a pilot project was carried out in Bavaria from 2018 to 2020, aiming to sensitise ECEC settings to it and to support the professionals in developing the necessary knowledge and skills. Commissioned by the Bavarian Ministry of Social Affairs (StMAS), the State Institute for Early Childhood Research and Media Literacy (IFP) was responsible for the conceptual framework and implementation. In terms of the number of participating ECEC centres (100) and “media coaches”, it was the most extensive pilot project in Germany to date[9]. Following the successful completion of this pilot project, its findings are now being implemented state-wide. Starting in September 2021, ECEC settings in Bavaria (in the second year of the campaign 308) will be supported professionally through a multi-year qualification programme "Kampagne Startchance digital" in the use of media with children and the involvement of parents (IFP 2024).[10]

Monitoring – evaluation

One of the main goals of the Good Childcare Act 2019 was to improve quality and participation in ECEC settings nationwide. Improved monitoring (BMFSFJ 2020b) and improved evaluation were further goals. From ten fields of action, the 16 *Länder* selected the issues that were particularly relevant for the development of quality in their federal state. Two comprehensive evaluation studies also examined the impact of the Good Childcare Act itself (BMFSFJ 2021).

Under the new KiTa Quality Act (2023), the *Länder* receive funds from the allocated 4 billion euros until the end of 2024, provided that at least 50% of the funds flow into the new seven

[9] More information (in German) about this project can be found under the following link: https://www.kita-digital-bayern.de/

[10] More information (in German) about the implementation can be found under the following link: https://www.ifp.bayern.de/projekte/qualitaet/startchancekitadigital.php

priority fields of action (see footnote 3). New measures from 2023 onwards may only be implemented in these fields of action. The *Länder* determine the specific measures together with the federal government (BMFSFJ 2023a).

Child-related assessment

The starting point for an increase in documentation and assessment of children's performance and progress in Germany is, on the one hand, concern about early language development in general and, on the other hand, about the language acquisition of children with a family language other than German. To assess the developmental progress of children in ECEC settings, observations, tests or portfolios are among the tools used. In some *Länder*, mandatory language assessments and, if necessary, support measures are laid down by law. In Bavaria, for example, the use of an assessment tool called Seldak ("Sprachentwicklung und Literacy bei deutschsprachig aufwachsenden Kindern" - Language Development and Literacy in German-speaking Children) is obligatory for 4 to 5 year-olds (IFP 2016).

Centre-based self-evaluation

Self-evaluation procedures include, for example, assessing the general quality of the setting, how the centre team cooperates, liaising with parents, or the implementation of the centre programme based on the state curricular framework. There are no recommendations regarding the frequency of evaluations. The respective ECEC provider decides whether to publish the results or not.

The city state of Berlin was the first of the 16 *Länder* to introduce steps regarding monitoring related to the Berlin curricular framework, in which evaluation is prescribed. An agreement with the providers, linked to the funding of the ECEC settings, requires a number of self-evaluations and (every five years) an external evaluation. The Berlin Kita Institute for Quality Development (BEKI 2022) is responsible for monitoring and evaluations, the results of which contribute to ongoing developments and improvements in early education. The providers finance the evaluation, are informed about the results and measures and have to adapt their professional development programmes accordingly.

External evaluation

There is no national inspection system in Germany. External monitoring is carried out at the regional and municipal level. Since 2008, the Bertelsmann Foundation has conducted an independent and detailed annual review of the most important structural features of the early childhood education system in Germany, focusing on quality-related aspects. Sources are mainly federal statistics and federal state reports (Bock-Famulla et al. 2023).

In general, control measures to check compliance with state regulations are low key and based mainly on agreements with the provider organisations. The frequency of external evaluations or the submission of written reports is rarely prescribed. The main responsibility for the quality of monitoring lies with the providers, who have developed their own systems of quality management and pedagogical guidance. At the municipal-regional levels there are also some guidelines for both external and self-evaluation procedures.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), which was ratified in Germany in 2009, reignited the discussion on inclusive education at the political level.

"Children with and without disabilities should be able to learn together in one group, as far as the specific need for individual support allows" (SGB VIII 2012) – this is laid down in federal legislation. In doing so, providers have a duty to ensure that the staff in ECEC settings work together with families, community organisations and schools. The federal states have their own guidelines and/or legislation for implementation.

The inclusion in mainstream settings of children with special educational needs, developmental risks and (pending) disabilities has developed steadily since the 1970s. In all 16 federal states, the care of children with special educational needs and disabilities is regulated by law, either in ECEC legislation or under social law. In order to expand and strengthen inclusion and accessibility, corresponding laws (e.g. Disability Equality Act, General Equality Act, Accessibility Strengthening Act, Participation Strengthening Act) are to be further developed in the new coalition agreement of the government (BMAS 2021).

In 2022, 39.4% of all *Kitas* (23,374 out of 59,323) operated according to an inclusive approach while the number of special facilities for children with special needs decreased from 691 in 1998 to 229 in 2022 (Destatis 2023a). In 2022, 40.3% of ECEC centres care for at least one child who receives "inclusion support" (Bock-Famulla et al. 2023). 2.4% of children in (E)CEC settings were recipients of inclusion support in 2022: only 0.5% in the under-three age group and 3.2% in the group of over 3 year-olds (FKB 2023, 161).

Various projects initiated by ECEC providers also deal with the topic of inclusion in *Kitas*, e.g.:

In Baden-Württemberg, the Protestant Regional Association carried out the project "Shaping participation – avoiding disadvantage – *Kitas* develop an inclusion-oriented practice" in 24 *Kitas* from 2016 to 2019 as part of the action plan "Living inclusion". These were to be supported by professional supervision in the sustainable anchoring of an inclusion-oriented practice (Evangelischer Landesverband 2016).

In a pilot project of the city of Munich and Upper Bavaria, four ECEC centres in the city committed to offering at least five places for children with special needs in 2020/21. These centres were accompanied by specialists in inclusion issues and were also additionally staffed. Following the evaluation of the project, the model is to be transferred to other ECEC settings in Upper Bavaria (City of Munich 2021).

Children with a migration background – children from Roma communities

Pedagogical approaches in early childhood education are increasingly being framed in a paradigm that emphasises inclusion and the recognition of diversity of all kinds. This includes children with a migration background (defined as "at least one parent is of foreign origin").

In 2022, a total of 13.1% people with non-German nationality lived in Germany. Of these, 41.5% came from other EU27 countries. In the under-5 age group, these proportions were 14.1% and 34.7% respectively (Eurostat 2023c, own calculations).

Of the children under 3 years of age attending an ECEC centre in 2022, 22.8% had a migration background; in the group of children over 3 years of age 31.2%, i.e. almost one third. German is the language mostly spoken at home in 37.8% and 31.8% of these families respectively (Destatis 2023a, own calculations).

Since the beginning of the war in February 2022, 1,099,905 refugees from **Ukraine** have sought protection in Germany (as of 30.09.2023). Of the 347,000 children and young people, 38% are

of primary school age (Mediendienst Integration 2023). According to the second survey of the study "*Refugees from Ukraine in Germany (IAB-BiB/FReDA-BAMF-SOEP Survey)*" at the beginning of 2023, about every second child up to 6 years of age attended an ECEC centre, with large differences depending on the age of the children: While only 7% of 1 year-olds and 16% of 2 year-olds are enrolled in a centre, the proportion of 6 year-olds is 72%. The proportion of children attending a Kita is also higher in the eastern federal states (66%) than in the western states (46%). The results of the survey indicate that attendance at an ECEC centre is more frequent when one parent is employed or taking part in a language course (DIW 2023). The legal entitlement to a place in ECEC from the age of 1 also applies to refugee children. Upon application, the Youth Welfare Office pays the childcare costs for refugees (BMFSFJ 2023b).

A study by the DIW (Gambaro et al. 2019) examined the effects of children's attendance at ECEC centres on the integration of their parents on the basis of surveys[11] of refugees (N = 5,859, 2016 and 2017). It was found that especially mothers of children attending an ECEC centre were significantly better integrated, had higher language skills and a stronger labour market orientation. Therefore, care should be taken to ensure that the children of families who have fled to Germany are given the opportunity to attend an ECEC setting as early as possible.

A current project "Kitas and Ukrainian mothers with Kita children" is conducting an online survey of (a) 500 mothers each with questions on, among other things, the well-being and life of the mothers and their children in Germany, and (b) an online survey of Kita managers on the children enrolled (DJI 2023).

Reliable statistics on the number of **Roma** living in Germany are not available, as statistical data on ethnicity are not collected. Estimates range from 70,000 according to the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma (Frietsch 2018) to 120,000 (Statista 2010).

At the EU level, seven targets have been set for national Roma inclusion strategies for the period up to 2030, based on evidence from surveys of Roma communities, covering equality, inclusion, participation, education, employment, housing and health. With regard to early childhood education, the main aim is to improve access for Roma children (European Commission 2021). A measure for the integration and participation of Sinti and Roma in Germany within the framework of the ESF federal programme "Elternchance II" (Parental Opportunity II) also relates to improved access to early childhood education by strengthening cooperation with parents. To this end, persons, some of whom also belonged to the Roma, were trained as parent guides (BMI 2019).

Parental leave arrangements[12]

Fully paid **Maternity leave** (*Mutterschutz*) begins six weeks before the birth and lasts until eight weeks afterwards. These eight weeks are compulsory for all mothers. During that time 100% of the income is paid, with no upper limit.

There is no legal provision for **Paternity leave** (*Vaterschaftsurlaub*)**.** However, fathers can take two months of exclusive parental leave. An entitlement to Paternity leave is being prepared for 2024.

Parental leave (*Elternzeit*) is regulated by the Federal Parental Leave and Parental Benefits Act (*Bundeselternzeit- und Elterngeldgesetz*, BEEG) and can be taken by both parents as an individual

[11] These surveys contained data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF).

[12] The brief summary in this section is based on the country note for Germany by Pia Schober and colleagues in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

entitlement for three years up to the child's 3rd birthday. 24 months of this can also be taken up to the child's 8th birthday.

Parents who take Parental leave on a full-time or part-time basis can choose between two allowance options or combine them: (a) Basic parental allowance (*Basiselterngeld*) and (b) Parental allowance plus (*ElterngeldPlus*).

Basic parental allowance: The income-related Basic parental allowance is paid for twelve months - for 14 months if both partners take parental leave for two months (partner months). A minimum of €300 per month is paid, a maximum of €1,800. Parents with a previous net monthly income between €1,000 and €1,240 receive 67%, above €1,240 the share is 65%, below €1,000 they receive a higher share. Parents can work part-time for up to 32 hours per week.

ElterngeldPlus is paid for 24 (+four) months in the first two years of the child's life as partial compensation for the salary lost through part-time work. Up to four additional months (partnership bonus) are paid if both parents work part-time between 25 and 30 hours per week for up to four consecutive months. As with the Basic parental allowance, 65% or 67% is paid, depending on income - but only for the difference from the previous income. Both parents can take Parental leave at the same time and divide it into up to three blocks.

In Bavaria and Saxony, an income-related so-called state child-raising allowance of €150 to €300 per month and child is paid.

The main aim of the 2007 Parental allowance reform was to increase the proportion of fathers taking Parental leave. Overall, 38.7% of eligible women and 16.1% of men chose the *ElterngeldPlus* option in 2022. An average of 26.1% of eligible fathers made use of parental allowances. The average duration of Parental allowance receipt for mothers remained at 14.6 months; for fathers, this period was significantly shorter at 3.6 months and even decreased somewhat in recent years. However, there are significant regional differences with regard to the proportion of fathers: While 30.2% of eligible fathers received parental benefits in Saxony in 2022, in Saarland the relevant share was only 20.8% (Destatis 2023b).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Germany

*Country expert assessment by **Sigrid Lorenz***

In public discourse, the high systemic relevance of early childhood education, care and upbringing within the complex and federally organised German society of today is undisputed. This has not only been the case since the experience of nationwide closures of (E)CEC centres and schools to contain the coronavirus pandemic, although this once again sharpened the focus on specific professions and people (cf. Kaldewey 2022). The urgent question of current and medium-term challenges facing the (E)CEC system must be answered in particular against the backdrop of current social and lifeworld characteristics and developments. These are often described as uncertain, complex, ambiguous, diverse and dynamic and are essentially generated by the effects of globalisation, digitalisation and climate change (cf. OECD 2019; Fritz 2020).

Accordingly, two fundamental challenges need to be highlighted for the early childhood education system: On the one hand, the system itself has a responsibility to develop even more strongly into a dynamic, flexible system in order to be able to respond adaptively to these social developments, as well as providing its own impetus. On the other hand, it is linked to the concrete task of early education in the present to prepare all (!) children for a world described in

this way with as many opportunities as possible, on the basis of corresponding pedagogical concepts. With regard to the in-depth structure, this results in multiple developmental tasks for early education; three tasks are discussed below with subjective preference.

Challenge 1: High quality early education must remain in focus.

Currently, scarce financial and human resources dominate the situation and discussion of institutional ECEC in Germany. The associated focus on ensuring the care of children tends to marginalise qualitative aspects of early childhood education and upbringing, aspects of education that have been fought over for decades and which are enshrined in law and in the state-specific regulations. It is necessary to focus more strongly on this quality again in the future, because "the most important factor in a child's development that can be influenced by society is education" (Fritz 2020, 8; Rauschenbach und Meiner-Teubner 2019).

Challenge 2: Educational content must be conceptualised as future-oriented.

Early childhood education needs to follow a positive narrative and in this respect be understood as a formative, not a preventative pedagogy (Durand and Birnbacher 2021). This is linked to the challenge of ensuring the development of children's individual potential and enabling them to participate and shape their lives in a committed and responsible manner under the conditions of a dynamic, complex future (as outlined). For this reason, particular emphasis should be placed on exploring which forward-looking educational topics should be included in early education concepts.

In addition to cross-cutting problem-solving skills, such as collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking (OECD 2019/2020), which support children in finding their own (knowledge) path even in the face of uncertainty, the areas of "digital education", "education for sustainable development and climate protection (ESD)" and "democratic education" should be given special visibility in the curricular frameworks of all federal states in the future. "Digital education" is an indispensable key competence in a digitally permeated world; "ESD" supports children in thinking and acting sustainably and is therefore important for the future and for survival; "democratic education", understood as making it possible to experience and practice a democratic set of values and a values-based way of life, is of enormous importance for the continued existence of a democratic way of life in view of increasing anti-democratic tendencies. (cf., for example, SWK 2022; Schipprack 2021; Wunderlich et al. 2023; Deutscher Bundestag 2020).

Challenge 3: Educational disparities must be reduced and effective action plans developed.

Despite the constitutionally guaranteed right to equal education for all, the educational biographies of children and young people in Germany are still unequal in terms of opportunities and strongly linked to social background and parental education. Counteracting this and organising education in such a way that all children can develop according to their skills and interests continues to pose major challenges for the education system (Bertram 2021).

Even if there are clear limits to the compensatory influence of institutional early childhood education (Rauschenbach und Meiner-Teubner 2019), ECEC needs to (be able to) make an even greater contribution to reducing disparities in the future. This includes reducing existing barriers to access, as enrolment in ECEC varies according to the economic resources of families. To this end, a solid framework, relevant concepts and specialist knowledge must be promoted, as many

professionals are still uncertain about how to deal with heterogeneity and the associated support for children from disadvantaged families (Spensberger und Taube 2022).

Overcoming these and other challenges requires a well-equipped and competent education system in order to avoid "implementation dilemmas" (cf. Viernickel und Weltzien 2023). It also requires an intensification of vertical and horizontal coordination between the federal government, federal states and local authorities (including other groups), as regional and supra-regional differences in quality can still be observed (BMFSFJ 2023c). In order to reduce such fluctuations and ensure good educational and participation opportunities for children regardless of location, legally defined, cross-state minimum quality standards accompanied by monitoring and evaluation are likely to be an adequate control instrument. One example of such a cross-state agreement is the “Common Framework of the *Länder* for Early Education in ECEC Centres" (JMK/KMK 2004; KMK 2022); it should be actively promoted in the future, as the first years of early childhood development are crucial.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Germany was 83,237,124.

Between 1995 (81,538,603) and 2005 (82,500,849) there was a slight rise in the overall population. After a peak of 81,802,257 in 2010, numbers since then have decreased slightly (2015: 81,197,537; 2020: 83,166,711) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total birth rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total birth rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.58, Germany is close to the EU27-average (Eurostat 2023b).[13]

Children under age 6

In 2022, 2.8% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, and 5.8% were children under age 6. For the first time, these relative shares are slightly above the respective EU-average (see *Table 5,* Eurostat 2023a).

[13] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Table 5
Germany: Children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under age 1	791,254
1 year-olds	780,795
2 year-olds	789,145
3 year-olds	803,334
4 year-olds	810,805
5 year-olds	816,142
0 to 6 year-olds total	**4,791,475**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

Table 6
Germany: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population compared with EU averages, 2000-2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Germany/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Germany	2.9	2.9	5.8
	∅ EU15[14]	3,2	3,2	6,4
2005	Germany	2.6	2.8	5.4
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Germany	2.6	2.5	5.1
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Germany	2.8	2.9	5.8
	∅ EU27	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, *own calculations

Single households with children under age 6

The majority of households with children under 6 years of age were couple households in 2022. Households with single parents accounted for only 4.4% - as a rule, these are single mothers, the share of single fathers is very low at 0.4%.

Table 7
Germany: Households with children under age 6 in Germany, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of total households, in %*
Single and couple households	7,136,200	
Couple households	6,078,900	85.2
Other household type	714,600	10.0
Single households, total	342,700	4.8
Single households, women	313,700	4.4
Single households, men	29,000	0.4

Source: Eurostat 2023h, *Own calculations

[14] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Germany, in 2022, the employment rate (15–64 years) of men as a whole was 83.7%, that of women 75.6% (Eurostat 2023g).

In 2022, 65.8% of women and 90.4% of men with children under 6 were in employment (18–64 years). The shares of fathers in employment were thus above the average (87.2%) of the 27(2020) EU countries, as were those of mothers (EU average 63.6%) (Eurostat 2023d).

Table 8a

Germany: Employment rates of parents with children under age 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 and 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Germany	54.6	90.4
Highest employment rate in the EU27[15]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest employment rate in the EU27	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Germany	65.8	90.4
Highest employment rate in the EU27(2020)	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest employment rate in the EU27(2020)	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023d

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 8b.*

Table 8b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
+Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
+++United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	 75.6 72.4 70.7	 92.1 93.1 95.0	 ++72.3 ++72.1 (2023)	 ++79.2 ++79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023d, 2023g

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[16]

In 2022, 24.3% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was slightly above the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 20.9% (EU27: 21.6%). In 2020, 2.6% of children under 6 and 1.2% of the total population suffer from severe material deprivation (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023e, f).

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[16] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or (severely) materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

GREECE

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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1. ECEC governance in Greece

A split system

In Greece, early childhood education and care is not organised as a unified system. There are two main types of institution that serve the needs of children from 6 months up to 6 years: on the one hand, nurseries, extended-age nurseries and childcare centres for the younger children; on the other hand, kindergartens or pre-primary units in schools for 4 and 5 year-old children. Nurseries are attended by children aged 6 months to 2½ years, sometimes up to 4 years, while childcare centres admit children from 2½ years up to enrolment in compulsory education at age 4. In certain cases, infants as young as 2 months old may be admitted to a nursery if the board of directors of the setting or, in the case of municipal services, the municipal council, agrees to this (MD/2808 / 1997; Government Gazette 4249 / 05-12-2017).

At the local level, both public and private (MD D22 / 11828 / 293/2017) childcare centres fall under the jurisdiction of local government. At the national level, public childcare settings come under the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior (Law 2880/2001; Law 3801/2009) and private settings under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MD C2b 1570/1999). Kindergartens come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and are part of the primary education system. There are also private kindergartens which come under the supervision of the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs 2022). Attendance is obligatory for 4 and 5 year-olds (Law 4521/2018).

2. Who belongs to the early year's workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Table 1 shows ECEC staff working in direct contact with children in centre-based settings and also categorises the core professionals (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at end of this chapter).

Table 1
Greece: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Kindergarten Teacher *Nipiagogos* *Profile:*	*Nipiagogeio*	Core practitioner with group responsibility	4–5 years	University degree (4 years) awarded by the School of Education Early Childhood Department

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Pre-primary Education Professional	**Kindergarten** (public, private) 4–5 years[1] May also work in public and private **childcare centres** with 4–5 year-olds	Kindergarten principal *Proistamenos/Proistameni*		ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Nursery and Childcare Teacher *Vrefonipiokomos* *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	*Vrefikos stathmos* **Nursery** Mainly from 6 months (in specific cases from 2 months) up to 2½ years *Vrefonipiakos stathmos* **Extended-age nursery** 6 months (in specific cases from 2 months) up to 4 years *Pedikos stathmos* **Childcare centre** 2½–3years	Core practitioner with group responsibility Centre head *Diefthintis/Diefthintria*	2 months-3 years	4-year degree at University of Applied Sciences, awarded by Department of Early Childhood Care and Education (formerly Technological Education Institute (TEI) until reform in 2019) ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistant *Voithos vrefonipiokomou*	*Vrefikos stathmos* **Nursery** Mainly from 6 months (in specific cases from 2 months) up to 2½ years *Vrefonipiakos stathmos* **Extended-age nursery** 6 months (in specific cases from	Qualified co-worker	2/6 months–3 years	Certificate/Diploma as Nursery/Childcare Teaching Assistant (3 years) ECTS credits: n/a[2] EQF level: 4/5 ISCED 2011: 3/4

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In Greece the corresponding formats are **0–3** and **4–5** years.

[2] Not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
	2 months) up to 4 years *Pedikos stathmos* **Childcare centre** 2½–3 years May also work as a self-employed family day carer (also in: maternity clinics, summer camps, family planning centres)			

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Kindergarten settings 4–5 years

In public kindergartens, fully qualified Kindergarten Teachers may be appointed to the post of Kindergarten Principal, based on certain criteria and subject to an evaluation process (Law 4327/2015). In order to apply for a position as head of a kindergarten, a teacher must have reached a certain point on the salary scale (in Greece, PE60). Kindergarten Principals are granted a position allowance. There are no required training programmes either before or after taking up their appointment to this position and their continuing professional and educational development is not mandatory.

The specific position of Kindergarten Principals depends on the size of the setting. Kindergartens with one to three groups or classes have their own Principal. The head of kindergartens/pre-primary units with four or more classes is the Primary School Director. Management staff are appointed for a four-year term.

Kindergarten Principals and School Directors are recruited through an announcement on the website of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs or the Regional Primary Education Directorate at least three months before the end of term. In the case of larger kindergartens

applicants must have had at least twelve years of professional experience, in the case of smaller kindergartens at least eight years. They must also possess a Level A certification for Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Decisions about the placement of Kindergarten Principals and School Directors are made by the Regional Director of Education on the advice of a local selection board. Exceptions may be made to the requirements concerning the length of service or the ICT certification if no other suitable candidates are available.

The selection criteria include the candidate's scientific-educational background and training, administrative and teaching experience as well as their contribution to the field and personal qualities (Sakellariou, Strati, and Anagnostopoulou 2018). This latter criterion is assessed orally in an interview with the selection board. Both the candidate's abilities as well as personal qualities exhibited during the kindergarten's daily routine, e.g. ethos, integrity, sense of justice, democratic behaviour, professional development and consistency, are evaluated. Required competences include, indicatively, the ability to communicate and collaborate; to undertake initiatives and to support problem solving, especially with respect to teaching; administrative, organisational and operational issues and the ability to create an appropriate and inspiring environment for the kindergarten staff. Also taken into consideration the points awarded from the relevant Regional Primary Education Service Council, as well as other supportive information such as: studies in a different field; training and retraining; organisation of educational conferences, seminars and training programmes, including participation as group rapporteur; being a member of a scientific team or a trainer; published and research work; initiatives in education; carrying out educational programmes and implementing innovations; administrative or instructional experience; participation in councils, committees or work groups; social and union action; participation in administrative bodies of scientific and educational organisations or in local participation bodies and official awards (Doliopoulou 2018). The candidates are evaluated based on the points they are awarded according to the above criteria.

Kindergarten Principals and School Directors have a dual role of teaching and administrative duties (Law 1566/1985), without these duties being described in detail. They are not only teachers with full responsibility for a class of children, but also managers and supervisors of the kindergarten unit with considerable administrative tasks; there is no kind of secretarial support.

Kindergarten Heads are responsible for the planning, organisation, management and supervision of the setting. In general, Kindergarten Teachers are not strongly motivated to take on this position. This is mainly due to the large workload of bureaucratic administration in parallel with the work in the classroom and across kindergarten classes (Government Gazette 1340/2002). Overtime compensation is not provided, neither for Kindergarten Principals nor for teachers. A reduction of total contact hours is only awarded to School Directors; the allowance granted to Kindergarten Principals does not compensate for this wide range of required duties.

The position involves guiding the kindergarten community to set high goals and ensuring the conditions for achieving them under democratic working conditions. Tasks include guiding and assisting particularly younger teachers in their work, undertaking educational and pedagogical initiatives and acting as a role model. Furthermore, the Kindergarten Principal is responsible for ensuring that the workplace is a place for professional development in administrative, pedagogical and scientific matters. In general, in the larger kindergartens, where a reduction of teaching hours for management purposes is more likely, leadership duties tend to be primarily administrative rather than pedagogical (Sakellariou, Strati, and Anagnostopoulou 2018).

Nurseries/childcare centres

Childcare centres and nurseries fall under the jurisdiction of local authorities. They operate as legal entities, based on the "Standard Regulations for the Operation of Municipal Childcare Centres and Nurseries", the provisions of which constitute the framework for the operation of ECEC settings. A decision of the municipal councils determines these Regulations, which constitutes minimum operating conditions of municipal nurseries (Law 4368/2016). For Childcare Centres and Nurseries, standard operating regulations come under decision No. 16065 of the Ministers of the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation - Health and Welfare (Government Gazette 497 / 22.4.2002 and the Government Gazette 4249 / 5.12.2017).

The administrative management structure of the public and municipal childcare centres and nurseries is as follows:

- Director of the childcare centres in the municipality
- Director of each childcare centre and nursery
- Deputy director and
- Head of each group unit.

The administrative work of childcare settings is performed by the person in charge of the centre, who is appointed by the Head of the municipal department and with the consent of (a) the Directorate of childcare settings in the specific municipality and (b) the Chairman of the municipal council.

The work schedule is eight hours and is adjusted according to the needs of the childcare centre by the Directorate. The person in charge is usually from among the Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional staff, but it could be any municipal employee. For this reason, the working hours vary. If the person in charge is an Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional and acts as a Director as well as teaching, the work schedule is set at six hours.

The manager of each childcare setting conducts the administrative work of the setting (correspondence, implementation of circulars, operating regulations, etc.) and informs the staff about any changes, as well as the parents/guardians. Also, once a month the manager discusses and informs the staff about general issues related to the childcare setting. Another task is to oversee the supply of materials for the administrative and pedagogical activities, as well as the preparation of meals for the children. The manager also informs the municipality's legal entity of any technical problems (MD 41087, 2017).

For each privately run (for-profit and non-profit) **childcare unit**, the person in charge is required to have a degree awarded by a

- Specialist University Department of Early Childhood Education or a Pedagogical Department of Primary Education
- Specialist University of Applied Sciences Department of Early Learning and Care, Social Work or Home Economics.

For the **nursery unit** Director is required to have a degree awarded by a specialist department at a University of Applied Sciences (Early Childhood Education and Care, Obstetrics) or by a Higher School of Midwifery or equivalent in Greece or abroad (Law 3801/2009).

It is possible that in nursery and childcare centres which come under the responsibility of the municipalities and are governed by an internal regulation of the board of directors that no centre leaders will be appointed. Due to the varying internal regulations, there is no uniform operating procedure throughout the country.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

In Greek **kindergartens** there are no designated centre-based posts of responsibility. Regular teaching staff are responsible for specific tasks which may arise. These may include guiding the internships of students from abroad, taking on a mentoring role for students during their practicum, or informing parents about the kindergarten programme. For most administrative and operational issues, the Kindergarten Supervisor or the School Director is responsible.

At a more general level, there is a provision for someone to be responsible for managing violence within schools, for civil protection in cases of critical situations, such as floods, earthquakes, etc. where all school teachers take on specific roles (such as pharmacy manager). Also, due to the pandemic and within the framework of the health protocols that are observed in the schools, there is a person responsible for COVID-19 within each kindergarten unit. There is no extra pay for these roles.

In the case of **nurseries and childcare centres**, there is no legal framework for assigning centre-based posts of responsibility.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Kindergarten units 4–5 years

School Counsellors (formerly known as **Educational Project Coordinators**) are assigned to teachers in the kindergarten sector. The selection is made by a five-member regional council (one regional director, three faculty members, one director of primary education). Each Educational Project Coordinator has the scientific and pedagogical responsibility for the issues relating to all school units located in the Regional Centre of Educational Planning (Law 4823/2021).

Although the duties, responsibilities and tasks of School Counsellors are wide-ranging and supportive (see below), for kindergartens the number of such Counsellors is insufficient. The settings for which they are responsible may be spread over two prefectures, making cooperation and communication and supporting them difficult. Implementing the position of School Counsellors in recent years has highlighted the complexity of these structures as well as the cumbersome procedures. In contrast, for primary schools, there may be several School Counsellors even in the same prefecture, meaning they can share the school units with each other, something that facilitates their work.

School Counsellors are selected from teachers of the relevant branches with at least fifteen years of educational service and who also have knowledge of a foreign language to at least the B2 level of proficiency. Duties and responsibilities of School Counsellors are the pedagogical and scientific guidance of teachers and special education teachers and auxiliary personnel. These include training, the development of innovative educational initiatives, as well as the evaluation of the teachers and special education staff. Duties also include participation in the process of collective planning and self-evaluation of the work of the kindergarten/school unit and the relevant support structures.

In particular, the tasks of School Counsellors are to monitor and support teaching and educational needs, to monitor and support school laboratories and libraries and their utilisation, to initiate subject-specific improvements, to ensure the quality of the educational work and the overall smooth operation of the kindergarten/school unit. This includes cooperating with the teaching and special education staff of the school units for which they are responsible, their directors and supervisors and the parents' and guardians' associations on all matters concerning the effective operation of the school units (Law 4823/2021).

Pedagogical coordinators in the childcare sector

There is no provision for pedagogical coordinators to work with nursery and childcare centres. For any problems that may arise, the employees address these to the centre manager in the legal entity of the municipality.

2.5 Specialist support staff

Kindergarten units 4–5 years

Within the regular classes in a kindergarten unit, in addition to the Kindergarten Teachers there may also be a Nurse, a Psychologist and a Social Worker from the Committee for Diagnostic Educational Evaluation and Support assigned to each group of schools (Law 4115/2013) in order to support children with special needs or children with health problems such as diabetes. Each school unit belongs to such a committee (MD 17812 / C6 / 2014). Since the school year 2021/22, English language teachers are employed for two hours per week in each kindergarten class. Also, in cases of children with disabilities or special educational needs attending a regular kindergarten class, provision is made for their support by a Kindergarten Teacher specialising in special education, both within and parallel to the kindergarten teacher.

Law 4547/2018 ensures the right of *all* children, including SEND children, to education and establishes Schools of Educational Support Networks), which consist of School Units of Special Education and Educational Centres across the entire education system.

Diagnostic, evaluative and supportive bodies that investigate and ascertain the special educational needs of children with disabilities and special educational needs, are the Centres for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support, the Special Diagnostic Evaluation Committee and Education Medical-Pedagogical Centres of other ministries.

Regarding special education and training units, apart from the Special Educators, additional services are provided by specialist support staff including: School Nurses, Occupational Therapists, Speech Therapists, Physiotherapists, Psychologists, Social Workers, Professional Counsellors, sign language of deaf students, specialists in the orientation, mobility and daily living skills of blind students (Law 2817/2000; Law 3699/2008).

Nurseries/childcare centres

For the childcare centres and nurseries, special support staff are provided. These may be a Social Worker, who contributes to the prevention or treatment of problems of the children in each group and their families if requested or if considered necessary. Social Workers may carry out research in collaboration with the pedagogical staff, with whom they are in constant contact, while also collaborating with the Paediatrician of the childcare centres and nurseries. A Psychologist provides counselling services for the psychological support of children and parents in close cooperation with the Paediatrician, Social Worker and pedagogical staff. They also support the pedagogical staff in improving their work through lectures, discussions and special meetings. The Paediatrician visits each childcare centre and nursery at least once a week, examines and monitors the children's health and development, noting observations on the individual card of each child. Paediatricians are also responsible for advising on general health and hygiene measures in the settings. In each setting there are basic medicinal and first aid resources. In the case of an emergency, the Paediatrician is expected to be at the centre as soon as possible.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Kindergarten units 4–5 years

The Hellenic Statistical Authority publishes annual statistics on the workforce of public and private kindergartens in Greece. The data for the public schools are taken from the MySchool platform of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, which is constantly updated. This platform collects data on schools related to staff, infrastructure and timetables. Data collection for private schools is compiled through printed questionnaires.

The statistical unit for Primary Education aims at compiling statistics on an annual basis regarding the number of school units and number of teaching staff in Kindergartens and Primary Schools. These surveys are conducted on an annual basis in all Member States of the European Union, using common standards and methods. The legal framework governing investigations is Regulation 452/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council and the implementing Commission Regulation 912/2013. The reference unit is the school unit of education (kindergarten and primary school).

Table 2a

Greece: Structural composition of ECEC workforce in the education sector (4–5 years), 2019-2020

Staff categories	Year / proportion of workforce
Staff with a pre-primary and primary education higher education teaching degree	**All** core pedagogues employed in kindergartens have at least a four-year higher education (university) degree. **5.97%**of staff in public kindergartens and **1.58%** of staff in private kindergartens have postgraduate or other higher education studies. In the case of public sector teaching staff: **0.44%** hold a doctoral degree **5.11%** a postgraduate diploma and **0.41%** another higher education degree
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary, post-secondary)	Not applicable
Unqualified staff	Not applicable
Specialist support staff (e.g. speech therapists) who work on site on a regular basis	Not applicable in regular kindergartens. Such services are available only in special education settings.
Male kindergarten teachers	Public sector: **1.23%** Private sector: No statistics available
Staff with a minority ethnic background	No national statistics available

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority 2019

Nurseries/childcare centres

There are no such data for childcare centres and nurseries. There is a provision by the Statistical Authority to collect data and relevant forms are provided on its website. However, these are not completed. It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the municipalities to submit these data to the Statistical Authority.

Table 2b

Greece: Structural composition of ECEC workforce – Childcare sector (0–3 years)

Staff categories	Year / proportion of workforce
Staff with a specialist three-year (or longer) early years higher education degree	There are no national statistics available. However, key professionals have a specialist four-year degree from the Early Years Learning and Care Department of a University of Applied Sciences/Higher Education Institution
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	No national statistics available
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	No national statistics available
Non-qualified or minimally qualified staff	No national statistics available
Specialist support staff (e.gg speech therapists) who work on site on a regular basis	No national statistics available
Male practitioners	No national statistics available
Staff with a minority ethnic background	No national statistics available

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

According to the National Agency for Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (NACQVG), the Greek National Qualifications Framework (NQF) corresponds with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in the following way:

The degrees of Kindergarten Teachers and Nursery and Childcare Teachers are classified at EQF level 6. The vocational award of Nursery and Childcare Assistants is classified at level 5 or at level 4, depending on whether they graduated from a post-secondary Vocational Training Institution or from an upper secondary Vocational High School.

In terms of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), the degrees of Kindergarten Teachers and Nursery and Childcare Teachers are likewise classified at level 6, while the Nursery and Childcare Assistants' vocational qualification is classified at level 4 if they graduated from a Vocational Training Institution and at level 3 if they graduated from Vocational High School (NACQVG 2022).

The initial professional education routes of Kindergarten Teachers, Nursery and Childcare Teachers and Nursery and Childcare Assistants are briefly outlined in the following tables.

Table 3a

Greece: Kindergarten Teacher

Job title in Greek: *Nipiagogos* **Profile**: Pre-primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: Higher school leaving certificate (*lykeio*); national entrance examination (*genikes exetaseis*) for university candidates (General Panhellenic Examination) **Professional studies:** Four years at university (School of Education, Department of Early Childhood Education), specialising in pre-primary education

Job title in Greek: *Nipiagogos* **Profile**: Pre-primary Education Professional
Award: University degree in Early Childhood Education (there are no Bachelor degrees in Greece) **ECTS credits:**240 **EQF level:**6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main ECEC workplace:** Kindergarten (4–5 years)

The qualification requirement for work as a Kindergarten Teacher in both public and private kindergartens is a degree from one of the nine Greek University Departments of Early Childhood Education. To be accepted for a degree course, students must have completed their high school diploma and have gained the required grade in the General Panhellenic Examination (held annually in June). Each student is required to complete eight semesters (four years) of coursework and to accumulate 240 ECTS credits. A full academic year corresponds to 60 credits and a full semester to 30 credits. The ECTS credits correspond to the workload that has been determined by each university for each course in order to be considered acquired knowledge. The University degree corresponds internationally to EQF level 6 and ISCED level 6.

Each university department develops its own curriculum. This includes compulsory courses, optional compulsory courses and also elective courses. Course content is compiled by a committee of teaching and research staff, put forward for approval to the General Assembly of the Department and the Dean of Faculty, and finally for approval by the Dean of the University. Learning goals and competences are defined for the overall curriculum and for each course unit (seminar, project, workplace-based learning etc.). The credits and level of skills correspond to international standards (Sakellariou 2010; Doliopoulou 2018).

Although the ratio of supply and demand in the field of public education is considered discouraging, a graduate of the Department of Early Childhood Education has opportunities to work in other areas. Specifically, graduates can also work as scientific/research staff or as a provider of private ECEC settings.

There is also the possibility of studying for other degrees, such as second degree, postgraduate or doctoral diploma, seminars, specialisations, foreign languages, giving them the opportunity to develop vertically in the administrative hierarchy.

Table 3b:
Greece: Nursery and Childcare Teacher

Job title in Greek: *Vrefonipiokomos* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: Higher school leaving certificate (*lykeio*) or vocational certificate; entry waiver defined by the respective University of Applied Sciences **Professional studies:** Four years at a University of Applied Sciences (School of Social Sciences, Department of Early Years Learning and Care), specialising in early childhood education and care **Award:** Degree / University of Applied Sciences (there are no Bachelor degrees in Greece) **ECTS credits:** 240 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main ECEC workplace**: Nursery/extended-age nursery (0–2 or 0–3 years) or childcare centre (0–3 years or 2½–3 years)

The qualification requirement for work as a Nursery and Childcare Teacher in both public and private ECEC settings is the completion of a degree from one of the three Departments of Early Years Learning and Care at a University of Applied Sciences. Entry requirements are a secondary education (Lyceum) leaving certificate and the required grade in the General Panhellenic Examination. Admission to these departments may also occur through qualifying examinations of candidates for holders of other university degrees. The duration of studies is eight semesters. During the first seven, students attend theoretical courses and participate in workshops. During the final (eighth) semester of studies, there is the possibility of preparing a thesis or two additional compulsory courses. The completion of an internship is a necessary condition for obtaining the degree, whereas the dissertation is optional.

Educational activities correspond to 30 credits per semester and 240 ECTS credits overall. The ECTS credits correspond to the workload that has been determined by each university for each course in order to be considered acquired knowledge. Learning outcomes and skills provided correspond to the requirements of the National and European Qualifications Frameworks. The University of Applied Sciences degree is placed at EQF level 6 and ISCED level 6.

The curricula of the Departments for Early Years Learning and Care are compiled by a special committee of faculty set up by the head of the department. The courses of study include compulsory, optional compulsory and also elective classes. Student education focuses on acquiring tools that will support the understanding of the importance of the child's early experiences and the application of developmentally appropriate practices and multidisciplinary approaches during the early stages of human development, from birth to compulsory education.

Graduates are qualified to work either in municipal or private day nurseries and childcare centres or to be self-employed as home-based carers of children aged from a few months old up to their enrolment in primary school. Furthermore, they may set up and operate nursery or childcare centres, as well as practise any other professional activity associated with their educational qualifications, including the entire range of administrative posts related to their field of expertise. They may work in all countries of the European Union and are accepted by universities in Greece, Europe and the USA for postgraduate and doctoral studies (MD 119730/2021).

Table 3c

Greece: Nursery and Childcare Assistant

Job title in Greek: *Voithos Vrefonipiokomou*
Entry requirements: Completion of first year of Lyceum (high school)
Route 1
Professional studies: Three years at Vocational High School, starting from the second year of High School and specialising in early childhood education and care
Award: Certificate as Nursery and Childcare Assistant
ECTS credits: not applicable
EQF level: 4
ISCED 2011: 3
ECEC workplaces: Nursery/extended-age nursery (0–2 years or 0–3 years) or childcare centre (0–3 or 2½–3 years)
Route 2
Professional studies: 2 years at a Vocational Training Institute, following successful completion of the certificate course above. Specialisation in early childhood education and care
Award: Diploma as Nursery and Childcare Assistant

Job title in Greek: *Voithos Vrefonipiokomou*
ECTS credits: not applicable **EQF level**: 5 after the successful participation in exams conducted by National Agency for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance. **ISCED 2011:** 5 **ECEC workplaces:** Nursery/extended-age nursery (0–2 years or 0–3 years) or childcare centre (0–3 or 2½–3 years)

Route 1: **Vocational High Schools** (*Epagelmatiko Lykeio*) offer a specialisation to become a Nursery and Childcare Assistant which starts during the second year of high school. The duration of studies is three years (Law 3475/2006). The graduate of a Vocational High School receives two awards: (1) a certificate as a "Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistant" and (2) a Higher School Leaving Certificate/Diploma. The specialised qualification (certificate) awarded corresponds to Level 4 of the National and European Qualifications Frameworks. The certificate also corresponds to a general school leaving certificate for admission to tertiary education through the process of the General Panhellenic Examination.

The Nursery and Childcare Assistant can work as an auxiliary member of staff in nurseries and childcare centres, in maternity clinics, camps, family planning centres, or as a freelancer taking care of infants and children at home.

Route 2: Those with a Vocational High School award are authorised to enrol in a **Vocational Training Institute** (*Institouto Epagelmatikis Katartisis*) in a course related to the specialism of their leaving certificate. The diploma they receive falls under EQF level 5 and ISCED level 4. The study programme is determined either at the central level by legislation for Vocational High Schools or by the Vocational Training Institute itself and is accredited by a central authority such as the National Agency for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance.

Studies at the Vocational Training Institute are for five semesters in total, divided into four semesters of theoretical and laboratory training 1,200 hours) and one semester of Internship or Apprenticeship (960 hours). The graduates of the specialty "Nursery and Childcare Assistant" after the successful completion of their studies receive a Vocational Training Certificate. Following successful participation in exams conducted by National Agency for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance they are awarded a level 5 Diploma of Vocational Specialty Education and Training.

Graduates can work in public and private childcare centres, settings related to the care and education of children up to 4 years of age, Ministry of Housing and Social Insurance, municipal and community nurseries and childcare centres and a variety of further qualification-relevant options.

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Kindergarten Teacher

Competences: Upon completion of the Department's Undergraduate Studies Programme graduates are expected to:

- Have acquired a strong background in the Sciences of Education and Education as well as excellent knowledge in specific fields of these
- Substantiate their opinions with data by developing arguments and causal reasoning

- Have acquired primary experiences
- Be familiar with reflective and metacognitive processes
- Have acquired critical, creative thinking, solving skills problem solving, decision making, while developing their imagination and their empathy to be able to respond to children's special needs
- Have developed the ability to continue their studies further with a large degree of autonomy as required in responsible research and innovation
- Have acquired a balanced development in the fields of the social sciences and humanities for their role as responsible educators and citizens
- Act in the context of the educational community for its goals of sustainable development (environment, climate change, place, time, social exclusions, inequalities, state participation, health and well-being) (University of Ioannina 2022, a).

Curriculum: Prospective Kindergarten Teachers must complete their four-year initial professional education at one of the nine Greek University Departments of Early Childhood Education. The curriculum is organised in four modules: Pedagogy; Social Sciences in Education; Positive Sciences and their Teaching; Speech, Art and Education, which correspond to the learning areas of the kindergarten curriculum. Learning activities include attending lectures, seminars, assignments, internships, personal study and exams. 60 ECTS credits correspond to the workload of a full year of formal full-time learning (academic year) and related learning outcomes. In most cases, the student workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, where one credit equals 25 to 30 working hours (University of Ioannina 2022a).

Pedagogical-didactic approaches: The courses include lectures, tutorial exercises, seminars or workshops or a combination of these. In the lectures an area of the subject matter and the related concerns are supervised. The tutoring exercises aim at providing or consolidating basic or general knowledge and are carried out, as far as possible, in small groups. In the seminars, the students research a special topic with the help of the relevant scientific literature. In the laboratories, applications of theoretical teaching are made (University of Ioannina 2022a).

While the above refers to the University of Ioannina Department Early Childhood Education, a similar structure is followed by other Departments across Greece.

The Department of Early Childhood Education in Ioannina has the following laboratories that enhance the scientific and professional dimension of the student: laboratory of special and therapeutic education; psychology; pedagogy; new technologies and distance education; human rights and interpersonal relationships in education; teaching and teaching sustainability; intercultural education and diversity pedagogy.

In addition to undergraduate studies, students can participate in training activities, in summer and winter schools, in international student mobility partnerships (ERASMUS+ Programmes), in research programmes, in conferences and workshops and in internships. By participating in all of the above, studies and activities within the university community, students essentially build the profile of a modern educator who can teach in the classroom or continue at a research level. The degree awarded by Departments of Early Childhood Education is uniform. However, the modules may differ from university to university.

Some examples of units in the four modules are summarised below:

- **Pedagogy:** Organising and implementing play, rhythm and movement in kindergarten: planning and evaluation of activities; introduction to intercultural education and the teaching of Greek as a second language; preschool pedagogy; modern teaching approaches in preschool education; teaching Greek as and additional language in modern (primary) school education;

language education in kindergarten and communication approach; philosophical and pedagogical anthropology, modern preschool education programmes

- **Social Sciences:** motivational psychology; psychophysiology I; cognitive psychology I; clinical psychology; the dynamics of family systems through children's drawing; counselling in special education; elements of paediatrics; sociology of Greek education; adult psychology
- **Positive Sciences and their Teaching**: Introduction to informatics and education – new technologies; introduction to computational statistics; basic mathematical concepts in kindergarten; teaching of mathematics II; teaching the concepts of natural sciences
- **Speech, Art and Education:** Modern Greek poetry; theory of literature 1; the international fairy tale; dramatisation and theatrical expression; rhythm and movement; themes of philosophy of education; creative music education; painting; Greek language and education; special themes of visual arts – applications; drama
- Foreign languages: English, French, German
- Internship issues (University of Ioannina 2022a).

Nursery and Childcare Teacher

Competences: Upon completion of their studies in the Department of Early Learning and Care, graduates are expected to:

- Possess a complete and scientifically proven body of knowledge in the professional field in which they will work
- Recognize the evolutionary and dynamic characteristics of education and care in infancy,
- understand relevant concepts, methods and practical applications
- Critically understand theories, basic principles and methodology related to education and care in early childhood
- Deepen, explore and enrich their knowledge
- Utilise their knowledge in order to respond in a flexible, creative and, above all, scientific way in the context of pre-school education and the needs arising from the special circumstances
- Use scientific sources and manage the data resulting from them in a responsible and critical way
- Design, manage and implement programme interventions aimed at the holistic development and well-being of children and their families
- Apply knowledge, skills and abilities in an environment of constant development and change with professionalism and responsibility
- Adopt a teacher-researcher identity that will allow them to reflect on their role and practice and to utilise data and current developments in order to solve problems, evolve and improve.

Curriculum: The curriculum courses include: Introduction to the sciences of education; education and infant care; Greek language, culture and history; introduction to psychology; health education; music pedagogy; preschool pedagogy; evolutionary psychology; art education and creativity; educational games; nutrition and child development; research methodology in educational sciences; first aid for infants and children; teaching – methodological approaches and preschool education programmes; introduction to children's literature; occupational ethics; innovation; neurodevelopmental disorders; developmental paediatrics; intercultural education - teaching approaches in early childhood; developmental psychopathology; critical review Semi-

nar on developmental frameworks in preschool and early childhood models; counselling psychology; theatrical play and dramatisation; environmental education; preschool management; employment relations; ICT utilisation in preschool education; puppetry; pedagogical resources and applications in early childhood; special education; critical Reflection and personal development.

Pedagogic-didactic approaches: In the majority of courses the teachers use classic teaching methods, such as lectures through PowerPoint presentations and other audio-visual media, case / example analysis, individual or group work, presentation of students' work in the group, use of the internet. The use of new technologies is particularly important, where students have access to teaching materials through online learning platforms such as Moodle (University of Ioannina 2022 d).

Nursery and Childcare Assistant

In order to obtain a vocational award as a Nursery and Childcare Assistant, two paths can be followed, through studies either at a Vocational High School or at a Vocational Training Institute.

Upper secondary route (Vocational High School)

Competence requirements: The graduate of the upper secondary vocational specialist track acquires knowledge and skills for working under the supervision of the Nursery and Childcare Teacher. These include: providing care to the young child; supporting children's comprehensive physical, mental, verbal and motor development through appropriate pedagogical methods; caring for children with special needs; implementing accident prevention measures in any area related to the children's activities; providing first aid and acting appropriately in emergencies; filling in the child's personal card and keeping records; giving advice to the child's parents or guardians.

Specific personal qualities and abilities include love for children, creativity and imagination, patience, responsibility, consistency, ability to follow instructions, composure in difficult situations.

Curriculum: Curricular studies include: elements of anatomy-physiology; hygiene; creative activities in preschool, infant and toddler education; music and movement; principles of general and developmental psychology; adult psychology; pedagogical environment of the nursery/childcare centre.

The curriculum includes common courses for all students, general education courses, orientation courses and elective courses.

Post-secondary route (Vocational Training Institute)

Competence specifications: The graduates of the Vocational Training Institute course of studies: are skilled in the use of materials, techniques and musical instruments in work with infants and toddlers. They are also able to:

- Organise a nursery/childcare centre based on pedagogical principles
- Assist the Nursery and Childcare Teacher in the implementation of appropriate pedagogical intervention in cases of diagnosis of disability, learning difficulties or other adjustment difficulties in supervised infants and toddlers
- Organise and manage space and time appropriately, taking into account the needs and capabilities of infants and children
- Organise and implement activities related to the verbal integration of all infants in the group

- Make puppets and puppet-shadow theatre sets and prepare theatrical performances for infants
- Inform parents daily about the childrens' time at the centre and any specific observations (physical, organic, emotional) made during the day
- Provide first aid in emergencies.

Curriculum: Curricular fields include: pedagogical – kindergarten; general, developmental and social psychology; infancy; paediatrics; hygiene; dietetics; play; music-rhythmic; children's art; puppetry-theatrical play; painting; environmental education; kindergarten Organisation; and interpersonal relationships and communication.

Pedagogical approaches: All known teaching methods are applied, while special emphasis is given to the application of participatory teaching methods and active teaching techniques according to the principles of adult education. Course content may also include: Lectures held by specialist professionals in the field, educational visits to companies and thematic exhibitions.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Kindergarten Teachers

There is no other way to enter the profession of Kindergarten Teacher other than through graduation from one of the nine University Departments of Early Childhood Education (see *Chapter **4.1***). However, holders of a degree as Kindergarten Teacher are authorised to work in other institutions and services besides public and private kindergartens. In terms of their career development, this concerns administrative positions in the school unit –as heads, principals, deputy principals or as a director of primary education at the school and regional level, or as school counsellors, provided they have the appropriate formal qualifications for each position.

Some examples of potential additional fields of employment for Kindergarten Teachers are: as an owner/service provider of a private kindergarten; in services, organisations and institutions concerned with education; as scientific staff in the production of pedagogical material and children's books; as scientific staff in public and private sector services; in children's creativity centres, summer camps, children's museums, playgrounds.

Kindergarten Teachers with postgraduate training in special education can teach in special education schools.

Teachers in service have the opportunity to be seconded for a period of one year and in positions outside the school upon request.

These secondments concern positions in services and bodies of the public sector such as the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, in the offices of the Regional Directorates of Education and the Directorates of Primary Education, as Coordinators of Refugee Education, in Universities, in Higher Education, in the Supreme Ecclesiastical Academies, in independent and decentralised services, supervised legal entities under public law and legal entities under private law such as: Academy of Athens, National Library of Greece, Public Libraries, National Agency for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance, Public Vocational Training Institute, Greek Language Centre, Inter-Orthodox Centre of the Church of Greece, Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, Holy Archdioceses in the Holy See.

Nursery and Childcare Teachers

There are no flexible pathways for becoming a Nursery and Childcare Teacher. The only legitimate entry to the profession is the qualification routes described in *Chapter **4.1***.

Nursery and Childcare Teachers may also be employed as (Doliopoulou 2018):

- Managers of research, organisation and operation of nursery and childcare centres
- Supervisors/principals of operational units (directorates, departments, offices) in nursery and childcare centres of local government bodies
- Teacher educators in secondary and tertiary education responsible for the theoretical and practical teaching in early childhood education course classes (Presidential Decree 523/24.12.91.

For staff of municipal nursery and childcare centres, the posting of an employee of one Local Government Body (LGB) to another LGB is possible subsequent to a petition filed by the employee and subsequent to the approval of the originating body with a decision of the person responsible for appointments of the receiving LGB. The posting is for two years and may be extended for one extra year (Law 4257/2014).

The formal opportunities for moving up the system are available only at the vertical level (i.e. starting with a specialist first degree and moving on to take a Master's degree or a Doctoral degree). There are no specifically horizontal qualifying options for side entries by career changers with non-specialist qualifications, i.e. no specifically defined career pathways with diverse entry points at different levels and a clear progression route (Law 3801/2009; Law 4674/2020).

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Kindergarten Teacher

Internships are included in the programmes of all the University Departments of Early Childhood Education in Greece, although their duration and point of time during the study programme may vary. This chapter describes how the University of Ioannina provides guided workplace experience.

Internships ("Practical Exercises") are carried out in kindergartens (in this case of the Prefecture of Ioannina) designated by the Ministry Education. For the academic year 2019/20, the certified kindergartens were defined according to the Ministerial Decision of the Ministry of Education sub no. 27/14599/D1 (Government Gazette Issue B' 398/13.02.2019). Following a request from the Ioannina Department of Early Childhood Education, Refugee Reception and Education Centres (DYEP) were included in the 2019 list of certified kindergartens in order to sensitise students to issues of intercultural education during their studies.

The internship of students in kindergartens is mandatory for obtaining the degree and takes place throughout the study period from the third semester onwards, with the guidance and cooperation of teachers seconded to the University Department. At the same time, specialised Practical Exercises are carried out in the context of other mandatory courses. The supervisory responsibility for the internship lies with the teacher of the relevant course, after preparation in the context of laboratory courses.

The internship aims to prepare professional teachers who can independently and responsibly undertake pedagogical work in early childhood education. The purpose of the internship is not limited to gaining practical experience in the workplace, but is associated with the use of theoretical knowledge and the development of research and thinking skills, seeking a critical approach to both personal teaching practice and the ways other teachers work. Its main goal is to connect theoretical knowledge with educational practice and to enhance the participation of

the students in activities that will help them to become reflective professional teachers. More specifically, the objectives of the internship are for students to be able to:

- Link academic theory with educational practice by relating their teaching options to the various theories and using them to analyse and understand the context in which they are going to intervene in the educational act itself
- Familiarise themselves with procedures for exploring the context of the classroom and the wider context before making decisions about the planning, implementation and evaluation of the activities they organise
- Be involved in self-assessment processes and to realise that this reflective practice contributes to a teacher's professional development.

Specialised Practical Exercises are carried out in the following mandatory and optional courses:

Systematic Observation in Kindergarten is an optional course taught in the 3rd semester of studies (6 ECTS). This particular course includes 4 days of practical training in partner cooperating kindergartens in the Prefecture of Ioannina. Before the start of the internship, the students attend four laboratory courses on systematic observation, its methodology, recording techniques and the axes on which their observations in the kindergartens will be based.

Teaching of Concepts of Natural Sciences, I and II: Practical training is directly linked to the objectives of the courses. These include the recognition of (a) the socio-cultural component of Natural Sciences, (b) the procedures of the scientific method in an organised activity, (c) of teaching objectives in a series organised activities and (d) dealing with conflicts. In this context, the main objective of the internship is to prepare work plans for micro-teaching and whole class teaching. The internship period lasts two weeks. Course I (6 ECTS) is taught in the 5th semester and Course II (8 ECTS) during the 6th semester.

Teaching Mathematics II. This is a mandatory elective course taught in the 6th semester (8 ECTS). It aims to develop the management of knowledge, abilities and skills for mathematics in the kindergarten curriculum. More specifically, key goals are for the students to be able to: (a) recognise the mathematical ideas underlying the activities for maths in the kindergarten, (b) evaluate maths activities in terms of their objective, their degree of difficulty, and their teaching management, (c) plan and carry out maths activities in a classroom with specific and worthwhile learning objectives and adjust them to the requirements and needs of the children they address, (d) to analyse and evaluate the children's action and their own when carrying out a mathematical activity. The internship period lasts two weeks and the course is taught in the 6th semester (8 ECTS).

Information Technology and Education – New Technologies. This is a compulsory course taught in the 6th semester (8 ECTS). Key goals are-(a) to acquire general background knowledge in this area and (b) to develop knowledge, skills and application skills about teaching IT and the new technologies in education, in particular in kindergarten. The objectives of the internship are (a) to utilise knowledge about new technologies (e.g. language programming in educational technology, security issues of the internet and copyright), (b) to utilise new technologies (e.g. educational software, modern online applications) in early childhood education, and (c) to develop teaching abilities and skills about computers in the kindergarten, with modern methods. The internship period lasts two weeks. The course is taught in the 6th semester (8 ECTS).

Teaching Applications II. This is a compulsory course which is taught in the 8th semester (10 ECTS). The internship in the context of this course includes laboratory courses and a training project by the students lasting four weeks in cooperating kindergartens. In particular, objectives of the internship are:

- To approach the educational process as an exploratory procedure

- To understand the classroom as a learning environment
- To plan both short-term and long-term activities
- To choose the appropriate activity for the realisation of specific goals and to experiment with new methods and media
- To develop observation and interpretation skills
- To create an open and flexible learning environment that facilitates the all-round development of children
- To recognise the importance of assessment and make use of appropriate methods, techniques and tools for educational evaluation
- To form their own personal educational theory through action and reflection

The internship of the course **Teaching Applications II** consists of three phases.

During the ***first phase***, students participate in laboratory courses at the University by delving into issues related to the collection, analysis and utilisation of information for the design of teaching interventions through observation, recording and reflective practice. At the same time, they plan cross-curricular activities around a topic in pairs, choosing the objectives, the teaching aids, the methods, the content and the process of evaluating the activities. Based on the feedback provided by the teacher and their classmates, they redesign the planned curriculum. During this period, they are placed in cooperating kindergartens and are informed about the internship file that they will have to submit at the end of the semester in order to be evaluated.

In the ***second phase***, the students undertake a complete educational project in placement kindergartens. The first of four weeks of the internship is spending in study the context of the classroom by collecting, recording and interpreting data in order to decide on any variations of the educational programme that they have designed and become familiar with the classroom environment. In the following weeks, the students undertake in pairs to carry out all the activities included in the kindergarten schedule during the morning session, such as the reception of children, free play and activities in the learning centres, break, children leaving for home, as well as the organised activities they have planned. The students work in the same classroom with the same group of children but alternate roles so that they take turns in having the main responsibility of the programme while the other observes, records and supports the whole process. At the end of each week, the two collaborating students meet up to, identify and interpret their observations, taking them into account for the planning of next week's programme. During this phase, visits are made to the placement kindergartens by the supervising and collaborating staff at the University in order to support and give feedback to the students and to communicate and cooperate with the teaching staff of the kindergartens.

In the ***third phase*** after the end of the internship in the cooperating kindergartens, the students present their work at the university and reflect on their teaching interventions. At the same time, they receive feedback from the professor in charge of the specific lesson on the project they presented and are supported in the compilation of the internship portfolio.

The presence of students is mandatory in all activities of the course. During their time in the cooperating kindergartens, the students must adhere to the schedule of the kindergarten, to adapt to the regulations and the specifics of its operation and to cooperate harmoniously with the kindergarten staff. In case they need to be absent for health reasons or for any other serious reason, they should inform the kindergarten teacher and the teacher and after consultation are required to make up for the day / days of their absence. Students who have not fulfilled their obligations have to repeat the course. When they have completed all their obligations (except the submission of their personal file / portfolio), they can be evaluated in the September exam. This is important for working students who do not have the possibility of additional educational

leave. According to the university guide to mandatory practical exercises they can, after presenting a relevant certificate, complete their internship in partner kindergartens in two instead of four weeks (Sakellariou 2010; University of Ioannina 2022b).

Nursery and Childcare Teacher

In Greece, three higher education institutions have a Department of Early Childhood Education and Care. The practicum of six months is mandatory in two of them. At the International Hellenic University (2021) the practicum is awarded 24 ECTS. At the University of West Attica practicum is mandatory (20 ECTS) (University of West Attica n.d.). In the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care at the University of Ioannina (2022c) the practicum of six months is optional. Moreover, students of the ECEC Department at the University of Ioannina – where there are two Departments, a Kindergarten Department and an ECEC Department – are provided with the opportunity to do an optional internship within the programme (ESPA) Enterprise Agreement for the Development Framework 2021-2027, which is the basic strategic plan for the development of the country with the assistance of significant resources from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) of the European Union.

(**ESPA) Enterprise Agreement for the Development Framework funded Internship Programme:** The internship lasts for two months (continuous duration) full time; it takes place in private and public sector institutions and is awarded at least 2 ECTS. It is offered in the final semester of the degree programme as an optional/elective course. It is not taken into account in the calculation of the degree grade. Participation in the programme takes place following an invitation to express interest and selection of students according to criteria set by the Department. Those students who finally complete an internship will receive, together with their degree, a certificate of internship, where the organisation of the internship will be indicated.

***Internship outline*:** During the optional internship the student should be trained in all areas of the service. It is structured in four progressive stages of activities:

- First stage: Duration of one week. The aim is to get acquainted with the infants and to participate in the work of the Nursery and Childcare Teacher: care, nutrition, education (handicrafts, play, etc.).
- Second stage: Duration of two weeks. The student coordinates the programme of the nursery and childcare centre (nutrition, pedagogical occupations of infants) with the participation of the responsible teacher.
- Third stage: Duration of four weeks. The student assumes full responsibility of the nursery under the supervision of the responsible teacher.
- Fourth stage: Duration of one week. Information and training on administrative and management issues (infant registration, correspondence with various services, archiving, cost sharing, etc.).

The working hours of the students coincide throughout the semester with the working hours of the permanent pedagogical staff (University of Ioannina 2022d).

Nursery and Childcare Assistants

Field studies in the post-secondary study route at a Vocational Training Institute

A six-month internship or workplace apprenticeship, lasting 960 hours, is mandatory for students of Vocational Training Institutes (VTI) and is considered a prerequisite for obtaining a Vocational Training Certificate (Government Gazette 1245/2017).

The **Internship** can take place after completion of the first two semesters. The students may carry out the internship in public and private sector bodies and services in accordance with the

relevant legal provisions in force (Law 4186/2013 (A '193)) under the responsibility of the Vocational Training Institute in which they study. The internship period can be continuous or spaced out. The supervision, coordination, quality assurance and evaluation of the internship are carried out under the responsibility of the Director of the Vocational Training Institute or another person designated by him as an Internship Coordinator. Coordinator is responsible for monitoring the presence of the trainees, ensuring the quality of their work environment, the on-site inspection of the company and the maintenance of an individual internship file with the relevant monthly progress reports. The internship, both in private and in public bodies, can be financed from national and / or community resources in accordance with the provisions in force at the time (Government Gazette 1245/2017).

The students of Vocational Training Institutes who have completed at least 120 working days or at least 120 days of insurance as self-employed or self-employed professionals in the specialty they are registered are exempted, if they wish, by filling out a declaration form, from the obligation to attend the semester of internship and they are awarded the certificate of vocational training upon completion of the four semesters of theoretical and laboratory training (Government Gazette 1245/2017).

The **Apprenticeship Programme VTI** at a Vocational Training Institute consists of two sections, one at the VTI and one at the workplace. Graduates of the 4th semester are registered for the programme if they have not completed an internship. The total duration of the Apprenticeship Programme is 960 hours and is divided into 192 hours of training at the VTI and 768 hours of apprenticeship in the workplace. The Apprenticeship Programme VTI is implemented in accordance with the respective current provisions of the VTI Operating Regulations.

The monitoring and coordination of the Apprenticeship Programme in the workplace is the responsibility of the relevant VTI. The evaluation of the learning outcomes of the apprentices is carried out at the VTI and in the workplace.

The purpose of the both the internship and the apprenticeship programmes for prospective Nursery and Childcare Assistants is for the trainees to gain experience in the workplace and to upgrade their professional knowledge, skills and abilities in order to acquire the qualifications with which they will be able to fulfil their professional duties.

In terms of knowledge, with the completion of the Internship or the Apprenticeship the trainee will be able to:

- Describe the purposes of a nursery
- Distinguish the basic principles that govern the profession of Nursery and Childcare Assistant
- Know the daily pedagogical and care programme, depending on the age, interests and needs of children
- Understand the value of a daily pedagogical schedule and a consistent routine in the lives of infants and toddlers
- Recognise cases of children with special needs
- Know in practice the ethics of the profession of Nursery and Childcare Assistant
- Understand the factors that can create obstacles in the developmental process of children
- Understand the cases of children who show particular characteristics and difficulties in their behaviour and know how to manage their difficulties
- Recognise the importance of special education in supporting children with disabilities
- Identify the factors that can contribute to the normal psycho-emotional development of infants and toddlers.

At the skills level the trainee will be able to:

- Familiarise themselves with and adapt to the conditions of the work environment with infants and toddlers
- Explain the role and duties of a Nursery and Childcare Assistant
- Take care of infants and toddlers
- Organise space and time and implement activities, depending on the children's age, needs and interests
- Select and use the psycho-pedagogical material depending on the age and the developmental level of the children
- Provide personal hygiene to infants and toddlers during routine hours
- Take care of the arrangement and hygiene of the space, equipment and materials
- Organise and implement activities based on a topic of choice, which is multifaceted and interdisciplinary
- Plan, implement and evaluate a daily programme
- Address the difficulties and problems that arise during pedagogical practice
- Manage child safety issues and provide first aid in emergencies
- Act based on the basic principles of ethics of the profession
- Enhance knowledge and skills for the care and education of infants and toddlers
- Contribute to the formation of a suitable and safe environment for the smooth psycho-emotional and social development of infants and toddlers
- Work according to the pedagogical principles and the culture of the workplace
- Respect diversity
- Work with responsibility, conscientiousness, consistency, patience and empathy
- Collaborate effectively with the administration, the staff of the nursery/childcare centre and the parents of the children.

Upper secondary study route at a Vocational High School

There is the possibility of optional attendance of an Apprenticeship programme after the completion of studies at the VHS, with the aim of upgrading knowledge, professional skills and abilities which smooth the transition of students from the school unit to the workplace and in real-life professional conditions.

Emphasis is placed on learning outcomes and the implementation of the curriculum focuses on the student-centred approach and collaborative learning and combines pedagogical learning principles with adult education principles (MD F2/181534/D4/2017).

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Kindergarten Teachers

Continuing professional development activities for Kindergarten Teachers are provided within the larger framework of CPD provision for all teachers in the education system. There is no specific CPD framework for teachers working in kindergartens or pre-primary units in schools.

Compulsory or optional? Continuing professional development for Kindergarten Teachers is partly compulsory, partly optional. It is provided in the form of training programmes, which, after their approval by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, are implemented by professional development agencies.

The forms of *compulsory* training are (PD 250/1992 with amendments, PD 101/1994, 145/1997, 45/1999):

Introductory training, lasting at least one hundred teaching hours for newly qualified Kindergarten Teachers who are applying for a post or for newly appointed teachers before taking up their post. This training aims to renew and supplement their theoretical and practical training (in Greece, newly qualified staff often have to wait several years before taking up their first post). A presidential decree, issued on the proposal of the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, determines the bodies, the duration of the training and any relevant details. During the training, the teachers attend classes in kindergartens where they also teach in parallel with their theoretical training. Those who are invited to the introductory training before their appointment are paid compensation, the amount of which is determined by a joint decision of the Ministers of Education and Religious Affairs and Finance.

Periodic training is offered in two training cycles each academic year lasting up to three months for full-time teachers with a permanent post. It is repeated for teachers every four to six years and aims at informing them about recent research, innovative educational programmes, new teaching and assessment methods and generally enhancing their professional expertise. However, this type of CPD is no longer offered, because it requires the absence of teachers from schools and their replacement, a procedure which is not chosen due to the economic crisis.

Special short-term training programmes of 10 to 100 hours' duration are offered for all serving teachers and up to 200 hours for teachers serving in special education units. These are related to educational reforms and innovations, changes in school curricula, the introduction of new courses, new teaching methods and textbooks.

Teachers serving in public schools with an employment contract under private law for an indefinite period of time and teachers serving in private schools which have been recognised as equal to the public can also participate in this type of training during their working hours.

Additional compulsory forms of CPD can be, for example, training seminars and workshops, decided on by the Education Counsellor (PD 79/2017, Law 4823/2021). These training sessions aim to address issues related to the scientific and pedagogical support of teachers, the implementation of curricula, the planning and evaluation of educational work or the treatment of problems that hinder the proper functioning of settings.

Funding: In the case of compulsory CPD, the employer funds the training. Forms of continuing professional development such as postgraduate or doctoral studies, participation in seminars or conferences are not financed by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and are not supported through paid leave. However, in certain cases teachers may participate in exams, conferences and other training activities while receiving their full salary. These activities usually take place outside of teaching hours. Permission is also provided for the participation in exams (see Law 3528/2007, Law 4210/2013, Law 4590/2019).

Providers of both compulsory and optional continuing professional development courses for teachers can be: (a) the school units, (b) the Regional Education Quality Supervisors; Education Quality Supervisors; Education Consultants; Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support Centres; and Education Centres for the Environment and Sustainability, under the coordination of the Regional Education Quality Supervisors; (c) Higher Education Institutions and supervised bodies of the Ministry of Education; (d) teachers' unions through their research centres; (e) international organisations such as OMEP through its Greek branch.

The universities are providers of continuing professional development options through their postgraduate and doctoral programmes and Training and Lifelong Learning Centres, which offer courses for higher education graduates and teachers, including courses in the latest developments in science and technology and in interdisciplinary fields which are currently developing rapidly. They may also offer short- and medium-term specialisation programmes and internships by scientific specialists in specific fields and applications of technology and science which require additional in-depth studies. A further focus includes the development and implementation of continuing vocational training programmes to complement, modernise or upgrade the participants' knowledge, abilities and skills with the aims of integration into the labour market, job security, as well as professional and personal development.

In addition to the above-mentioned providers, the Education Centres for the Environment and Sustainability also have an educational role through their support of schools in matters related to environmental education, with an emphasis on ecology and sustainable development.

CPD offers at the school unit level: On-site professional development through training seminars in the school setting is carried out for at least 15 hours per school year according to decisions made by the Kindergarten Principal or School Head. Topics of the training seminars are based in particular on: (a) the needs of the school unit, (b) the specific CPD provider. The training seminars are conducted outside teaching hours. Teacher participation is optional; participation, however, is taken into account in their individual evaluation. After the completion of each training seminar, the Kindergarten Principal or the Head of the school issues a printed or electronic certificate of attendance and enters the latter in the teacher's electronic service file. A characteristic feature of the 15-hour training is that it is the teachers' responsibility to organize it, to find lecturers and hours outside of working hours, which is a burden on their personal and family time, as well as tiring for them, since it is required to take place during the academic year.

CPD offers at the regional level: The Regional Supervisor organises and implements training programmes or seminars and other CPD activities at the level of the Regional Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education collaborating in particular with: (a) the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP), (b) the Quality Assurance Authority in Primary and Secondary Education, (c) Higher Education Institutions (HEI); (d) research centres/institutes; (e) local self-government organisations; (f) teachers with additional qualifications or experience in relevant issues arising. The Education Counsellors ensure the dissemination and exchange of knowledge and experiences between teachers of the same or different level and of the same or different disciplines in pedagogical and scientific matters.

CPD activities can be organised in September and June each year by the Education Counsellor in collaboration with the Primary Education support structures (PD 79/2017 as amended by Government of Greece 2018).

Further CPD options: Kindergarten Teachers can also participate in the mobility plan of the ERASMUS+ programme of the European Commission. Within this framework they have, for example, the opportunity to spend a period abroad in a similar educational institution, giving them the opportunity to improve their knowledge, professional and language skills, their abilities to get in touch with a new culture and civilisation and to develop a sense of European identity. Some Kindergarten Teachers participate in Erasmus programmes, but not as a part of their initial professional education. They choose this programme for their professional development. Moreover, participation in these programmes is positively graded in terms of career advancement. The number of participants in the programme per year, the length of participation and the number of participating teachers, students and accompanying teachers (who, as mentioned above, must necessarily belong to the school units and pedagogical groups of the programme), are de-

termined according to the approved programme in which the participation is included. The number of submissions of Erasmus+ programmes by the same school unit depends on the existing human resources and their management capacity and is decided by the Teachers' Association in the context of the strategic planning of the school units in combination with Erasmus+ priorities. The participation of Primary and Secondary education teachers for training, further training, attending seminars and teaching may last up to 14 days, including holidays. The participation of teachers without accompanying students in the context of the preparation of the approved European Programmes in which the school units participate, may not exceed five days, of which three must be working days.

The duration of travel within the framework of the Erasmus+ programmes is approved by the relevant Directorate of Education (MD 25735/H1/20-2-2020).

Each cycle of an eTwinning seminar lasts approximately 6 months (e.g. October 2022 until May 2023). The seminars are not specialised for a specific level of education; they are also used by Kindergarten Teachers (eTwinning Teacher Training Community 2023; Eurydice 2023).

Planning, coordination and supervision of CPD: The Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) is the main body supporting the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs in matters related to the continuing professional development of teachers. It is responsible for the design of training programmes, for the planning of the national CPD strategy and for the certification of CPD providers. The IEP coordinates and monitors the implementation, certification and evaluation processes of the training.

More specifically, one of its scientific departments, the Teacher Training Unit, based on law 4763/2020 (Chapter DG, art. 96):

- Plans the national strategy for teacher training and monitors its implementation
- Cooperates with the Department of Training of Primary and Secondary Education Teachers of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, the other services and bodies of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and other Ministries, as well as other Greek or international organisations for the planning and implementation of action
- Gives an opinion on the allocation of national and Community resources available for teacher training and on teacher training proposals submitted to the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs
- Advises on the certification of training institutions, coordinates and monitors the processes of implementation, certification and evaluation of teacher training
- Implements, in cooperation with the project manager, the criteria for registration of trainers in special registers, based in particular on the suitability and qualifications of the trainers, the subject matter, the objectives and the population to which the training programmes are addressed
- Establishes, maintains and updates the registers of trainers, prepares and implements training programmes and training actions
- Prepares or proposes studies and research on issues related to teacher training
- Organises publicity and dissemination events of the results of training actions and
- Ensures the development and sustainability of training activities, as well as any necessary details related to the operation and implementation of training programmes prepared by the IEP.

The following are examples of programmes that the IEP implements for teachers:

- Special Education and Training
- Training of specialised educational support for the integration of students with disabilities and / or special educational needs

- Training in the New Foreign Language Curricula - Unified Foreign Language Curriculum (EPS-XG) and English Early Childhood Learning Programmes
- Training Actions to support the education of refugee children
- Training in Skills Workshops (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs 2020; Educational Policy Institute 2023).

CPD evaluation: Law 4610/2019 established the **National Teacher Training Centre** at the Hellenic Open University. The purpose of this Centre is the design, implementation and evaluation of training programmes, held in person or online, for education staff, members of the Special Teaching Staff (SPD) and the Special Auxiliary Personnel (APS) of Primary and Secondary Education, as well as prospective members of these categories of staff. In order to achieve its goals, NTTCH cooperates with the IEP and the responsible service of the Ministry of Education. University lecturers and Collaborating Teaching Staff are employed as teachers in the training programmes.

Priority topics for kindergartens: Priority topics for those working in kindergartens include:

- Cooperation with families and supporting the parental role
- Training in the curricula
- Training in administrative tasks
- Crisis management (COVID-19)
- Class management
- Resilience in teachers and children
- Intercultural education.

In order to prioritise the training issues, the Principal of the school unit decides whether it is a matter for school-level training or whether it is a large-scale issue that concerns all Kindergarten Teachers in a prefecture or a district. Teachers' views are not formally submitted as a recording of needs. The possibilities are limited.

Large-scale and still ongoing CPD activities have focused for many years on the training of teachers in the utilisation of ICT. Currently, the Institute of Computer Technology and Publications "Diofantos" is implementing, in collaboration with the IEP, an educational project in the framework of the Act "Training of Teachers for the Utilisation and Application of Digital Technologies in Teaching Practice" which is co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund, NSRF 2014-2020) and the Greek State and continues the previous comprehensive training on the use and application of ICT in teaching.

The training is developed and implemented in two levels of knowledge and skills:

1. Introductory training for the educational use of ICT (**B1** ICT level) and
2. Advanced training for the use and application of ICT in teaching practice (**B2** ICT level).

CPD for Kindergarten Principals and School Heads include topics related, in particular, to the leadership, organisation and administration of the education system, human resource management, quality improvement in education, evaluation, national and international education policy and adult education and may vary according to the position of the specific duties and responsibilities of the education executives.

The acquisition of qualifications for professional development is also provided by law (L4823 / 2021). In order to be selected as an executive, additional qualifications to the necessary teaching experience are also required (postgraduate, doctoral or second university degree, foreign languages, ICT, seminars, etc.). The higher the position in the management pyramid, the more formal qualifications are required. For example, the position of consultant or regional director requires a doctorate. The acquisition of qualifications is done with personal funding and outside

school hours, as there are now few cases of supported leave (usually only for the examination period).

Leave entitlement: Kindergarten Teachers do not have official permits for attending professional development courses. For postgraduate studies, primary and secondary education teachers are only granted unpaid leave under the current restrictive fiscal policy.

However, the grant-renewal of in-service training licenses leave with mandatory remuneration to IKY (State Scholarship Foundation) fellows is allowed. Teachers who were granted a scholarship from the State Scholarship Foundation are allowed to have paid leave (Law 3528/2007).

For teachers attending a course at a higher education institution, an annual exam leave license may be granted for a period of up to 14 days (Law 3528/2007, 4210/2013, 4590/2019).

Short-term paid leave for educational or scientific reasons can be granted in accordance with Law 3528/2007. These leave licenses are issued compulsorily to employees who participate in competitions to receive a scholarship, to be admitted to the National School of Public Administration and Local Government or to be selected to study in postgraduate courses, to participate in conferences, seminars and all kinds of scientific meetings, at home or abroad, on subjects of interest to the service.

Motivation for participation in professional development activities: The Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs is obliged to take care of the training of its employees throughout their career regardless of their category, branch, specialty and grade (Law 3528/2007).

Motivating factors for participation in certified training activities may be both personal (enhancing knowledge of recent research and pedagogical methods) or related to career development.

If a teacher wishes to apply for a position of responsibility in the administration of education (e.g. as a consultant, supervisor, administrative officer (director), Law 4823/2021 sets as a prerequisite certified knowledge of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) at Level A. Also included as selection criteria may be the certified knowledge of Level B' ICT, annual training through a university department, certificates of attendance of certified training programmes of the Ministry of Education.

Research on continuing professional development: There have been no research projects in recent years focusing specifically on the CPD of Kindergarten Teachers (and the same is true for Nursery and Childcare Teachers).

Current issues relating to CPD: Ongoing professional development involves kindergarten staff, permanent and substitute teachers. In addition to the essential need for continuing education, they all face new challenges in their work, such as classes with refugees, children with learning difficulties in regular classes (cooperation with a special educator if any), managing financial and health crises, changes in the curriculum. Ongoing professional development is a matter of constant concern and demand by the teacher trade unions. During the pandemic, distance education emerged as an issue, as it was used as the only way to train teachers. This process is very problematic since it has nothing to do with the principles of adult education and proves to be insufficient and often tedious. Training by the IEP in the use of distance education took place during the health crisis and still continues with skills workshops or the introduction of English in the kindergarten curriculum, in addition to online seminars by the School Communication Control Council and the Regional Centre for Educational Planning. The approaches towards CPD described are not appropriate, as teachers cannot leave the classroom in order to be trained effectively and exclusively. In particular, very tight schedules are followed and in fact in the middle of the school year, the workload is particularly heavy, while CPD takes place remotely in a modern and asynchronous way.

In 2011 there were mergers, abolitions and cuts in education due to the financial crisis and also the abolition of the retraining of current teachers and Kindergarten Teachers, which was carried

out through an institution called “The Faculty”. The Faculty was an important and pioneering institution for the further education and training of current teachers. There were nine centres across the country connected to the respective university Departments of Early Childhood Education. The admission of teachers was through exams and lasted two years, a period of time when teachers were seconded in order to be able to improve their knowledge and reflective competences at universities. Since then, training priorities and assessment have been oriented towards the acquisition of formal qualifications through fee-paying training programmes, in which teachers are forced to participate without being given time off.

Continuing professional development falls under the principles of adult education, but the way it is conducted does not take these principles into account to ensure that learning is effective. More specifically, it is known that adults face obstacles (family obligations, etc.) and the possibility of overcoming them has not been explored. Also, while Kindergarten Teachers have a tendency for active participation, no one has asked their opinion on issues that concern them, their needs have not been investigated. A technique of one-sided information has been followed and not active / experiential techniques, no effective communication has been formed, there is no feeling of mutual respect. The pace at which Kindergarten Teachers want to and can learn is not taken into account, resulting in the risk of frustration. In addition, all CPD sessions are now held outside working hours, mainly in the afternoons and at the weekends, where they coincide with the necessary preparation for work. This leads to exhausting hours, fatigue, burnout and loss of personal and family time.

Nursery and Childcare Teachers

For the Nursery and Childcare Teachers there is no special provision for professional development. They are civil servants in the social welfare sector and are governed by this legislation. The CPD of Kindergarten Teachers, who are also civil servants but within the education sector, is organised differently.

The legal framework (Law 3528/2007) states that on-the-job training is a right of the employee, to be carried out through introductory training at the beginning of the employee’s career, continuing professional development activities, postgraduate programmes or postgraduate education cycles. The programmes take place either in Greece, particularly within the framework of the National Centre of Public Administration and Local Government, or abroad, according to the legal provisions in force.

Introductory training is mandatory, both for the service provider and for the employee. It takes place during the first two years following appointment and aims to familiarise the Nursery and Childcare Teachers with their duties both as an employee in their specific workplace and as an employee of Local Government Organisations in general. The employee is not promoted to the next grade level without successfully completing this introductory training, as a course which is mandatory.

Service providers are obliged to take care of the continuing professional development of their employees throughout their career, regardless of their category, industry, specialty and grade. The training can be general or in the form of specialisation related to the specific service. Employee participation in training programmes can be defined as mandatory, as can postgraduate education in recognised universities in Greece or abroad.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Kindergarten Teachers

According to the current legislation (Law 4354 / 2015, Law 4823 / 2021) the salaries of Kindergarten Teachers are at the same level as those of all teachers in primary education. The pay level is shaped by factors such as years of service, marital status, obtaining degrees beyond the basic degree, serving in border areas, serving in a position of responsibility (manager, supervisor, advisor, etc.), but also the employment relationship (permanent or contract employee).

The new salary scale provides for scales from 1 to 19. The salary scale changes every two years and the employee receives a corresponding increase of €15-20. Holders of postgraduate and doctoral degrees count extra working time of two and six years respectively. Position allowances are provided, i.e. for the supervisor (€150), the manager (€300), the deputy manager (€150) and the consultant (€300). The salary scale has been valid since 01.01.2016, with increases every four years. The increase of the basic salary amounts to 25% every year and concerns the years 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019. For example, an increase of €60 was attributed to €15 each year for the twelve months. There are also allowances paid in addition to the salary, such as family allowance (€50 for the first child, €70 for two), or service allowance in remote or border areas (approximately €100).

The average salary of a teacher, as a result of the continuous cuts due to the financial crisis, is estimated at around one thousand euros. This amount is not enough to live on in a big city as a single parent or a family. In the case of contract teachers, who during school holidays are paid with an allowance by the Organisation of Labour Employment (OAED), extra financial support is needed, which comes mainly from their parents. In addition to covering their living expenses with their salary, teachers also have to cover their travel expenses to and from their workplace, even if it is far away from home. Moreover, they have to cover their training needs, the printed or electronic resources they need for their work and also the tuition fees for the various seminars they attend. Contract teachers also face the risk of precarious sources of funding for their work as these are EU funding programmes which may be withdrawn at any time; the same applies even more so to those working in special education and training, where their pay is not part of government spending on education. A typical example is the non-payment of their salary even for one day's absence due to circumstances beyond their control, e.g. if the school closes and does not operate due to adverse weather conditions.

Nursery and Childcare Teachers

Their salary is determined on a monthly basis, corresponds to the total remuneration of their specific position and is paid fortnightly in advance. Salary, bonuses and benefits are the same as for other civil servants. While overtime is provided for work beyond the mandatory working hours. The director of the centre receives a bonus due to position (Law 4354/2015). According to data provided by the Ministry of Finance, for civil servants the salary scales start from 1 to 19. For example, an employee on salary scale 1 receives a salary of €1,151; on a salary scale of 10 and 18–20 years of service, he/she receives a salary of €1,623; on a salary scale of 19 and 38 years of service, he/she receives a salary of €2,154. These amounts refer to salary without deductions for care and pension. So the actual amounts are lower. For example, on salary scale 12

with 24 years of service, the employee's salary is €1,741, but in real terms, the net amount is around €1,100 (Ministry of Finance 2022).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

Kindergarten Teachers

With the Ministerial Decision no. 127187 / E1 / 01-08-2016 (Government Gazette 2524/2016), total working hours in primary education are 30 hours per week, five of which are non-teaching hours. Working hours mean that teachers attend the school unit even if they have completed their teaching hours in order to complete other tasks related to their class or school unit. Also, the teaching schedule differs according to the years of service and the type of school unit. As for the contractors, these can be full time, like the permanent staff, but there are also part-time workers, who work up to sixteen hours. The selection of substitute / contract teachers is carried out by the Supreme Personnel Selection Council, with transparent and objective procedures. In recent years, due to the retirement of teachers and at the same time the absence of permanent appointments in education while the needs remain the same, there has been an increase in the percentage of contract teachers working in education, amounting to about 25% of all Primary School Teachers, including Kindergarten Teachers.

Nursery and Childcare Teachers

Nursery and Childcare Teachers with permanent employment status and Nursery and Childcare Assistants work five days a week for thirty hours. Holiday leave is the same as for the other civil servants. During their two-year probationary period they attend introductory education programmes. Among nursery workers, a large percentage of the workforce are contract staff. This rate is on the increase due to the absence of permanent posts.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

For the newly appointed **Kindergarten Teachers** as employees with a permanent employment status, the possibility of introductory training is provided, which should be completed within the first two years, during which time they are considered probationers. Apart from this training, no further support is provided during their introduction to the profession. There are no on-site mentors supporting newcomers to the profession. Contract Kindergarten Teachers are not eligible for this training. Teachers' associations advocate for supportive institutions for new Kindergarten Teachers. With their mission of scientific and professional guidance, the Education Counsellors work in support of the teachers, whether permanent, contracted or newly appointed. However, in the kindergarten field the problem is the limited number of counsellors and the large number of schools for which they are responsible. This means a reduced possibility of effective support. In addition to the relevant law (4823/2021) which provides for the evaluation of Teachers and Kindergarten Teachers, School Counsellors are likely to have increased bureaucratic work with the evaluation, which means that their advisory duties will take second place.

For **Nursery and Childcare Teachers**, no similar support measures are provided, neither by a mentor, nor by the Counsellor, while any issue that refers to the operation of the nurseries and childcare centres which is not included in their Rules of Operation, is regulated by a decision of the Board of Directors.

7.4 Non-contact time

A feature of the work of teachers is the high workload and work outside the classroom, to prepare the work in the classroom, to hold meetings of the teachers' association, to correct, to organise activities of the school community in collaboration with various agencies (excursions, visits, etc.), to organise parent information events, school festive events, but also holding meetings with parents, etc. For these reasons, alongside the five non-teaching hours, a preparation and extracurricular employment allowance was introduced and granted. However, these allowances were abolished in 2011 when uniform salaries were applied to civil servants due to the financial crisis and thus there was a large reduction in salaries. Although these allowances have been abolished, teachers and Kindergarten Teachers in particular continue to function as before, for example in their cooperation and communication with parents outside the opening hours of the kindergarten, without receiving any additional remuneration (Law 4024/2011; MD 127187 / E1 / 01-08-2016).

7.5 Current staffing issues

Kindergarten Teachers

Between 2010 and 2015, 2,721 Kindergarten Teachers left the kindergartens, the permanent recruitments in those years amounted to 529, while in the years 2014 and 2015 no recruitments were made at all (Bratis 2016), while between 2010 and 2022, 4,070 Kindergarten Teachers retired (Teaching Federation of Greece (DOE) 2022). With Law 4589/2019 (Government Gazette 13 AD), 289 permanent Special Education Kindergarten Teachers were appointed in special education units and integration groups. However, these recruitments have not met the existing needs which are met by the temporary recruitment of contract teachers or in many cases are not covered at all. After many years of the absence of permanent appointments, or minimal in relation to the needs, 1,500 permanent appointments of general education Kindergarten Teachers took place in 2020 and in 2021 (MD 91715/E1/22-7-2022).

According to the European Commission's annual report on the monitoring of education and training, there is a steady decline in the funding for education in Greece (3.20% in 2012-2013, 2.85% in 2017, 3,44% in 2018 and 3.9% in 2019), whereas the European average is 4.6%. This is also reflected in the preference for contract staff, who cost less than a permanent employee in terms of salary, while their recruitment can also be covered through programmes to mitigate unemployment. In Greece, the ESPA program (Corporate Pact for the Development Framework) is utilised, which draws resources from the European Structural and Investment Funds. This is one of the reasons why many educators consider their contracts precarious, as this financial support may be discontinued. Also, under funding leads to understaffing, while there are mergers of schools, a reduction of teachers' income, insufficient and delayed staffing (mainly in special education) and a lack of logistical infrastructure.

In Greece, the education system is characterised as centralised, with the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs being the only authority responsible for the formulation and implementation of educational policy. Among the issues that are regulated centrally is that of the staffing of the education system. Law 2525/1997 abolished the system of appointment of teachers through the yearbook and replaced it with a system of examinations under the responsibility of the Supreme Council for Civil Personnel Selection, an independent authority established by law 2190/1994. From the year 2003 and with law 3027/2002, the appointment of teachers was determined at a rate of 75% from the competition and 25% from a list of contractors. These percentages changed several times in the following years. It is a fact that from 2008 onwards the

permanent posts for teachers were dramatically reduced and the needs were covered by contractors or substitutes. In 2010, with law 3848/2010, in parallel with the grade in the competition, the candidates could count other academic criteria such as a Bachelor's degree, postgraduate and doctoral degree, but also social criteria such as disability, while the possession of a Certificate of Pedagogical Competence was also institutionalised. Although this law provides for the appointment of permanent teachers, these are not made and this was the reason why no staff selection examinations of the Supreme Personnel Selection Council are held. As a consequence, temporary substitute Kindergarten Teachers are hired on a contract basis. Up to today, the competition has not taken place since 2008, although the Ministry of Education has recently spoken of its intention to reinstate it as part of the teaching staff selection process.

By law 4589/2019, the Supreme Council for Civil Personnel Selection, at the request of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, announces and conducts every two school years a classification process in order of priority, by sector and specialty, of the candidates for vacancies in primary and secondary education, including special education staff. The appointment or recruitment of teachers is made exclusively by ranking boards, which are valid until the end of the second school year following the end of the school year in which they were published in the Government Gazette, without the possibility of modifying the data in the intermediate period.

These tables are compiled on the basis of predetermined and objective criteria (academic, educational background, social criteria) in descending order of the overall score resulting from the cumulative rating of these criteria.

ASEP and the Ministry of Education then post the provisional ranking tables on their websites. Candidates can file an objection within a specified period of time. After checking the objections, ASEP prepares the final tables which are published in the Government Gazette.

Those interested can submit a candidacy application in the manner specified in the relevant announcement of ASEP. Candidate teachers and members of special education staff who have the formal qualifications for appointment in primary or secondary education are accepted in the process.

This law on the system of permanent appointments has provoked many reactions from teachers, because it devalues the previous service of deputies and proposes the formal qualifications, while it also devalues the basic university degree which is no longer enough to secure a job as a teacher.

As for recruitment strategies to meet the increased licensing needs of individuals belonging to vulnerable groups during the health crisis, this was addressed by the government with three-month training contractors.

Data on the number of contract teachers show a steady increase in recent years. Specifically, in the school year 2016/2017, 1,718 Kindergarten Teachers were hired on a contract basis, in the following school year 2,007, one year later 2,554, and in 2019/2020 3,742. Conversely, the proportion of permanent and seconded Kindergarten Teachers has decreased, due to retirement and the failure to recruit young people. This means that the needs for teaching staff remain and the shortages are great. From the school year 2019-2020, the provision of Law 4589/2019 came into force which allows a reduction of the maximum number of children in kindergarten groups from 25 to 22, in order to improve the pedagogical and didactic support of the children. However, this provision was changed again through law 4692/2020 and the aim is now to reduce the number of teaching staff, mainly by increasing the number of children by 3 per teacher, ignoring what is required pedagogically for the teaching and learning of young children.

According to the data of the Hellenic Statistical Authority for the school year 2019/2020, regarding the age distribution of the teaching staff in kindergartens, 39.94% of the teaching staff are over 55 years old. The total number of active teaching staff in kindergartens for the same school

year was 16,483. 29.56% are between 40 and 50 years old and 26.54% are between 30 and 40 years old.

Nursery and Childcare Teachers

Nurseries and childcare centres also face staff shortages. The recruitment of permanent staff has not changed since the 1990s. The needs are covered by contract workers who usually work for eight months a year, recruited through the Labour Organisation.

Each municipality, through the Legal Entity under Public Law responsible for children, announces the intention to conclude a fixed-term employment contract. The recruitments concern a fixed-term private law employment contract to cover the seasonal or temporary needs of any additional qualifications. The Supreme Council for Civil Personnel Selection posts the announcement and the deadline for applications (Law 4257/2014; Law 4354/2015). The existing workforce, the current permanent Nursery and Childcare Teachers with many years of work experience, will be retiring during the coming years. This implies the aging of the permanent teaching staff.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Kindergarten Teachers

Although not recent, it is worth noting that in 2013, the working hours of Kindergarten Teachers were officially regulated in the same way as those of Primary School Teachers. This was an important step forward for Kindergarten Teachers as professionals (Law 4115/2013).

In 2020, with Law 4589/2019 (Government Gazette 13/A/29-1-2019), 289 permanent Special Education Kindergarten Teachers were appointed in special education units and integration groups[3].

In 2018, a two-year compulsory education for 4 and 5 year olds was established by law (Law 4521/2018). This has slightly increased the number of jobs, as there are no more student outflows into other settings. Both teachers and parents supported the demand for the institutionalisation of a 2-year compulsory education in public kindergartens. The advantages include facilitation of the non-discriminatory inclusion of all children in the educational process, as it ensures the early detection of their educational needs, guides them for timely and valid assessment in the appropriate state services and agencies when this is necessary and offers the possibility to Kindergarten Teachers to implement the required pedagogical interventions. Furthermore, through transition programmes planned and jointly implemented by Kindergarten and Primary School Teachers, a smooth transition to primary school can be facilitated (Sakellariou, Anagnostopoulou, and Strati 2018).

[3] The same law appointed 1,041 permanent employees of special education and special auxiliary personnel for primary and secondary education. The positions included 116 Speech Therapists, 137 Psychologists, 114 School Nurses, 70 Physiotherapists, 81 Occupational Therapists-Occupational Therapists, 135 Social Workers, and 388 Special Auxiliary Staff. Most of the above employees were appointed to special education schools, the rest to regular schools, but also to Committees of Scientific Education Evaluation and Support (E.D.E.A.Y.) who are responsible for the educational evaluation and support of students and the school community.

Nursery and Childcare Teachers

An important development for Nursery and Childcare Teachers was the maximisation of the institutions that offer their studies, which were renamed from Technological Educational Institutions (TEI) to Universities of Applied Sciences. The staffing of the nursery and childcare settings with permanent staff is part of the public sector process (Law 3584/2007), but as mentioned in the previous chapter, permanent appointments have not been made in recent years. Consequently, the majority of employees are contract workers. Characteristic is also the absence of a selection procedure for Centre Heads/Directors due to a lack of relevant legislation since 2011. A serious issue is also the lack of formal and continuing training, but also the lack of pedagogical support through Counsellors.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

In terms of research studies focusing on Kindergarten Teachers, two kinds can be identified: (1) from a broader perspective as public sector employees, and (2) from the perspective of the trade union to which both Kindergarten Teachers and Nursery and Childcare Teachers belong, the "Supreme Administration of Civil Servants Associations". Within the trade union, a *Social Multicentre* organisation was founded in December 2004 with the aim of scientifically supporting the diverse activities of the trade union through educational research, while cooperating with respective institutes and higher education institutions in Greece and the European area.

It also promotes the continuing education and training of employees in the public sector.

The level and evolution of wages in the Greek public sector from the crisis of 2009-10 until today

Source: Mavroudeas, S., and K. Passas 2022 (see *References f*or full details)

***Aims and methods*:** The aim of this study was to record the level and the evolution of the salaries of the employees in the public sector in Greece from the outbreak of the Greek crisis until the present day. Data on employment in the public sector were used and analysed based on the data of the Labour Force Survey, which are compared with the data of the Register of Employees of the Greek State.

Selected findings: The main conclusions of the study can be summarised as follows:

- It is confirmed that public sector employees contribute more than they are paid for, while in terms of taxation, employees, and especially civil servants, they contribute the most.
- Due to adverse financial conditions. wages in general, but especially those for public sector workers, are more affected, leaving them in a more vulnerable position in terms of their income.
- Specifically, during the period 2010 to 2020, the average salary of doctors decreased by 10.5% – from €1,443 to €1,291 – while the average salary of teachers decreased by 15.7%, from €1,311 to €1,105, of health technicians by 11.9%, from €1,176 to €1,036 and the salary of general office clerks by 14.7%, from €1,196 to €1,020.
- Respectively, we can observe that the reduction of the salaries of the civil servants by sector of economic activity amounts to 11.5% in the sector of health, to 15.8% in the sector of education and to 15% in the sector of public administration. During the period 2010-2020,

average wages for both men and women declined while at the same time the gap between wages by gender increased.

- More specifically, it is observed that the average salary for male civil servants decreased by 14.7%, from €1,326 to €1,131, while for women it decreased by 15.4% from €1,210 to €1,024. As a result of this simultaneous decline, the average wage for women from 92.1% of the corresponding for men in 2010 falls to 90.6%. In other words, the crisis is leading to a widening of the gender pay gap.
- The proportion of the lowest paid employees is also increasing. It is indicative that employees earning between €1,000 to €1,100 have increased from 11% to 16% of the total, those earning €900 to €1,000 from 6% to 10%, while those with a salary level below €900 have increased from 12% to 20%.
- The evolution of the salaries of public sector employees in Greece is always adjusted negatively in relation to European countries where Economic Adjustment Programmes were implemented: for example, Cyprus shows an increase of 6.3%, Portugal of 5.2%; only Ireland shows a decrease of 6.5%, while in Greece the average salary in the public sector decreased by 25%. At the same time, it increased by 21.4% in the Eurozone and by 23.8% in the EU.

Implications: During the current period, the observed increase in inflation will lead to a decrease in the purchasing power of public sector employees, which also applies to Kindergarten Teachers and Nursery and Childcare Teachers, if there is no corresponding increase in wages.

Education and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic: narratives, experiences, practices – qualitative and quantitative dimensions

Source: Zagos, C., I. Kamarianos, A. Kyridis, and N. Fotopoulos 2022 (see *References* for full details)

Background: A second study by the Social Multicentre of the trade union concerns the levels of education of teachers in general, including Kindergarten Teachers as part of primary education, but not Nursery and Childcare Teachers.

***Aims and methods*:** The purpose of this study was to highlight the optics and dimensions of conditions faced by the educational community during the pandemic period, both inside and outside classrooms and educational institutions. The authors use a rich range of methodological tools for approaching, analysing and interpreting the Greek educational reality during the period of the pandemic crisis. A sociological perspective productively combines theoretical and empirical approaches with qualitative and quantitative character. Specifically, questionnaires were analysed and processed, as well as interviews with teachers (among them Kindergarten Teachers) and university teachers, trying to investigate how they as actors managed the extreme and unprecedented conditions in the education and practice of their work crisis. The sample drew from teachers working in both kindergartens and primary classes. The questionnaires were distributed to approximately 9,000 people. The response rate was 12.04% (1,084 responses).

Selected findings: The conclusions of the study include the following:

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the teaching profession and teachers went through an unprecedented and difficult period. The question is the magnitude of the impact of the pandemic on the substance of the teaching profession, the nature of teaching and the character of schools. The pandemic crisis came to intensify the already burdened landscape in education and to make the experience of everyday life more painful and stressful.

- In their responses to the Professional Exhaustion questionnaire, the teachers did not present extreme and unpleasant situations. Quite a significant percentage (27.9%) of the sample is in the range of high emotional exhaustion, 35.8% show low personal achievement, while 19.9% high.
- Regarding the scale Sources of Teachers' Stress, they include: the educational organisation, the lack of support for and prestige of the profession, the management of the pandemic, followed by factors related to learning, behaviour, relationships, workload and the pressure of time. In previous research (Leontari, Kyridi, and Gialama 1996) the factors causing the greatest stress to teachers are student behaviour and working conditions.
- The degree of satisfaction of teachers regarding the response of Greek public education is low and even lower regarding the response of Greek educational policy. In e-learning there were technical problems that made their work difficult, while they themselves experienced significant financial costs in supplying infrastructure and technological equipment. The sample considers that in terms of training and logistical support the Ministry of Education did not respond properly to support their work. The trainings were not focused on distance education, while training focused on the psychological management-support of their students did not exist and in general the responsibility of distance education was transferred from the ministry to the teachers.
- Teachers say they feel the nature of their work is changing. Regarding teaching and learning, they record the incomparable value of living teaching, the inability to evaluate the performance of students, the lack of control over the learning climate and the learning process in general, the inability of all students to participate in the distance learning process, but also the difficulty of teaching all courses remotely. They express their concern that in the future the methodology of distance learning, e-learning and in general the toolbox of e-learning methods and approaches will be used more and that in this way their jobs will be endangered. Also, in terms of distance learning, the lack of technological means and infrastructure did not allow equal access and participation of all students, while state resources for the purchase of equipment were limited and allocated with a long delay and a minimal percentage of schools, teachers and students.
- Vulnerable groups of the student population (students from weaker economic strata, children in remote areas, Roma, children of refugees and immigrants) were excluded from the educational process. The teachers, however, have done their job and continue with solidarity through independent activities and voluntary work – but at great personal cost, since they are not provided with the means to fulfil their social mission.

Implications: The study clearly highlighted the important role of schools (including kindergartens), and education in general, for the children's psychosocial development and well-being; in other words, the importance of living teaching and learning and the social role of the school.

Characteristics of public human resources in critical areas of education and health

Source: Tsiolas, G., and M. Filiopoulou 2021 (see *References* for full details)

Background: A report on the human resources of the public sector in the field of education is part of the documentation work by the Social Multicentre of the trade union.

***Aims and methods*:** The aim is to record the characteristic elements of the public's human resources in the critical field of education. Data on gender, age and years of service are used to show the demographic trends and specifics in each of the category of the professions in the field of education. The study draws on data from the 2020 census of public employees and from other official databases, such as the Public Sector Inventory Register.

Selected findings: This report notes that in primary education (including kindergartens), 32% of permanent teachers have 20 to 30 years of service, indicating an aging of the permanent teaching staff. The average age of teachers in primary education is 53 years. 37.0% are aged 51 to 60 years, while 34.7% are aged 41 to 50 years. In primary education, 75.3% are women. At all levels of education, the percentage of women is higher among the younger generation of teachers (under 30 years old) than among older people (50 years and older).

On average in OECD countries, 70% of teachers in 2019 were women at all levels of education. The largest concentration of women in the teaching profession is noted in the first years of school education and the percentage shrinks proportionally in the next levels of education. Women represent 96% of the teaching staff in pre-school education and 82% in primary education. At secondary level they make up 63% and only 44% at higher level on average in OECD countries (OECD 2021, 396).

No similar studies were found for the Nursery and Childcare Teachers, except for the first one presented in this chapter, which focused on all civil servants, including the employees of local government organisations.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Kindergarten Teachers

Kindergarten Teachers are very likely to face a reduction of jobs due to demographic issues: while the birth rate has been decreasing dramatically, at the same time the **unfavourable staff to child ratio** (1 teacher to 25 children) has been maintained. Another significant problem is the **aging of the teaching staff** and this will intensify even more with the constant increase in retirement age limits. This is particularly significant because the nature of the profession requires physical endurance to cope with the daily life of a Kindergarten Teacher, in addition to professional development activities to update their knowledge. In terms of day-to-day operation, another challenge is an **increase in bureaucracy** through the push for efficiency and promoting a culture of accountability. Under these conditions, the kindergarten curriculum is at risk of becoming overly structured and rigid, with more of an academic orientation rather than remaining flexible and offering opportunities for social learning.

A further continuing difficulty is the fixation of **salaries and pensions at very low levels** (Law 3833/2010) compared to those in force in the rest of Europe, with no prospect of improvement as the economy is not expected to recover. **Low funding for education** (Law 4584/2018) compared to other countries (OECD 2022, 4) is an important element that should be improved and which is not expected to improve immediately, also due to the prevailing economic situation and other factors. The underfunding of education is justified by the rulers at the level of public rhetoric with the underestimation of the profession, but also of teachers as public servants, with teachers arguing that it is simply a matter of priorities.

A further challenge with social implications is the increase in the relative number of substitute / **contract teachers**, who experience precarious working conditions while being expected to have high-level scientific and professional training. In the past, the local government authorities have often expressed the desire to have the operation and funding of primary education under their supervision, something that Kindergarten Teachers do not want and are constantly debating,

because they believe that not only will the quality of education provided to children be degraded, but also their own official status. Teachers believe that local government authorities under fund the organisations under their responsibility, that there is no transparency in the recruitment of staff and also fear that there will be no uniform professional development opportunities offered throughout the country, as is currently the case in the public sector.

Another challenge is the fact that in times of crisis, like the health care crisis which we have recently gone through, teachers in Greece have completed **remote learning** without support from the ministry (training, logistics) and this is required by the ministry, even in periods when, for example schools have to close due to adverse weather conditions. In addition to this fact, CPD programmes for Kindergarten Teachers tend to depend entirely on remote learning, which is not in line with the principles of adult education. The experience of the pandemic crisis raises many challenges, such as how much the teaching profession will be affected, its nature and character, how the curricula will be affected, what form initial and continuing professional education will take in the future, what organisational models will be developed and how much the forms of teaching in education will be changed, including the relative role distance education (modern or asynchronous) will occupy through remote learning or other e-learning tools (Sakellariou et al. 2021; Sakellariou and Banou. 2020).

Nursery and Childcare Teachers

Nursery and Childcare Teachers, as well as all civil servants, face the fixation of wages at very low levels (Law 3833/2010). The country's demographic problem, which could lead to a reduction in jobs, is a possible negative development for the employees in nurseries and childcare centres. Further negative factors are the absence of permanent appointments, the job insecurity and uncertainty of contract workers. This fact is directly related to the aging of the staff, a condition which complicates the daily operation of employees due to the requirements of the profession and the quality of work.

Another challenge will be to address the demand for places in nurseries and childcare centres, because currently, not all applications for registration can be met. Due to the lack of places in the public sector, many children have to be enrolled either in private nursery provision at an additional cost, or their parents have to use vouchers from European Union programmes, or the children have to stay at home. The needs exist mainly for the very young children, since the municipalities do not establish nurseries and childcare centres to the same extent. Nurseries require the recruitment of more staff (small groups of children and more staff due to the young age of the children). For this reason, the government has announced the intention to implement a programme called "Neighbourhood Nanny", which promises to meet the existing needs. Of course, the question remains as to why the existing structures are not improved, upgraded or why the nurseries are not strengthened with new buildings. This situation does not serve working parents, especially mothers, who find it difficult to look for work and to reconcile work and family life. Another important issue in the operation of nurseries and childcare centres is the need for a curricular framework which would be implemented in all settings.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

GREECE

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms chosen in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC settings are **nursery** (*vrefikos stathmos*, 0–2), **childcare centre** (*paidikos stathmos*), 2½–3) and **pre-primary school**[1] (*nipiagogeio*, 4–5)[2]. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Greece

1831	– The first infant school (*nipiako scholio*) for 2 to 6 year-olds is founded on the island of Syros by the German missionary Hildner. – In Athens a similar infant school is opened for 2 to 8 year-old girls by the American missionaries John and Francis Hill, considered to be the first initiative of systematic and organised early childhood education.
1836	Establishment of another private school by the organisation *Filekpedeftiki Eteria* in Athens which includes a pre-primary unit for 3 to 6 year-olds.
1837	Hildner establishes the first training school for early childhood education teachers on the island of Syros.
1853	Further training institutions are established: one by Hill in Athens and also one by the organisation *Filekpedeftiki Eteria.*
1864	Ekaterini Laskaridou establishes the first kindergarten based on Froebelian principles in Athens.
1895	Statutory definition of kindergarten education for 3 to 5 year-olds
1897	The first kindergarten teacher training school established in Athens by E. Laskaridou.
1926	Opening of first public day nursery
1929	Kindergartens come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.
1962	First official curriculum for kindergartens issued
1966	Founding of one-year kindergarten training departments in the pedagogical academies which close again after four years
1971-1974	Besides the Athens kindergarten teacher school, three new ones are founded in Thessaloniki, Karditsa and Chania, each with a two-year programme.
1980	New official curriculum for kindergartens introduced, putting the child in the centre of the educational process.
1982	Abolition of kindergarten teacher training schools and establishment of Early Childhood Education Departments at the universities
1985	– Kindergartens and childcare centres are seen as two separate institutions. – Establishment of experimental kindergartens at the universities – Kindergarten attendance increases gradually and in some areas is made mandatory. – Introductory, annual and periodical CPD of kindergarten teachers are held at the Pedagogical Institute, the Regional Training Centres and in the experimental kindergartens.

[1] In previous SEEPRO studies, these pre-primary educational institutions in Greece were called "kindergartens" – and still are in every day usage. However, as they are now part of the compulsory school system, we will refer to them in this key data synopsis as "pre-primary schools" or “pre-primary groups” or “pre-primary settings”.

[2] **Editors’ note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In Greece, where primary school starts at age 6, the corresponding formats are **0–2½/3** and **4–5** years.

1989	Revised curriculum for kindergartens issued.
1997	Official mandate of all-day kindergartens issued.
1998	Organisation and tasks of regular kindergartens issued.
2001	Responsibilities for childcare centres are transferred from the Ministry of Health and Welfare to the Ministry of the Interior; they are now funded and monitored by the municipalities.
2002/03	– Official curriculum for kindergartens is revised again. – Standard operating regulations are issued for municipal and private non-profit childcare centres.
2006	Kindergarten attendance in the year before starting primary school is made obligatory.
2017	Ministerial Decision 79 specifies regulations for the organisation, objectives and evaluation of pre-primary education and schools.
2018-2021	Gradual lowering of age for compulsory pre-primary enrolment to 4 years of age
2021	A new detailed curriculum is piloted.
2023	New pre-primary curriculum comes into force in September.

Sources: Doliopoulou 2000, 2018; Oberhuemer et al. 2010; Petrogiannis 2013; Birbili and Christodoulou 2018; Megalonidou 2020

ECEC system type and auspices[3]

Early childhood education and care in Greece is organised as a multi-sectoral system, involving three different ministries. The Ministry of the Interior (*Ypourgeío Esoterikón kai Dioikitikís Anasynkrótisis*) is responsible for municipal **nurseries** for under 3 year-olds (*vrefikoi stathmoi*) and **age-extended nurseries** for children aged 2 months to 4 years (*vrefonipiakoi stathmoi*), as well as municipal **childcare centres** for children aged 2½ to 4 years (*paidikoi stathmoi*). The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (*Ypourgeío Apaschólisis*) is responsible for licensing and supervising private-commercial and non-profit childcare settings. The municipalities are responsible for the establishment and operation of public and private childcare facilities.

Both public and private **pre-primary schools** (*nipiagogeia*) for 4 and 5 year-olds are part of the primary education sector under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (*Ypourgeío Paideías kai Thriskevmáton*).

General objectives and legislative framework

Childcare sector

The objectives of childcare settings for children up to 4 years of age are primarily related to holistic development, mitigating cultural, economic and educational inequalities, supporting a smooth transition from the family to the institution, and paying attention to health and safety aspects. Municipal nurseries and childcare centres for children up to 4 years of age are bound by the standard regulations of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Health (Ministerial Decision 41087/29.11.2017 with amendments of 2020), which define the minimum requirements of the facilities.

[3] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Greece provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are indicated within the text and in the references section.

Education sector

The overarching goal of early childhood education primarily concerns the balanced development of children's intellectual, psychological and physical potential, regardless of origin or gender. Important basic principles are freedom of religion, respect for different cultures, peaceful coexistence with others and protection of the environment.

Starting in 2018, attending a pre-primary education setting became mandatory for children from the age of 4, mainly to counteract inequalities of opportunity. Important goals are to build and maintain relationships with others and to prepare children for primary school. The Framework Law and the Presidential Decree (Law 1566/1985) lay down the operating modalities of the pre-primary education settings and the organisation of professional training.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Up to the age of 4, attending a childcare centre is voluntary and children have no legal entitlement to a place.

Law 4521/2018 stipulates that attending a pre-primary school for two years before primary school is to become mandatory on a staggered basis, starting from the 2018-2019 school year. This regulation was implemented nationwide in 2021/22. 25 hours of educational activities per week are obligatory. Four optional hours are offered in the afternoons to enable full-day attendance if desired.

Children start regular primary education at the age of 6.

Main types of provision

Childcare sector

Nurseries (*vrefikoi stathmoi*) are ECEC settings for under 3 year-olds and age-extended nurseries (*vrefonipiakoi stathmoi*) admit children aged 2 months to 4 years. In some private nurseries, babies are accepted as early as 40 days.

Childcare centres (*paidikoi stathmoi*) admit children between 2½ years of age and entry into the compulsory pre-primary programme. **Special needs settings** also exist to cater for children in these age groups.

Enrolment priority is given to children of working parents, children from unemployed families, families from disadvantaged backgrounds, children of single parents, separated parents and children with special needs.

Childcare settings are open from 1 September to 31 July; they are closed in August, on Christmas Eve, Easter and on official holidays. As a rule, they open at 7:00 in winter, 6:45 in summer and close at 16:00. Opening hours can also be adapted to the needs of parents.

Education sector

Public and private education in **pre-primary schools (***nipiagogeia* – formerly kindergartens) is now officially part of the primary school system (as with the *écoles maternelles* in France) for 4 and 5 year-olds. Compulsory educational activities take place from 8:30 to 13:00 (25 hours per week), non-compulsory sessions may follow up to 16:00. A pre-primary school can also open as early as 7:45 if more than five children are enrolled for the full-day programme. Children who live more than 1.2 km from the facility are transported there free of charge.

Private kindergartens follow the same organisational structures as public ones.

In 2022, there were a total of 5,734 preschools in Greece, 85.5% of which had public providers (Eurydice 2023, 2.8).

Provider structures

Nurseries, extended nurseries and childcare centres (ISCED 01) may be run by municipal or private providers or in municipal-private partnership. The majority are public. In 2022, overall there were 4,040 of these ECEC settings.

Table 1

Greece: Number of settings in the childcare sector by provider type, 2022/2023

Provider type	Nursery (*vrefikos stathmos*, 0–2, 2½–4)	Childcare centre (*paidikos stathmos*)	Total number of settings in the childcare sector
Public	764	1,125	1,889
Private	717	1,434	2,151
Total	**2,151**	**1,889**	**4,040**

Source: EETAA 2023

Most pre-primary settings in Greece are public. According to Eurostat data as well as to data of the national statistic, 11.9% of children (3–6) attended settings under private ownership in 2021 (Eurostat 2023e and *table 2*). The number of private pre-primary schools is increasing slightly: while in 2020/21, 722 of them were public, in 2022 the figure was 833 (see *Table 2*).

Table 2

Greece: Number of pre-primary schools and children enrolled by provider type, 2022

Provider type	Number of pre-primary schools (4-5)	Number of children enrolled*	Relative share of pre-primary settings, in %
Public	4,901	154,311	85.5
Private	833	20,797	14.5
Total	5,734	**175,108**	

Source: Eurydice 2023, 2.8; *Hellenic Statistical Authority 2023, 135, data from 2020/21

Participation rates in regulated provision

According to Eurostat data, the enrolment rates of under 3 year-olds in centre-based childcare settings quadrupled between 2005 (7%) and 2022 (29.1%). In 2022, 80.5% of children between 3 years of age and the start of primary school attended an ECEC setting, an increase of nearly 20% since 2005.

Table 3

Greece: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings according to age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly attendance rate	Under 3 year-olds in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	3	27
	Over 30 hours	4	34
	No enrolment in ECEC	92	38

Year	Weekly attendance rate	Under 3 year-olds in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age in %
2010	1 to 29 hours	3	46
	Over 30 hours	5	23
	No enrolment in ECEC	92	31
2015	1 to 29 hours	4.9	41.1
	Over 30 hours	6.5	26.0
	No enrolment in ECEC	88.6	32.9
2022	1 to 29 hours	8.7	39.8
	Over 30 hours	20.4	40.7
	No enrolment in ECEC	70.9	19.5

Source: Eurostat 2023b, Slight deviations from 100% due to rounding

In recent years, parental demand for childcare places for under 4 year-olds has exceeded the number of places available – both in public and in private settings.

Although the two years preceding primary school are now compulsory, only 82.8% of 4 to 5 year-olds are enrolled in a setting, but almost all 5 to 6 year-olds.

Table 4

Greece: Number and enrolment rates of children in ISCED-02 settings, by age, 2021

Age	Number of children	Enrolment rates in %
4 year-olds	82,171	82.8
5 year-olds	90,143	92.6
6 year-olds	3,575	3.7

Source: Eurostat 2023f, j

Financing and costs for parents

In 2019, public expenditure on early childhood education and care totalled 0.34% of the GDP (OECD 2023).

ECEC settings for children under 4 years of age and also the compulsory pre-primary groups are generally financed by state funds through municipal budgets. The salaries of municipal childcare centres are funded by the Ministry of the Interior through the municipalities in the form of regular monthly subsidies.

In public pre-primary settings, education for 4 and 5 year-olds is free of charge. In facilities for children under 4 years of age, monthly contributions based on income may be charged, especially for meals. Transport to the ECEC setting may be reimbursed under certain circumstances (e.g. income, distance, child's disability).

The Ministry of Education is also responsible for private pre-primary education settings. However, enrolment at a private institution that is not subsidised by the state is subject to fees set by the institution; these are significantly higher than in municipal settings. Parents do not have to pay fees if their annual income is below €15,000 (Megalonidaou 2020).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 6% of net household income on childcare costs[4] (OECD.Stat 2023).

[4] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

Staff to child ratios and group size in centre-based settings

In municipal nurseries, children are divided into two age-groups (2 months to 1½ years; 1½ to 2½ years). The groups consist of a maximum of 12 children, together with two qualified professionals and one assistant.

In childcare centres, children between 2½ and 3½ years form one group, those between 3½ and entry into a pre-primary group/unit another. The maximum number of children in a group is 25, supervised by one core professional and one assistant.

In pre-primary schools, the composition of each class includes children from both age groups, half 4 to 5 year-olds and half 5 to 6 year-olds. This is done on purpose. If there are more than 25 children registered, either a second group can be formed if this is possible in terms of room space, or 25 children are selected based on the distance of their permanent residence from the school, the rest are distributed to other settings which are closer to their home.

In 2020/21, the staffing ratio in public pre-primary settings was much better than in private ones (1:9.3 and 1:15.7 respectively (Hellenic Statistic Authority 2023, 135).

For a pre-primary school to be able to operate as a full-day setting (optional half-day provision alongside the compulsory half-day), the following conditions have to be met: in small *nipiagogeia* with only one teacher, at least five children need to be enrolled, in settings with two teachers at least ten children and in pre-primary schools with three or more teachers, at least 14 children (Eurydice 2023, 5.1).

Table 5

Greece: Maximum number of children per staff member and per qualified professional and maximum group size, by age

Age-group	Max. number of children per staff member	Max. number of children per core practitioner	Max. number of children per group
Under 3 years	4	6	12
3 year-olds	13	25	25
4 and 5 year-olds	25	25	25

Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 154

Curricular frameworks

Childcare sector

There is no national curriculum for work with under 4 year-olds in **childcare settings**. The respective centre-specific programmes are based on the standard regulations and also include free play activities, group activities and quiet times. Goals for children under 2½ years of age are primarily to develop their social, emotional, intellectual and motor skills in a safe environment. For older children, group play and encouragement to develop initial reading, writing and maths skills are also common features of the programme. Helping to mitigate educational inequalities and to make parents aware of educational and psychological issues are also general goals.

Education sector

In the compulsory **pre-primary curricular framework** for 4 and 5 year-olds (2003), there are guidelines on educational activities in five learning areas: (1) language; (2) mathematics; (3) environmental studies; (4) creativity and expression; and (5) information and communication technologies. The educational and learning processes are oriented towards free and organised play activities that take into account the children's needs and interests as well as their competences,

prior knowledge and individual learning pace. Compulsory activities take place from 8:30 to 13:00 and are complemented by four non-compulsory hours per day. The compulsory part includes a pilot initiative to promote new topics such as social skills, life skills, digital literacy and scientific literacy, as well as two hours of English per week.

Professionals are supported in the implementation of the curriculum through guidelines (Ministerial Decision No. 21072b/G2/28-2-2003). The curriculum and support materials for professionals (and parents) were prepared under the supervision of the Institute for Education Policy (*Instituto Ek-paideutikäs Politikäs, IEP*) and approved by the Ministry of Education.

In 2022, a revision of the national curriculum took place (Eurydice 2022). The focus was on children and their well-being as well as openness to social challenges. Also highlighted are the individuality of the children, learning in the community, learning environments, the promotion of self-motivation and communication, as well as the challenges posed by the rapid growth in the field of new technologies. In the context of global education, since 2021/22, English is now taught in pre-primary education and digital technologies have been introduced as a tool for research and learning.

Digital education

Information and communication technology is explicitly mentioned as an area of learning in the current pre-primary curriculum. Moreover, a pilot project was carried out in 2020/21 which, among other things, aimed to develop digital skills. As early as 2003, a project was carried out in western Greece including 653 pre-primary settings (kindergartens) and schools, in which network equipment, hardware and software as well as technical support were provided (CTI 2021).

The revised national curriculum (Eurydice 2023) focuses mainly on the:

- Acquisition of knowledge of basic IT concepts and the ability to use basic IT environments
- Competent use of digital tools for research, creativity, communication and education in the context of the themes of the curriculum and everyday school life
- Recognition and solving of technical problems
- Development of a digital identity (e-citizenship).

Monitoring – evaluation

Child-related assessment

There is no formal assessment for children under 4 years of age in **childcare settings.** However, professionals are expected to inform parents about their children's development once a month. Observations are considered the most important tool for child assessments, both in an ongoing form and as regular on-the-spot observations (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 103).

Such formative assessment of children in **pre-primary settings** is integrated into the daily routine. The professional determines a child's knowledge and experience at the beginning and tries to match learning processes to this. At the end, the progress of each child is considered and compared with the achievement of the goals of the centre-specific programme. The child's portfolio is also used for the assessments. Moreover, children are encouraged to assess their own progress.

Evaluation procedures involve the parents and specialist staff. On the basis of their assessments, teachers give the parents advice on how to support the learning process at home. In the case of

serious difficulties confirmed by a paediatrician or more than 100 days of absence, it is possible for a child to repeat a year in the pre-primary school. Children receive an official certificate of attendance at the end of their pre-primary years, which is a prerequisite for entry into primary school.

Centre-level assessment

There are no regulations or recommendations regarding self-evaluation procedures in the **childcare sector** (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 126).

Annual self-evaluation and external evaluation procedures in **pre-primary schools** are regulated by law (Law 4692/2020). According to Presidential Decision 79 (Official Gazette 109, 2017), kindergartens have to evaluate their educational work at the end of each scholastic year and make suggestions for improvement for the next year. In 2019/20 a new framework came into force (Ministerial Decision, Official Gazette (FEK) 16, 2019) which defines thematic areas for evaluation and also provides templates for the report.

The self-evaluation is carried out annually by the centre heads/principals. The objectives are to assess the educational programme, to define improvement strategies and to track implementation procedures and outcomes. The evaluation is based on 15 quality indicators which cover, for example, buildings and room space, human and financial resources, management, curricular effectiveness, and the assessment of children's personal and social development and achievements.

Regional Centres for Educational Planning (*Perifereiaká Kéntra Ekpaideftikoú Schedias-moú, PEKES*) support professionals in assessing their educational work. The institutions themselves are responsible for preparing an annual self-evaluation report, about which the regional supervisors are then informed. They use the self-evaluation reports to make suggestions for the next year's planning.

External evaluation

External evaluations in **childcare settings** focus primarily on structural quality and are carried out regularly by regional supervisors (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 125).

The independent authority for "Quality Assurance in Primary and Secondary Schools" (*Archä Diasphalisäs täs Poiotätas stän Protobathmiakai Deuterobathmia Ekpaideusä, ADIPPDE*) is responsible for example: monitoring and evaluating the implementation of education programmes; evaluating the quality of work in **pre-primary education** and schools; monitoring the evaluation of pedagogical staff; and for the meta-evaluation of quality assurance measures. *ADIPPDE* establishes criteria and indicators for the evaluations and, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, develops an integrated information system and database for educational evaluation. It also provides support to the institutions and its agencies regarding self-evaluation and carries out research projects, and cooperates with international networks. *ADIPPDE* also takes into account the reports on external evaluations prepared by the Regional Centres for Educational Planning (PEKE).

For each education department, the *ADIPPDE* sets up an evaluation committee with five members. On the basis of pre-determined criteria, a report based on document analysis or on visits to the institutions is prepared and submitted to the *ADIPPDE* Board of Directors, which evaluates these reports. Both the reports and the decisions are published on the *ADIPPDE* website.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

Guidelines for the organisation of education and care for children with special needs are set out in a statutory framework (Law 3699/2008; amendments: 4713/2020). This specifies that the state is obliged to provide appropriate educational support at all levels of education. In general, children with special needs are to be integrated into mainstream institutions whenever possible.

Currently, a "Strategic Action Plan" is being implemented, which contains 13 goals. These include promoting and improving accessibility to inclusive programmes. Center for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counseling and Support and Interdisciplinary Education, Evaluation and Support Committees provide assistance by recommending the appropriate institution and support for a child. Children have the option of attending either a mainstream institution, a group with support from support staff or specially equipped integrative groups.

Children with disabilities or special educational needs may attend a special needs setting up to the age of 7. As in mainstream pre-primary education, the Institute for Educational Policy is responsible for developing and organising an appropriate educational curriculum. In addition to a general curriculum, there are also programmes tailored to specific needs/disabilities. The development of curricula for support institutions is regulated by law and a personalised educational plan is prepared for each child. The exact schedule (25 hours per week) is prescribed by Ministerial Decree 85317/2019.

In 2022, there were 114 municipal pre-primary settings specifically for children with special educational needs (Eurydice 2023, 2.8).

Children with a migration background

Children with a migration background are to be integrated into ECEC settings with respect for their culture and language. In recent years, the education of children from refugee families and their inclusion has also been a predominant goal. Although the number of asylum seekers and refugees has decreased somewhat compared to previous years, in 2023 Greece recorded 21,100 asylum seekers and 70,000 refugees. Most of them came from Ukraine (25,000), followed by persons from Syria (16,453) and Afghanistan (15,062) (UNHCR 2023).

Since 2016, a project supported by the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund has ensured access to early childhood education specifically for children of refugee and migrant families. A special education programme for so-called "reception or preparation groups" makes it easier for children in reception camps in particular to attend regular institutions. Within the camps there are pre-primary groups for 4 to 5 year-olds that work according to the regular curriculum (European Commission 2020, 123).

In 2022, 7.1% of the population held a non-Greek citizenship, the same as in the age group of children under 5 years (7%). 15.4% of the total non-Greek population came from other EU27 countries, for the under 5 year-olds this rate was 8.2% (Eurostat 2023c, own calculations).

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Private sector leaves are the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs whereas public sector leaves are regulated by the Ministry of the Interior.

[5] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Greece by Evi Hatzivarnava-Kazassi and Maria Karamessini in the *19th International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Maternity leave (*Adeia Mitrotitas*): In the private sector, compulsory basic Maternity leave is fully paid and lasts 17 weeks, of which eight weeks must be taken before and nine weeks after the birth. Employees have to have worked for 200 days during the previous two years. This can be followed by a special Maternity leave (*Eidiki Adeia gia tän Prostasia täs Mitrotitas*), which lasts nine months paid at minimum wage level. Up to seven months can be transferred to fathers.

In the public sector, Maternity leave, which is also compulsory and fully paid, lasts five months, of which two must be taken before and three after the birth. There are no conditions linked to the length of former employment.

Paternity leave (*Adeia Gennisis Teknu*): In both the private and public sectors, fathers are granted 14 working days around the time of birth, fully paid (by the employer).

Parental leave (*Goniki Adeia Anatrophis*): In the private sector (including teachers without a permanent employment relationship) each parent can take four months altogether, two months paid at minimum wage level and two months unpaid. This leave is non-transferable and can be taken up to the child's 8th birthday. If both parents work for the same private employer, they cannot take parental leave at the same time.

In the public sector, employees can be granted leave for up to five years if requested and up to their child's 8th birthday, although only the first two months are paid corresponding to the minimum wage, the rest is unpaid.

Childcare leave: In addition, each parent has the right to work two hours less per day at full pay in the private sector for the first 12 months after Maternity leave and one hour less per day for another six months. These reductions can also include more hours over a shorter period of time or be taken in different blocks of time within a 30-month period after Maternity leave. The leave is a family entitlement and parents decide who and for how long each will take this fully compensated leave.

In the public sector, instead of reducing weekly working hours, it is also possible to take nine months of fully paid childcare leave after maternity leave or has two hours less work per day up to the child's 2. birthday and one hour less if the child is between 2 and 4.

In both cases, Childcare leave is paid by the employer.

Statistical data on the uptake of Parental and Childcare leave do not exist.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Greece

*Country expert assessment by **Maria Sakellariou***

Meeting current challenges in the field of Education are first and foremost a question of sufficient **investment** in key components of the education system as a whole. These include improving the quality of education, the continuing professional development of teachers, labour relations and the financing of Education (operational, infrastructure, logistical), strengthening inclusion practices in order to deal positively with diversity and the increasing social and cultural heterogeneity within the population, utilising research and innovative initiatives, utilising digital technology in the promotion of learning and development, and ensuring smooth transitions both from one educational level to another and also from one setting to another within each level.

A great challenge for ECEC is that of **providing quality education** for all children. In terms of preprimary settings for the 4 and 5 year-olds, this is achieved through a strong, inclusive and publicly funded school system. The universal provision of quality early childhood education and care

mitigates against inequalities and exclusion, works to compensate for learning and developmental deficits and supports the inalienable right of every child to quality education. The challenge of quality early childhood education is considered pivotal, as it lays the foundations for successful lifelong learning (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019; European Union 2021).

However, in Greece, care and education **do not form a single educational system** in the years preceding primary schooling; they are framed within education policy on the one hand and social policy on the other. "Education" is provided for 4 and 5 year-olds in public (fee-free) and private kindergartens, with the Ministry of Education being responsible for the administrative and educational organisation and the municipalities (through the School Committees) for financial matters concerning equipment and operational issues. "Care, education and social support" for children up to compulsory education at age 4 is provided in municipal and private nurseries and childcare centres under the supervision of local government authorities and at the national level under the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Labour. In other words, at the level of service provision, the presence of a dichotomous model between educational and social policy can be observed.

With the election of a new political leadership in the Ministry of Education, a Government intention was announced to place municipal and private nurseries and kindergartens under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, accompanied by relevant evaluation studies. This emphasis on "education" as a key point of reference for the future of ECEC in Greece constitutes an important indicator of change and paradigm shift; it also presents a significant challenge for the structural reorganising of a "Unified Early Childhood Education".

A further challenge within ECEC is to ensure the **smooth transitions** of children from the family to nursery, from nursery to kindergarten and from kindergarten to primary school with the cooperation of all those in the local community involved.

As far as operational issues are concerned, it is a constant challenge to provide **CPD support** for all teachers in kindergartens, nurseries and childcare centres in a uniform and ongoing way, although it is obvious that this is the key to ensuring the quality of early childhood education and care in the context of a common vision. The role of ECEC (Unified Early Childhood Education) and Training is multi-layered and complex, as there is a need to develop a collective professional identity that meets the needs of 21st century learning, within the context of the operation of all structures of early childhood education as a learning community.

In the context of all the above challenges, providing continuous internal and external evaluation of all ECEC structures within a common evaluation framework, with the purpose of improving the quality of education and of the services in general, is of major importance.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Greece was 10,459,782. It increased steadily until 2010, then started to decrease (2000: 10,775,627, 2005: 10,969,912, 2010: 11,119,289, 2015: 10,858,018, 2020: 10,718,565) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.43, Greece is below the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[6].

Children under 6 years of age

Table 6

Greece: Children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under age 1	84,618
1 year-olds	84,613
2 year-olds	83,768
3 year-olds	86,019
4 year-olds	87,170
5 year-olds	90,421
Total 0 to 6 year-olds	**516,609**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 2.4% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, 4.9% were children under 6 years of age. For about 20 years, the shares of both age groups have been slightly below the respective EU averages.

Table 7

Greece: Share of children under 6 years of age in the total population compared with other EU countries, 2000 - 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Greece/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	**Greece**	2.8	2.8	5.6
	∅ EU15[7]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	**Greece**	2.9	2.9	5.8
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	**Greece**	2.6	3.0	5.6
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	**Greece**	2.4	2.5	4.9
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, *Own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

[6] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU)

[7] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Single households with children under 6 years of age

The majority of households (84.3%) with children under 6 in Greece in 2022 were couple households. Single-parent households accounted for only 0.6% - exclusively single mothers.

Table 8

Greece: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %*
Total households	834,800	
Couple households	703,700	84.3
Other types of households	126,400	15.1
Single households, total	4,800	0.6
Single households, women	4,800	0.6
Single households, men	--	

Source: Eurostat 2023l, *own calculations

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Greece, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 77.5% and for women 61.4% (Eurostat 2023k).

In 2022, 58.1% of women and 88.3% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were slightly above the EU-average (87.2%) while those of mothers were well below the EU-average (63.6%) (Eurostat 2023i, own calculations).

Table 9a

Greece: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Greece	54.0	91.1
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[8]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Greece	58.1	88.3
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[9]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023i

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 9b.*

[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Table 9b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	n.d.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023)
+Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
+++United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	++72.3 ++72.1 (2023)	++79.2 ++79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023i, 2023k

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[10]

In 2022, 24.4% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, which was higher than the EU27 average (23.3%). The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 26.3% in Greece, compared to 21.6% for the European average. 7% of children under 6 and 5.8% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation in 2020 (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023g, h).

[10] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or (severely) materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

HUNGARY

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

Marta Korintus worked as a childcare expert and director of research at government institutes in Hungary. For more than 40 years she was involved in research and development work related to services for children under the age of 3. Her international work experience includes bi-lateral and cross-national cooperation and research as well as participation in international (EU, OECD) projects and activities.

1. ECEC governance in Hungary

The system of ECEC in Hungary is bi-sectoral. ECEC for children younger than 3 years of age (*bölcsőde*) is regulated by the legislation relevant to children's rights, child welfare and child protection, and is therefore part of the child welfare system, whereas ECEC for children between 3 years and compulsory school age (*óvoda*) is part of the education system. *Bölcsőde* is the responsibility of the Minister of Culture and Innovation and *óvoda* is the responsibility of the Minister of the Interior since the new government was set up after the national elections in 2022. Provision and organisation of *bölcsőde* and *óvoda* are delegated to local authorities.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

The term *nevelés* has a central role in early childhood work in Hungary. It does not have an exact English equivalent, the closest translation being 'upbringing'. It is a holistic concept, including not just care and education (considered as very closely related, if not inseparable), but also health, behaviour, and social skills – everything needed in life. It has, therefore, much in common with the concept of 'social pedagogy' (as used, for example in Denmark or Germany) or 'education in its broadest sense' (Kaga, Bennett and Moss 2010, 104). When you provide care, you also teach children directly or indirectly and vice-versa. In other words, it relates to the concept of 'pedagogy'.

The **occupational titles** of core pedagogues in ECEC centres for children under the age of 3 are *kisgyermeknevelő* (Infant and Early Childhood Educator) and *szolgáltatásnyújtó* (Childcare Worker, lit. 'Childcare Service Provider'). The term *kisgyermeknevelő* was first introduced in the relevant legislation in 2011 to replace the term *gondozónő* (childcarer) and to acknowledge the work in nurseries and mini nurseries as pedagogical. *Szolgáltatásnyújtó* is the occupational title for practitioners working in family nurseries and workplace nurseries. The occupational title of core pedagogues in ECEC centres for children between the ages of 3 and 6 is *óvodapedagógus* ('Pre-primary Pedagogue').

The jobs and the content of the respective initial professional studies of *kisgyermeknevelő* and *óvodapedagógus* follow the pedagogical tradition, and both have the term 'pedagogue' (*nevelő* and *pedagógus*) in the Hungarian terminology. It is important to note that the translation 'Pre-primary Pedagogue' does not indicate a school-type approach in kindergartens. The job and content of the 100-hour course to qualify as a *szolgáltatásnyújtó* also includes pedagogical aspects, but to a lesser extent and for a shorter duration.

There are several types of qualification which are acceptable when wishing to work as a *kisgyermeknevelő*. Three of these in *Table 1*, the Bachelor's degree (*csecsemő – és kisgyermeknevelő*), the Certificate in Childcare and Early Education[1] *(kisgyermekgondozó,-nevelő*) and the

[1] This form of VET education replaced the first one in this column, which has the same name, in 2020. it is now a school-based form of education.

Certificate as Childcare Worker (*szolgáltatásnyújtó*) can be currently acquired during initial professional education/training. However, five other, older qualifications are also still legally recognised (15/1998 NM *rendelet,* Ministry of Welfare 15/1998*)*.

Auxiliary Co-workers/Assistants (*bölcsődei dajka*) in nurseries, who do the cleaning, bring the food to the children's room, prepare the room for after-lunch nap, etc. can acquire a vocational certificate for support staff in *bölcsőde* as specified in legislation (Ministry of Human Resources 20/2017)[2]. The content of the 100-hour course includes 75 hours theoretical subjects and 25 hours practicum.

Table 1 shows the details and also categorises the core pedagogues (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at end of this chapter).

Table 1
Hungary: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Childcare sector				
Infant and Early Childhood Educator *Kisgyermeknevelő* Previous and still valid title: **Early Childhood Caregiver and Educator** *Profile*: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional (Nursery specialist)	*Bölcsőde* **Nursery** **Mini-Nursery** 0–2 years[3]	Core pedagogue with group responsibility Centre head	0–3 years	**Infant and Early Childhood Educator** (optional qualification route since 2009) 3 years at university *Award:* Bachelor's degree *csecsemő- és kisgyermeknevelő* ECTS credits: 180 EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2011: 6 **Early Childhood Caregiver and Educator** 1 or 2 years post-secondary vocational programme *Award*: Certificate in Childcare and Early Childhood Education *(kisgyermekgondozó,-nevelő*)

[2] 20/2017. (IX. 18.) EMMI rendelet (Ministry of Human Resources 20/2017 Ministerial Decree

[3] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6 (as in Hungary): **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds.

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				ECTS credits: n/a[4] EQF: Level 5 ISCED-P 2011: 454[5] ***or*** Childcare Diploma (*csecsemő- és kis-gyermeknevelő asszisztens*) Since 2017 the occupa-tional title **ECEC Assis-tant** is used. ECTS credits: 120 EQF: Level 5 ISCED 2011: 5 ***or*** one of the older (up to 2002) upper secondary Childcare Certificates listed in legislation ECTS credits: n/a EQF: Level 3 ISCED 2011: 4 and 3
Nursery auxiliary co-worker *Bölcsődei dajka*	*Bölcsőde* **Nursery** **Mini-nursery** 0–2 years	Co-worker with no for-mal IPE or specialist qualification		20 hour training course leading to a vocational certificate for support staff
Childcare Worker (lit. 'Childcare ser-vice Provider') *Szolgáltatásnyújtó*	*Munkahelyi bölcsőde* **Workplace nursery** 0–2 years *Családi bölcsőde* **Family nursery** 0–2 years	Core peda-gogue with group respon-sibility no IPE requirement.		100-hour training course leading to a vocational certificate for working in family nurseries and workplace nurseries. *Award:* Certificate as Childcare Worker (lit. 'Childcare Service Pro-vider') (*szolgál-tatásnyújtó*)
Education sector				
Pre-primary Pedagogue	*Óvoda* **Kindergarten**	Core peda-gogue with	3–6 years	Bachelor's degree 3 years university

[4] n/a = not applicable

[5] For more information on VET in Hungary and on EQF 5 post secondayry VET programmes, see CEDEFOP 2019

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Óvodapedagógus *Profile*: Pre-primary Education Professional	3–5 years	group responsibility Centre head with group responsibility in small centres		ECTS credits: 180 EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2011: 6 Centre Heads: 5 years' work experience as a Pedagogue plus a certificate in centre leadership
Minority Ethnic Pre-Primary Pedagogue *Nemzetiségi óvodapedagógus* *Profile*: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional (minority ethnic specialist)	*Óvoda* **Kindergarten** 3–5 years	Core pedagogue with group responsibility	3–6 years	3 years at university with specialisation in a minority language *Award*: Bachelor's degree ECTS credits: 180 EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Auxiliary Co-worker *Dajka*	*Óvoda* **Kindergarten** 3–5 years	Co-worker with no formal IPE or specialist qualification		No requirements Since 1990 available: 400 hour training course leading to a vocational certificate for support staff

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Centre Heads in **settings for children under the age of 3** may have one of the following qualifications:

– Master's degree with a specialisation in early childhood pedagogy

- Bachelor's degree as Infant and Early Childhood Educator
- One of the (upper secondary vocational) qualifications listed in legislation[6]
- Higher education degree in other study areas listed in legislation (e.g. health visiting, health management, pedagogy, social pedagogy) in addition to one of the qualifications for regular contact staff as specified in the 15/1998 NM *rendelet* (Ministerial regulation, Ministry of Welfare 1998).

Employers usually issue calls for the job requiring one of the higher level qualifications.

The requirements for Centre Heads in **settings for children between the ages of 3 and 6** are:

- Bachelor's degree as *óvodapedagógus* (pre-primary education professional)
- Certificate specialising in centre leadership
- Five years of work experience as a Pre-primary Pedagogue (Hungarian Parliament 2011).

Centre Leaders for large centres in both sectors usually have administrative tasks and responsibility for the pedagogical work. In smaller centres – defined either by the low number of children or by its position in a large hierarchy – the director works directly with children on a regular basis and also fulfils administrative tasks. The daily work hours are divided between these responsibilities.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Centre-based posts of responsibility can be for supervising students coming for their practicum and placed with regular staff. Either the Centre Head or one of the core pedagogues (*kisgyermeknevelő* or *óvodapedagógus* respectively) is assigned this responsibility. The Hungarian Government 230/2012 Regulation states the requirement to draw up a contract for the cooperation between IPE institutions and ECEC centres for students' field-based studies, including the rights and obligations of higher education institutions and of the hosting ECEC centre.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Coordinating and supervisory staff are employed in designated large nurseries for monitoring, coordinating and advising staff in other nurseries in a given area to ensure a standard level of quality. These employees usually do not work in children's groups but have the same qualification as the core workers.

In the case of family nurseries, legislation (Ministry of Welfare 1998) requires setting up a network with a coordinator for every three or more services having the same owner/provider. The coordinator is responsible for providing support and coordinating work within the network.

There are no coordinators or supervisory staff in kindergartens.

2.5 Specialist support staff

Special support staff to work with individual children is not employed by the ECEC sites, but usually come to work with the children at pre-arranged given times. Such staff can be Special Needs Educators, Paediatricians, Nurses working with paediatricians or Speech Therapists (in kindergarten).

[6] *Bölcsődei szakgondozó (OKJ), csecsemő- és kisgyermekgondozó (OKJ), csecsemő- és kisgyermeknevelő-gondozó (OKJ), csecsemő- és gyermeknevelő-gondozó (OKJ), kisgyermekgondozó, -nevelő (OKJ), csecsemő- és kis-gyermeknevelő asszisztens (FOSZK), csecsemő- és gyermekgondozó (OKJ)*

In addition, integrated kindergartens (centres located at several sites) with 500 places have to employ a Kindergarten Psychologist and an Assistant (not a Pedagogue) for every three children's groups.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Staffing qualifications are different for core pedagogues in ECEC centres for children under the age of 3 and in those for children between the ages of 3 and 6.

Since 2018, the Statistical Office no longer compiles such detailed data as in previous years concerning staff in nurseries and kindergartens. In 2022, there were altogether 10,251 core pedagogues employed in the different types of nurseries (0–2), 100% of them qualified. There were approximately 84% working as *kisgyermeknevelő*, and 16% working as *szolgáltatásnyújtó (*Hungarian Central Statistical Office 2023a). In 2020, about 25% of all *kisgyermeknevelő* worked with a BA qualification as Infant and Early Childhood Educator or another legally accepted higher education degree.

Tertiary level education has been available for **Pre-primary Pedagogues** since 1958/59, and this became obligatory in 1993. Since 2008, this is a BA level course. Only the BA level qualification (and its earlier tertiary equivalent) is accepted for *óvodapedagógus* as the minimum qualification, i.e. 100% of Pre-primary Pedagogues in kindergarten settings have a specialist higher education degree.

In the 2021/2022 academic year, there were 30,750 Pre-primary Pedagogues *óvoda* (3–5) (Hungarian Central Statistical Office 2023b).

Auxiliary Co-workers/Assistants (*dajka*) work alongside Pre-primary Pedagogues. They basically perform care work and cleaning. No special qualification is required for this job. In 1990, however, a special 400-hour training course was set up for these workers who now can acquire a vocational certificate as support staff in *óvoda* (3–5).

Infant and Early Childhood Educators in *bölcsőde* (0–2) are exclusively female, and there are only a handful of male Pre-primary Pedagogues in *óvoda* (3–5).

There are no systematically compiled data on the ethnic background of workers in *bölcsőde or óvoda*.

Table 2 shows the composition of the ECEC workforce in Hungary without the data on the main support staff *dajka*. There are were 2,305 *bölcsődei dajka* working in nurseries and mini nurseries but there is no available data about the ratio of them having a vocational certificate for support staff. There is only general data, not separated according to staff categories, on 'educational support personnel' and 'other support personnel' (e.g. *dajka*) in *óvoda*.

Table 2
Hungary: Structural composition of ECEC workforce, 2021/22

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce in %
Bölcsőde (0–2 settings)	
Staff with legally required qualifications in nursery, mini nursery, workplace nursery and family nursery	**100**
– *kisgyermeknevelo*	84
– *szolgáltatásnyújto*	16

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce in %
Staff with higher education degree (BA or other legally accepted qualifications)	**25**
Staff with no formal IPS	No data available
Specialist support staff (e.g. speech therapists)	Mostly off-site
Male staff	**0**
Staff with minority ethnic background	No systematically compiled national data
Óvoda (3–5 settings)	
Staff with specialist higher education degree	**100**
Staff with non-specialist qualification	**0**
Staff with no formal IPE	**0**
Specialist support staff (e.g. speech therapists)	Mostly off-site
Male staff	**0.5**
Core workers with minority ethnic background	No systematically compiled national data

Source: own calculation based on tabular data prepared by the HCSO [Hungarian Central Statistical Office] in 2022 upon individual request

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

The qualifying routes for core pedagogues in nurseries and kindergartens are separate. However, there is no entrance exam either for the *kisgyermeknevelő* or the *óvodapedagógus* BA study programmes. The entrance criteria for both consist of the number of points accumulated based on the grades (evaluation) received during the secondary school leaving exam and the singing and physical abilities of prospective *kisgyermeknevelő* and the singing and speech abilities of prospective *óvodapedagógus*.

Childcare sector

Infant and Early Childhood Educators *(kisgyermeknevelő)*

Since 1991, the entry requirement for all initial professional studies for the Infant and Early Childhood Educators has been the completion of the secondary school leaving exam. Before 2009, several types of qualification were awarded at the upper secondary and post-secondary level for those working in *bölcsőde* (0–2). In 2009, a BA-level qualification was introduced. In 2012, structural changes were made to the National Qualification Register (*Országos Képzési Jegyzék*, *OKJ*) in accordance with the government's intention to change the system of vocational training in order to meet the needs surfacing in the economy (see Eurofound 2016). The post-secondary vocational education for workers in nurseries was moved to the new system of vocational training (CEDEFOP 2019) in 2020.

The current system includes two different pathways for attaining *kisgyermeknevelő* qualification:

- Higher education studies (BA level) for the award of *csecsemő- és kisgyermeknevelő* (Infant and Early Childhood Educator)
- At the post-secondary vocational programme level for the *kisgyermekgondozó, -nevelő* (Early Childhood Caregiver and Educator).

However, it is also possible to work in a nursery or mini-nursery with one of the earlier upper secondary qualifications mentioned in legislation (see footnote under *Chapter **2.2***).

Table 3
Hungary: Infant and Early Childhood Educator

Job title in Hungarian: *Csecsemő és kisgyermeknevelő* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional (nursery specialist)
Entry requirements: 12 years schooling with a secondary school leaving certificate, specific entrance criteria **Professional studies:** 3 years at university – specialising in early childhood education and care **Award:** Bachelor's degree **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main ECEC workplace:** *Bölcsőde, Mini bölcsőde* (ECEC centres for children younger than 3 years of age)

Table 4
Hungary: Early Childhood Caregiver and Educator

Job title in Hungarian: *Kisgyermekgondozó, -nevelő* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional (nursery specialist)
Entry requirements: 12 years schooling with a secondary school leaving certificate **Professional studies:** Regular school-based full time education with 1 or 2 year post-secondary vocational programme **Award:** Certificate in Childcare and Early Childhood Education **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED-P 2011: 454** (see CEDEFOP 2019) **Main ECEC workplace:** *Bölcsőde, Mini bölcsőde, Munkahelyi bölcsőde, Családi bölcsőde* (ECEC for children younger than 3 years of age), children's residential home

Childcare Worker (lit. 'Childcare Service Provider') (*szolgáltatásnyújtó*)
In the current system, there is only one pathway to attain the *szolgáltatásnyújtó* qualification as a Childcare Worker. Since 2020, a specialised 100-hour training course leads to a vocational certificate for working in family nurseries and workplace nurseries.

Table 5
Hungary: Childcare Worker (lit. 'Childcare Service Provider')

Job title in Hungarian: *Szolgáltatásnyújtó*
Entry requirements: 12 years schooling, no specific entrance criteria **Professional studies:** 100-hour training course – specialising in early childhood education and care **Award:** Vocational certificate as 'Childcare Service Provider' **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** n/a **ISCED 2011:** n/a **Main ECEC workplace:** *Családi bölcsőde, Munkahelyi bölcsőde* **(**Family nursery, Workplace nursery for children younger than 3 years of age)

Education sector

For core pedagogues working in kindergartens (*óvoda*, 3–5) there is only one qualifying route – resulting in a BA qualification.

Table 6
Hungary: Pre-primary Pedagogue

Job title in Hungarian: *Óvodapedagógus* **Profile**: Pre-primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: 12 years schooling with a secondary school leaving certificate, specific entrance criteria (see above)
Professional studies: 3 years at university, specialising in pre-primary education
Award: Bachelor's degree
ECTS credits: 180
EQF level: 6
ISCED 2011: 6
Main ECEC workplace: *Óvoda* (ECEC centre for children between the ages of 3 and 6), children's residential home

The qualifying route for **Minority Ethnic Pre-primary Pedagogues** is the same as for Pre-primary Education professionals, with a specialisation in one of the minority languages used in Hungary. By the end of their professional studies, these pedagogues have been prepared to educate children (according to the Hungarian Kindergarten Core Programme) both in Hungarian and in the chosen minority language. They are also expected to demonstrate a good knowledge of the minority language, history and culture.

Table 7
Hungary: Minority Ethnic* Pre-primary Pedagogue

Job title in Hungarian: *Nemzetiségi óvodapedagógus* **Profile**: Pre-primary Education Professional (minority ethnic)
Entry requirements: 12 years schooling with a secondary school leaving certificate, entrance criteria (see above)
Professional studies: 3 years at university, specialising in pre-primary education and a chosen minority language
Award: Bachelor's degree
ECTS credits: 180
EQF level: 6
ISCED 2011: 6
Main ECEC workplace: *Óvoda* (ECEC centre for children between the ages of 3 and 6), children's residential home

* Croatian, German, Romanian, Serbian, Slovakian, Slovene, Roma

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Childcare sector

Infant and Early Childhood Educator (*Csecsemő és kisgyermeknevelő*) – Bachelor's degree programme

A number of universities offer BA courses in Infant and Early Childhood Pedagogy.

Competence specifications are grouped into four categories: (1) Knowledge, (2) Ability, (3) Attitude, (4) Autonomy and responsibility. Some examples:

1. **Knowledge** is expected to cover the development, characteristics, care, education, and feeding of young children; the options and methods of forming good habits; the importance and effects of play, arts and singing; the legal framework of working with young children; administrative tasks; ethics, specifics of caring for children in ECEC services; the effects of family upbringing and the importance of early attachment; electronic information systems.
2. **Abilities** include applying a holistic view towards educating and caring for the children; to apply early childhood pedagogical methods; to recognise the processes of normal development and to interpret family contexts; to form good relationships with the children, their families and other professionals; to create conditions suitable for the education and care of young children; to organise the daily routine; to handle information and document children's development; to communicate well.
3. **Attitudes** include the recognition of professional competencies and their limitations; use reflections; having empathy.
4. In terms of **autonomy and responsibility**: to make decisions, to demonstrate responsibility; to cooperate with other professionals; to observe ethics; to be able to make compromises; to be able to work in teams.

Curricular areas: The overall emphases of the study programme are set out in *Table 8* below. The ratio of theory to practice is 83% to 17%.

Table 8
Hungary: IPE curricular areas – Infant and Early Childhood Educator

Curricular areas	ECTS credits/ credit framework
Social sciences and information technology	10–20
Pedagogy, psychology	40–65
Health sciences	15–35
Methodology of early childhood education and care, supporting development and care	20–40
Practicum: at least 6 weeks (240 hours) in the final year, spent in a nursery or mini-nursery	30
Total min ECTS credit requirement	180
Total max ECTS credits	190

Source: Ministry for Innovation and Technology 2021

Early Childhood Caregiver and Educator (*Kisgyermekgondozó, -nevelő),* post-secondary vocational programme

Regular school-based full-time education in a one or two-year post-secondary vocational programme. This form of vocational education is regulated by legislation (Hungarian Parliament 2019) and is based on specific competence specifications (IKK 2022a, 2022b).

Competence specifications

1. 18 competence areas cover skills and abilities related to sector specific basic education: communication and cooperation; preparing paper-based and electronic documentation; digital competence; using legislative, health and special knowledge in practice; protection of interests; identifying risks and dilemmas related to changes is life; understanding health-related data.
2. A further 18 competence areas cover skills and abilities related to specialised education (child welfare and child protection): understanding and using relevant legislation and literature; understanding and supporting children's development; applying an individual pedagogical and psychological approach to children; identifying atypical development; understanding different socio-cultural family backgrounds and supporting families; communication and cooperation; setting goals and planning processes based on pedagogical and psychological knowledge.

Curricular areas: The overall emphases of the study programme are set out below. ECTS credits are not awarded.

- Employment issues
- Social sector specific basic education related subjects (professional personality development, psychology, health, first aid, social studies)
- Child welfare and child protection, nursery care
- Professional skills development
- Knowledge and practice of child development and care
- Atypical development and special education
- Family pedagogy
- Practicum (200 hours)
- Optional subject
- Thesis.

Childcare Worker (*Szolgáltatásnyújtó*)

This special 100-hour training course leading to a vocational certificate for working in family nurseries and workplace nurseries is based on legislation (Ministry of Human Resources 20/2017) and a national education programme (Ministry of Human Resources 2017 EKP). Responsibility for the training is put with the non-profit organisation coordinating family nursery care nationally, called MACSKE (Ministry of Human Resources 20/2017), both for the organisation and delivery of the courses.

Competence requirements: Knowledge and application of relevant legislation, child development and play, characteristics and licencing of family- and working place nurseries, possible ways to address atypical development, ability to make decisions.

Curricular areas (modules):

- Licencing and conditions of running family nurseries and workplace nurseries
- Nursery pedagogy and care
- Pedagogy, psychology, development of play
- First aid and caring for children

- Professional skill development
- Operational issues and administrative tasks in nurseries
- Practicum.

The ratio of theory to practice is 75% to 25%.

Education sector

Pre-primary Pedagogue (*óvodapedagógus)*
Minority Ethnic Pre-primary Pedagogue *(nemzetiségi óvodapedagógus)*

A number of universities and teacher training colleges offer this study programme.

Competence requirements are grouped into four categories: (1) Knowledge, (2) Ability, (3) Attitude, (4) Autonomy and responsibility. Some examples:

1. **Knowledge** is expected to cover the links between societal changes, public education and pre-primary education; the documents, legislations and regulations related to their work; theory and practice of development and education of 3-6 years old children; the specifics of working with special needs and disadvantaged children and their families; the methods of organising activities; theoretical and practical issues of mental and physical health; and the theory and methods of assessment, evaluation and quality improvement.
2. **Abilities** will be to provide the necessary conditions for the personal development of children; to recognise and critically analyse problems and solve conflicts; to work together with families, other professionals and services; to learn new competencies, and to communicate in a foreign language.
3. Some of the professional **attitudes** and behaviours include a child centred approach and ability to play; good communication skills; social responsibility; respect for human values; ability to cooperate in a team; environmentally conscious behaviour.
4. In terms of **autonomy and responsibility**: to carry out pedagogical activities; to assess their professional options and tasks; to make pedagogical decisions.

Curricular areas: These are set out in *Table 9* below. The ratio of theory to practice is 80% to 20%.

Table 9

Hungary: Curricular areas – (Minority Ethnic) Pre-school Pedagogue

Curricular areas	ECTS credits/ credit framework
Pedagogy, psychology, social sciences and information technology	32–45
Methodology of early childhood education and care in *óvoda* (related to play, native language, literature, mathematics, surrounding environment, music and singing, visual arts and physical education)	54–72
Additional special subjects (such as inclusion, family pedagogy, multi- and intercultural education and special needs) or ethnic minority subjects (such as ethnic language, ethnic minority culture and bilingualism)	32–40
Practicum: at least 8 weeks (at least 6 weeks of these in an ethnic minority setting for Minority Ethnic Pre-primary Pedagogue students)	26–34
Thesis	10
Total ECTS credits	**180**

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

There are no alternative forms of qualification accruement for either of the occupations. The BA level qualification is the highest level of initial professional education both for Infant and Early

Childhood Educators and Pre-primary Pedagogues. Core pedagogues with a BA can study further for an MA in educational sciences.

Formal opportunities for moving up qualification frameworks are different for *bölcsőde* (0–2) and *óvoda* (3–5) core pedagogues, and opportunities for moving across qualifications are limited for both. Only the specialised qualifications are accepted for work in each kind of setting. For example, Infant and Early Childhood Educators wishing to work as a Pre-primary Pedagogue have to complete the full study programme for Pre-primary Pedagogy. Some subjects which were part of the initial qualifying route (up to 75% of the curriculum content is similar) may be acknowledged. However, this does not mean that the student can finish the course in a shorter length of time.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Guided workplace experience in the IPE of prospective core pedagogues working in both nurseries and kindergartens takes the form of a practicum[7]. The general requirements for higher education programmes are stated in legislation (Hungarian Government 230/2012), as for all nationally recognised vocational education studies and are required to follow the national curriculum framework for each specific vocational occupation. Government Regulation 230/2012 states the requirement to draw up a contract for the cooperation between IPE institutions and ECEC centres for students' field-based studies, including the rights and obligations of higher education institutions and of the hosting ECEC centre.

The technical descriptions of the higher education study programmes for Infant and Early Childhood Educators and for Pre-primary Pedagogues describe in detail the specific requirements in terms of content, length of time, number of credits, and so on. All include a longer, continuous time period to be spent at an ECEC centre, usually during the last semester of the course of study.

Table 10
Hungary: Duration of field practice during IPE in higher education institutions

Qualification	Length of time spent in the training place	ECTS credits
Infant and Early Childhood Educator (Bachelor)	At least 6 weeks (240 hours) in the final year	30
Pre-primary Pedagogue (Bachelor)	8 weeks	26–34

Guided workplace experience in the **post-secondary vocational education** future employees in nurseries (**Early Childhood Caregiver and Educator***)* is 200 hours, but theory and practice are not clearly divided. The aim is to provide opportunities to teach theory even during the practicum. Decisions on the minimum number of hours of practice are made separately for each subject by the school.

The practicum for **Childcare Workers** is 25 hours to be spent at a family nursery or workplace nursery, with a duty to prepare written tasks on different topics, based on their observations.

[7] Field practice: practice during which a group of students acquires and practices professional skills in a natural environment or in real working conditions under the supervision of an instructor.

There are no criteria for the selection of ECEC provision sites where the students can spend their practicum. Usually, nearby centres or centres known to the university staff are the ones contracted. During the 1990s, a CPD course was designed for people mentoring/supporting the students in the ECEC centres for children under the age of 3. However, it was not adopted into legislation and has since been discontinued. Despite this, the ECEC sites are expected to nominate staff to help and supervise students while conducting the observations and/or the work assigned to them. Individual student's work is evaluated at the end of the practicum period. Some remuneration for the mentoring staff at the ECEC sites is provided by the higher education institution or MACSKE, respectively.

Selection criteria to be a practice site for family nurseries includes the completion of a self-evaluation form and a site visit from the organisation responsible for the specialised training course (MACSKE n.d.).

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

CPD is defined by legislation for Infant and Early Childhood Educators, Childcare Workers and Pre-primary Pedagogues. Non-qualified co-workers are not required to attend CPD.

Qualified core pedagogues both in the social/child welfare and education sector can obtain a specialist professional diploma if they have worked at least five years in a relevant job, by passing a specialist exam related to their specific profession, which can result in a salary increase, depending on the employer's decision. Some universities offer preparatory courses for the specialist pedagogue exam (e.g. Apor Vilmos Catholic College).

Centre Leaders in nurseries are not required to attend CPD courses, but those in kindergartens are.

Infant and Early Childhood Educator (*kisgyermeknevelő)*

The Social Act of 1993 (Hungarian Parliament 1993) lays down the obligation of core pedagogues in social and child welfare services (including *kisgyermeknevelő*) to attend CPD programmes in order to maintain their job and to stay on the National Register of Care Workers. In case of not fulfilling the obligation, the core pedagogue's employment can be terminated. The 9/2000 Ministerial Decree (Ministry for Social and Family Affairs 9/2000) describes the regulatory framework and details the requirements, including the number of credits (which are not linked to the ECTS system) to be accumulated, the type of formal CPD programmes that can be accepted for accreditation and for prospective CPD providers as well as the process of applying to have different programmes accredited.

One CPD period is six years, during which core pedagogues with a higher education, post-secondary, or upper secondary qualification have to accumulate 80 credits, whereas those with a lower level (older) qualification have to accumulate 60 credits to stay on the National Register. If someone fails to achieve this, she/he can be taken off the register and could lose her/his job as a consequence. There are no specific requirements for heads of ECEC provision in terms of CPD.

All formal CPD programmes are accredited with a different number of credits that are not taken into account when participating in other higher education courses.

a. *Courses of at least 30 hours* addressing different professional themes and ending with some form of report (30–50 credits)
b. *Group work of at least 25 hours* related to professional personal development and skills development, including case studies and supervision (25–35 credits)
c. *Meetings or conferences having at least five presentations* in social policy, child protection, child welfare, or social work (5–10 credits)
d. *Study trip* lasting at least three days *to learn about a certain topic or to gain experience* (10–20 credits)
e. *Professional workshops* with at least six meetings in a year addressing different themes each time (10–20 credits).

In order to have all credit points recognised in a six-year CPD period, the *kisgyermeknevelő* has to attend at least one 30-hour course directly related to work with children under the age of 3.

Any organisation or legal person can apply for CPD programmes to be accredited. The Slachta Margit National Institute for Social Policy Institute accredits and allocates credits to all CPD programmes for staff working in social, child welfare and child protection services once a year, and maintains the register for CPD programmes. The duty of CPD providers to document the programmes is also detailed in the Ministerial Decree 9/2000 (Ministry for Social and Family Affairs 9/2000).

Core pedagogues in *bölcsőde* (0–2) have 45–46 days of paid leave days a year (20–21 working days regular annual leave and 25 working days additional leave for pedagogues). 10–15 days of these can be used for professional development. The Centre Head has to design a yearly CPD plan that takes into account all staff with still unmet duties in order to make sure that everyone who needs to fulfil their CPD obligation has the opportunity to do so. The plan includes a schedule for attending programmes, the substitution of staff while they are away from work and a financial plan for support. Employers have to ensure remunerated time for the CPD and to pay the participation fee.

The qualification requirements for Centre Heads are listed in the legislation (Ministry of Welfare 15/1998). There are no additional requirements in terms of CPD.

Childcare Worker (*Szolgáltatásnyújtó*)

CPD is also compulsory for Childcare Workers through legislation (Ministry of Welfare 15/1998) – once every three years. The responsibility for accrediting and offering CPD programmes was also placed with the NGO organisation MACSKE and since 2023 is placed with the NGO "*Magyar Bölcsődék Egyesülete*" (Association of Hungarian *Bölcsődes*). The cost of participating in a CPD programme can be covered either by the participant or the employer. Employers have to ensure remunerated time for the CPD.

Pre-primary Pedagogue (*óvodapedagógus)*

The Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education (Hungarian Parliament 2011), which has replaced the former Education Act of 1993, lays down the obligation of all pedagogues (including kindergarten core pedagogues) to attend CPD programmes. The Government Decree on Teacher Further Training (Hungarian Government 277/1997) details the conditions related to participation in and funding of CPD programmes, the rights and duties of both staff and centre leaders and the process of accrediting CPD programmes. Participating in CPD programmes is also a legislative right, not just a duty for pedagogues.

Kindergarten core pedagogues have to attend 120 teaching hours (45 minutes/teaching hour) of pedagogue CPD courses within every seven years. Those who finish the courses successfully are mostly given a financial reward by their employer, although this is not binding. Those who

do not meet this obligation or cannot finish the courses successfully can lose their job. Heads of *óvoda* (3–5) have to attend CPD courses that contribute to their knowledge advancement and skills as a manager of the centre.

As is the case with staff in nurseries, core pedagogues in kindergartens have 45–46 days of leave days a year (20–21 working days of regular leave and 25 working days of additional leave for pedagogues). The head of the centre has to design a five-year CPD plan that takes into account all staff with still unmet duties in order to make sure that everyone who needs to fulfil their CPD obligation has the opportunity to do so. The plan includes a schedule for attending programmes, the substitution of staff while they are away from work and a financial plan for support.

Being a public education duty, pedagogue CPD programmes are free of charge. The costs for the participants are covered by contributions from the state (central budget), the provider and the employer. If the CPD programme is not offered within the state educational duty, the contribution by the state cannot be more than 80% unless the course is necessary for obtaining the next level (qualification) within the Promotion System of Teachers (Hungarian Parliament 2011).

Employers have to ensure remunerated time for CPD activities and to pay the participation fee.

Pedagogue CPD courses have to be approved by the Minister responsible for education. Applications for running such programmes are to be submitted to the Education Office (*Oktatási Hivatal*). The decisions of the Minister are based on the recommendations of the Pedagogue CPD Accreditation Council.

Prospective providers can submit programmes for accreditation all the year round. The Education Office keeps a register of approved programmes, makes it available on its website and is responsible for inspecting them. The duty of providers to document the programmes is also detailed in the decree.

Any organisations registered as providers of adult education can apply for accreditation with pedagogue CPD programmes within the higher education accreditation system.

Main providers of CPD

Most of the CPD programme providers – both for *kisgyermeknevelő* and *óvodapedagógus* – are public. The roles and responsibilities described by the legislation apply to public and private providers alike. They have to follow the same procedures and have to comply with the same national standards specified in the 9/2000 Ministerial Decree (Ministry for Social and Family Affairs 9/2000) and the 277/1997 Government Decree (Hungarian Government 277/1997). Their choice of teachers/trainers employed and programme content influence their chances of accreditation and the number of credits the programme is awarded.

During past 10 years or so, many EU funded projects offered training courses for free, which have been accepted as part of CPD fulfilment in both sectors.

Challenges regarding CPD

Finding replacements for practitioners attending CPD programmes can be a problem both for *bölcsőde* (0–2) and *óvoda* (3–5). Other practitioners from the same centre usually substitute, but it can be difficult for the Centre Leader to keep the balance between guaranteeing available leave days for staff members and absences due to CPD activities, especially for smaller centres with only a few staff. CPD programmes are usually offered in the evenings or on the weekends, since some of the service providers work alone or with one helper and cannot close the site for the duration of the courses.

The certificates of CPD programmes are only partially and selectively accepted across the two sectors (e.g. pedagogues working in children's homes or in a childcare centre can fulfil part of their professional development duties in pedagogue CPD programmes).

There are no systematically collated data on the content of CPD programmes. The specific topics are not prioritised, they arise as a result of the accreditation process. Prospective CPD providers aim to submit topics of interest since there is a (market) competition for attracting participants.

In addition to compulsory CPD, most core professionals participate in non-formal professional development activities in the centre, such as regular consultations, organised visits to other centres, etc. The content and form of these activities depend on the perceived needs of children, parents and the staff themselves.

Act CXC of 2011 (Hungarian Parliament 2011) on National Public Education introduced the Promotion System of Teachers, which also applies to Pre-primary Pedagogues and Infant and Early Childhood Educators with a BA degree. The system has five levels:

- Trainee
- Pedagogue I
- Pedagogue II
- Master Pedagogue
- Researcher Pedagogue.

The first level is the trainee programme, which lasts for one or two years. Government Decree 326/2013 (Hungarian Government 326/2013) lists the relevant detailed requirements for each level: the contents of the portfolio (documents representing the activities of the pedagogue) to be submitted and evaluated by an independent committee; the requirement for a site visit by the committee to assess and evaluate the practice of the pedagogue; and the need to pass a relevant exam. Achieving the Pedagogue I. level is obligatory as a means of quality assurance. The need for mentoring, the tasks and duties of both the mentor and the trainee are also included. The trainee is to be evaluated regularly every six months and at the end of the trainee period. If the trainee's certification/qualification exam is successful, they can be ranked into the next category, which is Pedagogue I.

One of the important elements of the system is the requirement for Pedagogues to reflect on their work before their assessment by an independent committee. Achieving a new level comes with a raise in salary.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Most *kisgyermeknevelő* and *óvodapedagógus* work in public ECEC provision and they receive salaries according to unified wage scales. The wages of *kisgyermeknevelő* are based on the wage table of public employees regulated jointly in the Act XXXIII of 1992 on public employees (Hungarian Parliament 1992), and the Government Decree 257/2000 (Hungarian Government 257/2000). The table determines the minimum wages based on the qualification and number of years worked. The Government Decree states the additional wage supplements as well.

The wages of *óvodapedagógus* are determined by a so-called pedagogue wage table, which takes into consideration the number of years worked and the level (qualification) within the Promotion System of Teachers (Hungarian Government 326/2013). This table is the basis for all teachers/pedagogues in the entire education system.

Over the past 5–10 years, core staff in nurseries coming under the Act XXXIII of 1992 (Hungarian Parliament 1992) have received several types of wage supplements, with the result that now a *kisgyermeknevelő* with a BA level education (salary set by the pedagogue wage table) earns less than lower educated colleagues.

The wages of core pedagogues in *bölcsőde* (0–2) were traditionally low, partly because they are part of the social sector, where the wages are the lowest in Hungary, and partly because many of them did not have higher level qualifications. Core pedagogues in *óvoda* (3–5), and pedagogues in general had higher wages, partly because they all have BA level qualifications and partly because of the government's earlier reform of the evaluation of pedagogues and teachers working in public education (Promotion System of Teachers). However, this situation has reversed recently due to the several wage corrections for people working in *bölcsőde*, which resulted in somewhat higher wages than for those in working in *óvoda.*

In both types of ECEC centres there is additional payment for posts of responsibility, which is also regulated in legislation (Hungarian Government 230/2012).

The government introduced a major wage increase for pedagogues employed in *bölcsőde*, *óvoda* and schools and other types of services. The scale of contribution from the central budget is an average 32.2% effective on 1 January 2024 (Hungarian Government 662/2023). Further plans include yearly increases to achieve an average 90% wage increase by the year 2025.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

Workers in *bölcsőde* (0–2) and *óvoda* (3–5) are almost exclusively employed full time. The official weekly working time amounts to 40 hours. According to the author's own calculation (based on Hungarian Central Statistical Office data 2021 provided for the author's request[8]) 99% of *kisgyermeknevelő* work full time. The Ministry of Human Resources (2016) indicated that 99% of the staff in *óvoda* also worked full time and only 1% part time.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Newly qualified core pedagogues are legally obliged to spend a certain period of time as a trainee (*gyakornok*) when they begin to work in their job. Act XXXIII of 1992 (Hungarian Parliament 1992) on public employees states the requirement for applying the trainee programme in the case of newly qualified staff and Government Decrees describe the varying details for the different sectors. A *kisgyermeknevelő* and also a *óvodapedagogus* who is new in the job has to work as a trainee for a period of two years. The Government Decree 257/2000 (Hungarian Government 257/2000) lists the requirements for the ECEC centre to develop the guidelines, to appoint a mentor and to set out the tasks and duties of both the mentor and the trainee. At the end of the trainee programme period, the trainee is evaluated. Failure results in job loss. In the absence of a central government contribution for the mentoring, the ECEC centre has to provide the mentoring remuneration from its own budget.

There are no such measures required for new practitioners in family nurseries and workplace nurseries. If a regional network for these workers exists, the coordinator's duty is to provide the support.

[8] The data have been created with the use of "Ikalmazásban állók létszáma, 2020. december 31." (Number of employees in *bölcsőde*) Datafile prepared upon individual request by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (www.ksh.hu). The calculations and the conclusion are the sole intellectual products of the author of this report, Marta Korintus.

7.4 Non-contact time

Legislation states that the contact time for core pedagogues in *bölcsőde* (0–2) is seven hours per day. One hour per day can be used for preparation work, staff meetings, administration, and so on. Contact time for core pedagogues in *óvoda* (3–5) is 32 hours a week (Hungarian Parliament 2011). The remaining eight hours can be used for preparation work, or anything else related to their work.

There is no such time included in the work hours of childcare service providers.

7.5 Current staffing issues

For a few years after the introduction of the Bachelor level qualification for *kisgyermeknevelő* and the Promotion System of Teachers including *óvodapedagógus* (see also Korintus 2018), better pay and career advancement opportunities were available and therefore there was no severe shortage of staff in either *bölcsőde* (0–2) or *óvoda* (3–5) nationally. However, due to changes in remuneration for *kisgyermeknevelő* with lower level qualifications (i.e. the introduction of wage supplements), staff with a BA education level now earn somewhat less. This situation creates tensions within the workplace, and also results in less people wanting to work in these jobs.

Over the past years, the government introduced higher wages in many sectors of the economy with the result that earnings in the education sector as a whole are left behind. The situation has become so serious that in 2022, fewer prospective students applied for admission to pedagogical oriented universities than the number of places available.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

There have been some educational reforms introduced by the government since the previous SEEPRO report.

Reform of vocational education and training (VET)

Major changes were introduced in 2013, modifying the structure of VET schools, the content and the qualification requirements of VET, as well as the organisation and implementation of guided workplace experience. All these changes have aimed at better serving the demands and needs of the labour market/economy and increasing the attractiveness of VET. In 2013, responsibility for VET schools changed from the local government level to central maintenance by the state (Eurofound 2016) The post-secondary vocational education for workers in nurseries (*kisgyermekgondozó, -nevelő*) was moved to the new system of vocational training (CEDEFOP 2019) in 2020.

Reform of home-based ECEC provision and the structure of the nursery system

In 2017, the system of ECEC for children under the age of 3 was changed, by including and redefining home-based childcare provision as family nurseries. It meant a major change in the training of childcare workers (extending it to pedagogical and professional issues) and a major change in the minimum requirements in terms of the spatial environment and the pedagogical work with children. Since then, all basic requirements are the same for all types of nurseries.

Reform related to digital education

Affecting workers in both sectors is The Digital Education Strategy of Hungary, which was adopted by the Government Decree 1536/2016, IX. 13 (Hungarian Government 1536/2016). The main goal of DES is that nobody leaves the public education and training system without adequate digital competencies.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Over the past six years in Hungary, no government-funded or third-party funded research has been conducted which specifically focuses on ECEC staff. However, several EU funded projects both in the education sector and in the social welfare sector have aimed to provide a basis for and develop the professional aspects and/or training materials required by reforms in both sectors. One specific example is the following:

Early Childhood Programme

Sources: EFOP-1.9.5-VEKOP-16-2016-00001 "A kora gyermekkori intervenció ágazatközi fejlesztése" [Intersectoral development of early childhood intervention] 2017-2022, National Centre for Public Health 2018 (see *References* for further details)

Aims: The aims of the complex programme – built on cooperation among the different sectors (education, health and social) responsible for young children – were to provide/ensure a system of higher quality and better access services that meet the needs of children below school age and their families, especially of those with special needs; and to design a complex screening measure to support professionals and parents in supporting children with atypical development.

Methods: The methods involved designing a common "route for children" (*gyermekút*) by modernizing the institutional structure, endorsing coordination; expanding the types and forms of services; developing the competences of professionals; and providing better information for parents.

Selected findings: Several documents of guidance have been developed – including a detailed description of children's development below school age, information for parents and guidance for health and education personnel – which can also be used by staff in nurseries and kindergartens[9]. One example is a description of standards for professional work in all types of *bölcsőde*, and another is a developmental questionnaire to be used by staff in both sectors to follow children's development and receive feedback based on national standard values (see also Szombathelyiné et al. 2021).

Implications: The use of both are expected to become compulsory in nurseries and kindergartens.

[9] See the gyermekut.hu website for publications and guidance for professionals and parents

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Several changes in the auspices of nurseries within the government structure and ministerial reorganisation after the 2022 elections have affected the perspectives. Nurseries and kindergartens came under the same ministry (EMMI – Ministry of Human Resources) before 2022. Even though the responsibilities were under different parts of the ministry, there was some hope of achieving a unified approach to ECEC. Now different ministries are responsible for nurseries (Ministry of Culture and Innovation) and kindergartens (Ministry of the Interior), once again diminishing hopes of a society-level acceptance of nurseries as places of early childhood education

The workforce challenges Hungary is facing are still mainly related to the level of wages. Teachers*, óvodapedagogues* and *kisgyermeknevelő* have always had lower wages compared with other sectors (maybe the only exception being social services). However, since the major wage increase introduced by the Hungarian Government (2023), with effect from January 2024, this is now changing.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

HUNGARY

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC are **nursery** (*bölcsőde,* 0–2) and **kindergarten** (*óvoda*, 3–5)[1]. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Hungary

1828	First kindergarten established by Therese Brunswick
1891	The first Kindergarten Act emphasises a holistic approach to children's development.
1852	First day nursery for children of working mothers is opened in Budapest.
1879	First state kindergarten is opened.
1891	Attendance made compulsory for 3 to 6 year-olds but without compliance procedures
1936	The mission of kindergartens changes from an educational to a health-oriented approach.
1953	Legal entitlement to a place in early childhood provision is established and state provision transferred to the municipalities.
As from 1967	Steady expansion of ECEC provision with a number of quality measures (such as national guidelines, regular inspections) introduced both for nurseries and kindergartens.
1970	The first institute (*Bölcsődék Országos Módszertani Intézete*) for supporting, monitoring and inspecting nurseries nationwide is established by the Ministry of Health as part of a general effort to establish national institutes in many areas in Hungary.
1984-2003	Drop in the birth rate and financial constraints lead to the closing of roughly 60% of the available provision.
1993	Kindergartens recognised as part of the education system
1997	Nurseries are recognised as part of the new child protection/child welfare system.
1997	Licensed family day care and home childcare are also included in the 1997 legislation as basic services to be provided for families with young children.
2009	Introduction of Sure Start Children's Houses as a pilot project
2012	National Core Curriculum for kindergartens comes into force.
2013	Sure Start Children's Houses become a state-financed service regulated under the Child Protection Act.
2015	Kindergarten are made compulsory for 3 year-olds and above.
2017	Integration of all types of ECEC services for children under 3 years of age under the term *bölcsőde*
2018	The Public Education Act is amended.
2022	Responsibility for nurseries is assigned to the Minister of Culture and Innovation and for kindergartens to the Ministry of the Interior.

Sources: Korintus 2008; Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010; Korintus 2018; Pálfi et al. 2019; Farkas 2020, 80

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years, as in Hungary, where children usually start school when they are 6 years old.

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Early childhood education and care in Hungary is organised as a bi-sectoral system. Since 2022, nurseries (*bölcsőde*) for children under 3 years of age come under the responsibility of the Minister of Culture and Innovation, whereas kindergartens (*óvoda*) for children between the ages of 3 and statutory school age come under the Minister of the Interior. The municipalities are responsible for the operation and organisation of both nurseries and kindergartens.

General objectives and legislative framework

The Basic Law of 2011 enshrines the universal right to education, irrespective of gender, race, language, social origin or any other status.

The overarching socio-political goals of early childhood education, care and upbringing are to support family employment and to reduce disadvantages. Particularly important goals in education and learning processes are the transmission of democratic and humanistic values and respect for the individual. Emphasis is placed on the basic right to education and equality of opportunity as well as the right of national minorities to their culture. In the field of early education, the importance of cooperation between the family, ECEC settings and the state is also emphasised.

Relevant laws for kindergartens, childcare centres and home-based ECEC provision are, on the one hand, the Public Education Act (Act CXC, *törvény a nemzeti köznevelésről*) of 2011 with amendments) which confirms local authorities as the responsible bodies for providing kindergartens and on the other hand, the Child Protection Act (XXXI, 1997, amended in 2017), which in 2017 reorganised the structure of nursery provision (KSH 2023b) and confirms local authorities as the responsible bodies for providing nurseries. Other important legal provisions are:

- Government Decision 229/2012 on the implementation of the Education Act
- Ministerial Decision 20/2012 on the management of educational institutions
- Ministerial Decree 15/1998 on the Task and Operational Criteria of Child Protection Institutes and Personnel and
- Government Decision 1246/2015 on measures for effective early childhood development.

These laws define minimum standards, the inspection system, educational content and quality standards.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Attendance is voluntary for children under 3 years of age. Since 2017, however, municipalities have been obliged to provide places if at least 40 children under the age of 3 live in the area or at least five families express a wish for childcare services.

Children from the age of 3 have a legal right to a free place in a kindergarten. The Education Act stipulates that attendance is compulsory for at least four hours per day. Hungary is one of the few European countries with a three-year compulsory kindergarten enrolment (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 53). Stricter regulations have been in place since 2019 to strengthen compliance with this requirement.

Primary school (ISCED 1) starts at the age of 6.

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Hungary provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are indicated within the text and in the references section.

Main types of provision

Childcare sector

Since January 2017, there are three types of ECEC setting for under 3 year-olds: (1) centre-based (childcare centres, mini nurseries), (2) home-based and (3) workplace nurseries.

Nurseries (*bölcsőde*) are the most common type. They operate according to the National Core Framework for Education and Care in Nurseries. A few (no statistical data available) offer 24-hour care or care during weekends or holidays. However, these may be used by a child for a maximum of ten days per year.

Mini nurseries (*mini-bölcsőde*) can be set up if necessary where only a few children (seven or even eight if they are all over 2 years old) are to be cared for.

Family nurseries (*családi bölcsőde*) as a home-based ECEC setting provide for children between 20 weeks and 3 years and may be (but are not usually) located in the provider's home. Since 2017, this form of care has replaced the former family day care (*családi napközi*) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 183).

Workplace nurseries (*munkahelyi bölcsőde*) are set up by employers, primarily for the children of their employees. Here, a maximum of seven children can be cared for on the premises of the workplace. Family nurseries and workplace nurseries have less strict legal requirements for operation than regular nurseries.

Sure Start Children's Houses (*biztos kezdet gyerekházak*) are a new kind of multi-age ECEC setting established by law in 2013. They provide for 0 to 5 year-old children and their families in disadvantaged areas where most of the population live in poverty and social exclusion (Farkas 2020, 80) (see section on *Inclusion agenda*). They provide preventive services to support the healthy development of children, compensate developmental delay and strengthen parental competence.

In 2023, 55,748 children were enrolled in a total of 2,611 different nursery facilities. The number of available places was slightly higher than the relevant demand (see *Table 1*), yet the available places and attendance rates are very unevenly distributed across the country: In Budapest in 2018, for example, 21.2% of children under 2 attended a nursery, but only less than 10% in northern Hungary (Farkas 2020, 90). Although the number of children under 3 years of age who do not have access to childcare facilities at their place of residence decreased in recent years, 20.1% of children (4,991) under 3 years of age were still unable to attend an ECEC setting in 2023 (KSH 2023b, 25.1.1.9).

Table 1

Hungary: Number of nurseries, available places and enrolments, 2023

Type of nursery	Number of nurseries	Number of available places	Number of children enrolled
Traditional day nursery	1,016	48,444	44,420
Mini-nurseries	398	3,500	3,283
Family nurseries	1,171	8,018	7,829
Workplace nurseries	26	300	216
Total	**2,611**	**60,262**	**55,748**

Source: KSH 2023b, 25.1.1.9

Nurseries are open for at least ten hours a day; the opening hours, which are usually based on parents' working hours, are set by the provider. According to the Welfare Act 15/1998, a child

should spend a minimum of four and a maximum of twelve hours in a nursery. In summer, nurseries can be closed for up to five weeks, some are open all summer.

Education sector

Kindergartens (*óvoda*) provide education, care and upbringing for children aged between 3 years and statutory school age. The kindergarten year runs from 1 September to 31 August. The daily opening and closing times and holidays are decided by the provider or the kindergarten head. Kindergartens are usually open on 250 to 252 working days per year, mostly from 7:00 to 18:00; in summer they are closed for up to five weeks.

In 2022/2023, there were 4,599 kindergartens in Hungary, with 387,649 available places and 322,868 children. Of these, 2,335 children attended special education groups or facilities (KSH 2023a, Tab 23.1.1.7). As with the nurseries, the total supply of places is greater than the demand. Despite this, in 2017, an average of 2% of children nationwide lived in an area without kindergarten, and in some parts of the country up to 14% of children had no access to kindergarten (Farkas 2020, 94).

Provider structures

Kindergartens and nurseries are predominantly public and are then either run by the state or by municipalities. Private, state-subsidised facilities, or settings run by churches or other legal entities were attended by 12.1% of kindergarten children in 2021 (Eurostat 2023e, own calculations).

Table 2

Hungary: Number and relative share of children in kindergartens by age-group and provider type, 2021

Type of provider	Under 3 year-olds**		3 years to statutory school age	
	Number of children	Relative share of age-group*	Number of children	Relative share of age-group*
Public	11,235	79.2	276,091	87.9
Private state-subsidised	1,349	9.5	26,229	8.3
Private independent	1,599	11.3	11,949	3.8
Total	14,183		314,269	

*Own calculations ** These are children aged 2½ to 3 years who are admitted to kindergartens if needed
Source: Eurostat 2023e

Childcare sector

The greater majority of centre-based provision (nurseries and mini nurseries) for under 3 year-olds is publicly run. However, most home-based settings (family nurseries) are private, non-profit (see *Table 3*).

Table 3

Hungary: Distribution of nursery provision by provider type, 2022

Provider type	Nurseries		Mini nurseries		Family nurseries		Workplace nurseries	
	No. of settings	No. of children	No. of settings	No. of children	No. of settings	No. of children	No. of settings	No. of children
Public	853	38,519	290	2,232	118	754	6	39
Private non-profit	75	2,345	44	403	924	6,104	5	37

Provider type	Nurseries		Mini nurseries		Family nurseries		Workplace nurseries	
	No. of settings	No. of children	No. of settings	No. of children	No. of settings	No. of children	No. of settings	No. of children
Private commercial					44	273	1	14
Total	**928**	**40,864**	**334**	**2,635**	**1,086**	**7,131**	**12**	**90**

Source: KSH 2023g (HB1021)

Education sector

In 2022, most of the 4,599 kindergartens had a public provider (82.2%), 9.9% of the facilities were run by churches and 7.9% had another provider (foundations, private organisations), see *Table 4*.

Table 4

Hungary: Number and distribution of kindergartens by provider type, 2022

Provider type	Number of kindergartens	Relative share, in %
Municipal	3,782	82.2
Church-affiliated	455	9.9
Others	362	7.9
Total	**4,599**	

Source: KSH 2023g (FS1A03)

Participation rates in regulated provision

The proportion of children under 3 years of age attending kindergartens increased from 7% to 12.9% between 2005 and 2022. In the same period, the attendance rate of children between 3 years and statutory school entry increased from 79% to 100% (see *Table 5*).

Table 5

Hungary: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings according to age group and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds, in %*	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	2	30
	Over 30 hours	5	49
	No enrolment in ECEC	93	22
2010	1 to 29 hours	1	14
	Over 30 hours	8	66
	No enrolment in ECEC	91	21
2015	1 to 29 hours	4.6	9.6
	Over 30 hours	10.8	79.5
	No enrolment in ECEC	84.7	10.9
2022	1 to 29 hours	3.9	20.9
	Over 30 hours	9.0	79.1
	No enrolment in ECEC	87.1	0.0

*These data refer only to children under 3 **in kindergartens**, not in the various nursery types.
Source: Eurostat 2023b, Slight deviations from 100% due to rounding

Looking at the age groups separately (see *Table 6*), the 4 to under 6 year-olds in particular had very high attendance rates of more than 95% in 2021. However, very few under 2 year-olds are enrolled in centre-based nursery settings.

Table 6

Hungary: Number and enrolment rates of children in nurseries and kindergartens, by age, 2021

Age	Number of children in nurseries	Enrolment rates in nurseries	Number of children in kindergartens	Enrolment rates in kindergartens
Under 2 years	1,736	0.9	--	--
2 year-olds	10,113	10.9	--	--
3 year-olds	1,395	1.5	79,413	83.9
4 year-olds	637	0.7	91,709	95.7
5 year-olds	247	0.3	91,217	98.4
6 year-olds	55	0.1	50,062	53.3

Source: Eurostat 2023f, g

According to national statistics, in 2022/23, the nationwide enrolment rate in the 3–5 years age group is 93.1% (KSH 2023e, Table 23.1.2.3).

Table 7

Hungary: Number and enrolment rates of children in kindergartens by age, 2020/21

Age	Number of children	Enrolment rate, in %*
Under 3 years	8,500	3.0
3 year-olds	79,400	85.0
4 year-olds	91,800	96.8
5 year-olds	91,200	95.1
6 year-olds	50,000	53.9
7 year-olds	1,900	2.0
Total	322,800	

Source: KSH 2021; * own calculations based on data of KSH 2023c

Financing and costs for parents

The share of GDP spent on education was 3.5% in 2021 – a significant reduction during the past decade from 4.3% in 2011, especially from 2019 onwards. 16% of education expenditure was spent on kindergartens (KSH 2023f, own calculations).

According to OECD data, total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 0.66% of GDP in 2019. Of this, 0.1% was allocated to childcare (OECD 2023).

In nurseries, parental fees may not exceed 25% of the family's per capita net income. In traditional nurseries and mini nurseries, the fee averages 8,000 HUF (€21) per month in 2022, in family crèches 40,000-100,000 HUF (€102-256). There is no charge for the care of children with disabilities, or for families with more than three children, or for families with an income below 130% of the minimum income (Farkas 2020, 92).

Kindergartens are usually financed through municipal budgets. The municipalities receive funds from the national budget for this purpose, based on the number of core professionals and support staff. The calculation is based on the average national salary of kindergarten teachers and the number of kindergarten children.

Kindergartens that care for children with language disabilities or learning difficulties receive double the rate for each of these children, and triple the rate for children with physical or sensory impairments.

In public kindergartens, parents pay only for meals. In privately subsidised kindergartens, parents pay a monthly fee of about €223 (without meals).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 4% of net household income on childcare costs[3] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

In **nurseries,** there are usually 12 children in a group with two professionals, or 14 if all the children are over 2 years old. Up to seven children are cared for in a mini nursery by one professional and one assistant. Up to seven children are also cared for in a workplace nursery; if more than five children are present, an assistant must be employed, whose working hours are determined by the provider. In family nurseries there can be 5 children or up to 8 if 2 core pedagogues or 1 core pedagogue and 1 assistant are employed.

Table 8

Hungary: Staffing ratios and group size in nursery settings

Nursery type	Number of staff	Maximum number of children per group
Traditional nursery	2 core pedagogues	12
Nursery where all children are over 2 years of age	2 core pedagogues	14
Mini nursery	1 core pedagogue and 1 assistant	7 8 if all children are over 2 years of age
Workplace nursery	1 core pedagogue 1 core pedagogue and 1 assistant if more than 5 children are in the group	7 or 8 if children are older than 2 years of age

Source: Ministry of Welfare 1998 with amendments 2017

As a rule, **kindergartens** have an average of four same-age or mixed-age groups, with a maximum group size of 25 children. Each group is staffed by two professionals, whose working hours overlap by two hours, and one assistant. One full-time pedagogical assistant must be employed for every three groups.

In 2022/23, one core pedagogue was responsible for an average of 10.5 children and there was an average of 21.5 children in a group. While there are hardly any differences between public and church-affiliated kindergartens, the average number of children in a group in facilities run by foundations or other organisations tends to be slightly lower (KSH 2023a).

When children with disabilities attend, the group size is reduced – as a rule, one child with a disability counts as two or three children without a disability. If only children with disabilities are

[3] The OECD calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included. From 2022, the gross childcare fee is calculated using an ad-hoc survey managed by the Ministry for Culture and Innovation. Previously, the gross childcare fee was based on the regulations of Budapest-District 8.

in a group, the maximum number may not exceed seven to 15, depending on the type of disability.

Curricular frameworks

Childcare sector

The National Core Programme for Nursery Education and Care (Ministry Decision 15/1998) applies to various nursery settings and the centre-based educational programmes are based on this. The following aspects are emphasised: the importance of family upbringing, respect for the child's personality, the unity of education and care, individualisation, security and stability, encouraging activity and self-confidence, the influence of education. Nurseries are required to support these goals by advocating a healthy lifestyle and fostering emotional, social and cognitive development. Methods that the professionals are free to choose include play, story reading, singing and creative activities. An individual plan is drawn up for each child based on observations by the core pedagogue.

Education sector

The compulsory National Core Programme for Kindergarten Education (Government Decision 363/2012, XII. 17) applies to all kindergartens, regardless of the provider, and defines the pedagogical principles and goals, such as the individual, needs-based development of emotional, social and cognitive skills. Particular emphasis is placed on accepting each child as a unique person and adapting pedagogical approaches to account for this. Based on the core curriculum, the professionals either develop their own centre-specific programme or adopt a ready-made one. An overriding goal is always to achieve "school readiness" and a smooth transition to school. Beyond this, the acquisition of key competences is also emphasised, such as communication in the family language, mathematical and scientific competences as well as social and artistic competences. Play is considered the most important form of learning, but reading stories is also valued, as are singing, drawing, painting and motor activities. The professionals are free to choose their own methods. The core curriculum is updated every five years by the government and supplemented if necessary.

Digital education

The government's Digital Education Strategy (Hungarian Government 1536/2016) makes it clear that knowledge of information technology and digital education must be integrated into everyday activities in kindergarten. As part of the Digital Success programme, the Digital Child Protection Strategy was also developed in 2016.

Among other things, the strategy recommends integrating digital education in ECEC settings, particularly since neither the information society per se nor digital tools or technologies are currently addressed in the core curriculum. Nor is there any mention of how professionals should deal with them. Therefore, the strategy emphasises the need to adapt the curriculum accordingly.

As a rule, digital devices are used in kindergartens primarily for documentation purposes. Here data protection needs to be guaranteed, that parents are included and that a safety awareness is developed among all those involved. In practice, this means supporting children in developing safety awareness to the extent that they become aware of the possible risks of the internet. It

also means ensuring that the professionals have sufficient digital knowledge, that only controlled content is accessible on the end devices used in kindergartens, that the children's personal data is always protected and that overall children learn to acquire critical digital consumer behaviour.

The strategy also points out that kindergartens need the appropriate equipment for this and that the training of professionals must be adapted. It is also recommended that specialist centres be set up to support the ECEC settings with problems in this area (Hungarian Government 2016a, b).

Monitoring – evaluation

Child-related assessment

In **nursery settings**, observations on the development of the children are documented by the core professionals in a diary, provided that the parents have given their consent. At the request of the parents, this documentation is handed over to them. Entries are made monthly until the first birthday, then every three months. Keeping a group diary is obligatory for centre-based nurseries.

In **kindergartens**, the assessment of children is laid down by law (Government Decision 20/2012, VIII. 31) and is also based primarily on observations. The professionals choose a monitoring system which can be adapted to the respective setting's programme. Health data, emotional, social, intellectual, linguistic and physical development (at least every six months) as well as other observations by the professionals are recorded. Parents are informed regularly. At the end of the kindergarten period, an assessment is made to determine whether the child has the "maturity" required for school. The standardised DIFER instrument (Diagnostic Instrument for the Assessment of Children, 4 to 8 years old, DIFER) is also used as an assessment method. This instrument is particularly suitable for assessing basic competencies and skills that are considered necessary for a successful start in primary school.

Centre-level internal evaluation

Each kindergarten carries out self-evaluation procedures, the results of which are included in the external evaluation and feedback from parents and children. These self-evaluation measures also serve to prepare the five-year plan (see below). The work of the management and staff as well as the work of the institution as a whole are evaluated. In 2019, revised guidelines for self-evaluation in kindergartens were issued by the education authority (*Oktatási Hivatal*).

External evaluation

A national inspection system evaluates all levels of education according to the same criteria. In **nurseries** these evaluations are conducted by a government agency (*Kormányhivatal*) every two years and by local authorities once a year. For **kindergartens** they are carried out by the education authority and take place every five years.

This national inspection system, also for kindergartens, is the responsibility of the State Education Secretariat, which appoints specialist education authorities for this purpose. In detail, the professionals, the management and the facilities are inspected, usually through on-site visits. The methods used are document analysis, observations, questionnaires and interviews. With regard to the inspection of the kindergartens, the emphasis is on pedagogical processes, the

implementation of the national core programme through centre-specific plans, the centre management, the work of the staff and compliance with prescribed standards. The results are summarised in a report which is sent to the management and the provider.

Based on this report, the management draws up a five-year action plan to implement improvement measures. The provider of an institution has to examine its efficiency as well as the implementation of the respective pedagogical programme. The education authority analyses the reports and evaluations and compiles them in the education information system (*köznevelés információs rendszerének,* KIR). Since 2018, the evaluated managers and professionals have the possibility to evaluate the evaluators in an anonymous questionnaire.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and with disabilities

Regulations regarding the education and care of children with special educational needs are laid down by the Government Decision 110/2012 (amended in this respect in 2022). With the involvement of the National Committee for Minorities in Hungary, the Ministry of Education issued guidelines as early as 1997 which are to be observed by kindergartens when drawing up their curricula. The National Core Programme for Kindergarten Education also applies in special education settings.

Children with disabilities can – depending on their disability – attend either special or mainstream institutions or, for example, receive additional support measures beyond attending a mainstream institution. Guidelines for inclusive education in mainstream settings are provided as a support for professionals.

Additionally, educational support services which employ around 5,000 professionals also provide free diagnoses and advice to special education institutions. In 2016/17, 4,542 children under 5 years of age in these settings attended special educational counselling and early intervention services, but this represented less than 1% of the age group (Farkas 2020, 79).

ECEC settings attended by children with special educational needs have a duty to ensure that they receive sufficient support. An individual plan is drawn up for each child and the methods used are based on individual needs. The institutions are supported by the staff of the Methodological Centres in Integrative Support Education (*Integrált Gyógypedagógiai Módszertani Insitution*).

Kindergartens that work inclusively and follow the corresponding regulations of the Ministry can receive financial subsidies.

In 2022, 2,335 kindergarten children attended separate special needs classes and 9,244 were enrolled in integrative groups (KSH2023g, HB1015).

Children with a migration background and from national ethnic minorities – children from Roma communities

In 2023, 2.4% of the total population had non-Hungarian citizenship. Of these, almost one half (45%) came from other EU27 countries, mainly from Germany, Slovakia and Romania. Persons from Ukraine represented 15.9% of the population with non-Hungarian citizenship (KSH 2023c, tab 22.1.1.3, KSH 2023d, tab 22.1.1.23, own calculations).

According to Eurostat data, in 2022, 0.9% in the age group up to 5 years had a non-Hungarian citizenship with 62.7% of them coming from countries outside the EU27 (as of 2020) (Eurostat 2023c, own calculations).

The core curriculum states that every child in Hungarian kindergartens has the right to education in his or her ethnic or family language. If there are at least eight children of a specific national minority, the establishment of an ethnic kindergarten can be applied for (Pálfi et al. 2019, 15f).

According to the Rights of National Minorities Act (2011), the languages of ethnic groups from Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Poland, Germany, Armenia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Slovakia and Ukraine as well as the language of the Ruthenians and the Roma are legally defined as languages of national and ethnic minorities. Kindergartens are required to promote their culture and language and they should have access to education in their family language.

In the 2011 census, 315,000 people (at that time about 3% of the population) identified themselves as Roma, making them the largest minority group in Hungary. Efforts to provide better opportunities for participation, especially for Roma children suffering from poverty or social exclusion, are particularly concentrated in the areas with the most Roma communities in northern Hungary. In the past, Roma children were often excluded from educational opportunities (Farkas 2020, 70, 80).

In order to integrate disadvantaged children, especially Roma children, into the education system as early as possible, relevant support measures have been implemented. For example, "Sure Start Children's Houses" have been established in the most disadvantaged areas of Hungary to provide comprehensive and free support to families with children under 6 years of age. In 2019, there were 155 centres reaching 2,150 families (Farkas 2020, 81).

Parental leave arrangements[4]

Maternity leave (*csecsemőgondozási díj- CSED*) is 24 weeks, of which up to four weeks can be taken before the birth. Two weeks are compulsory. Women who have been employed for at least 365 days over the last two years receive 100% of their daily average earnings (without upper limit).

Paternity leave is fully paid for ten days, which can be taken in the first two months of the child's life, also in two parts.

There are two types of **Parental leave** and allowances: (1) for uninsured parents (*Gyermekgondozási segítő ellátás* – GYES) and (2) for insured parents (*Gyermekgondozási díj* – GYED). GYES is a lump sum, equal to the twofold daily minimum salary of HUF 28,500 (€74,42), paid until the child's 3rd birthday. Parents receiving GYES must not work until the child turns 6 months, after that they may work full time. The GYED allowance is 70% of the average income of the 365 days before birth, up to a maximum of HUF 324,000 (€848.15) per month, and cannot be claimed by both parents at the same time; it is possible to work in addition. GYED can also be claimed under the same conditions by grandparents from the 1. to the 3. birthday of the child, if they care for the child at home. All parents who have been employed for at least one year and have at least one child under the age of 3 receive 44 additional days paid at 10% of an absence fee.

It is estimated that almost all mothers take Maternity leave and most fathers also take the days to which they are entitled. Only absolute figures exist on the take-up of parental leave: in 2021, 113,033 parents received GYED and 148,496 GEYES. No further statistics are available.

[4] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Hungary by András Gábos and Zsuzsanna Makay in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Hungary

*Country expert assessment by **Marta Korintus***

Several changes in the auspices of nurseries within the government structure and ministerial reorganisation after the 2022 elections have affected the perspectives. Before 2022, nurseries and kindergartens came under the same ministry (EMMI – Ministry of Human Resources). Even though the responsibilities were under different ministry departments, there was some hope of achieving a unified approach to ECEC. Now different ministries are once again responsible for nurseries (Ministry of Culture and Innovation) and kindergartens (Ministry of the Interior), thus diminishing hopes of a society-level acceptance of nurseries as places of early childhood education.

1. Affecting workers in both sectors is the *The Digital Education Strategy of Hungary*, which was adopted by the Government Decree 1536/2016, IX. 13 (Hungarian Government, 1536/2016). The main goal of DES is that nobody leaves the public education and training system without adequate digital competencies. An expected additional result would be to ensure that all children's groups in nurseries and kindergartens have the necessary equipment (e.g. laptops) for the administrative tasks.
2. The workforce challenges Hungary is facing are still related to the level of wages. Teachers*, óvodapedagogues* in kindergartens and *kisgyermeknevelő* in nurseries, have always had lower wages compared with other sectors (maybe the only exception being social services). Over the past years, the government introduced higher wages in many sectors of the economy with the result that earnings in the education sector as a whole have been left behind. The situation had become so serious that in 2022, fewer prospective students applied for admission to pedagogical oriented universities than the number of places available. However, the government has now recently introduced a major wage increase for pedagogues employed in *bölcsőde, óvoda* and schools and other types of services. The scale of contribution from the central budget is an average 32.2% effective on 1 January 2024 (Hungarian Government 662/2023). Further plans include yearly increases to achieve an average 90% wage increase by the year 2025.
3. Due to changes in the remuneration (i.e. the introduction of wage supplements) for *kisgyermeknevelő* with lower-level qualifications in nurseries, staff with a BA education level now earn somewhat less. This situation creates tensions within the workplace, and also results in less people wanting to work in these jobs.

Demographic data

Please note

For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Hungary was 9,689,010, representing a continuous decrease over the last 20 years (2000: 10,221,644; 2010: 10,014,324; 2020: 9,769,526) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.61, Hungary was slightly above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[5].

Children under 6 years of age

Table 9

Hungary: Number of children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under age 1	93,594
1 year-olds	93,677
2 year-olds	93,107
3 year-olds	93,411
4 year-olds	94,835
5 year-olds	95,918
Total 0 to 6 year-olds	**564,542**

Source: Eurostat 2023a.

In 2022, 2.9% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, 5.8% were children under 6 years of age. Since 2000, these percentages have been below the respective EU averages, in 2022 they were slightly above.

Table 10

Hungary: Distribution of under 6 year-olds in population by age-group compared with EU averages, 2000 – 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Hungary/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Hungary	2.8	3.2	6.0
	∅ EU15[6]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Hungary	2.8	2.9	5.7
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Hungary	2.8	2.8	5.6
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Hungary	2.9	2.9	5.8
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, *Own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

[5] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

[6] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO and HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Single households with children under 6 years of age

71.7% of households with children under 6 in Hungary were couple households in 2022. Households with single parents accounted for only 1.8% – almost exclusively single mothers (1.7%).

Table 11

Hungary: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %*
Total households	970,500	
Couple households	695,700	71.7
Other types of households	257,500	26.5
Total single households	17,200	1.8
Single households, women	16,200	1.7
Single households, men	1,000**	0.1

Source: Eurostat 2023l, *Own calculations **Calculated data

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Hungary, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 81.9% and for women 72.4% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 68.3% of women and 89.5% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were above the EU-average (87.2%) as were those of mothers (EU-average 63.6%) (Eurostat 2023k, own calculations).

Table 12a

Hungary: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Hungary	32.7	78.5
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[7]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Hungary	68.3	89.5
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[8]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023k

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 12b*

[7] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Table 12b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023)
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023j, 2023k

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[9]

In 2022, 16.3% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was well below the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 18.4% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 15.6% of children under 6 and 7.6% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation which was significantly above the EU average (6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023h, i). National data show that in 2019, the proportion of families with more than three children (22%) and Roma families (30.9%) suffering from severe material deprivation were among the highest in Europe (Eurochild 2021).

[9] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or (severely) materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

IRELAND

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report author

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

Maresa Duignan is Assistant Chief Inspector in the Ministry for Education in Ireland with particular responsibility for the evaluation of education provision in state funded early education and care settings for children aged from birth to six years. She has worked on the development of key national policy for the ECEC sector and has a particular interest in the professionalisation of the ECEC workforce, including the role of internal and external evaluation processes and their impact on professionalism in practice.

1. ECEC governance in Ireland

In Ireland, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services have a long tradition of multi-sectoral governance. This is primarily related to the source of state funding. ECEC provision is funded, in the main, by two government departments. The Department of Education (DE) provides for early education and primary education for children aged 3–6 years located in and under the governance of schools. ECEC for children under 3 years and for children aged 3–6 years in settings other than primary schools is funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). There is some small level of provision for children with disabilities or at risk funded by the Department of Health; however, these are small scale interventions and usually subject to regulation and policy generated by either of the two lead departments.

Children aged 0–6 are enrolled in centre-based ECEC settings on the basis of their parents' choice. There is low level of participation by 0 to 3 year-olds in centre-based settings, with the majority of parents providing care themselves or making informal childcare arrangements (Doorley et al. 2021; McGinnity et al. 2013). A further complexity to the pattern of ECEC enrolment in Ireland is the traditional early enrolment in formal education. Despite the fact that the compulsory school starting age is 6 years, some 4 year-olds and almost all 5 year-olds attend primary school (DE 2022a)

Governance and funding of ECEC is centralised, however there is a national support system at county level which assists ECEC services with funding application and improving the quality of provision. In November 2018, a landmark policy document was published which has the potential to transform the delivery of early childhood supports and services across multiple domains. *First Five: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families* presents a comprehensive cross-ministry strategy to deliver:

- A broader range of options for parents to balance working and caring
- A new model of parenting support
- New developments in child health, including a dedicated child health workforce
- Reform of the Early Learning and Care (ELC) system, including a new funding model
- A package of measures to tackle early childhood poverty.

Despite the interruption to the implementation plan for this strategy as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, a range of actions have already been delivered. The title for the Early Years sector, historically used to refer to the diverse range of ECEC (non-primary) settings and staff was replaced with the term Early Learning and Care (ELC) and this term is now used in all national policy pertaining to ECEC in non-school based settings in Ireland. The commitment to reform the ELC sector has multiple elements with the most significant for this report being the commitment to developing "an appropriately skilled and sustainable professional workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families" (DCEDIY 2018, 103). This translates into a series of actions including:

- *Identifying and putting in place the staff requirements to deliver early childhood supports and services*
- *Improving access to high-quality initial training and CPD opportunities to ensure the staff involved in delivering early childhood supports and services are fully prepared for the demands of their professional roles*

– *Developing mechanisms to raise the professional status of the ELC (and school-age childcare) workforce and support employers to offer more favourable working conditions to attract and retain staff increasing the qualification profile of the workforce* (*ibid*, 112*).*

It is also of note that the systems and structures that comprise the operating model for ECEC funded by DCEDIY were subject to review in 2020/21 as a result of a Programme for Government commitment to establish a national agency to support the development of "high quality childcare" (Government of Ireland 2020, 80). The report arising from this review was published in December 2021 (Indecon 2021) and is one of a number of significant research and policy publications that were published in 2021 and which will impact on the future development of the ECEC sector and workforce in the years ahead. These policy developments will be further detailed in *Chapter **6***.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

The complex nature of provision of ECEC services and patterns of enrolment of children aged 0–6 years in a variety of state funded care and education provision makes the definition and description of the ECEC workforce in Ireland quite challenging. The following definition, taken from Irish national policy, clearly excludes the staff in primary schools from the ECEC workforce as it characterises ECEC provision to be:

> *"…daycare facilities and services for pre-school children and school-going children out of school hours. It includes services offering care, education and socialisation opportunities for children to the benefit of children, parents, employers and the wider community. Thus, services such as pre-schools, naíonraí [Irish language: pre-schools], daycare services, crèches, play groups, childminding and after-school groups are included, but schools (primary, secondary and special) and residential centres for children are excluded"* (DJELR 1999).

However, for the purposes of this report, staff in primary schools working with children aged 3–6 years will be included in order to provide a full picture of workforce in Ireland engaged in the care and education of children aged 0–6 years.

Staff working directly with children in ECEC settings 0–5 (non-Primary)

The data in this paper draw from a Pobal[1] survey of ECEC settings which have an active contract with the state to deliver non-primary ECEC services for children. This survey is administered annually via an integrated IT system which manages the state ECEC funding programmes. While completion of the survey data was not a requirement for funding prior to 2022, it was integrated on the funding application system and completion of this 'survey profile' data was strongly encouraged by both Pobal and DCEDIY. The most recent survey results were published in December 2023 with a strong response rate (88.6%) that reflects the commitment of the Early Years sector to engagement with this survey. The Annual Early Years Sector Profile Report 2022/2023 (Pobal 2023) estimates that almost 33,000 staff worked in the Early Years sector in 2022/2023, with 83% working directly with children. This represented a 2% increase in the workforce since the pre-pandemic survey results for 2019/2020. This stability in the workforce across the years

[1] Pobal is a not-for-profit company with charitable status. Pobal manages programmes on behalf of Government departments, other national agencies and the EU.

of the pandemic may be attributed to the Government decision to establish an employee wage subsidy scheme which effectively supported the continued employment of staff in ECEC services throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Traditionally there has been a diverse range of titles for staff working in direct contact with children in ECEC settings (0 to 5 year-olds) in Ireland, with no consensus on terminology. This issue was again identified by the DCEDIY in *Nurturing Skills: The Workforce Development Plan for the Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare sector 2022-2028*. This report, the culmination of two years of research and consultation with all stakeholders identified that "… final decisions on terminology for the profession should be a matter for future decision by a professional body for the sector" (DCEDIY 2021b, 19). It determined that in the interim, the following titles would be adopted as working titles:

- **Early Years Educator** – staff working directly with children in centre based ECEC settings, irrespective of grade or qualification.
- **Lead Educator** – staff who lead practice with a group of children /other early years educators
- **Manager** – used to refer to the person in charge of the day-to-day operation of a setting

Prior to 2022, the Annual Early Years Sector Profile report maintained the naming conventions for staff used in previous reports (the *Nurturing Skills* titles will be used in all future surveys) and this can be observed in *Table 1* below which provides a breakdown of staff working directly with children (including managers) as follows:

Table 1

Ireland: Staff in ECEC settings (non-Primary) – percentage according to job titles, 2023

Job Title	Proportion of staff in %
Centre Manager	10
Deputy Centre Manager	3
Lead Educator	30
Educator	50
AIM[2] Level 7	6
Student placement/volunteer	1
Grand Total	100

Source: Pobal 2023

Data are also available on ancillary or support staff not working directly with children (including managers) in ECEC settings as follows:

Table 2

Ireland: Ancillary Staff in ECEC settings (non-primary) – percentage according to job titles[3], 2023

Job Title	Proportion of staff in %
Kitchen Staff	29
Cleaner	19
Administrator	18
Caretaker / Maintenance / Gardener	11

[2] Access and Inclusion Model

[3] Based on 3,440 staff, excluding 487 staff that did not have a job title.

Job Title	Proportion of staff in %
Other	9
Driver	4
Salaried Director	3
Owner-Operator / Sole-Trader	2
Non-salaried Director	2
Deputy Manager	2
Security	1
Grand Total	**100**

Source: Pobal 2023

Staff working directly with children in primary schools

In the primary education sector, staff working directly with children include qualified Primary School Teachers and Special Needs or Classroom Assistants. All Primary Teachers are required to have an honours Bachelor's degree in primary teaching and be registered with the Teaching Council of Ireland (The Teaching Council 2016). Special Needs Assistants (SNA) are required to have achieved a NFQI (*National Framework of Qualifications Ireland,* QQI 2021) Level 3 (ISCED Level 2) major award or equivalent, but no specialist subject is specified (DES 2011). Anecdotal evidence would suggest that many SNAs have achieved a specialist qualification. However, as this is not a requirement for employment, no data are available on the extent of such qualifications.

In 2022/2023, a total of 38,976 Primary Teachers were on the Department of Education payroll; however, these data are not disaggregated by the age of the children and so it is not possible to isolate those working directly with children aged 4 and 5 years old. Similarly, there were 16,827 full-time equivalent SNA posts sanctioned for employment in primary schools in 2022/2023, but there are no data available for the number allocated to work with 4 and 5 year-olds.

Table 3 shows ECEC staff in centre-based settings (non-primary) and the main staff in primary classrooms and also categorises the core pedagogues (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO-study (see *Box 1* at end of this chapter). The titles from Nurturing Skills have been adopted in this table.

Table 3
Ireland: ECEC staff in centre-based settings (0–5 non-primary and 4–5 primary)

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
ECEC sector 0–5[4] (non-primary)				
Centre Manager	**Full- and part-time day care**	Centre head	0 to 5 years	Post-secondary vocational qualification in

[4] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. The relevant formats for Ireland are **0–5** and **4–5** years.

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
(qualification only required if working directly with children) *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Profes-sional	**Sessional pre-school** **After school ser-vices** **Drop-in services** 0–5 years If after school pro-vision is offered, the age range may extend to 14 years			early childhood care and education ECTS credits: n/a[5] NFQI: level 5 EQF: level 4 or 5 ISCED 2011: 4
Lead Educator (ECCE) *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Profes-sional	**Full- and part-time day care** **Sessional pre-school** **After school ser-vices**[6] **Drop-in services** 0–5 years If after school pro-vision is offered, the age range may extend to 14 years	Core peda-gogue with group respon-sibility	0 to 5 years	Post-secondary voca-tional qualification in early childhood care and education ECTS credits: n/a NFQI: level 6 EQF: level 5 ISCED 2011: 4/5
Lead Educator (non-ECCE) *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Profes-sional	**Full- and part-time day care** **Sessional pre-school** **After school ser-vices** **Drop-in services** 0–5 years If after school pro-vision is offered, the age range may extend to 14 years	Core peda-gogue with group respon-sibility	0 to 5 years	Post-secondary voca-tional qualification in early childhood care and education ECTS credits: n/a NFQI: level 5 EQF: level 4 ISCED 2011: 4
Early Years Educator *Profile:* Early Childhood	**Full- and part-time day care** **Sessional pre-school** **After school ser-vices**	Qualified co-worker	0 to 5 years	Post-secondary voca-tional qualification in early childhood care and education ECTS credits: n/a

[5] n/a = not applicable

[6] For both Lead Educator and Educator roles, whilst individuals may also provide after-school services, their *roles* in after-school service provision have different titles (as set out in *Nurturing Skills*). In particular, in after-school provision, the equivalent of Early Years Educator is "School-Age Childcare Practitioner".

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Pedagogy Profes-sional	**Drop-in services** 0–5 years If after school pro-vision is offered, the age range may extend to 14 years			NFQI: level 5 EQF: level 4 ISCED 2011: 4
Primary education sector (4–5)				
Primary Teacher *Profile*: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional	**Classes in primary schools** 4 and 5 year-olds **Primary schools** 4–11 years	Core peda-gogue with group respon-sibility	4–11 years	Bachelor's degree (hon-ours) 4 years university ECTS credits: 180 NFQI: level 8 EQF: level 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Special Needs Assistant / Class-room Assistant	**Classes in primary schools** 4–5 years **Primary schools** 4–11 years	Co-worker without for-mal qualifica-tion	n/a	Junior certificate – Lower secondary or QQI Level 3 award[7] ECTS credits: n/a NFQI: level 3 EQF: level 2 ISCED 2011: 2

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neu-man 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

[7] Ireland has a 10 level national qualification framework (NFQI) through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way. The many different types and sizes of qualifications included in the NFQI are organised based on their level of knowledge, skill and compe-tence. Level 5 and 6 awards broadly equate to ISCED level 4 (ISCED 2011). For further information, see QQI – Quality and Qualifications Ireland 2017 and 2021.

2.2. Centre leader

ECEC Manager (non-primary)

The predominance of private for-profit provision in Ireland and the lack of regulation to practice until 2016 has mitigated against the availability of definitive role profiles for any staff in centre based ECEC (non-primary) settings. In the 2021 Workforce Development Plan, three "basic career grades are identified: Early Years Educator, Lead Educator (building on the current room leader role), and Manager" (DCEDIY 2021b, 51). The Manager role is described as "… the person in charge of a setting" (*ibid*). There is currently no qualification requirement for this role beyond the regulated qualification (NFQ Level 5 award) required of all staff working directly with children. However, the Workforce Plan makes the following commitment:

> *Over the lifetime of this Workforce Plan, minimum Qualification requirements will be introduced for Managers, at Level 6 in ELC ... In line with First 5, it will be a target that by 2028 all Managers of ELC services should have a qualification at Level 7 or higher (ibid, 53).*
>
> The tasks of the Manager are briefly described as including:
>
> *…human resources, finance, planning, quality improvement, and collaboration with a wide range of community partners and external agencies (ibid).*

However, perhaps reflecting the early stage of this development, the Workforce Plan also acknowledges that, "other leadership responsibilities may be distributed across a service in different ways". These leadership responsibilities have been identified as including pedagogy, diversity and inclusion, family and community partnership and student placement and induction.

Data on centre-based managerial staff collated in the Annual Early Years Sector Profile Report 2022/2023 (Pobal 2023) indicates the following:

- 40% are owner managers, 60% are employees of the service.
- On average 70% of the total cohort work directly with children.
- 71% hold a qualification at NFQ Level 7 (ordinary Bachelor's degree) or higher (this may not be in a field of study related to ECEC).
- The average hourly wage for a centre manager is €17.26.

It is worth noting that since September 2022 a legal minimum wage has been established through Employment Regulation Order of €16.50 for non-graduates and €17.25 for graduates.

Principal (primary)

The Principal is responsible for the day to day management of the school, is the leader both of learning and the school community, is a member of the Board of Management and an employee of the Board. The Principal can be secretary to the Board of Management but cannot be Chairperson or Treasurer. The Principal's Role is set out in Circular 16/'73 (Department of Education, Primary Branch 1973) and in Section 22 and Section 23 (eISB 1998a, b) of the Education Act 1998 as amended. The former document dates from 1973 when primary schools in Ireland were referred to as National Schools. In larger schools, the Principal may be appointed in a non-teaching capacity and may be assisted by a Deputy Principal. The Department of Education pays the salaries of Principals in recognised primary schools according to established and agreed pay scales. The Principal's salary is a combination of the teacher salary plus a post of responsibility allowance (incremental scales).

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

ECEC sector 0–5 (non-primary)

Once again, the historical absence of standardised role profiles or nationally agreed terms and conditions of employment in the ECEC (non-primary) sector has resulted in a variety of arrangements for deployment of staff to special assignments. The introduction of the Lead Educator post in the Workforce Plan, building on a previous role of Room Leader in the free preschool programme, is the closest articulation of a post of responsibility in this sector. This role is described as follows:

> "A Lead Educator will have responsibility for the learning and care for a group of children, leading the practice with that group" (*ibid*:52).

Further role profiles are set out *in Nurturing Skills* (*ibid: 121-136*). The different roles now have legal force through being the basis for the different pay rates specified in the Employment Regulation Orders in September 2022. *Nurturing Skills* commits to further development of roles of special responsibility, building on the INCO model, with the objective of developing a model of distributed leadership across ELC and SAC settings.

The role of Inclusion Coordinator (INCO) is regarded as a post of responsibility in ELC settings as it is usually a post allocated to an existing staff member, who is required to undertake a specialised qualification to occupy the post in the setting. This qualification and the operation of this post in the ELC setting is funded through the Access and Inclusion Model of supports for the inclusion of children with a disability in the ECCE programme of free preschool (see LINC 2022 for full details of the role profile of the INCO and the specialised course required for these staff).

ECE 4–5 years (primary)

There is a very well-established structure for the organisation and allocation of posts of responsibility in the primary school system (DES 2019).

They are part of a school's leadership and management structure. They are promotion posts and are referred to as Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal I and Assistant Principal II.

2.4 Pedagogical co-ordinators and supervisory staff

ECEC sector 0–5 (non-primary)

This category of staff in Ireland represents a very small percentage of the overall workforce, and traditionally has been employed either in national voluntary organisations, private large-scale ECEC services (e.g. chains) or private consultancy firms. There are no data available on the number, qualification requirements or terms and conditions of staff in these organisations. In 2015, the Better Start, National Quality Development Service was established to provide a range of supports for the improvement of the quality of provision in the ECEC (non-primary) sector. The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) was launched in June 2016 to enable the full inclusion and meaningful participation of children with disabilities in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. Early Years Specialists recruited to staff these new programmes had to be higher education graduates with a minimum of three years of relevant practice experience in ECEC (Pobal 2020). There are currently 147 Early Years Specialists employed by Better Start *National Quality Development Service* with a salary scale ranging between €41,528 and €56,968 per annum (Pobal employee management system/Pobal salary scale, information provided by personal email communication, January 2024).

Two distinct inspectorates monitor and evaluate the quality of the ECEC sector in Ireland. These are the TUSLA Early Years Inspectorate (TUSLA 2016) and the Department of Education Inspec-

torate (DE 2022b). Inspectors in each organisation must be higher education graduates. The Department of Education Inspectorate requires applicants for Early Years Inspector positions to hold a recognised qualification in ECEC and have a minimum of five years of practical experience in the ECEC sector preferably in a leadership role in a centre based ECEC setting providing for children aged 0–5 years. The TUSLA Early Years Inspectorate recruits from a wider range of qualifications with a significant number qualified as Public Health Nurses (TUSLA 2018).

2.5 Specialist support staff

ECEC sector 0–5 (non-primary)

Once again, due to the private sector nature of the significant majority of ELC settings, local arrangements are more generally the rule for the deployment of specialist support staff. Through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) a pilot programme has been established to allow for nursing support staff to be employed to support children with complex healthcare needs in mainstream ELC settings. Another pilot programme, The In-School and Early Years Therapy Demonstration Project, is a joint initiative by the two main government departments to provide specialised therapist support in school or preschool settings to children with disabilities (NCSE 2020).

ECE 4–5 years (primary)

The provision of therapeutic or other non-teaching supports for children in primary school (apart from SNAs) is generally managed by external agencies such as the Health Service Executive (HSE 2019), National Council for Special Education (NCSE 2022a) and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) (DE 2022c).

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

ECEC sector 0–5 (non-primary)

The Irish ECEC workforce is strongly female with less than 2% being male. Since the introduction of the universal free preschool education programme by the Irish Government in 2010, the qualification profile of the workforce has steadily improved due to the unprecedented introduction in 2010 of a contractual requirement for Preschool Leaders to have achieved minimum qualification levels to practise. The contractual qualification requirement for Preschool lead staff was raised to a minimum of a Level 6 major award in Early Childhood Education and Care in 2016, and a minimum of a Level 5 major award in ECEC became the regulated qualification to practise for all staff working directly with children in ECEC settings under the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016. The current qualification profile of staff in settings on contract to deliver state funded ECEC is represented in *Table 4* below.

Table 4

Ireland: ISCED levels of education, main programmes in Irish education/training, typical awards and National Framework of Qualifications Ireland (NFQI) levels

ISCED 2011 Level	Corresponds to:	Typical award	EQF Level	Award NFQI Level
0 Pre-primary education	Early Start and other pre-primary provision	QQI Certificate		Level 1/2
1 Primary education	Primary education		1	
2 Lower secondary	2nd level education – Junior Cycle	Junior Certificate	2	Level 3
3 Upper secondary	2nd level education – Senior Cycle	Leaving Certificate	3	Level 4
			4	Level 5
4 Post-secondary non-tertiary	Apprenticeship, Post Leaving Cert (PLC) courses, other Further Education and Training courses	QQI Level 5 Certificate	4	
		QQI Advanced Certificate	5	Level 6
5 Short-cycle tertiary education	Third level: Higher certificate HEI diploma	Higher Certificate	5	
6 Bachelor's degree or equivalent	Third level: Ordinary (three-year) or honours (four-year) Bachelor's degree Higher diploma	Ordinary Bachelor's Degree	6	Level 7
		Honours Bachelor Degree	6	Level 8
		Higher Diploma	6	Level 8
7 Master's degree or equivalent	Third level – master's degree and postgraduate certs/diplomas	Postgraduate Diploma Master's degree	7	Level 9
8 Doctoral degree or equivalent	PhD	PhD	8	Level 10

Source: Adapted from ISCED 2011 (UNESCO 2012)

Table 5

Ireland: ECEC staff (non-primary) – percentage according to qualification levels, 2023

Qualification Level	Percentage
No Qualification	6.7
NFQI Level 4	0.2
NFQI Level 5	24.3
NFQI Level 6	34.4
NFQI Level 7	11.8
NFQI Level 8	21.1
NFQI Level 9/10	1.5
Total	**100**

Source: Pobal 2023

The figure of 6.7% for unqualified staff in ECEC settings includes staff who worked only in school-age childcare (both those in SAC-only services and those staff employed in combined ELC/SAC services but who worked only with school-age children), as well as students on practice placements and volunteers. There are no specified qualification requirements for SAC staff.

There is also a small legacy from the 2013 policy decision to allow for a 'grandfathering' rule to apply to staff who are approaching retirement from their employment in the ECEC sector and who do not wish to undertake courses leading to the required regulated qualification. In such

cases staff can sign a declaration of their intention to retire from the sector and are then exempted from the minimum qualification requirement. This exemption was due to expire September 2021 but was extended for a further two years to September 2023.

The predominance of vocational qualifications at a lower level than a Bachelor's degree reflects the traditional absence of regulation for the ECEC workforce. Even with the introduction of regulation to practise in the ECEC sector, the required qualification will be set at a minimum level of 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQI). This is equivalent to ISCED 4 internationally (see *Table 4* above). However, despite the limited availability of funding to support the workforce to achieve higher level qualifications (a Learner Fund was set up in 2017 to support early years educators who complete degree programmes at level 7 or higher), there has been a steady increase since 2010 in the number of staff with a Bachelor's degree or higher working in the sector. In 2016, the percentage stood at 18% and was 34.4% in 2023 (Pobal 2023).

This has certainly been influenced by a range of incentives available to employers to recruit higher education graduates. Higher Capitation payments were established in the ECCE programme since 2011 and have recently been replaced by graduate premium payments for Lead Educators and Managers in the Core Funding Model in 2022. Since September 2022 there has been a higher minimum wage for Lead Educators and Managers who have a DCEDIY-approved qualification at level 7 or higher. These factors are likely to have been significant contributors to the rising proportion of graduates. It should also be noted here that *First 5* commits to a graduate-led workforce by 2028, and Nurturing Skills commits to introduce a new funding mechanism to support the upskilling of early years educators.

There are no data available regarding the ethnic breakdown of the ECEC workforce. However, processing of applications for contracts to deliver the Free Preschool in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme funding has led to the establishment of a qualification database which details qualifications currently accepted as fulfilling the contractual requirements for the DCYA funded free preschool education programme. This shows that there is a growing diversity in the qualification profile of the ECEC workforce albeit starting from a very homogeneous Irish national base.

Table 6

Ireland: Structural composition of ECEC staff (non-primary), 2023

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce in %
Staff with specialist higher education degree	34.4
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	58.9
Staff with non-specialist qualification	n/a
Unqualified staff	6.7
Specialist support staff (e.g. Speech Therapists)	n/a
Male staff	3.2
Staff with a background of migration	No comprehensive national data available; however, 13.9% of staff with qualifications achieved their initial qualification outside Ireland.

Source: Pobal 2023; 2022a, 105

ECE 4–5 years (primary)

The total number of Primary Teachers working with children aged 4 to 12 years on the payroll of the DE in 2022/23 was 38,976. There are no disaggregated figures for those working with 4 to under 6 year-olds in primary schools. Special Needs Assistants' (SNAs) employment is broken down into full time and part time as follows:

Table 7

Ireland: Special Needs Assistants according to gender and employment, 2022/23

	Full time	Part time	Full-time equivalent
Males	946	223	1,093
Females	12,603	4,792	15,734
Total	**13,549**	**5,015**	**16,827**

Source: DE 2022e

The combined workforce amounts to a total of 57,540 persons.

Table 8

Ireland: Structural composition of primary sector (no disaggregated data for pre-primary section), **2022/23**

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce in % n = 57,540
Staff with specialist higher education degree	68
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	n/a
Staff with non-specialist qualification (SNA)	32
Unqualified staff	n/a
Specialist support staff (e.g. speech therapists)	n/a
Male staff	Primary Teachers: 15 SNAs: 6
Staff with a background of migration	No national data available

Source: DE 2022a

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Regulation of qualification to practise in the ECEC sector was introduced in 2016. The Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 require that

> *"… all staff members working directly with children in pre-school services must hold at least a major award in early childhood care and education at level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework, or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent"* (Government of Ireland 2016).

The historical absence of regulation of staff qualification has resulted in a very diverse workforce whose members have undertaken a variety of initial professional studies (or in some cases none at all) before commencing work in ECEC settings. Into the future the likely range of IPE will comprise the following:

1. Completion of school leaving certificate (completed by the majority of pupils at the end of secondary education) as point of entry into a higher education programme in early childhood studies at Levels 6, 7 or 8 on the Irish national framework of qualifications (NFQI).
2. Completion of a further education programme in early childhood studies at Levels 4, 5 or 6 on the NFQI – this may also facilitate progression to awards in higher education as above.

For many in the ECEC sector in Ireland (outside of staff in primary schools), the latter route has been the most common. This is primarily due to the relatively recent introduction of minimum qualification requirements into the statutory regulations governing the registration and operation of ECEC services (specified as a vocational qualification QQI Level 5/ISCED Level 3); but is also a result of the low status with which work in this sector has traditionally been regarded (Duignan 2012; DES 2016a; DCEDIY 2021b).

Tables 9 to 11 give a brief overview of the main qualifying routes for core pedagogues and other key contact staff (e.g. Early Years Educators) in the 0–5 non primary ECEC sector. As all staff must now comply with regulatory requirements for a minimum qualification of a nationally accredited major award in Early Childhood Care and Education (or equivalent as detailed by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth list of recognised qualifications) (Government of Ireland 2023), the qualification route to achieving this award is common for all staff.

Table 9

Ireland: Centre Manager, ECEC 0–5 sector (non-primary)

Job title in English: *Centre Manager* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: School leaving certificate (secondary education) and/or completion of further education programme in early childhood studies. *Minimum requirement* = Level 5 (NFQI) major award in Early Childhood Care and Education or equivalent (only required for staff working directly with children) **Professional studies:** The duration, place of study and whether full or part time varies according to individual choice of educator. **Award:** Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 5 Certificate in Early Learning and Care **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011**: 4 **Main ECEC workplace:** The full range of ECCE settings for children 0–5 (non-primary)

Table 10

Ireland: Lead Educator, ECEC 0–5 sector (non-primary)

Job title in English: *Lead Educator* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: School leaving certificate (secondary education) and/or completion of further education programme in early childhood studies. *Minimum requirement* = Level 5 (NFQI) major award in Early Childhood Care and Education (or equivalent). **Professional studies:** The duration, place of study and whether full- or part-time varies according to individual choice of educator. **Award:** Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 5 Certificate in Early Learning and Care **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011:** 4 **Main ECEC workplaces:** The full range of ECCE settings for children 0-5 (non-primary)

Table 11

Ireland: Early Years, ECEC 0–5 sector (non-primary)

Job title in English: *Early Years Educator* **Profile:** Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: School leaving certificate (secondary education) and/or completion of further education programme in early childhood studies. *Minimum requirement* = Level 5 (NFQI) major award in Early Childhood Care and Education (or equivalent). **Professional studies:** The duration, place of study and whether full or part time varies according to individual choice of educator. **Award:** Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 5 Certificate in Early Learning and Care **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011:** 4 **Main ECEC workplace:** The full range of ECCE settings for children 0–5 (non-primary sector)

Table 12 summarises the IPE characteristics for Primary Teachers.

Table 12

Ireland: Primary Teacher

Job title in English: *Primary Teacher* **Profile**: (Pre-primary and) Primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: National Leaving Certificate; minimum points requirement. Restricted entry[8] **Professional studies:** 4 years at university **Award:** Bachelor's degree (honours) in Education – Primary **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main ECEC workplace:** Primary schools, classes in primary schools attended by 4–5 year-olds

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Vocational/Further Education Awards (ECEC sector 0–5, non-primary)

In 2018, Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI), the body responsible for the quality of further and higher education programmes in Ireland, also instituted a review of the Common Award System (CAS) (QQI 2011) which included standards for further education awards in Early Childhood Care and Education (QQI 2018). The CAS included a range of mandatory and elective component awards that could be selected by education and training providers who wish to deliver nationally accredited programmes of education and training for the early years sector in Ireland. The review was conducted by a Standards Review Group comprising representatives of the Early Learning and Care community of practice. This work took place concurrently with a similar review of higher education awards (see *Chapter **4.3*** below) and ultimately resulted in the publication of *Professional Award-type Descriptors at NFQ Levels 5 to 8: Annotated for QQI Early Learning and Care (ELC) Awards* in November 2019 (QQI 2019). These specially annotated Professional

[8] The number of places on initial primary teaching courses in Ireland is restricted annually by the Government. Each third level institution offering this programme has an allocation of places and sets the minimum points requirement for entry each year based upon demand. The average points requirement in 2016/7 was 465 (out of a possible 625). Alternative entry routes are available for mature students (The Teaching Council 2015b).

Award Type Descriptors (PATD) were then used as the basis for the development of new programmes of IPS at levels 5 and 6 on the NFQI. The introduction to the PATD explains the way in which they operate:

> *The Awards Standards herein set out, in broad terms, the standards of knowledge, skill and competence that must be achieved before a major award can be made in Early Learning and Care (ELC) at National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Levels 5, 6, 7 or 8. The awards standards are presented in the form of annotations to the NFQ Professional Award-type Descriptors (PATDs). The annotations explain how to interpret the PATD indicators when designing programmes leading to ELC awards* (*ibid*, 1)

The development of programmes leading to awards in ELC by educational institutions is governed by QQI validation processes (QQI 2017). The Awards Standards comprise a generic element, applicable to any professional award type and an ELC annotation. The annotation explains how the standards should be interpreted for ELC. The PATD for ELC also include a set of specific validation criteria as follows:

1. **Programme development**
   - 1.1 The programme will show evidence of the involvement of a broad range of expertise and experience in its development, including, Early Learning and Care professionals, curriculum development experts, programme providers, regulators, employers, higher education representatives.
   - 1.2 Programmes leading to a major award at NFQ Level 5 are expected to be at least one (full-time equivalent) academic year. Add on programmes leading to an ELC major award at NFQ Level 6 for those with an ELC major at Level 5 (or an equivalent award) are also expected to be at least one (full-time equivalent) academic year.
2. **Teaching staff**
   - 2.1 Teaching staff for programmes leading to ELC awards will hold a relevant Major Award at NFQ Level 7 or higher and either a teaching qualification or five or more years of teaching experience on programmes designed to prepare learners for practice in the ELC sector.
   - 2.2 The teaching team will include some with ELC qualifications, or equivalent, and previous experience working in the ELC sector.
   - 2.3 New staff members will be provided with an induction programme and all staff will have access to ongoing professional learning opportunities.
3. **Professional Practice placements**
   - 3.1 Professional Practice placements will be integral to the programme. Programme providers will maintain an appropriate code of practice for providers of Professional ELC Practice placement and associated procedures and criteria. Code of practice will apply to all aspects of the professional placements.
   - 3.2 Providers must specify (in writing as part of the application for validation) the intended learning outcomes for the practice placement and the strategy for the assessment of the achievement of those outcomes by learners.
   - 3.3 The programme will ensure that each (full-time) learner completes 150 hours of Professional Practice placement (per annum) in a minimum of two ELC settings: (1) working directly with children aged between 0 and 20 months and (2) working with children between 20 months and 6 years; with an appropriate balance between settings.

3.4 All Professional Practice placement settings must be with entities currently registered as service providers with TUSLA[9] and must meet the programme provider's criteria for placements selection.

3.5 During Professional Practice placements learners will have the opportunity to:

a) Observe experienced practitioners and reflect on these observations

b) Integrate theory and practice

c) Apply knowledge and practice

d) Acquire and demonstrate the required competence, values and work practices with babies, toddlers and young children in the context of their setting, family and community under the supervision of more experienced practitioners

e) Engage in self-reflection and self-evaluation of their own practice and engage in conversations with more experienced practitioners around their practice.

3.6 Learners must be Garda Vetted before going on Professional Practice placement and have completed the current *Children First* (DCEDIY 2021a) E-learning programme.

3.7 Providers will have policies and procedures covering elements such as: selection of placements to ensure a quality learning experience; an effective system to ensure the ongoing quality of the practice placements; procedures for effective communication with the practice placements; assessment of learners while on practice placement.

3.8 There will be a formal written agreement between the provider and the practice placement setting out respective roles and responsibilities and a code of practice for supervision of learners.

3.9 Professional Practice placement supervisors will be suitably qualified at NFQ level above that of the learner being supervised or will have appropriate experience/alternative qualifications.

3.10 Professional Practice placement monitors will be suitably qualified and experienced in ELC, be Garda Vetted and have experience in the assessment of learners.

3.11 Learners, Professional Practice placement supervisors and professional practice placement monitors will be informed about practice placement assessments, their link to programme learning outcomes and the marking criteria used.

3.12 While on Professional Practice placement, appropriate support, guidance and supervision arrangements will be maintained for the learner by the education programme team and supports will be in place for learners who are experiencing difficulties during the professional practice placement.

3.13 Learners must pass the Professional Practice placement element of the programme before an award can be made.

4. **Learner language competence**

4.1 Minimum English language and literacy competence at entry to the programme for speakers of English as a second language would be B2 in writing, reading, listening and speaking.

The emphasis on professional practicum and professional formation processes is the significant difference between these professional award type descriptors (PATD) for ELC and the preceding Common Award Standards (CAS). Their development in parallel with the professional award criteria and guidelines (PACG) for higher education programmes has also allowed for the develop-

[99] TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency through its Early Years Inspectorate is the statutory regulator of ELC/SAC services in Ireland.

ment of a suite of awards across the further and higher education systems that facilitate professional progression pathways for learners and removes traditional barriers between further and higher education awards by promoting continuity and coherence across the continuum of professional awards from QQI level 5–8. The PATD also promotes the possibility of cooperation across education and training providers in the development and validation of programmes leading to these awards thus providing greater consistency in the content and quality of initial professional education. (For further detail of the ELC related content in these award descriptors, see QQI 2019.)

Higher Education Awards

ECEC sector 0–5 (non-primary)

The Government commitment in *First 5* to support the development of a graduate-led workforce by 2028 in ECEC settings coincided with an initiative led by the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to develop a suite of professional awards from Level 5 to Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications for the Early Learning and Care sector. The first stage of this work resulted in the publication of *Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines (PACG) for Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) Degree Programmes for the Early Learning and Care (ELC) Sector in Ireland (2019).* The purpose of these criteria and guidelines is to support the development by higher education institutions of professional awards for early childhood educators, at Level 7 and Level 8 on the Irish national framework of qualifications. The aim is to guarantee consistency of approach and quality in provision of education, ensuring graduates are fully prepared to take on the complex challenges of practice in this field.

In 2020, the Minister for Education and the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth jointly instituted a Qualifications Advisory Board on a non-statutory basis to review Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) Degree Programmes for the Early Learning and Care (ELC) Sector against the PACG. By June 2022, a total of 27 higher education institutions had successfully submitted their Level 7 and Level 8 programmes for review and it is anticipated that the first graduates of these programmes will be available for employment in ECEC settings in 2024.

Details of the content of the Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines (PACG) for *Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) Degree Programmes for the Early Learning and Care (ELC) Sector in* Ireland may be viewed online (see DE 2022d).

ECE 4–5 years (primary)

Staff working in primary schools with children aged 4 and 5 years comprise qualified and registered Primary School Teachers and Special Needs or general classroom Assistants. Primary Teachers are required to have a higher education Bachelor's degree that meets the requirements of registration with the Teaching Council of Ireland and must meet the required Irish language proficiency requirements.

Table 13

Ireland: Mandatory Elements of Programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

The following are mandatory elements of all ITE programmes as stipulated by The Teaching Council of Ireland (2011).
Early Childhood Education (Primary)/Adolescent Learning (Post-primary)
– Inclusive Education (Special Education, Multiculturalism, Disadvantage, etc.)
– Numeracy
– Literacy
– Gaeilge (Irish) (Primary)

- The Teacher as Professional/Reflective Practitioner/Researcher
- Developing a Professional Portfolio
- Parents in Education – Co-operation and Collaboration
- The School as a Learning Community
- Preparation for School Placement
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment including School and Classroom Planning
- Differentiation
- Behaviour Management
- ICT in Teaching and Learning
- Legislation Relevant to School and Classroom
- The Teacher and External Agencies.

In all areas of study there should be provision for:

- The promotion of the love of learning, reflective practice and critical thinking
- The development of student teachers' understanding of schools as organisations
- The development of student teachers as researchers and lifelong learners
- Students' personal and social development, having regard to teachers' pastoral role
- Student teachers' literacy and numeracy and their competence in promoting and assessing literacy and numeracy as appropriate to their curricular/subject area.

The lack of specialised qualification requirements for the **Special Needs Assistants / Classroom Assistants** means that there are no specific competency or curricular requirements available for this role.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

ECEC 0–5 sector (non-primary)

The National Framework for Qualifications in Ireland (NFQI) describes a 10 level awards framework that provides clarity for learners regarding the potential pathways towards achieving qualifications awarded/recognized by the State (QQI 2021). This includes the options for linear progression through the Irish education system and for alternative entry routes and pathways including recognition of prior and experiential learning. The establishment of a suite of professional awards in ECEC (non-primary) since 2019 should provide greater opportunities for access transfer and progression for early years professionals into the future. The facilitation of career pathways that encourage continuing professional education is a core element of Nurturing Skills. It also includes a strong commitment to examining the development of a range of entry routes into the sector (including apprenticeships or other work-based learning, and access programmes in further and higher education) (DCEDIY 2021b, 55).

ECE 4–5 years (primary)

Entry into the teaching profession in Ireland is regulated by the Teaching Council of Ireland. There are also post-graduate routes into teaching (The Teaching Council 2015c).

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

ECEC 0–5 sector (non-primary)

A practicum in an ECEC setting is a requirement of all nationally accredited major awards in ECEC in Ireland**.** It is a core criterion for the recognition of international awards to be deemed equivalent to Irish awards in ECEC. Since the publication of the PACG in 2019, detailed specifications regarding the nature of this practicum element of IPE have been available to higher education institutions and this has been mirrored in the professional award type descriptors (annotated for Early Learning and Care published by QQI). This was a much welcomed development in Ireland as it streamlined this aspect of professional education across all national awards and addressed previously expressed dissatisfaction by graduates of ECEC award programmes at all levels (DES 2016a). See *chapter **4.2*** above for further details of guidelines for professional practica in initial professional education for ELC staff.

ECE 4–5 years (primary)

In the primary sector, supervised practicum for Primary Teachers is standardised and specified by the Teaching Council of Ireland. In general, it is required that 40% of initial professional education should comprise a supervised practicum. Further, it is a requirement of registration as a Primary Teacher that each student passes this element of the programme (The Teaching Council of Ireland 2011).

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

ECEC 0–5 sector (non-primary)

Once again, the traditionally unregulated nature of practice in ECEC in Ireland prior to 2016 has predicated against a coherent system for CPD**.** However, a number of significant developments have impacted on this situation including the establishment in 2014 of Better Start, National Early Years Quality Development Service (2022) and the National Síolta Aistear Initiative (NSAI) (Aistear Síolta 2016). Both of these initiatives have developed national programmes for CPD on a range of practice-oriented topics as well as online resources and materials to encourage engagement in internal/self-evaluation as a professional activity. Furthermore, the Access and Inclusion Model has had a significant impact through the delivery of the Leadership for Inclusion qualification and a range of other short courses to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream preschool settings (e.g. Hanen, Lámh, SPEL). A national initiative to provide training for ECEC (non-primary) staff in child safeguarding/child protection has also been established.

Other CPD opportunities are delivered through organisations and agencies at regional or local level, which are either funded by the state or membership fees to support quality improvement in ECEC. The courses offered through these organisations are varied and rarely adhere to a standardised format. ECEC staff traditionally have attended such CPD in their own time and at their own expense, however the Core Funding model established in 2022 includes funding to services to support early years educators to participate in CPD. In some instances, employers

may subsidise this activity for their staff but there are no national data available to establish the extent of this support. One of the five "pillars" of Nurturing Skills (DCEDIY 2021b, 70) is the development of a national CPD system for the ELC/SAC sector. This pillar includes commitments to:

- Adopt a "whole system" approach to CPD, with CPD to be coordinated by a single agency
- Develop a single national "gateway" to facilitate access to quality-assured CPD resources and supports
- Develop an online system to enable the recording, tracking and viewing of CPD engagement at individual and service levels
- Develop a single, national self-evaluation framework, supported by a suite of resources and training programmes
- Develop structures and processes for the quality assurance of CPD resources, activities and supports.

ECE 4–5 years (primary)

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of Primary School Teachers falls under the remit of the Teaching Council of Ireland (for details see: The Teaching Council 2015a). Under the terms of rule 58 of the Rules for National Schools, Primary Teachers are incentivised, through the availability of extra personal vacation days (EPV), to avail of a wide range of CPD courses during the summer months when schools are closed (DES 2017). Some of these courses are particularly relevant to teachers of children in the infant classes of primary schools (4 and 5 year-olds); however, they are not mandatory and are offered by a wide range of private education providers.

In the instance of the introduction of new curricula/practice in primary education, teachers will be offered specific CPD by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). The PDST was established in September 2010 as a generic, integrated and cross-sectoral support service for schools (PDST 2017). The PDST offers professional learning opportunities to teachers and school leaders in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

ECEC 0–5 sector (non-primary)

The annual Early Years sector profile report for 2022/2023, published in December 2023, highlights the continuing challenge of poor terms and conditions of employment that has existed across the ECEC workforce (non-primary) for decades. It reported that the average hourly wages of staff working directly with children was €14.34. When this data is disaggregated by role within the ECEC setting, it reveals that staff working directly with children in non-leadership roles earned an average of €13.93 (Pobal 2023).

It is important to note that a Joint Labour Committee for Early Years Services was established in 2021, and resulted in the Employment Regulation Orders that came into force in 2022. The legally binding minimum wage in the sector is now €13 per hour, and higher minimum wages are specified for those in Lead Educator and Manager roles and those in such roles who have relevant graduate qualifications.

ECE 4–5 years (primary)

Primary teachers' terms and conditions of employment are established centrally by the Department of Education in consultation with national representative bodies. Salaries are paid directly to teachers by the DE, however they are employed by the Board of Management of the school in which they work. Circular 0056/2021 provides full details of salaries and is available to view online (DE 2021).

A teacher's gross salary is comprised of various elements as follows – although these allowances may not be applicable to all teachers:

- The appropriate incremental point of the common basic scale
- An additional allowance for academic qualifications
- An additional allowance for a promoted post (i.e. principal, deputy principal, assistant principal, special duties teacher)
- Other special allowances
- Teachers' Children's Allowance in certain cases.

Special Needs Assistants (SNA)

Salaries of SNA's were revised in 2022 and full details can be found in circular 009/2022 and below. All SNA commence employment at point 1 on the salary scale (DE 2022e).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

A further disincentive to work in the ECEC sector may be the prevalence of part-time contracts for staff which translate into staff becoming unemployed for a number of weeks in each year. *Table 14* below shows the prevalence of this across the workforce.

Table 14

Ireland: ECEC staff working part time and full time[10]

Weeks paid per year	Number of staff	% of staff
Under 38 weeks	1,462	6
38–42 weeks	5,426	21
43–49 weeks	1,937	8
50–52 weeks	16,423	65

Source: Pobal:2023

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

In the ECEC (non-primary) sector, this is another aspect of Professional Practice that has not been developed in a standardised manner. However, the deficit has been noted in *Nurturing Skills* with a commitment to developing an induction programme for new graduates entering the ELC sector.

In the primary sector the induction and support processes for newly qualified teachers are detailed in the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT 2022).

[10] This data does not include managers working directly with children in ECEC settings

7.4 Non-contact time

There is very little information available at national level regarding the terms and conditions of employment of the ECEC 0–5 sector (non-primary) workforce due to the predominance of privately operated ECEC services. However, data on the number of non-contact hours worked per week by staff working directly with children was gathered in 2020/21 and showed that 60% worked at least one non-contact hour. The number of hours was higher for managerial staff in community (not-for-profit) ECEC settings. It is positive that recognition is being given by employers to the importance of paid non-contact time as a support for the professional activities of staff in ELC settings including for example, planning and internal review. However, the fact that 40% of staff still do not benefit from paid non-contact time is indicative of the need for continued promotion of the professional nature of this field of work. The Core Funding Model, which includes funding to services to support non-contact time for early years educators and managers, may serve to address this.

The terms and conditions of employment for Primary Teachers are standardised and subject to national pay agreements. This includes agreements regarding working hours and contact and non-contact time. The details of these arrangements are contained in Circular 11/95 (Department of Education and Science, Primary Branch 1995). The working time of SNAs is based upon the allocation of special education teaching resources to the school. However, in general there is minimal allocation (10–15 minutes before and after) of paid time for non-contact with children (NCSE 2022b).

7.5 Current staffing issues

Data collected on the length of time working in the ECEC (non-primary) sector identified that there was considerable mobility across the workforce in 2021/22 and in fact the annual staff turnover rate had increased 5% on the previous year to an average of 25% (Pobal 2022a, 119). When ECEC providers were surveyed regarding the retention of staff it became apparent that large, privately operated ECEC settings in urban areas had the greatest challenge in retaining staff and those with higher qualifications were the most likely to leave their employment. The survey data also revealed that only 29% of staff had moved to another ECEC setting, with 40% leaving the sector for employment elsewhere (a variety of other reasons accounted for the balance). It is also of note that 60% of ECEC settings with staff vacancies reported that they were experiencing difficulties with recruitment (*ibid*: 123).

The traditionally more stable workforce in the ECEC (primary) sector has also been experiencing challenges in the recruitment and retention of qualified Primary School Teachers. In both sectors the sustained rise in the cost and availability of housing is a strong factor influencing this situation.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

A series of policy reforms are underway in Ireland that will directly or indirectly impact on the situation of ECEC (non-primary) staff. These include changes to the way in which the sector is funded; the systems and structures that support the organisation and governance of the sector,

including regulation; the structure and delivery of initial and continuing professional development of the workforce and initiatives to begin to improve the terms and conditions of employment of staff. The following publications provide detail on each aspect of the reform agenda:

- *First Five: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families* (Government of Ireland 2018)
- *Partnership for the Public Good: A New Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, the Report of the Expert Group* (DCEDIY 2021c)
- *Review of Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) Operating Model in Ireland.* Report Submitted to Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Prepared by Indecon International Consultants (Indecon 2021)
- *Strengthening Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland, the Report of the OECD's Country Policy Review* (OECD 2021)
- *Nurturing Skills – The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, 2022-2028* (DCEDIY 2021b).

In 2022 and 2023, some of the actions and commitments contained in these publications have commenced implementation. Of note is the establishment of the Core Funding Model (First 5 2022) which is designed to promote the following objectives.

- Improved affordability for parents by ensuring that fees do not increase
- Improved quality through, among other things, better pay and conditions for the workforce
- Supporting the establishment of an Employment Regulation Order through the Joint Labour Committee (Early Years' Joint Labour Committee 2022)[11]
- Supporting the employment of graduate staff
- Improved sustainability and stability for services.

Nurturing Skills contains a comprehensive vision for the future of the ECEC (non-primary) workforce and identifies actions under five distinct but inter-related pillars.

- Establishing a career framework
- Raising qualification levels
- Developing a national Continuing Professional Development system
- Supporting recruitment, retention and diversity
- Moving towards regulation of the workforce.

Successful delivery of commitments under the five pillars will be supported by three "key enablers" that are identified in Nurturing Skills as:

- Improvement in pay and conditions of employment
- Coordination of the quality support infrastructure
- Ongoing engagement with the profession.

Another key reform agenda that has potential to impact upon the practice of ECEC in both non-primary and primary ECEC settings is that being undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA]. The NCCA has initiated an extensive consultation and research programme to review both *Aistear*, the early childhood curriculum framework (NCCA 2021) and the 1999 (NCCA 2020) primary school curriculum. The first ever Primary Curriculum Framework

[11] This initiative resulted in the establishment of a legally binding minimum hourly remuneration for staff in ELC/SAC settings. Two Employment Regulation Orders were established, one for early years educators and one for lead educators and managers.

was published in March 2023 (NCCA 2023) and marks the beginning of a period of sustained development of both curriculum content specification and continuing professional development for the ECEC (primary) workforce.

Impact of national initiatives to improve the quality of ECEC on the early years workforce

Since the establishment of the universal free early childhood care and education (ECCE) Programme in 2010 there has been a sustained national government commitment to capacity building of the ECEC (non-primary) workforce. Initially this took the form of a 'Learner Fund' which was established in 2014 to support early years educators to achieve a qualification in ECEC studies equivalent to a major award at NFQI level 5 or level 6. This was a very successful intervention and resulted in over 5,000 staff employed in ECEC settings achieving these awards (Pobal 2022b). The establishment of a higher capitation grant in 2011 and its successor, the graduate premium payments in Core Funding, acted to incentivise the employment of higher education graduates in ECEC (non-primary) settings. It has also proven to be influential in encouraging the development of the capacity of that workforce to engage with increased expectations regarding pedagogy and quality improvement.

Regulation has played a major role in the evolution of the ECEC (non-primary) sector. The commencement of the Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 (DCEDIY 2019) which transformed the workforce in ECEC (non-primary) into a regulated profession, sustained the demand for support for initial professional education and in more recent years the Learner Fund also offered bursaries to staff wishing to achieve NFQI Level 7 and Level 8 qualifications.

Another major initiative to build the capacity of the ECEC workforce was established in 2016 in the format of the Leadership for INClusion (LINC) in the Early Years programme. LINC, is a NFQI Level 6 Special Purpose Award (Higher Education), that is designed to support the inclusion of all children in the universal ECCE programme of free preschool. The course is offered for free to people working within Early Learning and Care and is fully funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Once qualified, graduates perform the role of Inclusion Coordinator within their Early Learning and Care Setting. This role was developed as part of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), a national Government strategy to support the inclusion of all children in the ECCE programme (AIM 2016). The LINC programme contains online and classroom based sessions in order to ensure a flexible and quality learning experience, enabling pre-school staff in full-time employment to participate in the programme. Over 4,000 staff have graduated from the programme in the period 2016–2021 and it will continue to operate until 2023 (LINC 2022).

The transformation of the qualification profile of staff in ECEC settings, as evidenced in *Table 5*, is strong testimony to the effectiveness of these initiatives. However, with the publication of *First Five* and *Nurturing Skills* and the commitment to a graduate-led workforce by 2028, there is a need for further investment of resources into IPE at higher education level. Plans for such investment are contained in *Nurturing Skills – The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare* 2022–2028 (DCEDIY 2021b) as previous discussed and have the potential to raise the profile, status and attractiveness of professional roles in the ECEC (non-primary) sector in the future.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Each of the policy documents listed in *chapter **6*** above were based on programmes of research and consultation. Most specific to the professionalisation of the ECEC workforce is the Workforce Development Plan for the Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare Sector in Ireland. This publication includes a vision for a graduate-led workforce in centre-based ELC settings and the introduction of registration and qualification requirements for home-based workers. The Plan includes commitments to "… raise qualification levels, to create professional development pathways and to promote careers in the sector" (*ibid*, 7). The background research studies that informed the Workforce Development Plan are published online (DCEDIY 2021b) and are available for review. The implementation of the plan is to be realised through a complex, but inter-related set of actions over the period 2022–2028.

The fact that the significant majority of ECEC settings are in receipt of funding from the State to deliver their services has allowed for the collection and collation of profile data through an annual beneficiary survey. Participation in this survey is obligatory since 2022, and it will be a very valuable source of profile data on the growth and development of the ECEC (non-primary) workforce into the future.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

The two years of the global COVID-19 pandemic, 2020–2022 served to highlight a wide range of challenges for the ECEC workforce in Ireland, both for those working with children in ECEC (non-primary) and in primary schools. The challenge of the largely private sector nature of ECEC (non-primary) was evident in the struggle many services experienced in retaining staff during periods of closure or limited operation due to public health restrictions. This struggle was significantly mitigated by the introduction of an employment wage subsidy scheme (Irish Tax and Customs 2022) which effectively stabilised the workforce and allowed this strongly private sector provision to continue to offer services during the pandemic. This scheme supported the idea of ECEC (non-primary) as a *public good* that should be substantially supported by the State in the same way as ECEC (primary), wider education provision and health services. This was reinforced in *Partnership for the Public Good* (DCEDIY 2021c) which was followed by the announcement of the Core Funding Model (DCEDIY 2021c) in December 2021. This included a commitment to improve the terms and conditions of employment of the ECEC workforce. How this translates into practice in a continued private for-profit ECEC sector will present a significant challenge in the coming years.

The pandemic also highlighted challenges for the practice of ECEC across all settings. These included working in partnership with parents and families, promoting the well-being of children, using ICT, supporting children with special educational needs and managing effective transitions across the early childhood continuum. The key challenge now is to ensure that the learning from these experiences is translated in professional education and support programmes.

A significant challenge for the ECEC workforce in Ireland is the continuing disparity between staff working in primary schools and those working in the non-primary sector. Whilst the past decade

has seen significant progress towards creating the context in which such parity could be established – through the establishment of a universal free preschool programme, increased State investment in ECEC provision, publication of professional awards for IPE and regulation of qualification to practice – there remains much work to be done. The scope and nature of this work has been identified in relation to the non-primary ECEC workforce (DCEDIY 2021b) and a complex series of implementation strategies is underway to deliver on the vision they articulate of a graduate-led sector fully equipped with the appropriate skills, knowledge and values to deliver high quality ECEC for babies, young children and their families in Ireland.

However, in addition to addressing challenges particular to the ECEC (non-primary) workforce there is the wider issue of addressing the disconnect between the two cohorts of the ECEC workforce, primary and non-primary. This is important because of the impact this disconnect has on the early learning and care experiences of children aged 0–5 years, particularly in relation to transitions across the continuum of settings funded by the State for children in this age range.

In recent years a number of national policy decisions have begun to erode the divide between these two workforces including in particular the establishment of universal free pre-primary education for all children for up to two years before enrolment in primary school. From a very low level of participation pre 2010, almost every child now attends some form of pre-primary education before entering primary school. The commission from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to the Department of Education Inspectorate to extend inspection to include early learning and care provision in 2016 was also a significant development and established parity of terms and conditions of employment for education inspectors in early years, primary and post-primary education contexts. More recently the establishment of a suite of professional award standards for qualifications for ECEC (non-primary) staff has identified the common aspects of initial professional education with ECEC staff in primary contexts and there is evidence that the higher education institutions delivering IPE for both cohorts of undergraduates have identified aspects of the content of IPE programmes that can be held jointly.

In summary, there is much reason to be optimistic regarding the potential for future ECEC workforce development in Ireland. A key challenge will be the retention of the current experienced workforce in the ECEC (non-primary) sector until these reforms are realised in practice.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

IRELAND

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

Early Learning and Care (ELC) is the widely accepted terminology for ECEC in Ireland. In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based provision are: (1) **ELC settings** when referring to facilities for 0 to 5 year-olds outside the school sector; and (2) **infant classes** in primary schools for 4 and 5 year-olds[1]. Any additional setting types are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Ireland

End of the 1960s	– The first playgroups are established. – In Dublin, the first state-funded ECEC setting opened in Rutland Street in 1969, which later became a model for Early Start centres in the country.
1973	A strong tradition of mothers remaining at home as primary carers of children in Ireland was reinforced by a ban on married women working in the civil service. This changed in 1973 when the so called 'marriage bar' was removed as a result of Ireland entering the European Union.
1991	Child Care Act
1994	The first Early Start centres are set up.
1997	Child Care (Pre School Services) Regulations 1996 and Child Care (Pre School Services) (Amendment) Regulations 1997 were commenced introducing first-ever statutory regulation for ECEC (non-primary).
1998	– Education Act – White Paper on Early Childhood Education
1999	National Child Care Strategy
2000	National Children's Strategy
2000–2006	Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme
2006	The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) produces the first quality framework *Síolta*, published by the Ministry of Education.
2006–2008	National Children's Investment Programme
2009	The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) publishes *Aistear*, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.
2010	Universal Free Pre-school Education in Early Childhood Care and Education settings (ECCE) Programme commences.
2013	National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Care and Education
2014	Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020
2015	– Report of Inter-Departmental Working Group: Future Investment in Childcare in Ireland – Better Start, the National Quality Support Service for the Early Years Sector is launched. – Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) launched to support the participation of children with disabilities in ECCE

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for settings for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. The relevant formats for Ireland are **0–5** and **4–5** years.

2016	– Commencement of Department of Education Inspection of the ECCE Programme of universal free preschool – Child Care Act (Early Years Services) regulations commenced, introducing first national registration system for early years services and mandatory minimum qualification requirements for staff. – Free enrolment in ECCE is extended to two years.
2017	Affordable Childcare Scheme
2018	Childcare Support Act comes into force.
2018/19	*First 5, A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families* is a 10-year reform strategy to include an overhaul of the ECCE system and structures supporting the delivery of ECEC (non-primary) (e.g. new funding models, measures to combat poverty, and workforce reform).
2019	– National Childcare Scheme (NCS) is launched to reduce childcare costs for parents. – Universal Design Guidelines for Early Learning and Care Settings published
2021	– Review of *Aistear, the early childhood curriculum* framework commenced – Amendments to Education Act – *Partnership for the Public Good: A New Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare*, the Report of the Expert Group – Review of Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) Operating Model in Ireland. Report Submitted to Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Prepared by Indecon International Consultants – *Strengthening Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland*, Report of the OECD's Country Policy Review – *Nurturing Skills – The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare*, 2022-2028
2022	Introduction of the Core Funding Model
2023	Publication of First Five Implementation Plan 2023 - 2025

Sources: Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010; Flood and Hardy 2013; Duignan 2018; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019; European Commission 2020b; Citizens Information 2021b, c

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

The early childhood education and care system in Ireland differs from most European countries in that there is no long tradition of state funded support for ECEC outside the primary school system which is open for enrolment of children from aged 4. However, since the first OECD review of ECEC in Ireland 20 years ago, the approach towards investing in the early years education and care outside the primary school system has changed considerably. Building on this shift in approach, the government is currently pursuing a comprehensive policy agenda through the "First 5" strategy (2019-2028) in terms of improving access, affordability and quality in the sector (OECD 2004; 2021b).

Today, ECEC for under 6 year-olds is primarily a bi-sectoral system funded and regulated by two lead ministries[3]. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) is responsible for the governance, quality, funding, regulation, monitoring and evaluation and workforce development of non-school settings for children under 6 years of age, co-operating with the Department of Education (DE) on issues of quality, curriculum development,

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Ireland provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are indicated within the text and in the references section.

[3] For the purpose of this report we will refer to the ELC services outside the education system as the **early years sector** and to provision for 4 and 5 year-olds within schools as the **primary sector**.

special needs education and workforce development. Although the governance and funding of ECEC provision is centralised, there is a national support system at district level which assists ECEC services with funding applications and improving the quality of provision. More than 30 City and County Childcare Committees (CCC) represent DCEDIY at the local level and are a first point of contact for providers and parents.

The Department of Education (DE) is responsible for a range of early education programmes in primary schools for children aged 3 and above with special educational needs, including Early Start (40) and Early Intervention classes for children with a diagnosis of autism (150). It also provides funding for early education provision to some children with disabilities, for education-focused inspections, curriculum development and provision of initial professional education for early years educators and primary school teachers (Frontier Economics 2020, 8). The DE is also responsible for infant classes in primary schools for 4 and 5 year-olds.

General objectives and legislative framework

Overarching goals of ECEC are to take a holistic approach towards promoting lifelong learning, supporting inclusion and diversity, especially for those with additional needs and improving quality and the infrastructure to support it, including the expansion of places.

The government's ten-year "First 5" strategy 2019-2028 for children in the first five years of life and their families commits to improving accessibility, affordability and quality in the ECEC sector by implementing national standards. In addition to improved and paid parental leave, parents should be able to access ECEC services more easily in order to better reconcile work and child-care (DCEDIY 2021). The strategy builds on the former government initiative Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, a national policy framework for children and young people from 2014-2020 (DCEDIY 2019a). It reinforces commitments to five overarching goals or outcomes: "Active and healthy; Achieving in learning; Safe and protected; Economically secure; Connected, respected and contributing" (Government of Ireland 2019). First 5 adopts the term **Early Learning and Care (ELC)** to define all regulated centre-based and home-based services that provide education and care from birth to compulsory primary school age. It does not include the early years of primary school (Government of Ireland 2019). In December 2023 a phase two Implementation Plan 2023–2025 was published by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. It outlined a number of strategic objectives to streamline the infrastructure that supports the governance, delivery, evaluation and monitoring of ELC services (DCEDIY 2023).

Both the Child Care Act, 1991 (amended 2016) and the Education Act, 1998 (amended 2021) provide the relevant legislation for early education and care. The Child Care Act sets out the basic regulatory requirements of ECEC settings, such as health and safety provisions (Government of Ireland 2021a).

The Education Act emphasises the right of parents to a free choice of provision. The general objectives of the education system are to help each person reach their full potential and thus contribute to the social, cultural and economic development of society. Important goals are the promotion of equal opportunities, inclusion, lifelong learning and the support of individual needs.

In 2019, Universal Design Guidelines for Early Learning and Care Settings were published, aiming to improve accessibility to early learning settings for all children. The guidelines follow a participatory approach (European Commission 2020b).

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Attending an ELC setting or an infant class in primary school is voluntary (Department of Education 2019).

Since September 2016, all children aged 2 years 8 months before 31 August are eligible to attend a universal two-year state-funded **ECCE programme** (early childhood care and education) until they are 5 years 6 months old. Attendance is free of charge for three hours a day for a total of 76 weeks. There is no such programme for children younger than 2 years 8 months.

Compulsory schooling starts at the age of 6.

Main types of provision

Early years sector

Centre-based **ELC (early learning and care) settings** (non-school) are variously called: crèches, nurseries, preschools, *naíonraí* (Irish medium preschools), playgroups, playschools, day care services, Montessori groups, drop-in centres. Settings eligible for government subsidies receive these primarily through the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

ELC settings offer the following (TUSLA 2022a):

- Sessional pre-school service lasting 3½ hours or less
- Part-time day care service lasting a minimum of 3½ and a maximum of 5 hours a day (half-day)
- Full day care service for more than 5 hours a day
- Short-term drop-in centre services (maximum two hours)
- Temporary pre-school service during a short absence of the parents
- Overnight pre-school service during which children are taken care of for a total of more than 2 hours between the hours of 19:00 and 6:00.

All ECEC settings are required to register with TUSLA - the Child and Family Agency. Since 2014, TUSLA has been the state authority (Early Years Inspectorate) responsible for the supervision and monitoring of early years services for children from birth to 5 (TUSLA 2022b). The Quality and Regulatory Framework (QRF), developed by TUSLA and the DCEDIY, provides reference support for ECEC providers (TUSLA 2022a).

Through the ECCE programme (see above), which includes children in Early Learning and Care (ELC) and - if enrolled in a primary school - School Age Childcare (SAC), children may attend a setting for three hours a day, five days a week and 38 weeks a year, free of charge, in the two years prior to compulsory school enrolment. Moreover, the National Childcare Scheme provides a flat-rate support for parents of 50c per hour towards the cost of a registered ELC place for a maximum of 45 hours per week (Government of Ireland 2021b).

In **home-based provision**, a registered childminder cares for up to five children up to 6 years of age at home alongside their own children. The times are agreed upon by the parents and the childminder (Citizens Information 2021a). However, home-based ECEC provision is largely unregulated and only a very small minority of childminders are registered (OECD 2021b, 35). Looking forward, a National Action Plan for Childminding (2021-2028) has set out phased steps for supporting and improving the quality of this neglected form of ECEC provision at all levels, including strengthening qualifications, funding support and monitoring (Government of Ireland 2021c).

In 2022, there were 4,483 ECEC providers with a contract with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) (Pobal 2023). 16% of ELC/SAC institutions were located in disadvantaged areas.

According to an annual survey of centre-based setting providers (N=4,009), in 2022/23 the most common form of enrolment in services for under 6 year-olds was part-time morning (82%), followed by half-day (39%) and full-day (37%) (Pobal 2023).

Primary sector

Infant classes in primary schools for 4 and 5 year-olds are funded by the Department of Education. Although compulsory education does not start until the age of 6, some 4 and most 5 year-olds attend a junior or senior infant class (ISCED 02), usually for 5 hours and 40 minutes a day (Department of Education 2023). The age of junior infants has been steadily increasing for the past twenty years, although the trend has accelerated in recent times. This is most likely due to the introduction of the free preschool scheme in 2010, and its expansion to two years in 2016. Overall, the proportion of 4 year-olds (and younger) in junior infants has fallen from 46.3 per cent in 2002 to 16.9 per cent in 2022 (Department of Education 2023c).

In addition, the Department of Education also funds **early intervention programmes in schools**. These are primarily targeted at the inclusion of children with special educational needs and include Early Start and Early Intervention classes for children with a diagnosis of Autism. The Early Start programme was initiated as a pilot project for inner-city children in Dublin in 1994. Children must be at least 3 years and 2 months and no more than 4 years and 7 months old on 1 September of the year in which they are enrolled. In 2021, the Early Start programme was offered in 40 schools. Children attend for two and a half to three hours every weekday for about 183 days a year (same as primary school). Early Intervention classes for children aged 3–5 years with a diagnosis of autism were established by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and were offered in approx. 150 schools in 2021. The school receives an allocation of one teacher for the early intervention class and the teacher is allocated to the class by the principal. Further resources are also made available to support the class, including building, training and transport. Six children are enrolled in each class and each class typically has two Special Needs Assistants (SNA) The classes follow the infant school day, i.e. 4 hours 40 minutes each day. Following early intervention, it is intended that the child will attend a mainstream class unless there is professional guidance that they require a special class.

Enrolment rates for children between 4 years of age and compulsory school entry are among the highest in Europe and among those with the most increases between 2009 and 2018 (European Commission 2020a).

Provider structures

Early years sector

ECEC in Ireland is operated by private providers. Through the introduction of Core Funding in 2022 all Early Learning and Care (ELC) services now have access to government funding (Together for Better Early Learning and Childcare 2023).

The relative share of private for-profit services has increased somewhat over the past few years, whereas the share of private non-profit community services (typically with a volunteer management board which may include parents) has remained stable. Private providers include chains, large structures and small structures (OECD 2021b, 34).

Of the 4,483 ELC/SAC providers, in services three-quarters (75%, 3,341) were private for-profit in 2022/23, and one-quarter (25%, 1,142) were private non-profit community settings. Overall,

108,619 children up to compulsory school age were registered in ECCE-programmes (Pobal 2023).

Table 1 illustrates the predominance of private ECEC provision in Ireland. According to these Eurostat 2021 data, in 2021, only a small percentage of children over 3 years of age in Early Start/Early Intervention settings and no children under 3 years of age attend a publicly funded programme.

Table 1

Ireland: Number of children in early years settings by provider type, 2021

Provider type	Under 3 year-olds	Share in %	3 years to statutory school age	Share in %
Private for-profit and Private non-profit	3,934	100.0	108,621	9.2
Public	0	0	905	0.8
Total	**3,934**		**109,526**	

Source: Eurostat 2023e

Primary sector

ECEC (primary) mostly takes place in public primary schools, i.e. in infant classes in mainstream national schools. *Table 2* also shows the number of children under and over 4 years of age attending a special school or a private school.

Table 2

Ireland: Number of children under and over 4 years of age in primary school infant classes by school type, 2001 and 2022/23

	Mainstream national		Special national		Private primary	
	2001	**2022/23**	**2001**	**2022/23**	**2001**	**2022/23**
Under 4 years of age	25,792	10,697	171	253	910	697
Over 4 years of age (5, 6, 7 years)	152,545	185,040	745	993	1,822	1,542
Total	**178,337**	**195,737**	**916**	**1,246**	**2,732**	**2,239**

Source: CSO 2023

The strong decrease in the number of under 4 year-olds attending both public and private primary schools between 2001 and 2022 is attributed to the increasing number of younger children participating in the 'free preschool' programme from 2010 onwards (Department of Education 2022a).

Participation rates in regulated ECEC settings

Early years sector

In 2022/23, 221,513 children were enrolled in at least one government-subsidised programme, an increase of 22% compared to the year before. This is mainly due to the statutory entitlement for the NCS age eligibility increasing from 3 years to 15 years and the increase to the universal minimum subsidy. 108,619 children benefited from ECCE programmes (Pobal 2023).

From August 2022 to August 2023, a total of 144,810 children from 103,048 households received financial assistance under the National Childcare Scheme (NCS). Since 2019, this scheme includes a statutory entitlement to financial support to attend ELC/SAC facilities (Pobal 2023). Subsidies are paid to providers, who reduce parental fees for hours beyond the ECCE entitlement (OECD 2021b, 33).

Broken down by age, the highest enrolment rates in non-school early years settings are found among 3 and 4 year-olds. In 2023 this was the case for 90.9% of children aged 3 and for almost 80% of 4 year-olds (see *Table 3*).

Table 3

Ireland: Number and enrolment rates of children in centre-based ECEC settings by age, 2023

Age	Number of children	Enrolment rates
Under 2 years	15,878	14.0
2 year-olds	24,623	42.0
3 year-olds	54,480	90.9
4 year-olds	47,621	78.1
5 year-olds	6,308	9.9

Source: Pobal 2023

According to Eurostat data, slightly fewer under 3 year-olds were enrolled in ECEC in 2022 than in 2005 (19.1% vs. 20%). The enrolment rates of children from 3 years to school entry age increased since 2005 from 78% to 94.4% (see *Table 4*).

Table 4

Ireland: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2005–2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	14	64
	Over 30 hours	6	14
	No enrolment in ECEC	80	22
2010	1 to 29 hours	21	73
	Over 30 hours	8	17
	No enrolment in ECEC	71	10
2015	1 to 29 hours	21.7	73.5
	Over 30 hours	9.0	18.8
	No enrolment in ECEC	69.3	7.7
2022	1 to 29 hours	6.7	81.3
	Over 30 hours	12.4	13.1
	No enrolment in ECEC	80.9	5.6

Source: Eurostat 2023b

Primary sector

By 2022/23, a total of 126,566 4 to 6 year-olds were attending entry classes; of these, almost all 6 year-olds (97.3%) were enrolled in a senior infant class, and most of the 5-year-olds (83.2%) were enrolled in a junior infant class (see *Table 5*).

Table 5

Ireland: Number of children in infant classes in primary schools by age, 2022/23

	Under 4 years	5 year-olds	6 year-olds	Total
Junior infants	10,695	51,296	1,446	63,437
Senior infants	1	10,382	52,746	63,129
Total	**10,696**	**61,678**	**54,192**	**126,566**

Source: CSO 2023

Financing and costs for parents

In 2019, the average expenditure of OECD countries on ECEC was 0.87% of gross domestic product (OECD 2021b, 25), whereas in Ireland, in 2019, only 0.33% of GDP was spent the early education sector in 2017 (OECD 2023). Looking forward, the government budget for 2022 includes plans for increasing public funding on ECEC (OECD 2021b, 24).

In order to receive subsidies from DCEDIY, settings in the **early years sector** must be registered with TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency. The providers receive per capita lump sums from DCEDIY, in return for which they must ensure that the facility is open free of charge to parents for three hours a day, five days a week and 183 days a year. Fees are charged for additional services outside the three hours of educational activities, e.g. excursions, meals (DCEDIY 2021).

The Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) is responsible for state subsidy of the early years sector. Care for children under 3 years old is usually paid for by the parents. However, since 2017, they have been supported by the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) in terms of costs. This strategy aims to increase accessibility to services and reduce poverty. Since January 2023, a universal subsidy of €1.40 per hour (with a maximum of 45 hours per week) is available to all families with children under 15 years attending ELC or school-age childcare services.

In addition, the former "free preschool year" for children between 3 years and 4½ years of age introduced in 2010 was extended to two years (the age of eligibility was lowered to 2 years 8 months) since 2016 until the start of primary school.

In 2022, a Core Funding Model was introduced. €259 million in full year costs includes allocations for improvements in staff pay and conditions, administrative staff/time, a contribution to non-staff overhead costs, and a contribution to support the employment of graduate Lead Educators across ELC and to support graduate Managers in ELC or combined ELC and SAC services.

The majority of Core Funding (€212 million of the €259 million) is distributed based on a service's capacity – the opening hours, opening weeks and the age group of children for whom services are provided as well as number of places available. It gives providers a stable income source based on the nature of the service they deliver. A provider's income now consists of Core Funding, NCS and ECCE subsidies, and parental fees.

Structuring Core Funding primarily based on capacity means that services have an allocation each year that does not fluctuate in line with children's attendance, thus contributing to services' sustainability and stability. The new funding model will include funding for universal and targeted measures to address socioeconomic disadvantage (Together for Better Early Learning and Childcare 2023).

Fees are generally set by the provider. In 2022/23, for full-day attendance the weekly average it was €197.43, for part-day €115.16. The younger the child, the higher the fees (€206.27 for full-day attendance for under 1 year-olds, €189.96 for over 5 year-olds); in Dublin the fees are higher

than elsewhere. Private institutions charge more than community ones €205.88 vs €174.33 for full-day attendance) (Pobal 2023).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 19% of net household income on childcare costs[4] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Through the National Childcare Scheme (NCS 2019), parents receive a flat rate for children under 3 years of age and an income-related amount for children up to 15 years of age. Since 2022, the lump sum can also be granted for up to 15 year-olds - parents can choose the option that is more favourable for them. The prerequisite is that the provider is registered with TUSLA. Since August 2021, the NCS system has replaced all previous support programmes. This does not include the ECCE programme, which will continue to offer free education units in the two years before primary school (Citizens Information 2021a, 2021b).

Under the leadership of the DCEDIY, a review of the established funding model was undertaken with a remit to assess its effectiveness in terms of quality, sustainability and inclusion. The opinions of providers, parents and other stakeholders were canvassed. The group consisted of representatives from all relevant early education agencies, financial and economic experts, and representatives from ministries. A report issued in December 2021 (DCEDIY 2021).

As part of the school system, infant classes in the **primary sector** are free of charge.

Staff to child ratios and group size

Early years sector

In the early years sector, one qualified member of staff cares for a maximum of three children under 1 year, five between 1 and 2 years, six between 2 and 3 years or eight over 3 year olds (see *Table 6)*.

Table 6

Ireland: Maximum number of children per group/professional in ECEC settings by age, 2022/23

Age	Max. number of children per professional	Max. number of children per group
Under 1 year	3	n/a
1 year-olds	5	n/a
2 year-olds	6	n/a
3 year-olds	8	22
4 year-olds	8	22
5 year-olds	8	22

Source: Eurydice 2023, 4

Furthermore, there are requirements regarding the square metres per child in ELC settings: 3,5sqm for children under 1 year, 2.8 for children aged 1 to 2 years, 2.35 for children aged 2 to 3 years and 2.3 for children aged 3 to 6 years (Eurydice 2023, 4).

A childminder in home-based provision who looks after five children or more must, like other providers, be registered with TUSLA (DCEDIY 2021). A maximum of two children may be under 15 months old (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 90).

[4] The calculation is based on the following fictitious model: two parents working full-time (average income); two 2 and 3 year-old children in full-time care; relevant care allowances included.

Primary sector

In the primary sector, groups in the Early Start programme usually consist of 30 children, 15 of whom are present in the morning (9:00 to 11:30) and 15 in the afternoon (12:00 to 14:30). Each group is led by a Primary School Teacher and a qualified Childcare Worker and, where appropriate, supported by parents working on a voluntary basis (Citizens Information 2021d). When six children aged 3–5 years diagnosed with autism are enrolled in Early Intervention classes, each class typically has two Special Needs Assistants (SNA). The change in average class size has been relatively stable during the last 20 years with its lowest point in 2021 at 22.8 (highest in 2015 at 24.9). The number of classes with 35 or more pupils fell significantly between 2001 and 2022 (from 13,844 to 2,435). The pupil to teacher ratio on the other hand has fallen consistently over the same period, from 18.4 in 2001 to 13.4% in 2022 (Department of Education 2023c, 6, 9).

Curricular frameworks

Early years sector

The Department of Education is responsible for the curricular and quality frameworks developed for the early years sector, but these do not apply to primary school infant classes (Department of Education 2021a).

Aistear, The Early Childhood Curricular Framework was introduced in 2009 for all **early years services** as a non-mandatory framework for working with children aged 0 to 6 years. It is structured around four overarching themes: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communication, and Exploring and Thinking. For each of these areas, specific skills, attitudes and values are defined. It was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) over a long period of time in close collaboration with the early years sector. The NCCA is also responsible for the implementation of Aistear. Currently, the framework is under review, with stakeholder consultations being held in 2022 (NCCA 2021a).

For settings which have a contract with the Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth for the two free years of early learning and care before starting school, the framework is mandatory. Settings for children under 3 years of age may develop their own curricula/programme as long as they adhere to the core principles of *Aistear* (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 96ff).

Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (2006), is a process-oriented framework and sets out quality criteria based on 12 principles: the value of early childhood; 'children first'; parenting; relationships; equality; diversity; enriching environments; care; the role of adults; teamwork; pedagogy and play. 16 quality standards and relevant indicators are intended to help translate the vision of quality into practice. Settings participating in the ECCE free pre-school scheme must develop a programme of activities based on this quality framework (Department of Education 2021a).

The NCCA has published guidance for the implementation of *Aistear* and *Síolta*.

Primary sector

Curricular guidelines for the **Early Start** programme in the primary sector include structured play activities designed to enhance children's language, cognitive and social development.

Infant classes in primary schools follow the Primary School Curriculum (1999), which is structured around seven areas of learning: language (English and Irish); mathematics; social, environmental and science education (history, geography and science); arts education (visual arts, mu-

sic, drama); physical education; social, personal and health education; religious, ethical education (NCCA 2021b). In March 2023 a new primary curriculum framework for primary and special schools was published. It builds on the successes and strengths of previous curricula while recognising and responding to challenges, changing needs, and priorities; provides agency and flexibility in schools; makes connections with what and how children learn in preschool, primary, special, and post-primary schools; identifies and responds to emerging priorities for children's learning; changes how the curriculum is structured and presented and supports a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to learning and teaching. The curriculum is presented in five broad curriculum areas: 1. Language, 2. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education, 3. Wellbeing, 4. Arts Education and 5. Social and Environmental Education. Additionally, schools can design their own programme in accordance with the ethos of the school (Department of Education 2023a).

Digital education

In the *Aistear* curriculum framework, handling digital media is not a specific requirement but it is recommended that they be integrated into children's daily lives. This was also foreseen in the digital strategy for schools 2015-2020 (including infant classes), which produced a digital learning framework to support schools. Here, in addition to incorporating digital technologies into learning processes, the digital skills of professionals and the digital infrastructure of institutions are addressed. The foundations are to be laid in early childhood through playful, active and question-centred approaches. For the ELC institutions, it was found that there is need for action but currently no agreed procedure; for example, there are still questions regarding the age-appropriate use of digital media (Department of Education 2020).

Monitoring – evaluation

Child-related assessment

There is no formal evaluation system in the **early years sector** in Ireland. However, the curricular framework *Aistear* contains guidelines for assessing children's developmental progress and planning the next stages of learning. As a rule, children are assessed through observation. How the results are recorded is left to ECEC staff. It is recommended to document learning progress by means of a portfolio according to the areas mentioned in the curriculum (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 103f).

In the **infant classes** in primary schools, observations or screening tests are carried out in order to detect possible developmental delays or difficulties as early as possible. Children are also encouraged to evaluate their own activities (NCCA 2021c).

Centre-based internal evaluation

The *Síolta* Quality Framework contains information on self-evaluation. The implementation of self-evaluation measures is not obligatory, but recommended. As part of this quality assurance process, settings may document relevant steps in a 'quality portfolio' (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 126f). In 2015, *Better Start* – a national quality support service for the Early Learning and Care sector – was established by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and hosted by Pobal. *Better Start* promotes quality and inclusion in Early Learning and Care (ELC) settings for children from birth to 6 years of age in Ireland and offers three programmes: "Quality Development Service", "The Access and Inclusion Model"

and "Early Years Learning and Development Unit". The Quality Development Service includes the provision of onsite mentoring and coaching to support internal quality review and development processes (Better Start 2023).

For infant classes in primary school a comprehensive system of school self-evaluation (SSE) is mandated by the Ministry of Education. During 2023–2026, schools will have autonomy to choose the focus of their SSE if they have a three-year plan which addresses, for example, context-specific school priorities related to teaching, equity and inclusion. In this period schools are supported by materials, inspections, collaborations with and between schools (Department of Education 2022b).

External evaluation

The monitoring and external evaluation of ECEC in Ireland is divided across three main institutions:

(1) TUSLA, The Child and Family Agency is responsible for assessing regulatory compliance in the early years sector. Inspections take place on the basis of the 2016 amended regulations of the Childcare Act (1991) and are based on the Quality and Regulatory Framework (QRF) published by TUSLA in 2018 which also offers guidance to providers on quality aspects (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 125). In addition to observations, checklists are also used. The reviews take place approximately every three years and the results are made available to the public.

(2) The Inspectorate of the Department of Education is responsible for evaluating quality in institutions participating in the ECCE Scheme and since 2022 for all ELC settings receiving Core Funding. The inspections (Early Years Education Inspections, EYEIs) are legally provided for in the Education Act 1998 (section 13(3)b) and are coordinated with the DCEDIY. They focus on the quality of children's learning processes in different areas, the learning context, learning processes, children's experiences and management and leadership for learning; they are primarily conducted through observation of practice. The inspections are based on a quality framework informed by the *Aistear* and *Síolta* principles. The framework describes 20 key aspects of best practice. After the inspection, the providers receive feedback and a written report with recommendations for quality improvement is sent to the ECEC setting. These reports are published. There are also follow-up inspections to assess the progress of the facility in implementing the recommended actions (Department of Education 2021c).

(3) Pobal, a government-funded, non-profit organisation, manages and monitors early years funding programmes on behalf of government departments, other national agencies and the EU. It works closely with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, where it is responsible for the disbursement of government funds to early years services. It also inspects the institutions to check whether the conditions of each funding programme are being adhered to (Pobal 2022).

Support for quality improvement is offered by a number of actors, including local City and County Childcare Committees, National Voluntary Childcare Organisations and the aforementioned *Better Start* (OECD 2021b, 40).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

– *Early years sector*

In June 2016, a new Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) was introduced for children attending early years services. The model includes seven levels of support, depending on the needs of the

individual child. *Levels 1 to 3* provide general support that promotes an inclusive culture in institutions. This includes the commitment of the setting to a Charter of Diversity, Equality and Inclusion and the publication of a setting-specific inclusion strategy; the funding by the DCEDIY of a new university degree programme in Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years for professionals who wish to work as inclusion coordinators; and a multi-year training programme for early years staff. *Levels 4 to 7* refer to a range of targeted supports to promote the participation of children with special educational needs. These may include: accessing advice and support from early childhood experts; applying for special equipment or minor alterations; accessing therapy services; applying for additional per capita funding for further staff support in the setting (DCEDIY 2021).

In 2022/23, 14,822 children with special needs were enrolled in 3,197 ELC and SAC facilities. 57% of all facilities participated in the AIM model (Pobal 2023).

In 2018/19, more than three-quarters (77%) of early years settings had at least one child with special needs, and 54% had at least one with a disability (Eurochild 2021).

The Health Service Executive (HSE) provides a free screening test for pre-school children. In addition to an assessment of hearing, vision and physical abilities, it also includes language development (HSE 2021).

– *Primary sector*

In the school sector, children with special educational needs attend mainstream settings whenever possible; sometimes in a special class or group or on an integrated basis with supports. There are also special schools for children with complex disabilities.

For the inclusion of children with special educational needs, there is also a Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan, updated in 2017, which also applies to the infant classes. This plan includes a standardised system for identifying disadvantages and an integrated School Support Programme (SSP) in a multi-layered approach. The action plan also emphasises the involvement of parents and families (Department of Education 2021b).

Children with a migration background – Children from Traveller and Roma communities

The wide range of private institutions in Ireland makes it difficult to find robust data on children with a migration background.

In 2022, 13.3% of the population had a non-Irish citizenship; of these, just over half (53%) were from other EU27-countries. In the group of under 5 year-olds 6.4% had a non-Irish background, just under two-thirds (65%) of them came from other EU countries (Eurostat 2023c, own calculations).

For refugee children up to the age of 5, the Community Childcare Subsidy Re-settlement (CCSR) programme provides free part-time and full-day care to support their integration into Irish society (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 61).

17% of settings had at least one Traveller child enrolled in 2018/19, and 7% had at least one Roma child enrolled. 12% of all children enrolled did not speak English or Irish (Eurochild 2021). In 2022/23, national statistics report 907 Roma children and 2,533 Traveller children in 303 and 687 ELC/SAC settings respectively. While 74% of Roma children (670) attended private institutions, the majority of Traveller children (65%, 1,650) were enrolled in community institutions (Pobal 2023).

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Maternity leave lasts 42 weeks, at least two of which must be taken before the birth. For 26 weeks, a weekly amount of €262 is paid, provided that the mother was in compulsory employment for 39 weeks in the 12 months before the birth.

The two weeks of **Paternity leave** must be taken in one go during the first six months after the birth and are paid at €262 per week.

Unpaid **Parental leave** is granted for 26 weeks per parent and child and is not transferable, unless both parents work for the same employer. In this case, 14 weeks can be transferred to the other parent with the employer's consent. Parental leave can be taken until the child's 12th birthday. Both parents may also take parental leave at the same time and in different blocks of at least six consecutive weeks. All persons who have been continuously employed by the same employer for one year are entitled to parental leave.

After taking maternity leave and parental leave, each parent is entitled to a further seven weeks of **Parent's leave**, remunerated at €262 per week, which must be taken in the first two years after the birth, even by both parents at the same time.

In 2019, maternity allowances were paid to 5.3% of employed mothers. Take-up of Paternity leave rose to 48% in 2020. Also, the take-up of paternity benefit has increased significantly in recent years (from 27,295 in 2019 to 26,539 in 2021). After the introduction of *Parent's leave* in 2020, its take-up increased significantly: from 16,683 in 2020 to 51,395 in 2021. It is estimated that nearly 100% of mothers and 48% of fathers made use of it in 2021. Data on the overall take-up of parental leave is not available.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Ireland

*Country expert assessment by **Maresa Duignan***

Ireland has made major progress in the development of the provision of ECEC services for children aged 0–6 years since 2000. With an almost 200-year history of infant education in primary schools for children aged from 4 years, attendance at 'pre-school' ECEC provision was traditionally low and exacerbated by a low participation rate of mothers of young children in the labour market. In 2023, Ireland's demographic, economic and social policy profile has undergone radical change and the State has responded positively in relation to the provision of ECEC services.

The level of state investment in ECEC (non-primary) provision exceeded €1 billion for the first time in the national budget for 2022 and a suite of national policy commitments were published to articulate a clear, strategic and cross government vision for the future development of the sector (DCEDIY 2022).

Whilst much of this commitment was built on decades of advocacy, research and evaluation of a continuum of previous government initiatives, the global Covid-19 pandemic (2020–2022), certainly highlighted the importance of realising this vision in a timely manner. During this period, the important role played by ECEC provision as a critical support for both economic activity and an inclusive society was widely accepted. In 2024, a renewed focus on development of the ECEC sector is gathering momentum. A set of cross government initiatives have been established to ensure that Ireland is a nurturing, enriching place to be a child. As the vision for *First 5, A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families* 2019–2028 states:

[5] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Ireland by Stephan Köppe und Dorota Szelewa in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References).*

All babies' and young children's early years will be valued as a critical and distinct period which should be enjoyed. Families will be assisted and enabled to nurture babies and young children and support their development, with additional support for those who need it. Those providing services for babies, young children and their families will be equipped to contribute to their learning, development, health and wellbeing. Community contexts will help babies and young children make the most of their early years and fulfil their potential. (DCEDIY 2018).

Whilst the range of initiatives are complex and cross-cutting, the core objectives can be summarised under the following headings:

1. **Improving access** – The commencement of Core Funding is a major step forward in state support for access to ECEC. Core Funding improves affordability for parents by instituting a fee freeze in participating early learning and care services; access for parents by expanding the capacity being offered by the sector, particularly for younger children; quality including promoting stability across the workforce through improved pay, conditions and career structure underpinned by Employment Regulation Orders; and operational stability and sustainability for providers.
2. **Promoting inclusion and participation –** A review of the innovative Access and Inclusion model of supports for children with disabilities in ECEC provision has been completed and a report is due to be published in 2024. Enrolment data would suggest that the findings of this review will be positive with the significant majority of all eligible children availing of publicly funded ECEC.
3. **Improving quality** - Investment in the quality of ECEC provision has resulted in a range of initiatives including: the establishment of Better Start, a national quality support service for ECEC; introduction of revised regulations to allow for establishment of a registration system for ECEC services; commencement of Education-focused inspection. An ambitious reform programme is underway in 2024 that aims to restructure governance and funding systems; extend regulation to family day-care and school age childcare; build workforce capacity and security; promote inclusion and participation for all children in Ireland and improve the quality of children's early learning and care experiences.
4. **Promoting positive transitions** – It is important to note that there is a clear understanding evident in national Government policy, that children's lived experiences must be to the fore in the shaping and delivery of public ECEC services. This translates into a series of commitments to promote positive, and where possible seamless transitions across the diverse settings they may experience in early childhood and beyond.

In conclusion

Ireland's journey toward establishing universal access for all children to high quality ECEC provision has advanced significantly in the two decades since 2000. A clear and coherent national vision with strong commitment to substantial State funding has been established and instils much optimism for future developments in ECEC.

Undoubtedly many challenges for implementation remain. The legacy of diverse provision and practice across ECEC services, including the split systems of governance for school and non-school based provision continues to create barriers to seamless transitions for children and their families. Increases to funding, whilst substantial are still significantly short of the international averages across OECD nations. Global inflationary pressures and increased costs of living, the war in the Ukraine and concomitant refugee crises have acted to exacerbate Ireland's home grown economic and social problems including a national homelessness crisis and staff shortages across the public services.

However, on balance a positive trajectory of improvement in ECEC provision has been achieved in a relatively short two decades of investment in change. The realisation of national commitments over the next ten years will act to consolidate and progress these achievements in the best interests of young children and their families.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Ireland was 5,060,004. This represents a steady increase over the last 20 years (2000: 3,777,565; 2010: 4,549,428; 2020: 4,964,440) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total birth rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total birth rate in the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.78, Ireland is well above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[6].

Children under age 6

Table 7
Ireland: Number of under 6 year-olds in total population, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year-olds	58,868
1 year-olds	56,524
2 year-olds	60,385
3 year-olds	61,980
4 year-olds	63,465
5 year-olds	64,274
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**365,496**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 3.5% of the total population were children under the age of 3, and 7.2% were children under the age of 6. As in the last 20 years, these proportions are significantly higher than the respective EU averages.

[6] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Table 8

Ireland: Relative share of under 6 year-olds in population by age groups compared with EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Ireland/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Ireland	4,3	4,1	8,4
	∅ EU15[7]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Ireland	4,4	4,2	8,6
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Ireland	4,3	4,6	8,8
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Ireland	3.5	3.7	7.2
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

71.9% of households with children under 6 in Ireland were couple households in 2022. Single parent households accounted for 9.5% - a good two-thirds of them were single mothers (6.8%), one-third single fathers (2.7%).

Table 9

Ireland: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Relative share of all households, in %*
Total households	553,200	
Couple households	397,600	71.9
Other types of households	103,300	18.7
Total single households	52,300	9.5
Single households, women	37,500	6.8
Single households, men	14,800	2.7

Source: Eurostat 2023j, *Own calculations

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Ireland, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15–64 years) was 81.8% and for women 71.8% (Eurostat 2023i).

In 2022, 68.7% of women and 88% of men (18–64 years) with children under 6 were employed. The share of employed fathers was thus slightly above the average of the 27 (2020) EU countries, while the share of mothers was more pronounced (averages 87.2% and 63.6% respectively) (Eurostat 2023h, own calculations).

[7] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Table 10a

Ireland: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Ireland	55.5	77.3
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[8]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Ireland	68.7	88.0
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[9]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023h

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 10b*

Table 10b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023)
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023h, 2023i

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[10]

In 2022, 19.7% of children under 6 in Ireland were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion is lower than the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 20.7% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 2.8% of children under 6 suffered from severe material deprivation - this proportion is significantly lower than the EU27 average of 6.1%. For the total population, it was 1.4% (EU: 4.3%) (Eurostat 2023f, g).

The strategy "A roadmap for social inclusion 2020-2025" aims to reduce the proportion of people living in poverty to 2% or less. Children with single parents are particularly affected by poverty or social exclusion (Eurochild 2021).

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[10] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

ITALY

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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1. ECEC governance in Italy

In Italy, early childhood education and care (ECEC) is currently organised within the 'Integrated System of Education from birth to six years' (*Sistema integrato di educazione e istruzione dalla nascita ai sei anni*), which was established by Law 107/2015 (The Good School – *La Buona Scuola*), and it has been regulated by a subsequent Act (Law Decree 65/2017). This newly Integrated System, from now on referred to as "Integrated System 0–6", overcomes the previous split system between childcare (0–3) and early education (3–6) which has existed since the 1960s.

The Integrated System 0–6 is part of the national education system under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and is composed of two sectors according to the children's age:

(1) The sector of "educational services for early childhood" (*servizi educativi per l'infanzia*), from now on referred to as "educational services 0–3 years"[1] comprises a variety of provisions for infants and toddlers up to age 3. These include: nurseries (*nidi or micronidi*, depending on their capacity) and integrative services (*servizi integrativi*) such as centres for children and families (*centri per bambini e famiglie*) and playgroups (*spazi gioco*) for children from 12 to 36 months for up to a maximum of 5 hours per day. Also included are so-called "spring sections" (*sezioni primavera*) for children aged 24–36 months, usually located in pre-primary schools. These services are provided by local municipal authorities or by the private sector, according to general criteria defined at the regional level. Attendance at educational services 0–3 years requires families to pay fees (*nidi* are on-demand services – *servizi a domanda individuale*);

(2) The provision for children aged 3–6 years consists of *scuole dell'infanzia* (lit. schools of early childhood), from now on referred to as "pre-primary schools", which can be provided by the state, municipalities or the private sector. Within the private sector, there are "recognised" private sector schools (*scuole paritarie*), most of which are managed by a catholic non-profit organisation (FISM)–and are normally subsidised through national or regional funds. There are also some "non-recognised" private schools. Attendance at state-maintained and municipal pre-primary schools is free of charge (families pay a fee only for lunch and the school bus), while confessional schools may charge modest participation fees.

The enactment of Law Decree 65/2017 has been driving a process of integration between the two sectors (Art. 4 "Institution of the integrated system from birth to six years") in terms of both governance and educational continuity (see *Chapter **8***). It has designed a complex governance of the Integrated System 0–6 within an articulated framework of interaction and cooperation between State, Regional governments, and Local authorities:

- The Minister of Education steers, plans, and coordinates actions for the progressive extension and qualification of the integrated system in collaboration with regional governments and has recently defined and drawn up Pedagogical Guidelines for the Integrated System 0–6 (*Linee Pedagogiche per il Sistema Integrato Zerosei*) (Ministerial Decree-DM 334/2021).

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In the case of Italy, however, in compliance with Italian legislation and regulations, the authors of this report have chosen the age formats: **0–3** years for settings for children up to 3 years of age and **3–6** years for pre-primary settings.

- Regions define the structural, organisational and quality standards of educational services 0–3 years, plan and develop the Integrated System 0–6 according to the specific needs of their areas, support the professionalism of ECEC staff and promote local pedagogical coordination in agreement with the *Uffici Scolastici Regionali* (Regional Ministry School Offices) and representatives of the local authorities.
- Local authorities have specific competences in managing (directly or through agreements with the private sector) and monitoring the educational services 0–3 years according to regional regulations and, in some cases, a number of municipal pre-primary schools. They also have the important tasks of promoting the quality of the Integrated System 0–6, by providing continuing professional development initiatives for professionals, and activating the local pedagogical coordination of all the educational services 0–3 years and pre-primary schools in their areas.

The implementation of this complex system of governance is currently an ongoing process and is supported by the National Multiannual Implementation Plan (*Piano di Azione Nazionale Pluriennale per la Promozione del Sistema Integrato di Educazione e Istruzione*) that defines actions and financial resources for developing and qualifying the system (see *Chapter **8***).

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

The staff categories currently working directly with children in the Italian ECEC provision are:

Educatori/educatrici (Educators), who are qualified professionals working with under 3 year-olds in nurseries (*nidi*), integrative services and spring sections (*sezioni primavera*). Upon the approval of the Law Decree 65/2017, from 2019/2020 onwards, a Bachelor's degree in Educational Science (*Scienze dell'Educazione*) with a specific pathway in Early Childhood Education or a 5-year degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education, plus a 60 ECTS credits additional module in Early Childhood Education, have become the mandatory requirements for working in an educational service 0–3 years.

Insegnanti (Teachers), who are qualified professionals working with children aged 3–6 years in pre-primary schools (*scuole dell'infanzia*). Their teaching qualification is a 5-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*), which makes them eligible to teach in both primary and pre-primary settings.

Ausiliari/ausiliarie or ***operatori/operatrici*** (auxiliary staff), who are responsible for cleaning, preparing lunch and providing practical backup for educators and teachers as necessary, for example by clearing up materials and tidying the room. They are not "teaching assistants" (this category does not exist in Italy) and do not assist teachers in delivering educational activities. The minimum qualification requirements for auxiliary staff are defined at the regional level but usually include having successfully completed compulsory education (*diploma di scuola dell'obbligo*).

Table 1 outlines the profiles and minimum qualification requirements of core practitioners working directly with children, who are categorised according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (*Box 1*).

Table 1
Italy: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Educator *Educatore/ educatrice* *Profile:* Social and Child-hood Pedagogy Professional	*Nido* **Nursery** 0–3 years *Servizi integrativi* **Integrative services,** including: *Centro per bambini e famiglie* **Centre for children and families** 0–3 years *Spazio Gioco* **Playgroup** 18–36 months *Sezione Primavera* **"Spring section"** 2–3 years	Core practitioner	All age groups, including 0–3 years	Bachelor's degree in Educational Science (*Scienze dell'Educa-zione*) with a specific pathway in Early Child-hood Education ECTS credits: 180 EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2011: 64 ***or*** 5-year university de-gree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Forma-zione primaria)*, plus a 60 ECTS postgraduate University module in Early Childhood Educa-tion ECTS credits: 300 +60 EQF: level 7 ISCED 2011: 74
Pre-primary Education Teacher *Insegnante di scuola dell'infan-zia* *Profile:* Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional	*Scuola dell'infanzia* **Pre-primary school** 3–6 years	Core practitioner (class teacher)	3–11 years	5-year university de-gree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Forma-zione Primaria*) ECTS credits: 300 EQF: Level 7 ISCED 2011: 74
Auxiliary Staff *Ausiliario/ ausiliaria* *or* *Operatore/ operatrice*	*Nido* **Nursery** 0–3 years *Servizi integrativi* **Integrative services,** including: *Centro per bambini e famiglie*	Co-workers without spe-cialist quali-fication	Not applicable	Not applicable A compulsory school leaving certificate is usually required for employment.

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
	Centre for children and families 0–3 years *Spazio Gioco* **Playgroup** 18–36 months *Sezione Primavera* **"Spring section"** 2–3 years *Scuola dell'infanzia* **Pre-primary school** 3–6 years			

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Dirigenti scolastici (School Heads) are qualified professionals who have management and educational responsibilities for state-maintained pre-primary schools or *istituti comprensivi* (groups of pre-primary, primary and lower-secondary schools under one head). They hold a relevant third-level qualification (a 5-year university degree/Master's degree) and are recruited from among former teachers who have worked in schools for at least five years. They are in charge of managing the human and financial resources of schools; they usually do not have a specific pedagogical competence in early childhood education.

For information on the management of nurseries and other services for under 3 year-olds, see *Chapter **2.4***.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

In state-maintained pre-primary schools (*scuole dell'infanzia*), Teachers can take on the role of managing, organising or coordinating specific projects aimed at implementing the quality of

ECEC provision, such as activities for promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities, continuity between educational services 0–3 years, pre-primary schools and primary schools or evaluation according to the national guidelines and procedures (INVALSI 2016). This role – called "instrumental function" (*funzione strumentale*) – has to be performed outside working hours and is remunerated with a fixed fee of €1,400 for each project plus an extra fee that varies according to the number of children attending the pre-primary school.

In some state-maintained pre-primary schools, a Teacher with a high level of seniority may be appointed as Referent for the coordination of pre-primary schools at the discretion of the School Head.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Coordinatori pedagogici (Pedagogical Coordinators, called *pedagogista* in the municipality of Reggio Emilia) are qualified professionals with management and educational responsibilities in the municipal ECEC system for 0–6 year-olds. This professional role was created in the 1980s and 1990s by local governments in the cities that had invested in ECEC provision areas (Baudelot, Rayna, Mayer, and Musatti 2003; Catarsi, 2010; Musatti, Mayer, and Braga 2003). Over the past 20 years, the number of Pedagogical Coordinators has increased significantly in the cities of the central and northern regions.

Pedagogical Coordinators are key figures in the Integrated System 0–6 approach to education. In municipal ECEC provision, they are responsible for a number of ECEC centres (usually both educational services 0–3 years and pre-primary schools) according to regional regulations. The presence of a Coordinator is a basic requirement for private providers of educational services 0–3 years to obtain public funding and is widespread in municipal pre-primary schools, while the role in state pre-primary schools is still to be defined.

No competence profile for Pedagogical Coordinators exists at national level, but most regional regulations have a job description for them. Although these descriptions may vary, the overall profile is found to be quite homogeneous: supporting educators'/teachers' reflection on their practice; monitoring educational practices sometimes documenting and evaluating ECEC quality; encouraging pedagogical continuity; promoting and caring relationships between the educational services 0–3 years/pre-primary schools and the municipal administration; promoting CPD initiatives specifically addressing ECEC core practitioners; and contributing to orienting and planning policies for early childhood and families at the local level (Campioni 2022). The crucial role of Pedagogical Coordinators is emphasised in the Pedagogical Guidelines of the Integrated System 0–6 (see *Chapter **8***), recently approved by the Minister of Education.

In most medium-sized and large cities (such as Reggio-Emilia, Milan or Rome) (see *Box 2*), Pedagogical Coordinators form a team at the municipal level (*coordinamenti pedagogici municipali*). Some regions (Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna and Umbria) have established a stable network of Pedagogical Coordinators at the regional or district level (*coordinamenti pedagogici regionali, coordinamenti pedagogici provinciali and coordinamenti pedagogici zonali*), which brings together all municipal pedagogical coordinators of the area (even from small towns). The team is responsible for research and innovation and thus for constantly revising the values underlying the overall educational programme, as well as directing and guiding everyday educational activities (Lazzari, Picchio, and Musatti 2013; Murphy, Ridgway, Cuneen, and Horgan 2016).

Box 2

Italy: The role of the Pedagogical Coordinator in the ECEC system

Three examples:

In **Milan**, a large and cosmopolitan city with about 300 ECEC services directly under the management of the city council, Pedagogical Coordinators (called *posizioni organizzative*) play a crucial role as trained professionals with education and management responsibilities. They work to improve the quality of ECEC provision and are each responsible for three to four ECEC services in one of the city's nine zones. At present, 68 Pedagogical Coordinators (*posizioni organizzative)* are employed in ECEC provision in the city of Milan. They are key figures within the integrated 0–6 approach that characterises the city's early education system. Each *Posizione Organizzativa* coordinates educational services, pre-primary schools and spring sections of the same "educational unit" in the logic of an integrated 0-6 system. Their role includes pedagogical, managerial and administrative tasks (*Linee Pedagogiche,* Comune di Milano 2016).

In **Reggio Emilia**, the role of Pedagogical Coordinator – called in this municipality *pedagogista* – is embedded in a system of relationships with educators, teachers, other school staff, parents, citizens, administrators, public officials and external audiences. *Pedagogisti* are organised in a Pedagogical Coordinating Team, form their own collaborative working group and interface with the educational services 0–3 years and pre-primary schools' teams (educators, teachers, *atelieristi*, mentor teachers, auxiliaries, cooks and other staff) as well as with administrators, officials and public bodies who are stakeholders in the Reggio Emilia ECEC system.

The municipal ECEC system of **Rome** consists of a large number of ECEC services. 400 educational services 0–3 years and 317 *scuole dell'infanzia* are managed directly by the municipality, while 173 educational services 0–3 years are subsidised by the municipal administration on the basis of specific agreements and quality requirements. In 2001, the municipality of Rome introduced the professional profile of Pedagogical Coordinator and employed a considerable number of coordinators (more than 200) in order to qualify the whole ECEC system in the city. Each of them, who was responsible for both municipal educational services 0–3 years and *scuole dell'infanzia*, supports staff practice and promotes its improvement. Subsidised educational services 0–3 years were also requested to employ Pedagogical Coordinators. Municipal Pedagogical Coordinators were grouped into district teams (*coordinamenti pedagogici municipali*) in order to network the ECEC services of the same area. A central coordination team (*coordinamento centrale*) at the city Department of Education coordinated their activities and organised CPD initiatives. In recent years, the number of Pedagogical Coordinators has decreased substantially due to many retirements, causing an overload for the coordinators still in service. In 2021, a decree of the Lazio Region (DR 61/2021) defined the professional profile of Pedagogical Coordinators and their workload. Currently, the municipal administration of Rome is discussing how to hire new staff and reorganise the pedagogical coordination teams in the different areas of the city according to the recent regional decree.

The Law Decree 65/2017 (see *Chapter **8***) confirms the importance of these key figures: it considers that establishing local pedagogical coordination is a strategic part of implementing the Integrated System 0–6 and states that Regions are expected to promote and Local governments to activate *coordinamenti pedagogici territoriali* in their areas; these will include Pedagogical Coordinators of municipal and private educational services 0–3 years and municipal, private and state-maintained pre-primary schools.

2.5 Specialist support staff

Insegnanti di sostegno (Special Needs Teachers) are qualified professionals working in pre-primary and primary schools. Their teaching qualification is a 5-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*) plus a 1-year course (60 ECTS credits = 1,500-hour course) on inclusion and teaching methods and approaches for children with special needs and disabilities.

A Special Needs Teacher usually works in a pre-primary school when a child with special needs attends it. Their role is not only supporting the child for a certain number of hours a day, but

also promoting processes of inclusion and integration within the group of children. The overall idea (pedagogy) is to respond to children's needs by fostering inclusion through personalised interventions as well as a suitable organisation of space and activities within the group of peers.

When a child with special needs attends an educational service 0–3 years, no Special Needs Teacher is required but either the number of children in the group is decreased or the number of Educators (*educatori/educatrici*) is increased.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

It is difficult to source data concerning the structural composition of the Italian ECEC workforce for a number of reasons. Firstly, as stated above, the reformed Italian ECEC system has not yet been fully implemented as a unitary system in terms of organisation and governance. Furthermore, multiple institutions are involved in gathering data related to 0–3 and 3–6 ECEC services in the public (municipal and state) and private sectors. Data are thus fragmented and collected according to different criteria. The most reliable sources are the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), the *Istituto degli Innocenti* (the first secular institution dedicated to taking in children, studying children's living conditions and promoting their rights and culture) and the Ministry of Education, which do not systematically collect data on the structural composition of the ECEC workforce.

Currently, the only data compiled by the Ministry of Education are related to the gender of teachers who work in pre-primary schools run by the state and the percentage of Special Needs Teachers in these schools. However, the implementation of a national information system for the Integrated System 0–6, envisaged by Law Decree 65/2017, should provide more information on the structural composition of the Italian ECEC workforce in the near future.

Table 2

Italy: Structural composition of ECEC workforce in state-maintained pre-primary education (3–6)

Staff category	Year/provision/proportion of workforce
Staff with specialist higher education degree	*No national statistical data available*
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	*No national statistical data available*
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	*No national statistical data available*
Staff with non-specialist qualification (other qualification)	*No national statistical data available*
Unqualified staff	*No national statistical data available*
Specialist support staff (e.g. Special Needs Teachers)	2021: State maintained pre-primary schools (3–6): **18.2%**
Male staff	2021: State maintained pre-primary schools (3–6): **0.8%**
Staff with a background of migration	*No national statistical data available*

Source: Ministry of Education database (Ministero dell'Istruzione 2022a)

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Educators (*educatori/educatrici*)

The Law Decree 65/2017 states that, from 2019/2020, two qualification alternatives are mandatory requirements for working in 0–3 settings. One is a Bachelor's degree in Educational Science (*Scienze dell'Educazione*) with a specific pathway in Early Childhood Education; these are differently named from university to university – such as *Educatore di Nido e di Comunità Infantili* (Educator for Nurseries and Early Childhood Communities), *Scienze dell'Infanzia* (Early Childhood Studies) or *Educatore della Prima Infanzia* (Early Childhood Educator). The other is a 5-year degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*, supplemented by a module of 60 ECTS credits in Early Childhood Education.[2]

Before the approval of Law Decree 65/2017, only three universities (the University of Bologna, University of RomaTre and IUL Online University) had already implemented a 3-year Bachelor's degree in Educational Science focused on early childhood education, while, following the approval of the Law Decree, an increasing number of universities (currently 33[3]) are activating a specific pathway in Early Childhood Education (55 ECTS credits) within the 3-year Bachelor's Degree in Educational Science.

To date, only a few universities have introduced the supplemented postgraduate module addressing Pre-primary Education Teachers, which enables them to work in educational services 0–3 years. This is due to a lack of applications by teachers.

Pre-primary Education Teachers (*insegnanti*)

The entry requirements for teachers working in pre-primary schools are established at the national level. Since 2010 (Ministerial Decree-DM 249/2010), these teachers have been required to hold a 5-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*), which qualifies them for posts in both pre-primary schools (3–6 years) and primary schools (6–11 years). This course of studies is not organised consecutively with a Bachelor's and a Master's degree but is a unified course. It is therefore termed a 'continuous cycle' degree. The universities chosen to provide this 5-year course (one per region and two each in Lombardy and Lazio), the syllabus and the entry criteria (number of students and tests) are decided each year by the Ministry of Universities and Research.

Special Needs Teachers (*insegnante di sostegno*)

Candidates wishing to work as a Special Needs Teacher (*insegnante di sostegno*) in pre-primary education settings have to complete the 5-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary

[2] In Note 14176/2018, the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR 2018a) stated that, in this transition phase, a Bachelor's degree in Educational Science (without a specific focus on early childhood education), a 5-year degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education or any other qualifications required by regions that have not yet updated their laws on the basis of Law Decree 65/2017 (such as a Secondary School Diploma in Education/Human Science) can also still be accepted.

[3] Sources: *Universitaly* database (https//www. universitaly.it) and university sites (last consultation May 2022).

Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*) plus a 1-year postgraduate course (60 ECTS credits) on 'inclusion and educational approaches' to work with children with special needs and disabilities (*diploma di specializzazione per l'attività di sostegno didattico agli alunni con disabilità*).

Auxiliary staff (*personale ausiliario*)

The minimum entry requirements for auxiliary staff working in educational services 0–3 years and pre-primary schools are set at regional level. Typically, auxiliary staff are required to have successfully completed compulsory education (i.e. lower-secondary school prior to 2003; currently at least the first two years of upper-secondary school, given that compulsory schooling now ends at the age of 16).

School Heads (*dirigente scolastico*)

State-maintained pre-primary schools (*scuole dell'infanzia*) are under the direction of *dirigenti scolastici* (school heads), who are responsible for the *istituti comprensivi* (group of pre-primary, primary and lower-secondary schools) to which *scuole dell'infanzia* belong. These heads hold a relevant third-level qualification (a 5-year university degree/Master's degree), and they are recruited from among former teachers who have worked in pre-primary, primary or secondary schools for at least five years.

Pedagogical Coordinators (*coordinatori pedagogici*)

The minimum qualification requirements for Pedagogical Coordinators (*coordinatori pedagogici*) with managerial, organisational and educational responsibilities in municipal ECEC settings are locally defined via regional legislation and vary across regions (see *Chapter **2.4***); however, a Master's Degree in Education, Psychology, Sociology or Social Work is usually requested.

Two examples follow: In the Lombardy region (e.g., in the city of Milan), a Pedagogical Coordinator (called *posizione organizzativa*) may hold a Bachelor's or Master's degree in Education, Psychology, Sociology or Social Work or a Master's degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education. It is also possible to work in this position at a lower level with 5 years of prior work experience in educational services 0–3 years, while, in the Emilia-Romagna region, a Master's degree in Education is required.

Some universities provide a Master's degree in Planning and Management of Educational Services (*Laurea Magistrale in Programmazione e Gestione dei Servizi Educativi*), which is aimed at training qualified professionals with competences in planning, managing and coordinating a variety of services, such as educational and socio-educational services, socio-cultural services, school and out-of-school services, integration and cultural mediation services for all ages, training agencies and so on. Other universities provide a 1-year Master's course (60 ECTS credits) specifically aimed at training Pedagogical Coordinators of ECEC services. For instance, since 2006, the University of Florence has been providing the first Master's degree course in "Pedagogical Coordination of Early Childhood Education and Care", instituted by Enzo Catarsi, professor of general pedagogy at the University of Florence (Silva 2019).

The following tables summarise the initial qualifying routes for ECEC staff.

Table 3
Italy: Educator

Job title in Italian: *Educatore/educatrice* **Profile**: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
The following qualification routes are the current *requirements* for core professionals (Educators) for working in educational services 0–3 years. *Route 1* **Entry requirements:** General university entrance qualification (*Diploma di istruzione secondaria superiore*); individual university selection procedures **Professional studies:** 3-year university degree programme **Award:** Bachelor's degree in Educational Science *(Laurea triennale in Scienze dell'Educazione*), with a specific pathway in Early Childhood Education. **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 64 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Nursery centres (*Nidi)* 0–3 years; Spring section (*Sezioni Primavera)* 2–3 years; Integrative services such as Centres for children and families (*Centri per bambini e famiglie*) 0–3 years; Playgroups (*Spazi Gioco*) 18–36 months; other educational and social and settings, such as social-care services (across the lifespan), residential care for minors, international cooperation, etc. *Route 2* **Entry requirements:** 5-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria)* (equivalent to Master's degree) **Professional studies:** An additional 1-year postgraduate module in Early Childhood Education. **Award:** Postgraduate diploma in Early Childhood Education (*Educatore della prima infanzia*) **ECTS credits**: 300 (degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education) + 60 ECTS credits (module in Early Childhood Education) **EQF level**: 7 **ISCED 2011:** 74 **Main ECEC workplace:** Nursery centres (*Nidi)* 0–3 years; Spring section (*Sezioni Primavera)* 2–3 years; Integrative services such as Centres for children and families (*Centri per bambini e famiglie*) 0–3 years; Playgroups (*Spazi Gioco*) 18–36 months; Pre-primary schools (*Scuole dell'infanzia*) 3–6 years.

Table 4
Italy: Pre-primary Education Teacher

Job title in Italian: *Insegnante di scuola dell'infanzia* **Profile**: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: General university entrance qualification (*Diploma di istruzione secondaria superiore*); individual university selection procedures. Criteria for access (number of students and tests) are decided each year by the Ministry of Universities and Research. **Professional studies:** 5-year university route in *Scienze della Formazione Primaria* (degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education) **Award:** *Diploma di laurea magistrale a ciclo unico per insegnante di scuola dell'infanzia e primaria* (5-year university degree equivalent to Master's degree) **ECTS credits:** 300 **EQF level**: 7 **ISCED 2011:** 74 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Pre-primary schools *(Scuole dell'infanzia)* 3–6 years.

Table 5
Italy: Special Needs Teacher

Job title in Italian: *Insegnante di sostegno*
Entry requirements: 5-year university degree in *Scienze della Formazione Primaria* (degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education) **Professional studies:** An additional 1-year post-graduate course in special needs education with a final examination **Award:** Postgraduate diploma in special needs education for the early years, *Insegnante di sostegno* **ECTS credits**: 300 (degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education) + 60 ECTS credits (course in special needs education) **EQF level**: 7 **ISCED 2011:** 74 **Main ECEC workplace:** Pre-primary schools (*Scuole dell'infanzia*), 3 to 6 year-old children with special needs.

Table 6
Italy: Auxiliary Staff

Job title in Italian: *Ausiliario/ausiliaria* or *operatore/operatrice*
The following qualification route is the usual *current* requirement for auxiliary staff in ECEC settings and may vary from municipality to municipality. **Entry requirements:** Completion of primary school **Professional studies:** Compulsory education: lower secondary school (before 2003), or (after 2003) at least the first 2 years of upper secondary school. **Award:** Compulsory school leaving certificate (*Diploma di scuola dell'obbligo*) **ECTS credits:** not applicable **EQF level**: not applicable **ISCED 2011:** 2 or 3 **Main ECEC workplace:** Nurseries (*Nidi)* 0–3 years; Spring section (*Sezioni Primavera)* 2–3 years; Integrative services such as Centres for children and families (*Centri per bambini e famiglie),* 0–3 years; Playgroups (*Spazi gioco*) 18–36 months; Pre-primary schools (*Scuole dell'infanzia)* 3–6 years.

Table 7
Italy: School Head of state-maintained pre-primary schools

Job title in Italian: *Dirigenti scolastici*
Centre Heads of state-maintained pre-primary schools are recruited from among former teachers who have worked in pre- primary, primary or secondary schools for at least five years. The following qualification route is the usual current requirement for the role of school head. **Entry requirements:** General university entrance examination (*diploma di istruzione secondaria superiore),* individual university selection procedures. **Professional studies:** 5-year university degree in *Scienze della Formazione Primaria* (Primary and Pre-primary Education) or Master's degree in Education, Psychology, or other human or scientific sciences. **Award:** Master's level degree in *Scienze della Formazione Primaria* (Primary and Pre-primary Education) or Master's degree in Education, Psychology or other human or scientific sciences. Qualified Teacher Status for pre-primary, primary or secondary education. **ECTS credits:** 300 **EQF level**: 7 **ISCED 2011:** 74 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Primary and lower secondary schools (*Scuole primarie e scuole secondarie di primo grado)* 6–13 years; Pre-primary schools (*Scuole dell'infanzia)* 3–6 years.

Table 8
Italy: Pedagogical Coordinators 0–6 sector

Job title in Italian: *Coordinatore pedagogico*
The following qualification route is the usual current requirement for the Pedagogical Coordinators of municipal nurseries (*nidi*), integrative services *(Centri per bambini e famiglie* and *Spazi gioco),* Spring sections (*Sezioni primavera)* or pre-primary schools. They can also be recruited among former Pre-primary Teachers or Educators (with a Bachelor's degree in Education, Psychology, Sociology, etc.) who have many years of professional experience in working in nurseries or pre-primary schools. **Entry requirements:** General university entrance qualification (*diploma di istruzione secondaria superiore*); individual university selection procedures. **Professional studies:** Three options are possible: (1) 5-year university degree in *Scienze della Formazione Primaria* (Primary and Pre-primary Education); (2) Master's degree in Education, Psychology, Sociology, Social work; (3) Bachelor's degree in Education, Psychology, Sociology, Social work **plus** a Professional Master qualification specifically aimed at training Pedagogical Coordinators of educational services 0-3 years and pre-primary schools. **Award:** See the three options above. **ECTS credits:** 180/300 **EQF level**: 6/7 **ISCED 2011:** 64/74 **Main ECEC workplace (it depends on qualification held):** Nurseries (*Nidi)* 0–3 years; Spring sections (*Sezioni Primavera)* 2–3 years; Integrative services such as Centres for children and families (*Centri per bambini e famiglie)* 0–3 years, Playgroups (*Spazi gioco*) 18–36 months; Pre-primary schools (*Scuole dell'infanzia),* 3–6 years; Primary and secondary schools (*Scuole primarie e secondarie),* 6–13 years

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Educators (*educatori/educatrici*)

The 3-year Bachelor's degree in Educational Science (*Laurea Triennale in Scienze dell'Educazione*) with a specific pathway in Early Childhood Education

As stated above, with the approval of Law Decree 65/2017 from 2019–2020, a 3-year Bachelor's Degree in Educational Science (*Laurea Triennale in Scienze dell'Educazione*) with a *specific pathway in Early Childhood Education* became a mandatory requirement for working in ECEC centres for children aged 0–3 years.

By Ministerial Decree DM 378/2018, the Ministry of Education, University and Research defined that the *specific pathway in Early Childhood Education* should consist of at least 55 ECTS credits on specific content concerning early childhood articulated as follows:

- at least 10 ECTS credits in general and social education (*pedagogia generale e sociale)*
- at least 10 ECTS credits in the methodology of education
- at least 10 ECTS credits in psychology (with a specific focus on early childhood)
- at least 5 ECTS credits in sociology (with a specific focus on early childhood)
- at least 5 ECTS credits in medical and health sciences (with a specific focus on early childhood)
- at least 5 ECTS credits in workshops connected with the above subjects
- 10 ECTS credits in internship/*tirocinio*.

The pathway is inscribed within the 3-year university course in Educational Science (*Laurea triennale in Scienze dell'Educazione*) aimed at training a socio-educational educator (*Educatore professionale socio-pedagogico* – see *Chapter **8***), who is qualified to carry out educational work in settings aimed at people of all ages, primarily in the following areas: educational and training; school; social welfare and health, limited to the socio-educational aspects; childhood, parenthood; cultural; judicial; environmental; sports and motor; integration and international cooperation. The course lasts three years and it provides for 180 ECTS.

Competences: The general course in Educational Science (*Scienze dell'Educazione*) is aimed at developing students' knowledge and competence in the areas of education methods/didactic approaches, educational and communication dynamics within an educational setting, teaching and learning processes, in order to prepare professionals to work with people of all ages and at all life stages, whether in conditions of 'normality', disadvantage, marginalisation, vulnerability or cultural diversity. Interdisciplinary activities and practical workshops are key coursework components (the workshops are designed to help students translate theory into practice). The basic goal underpinning the course is to foster the development of a professional with the ability to transfer and adapt a multidisciplinary approach to educational practices in different contexts (Mantovani 2007).

The degree course in Educational Science provides a *specific pathway* in Early Childhood Education.

The competences that graduate students are expected to have acquired through this *pathway* to become *educatore* in educational services 0–3 years are the following: cultural and psychopedagogical competences (knowledge about the pedagogical, sociological, psychological, anthropological, historical, philosophical and institutional aspects of the early education of children aged 0–3 years and their parents' needs); methodological competences (such as programming, observing, documenting and evaluating ECEC quality); technical and professional competences (setting up the environment, schedule and play materials according to children's developmental needs and capabilities, etc.); relational competences (for example listening and communicating empathically with children and parents or promoting children's well-being); and reflexive competences.

Curricular areas: The 3-year course is mainly focused on the human sciences (education, psychology, sociology, philosophy, intercultural education, anthropology, etc.), which are taught alongside the relevant curricular disciplines (languages, history, music, technology, etc.). Modules in special education and the psychology of disability and inclusion are also provided. A minimum level of competence in a foreign language (English, French, German or Spanish) is an obligatory entry requirement.

Pedagogic–didactic approaches: Coursework comprises lectures, workshops and internship (*tirocinio*) aimed at integrating theory and practice. Internship (*tirocinio*) is obligatory for all students and is carried out during the second and third years. The number of hours dedicated to this activity and their distribution over the years are established by the individual university. The practical work may take place in a variety of social and educational settings addressed to people of all ages. According to Decree DM 378/2018, which regulates the content of the *specific pathway in Early Childhood Education*, a minimum of 10 ECTS credits must consist of internship and at least half of its hours must be carried out in educational services 0–3 years.

The additional 1-year *Module in Early Childhood Education* (60 ECTS credits) for graduates with a degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*)

To work in educational services 0–3 years, graduates who hold a 5-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*) can integrate their initial

training by obtaining 60 ECTS credits in Early Childhood Education. Through Decree DM 378/2018, the Ministry of Education, University and Research defined the content and articulation of this module:

- Between nine and 12 ECTS credits in education of early childhood (pedagogical, sociological, anthropological, historical, philosophical and institutional aspects of the early education of children from 0 to 3 and their parents' needs, etc.)
- Between nine and 12 ECTS credits in methodological approaches (methodologies of play and inclusion, procedures of programming, observing, documenting and evaluating ECEC quality, etc.)
- Ten ECTS credits in psychology (child development, families' relational dynamics, etc.)
- Two ECTS credits in the sociology of childhood and families
- Two ECTS credits in medical and health disciplines (paediatrics, health education, etc.)
- Two ECTS credits in sciences concerning children with special needs
- Between ten and 12 ECTS credits interdisciplinary workshops on various topics, such as welcoming practices in educational services 0–3 years, planning care and play activities, relationships with families, observing and documenting children's experience in the ECEC context, evaluating the quality of ECEC settings and so on
- Nine ECTS credits in direct and indirect internship (*tirocino*) in educational services 0–3 years
- Two ECTS points in a final work project.

This module has not yet been initiated in any Italian university due to a lack of applications from postgraduates in Primary and Pre-primary Education, who seem to prefer to be employed in pre-primary and primary schools rather than 0–3 services (Restiglian 2021).

Pre-primary Teachers (*insegnanti*)

The 5-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*)

Since 2010, teachers working in pre-primary schools are obliged to hold a single-cycle 5-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*) that makes them eligible to teach in either pre-primary (3–6 years) or primary schools (6–11 years).

Competences that graduate students are expected to acquire by the end of this course are:

- Cultural pedagogical and psychological competences (knowledge in the field of educational science, with a focus on psycho-pedagogic and methodological competencies as well as didactic competences)
- Multidisciplinary competences related to pre-primary and primary education
- Basic knowledge related to children with learning disabilities and their welcoming into the school environment, with a focus on personalised didactic approaches and intervention
- Informatics/technological competences.

This course seeks to develop teachers with all-round professional competence who are capable of fostering children's motivation, creativity and identity development while constructing flexible and complex learning programmes for the different subject areas, with a strong emphasis on transversal learning objectives. Students also receive training in the contents and methods of teaching of the subjects listed in the National Curricular Guidelines for Pre-primary and Primary Schools (*Indicazioni Nazionali per il Curricolo della Scuola dell'Infanzia e del Primo Ciclo di Istruzione and Indicazioni Nazionali e Nuovi Scenari,* Ministerial Decree DM 254/2012, MIUR 2018b).

Curricular areas: The course offers advanced theoretical and practical training in the areas of pedagogy, history of pedagogy, didactic, special pedagogy, developmental and educational psychology, teaching methodologies, technology and research, which together make up the professional profile of Pre-primary and Primary School Teachers. The curriculum balances the human sciences (education, psychology, sociology, anthropology and pedagogy) with relevant curricular disciplines (languages, history, geography, mathematics, sciences, art, music, etc.). Candidates also receive training and specific preparation for the inclusion of students with disabilities. The curriculum requires participation in workshops and internships. During the workshops (or lab work), students are usually split into small groups to share practical learning experiences and simulations of their plans for their teaching practice internships. The internship begins in the second year and lasts for a total of 600 hours (equivalent to 24 ECTS credits) divided between the years. The individual university decides how to distribute the hours over the years.

As specified in the current legislation (Ministerial Decree DM 249/2010), the following components are an integral part of initial professional education:

a) English language competence – at least Level B2 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages adopted in 1996 by the Council of Europe. To qualify as teachers, undergraduates must either sit an examination or present certificates to prove that they have attained the required level of proficiency.
b) Digital competence as outlined in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 18 December 2006. It is particularly important that teachers possess the ability to use multimedia languages to represent and communicate knowledge and to create simulated environments and virtual laboratories.
c) Educational/didactic competence in fostering the inclusion of students with disabilities, in line with the provisions of Law 104/1992 and its subsequent modifications and additions.

Pedagogic–didactic approaches: The professional study routes for student teachers developed in recent decades are characterised by a multidisciplinary approach; the integration of theory and practice; and partnerships with pre-primary/primary schools. Experienced teachers play an active part in the delivery of these studies. The overall goal is to promote the development of all-round knowledge of the curriculum for pre-primary and primary practitioners.

At the end of this university route, there is also a final exam, known as VIVA, which consists of a written dissertation and oral defence about a teaching project carried out in a host school. Successful completion of the VIVA exam means that candidates have earned qualified teacher status for pre-primary and primary schools.

Special Needs Teachers (*insegnante di sostegno*)

To work as a Special Needs Teacher in pre-primary schools, graduates with a 5-year degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*) are required to attend an additional 1-year postgraduate course in Special Needs Education (60 ECTS credits).

Competences: The course content is specific to either pre-primary or primary school education, as relevant, and is aimed at helping teachers to develop the educational competences required to foster the inclusion of children with special needs (children with cognitive, sensorial or learning disabilities). In particular, students attending this course are expected to acquire the following competences:

- Managing a class group that includes children with special needs
- Planning the "individual educational plan" (*PEI – Piano Educativo Individuale*)
- Legal/juridical knowledge related to the integration of children with learning disabilities

- Using cooperative methods
- Psychological and psycho-pedagogical knowledge related to disabilities (neuropsychiatry)
- Relational competences (with children and families).

Curricular areas: The course includes lectures in different disciplines aimed at covering interdisciplinary professional preparation (for example, students are expected to attend lectures on the pedagogy of supportive relationships; child neuropsychiatry; metacognitive and cooperative teaching methods; and school legislation); nine workshops/education laboratories (also focused on how to use technologies when working with children with special needs); and an internship (at least 300 hours, for which 12 ECTS credits are awarded). A project is also included to obtain the title of "Special Needs Teacher".

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Until the beginning of 2000, Italy was one of the few countries in the European Union that did not offer standard university-level pre-service training to Educators and Teachers at all levels of the school system. Up to 2003, the basic professional education of Pre-primary and Primary School Teachers was at the upper secondary level. A school-leaving diploma in an occupationally relevant area of study (a diploma from a vocational secondary school specialising in primary teaching training – *istituto magistrale* – or in education/human sciences – *liceo psicopedagogico*; *liceo delle scienze umane*) was the only qualification required to teach at these levels.

Similarly, up to 2017, the initial professional education for Educators working in educational services 0–3 years was the same vocational secondary school diploma as described above or a shorter vocational course of studies (such as the 3-year vocational school programmes entitled *tecnico dei servizi sociali* or *assistente di comunità infantile*).

For these reasons, a significant number of Educators and Pre-primary teachers who already held permanent posts prior to the changes, who nowadays work in educational services 0–3 years or in pre-primary schools, have a qualification at the upper secondary level and over the years have upgraded their knowledge and competences through professional development courses.

Educators in educational services 0–3 years with a Bachelor's degree in Educational Science can enrol in the third year of a 5-year degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education to obtain the qualification of Pre-primary Teacher, while Pre-primary Teachers can extend their initial training by obtaining an additional 60 ECTS credits in Early Childhood Education, enabling them to work in educational services 0–3 years as well (see *Chapter **4.2***). This means that, to obtain both the qualification of Educator and that of Pre-primary School Teacher, students need to study for a total duration of 6 years.

There are no alternative pathways to the required university degrees described above (see *Chapters **4.1*** and ***4.2***) for working as an Educator in educational services 0–3 years or as a Pre-primary Teacher.

The only type of progression in the career path of an Educator or Pre-primary Teacher is linked to the length of service, which is evaluated in competitive exams to become a School Head (at least 5 years) or a Pedagogical Coordinator. In state-maintained pre-primary schools, the teacher with the highest level of seniority may be appointed Referent for coordination at the discretion of the school head.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Internship (guided workplace experience) is viewed as a key component of the initial professional education of Italian ECEC core practitioners. The number of hours devoted to internships is defined nationally for the 5-year degree programme in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*), while it varies locally for the Bachelor's degree in Educational Science (*Scienze dell'Educazione*). The following describes the current situation concerning workplace-based learning in the IPE routes of ECEC core practitioners.

Educators (*educatori/educatrici*)

Practica/internships within the 3-year Bachelor's degree in Educational Science (*Laurea Triennale in Scienze dell'Educazione*) **with a specific pathway in Early Childhood Education**

Regulation

For the 3-year degree course in Educational Science (*Scienze dell'Educazione*), workplace experience (referred to as *tirocinio*/internship) is obligatory for all students and is carried out during the second and third years of study. It is the responsibility of individual universities to organise these work placements.

Aims and goals

The goals of the internship are the following: promoting the integration of the theoretical knowledge that the student is gradually acquiring with hands-on experience of workplace settings; ensuring a healthy balance between theory, practice and reflection on experience; training students in the use of observation and documentation tools; and providing students with a framework for reflecting on practice.

Length of time spent in the workplace and number of ECTS credits

As Ministerial Decree DM 378/2018 states, students who choose the 3-year degree course in Educational Science (*Scienze dell'Educazione*) with a specific pathway in Early Childhood Education must obtain at least 10 ECTS credits in internships (*tirocinio*) and at least half of the hours must be spent in educational services 0–3 years.

Each university establishes the number of hours that students must spend in relevant workplace settings and the distribution of hours among the three years.

Structure of time blocks

The structure of time blocks varies across universities; for the most part, internship includes direct and indirect activities. The indirect (or preparatory) activities usually include formative group meetings and analysing the students' professional interests and aptitudes, identifying the setting in which they will carry out their internship and setting up an agreement between the university and the host organisation. Direct activities are those that are carried out by the students in the workplace setting (under the guidance of their supervisor, who will meet them periodically to discuss how the practicum is proceeding and encourage them to analyse and reflect on the practical experience gained to date). During the internship, students alternate observation, documentation and participation in the everyday functioning of the host organisation/service, with reflection and discussion with other students/interns and the supervisor.

Supervisors/mentors

Supervisors play a crucial role in the internship experience for all undergraduate students. For each degree programme, an internship board defines the criteria for selecting and recruiting supervisors. No "standard" criteria have been provided at the national or the local level, nor

have any minimum requirements been established (Lichene, Molina, Restiglian, and Sannipoli 2020).

Each supervisor could be responsible for a group of students whose number may vary from university to university. Group sessions alternate with individual meetings between student and supervisor. Supervision focuses on the students' observations and documentation and on analysing the practices that they have implemented in the field.

Self-evaluation and external evaluation

The methods used to evaluate the internship are also at the discretion of the individual university. However, assessment is usually continuous and generally involves both 'external' evaluation provided by the supervisor and critical evaluation and analysis on the part of the students themselves, such as self-evaluation based on the analysis of learning outcomes, self-observation and own appraisal of practical teaching experience. This formative evaluation model (*valutazione formativa,* Bondioli and Ferrari 2004) foregrounds the active involvement of the student.

As recent research promoted by the *Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia* has highlighted (see *Chapter **9***), the quality of direct and indirect internship and of supervision activities is strictly related to the capability of each university to build significant relationships with local socio-educational services. In particular, the recent implementation of the specific pathway in Early Childhood Education within the 3-year course in Educational Science, as well as the module of 60 ECTS credits in Early Childhood Education for Pre-primary Teachers, raised the issue of how to construct ongoing relationships between universities and educational services 0–3 years that could foster meaningful and fruitful exchanges for both institutions. In Italy, this issue is part of the current debate on the initial professional education of Educators for 0–3 year-olds.

Pre-primary Education Teachers (*insegnanti*)

Practica/internships within the 5-year university degree course in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*)

Regulation

Since 2010 (Ministerial Decree DM 249/2010, Art. 3), in the context of an overall redefining of IPE requirements for teachers, the government has made internship an obligatory part of the 5-year degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*).

Aims and goals

The goals of the internship are to promote the integration of the theoretical knowledge that the students are gradually acquiring with hands-on experience of workplace settings; to ensure a healthy balance between theory, practice and reflection on experience; to train students in the use of observation and documentation tools; and to provide students with a framework for reflecting on practice.

Length of time spent in the workplace and number of ECTS credits

Internship experience begins in year two and lasts a total of 600 hours (corresponding to 24 ECTS credits) over years 2–5. National legislation requires the placements to be designed to earn a progressively higher number of ECTS credits in each successive year up to the final year. Each university decides how to distribute these hours over the years.

Structure of time blocks

Guided workplace experience comprises direct and indirect activities. Direct activities are carried out in pre-primary and primary schools, and student teachers are supervised by experienced Pre-primary or Primary School Teachers. There is an orientation phase, an observation phase in schools, a phase for the preparation of a specific project and a final phase for the implementation of the project. The host teacher in the primary or pre-primary school cooperates with the

university tutor in supervising and evaluating the teaching practice. Thus, the curriculum is implemented in collaboration with schools: each university is responsible to work with schools in the surrounding area. School teachers and principals therefore work directly with students; they are assigned part time or full time to universities to supervise students in planning, carrying out, analysing and discussing their teaching practice assignments.

Supervisors/mentors

Supervisors are recruited via a selection process to work at the university for a few years. There is approximately one supervisor per 20–25 students. The relevant Ministerial Decree DM 178/2011 distinguishes between three different tutorial positions: Trainee Tutors (*tutor dei tirocinanti*) and Coordinating Tutors (*tutor coordinatori*), who both play the role of supervisor, and Organising Tutor (*tutor organizzatori*), with no hours of actual supervision. Article 11 states that those appointed as "supervisor tutors" must have worked for at least five years as teachers or head teachers within the Italian national school system. The appointment (role) must be either reconfirmed or terminated each year by the board of the university department employing the tutor. The posts of Coordinating Tutor may only be assigned for a 4-year period, may not be reassigned immediately to the same person and may be extended for a maximum of one additional year. The university department employing the tutors is responsible for selecting and recruiting them. In the course of their everyday duties, tutors/supervisors report to the degree programme board.

The function of Trainee Tutors (*tutor dei tirocinanti*) is to monitor the students' teaching activities during their periods of teaching practice and to help them manage their teaching processes. Coordinating Tutors (*tutor coordinatori*) are responsible for guiding and managing the regular tutors, assigning the students to classes and schools, formally drawing up a teaching practice plan for each student, catering for the training needs of the group of students under their supervision, monitoring and assessing the teaching practice placements and guiding the student teachers in writing their final reports. Organising Tutors (*tutor organizzatori*) organise and manage the relations between the university, schools and school heads and supervise all the administrative procedures involving the coordinating tutors and the regional education authorities. They also have responsibility for assigning a group of students to each coordinating tutor.

In general – independent of the supervisors' specific role – their job is to make sure that student teachers receive an adequate amount of feedback and guidance when carrying out their specific teaching practice assignments. Supervisors also help students to reflect on and organise their own knowledge, to appreciate the relationship between theory and practice, to apply formal learning to occupational roles and to become familiar with the running of schools and the different activities and practices implemented in the classroom.

With regard to remuneration, tutors are subject to the contractual conditions laid down by the relevant national wage agreement.

Evaluation

Evaluation and monitoring throughout the internship are the basis for intermediate and final assessments. At the end of each year of the internship, students submit project documents, including teaching materials, and a final report.

Special Needs Teachers (*insegnante di sostegno*)

Regulation

Ministerial Decree DM 249/2010 defined the *Linee Guida Nazionali Ministeriali* (National Ministry Guidelines) for the teaching practice component of the 1-year postgraduate course in special needs education that may completed by graduates in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*) or by recognised Primary Teachers.

Length of time spent in the workplace and number of ECTS credits

Students must complete 300 hours of internship experience (12 ECTS credits). Individual universities are free to decide how these hours will be distributed as long as they meet the national requirement for the teaching practice to take place in primary or pre-primary schools over a period of no longer than 5 months.

Content structure of time blocks

The placement comprises both indirect and direct components. The indirect component involves critical analysis of the teaching practice experience by the student teachers themselves and the design of interactive teaching activities for implementation with children with disabilities. The practical activities include the application of digital technologies (ICTs) to special needs education. The exact type of teaching experience provided can vary and is defined by the local university in collaboration with the host schools.

Supervisors/mentors

During the direct activity phase of the placement, the student is supervised by a practicum tutor (*tutor dei tirocinanti*) chosen from among the teaching staff of the host school, who must have at least seven years' teaching experience.

Evaluation

Assessment of the teaching practice is both external and internal (self-evaluation). The former is based mainly on tutors' evaluation of students' performance/progress during the placement. This is followed by the students' own critical assessment of their practical teaching experience at both the personal and the professional level.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Legislation and regulation

In Italy, the CPD provision for ECEC staff working in the Integrated System 0–6 varies according to the ECEC provider.

CPD for ECEC staff working in municipal provision

Continuing professional development for ECEC staff working in municipal and subsidised educational services 0–3 years or in municipal pre-primary schools is planned and implemented by local authorities with the support of regional governments and varies significantly across the country (there is a large gap between northern and southern regions).

CPD for teachers working in state-maintained pre-primary schools

CPD for teachers working in state-maintained pre-primary schools is regulated at the national level. A national framework and new guidelines for the CPD of pre-primary, primary and secondary school teachers were drawn up following the approval of Law 107/2015. The Law (Art. 1 paragraph 124) defined CPD as "compulsory, permanent and structural" and specified that in-service training activities should be planned by each school according to the priorities indicated in the National Teacher Professional Development Plan (*Piano per la Formazione dei Docenti*) elaborated every 3 years by the Ministry of Education (Ministerial Decree DM 797/2016, Ministero dell'Istruzione 2021). The law introduced an annual €500 bonus for teachers called

'Teacher's Card' (*Carta del docente*). This card must be used exclusively to purchase accredited CPD courses, to cover the expenses of training activities and/or to buy books.[4]

Towards a common framework for CPD in the Integrated System 0–6

With the implementation of Law Decree 65/2017, the Italian government acknowledged – including in economic terms – its crucial role in promoting and sustaining CPD activities to ensure the full professional development of ECEC staff across the 0–6 sector. To overcome the lack of a common framework for CPD provision and guarantee equal opportunities for ECEC staff across the country, Law Decree 65/2017 – which explicitly states that the CPD of *all ECEC staff* working in the Integrated System 0–6 is a strategic goal for qualifying the system (Art. 4 paragraph 1.f) – defines the tasks to be performed by the state, regional governments and local authorities in the field of CPD:

- The State has the task of implementing actions aimed at promoting the CPD of all ECEC staff of the Integrated System 0–6 in line with the framework of the National Teacher Professional Development Plan (Art. 5 paragraph 1.c).
- Regions define guidelines for supporting the professionalism of ECEC staff of the Integrated System 0–6 at the regional level in line with the framework of the National Teacher Professional Development Plan (Art. 6 paragraph 1.b).
- Local authorities plan and implement the CPD initiatives for ECEC staff of the Integrated System 0–6 in their areas in line with the framework of the National Teacher Professional Development Plan (Art. 7 paragraph 1.f).

As detailed in *Chapter **8***, the implementation of Law Decree 65/2017 is supported by a National Multiannual Implementation Plan (*Piano di Azione Nazionale Pluriennale per la Promozione del Sistema Integrato di Educazione e Istruzione*), which defines actions for and allocates financial resources to developing and qualifying the Integrated System 0–6. The most recent 5-year National Implementation Plan (2021–2025) established that each region should devote at least 5% of the resources to promoting CPD initiatives addressed to ECEC staff and/or local pedagogical coordination (DCM 706/2022).

Main forms

The main forms of CPD for ECEC staff (Educators, Teachers, Pedagogical Coordinators and School Heads) are workshops, conferences, local seminars, research projects (action research, intervention research, participatory research, etc.) and exchange programmes. In the best Italian ECEC experiences, CPD is aimed at fostering critical thinking and reflexive practices and encouraging shared learning and 'learning by doing' within communities of practice and of learners (Lave and Wenger 1991), rather than transmitting theoretical knowledge that is scarcely connected with practice.

It is important to stress that, since 1970/80, the administrations of some northern and central regions – such as Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and Umbria – have consistently and systematically invested in CPD initiatives for ECEC staff (Musatti, Picchio, and Mayer 2016; Bove, Jensen, Wysłowska, Iannone, Mantovani, and Karwowska-Struczyk 2018) that have contributed not only to improving the quality of ECEC provision at the local level but also to developing and spreading a "culture of early childhood" across the country within a "situated systemic framework" (Mantovani 2010).

[4] The Plan provides for an investment of 325 million euros for in-service teacher training plus 1.1 billion euros for financing the Teacher's Card, amounting to a total of 1.4 billion euros over the period 2016–2019.

These administrations set up partnerships with universities or research institutes aimed at developing a consolidated set of professional practices based on action research, practices of teamwork or co-constructed project work focused on working with families and the community (*partecipazione*). Participatory processes, the involvement of Pedagogical Coordinators, the designing of experiential learning processes, the focus on community-based learning, the role of documentation and the partnership with universities and research centres have been key elements in the implementation of high-quality CPD (Lazzari, Picchio, and Musatti 2013).

Collegiality is also a main feature of continuing professional development in Italy. Indeed, CPD is conceptualised as a collegial process aimed at constructing and implementing shared knowledge and practice at the team level and within the wider ECEC professionals' community. Collegiality is the context in which ECEC professionals have the opportunity to analyse and discuss the processes that take place in educational contexts and the impact of their practices on children's and parents' experience and to discuss their points of view on challenges that arise in their daily work. From this perspective, collegiality is the process by which the attitude towards research and reflexivity, now widely recognised as an essential component of ECEC professionalism, is nurtured (Picchio, Giovannini, Mayer, and Musatti 2012).

Most CPD initiatives are based on the use of procedures of observation and documentation aimed at connecting the pedagogical reflection to concrete matters and supporting the analysis of practices (Rinaldi 2001, 2006).

In some municipalities (e.g., Milan, Reggio Emilia and Pistoia), CPD is based on the synergy between staff meetings at educational services 0–3 years and pre-primary schools and broader training opportunities provided at the local, national and international levels. Moreover, bottom-up networks have traditionally played a crucial role in the CPD of Italian ECEC staff (see *Box 3*).

Box 3

Italy: Example of an influential professional network

The *Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia* (GNNI), founded in 1980, is a large network whose members are researchers, managers, decision makers, Educators, Teachers and Pedagogical Coordinators from different regions. It plays an important role in the development of quality educational services 0–3 years and pre-primary schools, promotes advocacy initiatives and periodically organises conferences and workshops on early childhood education at the local and national levels, which are attended by a large number of delegates. Today, the GNNI is one of the most authoritative voices in the Italian ECEC sector.
http://www.grupponidiinfanzia.it/

All the components of CPD described above reflect the broader Italian discourse on in-service professional development (*formazione-in-servizio*), which is particularly strong in municipal educational services 0–3 years and municipal pre-primary schools.[5]

CPD providers

Local authorities are the main providers of CPD activities targeting ECEC staff working in municipal – and often subsidised – educational services 0–3 years and in municipal pre-primary schools. They fund and plan CPD activities – usually on an annual basis – and negotiate the contents and modes of organisation with universities, research centres and external training agencies or use internal resources. CPD activities are carried out within a collegial framework. All

[5] It is important to stress that the term '*formazione*' conveys a very different meaning from the English word 'training'. It comes from *forma* (structure, shape) and means 'taking rather than being given a form' (Nigris 2007, 1146). This requires investment at many levels and a bottom-up participatory perspective on professional development as a dynamic, multimethod approach of reviewing practices within a community of learners.

ECEC staff of the educational services 0–3 years or pre-primary schools are involved on a team basis.

At the local level, some city/town administrations (e.g. Reggio Emilia, San Miniato, Pistoia and Modena) have set up other types of institution (e.g. documentation centres), which provide professional development activities for Educators and Pre-primary Teachers.

The Ministry of Education and external training agencies are the main providers of CPD targeting teachers of state-maintained pre-primary schools through funds allocated to schools and used for financing the annual "Teacher's Card". Each school draws up a professional development plan. Teachers can individually choose activities among a range of training courses accredited by the Ministry of Education.

According to Law Decree 65/2017, the private sector, which runs educational services 0–3 years and pre-primary schools, should guarantee CPD activities for their ECEC staff. However, the opportunity for staff to benefit CPD depends on the allocation of paid non-contact time (see *Chapter **7.4***).

Leave entitlement, access to CPD and funding support

Traditionally, in municipal ECEC provision, CPD has been considered both a "right" and a "duty" of Educators (0–3) and Pre-primary Teachers (3–6). Both professions have been guaranteed between 120 to 200 hours per year to attend professional development initiatives, collegial meetings with or without the supervision of Pedagogical Coordinators and meetings with parents and to carry out documentation activities.

In order to promote a sharing reflection on daily practices, in some municipalities, auxiliary staff participate in CPD initiatives together with Educators, Teachers and Pedagogical Coordinators.

In state-maintained pre-primary schools, regulations allow 80 hours per year to be devoted to teamwork planning, meetings with parents and CPD activities. Regional Ministry School Offices (*Uffici Scolastici Regionali*) may be more or less stringent in terms of monitoring how these hours are actually invested, allowing a lesser or greater proportion to be used for *auto-aggiornamento* (self-organised professional development), which may include individual study. A rough estimate of the time devoted annually to CPD is between 12 and 15 hours.

In the private sector, the access to CPD opportunities for Educators (0–3) and Teachers (3–6) varies significantly according to working contract agreements. For example, two leading providers – the PAN (a consortium of social entrepreneurship networks) in the 0–3 sector and the FISM (*Federazione Italiana Scuole Materne*) in the 3–6 sector – guarantee a minimum of 12 paid working hours per year for CPD activities, while, in other cases, the amount of paid working hours is fully absorbed by the work with children.

CPD and career advancement

Participation in CPD activities is not formally recognised in terms of career advancement.

Options for supplementary/additional study routes

Educators (0–3) and Teachers (3–6) who decide to pursue supplementary study routes or training courses are required to pay for these courses themselves. All employed Teachers and Educators have the right to benefit from paid study leave (*diritto allo studio* – the right to education), pending on the formal approval by the School Head/Pedagogical Coordinator. Recognised further study routes include PhD programmes, Master's degree programmes and so on. The amount of paid time available for achieving these additional formal qualifications depends on the contract of employment (public versus private, etc.). Despite the differences, it usually corresponds to an average of 150 paid hours per year.

Key content focus of CPD for core practitioners

In municipal ECEC provision, topics of CPD activities are defined at the local level, taking into account the needs of ECEC professionals working in the local ECEC system. In state ECEC provision, each pre-primary school defines the topic of CPD activities autonomously. However, in recent years a number of shared topics have emerged:

- Constructing a unitary and holistic approach to early childhood education across the 0–3 and 3–6 sector (Bondioli, Savio, and Gobetto 2018; Lazzari, Pastori, Sità, and Sorzio 2020). In a recent note (Ministero dell'Istruzione 2022b), the Ministry of Education requested all Regional Ministry School Offices (*Uffici Scolastici Regionali*) to promote joint professional development initiatives addressed to both Pre-primary Teachers and Educators of educational services 0–3 years, in collaboration with local authorities, aimed at discussing the Pedagogical Guidelines of the Integrated System 0–6 (*Linee Pedagogiche per il Sistema Integrato Zerosei,* Ministerial Decree DM 334/2021) and the National Guidelines for Educational Services 0–3 (*Orientamenti Nazionali per i Servizi Educativi per l'Infanzia,* Ministerial Decree DM 43/2022) (see *Chapter **8***). These initiatives are also meant to deepen issues related to educational continuity between the educational experiences offered to children from the first months of life to their entry into primary school at the age of 6 years, such as relationships with families, organisation of inclusive educational contexts, role of digital technologies for the healthy growth of children in educational and family contexts, observation, planning, documentation, evaluation and self-evaluation.
- Rethinking and promoting parents' participation in ECEC services, even considering needs expressed by parents during the pandemic period and the growing social, cultural and economic changes in communities (Bove 2020; Mantovani, Bove, Ferri, Manzoni, Cesa, Bianchi, and Picca 2021).
- Outdoor education (Malavasi 2019; Schenetti, and Guerra 2018), which has become a widespread topic within the initiatives because of the experience of the pandemic.

Research

At the national level, no large-scale research projects on the CPD of ECEC staff have received funding over the last 5 years, even taking the pandemic into account. However, in the following, we report a significant example of a study on the CPD of ECEC staff in Italy carried out in the last decade.

Italian case study in innovative PD practices in ECEC services in Europe – European CARE project

Source: Bove, Jensen, Wysłowska, Iannone, Mantovani, and Karwowska-Struczyk 2018 (see *References* for further details).

Aims: The Italian case study on "Innovative practices in the in-service professional development of ECEC practitioners" is part of the Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of the European Education and Care (CARE https://ecec-care.org/) project, funded by the European Union under the Seventh Framework Programme. The Italian case study was part of the work package on Professional Development – Impact and Innovation and involved in-depth exploration and analysis of two innovative approaches to professional development at the city level, which could act as models for PD at the national level. These were the cases of "Reggio Emilia: a model of diffused pedagogy" (Giudici and Castagnetti 2016) and "Milano: fostering innovation in a big city. Continuity and change" (Mantovani, Bove, Cescato, and Braga 2016).

More specifically, the aims of the study were to describe how innovative frameworks for the CPD of ECEC practitioners at the macro (city) level, typical of both the selected case studies, are transferred and further implemented at the micro (school) level; to explore which types of professional development are most effective in enhancing the quality of ECEC; to analyse how practitioners perceive and interpret the impact of innovation on their educational practices and on ECEC quality; and to investigate teachers' perceptions, views, ideas and beliefs about developing their professional competence within a qualitative–ethnographic framework.

Procedures: The research was designed as a 'Holistic Case Study' (Yin 2009) with embedded sub-case studies at both sites. After a preliminary narrative review of the concepts of "innovation" and "innovative PD practices in Early Childhood Education and Care", the case study was conducted by combining multiple and diverse sources of data. Existing/documentary data and new/empirical data were both viewed as the key to contextualising and analysing the two case study sites and their embedded sub-case studies in depth. In Milan, three sub-case units were involved: two nursery centres 0–3 and a pre-primary school 3–6; in Reggio Emilia, two sub-case units were involved: a nursery and a pre-primary school.

A total of 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of informants (stakeholders, Educators, Teachers, Education Coordinators and Researchers). In addition, three focus group discussions were conducted in Milan with Educators from the educational services 0–3 years involved in the study.

The interviews and focus group discussions were audio recorded and fully transcribed. The data were analysed qualitatively using content analysis methodology (Berg and Lune 2012), combining categories drawn from the literature with "bottom-up categories". Documentary sources (PhD and Master's theses, publications, documentation, etc.) on the history of the ECEC settings and their staff's in-service PD were analysed and compared with the interview data.

Findings: The results suggested a high level of consistency between the macro and the micro level, represented by the existing/documentary sources and the interviews with participants, respectively. More specifically, continuing professional development was not conceptualised as an optional extra but as "embedded in the services/in place". The accounts of Teachers/Educators, coordinators and stakeholders all reflected a shared perception of how innovation occurs in practice. The key themes concerning innovation and efficacy in PD are a good balance between theory and practice; the connection between research and PD; the impact (of PD) as "change in action"; the importance of workshops and opportunities for "learning by doing"; the need for reflexivity and opportunities for shared learning/teamwork; the key role of the education coordinator as a "driver of innovation"; and the use of new technologies (ICT) as a component of innovation.

In addition, there was widespread interpretation of innovation in PD as a participatory process, which not only includes workshops, action research, analysis of practice and video observations but also involves parents and children where possible. As a 'catalyst for adults to meet' (New, Mallory, and Mantovani 2001), CPD is viewed as a key means of developing a shared vision of early years education.

The study contributes to developing insights/perspectives for the future: the need for a better balance between pre-service and in-service PD practices; the need to reduce both intergenerational differences among staff and the rigid use of human and financial resources that is typical of the Italian public administration system; the need to bridge multiple perspectives within ECEC (by creating and combining real and virtual communities of learners); the need to invest in the training of key figures as multipliers of innovation; and the need to promote collaboration be-

tween policymakers, practitioners, researchers and parents to develop a common understanding of PD. In a word, there is a need to keep the rights of children in view as the compass ultimately directing our action.

Current debates

The current debates in Italy regarding the continuing professional development of ECEC staff include the following main issues:

- Reserving a portion of the new financial resources devoted to ECEC provision in the last years (Gruppo CRC 2021) for guaranteeing equal CPD opportunities for ECEC staff working in the Integrated System 0–6 across the country, reducing the gap between the quality of the ECEC services and capitalising the CPD best practices developed in municipal ECEC provision since the 1970s
- Planning and implementing systematic and sustainable joint CPD activities aiming to attract both 0–3 Educators and 3–6 Teachers through close cooperation between state, regions and local authorities to promote a common culture and a shared holistic approach to early childhood education and support practices of horizontal and vertical continuity
- Strengthening the role of local pedagogical coordination (*coordinamenti pedagogici territoriali*) in planning, promoting and monitoring CPD initiatives at the local level
- Revising employment contracts, in particular in the private sector, to ensure that all Educators and Teachers have an appropriate number of paid hours allocated to CPD activities
- Creating opportunities for inter-generational professional exchanges between newly recruited and senior ECEC practitioners
- Introducing new contents/topics into the CPD initiatives to meet the challenges of an increasingly diverse, complex and intercultural society that requires inclusive practices
- Encouraging inter-professional CPD initiatives to increase the capacity of ECEC professionals to act systemically in collaboration with other professional figures working with children and families (networking and multi-sectorial collaboration).

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration and working hours[6]

In Italy, the salaries and working conditions of Educators of 0–3 year-olds and Pre-primary Teachers vary significantly according to the setting providers (Mari 2016, 2021).

Educators of 0–3 year-olds and Pre-primary School Teachers working in municipal provision fall under the C category of workers under the terms of the National Wage Agreement/regional and local authorities and are entitled to an annual gross[7] salary of €22,039 per year for 36 working hours per week (usually 30 working hours with children and 6 hours devoted to collegial meet-

[6] *Sources*: National collective contract AGIDAE 2022; National collective contract ANINSEI 2022; National collective contract FISM 2016; National collective contract relating to the staff of the local functions sector, three-year period 2016-2018; National collective contract for staff in the education and research sector, three-year period 2016-2018; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2021.

[7] It should be considered that ECEC professionals pay taxes of about 25% on their remuneration.

ings, meetings with parents, documentation activities and attendance at professional development initiatives). However, both the salary and the working conditions vary across cities/towns and across Regions as a function of local wage agreements.

The annual gross salary of teachers working in state-maintained pre-primary schools – who are in the direct employment of the Ministry of Education – is €24,297 for 25 weekly working hours with children.

The salaries and working conditions of Educators of 0–3 year-olds or Pre-primary Teachers working in subsidised or private educational services 0–3 years or in private or recognised pre-primary schools vary according to the national agreement applied by the providers (FISM, AGIDAE, ANINSEI social cooperatives, private health enterprises, etc.). The gross salaries amount to a minimum of €17,680 and a maximum of €21,526 per year and the weekly working hours vary between 31 and 38.

The remuneration and working conditions of Pedagogical Coordinators also vary according to the type of provider and the number of hours worked per week. Full-time employed Pedagogical Coordinators can earn a gross salary between €20,709 (in private, subsidised or recognised early educational services 0–3 years and private and recognised pre-primary schools) and €24,895 (in municipal ECEC provision) per annum, while Heads of state-maintained schools may earn from €69,700 upwards according to the whole school size.

It is difficult to say in "absolute and general terms" whether it is possible to live on the salary of an Educator/Teacher in Italy today. The relationship between salary and standard of living is influenced by many factors (such as the average cost of living in one's city or region of residence, family circumstances, age, number of children, etc.). The economic crisis and the effects of the pandemic certainly had a strong impact on the purchasing power of ECEC professionals. Furthermore, it should be considered that the salary of ECEC professionals varies according to their length of employment by the same provider, though significantly long periods are needed to achieve modest salary increases.

ECEC professionals employed in the public sector enjoy long-term economic security, and this contributes to the perception of these occupations as being of a better quality. This is especially the case at the present time, when the long-term jobs and permanent positions previously expected by young graduates are become extremely difficult to attain. Educators, Teachers and Pedagogical Coordinators working in private ECEC provision not only face more variable working conditions but also enjoy less job security over the long term. Most of them are employed on the basis of fixed-term or discontinuous contracts and, even in state-maintained pre-primary schools, some teachers are employed temporarily (15.6%) (Ministero dell'Istruzione 2022a).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

As described above, the number of working hours of full-time ECEC professional staff varies according to the type of agreement applied. All professionals (Educators 0–3, Pre-primary Teachers and Pedagogical Coordinators) in municipal educational services 0–3 years and municipal pre-primary schools work 36 hours per week, while professionals in private or subsidised educational services 0–3 or private or recognised pre-primary schools work from 31 to 38 hours. Instead, teachers working in state-maintained pre-primary schools work 25 hours.

There are no data available concerning the number of part-time employees in either the 0–3 sector or the 3–6 sector.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

A probationary year for novice qualified Pre-primary Teachers and School Heads of state-maintained pre-primary schools is required.

The probationary period – defined by Ministerial Decree DM 850/2015 – is considered as part of newly qualified Teachers' ongoing training and professional development. During this period, Teachers are engaged in specific training activities: workshops and visiting innovative schools (12 hours), peer-to-peer meetings (12 hours), collegial meetings (6 hours) and individual online training activities (20 hours) for a total of 50 hours. During the probationary year, novice teachers are assigned to a Teacher Tutor, who plays an active and specific role in the training process and provides a final evaluation (which has to be submitted to the School Head) at the end of the year. The tasks of Teacher Tutors are welcoming, supporting, tutoring and supervising new entrants as well as evaluating their competences.

A similar path is provided for newly employed School Heads. It consists of a probationary year, during which they have to spend 25 hours on peer tutoring and 50 hours on training activities, such as workshops, case studies, analysis of practices, problem-solving activities and so on. They are assigned to a school Head Tutor, who makes a qualitative assessment of the competences acquired by the novice at the end of the probationary period (Ministerial Decree DM 956/2019).

Similar programmes are also implemented for Educators working in municipal educational services 0–3 years, but these measures are defined at the local level. For example, in Milan, newly recruited Educators are required to complete a 6-month probationary programme before being definitively employed (as established by the National Wage Agreement). During these six months, would-be employees work alongside the other Educators of the service and their work is observed by them. At the end of the probationary period, the Pedagogical Coordinator of the service is required to produce a full evaluation report.

At the national level, Law 107/2015 introduced new suggestions by stressing the relevance of a greater emphasis of *on-site mentoring* in schools. It defines the new role of "mentor–teachers" (chosen by the school's internal evaluation committee), who are required to conduct evaluations, coordinate training and peer tutoring, supervise the training of their colleagues and provide support for interns.

Some training programmes implemented in municipal educational services and pre-primary schools – for example the Milano-Bambini (MIBA) project (Bove et al. 2018; Premoli and Zaninelli 2020; see *Chapter **9***) – are also examples of how to develop, at the local level, innovative forms of *on-site training* that alternate in-service professional development with in-service supervision and are based on the professional knowledge of experienced ECEC staff.

7.4 Non-contact time

Educators and Pre-primary Teachers working in municipal provision (both educational services 0–3 years and pre-primary schools) are paid for an important amount of non-contact time (120 to 200 hours per year) to be spent on planning, staff meetings, meetings with parents, documentation and continuing professional development.

Teachers in state-maintained pre-primary schools have 80 hours per year of non-contact time. The Regional Educational Departments have stricter or looser policies concerning how these paid hours may be spent.

Non-contact time for Educators and Teachers working in educational services 0–3 years and pre-primary schools managed by non-public providers varies greatly according to their employment agreement (from 25 to 100 per year).

7.5 Current staffing issues

During the last decade, the Italian ECEC system has faced a major turnover in staff due to the retirement of professionals who entered the ECEC system during its years of expansion, and a similar upheaval is expected in the next decade. This poses a further challenge for the professional development of ECEC professionals.

Two main critical issues in the recruitment of ECEC staff are emerging: the very limited number of graduates who to date have the specific qualification required by the regulations for working in educational services 0–3 years (see *Chapter **4***); a shortage of Pre-primary Teachers – especially in the central and northern regions, where pre-primary provision is more widespread – due both to the established annual limited number of places on 5-year university courses in Primary and Pre-primary Education provided by universities and to the predominant choice of many graduates to work in primary schools rather than pre-primary schools (Gruppo CRC 2022).

In the coming years, these critical issues are bound to become dramatically more relevant in connection with the expected increase of ECEC provision for children aged 0–6.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Two core national policy reforms relating to ECEC staffing are highlighted in this chapter.

(1) Law 107/2015 and Law Decree 65/2017

As elaborated in *Chapter **1***, the National Law 107/2015 introduced a set of guidelines for a comprehensive reform of the Italian school education system at all levels (ECEC, primary, middle and high school). The main reform goals referred to:

- The introduction of merit-based components for teacher salaries
- Teacher recruitment (on a permanent basis)
- School autonomy
- The curriculum
- Digital and language skills
- Work-based learning
- Continuing professional development; and the previously mentioned
- Integrated System of education from birth to six years of age.

Teachers' professionalism is being taken seriously and new funds have been allocated to support the CPD of all teachers across the education system.

Two points are particularly relevant to the ECEC sector:

- The guarantee of "compulsory, permanent and structural continuing professional development for teachers at all school levels"
- The development of the "Integrated System of education from birth to six years" (Law 107/2015, Article 1, paragraph 181) that aims at overcoming the previous split system between the provision for children under 3 years of age (0–3) and the pre-primary sector (3–6).

In 2017, the Italian Parliament approved Law Decree 65/2017, which regulates the implementation of the integrated system in detail. The Law Decree does not aim to achieve uniform management, organisation procedures or educational practices but rather intends to bring all the

provision into an integrated system unified by shared standards of acceptability in terms of organisational and educational quality. It provides for the redefinition of roles and responsibilities among the regional and local authorities, the setting up of "hubs for 0–6 year-olds" (*poli per l'infanzia*) and the introduction of a new financing system based on co-funding by the state, regional governments and local authorities. Moreover, in line with most European countries, the Decree introduced – for the first time at the national level – the upgrading of initial professional education to a university degree for 0–3 Educators. Additionally, it sustains the development of a more inclusive system of early childhood and education and equal educational opportunities for all children and families by extending the ECEC provision across the country, enhancing the quality of educational services through CPD for both Educators and Pre-primary teachers and developing a system for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the ECEC system.

The main elements of the Decree are summarised in *Box 4*.

Box 4

Italy: Law Decree 65/2017: Establishment of an Integrated System of education from birth to 6 years

1. Ensuring equal educational opportunities, overcoming economic and cultural barriers to access (Art. 1, paragraph 3.b), encouraging inclusion (Art. 1, paragraph 1) and in general ensuring more accessible services for all families, especially the most vulnerable ones
2. Encouraging educational continuity between educational programmes for children aged 0–3 and 3–6 (Art. 1, paragraph 3.a)
3. Enhancing the quality of educational services 0–3 years by ensuring adequate initial professional education for ECEC professionals working in these services. Tertiary-level education is required: either a Bachelor's Degree in Educational Science with a specific pathway in Early Childhood Education or a 5-year degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education, supplemented by a 60 ECTS credits module in Early Childhood Education (Art. 4, paragraph 1.e)
4. Ensuring continuing professional development opportunities for all ECEC staff (Art. 1, paragraph 3.g) and delivering targeted in-service training programmes for ECEC staff working within the Integrated 0–6 years system (Art 4, paragraph 1.f; Art. 5, paragraph 1.b)
5. Defining criteria for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the educational programmes provided within the Integrated system 0–6 (Art. 5, paragraph 1.d)
6. Ensuring the pedagogical coordination of educational services 0–3 years and pre-primary schools at the local level (Art. 1, paragraph 3.g)
7. Establishing *poli per l'infanzia* (hubs for 0–6 year-olds), which unite educational services 0–3 and pre-primary schools in the same building (or in the same area) to enable more coherent local planning of the Integrated System 0–6 and ensure pedagogical continuity (Art. 3)
8. Consolidating, expanding and improving accessibility to educational services 0–3 years to ensure coverage of 33% of children under 3 and at least 75% of Italian municipalities (Art. 4, paragraphs 1.a and 1.b)
9. Defining multi-level governance of the Integrated System 0–6 (see *Chapter **1***) based on an articulated framework of interaction and cooperation between the state, regional governments and local authorities (Art. 5, Art. 6 and Art. 7)
10. Defining the National Pedagogical Guidelines of the Integrated System 0–6 and National Guidelines for Educational Services 0–3 (coherently with the existing National Curricular Guidelines for pre-primary and primary schools)
11. Establishing an Expert Committee, appointed by the Ministry of Education, with counselling tasks (Art. 10)
12. Establishing a National Multiannual Implementation Plan defining the distribution of the available financial resources for consolidating, expanding and enhancing the Integrated system 0–6 (Art. 8)
13. Setting up a National Fund for the development of the Integrated System 0–6 via investment in constructing, renovating and maintaining educational services 0–3 years and pre-primary schools, providing CPD for ECEC staff and establishing local pedagogical coordination (Art. 12)
14. Defining an upper limit to the contribution that may be asked of families to cover the cost of running educational services 0–3 years (Art. 9, paragraph 1) and prompting local authorities to offer reduced fees, fee exemptions and economic incentives to families with a low income.

The implementation of Law Decree 65/2017, as stated in *Chapter **1***, is supported by the National Multiannual Implementation Plan (*Piano di Azione Nazionale Pluriennale per la Promozione del Sistema Integrato di Educazione e Istruzione*), which defines actions and financial resources – the National Fund for the Integrated System (see Gruppo CRC 2021) – for developing and qualifying the Integrated System 0–6 (Art. 8). The fund is assigned to municipalities following the directions of regional governments, which are mandated to match the funds at an established rate as well as to programme the extension of ECEC provision in their area and interventions for its qualification (Art. 12).

The National Fund is dedicated to:

- Building and qualifying structures of both educational services 0–3 and pre-primary schools
- Covering part of the management costs of educational services 0–3 as well to reduce families' fees
- Expanding and consolidating the provision of municipal and subsidised private pre-primary schools
- Supporting the qualification of ECEC staff through CPD initiatives and promoting local pedagogical coordination.

The most recent 5-year National Implementation Plan (2021–2025) (DCM 706/2022):

- Specifies that regional co-financing should not be less than 25% of the resources allocated by the state and that at least 20% of the whole Fund[8] will be allocated to those regions where the availability of places in educational services in relation to the population of children under 3 years of age is lower than the national average
- Increases the number of the spring sections to counteract the early enrolment of children under the age of 3 in pre-primary schools (which is particularly widespread in southern regions where the provision for under 3 year-olds is still lower than the national average)
- Establishes that each regional government should devote at least 5% of its resources to the implementation of CPD initiatives addressed to Educators and Pre-primary Teachers, in line with the framework of the National Professional Development Plan (see *Chapter **6***), and/or promote local pedagogical coordination.

During the past two years, as required by Law Decree 65/2017 (Art. 10), the Expert Committee appointed by the Ministry of Education developed two important pedagogical documents:

- Pedagogical Guidelines of the Integrated System 0–6 (*Linee Pedagogiche per il Sistema Integrato Zerosei,* Ministerial Decree DM 334/2021)
- National Guidelines for Educational Services 0–3 (*Orientamenti Nazionali per i Servizi Educativi per l'Infanzia,* Ministerial Decree DM 43/2022).

The Pedagogical Guidelines of the Integrated System 0–6 define both the cultural and the pedagogical framework of the system, proposing a unitary and holistic approach to the education of children from birth up to 6 years of age, and the institutional and organisational framework of the system, describing the responsibilities and tasks of the state, regional governments and local authorities. The guidelines emphasise the key role of CPD and local pedagogical coordination in implementing the Integrated System 0–6 (Cerini and Spinosi 2021). The guidelines outline the basic elements of the educational competences of all professionals (Educators, Teachers and Pedagogical Coordinators) coherently with the existing National Curricular Guidelines for Pre-

[8] The fund consists of 307 million euros for the year 2021 and 309 million euros for the years 2022 and 2023, respectively.

primary and Primary Schools (*Indicazioni Nazionali per il Curricolo della Scuola dell'Infanzia e del Primo Ciclo di Istruzione* updated with *Nuovi Scenari* – Ministerial Decree DM 254/2012, MIUR 2018b).

The National Guidelines for Educational Services 0–3 years represent the first national pedagogical framework for the 0–3 sector. The guidelines were inspired by the "culture of childhood" (*cultura dell'infanzia*) elaborated in municipal educational services 0–3 years over many years. The guidelines provide a framework for planning and implementing high-quality educational contexts for children under 3 years of age. They are an open document aimed at promoting reflections and discussions on children's care and education in the first 3 years of life by all the actors involved in the 0–3 sector. In this document, the relevance of appropriate initial and in-service professional development of ECEC staff is also stressed.

Before being approved by the Minister of Education both documents were submitted to a broad consultation involving a great number of stakeholders: regional governments and local authorities, private providers, trade unions, ECEC professionals, professional associations and universities.

(2) Law 205/2017 (paragraph 594, 601) 29 December 2017

Law 205/2017, which was approved in 2017 and came into force on 1 January 2018, defines – in line with European and international standards – the occupations of Professional Educator (*educatore professionale*) and *pedagogista* and specifies the professional identity, academic qualifications and lines of work of both professionals.

The knowledge, skills and competences of Professional Educators correspond to EQF Level 6. More specifically, the law provides for two different types of Professional Educator: (1) Professional Educator - healthcare sector (*educatore professionale socio-sanitario*), who is eligible to work in healthcare contexts, and (2) Professional Educator – social and education sector (*educatore professionale socio-pedagogico*), who is eligible to work in educational and socio-educational services such as schools, social care services (across the lifespan), residential care for minors, family support, international cooperation and so on. Educators working in educational services 0–3-years are included in the second type of Professional Educator.

The former must hold a Bachelor's degree (3 years' full-time study) in the area of Health and Healthcare and the latter a Bachelor's degree in Educational Science. As described in *Chapter **4***, a Bachelor's degree in Educational Science plus a specific pathway on Early Childhood Education became a mandatory requirement for working in educational services 0–3 years.

The knowledge, skills and competences of a *pedagogista* correspond to EQF Level 7. They must hold a Master's degree (Planning and Management of Educational Services, Lifelong Learning Education, Educational Science or Theories and Methodologies of e-Learning and Media Education). Their role is to design, plan, organise and coordinate educational services from birth to adulthood and to manage, monitor, evaluate and supervise the educational quality of public and private education and training systems. In this perspective, their profile does not include either mainly or exclusively professionals working as pedagogical coordinators. *Pedagogisti* may also act as supervisors, teachers' trainers, consultants and so on, at all levels of education.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

InTrans – Sustaining inclusive transitions across the early years

Sources: Lazzari, Balduzzi, and Serpioni 2022a; Lazzari, Balduzzi, and Serpioni 2022b (see *References* for full details).

Aims: In the context of the reform on the Integrated System 0–6 (Law 107/2015), the continuing professional development (CPD) of Educators, Pre-primary Teachers and Pedagogical Coordinators has gained renewed attention. As educational services 0–3 years and pre-primary schools in Italy previously fell under the responsibilities of different Ministries at national level – and were regulated and funded by different bodies at regional and local levels – institutional splits as well as differences in pedagogical approaches and educational practice across the 0–3 and 3–6 services are posing major challenges to the implementation of the reform. In such a fragmented landscape, investing in CPD initiatives aimed to foster inter-professional learning communities across the 0–3 and 3–6 sectors – as well as across state-maintained, municipal and private provision – has become paramount for sustaining the development of a unitary pedagogical vision, promoting the continuity of educational approaches and practices from 0 to 6 (Law Decree 65/2017). Against this background, the research and development initiatives undertaken within the Erasmus+ KA3 project *InTrans – Sustaining Inclusive Transitions across the Early Years* (2020–2022) in the Italian context aimed to support the process of reform implementation by influencing the ECEC systemic conditions so that innovative educational continuity practices could be disseminated and upscaled.

Procedures: As part of the *InTrans* consortium[9], the research and development initiatives carried out in the Emilia-Romagna region by the University of Bologna (Department of Education) included the design, piloting and roll-out of an intensive CPD programme that involved approximately 50 participants, including Pedagogical Coordinators working in municipal and private ECEC services as well as pedagogical leaders operating in state-maintained pre-primary schools. The CPD programme, which was developed in collaboration with regional and local authorities, included both a theoretical and a practical component. The first was focused on raising awareness about the importance of sustaining inclusive transitions by drawing on international research findings. The latter was focused on providing participants with methodological tools to review critically the strengths and weaknesses of the transition practices implemented in their services by targeting their reflection on the experiences of children and families in transitions. At the end of the programme participants were asked to co-design small-scale transition projects to be piloted in their local context. To facilitate the implementation and follow-up of such initiatives, CPD activities were carried out mostly in "mixed groups" representing state-maintained, municipal and private provision on a territorial basis.

Findings: The results from focus groups carried out with participants after 6 months revealed that the successful outcome of experimentations was related both to the characteristics of the

[9] The *InTrans* project was coordinated by VBJK - Centre For Innovation in the Early Years, the University of Ghent (Centre for Diversity and Learning and Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy) in Belgium; the University of Bologna (Department of Education) in Italy; Tampere University (School of Education) in Finland; the Education Research Institute (ERI) in Slovenia; the Danish Union of Early Childhood and Youth Educators (BUPL) in Denmark; and the International Step by Step Association (ISSA). The Ministry of Education and Culture (FI), the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (SL), the Ministry of Education & Training and the Child & Family Agency (BE), as well as the Emilia-Romagna Regional government (IT) were involved as associated partners in the project.

CPD programme (i.e. developing a shared pedagogical vision by combining research and practice; sustaining the development of inter-professional networks at local level) and to the characteristics of the local context (i.e. support provided by school heads and/or local authorities to ensure the sustainability of experimentations; the possibility to rely on established pedagogical coordination networks to upscale innovative practice).

Implications: In this sense, the findings from the *InTrans* project reveal that joint CPD initiatives can contribute significantly to sustaining the process of reform implementation from a grass roots perspective, but only if they are combined with policy advocacy initiatives influencing the systemic conditions in which ECEC educational services 0–3 years and pre-primary schools operate at the local level.

The role of internship in the initial professional education of Educators working with 0–3 year-olds

Sources: Cecotti and Sannipoli 2021; Garbarini, Terzi, and Campioni 2020; Lichene, Molina, Restiglian, and Sannipoli 2020; Marchesi and Vassuri 2020 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: Following the enactment of Law Decree 65/2017, the *Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia* (GNNI) promoted working groups and in-depth studies on various aspects concerning the implementation of Integrated System 0–6, including exploratory research on the internship in initial professional training for Educators for 0–3 year-olds, which is considered to be a fundamental element for harmonising codified knowledge on early childhood and the reality of educational services 0–3 years. The aim of the study was mainly to analyse the connections between universities and providers of educational services and to investigate how direct and indirect internship are organised.

Procedures: A computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) survey was carried out through the Google Forms function by administering two questionnaires (February–June 2019) with structured and semi-structured questions that, despite the specificity of the two target groups (university and providers), would allow data comparison.

Questionnaires were sent to Italian universities in which the *specific pathway in Early Childhood Education* was implemented within the Educational Science course (*Scienze dell'Educazione*) (39 out of 51). A total of 17 questionnaires (44%) were collected by universities located in different areas of the country, and 18 questionnaires were collected by educational services 0–3 years located in the centre and north of Italy and managed by different providers (municipalities and the private sector). A focus group was conducted in the city of Bologna to gather the voices of students, Educators and Pedagogical Coordinators involved in the internship experience with different roles.

Findings: Some main issues emerged from the data collected. The procedures for planning and accompanying students' internship, as well as the number of hours dedicated and their distribution during the three years, vary significantly across universities. Although indirect internship is not implemented by all universities, it is gaining ground alongside direct internship and is designed for supporting students in developing knowledge of educational contexts and accompanying reflection on their experience. The supervising tutor emerges as a key figure for scaffolding students during their internship. It is important that universities invest in this role and define the criteria for recruitment, which are not set by regulations as in the course of Primary and Preprimary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*). Internship is viewed as a key component of the initial training of Educators by both students and providers as well as ECEC professionals who are already working in educational services 0–3 years, who consider internship as an opportunity to reflect on their practices.

Implications: Internship represents an important opportunity for universities and the ECEC sector to enter into dialogue and construct a shared view on the professionalism of educators of children up to 3 years of age.

Promoting shared reflection and collegiality among ECEC professionals through observation, documentation and evaluation practices

Sources: Picchio and Giandomenico 2021; Di Giandomenico and Picchio 2022 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: Law Decree 65/2017 calls for new attention to be paid to the issue of ECEC quality evaluation. The decree explicitly states that local authorities have the responsibility for both monitoring and assessing the quality of all educational services 0–3 years located in their area and for promoting their continuous improvement. Sharing evaluation activities provides an important opportunity for networking ECEC services managed by different providers in the same area and for promoting the Integrated system.

Quality evaluation projects, which have been carried out since the 1990s by some regional and local governments in cooperation with research agencies, showed that ECEC professionals should be considered the main actors of ECEC quality evaluation. This activity should be integrated into their current professional practice, taking into account their specific stance on direct participants in the educational context.

From the same perspective, an action research project financed by the Region of Tuscany was carried out by the Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Technologies – National Research Council (ISTC-CNR) in collaboration with the Municipality of Pistoia between January 2019 and January 2021. The project involved 140 professionals (Educators and Pedagogical Coordinators) of 35 municipal and private educational services 0–3 years located in a district of Tuscany (which includes seven municipalities) and aimed at implementing professionals' competences in observing, documenting and evaluating the quality of children's experience during daily life in ECEC services; supporting ECEC professionals' reflexivity and promoting it within collegial meetings that brought together professionals from different services; and promoting the elaboration of a common educational approach between professionals working in both municipal and private ECEC services.

Procedures: In the action research project, the educational team of each ECEC service was requested to use procedures for observing, documenting and analysing children's experience during daily life in ECEC services, taking into account their different aspects (well-being, sociality and participation in play and care activities) and their evolution over the months; to produce written narrative documentation systematically integrating photos; and to evaluate jointly the impact of their educational practices on the quality of children's experience.[10]

The documentation and reflections produced by each team were presented and discussed with Educators from other ECEC services, researchers and Pedagogical Coordinators within periodical meetings organised at different levels of collegiality (between professionals working in municipal and private ECEC services of the same municipality, between professionals working in municipal and private ECEC services located in different municipalities and between all the ECEC professionals involved in the project).

[10] These procedures were validated in previous action research initiatives in other Italian sites and were contextualised by taking into account the documentation practices and collegial work modalities usually implemented in the ECEC services involved (Picchio, Di Giandomenico, and Musatti 2014).

A total of 36 meetings were held, and the discussions among professionals during these meetings were recorded and fully transcribed. The transcriptions and documentation produced periodically by each team of professionals were analysed by researchers to verify whether and how the procedures proposed sustained professionals' reflexivity, collegiality and the improvement of educational practices and reinforced the network between ECEC services in the district.

Findings: The study highlighted that the systematic use of procedures of observation and documentation enhanced ECEC professionals' competences in grasping and understanding the complexity of children's experience and the ongoing processes that take place over time during daily life in ECEC services. Narrative documentation provides a useful tool for anchoring discussions to concrete matters, sharing judgements within and between ECEC services on the impact of current professional practices on children's experience and, accordingly, identifying elements that would improve them. In particular, during the pandemic, these procedures supported ECEC professionals in sharing reflections on the impact of practices implemented to maintain meaningful relationships with both children and parents during the lockdown period and then in introducing innovations into the procedures of *ambientamento* – that is, the children's gradual transition from home to ECEC service (Bove 2007) – on the reopening of the ECEC services in September 2020.

Implications: Sharing reflection among ECEC professionals at different levels of collegiality can be an important opportunity for empowering professional competences, improving daily practices and reinforcing feelings of belonging to an ECEC system.

Reforming the 0–6 educational system through research-training projects with children and adults: the case of Milan (Lombardy)

Source: Premoli and Zaninelli 2020 (see *References* for full details).

Aims: Since 2012, to date, the Research Centre on Intercultural Relations of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Milan (under the supervision of Milena Santerini), and the Research group of ECEC pedagogy of the University of Milan-Bicocca (under the supervision of Susanna Mantovani) have designed and managed two large research-training projects – called *Milano-Bambini* (Milan-Children) and *Didattica Inclusiva e Flessibilità* (Inclusive and flexible education. From teaching for a few to teaching for all) - for the ECEC's sector of the Municipality of Milan. Both projects were financed with funds pursuant to law 285/1997 (with public competitive process), and each lasted two years and were then extended for a further year for a total of six years (2012/13-2018/19). They were managed in the form of a temporary Association of Purpose (ATS), with the two Universities of Milan (Catholic University and Bicocca University) alternately in the role of leader. In the second three-year period, six social enterprises and local associations were also part of the ATS (Aldia Social Cooperative, CIDI association, Social Consortium ConOpera, the Orsa Cooperative, Pianeta Azzurro social cooperative, Social Consortium SIS). A group of researchers were involved in the two projects. Among them, Silvio Premoli, Monica Amadini, Alessia Todeschini (Catholic University); Francesca Zaninelli, Agnese Infantino, Giulia Pastori, Piera Braga (Bicocca University).

Procedures: Within the first project (Milano-Bambini, MIBA) a joint proposal was submitted which went beyond the traditional forms of ECEC professional development in Milan to include laboratories/workshops that were piloted and implemented in schools and open to families, as well as other forms of innovation such as the production of materials and the activation of participatory processes with the involvement of parents and children. Five sub-projects were funded within the city's ECEC settings over the years of the programme (2011-2013). Each covered the need for CPD of a significant number of ECEC professionals and produced a wide range

of documentation, which is of ongoing value at a number of levels. The programme involved 36 municipal ECEC services (educational services 0-3 years, pre-primary schools, integrative services) spread across the city of Milan, 300 ECEC practitioners and 12 coordinators, plus an additional 252 educators who took part in seminars conducted during the second year. The main actors in the project were Milano City Council (0-6 system), the Catholic University of Milan, Milan-Bicocca University and ECEC practitioners. Families and children were involved in the workshop phase of the project, based on experiential learning.

The second project (*Didattica Inclusiva e Flessibilità*) involved 150 ECEC services, with the additional involvement in transversal activities of almost all ECEC practitioners (3300) employed in the Milan's municipal services. In addition, a number of actions involved the pedagogical coordinators of all the ECEC services in Milan.

The main goal was to promote innovation at a methodological, pedagogical, didactical level through research training actions on key issues such as: intercultural education and family's participation in the first project (Milano-Bambini); inclusive education, with a focus on pedagogical continuity, well-being, parent-educator co-responsibility, and documentation in the second project (*Didattica Inclusiva e Flessibilità*).

Findings: Both projects have promoted innovative work logics through research-training courses and learning by doing processes, aimed at introducing and experimenting new activities with children who attend an ECEC services in Milan. Basically, action research interventions were activated and applied as a main professional development strategy, through the use of reflexive approaches for the exploration of implicit pedagogies/practices and theories. This approach highlighted the importance of recognising existing research studies and potentials as a starting point to promote innovation and to open spaces of possibility and change in working with children and with families. A main result is the impact of pedagogical research as a key tool to promote innovation and update practitioner's skills and competences, and the role of Pedagogical Coordinators as key figures. A huge investment was devoted to the involvement of the Pedagogical Coordinators as key figures or "*multipliers*" of the innovative actions introduce in the ECEC's settings (Bove, Mantovani, et al. 2016; Bove, Jensen, et al. 2018).

Among the results are:

(1) The *Linee di Indirizzo Pedagogiche dei Servizi all'Infanzia 0–6 del Comune di Milano* (Pedagogical Guidelines for Milan's ECEC services) written and established at the end of the first project through a participatory process involving all professionals involved in the ECEC services (Mantovani and Premoli 2020). The pedagogical guidelines are founded on the history and tradition of the City and at the same time aim to introduce pedagogical innovation.

(2) A tool for self-assessment of the quality of infant-toddler centres and pre-primary schools (Pastori, Morgandi, and Ripamonti 2020) developed and tested during the second project through a research-training (2018) on the quality of ECEC service. 78 Pedagogical Coordinators plus four central coordinators were involved in the participatory construction of the tool for the observation and improvement of educational quality.

An in-depth description of all the research-intervention projects developed at a city level is included in the Special Issue, METIS (Premoli and Zaninelli 2020).

Zero to six (*Zerosei*) in the face of the COVID emergency: experiences, research and pedagogical reflections

Source: Falcinelli and Mignosi 2022 (see *References* for full details)

Aims and background: The pandemic has had a significant impact on ECEC services in a number of ways; however, despite the incredible difficulties and challenges caused by the pandemic, in

most cases, Educators/Teachers and Pedagogical Coordinators in Italy acted as key responders in the crisis and "not only displayed a noteworthy capacity to keep the education system alive (an ability that has also been defined as "collective agentic action", Campbell 2020, 340)" (cited in Bove 2021) but also tried to transform these challenges into resources or lessons learned.

Procedure: In so doing, they reacted as a community of practice, developing small research projects (mainly qualitative or small-scale quantitative studies) in their settings, often in collaboration with local universities, with the goal of creatively re-inventing their practices to face the many challenges introduced by the pandemic. Examples of these studies are included in the book edited by Falcinelli and Mignosi (2022); they are local, mostly qualitative or quantitative studies using small samples and mainly concern issues emerging from the field, for example:

- New forms of parent–teacher communication, introducing flexible modes of remaining in touch despite the challenges involved in educating children remotely
- Innovative solutions for caring relationships with children despite the limitations due to the pandemic (LEAD – Educational Connections at Distance)
- Children's experience during the lockdown
- New media education
- Inclusion.

In addition, the book includes a national survey regarding the experience of the re-opening of educational services 0–3 years and pre-primary schools after the pandemic emergency promoted by the *Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia* (Garaffo, Lichene, Molina, Porcheddu, Sannipoli, and Savio 2022).

Findings: Among the main findings are the following:

- The great commitment of all ECEC professionals in coping with the emergencies by guaranteeing children the possibility to continue attending the ECEC services
- Increased attention to everyday routines such as sleep and meals
- Different ways of dealing with the sizes of groups of children.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

As in other European countries, a growing consensus in Italy on the importance of investing in the professionalism of ECEC staff and general acknowledgement of their role in supporting the quality of ECEC is emerging among ECEC professionals, policy makers and researchers (Bove et al. 2018; Peleman *et al*. 2018; Vandenbroeck, Urban, and Peeters 2016).

As we have shown, following Law Decree 65/2017, a major process of change is underway to implement an integrated system of education from birth to 6 years of age. The changes concern aspects of governance, educational quality and continuity, and workforce qualification. This process is posing some major workforce challenges that need to be faced in the near future and from a long-term perspective:

(1) Developing a more coherent and unified approach to the initial professional education of Educators (0–3) and Pre-primary School Teachers (3–6). The IPE for educators of 0–3 year-olds has been upgraded from the secondary to the tertiary level through the introduction of a Bachelor's Degree in Educational Science with a specific pathway in Early Childhood Education. Although this was an important step in qualifying the professionalism of the

ECEC workforce, a major gap remains regarding the qualification required for Pre-primary Teachers, that is, the 5-year degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*), the curriculum of which emphasises a narrow subject-oriented approach to teaching over a broader pedagogical approach to learning and which makes graduates eligible to teach in both primary and pre-primary settings (see *Chapter **4***).

The current splitting of the two IPE routes risks enlarging the traditional gap between the professional profiles, identities and perceived and actual professional status of Educators 0–3 and Teachers 3–6. It might also hinder the development of a shared educational approach that could ensure a smooth transition and continuity in children's experience in ECEC from birth to 6 years of age (Balduzzi, Restiglian, and Zaninelli 2021).

The professional profile of ECEC core practitioners working in the Integrated System 0–6 emerging from the Pedagogical Guidelines of the Integrated System 0–6 (*Linee Pedagogiche per il Sistema Integrato Zerosei*) recently approved by the Ministry of Education (Ministerial Decree 334/2021) provides a reference for reconsidering the IPE pathways of both university courses.

(2) Developing a common framework for CPD for ECEC professionals of both sectors (0–3 and 3–6) and ensuring equal CPD opportunities across the country through close cooperation between the state, regional governments and local authorities. In the coming years, systematic and sustainable joint CPD initiatives including both 0–3 Educators and 3–6 Teachers working in ECEC provision managed by different providers need to be implemented to promote a common culture and a shared holistic approach to early childhood education between ECEC professionals, support practices of horizontal and vertical continuity, and provide coherent responses to the new needs of children and their families in contemporary society by ensuring quality and inclusive education (Child Guarantee 2022). These initiatives might be driven by the CPD best practices and organisational expertise developed in municipal ECEC provision over the years (collegial work, peer learning exchanges, the use of observation and documentation, analysis of practices and collaboration with universities and research centres). However, this perspective needs to reconsider the conditions, procedures and content of CPD provided to teachers of state-maintained pre-primary schools (currently the choice of CPD activity is left to the individual teacher) to increase their participation in systematic shared CPD activities and promote opportunities for dialogue and cooperation between different pre-primary schools (see *Chapter **6***).

(3) Reviewing the employment agreements applied by ECEC providers to reduce inequality between ECEC professionals' salaries and working conditions (stability, contact and non-contact time, paid hours specifically allocated to CPD activities, etc.). Often such differences tend to have negative effects on their professional development and living conditions, as well as on the quality of ECEC provision (Mari 2021). It should be noted that over the years, the difference in salaries between the public and the private sectors have led many local authorities to outsource the management of educational services 0–3 years rather than opening and managing services directly, with the consequent risks of lowering the educational quality of ECEC provision and weakening their governance of the local ECEC system as a whole (see *Chapter **7***).

(4) Institutionalising and spreading a system of territorial pedagogical coordination (*coordinamenti pedagogici territoriali*) across the country. As presented in *Chapter **2.4***, the crucial role of Pedagogical Coordinators and local pedagogical coordination (a stable network of Pedagogical Coordinators at regional, district or municipal level) in promoting and supporting the quality of ECEC services, as well as the whole ECEC local system, is widely recognised. However, to date, Pedagogical Coordinators are mostly present in the central

northern areas, where local authorities have traditionally invested in quality ECEC provision (such as in the Umbria, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany and Lombardy regions), and this important role is not yet defined in state-maintained pre-primary schools. Law Decree 65/2017 (see *Chapter **8***) states that establishing and expanding territorial pedagogical coordination – a team that will include Pedagogical Coordinators of municipal and private educational services 0–3 years and municipal, private and state-maintained pre-primary schools working in the same area – are strategic actions for implementing and qualifying the Integrated System 0–6 across the country. Some major challenges need to be faced: defining the competence profile of Pedagogical Coordinators; providing pre-service and in-service training in order to support their qualification; promoting their dissemination in local ECEC systems across the country; and identifying ECEC professionals who may function as coordinators in state-maintained pre-primary schools.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

ITALY

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of ECEC provision are: **nursery** (nido 0–3) and **pre-primary school** (*scuola dell'infanzia* 3–6)[1]**.** Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Italy

1828	First childcare centre (*asilo*) founded in Cremona by the priest Ferrante Aporti to educate and care for children from 2 to 6 years in poverty or affected by health problems. Aporti's ideas spread rapidly in some northern regions in Italy, in particular in Lombardy and Tuscany. Nearly 20 years later, Aporti reports that 178 *asili infantili* have been established.
1840	First vocational schools established with a three-year programme for the training of childhood assistants, who could work in nurseries, children's orphanages, children's hospital wards and any other childcare institution.
Late 1850s	Several kindergartens based on Froebelian principles are founded. Resistance within the Catholic Church to the new educational ideas.
1861	Unification of Italy
1862	Childcare institutions are brought together with other public welfare institutions under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior. Provincial educational authorities are responsible for the suitability of staff and inspections. ECEC settings remain institutions provided mainly by private or religious associations and charities, but not as state-run educational institutions.
1895-1917	Rosa and Carolina Agazzi initiate a fusion of Aporti's infant school and Froebel's kindergarten in Mompiano near Brescia and produce a prototypical Italian school for young children (*scuola materna*) with a family-like atmosphere. They call for a broad expansion of educational services with state participation.
1907	Opening of first Montessori kindergarten (*Casa dei Bambini*) in Rome
1910-1920	Reggio Emilia is a pioneer among Italian cities, founding the first municipal nurseries.
1920s	Establishment of ONMI [*National organisation for the protection of mother and child*], public services for destitute families, under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior (Law 227/1925)
1923	*Scuola materna* recognised as a pre-primary educational institution.
1933	First upper secondary schools of education established with a three-year programme for the training of pre-primary teachers. Apart from some slight modifications, these schools remain in operation until 2001.
1963	First municipal preschool/kindergarten opened in Bologna and Reggio Emilia.
1968	Integration of the *scuola materna* into the state education system (Law 444/1968)
1969	Publication of the first National Guidelines for educational activities in the state *scuola materna* (*Orientamenti per l'attività educativa nella scuola materna statale* – Decree n. 647/1969)

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In the case of Italy, in compliance with Italian legislation and regulations, the authors of this report have chosen the age formats: **0–3** years for children up to 3 years of age and **3–6** years for those attending pre-primary settings.

1970s	Establishment of nurseries, childcare services for infant and toddlers of working mothers. Nurseries are defined not as universal provision, but as an individual service on demand in support of women's employment. Municipalities and private entities are responsible for providing them (Law 1044/1971).
1980s	The project *Tempo per le Famiglie* is initiated in Milan by the city council and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation – a precursor to the later integrative services for under-threes and their families (*Centri per bambini e famiglie*). Research on the dissemination of these centres shows that in 2013, 423 such centres were in operation, the majority in central and northern Italy.
1990s	– Publication of new pedagogical guidelines for pre-primary education (*Nuovi Orientamenti dell'attività educativa per la scuola materna* – Decree 3 June 1991) – Services for the under-threes start expanding, accompanied by increasing collaboration between research agencies and ECEC services. A culture of Early Education begins and new professional organisations are established, such as the *Gruppo Nazionale Nidi Infanzia* (founded by Loris Malaguzzi). – Establishment of a special national fund for local administrations to use for actions supporting children and young people – Expansion of integrative services for under-threes such as C*entri per bambini e famiglie (*Centres for Children and families*)* and *Spazi Gioco* (Playgroups) (Law 285/1997) – Establishment of four-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education that makes teachers eligible to teach in pre-primary (3–6) and primary (6–11) schools (DM 26 May 1998) – A growing number of studies, most of them action-research projects, are conducted in collaboration between researchers and practitioners and are closely related to practice and methodological innovation.
2004	National Guidelines for "individualised educational activities" in the *scuola dell'infanzia* (*Indicazioni per i piani personalizzati delle attività educative alla scuola dell'infanzia* – DM 59/2004).
2007	National Curricular Guidelines for pre-primary and primary cycle of education (*Indicazioni Nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione* – DM 31 July 2007)
2010	Establishment of a single-cycle 5-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (DM n. 249/ 2010)
2012	Revised version of the National Curricular Guidelines for pre-primary cycle *(Indicazioni Nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione* – DM 254/2012)
2015	Education Reform Act (Law 107/2015) outlines a "Reform of the national education and training system and mandate to reorganise existing legislative provisions**"** at all levels, including early childhood education and care.
2017	Law Decree 65/2017 (*Istituzione del Sistema integrato di educazione e istruzione dalla nascita sino ai 6 anni* – Establishing an integrated system of education from birth to six years) comes into force, introducing a series of implementation measures for the new unitary system.
2018	Update of the National Curricular Guidelines for pre-primary and primary education (*Indicazioni Nazionali e Nuovi Scenari* – MIUR, 1 March 2018)
2019/20	Bachelor's degree in Educational Science with a specific pathway in Early Childhood Education becomes obligatory for educators working with children under 3 years of age.
2021	National Guidelines defining both the cultural and pedagogical framework of the integrated system zero-to-six issued (*Linee guida pedagogiche per il sistema integrato zero-sei* – DM n. 334, 22 November 2021)
2022	National Guidelines for educational services 0–3 years (*Orientamenti nazionali per i servizi educativi per l'infanzia,* DM 43/2022)

Sources: Albisetti 2009; Bove and Cescato 2018; Hohnerlein 2009; Musatti 2015; Musatti and Mantovani 2013; Musatti and Picchio 2010; OECD 2017; Willekens and Scheiwe 2020, Picchio and Bove 2023.

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

The ECEC system in Italy has been changed by law from a split-sector to an integrated system recognised as the first stage of the national education system. In 2015, the Education Reform Act (107/2015) was adopted. Two years later a Law (65/2017) established the framework for an integrated ECEC system from birth to six years of age. Not only pre-primary schools (*scuole dell'infanzia*) for 3 to 6 year-olds and so-called 'Spring sections' (*sezione primavera*) for 2 to 3 year-olds now come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education (*Ministero dell'Istruzione*), but also educational services for children under three years of age (*servizi educativi per l'infanzia*).

Italy has a three-tier system of ECEC governance. Besides the Ministry of Education at the national level, the 20 Regions of Italy are responsible for the regulatory framework for educational services for under-threes and the administrative body may be either the education or the social policy department. At the local level, services for under-threes are provided by municipalities or the private sector while *scuole per l'infanzia* are provided by the state, municipalities and the private sector.

General objectives and legislative framework

Key legislative frameworks and declarations regarding children's right to education in an ECEC setting are the Italian Constitution, which emphasises the state's commitment to redress inequalities and promote the full development of all citizens; the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and relevant European Union documents. Overarching goals of early childhood education are to support children's identity building, autonomy and competence development, as well as laying the foundations for an understanding of civic values.

The Education Reform Act 107/2015 ("Reform of the national education and training system and mandate to reorganise existing legislation") and the related Legislative Decree 65/2017 ("Establishing an integrated system of education from birth to six years") provide the framework for a fundamental reform of the Italian education system. As described in the previous section, the two previously separated sectors of early childhood education and care are to be integrated into a unitary system.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

There is no legal entitlement to a place in an ECEC setting for 0 to 6 year-olds; nevertheless, high enrolment rates are the norm in pre-primary schools, including 3 year-olds. Attendance in all kinds of ECEC provision for 0 to 6 year-olds is voluntary.

Statutory schooling begins at age 6.

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Italy provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are indicated within the text and in the references section.

Main types of provision

Nurseries (*nidi*) provide care and education for children aged 0–3 years. Children with special educational needs are prioritised in admissions policies. Opening hours range between 7:30 and 9:00 in the morning to between 16:00 and 18:00 in the afternoon (Musatti and Picchio 2010).

According to national statistics (ISTAT 2023a), in 2021/2022 there were 11,618 nurseries, mini-crèches, and Spring sections in Italy, of which 4,282 (=37.2%) had a public provider. Of the total of 326,660 places available, about half (163,927) were public. In total, 57.9% of the Italian municipalities provided nurseries. At the end of 2021, the Lombardy Region had the most nurseries and mini-crèches (1,850). Overall, the largest number of settings (nurseries, mini-crèches and Spring sections combined) was in Lombardy (2,399), Lazio (1,283) and Veneto (1,135) (ISTAT 2023a).

Integrative centres/services (*servizi integrativi*) are also available for the under threes. They were initiated in the 1980s within a family policy framework (*Tempo per le Famiglie*). At the end of 2021, there were 1,900 of these services, of which 697 were playgroups; however, these settings are found in only 12.7% of municipalities and the attendance rate (0 to under 3 years) accounts for only 0.7% (ISTAT 2023a).

'Spring sections' (*sezioni primavera*) for 2 to 3 year-olds are aimed to smooth the transition between nurseries and pre-primary education. They may be located in either kind of setting, depending on the local circumstances. 'Spring sections' were first established in 2007 as an experimental form to meet the growing demand of families. In 2021, there were 2,679 Spring sections (ISTAT 2023a).

In total, at the end of 2021 in Italy, there were 13,518 facilities for under-threes with 350,307 places, almost half of which (48.8%) had public providers. Only 11.2% of the places are found in the southern regions (ISTAT 2023a), even though more than one third of all children under 3 years of age live there (CRC 2022).

In 2021/2022, 85.4% of available places for under 3 year-olds were in nurseries (*nidi*), 13.6% in Spring sections and 7.2% in integrative services, which include playgroups and centres for children and families (ISTAT 2023a, and own calculations).

Pre-primary schools (*scuole dell'infanzia*) are the regular form of provision for 3 to 6 year-olds. In general, these are state-maintained. However, in the larger cities with well-developed municipal provision the children often attend a municipal pre-primary school. Children must usually be at least 3 years old by the 31st December in any one year to attend. If places are available, younger children can also be accepted. *Scuole dell'infanzia* are open for eight hours daily, from 8:00/9:00 to 16:00/16:30 (Musatti and Picchio 2010). Municipal and private pre-primary schools often offer longer opening hours if there is a need. They are closed in July and August for the summer break.

According to national statistics, in 2021 there were 22,476 *scuole dell'infanzia* with 1,338,067 children attending, 72.9% of them in public pre-primary schools. 2.4% were children with disabilities and 11.5% were children with a non-Italian background (ISTAT 2023c).

A number of 2 year-olds, that is in advance of the planned starting age of 3 years, access *scuola dell'infanzia* and are included in the same groups of older children. This is the case in areas where the provision of ECEC services for children under 3 is scarce, such as in southern regions.

Provider structures

Nurseries and integrative services for the under 3 year-olds are usually run by municipal or private providers. Local authorities can also commission private agencies to establish nursery settings, or they may be provided by cooperatives or companies for their employees (Bove and Cescato 2018).

In 2021/2022, 4,606 of all (13,518) settings (nurseries, integrative services, Spring sections) were public (=34.1%), as were 48.8% of the available places. Regional variations are considerable: in Calabria, only 20.8% of the settings had a public provider whereas in Molise 59.2% were public (ISTAT 2023a, own calculations). Particularly in the larger cities, the proportion of publicly run settings is significantly higher, whereas in the southern parts of the country, some municipalities do not offer any kind of service.

The majority of Spring sections (83.1%) and of the integrative services (82.9%) were private in 2021/2022 (ISTAT 2023a).

Pre-primary schools (*scuole dell'infanzia*) may be run by the state, the municipalities or private (mostly church-affiliated) providers. Some pre-primary classes are in private independent schools which, under certain circumstances, have a status similar to that of state schools (*scuole dell'infanzia paritarie*). Regional disparities in the distribution of providers are considerable. In the southern parts of the country there tend to be more state-run pre-primary schools than in the north. As far as 0–3 services are concerned, public sector provision dominates in most of the northern and central Italian cities as well as on the outskirts of Bologna, Florence and Milan (ISTAT, Università Ca' Foscari and MIPA 2022, 14).

Overall, in 2021, more than half (58.8%) of pre-primary schools were public, nearly one third (32.2%) were private and 9.1% were run by municipalities. 72.9% of all children under the age of 6 attend a public pre-primary school. However, there are clear regional differences: While in Valle d'Aosta 83.1% of children are enrolled in a public setting, this is only the case for only just over half of children (58%) in Lombardy (ISTAT 2023c).

Table 1

Italy: Number and share of pre-primary schools and children by provider type, 2021

Provider	Number of schools	Share of schools, in %	Number of children	Share of children, in %
Public (state)	13,205	58.8	841,394	62.9
Public (municipal)	2,042	9.1	133,411	10.0
Private	7,229	32.2	363,262	27.1
Total	**22,476**		**1,338,067**	

Source: ISTAT 2023c, own calculations

Participation rates in regulated provision

The overall enrolment rate of 0 to 3 year-olds in nurseries, mini-crèches and Spring sections at the end of 2021 was 15.2%. Considerable differences in the enrolment rates remain between northern and southern Italy –22.9% in the North-East and only 6.6% in the southern regions. The highest participation rates were in Trento (32.1%), Emilia Romagna (30.9%), and in Friuli (30.5%), while in Calabria these rates were only 4.5% and in Campania only 4.3% (ISTAT 2023a.

25% of under 3 year-olds participated in centre-based provision in 2005, by 2022 this proportion has increased to 30.9%. The larger majority of children between 3 years of age and school entry attend some form of ECEC provision, although overall participation increased marginally from 91% in 2005 to 92.1% in 2022.

Table 2
Italy: Participation rates according to duration of attendance in centre-based settings 2005-2022

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years, in %	3 years up to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	9	21
	Over 30 hours	16	70
	No enrolment in ECEC	79	9
2010	1 to 29 hours	6	17
	Over 30 hours	16	70
	No enrolment in ECEC	78	13
2015	1 to 29 hours	10.4	23.3
	Over 30 hours	16.9	62.6
	No enrolment in ECEC	72.7	14.1
2022	1 to 29 hours	10.8	21.0
	Over 30 hours	20.1	71.1
	No enrolment in ECEC	69.1	7.9

Source: Eurostat 2023b

The participation rates for 3 to 6 year-olds are much higher: between 87% and 92% in 2021, whereas only 12.7% of the 2 year-olds attend an ECEC setting (see *Table 3*).

Table 3
Italy: Number and enrolment rates of children in centre-based ECEC settings, by age, 2021

Age	Number of children in ISCED 01 settings	Enrolment rates in ISCED 01 settings, in %	Number of children in ISCED 02 settings	Enrolment rates in ISCED 02 settings, in %
Under 2 years	n.d.			
2 year-olds	56,503	1.7		
3 year-olds			404,923	87.2
4 year-olds			441,498	91.9
5 year-olds			428,794	86.9
6 year-olds			6,349	1.3

Source: Eurostat 2023h, i

In 2020/21, the overall attendance rate of the over 3 year-olds was 88.7%. Especially in the southern regions and on the islands the groups also include some 2 year-olds (21.7% and 16.9% respectively) (CRC 2022, 127).

Financing and costs for parents

According to OECD data, total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 0.56% of GDP in 2019: 0.1% on provision for under 3 year-olds and approximately 0.5% on provision for 3 to under 6 year-olds (OECD 2023).

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the allocation of financial resources to the regional authorities, which provide guidelines for promoting the integrated system at the local level.

Nurseries and other ECEC services for under 3 year-olds are fee-paying for parents - in 2020 the national average comprised 12.7% of the total costs; compared to 2019 it fell by almost 6 percentage points (ISTAT 2023b, 3). The fees vary according to the family income, with considerable regional differences (CRC 2021). However, the Legislative Decree 65/2017 introduced an 'upper limit' to the contribution of families for covering the costs of running ECEC services.

State-maintained **pre-primary schools** are fully publicly funded: salaries by the state and buildings and meals by the municipalities. Municipal ECEC pre-primary schools working according to the national guidelines receive part-funding by the state, while buildings and staff salaries are financed by the municipality. Apart from a small sum for meals and transport, public pre-primary schooling is free of charge. Low-income families do not have to pay for meals and transport. There are no available data regarding the fee levels of private *scuole dell'infanzia,* which are established by the provider).

Staff to child ratios and group size

In **nurseries** and other settings for under 3 year-olds, children are mostly allocated to same-age groups, sometimes to mixed-age groups. The Regions decide on the required group size and staff to child ratios. There are no national regulations. The staff to child ratio varies between 1:5 and 1:10 according to the children's age and the region.

In **pre-primary schools**, groups are also usually organised according to the children's age. However, for some activities children of different ages are brought together in order to strengthen relationships between the older and younger children. In state-run provision, group size varies between a minimum of 18 and a maximum of 26 (under certain circumstances this may be 29). If children with special educational needs are enrolled, the group size is reduced accordingly. Each full-time class has two teachers who alternate and work individually in the morning or afternoon. During the midday meal, both teachers are present. In many municipal pre-primary schools, the co-presence of two teachers is also provided during other times of the day in order to divide the group of children into small groups. The staff to child ratio, taking as a reference the maximum limit of children for each section, is 1:26. In 2021, 19.7 children were enrolled in public settings, 19.1 in private settings, i.e. 19.5 on average (ISTAT 2023c).

Curricular framework

In 2021, Pedagogical Guidelines for the Integrated System 0–6 (*Linee Pedagogiche per il Sistema Integrato Zerosei*) were adopted by the Ministry of Education. They define both the cultural and the pedagogical framework of ECEC services, proposing a unitary and holistic approach to the education of children from birth up to 6 years of age.

In 2022, National orientation guidelines for educational practice in ECEC services attended by children **under 3 years of age** *(Orientamenti nazionali per i servizi educativi per l'infanzia*) were issued by the Ministry of Education. The guidelines provide a framework for planning and implementing a high-quality educational environment which supports children's agency and the development of their cognitive, social and communicative competences – through play, exploration, relationships with peers and adults, respecting each child's needs and rhythms of growth.

Centre programmes include various activities (e.g. times for play and rest, mealtimes, health care); sometimes family members (e.g. grandparents) are involved in parts of the everyday programme. Activities aim to foster the children's socialisation and learning at the individual and group level.

Since 2013/14, **pre-primary schools** are required to work according to the "National Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-primary Institutions and the First Cycle of Education" (*Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione 2012; Indicazioni Nazionali e nuovi scenari 2018)* issued by the Ministry of Education in line with key competences for lifelong learning adopted by the European Parliament. They are also binding for private pre-primary settings with equal status to state schools (*scuole paritarie*).

The curriculum is structured according to five key areas of experience and learning: (1) The self and others, (2) Body and movement, (3) Pictures, sounds and colours, (4) Language and words, (5) Knowledge of the world. Catholic kindergartens develop their own area of learning regarding religious education. The guidelines include competences which children are expected to have acquired by the end of their time in pre-primary schools, e.g. to be able to express their feelings, to enter into relationships with others, to convey experiences through language, to think about different meanings, or to show an understanding of rules. 'Civic education' has been a compulsory, cross-curricular subject in schools since 2020 (Ministerial Decree 35/2020). At the pre-primary level the focus is on identity development, respect, health, and well-being. 'Reading literacy' is not specified as a learning area in the National Guidelines (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 99).

Although staff are free to choose their preferred teaching methods, they are expected to ensure that the children experience a balanced curriculum between routine procedures and new learning; to be aware of the importance of active and discovery-oriented approaches; to organise the rooms in an aesthetically stimulating way; to feel responsible for the children's overall spatial experiences; and to offer them support when needed.

Digital education

The Ministerial Decree 35/2020 for all stages of the education system states that children should be introduced to digital devices in an age-appropriate way. Besides experiencing positive examples, teachers should also help children to become aware of the related risks.

Monitoring – Evaluation

In Italy, there is currently no nationally regulated or mandated system of evaluation of children's individual achievements, while national assessment procedures of pre-primary schools were recently introduced (Eurydice 2023; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019).

Child-related assessment

In both **nurseries** and **pre-primary schools** no formal or testing assessment takes place. According to the Pedagogical Guidelines for the Integrated System 0–6 (*Linee Pedagogiche per il Sistema Integrato Zerosei*), observations and narrative documentation of children's experience in everyday life of ECEC service provide the basis for tracing, analysing and understanding the development of this experience over time at the individual and group level in order to share it with parents and children and plan improved educational practices.

Centre-level assessment

There are no national regulations for internal evaluations at the centre level in **nurseries.** However, some Regions are developing self-evaluation instruments to qualify for accreditation procedures for nurseries.

Pre-primary schools have recently been included in the national educational quality assurance framework. Each pre-primary school is required to submit a Self-Evaluation Report (*RAV Infanzia*) following a set format developed by the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education System (INVALSI).

External evaluation

Regional and municipal authorities are responsible for inspections in **nurseries** and other provision for under 3 year-olds. These monitoring and evaluation procedures focus mainly on the structural quality of provision and compliance with the regional regulations.

External evaluations in **pre-primary schools** take place through the Regional Education Office of the Ministry of Education, but not necessarily on a regular basis. Beyond inspecting the rooms, equipment and compliance with safety regulations, staffing quality, curriculum implementation and the children's progress are also the focus of such evaluations. Inspections are not conducted according to a standardised instrument. The *scuole dell'infanzia paritarie* are checked for compliance with regulations every three years, when they reapply for accreditation.

Inclusion agenda

The principle of inclusion is enshrined in the Italian Constitution. Legislation and policy for inclusive education is cross-sectoral to ensure the efficient co-ordination of services, as well as clearly defining roles and responsibilities (EASNIE 2021).

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

In Italy, legislation adopted in 1992 ("Framework Law for the assistance, social integration and the rights of persons with disabilities") requires that children with disabilities and other special educational needs are included as far as possible in mainstream provision, both in nurseries and in pre-primary schools. Relevant guidance was issued by the Ministry of Education in 2009. Individual educational plans are developed for these children and they receive special support measures which may include additional specialist staff. Segregated pre-primary schools no longer exist. In a small number of schools that are considered "bilingual", deaf children are included in regular groups where both they and their peers without a hearing impairment learn sign language as a second language.

A Special Needs Teacher is usually employed in a pre-primary school if a child with special needs is enrolled. Their role is to support the individual child, but also to promote processes of inclusion and integration within the group of children. If a child with special needs is enrolled in an educational service 0–3 years, employing a Special Needs Teacher is not a requirement, but either the number of children in the group is decreased or the number of educators is increased (Picchio and Bove 2023).

In 2021, children with disabilities accounted for 2.4% of the total number of children enrolled in pre-primary schools, 2.8% of those in public and 1.2% of those in private settings (ISTAT 2023c).

No data are available fo

r nurseries.

Children with a migration background

In 2021, 11.5% children with a non-Italian background were enrolled in a pre-primary setting, 13.2% in public, 6.9% in private settings (ISTAT 2023c).

In 2022, 8.5% of the population in Italy held a non-Italian citizenship. More than two-thirds of them (72.4%) came from countries outside the EU-27 (2020). In the group of children under 5 years, 14.1% had a non-Italian background and three-quarters (75.4%) of them were from non-EU countries (Eurostat 2023c).

Parental leave arrangements[3]

Compulsory **Maternity leave** (*congedo di maternità*) lasts five months. At least four weeks of these can be taken before the expected birth date. During this period, monthly payments are based on 80% of previous earnings (no upper limit).

Employed fathers have to take ten compulsory days **Paternity leave** (*congedo di paternità*) in the period from two months before the birth to five months after the birth; they are fully paid with no upper limit. A further one day of optional Leave is available if the mother transfers part of her Maternity leave.

Each (employed) parent can be granted up to six months of **Parental leave** (*congedo parentale*), three months are non-transferable. It may be taken in different time blocks and also simultaneously at any time up to the child's 12th birthday. Parental benefit is paid for three months for mother and father each, as well as three additional months for one of them. If the father takes at least three months, parental leave is extended to 11 months. While the children are still under 6 years of age, parents receive 30% of their earnings; once the child is older, leave is unpaid. After nine months, an income-related allowance is paid if the income is less than 2.5 times the amount of the minimum pension (2021: €515.28).

Parental leave, which lasts about 15–16 months (depending on the bonus months of the father), is only well paid for about five months, but ECEC provision for children under 3 is fee-paying and availability varies considerably from region to region, resulting in a significant gap between leave entitlement and access to childcare services.

In 2021, 21% of employees making use of Parental leave in the private sector were men. On average fathers took 25 months of parental leave – compared to 61 months taken by mothers.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Italy

*Country expert assessment by **Mariacristina Picchio** and **Chiara Bove***

As already described in the Italian *ECEC* Workforce *Profile*, an important reform of the Early Childhood Education and Care system is in progress in Italy. In relation to the approval of the national law 107/2015 and the subsequent Law implementation Decree 65/2017, which legislates the "institution of the integrated system from birth to six years", a process of gradually establishing this system is in progress.

Main challenges are:

[3] The brief information in this section is based mainly on the country note for Italy by Tindara Addabbo, Valentina Cardinali, Dino Giovannini, and Sara Mazzucchelli in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

1. Redefining and implementing regular State financing or co-financing of ECEC services through one source, namely the Ministry of Education (MIUR)
2. Earmarking state funding for local services according to minimal standards
3. Progressively redefining ECEC governance to guarantee greater homogeneity and basic requirements through negotiations in a Standing Committee (*Conferenza Unificata*) comprising representatives of the state, the regions, the provinces and the municipalities
4. Ensuring more accessible services for all families, especially for the most vulnerable ones; increasing provision for children up to the age of three (overcoming inequalities and cultural barriers – Decree 65/2017, Article 4 (h))
5. Developing high quality integrated centres for the education of children aged 0–6 years (*Poli per l'infanzia*) and encouraging training programmes that involve 0–3 Educators and 3–6 Teachers
6. Progressively reconceptualising the 0–3 services as no longer being services provided according to individual demand. This process will include reduced fees for families.
7. Establishing educational continuity across the ECEC sector, integrating ECEC services both horizontally (among different providers, i.e. state, municipalities, associations, private providers) and vertically (0–3/3-6)
8. Clarifying the various possible professional profiles, qualifications, functions, roles and in-service training of the Pedagogical Coordinators to ensure that they can act as a *key figure* in the local integration of the 0–3 and 3–6 sectors, according to the specificities of the region
9. Developing a national system for monitoring ECEC quality, for sustaining the expansion and improvement of ECEC services within the integrated system, and for reducing disparities and differences between Regions
10. Developing an *updated* professional profile for ECEC Educators and Teachers, capable of working within a more flexible and integrated 0–6 system
11. Reviewing the University curricula required for working in a 0–3 service: Bachelor degree in Educational Science with a specific pathway in Early Childhood Education, the additional course of 60 ECTS credits following a five-year degree in primary and pre-primary education required for teachers of *Scuola dell'Infanzia* to enter the 0–3 profession
12. Designing new integrated opportunities for CPD (as envisaged in Law 107/2015 and Legislative Decree 65/2017), by encouraging a strong commitment through Universities and local agencies.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the population in Italy totalled 59,030,133. This represents a steady growth over the past 20 years; however, from 2020 it has been falling (2000: 56,923,524; 2010: 59,190,143; 2020: 59,641,488) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13).[4] At 1.25, Italy is well below the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d).

Children under age 6

Table 4
Italy: Children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age of children	Number of children
Under age 1	400,626
1 year-olds	407,634
2 year-olds	425,183
3 year-olds	444,638
4 year-olds	464,753
5 year-olds	478,684
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**2,621,518**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, children under age 3 accounted for 2.5% and children under 6 years of age for 5.2% of the total population. Since 2000, these percentage rates have been consistently lower than the EU average.

Table 5
Italy: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population from 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Italy /EU	Under 3 year- olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Italy	2.8	2.8	5.5
	Ø EU15[5]	3.2	3.2	6.
2005	Italy	2.8	2.8	5.6
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Italy	2.5	2.8	5.3
	Ø EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Italy	2.1	2.4	4.4
	Ø EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * own calculations, deviations due to rounding

[4] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

[5] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, 82.5% of households with children under age 6 were couple households. Single parent households accounted for 3.1%, whereby these were almost exclusively single mother households (2.9%).

Table 6

Italy: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Total households, in %*
Households – total	4,537,100	
Couple households	3,743,400	82.5
Other types of households	653,200	14.4
Single households, total	140,500	3.1
Single households, women	132,800	2.9
Single households, men	7,700	0.2

Source: Eurostat 2023k, * Own calculations

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Italy, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 74.6% and for women 56.4% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 52.6% of women and 87.2% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers corresponded with the EU-average (87.2%); those of mothers were significantly lower (average 63.6%) (Eurostat 2023e, own calculations).

Table 7a

Italy: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Italy	51.8	88.8
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[6]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2021	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Italy	52.6	87.2
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[7]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 7b.*

[6] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

[7] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Table 7b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023j

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[8]

In 2022, 26.8% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was above the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population also was 24.4% (EU: 21.6%). 5.4% of children under 6 and 6.1% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation in 2020 (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023f, g).

[8] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

LATVIA

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

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Note from the editors: In official translations of government documents, ECEC settings in Latvia are invariably described as *Pre-school education institutions* and core practitioners as *Pre-school education teachers*. The preferred terms in the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with an integrated ECEC system are *ECEC centre* and *ECEC Teacher*. The distinction is made because the term 'pre-school' is often used internationally to mean 'pre-primary' education, referring to the two or three years prior to school entry only. Since there is an official trend in Latvia to move away from the term 'pedagogue' to the term 'teacher' (associated in Latvia with a higher level of IPE and higher societal status), the terms *Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher* or *ECEC Teacher* are used interchangeably throughout this report.

Introductory note on methodology

The methods used for preparing the report on the early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce in Latvia are analyses of relevant statistical data, laws and regulations as well as expert interviews. Three interviews were carried out with the following experts: Ļubova Jakovele, a senior expert at the National Centre for Education (date of the interview 10.01.2022); Rasma Purmale, a principal of an ECEC institution in Riga and a lecturer in the University of Latvia, education programme "Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher" (date of the interview 13.01.2022); and Inese Seipule, Ministry of Education and Science, Department of Education, Deputy Director in the field of general education (date of the interview 17.01.2022). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. References to expert statements are included in the text.

1. ECEC governance in Latvia

Latvia has a unitary system of early childhood education and care for children up to statutory school age at 7 years, organised in two stages. Both ECEC provision for children up to age 5 and pre-primary education for 5 to 6 year-olds come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*). The Ministry of Education and Science has overall auspices of the ECEC institutions for children aged 1½–6[1] years, including the development of regulatory and curricular guidance. At the local level the municipal authorities are responsible for providing public ECEC facilities. The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the remuneration of ECEC Teachers working with children aged 5–6 years, while municipalities are responsible for the remuneration of ECEC Teachers working with the younger age groups. In general, all ECEC provision has two sources of funding: the state (for the salaries of teachers working with 5 to 6 year-olds) and municipalities (except for private ECEC settings). The small number of private ECEC centres is obliged to adhere to the same regulatory framework as the public institutions.

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In Latvia, with a school starting at age 7, the corresponding formats are **1½ –5** and **5–6** years.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

The main staff categories working directly with children in Latvian ECEC institutions are:

- Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers
- Teacher Assistants
- Early Childhood Music and Sports Teachers
- Speech Therapy Teachers
- Special Needs Pedagogues.

Minority ECEC institutions, where the language of instruction is not Latvian, may also employ a Latvian Language Teacher. Administrative staff categories are: Centre Heads (responsible for management tasks), Deputy Centre Heads (responsible for the educational programme), and Early Childhood Education Methodologists[2]. Technical staff categories include: teacher assistant, cooks, cleaners. In some institutions a Psychologist and/or a Nurse may also be employed. Music, Sports and Special Needs Pedagogues may be employed as permanent staff members of an ECEC centre and work on a daily basis with the children, but in the case of small ECEC institutions they may work part time and move from centre to centre.

Table 1 gives a brief overview of the main staff categories and also categorises the core practitioners (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at the end of this chapter).

Table 1
Lativa: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	**Main ECEC workplace settings and age range**	**Main roles and positions**	**Main age-range focus of initial professional education**	**Minimum qualification requirement[3]** **ECTS credits** **EQF level** **ISCED level**
Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher *Pirmsskolas izglītības skolotājs* *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	*Pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde* **ECEC centre / kindergarten** 1½–6 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility	1½–7 years	Tertiary-level qualification in pedagogy and professional award as Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher ***or*** Tertiary-level qualification in pedagogy and professional award as Primary School Teacher ***plus*** a 72-hour B-programme[4] on early childhood pedagogy

[2] 'Methodologists' in Latvia are senior Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers responsible for professional support in organising the educational work in ECEC institutions; one of his/her responsibilities is monitoring the staff needs for continuing professional development.
[3] Cabinet of Ministers 2018a.
[4] See *Chapter **3*** on IPE for a clarification of 'B-Programme'.

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement[3] ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				Or Second level profes-sional higher education (Bachelor) in pedagogy ***plus*** a 72-hour B-pro-gramme on early child-hood pedagogy ***or*** Higher education de-gree (Bachelor's or Master's or Doctoral degree) in early child-hood pedagogy ECTS credits: 108–240 EQF Level: 5 and higher ISCED 2011: 5 and higher
Teacher Assistant *Skolotāja palīgs*	*Pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde* **ECEC centre / kindergarten** 1½–6 years	Responsible for children's care needs and support-ing the teacher in ed-ucational and play activities	1½–7 years	There are no official minimum requirements for education and qual-ification. It is recom-mended that candi-dates have first aid training and attend courses on children's rights protection. Some municipalities may or-ganise a preparatory course on child psy-chology and develop-ment.
Early Childhood Music/Sports* Teacher *Pirmsskolas izglītības mūzikas/ sporta skolotājs* *Profile* depends on qualification route: ***either*** Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional with additional specialist qualification ***or*** Early Childhood	*Pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde* **ECEC centre / kindergarten** 1½–6 years	Main respon-sible person for children's music/ sports activities	1½–7 years	Second level profes-sional higher education degree in pedagogy with • additional qualifica-tion as Music Teacher ***or*** • additional qualifica-tion as Sports Teacher ***or*** ECEC Teacher qualifica-tion requirements (*see above*)

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement[3] ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Pedagogy Professional				ECTS credits: 108–240 EQF Level: 5 and higher ISCED 2011: 5 and higher
Speech Therapy Teacher *Logopēds* *Profile:* Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional with specialist qualification	*Pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde* **ECE centre/ kindergarten** 1½–6 years	Main responsible person who works with children with speech problems	1½–7 years	Second level professional higher education degree in pedagogy *PLUS* a postgraduate qualification as Speech Therapy Teacher ECTS credits: 108–240 EQF Level: 7 ISCED 2011: 5 and higher
Special Needs Pedagogue** *Speciālais pedagogs*	*Pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde* **ECEC centre / kindergarten** 1½–6 years	Main responsible person who works with children with special needs	1½–7 years	Second level professional degree in special needs education (Bachelor's or Master's) ***or*** ECEC Teacher or Primary School Teacher professional qualification ***plus*** a 72-hour B-programme on special education approaches in ECEC. ECTS credits: 240 and higher EQF Level: 6 and higher ISCED 2011: 6 and higher

* In some ECEC institutions there is not a designated post for a sports teacher. ECEC Teachers also prepare and lead sports activities for children.

** Special Needs Pedagogues (sometimes called Special Needs Teachers) work with children with complex needs both in regular ECEC settings and in special kindergartens. This staff position is not common in all ECEC institutions.

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)

- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

In Latvia, the right to work as a head of an educational institution, including ECEC centres, is determined by Regulation 569 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia (2018a). These rules apply to all schools and ECEC centres and the requirements are the same. Article 13 of these regulations stipulates that a person whose education meets one of the following requirements is eligible to work as a Centre Head, Deputy Head and Educational Methodologist of an educational setting:

- Higher education (except for the 2-year first-level professional higher education) in pedagogy or educational sciences (see *Table 3* – Route 1)
- Higher education and a part of the study programme related to pedagogy has been learned within the framework of the higher education study programme for at least two ECTS credits or at least 72 hours.

Article 50 of the Education Law states that the heads of educational institutions must not have a criminal record.

Regulation 618 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia (2020b) on assessment of the professional performance of educational setting managers stipulates that the performance of the head is evaluated after a certain period of time, not less than once every six years. It is evaluated by the State Quality Service of Education. A first-time head of an educational setting is evaluated within two years, but not earlier than six months after taking up the position. This gives new heads time to familiarise themselves with the specific setting context.

ECEC Centre Heads are hired by the municipalities, where their contracts are concluded. Job duties are determined more specifically by each municipality.

An interview with the Director of an ECEC centre in Riga revealed that to become a Centre Leader, three years of experience in pedagogical work with children or in methodological work are required. The candidate must have knowledge of at least one foreign language and know how to work effectively with information technologies. According to this interviewee, a professional development centre for young ECEC leaders/ managers has been operating in Riga for five years or more, where young directors have the opportunity to improve their pedagogical, administrative, and financial management skills, as well as work with staff (Purmale, expert interview, January 13, 2022). This professional development centre was established and financed by Riga municipality.

The main leadership tasks are primarily administrative, however the teachers' salary regulations (Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia 2018a), which also apply to ECEC Teachers, state that the Head and Deputy Head of the educational institution can work up to seven hours in addition to their basic workload. Therefore, in addition to the basic workload of 40 hours a week, directors can work an additional seven hours a week which may include working with children. Most often, the ECEC Principals work only at times when a teaching post is vacant and there is no one to fill these positions or a temporary replacement is needed. Secondly, there are Principals who wish to maintain their teaching experience and demonstrate their teaching skills in a real-life situation. Principals also need to be present in the everyday pedagogical work process, to understand what is happening in the classroom (Seipule, expert interview, January 17, 2022).

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

The specialisation of employees depends on the specific ECEC centre and municipality, as the municipality provides personnel funding. In addition, there is a salary bonus for teachers for working with the children of asylum seekers. For this, a separate contract is concluded with educational institutions and a state budget is allocated (according to the number of children in the institution).

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Most ECEC centres in Latvia have a co-ordinating staff member called a "Methodologist". Methodologists are senior Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers responsible for professional support in organising the educational work in ECEC centres. One of his or her responsibilities is monitoring the staff needs for continuing professional development, but they also have a counselling, coaching and support role in the ECEC setting. They may also organise on-site or regional continuing professional development activities. A person who has a higher pedagogical education (excluding a first-level pedagogical higher professional education), is entitled to work as an Educational Methodologist.

Supervisory functions are performed by the employees of the municipal education administration, which coordinates the professional development of teachers at the municipal level, as well as by the State Quality Service of Education, which in their inspections examines and verifies cases where there have been complaints about the quality of education.

Relatively recently, the National Centre for Education of the Republic of Latvia has launched the Learning Consultants Expert programme. The purpose of the programme is to promote the introduction of a new teaching and learning approach in the educational process. The main task of the consultant is to provide the ECEC Teacher with practical support in the work environment. Prospective Learning Consultant Experts are required to complete a certain number of CPD courses and then demonstrate the acquired skills. They study three levels of courses over a period of three years and are awarded 160 ECTS credits (this takes place alongside regular teaching work). In the second year, they are awarded the status of a learning expert; in this capacity they have the right to consult ECEC Teachers (Jakovele, expert interview, January 10, 2022). On 01.02.2021, there were 72 ECEC Learning Consultant Experts across the country, fully trained by the National Centre for Education (National Centre for Education 2021). Since 2017, six consulting centres have been operating in Riga, where attention has also been paid to ECEC settings. The consulting centres are staffed by specialists whose work is focused on support in organising the learning process and raising the quality of education (Purmale, expert interview, January 13, 2022).

2.5 Specialist support staff

Regulation 716 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia on "national preschool education guidelines "(2018b) stipulates that, taking into account the working hours and the number of groups of the educational setting, the local government which is provider of the ECEC centre ensures the necessary number of teachers and teacher support staff (including Speech Therapists) for the implementation of the ECEC educational programme. Therefore, in general, it is the municipality's responsibility and decision which specialists to involve in ECEC work.

Regulation 447 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia on national preschool education guidelines (2016a) about the state budget targeted grant for teachers' wages (article 8.5) envisages state funding for the salary of Speech Therapists employed to work with children from the age of 5 until the start of primary education. The ratio is set at one position for 200 children. For children up to the age of 5, the Speech Therapist's salary is paid by the municipality whereas

the state pays the salaries of those working with 5 and 6 year-olds. In Riga, there are Speech Therapists in all ECEC centres. In other municipalities, it depends on the size of the setting, the attitude of the municipality and the availability of specialists (Purmale, expert interview, January 13, 2022). In a study by the Latvian Speech Therapist Association (2021), it was found-that one quarter of municipalities in 2021 did not receive the necessary state grants in full. Using the ratio set by the state in the calculations, the authors of the study show that the funding allocated by local governments for younger children to ensure the work of a Speech Therapist is even more insufficient. This confirms the widely known fact that Speech Therapist services are only available in a segment of the ECEC settings in Latvia. It should be noted, however, that children can also receive state-paid Speech Therapist consultations in medical institutions through a family doctor or a medical specialist.

Special needs staff work only in ECEC institutions that implement a special education programme (in total, there are 28 municipal special ECEC centres in Latvia). In Latvia, special education is for children with visual, hearing, language and learning impairments, severe somatic illnesses, movement and support apparatus impairments, mental health illnesses and learning disabilities (among young children, mixed developmental disabilities). Special education centres or groups are fully financed by the state, and the funding is determined by Regulation 477 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia on the financing procedure for special education classes (groups) in both special and regular education settings (2016b). Specialists in these ECEC institutions are engaged according to the children's needs and disorders. The ECEC principal interviewee states that teachers receive bonuses of 10-20% for work with special groups (Purmale, expert interview, January 13, 2022). If the help of an assistant is needed, the municipality or the state covers the wages, depending on the child's age.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

In 2020/2021, 11,499 teachers were employed in ECEC centres in Latvia. 90.7% of these worked in municipal settings and 9.3% in ECEC centres established by legal entities or individuals. There are no data available on the technical staff (assistants, cleaners, cooks) who work in ECEC institutions.

8,282 or 72% of the pedagogical staff in ECEC institutions worked directly with the children as Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers, 10.2% were engaged in management duties (5.4% were employed as Centre Heads, and 4.8% worked as an Education Methodologist or Deputy Centre Heads).

7.2% of teachers were employed as early childhood Music Teachers, 4.4% as Sports Teachers and 6.5% of staff were Speech Therapists.

32.9% of the pedagogical staff in ECEC centres are teachers working for the mandatory preparation of children for school from the age of 5.

88.4% of teachers working in ECEC institutions have a tertiary-level professional qualification and the greater majority (84.7%) a specialisation in pedagogy (there are no available data on whether these teachers have a specialisation in early childhood pedagogy). 3.7% had a tertiary level education in another field. 13.3% of the staff with a specialised higher education degree have a Master's degree in pedagogy. 11.6% of teachers working in ECEC institutions have a qualification below tertiary level. Of these, 3.5% had a secondary vocational education and 8.1% a

general secondary education. 68.7% of this group of teachers with a secondary-level education (either vocational or general) are studying for a tertiary-level degree in pedagogy.

The available data show that 15.3% of staff working in ECEC institutions do not have a relevant qualification. In this group there are staff with a general secondary education, a secondary vocational education and with other (non-pedagogical) higher education.

In Latvia, the personnel working in ECEC institutions are mainly women (99%). Of all teachers working in ECEC institutions, only 0.84% or 97 persons are male. The majority of male teachers worked as sports teachers (58 persons or 59.8%) or music teachers (16 persons or 16.5%), 6 persons or 6.2% of all male staff were heads of institutions.

4.3% of teachers are younger than 24 years, 18.5% are in the age group 25-34 years and 21.9% are in the age group 35-44 years. More than half (55.3%) of the teachers working in ECEC centres are over 45 years of age. 29.9% are aged 45-54 years, and 25.4% are 55 years of age or older. In general, 6.2% of teachers working in ECEC institutions have reached retirement age.

Data on ethnic background or nationality within the ECEC workforce are not collected in Latvia. In 2020/2021, of all ECEC institutions registered in Latvia (in total, 643), 74.7% were with Latvian as the language of instruction, 7.6% with Russian, 17.4% were bilingual with both Latvian and Russian as the language of instruction. Teachers can work in any ECEC institution regardless of their ethnic background or nationality.

Table 2

Latvia: Structural composition of ECEC* workforce in Latvia, 2020/2021**

Staff categories	Number of staff and proportion of workforce	
Total staff with higher education degree (or tertiary-level professional qualification) (ISCED 5 and above)	10,166	**88.4%**
Staff with a higher education qualification in pedagogy	9,739	**84.7%**
of whom the following have a Master's degree in pedagogy	1,534	13.3%
Staff with higher education qualification in another field	427	**3.7%**
Staff with upper secondary or post-secondary IPE:	1,333	**11.6%**
– secondary vocational (ISCED 3)	398	3.5%
– general secondary (ISCED 3)	935	8.1%
the majority of whom are currently studying for a higher education degree in early childhood pedagogy	915	68.7%
Staff with non-specialist qualification (both higher and secondary)	1,760	**15.3%**
Unqualified staff	No data available	
Specialist support staff	977	**8.5%**
– Speech Therapists	744	6.5%
– Special Education Teachers	34	0.3%
– Special Needs Pedagogues	100	0.9%
– Educational Psychologists	99	0.9%
Male staff:	97	**0.8%**
– Sports Teachers	58	0.5%
– Music Teachers	16	0.1%
– Principals	6	0.05%
– Other	17	0.15%
ECEC Teachers in the mandatory preparation of children for school from the age of 5	3,783	**32.9%**
Staff with a background of migration	No data available	

* The data include only the pedagogical staff in ECEC institutions.

** Ministry of Education and Science 2021 (personal communication). Data were provided directly by a ministry official. Not available on ministry webpage.

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

During the last five years, the process of ECEC Teacher education in Latvia has been improved and some programmes have been modified, but the system has not fundamentally changed. Therefore, the information compiled in this chapter largely endorses the information in the previous report (Šūpule, Bebriša, and Jansone 2018).

The higher education programme 'Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher' is offered by four higher education institutions in Latvia: University of Latvia (*Latvijas Universitāte*); University of Liepaja (*Liepājas Universitāte*), Rezekne Academy of Technologies (*Rēzeknes Tehnoloģiju akadēmija*) and Daugavpils University (*Daugavpils Universitāte*). Previously there was also the Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy (*Rīgas Pedagoģijas un izglītības vadības akadēmija*; a non-university institution) offering this education programme. However, in 2017 the latter was reorganised and attached to the University of Latvia.

First-level higher professional education in early childhood education is provided at the four universities mentioned. Graduates of the first-level professional higher education study programme can obtain a Bachelor's degree in education by continuing to learn the content of the professional Bachelor study programme 'Primary Education Teacher'.

Primary School Teachers (grades 1-4) wishing to work in an early childhood institution, or Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers wishing to work in a special ECEC institution are obliged to follow a requalification course known as a 'B-programme'. These programmes are of 72 hours' duration and cover issues of early childhood pedagogy, particularly didactics. They are developed and conducted by the higher education institutions which offer study programmes in pedagogy.

Table 3

Latvia: Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher

Job title in Latvian: *Pirmsskolas izglītības skolotājs* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Route 1: First level professional higher education programme **Entry requirements:** Certificate of general secondary education or vocational secondary education (ISCED 34 and 35) **Professional studies:** 2 years (2 years and 6 months for external studies) of professional higher education **Award**: Professional status (diploma) as Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher **ECTS credits:** 120 **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011:** 55 **Main ECEC workplace:** ECEC centres/kindergartens (1½–6 years) Graduates with a Bachelor's degree can study further to gain a Master's or a higher education degree.

Job title in Latvian: *Pirmsskolas izglītības skolotājs* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Route 2: Professional Bachelor's degree programme **Entry requirements:** Certificate of general secondary education or vocational secondary education **Professional studies:** 4-year (4 years and 6 months for external studies) university/higher education study programme – sub-programme 'Early Childhood Education and Primary School Teacher' **Award**: Professional Bachelor's degree in educational sciences/professional qualification as Teacher **ECTS credits:** 240 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 65 **Main ECEC workplace:** ECEC centres/kindergartens (1½–6 years) **N.B.** Graduates with a Bachelor's degree can continue their studies in Master's programmes and professional education programmes. ***Route 3: Second level short professional higher education programme*** **Entry requirements:** Higher education degree in pedagogy/Bachelor of educational sciences **Professional studies:** 2 years of part-time studies affiliated to a university/higher education institution **Award**: Professional qualification as Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher **ECTS credits:** (240) +108, total 348 **EQF level:** 7 **ISCED 2011:** 65 **Main ECEC workplace:** ECEC centres/kindergartens (1½–6 years) **N.B.** Holders of the professional post-graduate qualification can follow further studies to gain a Master's degree.

Note: Since the required qualification routes of Early Childhood Music Education Teachers and Sports Teachers are similar to those of Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers (2nd level professional higher pedagogic education plus additional qualification as Music/Sports Teacher) and since Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers are eligible to fulfil the duties of Music/Sports Teachers, these IPE programmes are not described in more detail.

Table 4

Latvia: Speech Therapy Teacher

Job title in Latvian: *Logopēds*
Route 1: Professional Bachelor programme 'Special Education and Speech Therapy Teacher' or 'Speech Therapy Teacher' **Entry requirements:** Certificate of general secondary education or vocational secondary education (ISCED 3 and 4) **Professional studies:** 4 or 4½ years of professional higher education **Award:** Bachelor's professional degree in Education/professional status as Special Education Teacher and Speech Therapy Teacher. **ECTS credits:** 240 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 65 **Main ECEC workplaces:** ECEC centres /kindergartens (1½–6 years) *Additional workplaces include:* primary schools, special education institutions, art schools, school management institutions, study centres N.B. Graduates with a Bachelor's degree can continue studies in Master's programmes and 2nd level professional higher education programmes. ***Route 2: Second level (post-graduate) short professional higher education programme 'Teacher' – sub-programme 'Speech Therapy Teacher'***

Job title in Latvian: *Logopēds*
Entry requirements: Higher pedagogic education or Bachelor of educational sciences **Professional studies:** 2 years of part-time studies affiliated to a higher education institution **Award:** Professional status as Speech Therapy Teacher **ECTS credits:** 108 **EQF level:** 7 **ISCED 2011:** 65 **Main ECEC workplace:** ECEC centres /kindergartens (1½–6 years) *Additional workplace:* Primary schools Graduates with a Bachelor's degree can continue studies in Master's programmes.

Table 5

Latvia: Special Needs Pedagogue

Job title in Latvian: *Speciālais pedagogs*
Route 1: Professional Bachelor programme 'Special Education Teacher and Speech Therapy Teacher' or 'Special Education Teacher' **Entry requirements:** completed secondary education **Professional studies:** 4 or 4½ years of professional higher education **Award:** Bachelor's professional degree in Education/professional status as Special Education Teacher and Speech Therapy Teacher **ECTS credits:** 240 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 65 **Main ECEC workplace:** ECEC centres /kindergartens (1½–6 years) Additional workplaces: schools, special education institutions, art schools, school management institutions, study centres, N.B. Graduates with a Bachelor's degree may continue studies in Master's programmes and 2nd level professional higher education programmes ***Route 2:*** Second level professional higher education programme 'Teacher' – sub-programme 'Special Education Teacher' **Entry requirements:** Higher education depending on the length of programme **Professional studies:** 1½, 2 or 2½ years studies of professional higher education **Award:** Professional status as Special Education Teacher **ECTS credits:** 72, 90 or 120 (depending on previous initial professional education) **EQF level:** 7 **ISCED 2011:** 65 **Main ECEC workplace:** ECEC centres/kindergartens (1½–6 years) Additional workplaces: primary schools and special education institutions

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

As there are different study programmes for different staff categories, the main focus here is on the IPE programmes for Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers[5]. The main pedagogic didactic approach in the IPE programmes is a holistic and child-oriented approach. In the curriculum, Latvia is in the process of implementing a competency-based approach which allows pupils, based on their ability, to master a skill or competency at their own pace regardless of the specific learning environment.

Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher (*Pirmsskolas izglītības skolotājs*)

Route 1: First level professional higher education programme

Competency specifications:

- Understands the most essential concepts of early childhood education and the guidelines for the professional activity of an ECEC Teacher
- Justifies the choice of learning techniques, methods and technologies, according to the individual development of children and the achievable learning results
- Understands the principles of planning and implementation of a child-centred learning process in early childhood settings
- Knows the techniques of self-analysis, self-evaluation and self-reflection in the teacher's pedagogical activities.

Curricular areas:

- General education courses (for example, early childhood pedagogy)
- Specialisation courses (in pedagogy, psychology, physiology, study methods)
- Practical experience in an ECEC setting
- Preparing and presenting qualification thesis.

Route 2: Professional Bachelor's degree programme

Competency specifications:

- Understands the basic concepts of the field of educational sciences and the guidelines of professional activity, which are necessary to perform the basic tasks and duties of a teacher's professional activity
- Understands the principles of planning, implementation and evaluation of the pedagogical process, the possibilities of their application in practical pedagogical activities
- Is familiar with the content of subject areas, core competences, intermediate competences and methodology
- Knows the techniques which are necessary for the improvement of professional competence, e.g. self-analysis, self-evaluation and self-reflection.

Curricular areas:

- Theoretical courses in pedagogy and psychology
- Courses of specific psychological development features of young children, methods of promotion of children's creativity, specific tasks of home tutors
- Pedagogical practical experience in ECEC institutions
- Preparation of thesis.

[5] The information is gathered from descriptions of study programmes of different higher education institutions.

Route 3: Second level short professional higher education programme

Competency specifications:

- Being able to practically use knowledge of early childhood pedagogy and study methods, taking into account their previous pedagogic education and work experience
- Being able to plan and organise pedagogic processes with certain goals.

Curricular areas:

- Theoretical courses related to the field (for example, early childhood pedagogy, playing in theory and practice)
- Courses of professional specialisation (for example, bilingual education in ECEC settings, sports in ECEC settings, music in early childhood pedagogy and others)
- Freely chosen courses
- Practical use of theory
- State examination.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

During the last five years, the requirements on entry for working as an Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher have not changed significantly, only in one aspect. The information in this chapter therefore largely endorses the information already collected in the previous report (Šūpule, Bebriša, and Jansone 2018). The minimum requirement for working as an ECEC Teacher in an ECEC institution is a higher pedagogy-related education and a specific qualification. According to the relevant legislation, the only possibility for working without having these specific requirements is for students who are undertaking initial professional studies in pedagogy (Cabinet of Ministers 2018a). Experts still admit that it is common practice for students to start working during their studies and it has become one of the options to solve staff shortage problems in ECEC settings (Purmale, expert interview, January 13, 2022). Regulation 569 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia (2018a) also stipulates that after qualifying as an ECEC Teacher the pedagogue should work under the guidance of a teacher mentor for two years.

Almost anyone can work as an Early Childhood Teacher Assistant regardless of their education and qualification, the only requirement is a completed secondary education. However, according to legislation, when hiring a person, the ECEC setting provider is obliged to request information from the Punishment Register to make sure that a person has not been convicted of criminal offences that are related to violence or threats of violence, of criminal offences against moral and sexual inviolability (Latvijas Republikas Saeima 1998a) or of other crimes not permitted for those working with children.

An Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher has both vertical and horizontal career opportunities in ECEC institutions. A teacher can participate in the application process for vacant positions and become the Centre Head of an ECEC institution, a Deputy Centre Head for education work or a Methodologist. An ECEC Teacher can also make horizontal career moves. He/she can gain a specialist qualification and work as a Speech Therapist or a Special Needs Pedagogue. Teacher Assistants can only become an ECEC Teacher by following the required education and qualification routes.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Guided workplace experience in the form of a practicum is given great importance during the IPE programmes for the preparation of future Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers. It is an opportunity for students to test their theoretical knowledge and to improve their pedagogical skills. Workplace-based learning is implemented according to an agreement signed by both the higher education institution and the service provider/employer offering the work placement. The agreement includes the goals and tasks of the practicum, as well as its planning, evaluation procedures and the duties and responsibilities of both co-operating institutions. However, in most cases students currently have to find a suitable placement themselves – frequently it is an ECEC centre close to the student's home or the one where the student already works alongside his/her studies.

During their practicum students need to develop and improve their skills of observation, to note and evaluate the individual development of each child, to develop skills for the independent planning of learning processes (including goal-setting and tasks), and to learn to choose appropriate pedagogic-didactic and organisational approaches in order to promote the individual development of each child. Students make regular notes of observations of daily practices and these are included in the overall evaluation of the practicum: "A student has to write an internship report, an internship diary based on theoretical knowledge. The diary is evaluated by the university supervisor and also by the Head or Methodologist of the ECEC institution. In the diary, students describe how they have prepared the lessons and how they have conducted them. At the end, there is the practicum exam; a model lesson is filmed and then watched by the assessment commission and evaluated. Contact with children is assessed, as well as how they have used theoretical knowledge and selected materials in relation to specific children" (Purmale, expert interview, January 13, 2022). The representative of the co-operating ECEC institution (Centre Head, Deputy Centre Head for education work or Methodologist) and the HEI supervisor of the field practice assess the student's performance together. Evaluation also includes a presentation by the student in their higher education institution.

In terms of a centre-based mentor or support person for the students, this role can be fulfilled by an ECEC Teacher as well as by a Centre Head, a Deputy Centre Head for education work or a Methodologist. Each ECEC setting makes this decision according to the tasks a student has to fulfil during the field practice.

According to field experts, a mentor or support person in the ECEC institution should be specially prepared in order to support students during the field practice. Several higher education institutions in Latvia offer relevant courses in their professional development programmes for teachers. As a preparatory course for this role has not been set as a requirement, some experts report that a Centre Head or Deputy Centre Head for education work who has 20 or more years of work experience can perform the duties of mentors without special preparation. Usually, the ECEC staff do not receive additional payment for fulfilling the tasks of a mentor or support person.

The number of ECTS allocated to workplace experience in the professional study routes for core practitioners is 20. The ECEC principal and lecturer at the University of Latvia, Rasma Purmale, characterised the workplace-based learning of students in this way: "One practicum is in the first year, when a student goes to an ECEC setting and watches how an experienced teacher works. A second practicum takes place in the second year, in groups with children aged 1½–3 years, when the students are given practice assignments – …] In the second year, they may also lead different aspects: organising play sessions, games and walks. In the case of teachers who study

for only two and a half years, then before the end there is a qualification practicum period lasting for more than a month. By this time the student will be organising the daily schedule as a teacher. The qualification practice ends with the qualification exam, where the assessment committee evaluates the student's teaching practice" (Purmale, expert interview, January 13, 2022).

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Regulatory frameworks, rights and duties: According to the relevant legislation, continuing professional development is mandatory for all teachers, including those working in ECEC institutions. Each teacher is responsible for undertaking professional development of not less than 36 hours within a period of three years (Cabinet of Ministers 2018a). The Education Law (Latvijas Republikas Saeima 1998b) states that a teacher has the right to 30 days over three years for his/her professional development and that this can take place during working hours, maintaining the salary. Whereas ECEC Teachers are responsible for their professional development, its planning takes place in cooperation with the ECEC leadership.

The professional development of technical staff (for example, Teacher Assistants) working in ECEC settings is not regulated at the state level. It is up to the municipality or the specific ECEC institution to decide whether these employees need professional development. There are possibilities for professional development training designed especially for this target group provided in the big cities.

Providers: CPD courses are developed and offered by higher education institutions, state and municipal institutions, non-governmental organisations and private institutions. Some examples: the 'Latvian Language Agency', and the 'Education and Information Services of Riga City (RIIMC)' which are education support institutions established by Riga municipality; the organisation 'Early Childhood Education Association', the 'Education Development Centre', the 'Latvian Early Childhood Music Education Association' and many more, as well as higher education institutions such as Daugavpils University, the Latvian Academy of Sports Education, the University of Latvia, Liepaja University, and Rezekne Higher Education Institution.

Main forms: CPD for Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers is mainly conducted in the form of training programmes and study courses. The course provider is responsible for coordinating the programme with the municipal education board. Less often, professional development may take place through participation in workshops and conferences and may also include a study period in another country.

In recent years, a new form of professional development has been launched in Latvia – professional development based on the work environment. This means that the professional development of the ECEC Teacher takes place on-site, in the ECEC institution, focusing on a specific topic of current importance for ECEC Teachers. The topicality is determined either by the Centre Head or by the Methodologist. A Methodologist observes play-based activities and the learning environment in individual groups and provides feedback to teachers. Observations are discussed with the teacher, strong points are emphasised and suggestions for improvement are made. Then they agree on activities that the teacher can undertake. After some time, another meeting is arranged and the learning consultant again observes activities and the learning environment to understand what professional development the teacher needs.

Recent topics: The topics of CPD offers are diverse and broad. This was one of the findings in a study by Šķestere (2020), who analysed the options offered by the Latvian Local Government Training Centre. The programme included the following courses: internet use for preschool children; practical methods and techniques for preschool language development in the context of the competence approach; methods and techniques for forming mathematical concepts; implementing the competence approach; competence-based curriculum planning and organisation in younger age groups in ECEC centres; implementation of a competence-based curriculum; features of communication in working with children with autistic spectrum disorders; mathematical fairy tales and stories - a means of learning mathematical ideas within the competence approach in preschool.

Access, costs: The availability of different courses is satisfactory and many are provided free of charge. In the case of fee-paying courses, sometimes the ECEC institution or the municipality reimburse costs from their budgets. One of the interviewed experts pointed out that currently the most relevant courses are about improving the digital literacy of ECEC pedagogues, and these courses are offered at the expense of the state (Jakovele, expert interview, January 10, 2022). In her opinion, the three most relevant topics of professional development courses in ECEC are digital skills, children's rights and competence-based education.

Research, debates: Large-scale research projects on the continuing professional development of ECEC personnel have not received funding over the past five years. CPD has not been an issue in current debates in the field, in comparison with topicality of such issues as salaries and requirements for vaccination of ECEC Teachers against COVID-19.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

In general, the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the remuneration of ECEC Teachers working with children aged 5–6 years from the state budget, while municipalities are responsible for the remuneration of ECEC Teachers working with the younger age groups. As of September 1, 2021, the lowest monthly-salary for ECEC Teachers was set at €872 (in 2020/2021, it was €790). This is the pre-tax amount. The final salary of ECEC Teachers is calculated according to their workload and work with special groups.

The site that collects information about the amount of pay in various professions reports that the average net monthly salary of ECEC Teachers in Latvia is between €580 and €952 (https://www.algas.lv/algu-informacija/izglitiba-zinatne-petnieciba/pirmsskolas-skolotajs). To live on this salary without additional support (e.g. living as a single parent with one child in a major city) is rather difficult and it provides a very low standard of living.

In general, ECEC Teachers are paid less than Primary School Teachers. For posts of responsibility, ECEC employees receive a slightly higher salary. Remuneration does not increase proportionally with the job requirements and responsibilities. The remuneration of ECEC staff differs from municipality to municipality. For example, the municipal authorities in large cities frequently pay additional money to employees in ECEC institutions. Remuneration also differs between public and private ECEC institutions, with a tendency to higher salaries in private settings..

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

The workload of a ECEC Teacher is 40 hours in total, of which 36 are contact hours and four hours are for other duties (preparation and so on), while the workload of a Primary Teacher is 30 hours a week. There are no data available about the relative proportion of the full-time and part-time working patterns of staff in ECEC settings in Latvia.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified staff are the responsibility of each ECEC institution. Usually, newly qualified ECEC Teachers almost always work together with a more experienced colleague, who fulfils the duties of a mentor. The work of a new teacher is also supervised by the Deputy Centre Head or a Methodologist, who observes the teacher at work and judges whether he/she can organise the learning environment and educational processes independently. According to a new Regulation, provision of the mentor is now an obligation (Cabinet of Ministers 2020a).

7.4 Non-contact time

In Latvia, there are no available data on the amount of time ECEC Teachers actually spend on planning, staff meetings, cooperation with parents, networking in the community and other activities. However, the weekly workload of an ECEC Teacher is 40 hours in total, of which 36 are contact hours and four hours are for such other duties.

7.5 Current staffing issues

The workforce shortage in the education sector, especially in preschools and schools, has been an ongoing problem for years in Latvia. The Latvian Education and Science Employees' Union (LIZDA) updates the information on this issue regularly. Their survey of the heads of educational institutions conducted in November 2021 on the current vacancies and the crisis caused by the shortage of pedagogues in the sector, reveals that there were 819 vacancies in 575 educational institutions at the end of November (LIZDA 2022). Data gathered by the Latvian Association of Local Governments (*ibid.*) shows that Latvian municipalities currently lack around 2,030 teachers – 700 in ECEC institutions and 1,330 in general education schools. The main reason for staff shortages in ECEC centres continues to be the low remuneration for the work, which has consequences for the societal prestige of the ECEC Teacher profession. Although higher education institutions prepare the specialists for this work, only a small proportion of them choose to work in ECEC institutions at the end of their studies. Young people prefer, for example, to choose an administrative job or a job in the field of human resources.

Solutions to the staff shortage in ECEC institutions are sought in various ways. Firstly, teachers are permitted to work more than one work load (40 hours per week in one institution). Secondly, teachers may acquire additional qualifications in order to occupy posts reserved for various specialists, such as a Speech Therapy Teacher. Thirdly, it can happen that ECEC Teachers take on the duties of the specialists who are lacking. For example, if there is no Sports teacher, ECEC Teachers may organise sports classes for their group of children. The fourth option is that ECEC institutions may recruit students of pedagogy programmes to take on a post as an ECEC Teacher.

Finally, it should be stressed that the amendments to the Regulations No 569 on the Required Education and Professional Qualification for Pedagogues and System of Improving Professional Competencies of Pedagogues (Cabinet of Ministers 2020a) make it easier for teachers to work

in different positions and open up different solutions in professional development, including learning in the work environment (see also *Chapter **8***).

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Amendments to the Regulations No 569 on the Required Education and Professional Qualification for Pedagogues and System of Improving Professional Competencies of Pedagogues adopted in 2020 (Cabinet of Ministers 2020a) provide that, from December 1, 2020, the academic staff of colleges and universities will be able to work in schools and ECEC centres without additional pedagogical education, as well as those students who obtain a teacher's qualification in the new work environment-based study programme[6]. The ECEC institutions are now obliged to provide a Mentor for ECEC Teachers who obtain or have obtained first-level higher pedagogical education. This will promote support for young educators, develop cooperation skills and a more successful application of acquired knowledge in daily work. In general, these changes make it easier for those who have already worked at one level of education to move to work at another level of education or area of specialisation, including working in ECEC institutions.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

During the last five years no state or municipality commissioned research projects directly focusing on ECEC staffing issues have been conducted in Latvia. However, the professional education/training of personnel and their work has been analysed in student research projects. For example, a Master's degree student, Laura Šķestere, prepared and defended her Master's thesis on the continuing education of ECEC Teachers (Šķestere 2020). The findings are compared with the results of the TALIS study in Latvia (OECD 2020).

Opportunities for continuing professional development for ECEC Teachers in Latvia

Source: Šķestere 2020 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: The research aims to investigate the following questions: What opportunities for continuing professional development are available for ECEC Teachers in Latvia? What tendencies can be observed, what obstacles and necessities?

Methods: Survey of 166 ECEC Teachers in 50 ECEC institutions in Latvia

[6] This is implemented within a project (co-financed by the European Social Fund Nr. 8.2.1.0/18/I/004) called "The innovative, research-based education and pedagogy study programme" of the University of Latvia and the second-level professional higher education programme "Teacher". This education is intended for those who have a university education, but in a field other than the education sector. Every year, in the "*Mācībspēks*" project (https://macitspeks.lu.lv/), 100 selected candidates have an opportunity to obtain a teacher's qualification during one study year and continue professional development during the second year to become a teacher in one of Latvian schools or ECEC settings.

Selected findings: The findings are compared with the results of the OECD TALIS study 2018 (OECD 2020) conducted in Latvia among ECEC Teachers. The main conclusions are that there are various opportunities for teachers, including ECEC Teachers, to engage in continuing professional education in Latvia. The majority of ECEC Teachers evaluated the professional development courses as useful for their work (89%). Information about different courses is easily available on various websites, it is possible to apply or register for professional development events, and many of them are online. The most requested ECEC CPD course topics in 2017-2018 were: child development; promoting creativity and problem solving; promoting children's play. The interviewed ECEC Teachers felt the need for knowledge in working with children with special needs and with families. The main obstacle in professional development is the lack of replacement staff during their absence.

Implications: Each ECEC Teacher has their own needs in continuing professional development. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the opportunities for teachers to choose suitable professional development courses. According to the research results, there are teachers who have low motivation to improve professionally, and there are also difficulties balancing their working time with courses. At the level of municipalities and ECEC institutions, more attention needs to be paid to ensuring professional development opportunities are made accessible for teachers.

Another study is focused on the salaries of Speech Therapists working in ECEC centres.

Remuneration and workload of Speech Therapists in ECEC

Source: Latvian Speech Therapist Association 2021 (see *References* for further details)

Aims: To investigate the salaries of Speech Therapists working in ECEC.

Methods: Survey of 136 Speech Therapists of ECEC institutions in 84 municipalities; Survey of 102 Speech Therapists at schools in 76 municipalities in Latvia.

Selected findings: The target grant from the state budget allocated to municipal ECEC institutions for the salary of teachers' Speech Therapists is not being allocated in accordance with the regulatory framework, and it is not sufficient to provide speech therapy classes for all children who need them. The regulatory framework does not include the ratio of children with speech disorders per one teacher's Speech Therapist. In ECEC institutions, Speech Therapist teachers work with different numbers of children for the specified salary. When working with a large number of children with inadequate remuneration, the Speech Therapist has limited possibilities to provide quality services and to achieve the necessary results.

Implications: Speech Therapists work with too many children with speech disorders for inadequate pay. This makes it significantly more difficult to provide qualitative services.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

In 2021-2022, new challenges in ECEC institutions were related to the **COVID-19 pandemic** and the requirement to vaccinate ECEC staff. Among the employees in ECEC centres, there was a higher number of opponents to vaccination than in schools and universities. For example, data of Ministry of Education and Science on 16.08.2021 (Mammām un Tētiem 2021) showed that only 56% of ECEC staff had been vaccinated against COVID-19 compared with 69% in schools

and 82% in universities. This meant that many municipalities were faced with considerable resistance among ECEC staff. In all municipalities of Latvia, there were some ECEC Teachers who left their jobs due to the vaccination requirement, causing temporary difficulties in providing the necessary ECEC staff. (It should be noted that as of July 1, 2022, the requirements set for the education sector regarding the need for a vaccination or infection certificate were cancelled.)

Challenges that have been ongoing for a long time are related to **ECEC staff remuneration**. Although the ECEC staff salary has been increased in recent years, it still cannot be called competitive, and it should also be taken into account that in Latvia, as elsewhere in Europe, inflation and the cost of energy prices have significantly increased. Due to the low salaries, the work of teachers in ECEC institutions does not enjoy high societal prestige and for a long time has faced a gender misbalance with its almost all-female workforce.

Another challenge related to staffing in ECEC institutions concerns the readiness of teachers to deal with **ethnic heterogeneity** in ECEC institutions. In 2022, this issue was especially relevant in connection with **Ukrainian refugees in Latvia**. On October 1, 2022, there were 36,600 Ukrainian nationals who left their country due to hostilities and had registered their place of residence in Latvia (Central Statistical Office 2022). Among them, 3,500 were of preschool age (9.5% of all citizens of Ukraine in Latvia). According to information provided by Riga municipality in May of 2022, there were 730 Ukrainian children admitted in ECEC institutions of Riga municipality. During the year, this number changes all the time, because there is a continuous migration of Ukrainian refugees - some refugees return to Ukraine, some migrate to another country, new refugees arrive, and some remain. In some ECEC institutions, where there were such opportunities, Ukrainian persons have been hired as teachers and teacher assistants. In May 2022, there were seven groups with Ukrainian ECEC Teachers in Riga, and only Ukrainian children were admitted to these groups.

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

LATVIA

Key contextual data

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the general term used in this report for centre-based ECEC provision is **ECEC centre** (*pirmsskolas izglītības iestādes*, 1½–6/7), comprising **kindergarten** (*bērnudārzs*, 1½–5) and **pre-primary group/s** (*pirmsskolas izglītības vadlīnijas*, 6-7)[1]. Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Latvia

1910	The first childcare facilities are established by unions, churches and the State.
1950–1980	Expansion of ECEC provision under the Soviet system
1991	Following the political changes in Europe, many settings are closed as a result of high costs, a low birth-rate and low participation rates.
Since the end of the 1990s	The number of available places in ECEC settings no longer matches local demand.
1999	A new General Education Act comes into force.
2002	Pre-primary enrolment is made obligatory for 5 and 6 year-olds.
Since 2004	Most pre-primary buildings are included in renovation programmes financed by the municipalities and EU structural funds.
2011	Children aged 1½ up to statutory school age (7 years) are entitled by law to a place in an ECEC setting.
2012	National curricular guidelines are introduced for the ECEC sector (pilot programme for pre-primary education - *Noteikumi par valsts pirmsskolas izglītības vadlīnijām*).
2013	– Possibilities for becoming a home-based childcare worker are extended as a measure of dealing with the lack of available places. – Municipalities have to bear at least part of the costs of attending a private facility if there are no public places.
2019/2020	New regulations come into force regarding the national curricular guidelines for the ECEC sector, including home-based ECEC settings.

Sources: Oberhuemer et al. 2010; Splash database 2015; OECD 2016

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

At the national level, early childhood education and care in Latvia comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*), which is responsible for developing guidelines for the early education sector. At the local level, public ECEC settings for children aged 1½ to 7 years are the responsibility of the municipalities under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs (*Labklājības ministrija*). Private ECEC settings are also bound by

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In Latvia, with a school starting at age 7, the corresponding formats are **1½ –5** and **5–6**.

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Latvia provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

the regulations of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Thus, Latvia has a partially integrated ECEC sector, with age-integrated early childhood education centres and a unified curricular (and staffing) framework, but differing responsible bodies for other aspects of the system.

General objectives and legislative framework

The overarching focus of early education in Latvia is on a child's right to develop and learn, based on the premise that every child has equal rights and opportunities. Overall, the education system gives everyone, according to their needs, the opportunity to develop their moral, aesthetic and intellectual potential as well as to acquire skills in various fields, such as humanities, social, natural or technical, in order to participate in the life of the community as an independent person.

From a legal point of view, the General Education Act (*Vispārējās Izglītības likums*) of 1999 (with amendments until 2021) and the Guidelines of the Council of Ministers for Early Childhood Education and Model Programmes for Early Education (*Noteikumi par valsts pirmsskolas izglītības vadlīnijām*, 2012) form the basic framework. In addition, the regulations of the respective institutions have to be observed.

Local government legislation (*Par pašvaldībām*) obliges the municipalities to ensure that children from 1½ years of age in their catchment area can access a place in an ECEC setting.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Children over 1½ years of age have a legal right to a free place in a public ECEC centre. Latvia is currently one of the few European countries to guarantee a place from such a young age (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 45). If a municipality cannot provide a place in a public facility, it has a duty to cover the costs of enrolment in a private ECE setting.

Attending an ECEC setting is compulsory for 5 and 6 year-olds, and voluntary for younger children. The number of hours of early education to be attended is not stipulated by law.

Primary school attendance begins at age 7. A proposal by the Ministry of Education in 2018 to reduce the statutory school starting age to 6 years was not approved by parliament.

Main types of provision

ECEC centres (*pirmsskolas izglītības iestādes*) for 1½ to 7 year-olds consist of **kindergartens** (*bērnudārzs*) and **pre-primary groups** (*pirmsskolas izglītības grupas*). For children aged 4 and younger, attendance is voluntary whereas 5 and 6 year-olds attend a compulsory two-year pre-primary programme which takes place either in an ECE centre or within a school (*pirmsskolas izglītības grupas pie skolām*). ECEC centres are either self-contained or integrated into school premises.

As a rule, ECEC centres are closed for one month during the summer. However, depending on the needs of the parents, flexible opening times can be arranged. Most ECEC settings are open from 7:00 or 7:30 until 18:00 or 18:30. Some also have 24-hour groups where children can stay overnight.

Subsidised **home-based ECEC** settings (*bērnu uzraudzības pakalpojuma sniedzēji / aukles*) were introduced in 2013 as a measure to reduce the shortage of places.

In 2022, there were 631 early childhood educational settings attended by 98,031 children (OSP 2023a).

Provider structures

In 2021, the majority of children attended a public early childhood educational setting: 90.7% of the children over 3 years of age and 80.5% of those under 3 years (see *Table 1*). Most private facilities are located in Riga or other larger cities, where there is often a lack of places in public ECEC settings (OECD 2016).

Table 1

Latvia: Children in ECEC centres by provider type, 2021

Provider type	Number of under 3 year-olds	Proportion, in %	Number of children from 3 years to statutory school age	Proportion, in %
Public	14,044	80.5	75,149	90.7
Private, non-subsidised	3,395	19.5	7,704	9.3
Total	**17,439**		**82,853**	

Source: Eurostat 2023e

Participation rates in regulated ECEC settings

According to Eurostat data, the proportion of children under 3 years of age attending an early childhood educational setting has doubled: from 17% in 2005 to 34.5% in 2022. In the 3–6 age group, the participation rate rose from 79% in 2005 to 89.7% in 2022. In particular, the proportion of children attending a setting for more than 30 hours a week increased from 59% (2005) to 88.4% (2022).

Both under 3 year-olds and older children spend a relatively large amount of time in ECEC settings (see *Table 2).*

Table 2

Latvia: Participation rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	2	7
	Over 30 hours	15	59
	No enrolment in ECEC	84	34
2010	1 to 29 hours	2	6
	Over 30 hours	16	60
	No enrolment in ECEC	82	34
2015	1 to 29 hours	0.9	3.1
	Over 30 hours	22.0	79.2
	No enrolment in ECEC	77.2	17.7
2022	1 to 29 hours	2.3	1.3
	Over 30 hours	32.2	88.4
	No enrolment in ECEC	65.6	10.3

Source: Eurostat 2023b, deviations in the sums due to rounding

According to national statistics, very few children under 1 year of age (0.1%) attended an ECEC centre in 2022/23. The overall attendance rate of under 3 year-olds was just one third (33,1%).

Over three quarters (75.7%) of 3 to over 7 year-olds were enrolled in an early childhood educational setting.

Table 3

Latvia: Number of children and enrolment rates in ECEC centres by age, 2022

Age	Number of children in ECEC settings	Population, beginning of 2022	Enrolment rates in %
Under 1 year	18	17,273	0.1
1 year-olds	3,472	17,500	19.8
2 year-olds	14,243	18,782	75.8
Under 3 years	**17,733**	**53,555**	**33.1**
3 year-olds	17,615	19,374	90.9
4 year-olds	18,772	20,861	90.0
5 year-olds	20,794	22,005	94.5
6 year-olds	21,098	22,005	95.9
7 year-olds and older	2,019	21,819	9.3
3 to over 7 year-olds	**80,298**	**106,064**	**75.7**
total	**98,031**	**159,619**	**61.4**

Source: OSP 2023a, c

Financing and costs for parents

According to OECD data, total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 0.80% of GDP in 2019, 0.2% of which for the childcare sector (OECD 2023).

The General Education Act stipulates that public (state or municipal) early childhood education centres are financed through the state or municipal budget. Municipalities finance staff salaries, equipment and building maintenance; the salaries of staff working with 5 to 6 year-olds are paid from the state budget. Private settings operating under the National Curriculum receive state subsidies for staff salaries and set their own fees for parents.

Parents – also those with children under 3 years of age – therefore only pay for meals in public institutions (approx. €44 per month; Eurydice 2023, 3.3), and for any additional services such as language classes or dance lessons. Since 2013, if a municipality cannot provide enough places in public institutions, it has to pay at least part of the costs of attending a private institution (OECD 2016).

The costs can be reduced for low-income parents. In private, government-independent facilities, fees average €300 per month. If parents have to enrol their child in a private setting because there are no places available in the public ECEC centre, they are entitled to state and municipal subsidies.

According to Riga City Council's information in 2022, the municipality paid a co-financing of €307.85 per month for each child from 1½–4 years of age in a private setting, while the co-financing was €229.27 per month for children of compulsory education age. Municipal co-financing for home-based ECEC providers was €181.09 per month. In 2023, the municipality pays a subsidy of €328.54 per month for each child from 1½–4 years old, while the co-financing is €242.48 per month for children of compulsory education age (Riga 2023). The state support programme for the co-financing of private preschool educational institutions and home-based childcare providers (nannies) ended on May 31, 2016.

In 2022, a couple with two children spent 0% of net household income on childcare costs[3] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

There are no binding regulations regarding staff to child ratios (except for special education settings). However, hygiene regulations as well as the size of the group rooms must be taken into account, for which there are mandatory guidelines: 2.5m^2 for each child under 3 years of age and 3m^2 for each child over 3 years of age. As a rule, one ECEC Teacher and two Assistants work in a group. Children may be grouped in same-age or mixed-age groups (Eurydice 2023, 4.2).

Curricular framework

2019/2020 saw the start of the implementation of new, mandatory curricular guidelines for early childhood educational settings developed by a group of experts known as Skola 2030. Based on the "Regulations Regarding the State Guidelines of the Council of Ministers for Early Childhood Education and Model Programmes for Early Education", a template was developed for centre-specific education plans, which also includes recommendations on assessment and evaluation. This template provides guidelines and support for teachers, methodologists[4] and lead staff.

The content is based on cross-cutting competences that promote knowledge, understanding and basic skills in different contexts and learning areas. Seven learning areas are highlighted: language; social and civic aspects; cultural awareness and artistic expression; science; mathematics; technology; health and motor activities.

The National Centre for Education structures the specifications for learning processes and intended outcomes into three levels corresponding to the age of the children: (1) from 1½ to 3 years, (2) from 3 to 5 years and (3) from 5 years to school entry. However, the staff are expected to also take into account the individual development of the children when planning the learning activities. They can choose the methods that seem most appropriate for their purposes, but are encouraged to use play as the main pedagogical approach (OECD 2016). In cooperation with experts, they are expected to implement the curriculum as an integrated learning process.

Digital education

In the 2018 curriculum guidelines, the development of digital skills is mentioned as one of the goals of early education). The mandatory content of early education is that a child should learn to distinguish between the virtual and the real world and to understand the role of digital technologies. In addition, they are expected to understand the rules to be observed when using digital devices or information media (Ministry of Education and Science 2015).

[3] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

[4] Methodologists are responsible for deciding on pedagogical approaches to be used in the ECEC centres.

Monitoring – evaluation

Child-related assessment

Within the framework of the national curricular guidelines, assessment is an integral part of the learning process. Diagnostic, formative and summative assessment procedures are all used for planning and evaluation purposes. A main goal is to involve the children in the evaluation of their own learning as well as that of other children. Towards the end of each curricular stage (see chapter on *Curricular Framework)*, learning outcomes are summarised.

At the end of the time in pre-primary education, the professional assesses the child's achievements on a four-point scale: (1) has started to learn but still needs support, (2) has partially achieved the intended outcomes but they are not yet stable, (3) has fully achieved the intended outcomes and can apply them in other situations, (4) can independently apply and justify the outcomes in various situations.

The professionals prepare a written report on the child's achievements for the parents. The experts (Skola 2030) who designed the 2018 curriculum also provide support materials for professionals.

Centre-level self-evaluation

ECEC institutions are required to prepare a self-evaluation report and a development plan. Both are included in the external evaluations. Every two years, the self-evaluation reports are sent to the responsible body, which then assesses the institution (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 128).

External evaluation

The State Agency for Education Quality is responsible for safeguarding quality in education. According to the Education Act, all educational institutions must be officially accredited. This certification (external evaluation) must take place within the first five years following the establishment of the institution. The educational plan of each early childhood educational setting is reviewed during the two years following publication, after that at least once every six years. The professional activities of the staff are also evaluated.

The external evaluations are carried out by a specially trained team of experts approved by the Ministry of Education. Seven areas are evaluated: curriculum, teaching and learning, children's achievements, children's support, environment, resources, work organisation, and management and quality assurance. A total of 22 criteria are assessed and result in a final report.

Inclusion agenda

The Latvian National Development Plan 2014–2020 identifies inclusion as a particularly important aspect. In general, an inclusive education policy is in place that emphasises taking into account the individual needs of all children. According to these “Education Development Guidelines 2014–2020”, approved by the Council of Ministers, the target groups are mainly children with developmental or health risks, with a socially vulnerable or minority community background such as Roma children.

Children with special educational needs and with disabilities

The 2018 amendments to the General Education Act stipulate that from September 2020, children of nursery age with learning or language difficulties, physical disabilities or long-term illnesses should attend mainstream institutions.

Children with delayed language development will be supported in the compulsory pre-primary programme with an adapted preparation programme for primary school (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 113).

However, there are also special education settings for children who, despite additional measures, cannot attend a mainstream institution and who have a diagnosis from a national or municipal educational-medical commission. In 2019/20, there were 28 such public support facilities (Eurydice 2023, 2.8).

Children with a migration background and from ethnic minority groups – children from Roma communities

In Latvia, persons from minority groups are identified either (1) by their ethnic background (ethnicity) or (2) by their nationality (citizenship).

The project "TOY for inclusion" focuses primarily on younger children from Roma families, from families with a migration background or from ethnic minorities. It aims to find flexible solutions to reach these families and their children through low-threshold meeting centres (European Commission 2020, 92). In order to integrate more Roma children into early education programmes, training modules for professionals and parents are available in Latvian under the Khetaun project (European Commission 2020, 139).

Although there are groups in some ECEC settings where only one minority language is spoken, Latvian is compulsory in all centre-based settings from the age of 5 (OECD 2016).

In 2022, 86% of children in ECEC institutions were taught in Latvian, 13.1% in Russian, 0.2% in Polish and 0.7% in other languages (OSP 2023a, own calculations).

Table 4 shows data on persons with a non-Latvian ethnic background. In 2022, these persons made up 37.6% of the total population. Persons with a Russian background comprise the largest group at 23.7%. Also among the under 4 year-olds and the 5 to 9 year-olds, a quarter and more than a quarter, respectively, came from a family with a migration background.

Table 4

Latvia: Number and share of persons with a Latvian and non-Latvian ethnic background, 2023

	Total		0 to 4 years		5 to 9 years	
	Number	Share, in %*	Number	Share, in %*	Number	Share, in %*
Latvia, total	1,883,008		90,245		109,480	
Ethnic backgrounds:						
Latvia	1,175,902	62.4	68,120	75,5	78,230	71.5
Russia	445,612	23.7	10,229	11,3	16,643	15.2
Ukraine	56,675	3.0	1,533	1,7	2,310	2.1
Belarus	55,929	3.0	368	0,4	589	0.5
Poland	35,446	1.9	428	0,5	777	0.7
Lithuania	20,530	1.1	259	0,3	359	0.3
Roma	4,677	0.2	217	0,2	266	0.2
Estonia	1,478	0.1	15	0,0	21	0.0
Other backgrounds	86,759	4.6	9,076	10.1	10,285	9.4

Source: OSP 2023b, *own calculations

According to Eurostat data, the share of non-Latvian citizenship in the population looks somewhat different because the data are based on citizenship rather than ethnicities. In 2022, 13.1% of the total population had a non-Latvian citizenship. Of these, almost all (97.2%) came from non-EU27 countries. In the age-group of under 5 year-olds, only 0.9% had a non-Latvian citizenship, of which 86.4% were from countries outside the EU. For the age-group of the 5- to 9 year-olds, these shares were 11.7% and 88.3% respectively (Eurostat 2023c).

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Maternity leave (*grūtniecības un dzemdību atvaļinājums*), which is optional, lasts 56 days before the due date and 56 days after the actual birth date of the child. 80% of the average salary for which insurance contributions were paid for 12 calendar months is remunerated. In 2021, this was an average of €2,257.96 per month for the first part and €1,960.19 for the second part of the leave.

Under the same conditions, fathers can take 10 days of **Paternity leave** *(atvaļinājums bērna tēvam)* during the first six months of the child's life.

Parental leave (*bērna kopšanas atvaļinājums*) can be taken by either parent for a duration of 18 months per parent, either in one block or in parts, up to the child's eighth birthday. But only one parent may receive payment. There are three types of allowances:

(1) *Parental benefit*, which can only be claimed by parents with social insurance. In this case, either 60% of the previous earnings are paid for 13 months until the child is 1 years old (in 2022 this was on average €725.11 per month) or for 19 months 43.75% of the previous earnings until the child is 18 months old.

(2) *Childbirth benefit*: This lump sum of €421.17 is paid to all parents (including uninsured parents) for six months from the child's first day of life.

(3) *Childcare allowance:* A lump sum of €171 per month is paid up to the age of 18 months and a lump sum of €42.69 per month is paid up to the age of 24 months. In addition, a parent is entitled to a state family allowance of €25 for one child (€100 for two children, €225 for three and €100 per each child from four children). This allowance is paid until the child is 16 years old (or 20 years old if the child is still in education).

In terms of the take-up of parental leave, in 2022 it was mostly women (83,9%) who chose to do so – although most of the working parents who received parental benefits were men (77% in 2022). In 2022, the proportion of fathers taking paternity leave decreased by 7% compared to 2021.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Latvia

*Country expert assessment by **Inese Šūpule***

Potential challenges that Latvia is likely to face in the near future are related to a gradual transition within three years to **tuition in the national language** (i.e. Latvian) at all levels of education, as envisaged in the amendments to the Education Law prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science. Currently, at the secondary school stage, minority students are learning all subjects in Latvian, except minority language and culture and other languages, but in grades 1–

[5] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Latvia by Inese Upite in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

6, students learn only half of the curriculum in Latvian (another half in a minority language, which may be Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Lithuanian, and Hebrew; however, for the majority it is Russian) while from 7th to 9th grade - at least 80%. These are formal requirements and practices tend to vary. ECEC institutions have a system of two streams: Latvian language groups and Russian language groups. Often in practice, despite the existence of the appropriate language proficiency document (the Education Law requires knowledge of the national language at C level 1), teachers do not know the national language at the highest level. This policy change is based on the conclusion that the current approach to the language of instruction in minority education programmes has not fully ensured high-quality learning of the national language. However, the shortage of teachers who can qualitatively hold classes in the Latvian language creates a significant risk for a successful transition. According to the data available in the State Education Information System, in the school year 2021/2022, 15,553 children were involved in minority ECEC institutions, and 195 educational institutions provided pre-primary education programmes in minority languages. This constitutes 17% of the total number of ECEC institutions (Laganovskis 2022). The largest number of minority settings are in the biggest cities Riga and Daugavpils. Although there are no comprehensive statistics on the level of Latvian language skills among minority ECEC Teachers, usually the young teachers do not have a problem with the national language skills. The government has planned support measures for teachers by offering Latvian language and methodological improvement courses to ECEC Teachers, as well as experience exchange events.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Latvia was 1,875,757. For about 20 years, the population has thus continuously decreased (2000: 2,381,715; 2010: 2,120,504; 2020: 1,907,675) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), and the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.57, Latvia was slightly above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[6].

[6] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Children under age 6

Table 5

Latvia: Number of children under age 6 in the population, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 years old	17,273
1 year-olds	17,500
2 year-olds	18,782
3 year-olds	19,374
4 year-olds	20,861
5 year-olds	22,005
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**115,795**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 2.9% of the total population were children under the age of 3, and 6.2% were children under the age of 6 who were not yet in school. Thus, the shares of under 3 year-olds were slightly, those of 3–6 year-olds more clearly above the EU average. In the last seven years the shares of the under 3s fell while those of the older children rose.

Table 6

Latvia: Share of children under 6 years compared with the EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Latvia/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Latvia	2.3	2.7	5.0
	∅ EU15[7]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Latvia	2.7	2.8	5.3
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Latvia	3.1	2.9	6.1
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Latvia	2.9	3.3	6.2
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * own calculations, deviations in the sums due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

About half (50.7%) of households with children under 6 in Latvia in 2022 were couple households. Single-parent households accounted for 11.2% - the majority of which were single mothers (9.1%).

Table 7

Latvia: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %[+]
Total households	208,900	
Couple households	105,900	50.7
Other types of households	79,500	38.1

[7] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %+
Total single households	23,500	11.2
Single households, women	19,000	9.1
Single households, men	4,500	2.2

Source: Eurostat 2023e, *Own calculations

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Latvia, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 79.1% and for women 74.5% (Eurostat 2023i).

In 2022, 65.4% of women and 82.3% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were thus above the average (EU-average 87.2%) and those of mothers only slightly above (63.6%) (Eurostat 2023f).

Table 8a

Latvia: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %
Latvia	60.5	74.8
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[8]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %
Latvia	65.4	82.3
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[9]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023f

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 8b*

Table 8b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023

[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023f, 2023i

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[10]

In 2022, 18.9% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was below the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 26% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 13% of children under 6 and 11.5% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023g, h).

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[10] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

LITHUANIA

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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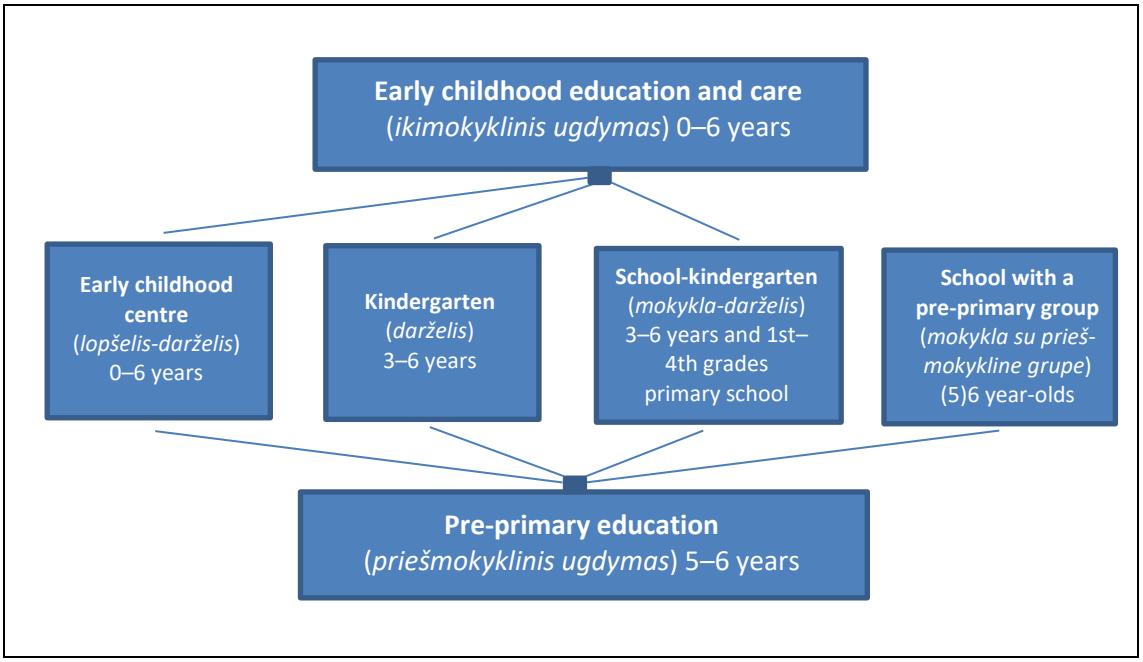
1. ECEC governance in Lithuania

In Lithuania, early childhood education and care (ECEC) is classified as non-formal education. It is organised for children up to statutory schooling at the age of 7 as a unitary system in two stages and comes under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MoESS). **Early childhood education**[1] (*ikimokyklinis ugdymas*) in Lithuania is not compulsory except when a child is considered to live in a socially at-risk family. It is organised for children from birth up to age 6 or, in some instances, up to the age of 5. **Pre-primary education** (*priešmokyklinis ugdymas*) has been compulsory since 2016, and is organised as a preparatory class focusing on 'school readiness' for 6 year-olds and, in some instances, for 5 year-olds. The education system in Lithuania is decentralised, with the state and municipal levels working closely together. Both stages of ECEC are granted partial public funding for up to 20 hours per week. The Ministry of Education is responsible for developing and implementing educational policy and curricula. All ECEC provision comes under the responsibility of the municipal authorities. Therefore, admission to pre-primary education is processed either by the educational institution or centralised through a registration system developed by the municipality.

Figure 1

Lithuania: Organisation of ECEC



[1] **Editors' note 1:** In government documents in Lithuania, the first stage of ECEC is referred to as "pre-school education" and the second stage as "pre-primary education". However, since there is no clear distinction between the terms in English, in this report "pre-school education" will be referred to as **early childhood education** and "pre-school pedagogues" as **Early Childhood Pedagogues**.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

There are two kinds of core practitioners in Lithuanian ECEC provision:

- **Early Childhood Pedagogues** (*ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogė -as*), who work in early childhood centres, kindergartens and school-kindergartens, and
- **Pre-primary Pedagogues** (*priešmokyklinio ugdymo pedagogė -as*), who work in schools with a pre-primary education group. A co-worker with a professional training certificate generally assists the core practitioners. Pre-primary Pedagogues are entitled to an Assistant if there are more than 20 children in the group and there is no chance to create a sub-group.

Pedagogue Assistants in Lithuania (*Ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogo padėjėja -as*) must have a secondary school leaving certificate and a professional training that lasts four months to be able to take care of children independently and support pedagogues in educational activities. Therefore, most staff hired in ECEC institutions have a pedagogical qualification that enables them to work with groups of younger or older children (MoESS 2015a).

Table 1 gives a brief description of the staff working in centre-based settings in Lithuania and also categorises the core practitioners (i.e. staff with a group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO-study (see *Box 1* at the end of this chapter).

Table 1
Lithuania: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age-range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Early Childhood Pedagogue *Ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogė -(as)* *Profile*: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	*Lopšelis-darželis* **Early childhood centre** 0–6 years[2] *Darželis* **Kindergarten** 3–6 years *Darželis-mokykla* **School-kindergarten** 3–6 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility	0–6 years	Professional Bachelor's degree or Bachelor's degree ECTS credits: 180 or 240 EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2011: 6

[2] **Editors' note 2:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In the case of Lithuania, the main relevant formats are **0–6** (early childhood centre) or **3–6** years (kindergarten/school-kindergarten) since compulsory primary school starts at age 7.

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age-range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Early Childhood or Pre-primary Peda-gogue's Assistant *Ikimokyklinio ug-dymo pedagogo padėjėja -(as)*	*Lopšelis-darželis* **Early childhood centre** 0–6 years *Darželis*, **Kindergarten** 3–6 years *Darželis-mokykla*, **School-kindergar-ten** 3–6 years	Minimally qualified co-worker sup-porting the learning pro-cess and care duties	0–6 years	The requirements may vary but are usually a completed upper sec-ondary school educa-tion and/or vocational training course lasting between 4 months to around a year, usually 6 months) + first aid courses and hygiene training. *Award:* Vocational Cer-tificate ECTS credits: at least 35, usually 45 EQF: Level 4 ISCED 2011: 4
Pre-primary Pedagogue *Priešmokyklinio ug-dymo pedagogė – (as)* *Profile*: Pre-primary Educa-tion Professional	*Lopšelis-darželis*, **Early childhood centre** 0–6 years *Darželis*, **Kindergarten** 3–6 years *Darželis-mokykla*, **School-kindergar-ten** 3–6 years *Mokykla su priešmokyklinio ugdymo grupe* **School with a pre-primary education group** 6 year-olds	A core practi-tioner with group respon-sibility	0–6 years	Professional Bachelor's degree or Bachelor's degree ECTS credits: 180 or 240 EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2011: 6

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neu-man 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)

- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

In Lithuania, the leader of an early childhood centre (as for all educational institutions) is seen as the person with the most decision-making powers and responsibility. It is a hierarchical position rather than a collaborative one. It is expected that the leader will have sufficient management competencies and encourage the whole institution to strive for better results (NŠA 2021a). In addition, there is no requirement to work with children directly regularly. Therefore, the leadership role is more administrative than pedagogical.

The head of a state or municipal early childhood centre is appointed through a public tender. Applicants for the post of Centre Leader is expected to meet the following requirements and possess the required competences:

Table 2

Lithuania: Required competences for the Centre Leader

Requirements	General competences	Leadership competences
University degree or equivalent education	Personal efficiency	Strategic governance of the educational institution
An impeccable reputation	Strategic thinking and change management	Pedagogical leadership (teaching process)
General and leadership competencies, and have no less than one year of experience managing a group of people.	Ability to continue learning	Knowledge of the structures of educational institutions, processes and resources management
Be able to work with information technologies.	Efficient communication and information	Leading partnerships between educational institutions and cooperation initiatives
Have a good command of Lithuanian and know at least one of the European Union working languages (English, French, German) at level B1 or higher		
Alternative requirements include a Pedagogue qualification, work experience and educational degree.		

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

In ECEC in Lithuania, there are no specifically designated positions for specialised pedagogical work across the ECEC centre (e.g. with a focus on working with the parents of migrant children or on students completing a practicum), except for experienced and practising pedagogues sometimes acting as mentors for student pedagogues during their internships in ECEC institutions.

However, Early Childhood and Pre-primary Pedagogues are rewarded for particularly complex educational work according to the criteria laid out below (Eurydice 2023c):

5-10% salary increase	– If two or more pupils in the group have *medium* special educational needs due to congenital or acquired disorders, or one to three pupils have *significant or severe* special educational needs due to genetic or acquired disorders

	– If one or more children with a migration background or with Lithuanian citizenship have come to live in Lithuania and do not speak the state language are educated in the group for the first two years after beginning schooling in Lithuania.
5-20% salary increase	– If the teacher works in an early childhood centre (group) for children with *significant or severe* special educational needs due to congenital or acquired disorders – If teaching children for whom home schooling is intended due to illness or a pathological condition.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

In Lithuania, there are no legal provisions for **coordinating** staff with a counselling, coaching or support role who are responsible for a number of early childhood settings in a certain region with a focus on team and centre improvement. However, in the case of social pedagogical assistance to learners, the early childhood education institutions collaborate with social assistance providers, healthcare and law enforcement institutions, and offer consultations to children's parents and teachers. This is regulated by the General Regulations on Provisions of Social and Pedagogical Assistance (Eurydice 2023b).

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is responsible for the state supervision of education providers' activities. The supervision of education institutions, including early childhood education institutions, are performed by the owners, institutions that implement the rights and obligations of the owners, and municipal executive institutions, with the help of external evaluators, if needed. External evaluations are performed regularly, initiated by the same actors. The external evaluation procedures are established and regulated by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport. The National Education Agency, an evaluation institution operating at the national level, is responsible for preparing external evaluators for all educational institutions throughout Lithuania. A single assessment system is used across all types of institution, including early childhood centres. However, there are no specialist supervisory staff specifically for the ECEC sector, only for general education institutions (Eurydice 2023d).

2.5 Specialist support staff

Specialist support staff include Psychologists, Social Pedagogical Assistants, and Public Health Consultants. Psychologists are in early childhood centres and kindergartens on a regular basis. They provide counselling and support for children, organise psychological tests, contribute to didactic materials, and work with children with special needs. Social Pedagogical Assistants also have a permanent working space in schools and early childhood centres. Their task is to ensure the child's safety at education institutions and cooperate with social assistance providers, parents, and guardians. Health Care specialists' working space is also based in education institutions. They are responsible for primary health care and methodological assistance providing health care and consultations on health improvement activities to teachers, learners, and parents. Language coaches and Special Needs staff can work with up to 30 and 24 children accordingly both on a demand basis or regularly in ECEC institutions.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

The ECEC workforce in Lithuania is rather homogenous. Most of the professionals working as ECEC educators are women with a specialist higher education degree or vocational qualification. This gender imbalance may be influenced by existing stereotypes about the teaching profession and ECEC sector and limited recognition of the profession. The ethnic composition of the ECEC workforce is unknown as such statistics are not available. Most of the staff in ECEC sector are the core practitioners, meaning general educators, and only slightly more than 10% of staff are other pedagogical or support staff, such as psychologists, special teachers, art instructors, and others. This may be a result of an integrated and holistic approach to early childhood education, where general educators are responsible for different subjects and development activities, including arts and socio-emotional competences.

Table 3

Lithuania: Structural composition of ECEC workforce, 2021

Pedagogical staff categories	Percentage
Pedagogical staff with a specialist three-year (or longer) early years higher education degree (*Aukštasis išsilavinimas*) in **Total** / urban / rural areas	**74.9** / 74.8 / 76
Pedagogical staff with a specialist vocational qualification: post-secondary education (*Aukštesnysis išsilavinimas*) in **Total** / urban / rural areas	**19** / 19 / 19.2
Pedagogue Assistants (primarily unqualified) with only secondary education (*vidurinis išsilavinimas*) in **Total** / urban / rural areas	**4.4** / 4.4 / 4.1
Specialist support staff who work on-site regularly **Total** / urban / rural areas	Core practitioners: **77.3** / 79.8 / 81.4 Art instructors: **4.2** / 4.5 / 3 Special teachers: **0.7** / 0.4 / 0.4 Speech therapists: **4.1** / 4.4 / 3.3 Psychologists: **0.6** / 0.6 / 0.2 Other pedagogical staff: **4.6** / 4.6 / 5.6
Leading staff **Total** / urban / rural areas	Principals: **3.9** / 4.1 / 3.3 Deputy director: **3.6** / 3.8 / 2.6
Male staff in the ECEC workforce	Less than **1%**
Staff with a background of migration	No national data available

Source: Statistics Lithuania 2022

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Since 2009, pedagogues employed in early childhood centres and pre-primary institutions must have a higher education degree at Bachelor's level.[3] Up to 2009, the requirement was a post-secondary specialist qualification; up to 1995, an upper secondary specialist qualification (MoESS 2005). **Early Childhood Pedagogues** have a degree either awarded from attending a study programme specialising in early childhood education or from a study programme specialising in education and who have then acquired a supplementary teaching qualification. **Pre-primary Pedagogues** have a degree from a study programme specialising in early childhood or pre-primary education and have completed a 40-hour course on work in pre-primary groups (or a similar course) during their studies.

In addition, all ECEC pedagogues are required to complete courses in special pedagogy and special psychology (*specialiosios pedagogikos ir specialiosios psichologijos kursus mokytojoms - (ams)*; MoESS 2007b). These courses have to be completed within one year after starting work as an Early Childhood/Pre-primary Pedagogue if comparable courses (of 2 ECTS credits or 60 hours) have not been followed before or during their initial professional education. Such requirements do not apply to teachers who completed special pedagogy or special psychology study programmes. Moreover, ECEC pedagogues have to complete a certificate of competence in computer literacy (*Reikalavimai mokytojų kompiuterinio raštingumo programoms,* MoESS 2007c).

Initial professional education (IPE) for future Early Childhood and Pre-primary Pedagogues are integrated into respective university or college study programmes at both Bachelor and Master levels. Students enrolling to study early childhood education usually have to provide the IPE institution with three different kinds of university entrance examination results (*Brandos examinas)* and participate in a motivation assessment. In some institutions, high-school exam results are sufficient to receive a state-funded scholarship for Bachelor's studies. Master study admissions are often based on previous academic achievements and an admission exam.

The duration of a Bachelor's study programme varies between three and four years: in most cases, full-time pre-school/pre-primary education studies (or childhood pedagogy) taking place at colleges are of three years' duration (180 ECTS), whereas university courses usually take four years (240 ECTS) to complete. Based on individual learning, writing and exams (and including professional practice), part-time studies can take up to 50% more time (MoESS 2015b).

In a recent 2020 study carried out by PPMI (2020), interviewed educational experts agreed that professional education in colleges is less demanding, and the requirements to secure a study place are significantly lower in comparison to universities. Also, universities attract professors and tutors with more experience and higher qualifications. Therefore, experts agree that pedagogues graduating from colleges could have a lower overall capability than those studying at university.

A Master's degree course in pre-school or pre-primary education often provides students with knowledge on curriculum formation, education strategies, and other higher-level educational issues.

[3] Qualifications obtained abroad are also accepted upon request to the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (*Studijų kokybės vertinimo centras).*

Table 4

Lithuania: Early Childhood Pedagogue / Pre-primary Pedagogue

Job titles in Lithuanian: *Ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogė -(as) / Priešmokyklinio ugdymo pedagogė –(as)* *Profiles*: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional / Pre-primary Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: Secondary education and university entrance examination **Professional studies:** *Route 1:* 3 years at a higher education institution (college) *Route 2:* 3 years at a higher education institution (college), plus a 40-hour course in pre-primary education if wishing to work as a Pre-primary Pedagogue *Route 3:* 4 years at a higher education institution (university), plus a 40-hour course on work in pre-primary education if wishing to work as a Pre-primary Pedagogue **Awards:** *(Routes 1 and 2):* Professional Bachelor's degree in early childhood and pre-primary pedagogy **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011**: 6 (*Route 3*): Bachelor's degree in early childhood and pre-primary pedagogy – can also be followed by a Master's degree **ECTS credits: 240** **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED level:** 6 *Route 4*: **Professional studies:** On completion of a Bachelor's degree, 1½ years of studies at university (90 ECTS credits), plus a 40-hour course on work in pre-primary education if wishing to work as a Pre-primary Pedagogue **Award:** Master's degree in early childhood education and pre-primary education **ECTS credits: 330** altogether **EQF level:** 7 **ISCED 2011:** 7 *Route 5*: **Professional studies:** Completed upper secondary school education and any programme in a professional education institution, plus a 40-hour course on work in pre-primary education if wishing to work as a Pre-primary Pedagogue **Award:** n/a **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011:** 4 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Early childhood centre (*Lopšelis-darželis*), 0–6 years; Kindergarten (*Darželis*), 3–6 years; School-kindergarten (*Darželis-mokykla*), 3–6 years

Table 5

Lithuania: Early Childhood Education / Pre-primary Pedagogue's Assistant

Job title in Lithuanian: *Ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogo padėjėjas -(a)*
Entry requirements: Secondary education **Professional studies:** A course of up to 1 year (from 4 months to a year, usually around 6 months) at a vocational secondary school **Award:** Vocational education certificate as an Early Childhood /Pre-primary Pedagogue's Assistant **ECTS credits:** At least 35, usually 45 **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011**: 4 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Early childhood centre (*Lopšelis-darželis*), 0–6 years; Kindergarten (*Darželis*), 3–-6 years

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Competence specifications for early childhood/pre-primary education studies in Lithuania are outlined in the *Standards Regulation for the Training of Early Childhood and Pre-primary Age Pedagogues* (*Ikimokyklinio ir priešmokyklinio amžiaus vaikų pedagogo rengimo standartas*). Three main areas of competence are outlined in the document (see *Table 6;* QVETDC 2008).

Table 6

Lithuania: Competence specifications in early childhood/pre-primary education studies (IPE)

Areas of competence	**Competences**
1. Getting to know the child and recognising their individuality	1.1. Recognising general and individual characteristics of child development 1.2. Combining general goals of early childhood/pre-primary education with the individual needs of children 1.3. Recognising symptoms of illness, providing first aid
2. Designing the content of education	2.1. Individualising and integrating educational content 2.2. Planning, organising, evaluating, analysing and documenting children's behaviour in an interactive pedagogical process 2.3. Creating an environment to stimulate children's physical and intellectual abilities 2.4. Actively including the children's families in pedagogical interactions
3. Continuing professional development	3.1. Adopting a reflective stance and participating in life-long learning 3.2. Using tools of information and communication technologies 3.3. Using the Lithuanian language correctly in real and virtual professional environments

In addition to the Standards Regulation, key competences for ECEC staff are outlined in the Description of Competences for Pedagogues (*Pedagogo profesijos kompetencijų aprašas*). These include (1) personal improvement and learning; (2) cultural knowledge; (3) ability to use new technologies and work with information; (4) professional communication (MoESS 2015a). Additional competences include (1) recognising children's differences and capabilities/giving support while learning/motivating children; (2) creating a learning environment with varieties in content and stimulation; (3) achieving goals and supporting development; (4) evaluating children's achievements and progress. In addition to the mentioned list of competencies, the Ministry of

Education also offers a framework of intercultural competences (*bendrakultūrinės kompetencijos*) for teachers of all education levels (MoESS 2007a).

These competence requirements aim to help pedagogues develop curricular content, apply different methods, and ensure that educational strategies match new developments in the respective area of learning and include the latest achievements in science or technology (MoESS 2015a). All study programmes in Lithuania are shaped by autonomous higher education institutions and have a variety of courses such as child psychology, physical culture, language and communication, multicultural education, social development, etc.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Several alternative pathways exist for becoming an ECEC pedagogue. Partly, the variety of ways has been driven due to a need to re-orientate pedagogues from secondary education to early childhood and pre-primary education in the face of demographic issues. Policy reforms in the ECEC sector, such as introducing compulsory pre-primary education and the expansion of early childhood education provision, are leading to increased ECEC participation levels and thus to a growing need for more pedagogues.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport announced that pedagogues without a specialist qualification in ECEC and pre-primary education have to obtain the pedagogue qualification within two years. In the following cases, individuals are considered as having a pedagogue qualification if they:

- Have a post-secondary award (pre-2009) or a specialist secondary award (pre-1995), have no less than eight years of pedagogical work experience, and have completed no less than 320 hours (or 12 ECTS credits) of pedagogy, psychology and didactics courses; *or*
- Have a higher education degree, have no less than six years of pedagogical experience, and have completed no less than 240 hours (9 ECTS credits) of pedagogy, psychology and didactics courses; *or*
- Have a higher education degree awarded by a university, have no less than five years of pedagogical experience, and have completed no less than 160 hours (6 ECTS credits) of pedagogy, psychology and didactics courses; *or*
- Have a higher education degree and have completed 1600 hours (60 ECTS credits) of pedagogy, psychology and didactics courses during full-time or part-time studies and have passed all exams in these courses.

In this respect, there is a possibility for current school teachers and graduates in education, the humanities or social sciences to change their profession and qualify as early childhood or pre-primary pedagogues. For instance, primary or secondary school teachers with a completed Bachelor's degree can gain an additional qualification in ECEC by attending a particular module (90 ECTS credits) provided by higher education institutions. For those applying for a modular course in a pedagogical specialisation (*Pedagoginės specializacijos modulio studijos*), the University accepts up to 30 ECTS credits for previously completed similar studies (in terms of content and duration).

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Learning in the early childhood workplace is not regulated in detail through national or regional guidelines. The only requirement for the IPE institutions is to dedicate at least 30 ECTS credits to learning in the ECEC education environment (MoESS 2012). How higher education institutions or post-secondary schools arrange placements/practica within the professional curriculum is the responsibility of each IPE institution.

Students are prepared for their future work as pedagogues during the programme and learn how to apply theoretical knowledge in practice. Work placements/internships are organised in ECEC institutions. The skills and competences which students are expected to develop during their field-based studies are as follows: learn how to provide professional education support to children, evaluate the quality of education and children's achievements, and reflect on and plan a child's progress. During the internship, student pedagogues are assigned a Mentor. A Mentor is an experienced and practising pedagogue who supports students during their pedagogical practice in ECEC institutions. According to the Regulation of Pedagogue Preparation (*Pedagogų rengimo reglamentas)*, Mentors should have five years of pedagogy experience. The quality of the student's completion of the scheduled tasks during the practicum, students' activities, and their contribution to the educational programme are discussed between the IPE supervisor, the mentor, and the student.

Lastly, at the end of the placement period, the institution's principal, the centre team, the Mentor, the IPE supervisor and the students discuss the results of the work placement together. Mentors spend up to 60% of the total placement time with the student. Remuneration for the task of mentoring is agreed upon on an individual basis, as are all additional assignments carried out by ECEC pedagogues. The table below provides an overview of workplace-based learning offered in different initial professional education programmes.

Table 7

Lithuania: Workplace-based learning in different IPE study programmes

Institution	Name of the programme	ECTS credits allocated to workplace learning[4]
Kaunas University of Applied Sciences (*Kauno kolegija*)	Early childhood education (full time) (*Ikimokyklinis ugdymas (dieninė NL)*)	– Pedagogical practice 1 (3rd semester, 6 ECTS) – Pedagogical practice 2 (4th semester, 6 ECTS) – Pedagogical practice 3 (5th semester, 6 ECTS) – Practice of educational activity (6th semester, 9 ECTS)
	Early childhood education (part time) (*Ikimokyklinis ugdymas (sesijinė I)*)	– Pedagogical practice 1 (3rd semester, 6 ECTS) – Pedagogical practice 2 (4th semester, 6 ECTS) – Pedagogical practice 3 (5th semester, 6 ECTS) – Practice of educational activity (6th semester, 9 ECTS)
Klaipėda State College (*Klaipėdos valstybinė kolegija*)	Pedagogy of early childhood and pre-primary education (full time) (*Ikimokyklinė ir priešmokyklinė pedagogika (dieninė NL)*)	– Test Practice of Learning Activities (3rd semester, 9 ECTS) – Early childhood and primary teaching practice (4th semester, 7 ECTS) – Early childhood and primary teaching practice, (5th semester, 9 ECTS)

[4] 1 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credit is equal to 25-30 hours of work. http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/docs/ects-guide_lt.pdf

Institution	Name of the programme	ECTS credits allocated to workplace learning[4]
		– Final teaching practice (6th semester, 11 ECTS)
	Pedagogy of early childhood and pre-primary education (part time) (*Ikimokyklinė ir priešmokyklinė pedagogika (sesijinė I)*)	– Observational practice (3rd semester, 3 ECTS) – Test Practice of Learning Activities (5th semester, 9 ECTS) – Early childhood and pre-primary teaching practice (6th semester, 7 ECTS) – Pre-primary teaching practice (7th semester, 7 ECTS) – Final teaching practice (8th semester, 11 ECTS)
Klaipėda University (*Klaipėdos universitetas*)	Childhood pedagogy (full time) (*Vaikystės pedagogika (dieninė NL)*)	– Introductory practice in educational institutions (1st semester, 5 ECTS) – Pedagogical practice (6th semester, 8 ECTS) – Autonomous practice of pedagogical work (7th semester, 17 ECTS)
	Childhood pedagogy (part time) (*Vaikystės pedagogika (sesijinė NL)*)	– Introductory practice in educational institutions (1st semester, 5 ECTS) – Pedagogical practice (6th semester, 8 ECTS) – Autonomous practice of pedagogical work (7th semester, 17 ECTS)
Marijampolė College (*Marijampolės kolegija*)	Childhood pedagogy (part time) (*Vaikystės pedagogika (dieninė NL)*)	– 30 ECTS credits dedicated to the professional practice (pedagogical practice, practice as Pedagogue Assistant, educational practice, educational-pre-primary practice, final practice)
Panevėžys College (*Panevėžio kolegija*)	Pedagogy of early childhood education (part time) (*Ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogika (sesijinė I)*)	– Introductory practice – Practice as a Pedagogue Assistant – Integrated practice in early childhood education groups – Integrated practice in pre-primary education groups – Final practice (no specific information on ECTS)
Vilnius University – Šiauliai Academy (*Vilniaus Universiteto Šiaulių akademija*)	Pedagogy of primary and early childhood education (full-time) (*Pradinio ugdymo pedagogika ir ikimokyklinis ugdymas (dieninė NL)*)	– Pedagogical practice (early childhood education), 15 ECTS – Pedagogical practice (pre-primary education), 15 ECTS
Vytautas Magnus university (*Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas)*	Early childhood and pre-primary education (full-time) (*Ikimokyklinė ir priešmokyklinė pedagogika (dieninė NL)*)	– Professional self-reflective practice (2nd semester, 4 ECTS) – Pedagogical practice as an assistant (4th semester, 6 ECTS) – Pedagogical practice with a mentor (6th semester, 10 ECTS) – Autonomous pedagogical practice (7th semester, 10 ECTS)
Vilnius University of Applied Sciences (*Vilniaus kolegija*)	Childhood pedagogy (full-time) (*Vaikystės pedagogika (dieninė NL)*)	– Practice of Pedagogue Assistant 1 + 2 (1st and 2nd semesters, in total 126 ECTS) – Pedagogical practice with a mentor (3rd semester, 6 ECTS) – Autonomous pedagogical practice (5th and 6th semesters, in total 12 ECTS)

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

The National Education Agency is an educational support institution founded in 2019 by merging five institutions governed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania. Besides policy implementation measures, the centre also provides information, counselling, qualification improvement and education environment building assistance, conducts education-related monitoring and educational research, develops curricular content and coordinates its implementation.

After graduation from college or university, legislative frameworks require a compulsory probationary year in the workplace, considered the start of professional development. This is organised by the higher education institution in cooperation with ECEC institution. Usually, the experienced practising mentor is assigned for easier integration into the educational institution after the newly-qualified professionals gain a higher level of competence and can work independently.

Under Lithuanian Education Law (2011), core practitioners are entitled to five days per year for their professional development; however, they are not obliged to use this opportunity. As with other issues, there is no specific regulation for the professional development of Pedagogue Assistants since they are not considered part of the core educational staff. Pedagogues do not have to pay for continuing professional development. Costs are covered either by the ECEC institution where the pedagogue is employed or by the state (through the National Education Agency).

The Teachers' Professional Development Concept (2012) outlines multiple ways of using the professional development days and other free time to raise professional competence:

- Individual learning (including scientific activities and research, and professional publications)
- Collegial knowledge sharing (participation in methodological groups and associations of subject teachers, demonstration and reflective supervision of lessons and other educational activities, coaching, mentoring and consultation)
- Specialised events (seminars, courses, projects, internships, training)
- Public activities (social activities, cultural activities, artistic expression)
- Academic studies (higher degree studies, studies in another study field, study programmes aimed at retraining which do not award a degree, etc.).

According to the regulation applicable to all higher education programmes in Lithuania, the state financially supports participation in further study routes such as Master-level studies. Depending on their previous study achievements and an admission test and competition in the study area, students can receive complete funding from the government.

The National Education Agency provides the list of accredited institutions offering teachers' professional development. In 2022, there were 71 institutions, including methodological centres at schools, municipal teacher education centres, and non-governmental organisations (NŠA 2022a). In addition, there are 13 higher education institution departments focusing explicitly on the CPD of teachers.

In 2022, the National Education Agency acknowledged 16 professional development programmes for the teachers (NŠA 2022b). These types of CPD are formally recognised in terms of promotion and career advancement. Some of these programmes are aimed at ECEC Teachers:

Table 7
Lithuania: Examples of accredited CPD programmes for (ECEC) pedagogues in 2022

Name of the programme	Applicable dates	Total hours
Choosing to be a leader of the educational institution – relevant competencies and tools	From 2022-02-07 to 2023-02-06	52
Raising ICT competences in pedagogues	From 2021-09-22 to 2024-09-21	80
The individual progress of schoolchildren: monitoring, achievements, self-evaluation	From 2021-12-22 to 2024-12-21	40
How to successfully implement the reformed early childhood education programme?	From 2022-03-16 to 2025-03-15	40

There are other types of CPD, which include professional development events, short courses, and weekend programmes. Teachers can contact people responsible for teachers' appraisal and continuing professional development in their education institution or directly at the regional teacher education centres. The municipal education authorities and regional teacher education centres regularly provide information about the plans for continuing professional development programmes, seminars and other events.

In 2021, a large-scale state-funded research project on pedagogue CPD improvement was published. The data for the indicators were collected in 2019-2020 in nine municipalities covering all education institutions providing CPD and teacher education centres. Findings show that in nine municipalities, on average, only 68% of teachers use the five-day CPD opportunity. It is demonstrated that pedagogues are well informed about the CPD opportunities at the municipality and state levels. The recommendations include increasing CPD programmes over 40 hours in duration and extending these programmes to early childhood, pre-primary and primary education teachers and also to administrative staff (NŠA 2021b).

Currently, governmental institutions, teachers' trade unions and the media do not portray CPD for ECEC staff as an issue.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Remuneration is still a topic under heavy debate in society and especially among pedagogues themselves. Although there were no more large-scale strikes and demonstrations in the past five years (as was the case 5–10 years ago), teachers are still generally unhappy with their salaries, exacerbated through rising inflation and living costs, especially in the major cities of Lithuania. However, the expression of this dissatisfaction initially led to a gradual increase in their salary. Since 2018, the remuneration of educational staff in general in Lithuania has been continually increasing after the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport introduced full-time equivalent pay instead of workload-based pay. Government Strategic Analysis Centre conducted thorough research after the reform and concluded that in 2018 remuneration grew by 13.6% (STRATA 2018), and in 2019 by 10% (STRATA 2019). However, Early Childhood and Pre-primary Education Teachers still had lower remuneration than other teachers. Therefore, this increase was significantly lower for ECEC pedagogues. Finally, in 2020 the income was equalised for both ECEC and primary and secondary staff. Thus, that year the wage increased for school teachers by 10% on average, while Early Childhood Pedagogues received a salary increase of over 46%

and Pre-primary Pedagogues an increase of over 30% (svietimonaujienos.lt 2020a). In 2021 and 2022, remuneration was increased by approximately 10% for all teachers.

In the last quarter of 2021, the average monthly salary of teachers working at all levels of public sector education was €1034.40 net and €1636.80 gross (Statistics Lithuania 2022), which means that the average salary of teachers (all grades) caught up with the average national monthly wage of €1679.30 gross. No national data is available on the average wages of Early Childhood and Pre-primary Pedagogues. Remuneration differs greatly, based on working experience, qualification, and working time (full-time equivalent). *Table 9* presents the base remuneration coefficients for core practitioners (including Special Pedagogues, Speech Therapists, Psychologists and others) and centre leaders.

Table 9
Lithuania: Salary coefficients for ECEC Teachers and Centre Leaders

Salary coefficients for core practitioners (pre-primary and early childhood education)			
Qualification category	**Length of working experience**		
	0–2 years	5–10 years	25+ years
Teacher	7.99	8.02	8.17
Senior teacher	-	8.21	8.66
Teacher-methodologist	-	8.74	9.28
Teacher-expert	-	9.94	10.45
Centre leaders			
Student count	**Length of working experience**		
	0–10 years	10–15 years	15+ years
Up to 200	12.54	13.00	13.31
201–400	13.70	13.82	13.83
401–600	13.75	13.84	13.88
601–1,000	14.75	14.78	14.81
1,001+	14.78	14.80	14.85

Source: Statistics Lithuania 2022

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

The working week of an Early Childhood and Pre-primary Pedagogue is 36 hours. Of these, 32 hours are devoted to working directly with children, and four hours are dedicated to indirect work– planning, preparing documents related to education, cooperating with other teachers and parents (guardians) on educational issues, etc. However, over 65% of teachers do not reach the full-time equivalent of working time, according to the state audit conducted in 2020 (AAI 2020). There are no national-level statistics specifically for ECEC pedagogues.

In addition, the Centre Leader is no longer the only person to approve teachers' workloads. Workloads are coordinated with the setting's work council. If no such committee exists, workloads are coordinated with the employee-level trade union (Eurydice 2023c).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Before 2018 there was neither an on-site mentoring system in Lithuania nor a formal induction programme for newly qualified teachers. This can be explained by the lack of young pedagogues in early childhood education institutions and the requirement for higher education institutions

to organise field-based studies during their IPE programmes; therefore, induction programmes are not deemed necessary at the policy level.

Since 2018, the National Education Agency has tested the EU funded project "TĘSK", which supports the ECEC Teachers by providing an internship for the first year of their professional career (NŠA 2022c). This is organised by the higher education institution in cooperation with the ECEC institution. An experienced practising mentor is assigned for the whole period, providing five hours of their time each month towards helping to draw up an internship plan and supporting ad-hoc questions. During the internship, various events and integration activities are envisaged in close cooperation with educational institutions.

7.4 Non-contact time

Core practitioners working on a full-time basis in municipal early childhood institutions have 34 hours weekly to fulfil their regular duties with children. In addition to that, four hours of non-contact time are granted for complementary work such as planning or working with parents.

The regulation differs for Pre-primary Pedagogues. The principal of an early childhood institution or a school with a pre-primary education group prepares a specific description of the Pre-primary Pedagogue's workload. The number of hours to be spent on each activity is set down according to the pre-primary education organisation model approved by the municipality.

7.5 Current staffing issues

In 2021, the Government Strategic Analysis Centre assessed the future demand for pedagogues in the Lithuanian education system. The relative shortage of teachers will gradually evolve to a lack of teachers in almost all specialities and qualification levels (STRATA 2021). The government is trying to solve the staffing issues in several ways: for example, by increasing scholarships for students at university, by funding travel costs for travelling to work and by enabling flexible working schedules to combine pedagogy with other commitments. However, to this day, the tendency of a rising shortage of ECEC staff continues to be a problem. Strategic actions will need to be taken during the coming years in order to bridge the gap.

In terms of gender distribution, the workforce is heavily dominated by women. According to data of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 87.5% of teachers in schools and ECEC centres in Lithuania are female. The overall share of male teachers across the country is inadequate; moreover, the number of male pedagogues in early childhood education institutions is even lower than in other levels of the education system and accounts for less than 1% of the workforce (MoESS 2016). For example, there were 1,116 ECEC pedagogues in total in the city of Klaipeda, with only one male amongst them. Similar tendencies can be observed in other municipalities, too, so ECEC pedagogy is overwhelmingly female-dominated (atviraklaipeda.lt 2020). This can be partly explained by the somewhat unfavourable and biased views towards male Early Childhood Pedagogues amongst the general population.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Pedagogue forecasting model

In 2018, the Science and Studies Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA) developed a pedagogue forecasting model that aims to create preconditions for more accurate planning of teachers and persons admitted to studies providing pedagogical qualifications, taking into account the changing needs of the economy, the labour market and the education system. The model provides opportunities to provide evidence-based public policy recommendations to match the supply and demand of teachers. The reports are generated annually by the Government's Strategic Analysis Centre (svietimonaujienos.lt 2018).

Expansion of Lithuanian language teaching in ethnic minority schools

From January 1st 2019, all ethnic minority schools working at early childhood and pre-primary education levels will provide no less than five hours per week of Lithuanian language teaching. In the fourth quarter of 2018, there were 7,000 children in early childhood education and 2,000 in pre-primary education. Although part of the early childhood education programme is available in Lithuanian, research and practice confirmed that without allocating specific hours and the necessary finances, education in Lithuanian usually does not occur even if the parents express a desire for their children to receive such education. Parents who regularly send their children to national minority schools want a specific number of hours dedicated to the Lithuanian language. However, the providers of these schools do not always take this into account and often do not have the financial means to do so. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport therefore confirmed a legislative proposal to increase the teaching of the Lithuanian language by one hour in minority schools (MoESS 2018).

Reorganisation of higher education institutions

On 13 January 2018, the Parliament of Lithuania ruled that Aleksandras Stulginskis University (ASU) and the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences (LUES) would be integrated into Vytautas Magnus University. After this change, Vytautas Magnus University became a university with the widest range of very different study programmes in Lithuania, taking over the educational programmes from LUES in the context of reputation and funding issues over the past few years. The reorganisation affected the prestige of the educational programmes. On a positive note, more emphasis was given to inclusive education in ECEC programmes (svietimonaujienos.lt 2019).

Pre-primary education can last up to two years

In 2020, the Minister of Education, Science and Sport adopted changes in pre-primary education, enabling an individualised learning approach for children which allows them to start school from age 5 for up to two years continuously (MoESS 2020a). After assessing the child's education and support needs and progress in the procedure established by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport, pre-primary education may be provided to a child when they reach the age of 5 in the calendar year before the 1st of September and can last for two years instead of one. Early childhood education is still available on a voluntary basis for children of two years of age until they are ready for pre-primary education. Mandatory early childhood education is still in place

for children living in poor socioeconomic conditions (according to 2020 data, there are over 4,000 such children).

Updated recommendations for Pre-primary Pedagogues working with children with autism spectrum disorders

In August 2020, new recommendations were developed, envisaging an individual support plan for children which would supplement the usual teaching plan in pre-primary education. It provides a perspective on the child's learning, expected changes in behaviour, forms and methods of providing educational support, behaviour prevention and intervention methods, and social skills development activities. The guidelines also provide advice on adapting to the learning environment at school. For children with autism, it is recommended to designate a permanent place for educational activities, if necessary, to use walls and screens to help focus during lessons. It is recommended that the school provides as much noise-isolated space as possible in the classroom, group, or another place where the children can rest quietly during breaks or during a state of emotional instability. In addition, it is proposed that the educational setting hosting the pupil organises a meeting with the "school welfare commission" no later than seven working days before the start of the school year. It is envisaged that the child, together with their parents, external pedagogical and psychological specialists and the relevant teachers would be able to participate in the meeting and discuss how to educate the child and how to assist the family (MoESS 2020b).

A monthly stipend for participation in pedagogy studies

In order to increase participation in professional bachelor or bachelor programmes in pedagogy, the Lithuanian government, since September 2020, has provided a €300 monthly grant for students. This support was extended in 2021. In 2022, students who sign a contract with a specific educational setting agreeing on their employment after completion of their studies are awarded a €500/month stipend. This targeted support is much higher than the usual basic grant in other study programmes of €42 per month for the highest achieving students in all other EQF 6 programmes (LRT 2021).

Additional support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in early childhood education

From September 2021, the government adopted new financial aid for children with disadvantaged backgrounds to increase their participation in pre-primary education. It is estimated that there are around 4,000 such children, but only 100 of them participate in the programmes. The main reason is the low incentive for parents to bring the children to school, especially if they have to support the transportation. Therefore, additional funding of €1,3 million for all municipalities will ensure access to transport, healthy food and proper care (MoESS 2021).

ECEC Teachers' remuneration rate unified with primary and secondary teachers' pay

In September 2020, ECEC Teachers' wages increased dramatically, and they became equal to those of other teachers in the education system. In 2020 alone, the average salary for schoolteachers increased by 10%, while Early Childhood Teachers received a salary increase of over 46% and Pre-primary Teachers an increase of over 30% (svietimonaujienos.lt 2020a). These changes were adopted in the context of frustration expressed by pedagogues who undergo a similar length and complexity of university studies (compared to primary and secondary education) but until now have received significantly lower salaries.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

The development of distributed leadership in Lithuanian early childhood education institutions

Source: Dambrauskiene and Liukineviciene 2018 (see *References* for full details)

Aims and methods: The article aims to analyse the theoretical literature and other sources (strategic documents, legislation, statistical information) and reveal the possibilities of distributed leadership development in Lithuanian early childhood education institutions.

Selected findings: The current context in the Lithuanian education system is favourable for developing the ideas of distributed leadership both in general and early childhood education institutions. According to the theoretical research, the institutional development and staff-specific contexts in Lithuanian ECEC settings are favourable for developing distributed leadership. At the same time, the national cultural context and the different communities of education institutions can pose difficulties in implementing the ideas of distributed leadership.

Implications: The theoretical material and legal framework analysis reveal the need to conduct empirical research on distributed leadership in Lithuanian early childhood education institutions to uncover the challenges and particularities of its implementation and reveal good practices.

Factors demotivating the choice of the teaching profession in early and pre-primary education

Source: Pikturnaite and Tamašauskiene 2021 (see *References* for full details)

***Aims and methods*:** To find out what demotivating factors determine the reluctance to choose the teaching profession in early and pre-school education. Methods were the analysis of research literature and a questionnaire survey. Participants were 421 students studying preschool education and early childhood education and care as well as 111 graduates of such programmes, who are now the professionals working in the field.

Selected findings: Theoretically and empirically analysed factors negatively affecting the choice of teaching in early and pre-school education can be classified into three groups: (1) the general political and socio-cultural situation in the field of education; (2) working conditions in ECEC institutions; (3) person-related characteristics, previous experience, and the lack of career advancement possibilities. The most critical demotivating factors were the low prestige, status and image of the teaching profession in the political and socio-cultural context, negative feedback about stress at work, disagreements with colleagues and competition. Moreover, the possibility for improvement was insufficient for beginner teachers.

Implications: Analysis of the demotivating factors for entering the ECEC teaching profession enhances understandings of the current situation and provides a basis for adopting necessary institutional and legislative changes to improve education.

Experiences of pre-primary education teachers in assessing children's achievements and progress in distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic

Source: Norvilienė et al. 2021 (see *References* for full details)

Aims and methods: The research aims were to investigate the views of Pre-primary Education Teachers about their experiences of distance learning in assessing children's achievements and progress during the first lockdown in the Covid-19 pandemic. Methods included an analysis of

the research literature and policy documents, semi-structured interviews with 15 pre-primary teachers who worked remotely in the spring of 2020, and qualitative content analysis.

Selected findings: Organisation of distance education after the declaration of lockdown in Lithuania posed new challenges for all participants in pre-primary education: the administrators of educational institutions, teachers and parents. However, the teachers managed to master digital software and information flows quickly, cooperate with colleagues and parents of children, maintain the continuity of pre-primary education, and individually consider each child's situation.

Implications: The research provides a basis for studying the views of primary school teachers working with first graders about the impact of distance learning in pre-primary settings on pupils' educational results.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Beyond historically low salaries, difficult working conditions due to an excessive number of children in the group, the challenging work and psychological stress and the dim prospects of CPD, there is also the problem of the **perceived low status of the teaching profession**, which has proved to be a significant problem for many years**.** Recent research by Pikturnaite and Tamasauskaite (2021) on demotivating factors in choosing the ECEC pedagogue profession revealed that the most demotivating factor is the low prestige, status and image of the teaching profession. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport report notes that 17 higher education institutions had at least one study programme for initial teacher education before the reform. This dispersion of resources was one of the reasons that led to a decline in the quality of initial teacher education. It was inevitably connected to the diminishment of the prestige of the teaching profession (Varanauskas 2020).

Lithuanian early childhood and pre-primary education programmes have an internal quality assurance system based on voluntary self-assessment. However, there is no comprehensive quality assurance system which would be widely applicable and would generate data that sheds light on the quality of education and children's achievement at the national level. The education analysis centre of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport developed a research paper on this issue and concludes that the assessment of achievement and planning of education is one of the weakest areas within the education system. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen teacher competence related to assessing children's educational achievements and progress, especially in areas such as children's self-assessment skills, involvement of parents (guardians) and children in the assessment process, and use of assessment results for educational planning and improvement. Recommendations have therefore been issued to teacher training centres, focusing on initial teacher training and/or continuing professional development, to consider modern assessment trends, monitoring and research developments and other skills related to better evaluation outcomes. Experts estimate that in five years, more thorough national reporting will be developed. Therefore, current teachers may face difficulties in adapting to these changes (MoESS 2022).

Poor ICT skills among the older pedagogue cohort are already a substantial problem affecting pre-primary education. Recent research on the COVID-19 impact highlighted challenges related to competences and infrastructure. Even though in some cases the teachers managed to adapt

rather quickly and improve their competences, existing digital infrastructure, specifically the lack of it, presented serious challenges for teachers and early childhood education institutions when introducing distance learning. Educators lacked support from management, adequate equipment, training, and time to prepare for activities. Distance learning eliminated the possibility of direct, "live" communication with children and complicated the processes of motivating students and assessing achievement. The lack of teachers' self-confidence and low motivation to participate in the distance learning process became apparent.

Research shows that adequate qualifications are essential for the child's development and learning and for working towards the curriculum goals. In Lithuania, there is a problem of **staff lacking relevant professional or formal education** both in early childhood and pre-primary education institutions. Between 2016 and 2019, the proportion of non-qualified pedagogues increased from 22.1% to 33.7% in early childhood education and from 10.7% to 16.5% in pre-primary education institutions (MoESS 2020c). In 2018, a thorough evaluation of 101 ECEC institutions (kindergartens) was carried out in the capital city of Vilnius[5]. One of the major problems regarding staff was the qualification of pedagogues, especially in early childhood education. It was estimated that over 50% of pedagogues do not qualify for ECEC education as they have a primary or secondary education degree. In some cases, the staff have not received comprehensive teacher training and attended only a 40-hour pre-primary teacher training course, while having academic background and degree in different field, such as logistics, law and similar (tavovaikas.lt 2018).

Moreover, the decreasing number of qualified workforce in some regions, specifically more rural regions, and a growing number of children with special educational needs proves to be a complicated problem to tackle in the long term. The 2020 report on education in Lithuania estimates that one particular support staff member has over 38 children to take care of in rural areas compared to 25 in urban areas (MoESS 2020c). This means an additional burden for early childhood and pre-primary education pedagogues, who lack support to work with children with special educational needs, further diminishing the attractiveness of the specialisation. In addition, there are over 1,500 children who learn in separate special education institutions for early childhood education, according to 2019–2020 data. According to the law passed in 2021, a national integration of these children will start in 2024 September (svietimonaujienos.lt 2020b). That means an additional influx of children with particular needs will be apparent in most municipalities, and the current challenges will be exacerbated unless a specific focus and appropriate funding are allocated.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

LITHUANIA

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the term used in this report for the main form of centre-based ECEC provision is **early childhood education centre** (*ikimokyklinis ugdymas, lopšelis-darželis*, 1–5), comprising **nursery groups** (*lopšelis,* 1–2) and **kindergarten groups** (*darželis*, 3–5). Compulsory **pre-primary groups** (*priešmokyklinio ugdymo grupės,* 6–7)[1] are located in both ECE centres and schools. Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Lithuania

1847	First educational establishment for young children opened in Klaipėda.
1936	Kindergartens included in national legislation for the first time.
1938-1990	During the Soviet era, access to education, including early childhood education, was an important policy focus, both to strengthen political ideology and to enable parents, particularly women, to enter the employment market.
Until 1990	Steady expansion of ECEC provision
1990–1997	Two alternative programmes for early childhood education are introduced: (1) Guidelines for Early Childhood Education: a Curriculum for Teachers and Parents, and (2) the Kindergarten Programme *Vėrinėlis*.
1998–2002	Parliament approves pre-primary education for 5 and 6 year-olds.
2003–2012	Access to early childhood education is expanded, in particular for children from socially disadvantaged communities.
2011	– Introduction of state funding for four hours of pre-primary education – Ministry of Education approves "Criteria for the early education programme".
2013	National education strategy for 2013–2022 sets out a goal to achieve 90% ECEC attendance among 4 year-olds by 2017 and 95% by 2022.
2014	The Education Act is amended to accommodate a needs-related approach in ECEC.
2015	Adoption of „Description of the achievements of preschool-aged children“ (*Ikimokyklinio amžiaus vaikų pasiekimų aprašas*) and the “General curriculum framework for pre-primary education” (*Priešmokyklinio ugdymo bendroji programa*)
2016	One-year compulsory enrolment in a pre-primary group comes into force.
2018–2022	Project on the development of guidelines for the external evaluation of ECEC settings is launched.
2019	A new mixed-funding model is introduced for early education.
End of 2020	– Amendments to the Education Act provide the framework for a step-by-step entitlement to universal early education by 2025 for 4, 3 and 2 year-olds. – Other amendments included: allowing parents to choose whether their child should start compulsory pre-primary education at age 5 or 6; and transferring responsibility for compulsory ECEC for children of at-risk families from the state to the municipalities.

Sources: Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010; Siarova and Buinaukas 2017; Malinauskienė 2020; Eurydice 2023

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for pre-primary settings in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In the case of Lithuania, where primary school starts at age 7, the relevant formats are **0–5** (early childhood centre) or **3–5** years (kindergarten) and **6–7** years (pre-primary group).

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

In Lithuania, the system of early childhood education and care for children up to primary school entry at age 7 is uniformly regulated and organised in two stages. Both **early education** in ECE centres (*ikimokyklinis ugdymas*) for 0 to under 6 year-olds and **compulsory pre-primary education** (*priešmokyklinis ugdymas*) for 6 to 7 year-olds are part of the education system and are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (*Švietimo, mokslo ir sporto ministerija*). Both stages are classified as non-formal education.

The education system in Lithuania is decentralised, with the State and municipalities working closely together. For example, while the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports is responsible for the development and implementation of education policy, the municipalities or other early education providers are responsible for the admission procedures of children. In terms of management, educational content and pedagogy, the ECE institutions have a relatively high degree of autonomy.

General objectives and legislative framework

Education has high political priority in Lithuania and is supported and funded by the State. Overarching goals are set out in the national ten-year education strategy 2013–2022, with particular emphasis on access to education for all children, high quality provision and structural financing strategies.

The 2011 Education Act (*Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo įstatymas* 2011, with amendments from 2020) sets out the basic principles of the education system: humanistic and democratic values, human rights and individual freedom. The objectives include: developing persons with a sense of responsibility; supporting communication and language skills as well as creative and cognitive competences; having regard both for national and ethnic cultural values; and the acquisition of skills and abilities needed to become a responsible citizen of the Republic of Lithuania, in Europe and in the global community.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Until very recently, there was no universal entitlement to a place in ECEC provision in Lithuania. Although each municipality was required to have a network of ECEC providers, they were not obliged to ensure a place for every child. However, amendments to the Education Act adopted at the end of 2020 provide for the step-by-step introduction of universal early education: from September 2023 for 4 year-olds, from 2024 for 3 year-olds and from 2025 for 2 year-olds.

In general, attending an early education institution is not compulsory in Lithuania. However, there are exceptions, for example: if child's family is considered "socially vulnerable"; if the child does not attend the setting despite being enrolled; if a child's special educational needs cannot be met by the family; or if the parents live in difficult conditions. Provision is then free of charge.

In September 2016, one-year compulsory enrolment in a pre-primary group for 6 to 7 year-olds came into force, with an obligation to attend for at least 20 hours per week (or 640 hours per year). Since September 2021, attendance may last two years if this is deemed necessary. From September 2024, pre-primary group enrolment is to start at the age of 5.

Primary school starts at age 7 and this will be lowered to 6 years of age in September 2024.

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Lithuania provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

Main types of provision

Early education for children under 3 years of age in Lithuania is classified as ISCED 01, and pre-primary education for children aged 3 and over as ISCED 02, although ECEC centres are not generally organised on an age-segregated basis.

Early education (0–5/6 years)

Early childhood education centres (*ikimokyklinis ugdymas*, *lopšelis-darželis*) for children from the age of 1 to 5 years are the regular form of educational provision. They are age-integrated facilities that cater for under 3 year-olds in nursery groups (*lopšelis*) and 3 to under 6 year-olds in kindergarten groups (*darželis*). Most centres offer full-day provision, but opening hours may vary and can be 12 hours, 9 to 10½ hours, 5 to 6 hours or 3 to 4 hours or have opening times that are negotiated with parents according to their specific needs for combining family and work duties. In addition, there are also a number of round-the-clock facilities

Pre-primary education (6–7 years)

Pre-primary groups (*priešmokyklinio ugdymo grupės*): Attendance at a pre-primary group in the year before school enrolment for a minimum of 640 hours (including holidays) has been compulsory since September 2016. The main aim is to provide targeted preparation for school. An increasing number of 5 year-olds are also attending these groups (see *Table 1*). Pre-primary groups are located both in age-integrated ECE centres and in schools (*priešmokyklinio ugdymo grupė mokykloje*) and, particularly in remote areas, also in other types of institution (see below). Additionally, they may be run by private teachers or other service providers.

Most groups open at 7:30/8:00 for a minimum of four hours daily. Transportation is provided for children living further than 3 km from the nearest facility, but parents have to cover the costs.

In 2022, a total of 46,139 children between the ages of 5 and 7 attended pre-primary groups in ECE settings and 10,450 pre-primary groups attached to schools (OSP 2023a – see *Table 1*).

Table 1

Lithuania: Number of children in pre-primary groups by location, 2022

Age	Children in pre-primary groups in ECE centres	Children in pre-primary groups in schools	Total*
5 year-olds	27,460	1,215	28,675
6 year-olds	18,629	9,205	27,834
7 year-olds	50	30	80
Total	**46,139**	**10,450**	**56,589**

Source: OSP 2023a, *own calculations

Additional forms of ECEC provision

Self-contained **kindergartens** (*darželis*) are a form of all-day setting. Traditionally they were for 3- to 6 year-olds, but today younger children can also be admitted. Kindergartens taking in children younger than 3 years old are normally referred to as kindergarten-nurseries (*lopšelis-darželis*), with groups for children younger than 3 being referred to as nurseries (*lopšelis*) and those for children between 3 and 6 being referred to as kindergartens (*darželis*). In remote areas with few children, kindergarten groups may also be offered in schools. Some kindergartens work according to an explicit educational approach (e.g. Waldorf, Montessori).

School kindergartens (*mokykla-darželis*) combine early education and elements of primary education in one institutional setting for children from 2 or 3 years old until they turn 10. They are mostly to be found in rural areas.

Multi-functional centres (*daugiafunkcinis centras*)**,** which also offer provision for children from the age of 3 years often focus on special education support. Besides providing ECEC, they also offer leisure-time activities and other services (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 181).

Provider structures

In 2022, there were a total of 742 ECEC settings (*ikimokyklinio ugdymo mokykla*) in Lithuania, 542 of which were public and 200 private-independent (Eurydice 2023, 2.8). These figures indicate a tremendous surge in privately-run settings. Whereas in 2013, almost all children up to 7 years of age (93.4%) attended public facilities (OSP 2018, 30), by 2021 the number of children in private facilities had increased significantly, both for under 3 year-olds and over 3 year-olds (Eurostat 2023e) – see *Table 2.*

Table 2

Lithuania: Children in ECEC centres and pre-primary groups by provider, 2013 and 2021

Provider	Number and age of children			
	Under 3 year-olds		3 years to school entry	
	2013	2021	2013	2021
Public	18,299	21,462	91,837	101,060
Private for-profit	719	3,240	1,732	6,741
Total	**19,018**	**24,702**	**93,569**	**107,801**

Source: Eurostat 2023e

In 2022, 54 ECEC providers had special education and development groups for children with SEN. In 2022 there were in total 15,578 pedagogical staff working in ECEC institutions (OSP 2023a, c, d).

Participation rates in regulated ECEC settings

National statistics show that in 2022, there were 715 ECEC centres in Lithuania offering 134,230 places, with a total of 125,207 children were enrolled in 7,453 groups (OSP 2022a, 2022b). On average, there were 107 places per 100 children in ECEC institutions across the country. However, the number varied between 98 to 140 depending on the region (OSP 2023c).

In 2022, 54.1% of 1 to 2 year-olds attended an ECEC setting, 82.7% of 1 to 6 year-olds and 94.9% of 3 to 6 year-olds (OSP 2023a, 2023b). Most 5 year-olds (92.7%) and 6 year-olds (63.5%) attended pre-primary groups (5–7) located in ECEC centres (OSP 2023a).

Table 3

Lithuania: Number and enrolment rates of 5 to 7 year-olds in pre-primary groups by age and institution, 2022

	Pre-primary groups in			
	ECEC centres		Schools	
	Number of children	Enrolment rate, in %	Number of children	Enrolment rate, in %
5 year-olds	27,460	92.7	1,215	4.1
6 year-olds	18,629	63.5	9,205	31.4
7 year-olds	50	0.2	30	0.1

Source: OSP 2023a

Table 4

Lithuania: Enrolment rates in ECEC centres by age, 2022

Age groups	Enrolment rates, in %
1 to 2 year-olds	54.1
3 to 6 year-olds	94.9
1 to 6 year-olds and older	82.7

Source: OSP 2023c

Eurostat data from 2022 (Eurostat 2023b) show a marked increase in enrolment rates in centre-based ECEC settings. They doubled for the under 3 year-olds (2005: 11%, 2022: 22,8%), but also increased significantly for the older age group (2005: 57%, 2022: 92.5%, see *Table 5*).

Table 5

Lithuania: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years in %**	3 years to school entry in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	2	11
	Over 30 hours	9	46
	No enrolment in ECEC	89	43
2010	1 to 29 hours	2	9
	Over 30 hours	12	59
	No enrolment in ECEC	86	32
2015	1 to 29 hours	2.0	5.0
	Over 30 hours	7.7	68.8
	No enrolment in ECEC	90.3	26.2
2022	1 to 29 hours	0.4	11.0
	Over 30 hours	22.4	81.5
	No enrolment in ECEC	77.1	7.5

Source: Eurostat 2023b, deviations in the sums due to rounding

Overall, the ratio between demand for places and supply was relatively balanced in 2022 (107 places per 100 children on average), although this can vary greatly depending on the region (from 98 to 140), with large cities often facing a shortage of places (OSP 2023c).

Financing and costs for parents

In 2022, 0.9% of GDP was spent on ECEC centres (0–5), and 2% on pre-primary, primary and secondary education (OSP 2023e).

Since September 2019, a new mixed funding model ("class basket") has been in place for ECEC centres and pre-primary groups, linked to the implementation of the national curriculum. The majority of the available funding is calculated for one group and part of the costs are based on the number of children. About 80% of the "class basket" is made available to the institutions (state, municipal and also private) and is used almost entirely for personnel costs. The municipalities receive the rest. The aim of this new principle is to give smaller settings more financial stability. The pedagogy-related costs (i.e. staff needed to implement the curriculum) are covered by the state, the operating costs by the provider. This has made it possible to expand the network of private facilities and thus reduce the shortage of places, especially in large cities. Nevertheless, the decision to include private institutions (especially private non-profit ones) has been and still is a controversial issue.

Both ECE centres and pre-primary groups are free of charge, except for the cost of meals. In pre-primary groups, the state contribution covers 20 hours per week; if a child attends the facility for longer, parents have to pay for the additional hours. Municipalities often charge less to families from disadvantaged backgrounds or families with more than three children. Some municipalities that cannot provide enough places in public facilities compensate parents for a partial fee in a private facility (€100 per month, European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 58).

Private ECEC institutions can charge the parents fees that are set individually by each institution. The prices may vary between a few hundred to up to around 1,500€ per month. Parents can apply for a subsidy of 100€ per month to cover part of the private kindergarten fee. The subsidy is financed by the municipalities.

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 5% of net household income on childcare costs. The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included (OECD.stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

Early education (0–5/6 years)

In Lithuania, the number of professionals per group is regulated by the Hygiene Standard (HN 75:2016), which is approved by the Ministry of Health. In addition to the required number of core professionals (see *Table 6*), other staff members also work in the groups. The children are usually placed in same-age groups. Children with a disability count as two children. Special groups in which only children with disabilities are cared for are smaller.

Table 6

Lithuania: Maximum number of children per group by age and required core practitioners per group

Age group	Maximum number of children in a group	Minimum number of core practitioners in a group
Under 1 year	6	2
1 to 2 years	10	1
2 to 3 years	15	1
Under 3 years	8	2
3 to 7 years	20	1
Under 7 years	10	2

Age group	Maximum number of children in a group	Minimum number of core practitioners in a group
1 to 7 years	12	1
2 to 7 years	16	1

Source: Eurydice 2023, 4.2

Pre-primary education (6–7 years)

A pre-primary group consists of a maximum of 20 children. If the group also includes a child with a disability, the maximum number decreases by one. If the children speak a language other than Lithuanian, the number is reduced to 15. If a group consists only of children with disabilities, group size depends on the type of disability, ranging from 3 to 10 children (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2022b).

Curricular frameworks

All early education institutions and pre-primary groups in Lithuania are required to follow guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education and develop a centre-specific programme based on them which reflects local needs. There is a national, approved, detailed curricular framework for the compulsory pre-primary year.

Early education (0–5/6 years)

In 2011, "Criteria for the early education programme" (*Ikimokyklinio ugdymo programų kriterijų aprašo*) were approved by the Ministry of Education, describing six stages to track children's development. This was followed in 2014 by "Methodological Recommendations" (*Rekomendacijos Ikimokyklinio ugdymo programai rengti*) and, in 2015, the "Description of the achievements of preschool-age children" (*Ikimokyklinio amžiaus vaikų pasiekimų aprašа*). The latter describes 18 learning areas (e.g. physical activities, expression of emotions, spoken and written language, aesthetic perception, creativity) and related skills that a child should have achieved at a certain age. However, the document is viewed as curricular guidance and not as a required national standard.

Each centre-specific programme is required to adhere to the guidelines and, for example, reflect universal human rights in its objectives. Objectives and materials are to be age-appropriate and methods for evaluation included. The early education curricular framework is not divided into specific subjects or time units; it is expected that the learning areas are integrated into everyday life in the setting through play-based activities.

Pre-primary education (6–7 years)

In 2015, the "General Curriculum Framework for Pre-primary Education" (*Priešmokyklinio ugdymo bendroji programa*) was adopted for the one to two-year pre-primary groups.

The curriculum is based on five basic principles: socio-cultural orientation; individualisation; integrity; contextuality; interactions. The content and activities emphasise health care, knowledge, communication and artistic education as well as the development of emotional intelligence. These activities are transmitted through a holistic approach and not as separate elements in at least 700 minutes per week (for half-day settings) or at least 1,260 minutes per week for full-day settings, which corresponds to approximately four hours per day.

Professionals choose their own materials and are expected to ensure ongoing development of the curriculum, opening up opportunities for children to make their own choices, satisfy their curiosity, solve problems and express their own opinions.

Digital education

Digital competence is included in the pre-primary curricular framework. In the framework digital competence is defined as a motivation and ability to use digital technology to complete various tasks, study, solve problems, work, communicate and cooperate, manage information, and safely, properly, critically, independently and ethically create and share digital content. According to the framework, children in pre-primary groups should be able to use digital technologies with the support of a teacher and to partially understand topics such as digital safety or ethical communication through digital technologies (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2022c). The early education curriculum suggests that children use digital materials to gather and assess information (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 100).

Monitoring – evaluation

Child-related assessment

– *Early education (0–5/6 years)*

The group leaders observe the children regularly and discuss the results with the parents. In the "Description of the achievements of preschool-age children" (see also *Curricular Frameworks*), there are six levels, of which the first three serve to evaluate the achievements of under 3 year-olds and the other three of 4 to 6 year-olds. If a 6 year-old child has not yet reached the sixth level, the corresponding focal points are continued in the pre-primary group.

– *Pre-primary education (6–7 years)*

Evaluation requirements as well as the handling of their results are laid down in the "General Curriculum Framework for Pre-Primary Education". The children are assessed at the beginning and at the end of the year by the respective core practitioner using preferred methods (e.g. observation, conversations, children's work). A written report is used to inform the primary teacher. The child's performance is also discussed with the parents at least twice a year.

Centre-level internal evaluation

Municipal education departments select the methods for self-evaluation and quality assurance, analyse the results and make recommendations for improvement. ECE centres carry out their self-evaluation according to the "Methods for the internal auditing of early education settings" (*Dėl ikimokyklinio ugdymo mokyklos vidaus audito metodikos*, 2005). Criteria include the support of children and their families and the management of the institution.

General education schools perform self-evaluation themselves. The School Head initiates the self-evaluation. The school council chooses the area of self-evaluation of the school's activities and the methodology. The self-assessment is performed by a group formed of the school staff.

External evaluation

For ECE centres there is no established procedure for external evaluation; each municipality can decide this for itself. As a rule, the education departments of the municipalities are then responsible for this. In 2018, however, only five of the 60 municipalities had carried out external evaluations.

A project conducted by the National Agency for Education (2018-2022) is focusing on the "Improvement and development of evaluation and self-evaluation in non-formal education (early education and pre-primary education) and general education". The aim is to test methods for (self-)evaluation, to train professionals in these methods and to develop an online system for self-evaluations. The Ministry of Education has therefore committed itself to creating a system for the external evaluation of ECEC centres by 2022 and in June 2022 a law defining external evaluation of schools providing early childhood and pre-primary education was published (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2022a).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

The Education Act (most recent amendment 2020) states that the responsibility to provide a safe and supportive environment for children with special educational needs lies with the Child Welfare Committee. It organises and coordinates the adaptation of curricula to the needs of children. It is also responsible for the initial identification of children with special needs. These children can either attend a mainstream institution in a special group located there, or a separate support setting.

Integrative preschool groups are smaller than the groups in mainstream settings. Depending on the severity of the disability, there are 4 to 12 children in a group. Educational plans and materials are adapted accordingly to the needs of the children.

In 2022, there were 54 ECE settings, in which 1,109 children were cared for in special needs groups, these were most frequently children with language-related developmental delays (564) and children with complex medical conditions (400). 24,740 children with special educational needs were integrated into regular groups (OSP 2023a).

Children with a background of migration

In 2022, only 1.2% of the total population held a non-Lithuanian citizenship, the majority of whom (89.2%) came from countries outside the EU27(2020). In the age group up to 5 years, these shares were 0.4% and 94.3% respectively (Eurostat 2023c). According to Busygina and Onishchenko (2019; 47, 55), persons of Polish and Russian origin make up the largest ethnic minorities (around 6% and 5.8% respectively in 2018 – but each only 0.05% of the total population).

National minorities have a legal right to use their family language in ECEC centres and schools (Department of National Minorities 2018).

In 2020–2021, Lithuanian was spoken in 634 ECEC centres, Russian in 10 and Polish in 6. In 55 settings, more than one language was spoken, e.g. Lithuanian and Russian (23) or Lithuanian and Polish (21) or Lithuanian, Russian and Polish (18), Russian and Polish (5) (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2021).

Since September 2021, it is a requirement that activities in Lithuanian should take place in ethnic ECE centres for at least five hours per week.

Parental leave arrangements[3]

Maternity leave (*nėštumo ir gimdymo, motinystės atostogos*) is 18 weeks, of which 70 are before the birth and 56 after. During this period, 77.58% of the net salary (without an upper limit), at least €294 per month, is paid. The payment of social security contributions for at least 12 months during the last two years is required.

Under the same conditions, fathers receive 28 calendar days of **Paternity leave** (*tėvystės atostogos*) in the three months following the birth of the child.

Parental leave (*vaiko priežiūros atostogos*) can be taken as a family entitlement until the child is 3 years old. Each parent is entitled to two individual, non-transferable and fully paid months. For the remaining time, parents can choose between two options: (1) They receive 77.34% of the net salary until the child is 18 months old, with a cap equal to the national average salary (in 2023: €2,929.11 per month), but at least €294 per month. (2) They receive 58% of the net salary until the child is 12 months, with a ceiling of €2,050.53, and 38.67% of the net salary until the child is 24 months, with a ceiling of €1,171.57. The remaining time until the child is three years old is not paid. If parents decide to work while receiving allowances, the amount is reduced accordingly.

According to the Social Insurance Fund Board (SODRA) data, all working mothers take Maternity leave; in 2022, 75.6% of mothers and 24.4% of fathers took Parental leave.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Lithuania

*Country expert assessment by **Hanna Siarova** and **Radvile Bankauskaite***

Quality of ECEC

Following the transfer of responsibility for the curriculum from the central to the local (pre-school education institution) level, combined with a lack of clear guidelines on how overall principles and recommendations for the content of pre-school education could be operationalised, the pre-school establishments and pedagogues face challenges on ensuring quality in pre-school education and responding to each child's specific needs. Many practitioners were used to working under structured and rigid curricula, and have not received adequate professional preparation on how to design curricula according to local needs or how to implement national guidelines effectively. For many, it is difficult to recognise different levels of pre-school children's achievements, to create an evaluation framework, to individualise the educational approach and to connect it with the real needs of children (UNICEF 2021).

Beyond this, the current work organisation of Early Childhood Pedagogues leaves very limited time for non-contact work, which could be dedicated to quality improvement (e.g. methodological work, self-reflection, cooperation with colleagues and other ECEC institutions) (Supreme Audit Institution 2019). Another important aspect affecting the professionalism of ECEC Pedagogues is the lack of attractiveness of the profession due to low salaries, challenging working conditions, and a lack of opportunities for further professional development. Nevertheless, there are also some improvements taking place such as a salary raise. Since 2020, ECEC Pedagogues (early childhood and pre-primary education) are paid the same amount of money as Primary School Teachers (UNICEF 2021). A shortage of learning support staff in ECEC centres (especially in rural areas) is also reported.

[3] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Lithuania by Ruta Braziene and Sonata Vysniauskiene in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

The evaluation and monitoring system of early childhood education and care also needs to be improved. There is no evidence as to whether the results of self-assessments are actually used by ECEC institutions for the improvement of their performance. Moreover, in some cases recommendations provided in self-assessment reports are not implemented in practice due to a lack of external supervision on how internal audit results are applied.

Funding of ECEC

The growing number of children participating in early childhood/pre-primary education is not proportionate to the much slower increase of financing levels for ECEC, despite the introduction of the so-called pre-schooler's basket. Recent debates regarding this issue urge the Ministry of Education to change the current pre-school basket of four hours daily to eight hours daily, using EU Structural Funds, government funding and education sector savings.

Municipalities also do not have budgets to offer transportation (shuttle service) for children living in remote locations to attend ECEC.

Starting in September 2021, compulsory ECEC for children living in at-risk families was introduced and additional financing granted to the municipalities for this purpose (Ministry of Social Security and Labour 2021). Children from families at social risk are provided with transport, free meals, learning equipment, families' monitoring by The Child Welfare Commission and parental counselling about the benefits of ECEC.

Accessibility and inclusiveness of ECEC

There is a huge disparity between children's participation rates in ECEC in cities and rural areas. Whereas there is a shortage of places in early childhood and pre-primary education groups in cities, the number of children attending such groups in smaller towns and rural areas is minimal. The data show that children in rural areas more often tend to experience poverty and social exclusion. Attending ECEC is therefore especially important in reducing negative socio-economic impacts on a child's development and academic achievements, as research shows that ECEC improves socio-economic competences and cognitive abilities among those children who attend.

Even though the overall number of private pre-school establishments has increased, they are not affordable for many population groups (UNICEF 2021).

For children aged 0–5 years there is no guarantee of a place in publicly funded ECEC (Eurydice 2023). A low participation rate can be observed among children under 3 years of age. In this regard, Lithuania ranks as the country with the fifth-lowest take-up in the EU after Bulgaria, Latvia, Slovakia, and Hungary (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2019).

There is also need for greater flexibility of the programmes on offer. Too little attention is paid to diversity within ECEC and settings are not adequately prepared to deal with multilingual children, or those from families at risk, or those with special education needs. There are no guidelines and support for ECEC staff on how to organise good quality learning for these children and to ensure their holistic development and the realisation of their fullest potential. ECEC centres lack both adequately prepared professionals as well as educational tools and methodology to work with immigrant children. Moreover, there is an insufficient number of psychologists who would be able to help children to cope with trauma (UNICEF 2021).

Demographic data

Please note: For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Lithuania was 2,805,998. Until 2020, the population continuously decreased slightly, since 2021 it has been increasing again (2000: 3,512,074; 2010: 3,141,976; 2020: 2,794,090) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27(2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), and the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.36, Lithuania was significantly below the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[4].

Children under age 6

Table 7

Lithuania: Number of children under age 6 in the population, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year	23,395
1 year-olds	23,733
2 year-olds	25,447
3 year-olds	27,206
4 year-olds	28,267
5 year-olds	29,625
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**157,673**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 2.6% of the total population were children under 3, 5.6% were children under 6. The proportions are thus roughly in line with the EU27 average, with those under 3 slightly below and those 3 to 6 slightly above.

[4] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU)

Table 8

Lithuania: Share of children under 6 years compared with the EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Lithuania/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Lithuania	3.1	3.4	6.5
	∅ EU15[5]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Lithuania	2.6	2.9	5.5
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Lithuania	3.1	3.1	6.2
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Lithuania	2.6	3.0	5.6
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

71.4% of all households with children under 6 in Lithuania in 202 were couple households. Single-parent households accounted for 13.3% – mostly single mothers (10.5%).

Table 9

Lithuania: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %+
Total households	259,300	
Couple households	185,100	71.4
Other types of households	39,800	15.3
Total single households	34,400	13.3
Single households, women	27,300	10.5
Single households, men	7,000	2.7

Source: Eurostat 2023k, *Own calculations

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Lithuania, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 79.2% and for women 78.1% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 75.5% of women and 90.5% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were thus well above the EU-average (87.2%) as were those of mothers (EU-average 63.6%) (Eurostat 2023g).

[5] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Table 10a

Lithuania: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Lithuania	67.5	75.2
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[6]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Lithuania	75.5	90.5
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[7]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023g

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 10b:*

Table 10b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023g, 2023j

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[8]

In 2022, 19.3% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was below the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 24.6% (EU: 21.6%). 3.3% of children under 6 and 5.4% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation in 2020 (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively). While the share of under 6 year-olds was significantly below the EU average, that of the total population was slightly higher than the EU average (Eurostat 2023h, i).

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[8] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

LUXEMBOURG

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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1. ECEC governance in Luxembourg

In Luxembourg, national policies aim to place children's social and educational rights and needs at the centre, while considering the multilingual and multicultural nature of the Luxembourgish society (MENJE and SNJ 2021; MENJE 2022). The Luxembourgish system of ECEC for children up to the age of 6 comprises **formal** and **non-formal** educational institutions. Formal education – with compulsory schooling at preschool level starting at the age of 4 – is organised within the official school system, while non-formal education occurs in out-of-school educational settings (MENJE and SNJ 2021). This chapter will briefly discuss both sectors.

Since 1963, all municipalities in Luxembourg have been required to provide voluntary early childhood education and care (*jardins d'enfants, Spillschoul*) for children aged 4 and 5 years (MEN 1963). In 1976, preschool education (*éducation préscolaire*) became compulsory for children aged 5, and in 1992 for children from the age of 4. Furthermore, in 1998, the government introduced a year of non-compulsory early education for children aged 3 (*éducation précoce*). One of the aims was to increase opportunities to learn Luxembourgish, especially for children of lower socioeconomic status and with a non-Luxembourgish mother tongue, to ease the transition to compulsory schooling (Honig, Schmitz, and Wiltzius 2015).

The 2009 Schools Act integrated "early education" (*éducation précoce*) and preschool (*éducation préscolaire*) into formal schooling (*école fondamentale, cycle 1*). As a result, all Pre-primary Teachers must follow the national curriculum that specifies competences for pre-primary education with children at the ages of 4 and 5 (MENFP 2009a). Teacher trainees no longer need to complete a specific training to work in pre-primary education, instead, they follow the general teacher training for primary schools.[1] In addition, since then, all municipalities are required to provide *éducation précoce* from 2009/2010 (Kneip 2009, 710; Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010, 295). The *éducation précoce* has a unique position in Luxembourg's education system. There are various important aspects to consider: (1) In terms of administration, *éducation précoce* is part of the basic education system (*enseignement fondamental*), and its staff are Primary School Teachers. (2) Early education is offered free of charge. (3) There is no obligation to attend *précoce*, meaning that the first year of basic education in *Cycle 1* is optional. Therefore, *éducation précoce* is a link between school and non-school educational contexts. Indeed, many 3 year-olds in Luxembourg who go to a *crèche* (non-formal education) during one part of the day attend *éducation précoce* during the other part. Thus, the 3 year-olds navigate complex and diverse education and care arrangements that structure families' everyday lives (Bollig, Honig, and Nienhaus 2016).

In 2013, the administrative and political responsibility for out-of-school and early childhood care facilities (non-formal education) was transferred from the Ministry of Family Affairs (*Ministère de la Famille, de l'Intégration et à la Grande Région, MFI*) to the Ministry of Education, Childhood and Youth (*Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse, MENJE*). At the same time, new regulations transformed the childcare sector into an independent and uniformly regulated *non-formal education* sector for children and young people to define it separately from the organisation of *formal education* in schools. In this process, the clear distinction between formal and non-formal education gradually replaced the difference between education

[1] Nevertheless, the first cycle of education in elementary education is defined in Art. 1 of the Schools Act as *éducation précoce* and *éducation préscolaire*, i.e., as *early education and pre-school education in school.*

and care. This process had consequences for the educational and social governance of Luxembourg's ECEC provision. Different types of institutional settings were created (*crèche, maison relais pour enfants, foyer de jour, garderie, assistants parentaux*). Distinct regulations apply to each institution, depending on its organisational form: for-profit, non-profit and municipal and those with or without a contractual agreement.

Later, all settings were regrouped under the *Services d'Éducation et d'Accueil pour enfants* (*SEA*) (Bollig 2018; Bollig, Honig, and Nienhaus 2016). The SEAs are different organisations that children can attend depending on their age and the number of hours they already spend in formal education settings[2]. 3 year-olds, for instance, can attend early education as well as SEA, one institution in the morning and the other in the afternoon. School children may attend a *maison relais* to have lunch or do schoolwork. Being classified as *non-formal education* is not just a case of adjusting terminology but also introducing a new understanding of 'education', which includes early childhood and out-of-school provision (MFI 2018).

The Ministry of Education, Childhood and Youth (*MENJE*) governs each sector with different jurisdictions and responsibilities. The ministry is responsible for policy implementation in the formal education sector and enabling the non-formal sector to reach policy goals. In the latter sector, this is ensured by granting operating licences (*agréments*) and entering into contractual agreements (*conventions*) with private (non-profit and commercial) providers. However, some municipalities assume responsibility for implementation. The proportion of publicly run ECEC settings is relatively tiny compared to the much larger number of private settings, both non-profit and commercial[3]. The expansion of ECEC for the under 4 year-olds was accompanied by defining the goals of early childhood education in the 'curriculum framework for non-formal education' and by developing corresponding practices across the different care providers.

This report builds on the previous SEEPRO Workforce Report for Luxembourg (Honig and Bock 2017) and was partially rewritten and updated with the latest information on new regulations and data.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

The early years workforce in Luxembourg comprises professionals working in the two sectors of early education and care. The Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Young People (MENJE) controls both sectors. There are separate pathways of professionalisation depending on whether personnel qualify for the formal or non-formal education sector.

(1) Professionals working in **formal education** have undergone training as Primary School Teachers, certified by a university degree at Bachelor's level (French: *Bachelor professionel)*. In

[2] The term "ECEC settings" in the context of this report refers primarily to the *services d'éducation et d'accueil (SEA)* for children under age 4; they are defined in the so-called SEA Regulation issued in 2013, modified in 2018 (MFI 2018). The term also includes the *éducation précoce* classes, which can be understood as non-compulsory preparatory classes for primary schools).

[3] The relationship between the state and private providers of educational and therapeutic support services is regulated by the 1998 ASFT Act (amended in 2011, see Le Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg 1998). The act is the codification of a Luxembourgish variant of the subsidiarity principle in Germany and forms the basis of the legislation and regulations, which propelled the transformation of day care services into a sector of non-formal education.

addition, childhood Educators with a vocational qualification (*éducateur/éducatrice diplômé(e))* assist teachers in the first non-compulsory stage of formal ECEC.

(2) The **non-formal education** sector is less unified and regulated than the formal sector and employs a diverse workforce. Some have been trained as Social Workers/Social Pedagogues, graduating with a Bachelor's degree in social and educational sciences (Fr. *Bachelor en sciences sociales et éducatives*); others have undergone vocational training graduating with a state diploma. Depending on the type of qualification, educators can work with specific age groups. They may work in *crèches* (children of ages 0–3)[4], *garderies* (0–8 year-olds), the new *mini-crèches* (0–12 year-olds), *foyers de jour* and the *maisons relais* (school children of ages 4–12) (Kneip 2009).

Until the founding of the country's first university in 2003, Luxembourgish staff with a university degree were predominantly educated and trained abroad (Germany, France, Belgium, Switzerland), while many were trained in pre-university educational programmes in Luxembourg resembling short-cycle tertiary or applied tertiary education. Therefore, the diversity of qualifications in ECEC settings is particularly pronounced in Luxembourg.

Language requirements and educational criteria further restrict access to the education and care sector. The following chapters provide an overview of the different qualifications required to work in formal and non-formal education and care and show the current demographic composition of the workforce.

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Employment in the **non-formal sector** of ECEC in Luxembourg mainly depends on specific formalised qualifications and language requirements. Since the sector comprises various ECEC provisions, different pathways qualify for employment as an educator. Over the past decades, the non-formal ECEC workforce has changed due to new developments in the professionalisation of educators, increasing demand for early care and education, and changes in the legal situation and formal degree requirements. Today, the early childhood workforce consists of personnel with different levels of qualification across the various types of ECEC institutions, catering to different age groups of children and parental needs.

The **public education** system, with its *éducation précoce* for 3 year-olds, employs Primary School Teachers with university degrees and Educators with vocational degrees. Both work in a team. Primary School Teachers are employed in preschools (*préscolaire*) attended by 4 to 5 year-olds. Staff in the formal education sector are state employees.

Home-based ECEC providers (Luxembourgish: *Dageselteren*) are responsible for up to five children aged 0 to 12 years. Their tasks and responsibilities are regulated by a law passed on November 30th, 2007 (MFI 2007) that introduced rules for their accreditation. However, home-based ECEC providers are not an official part of Luxembourg's public education and care system.

Above and beyond the formalised qualifications needed by ECEC personnel in the non-formal education sector and in home-based ECEC provision, language requirements for accreditation usually include sufficient knowledge of at least one of the official languages (Luxembourgish, French, German).

[4] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In the case of Luxembourg, the formats may vary, depending on the kind of setting (non-formal or formal) in focus, but generally they are **0–3** years and **4–5** years.

In the non-formal sector, proficiency in multiple languages is required in publicly funded ECEC institutions because of the plurilingual education programme introduced in 2017. The programme requires educators to develop children's skills in Luxembourgish or French, familiarise them with French or Luxembourgish (depending on the institution), and value their home languages (Kirsch and Seele 2020). These language requirements and selective admission procedures make it difficult for residents who immigrated to Luxembourg and cross-border workers to work in public ECEC institutions. Nevertheless, given the recognition of various qualifications in Luxembourg, cross-border workers who commute daily from neighbouring countries can work in the commercial sector, where only one of the official languages is required. However, SEAs need to have staff speaking several languages if they offer plurilingual education. Due to the high number of commuters from France, French has become the dominating language in commercial ECEC institutions. Portuguese is highly prevalent in home-based care, especially in regions with a sizeable Lusophone population (Bollig 2018; Kirsch and Aleksić 2021). As a result of language policies, professionalisation and credentialisation, the staff in public institutions and formal education are more homogenous in origin and qualifications than the workforce in the non-formal sector and privately-run ECEC settings. Teachers in the formal sector must be proficient in Luxembourgish, German, and French.

Table 1 provides an overview of the different types of ECEC staff in Luxembourg, their qualifications and possible workplaces. There are three types of staff: Teachers, Social Pedagogues/Social Workers, and Educators. Home-based ECEC providers make up another growing group of childcare workers. Significant differences and inequalities exist in how these staff categories are distributed across the formal and non-formal education sectors and settings. Furthermore, core professionals (i.e. persons with a group or centre responsibility) are classified according to five profiles adapted from previous SEEPRO studies (see *Box 1*).

Table 1
Luxembourg: ECEC staff in centre-based settings (formal and non-formal education sectors)

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Formal education sector				
School Teacher (Pre-primary, primary and lower secondary) *Profile*: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional	*Éducation précoce* **Early education as part of basic education** 3 year-olds Cycle 1 (the first year is non-compulsory) *Éducation préscolaire* **Preschool as part of basic education** (*école fondamentale*) 4–5 years Cycle 1	Core professional	3–12 years	4 years university Award: *Bachelor en sciences de l'éducation (professionel)* ECTS credits: 240 EQF: level 6 ISCED 2011: 655

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
	(compulsory from the second year) *École fondamental* **Primary school** 6–12 years Cycles 2–4 (compulsory)			
Educator *Éducateur/ éducatrice di-ploma(e)* *Profile*: Social and Child-hood Pedagogy Professional	*Éducation précoce* **Early education as part of basic educa-tion** 3-year-olds (non-compulsory)	Qualified co-worker, as teacher's assistant	All ages	3 years (post-)second-ary education Award: *Diplôme d'état d'éducateur/éducatrice* ECTS credits: n/a[5] EQF: level 4 ISCED 2011: 454 ***or*** *Bachelor en sciences so-ciales et éducatives* ECTS credits: 180 EQF: level 6 ISCED 2011: 655
Non-formal education sector				
Social Pedagogy/ Social Work spe-cialist *Éducateur gradué / éducatrice graduée* *Profile*: Social and Child-hood Pedagogy Professional	*Services d'éducation et d'accueil:* **Children's services in the non-formal education sector** All age groups – children and young people **Also employed in:** Leisure-time cen-tres; special needs services; residential homes for children and young people; workforce integra-tion measures for	Core professional Centre head	All ages, in-cluding adults	3 years university Award: *Bachelor en sci-ences sociales et éduca-tives (professionel)* ECTS credits: 180 EQF: level 6 ISCED 2011: 655

[5] n/a = not applicable. The qualifying routes for Educators and Care workers/Assistants (*auxiliaire de vie*, see below) are not anchored in the Bologna system and ECTS credits are therefore not applicable; instead different weightings are made within the course of study according to a coefficient system (the higher the coefficient, the more important the field of study).

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
	young people; support services for socially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups; services for older persons			
Educator *Éducateur/ éducatrice diplômé(e)* *Profile*: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional	*Services d'éducation et d'accueil* **Children's services in the non-formal education sector** Also employed in: Leisure-time centres; special needs services; residential homes for children and young people; workforce integration measures for young people; support services for socially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups; services for older persons	Core professional[6]	All ages	3 years (post-)secondary education *Award*: *Diplôme d'état d'éducateur/éducatrice* ECTS credits: n/a[7] EQF: level 4 ISCED 2011: 454 ***or*** *Bachelor en sciences sociales et éducatives* ECTS credits: 180 EQF: level 6 ISCED 2011: 655
Care Assistant/ Care Worker *Auxiliaire de vie*	*Services d'éducation et d'accueil* **Social care services** and **children's services in the non-formal education sector**	Care assistant in the non-formal education sector	All ages	Upper secondary, apprenticeship-type dual qualification Award: *Diplôme d'aptitude professionnelle (DAP) – auxiliaire de vie* ECTS credits: n/a EQR: Level 3 ISCED 2011: 353

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)

[6] In the non-formal education sector, educators *(éducateur/éducatrice diplomé/e)* can also be employed as Centre Head, see Article 7 in the 2016 law modifying the 2008 law on young people (MENJE 2016).
[7] See footnote 6.

- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

Professional profiles of staff and legal regulations: In the *formal education sector*, the professional profiles of teachers and educators are regulated by law. The core professional with class responsibility is a (Pre-primary and) Primary School Teacher. Educators (*éducateurs/éducatrices*) are employed as support staff, i.e., as teacher assistants (MENFP 2009c, Art. 1). Only teachers with a Bachelor's degree may be employed as core professionals. The teachers in *éducation précoce* classes have been trained to teach young children, although they are not specialised in working with 3 year-olds. Supporting staff have obtained vocational and upper-secondary qualifications in social pedagogy. One Primary School Teacher and one Educator are assigned to each *éducation précoce* class.

In the *non-formal education sector*, staffing is regulated by a quota system which defines which category of staff may work and in which function for how many childcare hours. The qualifications required for granting an operating licence (*agrément*) are laid out in Article 7 of the Regulations on the Restructuring of the Educational and Social Services (*SEA-Règlement*[8], MFI 2013, 2018). Staff work according to the 'curriculum framework for non-formal education in childhood and youth' (MENJE and SNJ 2021), which follows a process-oriented rather than an outcome-oriented approach. A wide variety of staff is employed in these settings. Social Pedagogues and Social Workers (mainly lead staff), Educators and Care Workers may also work as core pedagogues or support staff. In these mixed qualification profiles and levels, the proportion of staff with a Bachelor's degree is smaller than in the formal education sector.

The SEA-regulations also define the tasks assigned to staff. The general staff mainly does necessary coordinating work regarding day-to-day activities. In addition, the staff are responsible for the direct pedagogical work with the children, preparing educational activities, participating in staff meetings, and communicating with the parents and teaching staff in schools. Participation in professional development activities is also one of their duties (*SEA-Règlement;* MFI 2018, Art. 11).

2.2 Centre leader

Unlike all other staff types, the centre heads do not typically have regular contact with the children. In the non-formal sector, the head must have completed initial professional studies in the psycho-social or socio-educational field (*SEA-Règlement;* MFI 2018, Art. 8).

To be promoted to lead a non-formal ECEC institution, sufficient prior work experience in ECEC provision is a crucial requirement. In recent years, extended studies in education and social services at the Master's level have become essential to take on a leading role in an ECEC institution. The head's tasks are regulated by the *SEA-Règlement* and include the organisational development of the centre, compiling a dedicated educational programme that is applied by the centre's personnel and supervising the staff in its implementation.

[8] The SEA (*services d'éducation et d'accueil pour enfants*) regulations are an extension of the so-called ASFT law (MFI 2011) passed in 1998. This legislation regulates the relation between the State and private providers of human services in Luxembourg and defines minimum standards for social and therapeutic work.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Pedagogical and administrative responsibility at ECEC institutions is distributed among the centre staff depending on their formal qualifications. In SEA care facilities, 60% of the total hours of childcare must be carried out by staff with a recognised professional qualification in a psychosocial, educational, or socio-pedagogic profession awarded by a state-recognised vocational school or a university. Up to 40% of the total hours provided at a childcare facility may be carried out by staff with music, arts, or physical education qualifications. Paediatric nurses may work in childcare, which is reminiscent of the French childcare system rooted in healthcare. Up to 20% of the total childcare hours may be provided by care (or literally: life) assistants with a *Diplôme d'aptitude professionnelle* (*auxiliaire de vie*) or who have obtained a certificate as an *aide éducatrice* (educational helper) after attending 100 hours of training. Their role in ECEC centres is complementary, and they may work in *crèches* with children from 0 to 3 years old and in *maisons relais* for children aged 4–12.

In addition to these qualification-oriented responsibilities, each centre designates a specialist for multilingual education (*référent(e)s pédagogiques pour l'éducation plurilingue*) and a specialist for inclusive education (*référent(e)s pédagogiques "inclusion"*). Their task is to address pedagogical issues in their area of specialisation and to coordinate the implementation of multilingual and inclusive education, respectively.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Generally, the main daily coordinating work and supervision is done by the head of each ECEC institution. Pedagogical evaluation, through which *process and orientation quality* are assessed, was introduced by the Youth Act of 2016 (MENJE 2016).

ECEC providers are required to develop a pedagogical concept showing how the centre intends to address the curricular goals laid out in the national framework. The concept needs to be updated every three years and is assessed by the *agents régionaux* appointed by the Ministry of Education, Childhood and Youth. The *agents régionaux* are experts who evaluate the institutional concepts and check whether they comply with the national framework.

To guarantee the quality of work, the educational staff must participate in professional development offers aligned with the national educational framework. Continued professionalisation is monitored by a commission that coordinates staff professional development and approves educational measures. On top of that, staff need to engage in permanent self-evaluation.

2.5 Specialist support staff

There are no specialist support staff, such as therapists and special needs staff working in ECEC settings aside from the pedagogical specialists for multilingual and inclusive education selected among the regular staff. Currently, no data are available on how many children receive therapeutic support based on recommendations made by the regular ECEC staff.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

The composition of Luxembourg's ECEC workforce is becoming more and more diverse compared to the predominantly female staff of Luxembourgish origin in the past. In 2018, new regulations relaxed the entry requirements for educators and teachers interested in working in this

sector (European Commission 2019). Changes in the recruitment process had become necessary to combat the staff shortage in ECEC. The education reform addressed the need to increase the ECEC workforce following heavy investments in the ECEC sectors over the past decade, which roughly tripled the number of childcare places. Since 2010, the government has increased the budget for SEA facilities by about five times (Hekel and Simoes Loureiro 2021; MENJE 2020). In addition, during the 2010s the number of home-based childcare providers (*assistants parentaux/"Dageselteren"*) almost doubled (Neumann 2018).

The data on the qualifications of the workforce employed in both sectors of Luxembourg's ECEC system are incomplete (OECD 2022). The most current data on the workforce's sociodemographic composition are still based on an online survey by the Ministry of Education, Childhood and Youth (MENJE) in 2016. Before 2016, the National Youth Service (SNJ) collected survey data in 2013 (SNJ 2020). There are no continuing data collections regarding the personnel employed in the non-formal sector.

A considerable proportion of staff obtained their qualifications abroad. The required qualifications range from ISCED level 3 (Care Assistant) to level 7 (Master's degree), where staff with the lowest qualification typically work with the youngest children. The SNJ data show that in 2013 a total of 3,403 people were employed in ECEC facilities, of which 92% were women and 8% men. Other researchers report a considerably higher number of 13.5% male staff (Krabel et al. 2018).

The most recent study that included information on the childcare staff's gender composition is the PerSEALux project (Hadjar et al. 2021). 522 people fully completed the study's questionnaire. About 91% of these people are female, which aligns almost exactly with the 2013 government data and reveals little change in the gender composition.

Furthermore, the 2013 data show the age composition: 14% are younger than 25 years old, and another 23% are between 25 and 30, indicating a relatively young workforce. Only 30 people were older than 60.

According to the 2016 survey that already informed the previous SEEPRO report, the ECEC personnel is overall quite heterogeneous in terms of language: About 62% are Luxembourgish, 10% Portuguese, 9% French, 8% Belgian, 5% German and 5% of different origin. French is the most widespread language, with 91% of the staff being proficient. Luxembourgish is spoken by 77% of staff and German is known by 73%. About 16% of the staff speak Portuguese as well. However, these figures do not draw on a representative survey and differ by the type of ECEC centre, whether public or commercial. As one would expect, public institutions have personnel which is more proficient in all three of the country's official languages. Meanwhile, the private centres employ a relatively large proportion of French speakers.

In relation to nationality, the PerSEALux survey reveals that among the male ECEC staff, Germany and Belgium are (in relative terms) the largest groups of origin aside from the almost 80% men from Luxembourg. About 60% of the female staff are native Luxembourgers. The remaining women are from France, Belgium, and Germany, with around 10% each. The small but significant proportion of Portuguese staff is entirely female.

The relatively low response rates to the voluntary surveys limits valid conclusions and, therefore, the surveys can only give a hint of the current workforce composition in the Luxembourgish ECEC sector. Again, the numbers on qualifications stated in this report are not based on representative data collections but on a relatively small online sample.

The PerSEALux survey also asked staff about their qualifications but included all staff from *crèches* to the *maisons relais* and differentiated between men and women. Overall, 10.4% of male staff and 14.8% of the female workforce report the lowest qualification (*aide éducateur/éducatrice*). The *auxiliaires de vie* make up 5.3% of the women and 2.1% of the men in the sample. The *éducateurs diplomé* comprise 43.8% of the male and 39.9% of the female ECEC

staff, while 31.3% of men are *éducateurs gradués* and 27.8% of women. In addition, men have more often graduated with a Bachelor's degree (31.3%) than women (26.8%). Given that lower qualifications are needed to work in a *crèche*, it is not surprising that 49.2% of the women in the sample work in a *crèche* compared to 22.9% of the men. However, men frequently work at the *maisons relais* (70.8% of men, 44.1% of women). No differences are reported for the *foyers de jour* and *foyers scolaires*.

The following tables provide more details about the workforce's level of education in both the formal (*Table 2*) and the non-formal ECEC sector (*Table 3*).

Formal early childhood education sector

The table shows that a high proportion of staff have obtained a degree requiring at least three years of training. However, graduates with a social sciences and education degree (*Bachelor en sciences sociales et éducatives*) do not generally work in the formal education sector. Overall, the proportion of male staff is low: well over 90% of staff in *éducation précoce* classes are female.

Table 2

Luxembourg: Structural composition of the workforce in the formal ECEC sector (*éducation précoce*), **2016** (latest available data)

Staff categories	**Proportion, in %**
Staff with specialist higher education degree	**72.8** → 71.2% BA *sciences de l'éducation* → 1.6% BA *sciences sociales et éducatives*
Staff with generalist vocational qualification, ISCED level 4 (*éducateur/éducatrice diplômé(e)*)	**27.1**
Staff with non-specialist qualification	n/a
Staff with no formal IPE	n/a
Specialist support staff (e.g. Speech Therapists)	No data available
Male staff	**7.1**
Staff with residence outside Luxembourg (cross-border workers)[9]	**1.4**

Source: [MENJE and SEF] Ministry of Education, Childhood and Youth and *Service de l'Enseignement Fondamental*. December 2016.

Non-formal education sector

Table 3 shows the summarised data for the communal, private non-profit and private for-profit settings in the non-formal education sector.

Table 3

Luxembourg: Structural composition of workforce in the non-formal education sector (*services d'éducation et d'accueil pour enfants*), **2016** (latest available data)

Staff categories	**Year/Proportion, in %**
Staff with a relevant higher education degree	**23** → 16% lower tertiary degree → 7% university degree

[9] For the formal sector, there are no data on immigrant background. Based on the online survey in the non-formal sector, it refers to place of residence, nationality, and language(s).

Staff categories	Year/Proportion, in %
Staff with relevant vocational qualifications (post-secondary)	**37**
Staff with relevant vocational qualifications (upper secondary)	See footnote[10]
Staff with other non-specialised qualification (so-called "low skilled")	**26** → 17% *aide éducatrice* → 9% *auxiliaire de vie* CAP/DATP)
Staff with no formal IPE[11]	**4**
Specialist support staff	No data available
Male staff	**7**
Staff with an immigrant background (non-Luxembourgish nationality), non-Luxembourgish residency and first language: *nationality*: *place of residence*: *language*:	 LU 62 % → other: 37% (BE 8%, DE 5%, FR 9%, PT 10%, others 5%) LU 79% → outside Luxembourg: 20% (BE 7%, DE 5%, FR 8%) LU 77% FR 91% DE 73% PT 16%

Source: [MENJE and SEA 2017] Ministry of Education, Childhood and Youth and *Services d'éducation et d'accueil*. February 2017. Online survey in early childhood settings (available upon request).

In non-formal settings, the proportion of female staff is similarly high to that in the formal education sector – over 90% – but this is the only significant similarity between the two early education sectors.

The figures suggest that the proportion of staff with a higher education degree in the non-formal early childhood sector is not nearly as high as in the formal sector (*éducation précoce*). Staff with a post-secondary vocational qualification (37%) comprise the largest group; the proportion of lower qualified staff is comparable to that of staff with a higher education degree. Around 60% of staff have Luxembourgish citizenship; accordingly, the proportion of French- and Portuguese-speaking staff is high.

The summarised figures demonstrate some of the critical *differences between the private non-profit and the private for-profit* sectors. The proportion of staff with Luxembourgish nationality and place of residence is higher in the state-subsidised settings than in the commercial care centres. Thus, the three official languages of Luxembourg (with a dominant role of Luxembourgish at this early stage) are more strongly represented (85%) in state-subsidised centres. In contrast, the proportion of French- and Portuguese-speaking staff is higher in the private for-profit centres, particularly in the southern part of the country, which shares borders with Belgium and France. French is the primary language in these settings. Around 50% of staff in private for-profit institutions speak Luxembourgish and German. Portuguese is the native language of 21% of

[10] In Luxembourg, legislation does not permit the employment of staff with a non-relevant upper secondary vocational qualification in the non-formal ECEC sector for under 4 year-olds. In the online survey, several settings indicate that they do in fact employ staff with an upper secondary vocational qualification; these persons are often staff from another country. No exact figures are available; it could well be that these persons have special competences that were not catered for in the survey questionnaire.

[11] Luxembourg legislation does not permit the employment of unqualified staff in ECEC settings. The proportion shown in the table presumably refers to staff who have qualifications acquired in another country and which are difficult to categorise within the classifications provided by the Luxembourg qualifications grid.

staff, 8% more than in the state-subsidised settings in the non-formal sector. A high proportion have the *diplôme d'aptitude professionnelle* (DAP/DAPT) qualification. They are low-paid workers who often speak several languages and thus fulfil two necessary conditions for the commercial providers: profitability and staff coverage.

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

For many years, the initial professional training for practitioners in early childhood education in Luxembourg was influenced by the absence of a university in the country. Before the foundation of the University of Luxembourg in 2003, teachers and educators in Luxembourg used to have only post-secondary degrees. Since 2003, the University of Luxembourg has offered two practice-oriented professional Bachelor programmes for future teachers and educators: the *Bachelor en sciences de l'éducation* (BScE) for future teachers in primary schools and the *Bachelor en sciences sociales et éducatives* (BSSE) for prospective educators and social workers. Not all teachers working in the state education system are trained in the BScE and only around 60% of graduates of the BSSE make up the workforce in the non-formal early education sector, along with employees of other lower or less relevant qualifications.

The following chapters will present the initial professional education routes for Teachers, Educators, and Social Workers in Luxembourg. The workforce in the non-formal ECEC sector is much more diverse, as many Luxembourgish practitioners choose to obtain their initial professional education abroad. In addition, many cross-border commuters from Germany, France, and Belgium work in Luxembourg's ECEC sector.

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Since 2005, the initial professional education for Pre-primary and Primary School Teachers has remained the same. Graduates of the Bachelor's in educational sciences (*Bachelor en sciences de l'éducation, BScE)* are not only qualified to teach in primary schools. They can also choose to work with a qualified educator in an "early education" class *(éducation précoce)*, the non-compulsory year of pre-primary education. Until 2020, the entrance exam for the BScE included language tests in the official languages of the country: Luxembourgish, French and German. The study programme aims to foster pedagogical and didactical skills, focusing on practice and developing a reflective stance. In addition, it delivers a competence-oriented and child-centred teaching approach. The BScE does not specialise graduates for working in early childhood education. In 2021, the university admitted around 100 students to the programme, which is expected to rise.

Table 4

Luxembourg: School Teacher (Pre-primary, primary and lower secondary)

Title in French: *Bachelor en sciences de l'éducation (professionnel)* **Profile:** Pre-primary and Primary School Teacher
Admission requirements: General university entrance qualification (*diplôme de fin d'études secondaires)* or a diploma recognised as equivalent; entrance exam (until 2020); proficiency in the three languages of Luxembourg **Professional studies:** 4 years / 8 semesters, including a mandatory semester abroad

Title in French: *Bachelor en sciences de l'éducation (professionnel)* **Profile:** Pre-primary and Primary School Teacher
Award: Bachelor in educational sciences (*Bachelor en sciences de l'éducation – professionnel*) **ECTS credits:** 240 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 655 **Main workplaces in ECEC:** early education in the formal education sector, *éducation précoce* (children aged 3 to 4) and preschool (children aged 4 and 5).

The Bachelor's degree in social and educational sciences (*Bachelor en sciences sociales et éducatives, BSSE)* provides initial training for education and social work professionals. Different subjects, including early childhood pedagogy, can be chosen as a focus during the studies. Contrary to the BScE, students' language competencies are not tested before admission to the programme or play less of a role during the studies. In recent years, the BSSE has contributed to the growth of educators with an academic degree in the ECEC sector in Luxembourg.

Table 5

Luxembourg: Social Pedagogue / Social Worker (*Bachelor en Sciences sociales et éducatives – professionnel*)

Title in French: *Éducateur gradué / éducatrice graduée* **Profile:** Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Admission requirements: General university entrance qualification *(Diplôme de fin d'études secondaires classiques* or *secondaires générales),* or a certificate recognised as equivalent; good command of the course languages (minimum B2 level for French and German and minimum B1 for English) **Professional studies:** 3 years / 6 semesters, including a mandatory semester abroad **Award:** Bachelor in Social and Education Sciences, *Bachelor en sciences sociales et éducatives – professionel* **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 655 **Main workplaces in ECEC:** early education in the formal education sector, *éducation précoce* (children aged 3 to 4); diverse settings in the non-formal education sector, e.g. *crèches* or *maisons relais* with the possibility of assuming leading positions in child welfare settings and services

Initial professional studies for the *éducateur / éducatrice diplômé(e)* are offered at the general (technical) secondary school for educational and social occupations *(Lycée technique pour professions éducatives et sociales,* LTPES*)*. Since 1990, this school has also provided specialised training at the tertiary vocational level. Students earn the general university entrance qualification *(diplôme de fin d'études secondaires techniques)* or are awarded a three-year vocational qualification as a state-recognised educator. The diploma opens the way to a broad spectrum of educational and social occupations and provides the entry requirement for university studies.

Table 6

Luxembourg: *Educator*

Title in French: *Éducateur / éducatrice diplômé(e)* **Profile:** Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Admission requirements: 11 years of general schooling, including successful completion of 5 years of upper secondary classical education (*éducation secondaire classique*) or secondary general education (*éducation secondaire general* – social or paramedical section), or equivalent

Title in French: *Éducateur / éducatrice diplômé(e)* **Profile:** Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Professional studies: 3 years (or 6 years part-time) at a tertiary-level vocational college for the education and social occupations (*Lycée technique pour professions éducatives et sociales)* **Award:** State-recognised Educator, *diplôme d'état d'éducateur / éducatrice* **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011:** 454 **Main workplaces in ECEC:** Generalist qualification for social pedagogical work with all age groups in various settings and services, e.g. early education in the formal education sector, *éducation précoce* (children aged 3 to 4); non-formal education sector, *services d'éducation et accueil* (0–12 years), e.g. *crèches* (0–4 years); child and youth welfare settings and services (0–27 years).

The vocational course for prospective Care Workers/Care Assistants (*auxiliaire de vie)* is a three-year long programme, combining one year of full-time school with two years of alternating attendance at school and work in a care service. The diploma for successful programme completion is a 'Diploma of professional competence' *(diplôme d'aptitude professionnelle,* DAP*). Auxiliaires de vie* are part of the low-qualified staff who, according to law, may make up 20% of the staff capacity in non-formal education and care settings. The diploma holders also work in other social care services, such as those providing care for the elderly or persons with disabilities.

Table 7

Luxembourg: Care Assistant/Care Worker

Title in French: *Auxiliaire de vie*
Admission requirements: Successful completion of 9 years of compulsory schooling **Professional studies:** 3 years of vocational school, including one year of full-time attendance and two years of alternating weeks of school and internship **Award:** Upper secondary vocational diploma *Diplôme d'aptitude professionnelle : auxilaire de vie* **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 3 **ISCED 2011:** 353 **Main workplaces in ECEC:** Assistance in diverse socio-pedagogical and social care services, e.g. in the non-formal education sector, *service d'éducation et accueil* (0–12 years); children's centres, *maison relais pour enfants* (4–12 years); child and youth welfare settings and services (0–27 years)

4.2 Competences, curricula, and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

School Teacher (Pre-primary, primary and lower secondary) *Bachelor en sciences de l'éducation – professionnel*

The study programme of the Bachelor's degree in education (*Bachelor en sciences de l'éducation professionnel, BScE*) at the University of Luxembourg includes a mandatory semester abroad and an extensive time of internships in all cycles of basic education (*école fondamentale*). Following the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the entrance exam for potential candidates has been replaced by an online admission procedure. Therefore, since 2021, applicants must write a motivation letter, complete an online questionnaire about, among others, their personality traits, and submit two letters.

Competence requirements: The BScE prepares teachers to work with children from a range of age groups: children aged 3–12 years attending the four levels of the *école fondamentale*, students aged 13–15 years enrolled in the lower level of secondary education/ *régime préparatoire*, and children of special needs of all ages in the *éducation différenciée*. The BScE students will develop the pedagogical and didactic skills necessary to recognise and meet the multiple challenges of their future work environment in a highly multilingual and multicultural context.

Curricular areas: The study programme of the BScE has three axes (pedagogy, research, and professionalization) and foregrounds the pedagogical competence of the prospective teachers. Students develop knowledge of teaching and learning theories and carry out projects in various subjects (e.g. language learning, mathematics, science, arts and aesthetics, sports, and health). They also do internships each semester and can spend one semester at a university abroad, enhancing mobility prospects. While students follow introductory courses and can spend a semester abroad in the first two years of their studies, they have a mix of mandatory and optional courses in the remaining two years. In the last year, they write their Bachelor's thesis. The written and oral evaluations of the student's achievements are based on reports, presentations, essays, and pedagogical projects.

Pedagogic-didactical approaches: A close link between theory and practice, active participation, problem- and project-based learning and reflexivity characterise the BScE. Students are encouraged to implement individual and collective projects during their courses and internships in schools or out-of-school settings. During the four years, the students collaborate with teachers, school committees, administrative staff, and parents. Throughout the programme, they have support from a personal tutor and reflect on their development in a personal portfolio.

Social Pedagogue / Social Worker (*Bachelor en sciences sociales et éducatives – professionnel*)

The initial professional education for the degree in social and educational sciences (*Bachelor en sciences sociales et éducatives – professionnel, BSSE*) is wide-ranging, combining elements of social pedagogy and social work. Students can choose between optional courses and two specialisations and will be awarded either the degree of a pedagogue or a social worker (*assistant/e social/e*). Graduates of the BSSE may work in the government sector, in public institutions or in private enterprises. In the non-formal education sector, graduates can work as directors or core pedagogues. Finally, students can access subsequent studies in full-time or part-time Master's programmes.

Competences: The study programme aims to help students develop essential theoretical, practical, and didactical competencies necessary for social pedagogy and social work. Students are to become generalist practitioners; they develop practical skills and theoretical knowledge, learn to plan and implement prevention, advisory, educational or care programmes, and design projects in education and social contexts.

Curricular areas: The programme looks at social issues on different levels, combining people's perspectives as individuals, members of social groups and participants in society. Students learn about historical context, laws and regulations, theoretical concepts, and ethical considerations of social work. Thematic areas include inclusion, poverty, violence, diversity, and social inequalities. Course topics cover all life phases, from early childhood to old age.

Pedagogic-didactical approaches: Inter-disciplinarity through a combination of different research disciplines and promotion of self-organisation are fundamental didactic principles of the study programme. It, therefore, offers a broad spectrum of topics and subjects for specialisation.

Internships in potential workplaces are essential in moulding a close relationship between theory and practice. At the same time, the study programme in social work aims to present itself as a research-oriented discipline and introduces students to the corresponding research methods.

Educator (*Éducateur / éducatrice diplômé(e)*)

The three-year initial professional education course to become a state-recognised *educator* (*éducateur/éducatrice diplômé(e)*) is delivered in secondary general education, the vocational-technical secondary school for educational and social professions (*Lycée technique pour professions éducatives et sociales, LTPES*). During the first two years, the curriculum offers introductory courses in psychology, education, and the social sciences. The third year focuses on the professional preparation of Educators with social pedagogy, childhood, and special needs profile. Graduates from the LTPES can choose to continue their studies at the university level (e.g. BSSE).

Competences: Initial professional studies aim to qualify for work in a wide range of occupational fields in social education. Certificate holders gain competencies for working with young children and school children. With these skills, they work in early intervention, residential care settings, youth clubs, and special education settings. In addition, they are qualified to work with and support children of all ages, persons with special needs, the elderly, and persons with different psychological or social issues.

Curricular areas: The curriculum is organised according to three overarching principles: providing a general theoretical knowledge base, a balanced field-based approach for acquiring practically relevant competencies in everyday learning situations and contributing to students' personal growth (LTPES 2022). In the final year, students can specialise in three areas: social and educational pedagogy, sports, and cultural activities; educational approaches and developmental processes; and organisation and coordination within educational and social teams.

Pedagogical-didactical approaches: The initial professional studies include basic and optional courses, seminars, and practical time in social and cultural institutions in Luxembourg or abroad. The main aim is to link general theoretical learning at the LTPES with practical experiences from occupation fields. Staff members in the field setting and a tutor from the LTPES guide the students.

Care Assistant / Care Worker (*Auxiliaire de vie*)

Care Assistants or Care Workers (*auxiliaires de vie*) are part of multidisciplinary teams in health or socio-educational settings. They are mainly concerned with accompanying, guiding, and assisting persons of all ages in supporting their physical and psychological well-being (Berufer.anelo.lu 2022a, b). The three-year initial professional training can be compared with an apprenticeship and is completed by a secondary vocational qualification (*Diplôme d'aptitude professionnelle, DAP*).

Competences: Care assistants are qualified to work with people of all ages in different socio-educational settings. They can be employed in non-formal early education and care institutions (*crèches, garderies*), socio-pedagogical services (*centres d'accueil, foyers de jour*), care facilities for the elderly and in the home assistance sector (*aide à domicile*).

Curricular areas: The course transmits basic notions of assistance and care. Core content includes practical aspects of personal care and hygiene, preparing meals, household work, and accompanying persons who need appointments or during leisure-time activities.

Pedagogical-didactical approaches: The training focuses mainly on practical learning in work settings. During the first year, students complete the school-based part in one of five lycées in

Luxembourg which offer the training. The remainder of the course in the second and third years takes place in socio-educational settings.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Primary School Teachers, as a prominent part of the workforce in pre-primary education in Luxembourg, can also study for their degrees in Belgium or Switzerland. A reform of educational studies in Belgium is being undertaken to enhance the profession's status and improve the initial professional education. It includes an emphasis on language competence in French and foresees a four-year-long curriculum with the possibility of extending the studies through a Master's degree. Contrary to the studies in Luxembourg (BScE), the Belgian Bachelor's study programme in educational sciences separates pre-primary and primary school teachers' qualifications. In Switzerland, the initial studies do not include a specialisation in early childhood education.

To teach in Luxembourg, all prospective teachers, regardless of the country of study, must pass the state eligibility examination to be employed in the public elementary school system (*école fondamentale),* including the early education classes (*éducation précoce).* Candidates who do not pass the exam may be employed as contract teachers *(chargés)* and are paid a lower salary. Recently, it has become possible for some people with specific higher education degrees to complete a four-week internship and become substitute teachers in primary school. Substitute teachers are employed ad hoc (e.g. if a teacher is on sick leave) or in cases of staff shortages.

Since the academic year 2021/22, a governmental pilot project has tried to counteract the staff shortage of educators by speeding up qualifications and access routes into employment. The highly debated project allows students who graduated from a social sciences section of secondary school (*section sciences sociales, SO)* to immediately access the final year of tertiary-vocational studies at the LTPES. Therefore, students from this section can now become state-recognised Educators after one year of training instead of three.

The most common way of accessing employment in social pedagogy or social work in Luxembourg is by acquiring an equivalent degree in another country. Many Luxembourgish students earn a degree in social pedagogy in one of the three neighbouring countries and return to work in Luxembourg. In addition, many cross-border commuters from Germany, France, or Belgium work in the non-formal education sector of ECEC. Graduates with degrees from universities or other higher education institutions from countries other than Luxembourg may apply for recognition of their diplomas (*Validation des acquis)*. This includes officially recognising relevant previous work experience of three or more years. However, many commercial early education and care providers have difficulties recruiting Luxembourgish staff, contrary to the public institutions. Therefore, many staff in the non-formal education sector have foreign qualifications and use French as their primary language in everyday communications. Therefore, many private ECE facilities are francophone and have staff with very different qualifications and levels of experience.

Another possibility to enter the socio-educational work field is to attend the national school for adult education *(École nationale des adultes,* ENAD*).* This institution offers a part-time course of studies for prospective Educators *(éducateur / éducatrice en alternance).* The ENAD is aimed at young adults aged over 21 years who are already working in the socio-educational sector but have not completed secondary school and therefore do not have a vocational qualification or access to professional development courses. The courses combine principles of school and vocational training. Students can finish their secondary education in two years (*Diplôme de fin d'études secondaires)* or obtain a degree as a state-recognised Educator *(Diplôme d'éducateur / éducatrice)* in one year (ENAD 2022).

It is more likely for Educators in the non-formal education sector to be employed through an alternative entry or qualification route than for teachers or educators in the formal education sector. In addition to the options mentioned above, the legislation allows 40% of staff in a non-formal ECEC centre to have a professional qualification in the arts, music, or sports. Half of this group may comprise low-qualified staff (see *Chapter **2.1***). After a 100-hour professional development course, these persons without a relevant basic qualification in a social or educational area can enter employment in the non-formal sector.

Finally, as part of the non-formal ECEC sector, adults with socio-educational or healthcare training or initial studies in related fields can offer childcare services as self-employed home-based providers (*assistants parentaux*). To obtain the necessary accreditation, applicants must speak at least one of the three official languages, French, German, or Luxembourgish and have completed a pre-training course offered by the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth. The *assistants parentaux* can offer childcare services in their own homes for up to five children, from birth to 12 years old (no more than two children may be under two years old). In addition to regular training and supervision sessions (at least 20 hours per year), the *assistants parentaux* must submit a development plan (*projet d'établissement*) describing their offer and the pedagogical concept of their childcare. In 2021, there were approximately 430 accredited *agents parentaux* in Luxembourg (Lifelong-learning.lu 2022).

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the IPE of core professionals

Guided workplace experience is an essential component of all the initial professional education for practitioners in ECEC in Luxembourg. While the initial professionalisation of the Care Assistant (*auxiliaire de vie*) is entirely based on workplace-based learning, study programmes of the University of Luxembourg or other training institutions offer alternation between theoretical studies and practical learning experience (internship). Graduates should experience their future work environments over an extended period, focusing on becoming familiar with the different types of institutions and potential workplaces. Through their workplace experience, students are encouraged to reflect and evaluate their practices and determine their personal and professional development aims. Tutors from the education/training or study institution collaborate with practitioners from the respective workplaces to mentor and support the students in their field studies. Students are generally free to choose from possible workplaces in and around Luxembourg for their internships.

As described above, early childhood education is only one of many elements for most initial study programmes for potential ECEC employees. Students are therefore not obliged to spend their workplace-based learning time in an ECEC institution. They might choose to do this in other socio-educational settings, for example, in working with older children, disabled people, or senior citizens. Practical experience and reflection of the framework for non-formal early childhood education are therefore not mandatory for the graduates and potential ECEC employees. This possible shortcoming of initial professional education needs to be compensated for by professional development after entering the workforce.

The following describes the workplace-based learning arrangements for the three study programmes offered by the University of Luxembourg and the LTPES.

School Teacher (Pre-primary, primary and lower secondary) (*Bachelor en sciences de l'éducation – professionnel*)

The modalities of guided workplace-based learning in the BScE were reformed in the academic year 2021–2022. Throughout their studies, students of the BScE have seven periods of teaching practice in schools (internships), one per semester except during the semester abroad. Students must do an internship in each cycle of basic education (cycle 1, cycle 2, cycle 3 and cycle 4). From the third year on, students can choose to continue working in primary school classes during their internships or gain practical experience in other educational domains and potential workplaces. This includes classes of secondary education that prepare students for vocational training (*régime préparatoire*), facilities for children with special needs (*éducation différenciée),* and public international schools. During the first two years of their studies, students complete three internships, each for three weeks (accredited with 5 ECTS). In the third year of studies, the internships last for four weeks (accredited with 7 ECTS), and in the final year of studies, they last for five weeks (accredited with 10 ECTS). Before each internship, the students are expected to observe the school environment for at least three days to familiarise themselves with the teachers, children, and the resources to adapt their practical activities to the context. During the internships, students plan, organise and carry out school lessons and activities in all subjects.

Furthermore, they write weekly self-reflections and participate in exchanges with professors, tutors, and other students to connect their practical experiences with pedagogical theory. Students experience working in different school settings throughout their internships and are accompanied by different mentors. During each of the internships, they are accompanied by a teacher (*formateur/-trice de terrain*) and a tutor from the university. Their role is to introduce the student to the work environment and explain pedagogical concepts and practices. Furthermore, the *formateur/-trice* supports the student in planning and organising activities and gives constructive feedback.

Regarding workplace-based learning in an ECE setting, students of the BScE can therefore conduct at least one internship in cycle 1 of basic education. This comprises the *classe de précoce,* the first year of formal elementary education for children of 3 to 4 years.

Social Pedagogue / Social Worker (*Bachelor en sciences sociales et éducatives – professionnel*)

Students of the BSSE complete two internships during their studies, one in the third and one in the sixth semester. During the workplace-based learning phases, students are mentored by qualified and experienced practitioners from their respective fields and academic representatives from the study programme.

The internships in the third semester consist of around 220 hours of work, of which 125 are spent in a potential work environment, and the rest consist of courses at the university. The students choose the internship place and actively participate in all aspects of daily work life, including team meetings, planning and organisation of pedagogical activities. In addition, students write a short report about their work-based learning experiences. The aim of the first internship is to get to know different areas of work, its organisational and historical development, and field-specific practices and concepts. The internship is evaluated through a subsequent oral debriefing.

Over the sixth semester, the students do a more extended internship, consisting of around 450 hours of practical work in the field and 50 hours in courses at the university (in total, accredited with 18 ECTS). Students choose and contact the workplace for this more extended internship,

depending on their potential work aspirations. Like the internship in the third semester, students prepare, carry out and reflect on their workplace-based learning. The focus lies on methodological and ethical reflections and developing a professional attitude. Students are expected to analyse their practices critically and develop professional relationships with other actors in the field. The evaluation of the second internship is based on an extensive written report.

Educator (*Éducateur/éducatrice diplômé(e)*)

Future state-recognised Educators must do four internships each year of their four-year-long initial professional education. The internships take place in different pedagogical, social, or cultural institutions and aim to prepare the applicants for their diverse potential work environments.

The first internship serves as a professional orientation and has a duration of nine weeks (34 hours per week). The students can expand and deepen their practical knowledge during the second internship of six weeks (34 hours per week). The third internship of ten weeks (34 hours per week) is a completion of the students' practical skills and preparation for entering the job market. The fourth internship in the final year of the IPE to become a state-recognised Educator is part of the entry exam to the profession, which is regulated by law. The school (LTPES) and the facility of the trainee's internship sign an agreement (*convention*). They determine the work domains of the internship, its organisation and the tasks and responsibilities of the trainee. Facilities that agree to offer internships to potential educators receive a monthly indemnity of €180.

The aim of the workplace-based learning experience is for students to acquire transversal skills and to be able to apply the knowledge they develop during their theoretical studies in daily work-practice.

A teacher from the school (LTPES) and a tutor working in the internship facility support and mentor the trainee during workplace-based learning. The evaluation of the internships is based on a reflective paper.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Continuing professional development (CPD) is included in the relevant legislation and regulations for the formal and non-formal education sectors as a statutory duty.

Formal sector

In the formal sector, Primary School Teachers who work in the *éducation précoce* classes are required to attend eight hours of CPD annually. The wide range of courses are conceptualised and planned by the *Institut de Formation de l'Éducation Nationale* (IFEN) with the participation of schools and according to staff needs (INFPC 2022). Educators working in the *éducation précoce* must attend 40 hours of CPD each year (MENFP 2009b, Art. 4; MENFP 2009c, Art. 4).

Non-formal sector

In the non-formal sector, CPD is coordinated at the national level by the *Service National de la Jeunesse* (SNJ)[12], the tasks of which are regulated by the Young People's Act (*Loi modifiée du 4*

[12] SNJ hosts the internet home page www.enfancejeunesse.lu (*Enfance Jeunesse* 2017).

juillet 2008 sur la Jeunesse, Art. 7; Loi du 24 avril 2016 portant modification de la loi modifiée du 4 juillet 2008, *Art. 5*) (see MENJE 2016). The SNJ is a public service developed in the context of policies for young people.

Some of its assignments are to ensure the pedagogical quality in centre-based and home-based childcare settings, to support the continuing professional development of staff in institutions for children and young people, and to develop appropriate pedagogical material to work with children (*Enfance Jeunesse* 2017). Apart from the SNJ, the primary providers of CPD are the large non-governmental agencies responsible for non-formal education (*Croix-Rouge, Caritas, Focus*) and the *Entente des Foyers de Jour* (EFJ). The *Entente des Foyers de Jour* is a non-governmental umbrella association of the providers of children's services in Luxembourg. Its members are largely associations and communes who provide nurseries (*crèche, foyer de jour*) and out-of-school facilities (*maisons relais*) (EFJ 2017).

- The *Croix-Rouge* (Red Cross) is one of the largest providers in the non-formal education sector in Luxembourg, with numerous childcare centres in different communes. The Red Cross also has its CPD organisation and offers regular CPD activities (Croix Rouge 2017).
- *Caritas* focuses on social inclusion. One of the numerous services provided by the organisation is a quality development programme in the non-formal education sector. In addition, Caritas offers a broad selection of CPD activities focusing on critical topics in the sector (curricular framework, health and nutrition, leadership, and cooperation with parents) (Caritas 2017).
- *Focus* is the CPD organisation of *Arcus*. *Arcus* is a non-governmental association bringing together charities based on Christian ideals that have shared a commitment toward social, educational, pedagogical, and therapeutic work with children, young people, and families for more than 60 years (Arcus 2017a). *Focus* provides a wide-ranging programme of CPD courses related to childcare and educational and social work professionalisation. The courses are related thematically to the national curricular framework for non-formal education (Arcus 2017b).

Article 11 of the decree on the reorganisation of children's services (MFI 2018) regulates the number of hours that staff are expected to spend attending CPD activities. No distinctions are made between core pedagogues, lead practitioners and assistants. Staff employed full-time are required to complete 32 hours of CPD within two years (at least 8 hours annually); requirements for part-time staff are adjusted according to their work hours. The CPD must relate to the *Curriculum Framework for Non-formal Education in Childhood and Youth* (MENJE and SNJ 2021), a national-level requirement for the providers of children's services.[13] However, this does not mean that staff may not participate in CPD courses on other topics. Courses related to the curricular guidance must be reviewed and certified by the Commission for Continuing Professional Development (*Commission de la formation continue*).

Since the implementation of the plurilingual education programme – *Programme d'Éducation Plurilingue* (Le Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg 2017a) –, staff in non-formal education settings are required to do eight hours of CPD within two years on the topic of 'language development in early childhood'. The law also stipulates that each SEA must name a pedagogical specialist (*référent(e)s pédagogiques*) responsible for implementing the plurilingual programme in early childhood. Furthermore, to be recognised as a plurilingual education professional, the

[13] The University of Luxembourg research group *Early Childhood: Education and Care* has developed a CPD programme together with the *Entente de Foyers de Jour* within the framework of the 32-hour budget for supporting the implementation of the guidelines in terms of the programme development in ECEC settings for children up to age 4 (Neumann 2014).

designated person must attend a 30-hour CPD organised by the *Service national de la Jeunesse* (MENJE and SNJ 2018).

Expenses incurred by the state-subsidised and commercial providers of non-formal education for the compulsory CPD courses are reimbursed by the State. In addition, the providers regulate the leave arrangements for these compulsory hours of attendance on an internal basis. Therefore, being granted leave for participation in CPD and reimbursed for the compulsory CPD activities is not a significant problem for most of the early childhood settings. Regulations, however, vary according to the setting in terms of meeting the costs for CPD courses that exceed the compulsory amount or go beyond the thematic framework; in most cases, they are partially reimbursed.

Basic vocational courses for low-qualified adults and early school leavers

Since the turn of the century, programmes have been developed that offer low-qualified persons seeking employment (frequently over 40 years old) a dual qualification route into the childcare field. These 'flexi-programmes', which were introduced subsequently under the names *Fogaflex* in 2001, *Qualiflex* in 2001, and *Valiflex* in 2013 were developed and carried out by the *Confédération Caritas Luxembourg* with the support of the European Social Fund (for an assessment of the various measures of managing the quality of care in Luxembourg's ECEC institutions see, for example, Achten et al. 2009). The programmes aim to support re-entry into employment through qualifying options, enhance personal development, increase motivation and competence development (Caritas 2008, 2013), and recruit staff for the expanding childcare services in Luxembourg.

Based on these projects, an advanced modular course has been developed since April 2003 which is recognised by the *Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Formation professionelle* and seeks to integrate and validate personal and professional work experiences (see *Table 8*). This 100-hour basic training opens employment perspectives in the childcare field for low-qualified applicants *(aide éducatrice* – other job titles are *formation de base de l'éducation et de l'accueil d'enfants, formation aide socio-éducative*). The qualification course is provided in various models by different CPD providers up to 130 hours, not only for adults but also for school leavers. In addition, the training is available for communes and public-sector institutions in the *Institut national d'Administration Publique* (INAP) for persons without an initial professional qualification. It is also offered by the *Entente des Foyers de Jours*, *Arcus asbl* and *Caritas asbl*. To ensure consistent quality across courses, this essential qualification's constituent modules and contents are the same.

Table 8

Luxembourg: Educator's Assistant in the non-formal education sector

Title in French: *Aide éducatrice/ éducateur*
Admission requirements: None (see Caritas 2016) **Professional studies:** 100 hours of basic vocational course in six modules **Award:** Certificate of attendance ECTS points: n/a EQR level: 3 ISCED 2011: n/a **Main fields of work:** Settings in the non-formal education sector/*Services d'éducation et d'accueil* (0–12 years), including infant-toddler centres/*crèches* (0–4 years), childcare centres/*Maison Relais pour Enfants* (4–12 years)

Home-based childcare providers: Due to the high demand for childcare and limited availability of centre-based places, so-called 'parental assistants' (*assistants parentaux*) – childminders who take care of children in their own home – were given a political-legal framework that also imposed a state agreement (MFI 2007) to combat a black market of quasi-familial care services that had existed in the Luxembourgish childcare system for years (Wiltzius and Honig 2015). Since 2017 (Le Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg 2017b), parental assistants have been part of the SEA structures. After a professional development course of 100 hours and a minimum of 40 hours of internship within a SEA setting, parental assistants must regularly attend CDP and supervision sessions for at least 20 hours per year to obtain a yearly state agreement.

Leadership qualifications for Centre Heads. There are no specific qualifying courses for the lead staff in non-formal education settings; the only requirement in Article 8 of the SEA Regulations (MFI 2018) is that lead staff must have completed at least three years of work experience. However, since 2011 the University of Luxembourg has been offering a part-time Master's study programme (original title in German: *Master in Management und Coaching im Bildungs- und Sozialwesen, MAMACO*), which targets this subgroup of the workforce. It aims to provide personnel with leadership and group responsibilities in the educational and social fields with critical competencies to cope with the specific changes in these areas. Participants should be able to question their professional experiences systematically and research and develop, analyse, and lead projects. Degree holders of the Master's programme can describe and explain the conditions, processes, results, and effects of social interventions; they can also develop and organise such processes and are prepared to shape reform processes with colleagues and institutions and create target-oriented ways of dealing with everyday problems. They should also be able to cope with leadership assignments in their field (Uni.lu 2022c).

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

Luxembourg is known for its high salaries for teachers, which are well above the OECD average, and constitute the highest salaries in the European Union at all levels of the education system. The wages of (early childhood) teachers and centre heads are the primary expenditures in the formal sector (OECD 2021). However, there is still a shortage in educational staff, partly due to the language requirements, which include command of Luxembourgish, German, and French (European Commission 2019).

This chapter provides an overview of differences in remuneration, working hours and conditions between the formal and the non-formal childcare sectors. Teaching and educating children make attractive occupations. However, there are differences in salary, status, and working hours between the Primary School Teachers and the Educators employed in the formal sector and between Social Pedagogues/Social Workers and non-university educated Educators and Care Workers in the non-formal sector. In addition, the state encourages career changes for people who initially have been trained for a different occupation to meet the growing demand for personnel. This development creates differences regarding staff's qualification and remuneration. Open and subtle hierarchies among the staff might result from those differences in the multidisciplinary teams of the *éducation précoce* (SNJ 2020).

Most Primary School Teachers and Educators are women. In contrast, a similar number of men and women work at secondary schools.

7.1 Remuneration

Generally, Primary School Teachers receive higher salaries than staff working in the non-formal sector. Within the non-formal sector, publicly funded institutions pay better than commercial childcare centres. The different wages are mainly a result of contractual differences. Staff in the publicly subsidised SEAs are paid via the collective bargaining agreement. In contrast, staff in commercial day-care centres are not subject to the collective bargaining agreement.

Formal education sector

Primary School Teachers working in the *éducation précoce* are civil servants and are remunerated accordingly. The starting salary of (Pre-)Primary School Teachers in Luxembourg is 69,076€ and gradually increases after 10 years in service (OECD 2023).

Non-formal education sector

The differences within the non-formal sector are profound. Private for-profit institutions (*non-conventionnés*) pay considerably less than private providers that are not-for-profit (*conventionnés*). The differences between the sectors and within the sectors have resulted in a segregated workforce in ECEC. Luxembourgish residents and citizens who meet the language requirements can seek employment in better-paying institutions. Commuters from Belgium, France and Germany usually take the less well-paid jobs at the for-profit centres because they are still better paid than similar jobs at ECEC institutions in their countries of residence. While foreign qualifications are recognised and do not impede employment, the language requirements in public institutions work as a barrier for foreigners seeking employment in Luxembourg's ECEC system, steering them away from the highest-paid jobs.

To sum up, the remuneration paid by private not-for-profit (*conventionnés*) providers is laid out in the contractual agreement between the state and the provider based on the collective bargaining agreement. In contrast, the salaries paid by commercial, for-profit providers (*non-conventionnés*) are solely determined by the contract between the provider and their personnel.

The differences in remuneration also result in differences in working hours. The lower pay in the non-formal for-profit institutions makes it necessary for the employees to work full time to earn a sufficient salary. Since these people are mainly commuters from neighbouring countries, the additional commuting cost certainly requires maximising the potential income. Staff shortages in the for-profit sector also play a role. Staff from Luxembourg working in not-for-profit settings can afford to work part time more easily.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

The working hours of the ECEC workforce are difficult to estimate as there are no official and representative statistics for each sector. Indeed, for the formal sector, no data are available. At the same time, numbers for the non-formal sector are based on the non-representative sample drawn in the online survey conducted by the government for the previous SEEPRO publication. Therefore, the numbers reported here reflect the situation of 2016. *Table 9* shows the percentages of staff in the non-formal sector working full time and part time.

Table 9

Luxembourg: Staff in full-time and part-time employment in not-for-profit and commercial ECEC settings, 2016

	Private not-for-profit providers (with contract)	Private for-profit providers (without contract)
Staff in full-time employment (35.5 hours or more)	36.5%	93.5%
Staff in part-time employment	63.5%	6.5%

Source: Honig and Bock 2018

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Multiple measures support staff beginning to work at the different ECEC institutions in the formal and non-formal sectors.

Formal education sector

Newly qualified graduates of the *Bachelor en sciences de l'éducation* enter an induction programme taking a maximum of three years at a specific primary school that is coordinated and supervised by the *Institut de Formation de l'Éducation Nationale* (IFEN 2017). The IFEN is a subsidiary institution of the Ministry of Education and works with Primary and Secondary School Teachers in the Luxembourgish education system. The induction programme is a type of internship that comprises three components that link theoretical and practical training:

(1) Practical introduction to the school setting
(2) Completion of a general modular course of 108 hours
(3) Mentoring.

Non-formal education sector

Support for newly employed non-formal staff is much less formalised. As there is no educational route preparing specifically for employment in the non-formal ECEC sector, the institutions must invest time and financial resources in newly hired staff. For example, the centre might assign a mentor to beginners or provide a professional exchange, guidance and learning materials to new staff. In addition, new staff may attend courses offered by providers of continuing professional development to learn about the government's early childhood curriculum.

7.4 Non-contact time

Working hours are assigned differently to the various tasks in the formal and non-formal sectors.

Formal education sector

The working hours of Pre-primary and Primary School Teachers (MENFP 2009b) and Educators (MENFP 2009c) are regulated by law. Article 4 of the *Règlement grand-ducal du 23 mars 2009 fixant la tâche des instituteurs de l'enseignement fondamental* specifies that teachers should spend 60 hours a year on meetings with educational staff and staff in childcare centres, 40 hours on cooperation with parents, 18 hours on administrative work and eight hours on professional development (MENFP 2009a, Art. 4). On average, over a 50-week year, this amounts to roughly 2.5 hours of non-contact time per week (own calculation).

The same regulations apply to the Educators (*éducateurs/éducatrices* diplômé(e)s) who work as Teacher Assistants in the *éducation précoce*. However, the time allocated for professional development is more extensive (40 hours).

Non-formal education sector

Article 11 of the *règlement grand-ducal* on the restructuring of ECEC that established the *services d'éducation et d'accueil* (SEA) (MFI 2018) specifies that full-time employees in childcare services must spend 103 hours annually of their total working hours on team consultations and the preparation of educational activities; this regulation applies both to personnel in contracted and non-contracted services. The number of hours is adjusted proportionally for part-time staff. On average, over a 50-week year, this amounts to roughly 2.1 contact-hours per week (own calculation).

7.5 Current staffing issues

Overall, staff shortages are an ongoing issue across the ECEC sectors in Luxembourg. While pre-primary (*éducation précoce*) and primary institutions can deal with the problem by recruiting career changers and substitute staff, the non-formal sector faces more severe issues revealed in the government's online survey of 2016.

In particular, the for-profit centres have more difficulties finding qualified staff, partly due to the lower salaries compared to the not-for-profit and publicly funded institutions. Since the non-formal sector cannot rely on a pool of substitute staff or provide its system with measures to recruit and train career changers, the primary way of addressing the problem is to require the existing team to work full-time and overtime. In addition, mandatory staff-to-child ratios always make it necessary to keep a minimum number of staff present at the centre, which can result in overtime and merging groups of children in order to comply with the ratio requirements.

Moreover, problems arise from a labour market that does not provide enough applicants with the necessary qualifications and experience in ECEC. As quality and CPD requirements increase, recruitment issues may also arise. The growing misalignment further exacerbates these issues in the linguistic diversification of the population. A decreasing proportion was born and raised in the country, thus speaking all three official languages, and quickly meeting the professional language requirements. As the immigrant population is growing and more languages are spoken in the country in many spheres of daily life, such as English and Portuguese, fewer people will be fluent in the official languages. This development will likely result in increasing staff shortages or more difficult recruitment procedures. In addition to language requirements, limited-time contracts are a common issue in ECEC services, making the job less attractive for people who want to build their future.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

National Framework for Non-Formal Education in Childhood and Adolescence

Following the modifications of the Youth Act in 2016 (MENJE 2016) in which several mechanisms of quality development and monitoring have been established (see MENJE 2022), Luxembourg introduced its first official curriculum for the non-formal sector – the National Framework for Non-Formal Education in Childhood and Adolescence (*Nationaler Rahmenplan zur non-formalen*

Bildung im Kindes- und Jugendalter / Cadre de référence nationale sur l'éducation non-enfants et des jeunes) (Le Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg 2017c), which was first published in 2018 (see for the latest version: MENJE and SNJ 2021). This framework is a mandatory curricular requirement for all state-subsidised and commercial services in the non-formal education sector in Luxembourg which means that ECEC professionals may have to develop a different understanding of their profession. Rather than offering mere "care" to children, they have to offer education. Furthermore, the framework defines pedagogical goals and guidelines regarding the work with children in the non-formal sector. It also conceptualises legislative and administrative initiatives to improve structural and process quality. A commission comprising representatives of the MENJE, the communes, the providers, the parents, and scientific experts examine and revise it every three years.

Plurilingual education programme

The *Programme d'Éducation Plurilingue* (Le Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg 2017a) acknowledges the language diversity in Luxembourg in the formal and non-formal education sectors. The programme has three pillars: language education, collaboration with parents and networking. It aims to familiarise children at an early age with Luxembourgish and French and values children's home languages, among others, through close cooperation with the parents. All ECEC centres must implement the three pillars in their centres and indicate in their action conception how this will be done. The guidelines for implementing the plurilingual programme in the general action conception (CAG) were first published in a separate document, "*Guide pour la réalisation d'un concept local de l'éducation plurilingue pour jeunes enfants"* in 2018. As of 2021, the guidelines are part of the national framework (MENJE and SNJ 2021). Each centre also needs to document the daily language practices.

Since 2018, the *mini-crèches* have opened a pathway for home-based childcare providers ('parental assistants') to offer plurilingual education (Le Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg 2018). The main requirement to run a multilingual *mini-crèche*, which must be set up outside the staff's home, is that one of the two professionals can speak Luxembourgish and the other one French. The *mini-crèches* are small-scale childcare facilities and aim to tackle the growing need for places in ECEC.

Within each ECEC setting, there must be at least one pedagogical member of staff with a C1 level in Luxembourgish and a C1 level in French. Providers only benefit from childcare vouchers (*chèques-service accueil*) if they implement the programme. In addition, the legislation aims to ensure equal educational opportunities for children from different language backgrounds, a challenge with special significance for Luxembourg with its multilingual population (Brachmond, Günnewig, Kirsch, and Seele 2015).

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Since 2009, the Luxembourgish government has a contractual agreement with the university regarding research, development, and consultation in national ECEC policies. Within this framework of cooperation, several expert reports have been produced which analyse the Luxembourg system of early childhood education and care (e.g. Honig and Haag 2011; MENJE/Université du Luxembourg, Unité de recherche INSIDE 2015; Wiltzius and Honig 2015); further studies focus

on curricular concepts and programme development (e.g. Bollig, Honig, and Mohn 2015; Brachmond, Günnewig, Kirsch, and Seele 2015), some of which were published in a brochure series issued by the Ministry of Family Affairs (later Ministry of Education). In addition, the Ministry of Education, Childhood and Youth has established its own Research and Development department (SCRIPT) and the SNJ published educational guidance on early multilingual education in the Luxembourg context (SNJ 2017). Beyond this, the university has conducted independent research projects focusing on issues particularly relevant to Luxembourg, which provide links to the international debate on early childhood education and care. All refer directly or indirectly to the role of early childhood personnel in ECEC settings.

Developing multilingual pedagogies in early childhood (MuLiPEC)

Source: Université du Luxembourg (Uni.lu 2022a) (see *References* for further details)

Research team: Claudine Kirsch (PI), Katja Andersen, Simone Mortini, Laurence Di Letizia, Gabrijela Aleksić (from September 2017)

Duration: May 2016–April 2019

Funding: *Fonds National de la Recherche, Ministère de l'Education nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse*

Aims: The project MuLiPEC addressed the need for the development of multilingual pedagogies in early childhood education in Luxembourg. To this end, the research team offered a professional development (PD) path to Pre-primary Teachers (formal education sector) and Care Assistants working with 2 to 5 year-olds in the non-formal education sector (e.g. *crèches*). The aims of the research project consisted of analysing the influence of the PD programme on the practitioners' attitudes, knowledge, and practices; comparing practices across settings; and investigating the influence of multilingual practices on children. Simone Mortini, the PhD candidate within the project team, focused on the children in the four institutions and investigated the 'languaging' practices and the agency of eight children over one academic year.

Procedure: The project used quantitative methods (i.e., a survey done before and after the PD) and qualitative ones (i.e., observations, video recordings, interviews, and documentation). The researchers also asked the professionals to video-record activities and regularly interviewed the practitioners. The analysis of the quantitative data drew on content analysis, paired samples *t*-test and correlational analysis, whilst the qualitative data were analysed with thematic analysis and a socio-cultural perspective of conversation analysis.

Findings: The findings from the questionnaires before and after the PD, show a positive influence of the training on the participants: the practitioners had developed knowledge about multilingualism and language learning, changed attitudes towards 'translanguaging' and home languages, and became more interested in organising activities in children's home languages. The longitudinal study in the schools and ECEC centres provided further details. The findings indicate that the professionals implemented activities in languages other than the institutional ones and developed a positive stance towards 'translanguaging'. Furthermore, their flexible language use facilitated communication and promoted participation, language learning, and well-being. The professionals of the various settings differed, however, in how they designed their multilingual learning environment and used multiple languages. These differences could be explained by their perspectives on multilingualism, their own experience of multilingualism, language ideologies, qualification, and their ability to monitor children's linguistic needs.

Implications: The findings had concrete implications for the design and the content of professional development courses as well as for the content of some courses in teacher education. For instance, some teacher educators focused more on strategic translanguaging and translanguaging pedagogies (i.e., stance, design, shift).

Selected publications:

Kirsch, Claudine. 2020a. „Heranführung an die mehrsprachige Pädagogik durch Filmaufnahmen in der Lehrerausbildung in Luxemburg" [Introduction to multilingual pedagogy through videos in teacher education in Luxembourg]. In *Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht* 25 (1): 507–28.

Kirsch, Claudine. 2020b. "Opening Minds to Translanguaging Pedagogies". In *System* 92: 102271. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102271

Kirsch, Claudine. 2021. "Practitioners' Language-Supporting Strategies in Multilingual ECE Institutions in Luxembourg". In *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 29 (3): 336–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2021.1928721

Kirsch, Claudine, and Gabrijela Aleksić. 2018. "The Effect of Professional Development on Multilingual Education in Early Childhood in Luxembourg". In *Review of European Studies* 10 (4): 148-168. https://doi.org/10.5539/res.v10n4p148

Kirsch, Claudine, Gabrijela Aleksić, Simone Mortini, and Katja Andersen. 2020. "Developing Multilingual Practices in Early Childhood Education through Professional Development in Luxembourg". In *International Multilingual Research Journal* 14 (4): 319–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2020.1730023

Kirsch, Claudine, and Simone Mortini. 2021. "Engaging in and Creatively Reproducing Translanguaging Practices with Peers: A Longitudinal Study with Three-Year-Olds in Luxembourg". In *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2021.1999387

Schwartz, Mila, Claudine Kirsch, and Simone Mortini. 2020. "Young Children's Language-Based Agency in Multilingual Contexts in Luxembourg and Israel". In *Applied Linguistics Review* 13(5): 20190050. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2019-0050

Collaboration with parents and multiliteracy in early childhood education (COMPARE)

Source: Université du Luxembourg (Uni.lu 2022b) (see *References* for further details)

Research team: Claudine Kirsch (PI), Gabrijela Aleksić, Sascha Neumann (January–March 2020), Valérie Kemp, Laura Colucci, Džoen Bebić-Crestany

Duration: January 2020–December 2023

Funding: *Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enfance et e la Jeunesse, Service National de la Jeunesse, Fonds National de la Recherche*, University of Luxembourg

Aims: This project examines the multiliteracy practices in day care centres and partnership building in Luxembourg. To help educators develop their understanding of the importance of diverse literacies and collaboration, design productive activities, and enhance collaboration, the team offered a professional development programme to 30 childcare centres. The project aims to examine, firstly, how educators, parents and children engage in multiliteracy activities and adults establish home–*crèche* collaboration and, secondly, the influence of the multiliteracy practices and collaboration on the actors' attitudes and literacy engagement.

Procedure: The mixed-method study used questionnaires with educators and parents as well as interviews and observations in three ECEC centres over the academic year 2020-21.

Findings: The findings show that about half of the parents and three-quarters of the educators reported in surveys that they read or told stories daily and that many used several languages, mainly French and Luxembourgish, but also English, German, and Portuguese. Results from the fieldwork confirm that reading and telling stories did not occur daily in all day-care centres and that singing happened more frequently. The 3 year-olds were also frequently observed looking at books on their own. Speaking with children about symbols and scripts was rare.

Furthermore, the questionnaire data of the educators as well as the observations in three childcare centres, indicate that the professionals regularly exchanged in daily communication and

organised seasonal feasts. However, these practices were strongly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Activities where educators and parents jointly engaged children in the three observed day-care centres depended on the centres and the parents. On such occasions, parents offered literacy activities in their home languages. These collaborative events influenced the communication between parents and educators. This latter result was confirmed in the questionnaires that showed that goal-directed communication was predicted by the educators' attitudes, according to the educators, and the parents' satisfaction, according to the parents.

Implications The findings address research gaps in relation to partnership building at the micro-level, the engagement in multiliteracy activities of 3 year-olds, their parents, and educators, and, finally, the influence of collaboration and multiliteracy on attitudes and engagement. The results were disseminated in conferences, workshops, a parent guide as well as peer-reviewed papers.

Selected publications:

Aleksić, Gabriejal, Dzoen Bebić-Crestany, and Claudine Kirsch. 2024. "Factors influencing communication between parents and early childhood educators in multilingual Luxembourg". *International Journal of Educational Research 124*, 1–14

Kirsch, Claudine, and Lisandre Bergeron-Morin. 2023. "Educators, parents and children engaging in literacy activities in multiple languages: an exploratory study". In *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 18(4): 1386-1403. DOI: 10.1080/14790718.2023.2195658

Kirsch, Claudine, and Gabrijela Aleksić. 2021. "Multilingual Education in Early Years in Luxembourg: A Paradigm Shift?" In *International Journal of Multilingualism* 16(4): 534–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2021.1905643.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Early childhood education and care in Luxembourg have experienced continuous organisational and conceptual changes over several years, the latest ones being the national curricular framework, the programme of multilingual education, and different ways of training and qualifying educators and teachers. Staff in the formal and non-formal education sectors are under considerable pressure to implement new policies and regulations and would benefit from more training and guidance. Although the formal and non-formal education sectors are under the Ministry of Education, Childhood and Youth, they remain very different. As a result, the professionals who must implement the multilingual education programme, for instance, receive different training.

Below are several challenges identified by the authors of the report:

1. The tasks of ECEC professionals continue to multiply and become more complex in highly heterogeneous Luxembourg; therefore, it is essential to guarantee that all staff are well-qualified. Unfortunately, there are neither study programmes for teachers to become early years specialists nor for educators to develop this specialist profile.
2. Luxembourg is a multilingual country, but more and more staff members in ECEC settings seem to lack the necessary pedagogic and language competencies to address diversity and deliver a multilingual programme. The issue is particularly prominent in large commercial centres where many staff members commute daily from neighbouring countries to work in Luxembourg. They speak predominantly French and these centres, which offer lower wages,

find it challenging to recruit staff who speak Luxembourgish and can deliver a multilingual programme. There is some indication of a tendency to introduce children to English, a global language, rather than Luxembourgish.

3. The ECEC system in Luxembourg is highly diverse and encompasses the formal and non-formal sectors, compulsory and non-compulsory elements as well as public and private providers. Standardisation seems to be an issue, particularly regarding public and private providers. The lack of standardisation regarding the educators' and teachers' skills as well as resources in ECEC institutions that go beyond material equipment and may involve language resources and education styles, may drive early inequality.
4. With the growing language diversity in Luxembourg, it is not only necessary to be able to communicate in several languages but, even more, to be open to all parents and children with ethnic minority backgrounds and create inclusive environments. While recent studies have shown that language practices in ECEC centres have become more diverse, they have also pointed to existing language hierarchies.
5. To guarantee and improve the quality of the provision, early childhood staff need continuous guidance and training. There have been recent moves by the Ministry of Education to coordinate the CPD programmes in the non-formal sector, as the quality differed considerably. While continuing this effort, it is crucial also to train the trainers and regional coordinators (*agents régionaux*).
6. The issue of providing ongoing coaching and consulting for staff in the non-formal sector has not yet been answered adequately. In particular, the numerous small settings at the local level need coordinated support at the regional level. A further challenge is the need to include the growing number of commercial CPD providers in a conceptually and administratively coordinated system of quality development.
7. Many staff commute from neighbouring countries and work for commercial childcare providers for low wages. It is therefore possible to talk of two classes of professional staff in the *services d'éducation et d'accueil* (SEA). The transformation of childcare into a field of non-formal education, therefore, needs to find effective ways of involving the commercial providers.
8. Home-based childcare providers, primarily female, represent a special category of early childhood personnel. They are not the subject of this report, but they play an essential role in Luxembourg in what is essentially an ethnically segregated childcare market. Therefore, if ECEC is to contribute to social inclusion, the position of these home-based carers must be clarified and regulated within the system.

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seepro3

Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

LUXEMBOURG

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note:

In alignment with country-specific terminology, this report refers to non-formal education settings for children under 4 in general as **ECEC services** (*services d'éducation et d'accueil pour enfants*). Specific setting types are described where relevant. For formal education settings the terms used are **early education group** (*éducation précoce,* 3 to under 4 years) and **pre-primary class** (*éducation préscolaire,* 4 to under 6 years)[1].

Historical milestones in ECEC in Luxembourg

Around 1850	First custodial institutions (*écoles gardiennes)* established through caritative foundations and commercial enterprises
Approx. 1860	First public kindergartens established
1963	First legislation on early childhood education (*jardins d'enfants*, later; *éducation préscolaire)*, specifying the role of the communes
1976	Compulsory preschool enrolment *(éducation préscolaire)* for 5 year-olds
Early 1980s	First state subsidised centre-based childcare settings
1992	Compulsory preschool enrolment for 4 year-olds
1998	– Introduction of non-compulsory early education groups *(éducation précoce)* – ASFT Act comes into force, regulating the relationship between the state and private providers of educational and therapeutic services, and also the organisational and funding framework for childcare provision.
2005	The first *maisons relais pour enfants* (MREs) – children's centres – are established.
2007	Home-based childcare is regulated by law.
2008	Youth Act (*loi sur la jeunesse*) comes into force.
2009	– New Education Act and restructuring of the primary schooling system into cycles: *éducation préscolaire* is included in the 1st cycle. – Entitlement for 3 year-olds to a place in *éducation précoce* – The communes are required to provide outside-school-hours care *(encadrement périscolaire)* for school children. – Introduction of childcare service vouchers *(chèques-service accueil – CSA)*
2013	– The Ministry of Education, Children and Youth takes over responsibility from the Ministry of Family Affairs for all provision outside the school system as well as for formal education settings. – The SEA Regulation (implementation decree, ASFT Act 1988, amended 2012) introduces common requirements for all centre-based and home-based settings for children in the non-formal education sector (*services d'éducation et d'accueil pour enfants*). The Regulation specifies the criteria for the contractual agreements (*agréments*) – staff-child ratios, staff qualifications, maximum capacity, size, etc. – Framework plan for non-formal education for children and young people comes into force.

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO**3** reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In the case of Luxembourg, the formats may vary, depending on the kind of setting (non-formal or formal) in focus.

2016	Amendments to the Youth Act, regulating among other things quality assurance in all non-formal education settings
2017	Renewed amendment of the Youth Act and introduction of multilingual early education (*éducation plurilingue*) for 1 to 4 year-old children in SEA facilities
2018	– Subsidising childcare costs through vouchers is regulated by law. – Introduction of *mini-crèches* as a new form of childcare

Sources: Honig 2015; Honig und Bock 2018; University of Luxembourg 2018, 20; Eurydice 2023, 3.1

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Until the end of 2013, early childhood education and care in Luxembourg was organised on a bi-sectoral basis, with separate ministerial responsibilities for ECEC and out-of-school services (Ministry of Family Affairs) and pre-primary education (Ministry of Education). Since 2013, the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth (*Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse, MENJE*) has overall responsibility for all forms of provision for children up to primary school.

ECEC services are now formally understood as settings with an educational mandate. Accordingly, a distinction is made between a non-formal and a formal education sector.

The **non-formal sector** includes (1) publicly subsidised, non-profit education and care services as well as private-commercial settings for children under 4 years of age; (2) out-of-school forms of provision for 4 to 12 year-olds; and (3) home-based childcare services.

The **formal sector** in this report refers to the compulsory classes for 4 and 5-year olds in primary schools (*éducation préscolaire*) as well as the non-compulsory school classes for 3 year-olds (*éducation précoce*).

The state has implementation responsibility for the formal sector and guarantee responsibility for the non-formal sector; it exercises this responsibility by issuing operating licences (*agréments*) and through service agreements (*conventions*) with private providers. The Ministry of Education is responsible for legislation in the field of education, the provision of educational opportunities in the formal and non-formal sector, as well as for curricula and personnel. Municipalities must ensure the necessary infrastructure and equipment. Management is the responsibility of 15 regional directorates of the Ministry of Education and the local school committees. In addition, each institution has a school committee elected for five years, which makes proposals regarding organisation and financial budgets (University of Luxembourg 2018).

The divide between the non-formal/formal and the private/public education sectors means that Luxembourg can be described as a part-integrated ECEC system: while governance has been unified, sectors and setting types remain split.

General objectives and legislative framework

The system of early childhood education and care in Luxembourg is oriented towards family and social policy goals. These include supporting parents' participation in the labour market, gender equality and work-life balance. The provision of flexible, high-quality and affordable childcare services is given high priority, e.g. through benefits such as free childcare service vouchers or low fees for low-income families.

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Luxembourg provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

Another general objective is the promotion of children's development according to each child's potential. The Coalition Agreement of 2018–2023 sets out a holistic approach to the education of children and young people, providing equal access to educational opportunities for all, taking into account growing diversity and putting the child at the centre.

With regard to its educational policy objectives, the Luxembourg government considers the non-formal and the formal ECEC sectors as complementary. Overarching goals or principles in the **non-formal sector** are: To perceive children as competent persons, each with an individual biography, who learn in interaction with and from others and are to be seen as members of society with their own rights.

The ASFT Act of 1998 (*Loi du 8 septembre 1998 réglant les relations entre l'Etat et les organismes oeuvrant dans les domaines social, familial et thérapeutique*, modified on 28 July 2011) regulates the relationship between the state and non-state providers. An implementing regulation (2013) of the ASFT Act, the so-called SEA regulation (*services d'éducation et d'accueil pour enfants*, SEA), sets out the framework for the non-formal sector.

The modifications of the Youth Act 2016/17 and the corresponding law for home-based child-care services set out pedagogical measures as well as a national framework plan for the non-formal sector (University of Luxembourg 2018, 19).

In the **formal sector**, the 2009 Education Act (*Loi du 06.02.2009 portant organisation de l'enseignement fondamental with modifications*) restructured the Luxembourg school system. Since then, the 9-year basic/primary school (*enseignement fondamental*) has been organised in four cycles. The first cycle includes *éducation précoce* (for 3 year-olds) and *éducation préscolaire* (for 4 and 5 year-olds). The Education Act refers exclusively to formal education. At the same time, it contains a mandate for the municipalities to provide out-of-school services for children of school age (*encadrement périscolaire*). In order to further promote cooperation between schools and out-of-school education and care services, since 2012 every municipality has had to draw up a so-called out-of-school care plan (*Plan d'encadrement périscolaire*, PEP).

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

For under 3 year-olds, there is no legal entitlement to a place in an ECEC setting in the **non-formal sector**. For children between 3 and 4 years of age, attendance is voluntary; however, if enrolled, regular attendance is expected. All municipalities must ensure that children in their catchment area are offered a place.

Legal rights or obligations exist only in the **formal sector**. Since 2009, children between 3 and 4 years of age have been entitled to a free place in the first cycle of the primary sector for 36 weeks a year (*éducation précoce*). Compulsory education in pre-primary classes (*éducation préscolaire*) begins when a child has turned 4 by 1st September and is compulsory for 26 hours per week (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 48, 67).

After two years of *éducation préscolaire*, mainstream schooling begins at age 6 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 182).

Main types of provision

Non-formal education and care sector

The non-formal sector includes various types of **ECEC services** and after-school services. These fall under the SEA regulations (*Services d'éducation et d'accueil pour enfants*) and follow its provisions. They include *maisons relais, crèches*, and *foyers scolaires* (University of Luxembourg 2018, 19). ECEC settings are required to have an operating licence (*agrément*) under the ASFT law. Some (the majority of services for 4 to 12 year-olds) conclude a service agreement (*convention*) with the state. However, these service agreements are not obligatory. It is also possible that facilities are run only on the basis of an operating licence.

Children's houses: The *maisons relais pour enfants* for 4 to 12 year-olds, sometimes also for under 3 year-olds, were introduced in 2005 as a link between family, school and community and offer services for children during non-school hours and over lunch. The predecessors of the *maisons relais* are the *foyers de jour pour enfants*, which offer school children lunch and homework supervision. However, the range of services offered by the *maisons relais* is much broader; they are also aimed at children who are not yet of school age. Accordingly, their pedagogical goals are very broad in the sense of non-formal education, linking socio-pedagogical activities and the promotion of education.

Nurseries (*crèches*) usually cater for children up to 4 years of age.

Mini-crèches became legal in 2018 and came into force as a new childcare model from January 2019 (MENJE 2023b, 19). In these *mini-crèches*, children up to 12 years of age are catered for in a small setting by two social pedagogy professionals. They are mainly offered in less populated areas and have very flexible opening hours adapted to the needs of parents. The facilities must be accredited and offer multilingual education for 1 to 4 year-olds; they are therefore eligible for the state-funded CSA voucher scheme (see below), which provides 20 hours of free childcare. This was a significant reason for the doubling of available places in the non-formal sector in the last ten years (SNJ 2020).

ECEC services for under 4 year-olds are required to be open for at least 46 weeks a year; the exact opening hours are determined by the provider of the facilities (between 5:00 and 23:00).

In addition, under 3 year-olds can also be cared for by self-employed **home-based childcare workers** (*assistance parentale*) in their homes.

From the age of 3, children can either remain in the existing facilities or attend an optional year in primary school (*éducation précoce*, ISCED 02).

Formal education sector

The voluntary **early education groups** for 3 to 4 year-olds (*education précoce*) and the compulsory **pre-primary classes** for 4 and 5 year-olds are part of the first cycle in the school system. They are open 36 weeks a year, each with 26 hours of educational activities per week. They are usually open Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 8:00 to 12:00 and from 14:00 to 16:00, Tuesday and Thursday mornings only. They are closed during school holidays. During this time, the extracurricular SEA settings provide non-formal education services. In the first year of the 1st cycle, children spend a minimum of three and a maximum of eight half days in the institution. The two pre-primary years for 4 and 5 year-olds are organised according to the primary school timetables.

For the 1st cycle, there are also alternative types of provision such as *Eis Schoul* or the *École Jean Jaurès* with a focus on inclusion, or all-day schools. For 4 and 5 year-olds there is also the option of attending an international school with different languages of instruction or private-commercial schools.

On 1 September 2023, there were 165 public institutions offering 1st cycle education, as well as ten private and two international settings (Men.lu 2023).

Provider structures

Non-formal education and care sector

Types of settings that belong to the non-formal sector can be operated either by municipalities or by private non-profit or private for-profit providers.

According to the ASFT Act (1998, modified 2011), all providers need an operating licence (*agrément*) from the state. Non-profit providers that conclude a service agreement (*convention*) with the state receive public funding (OECD 2022a). Among the contracted providers, many are non-profit, but the majority are for-profit organisations. The providers also have their own admission criteria. For example, public *crèches* often give priority to children under 3 years of age living in the respective municipality. For children over 3 years of age, the municipalities are obliged to provide a place. The providers are bound by the conditions laid down in the ministerial accreditation, which includes, for example, the staffing ratio.

Since the introduction of service vouchers for parents in 2009 (*chèques-service accueil*, see also section *Financing*), the supply of private-commercial providers in the non-formal education sector has increased considerably. This development is a significant structural change that was not intended by political measures, but was accepted. Almost two-thirds of places for under 4 year-olds are provided by these commercial providers.

Table 1 shows the distribution of ECEC settings according to whether they have concluded a (non-mandatory) service agreement with the state or not. In centres with an agreement to provide *éducation plurilingue*, parents are eligible to receive 20 hours of free education for their child. The prerequisite is that these centres use plurilingual education in the fields of language education, in cooperation with parents and in their networks. Furthermore, they are required to employ a pedagogical coordinator (*réferent pédagogique,* with 30 hours of training). All staff are obliged to attend eight hours of CPD within a period of two years and one member of staff must have C1 level[3] in Luxembourgish, another the C1 level in French. If these conditions are met, the centres may employ 10% more staff than is the case in regular settings. The families are eligible to use the CSA vouchers (see *Financing and costs for parents*) in these settings.

There is a trend towards very young children being more likely to attend ECEC settings run by commercial providers, and older children being more likely to attend non-profit facilities. Overall, the number of available places has increased considerably between 2009 and 2019: Places in contracted facilities have more than doubled, and in non-contracted facilities they have even increased fivefold (OECD 2022a). Drawing on *Table 1*, 92.4% of the settings for children over 4 years of age have a contractual agreement with the state while this applies only to 27.1% of settings for under 4 year-olds.

[3] Language proficiency level according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)*

Table 1

Luxembourg: Number of places in non-formal ECEC settings with/without a service agreement with the state, 31.12.2022

	Number of available places for under 4 year-olds	**Number of available places for over 4 year-olds** (Children in primary education up to age 11/12)	**Total number of places**	**Number of ECEC settings with an operational licence**
ECEC settings with a contractual agreement with the state *Services d'éducation et d'accueil conventionnés* (Mostly private non-profit)	4,994	40,724	45,718	355
ECEC settings without a contractual agreement with the state *Services d'éducation et d'accueil commerciaux* (Mostly private for-profit)	13,392	3,368	16,760	491
Total	**18,386**	**44,092**	**62,478**	**846**

Source: MENJE 2023b, 18

In addition, there were 1,924 places provided by 395 home-based child carers in 2022 and 22 places in *mini-crèches*. Of the 2,133 children cared for, 601 were under 3 years of age (MENJE 2023b, 18f).

Formal education sector

Formal education institutions for 3 to 6 year-olds in the first cycle of primary education are almost exclusively state-run as part of the school system. Private schools are the exception in Luxembourg. Among them, there are private schools that follow the national curriculum, private schools that apply their own curriculum, and international schools.

In 2021/22, 4,587 3 year-old children attended early education (*précoce*) institutions and 203 private and international settings. 12,699 four and five year-old children were enrolled in public pre-primary schools and 1,400 in private and international settings. Approximately 10.3% of children aged 3–6 years are in private ECEC schools (MENJE 2023a, 10).

Participation rates in regulated ECEC settings

Non-formal education and care sector

Most places in non-formal education are to be found in conventional state education and care services for young children and for school children while places in *mini-crèches* and in home-based provision are relatively rare (see *Table 2*).

Table 2

Luxembourg: Number of places in non-formal ECEC settings by contract type, 2022

Settings (age range)	**Number of places**
Mini-crèche (0–12 years)	22

Settings (age range)	Number of places
Home-based providers (*Parental assistants*) (0–12 years)	1,924
Services with a contractual agreement	45,718
Commercial ECEC services	16,760
Total	**64,424**

Source: MENJE 2023b, 18

While in 2005 only just under a quarter of under 3 year-olds were enrolled in institutions, by 2022 this figure had risen to over a half. The proportion significantly increased for the over 3 year-olds: from 59% in 2005 to 91.4% in 2022 (see *Table 3*).

Table 3

Luxembourg: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings according to age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	14	48
	Over 30 hours	8	11
	No enrolment in ECEC	78	41
2010	1 to 29 hours	1	42
	Over 30 hours	8	66
	No enrolment in ECEC	91	21
2015	1 to 29 hours	16.9	27.0
	Over 30 hours	34.9	54.9
	No enrolment in ECEC	48.1	18.1
2022	1 to 29 hours	18.2	26.8
	Over 30 hours	36.5	64.6
	No enrolment in ECEC	45.3	8.6

Source: Eurostat 2023b, Slight deviations from 100% due to rounding

On average, under 3 year-olds spend approximately 32 hours in a centre-based setting, over 3 year-olds 35 hours. The latest report of the Ministry of Education indicated that children below 1 year of age spent on average 28 hours a week in a *crèche*. By contrast, they were enrolled for 30 hours in 2017 and 33 hours in 2012. The Ministry explains this drop through the introduction of parental leave in 2016, as a result of which children are now older when they first enrol in a *crèche*. Children under 4 are found to spend less than 30 hours a week in an ECEC service (MENJE 2023c). Finally, between 2015 and 2022, 52% and 59% of children aged 4–12 attended a *Maison Relais* 15 hours weekly (MENJE 2023c, 3-5). The number of hours has not increased significantly although the *Maison Relais* have been free of charge since September 2022 (MENJE 2023c, 6).

Formal education sector

Broken down by age, 2.6% of 2 year-olds were enrolled in a centre-based setting in the formal education sector in 2021, over two-thirds of 3 year-olds, and almost all 4 and 5 year-olds (see *Table 4*).

Table 4

Luxembourg: Number and enrolment rates of children in centre-based ECEC settings, by age, 2021

Age	Number of children in ISCED-02 settings	Enrolment rates in ISCED-02 settings, in %
Under 2 years	n.d.	
2 year-olds	176	2.6
3 year-olds	4,593	67.9
4 year-olds	6,700	99.6
5 year-olds	6,364	93.8
6 year-olds	406	5.8

Source: Eurostat 2023f, k

Table 5 shows the development of enrolment figures in **formal education institutions** (cycle 1, 3 to 6 year-olds). Over the last ten years, the proportion of 3-year-olds attending a non-compulsory early education group (*éducation précoce*) increased slightly. In 2017, over 87% of 3 year-olds were enrolled in an early education group (OECD 2022a). Due to compulsory education, it can be assumed that 100% of the 4 and 5 year-olds attended an early education group or pre-primary class respectively.

Table 5

Luxembourg: Number of enrolments and enrolment rates in formal ECEC settings

School year	Cycle 1			
	Éducation précoce Early education groups for 3 year-olds		*Éducation préscolaire* Pre-primary groups/primary school classes for 4 to 6 year-olds	
	Number	Share of 3 year-olds in %	Number	Share of 4 to 6 year-olds in %
2010/2011	3,961	67.8	10,195	100 (= statutory schooling)
2015/2016	4,183	64.5	11,027	100 (= statutory schooling)
2021/2022	4,587	67.4	12,699	100 (= statutory schooling)

Source: MENJE 2023b, 127

Drawing on survey data completed by parents on their first graders' ECEC enrolment between 2009 and 2019, a LUCET report of the University and the MENJE found that 53% of the children had attended early education (formal education) in addition to a *crèche* (non-formal education), 29% had only attended *crèche*, and 17% had only attended early education. Only 0.6% had attended no institution (Hornung et al. 2023, 33).

Financing and costs for parents

A total of 0.94% of the gross domestic product was spent on the early education sector in 2019 (OECD 2023).

Since their introduction in 2009, CSA vouchers (*chèques-service accueil*) entitle parents to three hours of free childcare, music or sport per week, regardless of their income. This contributed significantly to lowering parents' childcare costs and increasing demand. Since 2016, this entitlement has also applied to cross-border commuters and to institutions abroad if they meet the same quality standards as in Luxembourg. In addition, the free childcare hours were increased to 20 hours for 1- to 4-year-old children. The vouchers are valid for institutions that are recognised by the Ministry of Education as CSA service providers and are valid until the end of primary

school. These services are also used to supplement early education attendance for 3 to 4 year-olds. More than 60 hours per week per child are not subsidised and the state subsidy is a maximum of €6 per hour, plus a maximum of €4.50 per meal.

Through the 2018 amended law on *mini-crèches*, the state also subsidises childcare costs for children up to 12 years of age through the CSA vouchers. In addition to the state subsidy, *mini-crèches* receive an additional €0.71 per child per hour for participating in multilingual education sessions.

In 2022, a total of 55,593 children up to 12 years of age participated in the CSA model, with an additional 3,301 from border areas (MENJE 2023b, 20).

In ECEC settings in the **non-formal sector**, some types of facilities are subsidised by the state up to 75%, others up to 100% of the operating costs. The differences depend on various factors, including who paid for the buildings (state or municipality). Differences are covered by the municipality or the respective provider.

Private ECEC settings are financed through the CSA vouchers only; all other costs have to be covered by the setting providers. For low-income parents, costs for additional care are reduced. Since the introduction of childcare vouchers, take-up has increased considerably, especially in non-formal facilities without a contract with the state. Nevertheless, especially in these facilities the costs can be very high, as the fees are not regulated.

From 2022, out-of-school hours spent in non-formal facilities have been free of charge for parents between 7:00 and 19:00 (OECD 2022a).

According to the Ministry of Education, the system of CSA is an important instrument of social justice as the risk of poverty of children decreased by about 6% (STATEC 2019). However, the number of hours that children spent in a *Maison Relais* has not increased significantly albeit them having become free of charge since September 2022 (MENJE 2023c).

Formal educational settings (*précoce*) are free of charge for parents of children over 3 years old, except for meals. Municipalities bear the costs of public primary schools and receive state funding, mainly for salaries. Private schools receive some state subsidies, even if they do not operate according to the national framework plan, but in this case they are calculated differently. Parents pay fees that are set by the institution and are usually much higher than in public institutions. Costs for infrastructure and equipment are borne by the municipalities; the state contributes to the financing with annual budgets and personnel costs.

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 6% of net household income on childcare costs[4] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

Staff to child ratios depend on the age of the children (see *Table 6*).

In *mini-crèches*, a maximum of 11 children under 12 years of age may be enrolled at the same time, with a maximum of four children under 1 year of age.

Home-based child carers can look after five other children in addition to their own, with a maximum of two children under 2 years of age.

[4] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

Table 6

Luxembourg: Staff to child ratios and maximum group size in non-formal ECEC settings

Age	Max. number of children per group	Max. number of children per team member	Max. number of children per core practitioner
Under 2 year-olds	12	6	6
2 year-olds	16	8	8
3 year-olds	20	10	20
4 and 5 year-olds	24	24	24

Source: Eurydice 2023, 4.2

In the voluntary *éducation précoce*, the maximum is 20 children per core practitioner and one assistant; in the compulsory *éducation préscolaire*, there are on average 16 children per qualified staff member (SNJ 2020, 3).

Curricular frameworks

The curricular frameworks for both sectors in Luxembourg emphasise children's agency and view children as co-constructors of knowledge, identity, culture and values. Both take a plurilingual approach, recognising all children's multilingual potential (OECD 2021, 61f.).

Non-formal education and care sector

In 2017, the national framework for the non-formal sector for children under 3 (*Cadre de référence national sur l'éducation non formelle des enfants et des jeunes*) was issued with four annexes. It is mandatory for all state-subsidised institutions as well as for home-based childcare workers participating in the CSA voucher system. In 2018, a further addendum was added with guidelines for multilingual education. This is intended to give children contact with different languages at an early age and to facilitate language learning. Great emphasis is placed on regarding children as individuals with a unique educational background, on seeing them as social and cultural beings and as equal members of society. Educational work is seen as competence-oriented and aims to promote children's self-determination, participation and responsibility. The main characteristics of non-formal education are, among others, learning by doing, process-oriented and cooperative learning, openness to the needs of the children and participation. Areas of development and learning include social relationships, motor activities, gender education, languages, communication and media, creativity, environment and technology, values, democracy and interculturality.

In the 2021 revision, the individual parts became more closely aligned and more emphasis was placed on participation, children's rights and transitions. Furthermore, multilingual education has been integrated into the main document as multilingualism is considered a transversal mission of non-formal education. Unlike in the formal sector, however, the focus here is not on competences to be achieved.

The National Youth Service (*Service National de la Jeunesse* SNJ) is responsible for the development and implementation of the plan (OECD 2022a).

Institutions for children under the age of 3 draw up their own education plan on the basis of this national framework (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 97).

Formal education sector

Educational guidelines for children from the age of 3 (*plan-cadre pour l'éducation précoce*) and in the 1st cycle of primary school are set out in a compulsory framework plan (*Plan d'études*

pour les quatre cycles de l'enseignement fondamental, 2011) which specifies the skills to be achieved at the end of each cycle.

The 1st cycle of primary school includes the following learning areas: logical and mathematical reasoning, languages (Luxembourgish, French), discovering the world with all the senses, body expression and health, creative expression and community life. Cross-cutting (learning dispositions, attitudes to relationships and emotions, media literacy) and especially linguistic competences are also defined here. The main objective is to develop multilingual and multicultural awareness and to improve knowledge and skills in different languages, including those that are not languages of instruction.

Digital education

From September 2021, the strategy for the development of digital competences in school education ("*einfach digital – Zukunftskompetenze fir staark Kanner*") presented by the Ministry of Education in 2020 has also been implemented in the 1st cycle. The task of the professionals is to introduce children to digital media in an age-appropriate way. In doing so, the key competences of the "5Cs" are to be observed: Critical thinking, Creativity, Communication, Cooperation, Coding/programming (*kritescht Denken*, *Kreativitéit, Kommunikatioun, Kooperatioun, Kodéieren)*. The children should be guided to research independently, to look for solutions and to assess information. They should learn to discuss with one another and learn together with the help of digital media. The best approach is seen as one that promotes playful learning, independence, active participation and the enthusiasm of the children. This comprehensive approach proposed by the Ministry of Education follows the guidelines of a so-called media compass (*Guide de référence pour l'éducation aux et par les médias*) and offers practical support to professionals. The guide includes 16 competences based on the "5Cs", which can be used to build media and digital literacy step by step throughout the course of education (MENJE 2021).

Monitoring – evaluation

Child-related assessment

Only formative assessment is used for children below the age of 3.

In Cycle 1, children are formatively assessed on a quarterly basis (*bilans intermédiaires*), then summatively at the end of the cycle (*bilan de fin de cycle*). Formative evaluation is based on observation and documentation of children's development and learning and is designed to improve performance. The teacher or class team members evaluate the children's work and learning progress in relation to the competences and objectives set out in the national curriculum. Parents are also involved in this exchange about learning progress. At the end of the 1st cycle, it can then be shown that the basic competences have been achieved. The children receive a personal evaluation portfolio. To support the pre-primary teachers, the Ministry of Education has issued an observation instrument and guidelines on formative assessment.

The pre-primary setting usually decides on whether the child is ready to start primary school. If parents have a different opinion on this, the final decision is made by the regional director of education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 107).

Centre-level internal assessment

For the formal sector, school development plans (*plans de réussite scolaire*) are drawn up every four years as part of self-evaluation procedures. A setting analysis is prepared, based on the

recommendations of the district school director (previously called “inspector”) and the quality agency as well as the specifications of the ministry. In addition to providing quantitative data on finances, equipment and infrastructure, they also describe the strengths and weaknesses of the respective setting.

Institutions that receive state funding are obliged to carry out self-evaluation. A new self-evaluation tool developed by the SNJ is currently being tested in a pilot project. It is planned that the self-evaluation results will also be included in the external evaluations (OECD 2022a).

The results of the self-evaluations, which also take into account the children's views and experiences, are also used to review the institution's pedagogical plan (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 103f, 128).

External Evaluation

– *Non-formal sector*

Supervision and quality monitoring at all levels of the education system is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry also organises the accreditation of providers, which is regulated by law.

The National Youth Service (*Service National de la Jeunesse, SNJ*), created in 1964, together with the ministerial Department for Children (*Direction générale du secteur de l’enfance*), ensures the control and monitoring of the quality of education in the non-formal sector (OECD 2022a). In 2016, they decided on two main criteria for the evaluation of non-formal institutions: structural quality (e.g. staffing ratio, group size, infrastructure) and process quality (pedagogical approaches, activities, child and professional interactions). The structural quality of non-formal settings is also regulated by the previously mentioned ASFT Act of 1998. Measures for pedagogical, structural and process quality assurance are anchored in the Youth Act (*Loi sur la jeunesse*, 2008, with amendments from 2016): Private providers of ECEC settings that are allowed to accept service vouchers or receive public funds on the basis of a service agreement with the state are obliged to develop a centre-specific conceptual plan on the basis of the national framework. This should describe the implementation of pedagogical goals, measures of self-evaluation and the CPD plans of the professionals and be published on the setting’s website. The conceptual plan is valid for three years. In addition, a so-called logbook (*journal de bord*) is required which contains daily and weekly documentation, but also describes the distribution of tasks in the facility as well as the activities with the children and the participation of the professionals in CPD. Professional staff are required to participate in at least 32 hours of CPD over a period of two years (if employed full-time).

The external evaluation of ECEC settings is carried out twice a year by about 30 regional coordinators (*agents regionaux*). They also check the logbook and the CPD participation of the professionals and whether the objectives set in the curriculum for non-formal education are met. Non-formal settings only qualify for state subsidies if they can explain their quality assurance measures, have a general conceptual plan and implement the national framework.

On the basis of these visits, the regional coordinators draw up written reports, which also include comments from the provider. Since the end of 2021, indicators have been developed on the basis of which the regional coordinators are to write their reports within the framework of six quality dimensions (staff, infrastructure and equipment, interaction with children, pedagogical offer, relations with parents, management) (OECD 2022a).

– *Formal education sector*

For the formal sector, a quality agency (*Service de Coordination de la Recherche et de l'Innovation pédagogiques et technologiques* – SCRIPT) was established in 2009. Among other things, it

supports primary schools in evaluating their performance and in drawing up a conceptual plan for quality development. The agency is integrated into the Ministry of Education and works closely with the University of Luxembourg. External evaluations of the compulsory pre-primary groups are carried out at least twice a year. The overarching supervision lies with the Department of Primary Education (*Direction générale de l'enseignement fondamental*) (OECD 2022a).

Since 2018, there is also an independent national school quality observatory (*L'Observatoire national de la qualité scolaire*, ONQS) for the entire school system. A national report is published every three years.

Primary schools have been required since 2017/18 to draw up a school development plan (*plan de développement de l'établissements scolaire*, PDS) with six areas. National targets are set for each of these areas. 15 teachers specialised in school development are assigned to the quality agency SCRIPT to review the PDS and focus on the following areas: Quality improvement of learning, support for children with special needs, organisation of pedagogical support, cooperation with parents, integration of information and communication technologies and cooperation with the relevant education and care service.

The quality of education provided by private, state-subsidised institutions is monitored by national authorities. At the regional level, 15 directorates are responsible for the pedagogical supervision of the schools, the administrative management and the implementation of the school development plans (SNJ 2020).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

In the **non-formal sector**, since 2009, children with special needs have a legal entitlement to attend a public educational institution and participate in education according to their individual needs. Only 1% of children attend a separate support institution. In 2017, this entitlement was extended to ensure that children receive the support they are entitled to as quickly as possible. To this end, multi-professional teams can provide support and centres that specialise in the needs of these children (European Commission 2021, 103).

In the **formal sector**, the law stipulates that children with special educational needs receive all the support they need and are only offered a place in a support facility if this is not sufficient. This means that whenever possible children are admitted first to a mainstream institution. In some cases, special needs facilities are integrated into the buildings of the regular facilities. The group size in the facilities depends on the respective needs of the children.

At the municipal level, staff from the multi-professional service for special education (*service d'éducation différenciée*) also provide mobile support. A regional commission for school inclusion (*Commission d'inclusion scolaire*) draws up a diagnosis for each child according to his or her needs and, in cooperation with the teacher and parents, an individual education plan (*plan d'éducation individualisé*), which describes goals and further development steps.

Since 2017, inclusive institutions (in the non-formal and formal sector) receive financial support. In addition, different support modalities exist at national level (eight centres of excellence for different impairments and a national inclusion committee), regional level (15 directorates with a coordinating director) and local level (support teachers working with class teachers) (SNJ 2020).

In 2018, in addition to the five existing centres, four new specialist centres in educational psychology (*centres de compétences en psycho-pédagogie spécialisée*) were established to provide

further support and monitoring and are part of the government's strategy for inclusion in education. The focus of the new centres includes learning and behavioural difficulties, and giftedness.

Children with a background of migration

Luxembourg has three national languages: Luxembourgish, French and German. Multilingualism is therefore an important part in all areas of life and needs also to be given a high priority in early childhood. A holistic, child-centred approach in the formal sector aims to introduce children to other languages through play, supported by pedagogical coordinators (*référent:e pédagogique pour l'éducation plurilingue*) who are fluent in Luxembourgish, French or German. A multilingual education programme was also launched in the non-formal sector in 2017 (OECD 2022a).

In 2022, almost half of the total population held a non-Luxembourgish citizenship (47.1%), as well as children under 5 (47.2%). The majority (80.8%) of these persons came from other EU countries, with a similar proportion (77.1%) in the under-5s group (Eurostat 2023c).

Broken down by country of origin, according to national statistics, more than three quarters (78.4%) of the total population in 2023 were EU citizens. Of these, 37.5% were from Portugal, 20% from France and 7.8% from Belgium. Persons from Ukraine made up 1.7% of the foreign population and were the largest group of immigrants in 2022 (4,268), ahead of persons from Portugal (3,633) and France (3,107). In total, there were 180 nationalities in Luxembourg in 2023, eight of which came from the EU. The largest groups from non-EU countries are people from Ukraine and India (Le Portail Statistique 2023a, b).

In 2021/22, 55.8% of the children attending *cycle 1 – précoce* spoke Luxembourgish as their first language followed by 10.3% speaking Portuguese and 8.5% speaking French as their first language. In the same year, Luxembourgish was the first language for 54.6% of children enrolled in *cycle 1 – préscolaire* followed by 14.3% speaking Portuguese and 6.3% speaking French (MENJE 2023a, 22, 27). However, the linguistic repertoires vary considerably if the children's home languages are added rather than focusing on their first languages only (see section on *Current Challenges*).

For immigrant parents and their children, there is information in several languages and the possibility of using an intercultural mediator. On account of the relatively high proportion of Portuguese children (according to Eurostat data 2022, 11.5% of under 5 year-olds), a family language assistant can be present in the class for a certain number of hours. Furthermore, some teachers switch to children's family languages when teaching. In many studies, translanguaging is suggested as a strategy to incorporate the family language and cultural background, as this contributes to the development of the whole semiotic repertoire. Professionals switch spontaneously between languages during play, storytelling or reading aloud (see also Kirsch 2021 and the research section of the ECEC Workforce Profile for Luxembourg, De Moll et al. 2024). Other teachers use children's home languages to value and further develop them as it is understood that mastering the first language facilitates learning the language of instruction. The respect of the family language is part of the programme of multilingual education that resulted from the amendment to the 2016 Education Act. Since 2017, all children are introduced French as a second language and potentially encounter their peers' family languages (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 116f; SNJ 2020).

Finally, teachers can use two language support programmes developed mainly for Portuguese-speaking pre-primary children. The first language development programme MOLLY (Mother-tongue Oral Language and Literacy for the Young) lasts 30 weeks and promotes, among other

things, the vocabulary, narrative and phonological skills in the children's first language. The reading support programme LALA (*Lauter lëschteg Lauter*), which was developed especially for multilingual children, is primarily intended to support children who show a risk of reading or spelling difficulties in the first cycle before entering primary school. The aim is not to pre-empt reading skills, but to awaken the anticipation of reading (University of Luxembourg 2018, 133f).

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Compulsory **Maternity leave** (*congé de maternité*) lasts 20 weeks, eight of which must be taken before the birth, 12 after the birth. A sum of €12,541.18 (equivalent to five times the minimum wage of an unskilled worker) is paid per month. The condition is that the mother must have been a member of a social insurance scheme for at least six months during the year preceding the birth.

Paternity leave (*Pappecongé, congé extraordinaire*) amounts to ten working days, of which the first two days are paid in full by the employer. For the remaining days, the employer receives reimbursement from the state based on a maximum of €12,541.18 per month.

Parental leave (*congé parental*) is granted for four to 20 months per parent (depending on the hours worked and the option chosen). It is an individual, non-transferable entitlement. Full-time employed parents (40 hours per week) can choose between different options in terms of duration and payment: (1) take four or six months of full-time parental leave, (2) choose eight or 12 months of part-time parental leave, (3) four months within a maximum period of 20 months, or (4) one day per week for a maximum of 20 months. For parents working part-time (20 hours per week), the first two options are available. Parents who work 10 hours a week or are in training can choose option 1. Both parents can take parental leave at the same time. The pay depends on income, average hours worked in the last year before parental leave and the option chosen. For example, full-time employees who choose option 1 receive between €2,508.24 and €4,180.39 per month. The prerequisite is that the parent has worked continuously for at least one year before the start of parental leave.

Since 2016, the number of fathers taking parental leave has been increasing and exceeded the number of mothers (7,160 fathers vs. 5,529 mothers) in 2022. However, mothers and fathers took different parental leave options: 68% of mothers chose the full-time version, 21% the part-time version and 11% options 3 and 4. In contrast, 30% of fathers took full-time parental leave, 22% the part-time version and 48% options 3 and 4.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Luxembourg

*Country expert assessment by **Claudine Kirsch***

Since the last SEEPRO report, the Luxembourg population has grown more and more diverse with **monolingual children now a minority**. This complex and ever-evolving cultural and linguistic diversity poses considerable socio-political and educational challenges for Luxembourg and the ECEC system (ONQS 2022). These will be outlined following a brief consideration of the current situation, which differs considerably from that in other European countries. While the following paragraph focuses on children's plurilingual repertoire, it is clear that language diversity

[5] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Luxembourg by Frédéric Berger Ioana Salagean and Marie Valentova in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

is only one of many characteristics of children's heterogeneous experiences and living conditions.

A recent survey of 8,342 parents of 10,090 children aged 0–4 shows that the most frequently spoken languages at home are Luxembourgish (54.1%), French (15.8%), and Portuguese (12.0%), with most children speaking two languages (SNJ 2023a). Two-thirds of the parents claimed they spoke two or more languages with their children, most frequently combining Luxembourgish and French or French with English. According to the parents, however, the children did not always use the same language(s) with the parents as the parents use with them. When speaking to siblings, two-thirds of the children used only one language, in the main Luxembourgish or French. About 15% of the siblings were reported to communicate in Luxembourgish although their parents did not speak this language. The linguistic profiles become even more diverse and complex when one considers children's exposure to books, music, and television as the role of German and English grows considerably. Finally, given that 61% of children attended early childhood institutions in 2019 (Hornung et al. 2023) and that these centres have a multilingual policy, children have additional opportunities to encounter and develop languages[6]. According to Hornung et al. (2023), children encounter much Luxembourgish and some French in *crèches*, listening to the languages either separately or in combination. This finding helps us understand why 73.9% of parents reported in the SNJ survey that their children were exposed to Luxembourgish on account of the languages used at home and in ECEC. The role of ECEC settings in familiarising children with Luxembourgish is thus significant as only 55.7% of children were exposed to Luxembourgish at home (SNJ 2023a). Similarly, 61.5% of children are reported to encounter French (and 17.0% German) at home, but 74.3% (and 23.0%) were in contact with French (and German) in ECEC centres (SNJ 2023b, 30). A survey with parents of first graders aged 6 shows similar findings, indicating that about half of the children encountered Luxembourgish at home when they were 3 years old, although only a third of them spoke it as their first language (Hornung et al. 2023). Luxembourgish appears to be the main language of communication among first graders who enter a multilingual education system where they develop literacy in German, continue to develop oral French, and are taught in German or Luxembourgish, depending on the subject.

This multilingual education system is highly challenging and does not offer the equal opportunities the Ministry of Education aims for. Each year, evaluation reports show that children of families of lower socioeconomic status, migration background, or children whose home languages differ from the instruction languages, do not reach the required minimum standard in German reading and comprehension and in mathematics in cycle 3 (Hoffmann et al. 2018; Hornung et al. 2021). Based on the vision that "every child has a right to a high-quality education", the Education Ministry recently took several measures to strengthen equal opportunities (MENJE 2023c). For instance, non-formal education is now free of charge, all children have free meals, and a national network of resource centres and a national plan for help with homework have been instituted. Furthermore, there are currently six state-run European international primary schools, some with preschools, and six state-run European international secondary schools that offer tuition through the medium of English, French, Portuguese or German. Perhaps as a consequence of the programme of multilingual education and the dominance of French, the Ministry launched a pilot project in 2022 to help children to become literate in French and to teach maths in French.

Next, we outline some challenges particular to the ECEC system in Luxembourg.

[6] Since the introduction of *the éducation plurilingue* in 2017, practitioners in both the formal sector (early education and pre-primary) and the non-formal sector have to familiarise children with Luxembourgish and French and value their home languages.

1. An evaluation of the ECEC system (Hornung et al. 2023) shows that children benefit academically if they attend an ECEC setting. The findings are based on tests in Luxembourgish and German listening comprehension, early literacy, and maths, which children took in year 1, a few months after having finished pre-primary education. The results show that children scored highest in these tests when they had attended both early education (*précoce*) and an ECEC service. Their scores were slightly lower when they attended either early education or a childcare setting and lowest when they did not attend any ECEC institution. Children from a Luxembourgish-speaking background and from families with higher socio-economic backgrounds outperformed other children. Performances were mostly influenced by family background variables (e.g., socioeconomic status, home language) and child-related variables (e.g., age, gender). The results confirm that not all children benefit equally from ECEC and that the Education Ministry needs to continue to invest in equal opportunities.
2. To improve the effectiveness of ECEC provision, it is necessary to increase continuity between the formal and non-formal sector with a view to reflecting on similarities and differences between pedagogical approaches in both domains. Apart from helping children develop and learn, the discussion contributes to the current debates on the meaning of "non-formal education" and the potential "schoolification" of the non-formal sector. It may also encourage professionals from both sectors to collaborate. According to the National Observatory of Educational Quality (ONQS), professionals do not show the necessary respect for other ECEC institutions and are not willing enough to consider other viewpoints and integrate them in their own work (ONQS 2022).
3. In relation to the programme of multilingual education, more continuity between the formal and non-formal sectors could guarantee that language skills and positive attitudes towards languages developed in ECEC are built upon in primary schools (MENJE 2023c).
4. Home-based childcare providers, primarily female, represent a special category of early childhood personnel and play an essential role in Luxembourg in what is essentially an ethnically segregated childcare market. Therefore, if the ECEC system is to improve social inclusion, the position of these home-based carers must be clarified and regulated within it.
5. Standardisation appears to be an issue, particularly regarding public and private providers in the non-formal sector. The lack of standardisation regarding the professionals' skills and the diversity of human and material resources in ECEC institutions may be instrumental in creating early inequality.
6. According to the OECD (2022b), the quality of the ECEC services varies greatly and this diversity makes it difficult to define national criteria to monitor, evaluate and improve quality.
7. In the last years, the SNJ has instituted several measures to monitor and evaluate quality in ECEC: the national framework; the statutory requirement to write a pedagogical concept every three years that is validated by the regional coordinators; the statutory requirement to document pedagogical activities in a logbook; the statutory requirement for all staff to take 32 hours of CPD over two years. A recent survey with educators in the non-formal sector, parental assistants, and regional coordinators indicated that they all agreed that the quality of the pedagogical practice has improved (MENJE 2023c). The survey results furthermore showed that there is a need for a simplification of the national framework and of the structure of the logbook, for more guidance on how to write the pedagogical concept, as well as for more CPD. The SNJ is addressing all these issues

and, as a consequence, one could expect more monitoring and higher quality in the years to come.

8. On account of the split ECEC system (formal versus non-formal; state versus private), the very different working contexts and conditions (e.g. languages of children and staff, expectations) and the various organisational and pedagogical orientations, the multilingual education programme is implemented in different ways both in the formal and the non-formal sector and within institutions of the non-formal sector. There is a need to research the outcomes of the programme in the formal sector. Some studies in the non-formal centre provide insights into the implementation and the language use in the organisations. While studies (Kirsch and Aleksić 2021; Kirsch and Bergeron-Morin 2023) have shown that language practices in ECEC centres have become more diverse, they have also pointed to existing language hierarchies. Furthermore, they confirm that some professionals continue to be unsure of how to implement the programme and some report lacking competences in Luxembourgish. This is particularly the case in large commercial centres where many French-speaking professionals commute daily from the neighbouring countries to work in Luxembourg. These centres, which offer lower wages, find it challenging to recruit Luxembourgish-speaking staff who communicate or offer activities in this language. These findings show that the policy remains difficult to implement in similar ways in all settings. Furthermore, the differing conditions make it difficult to give professionals guidelines on how best to implement the programme.
9. The multilingual education programme aims to contribute to equal opportunities by giving all children better starting positions. The policy has, however, been criticised for its vague and unclear goals as well as for the absence of instruction in German which would help prepare all children for literacy development in primary school (Hornung et al. 2023). The current focus on Luxembourgish and French in ECEC could legitimise existing language hierarchies and privilege Luxembourgish as well as Luxembourgish-speaking children (Simoes 2023). It seems that a clarification of the goals of the multilingual education programme is necessary. This may also contribute to ease of implementation.
10. On account of the high language diversity, it is difficult to identify “the best” way to take account of and build on children’s language repertoires in the formal and non-formal sectors. While individualisation and differentiation are key principles in non-formal education (MENJE and SNJ 2021, 23), there is a need to help professionals systematically observe and document children's language practices to offer differentiated linguistic support (SNJ 2023a).
11. Inclusion is an important aim in the formal and non-formal sectors. In the latter, it is hoped that ECEC institutions develop inclusive practices with the help of the pedagogical coordinators in the forthcoming years, similar to the implementation of the programme of multilingual education. Given that the tasks of the ECEC professionals continue to grow, it is essential to guarantee that all staff are well-qualified and have access to continuous guidance and training. This is even more crucial in Luxembourg where the workforce is highly heterogeneous in relation to their social, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, qualification, country of qualification, citizenship, and country of residence (Honig and Bock 2018).
12. As seen above, the quality of initial professional education is important. There are, however, currently neither study programmes for teachers to become early years specialists nor for educators to develop this specialist profile. Furthermore, as in many other European countries, Luxembourg is currently experiencing challenges in the recruitment and retention of staff.

13. There was little consistency in the quality of CPD programmes. As a consequence, the National Youth Service now coordinates its quality. While continuing this effort, it is crucial also to 'train the trainers' and regional coordinators (*agents régionaux*).
14. Over the last years, the quality of ECEC has begun to be researched and monitored. There are, however, still few qualitative and quantitative studies of the non-formal sector and there is a need for a national database including all sectors, to guarantee sustained monitoring and contribute towards high-quality provision (Hadjar et al. 2021; Honig et al. 2015; Hornung et al. 2023).

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Luxembourg was 645,397. Population numbers have increased steadily over the last 20 years (2000: 433,600, 2010: 502,066, 2020: 626,108) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total birth rate in the EU27(2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries (EU27+6) was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.38, Luxembourg was below the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[7].

Children under age 6

Table 7
Luxembourg: Number of children under age 6 in the population, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year	6,671
1 year-olds	6,670
2 year-olds	6,724
3 year-olds	6,803
4 year-olds	6,857
5 year-olds	6,832
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**40,557**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

The proportion of children under 3 years of age in the total population was 3.1% in 2022, and that of children under 6 years of age was 6.3%. These shares were well above the EU average in

[7] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

2000 and remained that way, though they fell considerably during the next two decades (see *Table 8*).

Table 8

Luxembourg: Share of children under 6 years compared with the EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %

Year	Comparison Luxembourg/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Luxembourg	3.8	4.1	7.9
	∅ EU15[8]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Luxembourg	3.5	3.8	7.3
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Luxembourg	3.3	3.4	6.7
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Luxembourg	3.1	3.2	6.3
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

81.7% of households with children under 6 were couple households in Luxembourg in 2022. Households with single parents accounted for only 2.2% – the majority of them single mothers (1.5%).

Table 9

Luxembourg: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %+
Total households	66,700	
Couple households	54,500	81.7
Other types of households	10,700	16.0
Total single households	1,500	2.2
Single households, women	1,000	1.5
Single households, men	500**	0.7

Source: Eurostat 2023j, *Own calculations, ** data calculated

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Luxembourg, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 76.4% and for women 70.4% (Eurostat 2023e).

In 2022, 81.9% of women and 90.4% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were thus above the EU EU-

[8] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

average (87.2%); those of mothers were the highest in the EU27 (average 63.6%) (Eurostat 2023g).

Table 10a

Luxembourg: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2021

	2010	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Luxembourg	67.4	93.4
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[9]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Luxembourg	81.9	90.4
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[10]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023g

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 10b:*

Table 10b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023)
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023g

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

***Rosstat. 2022. *Statistical annex SDG in Russia 2022.* https://eng.rosstat.gov.ru/sdg/report/document/70355;
BRICS. 2023. *Joint Statistical Publication 2023.* https://brics2023.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/BRICS-2023-JSP_Final_Web.pdf

[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[10] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

[+][SSSU] State Statistics Service of Ukraine. 2022. *Employed population in 2021, by age group, sex and place of residence.* https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2017/rp/eans/eanse/Archznsmve.htm

[++]Statista. 2023. *Employment rate in the United Kingdom from June 1971 to January 2023, by gender*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/280120/employment-rate-in-the-uk-by-gender/

[+++]Office for National Statistics. 2023. *Families and the labour market, UK: 2021.* https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2021

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[11]

In 2022, 22% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was below the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 19.4% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 2.4% of children under 6 and 1.6% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023h, i).

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[11] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Materialdeprivation)

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

MALTA

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

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Introductory note: Overview

Administrative responsibility for childcare services catering for under threes was transferred from the Department for Social Welfare Standards, within the then Ministry for the Family & Social Solidarity, to the Ministry for Education and Employment on July 1st 2016. This was a laudable move which brought all services associated to early childhood education and care under one entity. However, thus far this has resulted in it being merely an administrative shift, where childcare services have been added on to the responsibilities of staff within various departments at the Ministry for Education.

Shifting the administration of childcare settings to the Ministry for Education was in part motivated by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (MEDE 2012) which foresaw an early years cycle that promotes the education and care for 0 to 7 year-olds. Bringing all services under one ministry had also been a recommendation in policy documents (MEDE 2013) in line with one of the OECD (2001) conclusions. However, in what appears to be an absence of a conceptual understanding of what the early years cycle implies in relation to the potential benefits of high-quality settings requiring highly trained staff skilled in managing, leading and working with young children and families, a decade later the ECEC services in Malta still comprise three distinct stages, namely:

1. Non-compulsory childcare services for under threes
2. Non-compulsory kindergarten settings for 3 to 5 year-olds and
3. The first two years of compulsory school, for 5 to 7 year-olds, traditionally and currently still part of the six-year compulsory primary cycle[1].

The distinct nature of the three stages is reinforced by policies and practices which contribute to fragmentation, making it difficult to establish a unified early years sector.

1. No single directorate is explicitly tasked with all matters related to ECEC.
2. Regulations for licensing a childcare setting are different to those which apply for kindergarten settings. Licences to operate a kindergarten are identical to those applied to schools.
3. Unlike childcare settings, most kindergarten settings are located within primary schools and this has had an impact on how kindergartens are perceived and how they operate. Despite childcare and kindergarten services being non-compulsory, the latter has been and continues to be perceived as a downward extension of compulsory school. In addition, the length of the 'school day', holidays, certain practices and routines, the sharing of physical resources (such as playgrounds), pedagogies associated with 'schoolification' and academic work and expectations about what kindergarten children should achieve before compulsory school, have all impacted the functioning of kindergartens.
4. Staff qualifications and working conditions are another example of the dissonance across the early years provision. Qualified, graduate teachers (EQF 6 and EQF 7) are recruited to work with children from the age of 5 whereas in childcare and kindergarten, EQF Level 4 qualifications are the norm. As will be illustrated elsewhere in this chapter, minimum qualifications required of staff within kindergarten settings are beginning to improve with an EQF Level 5 qualification being the minimum expected since 2021. An EQF Level 6 qualification in early

[1] For the purpose of this report, attention will be given to the workforce engaged with the under 5 year-olds. Where necessary and to help readers contextualise and position the information about childcare and kindergarten practitioners, salient differences between the non-compulsory and compulsory sectors of the Early Years Cycle will be included.

years is also available for kindergarten educators (KGEs) but this is not recognised as a teaching qualification and therefore salaries for staff employed at kindergarten, even with an EQF Level 6, are lower than those who have an EQF Level 6 teaching qualification.

5. Top-up courses offered by different entities are providing practitioners already in employment the opportunity to improve their qualifications. Such improvements lead to mobility away from childcare settings towards kindergarten and even primary school, where working conditions, salaries and career path mobility are more attractive.

The rapid growth in the number of childcare settings for under threes which has occurred in the last decade is set to continue. The introduction of the Free Childcare Scheme in April 2014 targeted children and families where parents were working or studying. This was explicitly motivated by labour force demands and the need to increase female participation in the work force. In reporting to the Parliamentary Committee for Family Affairs (2023b), the CEO of JobsPlus claimed that the desired increase has definitely been achieved: from 51.7% of 20–64 year-old women in employment in 2014, there are currently 75.2% of women in the labour market, leading to a situation where not only has this 23.5% growth been achieved in just under ten years, but Malta currently surpasses the EU27 average by over 5% points. Free childcare provision is expected to be available for everybody. One of the electoral proposals made by the Labour Party in its March 2022 manifesto (MLP 2022, 68) relates to making childcare freely available to any child, irrespective of parents' economic activity. Once again in the history of early childhood education services in Malta, the sector will experience a situation where primary consideration is given to availability and accessibility of services without due attention being given to the quality of the learning experiences being offered or to ensuring that highly qualified staff are available.

Retrieving data about the staff and the qualifications of Childcare and Kindergarten Educators (KGEs) remains a challenge since relevant data are maintained by different entities. Within the childcare system, where staff turnover is a regular feature, there is no obligatory reporting system in place for staff mobility or termination of employment. Data about childcare employees are collated by the managers ahead of the annual external audit and reviewed by Education Officers (EOs) within the Education Review Section (ERS) at the DQSE during their visit. Data about KGEs are collected by the Education Resources Department within the Directorate for Educational Services (DES). Information is collected annually at the beginning of each scholastic year from the State and the two non-State sectors (Church and Independent (Private) schools) to compile the School Statistical Returns (SSR) report. Schools must provide information about all employees, irrespective whether they are new or continuing members of staff.

Most of the data used for this report were obtained between May 2021 and July 2022 and were made available upon request. The assistance offered by staff from several departments and entities is gratefully acknowledged (see Chapter *Acknowledgements* at the end of this report).

Abbreviations used in this report

BA	Bachelor of Arts	MEYR	Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation
B.Ed.	Bachelor in Education	MFED	Ministry for Education
CACHE	Council for Awards in Health, Care and Education	MFHEA	Malta Further and Higher Education Authority
CCPA	Childcare Centre Providers Association	MFSS	Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity
CDEC	Centre for Child Development, Education and Care Studies	MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
CDAU	Child Development Assessment Unit		

CoPE	Community of Professional Educators	MQRIC	Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre
CPD	Continuing Professional Development	MTL	Master in Teaching and Learning
DES	Directorate for Educational Services	MUT	Malta Union of Teachers
DQSE	Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education	NCFHE	National Commission for Further and Higher Education
EO	Education Officer	NSSS	National School Support Services
ERD	Education Resources Department	NOS	National Occupational Standards
ERS	Education Review Section	POMA	Protection of Minors Act
ETC	Employment Training Corporation	RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
FES	Foundation for Educational Services	RCS	Regulatory and Compliance Section
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation	SMT	Senior Management Team
IfE	Institute for Education	SSR	School Statistical Returns
IPE	Initial Professional Education	UHM	Union Ħaddiema Magħqudin
KGE	Kindergarten Educator	UM	University of Malta
LRP	Legally Responsible Person		
LSE	Learning Support Educator		
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology		
MEDE	Ministry for Education and Employment		

1. ECEC governance in Malta

The Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR) has overall responsibility for educational direction, policy development and decision-making. Within the Ministry, directorates relevant for ECEC include:

1. The Directorate for Educational Services (DES) which, among others, includes a department for Educational Resources and a department for National School Support Services (NSSS). The latter includes psycho-social services and inclusive education support. These services are available for children of all ages and their families in any education sector (Church, State and Independent schools); and
2. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) which acts as the regulatory body for all educational institutions (State, Church and Independent) at all levels of education, from childcare and kindergarten through compulsory primary and secondary school (0–16) and is responsible for establishing quality standards. This Directorate comprises two sections relevant to the early years, namely the Regulatory and Compliance Section (RCS) and the Education Review Section (ERS) (DQSE 2023a).

Childcare services

According to the latest list of childcare settings (January 2024) there are currently 191 settings for under threes including 11 registered and 180 licensed settings which can cater for a maximum of 7,815 children (DQSE 2024). By the end of October 2023, 188 settings could cater for 7,825 children but only 5,500 children were reported to be making use of these services (Jobsplus)[2]. Elsewhere, staff from DQSE reported that a total of 5,744 children were attending

[2] CEO of JobsPlus reporting to the Family Affairs Committee, Parliament of Malta, 5th December 2023

childcare centres in 2023 (Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023a). The list of settings is updated regularly as is the status of the settings which are given their license by the DQSE. With the implementation of the Education Act Cap 605 in 2021 (Ministry of Justice 2023*), childcare centres are now recognised as educational institutions. Legislation has finally made it mandatory for all childcare services to be licensed and therefore be regulated by the DQSE Standards, irrespective of whether settings benefit from the Free Childcare Scheme. 13 childcare settings, of which 12 are currently in operation, are government subsidised and managed through the Foundation for Educational Services (FES 2023). Five settings operate within workplaces where priority is given to the children of the employees. Five operate through public-private partnerships (DQSE to the Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023a). The remaining childcare settings (N=169; 88.5%) are privately-owned and managed. These settings are respectively referred to as 'work-based' and 'centre-based services' where the premises are equipped and solely used for childcare (MFED 2021a, 10). In 2023, there were 3,529 new entrants into childcare services. By the end of October 2023, 8,627 children had used childcare services during this year (JobsPlus to the Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023b).

Setting up a childcare setting involves two separate processes: an application with the Planning Authority (PA) followed by the Registration Process with the DQSE (2024). Consultation between the PA and DQSE ensures that proposed plans are according to the *National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0–3 years)*[3] (MFED 2021a) and the *Registration Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0–3 years)* (MFED 2021b). A temporary licence is given to settings where an initial on-site visit does not result in full compliance. This becomes a provisional licence when pending issues are addressed and resolved to the satisfaction of the DQSE. According to information communicated to operators of childcare settings via a letter circular (DQSE 2022), "*the new Education Act Chapter 605 Articles 21–31, published in September 2021 states that all childcare centre providers are to be in possession of a valid licence to operate. To this effect, from 2022 a licence to operate childcare facilities will be issued/renewed by the DQSE, following the outcomes of external review process/es based on both Quality Area 1 and Quality Area 2 of the National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0–3)".*

Kindergartens

The DQSE is also responsible for the regulation of all **kindergarten services** irrespective of whether these are within State, Independent or Church schools.

1. The State sector is the largest of the three as kindergarten settings are attached to every primary school. State primary schools are available in every town/village in Malta and the island of Gozo. There are 68 state primary schools, organised within ten Colleges[4], 64 of which offer KG services, together with the first three years of compulsory primary school for 5 to 8 year olds (MEYR 2023). The remaining primary schools offer education services for the final three years of compulsory primary education (8 to 11 year-olds). Kindergarten

[3] This will be referred to as the National Standards in this document.

[4] Government schools have been organised into College networks since 2005. There are nine State Colleges in Malta. Each College consists of approximately 4 or 5 primary schools from villages/towns in relatively close proximity together with the middle and secondary schools which children from the cluster of primary schools in the College will attend as they progress through the education system. The 10th College is the Gozo College which constitutes all 11 primary schools and the two secondary schools.

settings which cater for children between the ages of 2 years 9 months to 5 years 6 months[5], have been under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education since 1987[6].

2. Kindergarten provision is available in 19 Independent (private) schools. Among the Independent sector, ten settings started out as childcare services, gradually extended their operation to include kindergarten services. In the remaining independent settings, kindergarten services are established within schools which also offer compulsory education (DQSE 2023b).
3. Among the Church schools with kindergarten facilities, most welcome children from the age of four rather than at the age of three. There are 18 Church schools in Malta and five in Gozo with kindergarten services (Archdiocese of Malta 2022a, b).

According to data from the Education Strategy and Quality Assurance Department, at the end of February 2024, the proportion of kindergarten children attending state and independent schools amounted to 73.6% and 15.7% respectively; 10.7% attended church schools. 3 year-olds accounted for most children in state and independent schools, whereas in church schools, children were mostly 4 and 5 years old. 9,523 children were attending kindergarten settings during academic year 2023/2024.

Table 1

Malta: Distribution of children in kindergarten by age and sector

Class level	Academic year 2023–2024			
	State	Church	Private	Total
Kindergarten 1 (3 year-olds)	4,108	299	797	**5,204**
Kindergarten 2 (4 year-olds)	1,897	721	701	**4,319**
Total Pre-Primary Level	**7,005**	**1,020**	**1,498**	**9,523**

Source: personal email communication of the Research Unit at the Office of The Director General, Education Strategy and Quality Assurance Department, 23 February 2024

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Two main categories of staff work directly with children within the non-compulsory early childhood education and care settings: **Childcare Educators**[7] are the core practitioners working with

[5] Compulsory education starts in the year a child turns 5. Children are admitted to school at the start of the scholastic year, end of September/beginning October.

[6] Between October 1975 (when State kindergarten settings were introduced across the island) and 1987/88, responsibility for kindergarten shifted twice between the Ministries of Social policy and Education.

[7] The main carer used to be referred to as a "Childcare Worker" or "Childcare Assistant". The term changed to "Childcare Educator" with the *National Standards for ECEC (0–3 years)* (MFED 2021a). Since "this is an official document which was launched nationally the new title is recognised" (email communication with Director QA, 9th June 2022).

the under 3 year-olds in childcare settings; and **Kindergarten Educators**[8] (KGEs) work as core practitioners in kindergarten settings with 3 to 5 year-olds.

Other staff in childcare settings acknowledged in the National Standards (MFED 2021a) include the 'Legally Responsible Person' (LRP), 'Centre Managers' and 'Childcare Assistants'. Although responsibility for ensuring structural, process and outcomes quality in an ECEC centre rests with the LRP, the day-to-day running of centres is often delegated to a Centre Manager. In some small settings, one person takes on multiple roles.

In **kindergarten** settings, in addition to the KGE, there may also be ECEC teachers and KGEs employed as relievers or supply staff. There are also Learning Support Educators (LSEs) who are assigned to statemented children. LSEs do not have any specific training or qualification in early years. They may be responsible for individual children or assigned more than one child depending on the needs of the children.

Staff in childcare settings[9]

Although the National Standards (MFED 2021a) refers to the LRP, the Centre Manager and the Childcare Educator, the updated National Occupational Standards (NOS) (MFHEA March 2022a, b) address the knowledge and skills expected of Childcare Educators with an MQF Level 4 qualification and the knowledge and skills expected of Centre Managers, who, in some settings are referred to as supervisors or co-ordinators and who are expected to be in possession of a MQF Level 5 qualification. *Table 3* summarises the broad criteria identified in the NOS for the main staff working in childcare.[10]

Table 2

Malta: National Occupational Standards for Childcare Educators and Centre Managers (MFHEA, March 2022a, b)

NOS for Childcare Educators **MQF Level 4** (MFHEA 2022a)	**NOS for Childcare Centre Managers** **MQF Level 5** (MFHEA 2022b)
Understanding child development	Understanding child development
Protecting and promoting children's rights	Protecting and promoting children's rights
Engaging in quality interactions and developing positive relationships	Developing and maintaining a safe, secure, and healthy environment
Implementing child-centred, inquiry, and play-based learning and care programmes	Collaborating with all stakeholders
Meeting physical development and care needs to support healthy development	Working in partnership with parents
Reflecting on practice and developing professional competences	Leading to enhance the quality of learning and care
Promoting positive behaviour	Promoting the centre's inclusiveness in the social, physical, and learning environment
Embracing diversity	Establishing ongoing professional growth
Supporting inclusive early childhood education and Care	Implementing and monitoring an internal review process

[8] Staff working with 3 to 5 year-olds were referred to as Kindergarten Assistants since the introduction of State KG in 1975. This was a misnomer as kindergarten staff never assisted anyone. It was rectified with the Government-MUT sectorial agreement (MEDE 2017).

[9] Details about the roles of staff in childcare are taken from the *National Standards for ECEC (0–3 years)*

[10] The publication of these revised NOS was communicated to all service providers via an email and an announcement uploaded to the MFHEA website (MFHEA 05/2022; 14th March 2022) which states that with immediate effect, courses and programmes of study for staff should reflect these NOS (MFHEA 2022c).

NOS for Childcare Educators **MQF Level 4** (MFHEA 2022a)	NOS for Childcare Centre Managers **MQF Level 5** (MFHEA 2022b)
Working in partnership with parent[11]	Meeting regulatory requirements
Developing and maintaining a healthy, safe, and secure environment	
Meeting and maintaining regulatory requirements	

Childcare Educators working within the centre are expected to contribute to the day-to-day running of the centre, implement policies and procedures that reflect high quality provision of learning experiences. Childcare Educators are expected to plan, monitor, assess and respond to children's interests and needs, by interacting with children and providing a language-rich environment which promotes both English and Maltese. Finally, they are expected to collaborate with parents, other members of staff and other stakeholders.

Childcare Educators are expected to be at least 18 years or over and in possession of a minimum MQF Level 4 qualification with at least 60 ECTS in Early Childhood Education and Care; a pass at MQF Level 3 in Maltese or Maltese as a Foreign Language and English; a valid Certificate in Paediatric First Aid and a valid Food Handling Certificate.

Childcare Assistants

The National Standards (MFED 2021a) allow for the employment of Childcare Assistants. They are expected to (a) work in collaboration with the Centre Manager, the Childcare Educator being assisted as well as parents; (b) assist and support the Childcare Educator in the provision of care, learning and play; and (c) ensure that the children are in a safe and comfortable environment and receive the personal attention required to promote learning, respectful care, and children's holistic wellbeing. Childcare Assistants were initially introduced to childcare settings in January 2018, at a time when managers and owners complained that they were unable to recruit suitably qualified staff and had therefore been informed that anyone over the age of 25 could be employed as an 'assistant' to manage a group of children. However, the revised National Standards (MFED 2021a) expect Assistants to be 23 years or over and show evidence of enrolment with an accredited institution licensed with MFHEA to offer training in childcare theory and practice at MQF Level 3 with at least 30 ECTS that is specifically organised for the Assistant to the Childcare Educator. They need to be able to communicate effectively in Maltese and English and have a valid Certificate in Paediatric First Aid and a valid Food Handling certificate. This requirement goes some way to modifying and addressing the introduction of 'assistants' in the workforce.

Data held by the DQSE (2022) recorded a total of 1,260[12] employees across the childcare settings in operation classified in the following way:

- 15% (N=189) as Centre Managers, supervisors, co-ordinators, assistant managers;
- 81% (N=1,023) as Childcare Educators of which 15% (N=188) are identified as 'childcare educators in training';
- 2.3% (N=29) as helpers/cleaners; and
- 1.3% (N=17) as the LRPs, owners or directors.

[11] Refers to any primary caregiver

[12] The data are reviewed and updated regularly. Some records were eliminated from the original data file where notes indicated that individuals had moved within or away from the sector but whose mobility had not been traced.

Table 3

Malta: Designation of staff in childcare settings

Designation[13]	Number of staff	Designation	Number of staff
Educators		*Managers and associated staff*	
Senior childcare practitioner	2	Centre Managers	161
Assistant carer	1	Centre co-ordinator	3
Carer/co-ordinator	1	Centre Manager in training	5
Carer and operations	1	Centre Manager/assist coordinator	1
Carers awaiting trade test result	3	Centre Manager/carer	4
Carers	831	Centre manager/LRP	3
Carers in training	184	Centre owner/manager	2
Helpers		Centre supervisor	1
Attendant/helpers	23	Child carer supervisor/KG Reliever	1
Cleaner	6	Assistant Childcare Manager	1
LRPs, owners		Assistant Director	1
Owner	2	Admin	1
Centre Director	2	Supervisors	2
LRP	4	Administrative Assistant	1
LRP Assistant	1	*Other*	
LRP/Owner/Director	7	Nurse	1
LRP/Owner/Director/Childcarer	1	Relievers	3

Source: DQSE 2022

Staff in kindergarten settings

With some exceptions, **Kindergarten Educators (KGEs)** work within a school structure and in these circumstances, KGEs are the sole persons responsible for a group of children assigned to their classroom. The Head of School has the overall responsibility for the kindergarten setting in addition to overseeing the management and leadership of the primary school where the kindergarten is located. In large schools, an Assistant Head of School is frequently assigned the responsibility of overseeing the kindergarten section. This delegation of responsibility depends on the school population and the distribution of roles determined by the Head. Neither the Head nor the deputy/assistant Heads of schools are expected to have any qualifications specifically related to the early years and most of them would have had a teaching career and experience in a primary or secondary school. Within kindergarten settings which operate independently of any school, a Kindergarten Manager with the role of setting head does not require any qualifications but only a clean police conduct and the POMA (Protection of Minors Applications) clearance.

KGEs are responsible for working directly with the children. State and Non-state schools follow the same rules and procedures for the engagement of Educators. The *Collective Agreement between the Government and the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT)* (MEDE 2017) for State schools and the *Collective Agreement between the Church Authorities and the MUT for Education Grades in Church Schools and in the Secretariat for Catholic Education* (Archdiocese & MUT 2018)[14] entertain the possibility of an Early Years Teacher.

[13] The nomenclature in some instances is not officially recognised (example "Senior Childcare Practitioner" or "Senior Childcarer") and would have been flagged in the official database maintained by the DQSE.

[14] Independent schools have separate Collective Agreements with the Union or no Collective Agreement with any Union. In this chapter, subsequent references to these documents, will refer to the Collective Agreements 2017/2018).

"The parties agree that Kindergarten education will be covered by the grade of teachers as per clauses in section 26. In the absence of a sufficient complement, Kindergarten education may be provided by Kindergarten Educator III" (Article 25.2, 30).

Individuals eligible for employment as kindergarten teachers would have a teaching qualification in ECEC (EQF Level 6) which would have included at least one practice placement in the compulsory education years (with 5 to 7 year-olds), thus making them eligible for a teaching warrant in accordance with the Education Act. For a relatively short period of time (2009–2017), the University of Malta (UM) offered a B.Ed. (Hons) in ECEC aimed at applicants who in line with the NCF (MEDE 2012)-would want to work as qualified teachers with kindergarten children or with 5 to 7 year-olds in the first two years of compulsory education[15]. This qualification would have put staff in kindergarten on a par with teachers in primary and secondary schools. However, most of the graduates from the B.Ed. (Hons) in ECEC were deployed to work in primary schools rather than with the non-compulsory kindergarten years and bar a couple of exceptions, this practice persisted. Since October 2016 the Faculty of Education at UM discontinued all its B.Ed. (Hons) programmes replacing it with a Master's degree in teaching and Learning (MTL) for prospective teachers wanting to teach at primary or secondary level. Ministerial direction at the time was to introduce a BA (Hons) in ECEC for prospective KGEs. The BA (Hons) is currently the highest non-teaching qualification for practitioners wanting to work with kindergarten children. However, it is not mandatory for prospective KGEs to have an EQF Level 6 qualification to gain employment in kindergarten settings.

The Collective Agreements (MEDE 2017, Archdiocese and MUT 2018) do not provide a specific description for a "kindergarten teacher" but the description for a 'teacher' (Article 26) is collated under one section irrespective of the age group of children the individual would be responsible for.

The duties of KGEs are described as follows in the Collective Agreements.

"… to provide appropriate, relevant, stimulating and engaging learning experiences for all learners under his/her care at kindergarten level as part of the Early Years Cycle. The KGE is expected to collaborate with other educators who may be supporting this endeavour within or beyond the classroom, under the leadership of the school's Senior Management Team, also by engaging in the development of a Community of Professional Educators, including through School Development Planning. … the KGE is to:

(i) keep abreast of developments in the Early Years Cycle, including but not limited to curriculum, pedagogy and recording/reporting of developmental progress

(ii) create optimal conditions which facilitate a child's holistic development according to guidelines provided by the national and local designated authorities

(iii) plan, create and evaluate a stimulating, enjoyable and positive environment conducive to learning through a variety of experiences, striking a balance between educator and learner led activities, which predominantly include structured learning through play, and informal creative play strategies

(iv) assist, record and report children's language, physical, emotional, cognitive, social and spiritual development by planning relevant and stimulating, challenging but achievable experiences and activities that meet the individual learners' needs

[15] The course was initially offered as a 180 ECTS five-year part-time programme to attract practising KGEs (2009–2016) and between 2013–2017 it was offered as a 240 ECTS four-year full-time programme. EQF Level 5 graduates from MCAST were allowed to join the BEd (Hons) course for a max of 120 ECTS. In all, 131 individuals graduated from this BEd (Hons) (ECEC) programme (data provided by the University of Malta 2022).

(v) *broaden the child's knowledge and understanding of the world around him/her and the ability to respect diversity, also through the creation of opportunities for communication and establishment of social routines*

(vi) *give full attention to children's language and literacy efforts and arranging environments which are symbol rich and interesting*." (Para 25.1, 30)

Despite identical roles and duties, KGEs have a designation of KGI or KGII or KGIII. The different designations are associated to the initial professional qualification and correspondingly imply different salary scales. Staff designated as KGI have a qualification pegged at EQF Level 5 with 30 ECTS; KGII staff have a qualification at EQF Level 5 with 60 ECTS and KGIII refers to staff who have an EQF Level 6 (BA (Hons) qualification) of 180 ECTS. These are the minimum qualifications expected since 2021. As will be shown elsewhere in this section, most KGEs in employment have an EQF Level 4 qualification, this being the minimum qualification requirement until 2020.

Within the State sector, apart from the regular KGEs with a full-time appointment, 147 KGEs are employed as Relievers. The latter take over a group of children when the regular KGE is away from school; or when there is non-contact time/curriculum time. KGE Relievers are sent to every College and in turn, Colleges assign Relievers to a school according to needs. All state schools can make use of the services of KGE Relievers. The qualifications of Relievers are identical to those of the regular KGEs. Responsibilities for kindergarten classrooms are assigned according to seniority. Senior educators (having longer years of service) are assigned classes whilst the junior KGEs take up roles as Relievers. A senior educator can work as a Reliever by requesting this via a deployment circular. Where the school has a considerable population, Relievers may be attached to one school. In small schools, KGE relievers are usually shared between two schools.

There are no Relievers employed with the non-state sector[16].

In addition to the ECEC Teachers, KGEs and Relievers, there are currently three Supply KGEs in the State sector. Within the State sector, the call for supply KGEs has not been issued for some time. This is in sharp contrast with the situation in Independent schools where close to 39% are supply staff. These could include supply graduate teachers (individuals with a university qualification not in ECEC) or Supply KGEs who do not possess any qualification or whose pre-university qualifications are not associated to ECEC.

Table 4

Malta: Distribution of main staff in non-state kindergarten settings (absolute numbers)

	ECEC Teachers	KG	KGEI	KGEII	KGEIII	Supply KGE	TOTAL
Church Sector	4	8	1	46	12	2	73
Independent Sector	2	3	14	38	9	39	105
TOTALS	**6**	**11**	**15**	**84**	**21**	**41**	**178**

Source: Education Resources Department (email communication 13/14 July 2022)

Table 5 shows the main contact staff in childcare services and kindergartens and the profiles of core practitioners according to previous SEEPRO studies (see *Box* at end of section).

[16] Director Education Resources, email communication July 3rd 2022

Table 5
Malta: ECEC contact staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Childcare services				
Childcare Manager / Coordinator *Profile:* Social/Health Care Professional	**Childcare settings** Under 3 year-olds	Core professional with management responsibilities, sometimes also working with children	Depends on the awarding body; 0–2 years[17] 0–4 years	One or two years at a further education college Applicants must have a minimum of one years' work experience as an educator in the early years. *Awards*: Diploma in Leadership for Health & Social Care Children & Young People's Services (England) Children & Young People's Management ECTS credits: 60 [18] EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5
Childcare Educator *Profile:* Social/Health Care Professional	**Childcare settings** Under 3 year-olds	Core practitioner with group responsibilities	0–2 years	One-year course at further education college (MCAST – Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology) *Award*: Children's Care, Learning and Development certificate ECTS credits: 60 EQF Level: 4 ISCED 2011: 4
Kindergartens				
Kindergarten Educator (KGE) *Profile:* Pre-primary Education Professional	**Kindergarten setting located in primary school** 3 and 4 year-olds (youngest possible starting age 2 years 9 months)	Core practitioner with group responsibility	3–4 years	*From 2021:* Top-up courses for Level 4 qualification holders for three levels: KGE I: 6-month course KGE II: 1-year course KGE III: 3-year study programme at university

[17] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: In the case of Malta, the relevant formats are **0–2** and **3–4** years, since children usually start school when they are 5 years old.

[18] Until 2022/2023, MCAST provided a level 5 course (120 ECTS) entitled *Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in The Early Years* which qualified students as Kindergarten Educators OR to join the 3rd year cohort at university to complete a BA degree. However, MCAST is now offering its own BA (ISCED 6, 180 ECTS credits).

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				Awards: Certificate (KGE I) ***or*** Certificate (KGEII ***or*** Bachelor (KGE III) which may be awarded by the University of Malta, MCAST or smaller private education institutions ECTS credits: KGE I: 30 KGE II: 60 KGE III: 180 EQF level: 5 (KGE I + II), 6 (KGE III) ISCED 2011: 5 and 6

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Centre Managers are responsible for the day to day running of the childcare service. In line with the NOS, the National Standards document (MFED 2021a) emphasises that managers are responsible for the overall organisation and management of the childcare setting; to oversee the children's learning and well-being; liaise with parents and other stakeholders; manage staff members and matters linked to professional development.

Centre managers are expected to be at least 21 years of age, have a minimum of one years' work experience as an Educator in the early years. They must be in possession of a minimum MQF Level 5 qualification with at least 60 ECTS in Early Childhood Education and Care, including pedagogy, leadership and management; a pass at MQF Level 3 in Maltese or Maltese as a Foreign Language and English; a valid Certificate in Paediatric First Aid and a valid Food Handling Certificate.

The Legally Responsible Person (LRP): Despite not needing specific formal qualification requirements, according to the National Standards (MFED 2021a) "ensuring structural, process and outcomes quality in an ECEC centre rests with the LRP". However, the LRP "may delegate responsibilities at a day-to-day level to the Centre Manager" (p. 12). The document only states that *it is desirable that the LRP has some knowledge about ECEC theory and practice.* In reality, in several

entities, the LRP is quite far-removed from the childcare setting with the responsibilities being delegated to the Centre Manager.

The responsibilities of the LRP are associated broadly with the smooth running of the childcare setting and the National Standards document defines the role of the LRP as follows:

The LRP must be 18 years or over (and over 21 years of age, if the LRP is also the Centre Manager), and in possession of a valid and clean Police Conduct Certificate. The LRP is to ensure that the:

- *Functions of the centre are in line with national strategies, policies, and legislations and subsequent updates*
- *Physical premises are in compliance with national standards, legislations and any subsequent updates*
- *Members of staff recruited meet the eligibility criteria.*

They must:

- *Assume legal responsibility for the provision of children's learning and care, as prescribed by the national standards, national strategies, policies, legislation and any subsequent updates; represent the registered childcare centre and has the power of attorney*
- *Assume accountability for the proper management of finances*
- *Oversee that the centre performs effective internal review processes*
- *Oversee that the recommendations identified by the DQSE are being implemented.*

There are no Centre Leaders in kindergarten settings. For kindergarten settings which are located within primary schools, the Head of School is responsible for the compulsory age groups as well as the running of the kindergarten.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Some childcare settings employ **Senior Childcare Educators**. This person would be a childcare educator who has completed or is in the process of completing an EQF Level 5 course and who, from time to time, could take over the responsibility for the childcare setting if/when the manager cannot be present. For example, Senior Childcare Educators are being appointed in childcare settings which are offering extended hours of service and where the appointed Childcare Manager cannot work beyond contractual hours.

There are no centre-based posts of responsibility in kindergarten settings.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

As indicated in *Chapter **2.1***, Centre Managers are responsible for co-ordination and supervisory duties in childcare settings.

In kindergarten settings attached to schools, the Head of School in smaller schools or a delegated Assistant Head of School in bigger schools would be responsible for all matters associated to the administration and management of the kindergarten section in the school.

2.5 Specialist support staff

Specialist support staff within childcare and kindergarten varies.

The National School Support Services (NSSS) is responsible for Educational Services in all school sectors, that is State, Church and Independent. Church schools have their own service such as counsellors, psychologists and an autism spectrum support team but they can resort to NSSS on a consultative basis should further support be required.

There are two departments within the NSSS: the *Educational Psychosocial services* and the *Inclusive Education Support*. Child Safety Service is the only service offered by the psychosocial

team at kindergarten. With regard to *Inclusive Education*, services for the hearing impaired, the visually impaired and Early Intervention support are provided to children from birth. The Early Intervention service offers support services for children with developmental disabilities and/or delays in the first five years of their life (NSSS 2023). Children up to the age of 3 years, and their families, are supported either in their home or in the childcare centre they attend. Early Intervention Teachers visit children in settings. Where children are being followed by the Child Development Assessment Unit (CDAU), specialists from this Unit could visit centres or refer cases to the Early Intervention team. If the preschool child is spending most of the day in childcare then the Early interventionist (not necessarily a teacher) provides support at the childcare setting, with the parents' consent. Visits by specialist staff, such as Speech Therapists, Psychologists or Paediatricians tend to be carried out on a needs basis. Unless coming via the Early Intervention service or CDAU, visits of support staff to settings could be financed directly by the parents.

Within the 12 **childcare settings** managed by FES, an Inclusion Co-ordinator is available to support the children, families and staff in these settings with all matters associated to inclusion. The support could relate to difficulties in child development; challenges which arise with cultural differences and language barriers as well as social difficulties which include abuse, poverty, racism and neglect.

In the **kindergarten** years, Early Intervention practitioners adopt a whole school approach, supporting educators in the planning and implementation of their educational programme with regard to the inclusion of all the children in class, and more specifically with the Individual Educational Programme of the child who is experiencing developmental difficulties. In class, support to children who are experiencing significant challenges is given when needed. Children in State, Church and Independent educational institutions are supported by the Early Intervention team. The team is made up of KGEs and Education Support Practitioners, Senior Education Practitioners and Principal Education Practitioners, with these categories of practitioners mostly coming from the field of Education, Psychology and Speech and Language Pathology. Parents who visit specialists privately would foot the bill where follow-up visits are conducted in kindergarten.

Teaching support or specialist staff focused on the curriculum or curricular subject areas are not found in kindergarten settings in State schools because peripatetic teachers were trained to teach primary and/or secondary school students. In the state schools, the Physical Education unit has recently offered physical education lessons to kindergarten classes, delivered by subject teachers who accepted to take on this role. In Independent schools, the situation varies: in some schools the KGE is responsible for the entire programme offered, whereas in others the services of specialist teachers for some curriculum areas may be arranged. In Church schools, there are subject teachers who also work with kindergarten children. These could be teachers for music, drama, ICT and/or STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics). The subject teachers employed in Church schools vary – different schools may have different subject specialists. Subject teachers who do give input in kindergarten settings would not generally have initial professional education in early years.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Gender and ethnicity in the ECEC workforce

The presence of men in both childcare and kindergarten settings is negligible. Early childhood education and care is overwhelmingly staffed by females. Of the 1,260 members of staff included in the childcare staff data (DQSE 2022, May 2022), 14 men (1%) and 1,246 (99%) females make up the workforce. JobsPlus, which is responsible for managing the Free Childcare Scheme, indicated that by the end of October 2023, there were 1,875 (93.3%) female and 135 (6.7%) male Childcare Educators across the childcare settings. In addition, there were 144 (91.1%) female and 14 (8.9%) male childcare managers (Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023b).

Similarly, men employed in kindergarten settings are in the minority. Of the 178 members of staff in the non-state sectors (Church and Independent sectors), only 3 men are on record.

Table 6

Malta: Staff employed in State Kindergarten settings (June 2022)

Type	Gender		Grand Total
	Female	Male	
KGE	626	3	**629**
Reliever	144	3	**147**
Grand Total	**770**	**6**	**776**

Source: Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability (email communication 30 June 2022)

Table 7

Malta: Staff employed in kindergarten in all three sectors (July 2022)

Sector type	Females	Males	Totals
State	770	6	776
Church	72	1	73
Independent	103	2	105
TOTAL	945 (99%)	9 (1%)	954

Source: Education Resources Department (email communication 13/14 July 2022)

Whilst there are no data about the nationality of staff working within kindergarten settings, according to the DQSE (2022) records, 15% (N=184) of the workforce in childcare settings is made up of persons with a non-Maltese nationality.

Table 8

Malta: Nationalities of staff employed in childcare settings

Nationality	No. of staff members	Nationality	No. of staff members
Albanian	3	Lithuanian	2
Armenian	2	Macedonian	6
Brazilian	3	Maltese	1,076 (85%)
British	33 (2.6%)	Nepalese	2
Bulgarian	2	Pakistani	2

Nationality	No. of staff members	Nationality	No. of staff members
Colombian	4	Peruvian	4
Czech	3	Philippines	8
Hungarian	6	Scottish	2
Indian	6	Serbian	19 (1.5%)
Italian	27 (2.1%)	Spanish	11 (0.9%)
Kazakhstan	2	Ukrainian	6
Kenyan	4	Venezuelan	2
Latvian	2		
And 1 each of the following nationalities: Bosnian, Canadian, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, Egyptian, Ethiopian, French, Georgian, German, Greek, Icelandic, Irish, Israeli, Japanese, Korean, Maltese/English, Mexican, Romanian, Russian, Slovakian, Slovenian, Sri Lankan, Thai.			

Source: DQSE May 2022

This is particularly important considering that the National Standards (MFED 2021a) expect Childcare Educators to *"provide a language-rich environment, ensuring the balanced provision of both Maltese and English*" and simultaneously "*support children and their families who are bilingual, multilingual or whose preferred language is not Maltese or English*." (p. 18). According to the National Standards, even the Assistants to the Childcare Educators are expected to have a working knowledge of Maltese and English (p. 19); like the main Childcare Educators, Assistants are expected to have the *"ability to communicate effectively in Maltese and English*".

Most of the staff with a non-Maltese nationality are employed as Childcare Educators (N=122) or Educators in training (N=33); ten are attendants/cleaners/helpers and 16 are Childcare Managers, one of whom was in training at the time data were collected.

Qualifications of staff in childcare settings[19]

According to the data from DQSE (2022), 21.9% (N=276) of staff working in childcare settings do not have qualifications relevant to their roles. 55.5% (N=699) have an EQF Level 4 qualification and 17% (N=215) have an EQF Level 5 qualification relevant to their roles. Some members of staff are in possession of higher qualifications. Several employees and employers in childcare settings are in possession of qualifications which are not relevant or related to early years[20]. However, the data available are rather sketchy and not reliable. The Director at DQSE claimed that the turnover of staff employed in childcare is very high with the sector being described as 'very fluid' (Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023a). At the time, the DQSE reported 231 qualified managers and 24 people in training who were following a Level 5 in childcare. There were 1,179 Childcare Educators with an EQF Level 4 qualification and a further 468 people who were still in training.

The minimum requirement of qualifications with 60 ECTS at EQF Level 5 for Childcare Managers and 60 ECTS at MQF Level 4 for Childcare Educators has been set by the National Standards (MFED 2021a). An implementation plan to ensure that everyone has these minimum qualifications is still to be discussed at ministerial level (Director DQSE, email communication, 17th June

[19] Data need to be interpreted with caution in the absence of any rigorous manner of collecting it. Data collection is based on the reporting which is initially collated and provided by Centre Managers ahead of external audits. The data are subject to verification by EOs at the time of the audit and transferred to a spreadsheet for the scrutiny, review and checking of staff from ERS and RCS. The inevitable time-lapse and regular turnover of staff make this a laborious and, in the long run, an unsustainable activity.

[20] Data from the DQSE database (DQSE, May 2022) indicate diplomas in hairdressing; health and social care; gender studies; undergraduate degrees in Computing, Management, European Studies, Nursing

2022). To date any EQF 4 or 5 course deemed relevant to the field, irrespective of the amount of ECTS has been accepted as appropriate for employability purposes.

Table 9

Malta: Qualifications relevant to roles of staff employed in childcare settings (N=1,290; May 2022)

Qualification (by EQF/MQF Level)	Number	Per cent
Level 3 qualification	24	2
Level 4 qualification	699	55.5
Level 5 qualification	216	17
Level 6 qualification	24	2
Level 7 qualification	15	1
Insufficient information	2	0.2
No relevant qualifications	276	21.9
TOTAL	**1260**	**100**

Source: DQSE May 2022

Among staff with relevant qualifications, six have a BA (Hons) in Early Years from the University of Malta. Other relevant qualifications at EQF Level 6 and 7 were obtained from higher education institutions in Mexico, Colombia, England, Italy, Spain and Greece[21]. Among the EQF 5 and EQF 4 qualifications, several are home-grown courses but others are designed by foreign entities[22]. Details about several courses will be provided in a subsequent section of this report.

Table 10

Malta: Main qualifications of staff in childcare settings[23]

Title of qualification/award	No of holders of award	Entity offering qualification
BTEC National Diploma in Children's Care Learning & Development	14	MCAST[24]
BTEC National Diploma in Children's Play, Learning & Development	18	MCAST[25]
MCAST Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years	18	MCAST
MCAST Advanced Diploma in Childcare, Learning & Development	55	MCAST
Diploma in Child Development, Education & Care Studies (0–5 years)	20	CDEC[26]
Award in childcare, well-being, development and learning	17	Outlook Coop

[21]Qualifications from foreign institutions include the University of Cassino and Universitá di Palermo in Italy; University of Ioannina, Greece; Universidad El Bosque, Colombia; University of the Basque country and Rey Juan Carlos University in Spain; Universidad Católica Andres Bello in Venezuela; University of Sheffield, Leeds Beckett University in England.

[22] Among its roles, the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) provides accreditation to further and higher educational institutions and programmes or courses of studies at further and higher education levels.

[23] Other qualifications not listed included undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications from UM and foreign institutions. In addition to the 'blank' entries, there were also entries for no qualifications or inappropriate qualifications (i.e. not relevant to childcare). It was also difficult to record some data because of the vague entries about the title of the qualification.

[24] MCAST (The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology) is a vocational education and training institution in Malta which was established in 2001.

[25] Having staff with BTEC qualifications from MCAST reflect the introductory courses offered when MCAST was first established. BTEC courses were gradually replaced with home-grown courses.

[26] Centre for Child Development, Education & Care Studies (CDEC) was a small private institution which ceased to operate in 2022.

Title of qualification/award	No of holders of award	Entity offering qualification
Certificate of Competence Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning for Child Care Workers (0-3 years)/Award in Childcare Work – Trade Test	150	NCFHE/ETC; MFHEA/Jobsplus
Jobs Plus/ETC VET Award in Childcare (0–3 years) or (0–5 years)	156	ETC/Jobs Plus
Certificate in Childcare Work for Children Aged 0–3	17	Future Focus
NCFE CACHE Diploma for the Children and Young People's Workforce (England)	97	CACHE through Future Focus
NCFE CACHE Diploma for the Early Years Workforce (Early Years Educator)	207	CACHE through Future Focus
NCFE CACHE Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People's Services (England)	102	CACHE through Future Focus
No information available	279	

Source: DQSE May 2022

Qualifications of staff in Kindergarten settings

Kindergarten staff in the state sector

Table 11

Malta: Qualifications of the workforce in State kindergarten settings (September 2021)

Qualification	EQF Level	Number of KGEs	% of KGEs
MTL[27] in Early Childhood and Primary Education	7	2	0.3
BA in Early Childhood Education and Care	6	92	13
MCAST Higher National Diploma in Advanced Studies for Early Years[28]	5	36	5.1
MCAST Advanced Diploma in Children's Play, Learning and Development	4	20	2.8
NCFE Cache Level 5: Diploma for the Early Years Senior Practitioners – Future Focus (2022c)	4	32	4.5
Level 4 Certification – no additional info provided	4	511	72.3
Advanced Levels – no specialist qualification	4	14	2
TOTAL		**707**	**100**

Source: Education Resources Department (email communication 13/14 July 2022)

Although the available data does not provide specific information about the qualifications which most KGEs have, the majority is in possession of an EQF Level 4 qualification. This is not surprising considering that this was the minimum entry requirement for KGEs until 2021. On the other hand, considering that the first cohort of graduates with a BA (Hons) in ECEC graduated in 2019, it is encouraging to note that within the State sector, 13% of the staff have an EQF Level 6 qualification.

[27] Master in Teaching and Learning

[28] The MQF Level 5 MCAST–BTEC Higher National Diploma in Advanced Studies in Early Years was replaced by the home-grown MCAST Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years from 2016 onwards.

Kindergarten staff in the non-state sector: Church school settings

There are 23 Church schools which provide kindergarten facilities (Archdiocese of Malta 2022a, b), employing 67 KGEs, 4 ECEC teachers, one graduate supply teacher and one supply teacher[29] for a total of 73 Educators working directly with children. *Table 13* illustrates the qualifications of the staff employed in kindergarten settings within Church schools.

Table 12

Malta: Qualifications of the workforce in Church kindergarten settings (July 2022)

Qualification	EQF Level	Number of staff	% of staff
MA in ECEC (Roehampton University)	7	1	1.4
BA (Hons) ECEC – University of Malta	6	12	16.4
B.Ed. (Hons) ECEC – University of Malta	6	4	5.5
MCAST Higher Diploma in Advanced studies in the Early Years	5	3	4.1
BTEC National Diploma in Early Years/MCAST Advanced Diploma in Children's Care Learning & Development/ MCAST Advanced Diploma in Children's Play, Learning & Development[30]	4	11	15.1
CACHE Diploma for Children & Young People's Workforce	4	11	15.1
Certificate of Achievement (210 hours)	4	2	2.7
Pre-school Education Certificate/Diploma	4	15	20.5
ETC Diploma in Childcare	4	5	6.8
Diploma in Child Care Managers	n.d.	1	1.4
CACHE Level 2 Diploma in Pre-school Practice	3	1	1.4
No qualification/not relevant to early years	n.d.	7	9.6
TOTAL		73	

Source: Education Resources Department (email communication 13/14 July 2022)

Kindergarten staff in the non-state sector: Independent school settings

19 independent institutions are licensed to offer kindergarten services[31]. The kindergarten classrooms in nine of these institutions are housed within schools which offer primary and secondary education too. The remaining ten settings started out as childcare centres and are now accepting kindergarten aged children. Just over 100 members of staff are employed in kindergarten across all 19 settings.

Table 13

Malta: Qualifications of the workforce in Independent kindergarten settings (July 2022)

Qualification	EQF Level	Number of staff	% of staff
MA in ECEC (of which3 are from the University of Sheffield)	7	4	3.8
B.Ed. (Hons) ECEC	6	2	1.9
BA (Hons) ECEC from the University of Malta	6	6	5.7
Bachelor degrees in Preschool Pedagogy (foreign institutions)	6	5	4.8
MCAST-BTEC qualifications	5	1	1

[29] Education Resources Dept, email communication June 9th 2022 and July 13th 2022.
[30] Courses offered by MCAST were initially BTEC courses until home-grown programmes were developed. Over the years, adjustments to the titles of the programmes were made.
[31] https://education.gov.mt/en/dqse/Documents/School%20Licensing/Independent%20Schools.pdf

Qualification	EQF Level	Number of staff	% of staff
MCAST-BTEC qualifications	4	5	4.8
NNEB/CACHE Diploma for Children and Young People's Workforce	4	36	34.3
Preschool Education Certificate (Malta)	4	1	1
Child Development Education & Care (CDEC) (Malta)	4	1	1
ETC/Jobsplus Certificate of Competence in Child-Care/Award in Childcare/Trade Test/ (Malta)	4	18	17
Diploma Montessori	n.d.	4	3.8
Undergraduate qualifications in an unrelated area	6	5	4.8
Diplomas in vaguely related/unrelated areas	n.d.	9	8.6
'A' Levels	4	8	7.6
TOTAL		**105**	**100**

Source: Education Resources Department (email communication 13/14 July 2022)

Within the sector, not only are the majority of employees qualified with an EQF Level 4 certificate but the qualifications are identical to those obtained by individuals working or following courses leading to employment in childcare, making them eligible to work with under threes. The data clearly illustrate how the somewhat better conditions in kindergarten settings, lures people away from childcare.

Having 22% of the childcare employees with minimal, no or unrelated qualifications (*Table 10*) and not knowing details about the EQF Level 4 qualification of the majority of staff in state kindergarten settings (*Table 12*) are challenges which need to be addressed.

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

Changes are underway with the initial professional education courses and the qualifications considered appropriate for staff working with the under threes in childcare settings and for staff seeking employment in kindergarten. Concerns about these changes will be shared in *Chapter **10*** of this report.

To date, Childcare Educators were expected to be in possession of a relevant qualification at EQF/MQF Level 4 whilst Supervisors/Managers should be in possession of a qualification at EQF/MQF Level 5. The challenges thus far have been two-fold:

(i) Ensuring that there is a minimum number of ECTS both across Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications which are considered appropriate for employability. There were discrepancies in the number of ECTS associated with available programmes and qualifications.

(ii) Having to resort to employing staff without any (relevant) qualifications. In the National Standards (MFED 2021a), reference is made to "*a minimum of MQF Level 5 qualification with at least 60 ECTS in Early Childhood Education and Care, including pedagogy, leadership and management*" (p. 16), for childcare managers and "*a minimum of MQF Level 4 qualification with at least 60 ECTS in Early Childhood Education and Care or comparable*" (p. 18) for Childcare Educators. Both roles also require a pass at MQF Level 3 in Maltese or Maltese as a Foreign Language and English.

With regard to KGEs, since 2021 and as a result of the Collective Agreements (MEDE 2017, Archdiocese and MUT, 2018), the EQF Level 4 qualification is no longer considered appropriate for prospective KGEs. The minimum requirement is EQF Level 5 (30 ECTS) for a KGI designation and EQF Level 5 (60 ECTS) for a KGII designation. Staff are appointed at the level of KGE III when in possession of an EQF Level 6 (180 ECTS) qualification relevant to the early years. *Table 15* outlines the eligibility requirements for KGEs and progression within respective salary scales.

Table 14

Malta: Eligibility requirements for KGEs, pre and post 2021

Eligibility Requirements – 2019 till 2020 and progression	**Eligibility Requirements – 2021 onwards**
In possession of a recognised full qualification (Degree) at MQF Level 6 or higher (subject to a minimum of 180 ECTS/ECVET credits, or equivalent, with regards to programmes commencing as from October 2003) in Early Childhood Education and Care or a comparable professional qualification – KGE III – Salary Scale 10 progressing to Salary Scale 9 on completion of 5 years' service in the grade of KGE III	In possession of a recognised full qualification (Degree) at MQF Level 6 or higher (subject to a minimum of 180 ECTS/ECVET credits, or equivalent, with regards to programmes commencing as from October 2003) in Early Childhood Education and Care or a comparable professional qualification – KGE III
In possession of a recognised full qualification (Diploma) at MQF Level 5 (subject to a minimum of 60 ECTS/ECVET credits, or equivalent, with regards to programmes commencing as from October 2003) in Early Childhood Education and Care or a comparable professional qualification – KGE II – Salary Scale 12 progressing to salary Scale 10 on completion of 5 years of service in the grade of KGE II	In possession of a recognised full qualification (Diploma) at MQF Level 5 (subject to a minimum of 60 ECTS/ECVET credits, or equivalent, with regards to programmes commencing as from October 2003) in Early Childhood Education and Care or a comparable professional qualification – KGE II
In possession of a recognised award at MQF Level 5 (subject to a minimum of 30 ECTS/ECVET credits or equivalent), in Early Childhood and Care or a comparable qualification. Provided that a full qualification (Diploma) at MQF Level 4 (subject to a minimum of 120 ECTS/ECVET credits or equivalent), in Early Childhood Education and Care or a comparable qualification shall also make candidates eligible for application into the grade of KGE I. For the purposes of paragraph 4.1 (v), the Childcare Training Programme (0-3 years) together with the Certificate of Competence (0-5 years), or the Vocational Education and Training Award in Childcare (0-5 years), are considered as equivalent to the Diploma, at MQF level 4, in Early Childhood Education and care. – KGE I Salary Scale 15 progressing to salary Scale 14 on completion of 5 years of service in the grade of KGE I and progress further to Salary Scale 13 after another 5 years of service in the grade.	In possession of a recognised award at MQF Level 5 (subject to a minimum of 30 ECTS/ECVET credits or equivalent), in Early Childhood and Care or a comparable qualification – KGE I Progression is the same as in 2019/2020 since from same agreement.

Source: HR Recruitment, Strategy & Support Department (email communication June 2021 & June 2022)

Information about EQF Levels 4, 5 and 6 courses available at the time this chapter was drawn up is provided in subsequent chapters.

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

There are two further and higher education entities which offer professional courses for prospective early years educators. Courses are offered on a full and part-time basis. Programmes targeting 16 year-old school leavers are offered by MCAST whilst the University of Malta recruits 18 year-olds who have completed EQF Level 4 education and are eligible to join University[32]. Mature students are also accepted upon turning 23 on the basis of a successful interview process to ensure that the student would be able to follow the course beneficially. Information about courses was obtained from the prospectus of the institutions, both of which are self-accrediting.

Table 15a

Malta:-Kindergarten Educator

Job title in English: *Kindergarten Educator* **Profile**: Pre-primary Education Professional
Route 1: **Kindergarten Educator III (KGE III)** **Entry requirements:** University of Malta general requirements for admission as specified in the Admissions Regulations of the University, in possession of a pass at Advanced Matriculation Level at Grade C or better in any one subject. Mature students and others who are accepted via RPL are also accepted. Students are also accepted for the 3rd year of the UM programme if they are from MCAST and have successfully completed the Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years (a top-up year). **Professional Studies:** 3 years' full-time study at University leading to an undergraduate degree. In addition to courses in educational theory, early years pedagogies, critical issues, reflective practices, there are opportunities to for weekly classroom visits and tutorials as an induction to life in schools followed by two teaching practice study units. **Award:** BA (Hons) (ECEC) **ECTS credits:** 180 ECTS **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Kindergartens for 3 to 5 year-olds (youngest entry age 2 years 9 months), located in State, Church-affiliated or Independent (private) schools or Independent kindergartens. *Route 2:* **Kindergarten Educator III (KGE III)** N.B. This qualification route is available from the academic year 2023/2024. **Entry requirements:** MCAST Advanced Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development or 2 A-Level passes and 2 Intermediate Level passes. Two subjects from Mathematics, English or Maltese are compulsory at either Advanced or Intermediate level. A pass at SEC/O-Level in the subject that is not presented at Advanced or Intermediate level is also compulsory. **Professional Studies:** 3 years' full-time study at MCAST leading to an undergraduate degree (MCAST 2023). Learners cover different components of the required learning to become practitioners with further specialisation in more specific areas. Placements are included to progressively become adept at working with a group of children using the emergent curriculum approach. **Award:** BA (Hons) (ECEC) **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6

[32] Compulsory education is from 5 to 16. Successful completion earns students the school-leaving certificate (EQF 3). Students planning to pursue further studies may follow a further two-year programme (post-secondary) and successful completion leads to the Matriculation Certificate (EQF 4). University also accepts mature students (who have reached the age of 23) and adult students who apply for RPL (recognition of prior learning).

Job title in English: *Kindergarten Educator*

Profile: Pre-primary Education Professional

Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergartens for 3 to 5 year-olds (youngest entry age 2 years 9 months), located in State, Church-affiliated or Independent (private) schools or Independent kindergartens.

Route 3 (phased out from end of academic year 2022/23):

Kindergarten Educator II (KGE II)

Entry requirements: MCAST Advanced Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development ***or*** 2 Advanced Level passes and 2 Intermediate Level passes. For compulsory Advanced Level or Intermediate Level – 2 subjects from Mathematics, English, Maltese. Applicants need to be in possession of a pass at SEC/Ordinary Level in the subject that is not presented at Advanced or Intermediate Level.

Professional studies: 2 years. Study units are designed to provide a strong link between theoretical concepts and hands-on practice during internships. Lectures focus on guiding the undergraduates on how to make learning for young children stimulating and fun, in a safe and healthy environment (MCAST 2021a, 128).

Award: Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years offered by MCAST

ECTS credits: 120

EQF level: 5

ISCED 2011: 5

Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergartens for 3 to 5 year-olds (youngest entry age 2 years 9 months), located in State, Church-affiliated or Independent (private) primary schools or Independent kindergartens.

Note:

Students who successfully complete the 120 ECTS can be admitted to UM to join the 3rd year of the BA programme (top-up course) and therefore if successful, graduate with a BA (Hons) in ECEC.

Route 4 (Universität Malta 2014–2019):

ECEC Teacher

Note: This programme is no longer offered by the University of Malta. *Only 4 of the 131 students who graduated with this EQF 6 teaching qualification between 2014 and 2019 are employed in kindergarten settings in the Non-State Sector.*

Entry requirements: General university entry requirements or, in the case of mature students, interviews to assess work experience, motivation, attitude and any qualifications. Proficiency in Maltese and English is required of all students. At the time the course was available, ECDL[33] was also a requirement.

Professional studies: 4 years' full time (or 5 years of part time) study at University leading to an undergraduate degree. The programme included three teaching practices (TP), each of six weeks' duration. One TP session was held in kindergarten and at least one TP was held with 5 to 7 year-olds in the first two years of compulsory education. Students also conducted research and presented a dissertation in their final year of the programme.

Award: B.Ed. (Hons) (ECEC)

ECTS credits: 240 ECTS for the full-time programme; 180 ECTS for the part-time programme

EQF level: 6

ISCED 2011: 6

Main ECEC workplaces: The first two years of compulsory education (5 to 7-year-olds) and Kindergartens for 3 to 5 year olds (youngest entry age 2 years 9 months), located in State, Church-affiliated or Independent (private) schools.

[33] European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) is a computer literacy certification programme, now known as ICDL (https://www.icdleurope.org/)

Table 15b

Malta: Childcare Educator

Job title in English: *Childcare Educator* **Profile**: Social Care/Health Care Professional
Entry requirements: MCAST Diploma in Health and Social Care or MCAST Diploma in Sport or MCAST Diploma in Performing Arts or MCAST Diploma in Art and Design or 4 SEC/O-Level/SSC&P (Level 3) passes Compulsory: English Language, Maltese, Mathematics. Post-secondary students can enrol at MCAST when compulsory education is completed at the age of 16. **Professional studies:** 1 or 2 years' full time (see note re award at exit after one year) at MCAST. **Award:** Advanced Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development (MCAST 2021b, 2021c) ***or*** BTEC Award in Children's Care, Learning and Development **ECTS credits:** 120 ECTS ***or*** 60 ECTS **EQF level**: 4 **ISCED 2011:** 4 **Main ECEC workplace:** Childcare settings, 0–3 years ***Note:*** On successful completion of the first year of the course, students can be awarded an MCAST Award in Children's Care, Learning and Development Level 4 (ECVET 60) which would enable learners to work in a professional capacity with children between 0 to 3 years old within a childcare centre. This award provides the skills, knowledge and understanding required for one to work effectively within a child-care environment.

Table 15c

Malta: Childcare Manager

Job title in English: *Childcare Manager/Coordinator* **Profile**: Social/Health Care Professional
Entry requirements: MCAST-BTEC National Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development and SEC/O-Level passes in Mathematics, English and Maltese ***or*** MCAST-BTEC National Diploma in Children's Play, Learning and Development and SEC/O-Level passes in Mathematics, English and Maltese ***or*** 2 A-Level passes and 2 I-Level passes Compulsory A-level or I-level: 2 subjects from Mathematics, English, Maltese. **Professional studies:** 2 years full-time study at MCAST. **Award:** MCAST Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years (MCAST 2021d, 2021e) **ECTS credits:** 120 **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011:** 5 **Main ECEC workplace:** Childcare settings, 0–3 years ***or*** Upon successful completion of the programme, students with this qualification can join UM and join the BA (Hons) (ECEC) cohort of students in their 3rd and final year of the programme to graduate with an EQF 6 qualification.

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Tables 16a to 16n highlight the competencies, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for EQF Level 3, 4, 5 and 6 courses for (i) Assistants to Childcare Educators, (ii) Childcare Educators, (iii) Childcare Managers and (iv) KGEs respectively. Information has been compiled from websites in the public domain. The information includes courses offered by UM, MCAST and a host of private entities licensed by the MFHEA and which have had their programmes of study accredited. Apart from UM and MCAST, there is currently another private institution accredited by

MFHEA which offers Level 6 programmes in early years (MLI 2023)[34]. UM was the first institution to offer a top-up programme for EQF 5 MCAST students who wanted to proceed to EQF 6, thus earning a BA (Hons) (ECEC). However, since January 2022, and following a memorandum of understanding between MCAST and the Institute for Education (IfE), another 60 ECTS top-up qualification at Level 6 is available (MCAST 2021f, 2021g; IfE and MCAST 2021).

Table 16a

Malta: Competences, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 6 IPE

Provider: University of Malta (2022a); Qualification: BA (Hons) (ECEC)

Competences	**Curricular areas[35]**
– Understanding the diversity of young children's growth and development – Developing an awareness of the impact of the social, cultural and life experiences on children's learning and development – Broad pedagogical knowledge to understand how young children learn – Ability to plan, develop and implement developmentally appropriate activities based on their interests through the most effective way, thus applying theory to practice – Awareness of a range of professional issues which impact directly on the management of and relationships amongst a group of learners – An array of skills, attitudes and dispositions to become competent and committed professionals through the practical aspects of the course – Awareness of the ethical issues implicit in the professional role – Commitment to social justice and democratic participation in an education where children's rights, voices and an ethics of care are valued – Understanding that teaching and learning are complex processes that involve working with multidisciplinary professionals, parents and multiple practitioners – Acquisition of specialised knowledge of early childhood education-related aspects in psychology, pedagogy, professional practice, creative activity and professional issues.	**1st Year:** – Child development (6 ECTS); – Emergent curriculum in early years: planning and implementation (4 ECTS) – Becoming an Early Childhood Educator (4 ECTS) – Young children exploring their physical and human environment (6 ECTS) – Introduction to early years settings: observation and experience (6 ECTS) – Children in society (4 ECTS) – Pedagogies of early childhood education (4 ECTS) – Quality matters in ECEC (4 ECTS) – Academic reading and writing in English (2 ECTS) – Play and its contribution to early years development (4 ECTS) – Psychological perspectives on children's learning in the early years (4 ECTS) – Music in the early years (4 ECTS) – Movement & Physical activity in early years (4 ECTS) – Health and Well-being for Children (4 ECTS). **2nd year:** – The reflective professional (4 ECTS) – Enabling environments: using indoor and outdoor spaces, resources and materials (4 ECTS) – Language, literacy and communication development in young children (4 ECTS) – Sharing responsibilities with families and pluralistic communities in early childhood education (8 ECTS) – *L-Użu tal-Lingwa Maltija fis-Snin Bikrin* [The Use of the Maltese Language in the Early Years] (4 ECTS) – Field placement in ECEC 1 (6 ECTS) – Observation, assessment and children's participation in early years settings (4 ECTS) – Nurturing the spiritual, moral and religious dimensions (4 ECTS) – Enjoying English in the early years (4 ECTS) – Children's early experiences of mathematics (4 ECTS) – Tapping on funds of knowledge (4 ECTS) – Becoming symbol literate (4 ECTS) – Creativity and arts-based pedagogies in early childhood (6 ECTS).

[34] The info on the MLI website shows 0 students for the undergrad course in ECEC which it promotes.
[35] Where available, the number of ECTS for each study unit/module is included.

Competences	Curricular areas[35]
	3rd Year: – Using digital technologies to promote 21st century learning in ECE (4 ECTS) – Leadership in early years settings, (4 ECTS) – High potential, emerging abilities and giftedness in young learners, (4 ECTS) – The emergent curriculum in action (4 ECTS) – Including learners with developmental disabilities in early years (4 ECTS) – Children's understanding of the world through environmental education (4 ECTS) – Second field placement in ECEC (8 ECTS) – Addressing diversity in early years (4 ECTS) – Critical debates in early childhood education and care (4 ECTS) – The early childhood practitioner (4 ECTS) – Transitions in the early years (4 ECTS) – Implications of children's rights and legal issues for early years practitioners (4 ECTS) – Social issues in early education (4 ECTS) – Promoting positive behaviour in the early years (4 ECTS).
Pedagogic approaches: A variety of methods, including lectures, workshops, tutorials, observations, fieldwork and practical field placements, where students will have the opportunity to experience first-hand working with young children in school contexts.	

Table 16b

Malta: Competences, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 5 IPE

Provider: MCAST (2021e); Qualification: Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years

Competences	Curricular areas
– Innovative underpinning knowledge, understanding and skills for success in employment within the early years sector – Experiences to link theory to practice in order to develop skills and competences as well as personal qualities and attitudes essential for an early years' professional – Engagement in pedagogical critical discussions and field internships which will help with leadership skills thus providing young children with the appropriate opportunities in their development – Conduct research in the Early Years sector – Maintain health and safety standards in child	**1st year:** – Sociology of childhood (3 ECTS) – Philosophical issues in early years pedagogy (3 ECTS) – Development of young children (6 ECTS) – Communicating values and leadership in an early years environment (3 ECTS) – Emergent curriculum 1 (6 ECTS) – Nurturing a practice of imagination (3 ECTS) – Multimodality in young children (3 ECTS) – Designing spaces conducive to Learning 1 (Work placement) (6 ECTS) – Research methods in early years education (3 ECTS) – Early years mathematics (6 ECTS) – Physical education in the early years (3 ECTS) – Documenting the narratives of young children (3 ECTS) – Continuing professional development (3 ECTS) – Developing play in the early years curriculum (3 ECTS) – Designing spaces conducive to learning 2 (work placement) (6 ECTS). **2nd year**: – Research project in early years education (3 ECTS); Creative arts in ECE (6 ECTS) – English for young learning (Key skill) (6 ECTS) – *Il-Malti għat tfal iż-żgħar* [Maltese for young children] (Key skill) (6 ECTS) – Childcare management (3 ECTS)

Competences	Curricular areas
care and kindergarten settings – Enhance managerial and pedagogical competences – Provide an adequate educational environ-ment for young learners.	– Designing spaces conducive to learning 3 (work placement) (6 ECTS) – Promoting positive relationships within families and the community (3 ECTS) – Positive behaviour in early years settings (3 ECTS) – Contemporary issues in child health (6 ECTS) – Promoting language development (6 ECTS) – Promoting knowledge and understanding of the world (6 ECTS) – Designing space conducive to learning 4 (work placement) (6 ECTS).
Pedagogic approaches: The study units provide a strong link between theoretical concepts and hands-on practice during internships. Lectures focus on guiding the undergraduates on how to make learning for young children stimulating and fun, in a safe and healthy environment.	

Table 16c

Malta: Competences and curricular areas for Level 6 (top-up course)

Provider: University of Malta (2022b); Qualification: BA (Hons) (ECEC) Top-up degree

Competences	Curricular areas
– The ability to plan, develop and implement developmentally appropriate activities based on children's interests – Applying theory to practice – An awareness of a range of professional issues which impact directly on the management of and relationships amongst a group of learners – An array of skills, attitudes and dispositions to become competent and committed professionals through the practical aspects of the course – An awareness of the ethical issues implicit in the professional role and a commitment to social justice and democratic participation in an education where children's rights, voices and an ethics of care are valued – An understanding that teaching and learning are complex processes that involve working with multi-disciplinary professionals, parents and multiple practitioners.	**3rd Year:** – Leadership in early years settings (4 ECTS); The emergent curriculum in action (4 ECTS) – Third field placement in ECEC (8 ECTS) – Children's understanding of the world through environmental education (4 ECTS) – Critical debates in early childhood education and care (4 ECTS) – Transitions in the early years (4 ECTS) – Implications of children's rights and legal issues for early years practitioners (4 ECTS) – Promoting positive behaviour in the early years (4 ECTS) – Using digital technologies to promote 21st century learning in ECE (4 ECTS) – High potential, emerging abilities and giftedness in young learners (4 ECTS) – Including learners with developmental disabilities in early years (4 ECTS) – Fourth field placement in ECEC (6 ECTS) – Addressing diversity in early years (4 ECTS) – Nurturing the spiritual, moral and religious dimensions (4 ECTS) – The early childhood practitioner (4 ECTS) – Social issues in early education (4 ECTS).
Pedagogic approaches: A variety of methods, including lectures, workshops, tutorials, observations, fieldwork and practical field placements, where students will have the opportunity to experience first-hand working with young children in school contexts.	

Table 16d

Malta: Competences and curricular areas for Level 6 (top-up course)

Provider: MCAST & IfE (MCAST 2021f); Qualification: Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Early Years, Learning and Care (Top-Up)

Competences	Curricular areas
– Implementing learning activities using the Emergent Curriculum approach to foster children's learning;	– Microteaching (3 ECTS) – Leadership and classroom management (6 ECTS) – Everyday science for young learners (3 ECTS) – Action research and the reflective practitioner (3 ECTS)

Competences	Curricular areas
– Applying early years pedagogy and practice in relation to the holistic development of the child; – Demonstrating positive leadership skills in an Early Years Environment; – Carrying out action research to further develop early years competence.	– Outdoor learning through nature for young learners (2 ECTS) – Children's Rights and Legislation (3 ECTS) – Critical engagement of the early years practitioner (6 ECTS) – Digital citizenship: enriching learning through web-based applications (3 ECTS) – Social Issues in the early years (6 ECTS) – Emergent curriculum in practice (10 ECTS) – Children's emotions and well-being (3 ECTS) – Dissertation (12 ECTS).
Pedagogic approaches: Blended programme	

Table 16e

Malta: Competences and curricular areas for Level 6

Provider: Malta Leadership Institute (MLI 2023); Qualification: Bachelor of Education (Honours) in Early Years[36]

Competences	Curricular Areas
– Demonstrate the ability to acquire knowledge pertaining to the Early Years (EY) educational field within the Maltese educational context, including an understanding of the common challenges present in the content, design and implementation of various legislations, policies and frameworks – Manage the practice placements creatively, show initiative and take responsibility for decision-making in the unpredictable EY educational context, whilst continuously reflecting on the practice throughout – Manage one's own learning to creatively learn about what constitute 21st-century skills and the strategies that can be implemented to help young learners develop such skills – Demonstrate initiative in learning about the correct way of observing young learners within an educational context – Demonstrate the ability to create, prepare and implement lesson plans and associated resources (activities) according to the developmental needs of young learners – Develop the learning skills necessary to learn independently about what constitutes the emergent curriculum, debunk current myths about it and design an EY classroom environment that promotes and allows for proper implementation of the emergent curriculum – Demonstrate a high degree of autonomy in learning about how Maltese and English literacy, and numeracy, develops in young learners in line with their development, and implement effective strategies for young learners to learn literacy and numeracy – Develop the learning skills necessary to learn independently about the characteristics of the Reggio approach and the Project approach to learning in the EY and their implementation in the EY classroom	**1st year:** – Introduction to the Maltese education system – legislation, policies and frameworks (4 ECTS); – Development as a professional educator: reflective practice (4 ECTS) – Practice in the kinder classroom – part 1 (7 ECTS) – Teaching and learning in the 21st century (4 ECTS) – Child development as a means to understanding children's needs (6 ECTS) – The emergent curriculum (6 ECTS) – Observation, planning and assessment in early years (8 ECTS) – Fostering literacy skills in young children – learning the Maltese language (5 ECTS) – Fostering literacy skills in young children – learning the English language (5 ECTS) – Introducing mathematics in the early years (5 ECTS) – A project approach in early years (6 ECTS). **2nd year:** – Critical issues in early years pedagogies: a psychological perspective (6 ECTS) – Practice in the kindergarten classroom – Part 2 (7 ECTS) – Critical issues in early years pedagogies: a sociological perspective (6 ECTS) – Critical issues in early years pedagogies: a philosophical perspective (6 ECTS)

[36] The table shows an excerpt from the list of competences included in the website (MLI 2023)

Competences	Curricular Areas
– Show creativity and initiative in managing activities and tasks related to pedagogies in EY and in promoting holistic child development in an EY context – Demonstrate responsibility to evaluate the impact of the different pedagogies that can be used taking into consideration the wider picture of the secondary socialisation of young learners and show initiative in acknowledging the increase in cultural and identity pluralism, in the evaluation and application of EY pedagogies – Show autonomy in learning about the various philosophical approaches and inquiries which underpin EY education, debunk common myths related to such approaches and sustain arguments related to how the EY cycle provides philosophical reflections on the role of society, people and knowledge – Demonstrate a high degree of autonomy in learning about what constitutes digital literacy and how it can be implemented within the EY setting to create meaningful learning experiences for young learners – Demonstrate creativity in learning about effective ways of communicating with young learners, with the ultimate aim of developing positive relationships conducive to learning; – Show creativity and initiative in learning about what constitutes sustainable development (SD) and about the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and in implementing Education for SD in an EY educational setting – Demonstrate the ability to manage knowledge on what constitutes STEM education and what role this has within the EY setting – Show autonomy in learning about the various digital tools available for young learners which support early learning in STEM and be able to design an EY classroom environment that allows for STEM education to take place – Demonstrate the ability to design an EY classroom environment that allows for creativity to take place through the use of effective strategies – Demonstrate the ability to design an EY classroom environment that allows for humanities and democracy education to take place – Develop autonomy in gaining the necessary skills to be able to implement strategies targeted at fostering supportive and caring learning environments for the benefit of young learners.	– Digital competencies in the early years classroom (4 ECTS) – Educating for sustainability in the early years (4 ECTS) – STEM in the early years (4 ECTS) Fostering creativity in the early years (4 ECTS) – Moral and inclusive religious education for young learners (4 ECTS) – Humanities and democracy for young learners (4 ECTS) – The heart in early education: creating caring learning environments (6 ECTS) – Principles of classroom leadership and management (6 ECTS). **3rd year**: – Rethinking children's spaces and places: experiential learning (6 ECTS) – Rights, equity and justice in education (4 ECTS) – Practice in the kindergarten classroom – Part 3 (6 ECTS) – Collaboration in the early years (6 ECTS) – Society, health and wellbeing of young learners (4 ECTS) – Educating young children with disabilities: theory and practice (6 ECTS) – Multiculturalism in the early years (4 ECTS) – The professional development of the early years educator (4 ECTS) – Quality assurance in early years education (4 ECTS) – Physical activity in early years (4 ECTS) – Giftedness in young learners (4 ECTS) – Transitions in early years (4 ECTS) – Academic reading and writing (3 ECTS).
Pedagogic approaches: Delivered through blended learning, with 50% of contact hours delivered online and the other 50% of contact hours delivered face-to-face	

Table 16f

Malta: Competences, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 4 IPE

Provider: MCAST (2021c); Qualification: Advanced Diploma in Children's care, learning and development

Competences	Curricular areas[37]
– Plan activities for babies, toddlers and children in the early years – Maintain health and safety standards in early years settings – Implement activities and construct resources for children – Monitor and record the development of children.	**1st year**: – Positive relationships for children's care, learning and development (6 ECTS) – Positive and safe environment for children's care, learning and development (3 ECTS) – Promoting children's development (3 ECTS) – Supporting children's language, pre-literacy and numeracy skills 0-3 (6 ECTS) – Safeguarding and promoting children's rights (6 ECTS) – Children's learning activities and play (6 ECTS) – Meeting additional requirements for children's settings, learning and development (6 ECTS) – Planning and reflecting on developing practice and children 1 (9 ECTS) – Developing and managing a registered childcare service (3 ECTS) – Malti (6 ECTS) – English (6 ECTS). **2nd year**: – Diet, nutrition and cooking activities for children (6 ECTS) – Physical activities for children (3 ECTS) – Psychological perspectives on children's behaviour (6 ECTS) – Environmental science for the early years (3 ECTS) – Design and technology for the early years practitioner (6 ECTS) – Contemporary issues in early years (6 ECTS) – Supporting children's language, literacy and numeracy Skills 3-5 (6 ECTS) – Planning and reflecting on developing practice for children 2 (9 ECTS) – Introduction to the emergent curriculum (6 ECTS) – Creative arts for the early years (3 ECTS) – Employability and entrepreneurial skills (4 ECTS) – Community social responsibility (2 ECTS).
Pedagogic approaches: Students are exposed to the most innovative teaching techniques and are also trained on observation techniques required to monitor the development of children. There is a major emphasis on the practical components carried out in this course. The course includes placements in early years settings.	

Table 16g

Malta: Competences, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 4 IPE

Provider: Learning Works (2023); Qualification: Award in Child Care (0–3 years)

Competences	Curricular areas
– Understand child development in children aged 0 to 3 years including physical, intellectual, language, social and emotional development – Be fluent with relevant national legislation and regulatory requirements with a focus on protecting and fostering children's rights and following health and safety procedures – Develop an awareness of the need to develop positive relationships and partnerships with children and their families	– Health and safety at the workplace and the outdoor environment (4 ECTS) – Teamwork and communication (4 ECTS) – Communicating with parents and carers of children (4 ECTS)

[37] The first 60 ECTS listed in the curricular areas pertain to the *MCAST Award in Children's Care, Learning and Development Level 4, ECVET 60.*

Competences	Curricular areas
– Plan and implement meaningful learning experiences that enable optimal development in babies, toddlers and young children – Identify and meet the diverse needs of children with additional needs to cater for cultural, linguistic, learning or physical differences – Adopt a reflective practice approach to their daily work to continually improve their own practice for the benefit of children's outcomes – Apply child development theories into practice – Work collaboratively in a team and promote positive relationships between all stakeholders – Plan, develop and facilitate play and learning experiences for children aged 0 to 3 years – Provide care of children's daily needs including those with additional needs; Support and communicate with parents/legal guardians within an inclusive environment that celebrates diversity and welcomes all families – Maintain a healthy and safe environment where children can be cared for and educated respectfully and safely – Report and document the daily occurrences, incidents and interactions as required for the safe upkeeping and running of a childcare centre according to the National Standards – Work and behave responsibly and professionally with the integrity and respect needed to adequately care for young children – Follow and uphold the policies, procedures and standards of a child care setting and work in collaboration with the management and the staff for a smooth running of the centre – Create and maintain positive relationships with children, their families and the staff at the centre for the benefit and optimal development of children under their care – Increase awareness and understanding of the need for care that is of high quality, non-discriminatory and inclusive – Develop critical reflective skills to engage in reflective practice as part of own professional development.	– Value of play and recreational activities for children (4 ECTS) – Children's development and learning (14 ECTS) – Work placement/Portfolio of evidence (30 ECTS).
Pedagogic approaches: Lectures, group activities and discussions	

Table 16h

Malta: Competencies, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 4 IPE

Provider: AVANZA (2022); Qualification: Award in Early Years development, education and care

Knowledge, skills, competences	Curricular areas[38]
Knowledge: Students will be exposed to the theoretical and practical features of early years child development, early years learning and forms of best practice. Students will learn factual and theoretical knowledge on how to implement, maintain and sustain early years learning and development within a *high-quality* early years childcare provision. **Skills:** Students will master a range of developmental, cognitive and practical skills to provide solutions to day-to-day specific issues in early years settings.	– National Childcare Standards, health and safety at work (6 ECTS) – Safeguarding children, child protection and rights (6 ECTS) – Infant/child development and learning (6 ECTS) – The holistic child and importance of play (6 ECTS) – Early years language, literacy numeracy acquisition (6 ECTS) – Fostering prosocial positive attachment behaviour (4 ECTS) – Equality, diversity and inclusive practice (4 ECTS)

[38] Where available, the number of ECTS for each study unit/module is included.

Knowledge, skills, competences	Curricular areas[38]
Competences: Students will be able to exercise self-management within the context of early years provision. Students will be able to implement specific strategies, conducive to the needs of young children under their care. They will be competent and fully aware of the importance of providing a responsive, caring, safe and nurturing environment, whereby the educational activities on offer for children will be age appropriate and designed to scaffold early years learning and development.	– Early years assessment and observation (4 ECTS) – Effective communication, colleagues and parent partnership (4 ECTS) – Professional reflective practice (2 ECTS) – Registered Early Years Service, responsibilities and legal requirements (2 ECTS) – Work placement (10 ECTS) All modules are mandatory to qualify for this MQF Level 4 Award.
Pedagogic approaches: During the course, students will be encouraged to engage in pedagogical critical and reflective discussions, whilst work-based learning experience will help students to acquire the required leadership skills needed to provide young children with the appropriate developmental opportunities.	

Table 16i

Malta: Competences, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 4 IPE

Provider: Outlook COOP (personal communication); Qualification: Award in Childcare, Well-being, Development and Learning for Early Years

Competences	Curricular areas
– Demonstrate personal and interpersonal qualities and skills required for caring in relation to the needs of young children aged between 0 and 3 years – Understand the importance of the role of the child care worker – Study children's rights and improve key competences in relation to diversity – Examine health aspects as part of the holistic wellbeing of children – Study psychology and its relevance to childcare work – Study relevant laws and regulations to childcare work – Establish safe practice consistently – Have a solid knowledge and ability to recognise the needs of children – Evaluate the contribution of different professional experiences related to child care work – Be affirmed as a child care worker in an intEducation Resources Departmentisciplinary professional team – Evaluate one's own learning through the use of reflective practice.	**Module 1: Child Development and Learning** – Principles of early education – Children's developmental milestones – The role of play in children's learning – Child study and observation – The childcare worker. **Module 2: Child Protection, Safety and Well-being** – Equal opportunities / disability issues – Nutrition, hygiene and food handling – Child welfare Multi-agency networking – Health and safety – First aid – Focus on the child care worker.
Pedagogic approaches: Lectures delivered in an interactive manner to encourage student participation. Theory presented in an applied manner, including examples from practice. Opportunities to engage in group discussions and team work. The practical placement is a major learning opportunity.	

Table 16j

Malta: Competences and curricular areas for Level 4

Provider: Jobsplus (2020), *Qualification: VET Diploma in Childcare 0–3*

Competencies	Curricular areas
No specific information is provided in the course material but the module titles and competences identified for each follow the National Occupational Standards for childcare educators published by MFHEA. *Learners are expected to acquire all the competences enlisted in the National Occupational Standards for Childcare Educators*[39].	– Child development (88 hours)[40] – Development of Communication, Imagination and Creativity (62 hours) – Physical care of the child (67 hours) – Nutrition and hygiene (32 hours) – Health and safety (33 hours) – Children's rights, equality and inclusion (38 hours) – Supporting a child with disability or individual educational needs, (50 hours) – Report writing (18 hours) – The child-led approach (30 hours) – Self-reflection, self-development and placement (512 hours – including 500 hours for placement); – First aid (16 hours) – Paediatric first aid (9 hours).
Pedagogic approaches: Mainly through lessons delivered by the trainer, who will engage learners in class discussions and role-play activities. To facilitate the learners' apprehension, the trainer will also use PowerPoint presentations. Learners will be undergoing practical training that will be carried out in a licensed childcare centre. During the practical training, learners have to prove their competence in putting the theory learnt into practice. They will have to follow the policies adopted by the respective childcare centre.	

Table 16k

Malta: Competences and curricular areas for Level 4

Provider: Future Focus (Future Focus 2022a; NCFE CACHE 2022a); Qualification: CACHE Level 3 Diploma for the Early Years Workforce

Competences	Curricular areas
No information is provided about the overall competencies expected to be addressed and achieved by students who register for this short course.	– Support healthy lifestyles for children through the provision of food and nutrition – Support healthy lifestyles for children through exercise – Support physical care routines for children – Promote children's emotional well-being – Understand how to support children who are unwell – Understand legislation relating to the safeguarding, protection and welfare of children – Use legislation relating to the health and safety of children – Follow legislation relating to equality, diversity and inclusive practice Working in partnership – Engage in professional development – Understand the value of play in Early Years – Plan, lead and review play opportunities which support children's learning and development – Promote enabling play environments – Developing children's emergent literacy skills; Developing children's emergent mathematical skills – Support children's transition to school – Develop children's cognitive skills

[39] Confirmed via email 11th August 2022

[40] Hours indicated on the course documentation sheet show that these hours associated to each module include one or two hours for assessment. Module 10 which includes the placement is an exception.

Competences	Curricular areas
	– Promote children's speech, language and communication – Promote children's physical development – Promote children's personal, social and emotional development – Support children with additional needs – Use observation, assessment and planning to promote the development of children – Use longitudinal studies to observe, assess and plan for children's needs.
Pedagogic approaches: Participants participate in a diverse programme that includes theory, hands-on-learning, small group work, observation and field based practical experience.	

Table 16l

Malta: Competences and curricular areas for Level 4

Provider: Apex Academy (2023), *Qualification: Pre-tertiary certificate in Early Childhood Education & Care*

Competences	Curricular areas
– Describe the main roles and responsibilities of a child carer to assist children in their learning and development from early years childhood – List and discuss the different health and safety practices to be taken into consideration when working within childcare – Recall the various theories of learning, development and play which are crucial knowledge for the child carer – Identify the need and the importance of promoting inclusion, anti-discriminatory practice and equality of opportunity at the childcare centre – List and describe various requirements and need to be able to care effectively for children under the age of 3 – List various recreational activities and discuss how these are important and crucial to assist children in development and learning – Recall the importance of promoting positive behaviour – Describe the role of reflective practice in childcare – Identify the importance of safeguarding, child protection issues and procedures and legislation – Demonstrate ability to assist children in their development and learning experience – Plan for and mitigate risks regarding health and safety which are relevant for children aged 0–3 years – Demonstrate understanding of different theories of learning, and development and the different stages of development of children – Prepare recreational activities, play and experience for children to support development and learning – Promote independence in basic needs of children such as potty training, nutrition, and others – Practice effective child caring techniques for basic requirements of children including nutrition, nap times, play times and others – Apply effective reflective practice techniques to always ensure high quality service and experience	– Roles and responsibilities of child-care worker (6 ECTS) – Health and safety practices in a childcare centre (6 ECTS) – Theories of child development and learning (6 ECTS) – Promoting inclusion and anti-discriminatory practice (6 ECTS) – Caring for babies and children (0–3 years) (6 ECTS) – Promoting professionalism and positive behaviour at the workplace (6 ECTS) – Theories of play and recreation in early years (6 ECTS) – Reflective practice in childcare (3 ECTS) – Work placement (15 ECTS)

Competences	Curricular areas
– Communicate effectively with different stakeholders including children, their parents/guardians and other fellow child carers – Promote positive behaviour at the place of work – Prepare for and implement an inclusive practice.	
Pedagogic approaches: Face-to-face lectures and hands-on practice. This programme aims to equip learners with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively work within a childcare setting, providing children between the ages of 0–3 with the most effective quality care. Learners will be exposed to different theories and different skills that they need to acquire to work effectively within the sector, as well as being provided with a placement opportunity to further learn and put theory to practice.	

Table 16m

Malta: Competences and curricular areas Level 5 IPS

Provider: Future Focus (2022b); Qualification: CACHE Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People`s Services (England); Children`s and Young People`s Management (NCFE CACHE 2022b)

Competences	Curricular areas
This qualification provides learners with the skills and knowledge needed to manage practice and lead others in health and social care and children and young people's services.	– Safeguarding and protection – Managing care services – Supporting development and partnership working – Contributing to broader activities such as change programmes and recruitment – Complying with quality systems and continuously improving quality – Developing and carrying out policy – Promoting and developing best practice – Care management.
Pedagogic approaches: No information provided	

Table 16n

Malta: Competences and curricular areas Level 3 IPE

Provider: Institute for Education; Qualification: Award in Assisting the Childcare Educator (IfE 2023)

Competences	Curricular areas
– Use child development theories to understand children's needs – Care for children's physical needs – Implement learning experiences that sustain children's' progress – Actively sustain inclusive learning environments – Follow all pertinent Health and Safety regulations – Employ positive behaviour management systems – Encourage parental involvement in children's learning and assessment – Foster collaboration and healthy working relationships with all stakeholders – Reflect on one's daily practices – Implement sustainability concerns in children's learning experiences.	– Understanding child development and caring for children's physical needs (4 ECTS) – Creating learning experiences that sustain progression (4 ECTS) – Sustaining inclusive learning environments in the early years (4 ECTS) – Health and safety in early years settings (4 ECTS) – Core themes in early years education (4 ECTS) – Practice placement in the early years (10 ECTS).
Pedagogic approaches: Most lectures are held online with some face-to-face sessions. Forum discussions, portfolios, reflection and practical assignments are included in the assessment procedures of the modules. A practicum of 200 hours is also included.	

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Alternative routes refer to any IPE for the early years workforce personnel offered at MQF/EQF Level 3, 4, 5 and 6 by institutions which have been licensed/approved by MFHEA[41]. These programmes are accredited according to the MQF level rating. MFHEA maintains a register of accredited further and higher educational institutions in Malta through a database[42]. This includes detailed information of the licenced education providers and of those who are self-accrediting[43].

Achieving recognition and thus approval to be employed without formal qualification is possible through the Trade Testing System (Jobsplus 2022). Trade Testing was set up in order to assess individuals who have acquired knowledge, skills and competences in a particular occupation but do not possess a formal qualification. A trade test therefore validates non-formal and informal learning. Through trade testing, a person is assessed by an interview, a theoretical and a practical test. Successful candidates are awarded a certificate in a particular occupation. In order to sit for these assessments, a candidate must be proficient in written English. With regard to childcare, there are two Trade Tests, one focusing on Childcare Educators and another test for childcare managers/supervisors. The validation process is regulated by MFHEA, however Jobsplus carries out the assessment on behalf of the Sector Skills Unit. Over the past ten years, 340 females and three males were awarded the EQF/MQF Level 4 qualification as Childcare Educators through the Trade Test whereas 125 females and six males were awarded the EQF/MQF Level 5 qualification as Childcare Managers (JobsPlus CEO at the Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023b).

Table 17a

Malta: IPE for KGEs via a further education institution

Job title in English: *Kindergarten Educator* **Profile**: Pre-primary Education Professional
Kindergarten Educator (KGE III)
Entry requirements: MATSEC Level in English, Maltese, Maths and a fourth (4th) subject (which might also be the ECDL or equivalent or a proficiency test equivalent to MATSEC in the three subject areas (MQF Level 3) – (all minimum Grade 5); **and** Advanced Matriculation Level (minimum grade E) (MQF level 4) in one subject – ***or*** equivalent including VET qualification; (MQF level 4, 120 ECTS) **and** a valid First Aid certificate.
Professional studies: Malta Leadership Institute 3 years part-time
Award: Bachelor of Education (Honours) in Early Years – (MLI 2023)
ECTS credits: 180
EQF level: 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6
Main ECEC workplace: Kindergarten settings 3–4 years

[41] In 2021, the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) was re-established as the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (https://mfhea.mt/overview), to seek to promote and develop further and higher education in Malta by means of regulation and by the promotion of best practices.

[42] Database maintained in accordance with Subsidiary Legislation 607.03 on Licensing, Accreditation and Quality Assurance.

[43] The University of Malta, for programmes up to and including level 8 of the MQF, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) for programmes up to and including level 7 of the MQF and the Institution of Tourism Studies (ITS) for programmes up to and including level 5 of the MQF are self-accrediting institutions by virtue of the Subsidiary Legislation 607.03.

Table 17b

Malta: Childcare Educator alternative entry qualifications

Job title in English: *Childcare Educator* **Profile**: Social Care/Health Care Professional
Route 1 **Entry requirements**: Candidates must be 18 years of age and in possession of a relevant MQF Level 3 accredited award related to childcare or have at least 5-years' experience as a childcare worker assistant in a Childcare centre, including a school leaving certificate. Candidates must be able to communicate in English and Maltese. A proficiency numerical and literacy skills test together with a Police Conduct Certificate will also be required. Should the students have qualifications or equivalent evidence in Numeracy and Literacy then they will be exempt from the required tests. Candidates are also required to obtain a paediatric first aid certificate prior to the start of this course programme. This is a prerequisite for Module 1: 'Health and Safety at the Workplace and Outdoor Environment'. Candidates may apply for recognition for prior learning (RPL) for up to 40% of the total credits of the award. The Maturity Clause will apply for those over 23 years of age, but such prospective students will be required to go through an interview. Candidates with foreign qualifications …must get their qualification validated through MQRIC at NCFHE (Learning Works 2023). **Professional studies**: Includes 200 placement hours in childcare settings (12 ECTS). Placements are done over 8 weeks, 5 hours per day. The course, which is held over one year includes online and face-to-face sessions, held at the 'Learning Works' premises. **Award**: Award in Childcare (0–3 years) – Learning Works **ECTS credits:** 60 **EQF level**: 4 **ISCED 2011:** 4 **Main ECEC workplace**: Childcare settings, 0–3 years *Route 2* **Entry requirements**: 16+ years of age and possess either – Minimum of 5 SEC O level subjects of which must include Mathematics, English (Lang or Lit), Maltese at Grade 5 or better and any other 2 O Level subjects at Grade 7 or better ***or*** Successful completion of a related MQF Level 3 Foundation/Certificate Qualification (for example, Health & Social Care/ Art & Design / Sports or Performing Arts) ***or*** Mature students (+23 years at the start of the academic year applied for), subject to proficiency and/or aptitude tests as directed by the Academy **Professional studies**: offered as a one-year full-time course. Includes a work-based learning placement within a registered 0–3 ECEC centre for a total of 250 hours. **Award:** Award in Early Years Development, Education & Care – AVANZA **ECTS credits:** 60 **EQF level**: 4 **ISCED 2011**: 4 **Main ECEC workplace**: Childcare settings, 0–3 years *Route 3:* **Entry requirements**: Individuals who are at least 18 years of age and who show an aptitude towards working with young children; a clean Police Conduct and hold two MQF level 3 passes (grades 1 to 5) in either Mathematics, English or Maltese. Applicants who are mature in age (over 23 years) may be considered under the Maturity Clause if they can provide satisfactory evidence (such as previous experience in this field and testimonials of care giving) of their ability to pursue successfully the programme of study. An Assessment board will be set up to help determine whether each applicant has the right aptitude or not for the job. This will be done during a standardised interview prior to registering for the Award in Child-Care. **Professional studies**: Offered as a one-year part-time course, held entirely face-to-face at Outlook Coop's premises. **Award:** Award in Child Care, Well-being, Development and Learning for Early years – Outlook Coop

Job title in English: *Childcare Educator*
Profile: Social Care/Health Care Professional

ECTS credits: 60
EQF level: 4
ISCED 2011: 4
Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years

Route 4:

Entry requirements: 16 years of age or older; an MQF Level 2 qualification in Mathematics, English and Maltese and a clean Police Conduct Certificate. In the absence of an MQF Level 2 qualification, individuals can apply if in possession of other qualifications or relevant experience[44].

Professional studies: This course is of 945 hours' duration and consists of twelve modules; 500 hours are allocated for placement in Module10.
Award: Vocational Education and Training Diploma in Childcare (0–3 years) – Jobsplus
ECTS credits: 60
EQF level: 4
ISCED 2011: 4
Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years

Route 5:

Entry requirements: There are no entry requirements for this course but students are expected to have a good working knowledge of English**.**

Professional studies: offered as an 8-month part-time course; 360 hours of work experience/ practicum

Award: NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma for the Early Years workforce (Early Years Educator) – advertised by two local entities, Future Focus (2022a) and The Playhouse Institute (2022)

ECTS credits: 30
EQF level: 4
ISCED 2011: 4
Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years

Route 6:

Entry requirements: 3 years of work experience with children in a childcare facility catering for children from 0–3 years in line with the L.N. 295 of 2012 which regulates the Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning. These candidates need to present a reference letter by an employer, confirming the number of hours of this experience; a portfolio including a description of the responsibilities of a Childcare Educator, a description of the contributions the candidate made at the childcare centre where employed, testimonials of any formal and/or informal training undertaken and any certificates in relation to childcare and a CV

Professional studies: Process of validation of informal and non-formal learning. Assessment consists of a written test, a 4-hour practical test and attending an interview, besides submitting an activity plan during the practical examination. Candidates will be assessed on the criteria laid down in the NOS issued by the MFHEA.

Award: Award as Childcare Educator – Trade Test administered by Jobsplus (Jobsplus and MFHEA, 2022a)

ECTS credits: not applicable
EQF level: 4
ISCED 2011: 4
Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years

[44] VET Diploma in Childcare 0–3 years Top up Level 4 (7 ECTS) is offered to holders of the VET Award in Childcare (0–3 years) offered by Jobsplus from year 2017 onwards, or those who completed the VET Award in Childcare (0–5 years), which was offered by Jobsplus from year 2014. Students following the top-up courses follow the new modules (Modules 8, 9, 11 and 12) only.

Job title in English: *Childcare Educator* **Profile**: Social Care/Health Care Professional
Route 7: **Entry requirements**: 4 SEC Subjects including Maltese, English, Mathematics, and any other subject. Proficient in English and Maltese; Clean Police Conduct; at least 18 years of age at start of the programme **Professional studies**: Offered as a full-time 60 ECTS course, starting in October 2023, this course includes 7 modules of 6 ECTS each; one 3 ECTS module and the 300-hour placement module worth 15 ECTS. **Award**: Pre-tertiary certificate in Early Childhood Education and Care – APEX **ECTS credits:** 60 **EQF level**: 4 **ISCED 2011:** 4 **Main ECEC workplace**: Childcare settings, 0–3 years

Table 17c

Malta: Childcare Manager (alternative entry qualifications)

Job title in English: *Childcare Manager/Coordinator*[45] **Profile**: Social/Health Care Professional
Route 1 **Entry requirements:** Preference will be given to students who hold the CACHE level 4 diploma certificate or equivalent irrespective of age. Students who completed the Future Focus Level 3 certificate and wish to proceed directly to level 5 must be at least 23 years on date of application. Students who do not have a level 4 can apply if they are 23 years old plus have at least 3 years of continuous experience working as a child carer or as an LSE. **Professional studies:** 8 months; part time and generally online. **ECTS credits:** 45 **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011:** 4 **Main ECEC workplace:** Childcare settings, 0–3 years ***Route 2*** **Entry requirements:** Level 4 in Childcare **Professional studies:** 8 months + 50 hours work placement in a kindergarten setting; part time. **Award:** NCFE CACHE Level 5 Diploma for the early years senior practitioner – CACHE through Future Focus (2022c) **ECTS credits:** 45 **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011:** 4 **Main ECEC workplace:** Childcare settings, 0–3 years[46] or kindergarten settings[47] ***Route 3*** **Entry requirements:** A Level 5 Diploma for the Early Years Senior Practitioner which carries 45 ECTS. Both courses together will make up for the required 60 ECTS to progress to KGE II. **Professional studies:** 15 weeks; part-time, online synchronous lectures for 5 modules and one module of 50 hours is allocated to practise in the kindergarten setting where the student is already employed. **Award:** Diploma ECEC Top-up – CACHE through Future Focus **ECTS credits:** 15 (this is a top-up programme and must follow from the 45 ECTS diploma)

[45] Some of the courses listed in this table are promoted as appropriate for KGEs.

[46] On its own, this course will no longer be a valid qualification when the National Standards (MFED 2021a) requirement of a minimum Level 5 with 60 ECTS for Managers becomes mandatory

[47] This qualification can be topped up with another 15ECTS programme for students to have 60 ECTS total leading to KGEII (Future Focus 2022c).

Job title in English: *Childcare Manager/Coordinator*[45] **Profile**: Social/Health Care Professional
EQF level: 5 **ISCED 2011:** 4 **Main ECEC workplace:** Kindergarten settings ***Route 4*** **Entry requirements:** Hold a valid First Aid Certificate that is recognised nationally. Be registered with the Food Safety Commission as a Food Handler. Have at least 3 years' experience in management of Child Care/ pre-school settings, catering for children from 0-3 years in line with the L.N. 295 of 2012 which regulates the Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning. Be well aware of the relative legislature and regulations. *These candidates will also need to present the contact details of two referees that can confirm their experience and endorse skills claimed to the Assessment Board, prior to being assessed*. Candidates will need to present to the Assessment Board a Portfolio including a description of the responsibilities of a childcare worker, a description of the contributions made at the childcare centre where employed, testimonials of any formal and/or informal training undertaken and any certificates awarded, for any formal training in supervision, management and or related areas with regard to child care. A CV is also to be submitted. **Professional studies:** Process of validation of informal and non-formal learning for Childcare Managers and Supervisors in childcare centres. Assessment is composed of three components: written test; interview; and portfolio **Award**: Certificate of Competence MQF/EQF Level 5 and endorsed by the MFHEA (Jobsplus & MFHEA, 2022b) **ECTS credits:** not applicable **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011:** 4 **Main ECEC workplace:** Childcare settings, 0–3 years

Formal opportunities for moving up the sector

UM and MCAST both offer top-up courses leading to an EQF 6 qualification (see *Chapter **4.2***). These top-up courses primarily target practitioners or students who would have completed the EQF 5 programme and have the possibility to progress in their studies or simultaneously continue their studies whilst in employment. The top-up course at UM is offered both as a one-year full time programme and as a two-year part-time programme.

Table 18

Malta: Top-up courses leading to EQF 6 BA degree in early years

Job title in English: *Kindergarten Educator* **Profile**: Pre-primary Education Professional
Kindergarten Educator (KGE III) *Route 1:* **Entry requirements:** (i) Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in Early Years (MCAST) or any other comparable and equivalent recognised qualification; (ii) passes at SEC level at Grade 5 or higher in English Language, Maltese and Mathematics; (iii) passes in proficiency tests in English and Maltese, approved by the Faculty. **Professional studies:** Two-years of part-time study (University of Malta 2022b). **Award:** BA (Hons) (ECEC) **ECTS credits:** 60 **EQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main ECEC workplace:** Kindergarten settings 3 to 5 year-olds

Job title in English: *Kindergarten Educator* **Profile**: Pre-primary Education Professional
Route 2: **Entry requirements:** A Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in Early Years (MQF Level 5, 120 ECTS), or equivalent; ***or*** MCAST-BTEC MQF 5 Early Years Learning and Development; ***or*** MCAST-BTEC Higher National Diploma in Advanced Studies in Early Years **Professional studies:** 18 months part-time, blended approach (MCAST and IfE, 2021g) **Award:** Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Early Years, Learning and Care (Top-Up) **ECTS credits:** 60 ECTS **EQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main ECEC workplace:** Kindergarten settings 3 to 5 year olds

Assistants to Childcare Educators

As mentioned earlier (*Chapter **2.1***), managers were formerly allowed to employ unqualified staff as Childcare Assistants. In light of the requirements for a minimum level of training according to the National Standards (MFED 2021a), letter circular (IfE45/2022) sent to childcare settings on August 1st 2022 by the Institute for Education[48], an invitation has been extended to these Assistants to follow a 30 ECTS EQF 3 programme for 'Assisting the Childcare Educators'. The programme ran from October 2022 to mid-July 2023.

Table 18a

Malta: EQF Level 3 Award for Assistants to Childcare Educators (Institute for Education)

Job title in English: *Assistant to the Childcare Educator*
Entry requirements: Be 23 years of age; currently employed in a childcare setting **Professional studies:** 8 months; delivered online – IfE portal **Award:** Award in Assisting the Childcare Educator, Institute for Education **ECTS credits:** 30 (part-time) **EQF level**: 3 **ISCED 2011:** 3 **Main ECEC workplace:** Childcare settings

According to the MCAST prospectus (MCAST 2023) a one-year diploma in early years will be available for prospective assistant childcare educators from October 2023 and seeks to prepare students who are interested in working in childcare settings. This course has attracted 94 students (MCAST reporting to Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023a).

[48] The Institute for Education was originally setup in April 2015 by virtue of Legal Notice 140 of 2015 as amended by Legal Notice 240 of 2015. The Institute was reconstituted as an agency by virtue of Legal Notice 243 of 2017. The Institute provides initial teacher training and professional development that inject 21st century skills and competences into the educators at all levels of leadership and infuse equity and social justice within all programmes. It aims to develop accredited programmes which are flexible and can be provided through different modes of delivery such as face-to-face lecture, online and blended learning. The Institute for Education is licenced by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) as a Higher Education Institution in accordance with the Second Schedule of Subsidiary Legislation 327.433.

Table 18b

Malta: EQF Level 3 Award for Assistants to Childcare Educators (MCAST)

Job title in English: *Assistant to the Childcare Educator*
Entry requirements: MCAST Foundation Certificate or 2 SEC/O-Level/SSC&P[49] (Level 3) passes **Professional studies:** Class based learning that provides introductory knowledge required to understand the basic practice of the childcare educator and sets a good foundation for learners wishing to embark on a career in Early Years Education and Care. The course also provides hands on practice through one placement. **Award:** Diploma in Early Years, MCAST **ECTS credits:** 60 (one year, full time) **EQF level**: 3 **ISCED 2011:** 3 **Main ECEC workplace:** Childcare settings

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Workplace/practice placements are not nationally regulated but are determined by the providers of the various programmes available. As illustrated in the subsequent sections, the amount of time students spend at kindergarten and childcare settings whilst following their initial professional studies varies. Similarly, the processes relating to the assessment of the practicum vary: some institutions have their own specifically-appointed examiners, others rely on staff at the childcare settings to monitor and supervise the students. To date, none of the staff employed or appointed for supervisory duties follow any mentoring course to prepare them for the role. Externally appointed assessors appear to have different roles as a number of institutions report that their assessor consults regular staff employed within the settings. These arrangements are applicable in particular to the EQF 4 courses which address Childcare Educators' qualifications and courses offered by private, independent institutions rather than the more established, government funded institutions which are nationally acknowledged as leading further and higher education.

Table 19

Malta: The professional practice component in EQF 4 programmes

Learning Works	**Avanza Training Academy**	**Outlook Coop**	**Jobsplus**	**Future Focus**	**MCAST**	**Apex Academy**
200 hours 12 ECTS One continuous period of 8 weeks duration, 5	250 hours 10 ECTS Placements are arranged by Avanza Training Academy to ensure all students are provided	400 hours Organised as 2 blocks x200 hours per module in the programme	500 hours	360 hours (NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma for the Early Years Workforce)	*Planning and Reflecting on Developing Practice and Children 1* (9 ECTS) and *Planning and Reflecting on Developing Practice for Children*	300 placement hours 15 ECTS Assessed through Observation

[49] Secondary school certificate and profiling (SSC&P) is the certificate obtained by students at the end of secondary school as proof of completion of compulsory education (https://education.gov.mt/en/dqse/Pages/SSC-and-P.aspx)

Learning Works	Avanza Training Academy	Outlook Coop	Jobsplus	Future Focus	MCAST	Apex Academy
hours a day.	with mentoring support from the respective Centre Owner/Manager	During the hours of placement, each student will have visits by the Centre Manager for assessment purposes.			*2* (9 ECTS). In the first study unit, no mention is made of the number of hours but the study unit description refers to two placements… *how to plan and implement activities with babies (0–14 months) and toddlers (14–36 months).* In the second study unit, learners must attend a minimum of 150 hours of placement with children aged 2–3 years.	(40%) and Reflection Course documentation indicates 30 hours for supervised placement and practice.

Additional information about the examination procedures concerning the practicum, together with any procedures linked to mentoring was obtained directly from the training institutions which offer the IPE courses.

Learning Works[50]

The Course Tutor responsible for the modules *Child Development and Learning* and *Work Placement, Portfolio of Evidence and Reflective Report* is also the person currently responsible for the placements and the assessment of students. This programme of studies has not been established for any length of time, and thus far one person with experience in educational settings has been responsible for supervising, examining and mentoring students during their practicum.

Students are visited twice during the practicum with the possibility of a third visit if the supervisor/mentor/assessor is not satisfied with the outcome. The Course Tutor is remunerated for each visit.

Other assessments during the practicum consist of

- A Portfolio of evidence, including the setting of childcare, personal philosophy about 'Child care education', weekly plan, 2 activities planned by the student
- A *Placement evaluation form* which includes information about programme development, professionalism, work with children, family engagement and professional development. This form is completed by the Centre Manager where the practicum is taking place.
- A reflective journal consisting of two topics such as *Adopting a play-based pedagogy* or *Partnerships with parents and families.* The choice of topic is discussed with the mentor.
- Child observations.

[50] Information via email August 4th 2022

Outlook Coop[51]

There is one examiner who has several years of experience in the early years sector who assesses and examines students during the practicum. Each student gets two assessment visits over the 400-hour practicum duration – one visit for each of the 200-hour block practices. The examiner is remunerated for these visits.

On a day-to-day basis, students are supervised by Centre Managers or by their appointees. However, the training institute does not get involved in who, within the childcare centre is appointed or takes on the role of mentoring/supporting the students doing their practicum.

Jobs Plus[52]

During the practical module, learners are required to write 15 journal entries highlighting what they have learned in class and how this was applied at the childcare centre. These can be observations made (for example during play time) or even things which they organised (for example an activity). They also need to highlight how they can further improve the activities (reflective practice). These journal entries are then corrected by a Jobsplus trainer, and the learners need to obtain a pass mark in order to pass from this module.

Learners are given a handbook through which they have to highlight the skills they practised at the childcare centre. The Centre Coordinator is responsible to grade the performance of the learner in each specific skill according to their performance during the placement. Placement monitoring visits are carried out by the Training Design and QA Unit and generally three visits are conducted so that Jobsplus gathers feedback at the beginning of the placement, halfway through the placement and towards the end.

It is up to the Centre to determine who should supervise the students during their practicum. Mentoring or coaching provided by the Centre is not remunerated as the agency sees this as something which ultimately the childcare settings will benefit from. Many of the students following this programme are offered a job before completing their placement. During monitoring visits, referred to earlier, feedback is sought from the students doing the practicum and the Centre Coordinators. The latter are reminded that students cannot merely observe but they must do the job. If there are instances where it is evident that either the trainee is not adhering to the Centre's policies or the Centre is not offering enough practical exposure to the learners, the training entity reserves the right to terminate the placement.

Practicum for EQF 5 IPE: Future Focus

With MQF5 courses that require a practicum, Future Focus allows learners to seek a placement within the related area of study. Once this is approved by the institution, the learner will conduct a specific number of hours of practice placement within the real-life setting. The practicum is internally supervised (by the particular Centre) and externally assessed by Future Focus on the place of work or via a professional discussion (depending on restrictions as per Covid measures). In both instances, Future Focus appoints a specialized tutor to assess the learner and draw up a report.

Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People's Services (England) Children's and Young People's Management (45 ECTS) includes 120 practice placement hours in a programme.

Level 5 Diploma ECEC TopUp course (15 ECTS) 1 module of the 6 modules is a practicum. Students need to conduct 50 hours in the role of KGE. Practice placement is conducted at the place of

[51] Information via email August 1st 2022
[52] Information via email August 8th 2022

work, hence within the school where they are already employed as KGEs. The learner will be expected to be in full-time employment within this setting and will be required to validate 50 hours of practice for this mandatory placement (Future Focus 2022c). No further information is provided about the assessment of the practicum.

MCAST EQF 5 and EQF 6 Top-up courses

Practicum study units are included in both the first and second year of the 120 ECTS EQF5 programme. There are two 6 ECTS study units in the first year and a further two 6 ECTS study units in the second year for a total of 24 ECTS. Students following this programme of studies are assessed by examiners appointed by MCAST itself.

Although the programme of studies for the MCAST/IfE joint degree top-up refers to a placement (IfE and MCAST 2021) none of the individual study unit descriptions indicate a specific period for the practicum. One 10 ECTS study unit, *Emergent Curriculum in Practice*, refers to practice placements which the students would have undertaken in their EQF 5 programme of studies. Also, considering that the literature for this programme explicitly states that preference is given to applicants who are already employed as KGEs, it would seem that any reference to placements may refer to students trying out specific activities with a more reflective and critical stance.

Undergraduate course at the University of Malta (UM) (University of Malta 2022a)

Within the BA (Hons) (ECEC) programme offered at UM, students are introduced to life in schools and classrooms in the first year of the programme. This is done through weekly visits where students are assigned to a classroom and where they spend initial weeks observing the regular Kindergarten Educator. These visits are accompanied by weekly, small-group tutorials and from time to time, students are expected to plan, prepare and conduct specific activities with the children they would have been observing. Towards the end of this study unit, students have a three-week practice placement where they take over the classroom independently. This entire study unit is worth 6 ECTS with the final assessment equally shared to students' responses to focused tasks followed during the year-long tutorials and the practicum, which assessment takes into consideration the planning and documentation associated to the actual practice.

There are 6 ECTS in the first block teaching practice for the students following the full-time BA (Hons) in early childhood education and care at UM. This takes place in the 2nd year of the programme. Another 8 ECTS teaching practice study unit takes place in the 3rd year of the programme. University-appointed examiners with experience in early years visit students at least twice during their placements in a kindergarten setting. Teaching practice is assessed against a number of criteria. There is no formal mentoring programme but casual staff (i.e. not full-time resident academic members) who accept to participate in teaching practice have the opportunity to discuss the processes, criteria and documentation associated to teaching practice and its assessment. Casual part-time members of staff appointed to conduct TP visits are remunerated for each visit.

For students following the 60 ECTS top-up undergraduate course, a practicum is included in their studies irrespective of whether the students opt for the full or part-time course.

Undergraduate course offered by the Malta Leadership Institute (MLI 2023)

There are three practice placements for a total 20 ECTS of the 180 ECTS part-time course. Cumulatively these placements account for 435 hours: 150 hours for 7 ECTS in the first and second year of the programme and 135 hours for the 6 ECTS third year study unit. Each of these three study units has the same general learning outcomes and the same modes of assessment. Mode of assessment is divided to include 50% placement observations; 25% portfolio; 25% teaching practice file.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

According to the European Commission publication on *Structural indicators for Monitoring Education and Training Systems in Europe* (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2022, 13), Malta is one of nine countries where CPD is undertaken among staff working in pre-primary settings such as kindergartens but where there is no such requirement for staff working with the under threes in childcare settings. This is in sharp contrast with 22 countries where CPD is a professional duty or necessary for promotion for all who work in settings across the entire phase of ECEC, from birth to compulsory school age.

CPD for Childcare Educators

Where CPD is undertaken in **childcare settings**, this is done through the initiatives and arrangements within settings themselves. For example, Childcare Educators and Co-ordinators (Centre Leaders) employed with the 12 state-funded childcare settings managed by the FES have their own CPD sessions. Compulsory staff training seminars are organised twice yearly with more training sessions organised throughout the year for both groups. Training for Centre Coordinators has included seminars about General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) matters, principles for inclusion and health matters affecting babies. Childcare Educators have had PD sessions to address proficiency in spoken and written English.

Education Officers for Early Years have started visiting childcare settings for training where the DQSE has asked for such support[53].

Among the responsibilities that define the role of the Childcare Manager and based on the NOS, the National Standards for ECEC (0–3 years) (2021) expect the manager to "*provide and/or facilitate continuous professional development opportunities for staff members on a regular basis''*. (p. 16). As stated elsewhere, the implementation and follow-up of these standards, especially where new practices are being brought in, will be done gradually.

CPD for Kindergarten Educators

Regulation: For staff working within the State and Church **kindergarten** sectors, professional development/in-service training is regulated by the Collective Agreements (MEDE 2017; Archdiocese and MUT 2018). In lieu of the in-service training days, which used to be held at the beginning or at the end of a scholastic year, staff were given more leeway to have a say in their own professional development.

> *"… greater emphasis is placed on schools and individuals to seek the most appropriate professional development which best respond to the contextual, national and international needs with a particular focus on the respective communities' learners, educators, and educational leaders. The concept of CPD is being widened to encompass all development opportunities that nourish the creation of a Community of Professional Educators (CoPE), which includes all initiatives that facilitate professional discussion and growth amongst community members, such as school development planning sessions, continuous professional development and links with the internal and external community"* (MEDE 2017, 30).

Obligation/leave entitlement: In addition to the 40 compulsory hours of CoPE sessions, organised and managed by the school leadership/management team, members of teaching grades

[53] Email communication 1st July 2022

are encouraged to participate in self-sought CPD which may be followed during or outside normal school working hours. A maximum 80 hours of self-sought professional development can be claimed for career advancement. This can include a variety of activities which must be endorsed by the Head of school.

Despite the obligations for CoPE, sessions can be somewhat sporadic. Guest speakers may be invited to conduct presentations about their area of expertise and according to the needs perceived by the administration. However, when such presentations are not followed up and are reduced to awareness raising, or providing ideas and suggestions to try things out, and where the practitioners have not been given the opportunity to suggest where they would like more support, it is more challenging to engage with the practitioners or to follow-up on any subsequent development.

CPD providers: Compulsory CoPE sessions may consist of school based and national/central training which would be offered to all settings. CPD associated to school-based sessions can be quite diverse in the way the sessions are organised and conducted. The content, delivery, nature of the presentations and attendees for the sessions can vary. The school leadership team may be entirely responsible for organising PD depending on particular issues, projects or the vision for the school. PD sessions would also complement the school's School Development Plan for the specific scholastic year or cycle of two years and would have been included in the school's action plans. Since action plans lead to changes, be it curricular or structural, training is always imperative. PD sessions could include external interventions and presentations by, for example, staff working at University or within the Education Directorates who would be invited to address staff about specific issues of relevance. Issues vary and could focus on national innovations, curricular changes, the promotion or introduction of methodologies, school policies etc. The topic and content for school-based PD sessions could be decided exclusively by the school management team or arising from suggestions made by members of staff and which could be relevant to educators working with specific age groups or for the entire staff. At a time when the emergent curriculum and a learning outcomes framework are being promoted in early years settings, particularly kindergarten and the first two years of compulsory school, the three EOs responsible for the early years sector have focused their CoPE commitments on these topics. EOs can avail themselves of a maximum of 15 of the 40 hours and have organised three CoPE sessions per term in recent scholastic years. Training has been offered to teachers working with 5 to 7 year-olds whereas KGEs have continued to follow training and be monitored through curriculum time, at the request of the school leadership team. Some schools request specific PD session for their Educators, which EOs provide accordingly.

CoPE sessions are also held for staff in Church and Independent schools.

Irrespective of who takes any initiative for CPD, these initiatives should be considered within a wider context of actual practice with children and therefore be relevant to specific settings. In the absence of a wider strategy or vision, CPD activities risk becoming repetitive, or lack coherence and fail to lead to growth, change and development. Ideally, an infrastructure needs to be set up to enable and facilitate monitoring and support: it is futile to invite staff to attend CPD and expect participants to rapidly interpret, understand, adopt and adjust their practice and activities without further support, feedback or opportunities to reflect on their practice.

Content and quality assurance: Although nobody obliges schools to follow or choose the content or format of PD, schools are held accountable for PD sessions which are organised. A list of such sessions must be submitted to the quality assurance department, and the church school secretariat in the case of church schools, for review purposes. When school-based PD sessions are organised it is the responsibility of the Head of School, aided by the SLT members, to plan enough sessions in the year which would cover the required 40 hours. Evidence of each session

must be maintained, along with signed attendance sheets; the evidence is usually asked for during an external review visit from QAD auditors. Certification to denote attendance/participation could be given when professional development meetings, lectures, workshops and/or courses are followed. However, such CPD would be followed through the initiative of individuals and not part of the CoPE sessions.

Funding: Self-sought courses may be funded by the individuals who are following them. Upon completion, holders of the qualification could be entitled to rebates through the *Get-Qualified* scheme (Malta Enterprise 2021, 3): "*The scope of this incentive is to support the personal development of individuals who aim to achieve qualifications and certifications required by industry. The incentive is applicable to students following a course of studies leading to a certification, diploma, degree or post-graduate degree courses. On successful completion, the student will benefit from a tax credit, hence recovering part of the costs incurred*".

Career advancement: CPD which forms part of the CoPE sessions are not accredited as they do not reach established criteria of ECTS values and corresponding number of hours in training; neither would there be any assessment involved. On its own, CPD is not used as a tool for career advancement and whilst attending professional development courses and corresponding, relevant certification where applicable are generally listed in individuals' personal curriculum vitae and included in their portfolio in response to job applications, there is no system in place where such courses can replace or top-up the formal qualifications which are required.

Research, debates: To date, there are neither research projects focusing on the CPD received by ECEC personnel, nor has there been any funding allocated over the past five years to review issues associated to access, motivation or impact of CPD on practice, participation or professional engagement of practitioners. CPD for early years practitioners is not an issue which has arisen in any debate about early childhood education.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Early childhood educators were once described as the poor relatives of primary school teachers (Ayers 1989), considered an appendage, outside the teaching profession and unworthy of any particular attention. Although this may be a dated summary of perceptions about early years educators, it is certainly still reflected in the salaries and remuneration of staff employed in kindergarten and more so in childcare settings in Malta.

Childcare Educators

Information about salaries paid to Childcare Educators is rather sketchy. There are no national data available. Since most of the settings are privately owned, salaries are negotiated with the carers seeking employment. Some random requests sought from different sources yielded the following information.

Table 20

Malta: Information about employment conditions in childcare settings

Setting A	Setting B	Setting C	Setting D	Setting E	Setting F	Setting G
Staff are employed on a full-time basis – a 40-hour week. With an EQF 4 they have a starting salary of €15,853 per annum (Scale 15). Over a number of years and depending on their performance, this increases gradually to Scale 13 (€18,074-€20,087).	The manager and carers are employed on flexible hours depending on their family arrangements and commitments. The Childcare Educators are paid €8 an hour and the managers are paid €8.50 an hour before any tax deductions.	Staff work on a full-time, 40-hour week basis. A max of 30 hours is direct contact time with children. Ten hours of non-contact time is expected for preparation and is available weekly. A manager earns a minimum of €20,889 up to a maximum of €31,211. Childcare Educators have a starting salary of €14,134 which goes up to a max of €22,438.	Two full-time and 3 part-time staff are employed. Working hours are 8 hours a day and remuneration is less than €10 an hour. Paid non-contact time is available.	Staff are on a full-time or full-time (reduced hours) contract. Staff work 5 to 8.5 hours a day. Paid on a monthly basis at the rate of €7.05 per hour (revised annually). Non-contact time is available for 2-3 hours a week and is allocated on certain days. Staff choose whether to plan together during non-contact time or use personal time for planning.	Staff work full time, for 5.5 hours a day. There is no allowance for non-contact time. Staff working with the under threes earn €1038 monthly.	Employs two Childcare Educators on a full-time basis; a helper works parttime. They work 4 hours a day (08.30 – 12.30). They are paid monthly, and are on salary scale 15, starting at €15,717. The Childcare Helper is on an hourly rate basis and gets €7/hour, depending on the number of hours worked. Not paid in July, August and September.

Kindergarten Educators

The starting salary at the various grades applicable to staff in kindergarten settings is presented in *Table 21*. KGEs have salaries ranging from scales 15 (supply) to 9 (KGE III). Primary teachers' salaries range from scales 9 starting at €23,353 per year to scale 7 with a starting salary of €26,438. Thus, Primary school teachers earn considerably more than KGEs.

Table 21

Malta: Salaries for KGEs

Designation	Starting Salary[54]	Increments
KGE III EQF 6	€21,950 with increments of €407,67	Salary Scale 10 upon entry; progressing to Salary Scale 9 upon completion of five years of satisfactory service in the grade.
KGE II EQF 5 60 ECTS	€19,323 with increments of €354	Salary Scale 12 upon entry; progressing to Salary Scale 10 upon completion of five years of satisfactory service in the grade.
KGE I[55] EQF 5 30 ECTS	Scale 15: €15,717 with increments of €298 Scale 14: €16,865 with increments of €316.83 Scale 13: €18,074 with increments of €335.50	Salary Scale 15 upon entry; progressing to Salary Scale 14 upon completion of five years of satisfactory service in Salary Scale 15 and to Salary Scale 13 after a further five years of satisfactory service in Salary Scale 14.

As with childcare settings, some information sought randomly from five private/independent settings yielded the following information.

Table 22

Malta: Information about working conditions for KGEs in five private settings

Setting A	Setting B	Setting C	Setting D	Setting E
KGEs employed on a full-time basis earn €1,280 per month (before taxes). They have four and a half hours of daily, direct contact with the children and an additional daily two hours of non-contact time.	KGEs work full time, with five hours of direct contact time with the children daily (08:00-13:00) and with a monthly salary ranging from €1079.67 – €1225.75 gross (this is revised yearly to reach government wages according to qualification). Non-contact time to be used for preparation, is an hour every day after the children leave.	KGEs working on a full-time basis work from 08:00-13:30 or 09:00-14:30. The monthly salary is worked out according to their qualifications. Non-contact activities are normally done during school hours, i.e. preparation during a free lesson, talking to parents after school, staff meetings are held once a term, on a half day. Weekly meetings with colleagues from same year	KGEs employed on a full-time basis for 5.5 hours a day. Paid €1,173 monthly. No non-contact time is available for preparation.	KGEs are employed on a full-time basis. Working hours are from 08:30-14:00, five and a half hours daily. Salaries vary, depending on the qualifications. Starting salary for KGE is at scale 15, i.e. €15,717 per annum in 2022 with annual increments of €298 per annum (depending on the number of years employed at the setting).

[54] Collective Agreement for Employees in the Public Service 1st January 2017 – 31st December 2024 (Government of Malta 2017)

[55] A full qualification at MQF Level 4 in early childhood education and care recognised by the competent authorities shall also make candidates eligible for application into this grade, up to end of year 2020 (Article 25.4: p. 41; MEDE 2017).

		group are held together with the Senior Management Team (SMT)		The highest salary for a KGE is scale 9, which in 2022 was at €23,353 per annum with annual increments of €447.33 per annum.

Across all settings it is customary for professional development/staff meetings and parents' days to be carried out on days when children are asked not to attend. These would be considered working days for staff.

It is worth noting that another electoral proposal in the March 2022 Malta Labour Party manifesto (MLP 2022, proposal 252, 76) refers to better salaries and working conditions in the forthcoming collective agreement for Childcare and KGEs.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

The data available (DQSE May 2022) indicates that 62% (N=775) of the **staff in child care** are working full time and a further 31% (N=391) are employed on a part-time basis. Another 5% (N=63) are recorded as "full time – reduced hours". Others are listed as ''casual'' staff or working ''flexible hours''.

Kindergarten staff within school settings who are employed on a full-time basis work 5½ hours a day or a 27½ hour week including mid-morning break. This applies from the fourth Monday in September to the 31st of May. Between the 1st of June and the 6th of July, the school working hours are 3¾ hours per day or an 18¾ hours week, including mid-morning break (DES 2010).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

There are no formal measures available either for induction or for mentoring and supporting newly-qualified staff. This applies to practitioners working in kindergarten settings as well as staff in childcare settings.

7.4 Non-contact time

In childcare settings operated by FES and in accordance with the Collective agreement with UHM, Childcare Educators work on a full-time basis. Of the 40-hour week, 10 hours a week are allocated for non-contact time. They are not obliged to spend these hours at the setting. Duties expected of Childcare Educators during non-contact time were initially specified in an appendix of the Union's Agreement (FES-UHM[56]) and some modifications have been made to reflect the pedagogical shift being promoted with the introduction of the emergent curriculum. Besides attending team meetings every three months and monthly meetings with the Coordinator other non-contact time duties of Childcare Educators include:

- Assessing the children for whom they are directly responsible
- Compiling learning journals accompanied with photos of children's activities
- Developing the objectives to be achieved by the children and planning daily activities
- Evaluating the activities and seeking ways to improve them
- Drawing up a report on a prescribed template, about each child before s/he progresses to a kindergarten setting

[56] Union Ħaddiema Magħqudin – Voice of the workers

- Proposing actions for improvement of service to be discussed and agreed to with the Co-ordinator during the mentoring time as well as inform other colleagues at the setting
- Seeking professional training in addition to the bi-annual sessions, directly by FES
- Meetings with parents every six months.

In the privately-owned and managed **childcare settings**, non-contact time is at the discretion of the owners. Some allocate non-contact time for their staff but this does not seem to be widespread. For example, one setting reported that the Childcare Educators are with the children all the time; another setting offers Educators 4 hours a week of non-contact time which is divided over two occasions each of two hours', duration.

In **kindergarten settings**, following the Collective Agreement (MEDE 2017) arrangements had been planned for non-contact time. "For non-compulsory schooling years, all KGEs and Teachers serving at Kindergarten level, shall be entitled to 60 minutes per week of non-contact/curriculum time as from scholastic year 2018/2019 to reach a maximum of 90 minutes per week of non-contact/curriculum time from scholastic year 2019/2020. This time shall be covered by Learning Support Educators or KGE Relievers (who may include Students performing practicum as part of further and higher education studies in a related area)." Although some schools tried to adhere to these arrangements when/where possible, because of COVID-19 pandemic, non-contact time was put on hold because Relievers were assigned duties to replace regular staff who were on sick leave.

Church schools were encouraged to maintain non-contact time even during the pandemic. Some schools found it more efficient to accumulate the non-contact time for monthly rather than weekly meetings when children would not be in school. Weekly non-contact hours were more challenging to adhere to in the absence of Relievers or suitable replacements as approved of by the Union agreement.

7.5 Current staffing issues

Whilst there are no official data about shortage or ease of recruitment, within **childcare settings** there continues to be a steady turn-over. Childcare providers claim to have difficulties in employing qualified Childcare Educators since staff prefer to work in kindergarten settings where working conditions are better. This claim seems to be reinforced by teaching staff at MCAST who reported (Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023b) that despite the possibility of Childcare Educators to be accredited with an EQF Level 4 after their first year of the two-year Advanced Diploma, most students pursue the second year of studies. The current EQF Level 4 cohorts (2023–2024) include 76 first year and 43 second year students.

When vacancies arose within KG settings, Childcare Educators understandably saw this as an opportunity for a better salary and improved job security. The extent to which this mobility and trend will continue remains to be seen. On the one hand, the move away from being a Childcare Educator with an EQF 4 qualification to becoming a Kindergarten Educator with the minimum of EQF 5 (30 ECTS) or EQF 5 (60 ECTS) may still be perceived as a good opportunity worth investing in. For Childcare Managers, the enticement to move to kindergarten is going to be greater since an EQF 5 with 60 ECTS is the minimum requirement for managers and for KG II educators. However, the stumbling block might actually be the saturation of the kindergarten market. As mentioned earlier in this report, within the state sector Relievers are identified from the same pool of qualified KGEs. The older/more experienced practitioners are assigned a group of children while the younger ones are Relievers. This implies that the younger graduates are increasingly less likely to find a full-time position at kindergarten level with responsibilities for their own group of children. MCAST staff reported that despite a healthy intake of students for their 180

ECTS, EQF Level 6 Bachelor degree (early years) programme, the market is saturated and vacancies/calls for Kindergarten Educators are absent (Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023b). MCAST officials believe that many of their students will pursue further studies and apply for the two-year, 120 ECTS Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) offered for Primary School Teachers at the Faculty of Education, University of Malta.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

One reform which has come about follows from the Collective Agreements (MEDE 2017; Archdiocese and MUT 2018) about the organisation of kindergarten staff as KGE III, KGE II and KGE I. Categorising KGEs in this way has led to a raise in the minimal level of entry qualification for KGEs from EQF 4 to EQF 5 from 2021. KGE III are holders with a BA (Hons) (ECEC) who started graduating from UM in 2019; and KGE II and KGE I are expected to have an EQF 5 with 60 ECTS or 30 ECTS respectively. This therefore implies that EQF 4 programmes, which were previously and until recently the minimal level of qualification for KGEs, are no longer accepted. Being in possession of EQF 5 or 6 qualifications and the corresponding designation of KGE I, II or III is reflected in the salary scales and progression. There is no distinction in duties amongst KGEs, irrespective of their initial professional education and subsequent qualification. According to the European Commission publication on *Structural indicators for Monitoring Education and Training Systems in Europe,* of the 35 countries which were reviewed, Malta is one of only eight countries with no compulsory requirement for at least one member of staff to have a tertiary (Bachelor-level) qualification in education sciences (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2022, 13).

At the time of writing this report, a second reform which is still awaiting Ministerial discussion and confirmation refers to the excerpt in the *National Standards for ECEC (0–3 years)* (MFED 2021a) which seeks to establish that Childcare Educators and Childcare Managers have an EQF Level 4 and 5 respectively with a minimum of 60 ECTS. If this position is accepted and implemented, having Childcare Educators with an EQF 4 qualification consisting of 60 ECTS will actually promote shorter courses than previous EQF 4 qualifications which were offered over two years of full-time study for a maximum of 120 ECTS.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

There are no national or large scale projects planned, commissioned or driven by the Ministry of Education or the DQSE which focus on the workforce, or the professional needs of the workforce in the sector. Small-scale research which included ECEC staff as the main participants has shed light on some crucial issues, even where workforce issues may not have been the main focus.

Reflecting on 'quality' in early childhood education: practitioners' perspectives and voices

***Source*:** Sollars 2022a (see *References* for full details)

Aims: Participants were invited to reflect upon, discuss and define quality.

Methods: Data included responses from over 400 practitioners from Malta and Gozo employed as KGEs in 34 State, Church and Independent settings, together with Childcare Educators and some Managers from 16 childcare settings via semi-structured interviews or focus group discussions.

Selected findings: Data indicates that the practitioners themselves, the work they do and the potential impact their professional relationships and experiences have on children are not characteristics which feature prominently in the participants' considerations about quality issues.

Implications: Practitioners do not acknowledge themselves or their professional work as central to the quality of services offered in early years settings. This suggests a lack of awareness about the potential impact which their professional and/or pedagogical knowledge and competences, have on the quality of the learning experiences. Such findings are of concern in light of earlier research which resulted in significant correlations between higher teacher education and qualifications with higher quality ECEC environments including the programme structure (Manning, Wong, Fleming, and Garvis 2019).

"There's always room for improvement": Practitioners' perspectives on challenges to quality in ECEC settings

***Source*:** Sollars 2022b (see *References* for full details)

Aims: Participants were invited to identify challenges they face when attempting to offer quality services.

Methods: Data were collected from 460 practitioners across Malta and Gozo who were employed as KGEs in 34 State, Church and Independent settings, together with Childcare Educators and some Managers from 16 childcare settings via semi-structured interviews or focus group discussions.

Selected findings: Responses given by practitioners yielded three broad categories of challenges: work-related; challenges arising from the nature of the relationships with stakeholders, including children, parents, colleagues and the leadership staff; and professional challenges which arose from the practitioners' perceptions about their profession and other issues associated to pedagogies and practices.

Implications: Practitioners cannot address work-related challenges single-handedly. Systemic shortcomings need to be strategically addressed, especially to give staff the confidence to make them articulate and assertive when discussing, defending and deciding what constitutes quality early years programmes and environments. A disheartened workforce which perceives itself as a voiceless profession requires professional support and development, adequate resources and facilities which collectively would contribute towards a concerted effort to improve quality services in the early years.

Introducing curricular changes in Maltese kindergarten settings. A comparison of stakeholders' perspectives

***Source*:** Portanier 2022 (unpublished Master's dissertation) (see *References* for full details)

Aims: Data were collected in 2018–2019 at the time when the emergent curriculum was being introduced and professional development sessions were organised for the senior management/leadership teams and the KGEs across all settings.

Methods: The inquiry was conducted with two Education Officers, four Assistant Heads with responsibilities for the kindergarten setting in their State school and thirteen practitioners working with 3 to 4 year-olds. Through interviews, participants were asked to discuss what they knew about (i) the learning outcomes framework (DQSE 2015) which had been developed for the early years following the publication of the National Curriculum Framework (MEDE 2012) and (ii) the emergent curriculum which they were expected to adopt and implement during that scholastic year.

Selected findings: Thematic analysis of the qualitative data led the researcher to conclude that "*rather than being informed about the curricular changes and implementing decisions taken by external sources, practitioners at the coalface need to be involved at the development stage of any policy in order to own the process and implement it effectively".*

Implications: The researcher noted that there was a gap between the intended curriculum and the enacted curriculum and the differences in the views expressed by the participants indicated that stakeholders, "*did not appear to have been adequately prepared to adopt or translate it to best practice and appropriate pedagogy*".

COVID-19 and education in Malta (Cov-EM) study

Source: Bonello, Camilleri, Deguara, Milton, and Muscat 2022 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: A research report focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on the personal and professional lives of kindergarten educators, childcare educators and learning support educators during the first and second waves of the pandemic (2019/2020; 2020/2021).

Methods: Data were collected through two online surveys, which included open-ended questions. 201 kindergarten educators, 30 childcare educators and 29 learning support educators participated in the first survey and 58 kindergarten educators and 11 learning support educators took part in the second survey.

Selected findings: Early years pedagogies for the under-fives were reshaped within online and off-line environments. In addition to the uneven start to online learning, early years practitioners did not use daily online interactive, live sessions creating a sense of detachment among parents and young children. Shifting to online activities had some benefits (such as more parent engagement) but did not come without its challenges shedding doubt on the extent to which online learning environments are successful learning spaces for young children.

Implications: Among the recommendations proposed in the report, the researchers propose strengthening the technological preparedness of early years educators for online learning spaces to capitalise on children's learning. They also advocate for increased curriculum time for early years educators to promote collaborative, critical, reflective practices and professional growth; increased monitoring and support for educators and early years leaders.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Malta continues to face several challenges in relation to the early years workforce including initial professional education (IPE) and continuing professional development (CPD); monitoring and support of practices during IPE and in employment; and recording, maintaining and evaluating data about the settings, the services and the work-force.

Initial professional education of Childcare and Kindergarten Educators

The issues around IPE, qualifications and CPD are multifaceted. In the first decade of the 21st century the primary challenge focused on ensuring that early years educators have a qualification at a time when unregulated childcare settings were beginning to flourish. A two-year full-time course was one of the first to be introduced in 2001 when MCAST was set up. This BTEC course was offered before home-grown programmes became available. It targeted students seeking employment in childcare settings but, with some additions to what was referred to as the 'extended practice placement', it gradually replaced the two-year full-time course for KGEs which used to be offered by the Education Department between 1993–2003. Simultaneously, private institutions and public entities such as the Employment Training Corporation (ETC)[57] introduced a variety of courses directed at women seeking to (re)join the labour market. The duration of the programme, number of ECTS and depth of content covered was somewhat sporadic but courses received their EQF rating once the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) was set up in 2012 with a specific mission to oversee 'the regulation of the Further and Higher education sector in Malta, making sure that the Malta Qualifications Framework is respected throughout' (NCFHE and MEDE 2016, 5).

Gradual changes and adjustments have been introduced in a piecemeal fashion. The focus has been on the EQF level irrespective of the variation in the number of ECTS attributed to courses considered as appropriate, formal qualifications. Little consideration seems to have been given to the content of these courses. Task permeability has been allowed merely by virtue of accredited EQF 4 courses and with the lure of better working conditions in kindergarten settings. Staff initially trained to work with under threes have been employed in kindergarten settings without much consideration attributed to the different roles and responsibilities assigned to an early years workforce engaging with very young children at different stages of development. The content of the courses offered by various institutions, together with the philosophy and didactic-pedagogic practices promoted, need to be reviewed at the same time as taking initiatives to harmonise and strengthen the early years initial and continuing professional development.

As mentioned earlier, the EQF 4 course offered by MCAST has always included 120 ECTS. However, in the ongoing process of establishing standardised minimal qualifications at both EQF 4 and 5 levels, courses having a minimum of 60 ECTS are now the qualifications required for employment for Childcare Educators or Managers respectively (MFED 2021a), and an EQF 5 worth 30 ECTS is now the minimum required qualification for KGEs. There are several concerns arising from these changes:

1. Despite the attempts to harmonise the minimum qualifications of staff, the duration of the mandatory initial qualification is being curtailed, transmitting a message that getting qualified to work in ECEC is a relatively short journey. If EQF Level 4 and 5 60 ECTS courses are acceptable qualifications what motivation would students have to pursue a longer programme of studies? Top-up courses are already underway for holders of a EQF5 with 120 ECTS to proceed to an undergraduate degree. This in itself is praiseworthy but the downside of this upgrading is that qualified personnel continue to be drawn away from working with the youngest children.

[57] The Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) was established in August 1990 through an act of Parliament entitled the Employment and Training Services Act. Its primary functions were those of providing a public employment service and training persons to improve their skills to find employment. Its training function focused on the provision of training courses and the management of apprenticeship schemes. In June 2016, an act of Parliament brought about the change in name from Employment and Training Corporation to Jobsplus (2023).

2. With a reduction in the length and therefore duration of the course content, students will have less opportunity to engage with key, critical issues affecting their practices in early years settings. New recruits in both childcare and kindergarten settings will have less background knowledge and fewer theoretical insights.
3. Since the EQF 5 worth 60 ECTS is now the minimal qualification for Childcare Managers and this coincides with the necessary qualification to be employed as a Kindergarten Educator (KGE II), when programmes of study will be again considered interchangeable to admit individuals to either professional role, irrespective of the content of the programme, it seems evident to conclude that staff may not be adequately trained to address the roles and responsibilities they will be assigned[58].
4. If working conditions remain unchanged, working in childcare settings will continue to be the introductory stepping stone in one's career and consequently, the least qualified staff will remain in childcare with an EQF 4 of 60 ECTS.
5. The NOS for Childcare Educators and Managers present criteria against which to address the content of the IPE courses applicable to staff at childcare but there are no established criteria for staff in kindergarten settings and which could offer a common framework for programme accreditation.
6. A mapping exercise needs to be undertaken to ensure that the expectations of the NOS are actually being addressed and met with programmes developed for childcare staff; a similar exercise needs to be done to compare the skills, knowledge and understanding which prospective KGEs are offered in their IPE. In the absence of criteria which would allow for comparisons, IPE programmes will continue to be developed and promoted without any shared vision, underlying philosophy, theoretical understanding or professional insights prospective practitioners would have acquired about ECEC and which they would be expected to promote through their practices.
7. Having KGEs qualified to various EQF levels, without any distinction in the assigned roles when employed in kindergarten settings (differences in designations are reflected in the salary of KGE I, II or III), does not motivate individuals to improve their understanding, development and theoretical perspectives; nor does this situation help to promote a sense of collegiality among staff. Educators with higher qualifications are not assigned tasks to lead and support their colleagues when/as needed. In a context where Educators with an undergraduate qualification are not assigned leading roles, where the immediate support of the school leadership team could also be absent, and when three EOs for the entire early years sector in Malta are unable to meet the needs of the staff, not investing in KGE III personnel to share their insights and knowledge is sadly a wasted resource.
8. The absence of any national and/or longitudinal study to investigate the impact which early years services and the early years workforce are having on children's short, medium and long term achievements is long overdue. There are concerns about achievements in children's later school years: both PISA (2018) and PIRLS (2016) reports about Maltese students reading achievements indicate that Maltese students' reading levels are well below the international

[58] Compiled information about IPE indicates that several recent (no longer available) and current courses serve/d as initial qualification routes for the ECEC workforce. The qualifications of the workforce as identified in *Chapter **3*** illustrates that despite programme documentation claiming to prepare participants for either childcare **or** kindergarten, courses initially introduced for childcare, have been accepted as an appropriate qualification for kindergarten, irrespective of the content or the occupational roles and responsibilities. Judgement of the suitability of a qualification for employability was/is based on the EQF level, the number of credits and the professional practice placement component with little consideration about the content of the modules/study-units.

average. Malta still ranks among the top six EU countries having higher numbers of early school leavers than the average EU target (Eurostat 2021), although inroads have been registered and the number of early school leavers has been reduced over the past years. A document entitled *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024: Sustaining Foundations, Creating Alternatives, Increasing Employability*" (MEDE 2014a) seems to have been shelved despite the promise of '*a strategic document which will outline the plan for the next 10 years, starting from early childhood education and care…*' (p. 8). Another document – *A Strategic Plan for the prevention of early school leaving in Malta*, had recommended that "*MEDE to monitor the nationwide provision of free childcare to ensure that it is a quality experience for staff, children and parents, and that it contributes to the children's development as they prepare themselves to get into early childhood education*" (MEDE 2014b, 21). Eight years on, this recommendation has not been taken up. Moreover, this recommendation betrays a misunderstanding of 'early childhood education' and suggests that childcare is some 'preparatory' phase before early childhood education!

A review of IPE programme content could also shed light on requirements for CPD. If CPD is to have maximum impact on the workforce and their practices, the content needs to be directed at the identified needs and gaps which Educators would demonstrate in their practices and in their abilities to reflect and discuss the work they do with children, families and colleagues.

Continuing professional development for Childcare and Kindergarten Educators

CPD for Childcare Educators and managers is limited and offered upon request. The EOs within the DES have started offering CPD to childcare settings which are flagged by DQSE. CPD for KGEs within schools is somewhat more organised. One challenge concerns the relevance of the CPD sessions for staff working with kindergarten-aged children. The dilemma arises whether to do CPD sessions specifically for KGE or invite KGE to follow CPD identical to/with primary school teachers simply because they are located within a primary school and therefore kindergarten staff would feel that they belong and are an integral part of the educational system rather than simply an appendix to the primary school setting. However, KGEs often complain that the professional development sessions dedicated to discussing and agreeing on action plans which the school sets out for the subsequent scholastic year are driven by the needs of the primary school and its expectations about achievements of older children. Some suggest that this impacts the work they are expected to do with kindergarten children in preparation for primary school. The content of the CPD would also be expected to be more relevant where educators are invited to suggest, identify and participate in decisions about their CPD rather than simply attend sessions because the rest of the school has PD days (in the case of KGEs working within schools) or when the CPD time is taken up by issues identified as being of national priority or where the school administration determines what the school priorities are with minimal consideration about how this is relevant and applies to kindergarten staff and children.

The work-based components of any IPE are crucial for the students and are a vital learning experience when appropriately supervised and mentored. Currently, there is no programme for mentors who are monitoring, supporting and assessing students during their practicum. Especially in childcare, there seem to be very few appropriately qualified and experienced examiners/supervisor/assessors or mentors who can follow students and assist them in their professional development. In situations where Managers of childcare settings, may find themselves mentoring and supervising students on their work placements despite having minimal qualifications, practice and understanding or work experience with children, the placement experience would be reduced simply to a matter of clocking up hours.

The importance of carefully monitored and assessed practice placements during IPE courses becomes more crucial in the absence of any induction, mentoring or support for newly qualified staff either in childcare or kindergarten settings. Induction periods, mentoring and support measures need to be addressed to ensure that responsive and sensitive carers plan, prepare and deliver appropriate activities and experiences for children.

Monitoring and support systems need to be established especially when newly qualified staff are recruited and where placement supervision during IPEs may be weak. Staff who mentor, monitor, support and have a lead role in early years settings, should have a clear vision about early childhood education and care and its benefits for children and families and should themselves be well-informed about pedagogical approaches which can best be adapted to suit young children. Monitoring and support cannot be offered by colleagues who have limited knowledge, insights and understanding about early years education or the challenges faced by the educators.

Recording, maintaining and evaluating data about settings and services

The Directorates which are responsible for the childcare and kindergarten settings require data collection procedures and systems which ensure that vital information about all members of staff employed in early years settings together with their employment history can be easily traced. Upon employment, staff should be bound to provide accurate information about their qualifications as well as be obliged to inform the appropriate sources of their termination and/or engagement of duties elsewhere within the sector. Having incomplete or inaccurate data does not capture the true strengths of the workforce.

Service providers and personnel involved in recording data about qualifications need to be instructed and assisted to ensure that information is reported accurately and thoroughly. Having to go through individual files to retrieve data pertaining to the initial professional qualifications or trying to make sense of data inputted independently by the administrative staff from every school or setting makes this process cumbersome and subject to inaccuracies, therefore becoming less reliable.

Concluding remarks

Despite repeated discourse about the importance of early childhood education and care, the increase in services and the continued attempts to make settings more affordable, there has not been any attempt to take stock of the situation from a holistic perspective and to address the crucial issues, namely how the quality of children's learning experiences impact their achievements and progress in later years through the contributions of highly qualified staff.

Raising the profile of the early years workforce is a delicate balancing act: the entry requirements expected when accepting students for IPE; the depth of knowledge and understanding acquired through the IPE; support through induction and mentoring together with opportunities for CPD; employability prospects; decent conditions of work and the reduction of staff turnover are interlinking challenges which have to be addressed. Resolving the different aspects satisfactorily requires a well-researched and well thought out policy which includes an equally insightful strategy to ensure its successful implementation.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

MALTA

Key contextual data

Compiled by

Inge Schreyer, Pamela Oberhuemer, and Valerie Sollars

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of ECEC provision are **childcare centre** (0–2) and **kindergarten centre** (kindergarten, pre-primary class, a two-year programme starting as early as 2 years 9 months)[1]**.** Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Malta

1827 - 1964	British colonial rule on the Maltese islands, initially showing little proactive interest in advancing a state-funded education system. Between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, many schools are established by the Roman Catholic Church and its Religious Orders and will have a lasting impact on the education system, including pre-primary schooling.
1837	The British Home and Colonial Infant School Society recommends establishing infant schools, but this is a slow process. Over the ten decades to follow, up to 1944, some 375 applications (petitions) are submitted, mostly by women hoping to earn a living by providing a safe environment for neglected and destitute working-class children. Even illiterate applicants are granted a license if they are considered to have the necessary moral attitudes and practical skills.
1845	First fee-paying school opened by nuns for 4 and 5 year-old girls; poor children are not required to pay.
1869	Strategic military importance of Malta heightened by the opening of the Suez Canal – followed by an increasing formalisation of the education system
1870	Maltese becomes the language of instruction during the first two years of school, otherwise English replaces Italian as the formal language of the education system.
1899	First curricular guidelines for elementary schools, including infant and preparatory classes, are issued.
1904-1907	The first crèches are opened by Religious Orders, with few regulatory requirements beyond basic issues of hygiene.
1914	Provision for 'infant schools' predominantly through private entities due to inadequate public school accommodation
1923	'Infant' schools are an integral part of 'elementary' schools. The infant syllabus included English, arithmetic, writing, religious instruction and drill.
1924, 1927, 1946	Compulsory school attendance Act for pupils of elementary schools, which included two years in infant stages and six elementary 'standards'. School-leaving age was initially 12 years, later raised to 14 years. 'Elementary' schools became known as 'Primary' schools.
1936	In the annual education report for 1935/1936, the then Education Director refers to the 'Montessori' school and argues that 'for the present, we must limit ourselves to following Montessori principles in the education of children up to the age of 6½ and afterwards proceed to more formal teaching…'.
1975	Introduction of the first state-funded kindergarten provision for 4 and 5 year-olds, i.e. at a late time in history compared with other European countries

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. The SEEPRO-3 editors have chosen the following age-inclusive format for countries where primary schooling starts at age 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In the case of Malta, the relevant formats are **0–2** and **3–4** years, since children start primary school in the year when they turn 5. Locally, 0–3 and 3–5 are the age group parameters generally referred to.

1987	Kindergartens come under the auspices of the Ministry for Education, having been the responsibility of the Department of Social Services within the Ministry for Labour and Social Services until this time.
1988	Kindergarten provision extended to include 3 year-olds.
1996	The University of Malta playschool is one of the first settings at the workplace, welcoming 2 to 4 year-olds, thus addressing the needs of employees and university students. The state general hospital and a secondary hospital also offer some form of childcare services for their employees.
1997–1999	A feasibility study on the introduction of public child day care centres is conducted following a request by the Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Rights. A post-implementation audit was conducted in 1999 to identify shortcomings which had led to the lack of uptake. Apart from poor market research, entrusting children to strangers rather than resorting to family support and having guilt feelings about using childcare contributed to the very low attendance.
2001	A *Child Care Task Force* was set up on the initiative of the Co-operatives Board. Since settings were totally unregulated, some 15 existing private day care centres/nurseries were identified through adverts on the media and phone directories (yellow pages).
2006	Publication of the first *National Policy for Early Childhood Education* and publication of *National Standards for Child Daycare Facilities*
2009	Introduction of an optional Bachelor-level qualification for core practitioners working in kindergarten centres/pre-primary classes in schools which entitled holders to a teachers' warrant
2012	Publication of the *National Curriculum Framework for All* – the first document to acknowledge the early years as a distinct cycle of education (*Early Years Cycle*) for 0 to 7 year-olds
2013	Publication of *ECEC in Malta: The way forward*. This document summarises the development of ECEC in Malta and makes recommendations towards promoting high quality provision across early years services in light of the Government's 2013 electoral manifesto proposal to extend services through free child-care services.
2014	Free childcare services introduced for parents in employment or pursuing studies utilising registered childcare centres (*Free Childcare for All* scheme).
2016	Publication of the *Professions in Education Act* (July 2016) – one of the proposals for the amendments to the Education Act identifies an MQF Level 4 qualification in early childhood education as the minimum required level in order to obtain a license to practise the profession of Kindergarten Educator. This undermines earlier initiatives to introduce an MQF Level 6 qualification in the field. Childcare centres come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.
2017	The Government – MUT agreement organises kindergarten educators into three tiers: KG III for staff with an EQF 6 Bachelor degree; KG II and KG I for staff with EQF 5 qualifications for 60 ECTS or 30 ECTS respectively. Duties of staff are identical irrespective of qualification.
2018	The promotion of the emergent curriculum in the early years is launched with kindergarten educators (2018/2019) through 10 hours of training but without a clear plan for on-going support or monitoring.
2019	Amendments to the Education Act (1988)
2021	Publication of the second *National Policy for Early Childhood Education* and publication of *National Standards for Child Daycare Facilities.* The 'standards' are organised around structural and process factors. It also established the minimum level of qualifications for staff in childcare retaining a low-level qualification for both childcare educators and managers.
2021	Publication of the *Early Childhood Education and Care - National Policy Framework for Malta and Gozo*. This framework is presented as a precursor to the eventual designing of a strategic action plan.

2023	The number of childcare settings over the past decade rises considerably. In May 2023, there were 180 settings (licensed or registered). By comparison, in 2016 there were about 93 settings. Participation of children aged 3 and older in ECEC sees one of the greatest decreases in the EU to 89.1% in 2020 from 96.9% in 2015.

Sources: MGG 1936; MEU 1997, 1999; National Archives Malta (various sources) 1899, 1923; MEYE 2006; MFSS/MEYE 2006; Sollars 2013, 2018a; Childcare Task Force 2021; European Commission 2023

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Following the Council of the European Union's Recommendation on ECEC in May 2019, a National ECEC Policy Framework for Malta and Gozo was published in 2021 (DQSE 2021a). The stated aims are to address the need for a multi-sectoral approach embedded within an integrated ECEC system.

Currently, the system of early childhood education and care can be described as only partially integrated. Overall responsibility lies with one top-level authority, the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR), and regulatory mechanisms apply to all ECEC settings for children up to statutory school age (5 years). However, the settings themselves are not unitary, but separated between mostly privately-owned childcare centres for under 3 year-olds and mostly state-maintained kindergarten centres/pre-primary classes for 3 and 4 year-olds. Both kinds of setting were initially located in the social welfare sector: whereas childcare centres came under Social Welfare authorities until 2016, state kindergarten centres were the responsibility of the Ministry for Labour and Social Services when first introduced in 1975. However, the kindergarten centres came under the auspices of the Ministry for Education in 1987.

Although the first stage of the education system is described in the National Curriculum Framework (2012) as the *Early Years Cycle* (0–7), it comprises not only childcare and kindergarten settings, but also the first two years of primary schooling (MEDE 2012). There is no unifying ECEC curricular framework across settings, but two binding sets of guidelines. Also, staffing qualifications within the three stages of the *Early Years Cycle* differ in that a lower level of qualification (ISCED 4) is required for work within the non-compulsory sector (0 to 4 year-olds) compared to the university qualification (ISCED 6) necessary to work with 5 to 7 year-olds (Sollars 2018a). Thus, early childhood education and care is not as yet a fully unitary ECEC system.

Within the MEYR, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) is responsible for the regulation of non-compulsory ECEC settings, including (since July 2016) childcare provision. The 12 childcare centres which are state-funded and managed by the *Foundation for Educational Services* (FES) are located adjacent to the state primary school of the town or village, with an entirely separate administration. However, most childcare centres are privately owned and managed (Sollars 2018a).

General objectives and legislative framework

The general objectives of the *Free Childcare for All scheme* (FCS) introduced by the Maltese government in April 2014 for parents in employment or education are to provide equitable early childhood education and care irrespective of the family's financial means and social background and to increase women's participation in the labour market.

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Malta provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are indicated within the text and in the *references*.

The two currently binding regulatory frameworks are subsidiary legislation of the 1988 Education Act (most recently amended in 2019). These are the

- *National Minimum Curriculum (Pre-Primary Level) 1989*, which sets out the main curricular objectives for pre-primary classes for 3 and 4 year-olds (see chapter on *Curricular Frameworks* for details of the more recent National Curriculum Framework 2012).
- *Registration of Childcare Facilities as Educational Establishments 2008,* which provides framework regulations for setting up provision for children under 3 years of age (MFED 2021c).

The objectives of the recently issued *National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0–3 years)* (MFED 2021a) are to: reflect recent developments in the ECEC (0–3) field within a Maltese context; be in line with ongoing ECEC research and practice for under 3 year-olds; develop and strengthen a more socially just and active labour market in Malta by sustaining availability and accessibility to quality ECEC services; and ensure that the standards, focused on ECEC services for 1 to 3 year-olds, are consistent with the overall framework for the Early Years Cycle (0–7 years) within the National Curriculum Framework (MEDE 2012). They replace the 2006 National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities.

General objectives of the recent *Early Childhood Education and Care National Policy Framework for Malta and Gozo*, issued in 2021, are to "maximise young children's development which will profoundly impact on children's future learning, health and earning potential which can perpetuate intergenerational benefits" (DQSE 2021a). The framework is also seen as contributing towards the 2016 G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Five policy goals and dimensions are addressed: access to ECEC; the workforce; curricular issues; monitoring and evaluation; governance and funding (MFED 2021b).

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

There is no universal legal entitlement or guarantee to a place in ECEC provision in Malta. Attendance is voluntary. Through the Free Childcare Scheme (FCS) introduced in 2014, a targeted legal entitlement from the age of 3 months is available for parents/guardians in employment or education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 184). From the age of 2 years 9 months, kindergarten enrolment is free of charge, irrespective of whether the parent is economically active or not, and enrolment rates are high (see *Participation rates in regulated provision*).

Compulsory schooling begins early compared with most other European countries. The official school starting age in Malta is 5. Since children are enrolled during the year they reach their fifth birthday, and the scholastic year starts in late September, some children may be as young as 4 years 9 months when they enter the first class of primary school (ISCED 1).

Main types of provision

Childcare centres (sometimes known as Childcare and Family Support Centres) are available for children from three months up to 3 years of age and are owned, managed and organised by mostly private entities. By the end of January 2024, there were 191 centres registered with the DQSE: 11 were licensed and 180 were registered. Of these, 12 (6.3%) were state-funded, managed through the Foundation for Educational Services (FES) and registered with DQSE; two (1.4%) were organised by the local council for the town/village; three (2.1%) were managed by

the church and a five (2.6%) were run on a private/public partnership basis, where the Government supports a private entity by hiring the premises; two (1.4%) were set up by corporate entities which give priority to the children of employees of the entity before admitting children from the wider context and three (2.1%) were located in higher education institutions

The state-maintained centres are open between 07:30 and 16:00 although in six of the 12 settings, longer hours are available (06.00am–18.00) (FES 2023). Private centres have varying opening/closing times, ranging from as early as 06:00 to as late as 20:30 hours.

Kindergarten centres (kindergartens; pre-primary classes) are available for children from 2 years 9 months up to school entry age. Most are located either in state-maintained schools (64 in 2022/2023), or affiliated to grant-aided Catholic Church schools (23), or run by independent schools (9). These kindergarten centres thus come under the organisational regime of the school. The primary school head is formally head of the pre-primary classes. Children are grouped in same-age classes called 'Kindergarten I' (3 year-olds) and 'Kindergarten II' (4 year-olds). There are also 10 kindergarten settings which operate independently and are not affiliated to schools but have extended their services from childcare settings (Government of Malta 2023, own calculations).

Pre-primary classes are typically open from Mondays to Fridays from 08:30 to 14:30 (i.e. opening hours do not necessarily match parents' employment hours) and closed during school holidays. Where larger independent schools offer the full range of educational provision – nursery, kindergarten, primary and secondary - the hours for nursery and kindergarten are rather short (8:30 to about 12:30/13:00). However, the parents have the option of making use of extended hours against additional payment. Schools belonging to five religious orders welcome boys and girls at pre-primary/primary level but others are single-sex. All state-run provision and most of the private/independent schools are co-educational.

Provider structures

Childcare centres

Most under 3 year-olds in **childcare centres** attend privately-run provision. Of a total of 180 settings by the end of May 2023, only 12 were state-funded (FES 2023). Providers offering childcare services include corporate entities, the Church, local councils, and individuals investing in their private business. The small number of Government childcare centres are managed by the Foundation for Educational Services (FES) and are registered with the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE). They follow the 2021 National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0–3). An individualised service is offered, most particularly to children at risk of social exclusion (MFED 2020). In April 2014, the FCS was introduced and settings registered with the Ministry for Education are entitled to participate thus becoming eligible to receive subsidies (see chapter on *Financing and costs*).

Kindergarten centres/pre-primary classes

Kindergarten centres are run by three different providers and may be state-maintained, church-affiliated or private/independent. The largest provider is the state sector, followed by the independent and church school sectors. In 2023–2024, a total of 9,523 children aged 3–4 years were enrolled in kindergarten provision (Education Strategy and Quality Assurance Department 2024). *Table 1* shows the distribution according to provider type.

Table 1

Malta: Number of children enrolled in kindergartens by setting provider, 2023–2024

	State maintained	Church-affiliated	Private/ Independent	Total number of children in kindergarten
Kindergarten 1 (3–4 year-olds)	4,108	299	797	5,204
Kindergarten 2 (4–5 year-olds)	2,897	721	701	4,319
Total*	**7,005**	**1,020**	**1,498**	**9,523**
Relative share by provider type, in %	**73.6**	**10.7**	**15.7**	

Source: personal email communication from the Research Unit at the Office of The Director General, Education Strategy and Quality Assurance Department, 23 February 2024

*Depending on the date of data collection there might be slight variations in other statistics regarding the age or the year group of the children

In the school year 2022/2023, there were a total of 106 kindergarten centres. Of these, 64 were state-run (11 located in Gozo), 23 were run by Church schools and 19 by Independent/private schools (Government of Malta 2023).

Participation rates in regulated provision

Childcare centres

By the end of June 2022, a total of 6,518 children were benefitting from the FCS at any point in time between January and June 2022: 1,913 children joined a childcare setting in 2022, whereas the remaining 4,605 children were in childcare in previous year/s and were still registered in the system in 2022[3]. By the end of October 2023, 8,627 children had benefitted from the FCS at any point in time during this year. There had been 3,529 new entrants in 2023[4]. *Table 2* illustrates the uptake of childcare services from the time it was introduced up to 2019.

Table 2

Malta: Number of children benefitting from Free Childcare Scheme, 1st April 2014 till 31st December 2019

Year	Period	Number of children benefitting from scheme for first time	Total number of children benefitting from the scheme
2014	1 Apr - 31 Dec	3,856	3,856
2015	1 Jan - 31 Dec	2,843	5,852
2016	1 Jan - 31 Dec	2,767	5,335
2017	1 Jan – 31 Dec	3,025	5,939
2018	1 Jan – 31 Dec	3,343	6,737
2019	1 Jan – 31 Dec	3,579	7,341

Source: DQSE 2019/20, 12

The FCS helped to significantly increase the proportion of children below the age of 3 in formal childcare between 2005 (5%) and 2022 (43.1%) (see *Table 3*).

[3] Data were provided by JobsPlus via email communication on July 11th 2022.

[4] CEO from JobsPlus at the meeting of the Family Affairs Committee, Parliament of Malta, Session no. 14 held on December 5th 2023.

Kindergarten centres/pre-primary classes

The proportion of children over 3 years of age also increased from 2005–2022, although not to the same extent as with the under-threes (from 58% to 91%, see *Table 3*).

Table 3

Malta: Enrolment rates by duration of attendance in centre-based settings and age, 2010-2022

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years, in %	3 years up to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	4	32
	Over 30 hours	1	26
	No enrolment in ECEC	95	43
2010	1 to 29 hours	6	26
	Over 30 hours	3	46
	No enrolment in ECEC	91	28
2015	1 to 29 hours	10.7	34.6
	Over 30 hours	7.2	53.8
	No enrolment in ECEC	82.1	11.6
2022	1 to 29 hours	19.5	26.6
	Over 30 hours	23.6	64.4
	No enrolment in ECEC	56.9	9.0

Source: Eurostat 2023e

In 2021, the overall share of children attending pre-primary education amounted to 72.5% in state-run settings, 17.2% in private/independent and 10.3% in church settings (NSO 2023, 49). Eurostat statistics of age-disaggregated data (*Table 4*) indicate that in 2021, the vast majority of the 4 and 3 year-olds were enrolled in a centre-based setting.

Table 4

Malta: Number of children in centre-based ECEC settings and enrolment ratios according to age, 2021

Age	Number	Share in %
Under 2 years	No data available	No data available
2 year-olds	795	16.6
3 year-olds	4,030	83.6
4 year-olds	4,445	88.5
5 year-olds	46	0.9

Sources: Eurostat 2023b, f

There has been a decrease in participation rates in early childhood education: In 2020, the proportion of children over 3 years was 89.1% compared to 96.9% in 2015 (European Commission 2023b, 57). This could possibly be related to the COVID pandemic and/or the drop in the fertility rate which currently is the lowest in Europe (Eurostat 2023d).

Financing and costs for parents

In 2021, 5.5% of total general government expenditure was on education, 1.4% on pre-primary and primary education (Eurostat 2023k). No specific information is available for the childcare sector.

Since April 2014, parents who are in education or employment and whose children attend any of the childcare settings registered with the Ministry for Education do not pay fees. The providers of childcare settings registered in the FCS receive €4.80 per hour per child for children under the age of 12 months and €4.55 for children between the ages of 13 to 36 months (JobsPlus 2022).

Private childcare centres for children under age 3 and where parents are not eligible for the FCS set their own fees. Variations in fees reflect the diverse services, including whether the childcare setting is operating independently or whether the 'nursery' is part of a school. The former are open all the year round and may offer two, three or five-day a week packages and rates but services within independent private schools tend to follow the school timetable in some respects, such as school holidays. Fees in the private settings vary. Information provided by various settings suggests that every three months, parents pay anything from €650 to over €900 (various email communication, May 29th 2023; Sept 21st 2023).

Fees in state-subsidised childcare centres are means-tested and may be as low as €2 a day for low income earners where the service is used once a week and range overall from €8 to €150 per month (personal email communication, May 28th 2023).

Attendance in state-maintained kindergarten provision is free of charge. Places in grant-aided church-run kindergarten centres are also free of charge, although parents are encouraged to give donations to help with institutional expenditure. Independent schools charge tuition fees for which parents receive a tax rebate. Parents whose children attend church-run and independent schools with pre-primary classes pay registration and administration fees and must also purchase books and other requisites. Provision of textbooks is free of charge for children in state schools and there are no registration fees.

Staff to child ratios and group size in centre-based settings

Childcare centres

The *National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0–3) 2021* recommend the following ratios of qualified staff to children:

- 1:3 for infants under 12 months of age,
- 1:5 for children aged 13 to 24 months, and
- 1:6 for children aged 25 to 36 months.

In the case of mixed-age groups, the recommended ratio is 1:6, although only one child under 18 months may be in such a group.

Kindergarten centres/pre-primary education

Irrespective of the service provider, all pre-primary settings are required to provide a standard ratio of

- one staff member for a maximum of 14 3 year-olds and
- one staff member for a maximum of 19 4 year-olds

The respective maximum group size (14 for Kindergarten I and 19 for Kindergarten II) may not be exceeded (MEDE and MUT 2017; Archdiocese of Malta and MUT 2018).

At present, staff to child ratios in kindergarten settings are as follows:

- Kindergarten 1 classes have a maximum of 14 pupils per class (this being reduced to 12 if the group includes a pupil with a statement of needs);
- Kindergarten 2 classes have a maximum of 19 pupils per class, reduced to 16 if the group includes a child with special education needs.
- In the event of shared classes (two classes in one room), children shall not exceed 22 pupils for Kindergarten I, and 30 for Kindergarten II (Eurydice 2023).

Curricular frameworks

ECEC in Malta (childcare and early education) is not guided by a co-ordinated curriculum document. The National Curriculum Framework, although explicitly for the age-range 0 to 7 years, makes no provision for educational activities with under 3 year-olds. However, the more recent *Educators' Guide for Pedagogy and Assessment: Using a Learning Outcomes Approach* (DQSE 2015) promotes learning for under 3 year-olds by "being active, exploring and investigating, playing, using language and interacting with others".

Activities in the **childcare centres** are loosely guided by the *National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0–3) 2021* and two sets of *National Occupational Standards* for the Childcare Worker and the Childcare Manager respectively. Both documents refer to areas of child development, and helping children to develop their potential through inclusion and participation in a range of stimulating activities reflecting non-stereotypical roles and the diversity of race, culture and religion (MFHEA 2022a, b). The daily programme provides a variety of play activities to stimulate learning.

The **kindergarten centres** are included in the *Early Years Cycle* of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for schools (MEDE 2012). The policy document is binding. For the early years, five broad learning outcomes are defined: a strong sense of identity; a positive self-image; social competence; communicative competence; positive attitudes towards learning in order to become engaged and confident learners. However, no discrete learning areas are proposed. Both the Educators' Guide for Pedagogy and Assessment (2015) and the NCF promote a vision of an ECEC curriculum grounded in children's rights and view children as competent, able and having unlimited potential. Staff are expected to adapt their teaching approaches to meet children's individual needs (Eurydice 2023).

Digital education

Digital education was set as a policy priority early on in Malta, to sustain a strong digital economy. Several national policies and programmes have been put in place to develop digital competences from an early age (European Commission 2020). The new National Standards 2021 refer to a 'digital learning environment' in childcare centres which includes services and tools that enable learning, support administration and improve communication, thus enhancing the quality of childcare programmes. The National Curriculum Framework (2012) for schools refers in general to 'digital literacy skills' as key competences that enable pupils to move up the ladder of society's economic and social opportunities, but these are not specifically mentioned for the Early Years Cycle.

Monitoring – evaluation

There is no national agency or specific entity focusing on the monitoring and evaluation of early childhood education.

Child-related assessment

There are no formal assessment requirements for childcare centres. The staff observe and record notes on individual children's progress during their daily activities, as indicated in the *Educators' Guide for Pedagogy and Assessment: Using a Learning Outcomes Approach* (2015).
The National Curriculum Framework states that children will not be formally assessed in the Early Years Cycle. However, their development and progress are to be recorded and reported to parents at least twice a year. Formative assessment is advocated for this Cycle and the learning programmes developed are to lead to the stated learning outcomes (see section on *Curricular frameworks*) (National Curriculum Framework, MEDE 2012).

Centre-level assessment

There are no requirements for centre-level assessment for the **childcare centres**. For the **kindergartens/pre-primary classes**, internal quality assurance is the responsibility of each school. In most cases, an internal evaluation of the kindergarten centre is carried out annually and leads to a new development plan (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 128).

External evaluation

External evaluation of ECEC settings, irrespective of the provider, is the responsibility of the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education in the Ministry for Education.
Childcare centres are externally reviewed annually by a team which includes a compliance officer from the Regulatory and Compliance Section (RCS) and an EO from the Education Review Section (ERS). Both departments are located within the QAD (*Quality Assurance Department*). During the visit, the review team conducts meetings with the legally responsible person (LRP) and/or the centre manager, reviews centre documentation, conducts observations, informally discusses the outcomes of observations and provides final feedback. The outcomes of the visit are included in a report which is sent to the LRP. The outcome of the process will determine the registration status for the subsequent calendar year.
A letter circular from the DQSE (QAD 01/2022, April 2022) informed childcare settings that gradual changes to the audits will be taking effect as a result of the new *National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0–3 Years)* (MFED 2021a), *The Registration criteria* (MFED 2021c) and the *Early Childhood Education and Care National Policy Framework for Malta and Gozo* (MFED 2021d). Ahead of the external audit, settings are required to compile a wide range of health and safety documents.

Monitoring and inspection of **kindergarten centres** for 3 and 4 year-olds varies across providers. Church-affiliated and independent schools with kindergarten centres organise and manage their own monitoring. Early Years Education Officers from the Department of Curriculum Management (DCM) visit Church and/or Independent kindergarten settings upon invitation by the Secretariat for Catholic Education or the invitation from the senior management team of the independent school respectively.
The state kindergarten centres are monitored by Early Years Education Officers within the Department of Curriculum Management at the Ministry for Education. Kindergarten Educators are supported on a regular basis starting from a year before they need to be confirmed in the Public Service. The frequency and intensity of these observation visits before and after confirmation

depends on the level of support required, as determined by the Education Officers. In addition to monitoring visits, kindergarten centres are inspected by Education Officers (QAD) as part of broader school audits.

Apart from support and confirmation visits, Early Years Education Officers also conduct routine visits. These can be organised and structured according to:

- Requests made by the Head of School through the College Principal and Director- DCM
- Requests made by the Council for the Teaching Profession, and
- Evaluation of current performance of staff who have been newly recruited or transferred to a different kindergarten setting.

Although the Early Years Education Officers are considered to be fully qualified to be appointed Education Officers, they are not necessarily in possession of academic qualifications specifically in early childhood education but may have accumulated years of service or experience in a range of settings or appointments, even in the primary and secondary school sectors.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

Malta ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2013 (EASNIE 2020). National policy emphasises the importance of an inclusive approach from an early age. For the **childcare sector**, Standard 10 of the National Standards for Child Day-Care Facilities is dedicated to equal opportunities and children with special needs. Early intervention services managed by the Directorate for Educational Services are also provided to children at risk of or diagnosed with learning difficulties or disabilities. Assessment is carried out by a multi-disciplinary team at the Child Development Assessment Unit and then referred to the early intervention service. The service is given to these children in their own home setting, in the childcare centre and, eventually, in kindergarten.

Children diagnosed as having special educational needs (256 children in public **kindergartens**) in 2020/21 (EASNIE 2023) are usually admitted to mainstream kindergarten centres, a decision which is taken by the parents. The staff are required to refer children needing extra support to the relevant professionals. Such referrals are processed by the Statementing Moderating Panel. Furthermore, the Child Development Assessment Unit (CDAU) works in close collaboration with the Inclusive Education Network to provide early intervention for children born with a disability or one detected in the early months. In state-run pre-primary classes, a Learning Support Educator is allocated to give either one-to-one or small group support, depending on the specific educational need. The Directorate for Educational Services sponsors professional development for supply staff to work with special needs children as support staff. Church-run and independent pre-primary classes receive state support for staff. In terms of Learning Support Educators (LSEs), in 2022/2023, 459 were employed in state-maintained (236 in KG 1 and 223 in KG 2), 66 in church-affiliated and 103 in private-independent kindergarten centres, responsible for one child or having shared duties if supporting more than one child with special educational needs (email communication through Director of NSSS, May 31st 2023).

LSEs may be employed without any formal training. They are required to follow a 70-hour course and subsequently another 140-hour course whilst already in employment. Several follow a two-year part-time Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education at University. More recently, a 210-hour course leading to a Level 5 Higher Certificate in Inclusive Education has been introduced and offered by the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST). LSEs are not trained to work with a specific age-group or a particular disability. They may be assigned duties to any child, irrespective of the child's age or whether s/he is in kindergarten, primary or secondary

education. LSEs' responsibilities can range from one learner with full time one-to-one support to three learners on shared support depending on the assistance required according to the recommendations of the Statementing Moderating Panel (SMP) (Sollars 2018a).

Children with a migration background

Foreign-born children attending pre-primary settings (under 5 year-olds) in Church and Independent schools in 2021-2022,[5] as reported by the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability, accounted overall for 0.7% (N=338) and 20.1% (N=330) of the pre-primary population respectively; in state settings for 18.2% (N=1,226). The top five countries of origin in state kindergarten settings in 2021-2022 included children from Italy (177), Syria (147), Serbia (100), UK (79) and Bulgaria (65). Within Independent schools, foreign-born children came from Italy (55), England (41), France (24), Germany (19), Sweden (17) and Spain (16). Within Church schools, the number of foreign-born children was very low, with 4 coming from Pakistan and 1 each from Belgium, Italy, Sudan, and Ukraine.

Children with a migration background are defined as those where both parents are born and raised outside Malta.

In 2021–2022, 776 foreign-born children in state kindergartens came from countries outside the EU27, i.e. 11.5% of all children (6,731) in state kindergartens. In the same scholastic year, 151 foreign-born children in non-state kindergartens came from countries outside the EU27, i.e. 5.6% of all children (2,713) in non-state kindergartens.

According to Eurostat, in 2022, 20.6% of the overall population held a non-Maltese citizenship, more than half of them (58.1%) came from countries outside the EU27. In terms of children under age 5, 24.3% did not have a Maltese background, with almost two thirds (64.1%) of them coming from outside the EU27 (Eurostat 2023c).

Traditionally, Maltese was the predominant language in state settings, with English being the predominant language in private and in church school settings. With the influx of foreign children in schools, a shift in favour of English across all school sectors is becoming evident. The Ministry of Education's *Language Policy for the Early Years* (2016) promotes a heterogeneous model of bilingual education to encourage children's language development, in which professionals switch between the two languages according to the children's needs, based on their own experience and knowledge (Mifsud and Vella 2020, 4f, 9).

Parental leave arrangements[6]

Maternity leave is obligatory during the six weeks immediately following the birth of the child. A further eight weeks can be taken either before or after birth. 14 weeks are covered 100% by the employer (no upper limit), followed by a flat-rate payment for a further four weeks during which mothers receive €175.84 per week in alignment with the statutory minimum wage.

Fathers working as public sector employees are entitled to ten, fully paid days of **Paternity leave** which have to be taken during the 15 days immediately following the child's birth. In the private sector, the days have to be taken immediately after birth.

Parental leave in the public sector is granted for 12 months per family if the parent has been working for at least a full year and is unpaid. If both parents work in the public sector they have

[5] Data for Church and Independent schools obtained from the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability (email communication, 23 March 2023).

[6] The brief overview in this chapter is based mainly on the country note for Malta by Frances Camilleri-Cassar in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

to divide this time between them, but cannot both be on leave at the same time. Leave may be taken in one continuous period or in blocks of four, six or nine months. Four months can be split in blocks of one month, up to the child's 10th birthday. Parental leave in the private sector is four months per parent. For eight weeks, parents are paid 50% of previous earnings for children under 4 years and 25% of previous earnings for children 4–8 years. The leave can be taken in blocks of one month, up to the child's 8. birthday. The requirement of at least one year of continuous employment applies here as well.
The most recent data are from 2019: In the public sector, 814* mothers took up the 14 weeks paid Maternity leave entitlement, but only 624* took the remaining low-paid four weeks of leave. In 2019, only 145* fathers in the public sector took Paternity leave. In 2018, regarding the uptake of the unpaid Parental leave, the mother's share was 97%. There are no available data for the private sector (* own calculations).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Malta

*Country expert assessment by **Valerie Sollars***

One of the key challenges facing ECEC concerns the absence of an entity or directorate with an explicit focus on and responsibility for early years policy development, promotion, guidance and implementation. The absence of such an entity (a) is an indicator of the minimal importance attributed to early childhood education; (b) perpetuates a situation where the sector is sometimes directed by inappropriate policies which fail to acknowledge the specific needs of early years or to show an understanding about the development of very young children; (c) contributes to a situation where early childhood education and care has no voice; and (d) implies no holistic vision about the sector or a strategy to ensure quality provision of services. Indeed, there is no large scale national research which has yet monitored actual practices either in childcare or in kindergarten and their short, medium or long-term effects or implications on children and their families.

A second challenge faced by ECEC stems from the historical development of the sector. Over the years, responsibility for the kindergarten section swung back and forth between different Ministries before finally becoming part of the Ministry for Education. Similarly, the responsibility for childcare settings was, until June 2016, within the Ministry for Social Policy. Although the Ministry for Education is now responsible for all settings, there is as yet no holistic vision for early childhood education and care. Many of the personnel who are expected to monitor and support the early years sector have themselves minimal academic training or work experiences specifically in ECEC and the much-needed support and guidance especially required because of the low-level of qualifications of the practitioners themselves, cannot be appropriately provided.

A third challenge arises from the generally low-level qualifications expected of staff working in childcare and to a slightly lesser extent, in kindergarten. An EQF Level 6 qualification leading to an undergraduate degree has been introduced for Kindergarten Educators, but this is not compulsory and the majority of KGEs have lower qualifications. The latest standards document (DQSE 2021b) establish a 60 ECTS Level 4 qualification for Childcare Educators and a 60 ECTS Level 5 qualification for managers. Whilst initiatives and services have increased rapidly, thus addressing availability and accessibility, there was never any vision or strategy which should have accompanied the spread of services and nurtured a highly-educated workforce.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the population in Malta totalled 520,971. The population has been rising steadily over the past 20 years (2000: 388,759; 2010: 414,027; 2020: 514,564) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average of the total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate in the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84); Malta had the lowest rate (1.13) in the SEEPRO-3 countries (Eurostat 2023d)[7].

Children under age 6

Table 5
Malta: Children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under age 1	4,400
1 year-olds	4,588
2 year-olds	4,514
3 year-olds	4,847
4 year-olds	4,849
5 year-olds	5,025
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**28,223**

Source: Eurostat 2023a, own calculations, differences due to rounding

In 2022, children under age 6 comprised 5.4% of the total population in Malta, 2.6% of the total population were children under 3 years of age. Those shares were approximately on a level with the EU-average (cf. *Table 6*).

Table 6
Malta: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population from 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Malta /EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Malta	3.5	3.7	7.2
	∅ EU15[8]	3.2	3.2	6.4
	Malta	2.9	3.2	6.1

[7] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from World Bank Data (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

[8] For the 2000 data, the then EU15 countries (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK) were taken into account, the 2005 data (EU25) additionally include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK and the basis of the 2015 data are the EU28 countries with additionally BG, RO and HR. The EU27 data (from 2020) include the EU28 countries without UK.

Year	Comparison Malta /EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2005	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Malta	2.9	2.9	5.8
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Malta	2.6	2.8	5.4
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, *own calculations, deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, 71.8% of all households with children under the age of six were couple households. Only 2% of all households are single households – almost all were single mothers (1.8%).

Table 7

Malta: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Total households, in %*
All households	56,400	
Couple households	40,500	71.8
Other household type	14,800	26.2
Single households, total	1,100	2.0
Single households, women	100	1.8
Single households, men	100**	0.2

Source: Eurostat 2023l, * own calculations, **data computed

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Malta, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 86.2% and for women 72.9% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 72.1% of women and 94.9% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the EU27-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were the second highest rate in the EU (EU-average 87.2%); those of mothers were above the EU-average (63.6%) as well (Eurostat 2023g, own calculations).

Table 8a

Malta: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010, 2022

	2010	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Malta	40.6	88.2
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[9]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Malta	72.1	94.9
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[10]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023g

[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

[10] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 8b.*

Table 8b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023g, 2023j

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[11]

In 2022, 17.9% of children under 6 years of age were at risk of poverty or social inclusion. This positions Malta slightly better than the EU average (23.3%) for this age-group. The relative share of all persons in the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion was 20.1% compared to 21.6% of the EU average. 2.8% of the children under 6 years suffered from severe material deprivation in 2020, compared to 1% of the total population (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023h, i).

[11] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or (severely) materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

THE NETHERLANDS

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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1. ECEC governance in The Netherlands

Historically, the Dutch childcare context is characterised by a 'split system' with two separate sectors for young children, namely, childcare and education, each with its own pedagogical roots (see Bahle 2009; Bennett and Tayler 2006; Singer 2018). Nowadays, the early childhood education and care (ECEC) system is partially unified with the involvement of two ministries.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (*Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid – SZW*) is responsible for the governance of childcare at the national level (ECEC settings for children 0–3[1] years; after school care, 4–13 years; and home-based childcare, 0–13 years)[2]. The same ministry provides financial support for the costs of childcare to parents that need childcare because of work or study. The childcare sector is organised by private companies.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap – OCW*) is responsible for the governance of early education programmes for children from 2½ up to 4 years *(vroeg- en voorschoolse educatie)* and for primary education *(Basisschool)*. Primary education starts for most children in the Netherlands at the age of 4 and is compulsory from the age of 5. The Ministry of Education gives financial support to the local authorities, which have to provide at least 16 hours (usually taken on four half-days) of early education per week for children between 2½ and 4 years with non-working and working parents. These local governments have some policy space by making extra funds available for specific categories of disadvantaged children. These categories are defined at the municipal level and generally take into account parental income, education level and migration status.

Coordination, cooperation and integration of the originally split systems of child care and early education have become a matter of urgency. Since the implementation of laws to stimulate child development and quality promotion in 2010 and 2018 (Development opportunities through quality and education, OKE Act – *Ontwikkelingskansen door kwaliteit en educatie, Wet OKE*), and the Childcare Innovation and Quality Act, IKK Act – *Wet Innovatie and Kwaliteit Kinderopvang, Wet IKK,* 2018), both sectors are partly covered by the same laws and regulations for quality and inspection (Veen, Van Daalen, and Blok 2014; SZW 2020). But the financial regulations are still different. Childcare centres often have to take into account two financial systems – SZW, Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (*Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelgenheit*), from 2022 renamed "Netherlands Labour Authority" (*Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie*) and OCW, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science *Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap* – as well as two systems of inspection of quality. Moreover, there are differences in educational goals. The childcare sector is focused on child well-being and is legally required to comply with four broad pedagogic objectives: the childcare facility must offer children a safe and caring environment that promotes personal competence, strengthens social competence and transmits norms and values (see Riksen-Walraven 2004). No specific references are made to cognitive development and stimulation of development to prepare for primary education. The inspection agencies of childcare centres are part of the municipal public health services and located at the

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. For the SEEPRO-3 reports we have chosen the following age-inclusive format: **0–2** years for settings for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for pre-primary settings in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In the Netherlands the corresponding formats are **0–3** and **4–5**.

[2] Although this age range reflects the legal basis, in reality – since most children start primary school at age 4 – the overwhelming majority of children finishes at age 12. Those who finish later have usually just turned 13 after a repetition year at school due to poor performance.

level of the municipalities. The inspections are conducted at least annually, during which the childcare inspectors assess whether or not childcare centres meet the national quality requirements as stated in The Dutch Childcare Act (2005).

The goals of early education programmes are also broad, but more focused on cognitive development and language, especially in the case of stimulation programmes for disadvantaged children. The nationally organised Inspection of Education is responsible for inspecting the quality of early education in groups for 3 year-olds attached to the primary school (*Basisschool*); and for inspecting the schools for primary education, including classes for children aged 4 up to 6 years (Education Inspectorate, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science 2021).

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Childcare sector 0–3

In 2022, some 117,000 persons worked in the childcare sector. To cope with the current very high staff shortage, the Minister for Social Affairs is permitting the employment of 50% unqualified staff over the next two years. (Dutch News 2023).

Most of them are core practitioners working directly with children; 23% have a leadership position (manager of the organisation, responsible for quality and innovation and for the coaching of pedagogical workers).

According to one of the branch organisations, the social childcare sector is growing at an average annual rate of 7–9%, despite staffing challenges (BMK 2023).

All Dutch caregivers need a certificate of conduct (*Verklaring Omtrent het Gedrag, VOG)*. This is a document through which the Dutch State Secretary for Security and Justice declares that the applicant has not committed any criminal offences relevant to the performance of his or her duties (e.g. sexual child abuse). Obviously, this certificate is not a qualification in the professional sense of the word, but it is a requirement for contact staff in the Netherlands.

Pedagogical Worker

Pedagogical Workers *(pedagogisch medewerkers)* are core professionals in early childhood education and care. They cooperate with one or two colleagues and are responsible for a group of children in children's centres (0–3 years) and in out-of-school care (4–13 years) in same-age or mixed age groups.

The minimum qualification that is required is a 3-year upper secondary vocational course in Pedagogical Work (MBO 3), although in the face of current staff shortages, this requirement has been weakened, particularly in the field of out-of-school childcare where persons with an MBO qualification from a semi-relevant field are now also eligible for employment as a Pedagogical Worker. Beginning in January 2025, all Pedagogical Workers will be required to have a sufficient level of Dutch language skills.

Pedagogical Trainee Worker

Students of MBO 3 or 4 and students following a Bachelor's degree in higher education for the Primary School Teacher profession or to become an academic Pedagogue who meet certain criteria are allowed to be paid wages for working in childcare centres. The current drastic staff shortage has even led to them being counted as qualified staff as long as they have completed

minimal additional schooling (which could be, for example, working a specified number of hours under the supervision of a fully qualified colleague).

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Teacher in Primary Education (*Basisschool*)

Teachers in Primary Education complete a 4-year higher education degree at Bachelor level (PABO – *Pedagogisch Academie voor het basisonderwijs*). Again, because of staff shortages in schools, lateral entrants with a non-specialised higher education degree (ISCED 6) are allowed to enter the profession through 'on-the-job training', i.e. working alongside qualified Primary Teachers after an initial assessment of suitability.

Teachers with a PABO-diploma are allowed to work throughout the entire primary education, including with the youngest children. Students in the third year of the 4-year higher education course at the PABO may choose as a specialisation 'the young child'. Special guidelines and pedagogical methods are developed for teachers working with 4 to 5 year-olds and for teachers working in the early education classes for 3 year-olds. For instance, the *Stichting leerplan ontwikkeling* 2021 [Foundation for curriculum development] states that young children learn through play and that under 6 year-olds mainly learn by doing; therefore, a home corner and concrete material like puzzles, building blocks, beads and wooden numbers and letters should be available. Moreover, the *Stichting leerplan ontwikkeling* states that young children learn best if they are offered meaningful topics with which they are familiar. Think, for example, of researching plants and insects in the park next to the school.

Teaching Assistant

The Teaching Assistant supports the teacher. Two levels of training for a pedagogical support post are available. With an upper secondary qualification at level 3 (MBO 3) in social and community work and a specialisation in primary education, the Teaching Assistant is involved in tasks such as clearing up materials; collecting objects that the teacher needs for working with the children; routine paperwork; support of the physical care of children; or making coffee and lunch. The Teaching Assistant at level 4 (MBO 4) is involved in the guidance and supervision of individual children and small groups; and they assist the teacher in the preparation of and during project work by the children. Teaching Assistants are not allowed to be solely responsible for the class; they work under the supervision of the teacher. For this position there are standard job profiles.

Table 1 distinguishes between different types of contact staff categories and also categorises the core pedagogues (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 at the end of this chapter).

Table 1
Netherlands: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Childcare sector				
Pedagogical Worker *Pedagogisch Medewerker* *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Profes-sional	*Dagopvang in kinderdagverblijf* Childcare centre (including early ed-ucation – VVE – programmes)) 3 months up to 4 years	Core peda-gogue with group respon-sibility in a same-age or mixed-age group	3 months up to 4 years	3-year upper secondary vocational course in Pedagogical Work (MBO 3) *Award*: Certificate in Pedagogical Work Certificate for compe-tence in Dutch language at level 3F of B2 (as from 2025) ECTS credits: n/a[3] EQF level: 3 or 4 ISCED 2011: 3 or 4
Pedagogical Worker for babies (under 1 year-olds)	Babies in same-age and in mixed-age groups	Core practi-tioner – re-sponsible for the children and contact with parents.	3 months up to 4 years and additional specialisation in working with under 1 year-olds	Qualification as Peda-gogical Worker **plus** Certificate 'Working with Babies' (as from 2025 mandatory)
(Pre-) Primary education sector				
Pre-primary / Primary School Teacher *Leerkracht* *Profile:* Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional	*Basisschool* **Primary school** 4–13 years (including volun-tary pre-primary class for 4 year-olds and compul-sory pre-primary class for 5 year-olds)	Core peda-gogue with group/class responsibility	4–13 years	(1) 4-year higher educa-tion study programme (*Pedagogisch Academie voor het basisonderwijs – PABO*) ISCED 2011: 5 ***or*** (2) 5 years higher edu-cation at university (*academische opleiding voor leerkracht ba-sisschool* ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Teaching Assistant *Onderwijsassistent*	*Basisschool* **Primary school** 4–13 years	Qualified co-worker	4–13 years	3-year upper secondary vocational course in Pedagogical Work

[3] n/a not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
	(including pre-primary classes for 4 and 5 year olds)	Teacher's class assistant		ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 3 or 4

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Childcare sector 0–3

Managers in childcare organisations

The management functions in early education and care are diverse. These range from managers of large organisations with over 700 locations attended by over 6,000 children in childcare centres and out-of-school care to the managers of small organisations with only two or three groups of children. In small organisations with a few locations the director also has the task of location manager. In an organisation with only one location the manager combines the leadership function with working directly with children. Roughly two-thirds of centre managers have a Bachelor level qualification.

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Candidates applying for a post as head or deputy head of a primary school, and thus also being responsible for pre-primary education, must hold a higher education qualification and a certificate of good conduct. Depending on the kind of management duties involved, specific competence requirements must also be met. This also applies if the post includes teaching duties (Eurydice 2023).

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Childcare sector 0–3

Pedagogical Worker in groups with under 1 year-olds (baby groups)

Pedagogical Workers in baby groups must have a certificate in 'Working with Babies', that will be legally required in 2025 (Berenschot 2022, 21). The focus of the training is on: What does a baby need during a day at the nursery? How can you give each baby enough attention in a group

of babies? Extensive attention is paid to pedagogy, development and care aimed at babies (age category from 0 up to 2 years). At the moment Pedagogical Workers who wish to qualify for working with babies can choose from 43 different courses that are certificated and accepted by the collective bargaining agreement (CAO) parties in childcare 2021 (Kinderopvang werkt 2022). These courses are offered by private companies or large childcare organisations.

Pedagogical Worker for children from disadvantaged families

Childcare centres subsidised by the local government to stimulate the development of 'disadvantaged children' are required to work with an accredited programme for early education for children aged 2½ up to 4 years and/or with children labelled as 'disadvantaged'. Groups that use an accredited programme are required to employ at least one Pedagogical Worker with the certificate for working with that specific programme. This includes having a certificate of proficiency in the Dutch language (3F or B2).

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Within primary schools, some teachers are appointed with the coordination of a part of the school based on the children's age. These are something like 'age band coordinators' mostly 'lower' (4–8 years) or 'upper' (8–12 years), sometimes also for the two years of pre-primary education (4–6 years). So the 'lower age band coordinator' (*onderbouw coördinator*) is the relevant post of responsibility for pre-primary education. Specific responsibility may differ from school to school, but it usually includes a combination of practical and pedagogical coordination tasks. There are no specific qualification or other requirements for this. The teacher is usually granted a certain amount of hours for this coordinating role.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Childcare sector 0–3

Since January 2019, childcare organisations are required to provide a Pedagogical Coach and/or a Pedagogical Policy Assistant to the manager of the organisation (SZW 2020).

Pedagogical Coaches (*pedagogisch beleidsmedewerker*) support Pedagogical Workers in their work with children and parents. Full-time staff receive ten hours of coaching per year (Kinderopvang totaal 2023). The coach can help familiarise new colleagues, observe individual children, analyse group dynamics and cooperate in preparing specific activities.

Pedagogical Policy Employees support the leading managers in evaluating, preparing and implementing pedagogical policy issues.

Both have a minimum qualification of MBO 4 (ISCED 3 or 4[4]) plus successfully completed courses to prepare them for their position. In the collective bargaining agreement (CAO, Kinderopvang werkt 2022) both functions are classified at HBO level (*hoger beroepsonderwijs* – higher vocational education, ISCED 6). In smaller organisations one or two Pedagogical Workers can combine the function of Pedagogical Coach or Policy Employee.

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Inspectors are employed by a (local) authority outside the schools to carry out inspections both of primary schools and childcare centres. There are no specific job requirements for this post.

[4] To qualify for an MBO 4, this can be done either directly after secondary school (3/4 years, classified as ISCED 3) or by first doing an MBO3 and then a specialist training for MBO 4 (classified as ISCED 4).

However, preferred candidates are those with relevant field experience and/or analytical skills. Inspectors have the same legal status as civil servants.

2.5 Specialist support staff

In the **childcare/early education** sector, there are no legal requirements or regulations governing the responsibility for support and guidance.

In **pre-primary education**, a special needs coordinator (*intern begeleider*) is appointed to support individual children who need additional backing. It is also their role to support the teachers of these children. There are no specific requirements for this job, although many schools require a specialised training before taking on such a role within the school.

Special schools also employ specialist support staff such as Speech Therapists, Physiotherapists and Mobility Instructors.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Level of education

The majority of Pedagogical Workers working in the childcare 0–3 sector have an intermediate level vocational training certificate in childcare (*Pedagogisch Werk* – MBO level 3). In 2015, a third of the Pedagogical Workers were educated at MBO level 4; more recent figures are not available. Since the law on Innovation and Quality in Child Care and Education came into force (Wet IKK 2018; SZW 2020), the employers' organisation of the childcare sector has tried to increase the level of education of Pedagogical Workers with an MBO 4 level vocational qualification (ISCED level 4).

Up to 2024, a maximum of one half of the professionals to be employed at a childcare setting may be not-yet-qualified, that is pedagogical staff on their way to becoming a qualified Pedagogical Worker (student staff members or trainees) (The Holland Times 2022, 26). This is the requirement stated in the Childcare Act regulations. However, since 2020 there is an increasing proportion of not-yet-qualified student-trainees in childcare centres working in the position of a Pedagogical Worker. In 2022, childcare organisations are temporarily (for six months) allowing one student trainee for every qualified Pedagogical Worker responsible for a group of children. This measure is being taken because of the tight labour market and the dire shortage of qualified workers. This temporary measure implies that 50% of the staff is permitted to be in training, i.e. not-yet-qualified.

Data from 2012 state that roughly three-quarters of childcare managers/centre heads had a Bachelor-level qualification (Fukkink et al. 2013). This distribution has been confirmed in the more recent Dutch National Childcare Quality Monitor (Romijn et al. 2023a).

Gender

Staff in the Dutch ECEC workforce are predominantly female. The number of men has always been modest in childcare and has diminished further for work with children under 4 years of age (Van Polanen et al. 2017). In 2021, 12.7% male staff worked in the childcare sector, but half of them in after-school childcare rather than early childhood setting. Males seldom work in baby

groups. Teachers in primary schools are also predominantly female; 12.3% were male in 2021 (Berenschot 2022, 82ff).

Ethnicity

The ethnicity of ECEC staff is mixed, but national data are not registered in the Netherlands; recent figures are therefore not available. In a large scale childcare assessment study (Fukkink et al. 2013), about one in 11 caregivers was not born in the Netherlands. This distribution has been confirmed in the more recent Dutch National Childcare Quality Monitor (Romijn et al. 2023a). Dutch was the home language for 92% of the caregivers. But there is local variation in the composition of staff, which reflects differences in the population between the major cities in the urban part of the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht) and other parts of the country. For example, Amsterdam and subsequently Rotterdam and The Hague have recently become 'majority-minority cities' (Crul, Uslu, and Lelie 2016), where no one ethnic group can be described as a majority group and the superdiversity of these cities is reflected in the child population and staff in these areas.

Age and years of work experience

Staff in the childcare sector are relatively young. In 2021, 49% were under the age of 35. In comparable sectors of care, welfare and education, an average of 37% is younger than 35 years. Only 12% were 55 years or older in the childcare sector. The number of years that employees work in childcare is also relatively low. About half (49%) have been working in childcare for less than 5 years; and about a third (34%) work for ten years or more. The young age is probably related to the fact that childcare is a relatively new sector in the Netherlands. Childcare and out-of-school care have only been offered on a larger scale since 1990 (Berenschot 2022, 83f).

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Childcare sector 0–3

Pedagogical Worker (*Pedagogisch Medewerker*)

The pre-service training requirement for the childcare sector in the Netherlands is a three-year upper secondary vocational course in Pedagogical Work (MBO 3). The training routes for Social Cultural Work (*Sociaal-cultureel werker*, SCW) and Teaching Assistant (*Onderwijsassistent*), both vocational qualifications at intermediate level, also qualify for childcare work. The entry requirement for this education is the pre-vocational track of secondary education or equivalent educational levels. This Pedagogical Work IPE is organised at two levels: EQF/ISCED 3 and 4. The majority of caregivers has a certificate at EQF level 3. At both levels 3 and 4 the qualifying route distinguishes between two learning paths: the school-based pathway or the on-the-job training pathway. In the school-based pathway, learning at school accounts for the largest part of the course (about 60%) and students tend to be younger than in the on-the-job training route. Students combine this with internships, starting from their first year. In the on-the-job training pathway, students work mainly in childcare settings as trainees and they combine this with school experience (about 20%).

There is no certificate at higher educational level (EQF 5 or 6) which is required for employees in the childcare sector. This level is not included in the current childcare regulations for staff and the required qualifications. However, as previously described, a number of higher-level routes

also qualify for ECEC work, although these are barely represented in the childcare workforce. These include a relevant associate degree (pedagogic-educational co-worker, childcare worker, educational support worker) and a Bachelor-level degree (primary school education, pedagogy, social work, cultural-societal work, pedagogical management).

Furthermore, *Pedagogisch Medewerker* as well as assistant staff must have language skills at least at level B2. By 2025, those working with babies need to complete an additional training (Berenschot 2022, 21).

Table 2
Netherlands: Pedagogical Worker

Job title in Dutch: *Pedagogisch Medewerker, Leidster* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: Completion of secondary education or equivalent **Professional studies:** 3-year upper secondary vocational course in Pedagogical Work **Award:** Certificate in Pedagogical Work **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 3 or 4 **ISCED 2011**: 3 or 4 **Main ECEC workplaces:** *Kinderdagverblijf* (childcare centre, 0-3 years**);** *Reguliere peuterspeelzaal* (regular playgroup, 2½ up to 4 years)

Note: The qualification routes for social cultural work (*Sociaal-cultureel werker.,* SCW) and Teaching Assistant (*Onderwijsassistent*), which have similar qualification requirements, also qualify for working in childcare settings.

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Teachers in primary education (*Basisschool*) who work with 4 and 5 year-olds have a Bachelor-level qualification (*Pedagogisch Academie voor het basisonderwijs – PABO*) and the course of studies lasts 4 years. In recent years, some IPE institutes in Amsterdam, Utrecht and Nijmegen have been offering, in close collaboration with the university, a new type of teacher education/training which combines a vocational track at higher education level and an academic track in a five-year IPE route (instead of four years). More specifically, the regular teacher education course is complemented with educational, pedagogic and research modules at academic Bachelor level. This type of teacher preparation is referred to as academic teacher education/training (*academische PABO*).

Table 4
Netherlands: Primary School Teacher (pre-primary)

Job title in Dutch: *Leerkracht* **Profile**: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Route 1: **Entry requirements:** University entrance qualification **Professional studies:** 4 years of study at a vocational higher education institution ('Pedagogical Academy') specialising in pedagogy (*Pedagogisch Academie voor het basisonderwijs – PABO*) **Award:** Professional Bachelor's degree **ECTS credits:** 240 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main workplace:** *Basisschool,* working with 4–13 year olds *Route 2:* **Entry requirements:** University entrance qualification

Job title in Dutch: *Leerkracht* **Profile**: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Professional studies: 5 years of study at a vocational higher education institution specialising in pedagogy in close collaboration with the regional university **Award:** Academic Bachelor (*academische PABO*) **ECTS credits:** 240 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main workplace:** *Basisschool,* working with 4–13 year-olds (4–7, 8–13)

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Pedagogical Worker (*Pedagogisch Medewerker*)

Competence requirements: The competence requirements for Pedagogical Workers are organised into ten clusters focused on (1) the primary process (interactions with children and parents) and (2) their functioning as a professional in the specific context and (3) their own professional development (EVC-Branchestandaard 2021).

Table 5
Netherlands: Clusters of competence requirements for Pedagogical Workers

Cluster	Competences
Cluster 1 **Caring for the emotional and physical well-being of children**	– Providing emotional support (sensitive responsiveness) – Providing support on a physical level
Cluster 2 **Ensuring the safety of children**	– Providing an emotionally safe base – Creating a safe environment for discovery, practice and adventure – Matching the approach to the situation, developmental age and individual needs – Responding to (possibly) unacceptable behaviour toward the child
Cluster 3 **Following and stimulating the development and learning of children**	– Monitoring the development and respond to it – Supporting and stimulating competences and talents – Letting children experience, discover, explore and expand – Providing a balance between new and familiar things – Enabling children to learn in a goal-oriented way
Cluster 4 **Supporting and stimulating play and leisure activities**	– Supporting play and leisure activities as a basis for development – Enriching children's experiences
Cluster 5 **Supporting and stimulating autonomy, participation and citizenship**	– Providing space and respect autonomy – Involving and empower children – Motivating children to engage in social activities and build friendships – Enabling children to connect with society
Cluster 6 **Influencing the behaviour of and interaction between children**	– Promoting positive interactions between children – Providing structure and set boundaries – Offering process-based support – Responding to special behaviour/characteristics

Cluster	Competences
Cluster 7 **Establishing a partnership with the parents**	– Hearing and seeing the parents – Sharing information with the parents – Collaborating with the parents – Working with the parents on joint responsibility and involvement
Cluster 8 **Collaborating with colleagues and other professionals in the child's environment**	– Working on an unequivocal approach/support with direct colleagues – Stimulating each other as colleagues – Collaborating with other professionals – Collaborating in a dynamic environment
Cluster 9 **Improving the service quality**	– Maintaining the quality of work – Evaluating and justifying work and actions – Improving the work
Cluster 10 **Developing in the profession**	– Continuing to develop – Using acquired expertise – Monitoring one's own working conditions.

Curriculum: The MBO 3 course contains: a) general subjects (citizenship and the ethics of being professional); arithmetic level 2F; Dutch language level 3F; b) subjects to become a competent Pedagogical Worker (communication, play activities, stimulating child development, pedagogy, cooperation with parents, first aid, professional development; c) apprenticeship of at least 570 hours: part time during the 3-year course or full time over a period of several weeks or months.

Primary School Teacher (*Leerkracht*)

The competence specifications for teachers are laid down in the Education Professions Act 2013. Schools are required to keep a record of the competences of each member of the teaching staff, setting out agreements made between the employer and the teacher on, for instance, continuing professional development.

Competence requirements: Seven competences with Dublin Descriptors (knowing, applying, evaluating, communicating, learning to learn) are distinguished in the national curriculum of the teacher education programme for Primary School Teachers: interpersonal; pedagogical; didactic; organisational; team collaboration; collaboration with local community; reflection and professional development (*Stichting leerplan ontwikkeling, 2021).* Specific indicators are distinguished at different levels during pre-service training: qualified for training after year 1 (level 1), qualified for final traineeship (level 2) and qualified to start practising in schools (Bachelor level, level 3).

Curricular areas: The Primary Education Act (1998) sets out the basic principles, objectives and core objectives of primary education. The core objectives describe what a school up to group 8 (oldest children) must offer the pupil. Schools are allowed to shape the teaching and learning processes themselves, i.e. didactic method, teaching materials, distribution over school years. The national teacher education profile distinguishes between seven key learning areas (see above). The (pedagogical) content knowledge includes language, maths, geography, history, physics, biology, music, drama, arts, gymnastics, ethical education or philosophy. Further, teacher education at different higher education institutions may also include complementary curricular areas or a special emphasis (e.g. on urban education, integrated children's centre, science). Core subjects of the primary school are Dutch language, maths and science, world orientation, artistic orientation, physical education and (in group 8) English.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Childcare sector 0–3

Pedagogical Trainee Worker

Employees who wish to be employed as a Pedagogical Worker but do not have the required diplomas can qualify via a pre-designed route based on their individual competences. These can be employees with considerable practical experience; employees with a different education at EQF levels 3 or 4 (e.g. for work with the disabled, the elderly); employees with a HBO diploma (EQF 5 or 6) that does not qualify for working with young children. For workers in out-of-school care settings, certificates in sports, art or music can be accepted for entry into an Assessment of Prior Learning procedure (*Erkenning Verworven Competencie – EVC*).

The Pedagogical Trainee Workers have to prove that they meet the acknowledged standard for a qualified Pedagogical Worker in childcare during in an EVC procedure. When the employee meets the standards, they no longer need to obtain a diploma to meet the qualification requirement for a pedagogical employee. This procedure may last three years with about 12 hours of training on a weekly basis.

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Prospective Primary School Teachers may follow a condensed curriculum at the higher education institutution for Primary School Teachers (*PABO*) if they have already finished an alternative study route at Professional Bachelor or Academic Bachelor level (lateral entrants – *zij-instromers*). Teaching Assistants in schools may also follow a new study programme to obtain a higher vocational level, moving for instance from MBO level 4 to HBO level. Recently, it has become possible for teachers working in primary schools and with an academic background to apply for a PhD scholarship (*Lerarenbeurs*).

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Childcare sector 0–3

Childcare training routes follow two learning paths: the school-based track (BOL – in Dutch) and the on-the-job track (BBL – in Dutch). However, the latter is not standardised practice.

The duration of the **school-based BOL** route depends on the MBO level aimed for and to a certain extent on the specific school programme. In general, the level 3 course lasts three years, full time, and workplace experience starts after a few months. This either builds up over time (starting with one day per week in year 1 and three days per week in year 3) or is more or less consistent (then usually 2–3 days per week). The competences they are expected to build are described in *chapter **4***.

In terms of the **on-the-job BBL** qualifying route, if the student aims for the MBO 3 level, it usually takes two years to complete. Roughly 80% of the time is spent in the workplace and 20% in the upper secondary school (i.e. generally four days in an ECEC setting and one day at school). For the MBO 4 level qualification, an additional 1-1½ years are needed.

Although the student is to be supported and supervised by an educator from the ECEC institution and by a staff member of an accredited job training childcare centre, there are no standard regulations for this. Little is known about the quality of support or the amount of time spent on supervision.

Job training centres and vocational training centres ('ROC's') may collaborate at a regional level to advance professional development.

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Work-based learning is a regular part of teacher education programmes for Primary School Teachers (PABO). Students complete an internship in both the lower as well as the middle and upper primary grades. Work-based learning starts in the first year of the PABO and students are placed in a primary school for one or two days per week. Students play an increasingly active role, starting with observing the class, then assisting with part of a lesson, and finally teaching classes for part of the day. In the final year of the Bachelor's degree studies, workplace-based learning takes place during an extensive period of half a year in which the student is responsible for the class and is also a full member of the school team (lio-stage). Workplace learning is supervised by a tutor from the IPE institution and by a staff member of the host school. Whether the supervising teacher receives remuneration for this depends on the school and on other factors related, for example, to the staff member's function within the school, for which they may be on a higher salary, or whether this kind of mentoring is understood as part of the teacher's 'non-contact time'.

Dutch teacher education institutions (PABO) work with primary schools in regional networks to exchange findings and to promote the professional level of the field.

The post of Trainee Teacher (LIO) was introduced in primary schools in August 2000. Students in the final year of their training can be employed part time under a training and employment contract for a limited period (equivalent to no more than five months' full time), provided the school has a vacancy. The Trainee Teacher is supervised by a qualified teacher and does everything a regular member of staff would do. This makes the transition from student to teacher less abrupt and the teacher education institutions are better able to keep abreast of current developments in education (Eurydice 2023, 9.1).

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Childcare sector 0–3

Legislation/regulation: The Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment has undertaken several measures to promote professional development in the childcare sector. In 2012, the Ministry developed an agenda for improving the pedagogical quality of childcare together with stakeholders, i.e. employer representatives, employees, parents, researchers (BKK 2012). A cornerstone in their approach is the provision of training aimed at the improvement of pedagogical interaction skills, informed by scientific evidence from international and Dutch experimental research, which showed that specialised training can improve the process quality of childcare and the pedagogical quality of interactions between staff and children (see Egert, Fukkink, and Eckhardt 2018). Training courses were developed that are focused on language and interaction skills

(including sensitive responsivity, respect for autonomy, structuring and limit setting, verbal communication, developmental stimulation, fostering positive peer interactions (see Helmerhorst et al. 2017).

The introduction of the Childcare Innovation and Quality Act in 2018 enhanced the quality debate, in particular through measures relating to ongoing professionalisation through on-site coaches, improved staff to child ratios, raising the level of required language skills (see *chapter **2***) and strengthening the cooperation between the childcare sector and education (*Wet Innovatie en Kwaliteit Kinderopvang* – IKK, SZW 2020). It is a legal requirement that professionals working with the youngest children (0–2) need a special training for this. The service providers therefore pay for these courses and the time needed for them.

Providers: The IKK measures invoked projects on lifelong learning (*Permanente Educatie Pedagogische Professionals*) that aim to stimulate professional development with modules, tests and accreditation of certificates for ECEC staff. Courses for CPD and certification are developed and offered by a multitude of large and small private organisations working at the national or local level. For instance, the website for childcare organisations mentions 23 accredited courses for Pedagogical Workers to obtain a certificate for working with babies (Kinderopvang werkt! n.d.(b), n.d.(c).

Access: In 2019, 77% of employees indicated that they had followed some form of training in the past 12 months (Berenschot 2022, 86). Further training is related to the tightening of quality requirements since 2018 (see above IKK measures). Moreover, the collective labour agreement for the childcare sector states that employers have to make a yearly plan for the training and education of staff. Organisations are required to describe what they do to evaluate and promote the quality of the pedagogical work, cooperation with parents and continuing professional education of the staff.

Main forms: The staff can be permitted to follow courses to refresh their capacities, to obtain a higher level of education or to study a specific topic related to organisational innovation, such as 'diversity', 'sustainability', 'health and food', or cooperation between the childcare sector and primary education. The scope, form and duration is entirely a matter for the service providers and little is known how regularly CPD activities take place. However, in-house professional development is regulated: at a minimum of 50 hours coaching and training per setting and a minimum of 10 hours per year per full-time teacher. This has to be facilitated and organised within the ECEC centre. The national labour agreement for ECEC teachers differentiates between necessary CPD (e.g. the baby course mentioned earlier) and additional CPD. Attending CPD sessions beyond the legally required has to be negotiated between staff and centre managers, both in terms of time and payment.

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Legislation/regulation: As part of collective labour agreements, teachers in pre-primary education have the right to individualised professional development for two hours per week (when full-time employed). These hours are in addition to team-based schooling days. Moreover, schools have on average €500 per FTE (full time equivalent) available for this individual professional development. The directors and participation councils (which consists of teachers working in the school) decide how the budget is allocated.

To improve teachers' professional development and career prospects, the 2020 Teacher Action Plan introduced various additional measures, including: a teacher development grant (covering course fees and material costs to follow a BA/MA) and the prospect of promotion with higher salaries (Eurydice 2023, 9.3).

Providers: Schools for primary, secondary and special education have their own budgets for in-service training. There are no specific in-service training institutions governed by law. Courses can be provided by institutions within both the public and commercial domain. Many are provided by teacher education institutions (HBO institutions and universities with teacher education departments). They are sometimes organised in cooperation with the school advisory services, one of the national educational advisory centres or experts from outside the education system (Eurydice 2023, 9.3).

Access: In 2022, approximately 70% of employees indicated that they had followed some form of training in the past two years (Arbeidsmarktplatform 2022). The vast majority (92%) feels (somewhat) supported by their management to engage in continuing professional development. There are no national data available about the further extent to which teachers engage in professional development activities.

Main forms: Sometimes course offers are for both Pedagogical Workers and Primary Teachers – for instance, training for interactions with young children, and for the staff working with early intervention programmes. Specific language training has recently been provided on a large national scale to raise the linguistic competences of staff; if teachers are not certified at a certain proficiency level (level 3F, which is equivalent to an ISCED level 5 or Bachelor level), they are not allowed to work in a pre-primary education setting.

One of the themes that has recently received attraction in the Netherlands is urban education and working as a teacher in an urban context (Fukkink and Oostdam 2016). Urban education may be an integral part of the IPE programme, but also plays a role in continuing professional development. For ECEC staff, early intervention programmes for young children are an important topic in urban contexts.

Primary School Teachers may also choose to follow a Master's degree in education. Popular courses are the Master in Educational Leadership, Master in Educational Needs and Master in Pedagogy, which are accredited by the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation *(Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisati,* NVAO).

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

The average gross salary of a full-time worker in the Netherlands was €2,238 in 2023 (Nationaleberoepengids.nl 2023a). The gross salary of a full-time Pedagogical Worker ranges between €1,889 and €2,588 per month, depending on the level of education and length of working experience. The salaries of core pedagogues in childcare settings are, on average, lower than those of Primary School Teachers. The gross average salary of a full-time Primary School Teacher is €4,530, i.e. between €3,001 and €6,059 per month (Nationaleberoepengids.nl 2023b). Whether it is possible to live on a salary of a Pedagogical Worker in the childcare sector depends on where they live in the Netherlands. Housing is very expensive in the big cities, and it will be hard to find affordable housing, both for Pedagogical Workers and Primary School Teachers. This is one of the reasons why it is so hard to recruit them in urban areas. It can be difficult to get by on a salary as a Pedagogical Worker or Teacher.

Since the introduction of a more flexible personnel budget, school boards have more scope to give their teachers a performance-related allowance or bonus. They may decide to do so on the

basis of an assessment. It is up to the school to decide under what conditions bonuses or allowances will be granted, and how much money they are prepared to allocate for them (Eurydice 2023, 9.2).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

Dutch society is characterised by part-time work, especially among women with children. In this respect, the childcare sector and primary education are no exception.

In 2021, professionals in the **childcare sector** worked on average 65% of the possible hours of a full-time job; that is 26 hours per week (Berenschot 2022, 82). As a result, the majority of children under the age of 4 also attend ECEC on a part-time basis (on average 2 days per week).

In the **primary sector** in 2023, more than half (59%) of the Teachers worked on average between 2½ and four days per week (0.72 of FTE), 32% worked (almost) full-time (four to five days, 0.8 FTE) and only 9% worked less than 2.5 days (0.5 FTE) (Ministerie OCW 2023).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Support measures for Pedagogical Workers include the on-site Pedagogical Coach, as described in *chapter **2.3***.

Teachers are appointed by the school board. Each school board is responsible for personnel policies and for supervising, supporting and assessing newly qualified teachers. The necessary funds are included in the school's block grant. The money may be spent on supervising Trainee Teachers, lateral-entry teachers and other new staff members.

Staff assessments are based on two instruments: job performance interviews, in which teachers discuss their performance with their heads, and consider their prospects for the future; assessment interviews, in which the teacher's performance in the period preceding the interview is assessed.

Most schools regularly hold job performance interviews with their teaching staff, in most cases once every two years. Information on a teacher's performance is mainly supplied by the individual concerned. In primary schools, classroom observation is also an important source of information (Eurydice 2023, 9.2).

7.4 Non-contact time

The employers in the childcare sector are required to ensure that at least 50 hours per year are available for non-group work for each full-time pedagogical employee. However, these hours are not an individual right. The employer can decide how to allocate non-group hours among employees. There are no national regulations regarding non-contact time for individual members of the Dutch staff in the child care sector.

The standard number of hours to be worked per year is fixed at 1,659 for all sectors of education. Primary and special school teachers may spend an average of no more than 930 hours a year on teaching duties (Eurydice 2023, 9.2).

Teachers in pre-primary/ primary education have an individual right of 7 days for studying per year if they work full time. According to the collective agreement, Primary School Teachers have to spend 56% of their time in contact with children (PO-raad 2022). The rest of their time is allocated to preparation, checking students' schoolwork, contact with parents, team meetings, etc. Many teachers complain that they have to work more hours per week than they are paid for. But on average teachers have more opportunities for study and collaborative work than the pedagogical staff in the child care sector. These and other differences in the working conditions

of Teachers and Pedagogical Workers are one of the obstacles in the integration of education sector and childcare sector.

7.5 Current staffing issues

The Dutch childcare sector consists exclusively of private companies. Working parents pay these companies for the hours their children spend in the setting. Working parents are financially supported by the the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment through the tax system. Linking financial support to the number of hours parents work makes the childcare system vulnerable and dependent on labour market fluctuations. In the 2010s, the Dutch economy and childcare market was declining, following a significant drop in demand for places. A shift was observed from the use of formal childcare to informal childcare arrangements (e.g. grandparents taking care of their grandchildren). But in the 2020s, the economy is growing and in 2022 there is a very tense labour market with shortages of employees, staff and labourers in almost every sector, including childcare and education (UWV 2022).

Childcare organisations and primary schools have been struggling with serious staff shortages since 2015. In recent years, they have increased. In January 2022, a quarter of entrepreneurs said they were experiencing problems due to labour shortage (Berenschot 2022, 82). Results from the Dutch National Daycare Monitor indicate a substantial increase in reported labour shortage since 2019. The experienced problems are a combination of market wide labour shortages and an increasing number of staff on sick leave (Slot et al. 2023b). Among other things, these shortages are related to the higher qualification requirements that have been introduced since 2019, reducing the potential number of pedagogical staff who meet these requirements. In addition, the staff-child ratio in the baby groups was changed from 1: 4 to 1: 3 children. More staff are therefore needed for the baby groups.

A number of measures have been taken to solve this labour market problem:

1. In the context of an acute shortage of staff, the government has allowed a temporarily lowering of qualification requirements. Pedagogical Trainee Workers may be included when calculating the required number of employees in a group. It will be easier for people without the required qualifications to enter the field (Rijksoverheid 2021; Kinderopvang werkt! 2022).
2. Most Pedagogical Workers are employed on a part-time basis (Berenschot 2022, 82). Employers are looking for measures to stimulate the staff to work more hours. A survey shows that especially workers in out-of-school childcare are keen to work longer hours. Current working hours for out-of-school care workers are short and fragmented throughout the day and week. Their working hours depend on school hours. The opening hours of many schools date from the time when mothers were at home with their children, with breaks at noon, finishing at 15:30 and closing on Wednesday afternoons.
3. Measures to make the work more attractive and to reduce sick leave and work pressure: The unions are committed to wage increases and better fringe benefits. Private companies can give the workers a rise if the (well-off) parents are willing to pay higher fees. The employers in the childcare sector are also trying to make the work more attractive by emphasising the pedagogical value of working with young children and in out-of-school care.

The organisation of employers in the childcare sector (BMK 2023) fears that the staff shortage will have a negative effect on quality and standards for staff qualifications. On the one hand, there is pressure from parents (and their companies) for more childcare – the waiting lists are currently growing; on the other hand, there is the risk of unqualified personnel and decline in quality.

According to a recent labour market survey, after the considerable staff shortages registered between October 2022 and March 2023, a slight decrease can be seen among the different types of childcare organisations. However, an increase in the shortage is expected in toddler care. To solve the staff shortage, organisations are taking various measures, such as having pedagogical staff fill in or help out (82%), having employees work above their contractual hours (58%), and deploying more trainees (52%) (Kinderopvang werkt! 2023).

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Towards a national pedagogical curriculum: initiatives of stakeholders

Until now, the Dutch government has refrained from establishing a national curriculum for childcare centres. The official ideology is that the government does not interfere with the content of upbringing. The government only provides a broad framework that has to be taken into account by the childcare companies, i.e. the service providers. Various initiatives are being taken to formulate a Dutch pedagogical framework and curriculum; these frameworks or curricula are not recognised by the government. In 2008, the National Platform of Pedagogues in Childcare Centres managed to get a subsidy from the Ministry of Social Affairs for a project that resulted in a pedagogical framework for childcare centres 0–4 years (*Pedagogisch kader kindercentra 0–4 jaar* (Singer and Kleerekoper 2009). Professionals, parents, policy makers and researchers from all over the country participated in discussion groups. Later, pedagogical frameworks for after-school care (Schreuder et al. 2011), home-based ECEC provision (Boogaard et al. 2013) and diversity (van Keulen and Singer 2012) were published.

In 2017, the National Expertise Centre for Childcare (*Landelijk Experticecentrum Kinderopvang*), also published an educational curriculum for the young child in childcare (*Pedagogisch curriculum voor het jonge kind in de kinderopvang*, Fukkink 2017) and trainings were offered for implementation in private organisations.

The national organisation of companies in the childcare sector (Brancheorganisatie Kinderopvang 2023) has published a discussion paper to develop a shared pedagogical vision on caring for and educating young children in children's centres (Brancheorganisatie kinderopvang 2022). The organisation is an important stakeholder in the privatised childcare sector; 80% of organisations that offer childcare are members of this nation-wide organisation. With the discussion paper of 2021, it is the first time that an organisation of employers expresses its pedagogical view on early education. The paper has a strong focus on the value of and children's need to play which is reflected in the title*: "Space for play". An academic essay on play, playing and space for play, and on how young children are on a melting rock of ice* (Brancheorganisatie kinderopvang 2022). The *Brancheorganisatie* has organised conferences and workshops for managers in the childcare sector to discuss the paper and the opportunities for implementation by companies. The process of implementation is ongoing; it is too early to assess the impact.

Cooperation between professional organisations related to early education and care

Recently, extensive cooperation between schools, teacher education institutions and universities has been taking place in several collaborative field and research projects such as academic workshops *(academische werkplaats or werkplaats)* in Amsterdam, Tilburg and Utrecht with external funding. In these projects, professional development occurs in field-based research and

development projects between a university, the teacher education department of a university of applied sciences and several primary schools (Ploeger and Fukkink 2013).

Several new initiatives are focusing on the integration of the childcare sector and the education sector. For instance, a group of policymakers of diverse municipalities have united to stimulate the development of so-called 'Integrated children's centres' (*Integrale Kindcentra, IKC*), that integrate facilities for childcare, education and youth health care in their municipalities as long as there is no legislation or regulations which provide a framework for this (Veen et al. 2019). The leading group of policymakers is contributing towards making that legal framework possible. Several cooperative projects have been initiated. In 2020, the Platform Children's Centres (*Platform Kindcentra)* was set up. The Platform consists of representatives of employees, sector and parent organisations from childcare and primary education and 'adjacent' organisations that are involved with the young child from the sectors of art, culture, sport, youth care, youth health care, emancipation, science and more. In *chapter **9*** research related to the development and impact of integrated children's centres will be discussed.

Another initiative focuses on the transition between ECEC and primary education. Several schools started collaborations in so called "*peuter-kleutergroepen*": groups where toddlers and kindergartners are mixed and supported by the presence of a Pedagogical Worker and Primary School Teacher. An exploratory study on the quality of these groups show that a similar level of quality is provided when comparing them with regular toddler or kindergarten groups (Fukkink et al. 2023). Overall, children's well-being and engagement is considered high, though the results seem a bit more in favour of the kindergartners than the toddlers. Kindergartners seem to have more interactions with peers and teachers and a higher level of well-being compared to the toddlers in the same group. A second important conclusion relates to the collaboration between staff members and role division during the day. These groups require a new way of working for both the Pedagogical Worker as well as the Primary School Teacher. More attention should be given to their collaboration and how this relates to the schools' vision of early child development.

Initiatives for system reform

The current Dutch ECEC system is under pressure and is likely to undergo reform in the years to come. Several societal discourses and events have triggered the drive for innovation. The first relates to the growing legitimacy of ECEC as a formal institution with the potential to narrow early education gaps. This growing understanding of the public role of ECEC raises questions about the privatised and marketised system in the Netherlands that was historically developed as an instrument to increase labour market participation. In addition to this, there is an ongoing debate about the effectiveness of market principles in 'public' sectors and its impact on quality. More specifically, privatisation and marketisation have opened up the sector for private equity which raises the question as to what extent it is ethical to make private profits within a system that is largely funded by the government. A third trigger has to do with the way the system is funded by the government. The Dutch ECEC system is characterised by indirect funding, meaning that childcare providers are not paid by the government directly, but by the parents who receive benefits from the government. These benefits are income dependent, ranging from 33% for high-income families to 96% for low-income families. The indirect benefits system is considered too complex and sensitive to errors. In 2018, it was brought to light that the Tax and Customs Administration that is responsible for the benefits system made false allegations of fraud. Approximately 26,000 parents were wrongfully accused by the authorities, which required them to pay back the entire amount of benefits they had received. For many parents this amounted

to tens of thousands of euros, driving families into severe financial hardship with far-reaching consequences (e.g., parents losing custody over their children).

As a result, several stakeholders have been advocating reforms. Several studies and papers have been written on the topic in the past few years, (e.g., Leseman et al. 2021; Van Eijkel et al. 2023; Van Huizen & Plantenga 2023), some of them commissioned by the government. These publications point out the possible implications of reforms both on a pedagogical level (i.e., quality and equal opportunities for child development) and an economic level. Given the political sensitivity of the topic and the huge economical impact, it is hard to speculate how and when the system will change. Yet the call for a new system has been widely acknowledged.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Integration of child care, early education and youth health care

Source: Doornenbal, J., and A. Kassenberg 2022 (see *References* for full details)

***Background*:** Initiatives to develop integrated services and education for young children. The teacher education department of the university of applied sciences in Groningen (*De Hanze school)* is committed to field research projects to support the development of Integrated children's centres.

Aims: The focus is on field research of 'what works' principles in innovation processes in education. Innovation cannot only rely on the implementation of 'evidence-based' programmes; teachers' day-to-day practice involves working with 'evidence based programmes' only 20% of the time.

Procedure: Several pilot settings ('field labs') were set up to create an inclusive play-learning environment in which every child (from 0 to 6 years) can blossom. They started in 2015, and an evaluation was published in 2017 (Doornenbal et al. 2017). A mixed method design was used: (1) A qualitative case study focused on regularly visiting, monitoring and supporting eight field labs in their development and discussing processes and results. (2) An Interprofessional Collaboration Monitor was set up to analyse quantitatively the nature and degree of interprofessional collaboration: is the collaboration changing and contributing to the aims of the field labs? (3) A survey among project leaders to assess whether more or less children have been referred to youth care and/or special (primary) education compared to the situation before the field labs.

***Findings*:** The following contributory factors in the development of an Integrated Children's Centre (IKC) were found (Doornenbal 2007): (1) Openness: a mixed population of children from different backgrounds; flexibility towards parents and children adapted to the specific needs in the municipality; open for children with disabilities. (2) Learning: a pedagogical climate that offers security, structure and opportunities to explore; supporting a positive identity and self-esteem in children; a balance between cognitive, social and moral learning; professionals who are involved and have the necessary didactic skills and knowledge. (3) Professional Community: moral and visionary leadership; balance between working along planned and systemic lines and space for improvisations; cooperation between professionals of different backgrounds, and between professionals, parents and local policy makers. The increased interprofessional collaboration is striking in all pilot projects. Professionals talk about learning from each other and that a common vision of child development and support arises. The extent to which this leads to better handling of differences and fewer referrals is modest, but certainly not negligible. The field labs show that

the emphasis shifts from curative to preventive and strengthening the pedagogical climate. The integrated children's centres that were most effective had an elaborated pedagogical concept that was shared by all involved professionals. There was a high investment in the quality of the professionals and continuing professional development. They used structured programmes to stimulate the development and education of under 4 year-olds children with less free play; there were more activities to involve the parents and a better embedding in the neighbourhood (Slot and Leseman 2020).

Implications: The field labs of Integrated children's centres and other initiatives aimed to stimulate the collaboration of Pedagogical Workers, Primary School Teachers, professionals in youth health care and parents. The field labs show that there are a number of obstacles to be faced. These are in particular the obstacles caused by the fact that childcare, education and youth health care fall under the responsibility of different ministries, have different legal frameworks and different organisations for inspection. Professionals in the three sectors have different working conditions, including salaries, working hours and rights to further professional training (Doornenbal and Kassenberg 2022).

Overall quality of the childcare system

***Sources*:** Romijn et al. 2023a; Slot et al. 2023b (see *References* for full details)

***Background*:** The Dutch National Daycare Quality Monitor (LKK in Dutch) was commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. It is a 9-year project (2017-2026), with yearly measurements and reports on the status quo of the country. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the scheduled measurement of 2020 was determined and the measurements of 2021 and 2022 were combined in one bigger sample. Quality is determined as a multifaceted construct and as such a wide variety of measures are used to study the process quality, structural quality, curriculum quality and organisational quality of the Dutch ECEC system.

***Methods*:** The study applies a rolling sampling method, using a national database listing all Dutch childcare provisions (at the centre level) as its population. A random sample of different forms of early care and education provisions is drawn every year following a stratified sampling model based on region of the country, degree of urbanisation and size of the organisation. These annual samples result in a large, nationally representative sample over the consecutive years. In the sample up to 2022, *N* = 659 centres are included. The results are based on more than 3500 live observation measures (i.e., CLASS – La Paro et al., 2011; ERS – Harms et al., 1998, 2003), over 2500 observation measures using video recordings (i.e., NCKO-interactieschalen – Fukkink et al., 2013) and more than 1500 surveys completed by staff working directly with children as well as centre managers. Approximately half of the data is collected in centre-based ECEC groups for 0–4 year-olds. The other half consists of centre-based after-school care for 4-12 year olds and home care provisions for 0–12 year–olds.

Selected Findings: The average emotional process quality (i.e., interaction quality of teachers) is considered good. The average educational process quality is considerably lower and considered as mediocre according to the benchmarks of the instrument. A comparison of the care pre and post COVID shows a stable process quality with a small increase in some areas. The governmental effort to increase quality with the new legislation in 2018 (Wet IKK) is a likely explanation for this. Other quality aspects show a slight decrease after the COVID pandemic. This mostly related to the curriculum quality (the extent to which a variety of activities is provided and how the daily programme is structured) and the contact with parents. The pandemic and the increasing staffing shortages are likely explanations for this. Concerning the organisation quality, staff appear to be generally satisfied with their work; however, overall work stress has increased over the

past few years and centre managers also indicate an increase in experienced problems (mostly related to staffing shortage) to maintain their quality.

Implications: The studies suggest that the Dutch childcare system is under pressure. Nevertheless, the recent investments in the quality of the sector seemed to have paid off, especially with regard to process quality. Overall the slight increase in process quality despite the more complex working conditions is a compliment to the sector.

Organisation logics in relation to quality and inclusion

***Sources*:** Romijn et al. 2023b (see *References* for full details)

***Background*:** Research has extensively investigated the relationship between structural quality characteristics on the one hand and process quality on the other hand. However, given limited variation in the Netherlands in structural characteristics (such as group size, staff to child ratios, education level) due to regulations, these characteristics do not sufficiently explain the large variance in process quality. In the current paper we adopt a configurational approach, arguing that organisations are more than just a sum of individual structural characteristics, and that differences we see in quality should raise the question whether some provisions have found more effective organisation forms than others when it comes to creating inclusive, high quality environments. This is especially relevant in the Dutch context, where the ECEC system can be considered hybrid in the sense that the public task of providing high quality early child care, including the reduction of inequalities and the prevention of early education gaps, is nowadays allocated to both private for-profit and not-for-profit organisations (Van der Werf, 2020).

***Methods*:** We drew on data from centre-based ECEC provisions for 2–4 year-olds collected during the first three years (2017-2019) of the National Dutch Childcare Quality Monitor. A latent class analysis was performed on 14 dichotomised organisation characteristics (based on manager surveys) reflecting several organisational logics (i.e., market logic, corporation logic, community logic, profession logic). This led to three organisation profiles which were then compared in terms of quality (process, curriculum, structural) and inclusive practices.

Findings: Three types of organisations could be characterized; engaged professional organisations, commercial service-oriented corporations, and traditional bureaucratic organisations. The engaged professional organisations outperformed the other two types in terms of quality and inclusion. These organisations are considered engaged in the sense that they show a strong connection with their community. They actively reach out to parents, engage in partnerships with local organisations (i.e., schools, community services), and have a clear social mission. They can also be considered professional organisations as they try to create communities of practice and support teachers in their continuous and team-based professional development. Also, professionals and managers are more interconnected as they show lower scores on the corporation logic. Though these organisations are not characterised by strong profit goals or client-centred flexibility, they can be for-profit legal entities and endorse a relatively strong service-oriented profile. In conclusion, they have an eye for the quality of their work (professional logic) and the public goal of childcare to fulfil a meaningful role in the community (community logic), while not losing sight of their position in the market and addressing parents' needs for flexibility (market logic).

Implications: This study stressed the importance of the organisation climate when it comes to practices in classrooms. More specifically, it shows that a strong support for professionalism (i.e., investing in staff and their skills) in the whole organisation and a more interconnected workplace can have a positive impact on children's day to day experience.

Social life of young children and pedagogical innovations

***Sources*:** Singer 2016; Singer and Wong 2019 (see *References* for full details)

***Background*:** Researching peer relations of under 3 year-olds in group settings emerged as a new phenomenon in the 1970s and 1980s and a common focus of educators tended to be peer conflict. A widespread assumption at the time was that only adults – especially mothers – constitute the meaningful environment of infants and toddlers. Related to the rise of children's centres, researchers in diverse countries carried out explorative studies of groups dynamics among young children and caregivers/pedagogical workers; also in the Netherlands (Singer and De Haan 2007).

***Methods*:** Observation studies with focussed video recordings in natural group situations in children's centres for under 4 year-olds and interviews with pedagogical workers and parents. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were used.

Studies were conducted on early social and moral learning in interaction with peers in childcare centres: on how young children make contact and create togetherness; humour in young children and how they make fun and jokes together; conflicts in young children, peace-making and co-construction of social and moral rules; friendship and factors that predict friendship among very young children (Singer and de Haan 2007). In these studies, the impact of peer behaviour and strategies of the pedagogical worker were analysed and discussed with the involved pedagogical workers.

Selected Findings: For instance, the studies of peer conflicts showed that children's interest in the continuation of joint play is the strongest incentive to use bilateral and prosocial strategies. But Dutch educators often focused on the (alleged) perpetrator of the conflict.

Implications: The study suggests that teachers should value and support peer relations rather than focusing on the perpetrators in conflict situations (Singer, van Hoogdalem, de Haan and Bekkema 2012). Based on these studies, training programmes were constructed, evaluated and implemented.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

The following workforce challenges are emerging in the field of early childhood education and care in the Netherlands.

Professionalisation: investing in interdisciplinary skills

Coordination between childcare and the pre-primary education system is a topical social issue in the Netherlands; both sectors are currently searching for appropriate forms in terms of organisational governance and pedagogical practice. The current focus of interest is on how professionals from different organisations with their respective specialisms can best work together in a coordinated way (Doornenbal et al. 2017). As indicated above, the differences in regulations, employment conditions and salaries of staff in the childcare, education and youth health care sectors form an obstacle to cooperation.

Investing in professional networks in ECEC practice

The continuing professional development of ECEC staff is currently provided in a course-based format. Other formats may complement this approach. For example, team intervision, supervision, and learning communities are promising complementary approaches for ECEC. Also the

"(academic) workplaces" (a form of learning communities) that already exist for teachers of primary and secondary schools in different places, may offer opportunities for professional development (Kinderopwang werkt! 2022/n.d. c).

This challenge will become even more urgent if the Dutch ECEC workforce becomes more diverse with professionals at ISCED levels 3, 4 and 5/6 and with professionals from childcare, education and youth care. Interdisciplinary networks may support interprofessional practice and collaboration (type 1: multidisciplinary networks), but also key stakeholders from different teams may organise meetings in (peer) supervision groups (type 2: mono-disciplinary specialist networks).

Evidence-informed practice and practitioner research

Scientific research has shown that not all pre- or in-service interventions for ECEC staff are (equally) effective (Egert, Fukkink, and Eckhardt 2018; Werner et al. 2016). Moreover, there are many training modules in the field; however, solid proof for their effectiveness is scarce. It is vital for future professional development that innovative practices are developed and evaluated. Mixed methods evaluation in controlled experimental designs may be helpful in charting the different learning experiences and learning gains, but also pitfalls of the different stakeholders (NCKO 2017).

Practitioners' research is also under development. Pedagogical coaches and staff at Bachelor's level have a stimulating influence in this. Childcare organisations and schools can tackle urgent issues within their organisation. The impact of practitioners' research in collaboration with universities of applied sciences and universities is promising (Doornenbal and Kassenberg 2022; Tajik and Singer 2018).

Research into innovation at national and international level

In the Netherlands there is no organisation that can play a leading role in innovation with regard to all sectors involved in early education. The organisations involved in innovation and quality assurance are fragmented and compete with one another. The childcare sector and early education sector are the responsibility of different ministries and systems of inspection. Innovation and professional development in the childcare sector are steered by market forces. Employers are obliged to meet the quality requirements, but are free in the design: regarding the fees, they can stick to the minimum or provide extras if the parents want to pay more. Universities compete for government grants. Moreover, papers on the results of research written in Dutch and accessible for practitioners are not counted as scientific products. This has a negative impact on collaborative research between practitioners and academics (Singer and Wong 2019).

Dutch organisations that offer continuing professional development courses are also steered by the market system. They have to compete in securing assignments. Some of the big non-profit childcare companies do invest substantially in quality evaluation and the coaching of Pedagogical Workers. But it is not the prime task of these companies to invest in the improvement of pedagogical quality of children's centres in general. For example, no company ever pays for their pedagogical counsellors to participate in international conferences. Dutch representatives of the early education and childcare sectors rarely participate in international organisations like OMEP (*Organisation Mondiale pour l'Éducation Préscolaire*) or international research conferences such as EECERA (European Early Childhood Education Research Association).

Nonetheless, there is a strong ECEC research tradition in the Netherlands. Although research groups have to compete for funding, the government funds ECEC research on a regular basis. Funding opportunities include initiatives to monitor the status quo of the quality of the system

since the early 2000's (e.g., research of Fukkink et al. 2013; Romijn et al. 2023a to study explanatory factors in differences in quality (e.g., research of Slot et al. 2023a) or to inform the government about system reforms (e.g., research of Leseman et al. 2021). In addition, the research groups on ECEC have strong international connections on the topic. The Netherlands often collaborates in European projects (e.g., Horizon2020) on ECEC quality and is an active member of the research associations connected to the field (EECERA; EARLI, specifically the SIG5 – Learning and Development in Early Childhood).

Reducing staff shortages

Severe staff shortages continue to be a huge challenge for the childcare sector in the Netherlands and suggestions for reducing these are not fully convincing. One is extending the government measure allowing for half of all childcare workers in a setting to be student workers. Instead of concluding in July 2022 this measure has now been extended to July 2024, which means that the composition of the workforce in childcare centres will continue to be unbalanced, with inevitable effects on the quality of relationships. Another is reducing the staff to child ratio – which does not bode well for the individual and small group work needed in a high quality childcare environment. A further suggestion is to give discounts for enrolling on Wednesdays and Fridays, when parents usually work part-time, but this also falls short of expectations for a full-time, accessible system for working parents. More innovative is a proposal at ministerial level to incorporate qualified newcomers to the Netherlands into the childcare sector, including recently arrived persons with valid refugee status and Ukrainian refugees, who can work in reception centres with children and parents speaking other languages (The Holland Times 2022).

At the end of the day, however, what is really needed is not only substantial investment but a reconceptualisation of the system as a whole and not a piecemeal, incremental approach.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

THE NETHERLANDS

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based provision are **childcare centre** (*kinderdagverblijf*, 0–3) and **kindergarten class** (*kleuterklas*, 4–5)[1]. Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in the Netherlands

1850	Increasing maternal employment leads to the establishment of the first institutions for the care of children from the age of 2½ years
During the following decades	Childcare institutions are gradually followed by kindergartens based on the pedagogical approaches of Pestalozzi and Froebel – and later, Montessori
1950s and 1960s	Childcare/nursery settings and playgroups are founded
1985	Kindergartens are integrated into the primary school system
Up to 1986	Significant increase in the number of playgroups for 2- to 4-year olds
1990-1996	Expansion of childcare/nursery settings
Since 1991	Decision to primarily provide for the integration of children with special educational needs into mainstream settings
1996	First national assessment of quality of childcare
1998	First Chair in Childcare established at the University of Amsterdam
2002	Childcare settings for under 4-year olds come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs
2005	The Childcare Act comes into force
2007	Childcare settings for disadvantaged under 4-year olds come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education
Since 2010	Both childcare centres and playgroups come under the same legislation.
2014	Inclusive Education Act comes into force.
2015	Municipalities are made responsible for disadvantaged and vulnerable children in the entire early education sector.
2018	Legislation on "Innovation and Quality of Childcare" and on "Harmonisation of Work in Childcare and Playgroups" comes into force.
2019	For disadvantaged children between 2½ and 4 years of age, attendance at a childcare centre is increased from 10 hours a week to 16 hours.
2022	New childcare funding system is planned (to be in force from 1 January 2025): The government will pay 96% of the maximum hourly rate for childcare directly to the childcare institutions
2023	New law for multilingual day care: From 2024, childcare centres can provide child care in German, French or English for a maximum of 50% of the daily hours.

Sources: Oberhuemer et al. 2010; Fukkink 2017, 2018; Slot 2018; Netherlands Youth Institute 2019; Eurydice 2023, 14.1

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In The Netherlands, relevant formats are **0–3** and **4–5** years.

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

The system of early childhood education and care in the Netherlands comprises two separate and partly overlapping sectors (childcare and early education) with different ministerial responsibilities.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (*Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid* – SZW) has overall responsibility for ECEC settings for under 4 year-olds, for out-of-school childcare provision for 4 to 13 year-olds, and for home-based childcare.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap* – OCW) is responsible for ECEC provision for children under 4 years of age who are at risk of language disadvantage and for the pre-primary education of 4 and 5 year-olds in primary school[3] (*Basisschool*).

Municipal authorities are responsible for the inspection and monitoring of ECEC settings for under 4 year-olds in term of compliance with legislation and regulations. The administration and management of schools is the responsibility of both the municipalities and the school inspectorate: While the municipalities are responsible for compliance with the law and for allocating budgets, the school supervisory authority is responsible for day-to-day operations (costs, curriculum, staff). This applies to both public and private schools.

General objectives and legislative framework

The overarching goal of ECEC is primarily to ensure continuity of learning and support over time. The underpinning principle is that of lifelong learning, starting at an early age to enable individuals to realise their full potential and respond flexibly to change. In the case of children up to 6 years of age, particular attention is paid to reducing or preventing educational inequalities, particularly by providing support for language development. Further important goals are to support children in acquiring skills that will enable them to make a good start in primary school and to make it easier for parents to reconcile work and family commitments (Slot 2018).

In recent years a considerable transformation has been taking place in terms of the overall conceptualisation of ECEC in the Netherlands, and the sector has been experiencing dynamic changes which are still ongoing. As part of the implementation of the Dutch Childcare Act (*Wet Kinderopvang,* 2005 with amendments from 2020), all ECEC settings are required to work according to specific pre-defined general pedagogical objectives: to provide children with a safe and caring environment, to support the development of their personal and social competences and to transmit cultural norms and values; they are also required to establish a parents' board.

In 2018, the Childcare Innovation and Quality Act (*Wet innovatie en kwaliteit kinderopvang*) and the Childcare and Playgroup Work Harmonisation Act (*Wet harmonisatie kinderopvang en peuterspeelzaalwerk*) entered into force. The main purpose of this legislation is to improve the quality and accessibility of childcare. The Childcare Act lays down provisions for various types of childcare for children over 6 weeks, especially with regard to special safety regulations. In addition, since 2010, childcare centres (*dagopvang in kinderdagverblijf*) and playgroups (*peuterspeelzaal*) for children under 4 years of age are covered by the same Education and Quality Act (*Wet ontwikkelingskansen door kwaliteit en educatie*, OKE). For playgroups, the Childcare and Quality Standards for Playgroups Act (*Wet kinderopvang en kwali-teitseisen peuterspeelzalen*,

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in the Netherlands provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

[3] In the Netherlands, it has long been a tradition for 4 and 5 year-olds to attend kindergarten classes in the *Basisschool* before primary school officially starts at age 6.

WKO, 2010) also applies. In addition, the Decree on the basic requirements for quality pre-primary education (*Besluit basisvoorwaarden kwaliteit voorschoolse educatie*, 2010 with amendments from 2018) applies (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 36).

The Children and Young People's Act (*Jeugdwet* 2015) stipulates that since 2015 municipalities are responsible for disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people. One of the aims of this legislative reform was to create more transparency between different services and to reduce the number of these children (Netherlands Youth Institute 2023).

The Primary Education Act (*Wet op Primair Onderwijs*, 1998) applies to primary schools that admit 4 and 5 year-olds; it describes aspects concerning quality and funding modalities in addition to the relevant learning areas.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

For children between 2½ and 4 years of age, municipalities are obliged to provide a place (at least 960 hours; approx. 16 hours/week) in a childcare centre if needed, especially for children from disadvantaged families. Attendance is voluntary.

Children from the age of 4 have a legal right to education, which in the Netherlands means a place in a kindergarten class (*kleuterklas*, ISCED 02) of the primary school (*basisschool*). Attendance is compulsory from the age of 5. There are no national regulations regarding the number of hours of this obligation (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 50), although most children attend for 20 hours per week.

Primary school (ISCED 1) starts at the age of 6.

Main types of provision

Childcare sector

In the Netherlands, there are two main types of ECEC settings for children up to 4 years of age:

Childcare centres (*kinderdagverblijf*) admit up to 185 children from 6 or 8 weeks to 4 years. This option is mainly used on a half-day basis by double income families, as a tax reduction is only granted if both parents work. With morning and afternoon shifts, they may be open for up to eleven hours a day and for 50 weeks a year.

Playgroups (*peuterspeelzalen*) are primarily attended by children with socially disadvantaged backgrounds or children with impending disabilities or developmental delays aged 2½ to 4 years. The children are supported with special educational programmes (*voorschoolse educatie*) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 185). In most cases, the playgroups are only open half days. Since 2019, the number of weekly attendance hours has been increased from 10 to 16.

Children from 6 weeks of age can also be cared for through regulated **home-based childcare** services (*gastouderopvang*). While in 2018, 18% of the under 4 year-olds were enrolled (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 34), in 2023 this share had decreased to 13% (SZW 2024)

In 2018, there were 4,654 ECEC centres altogether, all privately owned (Eurydice 2023).

Education sector

4 and 5 year-olds usually attend a **kindergarten class** (*kleuterklas*) at the *basisschool* – often in the two months before they turn 4. The groups for 4 year-olds must be open for at least 2.5

hours on four half days. The exact daily opening hours are decided by the schools or the providers. They are usually closed on Wednesday afternoons. The official school year runs from 1 October to 30 September.

Provider structures

As a rule, **childcare centres** and **playgroups** that offer educational programmes for disadvantaged children or children with special educational needs are publicly funded.

However, most of the facilities for under 4 year-olds are privately run and have to compete in a competitive market (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 63) though there is a means-tested public funding for working parents.

In 2022/23, of the **kindergarten classes** at 6,582 primary schools attended by most children over the age of 4, only 30.6% were publicly run. Church sponsors (roughly equally divided between Catholic and Protestant sponsors) accounted for 58.9% of primary schools but are also publicly funded, only 10.5% were run by other private sponsors (CBS 2023a).

According to Eurostat data, 69.9% of children from 3 years up to the first class of primary schools attended public institutions in 2021, 30.1% were in private-commercial settings (Eurostat 2023e). This share likely includes those 3- and 4 year-old children who are enrolled in settings of the private care sector for under 4 year-olds.

Participation rates in regulated ECEC settings

According to Eurostat data, the share of children under 3 years of age enrolled in ECEC settings increased significantly from 2005 to 2022: from 40% to almost three quarters (72.3%). The share of children from 3 years to school entry also increased, but to a lesser extent: from 89% to 95.8%.

On average, under 3 year-olds in the Netherlands spend less than 17 hours per week in an ECEC setting, compared to 21 to 22 for children over 3 years of age (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 68).

Table 1

Netherlands: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings according to age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	36	82
	Over 30 hours	4	7
	No enrolment in ECEC	60	11
2010	1 to 29 hours	44	76
	Over 30 hours	6	15
	No enrolment in ECEC	50	9
2015	1 to 29 hours	41.1	77.5
	Over 30 hours	5.3	13.2
	No enrolment in ECEC	53.7	9.3
2022	1 to 29 hours	61.3	66.5
	Over 30 hours	11.0	29.3
	No enrolment in ECEC	27.7	4.2

Source: Eurostat 2023b, Slight deviations from 100% due to rounding

According to quarterly ministry (SZW) reports (SZW 2024), 67% of under 4 year-olds are enrolled in a centre-based setting, 13% in a home-based setting, but no age-disaggregated data exist.

According to Statista (2023), 72.3% of children under 3 years of age attended a childcare centre for at least one hour a week in 2022. Children in home-based care usually spend 1½ days per week there (SZW 2024). Among the 4 and 5 year-olds, almost all attended a kindergarten class at primary school in 2021 (see *Table 2*), usually for 22 hours per week.

Table 2

Netherlands: Number of children and enrolment rates in school-based ECEC settings by age, 2021

Age	Number of children	Enrolment rates, in %
3 year-olds	146,586	84.9
4 year-olds	167,207	95.0
5 year-olds	173,311	98.8

Source: Eurostat 2023f, k

Financing and costs for parents

In 2019, a total of 0.73% of the gross domestic product was spent on the early education sector (0.4% for the under-threes age group and 0.3% for the 3 to under 6 age group (OECD 2023). The entire education sector accounted for 5.4% of gross domestic product in 2022 (CBS 2023b).

Childcare centres, which are mainly attended by children with language delays, or the municipalities as providers, decide how the state funds are used.

After the introduction of the Dutch Childcare Act in 2005, the funding of the ECEC sector, especially childcare centres, changed from a supply-based to a demand-based funding system. Private facilities are not subsidised by the government. However, parents whose child attends a private facility or is cared for in day care receive tax relief on the cost of childcare. Between 2005 and 2008, parents paid only half of the childcare costs; an increase in costs and budget cuts, especially from 2012 onwards, resulted in a lower attendance rate. Since 2016, the situation has stabilised, but the parents of most children in ECEC settings tend to come from middle- and higher-income groups (Slot 2018).

After the introduction of the Childcare Act, the compensation scheme for parents was extended so that their own contribution decreased. However, as the take-up of childcare increased sharply at the same time, the state costs also increased. Therefore, in 2007, the employer's contribution was made compulsory. This contribution is stable and amounts to 0.5% of the employee's salary (as of 2020) (Berenschot 2022, 69).

Furthermore, in 2022, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment planned, jointly with four executive bodies – the Education Executive Agency, the Tax Administration/Benefits, the Employee Insurance Agency and the Social Insurance Bank – a new financing system to come into effect in 2025: Under the new system, the state will cover 96% of childcare costs, which will be transferred directly to the childcare institutions. So parents will no longer be at risk of having to repay part of their childcare allowance (Eurydice 2022/2023).

Fees for childcare facilities for under 4 year-olds are among the highest in Europe (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 11). In 2021, the maximum cost for one hour of childcare was €8.46 (Berenschot 2022, 68). Parents can apply for an income-related childcare allowance (*kinderopvangtoeslag*) to reduce the cost of childcare. Conditions for receiving such an allowance include: both parents are working or studying, they have a contract with a registered institution, they pay part of the childcare costs themselves. For disadvantaged children, fees can be

reduced according to a certain indicator system. This takes into account, among other things, the educational level of the parents or the country of origin (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 61).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 19% of net household income on childcare costs[4] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Primary schools are financed through municipal budgets provided by the government. They receive lump-sum subsidies from the municipalities to cover their staff and operating costs. Additional basic subsidies are provided for equipment and maintenance of the buildings. Since 2012, the schools have received additional funds for special activities such as language learning, the teaching of scientific or technological subjects or for staff professional development. Financial resources for children with special educational needs have no longer been reserved for individual children since 2014, but are distributed to the institutions concerned via a regional pool.

Enrolment in a kindergarten class at school is free of charge for parents. However, they often donate money to the school, which is mostly used for excursions or cultural activities. Schools may also be supported by sponsors.

Private schools can receive state subsidies if they adhere to certain legal requirements such as the number of children per group.

Staff to child ratios and group size

The maximum group size in childcare centres and playgroups for children from 0 to 4 years is 16. For children with special educational needs/language development difficulties, at least two professionals must be present (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science 2014. Since the beginning of 2018, babies up to one year of age are cared for by at least two childcare workers who remain consistent.

Table 3

Netherlands: Staff to child ratio in childcare centres and playgroups by age, 2022

	Max. number of children per core practitioner
0 to 1 year	3 (per 2 core practitioners)
1 to 2 years	5
2 to 3 years	6
3 to 4 years	8
4 to 7 years	10
4 to 13 years	11

Source: Eurydice 2023, 4.2

For **primary schools**, there are no regulations regarding the minimum or maximum number of children per group, but there are regulations regarding the size of the building in relation to the total number of children (usually 3.5 sqm per child). As a rule, primary schools consist of eight grades, of which grades 1 to 4 cover the age range between 4 and 8 years. Schools decide on their own groupings. In most, the children are organised in same-age groups, but there are also schools with mixed-age groups or with groups based on the children's abilities.

[4] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

In support institutions, there are less children in a group, and they may also be mixed-age groups – depending on the developmental stage of the children.

Curricular frameworks

Childcare sector

There is no prescribed national curriculum for work in ECEC settings for under 4 year-olds. However, providers of these facilities are obliged to ensure that each setting creates its own educational programme. In cooperation with the parents' council, a strategy is drawn up with regard to the children's development and learning opportunities. Important components of this are the professionals' interactions with the children, their care, the age distribution in groups, the teaching of rules and values, as well as opportunities for play and outdoor activities. Play is considered the predominant method for learning.

Particularly in special needs settings, a variety of different early childhood education programmes (*voorschoolse educatie*, VVE) are used to promote specific areas of development (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 185). Children are expected to participate in these programmes at least four half days a week. Some are applied nationally, others only locally. Such programmes must meet strict criteria to be approved by the Accreditation Commission for Intervention Programmes (*Erkenningscommissie Interventies*) or the Panel for Welfare and Development Stimulation (*Panel Welzijn en Ontwikkelingsstimulering*). Currently, five programmes are nationally approved: *Piramide, Kaleidoscoop, Startblokken/Basisontwikkeling, KO Totaal* and *Sporen* (Eurydice 2023, 4.3). All these programmes focus on four core areas: language (Dutch as a second language), mathematics, motor and socio-emotional development (Slot 2018).

Education sector

According to the Primary Education Act, primary schools must cover the following areas of learning – including kindergarten classes for 4 year-olds: (1) sensory coordination and physical activity; (2) Dutch language; (3) arithmetic and mathematics; (4) English; (5) electives such as geography, history, religion; (6) expression; (7) self-confidence and (8) healthy living. The number of hours in each area is not specified, only the total number of hours of 7,520 in the eight primary school years. Teaching and learning methods and materials can be chosen by the schools themselves. The government has set certain targets to be achieved by the end of the primary school years. The National Institute for Curriculum Development (*Stichting Leerplanontwikkeling*) has been commissioned by the Ministry of Education to develop further learning objectives with more detailed content and activities. According to the government's wish, more time should be set aside in schools for science and technology.

Digital education

The use of digital media is not regulated by law, neither in primary schools nor in childcare centres. However, in 2018, 98% of the schools had a computer for every 3.5 pupils and 99% of the teachers used digital learning materials in the classroom. In addition, digital media are used by teachers for planning or evaluation. Professionals can get support from expert centres such as *Kennisnet*.

Monitoring – evaluation

Child-related assessment

Children under 4 years of age in childcare centres are evaluated by professionals through observations and checklists. As a rule, different areas of development are assessed three times a year. This information is also shared with other professionals, discussed with parents and summarised and passed on to the primary school. Since 2018, tests are no longer used in this age group.

For disadvantaged children under 4, education programmes place particular emphasis on a good transition to the kindergarten class at school, but do not specify exact measures (European Commission/EACEA//Eurydice 2019, 112).

In the education sector, children's progress is also recorded three times a year. Parents are invited to discuss children's progress and achievements. In some schools, grades are used, in others written assessments.

Centre-level internal assessment

Childcare centres are required to regularly assess their quality through self-evaluation to ensure that they meet all quality standards. These include parental participation, the quality of the programmes offered, the knowledge and skills of the professionals, the learning environment, the responsiveness to individual needs, including the use of an observation system. Parents are involved in the self-evaluation through the parent' council/board (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 131).

The Dutch Consortium for Childcare (*Nederlands Consortium Kinderopvang Onderzoek*, NCKO) has developed a so-called 'quality monitor' (*Kwaliteitsmonitor*) as an example of a self-evaluation tool that allows childcare centres to better assess their quality, strengths and weaknesses (NCKO 2018).

Primary schools decide themselves on their standards and on the methods used. Since 1998, schools have been obliged to draw up a school plan, which is updated every four years and describes the planned steps for quality improvement. Based on this plan, a brochure is produced annually to inform parents and pupils. These two documents and the general results of the self-evaluation are the basis for inspection visits by the Education Inspectorate.

Externe Evaluation

Quality criteria for **childcare settings** for under 4 year-olds are laid down in the Childcare Innovation and Quality Act (2018). Municipalities must ensure that the facilities comply with the requirements of the Childcare Act (2004 with amendments from 2020), which has been delegated to the Municipal Health Services (*Gemeentelijke Gezondheidsdienst*, GGD). In their annual inspections, a pedagogical practice observation tool is used, which was developed in cooperation with the Netherlands Youth Institute. If it is decided that improvements are needed, the Education Inspectorate conducts a follow-up inspection (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 124ff). Two frameworks exist for the inspection of childcare facilities: one is more concerned with an overview of the quality of full-day settings in the Netherlands, the other with inspections of facilities whose quality needs to be improved. The annual results of the evaluations by the Municipal Health Service are included in the Inspectorate's report on the general state of education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 133).

External evaluations in **primary schools** are carried out by the Education Inspectorate (*Inspectie van het Onderwijs*), a partially independent authority under the Ministry of Education. The Education Inspection Act contains the legal criteria, the respective quality objectives are set by the

schools themselves – and are evaluated in the same way. The Inspectorate conducts a full inspection of the schools every four years and prepares a report. Among other things, the quality of teaching is assessed on the basis of the relevant laws or quality improvements. A framework (2012) serves as a guideline for schools and school inspectorates, setting out the methods to be used, the criteria to be reviewed and the standards that schools must meet. The Education Inspectorate checks whether schools comply with the relevant laws and also focuses on the quality of teaching.

Inclusion agenda

Childcare centres and primary schools in the Netherlands are responsible for creating a suitable learning environment for every child. Particularly since the Act on Inclusive Education (*Passend Onderwijs* 2014) came into force, inclusion has been an important issue. Inclusion is understood as the consideration of diverse and multiple needs, such as having a disability, a different linguistic background, being a member of a minority group or other culture. This "super-diversity" needs to be taken into account in childcare and school settings (Fukkink 2018).

In 2020, the Dutch government allocated 7 million euros to provide children with special educational needs with the support they need (European Commission 2020, 141).

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

For **childcare centres**, the quality standards of support programmes are laid down in the Education and Quality Act (*Wet ontwikkelingskansen door kwaliteit en educatie*, 2010). Especially children from socially disadvantaged families have the opportunity to experience a range of cultural and social activities. Municipalities decide on the implementation of various projects and programmes (e.g. *Piramide, Kaleidoscoop*). According to the Youth Act (*Jeugdwet*, 2015), children and young people and their parents also receive support from municipalities in dealing with developmental delays and other problems. In addition, there are various measures for parents of children under 3, such as reduced fees (European Commission 2020, 27f).

In order to identify children with special educational needs as early as possible and to initiate attendance at a mainstream institution, childcare centres cooperate with health services (European Commission 2020, 86, 107).

In the **education** sector, since 1991, children with disabilities or special educational needs are to be integrated as much as possible into mainstream institutions ('Going to school together'). Since 2014, schools have had to ensure that such children receive the support they need. They receive special financial subsidies for this, based on the individual child. Parents can register their disabled child at any school and it is the school's responsibility to ensure the appropriate support is provided.

The Act on Centres of Expertise in Special Needs Education (*Wet op de Expertise centra*, 1998) refers to four types of special schools: (1) for visually impaired children; (2) for hearing impaired children and children with communication difficulties; (3) for physically and/or intellectually disabled children; and (4) for children with mental or behavioural disorders.

Children with a migration background – Children from Roma communities

The *TOY for inclusion* project has tried to facilitate access to early education for children with a migrant background or from Roma communities, mainly through meeting centres. For newly arrived children in the Netherlands, activities are offered either in the respective accommodation or in ECEC settings (European Commission 2020, 92, 125).

So-called bridge classes in primary schools provide children with language difficulties intensive support in small groups (full or half day or as an extended school day).

In 2022, 7.1% of the total population had a non-Dutch citizenship, roughly half of which (51.8%) came from other EU27 countries. The distribution among under 5 year-olds is very similar (7.1%, 50%) (Eurostat 2023c).

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Compulsory **Maternity leave** (*zwangerschapsen bevallingsverlof*) lasts 16 weeks, of which up to six can be taken before the birth. At least four weeks before the birth and six weeks afterwards are compulsory. The period of maternity leave is fully paid up to a maximum of €256.54 per day or 70% of the "daily maximum wage".

Since 2020, there has been fully paid **Childbirth leave for fathers and partners** (*geboorteverlof*), the length of which corresponds to the number of hours they work per week (e.g. 38 hours = one week's leave). Furthermore, there is an additional time off (*Aanvullend geboorteverlof*), which is equal to five times the weekly working hours (maximum five weeks). The first week is fully paid, with no upper limit; the additional time is paid at a maximum of €256.54 per day. The first week must be taken within four weeks after the birth, the additional time can also be taken within six months after the birth.

Unpaid **Parental leave** (*ouderschapsverlof*) lasts 26 times as long as the number of weekly working hours of each parent. This individual, non-transferable entitlement can be taken until the child is 8 years old. At 38 weekly hours, for example, this is 988 hours, i.e. approx. 26 weeks. Parental leave is an Both parents can also take parental leave at the same time. Since the Flexible Working Time Act (2016), parents can apply for a change in their working hours or, if necessary, also work from home. From August 2022, the first nine weeks will be paid at 70% of daily earnings (maximum €256.54), if taken within the first year of the child's life.

In 2021, 90% of fathers took the Childbirth leave directly after birth – almost all for four days at least. One third of the fathers took five or more weeks.

In 2021, 18% of mothers took an average of 9 hours/week for 14 months, compared to 17% of fathers who took an average of 11 hours a week for 13 months. It was also found that it is mainly better educated mothers and fathers who take parental leave.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in the Netherlands

*Country expert assessment by **Elly Singer**†*

Developing a clear and unified political vision on the care and education of young children is a major challenge for the ECEC system in the Netherlands. Who is responsible for what: the government, parents and/or private companies? And how do we want to balance (unpaid) caring activities and paid employment between males, females and professionals in the Netherlands?

There is a growing consensus about the importance of early childhood education. Ideally, this would be organised as a unified system with regulations for settings for 0 to 5 year-olds that would guarantee good quality provision for all children. Stakeholders of early childhood care and education in the Netherlands – local and national authorities, the primary school system, services for care and education, parent organisations, and experts all agree on this. However,

[5] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for the Netherlands by Laura den Dulk and Mara A. Yerkes in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

the current situation does not provide effective links between the child care system and the education sector. This creates problems for parents who need care for their children while working outside the home and for the child's education.

1. **Challenges for working parents because of the remains of the mother-at-home policy.**

a. Until recently, the Netherlands had relatively short maternity and parental leaves. The mother was entitled to a maximum of 10 weeks of paid maternity leave and the father to 5 days. This has now improved slightly. Since 2020, paternity leave is on average granted for 5 weeks (at 70% of previous pay); since 2021, fully paid maternity leave is granted for 16 weeks; and since August 2022, paid parental leave (at 70% of previous wage) has been extended to 9 weeks, although this is only for salaried employees, not for self-employed workers (Rijksoverheid 2022). However, these arrangements make full-time work after birth difficult. In addition, low-income parents cannot get by on 70% of their salaries.

b. School hours are often not geared to the needs of working parents. Many schools have a lunch break during which childcare must be arranged; they close at 15:00 (young children) or 15:30 (older children); and on Wednesday afternoons schools are also closed; childcare has to be arranged during school holidays (Berenschot 2022). Parents with several children may have to deal with differences in school hours. Childcare is faced with the task of filling 'the gaps' in school hours. This causes problems, especially in out-of-school care, to find staff who accept these fragmented and short working hours. This lack of coherent childcare and school times causes a lot of stress for parents and can have a negative impact on the quality of family upbringing.

2. **Challenges because childcare is a privatised sector.**

a. In line with neoliberal government policy, the Dutch government chose – through the 2005 Childcare Act – not to be directly responsible for childcare facilities. Childcare must be provided by private companies and parents are responsible for the choice of provision and payment. In theory, the parents would be responsible for the quality: after all, they opt for a certain kind of provision. In practice, however, parents appear to pay particular attention to accessibility, costs and opening times, and not to pedagogical quality (Thijssen, Voorn and Gijsbers 2019). Government supervises the companies via the local inspection of youth health care and the national inspection of education. The government prefers minimal interference with the pedagogical content in the child care sector. Hence there is no national pedagogical curriculum and no strong national institute to stimulate pedagogical discussions and innovations.

b. Dutch parents are required to pay for the costs of child care. Part of the costs are covered by childcare benefit. The amount of childcare benefit is calculated as a percentage of the hourly rate of the childcare provider ranging from 33.3 to 96.0% depending on the parents' collective income and the number of children. This system has recently resulted in one of the biggest scandals in the history of the Dutch government: the so-called Dutch childcare benefits scandal (*kinderopvangtoeslagaffaire* – Belastingdienst 2023; Trouw 2022). Between 2013 and 2020, authorities wrongly accused over 26,000 parents of making fraudulent benefit claims, requiring them to pay back the allowances they had received in their entirety. In many cases, this sum amounted to tens of thousands of euros, driving families into severe financial hardship and severe stress in the family, related to evictions, divorces and child care placements by child protection services. Moreover, the procedure of the Tax and Customs Administration turned out to be "discriminatory" and filled with "institutional bias" against migrant parents, parents of Islamic faith, parents of colour. The (financial) problems of parents caused by the authorities have still (2022) not been solved.

c. There are serious plans to make the Dutch childcare system free of charge, also for non-working parents. That would prevent another childcare benefits scandal. But there are political obstacles. Free childcare for all children will increase the demand, and there are already large waiting lists due to a shortage of staff. Moreover, childcare is privatised, 15% of the childcare sector is owned by investment companies; they can set the price. A lot of public money would then go to private for profit companies. Moreover, wealthy parents will take the benefit and can use it to buy more expensive childcare for their child.

3. **The challenge of working on quality and of the balance between the responsibility of parents, employers and government.**

   In the Netherlands, like in any other country, there is an abundance of pedagogical potential; many parents and professionals are passionately involved in early childhood education and care. There are many examples of excellence. There are also initiatives at the local and the national level for cooperation between schools and the childcare organisations. The current challenge for the early education and care system in the Netherlands is to coordinate these initiatives, to promote cooperation between practitioners, academics, managers and social politicians, and to mobilise the pedagogical potential in discussions and constructive dialogues. Both Dutch politicians and the broader public have to be convinced that the main purpose of the sector is care and education to support parents in combining work and care for children. Early childhood education should be focused on the well-being of young children and their parents – and also the well-being of the pedagogues, who deserve respect and salaries that are comparable with other sectors in education and social welfare.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population in the Netherlands was 17,590,672. For about 20 years the population has been increasing continuously (2000: 15,863,950; 2010: 16,574,989; 2020: 17,407,585) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.62, the fertility rate in the Netherlands was above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[6].

[6] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Children under age 6

Table 4
Netherlands: Number of children under age 6 in the population, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year	179,133
1 year-olds	169,323
2 year-olds	171,226
3 year-olds	171,415
4 year-olds	173,556
5 year-olds	176,741
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**1,041,394**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 3.0% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, 5.8% were children under 6 years. These proportions were slightly above the respective EU27 (2020) average. With one exception, the shares of children under 3 years of age as well as of children aged 3 to 6 years were above the EU averages at the reporting dates 2000, 2005 and 2015, in some cases considerably so.

Table 5
Netherlands: Share of children under 6 years compared with the EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Netherlands/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Netherlands	3.8	4.1	7.9
	∅ EU15[7]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Netherlands	3.5	3.8	7.3
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Netherlands	3.3	3.4	6.7
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Netherlands	3.0	3.0	5.8
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, *own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, the majority (91%) of all households with children under 6 were couple households. Households with single parents accounted for 4.1% – almost exclusively single mothers (3.4%).

Table 6
Netherlands: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %*
Total households	1,479,000	
Couple households	1,346,000	91.0

[7] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %*
Other types of households	72,700	4.9
Total single households	60,200	4.1
Single households, women	51,000	3.4
Single households, men	9,300	0.6

Source: Eurostat 2023l, *Own calculations

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In 2022, the overall employment rate in the Netherlands for men (15-64 years) was 88.3% and for women 81.8% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 81.3% of women and 94.9% of men with children under 6 were employed. Both shares were thus in third place among the 27 (2020)-EU-countries (EU-average mothers: 63.6%, average fathers: 87.2%) (Eurostat 2023g own calculations).

Table 7a

Netherlands: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Netherlands	76.6	93.7
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[8]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Netherlands	81.3	94.9
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[9]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023g, own calculations

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 7b.*

Table 7b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9

[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023g, 2023j

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[10]

In 2022, 13.6% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, which was lower than the EU27 average (23.3%). The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 16.5%, compared to the European average of 21.6%. 1.4% of the under 6 year-olds and also 1.5% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation in 2020 (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023h, i).

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[10] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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seepro3

Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

NORWAY

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

Lars Petter Gulbrandsen, PhD in political science, was employed at Oslo University from 1972 to 1977 and from 1977 to 1996 at the Institute of Applied Social Science. Since 1996 he has been a senior researcher at NOVA – Norwegian Social Research, part of Oslo Metropolitan University since 2013. Main research themes are kindergartens and housing.

1. ECEC governance in Norway

Since 2010, all children in Norway have a right to a place in an ECEC centre from the age of one. All ECEC provision is regulated by the same law, the Kindergarten Act (last amended 2021). All ECEC centres have to follow the national early childhood curriculum (*Framework Plan for Kindergartens*). In 2006, political responsibility at the national level was transferred from the Ministry of Family Affairs to the Ministry of Education. Responsibility for the administration of the sector has been gradually but increasingly transferred from the Ministry to an affiliated agency, The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. At the local level, municipalities serve as the government authority responsible for steering and controlling the ECEC centres.

Even if about half of ECEC settings have a private owner and the other half are run by municipalities, the ECEC system as a whole should undoubtedly be characterised as **unitary**.

The qualification requirements for staff across the entire ECEC sector are the same, regardless of the age of the children. All centres, whether publicly or privately run, have to follow the same rules and regulations. The regulation of public financial support is also the same and according to the Day Care Institution Act, private and municipal centres are to receive equal treatment. The bulk of public subsidies are transferred from the state to the municipalities, which then distribute the funds to each centre. If a municipality wishes to give more money to the ECEC centres under their ownership, they are bound through the regulations to increase the funding support for private settings in the same way.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

According to the Kindergarten Act, each ECEC centre should have at least one employee per three children under 3 years and one employee per six children over 3 years. The law defines children as 'older than three years' from the August in the year they turn three. The employees mentioned here are the staff working directly with the children and classified as the core personnel (*grunnbemanning*). The Centre Leaders (*barnehagestyrer*) are not included unless some of their working hours are allocated to work directly with the children. This is often the case in small centres. If a centre employs, for instance, a kitchen assistant or a caretaker, they are not considered to be part of the core personnel.

The undisputed largest group among the main staff are the Pedagogical Leaders. The title Kindergarten Teacher seems now mainly to be used in the official statistics, but in the ECEC centres as well as in the relevant legislation, Pedagogical Leader (*pedagogisk leder*) is still the most common term used. We also find the concept Pedagogical Leader in the rules governing the qualifications. According to these rules, there should be one Pedagogical Leader per seven children under the age of three, and one to every 14 children older than three years. The Pedagogical Leader supervises the other staff in the section and ensures that the centre follows the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan in its pedagogical work.

Both Centre Leaders and Pedagogical Leaders must have completed at least a three-year pedagogical education (study programme for Kindergarten Teachers) at Bachelor level at a university or university college (*høgskole*). The EQF level for this education is 6. Some other pedagogical study programmes, such as that of Primary School Teacher, might also be approved if they are supplemented with a one-year additional course in kindergarten pedagogy (60 ECTS credits). The bulk of Centre Leaders have the regular qualification but a wider range of pedagogical professions may be approved for Centre Leaders.

The largest group among the 56,251 other employees are skilled workers with a qualification as Child and Youth Worker. Their total number is approximately 20,750 persons. They follow a specific upper secondary route which is classified at EQF level 5.

Otherwise, Assistants are an important part of the main body of staff. For many years, however, their relative position in the overall staffing of ECEC centres has been decreasing. There are no educational requirements for the position as Assistant. However, many of them have considerable experience of working in ECEC centres.

Table 1
Norway: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Kindergarten Teacher / Pedagogical Leader *Barnehagelærer / Pedagogisk leder* *Profile*: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	ECEC centre, Kindergarten *Barnehage* 0–5 years[1]	Core practitioner with group responsibility Centre Leader	0–5 years	3 years at a university or university college (*høgskole*) *Award*: Bachelor ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: level 6 ***or*** Qualification as Primary School Teacher (since 2018 = Master) *plus* 1 year course in kindergarten pedagogy (60 ECTS credits) for teachers with a 3-year Bachelor's degree awarded before 2018)
Child and Youth Worker *Fagarbeider/Barne- og ungdomsarbeider*	ECEC centre, Kindergarten *Barnehage* 0–5 years	Qualified co-worker	0–18 years	Upper secondary qualification *Award*: Certificate as skilled worker

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6 (as in Norway): **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds.

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				ECTS credits: n/a[2] EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5
Kindergarten Assistant *Assistent*	ECEC centre, Kindergarten *Barnehage* 0–5 years	Non-qualified co-worker	n/a	n/a

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre Leader

According to the Kindergarten Act, each ECEC centre should have a recognised pedagogical and administrative leadership. As a rule, each centre has a Centre Leader. According to the *Framework Plan for Kindergartens* (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017), the Centre Leader has the daily responsibility for running the centre by leading the work in planning, documentation and evaluation as well as developing the content and working approach of the centre and ensuring that all staff participate.

Large centres sometimes have a Deputy Centre Leader. In small centres, however, leadership might be a part-time post, combined with a part-time position as Pedagogical Leader. The owners of many centres, often municipalities, sometimes organise leadership teams covering a number of centres. The most important trade union, *Utdanningsforbundet*, has been against such solutions and prefers to have a leader present in all centres. It might even be the result of such organisation that in December 2021, 5,020 regular centres were registered, but only 4,420 Centre Leaders. The majority of Centre Leaders are educated as Early Childhood Pedagogy Professionals. Additional qualifications are optional.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

In Norway, there are as a rule no designated posts of responsibility for tasks beyond those of the Centre Leader and Pedagogical Leader. Other needs will usually be met by external specialists who are employed by the municipality or by private firms and who visit the centres.

[2] n/a = not applicable

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

As a rule, there are no specialist advisory and supervisory staff in the ECEC sector in Norway who have a co-ordinating or supervisory role across a number of centres. However, such functions may be assumed by the service providers, i.e. municipalities or private providers who own many centres.

2.5 Specialist support staff

Both the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan state that children in need of extra support are to receive the social, pedagogical and physical adaptation they need. Each centre is required to have an inclusive approach which guarantees equality of opportunity. If such needs surpass the regular provision of the centre, the centre will usually have a right to apply for extra staff resources. Staff engaged in this way will often be part of the core personnel, but might also have special duties for one or more specific children with special educational needs.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

At the end of 2021, 96,324 persons were employed in Norwegian ECEC centres. The official statistics describe 4,420 as Centre Leaders, 32,827 were pedagogues with the professional title of Pedagogical Leader or Kindergarten Teacher (*pedagogisk leder* or *barnehagelærer*) and 56,251 were other employees belonging to the main staff (see *Chapter **2.1***). 2,826 persons were described as other employees outside the main staff (not working directly with the children) (Statistics Norway 2022a).

Table 2.1 lists the various qualification levels among ECEC centre staff in December 2021. The obligatory requirements for both Kindergarten Teachers (Pedagogical Leaders) and Centre Leaders are found in the first three rows in the table. Those with an "other higher education" refers to persons with a non-pedagogical IPE who may be employed as Centre Leaders.

Table 2

Norway: Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

2.1 Norway: Educational background of ECEC centre staff, December 2021

Staff categories	% of all staff	EQF Level
Staff with specialist higher education degree (Kindergarten Teachers)	42.0	6
– Professional education equivalent to Kindergarten Teacher	1.4	6
– Other pedagogical education	1.7	6
– Other higher education	1.8	6
Staff with upper secondary vocational qualification (Child and Youth Workers)	22.2	5
Other skilled worker with upper secondary qualification	5.2	5
Staff with other professional background or no formal qualification	25.8	5 or (generally) lower

Source: Statistics Norway 2022a

Table 2.2 shows the proportion of men in the workforce according to official statistics. 10.7% of the workforce are men. Only a very small group, mainly in jobs outside the pedagogical staff, consist almost only of men, such as caretakers.

2.2 Norway: Distribution of male workers in different positions within centre-based ECEC, December 2021

Position	Total number	Proportion of men, in %
Kindergarten Teachers (Pedagogical Leaders)	32,827	9.1
Centre Leaders	4,420	8.8
Others employees in direct contact with children	56,251	11.0
Other jobs (e.g. technical, administrative)	2,826	96.1
All jobs in early childhood centres	**96,324**	**10.7**

Source: Statistics Norway 2022a

In 2021, 9% of Kindergarten Teachers had a minority ethnic background and 1.2% were "Norwegian born to immigrant parents". Among other staff belonging to the core personnel, 20.5% had a minority ethnic background and 1.2% were "Norwegian born to immigrant parents" (Statistics Norway 2022c).

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

The professional education of Kindergarten Teachers in Norway started in 1935. At first, it was a rather short qualifying course which included much practice. The only entrance requirement was what we could call – for lack of a better translation – the „housewife school". In the 1960s, the official title was Kindergarten Mistress, but this was changed into the gender neutral term Kindergarten Teacher (probably due to the fact that the first two male "mistresses" started their education in 1969). At this point of time, only 24% of Kindergarten Teachers had completed an upper secondary education. The incidence of such an education was higher among the assistants than among the teachers. From now on, professional education took place as a two-year course at university colleges. In 1971, the job title was changed to Preschool Teacher, a title that existed until 2013 when Kindergarten Teacher once again become the official title for people who had completed this education. Around 1980, three-year study programmes were introduced. This is still the case, whereas since 2018, the initial education of Primary School Teachers has been extended to five years, with a minimum qualification requirement at Master level.

Today, twelve Norwegian universities and university colleges provide professional studies for Kindergarten Teachers. In terms of geographical location, the number is even larger, since for some years now, educational institutions have been merged and the study programmes for Kindergarten Teachers have sometimes continued to be provided at the locations of the former independent institutions.

The regular entry requirement is a completed upper secondary education. However, for about 15 years it has been possible to combine work in an ECEC centre with part-time attendance at a university or university college, usually for four years. Kindergarten Teachers educated in this way have turned out to be a very stable part of the workforce (Gulbrandsen 2015).

Until 2003, Kindergarten Teachers had the opportunity to teach in the first four grades of primary school.

Table 3
Norway: Kindergarten Teacher / Pedagogical Leader

Job title in Norwegian: *Barnehagelærer/Pedagogisk leder* Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: University entrance certificate **Professional studies:** 3 years at a university or university college (*høgskole*) **or** 1 year studying kindergarten pedagogy (60 ECTS) in the case of Primary School Teachers with a pre-2018 Bachelor's degree **Award:** Bachelor's degree, which can be followed by a Master's degree (+120 ECTS, EQF-level: 7, ISCED level: 7) **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** level 6 **Main ECEC workplace:** ECEC centres/kindergartens (*barnehage*), 0–5 years

Table 4
Norway: Child and Youth Worker

Job title in Norwegian: *Barne- og ungdomsarbeider/fagarbeider*
Entry requirements: 10 years of compulsory schooling **Professional studies:** Upper secondary qualification (specialised stream) **Award**: Certificate as skilled worker **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011:** level 5 **Main ECEC workplace:** ECEC centres/kindergartens (*barnehage*), 0–5 years

Table 5 shows all persons living in Norway of working age (67 years or younger) with a professional education as Kindergarten Teacher according to type of occupation in 2000 and 2012 (Gulbrandsen 2015). As the table indicates, between 2000 and 2012 the proportion of those educated as Kindergarten Teachers and working in a kindergarten increased considerably. Since 2012, however, this type of statistics is no longer compiled.

Table 5
Norway: Type of work among people educated as Kindergarten Teachers, 2000 and 2012

	2000	**2012**
In an ECEC centre (kindergarten)	44.1%	54.0%
In primary school (possible until 2003)	25.6%	16.3%
In other occupations	22.6%	20.9%
Not in employment	7.7%	8.8%
Total in absolute numbers	(27,353)	(46,385)

Source: Gulbrandsen 2015

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

There is a national framework plan (curriculum) for Kindergarten Teacher Education. This is compulsory for all institutions that offer such a course of study. The current framework was introduced in 2013 (Ministry of Education and Research 2012). An important change was that all academic disciplines except pedagogy were removed from the text and replaced by knowledge areas. Pedagogy is to be integrated into all knowledge areas.

The national framework plan for Kindergarten Teacher Education specifies learning outcomes for the student concerning knowledge, skills and general competence. The education focuses on the following six knowledge areas: (1) Children's development, play and learning; (2) Society; religion, philosophy of life and ethics; (3) Language, texts and mathematics; (4) Nature, health and movements. These four areas are covered during the first two years of IPE (80 ECTS credits). The fifth area – Management, cooperation and development work (15 ECTS credits) – is assigned to the final year. In addition, two areas from the first two years are studied in more depth (40 ECTS). Also in the final year, 30 credits are allocated to a specialisation intended to build on the knowledge areas and contribute to professional progression and increased competence relevant for work in kindergartens. A Bachelor thesis is also completed during the final year (15 ETCS credits).

Table 6

Norway: Competence areas in the qualification route of Kindergarten Teachers

Knowledge area	ECTS credits	Year of study
1. Children's development, play and learning	20	Years 1 and 2
2. Society, religion, philosophy of life and ethics	20	Years 1 and 2
3. Language, texts and mathematics	20	Years 1 and 2
4. Nature, health and movements	20	Years 1 and 2
Specialisation in two of the areas above	40	Years 1 and 2
5. Management, cooperation and development work	15	Year 3
6. Specialisation	30	Year 3
Bachelor thesis	15	Year 3
Total	**180**	

Source: Ministry of Education and Research 2012

An ideology which is often called the 'Nordic Model' or 'educare' pervades the course of study. The model is based on a balance between self-generated play activities and the structured and prepared educational activities of the Kindergarten Teachers. Applying a holistic perspective, teaching, play and care are interlinked in developing children's cognitive, social and emotional learning (Sheridan, Sandberg, and Williams 2015).

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

There is no alternative entry into IPE apart from the one-year kindergarten pedagogy qualification for other persons with a minimum three-year pedagogical education (as was formerly the case for Primary School Teachers).

Certification as a skilled worker (Child and Youth Worker) is normally given on the basis of a successfully completed exam from specific streams at upper secondary school. An unknown

number of people with such a certificate have never been in upper secondary school, and have qualified as Child and Youth Workers by studying alongside their jobs as Assistants.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the IPE of core professionals

The practicum is an important part of the education of Kindergarten Teachers. A minimum of 100 days, integrated in all six knowledge areas, are distributed, with 75 days during the two first years and 25 days in the final year. This element of IPE is regulated by national guidelines. The students complete their practicum in ECEC centres after the university/university college has entered an agreement with the kindergarten.

Practice supervisors are Kindergarten Teachers who are assigned this function as a supplement to their regular job in the centre. The educational institution is their employer for this function and pays them extra. In 2005, the most important union, *Utdanningsforbundet*, and the Ministry of Education entered an agreement, but this agreement has never been renewed and has in practice been replaced by local agreements between the IPE institutions and the kindergartens in a specific area. This can be illustrated by the agreement between Oslo Metropolitan University, the institution that educates the greatest number of Kindergarten Teachers, and the local kindergartens. A practicum supervisor-teacher is paid a weekly bonus of 1075 NOK (€107.50) for mentoring two students. The Centre Leaders receive 400 NOK (€40,00) per week regardless of the number of students.

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training has established a formal course at the national level for student supervisors or for those who have supervisory functions towards newly employed staff. This specialist qualification is awarded 30 ECTS credits. The Directorate gives funding support so that the employee can combine such a qualifying course with their regular job (see, e.g., Jensen, Bråten, and Svalund 2020).

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Formal courses of continuing professional development at the national level are administered by The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. The centres apply for places through their owners, who control and send on the applications to The Directorate for final approval. In 2022, the providers of ECEC settings forwarded 1,593 applications and 1,050 Kindergarten Teachers were offered a place from the autumn of 2022. The most important reason for refusal was the popularity of some courses. Here the number of applicants went beyond the number of places.

The CPD catalogue of the Directorate is structured into eight thematic areas. These are offered at 12 universities or universities colleges, with a total of 37 courses in 2022. All of them are certified for the education of Kindergarten Teachers. The most frequently offered topic was that as supervisor for practical training (9 courses). The second most widespread was supervisor education (7 courses) and the third was children´s language development and language learning (6 courses). Other topics were: pedagogical leadership and learning environment (5), additional

education in kindergarten pedagogy and physical development and motor activity (both with 3 courses), and special pedagogic and natural science in kindergarten (both with two courses). In terms of the number of applications, the most popular courses were on pedagogical leadership and the learning environment.

The target groups for the courses are Centre Leaders and Kindergarten Teachers. The owners of the centres receive a fixed sum of money per candidate; 70,000 NOK or about €7,000. According to the most recent evaluation rapport, 86% of the participants attended the course on full pay (Jensen, Bråten, and Svalund 2020). Close to 90% of the participants are satisfied with the support they have received. The centre might use some of the money to hire a substitute, but they are not obliged to do so. Such formal CDP-activities normally cover one study year (two semesters).

Even if the political authorities strongly wish and support such CPD activities, attendance is always optional. All courses are attended alongside regular employment. Staff are permitted to leave their jobs to follow courses and lectures and they also use their free time in the evenings or at weekends to study. Most completed courses are credited with 30 ETCS.

Since 2017, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training has commissioned yearly evaluations of the national CPD activities. The first report was conducted by the Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU) (Siddiq and Gjerustad 2017), the latter by the applied research institute Fafo (Jensen, Bråten, Svalund, and Talberg 2018 and 2019; and Jensen, Bråten, and Svalund 2020). All reports are in Norwegian, but have summaries in English.

Surveys were the main data source for the reports. The vast majority of the survey respondents, both Kindergarten Teachers and Centre Leaders, assessed the CPD programme as good, relevant and interesting; they felt that there was an appropriate mix of theory, reflection and methodology. Learning outcomes were considered to be high, the syllabus 'suitably' demanding and the lectures and teaching sessions were appraised as good (Jensen, Bråten, and Svalund 2020).

The most recent survey showed that most Kindergarten Teachers claimed to share the knowledge they had gained with their co-workers in the kindergarten, but that a hectic work schedule in the kindergartens made it hard to find both the time and arenas for knowledge sharing. As in previous surveys, the educational grant was emphasised as important, both for the individual participants who had their expenses covered and for the kindergartens that could call in staff replacements to cover absence. It appeared that the reimbursement of expenses had been sufficient for most participants.

The number of people following such further education is modest compared to the total number of Kindergarten Teachers. Only about 2% of them attend such a formal course of CPD each year. However, the number of teachers attending these courses every year accounts for more than 50% of the number of newly qualified Kindergarten Teachers.

Most of the IPE institutions which offer study programmes for Kindergarten Teachers also offer a follow-on Master's degree. So far, few graduates with a Master's degree have taken up a post in an ECEC centre. However, the number is increasing and the political authorities welcome this development. In 2022, there was at least one employee with a Master's degree in 20% of the centres. Among the Centre Leaders, 10% had a relevant degree at Master level (Kasin and Gulbrandsen 2022).

In 2017, the Ministry of Education introduced a new Competence Development Model at the regional (county) level (Recomp – Regional Competence Development) for primary schools and kindergartens. This is an arrangement where ECEC centres within a regional unit of Norway can participate in a CPD activity for all staff members of a kindergarten, aiming to achieve systematic setting improvement. The system is organised as a cooperation between the participating centres, the IPE institutions in the region, service providers, and the county governor. Since the

measure is fairly recent, no evaluations for the kindergarten sector are available (for primary schools see OECD 2020).

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

In 2010, Statistics Norway published calculations on the expected lifetime income for different educational groups. Among those with the same initial professional education, Kindergarten Teachers came out with the lowest (Kirkebøen 2010). The calculations were based on income statistics from the period 1999-2008. During the following ten years, the income for this group of employees has increased more than those with a comparable qualification and Kindergarten Teachers are no longer a low-paid group within the public sector (Gulbrandsen 2018).

The wages are the results of negotiations at the national level between the provider organisations and the trade unions. The employers' organisation for centres owned by the municipalities is the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS, *Kommunesektoren)*, while a great part of privately owned centres are organised within the National Federation of Private Kindergartens (PBL, *Private Barnehagers Landsforbund).* The most important unions are *Utdanningsforbundet* who organise and negotiate on behalf of Centre Leaders and Kindergarten Teachers and *Fagforbundet,* which represents the skilled workers and assistants.

A newly graduated Kindergarten Teacher in a municipally owned centre will for instance receive a yearly wage before tax of 423,500 NOK (about €42,350), while the same person would receive at least 446,100 NOK (about €44,610) in a privately owned centre with a collective wage agreement. Work experience is very important for the level of wages. After ten years of work as a Kindergarten Teacher, the wage will be 515,200 NOK (about €51,520) in a municipally owned centre and 549,000 NOK (about €54,900) in a private one. Regardless of experience, the wage for Centre Leaders is about 70,000 NOK (about €7,000) higher than for Kindergartens Teachers. All these figures are based on the agreement from June 2021 (Salary explorer 2022).

The wages of Assistants and Child and Youth workers are lower. A Kindergarten Assistant with ten years of experience is guaranteed 379,600 NOK (€37,960), while a skilled worker with a certificate as a Child and Youth Worker is guaranteed 434,100 NOK (€43,410).

In the most recent TALIS Starting Strong Survey, only 30% of the Norwegian staff said they were satisfied with their salary. However, in contrast to the other participating eight countries, a higher salary did not have the same priority among the Norwegian staff as it did in the other participating countries, particularly if their centre had received a moderate increase of the budget (Gjerustad, Hjetland, and Opheim 2019).

Due to the continuing high prices of housing in Norway, particularly in the capital, it has been estimated that a newly qualified member of the nursing profession, for example, can only afford to buy the lowest-price housing at around 2 to 3% of the total housing announced for sale in the capital. In the case of Kindergarten Teachers, the special collective wage agreement for Oslo helps meet their living costs. However, they may also be reliant on financial help from parents (Sandlie and Gulbrandsen 2018) or a well-earning partner.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

According to the Working Environment Act, the maximum number of working hours in a week is 40. However, most collective wage agreements operate with 37.5 hours. All those in paid employment in 2021 had a right to five weeks of paid holidays and for workers older than 60, six weeks. The regular retirement age is 67; the right to receive public benefits other than a pension cease at this age.

In 2021, 67.2% of the main staff in ECEC provision had a full-time employment contract. 22.1% of the staff had a contract between 40 and 99% of a regular week and 10.7% had agreed upon less than 40% (Statistics Norway 2022b).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Since 2009, various agreements have been made to ensure appropriate mentoring support for newly qualified teachers in kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools. In 2018, a new agreement between the Ministry, the provider associations, the trade unions and the association of education students was signed. The target group is newly qualified entrants into the profession and they receive supervisory support during the two first years of their employment. The advisory support should be given by a qualified mentor who is a teacher with a formal qualification as mentor or with the necessary professional competence and with at least three years of experience as a teacher. The measure is financed by the state and the service providers/owners are responsible for ensuring it takes place. Although the proportion of the target group who received mentoring increased from 55% to 63% between 2016 and 2019, there is still a large number of newly qualified staff who do not receive the agreed advisory support and mentoring. Another problem is that only half of the advisers have the formal competence as mentor as described above (Rambøll 2022).

7.4 Non-contact time

For more than 40 years now, Pedagogical Leaders in municipally owned centres have had a negotiated right to a minimum of four hours weekly for planning, preparations and follow-up work. The privately owned centres do not have this basic right. A survey in 2018 among the members of *Utdanningsforbundet* showed that 25% used less time than allocated and 29% more (Respons Analyse 2018). 93% of the centres had allocated four hours per week as non-contact time.

7.5 Current staffing issues

From the 1960s up to the recent past, the lack of qualified Kindergarten Teachers was constantly very high. The problem during these early years was that a large number of newly educated teachers left the kindergartens and few returned to work. This problem was exacerbated in the first decade of the 2000s through the strong increase in provision for under 3 year-olds, which requires double the number of pedagogues than groups with older children. During this time, the political authorities initiated many attempts to reduce the gap by trying to increase recruitment, encourage employees who had quitted to return and generally to encourage employees to stay (Gulbrandsen 2015).

During the following decade, this shortage of staff gradually disappeared. Today the number of teachers wishing to work in an ECEC centre is sufficient enough even to improve the teacher to child ratios (Gulbrandsen 2015). This change did not come about because former teachers returned to work in kindergartens but rather through an ever-increasing number of qualified staff who stayed in the profession. Whether this was due to the effects of the political measures is

unclear; it probably coincided with other social changes. Compared to the 1970s and 1980s, the recruitment of Kindergartens Teachers changed in terms of social class. An ever-increasing proportion of students came from homes without an academic tradition. For a student with well-educated parents, a job in a kindergarten was probably not in line with the level of parental ambitions and in the best case only a temporary position of waiting and preparing for something else. In contrast, for students with a working class background and without family academic traditions and ambitions, it could mean a rise in social status to become a pedagogue, highly sought after both among centre owners and political parties and authorities (Gulbrandsen 2018).

This increased stability changed the age composition of the staff. Since so few left the profession, the mean age of the staff increased steadily. Since so many of the older teachers had left the centres many years ago, the centres no longer had a retirement problem (see also *Table 7*). Kindergarten Teachers who would by now be approaching retirement age, were no longer working in ECEC (Gulbrandsen 2018).

Table 7

Norway: Age structure among Kindergarten Teachers, 2021

Age	Distribution, in %
Under 29 years	18.8
30–39 years	35.2
40–49 years	26.8
50–59 years	15.0
Over 60 years	4.2

Source: Statistics Norway 2022c

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

The content of initial professional education is important for the competence and quality of the Kindergarten Teachers. *Chapter **4.2*** describes the current content of IPE. Although there has been a certain amount of pressure for change for more than 10 years, no decision has as yet been made. In 2010, the entire professional education was evaluated by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT, *Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet i utdanningen*). In 2012, a new Framework Plan was issued, without giving too much attention to the foregoing evaluation. The implementation of the new study programme was followed by an expert group. This group delivered a rather critical report in 2017. As a representative of many critical research contributions, Havnes (2021), for example, wrote that the reduction of 10 disciplinary subjects into 6 integrated "knowledge areas" was not without its problems. In the Autumn of 2020, the Ministry appointed a new expert group that should propose amendments in the Framework Plan for Kindergarten Teacher Education. The proposals from this group are awaiting a response from the political authorities.

Another important question is the length of the course of study. The NOKUT evaluation from 2010 had already discussed an extension from three to five years. The majority of experts was against this, not least because of the great shortage at that time (the shortage gradually disappeared after 2010). Since the IPE of Primary School Teachers has been raised to Master's level

and five years' duration, a discussion of an extension for Kindergarten Teachers is bound to follow. Closely associated with this question is the number of students who follow a relevant Master level course, building on their Bachelor's degree. Establishing requirements for those with a Master's degree in terms of specific centre-based posts of responsibility, such as Centre Leader, could contribute to such a discussion.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

TALIS – Starting Strong

Source: Gjerustad, Hjetland, and Opheim 2019; Gjerustad, Opheim, Hjetland, Rogde, Bergene, and Gulbrandsen 2020 (see *References* for full details)

The Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU) is conducting the Norwegian part of the project. A new round of data collection took place in 2023.

Aims: The aim of the project was to investigate work conditions, views about competence, wages, content of work and work satisfaction as well as views on play, well-being and learning among the children.

Methods: Surveys among leaders and the other members of the core personnel were carried out in the spring of 2018. Participants were 315 centre leaders (response rate 85%) and 1,753 other members of the staff (response rate 88%) from a national representative sample of 305 kindergartens.

Selected findings: The surveys showed a very high degree of well-being among the different groups within the staff. Compared with the staff in the other participating countries, staff in Norway were relatively more satisfied with their wages.

Implications: The findings throw light on why Kindergarten Teachers for some years now no longer quit their workplace. The high degree of work satisfaction might also be valuable for the quality of the provision the centres offer.

Kindergarten Teachers with a Master's degree (*Barnehagelærere med masterutdanning*)

Source: Kasin and Gulbrandsen 2022 (see *References* for full details)

The project is being conducted at Oslo Metropolitan University.

Aims: To describe the incidence of staff members with a Master's degree and the efforts and initiatives taken by the centres to recruit persons with a Master's degree**.**

Methods: Documentary analysis and a representative survey among all regular Norwegian ECEC centres. The Centre Leaders filled in the questionnaires. The survey was conducted in the winter 2022. The response rate for the survey was 31%.

Selected findings: 20% of the centres have at least one employee with a Master's degree in early childhood pedagogy. 10% of the centres had a Centre Leader with a qualification at this level. An increasing proportion of Kindergarten Teachers now have such an education.

Implications: The authorities have welcomed staff with a Master's degree but have so far done little to realise this. So far, the growth is primarily a result of individual teachers who want to increase their competence. The report will give important input into the work to realise the wish for more formal and certified competence in the centres.

Small, but good. Need for competence in small ECEC centres in Oslo and Viken (*Liten, men god. Om kompetansebehov I små barnehager I Oslo og Viken*)

Source: Gulbrandsen and Os 2022 (see *References* for full details)

The project is conducted at the Oslo Metropolitan University.

Aims: As an important stakeholder in the Regional Competence Development Model (Recomp, see *chapter **6***), concerns have been expressed at the county governor level that small centres are not being reached with these new measures for increasing setting-level competence.

Methods: A questionnaire was sent to the Centre Leaders in all small centres in the two counties. A small centre was defined as a centre in the group comprising the fifth smallest centres according to the number of children enrolled. This gave a sample of 344 centres. The response rate was 51,3%.

Selected findings: The participation of small centres in Recomp was quite high and not alarmingly lower than among larger centres. The participants from small centres were also quite satisfied with the competence development activities they had been offered.

Implications: There seems to be no immediate need to implement competence measures specially directed towards small centres. The participants were most satisfied with lectures that presented new knowledge about kindergartens and least satisfied with the cooperation with the universities and the university colleges.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Two challenges will be highlighted: keeping the pedagogues in the centres (staff retention) and enhancing the internal organisation of the centres.

The development of qualified staff has been rather good over the past ten years. A very high proportion of newly qualified Kindergarten Teachers have chosen to work in an ECEC centre, and very few have quitted their jobs. It will be a challenge to maintain this positive development in the years to come. A danger signal could be the number of applicants to the Kindergarten Teacher education study programmes, which were 27% lower in 2022 than in the preceding year. All upcoming negotiations about wages and working conditions need to take the effects on recruitment into consideration.

The regulations for pedagogue to child ratios have had important implications for the organisation of the centres. With up to nine children per pedagogue among children under 3 and 18 children per pedagogue among children older than 3, the units very often were organised with these numbers of children, meaning one Kindergarten Teacher and two other members of staff with a lower or with no qualification. With a new pedagogue norm where the figures nine and 18 have changed to seven and 14, all staff members who previously would have worked with a qualification as Kindergarten Teacher can no longer be a leader of the units. This suggests that new posts and work titles and a new division of responsibilities will be necessary to develop and negotiate in near future.

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NORWAY

Key Contextual Data

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the term used in this report for the main form of ECEC provision is **kindergarten** (*barnehager,* 0–5)[1]**.** Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Norway

First half of 19th century	Charities establish the first institutions for poor children (*barneasyl*).
1840 ff.	Crèches are established for children under 3 whose parents cannot care for them and for poor children of single mothers.
1850 onwards	Froebel-inspired kindergartens are established.
1920-1970	Kindergartens (*barnehage*) continue to develop against the backdrop of the welfare state era. In 1970, however, the coverage rate was still as low as 3%.
1970s onwards	Employment rate of mothers with under 2 year-olds more than doubles from 1972 to 1991.
1975	The number of kindergartens for children up to age 6 increases and the first *Kindergarten Act* (*Barnehageloven*) comes into force. In the years that follow, public interest in kindergartens also increases.
1995 onwards	The Kindergarten Act is amended. The *Framework Plan for Kindergartens* is issued, regulating the content and tasks of kindergartens. In 1997, compulsory schooling begins in the year children turn 6.
2005/2006	The Kindergarten Act is amended in 2005 and comes into force in 2006, together with a revised version of the Framework Plan.
2006	Responsibility for kindergartens is transferred from the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Research. Creating a better transition between kindergartens and primary education and acknowledging the kindergarten's role as the first step in a lifelong learning process are the main reasons.
2009	An individual statutory right is introduced: each child from the age of 1 is entitled to a place in kindergarten.
2011	Amendments to the Kindergarten Act are included in the Framework Plan for Kindergartens.
2016	Introduction of free 20-hour kindergarten attendance for children over 3 years of age from low-income families
2017/18	Further amendments to the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan
2019	Low-income families are entitled to 20 hours of free kindergarten attendance for children aged 2 and over.
2021	The Kindergarten Act (§ 42) is amended regarding the avoidance of discrimination.

Sources: Rønsen 1995; Haug and Storø 2013; Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2006; Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2015; Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2016; Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017; Sadownik and Ødegaard 2018; Eurydice 2023

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In the case of Norway, the relevant format is **0–5** years, as children start primary school at age 6.

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Norway has a unitary system of early childhood education and care. At the national level, the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for ECEC centres (*barnehager* - "kindergartens") for children from the age of one until they start school at age 6 since 2006.

The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training is responsible for monitoring and supervision. At the decentralised level, regional government agencies (county governors) ensure that national policies are implemented (Engel et al. 2015, 29) and, since 2006, that municipalities fulfil their duties as kindergarten authorities. Municipalities are responsible for directly supervising kindergartens. They also own and run about half of the kindergartens.

General objectives and legislative framework

There are three overarching goals for the education sector in general, including early childhood education and care: All learners participate in an inclusive learning environment; children and young people in need of special support are given appropriate assistance early in order to being able to develop their potential; staff in the education system are highly qualified and competent.

The first Kindergarten Act (*Barnehageloven*) in Norway came into force in 1975. According to the current Kindergarten Act, which came into effect in 2006 and was last amended in 2021, children in kindergartens have the right to express their views on the day-to-day activities of the kindergarten and are to be given the opportunity to take an active part in planning and assessing kindergarten activities on a regular basis. “The Kindergarten must be based on fundamental values, such as respect for human dignity and nature, on intellectual freedom, charity, forgiveness, equality and solidarity, values that also appear in different religions and beliefs and are rooted in human rights.” (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2006, Section 1).

A prescribed regulatory framework – *The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017) – sets out the principles, goals and objectives for pedagogical work in ECEC centres (see section on *Curricular framework*).

Both public and private settings are obliged to comply with the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Since 2009, children from the age of 1 year are entitled to a kindergarten place, which the municipalities are obliged to provide. Attendance is not compulsory. Since paid parental leave lasts until a child's first birthday, few children below that age are enrolled in a kindergarten.

In 1997, the compulsory school starting age was lowered from 7 years and now starts in the year a child turns 6 (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2023a).

Main types of provision

Children up to school age can attend either a kindergarten or a family kindergarten (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 205).

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Norway provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

Kindergartens (*barnehager*) are unitary ECEC settings for children until they start school. The respective provider decides on the opening hours. To cover parents' working hours as far as possible, most kindergartens are open at least 41 hours a week (usually from 7:00 or 8:00 to 17:00 or 18:00). Children can attend them either full time or part time.

Family kindergartens (*familiebarnehager*) are located in private homes, where an assistant works with a maximum of five children, usually under 3 years of age. A qualified kindergarten pedagogue provides supervision and support on a weekly basis (Engel et al. 2015).

Both are obliged to comply with the Kindergarten Act.

Open-door kindergartens (*åpne barnehager*) are drop-in parent-child groups run by a qualified kindergarten pedagogue on a sessional basis. They are only open for part of the day.

Table 1

Norway: Number of kindergartens and children enrolled, 2005 – 2015 – 2022

Year	Kindergartens	Children (0 to under 6 years)
2005	6,278	223,501
2015	6,087	283,608
2022	5.420	268,730

Sources: Statistics Norway 2023a, 2023b

Provider structures

The shares of children's groups under and over 3 years of age are distributed almost equally between private and public ECEC settings (Statistics Norway 2023a). In 2022, there were 5,420 kindergartens for children up to school age - just under half (48.3%. 2,606) were public settings, nearly all of them owned by municipalities. In recent years, both the number of facilities and the number of children have decreased (Statistics Norway 2023a, b). This is primarily due to a lower birth rate. The coverage rate has not decreased.

Within the private sector, there are both commercial and non-profit owners. However, it is difficult to draw a clear-cut line between them. An increasing number of the private kindergartens has been integrated into large companies, but the majority is still independent, with the provider owning just one kindergarten.

Private kindergartens are approved and supervised by the local authority. All approved institutions receive the same municipal grants to cover the main part of the running costs.

The responsibility of the provider is to guarantee operation in accordance with the relevant laws and regulations and to ensure quality (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017).

Table 2

Norway: Settings by provider type and children by age, 2022

Provider type	Kindergartens	0 to under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	1 to under 6 year-olds
Municipal	2,606	49,929	86,152	136,081
County authority/ Government	12	310	396	706
Private	2,802	50,552	81,046	131,598
Total	5,420	100,791	167,594	268,385

Sources: Statistics Norway 2023a, 2023b

Participation rates in regulated provision

In 1963, national statistics on ECEC were published for the first time in Norway. At that time, the attendance rate for children under primary school age was just 2%. The first significant expansion of services took place in the 1970s: attendance increased from 3% in 1970 to 20% in 1980, reaching 62% by 2000 - 37% of children aged 1 or 2 and 78% of the 3 to 5 age group. In the following decade, the attendance rate increased from 37% to 81% for the youngest children and to 97.5% for 3, 4, and 5 year-old children. According to the most recent statistics from 2022, they were 87.7% for 1 and 2 year-olds and 97.2% for 3 to 5 year-olds (see *Table 3*).

In Norway, parental leave lasts until the child's first birthday and therefore relatively few children under the age of 1 attend a kindergarten (2022: 4.6%), but 94.7% of the 2 to 3 year-olds. In 2022, significantly more children under 2 years of age (4,874) were on the waiting list for a kindergarten place than children between 3–5 years (Statistics Norway 2023f).

Table 3

Norway: Number of children in kindergartens and enrolment rates by age, 2022

Age	Number of children	Enrolment rate, in %		
Under 1 years old	2,392	4.6		
1 year-olds	46,506	81.0	87.7 (1–2)	93.4 (1–5)
2 year-olds	51,893	94.7		
3 year-olds	54,666	96.8	97.2 (3–5)	
4 year-olds	55,561	97.2		
5 year-olds	57,367	97.4		
0 to under 6 years	268,385	79.7		

Source: Statistics Norway 2023b, 2023e

Children generally attend kindergarten full time: over 97% of children under and over 3 years of age attended for more than 41 hours per week in 2022.

Table 4

Norway: Number of children in kindergartens by age and weekly hours of attendance, 2022

	Weekly hours of attendance						Proportion attending over 41 hours, in %
	0-8	9-16	17-24	25-32	33-40	over 40	
0 to under 3 years	2	24	210	1,043	1,558	97,954	97.2
3 to under 6 years	4	41	158	957	2,339	164,095	97.9

Source: Statistics Norway 2023b, own calculations

Financing and costs for parents

Alongside Iceland and Sweden, Norway is one of the OECD countries that spends the most public money on the early childhood sector. In 2019, total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 1.38% of GDP, a significant increase from 0.69% in 2000. Around 0.7% was each allocated to provision for under 3 year-olds and to settings for 3 to 5 year-olds (OECD 2023).

Kindergartens are financed by municipalities (about 85%), with the expenditure in this area covered largely by state transfers as well as fees from parents. In 2004, a regulated maximum fee for parents was introduced (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2015).

In 2011, earmarked transfers for kindergartens were replaced by block grants to municipalities, thus strengthening local self-government. However, it is doubtful whether this reform provided the municipalities with more financial means for fulfilling the right to high-quality *barnehager* for all children (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2015, 9).

Since 2015, all public and private kindergartens receive similar subsidies from the government. National regulations for a free kindergarten place on a universal basis do not exist, but municipalities can issue their own regulations.

In January 2023, parents paid an average monthly fee (including meals) of 2,894 NOK (approx. €255[3]) (Statistics Norway 2023g). The maximum fee in January 2023 was NOK 3,000 (approx. €265) per month (Eurydice 2023, 4.1).

Since 2015, the fee has been capped at 6% of household income (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 57). Low-income families pay a reduced fee; all families pay a lower amount for siblings. These regulations apply to both private and public kindergartens. Low-income families receive legally regulated, free 20-hour kindergarten attendance for children aged 2 years and older.

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 5% of net household income on childcare costs[4] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

Kindergartens are usually organised in mixed-age groups, on the one hand for under 3 year-olds and on the other for 3 to under 6 year-olds. The exact arrangement is decided by the provider.

Since 2018, a statutory staffing ratio came into force of one employee for up to three children under 3 years of age and up to six children over 3 years of age. In each group, there must be at least one fully qualified pedagogue member of staff for every seven children under the age of 3 and for every 14 children over the age of 3 (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2023b). There are no regulations on group size.

Rooms must offer at least 5.3 square metres of space per child under 3 years of age, and at least 4 square metres per child over 3 years of age.

Curricular framework

The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017) emphasises humanistic and democratic values and traditions, which are to be implemented in a holistic manner. The Framework Plan states that all kindergartens must work towards the goal of promoting children's development and learning, and stimulate children's linguistic and social competence. Childhood is a phase of life with intrinsic value; kindergartens must be inclusive communities with space for every child. The rights and needs of the individual child should always be taken into account. The pedagogical approach includes outdoor play and physical activities, free play and guided activities. Building good relationships and the age-appropriate participation of children are foregrounded, as is the promotion of language, including sign language and Sami language.

[3] Conversion rate December 2023

[4] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

All kindergartens, whether public or private, are obliged to adhere to the principles of the Framework Plan. The provider may adapt the plan according to the local circumstances, but this needs to be described in the ECEC centre's programme. Kindergartens prepare an annual plan that documents the respective decisions and activities and describes how the contents and goals of the Framework Plan are implemented.

In August 2017, a revised version of the Framework Plan came into force. It is organised into nine sections: foundations and values, responsibilities and roles, aims and content, children's participation, cooperation between families and kindergartens, transitions, kindergarten as a pedagogical institution, ways of working in the kindergarten, and seven learning areas (Sadownik and Ødegaard 2018).

The seven learning areas are:

- *Communication, language and text*
  Children should explore and develop their understanding of language and learn about different ways of communicating. They should be encouraged to play with spoken and written language and symbols.
- *Body, movement, food and health*
  Children should learn about their bodies and needs through various physical activities, gain a positive view of themselves and respect the limits that others may have.
- *Art, culture and creativity*
  Children's curiosity, imagination and creative thinking should be stimulated; they should be encouraged to express themselves in different ways and to respect other cultures.
- *Nature, environment and technology*
  Children should be able to play outside all the year round in order to experience nature and their environment in a holistic way. They should also have the opportunity to work with different tools and materials.
- *Numbers, spaces and shapes*
  Children should learn to understand mathematical concepts, play with numbers and get to know different shapes in their environment.
- *Ethics, religion and philosophy*
  Children should learn about basic Christian and humanistic values and explore religions. They should be encouraged to ask questions and develop respect for other points of view.
- *Local community and society*
  Children should learn about and respect local traditions, including those of minorities, and develop a sense of belonging to their community. Cultural diversity, different family forms and different ways of living should be equally emphasised.

Special emphasis is placed on learning and play. The concept of *Bildung* (based on the German term) is explicitly considered to be the basis for the core kindergarten values. Children are encouraged to develop into critical citizens with responsibilities towards nature and society (Sadownik and Ødegaard 2018).

The children's transition to primary school is also regulated in the Framework Plan. It states that kindergarten and school "should share knowledge and information to enable them to co-operate on provision for the oldest kindergarten children, their transition to and enrolment in school. The kindergarten must obtain the parents' consent before sharing information about individual children with the school" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017, 33).

Digital education

In the *Framework Plan for Kindergartens* (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017), different working methods are presented to reflect the diversity of content. Among other things, digital practices are mentioned as helping to support learning processes, creativity and play. When using digital tools, which should not take too prominent a place, pedagogues should actively accompany the children and also be aware of copyright issues, data protection and the children's privacy. The children should be supported in reflecting critically on digital media.

Monitoring – evaluation

In Norway, the municipalities are responsible for the supervision and external inspection of the kindergartens. The county governors ensure that the municipalities within their county perform this responsibility correctly. According to the Framework Plan, kindergartens are to carry out their own internal quality assessments.,

Child-related assessment

There is no formal assessment of children at the pre-primary level. However, staff in kindergartens regularly share with parents their observations regarding the child's health, well-being, development and learning.

Centre-level assessment

Pedagogical practice is evaluated regularly, mainly in the form of self-evaluation on the basis of staff reflections (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017). The frequency is not prescribed, but the results must be recorded in the kindergarten's annual report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 128f).

When evaluating kindergartens, the children's perspective is also important and, in addition to observations by staff, even the youngest children and their parents have the opportunity to contribute. In addition, staff ensure that they communicate regularly with parents about the children's health, skills and development. This is usually done through informal conversations when the children are brought and picked up (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 20, 130).

RefLex is a self-assessment tool offered by the Directorate for Education and Training that helps ensure compliance with the Kindergarten Act.

External evaluation

There are no specific procedures for the external evaluation of kindergartens in terms of methods or compulsory use of instruments. However, there are instruments provided by the Directorate of Education and Training for voluntary use, such as parent questionnaires or pedagogical documentation materials.

In most cases, the municipalities and county governors share the duties of external evaluation (Engel et al. 2015, 83). The municipalities are responsible for monitoring and developing the quality of kindergartens, especially with regard to process quality. They can draw on national guidelines issued by the Directorate for Education and Training (Engel et al. 2015, 58, 86). There are no formal regulations for external evaluations, which are the provider's responsibility (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 123f).

The criteria for external evaluations include (1) the quality of the setting (e.g. safety, minimum number of fully qualified staff, working conditions), (2) the quality of the staff (e.g. qualifications,

cooperation with parents, interactions with children) and (3) the development of the children and their achievements through observations and assessments (Engel et al. 2015, 83ff).

Inclusion agenda

Kindergartens must observe the children's right to participate by enabling and encouraging them to express their views on day-to-day life in kindergarten (Sections 1 and 3 of the Kindergarten Act, Article 104 of the Norwegian Constitution, and Article 12, No. 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). The children must be able to actively participate in planning and assessing the kindergarten's activities on a regular basis. All children have a say concerning what goes on in kindergarten (see section on *Curricular Framework*) (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2020).

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

The Kindergarten Act ensures the right to special needs support below compulsory school age. The Act also states that children with disabilities shall be entitled to priority admission to a kindergarten.

Mostly, children with special needs or disabilities attend a regular facility. Only very few attend separate facilities (2010: approx. 2%).

In 2022, 2.1% of children in municipal kindergartens received special educational assistance; in private kindergartens this applied to 1,5% of the children (Statistics Norway 2023h, own calculations).

Inclusive practice in early childhood education ensures that all children have equal opportunities in terms of development and learning. In Norway, children who cannot benefit sufficiently from mainstream provision are entitled to receive special support. For example, there is support in sign language, but also in individual languages for children from ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, the aim is for all children to attend regular institutions and to be supported there according to their needs. Furthermore, kindergartens are expected to cooperate with health services or educational-psychological services in order to provide the best possible support for each child. For example, White Paper 19 (2015-2016) *Time for play and learning - better content in kindergarten* sets the minimum staffing ratio, calls for a minimum qualification for professionals and presents concrete measures to improve the quality of inclusive practice (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2021). Studies by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2021) were also incorporated into the White Paper.

Inclusion in the kindergarten also means that the learning environment is geared towards children with special needs and that the staff look for flexible solutions that benefit everyone. This may include using digital media to support children with hearing or visual impairments.

Children with a migration background

In the *Framework Plan for Kindergartens* (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017), particular reference is made to children with a Sámi background. These children have the right to speak their language in kindergarten and to learn about their culture so that they can develop their own identity. The Sámi language and Norwegian have the same status as official languages of Norway. It is estimated, that around 50,000 to 65,000 Sámi live in Norway, between 1.1% and 1.4% of the total Norwegian population (IWGIA 2023).

In 2021, there were 20 Sámi-kindergartens and 9 kindergartens with Sámi sections in Norway, attended by 800 children (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2022).

Since 2019, children in asylum centres aged 1 year and older also have the right to attend a kindergarten for 20 hours per week free of charge (European Commission 2020, 50).

In 2022, 10.8% of the total population and 12.5% of children under 5 years had a non-Norwegian citizenship. 61.6% and 57.6% respectively of them came from EU27 countries (Eurostat 2023b, own calculations).

According to national statistics, in 2022, 23.2% of children attending kindergarten had a migration background, and 20% were from linguistic and cultural minorities. These two groups overlap considerably: 86.2% of those with a migration background also belonged to linguistic or cultural minorities (Statistics Norway 2023c).

During 2022, 4,919 asylum applications were filed, 206 of them for children under 5 years of age (Statista 2023). Approximately one third (32.2%) were filed by persons from Syria, followed by persons from Ukraine (16.9%) and Afghanistan (10.3%) (UDI 2023).

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Maternity leave (*mødrekvoten*) is part of Parental leave (also termed "mother's quota") and covers three weeks before the birth and up to 15 or 19 weeks afterwards depending on payment level. Six weeks following the birth are compulsory, after which the time can also be divided into smaller blocks. Either the full salary continues to be paid for 18 weeks or 80% of it for 22 weeks (up to a maximum of NOK 9,290 (€798.32). The condition for this is having been employed during six of the last ten months before the birth and a salary that corresponds to at least half the basic national insurance benefit payment over the previous year. Unemployed women receive a one-off payment per child.

Paternity leave (*pappapermisjon*) lasts two weeks which can be taken flexibly. Payment is only made if this is negotiated with the employer. It can be taken at different times and also by other persons who support the mother.

Parental leave (*foreldrepengeperioden*), which also applies to same-sex parents, lasts 46 or 56 weeks (together with the three weeks before the birth 49 or 59), depending on which payment option is chosen. After the birth, 15 to 19 (non-transferable) weeks are provided for each parent. The remaining 16 or 18 weeks are considered family time (*fellesperioden*) and can be taken by either parent (even at the same time). As with Maternity leave, either full pay can be paid for 49 weeks or 80% for 59 weeks. Non-employed women receive a flat-rate payment of NOK 90,300 (€ 7,759.73) per child. After the first six weeks, Parental leave can be postponed until a maximum of three years after the birth or taken part time, also by both partners at the same time. However, the latter option reduces the payments.

Parents with a child between 1 and 2 years of age who do not use a publicly funded childcare place receive a monthly lump sum of NOK 7,500 (€644.50) - this amount is reduced for part-time care.

Regarding Paternity leave, it is assumed that about 89% of fathers make use of it. In 2021, 48% of mothers and 11% of fathers took unpaid leave. Family time is mostly taken by mothers. Trend-wise, it tends to be well-educated mothers and mothers with well-paid jobs who share this time with their partner. However, there is no detailed data on this.

[5] The brief summary in this section is based on the country note for Norway by Brita Bungum and Elin Kvande in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Current challenges for the system of Early Childhood Education and Care in Norway

*Country expert assessment by **Lars Gulbrandsen***

Stability of the pedagogical staff

As stated in the ECEC Workforce Profile (Gulbrandsen 2024), a major challenge for the ECEC system in Norway is the retention of well-qualified pedagogues. After many years of significant staff shortages, the number of pedagogues willing to work in a kindergarten is now sufficient to meet the pedagogue norm, even enough to meet the strengthened staff to child ratio proposed by the government in October 2022. Ways need to be found to maintain the current workforce and to ensure that a high proportion of the newly qualified pedagogues really choose to work in a kindergarten. Moreover, the volume of newly educated candidates needs to remain stable. In this respect, both the organisation and content of the work as well as wages and other forms of recognition of the employees' work, are of great importance. In 2022, there were two strike actions, the first concerning wages, the second concerning pensions. In all negotiations and reforms, the stability of the pedagogical staff should be a central concern.

Governance of the sector and the private-public mix

The kindergartens in Norway are owned either by the municipalities or by private owners (50 – 50). Since this has been the case ever since kindergartens were established in Norway, there has never been any process of privatisation in the sector. However, in recent years the question of ownership has increasingly become a topic of controversial debate, with political parties to the right supporting private owners and the parties to the left generally preferring to re-establish the private centres as centres owned by the municipalities. In 2022, the new government (The Labour party and the Agrarian party) set up an ad hoc committee ("the de-commercialisation committee") to clarify the issue of commercial owners. The committee was hoping to secure parliamentary support on a broader base and was planning to deliver a White Paper in mid-2024. However, since the competent and experienced civil servant who had been chairing the committee decided to resign in February 2023, it is now unclear whether the committee will continue or not. Whatever the outcome, parents in general express very high satisfaction with their kindergarten, regardless of the owner. At the same time, surveys consistently show that users of private kindergartens tend to be more satisfied than users of municipal kindergartens.

Presence of staff during opening times

As a rule, ECEC centres are open for 9 hours per day. However, the centres do not have sufficient financial resources to meet the required staffing regulations all the time. Therefore, there will often be fewer adults present than the regulations specify, usually at the start and the end of the day. This reduces the amount of time that staff can carry out pedagogical work with the children. The real staff to child ratio across the whole day will therefore often be a result of how the parents use the time they are allowed to use. If many use all the time they are permitted to use, this could reduce the quality of the centre by giving each member of the staff responsibility for more children. The municipality receives the bulk of the funding for kindergartens through framework grants from the state, based on objective criteria. A rich municipality might choose to allocate more money to the centres while, for instance, a municipality which is less rich but has many elderly people needing intensive care, might choose to allocate their extra funds to care arrangements for the elderly. The philosophy behind framework grants is to promote autonomous local government, the result might be kindergartens of varied quality. Since 81 per

cent of the kindergarten costs are staffing costs, there are few possibilities to change this given the current amount of transfers from the state, the current financial situation and other needs of the municipalities, the current amount of user fees and the current opening hours.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population of Norway was 5,425,270. Over the last 20 years it has slowly but steadily increased (2000: 4,478,497; 2010: 4,858,199; 2020: 5,367,580) (Eurostat 2023a)

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average of the total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). With 1.55, Norway is approximately on EU average (Eurostat 2023c)[6].

Children under 6 years of age

Table 5

Norway: Children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Up to 1 year	56,458
1 year-olds	53,674
2 year-olds	55,550
3 year-olds	56,293
4 year-olds	58,065
5 year-olds	60,653
0 to under 6 year-olds, total	**340,693**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

The proportion of children under 3 years of age in the total population was 3.1% in 2022, and that of children under 6 was 6.3%. These proportions were significantly higher than the EU averages (Eurostat 2023a).

[6] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Table 6

Norway: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population from 2000 to 2022, in %*

		Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Norwegen	4.0	4.1	8.1
	Ø EU15[7]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Norwegen	3.7	3.9	7.6
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Norwegen	3.5	3.7	7.2
	Ø EU25	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Norwegen	3.1	3.2	6.3
	Ø EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations, deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, 91% of households with children under 6 were couple households. Households with single parents accounted for only 4.3% - almost exclusively single mothers (4.2%).

Table 7

Norway: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of total households, in %*
Households – total	500,000	
Couple households	455,100	91.0
Other types of households	23,300	4.7
Single households, total	21,600	4.3
Single households, women	20,900	4.2
Single households, men	700**	0.1

Source: Eurostat 2023h, * Own calculations, ** Data calculated

Employment rates of parents with children under age 6

In Norway, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 80.1% and for women 75.4% (Eurostat 2023g).

In 2022, 82.9% of women and 94.3% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), both the shares of employed fathers and mothers were well above the EU-averages (63.6% and 87.2% respectively) (Eurostat 2023d, own calculations).

[7] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Table 8a

Norway: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Norway (age of the youngest child: 4–5 years)*	82.0	92.0
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[8]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2021	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Norway	82.9	94.3
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[9]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e, *Statistics Norway 2023d

For other SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022 – like Norway – data are displayed in *Table 8b.*

Table 8b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023d, 2023g

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[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[10]

In 2022, 14.6% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was below the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 16.3% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 2% of children under 6 and 1% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023e, f).

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[10] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

POLAND

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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1. ECEC governance in Poland

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Poland is split into two stages and sectors. The first stage, covering the provision of children aged 20 weeks to 3 years[1], falls under the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (*Ministerstwo Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej*). The municipalities are responsible for the administration, management and supervision of ECEC provision.

The second stage, catering for 3 to 6 year-olds[2], is officially recognised as the first phase in the education system and falls under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science (*Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki*). Provisions for this older age group are supervised at the voivodeship level by the Superintendencies of Education (*Kuratorium Oświaty*). These are budgetary units and their tasks include the implementation of state educational policy, i.e. the core curriculum, the allocation of financial resources and the improvement of the quality of education in the voivodeship and the competence of teachers. The 16 vovoidships in Poland represent the highest level of administration.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

The professional requirements relating to ECEC staff working with children in the two sectors (for children from 20 weeks up to the age of 3 and between 3 and 6 years of age) differ considerably and are regulated through different sets of legislation.

Childcare sector

Centre-based facilities for younger children are: nurseries/crèches (*żłobki*), kids' clubs (*kluby dziecięce*) and day care providers (*punkty dziennego opiekuna*); the latter can also be home-based and can care for up to 5 children.

Since 2011, when the 0–3 sector was initiated in its current form, numerous changes have been made annually to the documents regulating the sector's work. Initially, the organisation of the work of crèches, kids' clubs and day care providers differed significantly due to, for example, the number of opening hours, the age of the children and the training of specialists. Over time, these differences began to blur, and now there are virtually no differences between crèches and kids' clubs, and specialists prepared to work in a crèche can also work as a day care provider by completing an additional 40-hour course. Day Care Providers who have worked in the profession for one year have documented experience in working with children and acquire the right to work in a crèche. Nevertheless, these facilities are still recognised as different type of setting in the legal documents.

All these settings are primarily staffed by **Caregivers**. Some childcare networks, especially public ones such as the Warsaw Public Crèche Network (*Warszawski Zespół Żłobków)*, have introduced

[1] In particular cases this may be extended until the end of the (school) year in which the child reaches the age of 4.

[2] In particular cases, if the setting has available spaces, it can accept a child as young as 2½ years old.

additional internal regulations for 'junior' and 'senior' Caregivers, allowing for promotion. Unpaid **Volunteers** may also be employed in such facilities and their scope of responsibility is defined individually. In settings attended by more than 20 children, at least one **Nurse** or **Midwife** must be employed. In addition, occasionally there are providers which employ or establish partnerships with specialists such as Psychologists, Physiotherapists or Speech Therapists, but this is regulated at the municipality level in the case of public facilities or at the provider level in the case of private ones.

Education sector

Kindergarten Teachers are the main professionals responsible for children between 3–6 years who primarily attend kindergartens (*przedszkola*). Other types of settings are: pre-primary sections in primary schools (*oddziały przedszkolne w szkołach podstawowych*) and pre-primary centres (*punkty przedszkolne*). Depending on the profile of the setting (e.g. inclusive, special education), its size and the particular needs of the children enrolled, teachers collaborate with different specialists.

From May 2022, one **Specialist Support** person (Pedagogue, Psychologist, Speech Therapist, Educational Therapist or Special Needs Teacher) must be employed for every 100 children (the post can be split between more specialists according to the needs of the children who attend the setting). From 2024 this number will be increased to 1.5 posts. The number of specialists in inclusive settings (those involving about 25% children with special educational needs) and for special education ones, e.g. for children with sight impairment, is higher and depends on its size. Supporting teachers *(Nauczyciele wspomagający)* are employed when a child diagnosed with special educational needs, e.g. behavioural disorders, attends the setting.

A person is qualified to occupy the position of a **Supporting Teacher** if he/she:

- Has completed a university degree (at least BA) in a field that qualifies for working with children with physical or intellectual disabilities or children with challenging behaviour.
- Is qualified to occupy a position of a Kindergarten Teacher and, in addition, has completed postgraduate studies (at least one year with a minimum of 60 ECTS credits) or a qualifying course in a field that qualifies for working with children with intellectual or physical disabilities.

The employment of a **Teacher's Aide** (*Pomoc nauczyciela*) is a decision of the managing body. In practice, they are employed for groups of 3 year-olds and/or for mixed-age groups in which 3 year-olds make up a certain proportion of the group. They must have at least completed eight years of primary school. Duties of a Teacher's Aide are individually defined by the Kindergarten Director and typically involve cleaning and care activities, accompanying the group outdoors, and preparing materials for organised activities.

Table 1 outlines the profiles and minimum qualification requirements of staff working directly with children and also categorises the **core practitioners** according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 at the end of this chapter).

Table 1
Poland: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Childcare sector				
Caregiver *Opiekun dziecięcy /wychowawca małego dziecka* *Profile:* Social Care/Health Care Professional	*Żłobek* **Nursery/Crèche** 0–2 years[3] *Klub dziecięcy* **Kids' club** 1–2 years	Core practi-tioner with group responsibility	0–2 (crèche) 1–2 (kids' club)	12 years schooling **plus** 280 hours training (at least 80 hours of practice supervised by fully quali-fied Caregiver), Certificate as Caregiver **or** 1 year of working experi-ence with children up to the age of 3 at least 6 months immediately be-fore taking up employ-ment ECTS credits: n/a[4] EQF level: 3 ISCED 2011: 3 *Optional requirements* A qualified Nurse, Mid-wife, Nanny, Kindergar-ten Teacher, Primary School Teacher or Social Pedagogue
	Punkt dziennego opiekuna **Day care provider** 0–2 years		0–3 years	160 hours training (at least 30 hours of practice supervised by fully qualified Caregiver) Certificate as Day care provider **or** 40 hours supplementary training for candidates qualified to work in a crèche or kids' club **or** 1 year of experience working with children up to the age of three im-mediately prior to taking up employment

[3] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children en-rolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In Poland the relevant formats are 0–2/3 and 2½/3–5 years and 6–7 years, since primary school may start at age 6 or 7, depending on parental choice.

[4] n/a = not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Nurse/Midwife *Pielęgniarka/ Położna*	*Żłobek* **Nursery/crèche** 0–2 years	Qualified co-worker	All ages	Min. 3 years university, Bachelor's degree in health care ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Volunteer *Wolontariusz*	*Żłobek* **Nursery/crèche** 0–2 years *Klub dziecięcy* **Kids' club** 1–2 years *Punkt dziennego opiekuna* **Day care provider** 0–2 years	Co-worker with minimal specialist preparation	n/a	First aid for children course
Education sector				
Kindergarten Teacher *Nauczyciel Wychowania przedszkolnego* *Profile:* Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional	*Przedszkole* **Kindergarten** 3–5 years	Core practi-tioner with group responsibility	0–10 years	5 years at university, Master's degree special-ising in Early Childhood and Primary Education ECTS credits: 300 EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Supporting Teacher *Nauczyciel wspo-magający*	*Przedszkole* **Kindergarten** 3–5 years	Qualified co-worker/ Practitioner with group responsibility	3–15 years	Bachelor's degree (3 years university) **or** Master's degree (5 years university) **or** Postgraduate degree (1,5 years) in Special Peda-gogy ECTS credits: 180 (BA), 300 (MA) EQF level: 6 (BA), 7 (MA) ISCED 2011: 6 or 7
Teacher's Aide *Pomoc nauczyciela wychowania przedszkolnego*	*Przedszkole* **Kindergarten** 3–5 years	Non-qualified co-worker	n/a	Primary school leaving certificate (8 years schooling) ECTS credits: n/a

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 2
Educational specialists – Pedagogue, Psychologist, Speech Therapist, Educational Therapist, Special Needs Teacher *Specjalista*	*Przedszkole* **Kindergarten** 3–5 years	Qualified co-worker	All ages	5 years university, Master's degree specialisation in the field of Pedagogy, Psychology, Speech Therapy, Educational Therapy or Special Pedagogy ECTS credits: 300 EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7

In addition to completing the relevant initial education/training, ECEC employees must meet additional criteria: they must not be deprived of parental authority or have suspended or limited parental authority, the need to fulfil maintenance obligations if imposed by an enforcement order issued or approved by a court, and not be convicted of an intentional crime.

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Qualification standards of ECEC leaders in centres for younger and older children differ. The minimum educational requirements for leaders of **centres for under 3 year-olds** are lower than those for directors in kindergartens. More specifically, a leader of a crèche or kids' club is required to have **either** a university degree (Bachelor's degree as minimum) and at least three years' experience of working with children **or** a secondary (vocational) education and five years' experience working with children. In addition, the leader of a kids' club may be a qualified Caregiver whereas a **Kindergarten Director** must hold a Master's or Engineering degree, a pedagogical preparation or qualification course in education management and a qualification to hold a teaching position in a particular kindergarten (see *Chapter **2.4*** for a description of supervisory tasks). There are no additional requirements such as attending a specified course for leadership.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

At the level of national legislation there are no posts of responsibility which the Caregivers or Kindergarten Teachers take on in addition to their regular work for a specifically designated area (e.g. working with migrant parents, mentoring students during their practicum), for which there may be specified time allocation and payment.

At the voivodship or municipal level, it may happen that agreements are made with third parties (e.g. universities) and activities are implemented that provide additional pay, such as mentoring prospective professionals during their internships.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Tasks concerning the administration of facilities for children **under 3 years of age** are the responsibility of municipalities, which supervise nurseries, kids' clubs and day care providers in terms of the conditions of their operation (confirming compliance with legal requirements). Supervision and coordination of the pedagogical work depends on the organisational arrangements adopted by the municipality.

The pedagogical work of the setting may be regulated internally (the head of the establishment determines the rules of work according to general national guidelines) and/or externally, e.g. the facilities operate in a network that is bound by common operating guidelines.

At the municipal level, territorial units are set up which also coordinate and supervise the work of **kindergartens** and schools. Their tasks include, among others, the establishment, operation, transformation and closing down of centres. Coordination and supervision of the kindergarten's pedagogical work is carried out internally and externally.

The internal process in kindergartens is the responsibility of the Kindergarten Director, who is obliged to develop a pedagogical supervision plan for each school year. The plan of supervision should take into account conclusions from pedagogical supervision exercised in the previous kindergarten year and basic directions of implementation of the national educational policy, including tasks of pedagogical supervision announced annually by the Minister of National Education.

Within the framework of supervision, the Kindergarten Director is obliged to conduct internal evaluation with respect to issues considered crucial in the kindergarten's operation and to use its results for improvement of quality of kindergarten's work; to control teachers' compliance with rules of law concerning education, upbringing and care activities as well as other statutory activities of the kindergarten; to support teachers in the performance of their tasks, taking into consideration a diagnosis of the kindergarten's work, planning developmental actions, including teachers' motivation regarding professional improvement, organisation of trainings and meetings, monitoring of the kindergarten work.

External supervision is conducted by Superintendencies of Education. The forms of pedagogical supervision are control and support and concern: observing, analysing and evaluating the course of education and upbringing processes and the effects of teaching, upbringing and caring activities and other statutory activities of the institutions, assessing the status and conditions of teaching, educational and caring activities and other statutory activities of kindergartens, schools and educational institutions, providing assistance to establishments, as well as to teachers in the performance of their didactic, educational and caring tasks, and inspiring teachers to improve existing or implement new solutions in the education process, using innovative curricular, organisational or methodological activities aimed at developing pupils' competences. The subject of the inspection by the educational superintendent may also include compliance with children's rights and verification of conditions in the kindergarten in terms of safety and hygiene.

2.5 Specialist support staff

All kindergartens are required to employ specialist support staff such as a: Pedagogue, Psychologist, Speech Therapist, Educational Therapist, Special Needs Teacher. Their compulsory presence is something new in Polish ECEC settings. These specialists are hired by the Kindergarten Director. The number and type depends on the size of the centre and the needs of the children. All specialists need to have completed a corresponding higher education programme for their specialisation. They usually work with individual children or small groups in pull-out programmes. They also sometimes provide classes for whole groups, support teachers, conduct consultations with parents and organise more specialist support if necessary.

Psychological-Pedagogical Counselling Centres (*Poradnie psychologiczno-pedagogiczne*) cooperate with kindergartens as independent entities. By virtue of employing a larger number of specialists and having a more extensive resource base and more advanced and comprehensive activities in supporting the development of the child (also through providing support to the family), as well as working with children over a number of years regardless of the setting the child attends. Tasks of the counselling centres are: diagnosing (e.g. developmental disorders), giving recommendations, therapeutic activities (e.g. speech therapy), conducting support groups (e.g. for socioeconomically disadvantaged families), mediation, crisis intervention, counselling, consultations, information and training activities, prevention activities (e.g. distributing preventative materials). Many cities also have teacher support centres – such as the Warsaw Centre for Educational and Social Innovation and Training (*Warszawskie Centrum Innowacji Edukacyjno-Społecznych i Szkoleń*), where various types of teacher support courses are organised.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Despite the wide variety of qualifications that enable them to work with the youngest children, this work is mainly undertaken by women with vocational training. The structural composition of staff in this sector is presented in *Table 2*.

Table 2
Poland: Professionals working in centre-based settings for 0–2 year-olds, 2021

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce, in %
Staff with relevant university degree (Bachelor or Master), of which: – Caregivers – Nurses – Midwives	**19.3** approx. 10 7.6 1.7
Caregivers with a relevant vocational qualification (upper secondary, post-secondary)	**71.7**
Male practitioners	**0.08**
Staff with a minority ethnic background or a 'background of migration'	No national data available

Source: Central Statistical Office 2022

Settings for children from 3 up to school entry

In August 2022, there were about 180,000 frontline staff working in kindergartens (teachers: 157,465, specialists: 10,377, supporting teachers: 4,843 and teachers' aides: 5,731), of whom the great majority were women with Polish origins. The structural composition of staff working with children from the age of 3 up to school entry is presented in *Table 3*.

Table 3

Poland: Professionals working in facilities for 3–5 year-olds, 2022

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce, in %	
Qualification level of Kindergarten Teachers	Master's degree Bachelor's degree Secondary education	**85.0** **10.0** **0.2**
Kindergarten Teachers at different career stages	Trainee teacher Contract teacher Appointed teacher Chartered teacher Missing data	**10.0** **30.5** **21.5** **33.6** **4.3**
Educational specialists /specialist support staff	Pedagogues Psychologists Speech Therapists Educational therapist	**10.7** **15.0** **74.0** **8.6**
Male professionals		**3.9**
Staff with a minority ethnic background or a 'background of migration'	Polish Ukrainian Belarusian British Others	**99.5** **0.10** **0.02** **0.01** **0.07**

Source: SIO – Educational Information System Ministry of Education and Science 08/2022

Since 2017, in order to obtain the right to work as a teacher in kindergarten and lower primary schools, a 5-year unified Master's degree must be completed. Teachers who have already obtained a Bachelor's degree remain eligible to teach in kindergarten and lower primary school.

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Childcare sector

The right to work as a **Caregiver** in crèches and kids' clubs is granted to a …

- Qualified professional: Nurse, Midwife, Kindergarten Teacher, Primary School Teacher, Social Pedagogue, or a graduate from a university or postgraduate study programme in a field related to early childhood education and care
- Person who has a university degree in any subject in which the curriculum includes issues related to the care or development of the young child and who has followed an 80-hour specialised training to update and supplement their knowledge and skills

- Person who has at least an intermediate school-leaving certificate and one year of experience working with children up to the age of three directly before starting work at the ECEC centre (no specialised pre-service training required); if the person's professional experience took place earlier than six months it is required to undertake an 80-hour supplementary training course within six months of starting as a caregiver in order to update and complement their knowledge and skills.
- Person who has at least an intermediate school-leaving certificate and has accomplished 280 hours specialised training including at least 80 hours of work supervised by a fully qualified Caregiver.

The right to work as a **Caregiver in day care provision** is granted to a …

- Person who has completed 160 hours of specialised training
- Qualified Nurse, Midwife, Nanny, Kindergarten Teacher, Primary School Teacher
- Social Pedagogue who has completed an additional 40 hours training (with Baby and Child First Aid)
- Person who has worked for at least 12 months with children under 3 years of age directly before starting work at the childcare provision (no specialised pre-service training required).

The right to work as a **nanny in a home-based provision** is granted to a person who is not the parent of the child he/she is to care for, is over 18 years of age and will undergo a sanitary-epidemiological examination and will receive a medical certificate of no impediment to work.

Table 4
Poland: Caregiver

Job title in Polish: *Opiekun dziecięcy/Wychowawca małego dziecka* **Profile**: Social Care/Health Care Professional
Route 1 **Entry requirements:** 12 years of schooling **Professional studies:** 1 year of working experience with children up to the age of 3 at least 6 months immediately before taking up employment **Award:** No specialist certificate awarded **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level**: 3 **ISCED 2011:** 3 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Nursery/crèche (*Żłobek*) 20 weeks–2 years; kids' club (*Klub dziecięcy*) 1–2[5] years. *Route 2* **Entry requirements:** 12 years of schooling **Professional studies:** 280 hours training (at least 80 hours of practice supervised by a fully qualified Caregiver) **Award:** Certificate as Caregiver **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level**: 3 **ISCED 2011:** 3 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Nursery/crèche (*Żłobek*) 20 weeks–2 years; kids' club (*Klub dziecięcy*) 1–2

[5] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for settings for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for pre-primary settings in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In Poland the relevant formats are 0–2/3 and 2½/3–5 years and 6–7 years, since primary school may start at age 6 or 7, depending on parental choice.

Job title in Polish: *Opiekun dziecięcy/Wychowawca małego dziecka* **Profile**: Social Care/Health Care Professional
years *Route 3* **Entry requirements:** 12 years of schooling **Professional studies:** 160 hours training (at least 30 hours of practice supervised by a fully qualified Caregiver) **Award:** Certificate as Day Care Provider **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level**: 3 **ISCED 2011:** 3 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Day care provision **or** 40 hours supplementary training for candidates qualified to work in a crèche or kids' club **or** 1 year of experience working with children up to the age of 3 immediately prior to taking up employment *Route 4* **Entry requirements:** University entrance qualification **Professional studies:** 3-year university qualification as Nurse or Midwife **Award:** Bachelor's degree **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Nursery/crèche (*Żłobek*) 20 weeks–2 years; kids' club (*Klub dziecięcy*) 1–2 years

Education sector

There are four types of staff mainly responsible for early childhood education and care of 3 to 6 years old children: Kindergarten Teacher, Supporting Teacher, Teacher's Aide and Educational Specialist.

To work as a **Kindergarten Teacher** a person is required to complete a five-year unified Master's degree. This study programme also provides qualifications to work in the lower grades of primary school (the first three years of eight grades primary school). The main responsibilities of the Kindergarten Teacher relate to the day-to-day organisation of the developmental environment of a group of children, while taking care of the individual needs of each child; collaborating with the staff, families and the local community to provide a coherent developmental environment for the children; monitoring and documenting children's activities and development.

Kindergarten Teachers can also work in the childcare sector.

Table 5

Poland: Kindergarten/Pre-primary Teacher

Job title in Polish: *Nauczyciel wychowania przedszkolnego* **Profile**: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: University entrance qualification **Professional studies:** 5 years at university **Award:** Master's degree in Early Childhood Education **ECTS points:** 300 **EQF level**: 7 **ISCED 2011:** 7

Job title in Polish: *Nauczyciel wychowania przedszkolnego* **Profile**: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergarten (*Przedszkole)* 3–5 years; pre-school class in primary chool (*Oddział przedszkolny w szkole podstawowej)* 5–6 years; pre-primary education centre (*Punkt przedszkolny)* 3–5 years; primary school grades 1–3

Table 6

Poland: Supporting Teacher

Job title in Polish: *Nauczyciel wspomagający*
Entry requirements: University entrance qualification **Professional studies:** 3 or 5 years at university **Award:** Bachelor or Master's degree in a relevant field **ECTS points:** 180/300 **EQF level**: 6 or 7 **ISCED 2011:** 6 or 7 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Kindergarten (*Przedszkole)* 3–5 years; pre-school class in primary school (*Oddział przedszkolny w szkole podstawowej)* 5–6 years; pre-primary education centre (*Punkt przedszkolny)* 3–5 years; all types of school

Table 7

Poland: Teacher's Aide

Job title in Polish: *Pomoc nauczyciela wychowania przedszkolnego*
Entry requirements: 8 years of schooling, with school leaving certificate **Professional studies:** n/a **Award:** n/a **ECTS points:** n/a **EQF level**: n/a **ISCED 2011:** 2 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Kindergarten (*Przedszkole)* 3–5 years; pre-school class in primary school (*Oddział przedszkolny w szkole podstawowej)* 5–6 years; pre-primary education centre (*Punkt przedszkolny)* 3–5 years

Table 8

Poland: Specialist Support Staff – Educational Specialists

Job title in Polish: *Specjalista*
Entry requirements: University entrance examination **Professional studies:** 3 or 5 years at university **Award:** Bachelor's or Master's degree in area of specialisation (e.g. psychology, pedagogy, speech therapy) **ECTS points:** 180/300 **EQF level**: 6 or 7 **ISCED 2011:** 6 or 7 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Kindergarten (*Przedszkole)* 3–5 years; pre-school class in primary chool (*Oddział przedszkolny w szkole podstawowej)* 5–6 years; pre-primary education centre (*Punkt przedszkolny)* 3–5 years

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Childcare sector

Frameworks of the specialised training programmes are defined in a regulation of the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy from 25th March, 2011. The Ministry is also responsible for the accreditation of individual programmes (private and public).

Table 9

Poland: Caregivers: Framework of specialised training programmes

Duration	Themes of the programme modules, required competences
280-hour programme (for prospective Caregivers in nurseries/ crèches and kids' clubs)	**Psycho-pedagogical bases of development (20 hours)** Adaptation as an outcome of development, the course of development of the individual in the life cycle, the determinants of the individual's development process, developmental achievements during the individual's life cycle stages. **Stimulating the comprehensive development of a child (120 hours)** Identifying the child's developmental needs, planning and documenting the child's development in everyday situations (greeting, farewell, meals, hygienic routines, resting, etc.), creating a physical and social environment for the child's development, nursing and health care of children with different needs, play as a basic form of activity of the child – exploratory, musical, rhythmic, artistic and technical play, introducing the child to culture, building social relationships with the child, and parents and local services responsible for responsible for the child's development. **Child development in early childhood (25 hours)** Developmental tasks in infancy and toddlerhood, aspects of child development – characteristic changes in cognitive development, psychosocial and motor development at different stages of a child's life, sources of opportunities and threats to the child's development up to the age of 3 years, neurological basis of child development, mechanisms of child development. **Competences of a caregiver (35 hours)** Legal responsibility of the caregiver, basics of emergency medicine (administering child first aid), health and safety regulations, stress management and problem-solving skills, voice emission. **Practical training (80 hours)**
80-hour supplementary training (for Caregivers in crèches and kids' clubs)	**Stimulation of comprehensive development of a child (60 hours)** Recognition of the child's developmental needs, sources of opportunities and threats to the child's development at the age of 3, early support of the child's development, innovative methods of planning, organising, monitoring and documenting the process of child development, building social relationships with the child, parents and local services responsible for child development **Competences of a caregiver (20 hours)** Legal responsibility of the caregiver, coping skills, stress management and problem solving
40-hour supplementary training (for Caregivers in day-care provision)	Baby and child first aid Methods of coping with stress and solving problems Innovative methods of stimulating child's development
160-hour training (for prospective	**Development of a young child (20 hours)** Aspects of child development – characteristics of changes in cognitive, psychosocial and motor development at individual psychosocial and motor development at different stages of the child's life, sources of opportunities and threats to the child's

Duration	Themes of the programme modules, required competences
Caregivers in day-care provision)	development up to the age of 3, mechanisms of child development. **Stimulation of comprehensive development of a child (90 hours)** Identifying the child's developmental needs, planning and documenting the child's development in everyday situations such as greeting, farewell, meals, hygiene routines, rest, play, creating a physical and social environment for the child's development, nursing and health care of the children with different developmental needs, play as the primary form of activity of the child, introducing the child to music and culture, building social relationships with the child, parents and local services. **Competences of a caregiver (20 hours)** Legal responsibility of the caregiver, basics of emergency medicine with Baby and Child First Aid), health and safety regulations **Practical training (30 hours)**

Education sector

Table 10 presents the legal framework guidelines regarding university study programmes for Kindergarten Teachers (and lower Primary School Teachers). This is a joint programme, not a specialist qualification route for working in kindergartens only.

Table 10

Poland: Kindergarten Teacher – Minimum number of hours of structured activities and ECTS in initial professional education study programmes for pre-primary and lower primary school teachers

Groups of activities in which specific learning outcomes are achieved	Contents	Number of hours	ECTS
A. Psychological and pedagogical background	A.1. Basics of practical Pedagogy	300	80
	A.2. Kindergarten and lower primary school pedagogy	180	
	A.3. Basics of psychology for teachers	180	
	A.4. Psychological and pedagogical foundation of teaching children a foreign language	60	
B. Content preparation for teachers in kindergarten and grades I-III of the primary school	B.1. Polish language	60	57
	B.2. Foreign language	120	
	B.3. Maths	60	
	B.4. Social and environmental education	30	
	B.5. ICT	30	
	B.6. Art	30	
	B.7. Music	30	
	B.8. Handcrafting	30	
	B.9. Physical education	60	
	B.10. Health education	30	

Groups of activities in which specific learning outcomes are achieved	Contents	Number of hours	ECTS
C. Supporting the development of children in kindergarten and grades I-III of the primary school	* See note below the table.	400	45
D. Basics of didactics of integrated teaching in kindergarten and grades I-III of the primary school	* See note below the table.	60	7
E. Methodology of the specific types of education including ways of integrating the knowledge and skills of children or pupils	E.1 Methodology of teaching Polish	60	57
	E.2 Methodology of teaching a foreign language	60	
	E.3 Methodology of teaching Mathematics	60	
	E.4 Methodology of teaching social and environmental education	45	
	E.5 Methodology of teaching and use of information and communication technology	45	
	E.6 Methodology of teaching art	45	
	E.7 Methodology of teaching music	45	
	E.8 Methodology of teaching handcrafts	30	
	E.9 Methodology of teaching physical education	60	
	E.10. Methodology of teaching health education	30	
F. A child or pupil with specific developmental or educational needs in kindergarten and grades I-III of the primary school	* See note below the table.	120	14
G. Organisation of the work of the kindergarten and school with elements of educational law and children's rights, as well as the culture of the kindergarten and school, including with regard to the education of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities	* See note below the table.	60	7
H. Basics of educational diagnostics for teachers	* See note below the table.	60	7

Groups of activities in which specific learning outcomes are achieved	Contents		Number of hours	ECTS
I. Culture of language	* See note below the table.		60	7
J. Guided workplace experience	J.1. Mid-year practicum	J.1.1. General pedagogical practice	240, of which 30 hours general pedagogical practice	10
	J.2. Internship			
K. Research methodology	* See note below the table.		120	10
Total			**2,800**	**300**

Source: Authors' translation of the Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education, of July 25, 2019 (Ministry of Science and Higher Education 2019)

***Note**: Contents for these learning outcomes are not defined by the regulation, but specified by the qualification institution to ensure substantive and pedagogical preparation (psychological, pedagogical and didactic) for teaching in kindergarten or the first three grades of primary school.

The number of ECTS credits that may be obtained through training using distance learning methods and techniques may not exceed 25% of the number of ECTS credits necessary for graduation.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Currently, there are no alternative paths of entry into the ECEC teaching profession. However, due to staff shortages, various options are being considered, none of which are legally regulated to date.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Childcare sector

Caregivers can enter the profession with a variety of qualifications, but the majority of them (more than 70%) complete a specialist 280-hour training programme of which 80 hours have to be dedicated to practical training. There are no regulations that specifically define how practical training should be organised. Typically, trainees will work for a period of two weeks (five days a week, eight hours a day) in an ECEC setting which the training provider cooperates with, under the supervision of experienced Caregivers. During the practical training trainees may be required to keep practice diaries, complete observational charts or take part in meetings with the mentoring Caregiver to discuss specific issues. Sometimes, however, during the practical training the trainee only observes the work of experienced staff. Private and public training providers are required to submit detailed training programmes to the Ministry for accreditation. Some of these training programmes are organised online but the practicum requirement stays the same.

Education sector

Within the framework of the five-year Master's programme for prospective Kindergarten Teachers, a minimum of 240 hours organised workplace experience is a legal requirement. This is less than 10% of the time available for the degree programme; and the number of ECTS credits a student can earn for this practical training is 10 which is just over 3% of the total number of credits. Students' practicum sessions are carried out in three types of activities.

The first is the mid-year practicum. Its main objective is for the student to learn about the organisation of the kindergarten and school facilities. The specific practicum concept may vary depending on the university and the characteristics of the settings with which the university cooperates. Usually, however, the activities consist of a small group of students visiting the setting, talking with the staff about their roles in the setting, and observing classes. These visits can be accompanied by assignments agreed with the practicum coordinators from the university and the kindergarten (or primary school), e.g. observing and analysing the way in which classes are delivered.

The second type are general pedagogical practices which last up to 30 hours. This is a time when the student can learn about the work of other educational settings, e.g. the local community centre.

The third type of practicum is a full internship, which usually lasts for about two weeks (approx. 60 hours, although the number of hours is not legally specified). It may take place in one block or may be staggered across this time. During these internships, the students may conduct teaching activities independently on the basis of their lesson plans and these may be observed and discussed by a supervisor from the university; sometimes they also participate in meetings with parents. Students learn how to apply acquired knowledge, and to develop both pedagogical and social skills. Importantly, work placements may not be conducted using distance learning methods and techniques.

The quality of the initial professional education of Kindergarten and Primary School Teachers is monitored by the Ministry of Education and Science (*Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki*).

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Legislation/regulation: The legislation treats the professional development of ECEC professionals working with children up to the age of 3 and children from 3 up to 6 years very differently. Current legislation relating to the **childcare sector** does not refer in any way to the professional development of Caregivers and time for in-service training is not guaranteed as part of Caregivers' contracts. Nevertheless, in some cases they may have the opportunity to participate during working hours with financial support from the service provider. In both the public and private sectors, this issue is the responsibility of the lead authority (municipality or private owner/provider). The decision whether participation in the training is obligatory or optional is taken at the municipality level for the public settings and by the owners of the facilities for the private ones. If training is mandatory, its cost is covered by municipalities in the public sector and owners in the private sector; if it is not obligatory, the cost is usually covered by professionals.

As the priority related to meeting the accessibility of settings is met in a growing number of municipalities (also due to the demographic decline), the issue of monitoring, evaluation and

improving the quality of services is increasingly being raised among professionals and decision-makers.

The national legislation regulating rights and duties of Kindergarten Teachers and school teachers in the public **education sector** concerning continuing professional development is the *Teacher's Charter* (26 January 1982). The document secures financial resources for CPD at different levels of the education system. At the national level, the Minister of Education is obligated to provide funding equal to the salaries of 5,000 average trainees (the lowest level in the teacher's career advancement process) and to distribute this accordingly. The same amount and its allocation rule applies at the voivodeship level. Moreover, at the municipality level funding equal to 1% of planned annual expenditure earmark for teachers' salaries has to be secured for CPD activities and distribution of these means has to be consulted with the Teachers' Unions.

Main forms: For *Caregivers,* various different forms of professional development are available, e.g. courses or conferences on the open market, often provided online, on a limited-time basis. In municipalities that manage a large number of nurseries/crèches, they are often organised into a network which supports professional development initiatives based on internally developed strategies. For example, in 2020 in Warsaw, where the network includes around 80 public settings, a professional development strategy has been introduced that makes extensive use of the organisation's staff resources. As part of an annual training cycle, network staff with specific competences share their knowledge and experiences with other professionals in the organisation. Another example is an initiative undertaken by the public crèche network in Łódź, which cooperates with universities in the city. Depending on the needs of the staff, different specialists organise training meetings for practitioners. In addition, these two largest crèche networks organise national (often including international speakers) conferences enabling all stakeholders to learn about the latest trends, policies and research findings in ECEC.

CPD for *Kindergarten Teachers* is usually organised as one- or two-day activities such as courses, workshops or conferences.

CPD providers: Despite the lack of legislative solutions to support the professional development of Caregivers in the **childcare sector**, there is a growing number of organisations, mainly private firms, offering various forms of in-service training for this professional group. However, there is no reliable information on the quality of the support they offer. As a result, accreditation of pre-service training programs is the only regulation ensuring quality in the professional preparation of Caregivers.

In the **education sector**, the Centre for the Development of Education (*ORE – Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji MEN*) is a public teacher training establishment with a nationwide reach run by the Minister of National Education and Science. Moreover, there are between a dozen and several dozen accredited, public and non-public centres of teacher's professional development in each Voivodeship offering diverse programmes also specifically designed for Kindergarten Teachers. Many teachers also benefit from in-service training programmes funded by the EU.

Leave entitlement: *Caregivers,* due to the lack of time allocated to professional development activities under their contracts, and in the current context of staff shortages, have very limited (in some cases none) opportunities to participate in training sessions during working hours. The situation is slightly better for facility leaders, who, because of the little or no time they spend directly working with children, have more opportunities in this regard.

Kindergarten Teachers are granted 15 hours per week for non-teaching tasks, which also include participation in professional development activities. It is up to the Kindergarten Director to decide how much time is allocated specifically for CPD as well as whether participation is obligatory or optional. Occasionally, the need for specific training in a particular area is decided by author-

ities at the voivodeship or national level; in such cases participation is obligatory for all professionals. Such CPD sessions are usually held when new legislation or new regulations are introduced, e.g. regarding the organisation of activities in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Costs of all obligatory forms of training are covered through the national subsidy. Professionals in the public sector may also claim partial or complete reimbursement of costs of optional training from this subsidy. Decisions on reimbursement are dependent on the recommendation of the Director (whether the setting benefits from having an employee with such training) and at the municipal level (whether the available subsidy is sufficient to allocate resources for such a purpose). In some private settings owners of facilities also provide such support for employees; however, this is not a common practice. Similar rules for participation in CPD apply to Directors and Specialised Support Staff. Teacher's Aides working under the rules of the Labour Code and not under the Teachers' Charter, have barely any options to take part in any training.

Contents: Regarding the content of in-service programmes, the decisions may be taken at all levels of the system. Concerning the Kindergarten Teachers, a specific course may be recommended by the Ministry of National Education – Teacher's Charter (1982) Voivodeship Superintendent, the municipality educational supervisor, or be chosen by the Kindergarten Director. Individual teachers may also apply to attend a particular CPD activity within working hours and for (co-)financing to the director of the setting. Many of the training proposals and offers are related to the current geopolitical and pandemic situation. Training offers on distance learning (both related to the technical operation of computer programmes as well as distance learning methodologies) and dealing with the challenging situation of children forced into isolation due to COVID-19 and the social, emotional, physical and cognitive consequences of this situation are proposed closer to the market. Moreover, in connection with the huge wave of refugees from Ukraine who have come to Poland in the context of the Russian invasion of their country, there have been some proposals in recent months for training on supporting children struggling with trauma in a broad sense.

Career advancement: Participation in CPD is not explicitly or formally recognised in terms of the career advancement of Kindergarten Teachers. However, it contributes favourably towards promotion. The promotion of teachers is regulated by the Teacher's Charter specifying three categories in the teaching career: (1) novice teacher, (2) appointed teacher, and (3) certified teacher. All promotions are regulated by law (Ministry of Education and Science 2022). In general, in order to be promoted to a higher grade, a teacher should hold the required qualifications, complete a "probationary period" (the period preceding an application for promotion) and receive a positive assessment of his/her professional achievements during this period (the teacher follows an individual professional development plan during the probation period) and have his/her application for promotion approved by a so-called qualifying board or, in the case of a contract teacher, pass an oral examination before an examination board. This process aims to motivate teachers in their personal and professional development and thus, additionally, to improve the quality of educational institutions.

Research: There is no research or monitoring practice investigating the effectiveness of CPD and its impact on the daily work of kindergartens.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

The rules for calculating the salary and its amount for a Caregiver and a Kindergarten Teacher differ considerably. In general, Kindergarten Teachers earn more and their income is similar to that of primary school teachers. With regard to both professions, the sector in which the core practitioners work (whether private or public) also makes a difference (in favour of the private sector).

An additional and very important factor is the location. Those working in large metropolitan areas tend to have higher earnings, especially in kindergartens. However, regardless of all the characteristics mentioned, independent living off earnings, especially for a Caregiver, may be very challenging and in big cities barely possible.

Caregivers in crèches and kids' clubs and day care provision

Caregivers in the public sector are considered municipality employees, and therefore their salaries depend on the municipality regulations. Remuneration usually starts at the lowest domestic amount. In 2023, this was PLN 3,490 gross salary (PLN 2,709.48 net salary) (The Council of Ministers 2022), which in euros amounts to approximately €784,75 (gross) and €609,24 (net)[6]. It is also typical that municipality employees receive various types of benefits, e.g. "thirteenth salary", or Christmas bonuses. The salaries of municipal employees are made public.

Private sector: Salaries, bonuses and allowances vary widely. Contract arrangements often depend on the level of pre-service training, qualifications and experience. Earnings are usually an internal arrangement between the employer and the employee and are not published.

Nanny

A Nanny's salary depends on the arrangement made between the parents and the Nanny. Typically, it depends on her/his professional background but also on the availability and scope of duties that is expected. Parents can apply for a subsidy of up to 50% of the minimum social security contribution of the nanny they employ.

Kindergarten Teachers

Public sector: Teachers' salaries consist of several components: basic salary, remuneration for overtime and substitute hours, awards and other benefits resulting from the employment contract, e.g. motivation or position.

The level of the basic salary and some of the bonuses are determined at the national level but some of the components including the motivational bonus which in some settings may be quite high, are determined at the municipal level. Detailed information on the rules for calculating teachers' salaries in the public sector is included in the Teacher's Charter (Ministry of National Education 1982), and some additional executive regulations. Most of all, salaries depend on the level achieved within the teaching career. From September 2022, the former four-stage promotion system has been replaced by a three-stage system. The following basic salaries were allocated for each stage from 2023 (gross salary): (Ministry of Education and Science 2023).

Novice teacher – PLN 3,690 (approximately €830)

Appointed teacher – PLN 3,890 (approximately €875)

Certified teacher – PLN 4,550 (approximately €1,023).

[6] Conversion rate Juni 2023

Private sector: Teachers' salaries are paid in accordance with the Labour Code. Usually teachers in the private earn more than in the public sector; however, their contracts typically foresee more contact hours.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

There are no overall data on full-time or part-time employment in crèches and kindergartens. However, taking into account the specifics of the Polish labour market, it can be hypothesised that the vast majority of Caregivers and Teachers work full-time.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

There is no regulation regarding support for professionals starting careers in settings for the youngest children. Both public and private facilities use individually elaborated strategies in this respect. In kindergartens, novice teachers are assigned a mentor (Appointed or Certified Teacher chosen by the Director) during the first stage of work. This experienced professional is responsible for monitoring and supporting their work. A teacher who is assigned to this role receives a bonus amounting up to 20% of the minimum rate of the teacher's basic salary, taking into account their level of education and degree of professional advancement.

7.4 Non-contact time

According to the Labour Code, full-time Caregivers work eight hours a day, 40 hours a week. If Caregivers can devote part of their working time to other tasks not related to the direct care of children, these are individual cases resulting from specific arrangements with the employer (public or private).

In the public sector, Kindergarten Teachers working with groups of 3, 4 and 5 year-olds are with the children 25 hours a week, and those working with 6 year-olds (the only compulsory kindergarten year intended as a preparatory year for school) for 22 hours. Given that full-time is 40 hours per week, they have 15 and 18 non-contact hours respectively per week. In the private sector, in most kindergartens teachers work 35-40 hours a week with the children.

7.5 Current staffing issues

The current workforce situation in ECEC is problematic. In private and public settings in both the childcare and the education sector, there is a shortage of qualified staff and staff turnover is high. The situation is slightly better in smaller cities, where the labour market is less flexible and career changes are more difficult. The fact that teachers are ageing is also an issue as the average age of a teacher is 47 years (this figure represents the average age of teachers at all stages of education in the country). There are many reasons for this challenging situation, among which the most frequently mentioned are low salaries, the low prestige of the profession (especially in the case of Caregivers), difficult working conditions and pressure due to parents' demanding attitude. In addition, new regulations requiring prospective teachers to complete a unified five-year degree discourage young people from choosing this career path.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

In recent years, there have been no significant changes in the legislation regarding the professionalisation of Caregivers or other staff in provisions for children aged 0–2 years – unlike the sector for older children, where regulations concerning minimum level of pre-service training have been changed as well as career progression paths and salary levels at different career stages. Currently, a unified Master's degree programme is the basic requirement for the initial professional education/training of Kindergarten Teachers, a degree programme that also qualifies for working in the first three grades of primary school. This means that Kindergarten Teachers are entitled to work with children from the age of 20 weeks up to 10 years (as mentioned in earlier chapters of the report, preschool and lower primary school teachers are entitled to work in creches and kinds' clubs). Teachers who have a degree at a lower level do not lose their teaching credentials; they are encouraged (but so far not required) to supplement their education by pursuing individual study paths in Master's programmes for which the subjects completed in the Bachelor's degree are automatically credited and the study takes less time to complete. From September 2022, the career progression path for teachers is also changing. The previous four-stage procedure has been replaced by a three-stage procedure (the first two stages have been merged). Salaries for entry-level teachers have also been increased (junior and senior teachers' salaries are now more differentiated). One more change was to increase and clarify the qualifications of professionals entitled to teach English in kindergartens.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

The professional situation of Caregivers and Kindergarten Teachers is not a frequent topic of research in Poland. However, statistical data on professionals' backgrounds is systematically collected by the Ministry of Education and Science as well as the Central Statistical Office, which gives a general overview of the situation of the workforce in the ECEC sector (e.g. age, education, sector) – see *Chapter **3**.*

Below three projects are highlighted which were carried out in recent years involving Polish ECEC professionals, focusing on their work and professional development.

Professional development tools supporting participation rights in early childhood education – PARTICIPA

Source: Correia, N. et al. 2020; Wysłowska, O. et al. 2021; PARTICIPA 2022 (see *References* for further detail).

Countries involved: Portugal (project lead: Polytechnic Institute of Porto); Belgium (Odisee); Greece (Hellenic Open University), Poland (University of Warsaw).

Funded by Erasmus+; Grant Agreement No. 2019-1-PT01-KA202-060950)

Aims: To develop four independent but complementary professional development resources: Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), self-assessment tool designed to support teachers, assistants, and coordinators. The tools are intended to strengthen ECEC teachers', assistants', and

coordinators' knowledge on children's right to participate, their positive attitudes regarding the design, implementation, and monitoring of practices that promote children's participation, ability to identify, design, implement, and monitor practices that enhance children's right to participate and ability to work together. The resources are designed to work at multiple levels of the ECEC centre, to identify, use, and sustain the individual and organisational resources needed to increase children's participation.

Procedure: Over 100 ECEC professionals (ECEC teachers, assistants, coordinators) from Belgium, Greece, Poland and Portugal participated in focus groups, questionnaires, individual online and telephone interviews to discuss professional development tools. Another 100 ECEC professionals from the four countries explored the feasibility of the tools by taking part in classroom observations (CLASS pre-k; Involvement and Well-being Leuven Scale, Children Participation Scale) and completing questionnaires.

Selected findings/Implications:

- Involvement of ECEC professionals in the development of PD tools should be integrated into the tool design process from the initial stage of the work, since professionals have specific opinions on what and how they would prefer particular contents to be delivered.
- PD tools for ECEC staff should take into account the different responsibilities of professionals in different positions and structural conditions, since professionals seem to be very sensitive to the adequacy of PD tools for their scope of responsibilities.
- The structure of the tools should allow professionals to use them in a flexible manner (individually vs team) and take into account the diverse structural contexts in which ECEC professionals work (possibilities resulting from rural/urban location).
- Contextual support is a necessary condition for promoting child participation at the classroom and centre level.

Teaching for Holistic, Relational, and Inclusive Early Childhood Education – THRIECE

Source: Nowak-Łojewska, A. 2020; THRIECE 2022 (see *References* for further details)
Countries involved: Ireland (Marino Institute of Education – leader, Dublin), Portugal (University of Porto) and Poland (University of Gdansk); six ECEC facilities (two per country).
Funded by Erasmus + fund -Agreement 2017-1-IE01-KA201-025698

Aims: Elaboration of three online training modules for ECEC and primary school professionals on an alternative view on quality in ECEC that supports inclusion through recognition of the crucial nature of relationships and interactions based on three pillars:

- Holistic education: emphasising the interrelatedness of domains of development, drawing on children's own talents, emotions, cultures, and interests
- Inclusive education: Supporting sociocultural diversity and inclusion, and opposing exclusive, standardised perspectives and methods
- Relational education: Identifying positive interactions and relationships is more important for measuring quality in ECEC than narrow numerical indicators.

Procedure: Triangulation of methods and data (interview, observation, document analysis, etc.). The study used statements of the respondent teachers and children in three preschools, three primary school and four HEIs, observations from meetings and classes, photographs, art works made by the children, and videos. Action research – to discern the current situation in the education of ECEC and early school children, to see the shortcomings, to take action (three pillars holism, relationality, inclusion), with concern for the contribution of theory to practice.

Selected findings: Elaboration in three languages (Polish, English, Portuguese) of three online free of charge training modules:

- Holistic education (supporting children's development in the cognitive sphere: thinking, speaking, creating strategies; emotional: interests, coping with stress, joy of creation; social: cooperation, group communication, conflict resolution)
- Inclusive education (transcending cultural prejudices; popularising inclusive practices, the "Other" is seen as interesting, worth knowing)

- Relational education (the quality of relationships and interactions for children's learning and development, developing empathy, assertiveness, expression, cooperation).

Baby on the net (*brzdąc w sieci*) – the phenomenon of mobile device use among children aged 0–6 years

Source: Rowicka and Bujalski 2021 (see *References* for further details)

Funded by the Polish Ministry of Health (Programme: Scientific, epidemiological research, monitoring, evaluation – supporting scientific research on behavioural addictions as well as tackling the problems associated with them).

Aims: The aim of the survey was to identify the phenomenon of mobile device use by children aged 0–6 years and their parents and to diagnose the risks associated with pre-school children's (and their parents') device use.

Procedure: The study was carried out in a mixed design, consisting of a qualitative and a quantitative part. The qualitative research involved eight group interviews with parents and eight interviews with children aged 5–6 years. To diversify the sample, the qualitative research was conducted in five locations (Warsaw, Tricity-Gdansk, Sopot, Gdynia and Krakow).

A total of 48 parents and 60 children participated in the qualitative study. The quantitative survey was conducted on a representative sample of 2,000 parents of children aged 0–6 years.

Selected findings: The survey found that more than half of children aged 0 to 6 years (54%) use mobile devices such as a smartphone, tablet, smartwatch or laptop. The age of the child is correlated with mobile device use. The older the children, the more of them use mobile devices: this is the case for three out of four children aged between 48 and 72 months. The average age of initiation of mobile device use is 2 years and 2 months. Most children use mobile devices that access the internet (are online) (75%). Children aged 0 to 6 years use mobile devices for more than one hour per day on average. The majority only use content aimed at children (films, cartoons, games, colouring books, etc.) (88%). Almost three out of four children aged 0 to 6 use mobile devices while travelling by car (or other means of transport), one in two during meals and one in nine during the toilet. More than half of parents allow their child to use mobile devices when they spend time with them. Almost two-thirds of parents give their child a mobile device as a reward. Just over 80% of parents give their child a mobile device when children are bored and two-thirds of parents give their child a mobile device when children cry or fuss.

Implications: The results of the research indicate the need to raise awareness among parents of children in kindergarten about the risks associated with the use of digital devices by the youngest children. Supporting parents to spend time with their children in a more varied way is conducive to developing their relationships and communication skills without the mediation of electronic devices.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Currently, the Polish early childhood education and care system faces a number of workforce challenges. Here three will be outlined which particularly demand attention due to their potentially far-reaching consequences.

1. **Staff shortage and staff turnover**. The low level of salaries, the low social prestige of the profession, unstable working conditions, e.g. regarding frequent changes in the organisation of the education system, are the reasons for the increasing staff shortages and staff turnover. It is a significant issue throughout the country (especially in large cities), and in both the private and public sectors.
2. **Lack of social inclusion specialists**. Due to the huge number of refugees from Ukraine who have been in Poland since February 2022 (the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine), professionals have been confronted with numerous new tasks related to the integration of new residents, both children and their families, often after extremely traumatic experiences. Until this time, Poland had a low percentage of children with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds; now, in this completely different situation, there is a lack of professionals to shape integration policy, but above all a lack of effective support for professionals in their daily work.
3. **Intricacy of legislation and recommendations**. The work of professionals in early childhood education and care centres is regulated by a number of institutions (e.g. educational, sanitation, health) operating at different levels (national, provincial, municipal). In combination with increasing bureaucratic requirements, this creates very frustrating working conditions for teachers, is the cause of misunderstandings and, in some situations, prevents professionals from carrying out their tasks. For example, recommendations from psychologists and nutritionists clearly indicate the benefits of children and caregivers eating together, whereas through some municipal regulations this is prohibited in many public settings.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

POLAND

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC provision are **nursery/crèche** (*żłobek*, 0–2/3), **kindergarten** (*przedszkola,* 2½/3–6) and **pre-primary class/group** (5–6/7)[1] in schools (*oddziały przedszkolne w szkołach podstawowych*). Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Poland

Early 20th century	First kindergartens established
1919	The term *kindergarten* is used for the first time during the Nation Education Reunion (Teachers' Parliament)
1932	The term *kindergarten* is included in the Act on School Education.
1940s	Expansion of provision following increased entry in the labour market by women
1961	First Act on School Education issued – aims of early childhood education and basis for curriculum
1970s	Expansion of early education for 6 year-olds (introduction of reading elements, emphasis on preparation for primary school)
1991	Amendments to Act on School Education
1990–1993	Following the political changes, responsibilities for kindergartens are delegated to the municipalities.
Up to 1995	Many ECEC settings are closed down.
1999	Further amendments to Act on School Education – reforms focus on schools.
2008	– Early education reform starts – new curriculum for pre-primary education – Introduction of alternative forms of provision: pre-primary education hubs, kids' clubs, playgroups
2009	Entitlement to a place in kindergarten or pre-primary class introduced for 5 year-olds
2011	– Kindergarten enrolment made compulsory for 5 year-olds and attending a pre-primary class for 6 year-olds – Act on Care for Children up to the age of 3 comes into force. – Responsibility for provision for under 3 year-olds transferred from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Family, Employment and Social Affairs.
2013	Five hours in kindergarten are free of charge for parents; additional hours may not cost more than approx. €0.22 per hour.
2015	Entitlement to a place in kindergarten or pre-primary group introduced for 4 year-olds.
2016	Parents are entitled to decide at what age their child starts school (6 or 7).
2017	– Entitlement to a kindergarten place introduced for 3 year-olds – New Act on School Education (*Prawo oświatowe*) comes into force, with revised curricula for kindergarten and pre-primary education and confirmation that in justified cases children may be enrolled from the age of 2½ years.

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4, and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In Poland the relevant formats are **0–2/3** and **2½/3–5** years and **6–7** years, since primary school may start at age 6 or 7, depending on parental choice.

2021	The ministries for National Education and for Research and Higher Education are merged and renamed as the Ministry of Education and Science.

Sources: Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010; Ślusarczyk et al. 2018; Eurydice 2023; OpenLex 2023.

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

The system of early childhood education and care in Poland is organised in two separate sectors. Childcare settings for children under 3 years of age come under the Ministry of Family and Social Policy (*Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej*, MFSP 2020). ECEC settings for children from 3 years to school entry at the age of 7 are considered the first stage of the school system and are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science (*Ministerstwa Edukacji i Nauki*) (MES 2021). The municipalities (*gmina*) are responsible for the management, maintenance, equipment and administration of ECEC facilities in both sectors. Monitoring and evaluation of pedagogical work of settings for younger children is also carried out at the municipal level; for pre-primary education settings, they take place at both the voivodeship (province) and municipality levels.

General objectives and legislative framework

The most important legislation regarding the **childcare sector** is the "Act on Care for Children under the age of 3" (MFSP 2011 with amendments up to 2023). It indicates that the roles of settings are: care, upbringing and education, nevertheless highlighting the custodial aspects, providing meals and rest times, age appropriate indoor and outdoor activities and health and hygiene. The "Act for Entrepreneurs" (2018) describes the infrastructure and sanitation requirements for nurseries and kids´ clubs. Hygiene and Sanitation Guidelines, updated in 2020, also apply.

For kindergartens/**pre-primary education**, the Act on School Education (*Prawo oświatowe*, 2016) and the accompanying regulations have applied since September 2017. Among other things, these formed the framework for the admission of 2½ year-old children to kindergartens. Overarching goals in the early education of children aged 3 and above are described in the national core curriculum which has been in force from the 2017/18 school year and the relevant Ministry of National Education and Science guidance and regulations (Gazette of the Republic of Poland 2017) as supporting and promoting the intellectual, emotional, social, creative and aesthetic dimensions of children's development; fostering values; and learning a foreign language. Furthermore, supporting children from minority groups concerning only the minorities defined in the Act on national and ethnic minorities (Ministry of the Interior and Administration 2005) and those with special educational needs are mentioned.

Besides the Education Act (*Ustawa o systemie oświaty*, 1991 with amendments up to 2022), which is the main document framing the work of kindergartens (MES 2022), key legislation relating to the working conditions, rights and obligations of professionals is the Teachers' Charter (*Ustawa o Karta Nauczyciela*, 1982 with amendments up to 2014, Ministry of National Education 1982).

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Poland provided orientation on legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

There is no legal entitlement or obligation for children up to the age of 3 to attend an ECEC setting.

Since 2017, 3 to 7 year-olds have a legal right to a place in an ECEC setting for at least 25 hours per week. Attendance is voluntary for 3 to 5 year-olds whereas for 6 year-olds, attendance at a kindergarten or pre-primary class at school has been compulsory since 2017. The legal entitlement was introduced on a staggered basis: in 2009 for 5 year-olds, in 2015 for 4 year-olds and in 2017 for 3 year-olds.

Priority admission to kindergarten is given to: a child from a large family, with disabilities, whose parents or siblings are persons with disabilities, who is being brought up by only one parent, who is being brought up in a foster family. In addition, each municipality may set additional criteria, which may be based on local social needs.

In recent years, there have been a number of changes to the starting age of primary schooling. Currently, primary school starts at age 7. Since December 2015, attendance has been compulsory for 7 year-olds but optional for 6 year-olds. Parents can apply for an earlier start, provided the child has attended kindergarten for at least one year (Ślusarczyk et al. 2018, 43). This means that, since January 2016, parents can decide whether their 6 years old child should remain in kindergarten or attend school. Most parents decide to enrol their children for school when they are 7 years old.

Main types of provision

Childcare sector

Since 2011, municipalities are legally in a position to provide **four** different options for children up to 3 years of age. However, the following types of setting are not a requirement and their provision depends on the local needs and resources.

Nurseries/crèches (*żłobki*) admit children from 20 weeks up to 3 years of age. Children may attend crèches for a maximum of ten hours per day, however this time may be extended in justified cases, which requires submission of an application by a parent. One Caregiver may look after for up to eight children between 1 and 3 years, and five if children under 1 year or with special needs are enrolled. Group size depends on the amount of square meters available. Children may be enrolled up to the end of the school year in which they turn 3 years, meaning that some 4 year-olds also attend the settings. Most children are between 2 and 3 years of age.

Kids' clubs (*klub dziecięcy*) may accept up to 30 children who have to be at least 1 years old.

These two types of facilities, which have a care, upbringing and educational function, must be registered in a municipal register and come under the supervision of the respective municipality. This applies to both public and private settings. They also need positive assessments from fire and health authorities. The availability of places varies greatly from region to region.

Day care providers (*dzienny opiekun*) were originally a form of home-based provision and are now becoming increasingly centre-based. In principle, this form of care was supposed to be more informal, comprising groups of five children (upon parental agreement eight children) from 1 up to 3 years of age or groups of three children when a child below the age of 1 or with special educational needs attends. However, due to lower requirements than in the case of crèches and kids' clubs with regard to pre-service education/training of Caregivers and the structural conditions of operation, facilities that combine several day care providers in one space are increasingly common. In 2021, 1,637 such providers supplied 10,131 places (CoM 2022, 12).

A **nanny** (*niania*) may also be employed by parents in their own home for children aged 20 weeks and above. Salary and social security are paid by the parents, who receive partial reimbursements from the Social Insurance institution (Gov.pl 2023). By the end of 2021, there were 4,900 nannies whose employment was co-financed from the state budget (CoM 2022, 18).

Overall, although the number of settings for under 3 year-olds has increased significantly over the past ten years, in 2021 only just over half of the municipalities had such facilities, and especially in rural municipalities there are usually fewer (36%).

According to national statistics, there were a total of 5,304 ECEC settings for under 3 year-olds in 2022. These included 4,446 nurseries and 858 kids' clubs (GUS 2023b, 1) and, in 2021, 1,637 home- and centre-based day care providers (see *Table 1*), with the greater majority of children attending nurseries. This means that over the past ten years, the number of childcare settings for under 3 year-olds has increased immensely, rising by more than 700% between 2012 and 2021 (CoM 2022, 12, own calculations). Most of these facilities are open between 5 and 10 hours.

Table 1

Poland: Number of childcare settings for children up to 3 years of age, from 2012-2022

Type of childcare setting	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020	2021	2022*
Nurseries/ crèches	791	1,667	2,272	3,155	3,985	4,270	4,446
Kids' clubs	105	384	515	676	795	831	858
Day care provider (home- and centre-based)	30	442	664	1,249	1,576	1,637	
Total	**926**	**2,493**	**3,451**	**5,080**	**6,356**	**6,738**	

Source: CoM 2022, 12, *GUS 2023b, 1

Education sector

There are **four** types of provision available for 3 to 7 year-olds and, in justified cases, for 2½ year-olds (OpenLex 2023).

Kindergarten (*przedszkola)* is the regular form of provision for 3 to 6 or 7 year-olds, with 1,249,173 children enrolled in 13,756 settings in 2022/23 including 7,486 children with disabilities in 350 special education kindergartens (GUS 2023a). Facilities are open all year round, usually for nine hours a day (public settings often have a two-week holiday break when children may be referred to other settings). Same-age groups are the most common form of grouping children in kindergartens, although mixed-age groups may be found in rural areas or in private settings where there are not enough children to form homogenous age groups or because of the pedagogical approach adopted. The children are grouped according to age and sex (mostly in single sex groups); 3 year-olds, sometimes 2½ year-olds (group 1); 4 year-olds (group 2); 5 year-olds (group 3); 6 year-olds (group 4). The final year for 6 year-olds may be organised in primary school and in this case it is called a pre-primary class/group. However, it is organised with same structural characteristics as a group 4 in kindergarten.

Pre-primary/kindergarten units in primary schools (*oddziały przedszkolne w szkołach podstawowych*) are an obligatory form of provision for 6 to 7 year-olds. This one year of preparatory pre-primary provision may be organised in kindergarten or primary school. In 2022/23, 260,235 children were enrolled in 7,305 settings (GUS 2023a). In kindergartens such units usually operate five days a week all year round, whereas in primary schools they follow the regular school year.

Two further forms of ECEC are available, but they are relatively rare:

Pre-primary centres (*punkty przedszkolne*), with a total of 1,399 settings serving 24,140 children in 2022/23; and **Pre-primary education units** (*zespóły wychowania przedszkolnego*), with a total of 45 units serving 664 children (GUS 2023a).

Both types admit a maximum number of 25 children. Mostly they are organised according to different sets of structural regulations or according to simplified criteria in rural regions with limited resources. Pre-primary education units are usually open for at least three hours per day and 12 hours per week. A pre-primary centre, on the other hand, implements activities on all workdays of the week throughout the school year, except for breaks set by the responsible authority. The basic criterion that distinguishes the two forms is the frequency of classes. Opening hours are flexible, depending on local needs, the needs of parents and the number of children.

Alternative forms of pre-primary education have become increasingly popular, e.g. forest, farm or foreign language settings (Ślusarczyk et al. 2018, 66).

According to national statistics, in 2022/23 there were a total of 22.505 ECEC settings for children over 3 years of age (GUS 2023a), though an increasing number of 3 year-olds attend settings in the childcare sector. Currently, the demand for places exceeds the available supply.

Provider structures

Childcare sector

Nurseries/crèches and kids' clubs are mostly run by private individuals and organisations. In 2022, there were 4,446 nurseries in Poland, 25,2% of which were public settings providing approximately 40% of all places (indicating that non-public settings are smaller: on average 31 places in private and 61 in public nurseries). Only 18.1% (155) of kids' clubs were run by municipalities (*gmina*). Most (66.2%) of non-public nurseries and kids' clubs were run by legal persons and entities; in the public sector, local governments provided the largest number of nurseries and kids' clubs (96.8%) GUS 2023b, 1, 2).

Education sector

The administration and organisation of kindergartens is usually the responsibility of the municipalities, which must ensure that sufficient places are available for children aged 3 years and older. In the event that a municipality has a shortage of places in public facilities, it can make a request to private providers and give them subsidies equal to the public fees.

In 2022/23, 52.2% (7,181) of the 13,756 kindergartens were run by municipalities, county governments or provincial self-government units (GUS 2023a). In 2021/22, 36.2% (4.884) were owned by private non-profit providers, 6.1% (825) by commercial companies and 3.4% (457) by religious organisations (GUS 2022, own calculation).

Table 2

Poland: Number of children in kindergartens and pre-primary settings for 3 to 6/7 year-olds, 2022/23

	Settings	Children
Kindergartens	13,756	1,472,572
	Of which public: 7,181*	*Of which public:* 847,224*
Of which special kindergartens	350	7,486
Pre-primary hubs	1,399	24,140
Pre-primary group in kindergarten	45	664

	Settings	Children
Pre-primary units in primary schools	7,305	260,235
Total	**22,505**	**1,534,212**

Source: GUS 2023a, *Own calculations

Participation rates in regulated ECEC settings

According to Eurostat data, in the past it was unusual for children under 3 years of age to be enrolled in an ECEC setting. In 2022, only 15.9% of under 3 year-olds attended a centre-based setting, but even this represents an eight-fold increase compared to 2005.

Of children between the ages of 3 and school entry, enrolment rates more than doubled, with 62.8% attended an ECEC setting in 2022 compared to only 30% in 2005.

Table 3

Poland: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2005–2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	0	8
	Over 30 hours	2	22
	No enrolment in ECEC	98	70
2010	1 to 29 hours	0	10
	Over 30 hours	2	32
	No enrolment in ECEC	98	58
2015	1 to 29 hours	1.1	7.5
	Over 30 hours	4.2	35.5
	No enrolment in ECEC	94.6	57.0
2022	1 to 29 hours	1.6	18.5
	Over 30 hours	14.3	44.3
	No enrolment in ECEC	84.2	37.2

Source: Eurostat 2023b, slight deviations from 100% due to rounding

Childcare sector

In kids' clubs and nurseries/crèches, children up to the age of 1 were the smallest group (1.2%), followed by the oldest ones from 3 years of age (5.9%) and those from 1 to 2 years of age (39,7%). The largest group of children attending kids' clubs and nurseries/crèches were children aged 2–3 years (53.2%) (GUS 2023b, 2).

Table 4

Poland: Number and enrolment rates of children in nurseries/crèches, kids' clubs and day care provider settings, by age, 2022

Age	Number	Enrolment rate in %*
0 to 1 year-olds	2,156	0.7
1 to 2 year-olds	70,146	19.8
2 to 3 year-olds	94,116	25.1
Under 3 year-olds	**166,418**	**15.8**

Age	Number	Enrolment rate in %*
3 to 4 year-olds	10,447	2.7
	176,865	**9.6**

Source: GUS 2023b, 2 *calculated according Eurostat population data 2022

The number of enrolments in ECEC settings for under 3 year-olds has been steadily growing over the last few years. Nurseries/crèches provided about 178,537 care places, which accounted for about 87.2% of all available places. In addition, a total of approximately 4,900 Nannies were enrolled in health insurance at the end of 2021 (CoM 2022, 18).

Education sector

In 2022/23, 94.9% (GUS 2023a) of children aged 3–6 years participated in various forms of pre-primary education and there were 22,505 registered ECEC facilities, attended by 1,534,212 children. However, participation rates across the country vary substantially from 85% to 95%, depending on the region (GUS 2023a).

Of all children attending ECEC settings in 2022/23, 80.9% were enrolled in a kindergarten and 19.1% in the various other types of preparatory pre-primary facilities (see *Table 5*).

Table 5

Poland: Number of children in ECEC settings by age, 2022/23

Age	Kinder-garten	Pre-primary hub	Pre-primary group in kindergarten	Pre-primary class in school	Total
Under 2 years	21,642	771	16	1,769	24,262
3 year-olds	278,984	6,822	223	28,597	315,542
4 year-olds	320,593	7,683	234	41,957	372,023
5 year-olds	337,324	5,561	164	63,181	407,861
6 year-olds	276,292	2,514	24	120,496	401,327
7 year-olds and above	6,852	789	3	4,235	13,197
Total	**1,241,687**	**24,140**	**664**	**260,235**	**1,534,212**
Proportion of children attending specific types of ECEC setting*	80.9%	1.6%	0.04%	17.0%	

Source: GUS 2023a, *own calculations

Age-related enrolment rates according to Eurostat data are shown in *Table 6*. Almost all 5 and 6 year olds attend an ECEC setting, although attendance is only compulsory for 6 year-olds.

Table 6

Poland: Number and enrolment rates of children in ECEC settings, by age, 2021

Age	Number of children	Enrolments rates in %
2 year-olds	22,255	5.7
3 year-olds	309,097	76.2
4 year-olds	346,936	89.5
5 year-olds	360,509	96.3
6 year-olds	373,847	98.9

Source: Eurostat 2023h, I

However, in 2021/22, pre-primary education institutions were attended by a much larger proportion of children aged 3–5 years in urban areas (92.9%) than in rural areas (85.3%). The overall attendance rate was 89.7% (Eurydice 2023, 4.1).

Financing and costs for parents

In 2019, a total of 0.58% of GDP was spent on early education (OECD 2023). According to national statistics, in 2021, 3.7% of GDP was spent on education as a whole, roughly 18% of that for nursery schools and other pre-primary education settings (GUS 2022, 25).

Parents enrolling their children in an **ECEC setting for under 3 year-olds** have to pay a fee and cover the costs for meals. The exact costs are set by the municipality; in the case of private settings, the provider decides on the fees. In some municipalities, such as the city of Warsaw, some private settings are also subsidised and the costs for parents are the same as for the public ones. Fees are lower in the public sector than in the private sector. Since 2018, subsidies for settings providing for under 3 year-olds have also come from the Labour Market Fund.

The salary for a Nanny depends on the arrangement made with the parents. Typically, it depends on her/his professional background but also on the availability and scope of duties that is expected. Parents can apply for a subsidy of up to 50% of the minimum social security contribution of the Nanny they employ.

Kindergartens are financed through public subsidies. In public kindergartens, enrolment is free of charge for five hours a day. Additional hours and meals must be paid for. However, the municipality can determine how many hours are free of charge. Since October 2017, an additional hour may not cost more than PLN 1 (€0.22). Families with low incomes receive concessions. For 6 year-olds, attendance is free regardless of the number of hours. If the institution is more than 3 km from the place of residence, the municipality is obliged to provide free transport. Each municipality can decide on partial or total cost reductions.

Since 2016, child benefit (until the child is 18 years old) has also been granted at PLN 500 (€109.90) per month; in addition, there are various models of tax relief. Since 2019, child benefit is paid regardless of household income.

The costs for private kindergartens are significantly higher than for public institutions and vary greatly – between roughly €150 and €350 per month. They also charge an additional admission fee of €50 to €300. Meals are usually included, but costs of €2.50 to €5 per day for meals may still apply (Ślusarczyk et al. 2018, 66).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 5% of their net household income on childcare costs[3] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

In **nurseries** and **kids' clubs**, a maximum of eight children are cared for by one professional. If a child with special educational needs or a child under 1 year of age is among them, the group size is reduced to five. In nurseries with more than 20 children, at least one nurse or midwife is also employed, sometimes assisted by volunteer support staff.

Group size is only limited by the square meters available (in kids' clubs there may be a maximum of 30 children in the whole setting, even if the amount of space would allow for more). For the

[3] The calculation is based on the following fictitious model: two parents working full-time (average income); two 2- and 3-year-old children in full-time care; relevant care allowances included.

first five children 16 square meters are foreseen and it increases by at least 2 m^2 if the duration of the stay of the children does not exceed five hours per day, and by at least 2.5 m^2 if the duration of the stay exceeds five hours per day.

Since 2022/23, the legislation provides for an increase in the group size limits in **kindergartens** and **pre-primary units in primary schools** due to the large number of children from Ukraine. In primary schools the limit is 28 children, including three from Ukraine. In public ECEC settings there are two core practitioners per group, one working in the morning and the other in the afternoon (with about one hour of overlap in the middle of the day). In private settings very often only one teacher is responsible. In both public and private settings core practitioners are usually supported by auxiliary staff; their responsibilities are decided by the respective setting. In integrative settings, additional staff with a special education qualification work alongside the core practitioners. In most cases, children in ECEC settings are divided into same-age groups. However, mixed-age groups can also be formed – especially in rural areas when there are sometimes not enough children to set up same-age groups or due to the chosen pedagogical approach.

Curricular frameworks

Childcare sector

There is no national curriculum for work in nurseries and kids' clubs. Staff are expected to create a family-like atmosphere for children's play, with an emphasis on their psycho-motor development and working closely with parents. The Centre Leader is responsible for ensuring compliance with health and hygiene regulations and responding to parents' perspectives.

Recently, there has been increased interest in various methods of working with young children, also in settings for children up to 3 years of age. In the public debate, the topic of preparing an educational programme for establishments working with children under the age of 3 is increasingly being discussed, but no related requirements have as yet emerged. Publications on 'good practice' are on the increase. Due to the lack of legislation in this respect, some settings adapt standards for working with children developed by NGOs. One example is the 'Quality from the beginning' Standards of *educare* for 0–3 year-olds by the Comenius Foundation for Child Development (2019). This document provides the pedagogical framework for nearly 80 settings across Poland established by the Foundation under the SPYNKA program (www.spynka.org) to tackle the crises in ECEC sector resulting from the influx of Ukrainian families with children.

Education sector

All kindergartens follow the National Pre-Primary Education Curriculum (*Podstawa Programowa Wychowania Przedszkolnego dla przedszkoli oraz innych form wychowania przedszkolnego*) (MES 2013), issued by the regulation of the Minister of National Education (February 14, 2017) and the primary school core curriculum. The curricular framework also provides for children with intellectual disabilities (Gazette of the Republic of Poland 2017). Recommendations are provided for promoting the physical, emotional, social and cognitive development of children. 17 tasks of pre-primary education are defined, e.g. to create conditions that allow children to develop and play freely in a safe environment.

ECEC staff are required to develop their own centre-specific educational plan, using the national curricular framework as a reference point. The professionals have a free hand in the choice of methods.

Digital education

No guidelines for supporting digital competence are provided in the Polish national curricular framework for pre-primary education.

Monitoring – evaluation

In the pre-primary education sector in Poland, the term 'evaluation' has been replaced with the terms 'control' – here referred to as 'inspection'. This refers to both internal and external pedagogical supervision and assessment.

Child-related assessment

Assessment of process and pedagogical quality regarding the work with **under 3 year-olds** is not required by law. However, professionals consult with parents and provide information about their child on an ongoing basis).

According to the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 9 August 2017, professionals working with **over 3 year-olds** with special educational needs should keep records based on daily observations. These provide a basis for identifying specific developmental needs, collaborating with parents and cooperating with counselling and healthcare specialists (Ministry of National Education 2017). Otherwise there are no specific regulations for assessing children in kindergartens.

Professionals working with **6 year-old children** in all types of ECEC facilities are obliged to inform the parents in writing by the end of April about their child's 'readiness' for school. This document relates to the child's mastery of the requirements of the pre-primary curriculum in the physical, emotional, social and cognitive areas. It also includes a description of the degree of independence of each child, their developmental needs, predispositions, aptitudes and interests and any further comments the teacher finds important. Parents decide whether they want to share this information with the primary school staff.

Centre-based internal evaluation

There are no national regulations for internal self-evaluation measures in ECEC settings for **under 3 year-olds** (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 126), whereas in the larger municipalities self-evaluation measures are becoming more and more common.

Centre leaders in **kindergartens** are responsible for mandatory annual internal evaluations, both in terms of scope and subject matter. They are expected to review the alignment of the settings' educational plan with the National Curriculum and document this in an annual report. At the beginning of each school year, these supervision plans are presented to the Teachers' Council. Parents' views are also heard (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 128, 131). The results of internal evaluations are included in external evaluations and are intended to contribute to quality improvement. They are not published.

External Evaluation

Municipalities are responsible for the inspection and supervision in terms of organisation and operation of both public and private settings for **under 3 year-olds** (MFSP 2020). The focus is on the structural characteristics of the settings, namely compliance with legal regulations.

The Ministry of Education and Science and the regional education authorities (*kurator oświaty,* REA) are responsible for the professional supervision of all ECEC settings for **3 to 6 year-olds**

with regard to pedagogical aspects. The latter appoint inspectors from their ranks and carry out the inspections.

External inspection is based on legally defined criteria and take place both on a scheduled and ad-hoc basis. As a rule, documentation provided by the ECEC setting is inspected, an on-site visit takes place and a report is prepared. The choice of instruments (e.g. questionnaires, interviews, etc.) is left to the inspectors. According to the current Regulation (Gazette of the Republic of Poland 2021) there are two main areas of control (§ 22 p.2): (a) the teachers' compliance with the statutory provisions on teaching, upbringing and caring activities; (b) the educational and care processes in the school or ECEC institution and their effects.

The results of the external and internal inspections could provide a basis for monitoring quality in early education and initiating discussions on quality improvement.

Inclusion agenda

Children with disabilities and children with a background of migration are explicitly included in the National Pre-primary Education Curriculum (2017).

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

Children with special educational needs may attend either a mainstream setting or a special needs institution. In kindergartens, specific groups can also be created in which these children receive individual support. If necessary, the core curriculum can also be adapted to the respective needs of the children.

In 2022/23, there were 350 special kindergartens (approximately 2.5% of all kindergartens), attended by 7,486 children (approximately 0.9% of all children in kindergartens) (GUS 2023a). In 2022/23, 512 mainstream kindergartens provided integrative groups (3.7% of all kindergartens), 62 mainstream kindergartens had special groups (0.5%) and 45 mainstream kindergartens provided both integrative and special groups (2%) (Eurydice 2023). Children with disabilities who have a corresponding confirmation from a counselling centre can also attend special education facilities where they receive the necessary support.

During 2022, 1,600 children under 3 years with disabilities attended mainstream settings, which represents about 0.5% of this age group. More than a half (59.5%) of facilities for young children were equipped with amenities for children with disabilities (GUS 2023b, 1, 3, own calculation).

Children with a migration background – Children from Roma communities

Members of some national and ethnic minorities are guaranteed State support related to the preservation and development of their cultural identity. One of the requirements for inclusion among the minorities receiving State support is that their ancestors have lived in the present territory of the Republic of Poland for at least 100 years (Ministry of the Interior and Administration 2005). The recognised minorities include persons from Belarus, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Germany, Armenia, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Jewish persons. Persons of Karaite, Lemko, Romani and Tatar origin are considered ethnic minorities.

In 2022, only 1.2% of the total population had a non-Polish citizenship, with a large majority (91.9%) coming from countries outside the EU27(2020). Also, among children under 5 years of age, only 0.9% were of non-Polish origin, 92.3% of those came from countries outside the EU27 (Eurostat 2023c).

Roma are one of the four recognised ethnic minorities in Poland. The Act on Ethnic and National Minorities (2005) stipulates their rights to preserve their cultural and linguistic identity. It is recommended that children from these four ethnic minorities should be supported according to their specific needs and given the opportunity to speak their family language.

At the request of parents, public ECEC settings are obliged to offer groups in "national and ethnic minority languages (e.g. Lithuanian, German, Belarusian, Ukrainian or Kashubian) for children over 3 years of age (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 115).

Since 2017, all children are meant to participate in activities that "prepare them for the use of a foreign language"; this has been introduced in all settings although teachers do not have to meet certain requirements for teaching a foreign language. Language tuition is free of charge.

According to Council of Europe estimates, 12,731 Roma (0.1% of the population) live in Poland (European Commission 2022). The new national strategy for the inclusion of the Roma community in Poland (2021-2030) emphasises, among other things, the goal of ensuring that Roma children have sufficient access to and attend kindergartens and pre-primary settings. The Ministry of the Interior will issue minimum standards for the educational activities of ECEC settings and centres for the integration of children which should to be met in order to maintain their funding. Furthermore, additional groups for Roma children are to be created as the one-year compulsory pre-primary year alone may in some cases be insufficient for bridging the educational gap of Roma children before starting primary school. From 2014 to 2020, an average of 168 Roma children per year benefited from the intervention programme (Ministry of the Interior and Administration 2020, 59).

As of 12 September 2023, the UN reported that 1,681,930 refugees from Ukraine are recorded in Poland – the highest share among the European countries. 134,554 (about 8%) of them were children under age 4 (UN 2023).

The maximum group size in ECEC settings has been increased from 25 to 28 if there are at least three Ukrainian children in the group. Support for Ukrainian children is organised at the municipal or facility level. For example, there are some CPD offers on how to deal with traumatised children and families, or special materials such as books or videos. Nevertheless, many professionals feel left alone in the end. Some NGOs, such as the Comenius Foundation's SPYNKA network, have set up about 80 ECEC settings, mainly (but not exclusively) for Ukrainian children, which also employ Ukrainian refugees (Foundation for Child Development 2022).

Parental leave arrangements[4]

Maternity leave (*urlop macierzyński*) is granted for 20 weeks (or more with a multiple pregnancy), of which up to six weeks can be taken before the birth. 14 weeks after the birth are compulsory. There are two payment options: (1) 20 weeks with 100% of the average income (without upper limit) of the last 12 months. Parental leave is then remunerated with 70% of former average earnings. (2) 81,5% of the average income of the last 12 months and the same proportion during Parental leave. The decision on this must be made 21 days after birth.

Fathers receive two weeks of fully paid **Paternity leave** (*urlop ojcowski*), which must be taken in the first 12 months after the birth, either altogether or in two blocks.

[4] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Poland by von Anna Kurowska, Barbara Godlewska-Bujok and Piotr Michoń in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Parental leave (*urlop rodzicielski*) is granted for 41 weeks per family and is paid according to the option chosen before Maternity leave. 23 weeks are a family entitlement, 18 weeks are an individual (nine weeks for mother and father each) and non-transferable entitlement. The time can also be taken in (a maximum of five) parts, at most up to the child's 6th birthday. It is possible for both parents to take Parental leave at the same time. It is also possible to work (at most half-time); Parental leave is then extended accordingly.

Up to 36 months of **Childcare leave** (*urlop wychowawczy*), independent of Parental leave, can be taken by persons who have been employed for at least six months up to the child's 6th birthday. 34 months are considered a family entitlement, one month each for mothers only and fathers only. If the household income is less than PLN 674 (€150.60), an allowance of PLN 400 (€89.38) is paid for 24 months. The time can be taken in up to five different parts; both parents can take it at the same time.

To those who are not entitled to a maternity allowance (e.g. students, unemployed), a parental allowance of PLN 1,000 (€223.45) per month is paid.

In 2021, 99% of the beneficiaries of parental leave were mothers. In 2018, fathers took an average of 12.3 days of paternity leave, slightly less than in 2016 (13.2).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Poland

Country expert assessment by
Małgorzata Żytko**, **Marta Pacholczyk-Sanfilippo,** and **Olga Wysłowska

Raising societal awareness of the importance of high quality of ECEC

An increase in societal awareness regarding the crucial role of early childhood education is needed. It is necessary to present the arguments from research and international experience on how the quality of ECEC affects social, educational, economic levels of life in society. For this reason, it is important to assess the main problems of Polish Early Childhood Education, especially the role of education and care in this field, and to prepare recommendations for policy makers, experts, and parents regarding the dimensions of change needed in supporting families with young children.

Creation of a common vision and a system of cooperation in ECEC

It is necessary to integrate the different ideas, ways of thinking, activities and institutions around the main aim – raising the quality of ECEC. We need a clear vision of the social policy makers for parents, teachers, stakeholders and other people interested in early childhood education. Institutional integration of ECEC by the Ministry of Education and systematic cooperation between three services: education, health and welfare could be a significant challenge for the future. The preparation of well qualified, creative people for working in ECEC, ready to engage in educational and social activities is necessary (Brzezińska and Czub 2012).

Organisation of ECEC provision

Access to kindergartens and other forms of ECEC provision varies significantly from region to region. Across the country, there are insufficient places to meet the rising demand, particularly in terms of provision for under 3 year-olds in urban areas. Moreover, the children who would profit most from participation are the least likely to attend. The Ministry of National Education has therefore declared an increase in the participation rates as a priority: since June 2013, all 4

year-olds and since September 2017, all 3 year-olds are entitled to a place in a public kindergarten. The municipalities are required to provide the places needed and receive subsidies for ECEC services for children aged 3 years and above. However, concerning provision for the under-threes, this is a significant challenge, since it is mostly only the larger municipalities who are in a position to comply with this requirement. The greatest organisational challenge, however, is the need to merge the two sectors by including services for the youngest in the education sector. This would be a clear acknowledgment of the importance of early childhood education and care for the holistic development of children.

Social programmes for families

Another challenge is the continuing fall in the birth rate. It has therefore become a government priority to provide a range of support measures for young couples to encourage them in making the decision to have a child. Alongside a year's paid combined maternity leave and parental leave, the parents of each child receive monthly support from the State to the amount of 500 zlotys (the Rodzina 500 plus programme – this is about €104). Despite this, the birth rate was -3.6 per 1,000 persons in the population in April 2022.

A new programme to support parents of young children is the Family Care Capital. The benefit, introduced in January 2022, is available from the month in which the child turns 12 months old until the end of the month in which the child turns 35 months old. The maximum amount to which the care capital is granted is PLN 12,000 (€2,495) per child. Family care capital is eligible in the amount of PLN 500 (€104) or PLN 1,000 (€207) per month. Parents themselves can indicate whether they want to receive the capital in the amount of PLN 500 for 24 months or in the amount of PLN 1,000 for 12 months. The benefit is available regardless of family income.

However, in April 2022, an additional change was introduced, and if parents have only one child, or the child is already 36 months old and still attending a nursery or kids club, they can receive a subsidy for the child's stay in the chosen type of a setting as part of the family care capital.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022 the total population in Poland was 37,654,247. This has been falling slightly but steadily for more than 20 years (2000: 38,263,303; 2010: 38,022,869; 2020: 37,958,138) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), and the lowest in Malta (1.13). Poland was well below the EU27 average with 1.33 (Eurostat 2023d)[5].

Children under age 6

Table 7

Poland: Number of under 6 year-olds in the total population, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year-olds	325,293
1 year-olds	354,899
2 year-olds	374,765
3 year-olds	389,709
4 year-olds	406,536
5 year-olds	388,295
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**2,239,497**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 2.8% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, 5.9% were children under 6 years of age. These proportions are slightly above the respective EU27 average.

Table 8

Poland: Distribution of under 6 year-olds in population by age compared with EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Poland/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Poland	3.1	3.5	6.6
	Ø EU15[6]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Poland	2.8	2.8	5.7
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Poland	3.0	3.2	6.2
	Ø EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Poland	2.8	3.1	5.9
	Ø EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

61.2% of all households with children under 6 in Poland in 2022 were couple households. Single parent households accounted for only 2.4% – most of them were single mothers (2.2%).

[5] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

[6] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Table 9

Poland: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %+
Total households	3,826,200	
Couple households	2,340,000	61.2
Other types of households	1,395,000	36.5
Total single households	91,200	2.4
Single households, women	83,300	2.2
Single households, men	7,900**	0.2

Source: Eurostat 2023k, *Own calculations, **data calculated

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Poland, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 79.6% and for women 67.4% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 59.3% of women and 79.4% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were the second lowest (average 87.2%) and also those of mothers were well below the EU-average (63,6%) (Eurostat 2023e, own calculations).

Table 10a

Poland: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Poland	57.4	85.6
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[7]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Poland	59.3	79.4
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[8]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 10b.*

Table 10b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)

[7] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023j

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[9]

In 2022, 14.1% of children under 6 in Poland were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was significantly lower than the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 15.9% compared with the EU average of 21.6% (Eurostat 2023f).

Historically, the proportion of children in Poland classified as at risk of poverty or social exclusion reached a record high of 31.0% in December 2009 and a record low of 15.8% in December 2020 (Trading Economics 2023, based on Eurostat data).

In 2019, 9.2% of children under 6 suffered from severe material deprivation – higher than the then EU28 average of 5.0%. For the total population, it was 7.9% compared with the EU average of 3.7% (Eurostat 2023g).

This proportion of children in Poland classified as being severely deprived decreased from 30.3% in 2009 (the sixth highest level in the EU at the time) to 6.2% in 2020 (the second lowest figure) (Notes from Poland 2022).

[9] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

Under the programme “Rodzina 500 plus”, families with dependent children are entitled to a child benefit in the amount of PLN 500 (roughly €104) per child up to the age of 18, regardless of the income earned by the family.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

PORTUGAL

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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1. ECEC governance in Portugal

The Portuguese ECEC system comprises two main sectors: provision for children up to the age of 3, encompassing nurseries (*creches*) and childminders/nannies (*amas*)[1], and centre-based pre-school provision for children from 3 years up to primary school age (6 years) (*estabelecimentos de educação pré-escolar* or *jardins de infância*).

Governance is characterised by a split system: the 0–2[2] sector (both centre-based and home-based) is governed by the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MLSSS) (*Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social*) and the 3–5 sector is governed by the Ministry of Education (ME) (*Ministério da Educação*). The pre-school sector (3–5) is part of the Portuguese education system as defined by the Education Act (Law 46/86, 14 October). Both sectors are centralised, i.e. responsibilities at the level of ECEC financing, monitoring and curriculum development are set at the national level. However, a partial decentralisation process came into force in 2018 (Law 50/2018, 16 August), establishing the transference of some competences to municipalities, namely the implementation of leisure time activities (*atividades de animação e apoio à família*) and the recruitment of auxiliary staff in the pre-school public sector.

An exception to the split system is the Autonomous Region of Madeira, where an integrated network of public and non-profit ECEC institutions for 0–5 children is under the pedagogical coordination of the Regional Secretariat of Education, Science and Technology (Regional Legislative Decree 16/2006/M, 2 May).

The Portuguese split system has been the focus of debate over the last few years and some initiatives are worth mentioning. The first is the publication by the Portuguese National Council on Education[3], in 2011, of a set of recommendations on the education of children up to 3 years of age (Vasconcelos 2011). The document stresses the need for the 0–2 sector to be integrated into the education system (requiring an amendment to the Education Act), progressive responsibility of the ME in this sector, and an articulated form of shared governance by the two ministries until full governance through the ME is reached. More recently, a civic movement led by the Association of Professionals of Early Childhood Education (*Associação de Profissionais de Educação de Infância* [APEI]) presented a petition at the Assembly of the Republic in March 2021 with over 14,000 signatures proposing a change to the Education Act in order to integrate the 0–2 sector into a unitary system of early childhood education.

At a more formal level, the publication by the Directorate-General of Education of educational principles for the 0–5 phase is noteworthy, safeguarding the unity and continuity of early childhood pedagogy. These common educational principles were integrated in the updated and revised edition of the Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education (Lopes da Silva et al. 2016). Moreover, an inter-ministerial collaboration is taking place between the ME and the MLSSS on establishing a pedagogical framework for children up to 3 years of age which is being developed by a team of invited experts.

[1] Corresponding to family day care ECEC or licensed home-based ECEC (OECD 2017, 60)

[2] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the **seepro3** reports: **0–2** years for settings for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for pre-primary settings in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years.

[3] The National Council on Education (*Conselho Nacional de Educação* – CNE) is an independent advisory body on educational issues that produces statements and recommendations according to its own agenda or as a response to requests from Parliament or the Government (https://www.cnedu.pt/pt/)

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Regular contact staff in Portuguese ECEC provision are:

Educador/a de infância (Early Childhood Teacher)

The specific professional profile of the Early Childhood Teacher was legally established in 2001, through the Decree-Law 241/2001, 30 August. This document set the legal framework for the organisation of the initial education/training of teachers. Early Childhood Teachers are qualified to work with children from 0–5 years, both in the *estabelecimentos de educação pré-escolar/jardins de infância* for 3 to 5 year-old children and in the *creches* for 0 to 2 year-olds. Their professional qualification includes a three-year Bachelor's degree in Basic Education followed by a three-semester Master's degree in Pre-School Education **or** a four-semester Master's degree in Pre-School and Primary Education (for further information, see section **4**). In the latter case, the professional is qualified for working with children up to 10 years of age, both in early childhood education and primary education.

Assistente operacional (Auxiliary Staff)

The Portuguese Education Act establishes that auxiliary staff should have completed compulsory education, corresponding to a minimum of 12 years of schooling. In some cases, municipalities may give priority to staff with a related qualification.

The functions of auxiliary staff are described in Decree-Law 184/2004, 29 July (annexe III) and include the logistical support of the Early Childhood Teacher, hygiene and cleaning of spaces, space security and surveillance/supervision of children indoors and outdoors, and guaranteeing the opening and closing times, including welcoming the children and being present when they are picked up by their parents. Moreover, Portuguese regulations do not prescribe the need for an Early Childhood Teacher in 'rooms for infants' (*berçário*), which means that the direct work with babies up to 12 months is guaranteed by two auxiliary staff members per group.

Dinamizador/a das atividades de animação e apoio à família (Facilitator of Leisure-time Activities)

The Facilitator of Leisure-time Activities is responsible for ensuring the accompaniment of pre-school children before and after the five-hour daily period of pedagogical activities and during the school holidays (Ordinance n. 644-A/2015, 24 August). Providing leisure-time activities in pre-school institutions is mandatory and is implemented by municipalities, including the recruitment of professionals (Law 50/2018, 16 August). The planning of these activities comes under the responsibility of the schools in collaboration with municipalities. The Early Childhood Teachers with group responsibility must ensure pedagogical supervision and accompaniment of the implementation. The general guidelines for leisure-time activities stress their playful, cultural and educational nature, as well as the need to involve families and the community in order to promote their contextualisation, adequacy and diversification (Vilhena and Lopes da Silva 2002). The Facilitators of Leisure-time Activities must have completed compulsory education.

Besides these professional profiles working in centre-based ECEC provision, services for children up to the age of 3 also include the *ama* (childminder/nanny). The *ama* is a person who provides individual care for infants and toddlers in her/his own residence during the family working time. The activity of these professionals is governed by the Ministry of Work, Solidarity and Social Security (MWSSS) and can only be developed through an authorisation issued by this Ministry. Minimum qualifications include upper secondary education (corresponding to compulsory education) and short term units of training from the National Qualifications Catalogue in the domain of support services for children and youth. This new requirement was established by a legal framework for the *amas'* professional activity that came into force in 2015 (Decree-Law 115/2015). This framework also determined the liberalisation of this activity, which was technically and financially under the responsibility of the MWSSS before 2015.

Table 1 presents an overview of the staff in daily direct contact with children in centre-based ECEC provision.

Table 1
Portugal: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Early Childhood Teacher *Educador/a de infância* *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional *In some cases:* Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional	*Creche* **Nursery/infant-toddler centre** 0–2 years *Estabelecimento de educação pré-escolar/jardim de infância* **Preschool/kindergarten** 3–5 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility	0–6 years	Bachelor's degree in Basic Education, 3 years university or polytechnic ECTS credits: 180 ***plus*** Master's degree in Preschool Education (3 semesters) ECTS credits: 90 EQF: level 7 ISCED 2011: 7
			0–10 years	Bachelor's degree in Basic Education, 3 years university or polytechnic ECTS credits: 180 ***plus*** Master's degree in Preschool and Primary Education (4 semesters) ECTS credits: 120 EQF: level 7 ISCED 2011: 7

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Auxiliary Staff *Assistente operacional*	*Creche* **Infant-toddler centre** 0–2 years *Estabelecimento de educação pré-escolar/jardim de infância* **Preschool/kindergarten** 3–5 years	Co-workers without specialist qualification	n/a[4]	Compulsory school certificate ECTS credits: n/a EQF: level 3/4 ISCED 2011: 3
Facilitator of Leisure-time Activities *Dinamizador/a das atividades de animação e apoio à família*	*Estabelecimento de educação pré-escolar/jardim de infância* **Preschool/kindergarten** 3–5 years	Co-workers without specialist qualification	3–5 years	Compulsory school certificate ECTS credits: n/a EQF: Level 3/4 ISCED 2011: 3

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

The characteristics of ECEC leadership vary across sectors. In the public sector, for 3–5 children, ECEC settings are part of school clusters[5] or non-grouped schools. ECEC services can operate in establishments exclusively dedicated to ECEC or can be grouped into schools jointly with primary education classrooms. Each pre-school establishment or school has a coordinator, who is designated by the director of the school cluster among the teachers working there full-time. In

[4] n/a = not applicable

[5] School clusters are organisational units with their own administration and management bodies, integrating pre-school establishments and schools from different teaching levels and cycles (Decree-Law 137/2012, 2 July).

schools that integrate both pre-school and primary school classrooms, the coordinator can either be an Early Childhood Teacher or a Primary School Teacher. The relevant Decree-Law stipulates the coordinators' competences: These are to:

- Coordinate educational activities, in agreement with the director
- Comply with and enforce the decisions of the director and exercise the powers delegated by him/her
- Transmit information to teaching and non-teaching staff, and to students; and
- Promote and encourage the participation of parents and guardians, local and municipal interests in educational activities (Decree-Law 75/2008, 22 April, 2351)

The private sector, both non-profit and for-profit, is regulated by the Decree-Law 152/2013, 4 November, which stipulates the existence of a pedagogical leadership with the following competences:

- Represent the school before the Ministry of Education in all matters of pedagogical nature
- Plan and supervise curricular and cultural activities
- Promote compliance with study plans and programmes
- Ensure the quality of teaching
- Ensure the education and discipline of students (6350).

The qualification required to take up this role is a higher education academic degree and adequate professional qualifications or, in place of the latter, pedagogical experience of at least three years. No additional specific qualification is required.

Nurseries/infant-toddler centres have a specific legal framework set out in Ordinance no. 262/2011, 31 August. The document establishes that each nursery is coordinated by a *director/a técnico/a* (Technical Director) with the following responsibilities:

- Develop a management model that guarantees the operation of the infant-toddler centre
- Supervise the recruitment of new professionals
- Promote the continuous improvement of the services provided (including quality management)
- Manage, coordinate and supervise professionals
- Implement staff education/training programmes
- Encourage the involvement of the technical team and families in the planning and evaluation of activities
- Ensure collaboration with external entities and services.

In many cases, the Centre Head is also a core practitioner with responsibility for a group of children and pedagogical responsibility for the activities carried out in 'baby rooms' (*berçário*) by auxiliary staff. The technical director is, preferably, an Early Childhood Teacher, but can also be a professional with a degree in another domain of the Educational Sciences or the Human and Social Sciences. No additional specific qualification is required.

2.3 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff and centre-based posts of responsibility

Coordinating and supervisory structures also vary according to sector. In the public pre-school sector, the educational coordination and pedagogical supervision is part of the pedagogical organisation of each school cluster or grouped school, and intends to guarantee the coordination,

supervision and accompaniment of educational activities, to promote collaborative work and to carry out the performance evaluation of the teaching staff (Decree-Law 75/2008, 22 April). The role of the coordinator of the department of pre-school education aims to guarantee the articulation and management of curricular activities related to the Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education (Lopes da Silva et al. 2016), the organisation, accompaniment and evaluation of the groups'/classes' activities, the pedagogical coordination and the performance evaluation of Early Childhood Teachers.

In nurseries, both non-profit and for-profit, the evaluation and inspection of services are carried out by the Institute of Social Security (ISS), under the superintendence of the MLSSS. The ISS is responsible for evaluating the quality of care and verifying the conformity of services provided, namely in what concerns the conditions of installation and housing, adequacy of equipment, food and sanitary conditions (Decree-Law 64/2007, altered by Decree-Law 99/2011 and Decree-Law 33/2014; Ordinance 196-A/2015). The evaluation is carried out by specialist support staff from the ISS through on-site visits (a minimum of one visit every two years) and analysis of relevant information. The evaluation and inspection activities can encompass the collaboration with other entities (e.g. health authority) with a focus on health, safety and sanitary conditions.

2.4 Specialist support staff

In Portugal, the specialist support for children from birth up to 6 years involves two systems: (a) the National Early Childhood Intervention System (*Sistema Nacional de Intervenção Precoce na Infância*), under the coordinated work of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with families and professionals working in nurseries and pre-schools; (b) the services governed by the Ministry of Education that provide support for children/students from pre-school to the end of secondary education.

The National Early Childhood Intervention System was established in order to guarantee the necessary support for children up to 6 years of age with physical or functional issues that limit personal growth and participation in typical activities for their age and social context or who are in serious risk of developmental delay, as well as their families. In this system, the role of the local intervention teams (*Equipas Locais de Intervenção* – ELI) is particularly relevant. These are composed by professionals from education (Early Childhood Teachers), health (Nurses, Paediatricians), social services, therapists and Psychologists) working at a municipal level. According to Decree-Law 281/2009, 6 October, these teams are responsible for:

- Identifying children and families immediately eligible for the National Early Intervention System
- Monitoring the situation of children and families who, although not immediately eligible, present risk factors
- Referring ineligible children and families that lack social support
- Elaborating and implementing individual plans of intervention
- Identifying communities' needs and resources, and organising formal and informal social support networks
- Coordinating with services of child protection
- Ensuring adequate transition processes to other programmes, services or educational settings for every child, and
- Coordinating with Early Childhood Teachers from nurseries and pre-schools attended by children involved with early childhood intervention.

In the case of the services under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, legislation on inclusive education was established by Decree-Law 54/2018, 6 July (for further details, see *chapter **8***) proposing a shift towards a more integrated, holistic and continuous vision of the educational approach, based on universal design for learning and a multi-level approach. The professionals working in these services supporting learning and inclusion are Special Education Teachers (*docentes de educação especial*), specialised support staff (such as Occupational and Speech Therapists, Physiotherapists, Psychologists, Interpreters and Teachers of Sign Language, and experts on mobility and orientation training) and auxiliary staff, preferably with specialised training. Specifically, the Special Education Teacher supports the Early Childhood Teacher in the definition of strategies of pedagogical differentiation and in identifying multiple means of motivation, representation and expression, through collaboration and co-responsibility. The Special Education Teachers must possess a higher education degree in teaching (preferably, in early childhood education, but not mandatory) and a specialised training course in special education at a university or polytechnic institute. These courses are accredited by the Scientific and Pedagogical Council of Professional Development and have a minimum of 250 contact hours. In order to gain access to these courses, besides the teaching certification, candidates must have at least five years of teaching practice.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

The available compiled data on the structural composition of the ECEC workforce is focused on the professionals working in pre-primary settings (public and private) under the governance of the Ministry of Education. This information is reported in documents issued by the Directorate General of Education and Science Statistics (*Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência*). No systematically compiled national data is available for the 0–2 sector.

Table 2

Portugal: Structural composition of ECEC workforce in early childhood settings (3–5) under the Ministry of Education: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Staff categories	Year / Proportion of workforce, in %
Early Childhood Teachers with a higher education degree (N=17,065): – Three-year bachelor degree or equivalent – Four-year bachelor degree (*licenciatura*) or equivalent – Master's or Doctoral degree	2019/20[1] **18.3** **77.8** **3.8**
Specialist support staff (e.g. Special Needs Teachers)	2017/18[2] (aggregated data, including pre-primary, primary and secondary education)[2] *Special Needs Teachers*: 7,518 (with a specialisation in special education: 2,733) *Other specialist support staff integrated in the Centres of Resources for Inclusion:* – Occupational Therapists: 463

Staff categories	Year / Proportion of workforce, in %
	– Speech Therapists: 629 – Physiotherapists: 277 – Psychologists: 558 *Specialist support staff from the National Early Childhood Intervention System*: – Early Childhood Teachers: 398 (with a specialisation in special education: 313)
Staff with a non-relevant qualification	No data available
Unqualified staff	No data available
Male practitioners	2019/20[3]: Core practitioners: **0.9** 2019/20[4] Non-teaching staff (aggregated data, including pre-primary, primary and secondary education): **12.7**
Staff with a background of migration	2019/20: **1.1**[3] (most frequently represented countries of origin: United Kingdom, France and Angola)

[1][DGEEC] Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, Direção de Serviços de Estatísticas da Educação, and Divisão de Estatísticas dos Ensinos Básico e Secundário n.d. (2021)

[2][DGEEC] Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência n.d. (2018)

[3][DGEEC] Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, and Direção de Serviços de Estatísticas da Educação 2021.

[4][DGEEC] Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, and Direção de Serviços de Estatísticas da Educação n.d. (2020)

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Early Childhood Teacher (*educador/a de infância*)

The Early Childhood Teacher's initial professional education is characterised by a sequential model that integrates a Bachelor's degree in Basic Education (*Licenciatura em Educação Básica*) and a professional Master's degree in Pre-school Education (*Mestrado em Educação Pré-Escolar*) or Pre-school and Primary Education (*Mestrado em Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensino do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico*). This model was established at the national level in 2007 within the changes brought about by the Bologna Process and is currently regulated by Decree-Law 79/2014, 14 May, altered by Decree-Law 112/2023, 29 November. The access to the 1st cycle of studies, Bachelor in Basic Education, requires successful completion of secondary education and national exams in Portuguese and Mathematics. Entry requirements for the 2nd cycle of studies, corresponding to a Master's degree, are the successful completion of the Bachelor's degree in Basic Education, as well as proficiency in oral and written Portuguese and on the essential rules of logical and critical argumentation. Depending on the higher education institution (HEI), the assessment of the latter may be carried out through written or oral tests, interviews, documentary

evidence, or a combination of these. More recently, Decree-Law 112/2023 allowed access to the Master's degrees to the candidates that have completed 75% of the required ECTS in the respective staff profile.

The Bachelor's degree in Basic Education is common for all candidate teachers, from the early childhood education to the secondary level of education. Course length is six semesters, corresponding to 180 ECTS credits. During the 2nd cycle of studies, two options are available for candidate Early Childhood Teachers: (a) a professional Master in Pre-School Education, lasting three semesters (90 ECTS credits), which qualifies for working with children aged 0–5 years (EQF Level 7); (b) a professional Master in Pre-School and Primary Education, lasting four semesters (120 ECTS credits), which qualifies for working with children aged 0–10 years (EQF Level 7).

Table 3
Portugal: Early Childhood Teacher

Job title in Portuguese: *Educador/a de infância* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional ***or*** Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: Bachelor's degree in Basic Education
Professional studies: For working with children 0–5: 3 semesters at a HEI; for working with children 0–10: 4 semesters at a HEI
Award: Master's degree in Pre-School Education (*grau de Mestre em Educação Pré-Escolar*) or Master's degree in Pre-School and Primary Education (*grau de Mestre em Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensino do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico*)
ECTS credits: 90 / 120 (depending on the Master's degree) **EQF level:** 7 **ISECD 2011**: 75
Main ECEC workplace: nurseries, pre-primary settings (and primary schools, if qualified through the Master in Pre-School and Primary Education)

Auxiliary staff (*assistente operacional*)

Auxiliary staff are required to have completed compulsory education that corresponds, in Portugal, to 12 years of schooling (secondary education). This formal requirement is set at the national level. No specific pedagogical requirements need to be met. In some cases, recruitment through the municipalities privileges additional preparation, such as a specialist course for gaining the title of 'Specialist in Educational Activities' (*técnico de ação educativa*) (EQF Level 4) or a three-year secondary vocational course specifically focused on child support (*técnico de apoio à infância*) (EQF Level 4). Recruitment may also take place through employment centres, as a measure to promote the professional integration of unemployed persons.

Table 4
Portugal: Auxiliary staff

Job title in Portuguese: *Assistente operacional*
Entry requirements: Secondary education leaving certificate (*diploma de nível secundário de educação*)
Professional studies: No specific professional requirements need to be met, although related vocational qualifications may be favourable for recruitment.
Award: No specific professional award
ECTS credits: n/a **EQF level:** 3 or 4 (in the case of completion of a vocational course) **ISECD 2011**: 3
Main ECEC workplace: nurseries, pre-primary settings

Facilitator of Leisure-time Activities (*dinamizador/a das atividades de animação e apoio à família*)

The Facilitators of Leisure-time Activities are required to have completed compulsory education. This formal requirement is set at the national level. By law, no specific pedagogical requirements need to be met, although some municipalities privilege additional pedagogical preparation on recruitment. Thus, this professional group is characterised by a wide diversity, ranging from unqualified staff with a secondary education diploma to professionals with a higher education diploma in early childhood education.

Table 5
Portugal: Facilitator of Leisure-time Activities

Job title in Portuguese: *Dinamizador/a das atividades de animação e apoio à família*
Entry requirements: Secondary education leaving certificate (*diploma de nível secundário de educação*) **Professional studies:** No specific professional requirements need to be met, although related vocational qualifications may be favourable for recruitment. **Award:** No specific professional award **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 3 **ISECD 2011**: 3 **Main ECEC workplace:** pre-primary settings, school clusters or non-grouped schools

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

In this section, the focus is on the IPE programmes for Early Childhood Teachers, since no specific IPE requirements are needed for the auxiliary staff or the Facilitators of Leisure-time Activities.

The IPE programmes for Early Childhood Teachers are developed according to a sequential or biphasic model comprising a Bachelor's and a Master's degree, as stipulated in Decree-Law 79/2014, 14 May. After completion of the Bachelor's degree, the candidate Early Childhood Teachers can choose between two professional masters (see *Chapter **2.1***). The presentation of competences, curriculum and pedagogic-didactic approaches will take into consideration the basic initial qualification and the two second-stage options.

Competence specifications

The professional preparation of candidate teachers is based on general principles stipulated in the Education Act, the curriculum guidelines for pre-school education and the curriculum matrices for basic and secondary education, the student's profile at the end of compulsory schooling, essential learning defined for each discipline and teaching cycle, and general guidelines of educational policy (Decree-Law 79/2014, 14 May, altered by Decree-Law 112/2023, 29 November).

The **Bachelor in Basic Education** (*Licenciatura em Educação Básica*) constitutes the first stage of professional preparation for teachers working in pre-school and the first, second and third cycles of basic education. It aims to promote generic and transversal competencies that prepare for assuming a professional role in a diversity of educational contexts. Competencies encompass:

- Observing and evaluating educational contexts (formal and non-formal)
- Knowing and understanding the professional profiles of the Early Childhood Teacher and Basic Education Teacher

- Developing educational projects and resources
- Mobilising knowledge for working in early childhood, basic education and non-formal education contexts in an integrated and contextualised way
- Reflexive, investigative and critical competencies.

The **Master in Pre-School Education** (*Mestrado em Educação Pré-Escolar*) focuses on the professional specialisation of Early Childhood Teachers working with children from birth up to 6 years. Despite the course descriptor (*educação pré-escolar* corresponds to the 3–5 sector), the entity that formally evaluates and accredits higher education courses in Portugal, the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (*Agência de Avaliação e Acreditação do Ensino Superior* – A3ES) has been emphasising the need to reinforce the education/training of educators for working in provision for under 3 year-olds. The competencies that the prospective Early Childhood Teacher needs to develop are closely aligned to the general and specific professional profile of the Early Childhood Teacher (Decree-Law 240/2001, 30 August and Decree-Law 241/2001, 30 August, annex 1).

For example, the intended general learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) of the Master in Pre-School Education of School of Education of the Polytechnic Institute of Porto are to:

- Mobilise scientific, pedagogical and cultural knowledge in the design, development and evaluation of a curricular project
- Organise the educational environment in its various pedagogical dimensions
- Encourage the development of positive and stimulating interactions with children
- Develop systematic participant observation and regulatory reflection (about contexts, processes and learning outcomes)
- Plan and evaluate educational activities that are adequate for the development of integrated learning, considering strategies of pedagogical differentiation
- Develop strategies of collaborative and team work
- Promote actions that facilitate continuity of learning (with families, community and other different levels of education)
- Problematise the demands of professional practice in a grounded, reflexive and ethical way, considering a lifelong learning approach.

The **Master in Pre-School and Primary Education** (*Mestrado em Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensino do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico*) is a two-year programme (four semesters) and focuses on the professional specialisation for both early childhood and primary education. The competencies to be developed by the prospective Early Childhood Teacher/ Primary Teacher are aligned to the professional profile (Decree-Law 241/2001, 30 August) of the Early Childhood Teacher (annex 1) and the Primary Teacher (annex 2).

Curriculum

The IPE components are prescribed in Decree-Law 79/2014 and encompass:

(1) Teaching subject (*área de docência*): this component is focused on the knowledge that is needed for *teaching* in specific content areas or disciplines;

(2) General education (*área educacional geral*): includes the knowledge, skills and attitudes common to all teachers that are relevant for their work in the classroom, in the educational institutions and in cooperation with families and communities. It includes curricular units in the

domains of developmental psychology, basic cognitive processes (particularly those involved in reading, writing and mathematics), curriculum and assessment, citizenship education, organisational studies, inclusive education and the use of digital technologies in education;

(3) Subject-specific didactics (*didáticas específicas*): encompasses the skills (knowledge, abilities and attitudes) related to specific content areas or disciplines;

(4) Cultural, social and ethical dimension (*área cultural, social e ética*): includes raising awareness of the world's contemporary problems (e.g. freedom of expression, respect for ethnic minorities, values of gender equality), extending knowledge and culture beyond a specific teaching area, learning about data collection methods and the critical analysis of data, hypotheses and theories, and raising awareness for the ethical and civic dimensions of teaching activity. This component does not have formally allocated ECTS credits and should be integrated into the other components of education/training.

(5) Initiation into professional practice (*iniciação à prática professional*): includes observation and cooperation in educational institutions and supervised practice in ECEC settings (see *Chapter **5***).

Minimum ECTS credits are distributed as follows, according to the cycle of studies, as prescribed by law:

Table 6
Portugal: IPE of Early Childhood Teachers, curriculum structure

Minimum ECTS credits per component			
Education/ training components	**Bachelor in Basic Education**	**Master in Pre-school Education**	**Master in Pre-School and Primary Education**
Teaching subject	125	6	18
General education	15	6	6
Subject-specific didactics	15	24	36
Initiation into professional practice	15	41	54

The particular focus of the Bachelor in Basic Education is on the knowledge needed for *teaching* in certain content areas or disciplines. The distribution of the 125 ECTS credits prescribed by law is as follows: Portuguese (30 ECTS credits); Mathematics (30 ECTS credits); Natural Sciences, and History and Geography of Portugal (30 ECTS credits), Expressive Arts (Music, Visual Arts, Drama) and Physical/Motor Expression (30 ECTS credits). The HEI is free to allocate the remaining 5 ECTS credits to selected content areas.

The components of subject-specific didactics and initiation into professional practice integrate fewer ECTS at the Bachelor's level than at the Master's level (*see Table 6*). Specifically, the integration of field-based experiences into the Bachelor's programme varies across the HEI, with some institutions offering observation and cooperation experiences throughout the three years and others tending to provide these experiences only in the final year of the course.

At the Master's level, subject-specific didactics and, in particular, the initiation into professional practice constitute the core of the plan of studies. Subject-specific didactics include curricular units in the domains of Mathematics, Spoken Language and Introductory Writing, Natural and Social Sciences, Artistic Education (Music, Visual Arts, Drama/Theatre, Dance) and Physical Education. The component of *initiation into professional practice* includes curricular units of Supervised Educational Practice (*Prática Educativa Supervisionada*) in early childhood settings and, in the case of the Master in Pre-School and Primary Education, also in primary schools.

The plan of studies also integrates a curricular unit on Methods of Research in Education that intends to support the candidate teachers' learning in the contexts of practice. In most cases, a curricular unit of Early Childhood Pedagogy or Early Childhood Education Methodology is also allocated to the plan of studies.

Pedagogic-didactic approaches

The Education Act stipulates guiding principles for (early childhood) teacher education that include: the need for an integrated approach at the level of scientific and pedagogical preparation, and articulation of theory and practice; methodological practices similar to those that the educator will use in pedagogical practice; the encouragement of an attitude that is both critical and active in relation to social reality; education/training that favours or stimulates innovation and research in relation to educational activity; and participation in education/training that leads to a reflective and continuous practice of self-learning (Article 33).

The pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes can vary across HEIs. In a study conducted by Almeida and Lopo (2015) in 17 Portuguese higher education institutions, two tendencies were identified in the Bachelor in Basic Education: (a) a cluster of institutions with a profile characterised by the use of artistic and physical-motor experimentation, problem solving strategies, the use of authentic materials (materials that can be manipulated and worksheets) and the diary as an element of written assessment; (b) a cluster of institutions characterised by the use of experimental activities / laboratory practices and simulation as activities to stimulate the appropriation of knowledge, and by the use of a project approach to assess learning.

At the Master's level, the curricular units of Supervised Educational Practice constitute the core of these programmes, fuelled and supported by other curricular units, namely the subject-specific didactics. The practicum periods aim for the construction of professional knowledge, competences and attitudes, and are sustained by active and heuristic-hermeneutic approaches, intending the integration of the conceptual and experiential components of education/ training. Research processes are valued throughout the professional preparation that encompass several hours at the workplace and theoretical-practical classes and seminars at the HEI. A triadic model of supervision is frequently used, involving the prospective Early Childhood Teacher, the cooperating educator and the supervisor of HEI, aiming at stimulating students' critical and reflexive analysis and the articulation between theory and practice.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

The exclusive entry requirement for a Master's degree in early childhood education is a completed three-year Bachelor's degree in Basic Education (Decree-Law 79/2014). Decree-Law 112/2023 allows access to the Master's degrees to the candidates that have completed 75% of the required ECTS in the respective profile. The professionals that hold a three-year or four-year Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, i.e., all professionals who qualified as Early Childhood Teachers before the Bologna Process, are formally recognised as fully qualified early childhood core practitioners. This has led to a scenario of coexistence of different levels of qualification within the profession, with 18.3% of core professionals holding a three-year Bachelor's degree, 77.8% a four-year Bachelor's degree or equivalent, and 3.8% a Master's or Doctoral degree (see *Table 2*). There is a growing tendency for younger practitioners to hold higher qualifications.

For those with a non-specialist qualification, the options are limited to the completion of the Bachelor in Basic Education followed by a professional Master's degree. This is the case, for example, for auxiliary staff who are motivated to become an Early Childhood Teacher.

Since 2015, it is also possible to obtain a formal authorisation for working as a childminder if the candidate possesses an upper secondary education diploma and completes short term units of training from the National Qualifications Catalogue in the domain of support services for children and youth. Auxiliary staff who worked in a nursery (*creche*) during a minimum period of one year over the previous two years can also become a childminder.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

The guided workplace experience (practicum) in the IPE of core professionals is regulated at a national level through Decree-Law 79/2014, 14 May. This component is termed *Initiation into Professional Practice* and corresponds, at the Master level, to the Supervised Teaching Practice (*prática de ensino supervisionada*). According to the legal framework, this component is organised around the following principles: It "(a) includes the observation and collaboration in education and teaching situations and the supervised practice in the activity room or classroom, in early childhood education institutions or in schools; (b) provides experiences of planning, teaching and assessment, according to the functions that are attributed to the teacher, inside and outside the classroom; (c) is developed in nurseries or pre-school classrooms, as well as in groups or classes of the different levels and cycles of studies that are covered by the recruitment group for which the cycle of studies prepares; if possible, it should be carried out in more than one educational institution (…); (d) is conceived within an educational perspective that values the articulation between knowledge and the way of transmitting it, with a focus on students' learning; (e) is conceived in a perspective of professional development of students and in promoting an attitude oriented towards the permanent progress of their students' learning" (Art. 11, 6).

ECTS credits and duration: As stated previously (*see Table 6*), the *practicum* is differentially distributed across the Bachelor and the Master programmes, with a visible reinforcement in the plan of studies of the latter. The number of ECTS credits allocated to this curricular component is specified in Decree-Law 79/2014. Thus, HEI must take into account the following specifications:

- Bachelor in Basic Education – a minimum of 15 ECTS credits (divided among different age levels, including formal and non-formal educational settings)
- Master in Pre-School Education – a minimum of 41 ECTS credits (divided between nurseries and preschools/kindergartens depending on the decision of the individual HEI, whereby only the practicum in preschools is mandatory).
- Master in Pre-School and Primary Education – a minimum of 54 ECTS credits (equally divided between the two education levels).

Following these ECTS specifications, each HEI establishes the number of hours and overall organisation of time blocks. Generally, at the level of the Master's programmes, the students spend three or four days per week (five hours a day, following the hours daily attributed to the teaching component) in ECEC centres and one or two days per week in HEI, attending classes (theoretical-practical, tutorial meetings, seminars).

Cooperation between / complementary roles of IPE institutions and ECEC centres: Decree-Law 79/2014 also establishes the conditions for the cooperation between the IPE institutions and ECEC centres, designated as cooperating schools (*escolas cooperantes*). It states the need for a

formal, multi-annual cooperation protocol between the two institutions. This protocol should include the following (Art. 22):

- Levels and cycles of education and teaching in which Supervised Teaching Practice is carried out;
- Identification of the cooperating supervisors (*orientadores cooperantes*) and any compensatory payments made available to the cooperating ECEC centre
- Number of places available for students
- Roles, responsibilities and competences of all stakeholders, including students
- Conditions for the supervised teaching practice in the activity rooms, accompanied by a cooperating supervisor
- Conditions for the participation of students in other curricular and organisational development activities outside the activity room, provided that they are supported by cooperating supervisors
- Counterparts made available to the cooperating schools by the HEI.

The legal framework stipulates that the HEI should assure that the ECEC centres possess the necessary human and material resources in order to guarantee the quality of the practicum experience. Moreover, the HEI should actively participate in the development of the quality of the cooperating institutions, in collaboration with their management structure.

Students' skills and competences: Decree-Law 79/2014 does not specify the skills and competences students are expected to develop throughout the guided workplace experience. However, the principles inherent to the component of Initiation into Professional Practice emphasize the importance of observation, planning, teaching, assessing and collaboration processes throughout the practicum experiences. Also, these principles stress the focus on children's learning through the articulation between theoretical and practical knowledge, and state the importance of adopting a perspective of continuing professional development. According to the Education Act, this component, like the overall preservice teacher education programmes, should consider the set of professional competences that are needed according to the professional profile defined by law. In the case of the Early Childhood Teacher, the professional profile is defined by Decree-Law 240/2001 (general professional profile of teachers from pre-school to secondary education), and, especially, the Decree-Law 241/2001 that establishes the specific professional profile of the Early Childhood Teacher. The Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education (Lopes da Silva et al. 2016) should also be considered closely, namely its:

- Four core pedagogical principles (a) viewing development and learning as inseparable strands in the child's progress; (b) recognising the child as a subject and an agent of the educational process; (c) addressing inclusion and pedagogical differentiation in order to be responsive to all children; (d) articulating the different domains of the child's learning and development within a holistic approach
- Guidelines for the organisation of the educational environment
- Guidelines for guaranteeing educational intentionality (through processes of observation, planning, action and assessment/evaluation)
- Guidelines for safeguarding educational continuity and transitions.

Student assessment: Students' self-assessment can include a variety of forms such as oral and written reflexion (individually or collaboratively), field-based journals, portfolios, etc. The responsibility for the students' external assessment is attributed to the teacher who is responsible for the curricular unit of Supervised Teaching Practice, integrating information provided by the cooperating supervisor and the pedagogical director/coordinator. The students' assessment

must also encompass a practicum report subjected to public presentation and discussion before a jury.

Mentoring/ supervising staff: Decree-Law 79/2014 establishes the criteria for selecting cooperating supervisors. These should be chosen by the HEI, following the previous acceptance on the part of the cooperating supervisor and the leader of the cooperating institution. Furthermore, the cooperating supervisor should possess appropriate training and experience for the role and its functions; possess a minimum of five years of professional practice in ECEC contexts and, preferably, post-graduate studies in early childhood education, specialised education/ training in pedagogical supervision and professional experience in supervision. The legal framework does not specify a recommended time allocation for supervision/ mentoring activities. In some cases, this specification is included in the cooperation protocol and can vary across institutions.

The cooperating supervisors are not remunerated for their work as practicum supervisors. The HEI is requested to pay the travel expenses of the cooperating supervisor whenever there is the need to participate in education/ training activities and seminars, as well as to collaborate with the cooperating schools in the professional development of its Early Childhood Teachers, especially the cooperating supervisors.

Current debates: As stated previously, the IPE of Early Childhood Teachers is developed through a sequential model in which the guided workplace experience is located predominantly in the final stage of the education programme, i.e., at the Master's level. According to Vieira et al. (2021) this mirrors a theory-to-practice rationale in which the practicum is *conceived as a curricular space devoted to applying theoretical knowledge to teaching* (11-12). Some authors have been arguing that this post-Bologna model may potentially be hindering the candidate teachers' opportunities to be engaged in research processes (Flores 2011, 2015) and to develop recursive dialogues among values and beliefs, practices and theories (Araújo 2022) throughout the first three years of IPE (Bachelor's degree).

The anticipated shortage of teachers in the Portuguese context, including Early Childhood Teachers, in the next ten years (see *Chapter **7.5***), has given rise to discussions around the introduction of alterations to the current legal framework that regulates IPE, including the component of Supervised Educational Practice. A tentative move was made through the publication of Decree-Law 112/2023, 29 November, that was revoked on 19 January 2024 due to massive criticism and pressure from higher education institutions.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

The Portuguese Education Act recognises continuing professional development as a right for all educators and teachers and emphasises its importance in complementing and updating initial professional education within a perspective of life-long learning. It also states the need for in-service education to be sufficiently diversified in order to ensure this complementary role of deepening and updating professional knowledge and competences, as well as enabling career mobility and progression.

Legislation and regulation: Decree-Law 22/2014, 11 February, establishes the legal framework for the CPD of teachers and defines the system of coordination, management and support. As far as ECEC is concerned, this decree-law regulates the CPD of core practitioners working in the 3–5 sector (with the exception of private institutions not affiliated to school clusters). Decree-

Law 22/2014 establishes the following seven principles for CPD: "(a) Promoting the improvement of teaching quality and the outcomes of the educational system; (b) Contextualising education/ training projects and provision; (c) Relating to the needs and priorities of schools and teachers; (d) Prioritising the scientific and pedagogical dimensions; (e) Maintaining the scientific and pedagogical autonomy of the education/ training entities; (f) Strengthening institutional cooperation between basic and secondary education establishments, higher education institutions and scientific and professional associations; (g) Promoting a culture of monitoring and evaluation oriented towards the improvement of the quality of the education/ training system" (1287). Besides these principles, the decree-law regulates different aspects of CPD: aims; domains; modalities; duration; mandatory activities; education/ training entities; accreditation and qualifications of educators/ trainers; rights and duties of trainees; processes of accreditation and certification; evaluation, recognition, certification and monitoring; competences and composition of the Scientific and Pedagogical Council of Professional Development (SPCPD); role of the inspection system; and guidance and support for continuing education/ training activities.

In the case of other ECEC professionals, namely those working in the 0–2 sector (both private non-profit and private for-profit) and non-qualified co-workers, the national Labour Law is applied (Law 7/2009, 12 February). The last revision of the Labour Law (Law 93/2019, 4 September) establishes the right to a minimum of 40 hours per year of continuing education/ training for Portuguese workers.

***Main forms*:** Decree-Law 22/2014 stipulates the following forms of CPD for core professionals: education/ training courses (*cursos de formação*), workshops (*oficinas de formação*), study circles (*circulos de estudos*), short-term activities (*ações de curta duração*), professional placements (*estágio*) and projects (*projeto*). Independently of their form, these activities must be accredited by the SPCPD (*Conselho Científico-Pedagógico de Formação Contínua*).

Other CPD activities can include specialised courses in higher education institutions (also accredited by the SPCPD), congresses, seminars, and research activities that confer a higher education degree (academic Master or Doctoral studies).

***CPD providers*:** The main providers of CPD across the country are the education/ training centres from school clusters (*Centros de Formação de Associação de Escolas*, CFAE), higher education institutions, the education/ training centres of non-profit professional or scientific associations, central services of the Ministry of Education, and other accredited non-profit public, private or cooperative entities. According to the last available report of the Scientific and Pedagogical Council of Professional Development, in December 2020 there were 263 accredited providers: 89 education/ training centres from school clusters, 78 higher education institutions, 55 professional associations and 41 other unspecified entities (Conselho Científico-Pedagógico da Formação Contínua 2020).

Leave entitlement: The national Labour Law stipulates that CPD activities (40 hours per year, as stated previously) are to be completed during working hours, confer the right to remuneration and count as time of effective service. This also includes hours spent in attending classes and in assessment activities, under the student-worker status, as well as absences within the scope of processes of recognition, validation and certification of professional competences.

For Early Childhood Teachers working in the 3–5 sector (public, and private and social solidarity settings affiliated to a public school cluster), the leaves for CPD activities developed by the central and regional services or by the school clusters are granted during working hours, preferably during non-contact time. For CPD activities initiated by the Early Childhood Teacher, leaves may not exceed five consecutive days or eight intercalated days per school year. A one-year special leave (*licença sabática*) can be authorised in order to participate in continuing education/ train-

ing activities, complete specialised courses or develop applied research. The authorisation is dependent on the following conditions: having a permanent post, having a performance assessment equal or superior to 'Good' and working uninterruptedly as an Early Childhood Teacher for a minimum of eight years.

Obligatory or optional? The 40 hours of CPD for Portuguese workers are mandatory, according to the Labour Law. More specifically, CPD activities are obligatory for Early Childhood Teachers working in 3–5 public sector, influencing performance assessment and career progression. In this case, 50% of CPD activities must focus on the scientific and pedagogic dimension and at least one fifth of those activities must be accredited by the Scientific and Pedagogical Council of Professional Development.

In terms of specific CPD offers for the heads of ECEC provision, HEIs offer specialisation courses accredited by the SPCPD in domains such as School Organisation, Education Organisation, and Pedagogical Supervision and Training of Trainers, that can better prepare professionals for leadership roles. Master's and Doctoral degrees in these areas are also offered in several higher education institutions. Shorter continuing education/ training activities are available in the following areas: School Administration and Educational Administration, and Leadership, Coordination and Pedagogical Supervision.

***Funding support*:** CPD activities mandatory by law are free of charge for the ECEC professionals. The costs for the remaining CPD activities, including Master's and Doctoral studies, are usually covered by practitioners.

***Access to CPD*:** The most regular problem regarding access opportunities to CPD, both for core practitioners and for qualified and non-qualified co-workers, is the lack of specific opportunities for ECEC continuing education/ training. When available, the most common difficulty is associated with the need to ensure a temporary replacement, given the shortage of staff. According to the most recent report from the SPCPD (Conselho Científico-Pedagógico da Formação Contínua 2020), the pandemic also led to a decrease in CPD activities.

***CPD and career advancement*:** The participation in specific forms of CPD can benefit the Early Childhood Teacher at the level of career progression: the completion of a Master's degree reduces by one year the time legally demanded of permanence in a given professional position. The completion of doctoral studies reduces that time by two years. In both cases, the degree must be completed in a scientific area directly related to early childhood education, including Educational Sciences. Also, the result of teacher performance assessment must be at least 'Good'.

Key content focus of CPD for core professionals: No nationally compiled data are available on the main topics that are currently in focus in CPD activities offered in the public sector mainly by the CFAE. Information provided by the Association of Professionals of Early Childhood Education (*Associação de Profissionais de Educação de Infância* – APEI), the main private non-profit provider of CPD for core practitioners, shows that over the last five years the three main topics of CPD were: curriculum (organisation, management and assessment/evaluation), literacy, and expressions (arts, drama, motor).

The foreseen creation and publication of the pedagogical guidelines for the education and care for infants and toddlers is likely to have an influence on nationwide CPD initiatives for this particular sector.

Concerning the definition of priorities in CPD and the practitioner's participation in this process, Decree-Law 22/2014 foresees, as core principles, the contextualising of the various levels of education and of the provided offer, as well as linking CPD to the needs and priorities of schools and teachers. However, the lack of studies on CPD hinders the possibility to have a clearer picture on the practitioners' participation on defining the key content focus of CPD.

Research: Research focusing on the CPD activities for ECEC staff and their impact is practically non-existent. No large-scale research projects over the past five years were identified.

Current debates: In the current panorama of teachers' shortages in the short-term, the debates are particularly focused on initial professional education. However, CPD activities of ECEC staff continue to be a focus of attention. Concerning core practitioners, a recommendation from the National Council on Education (Faria et al. 2019) on the qualification and valorisation of Early Childhood Teachers and teachers from primary and secondary education emphasised the need to implement context-based CPD initiatives, with a strong focus on the problems identified by (early childhood) teachers, on collegiality and on research developed by professionals aiming at improving pedagogical practices. It also recommends the implementation of long-term reflection-based modalities, following international evidence on CPD and ECEC quality (e.g. Peleman et al. 2018).

The National Council on Education also published recommendations on the situation of auxiliary staff, calling attention to their important role within the education communities, as well as the relevance of their qualification and professional development, namely in the field of inclusive education (Percheiro, Almeida, and Rodrigues 2020). Indeed, the CPD of all staff in inclusive education has also been a relevant cornerstone in the national agenda, including teachers, leaders, specialist support staff, auxiliary staff, and also families.

Finally, some debate around new forms of CPD is to be highlighted, namely the initiative from the SPCPD to explore the advantages and risks of adopting the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) as a CPD format in teacher CPD (see Conselho Científico-Pedagógico da Formação Contínua 2021 for further information in Portuguese).

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

In terms of remuneration, there are differences between core practitioners working in public sector pre-primary education (3–5) and in the private sector non-profit or for-profit centre-based services for over and under 3 year-olds. This disparity is due to the split system that characterises ECEC provision in Portugal (see *Chapter **1***). This division leads to differences in the financing systems of each Ministry and in the practitioners' salaries. The salaries of Early Childhood Teachers working in the public sector depend on the professional positions and pathways established in the Career Statute of Pre-school, Basic and Secondary Teachers (Decree-Law 41/2012, 21 February). This statute establishes the same positions, remuneration rates and career progression requirements for all teaching professionals in the public sector (from pre-school to secondary education). When the Framework Law on Pre-School Education, Law no. 5/1997, 10 February (*Lei Quadro da Educação Pré-Escolar*) came into force, the Ministry of Education stated the intention to provide identical professional conditions for early childhood educators working in the private sector. This was realised through a salary supplement provided by the Ministry of Education for these professionals, in order to reduce the disparities between the two sectors. In spite of this initiative, remuneration differences still persist.

In the case of posts of responsibility, Centre Heads in the public sector have a reduction in the number of working hours. In the non-profit private sector, a higher salary is paid to the Technical

Director/ Pedagogical Director (close to 10% more). Student mentors/ supervisors receive no monetary reward.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

The vast majority of Portuguese Early Childhood Teachers work full-time. In spite of the absence of data on this specific issue, part-time employment is a rare occurrence among ECEC staff. In the pre-school public sector, the revision of the Career Statute of Pre-school, Basic and Secondary Teachers foresees the reduction of the contact time (*componente letiva*) in the following cases: (a) Early Childhood Teachers who have reached the age of 60 may request a five-hour reduction in their respective weekly contact time; (b) those who have completed 25 and 33 years of service can request the granting of total exemption from the contact time component for a period of one school year. The most recent amendment to the General Law on Labour in Public Functions allows for part-time employment (*meia jornada*). The Early Childhood Teachers can benefit in the following cases: (a) if they are 55 years of age or older and have grandchildren under the age of 12; (b) if they have children under 12 years of age or, regardless of age, with a disability or chronic illness.

Working hours may differ between the public and private sectors. In general, most Early Childhood Teachers in both sectors work 35 hours, 25 of them in direct contact with children (*componente letiva*), although the number may vary more in the private sector. The professionals working in private for-profit centres tend to work more hours than the educators working in the other sectors.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

The Career Statute of Pre-school, Basic and Secondary Teachers stipulates a probationary period, corresponding to one year, mandatory for all Early Childhood Teachers entering a permanent post in the public sector. This probationary period aims at verifying the teacher's competencies regarding the required professional profile; it is carried out in the educational setting in which the (pre-school) teacher is employed. During this period, the Early Childhood Teacher is accompanied and supported by an experienced ECEC core practitioner in the pedagogical, didactical and scientific domains. This senior teacher is designated by the coordinator of the curricular department and should preferably possess specialised training in the fields of educational organisation and curriculum development, pedagogical supervision or the training of trainers. The provided accompaniment should encompass: (a) support in the elaboration and implementation of an individual work plan including scientific, pedagogical and didactic components; (b) support in the planning of pedagogical activities, as well as in reflection about pedagogical practice and its improvement; (c) produce a report on the activities carried out, including classroom observations; (d) participate in the assessment of the teacher throughout the probationary period.

Despite this legal framework, the support measures in the workplace for newly Early Childhood Teachers have received little attention over the years. Some debate has arisen on the induction period of teachers, with the National Council on Education publishing a technical report that brought together national and international perspectives for a deeper reflection on the nature and models of the induction period (Faria et al. 2016) and for a "systemic and global view of the *continuum* of initial teacher education, induction and in-service education" (Flores 2021, 135).

7.4 Non-contact time

Early Childhood Teachers in the public sector – and also most in the private non-profit sector – are granted ten hours of paid non-contact time dedicated, among other activities, to planning, staff meetings, work with parents and the community, research and CPD activities.

7.5 Current staffing issues

A shortage of Early Childhood Teachers in the next few years is currently the most debated challenge relating to the ECEC workforce. In recent years, the accentuated aging of Portuguese teachers, including Early Childhood Teachers, has been identified as a critical issue (DGEEC and Direção de Serviços de Estatísticas da Educação 2021; Faria et al. 2019; Rodrigues et al. 2019). The most recent statistics, referring to the school year 2019/2020, show the following panorama regarding the Early Childhood Teachers in the public sector, by age range: <30 years: 3,4%; 30-39 years: 16%; 40-49 years: 26%; 50-59 years: 41,3%; <60: 13,3% (DGEEC, Direção de Serviços de Estatísticas da Educação (DSEE), and Divisão de Estatísticas dos Ensinos Básico e Secundário (DEEBS) n.d.). This circumstance is associated with other critical issues, namely the lack of attractiveness of the teaching profession and the decline in the number of candidates to pre-service programmes in HEI (Faria et al. 2019; Rodrigues et al. 2019). In a diagnosis study on the need for teachers from 2021 to 2030 (Catela Nunes et al. 2021), a reduction of 61% of pre-school teachers in the public sector due to retirement was estimated. This is the highest reduction in all teaching levels. The same study concluded that early childhood education is the educational level with a higher need for recruitment (54%) up to 2030/31.

Current debates on ways to ameliorate these circumstances are being conducted, particularly focused on introducing changes to legislation that regulate initial professional education (Decree-Law 79/2014) in order to increase the number of ECEC teachers being prepared in HEI.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Over the last five years, no policy reforms and initiatives relating directly to ECEC staffing and professionalisation were identified. However, relevant legislation on inclusive education came into force in 2018, altering the principles and intervention approach to inclusive education, with an impact on ECEC professionals and settings. More recently, important changes to the legal framework that regulates the IPE of Early Childhood Educators were introduced through decree-law 112/2023, 29 November, that was, meanwhile, revoked due to intense criticism from HEI. Changes to this legal framework are expected in the near future.

Decree-Law 54/2018, 6 July

This new legal framework aims at the realisation of the right of children to an inclusive education that responds to their potentialities, expectations and needs, “within the framework of a common and plural educational endeavour that provides everyone with the sense of participation and belonging in authentic conditions of equity” (2918). It entails the following guiding principles: (a) universal educability; (b) equity; (c) inclusion; (d) customisation; (e) flexibility; (f) self-determination; (g) parental involvement; (h) minimum interference. The adopted methodology is based on universal design for learning and on a multi-level approach to access the curriculum. This approach includes: flexible curricular models, systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of

the continuum of implemented interventions, dialogue between teachers and parents/caregivers, and a choice of measures to support learning, organised at different levels of intervention, according to the educational responses necessary for each learner to acquire a common base of competences while valuing their potential and interests (2919). These levels of intervention are: universal measures, corresponding to the responses that the school mobilises for all students, aiming at promoting participation and improved learning (e.g. the promotion of pro-social behaviour); selective measures, aiming at fulfilling the needs for learning supports not provided by universal measures (e.g. differentiated curricular pathways); and additional measures, aiming to respond to intense and persistent communication, interaction, cognitive or learning difficulties that require specialized resources of support to learning and inclusion.

This legislation also recognises the role of the Early Childhood Teacher within a multidisciplinary team to support inclusive education, as well as the right of this professional to support provided by the learning support centres, a support structure that aggregates human and material resources, knowledge, skills, and competencies of the school (Article 13).

In the context of the implementation of Decree-law 54/2018, a monitoring system was created, CPD processes were developed and a practical manual for professionals was produced by a team under the auspices of the Directorate-General of Education (2018). This manual intends to clarify aspects related to the implementation of the decree-law specially at a methodological level, including practical situations and materials to support the professionals' observation, self-reflection and self-assessment.

The recent OECD background country report on Portuguese inclusive education (Ministry of Education 2022) recognises the impressive progress that the country has made on this matter, but also identifies teachers' preparation for inclusive education as an area in which further improvements are needed, both at the level of pre-service and in-service education.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Professionalism of early childhood teachers working in baby rooms

***Source*:** Tadeu, B., and A. Lopes 2021 (see *References* for full details)

***Aims*:** The study examines the professional identities of Early Childhood Teachers who develop their professional activity in baby rooms.

Methods: The methodology was qualitative and interpretative. Seven educators, seven assistants and seven parents participated in focus groups, one for each type of participant. These discussion groups intended to explore perceptions, perspectives and conceptions about the socio-educational role of baby rooms and professionals, were moderated by a researcher and were guided by a script focused on predefined themes. In the case of early childhood teachers, the themes were: (a) socio-professional and training trajectories; (b) perceptions of professionalism and valued aspects in practice; (c) the lived world of work and (d) conceptions of children and childhood.

Selected findings: Concerning the main influences on professional identities, two main categories were identified: socio-professional and training trajectory, and the experience of the world of work. Within the first category, results indicated that three educators attributed importance to the influence of primary socialisation, namely the knowledge acquired within the family con-

text and the choice of their training paths. One of the educators referred to the minimal attention of HEI institutions to training for work with infants and toddlers in comparison with the preparation for pre-school education. Concerning the second category, all participants identified the main distinguishing features of practice in baby rooms as individualised routines and respect for the individual interests, rhythms and needs of babies. Tensions and inequalities were addressed by all participating Early Childhood Teachers, namely a lack of recognition as teachers, the exclusion of their work from service record, and the lack of legislation to place professional educators in baby rooms. The majority of educators referred taking on mainly a supervisory role, following up the work of assistants/auxiliary staff working directly with babies. Also, they identified that the burden of technical management and the multiplicity of tasks, functions and duties created a negative effect at the level of their physical and psychological well-being, resulting in a certain withdrawal from practice. Results also show the commitment of all professionals to their work, including their efforts towards pedagogical intentionality.

Implications: The study reinforces the need for changes in the Portuguese legal framework in order to make the placement of early childhood educators in baby rooms mandatory. It also emphasises the need to pay attention to educators' physical and emotional well-being given its impact in children's well-being. Finally, it reinforces the need to address team work in baby rooms, actively involving assistants and educators.

Assessment of workplace-based learning in the ECEC professional Master

***Source*:** Araújo, S. B., and A. P. Antunes 2021 (see *References* for full details)

***Aims*:** To examine ECEC candidate teachers' pathways of professional learning during a practicum through the use of a reflection-based instrument, in two different phases: interim regulatory assessment and final assessment. The study presents a composite research question: what was the professional Master students' learning progression on core professional competences at the level of: (i) observation; (ii) planning; (iii) action and (iv) reflection?

Methods: Participants were 62 students attending a professional Master course in Pre-school Education at a Portuguese HEI. Data were collected through the use of the Assessment Grid on the Learning Processes in Supervised Pedagogical Practice (AGLP_SPP), a reflection-based instrument used in the interim regulatory assessment and the final assessment of students' professional learning. Its construction took into consideration the Portuguese specific profile of the professional performance of an early childhood educator (Decree-Law 241/2001, Annex No. 1), the guiding principles of Pedagogical Practice of the HEI, and selected theoretical and methodological underpinnings, namely ECEC curricular approaches. The AGLP_SPP was organised in four domains and 25 dimensions: (1) observation (5 dimensions); (2) planning (6 dimensions); (3) action (9 dimensions) and (4) reflection (5 dimensions). The assessment based in the AGLP_SPP aimed at a collaborative and co-participatory analysis of the professional learning processes, both retrospectively and prospectively, with the participation of the student in her/his own assessment being highly valued.

Selected findings: The study shows a positive evolution of the Master students on core professional competences in the domains of observation, planning, action and reflection. However, in the observation domain (observation of the child and group(s), recording practices, and self-observation and observation of others) students showed more difficulty in reaching excellency in their practices. Lower results in the dimension "partnerships with families and community" in the interim regulatory assessment indicated the need to intensify students' learning opportunities on the collaborative work with families and communities during the first phase of the practicum. Once the assessment of workplace-based learning is relevant for the quality evaluation of

pre-service education programmes, the results also indicate the perceived effectiveness of the education processes undertaken within the ECEC Master programme.

The study also reveals that students' participation in their own assessment contributes to their professional learning and to strengthen their perception of the trustworthiness and transparency of the assessment process.

Implications: Results of the study show implications for the IPE of prospective Early Childhood Teachers, calling attention for the need to involve the students in the assessment of their professional learning during and after the field-based practicum. This participation is not stipulated in the legal framework that regulates IPE in Portugal. Also, the formative nature of assessment and evaluation in ECEC contexts creates a challenge for HEI in order to put into place a repertoire of assessment instruments and procedures through which the students can experiment first-hand the values and practices that she/he will develop in the ECEC contexts.

The place of the pedagogical practicum in the post-Bologna initial professional education of ECEC teachers

***Source*:** Figueira, S. 2017 (see *References* for full details)

***Aims*:** This study aimed: (a) to understand how the pedagogical practicum was conceived and developed in four Portuguese higher education institutions; (b) to understand the conceptions of the HEI teachers regarding the pedagogical practicum in the IPE of Early Childhood Teachers; (c) to know and evaluate the component of pedagogical practice according to the students' perspectives.

Methods: This qualitative study was developed in four Portuguese HEI. The participants were teachers, students and coordinators from the Master course in Pre-school Education of each institution. Techniques of data collection included documentary analysis of core documents (e.g. regulation of the pedagogical practicum), questionnaires for students and teachers, and semi-structured interviews for the coordinators of the Master programmes. Qualitative and quantitative data analysis were conducted.

Selected findings: Results indicated that the participants recognised the importance and central place of pedagogical practice in IPE. Students considered that the time allocated to initiation into professional practice in the Bachelor's degree in Basic Education was *insufficient* or *very insufficient*; on the contrary, their assessment of the *practica* in the Master's degree in Pre-school Education was positive, affirming its relevance for learning to become an Early Childhood Teacher. Teachers and coordinators confirmed the central relevance of pedagogical practice and the necessary links between all the course subjects to this component of the Master programmes. Globally, results also show that the organisation of *practica* in an alternating model (between the ECEC centres and HEI) made possible a consistent relationship between 'theory' and 'practice' and encouraged students' reflexivity. Finally, the active role of the student was unanimously recognised, as well as the importance of developing research processes throughout the pedagogical practice.

Implications: The study draws considerations on the need to strengthen the links between the *practica* and the other curricular units of the ECEC study programmes. It also recognises the lack of studies and the fragile body of evidence existing in Portugal and the need to conduct more research on this topic.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

An overview of the previous sections of this report suggests in conclusion that early childhood education has not been a priority in Portuguese public policies over the last five years. One exception is the political decision to legally guarantee free places in public pre-schools for all children from the age of 3 (Legislative Order n. 6/2018, 12 April), as well as the gradual extension of free places for all children attending non-profit nursery provision and home-based ECEC (Law n. 2/2022, 3 January). Critical circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the difficulties faced by different structures and dynamics related to the ECEC workforce. The next step is to identify some trends, tensions and challenges that will be critical for the Portuguese ECEC workforce in the next years.

Towards an integrated ECEC system: As outlined in *chapter 1*, Portugal has an split-sector ECEC system, maintaining a division between the 0–2 sector and the pre-school sector in terms of governance. This core characteristic of the Portuguese system creates disparities between the two sectors, impacting more negatively on the working conditions and socio-professional status of the professionals working with infants and toddlers. In 2021, a civic movement led by the Association of Professionals of Early Childhood Education (APEI) delivered to the Assembly of the Republic (AR) a petition with over 14,000 signatures demanding that the education and care of children under 3 years be fully integrated into the Education Act as part of the education system. However, the discussion of this issue in the AR has not yet created changes in the political panorama. The creation of an integrated ECEC system under the governance of the Ministry of Education remains a priority challenge.

Increase public investment in the 0–2 sector: The problems identified in this sector in the last SEEPRO report persist, i.e. lack of a national pedagogical framework, weak pre-service and in-service education/training of professionals, poor working conditions. The lesser attention that this sector has been receiving is also visible in terms of the scarcity of information available on provision for infants and toddlers, preventing a more comprehensive characterisation of the workforce profiles. Improving the availability and accessibility of data on this sector is strongly recommended. On a positive note, it is worth mentioning that the political programme of the current government included prospective investment in this sector and that an inter-ministerial initiative is being launched, combining the efforts of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, in order to produce pedagogical frameworks for working with infants and toddlers, aligned with the existing frameworks for pre-school education.

Improve IPE and CPD opportunities for ECEC professionals: As for IPE, continuous monitoring of HEI programmes needs to be carried out, in order for pre-service education/training to be consistently responding to the specificities of the professional profile of Early Childhood Teachers. In a time of relevant changes to the legal framework that regulates the professional qualifications for teaching in order to face the anticipated shortage of (early childhood) teachers, efforts should be made to avoid pervasive effects that could undermine HEI programmes quality and the overall quality of pedagogical practices. The attraction of students to the profession is also dependent on the working conditions, public image and prestige of these professionals. Improving these central aspects constitutes a relevant challenge for all stakeholders. As for CPD

opportunities, it is important to underline the much-needed inclusion of Early Childhood Teachers in large-scale national CPD programmes, something that has been somewhat neglected in recent years. Incremental CPD opportunities for the 0–2 sector, for assistants and leaders should also constitute a priority endeavour. Moreover, investing in research initiatives on these issues, as well as on other ECEC professionalisation and staffing issues, remains a challenge in the Portuguese context.

As we extensively know, ECEC can make relevant contributions towards more equitable, inclusive and sustainable societies. In Portugal, as in other countries, this cannot be met without creating the conditions for the rhetorical intentions to be converted into decisions and actions that really make a positive differential in the lives of young children, professionals and families.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

PORTUGAL

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC provision are: **nursery** (*creche,* 0–2) and **kindergarten** (*jardim de infância*, 3–5)[1]**.** Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Portugal

1882	Opening of the first official kindergarten working according to Froebelian principles
1911	Decree law that establishes the educational function of early childhood education, together with families
1936	Under the dictatorship regime, early childhood education schools were extinct; the education of young children was fully assigned to families – especially to mothers
1950 onwards	The first – mostly Catholic – training institutions are established for staff wishing to work professionally with young children.
Up to the 1970s	Early childhood education continues to be viewed primarily as a private family matter.
1973	Comprehensive reform of the education system
1978	First kindergarten opened under the auspices of the Ministry of Education
1979	– Publication of the Kindergarten Statutes – Publication of the Statutes for the training institutions (public) for early childhood teachers
1986	– Education Act, integrating the pre-school sector (3–5) – Initial professional education of early childhood teachers is carried out in polytechnic higher education institutions
1997	– Definition of the legal framework for the development and expansion of the national network of pre-primary education – The Framework Law establishes kindergartens as an official part of the education system. – Publication of the Curricular Guidelines for Pre-primary Education
2001	Publication of the professional profile of the Early Childhood Teacher
2006	Creation of the PARES programme that allows for the expansion of the national network of ECEC settings for under 3 year-olds
2008	Definition of specialised support (special education) in public and private kindergartens
2009	Legal entitlement to at least one year in kindergarten for 5 year-olds comes into force.
2011	Publication of guidelines by the Ministry of Education on assessment and evaluation in pre-primary education.
2015	Revision of the Framework Plan New legislation on the conditions for becoming a childminder
2016	Publication of the revised version of the Curricular Guidelines for Pre-primary Education
2016/2017	Legal entitlement to a place in kindergarten is extended to 4 year-olds.

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6 (as in Portugal): **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds.

2018	– Introduction of legal entitlement for 3 year-olds – New legislation on inclusive education
2022	– Progressive extension of entitlement for the 0–2 sector (*creche*) is introduced. – A working group is set up to develop national pedagogical guidelines for the 0–2 sector (*creche*) under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security.

Sources: Oberhuemer et al. 2010; Barros Araújo 2017; Eurydice 2023.

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Portugal has a separately organised system of early childhood education and care with two different sectors. ECEC settings for children under 3 (ISCED 01) are the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MLSSS – *Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social*). The Ministry of Education (*Ministério da Educação*) is responsible for pre-primary education in kindergartens for children between the ages of 3 and school entry and for ensuring the quality of education. Pre-primary education is legally considered the first stage of the education system. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour share responsibility for the supervision, monitoring, organisation and operation of ECEC settings.

General objectives and legislative framework

The Portuguese Constitution establishes the right of every individual to education, regardless of gender, race, language, religious, political, ideological convictions or sexual orientation.

Objectives for ECEC for under 3 year-olds emphasise child well-being and holistic development, as well as support for parents in balancing their work and family life.

Legislative decrees of 2011 (Ordinance 262/2011, 31 August) with amendments introduced in 2012 (Ordinance 411/2012, 14 December) and in 2023 (Ordinance 190-A/2023, 5 July) set out the conditions for the operation of day nurseries.

The main objectives of pre-primary education include promoting children's personal and social development, supporting their integration into different social groups and their communication and critical thinking skills, and ensuring equal opportunities. Also in focus are the well-being and safety of children, the identification of special needs and the support of parents in the educational process. Early childhood education and care is understood as complementary to parental education. A strong emphasis is therefore placed on close cooperation with parents.

According to the Act on Early Childhood Education (*Lei-Quadro da Educação Pré-Escolar*, 1997) (Law 5/1997, 10 February), this is the first stage of the education system in Portugal in close cooperation with families. In addition, the Basic Law on Education (*Lei de Bases do Sistema Educativo*, 1986) (Law 46/1986, 14 October) with amendments until 2023) defines pre-primary education as being for children between 3 years of age and school entry and should take place in kindergartens.

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Portugal provided orientation on legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the *chapter References*.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Attending ECEC provision during the early childhood phase up to school entry is not compulsory in Portugal. For under 3 year-olds, there is no legal entitlement to a place in ECEC provision.

From the age of 3 onwards, children have a legal right to a place in a kindergarten for 25 hours a week (Normative Order 6/2018, 12 April, with amendments of Normative Order 10-B/2021, 14 April).

Compulsory schooling begins at the age of 6.

Main types of provision

Childcare sector (ISCED 01)

Nurseries (*creches*) offer places for children between 3 months and 3 years. Each setting decides on its own opening hours; the majority are open from 7:00/8:00 to 18:00/20:00. 87% of nurseries are open 10–12 hours a day; 42.4% of children spend 6–8 hours a day at the nursery and 45.8% 8–10 hours a day (MLSSS 2023, 36).

Registered **childminders** (*amas)* provide home-based services for children up to the age of 3. These services are organised and monitored by the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security. Minimum qualification requirements came into force in 2015 (Decree-Law 115/2015, 22 June). They include a certificate of compulsory education and short-term training units in supporting children and young people.

At least four home-based providers may join together to form a **family childcare service** (*creche familiar*), which operates within the framework of a social or non-profit institution.

Education sector (ISCED 02)

Kindergartens *(jardins de infância)* for 3 to 6 year-olds usually provide educational activities for approximately five hours daily, and also additional recreational activities and family support. Required opening hours are up to 17:30 for at least eight hours per day. Some have longer opening hours to meet the needs of parents.

In order to reach children in rural or remote areas, in rare cases **mobile early education provision** (*educação pré-escolar itinerante*) may be available for 3 to 5 year-olds, deploying professionals in changing locations (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 188).

Provider structures

In Portugal, a public and a private network of ECEC settings complement one another. The private sector consists of both non-profit and for-profit provision. In order to ensure that children can attend centre-based settings beyond the 25 free hours, a cooperation between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security and the Network of Private Institutions for Social Solidarity (*Instituições Particulares de Solidariedade Social*, IPSS) was formed.

Childcare sector (ISCED 01)

Most nurseries are under private (non-profit or commercial) ownership, with operating licences approved by the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security. The national coverage (Portuguese mainland) rate in 2020 was 52,9%, with lower coverage rates in large urban centres like Lisbon and Porto.

In 2021, 77% of nurseries were private-non-profit, while 23% were private-for-profit. 101,191 children attended nurseries (MLSSS 2023, 25f).

Education sector

In 2022, well over a half (60.3%) of Portuguese kindergartens were public services: of a total of 5,767 settings, 3,475 were publicly run (Pordata 2023). 2,292 kindergartens were privately run.

Also, of the children over 3 years enrolled in kindergartens in 2021, more than half (53.9%) attended public settings, 28.9% private non-profit, mostly IPSS-affiliated institutions, and 17.2% private-commercial institutions (Eurostat 2023e).

Table 1

Portugal: Number and shares of children in kindergartens (3 years to statutory school age) by provider type, 2021

Provider type	Number of children	Shares, in %
Public	135,372	53.9
Private non-profit	72,618	28.9
Private for-profit	43,070	17.2
Total private	115,688	46.1
Total	**251,060**	

Source: Eurostat 2023e

Participation rates in regulated ECEC settings

Over the past 15 years, a significant increase in participation rates can be observed in both age groups (4 months to under 3 years and 3 years to statutory school entry). While in 2005 only 30% of under 3 year-olds and 46% of over 3 year-olds were enrolled in a centre-based setting, in 2022 over half (52.5%) of under 3 year-olds and over 3 year-olds (57.6%) attended ECEC provision (see *Table 2*).

Overall, children under the age of 6 spend an average of 39 hours a week in an ECEC setting (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 68).

Table 2

Portugal: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2005–2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	3.6	18.5
	Over 30 hours	26.3	27.5
	No enrolment in ECEC	70	54
2010	1 to 29 hours	4.5	10.1
	Over 30 hours	27.0	71.0
	No enrolment in ECEC	68.6	19.0
2015	1 to 29 hours	3.9	5.8
	Over 30 hours	39.2	86.5
	No enrolment in ECEC	57.0	7.7
2022	1 to 29 hours	2.3	3.9
	Over 30 hours	50.2	53.7
	No enrolment in ECEC	47.5	42.4

Source: Eurostat 2023b, slight deviations from 100% due to rounding

National statistics reveal that in 2022, a total of 259,030 children attended kindergarten and were cared for by 17,260 professionals, of whom only 1% were men (Pordata 2023).

Broken down by age group, Eurostat reports that more than three quarters of 3 year-olds attend a kindergarten, 93.9% of 4 year-olds and almost all 5 year-olds (see *Table 3*).

Table 3

Portugal: Number and enrolment rates of children in nurseries and kindergartens, by age, 2021

Age	Number of children in kindergartens (ISCED 02 settings)	Enrolment rates in kindergartens, in %
Under 2 years	n.d.	
2 year-olds	n.d.	
3 year-olds	68,533	78.3
4 year-olds	83,253	93.9
5 year-olds	86,534	99.0
6 year-olds	12,740	15.1

Source: Eurostat 2023g, j

The enrolment rate for children under 3 years of age was 48.8% in 2021. Of the overall percentage of children attending nurseries, 17% were infants (up to 1 year of age) and nearly 81% were toddlers (1–2 year-olds) (MLSSS 2023, 37). However, the enrolment rate varies widely across the country: for example, demand is significantly higher than supply in Lisbon and Porto, while in rural areas supply often exceeds demand.

Financing and costs for parents

National data indicate a projected share of 4.6% of GDP for 'education' in Portugal for 2021 (Pordata 2023). In 2019, 0.34% was allocated to the early education sector (OECD 2023).

The financing of pre-primary education is the joint responsibility of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security and the municipalities. The educational programme of the public pre-primary network is completely financed by the state. For ECEC settings in the private solidarity network (IPSS), the state covers the costs of educational units and ensuring pedagogical quality. Childcare beyond the state-funded 25 hours and other private facilities are financed by parents through income-related fees. Low-income families can receive financial support under certain circumstances (European Commission 2020, 51).

In 2022, a new legal framework (DRE 2022] came into force stipulating the progressive extension of free access to childcare until 2024. 25 hours in kindergartens are free of charge for parents, beyond which they also pay income-related fees regulated by law.

For children under the age of 3 who attend non-profit nurseries with a cooperation agreement with the MLSSS, there is a fixed annual state contribution of €304.23 (2022). In addition, it is regulated by law (Law 2/2022) that from 1 September 2022, the first year in nurseries will be free of charge for all children, followed by the second year in 2023 and the third year in 2024. Furthermore, in September 2023, the *Creche Feliz* (Happy Nursery) programme was launched, which offers free access to all nurseries for children born after 1 September 2021. This applies to low-income parents nurseries which are part of the pool of participating nurseries in the social and solidarity network.

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 6% of net household income on childcare costs[3] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

In **childcare settings** for under 3 year-olds children are usually divided into same-age groups. The maximum number per group is 10 children if they cannot walk, 14 children who can walk or are under 24 months old, or 18 children between 24 and 36 months. If there are too few children for this type of grouping, mixed-age groups with a maximum of 16 children can also be formed. Two assistants are responsible for ten children at most under 1 year, one core pedagogue and one assistant for 14 children between 1 and 2 years, and one core pedagogue and one assistant for 18 children over 2 years.

Groups in **kindergartens** consist of a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 25 children. If there are children with special educational needs in the group (maximum two per group), the maximum number is 20, with one core pedagogue and one assistant per group. The ratio in groups with 1 year-olds is 14 children maximum per core pedagogue or assistant, with 2 year-olds 18 children and with 3, 4 or 5 year-olds 25 children.

In special education facilities the maximum group size is 15 children.

In 2022, one member of teaching staff was responsible for an average of 15 children in kindergarten (Pordata 2023).

Curricular frameworks

Childcare sector

There is no pedagogical framework for **nursery settings**, although the Directorate General of Education and the Institute of Social Security are currently working on pedagogical guidelines for this age group. However, the Curriculum for Pre-primary Education, updated in 2016, indicates that the general pedagogical approaches and principles should apply to the whole period before compulsory schooling (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 95). According to legal regulations of 2011 and 2012, each nursery setting is obliged to implement its own pedagogical projects in each group, which serve to plan and accompany activities that are geared to individual children's needs and include fostering motor, cognitive, personal, emotional and social skills. In addition, there is a focus on nutrition, hygiene and safety aspects.

Education sector

The reference framework for work in **kindergartens** is the Curricular Framework for Pre-primary Education (*Orientações Curriculares para a Educação Pré-Escolar*, OCEPE), updated in 2016, which sets out pedagogical principles and organisational aspects. Three content areas are particularly emphasised: (1) social and personal aspects, including the development of attitudes and values; (2) expression and communication, including artistic expression, spoken language, introduction to writing, as well as mathematics and physical activity; and (3) knowledge of the world, including learning about different sciences by practising how to search for information in a systematic way.

[3] The calculation is based on the following fictitious model: two parents working full-time (average income); two 2 and 3 year-old children in full-time care; relevant care allowances included.

Professionals can choose the methods they think best suit the children's interests and needs. To support professionals, the Ministry of Education provides various booklets on working with the curricular framework. To facilitate the transition to primary school, the learning areas of the curriculum are aligned with those of primary school.

Digital education

In the Curricular Framework for Pre-primary Education, the section on "knowledge of the world" also mentions the technological world. The use of technology in kindergarten is seen as a learning tool that makes it possible to gather information, to communicate with others or to organise. As digital media have a strong appeal to children and play an important role in their daily lives, it is important that they are supported from an early age to look critically at this influence, to understand the potential and risks and to know how to protect themselves. Media education is linked to other content areas and implies that the child is not only a consumer but also a producer, thus broadening their knowledge and perspective on reality. Professionals are required to start from children's existing knowledge and introduce them to new areas in a playful way. Children should therefore be supported in recognising technological resources in their environment, in explaining their functions and uses, and in using various technical media carefully and safely in their everyday lives.

Monitoring – evaluation

In general, evaluation procedures in the education system are the responsibility of the General Inspectorate of Education and Science (*Inspeção-Geral da Educação e Ciência*, IGEC), the Directorate of General Education and Scientific Statistics (*Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência*, DGEEC) and the Institute of Educational Evaluation (*Instituto de Avaliação Educacional*, IAVE). IGEC provides supervision, audits and technical oversight throughout the education system and also proposes quality improvement measures. The DGEEC ensures the analysis of statistical data, supports strategic planning and evaluates the results; IAVE creates and coordinates evaluation instruments.

Child-related assessment

No specific assessment measures are required for children **under 3 years** of age. However, professionals observe each child and discuss these observations with parents.

Current curricular guidelines reinforce the formative assessment of children in **kindergartens**. It is seen as an integral part of education and an ongoing process. It is neither about grading children's learning according to standards nor about making a value judgement about the child. The instruments used (e.g. conversations, learning histories, portfolios) should make it possible to observe, record and assess the children's learning and developmental progress based on the areas defined in the curricular framework. In this way, the educator can take measures, if necessary, to better adapt the educational processes to the needs of the children. These assessments take place at different points in time and the perspectives of the children themselves and the parents are also taken into account.

Centre-based internal evaluation

In ECEC settings for **under 3 year-olds**, self-evaluation is recommended but not compulsory (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 126).

Self-evaluation measures in **kindergartens** are mandatory and cover, among other things, the results of educational projects and the implementation of curricular strategies. Centre leaders are responsible for preparing a report at the end of each kindergarten year. Self-evaluation procedures follow set criteria such as staff satisfaction with working conditions, teamwork or availability of materials. The results are included in the external evaluation of ECEC settings.

External evaluation

Quality assurance measures in both sectors include, for example: overall quality, quality of staff, implementation of the curriculum (only in kindergartens), equipment, compliance with safety rules and children's performance. For this purpose, checklists are mainly used in nurseries, in kindergartens also questionnaires or self-reflection reports.

ECEC settings for under 3 year-olds are externally evaluated by the Institute for Social Security (*Instituto da Segurança Social*) through on-site visits (a minimum of one visit every two years) and an analysis of relevant information (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 125).

External evaluations of kindergartens are conducted by IGEC in cycles; each institution is evaluated once every five years. Two IGEC inspectors and two external experts look beyond aspects of self-evaluation to examine leadership and management, child development, educational planning and outcomes. They use different methods such as document analysis, statistics, questionnaires, observations, interviews and on-site visits. Each area is assessed using a 5-point scale. In kindergartens, the opinions of children and parents are also included. A manual on inspection suggests that the children's views should be taken into account, especially with regard to their preferred activities, their freedom in choosing these activities and their interactions with professionals (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 132). The evaluation reports are published and the institutions have the opportunity to comment on them.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special education needs and disabilities

Law 54/2018 newly regulates the inclusion of children with special educational needs. The main aim is to provide all children with the support they need and to place them in mainstream settings whenever possible (European Commission 2020, 104). In addition, the support of children under 6 with special needs has been regulated by law since 2009 through the National Intervention System in Early Childhood Education (*Sistema Nacional de Intervenção Precoce na Infância* – SNIPI). This law focuses primarily on the individualised support of all children with special care needs and also their families. The corresponding training of the professionals is also discussed.

This system, coordinated jointly by the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education in cooperation with families and municipalities, provides facilities for children from birth to 6 years of age through local resource centres, as well as in cooperation with families and experts working in nursery centres or in kindergartens. For children with disabilities, Individual Education Plans (*Plano Educativo Individual*, IEP) are drawn up, which include both the necessary measures and evaluation aspects. As a rule, these children have priority in the allocation of places in kindergartens. Each ECEC setting is required to establish a multidisciplinary team that supports inclusive education and provides appropriate measures.

The majority of children with disabilities attend regular institutions, only about 1% of the children who cannot be adequately supported there attend special institutions.

Children with a background of migration – Children from Roma Communities

In 2022, only 6.8% of the population had a non-Portuguese citizenship. Of these, three quarters (745.8%) came from countries outside the EU27(2020). In the age group up to 5 years, these proportions were 3.2% and 79.6% respectively (Eurostat 2023c).

In 2021, 29.2% of the group with a non-Portuguese background were persons from Brazil who held the status of right of residence, followed by 6% persons from the United Kingdom, 4.9% from Cape Verde, 4.1% from Romania and 3.9% from Ukraine (INE 2023, 7).

Guidelines for Portuguese as a second language in pre-primary education for children over 3 years of age have recently been introduced. There is an agreement with Romania to provide Romanian language and culture services to help children better understand their cultural identity (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 114f).

The RISE (Roma inclusive school experience) project, which has been implemented in kindergartens and other settings since 2019, aims to develop innovative strategies for the inclusion of Roma children in educational institutions. Within the framework of the National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities (*Estratégia Nacional para a Integração das Comunidades Ciganas*, ENICC – 2018-2022), professionals in kindergartens receive guidelines and training to facilitate their work with Roma children. However, in 2020, attendance rates of Roma children were still well below average (European Commission 2020, 133, 136).

Parental leave arrangements[4]

There are two options for **Maternity leave**, called "Initial Parental leave" (*licença parental inicial*) since 2009, of which 42 days are compulsory for the mother after giving birth: (1) either 120 days with full pay or (2) 150 days with 80% of pay. If each parent takes at least 30 (or twice 15) consecutive days, the time is extended to 150 days (with 100% payment) or 180 days (with 83% payment). If the father takes at least 60 consecutive days, the percentage increases to 90%.

The basis is the average income of the first six months before the Maternity leave and the payment into a social security scheme. 15 days during the fifth month can be taken by both parents at the same time. After the first 120 days, parental leave can also be combined with part-time work.

Fathers receive 35 days of fully (without upper limit) paid **Paternity leave** (*licença parental exclusiva do pai*), of which 28 days are compulsory and seven must be taken immediately after the birth. The remaining 21 days must be taken consecutively or in periods of at least seven days each.

The so-called **Supplementary Parental leave** (*licença parental complementar*) amounts to three (non-transferable) months per parent and is usually unpaid. It can be taken until the child's 6th birthday and also in different time blocks. Only unpaid Parental leave can be taken by both parents at the same time. It can also be taken part-time and combined with part-time work (three months each per parent, non-transferable) until the child is 12 months old.

In 2022, 45.9% of fathers shared the "Initial Parental leave" with the mother. 69.5% of couples chose the option with six months paid at 83%. In 2022, 68.3% of fathers took the non-compulsory days of Paternity leave. Only 13.6% of parents took Supplementary Parental leave directly following Maternity leave in 2022; this proportion decreased significantly since 2020.

[4] The brief overview in this chapter is based mainly on the country note for Portugal by Mafalda Leitão and colleagues in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Portugal

*Country expert assessment by **Sara Barros Araújo***

Providing access to and professionalising the 0–2 sector

Despite public investment in the expansion of services for infants and toddlers, access to these services remains a challenge. In 2021, the coverage rate in Portugal (mainland) was 52,9%, with identified disparities among regions (from 86,9% in the district of Guarda to 37,1% in the second largest Portuguese urban centre, Porto) (MLSSS 2023, 30). The need to increase access, particularly in large urban centres, persists as a critical challenge. At the level of public policies, the integration of the 0–2 sector into the education system, resulting in an integrated system of early childhood education and care (0–6) under the governance of the Ministry of Education, continues to be identified as a high priority. The professionalisation of this sector should encompass measures in order to improve the working conditions, the professional preparation and, overall, the status of the professionals working with infants and toddlers. Two recent positive initiatives related to this topic should be highlighted: the current process of creation of national pedagogical guidelines under the coordinated efforts of the ME and MLSSS and the implementation of the national programme "Happy Nursery" (*Creche Feliz*), with the aim of a progressive extension of entitlement for the 0–2 sector. Concerning the latter, monitoring mechanisms are advised in order to identify its strengths and needed adjustments.

Improving the working conditions of Early Childhood Teachers

Over the last months, the country has witnessed several public manifestations of dissatisfaction from teachers (strikes, demonstrations, interventions in the media), led by teachers' unions and demanding the urgent improvement of their working conditions. Among others, main demands are being made over the need to revise the recruitment and mobility model, to provide fair wages and to revise the retirement conditions for Early Childhood Teachers and Primary Teachers. Meetings have been held in order to find the most adequate and feasible solutions to improve the professionals' working conditions, the overall social status of the profession and its attractiveness for future teachers.

Reinforcing the specific professionalism and identity of ECEC

This remains a challenge in the Portuguese context and is related to the struggle against a colonisation through methodologies of a transmissive nature that are particularly used in primary education, resulting in a process of pervasive 'schoolification' that can be observed very early in children's experiences. This brings with it the need to rethink several aspects at the level of educational policies, particularly those that regulate the initial professional education/training of Early Childhood Teachers. Indeed, critiques have emerged regarding the sequential model introduced by the Bologna Process at the level of Early Childhood Teachers' pre-service education, characterised tendentiously by a disciplinary logic and a lack of units of pedagogical practice (practica) throughout the first three years of studies, two aspects that are likely to compromise professional learning and the specific identity of ECEC professionalism.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Portugal was 10,352,042. It increased slightly from 2000 to 2010, decreased between 2010 and 2019 and increased again slightly from 2020 onwards (2000: 10,249,022; 2010: 10,573,479; 2020: 10,295,909) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), and the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.35, Portugal was well below the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[5].

Children under age 6

Table 4
Portugal: Number of under 6 year-olds in the total population, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year-olds	79,911
1 year-olds	78,254
2 year-olds	81,207
3 year-olds	83,354
4 year-olds	84,634
5 year-olds	87,335
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**494,695**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 2.3% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, and 4.8% were children under 6 years of age. These proportions are now well below the EU27 average, whereas before 2015 they were around the same level as these.

[5] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU)

Table 5

Portugal: Distribution of under 6 year-olds in population by age compared with EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Portugal/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Portugal	3.3	3.1	6.4
	∅ EU15[6]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Portugal	3.2	3.2	6.4
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Portugal	2.5	2.8	5,3
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Portugal	2.3	2.5	4.8
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

Almost two thirds (65.6%) of all households with children under 6 in Portugal in 2022 were couple households. Single-parent households accounted for 4.4% – almost exclusively single mothers (4.3%).

Table 6

Portugal: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %+
Total households	962,500	
Couple households	631,800	65.6
Other types of households	288,000	29.9
Total single households	42,700	4.4
Single households, women	41,100	4.3
Single households, men	1,600**	0.1

Source: Eurostat 2023k, * Own calculations, ** data calculated

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Portugal, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 78.6% and for women 74.4% (Eurostat 2023l).

In 2022, 75.4% of women and 86.0% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were slightly above the EU-average (87.2%) and those of mothers well above EU-average (63.6%) (Eurostat 2023f).

[6] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Table 7a

Portugal: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Portugal	69.6	86.7
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[7]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Portugal	75.4	86.0
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[8]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023f

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 10b:*

Table 10b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023f, 2023l

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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[7] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

[+++]Office for National Statistics. 2023. *Families and the labour market, UK: 2021.* https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2021

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[9]

In 2022, 17.6% of children under 6 in Portugal were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was slightly lower than the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 20.1% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 8.2% of children under 6 suffered from severe material deprivation – also higher than the EU27 average of 6.1%. For the total population, it was 3.9% (EU: 4.3%) (Eurostat 2023h, i).

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[9] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

ROMANIA

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report authors

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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1. ECEC governance in Romania

In recent years, early childhood education and care in Romania has gone through considerable changes at the governance level. Pursuing an integrated approach towards early education has been further strengthened through the National Education Act 1/2011, modified by law 17/2022. The Act (article 27) was amended to include nurseries as part of the national pre-university education system and to offer children between the ages of 11 months and 3 years integrated education, care and supervision services.

Since September 15, 2021, nurseries come under the auspices and guidance of the Ministry of National Education (*Ministerul Educației Naționale*) – MEN – through the County School Inspectorates, regardless of whether they are assigned to a state kindergarten. Furthermore, on April 28, 2022, Decision 566 of 2022 included strategies for the organisation and operation of nurseries and other early education units, thus creating a legislative framework to support an integrated approach.

Since nurseries/crèches became part of the education system in the 2021-2022 school year, the draft Government Decision approving strategies for organising and operating nurseries and other early education units has proposed the following:

- Where local public authorities (LPA) request nursery provision, this should be included within the available early childhood education units (kindergartens) and included in the school network of pre-university education.
- Ensuring the strategic coordination of the nurseries for which the local public authorities do not request districting status and for which the LPA takes on the role of founding legal entity; in such cases, strategic coordination is carried out by delegating responsibility to a kindergarten through the school inspectorate.
- Ensuring, upon request, the strategic coordination of the nurseries remaining under the responsibility of local public authorities as social services.
- Ensuring the necessary personnel for the development of early childhood education by the Ministry of Education, in compliance with quality standards and the legislation in force; starting from the 2021-2022 school year, Childcare Educators from state nurseries that come under the coordination of the Ministry of Education can, for the next four years, occupy the position of Childcare Educator, provided they meet the specific requirements of the Ministry of Education's framework for the recognition and attestation of professional skills.
- Regulation of aspects regarding the enrolment of children, the number of children in the group, the types of staff and their duties, the partnership with parents and other partners at the central/local level, as well as aspects regarding the educational environment and the content of education in the units that offer childcare services and early pre-school education.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Staff in nurseries

Staff in nurseries currently comprise the following categories:

- Management staff: Director / Centre Head
- Pedagogical staff: Educator – Early Years (*educator-puericultor*)
- Specialist support staff, e.g. Medical Assistant
- Non-specialist staff: administrator, caregiver, cook, etc.

Two main groups of staff work directly with the children on a daily basis:

Educatori–puericultori (Educators – Early Years) hold a professional qualification acquired at a Pedagogical High School. Pedagogical High Schools are vocational upper secondary education institutions offering qualifications at EQF level 4 and ISCED (2011) levels 3 and 4. Some staff in nurseries may also hold a higher education Bachelor's degree (three years) in educational sciences (Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-primary Education), mainly where services for the under 3 year-olds are offered in groups affiliated to kindergartens. In recent years, Pedagogical High Schools have also organised a form of tertiary non-university qualification route for those already holding a high school graduation diploma from regular high schools.

Îngrijitori (Caregivers) complete a form of upper secondary education and a compulsory in-service training module of at least 30 hours focussing on early childhood education and care and parenting. Beyond that, there are no minimum requirements regarding initial professional studies for Caregivers in nurseries. There is currently no formal obligation for nurseries/crèches organised as independent institutions to have staff holding a specialist higher education qualification, although employing staff with the appropriate qualifications should be a necessary prerequisite for quality in early education for children under 3 years of age.

Although the staffing requirements for work in nurseries/infant-toddler centres are not formally regulated, some universities have started to offer specialist degrees in early childhood education. A relevant example here is the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, which has been offering a two-year Master's degree in Early Childhood Education since 2013.

Staff in kindergartens

At the level of pre-primary education/kindergartens (3 to 6 year-olds), three main categories of staff may be working in direct contact with the children, each having followed a different qualification route.

Educatoare (Educators – Early Years) complete a specialist (early childhood education) qualification at a Pedagogical High School (upper secondary vocational). Persons with this qualification are still working in the system, although this specific route is not available any more as a standalone qualification. This route is now viewed only as a precursor to becoming a fully qualified Pre-primary Teacher, since in order to gain a permanent position in a kindergarten, the completion of a Bachelor study route in Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-primary Education is now the formal requirement.

Institutori (Elementary Teachers) complete a short-term higher education degree (three years) awarded by the University College of Elementary Teachers *(Colegiul Universitar Pedagogic de Institutori)*. This award originates from the pre-Bologna system (up to 2005), when regular

higher education degrees took four to six years to complete. The title of *Institutor* could also be held by qualified Educators (*educatoare*) who had completed a higher education diploma after their initial studies, regardless of the specialisation they had followed.

As from 2005 this qualification has been replaced by:

Profesori pentru învățământul Primar și Preșcolar (Primary and Pre-primary Teachers) with a higher education degree and a dual specialism. The first graduates with this specialism completed their studies in 2008.

Although the minimum requirement for working in a kindergarten as a core professional is now a Bachelor's degree, the staff in kindergartens may have any one of the above-mentioned qualifications.

For early childhood education and care in **nurseries** in Romania, required staff qualifications are still not clearly defined. From the viewpoint of the authors of this report, the specialisation of "Childcare Educator" (see below) needs to be reintroduced in upper secondary schools with a pedagogical profile.

According to Law no. 17/2022, Art. 41 (Portal Legislativ 2022), the **Childcare Educator** in early education units in nurseries is broadly expected to carry out tasks according to the Early Education Curriculum approved by the Ministry of National Education. These include the following:

- Care and psychomotor stimulation; supporting the development of socio-affective behaviour; training and improving verbal behaviour; supporting cognitive development and learning skills and attitudes
- Recording each child's progress in an observation notebook and progress assessment sheet
- Actively collaborating with parents/legal representatives and holding information and training programmes to develop parental skills (Government of Romania 13/2022a)
- The activity of the Childcare Educator is coordinated by the Teachers' Council within the ECEC unit designated by the County School Inspectorate.

During recent years, the changes in early education in nurseries in Romania have led to new regulations regarding the training process of **non-teaching staff** who interact directly with the children.

The term 'non-teaching staff' refers to assistant staff not specifically educated/trained as teachers. Through the draft Government Decision of September 10, 2021, "non-teaching staff of the early childhood education unit must complete a specific professional training module in early education, with a duration of at least 30 hours, once every 5 years. The module includes the following topics: principles of early education, holistic approach to the child and teamwork and educating and supporting families to develop parenting skills" (Government of Romania 13/2022a, Project HG approval methodology nurseries, Art.36, 12).

The guidelines for the organisation and operation of nurseries and other early childhood education units approved by Government Decision no. 1252/2012 provide a framework regarding the activities of the nursery. However, the current Decision no. 566/2022 no longer specifies an employee to child ratio, so there are no staffing requirements based on the number of children in the group. The only exception is in the case of the Childcare Educator; however, this staff category is on the verge of extinction, given that today, in Romania, we only have 2–3 classes per year of Childcare Educators in the few remaining pedagogical high schools with an educator-childcare specialisation.

In terms of older types of certification, these may be graduates from pedagogical high schools, post-secondary pedagogical schools, university colleges of teachers or other equivalent schools with a specialisation in pre-school and primary education.

In the Ministerial Order 5573/2011, Art.32 and Art.33, the functions of **auxiliary teaching staff** are listed, and among those assigned to early education are the following: medical assistant, social assistant and a school doctor employed by the institution.

In terms of further non-teaching staff, among those who interact directly with young children are: cook, caretaker and night supervisor, the latter being a position found in nurseries with a weekly schedule.

Table 1 shows ECEC staff working in direct contact with children in centre-based settings and also categorises the core professionals (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at end of this chapter).

Table 1
Romania: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
(Primary and) Pre-primary Teacher *Profesor pentru învățământul preșcolar* *Profile*: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	Kindergarten and nursery *Grădiniţe, creșă* 1–5 years[1]	Core peda-gogue with group respon-sibility	1–5 years	3 years at university *Award:* Bachelor's de-gree ECTS credits: 180 EQF Level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Educator *Educatoare* *Profile*: Pre-primary Educa-tion Professional	Kindergarten *Grădiniţe* 3–6 years	Core peda-gogue with group respon-sibility	3–6 years	*Since 2005:* 3-year university pro-gramme *Award:* Bachelor's de-gree ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6 *Up to 2005:* 5 years upper second-ary pedagogical high school route ECTS credits: n/a[2] EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 3, 4
Elementary Teacher *Institutor*	Kindergarten *Grădiniţe* 3–6 years	Core peda-gogue with	3–6 years 6–11 years	3 years at higher educa-tion college

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children en-rolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3-, 4- and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years, as in Romania

[2] n/a not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
(since 2005 re-placed by „Early Childhood Teacher" qualification, but still working in kin-dergartens and pri-mary schools)	Primary school 6–11 years	group respon-sibility		*Award:* Short cycle uni-versity degree ECTS credits: 180 EQF Level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5
Childcare Educator *Îngrijitor copii* *Profile*: Early Child-hood Pedagogy Pro-fessional	Nursery / Kindergarten *Creșă /Grădinițe* 1–5 years	Core peda-gogue (nursery) Qualified co-worker (kin-dergarten)	1–5 years	Upper secondary edu-cation ECTS credits: n/a EQF Level: 4 ISCED 2011: 4
Early Childhood Assistant *Asistent educatoare*	Nursery/ kindergarten *Creșă /Grădinițe* 1–5 years	Non-qualified co-worker	1–5 years	Since 2021: Mandatory attendance at a 30-hour course every 5 years
Medical Doctor *Medic*	Nursery/ kindergarten *Creșă /Grădinițe* 1–5 years	Provides first aid in medical situations	1–5 years	Faculty of Medicine, University, 4 years ECTS credits: 240 EQF Level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Assistant Medical Nurse *Asistent medical*	Nursery/ kindergarten *Creșă /Grădinițe* 1–5 years	Daily triage of children	1–5 years	Post-secondary studies, 3 years ECTS credits: n/a EQF Level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5

Worth mentioning here is the fact that, at the level of National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, an initiative was registered to set up a new undergraduate degree (Bachelor level) on early childhood education, correlated with previous degrees in pre-school and primary education. This initiative led to approval of new quality standards for this degree, and a number of universities are working now to set up the programme.

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neu-man 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)

- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Concerning the management of ECEC services, this has not undergone considerable changes in recent years. **Directors/Centre Heads** (*Director/șef de centru*) are trained professionals with educational and management responsibilities to ensure the continuous improvement of quality at the institutional level. Since 2012 (see Government Decision 1252/2012), new conditions have been in place for applicants for this position: they need to have a higher education award (Bachelor level) in one of the following areas: economics, law, administration, medicine, sociology, psychology or educational sciences, with a minimum of two years of work experience in the field of ECEC. This is a significant change in terms of formal requirements.

The Director's duties are set out in the National Education Law no. 1/2011, with subsequent amendments and additions, and related documents.

Specific tasks of an ECEC director include:

- Ensuring that the stated objectives of the educational unit correspond with those established at the national and local level
- Submitting an annual report on the quality of education in the educational unit, drawn up by the evaluation and quality assurance committee; this report, approved by the board of directors, is presented to the teachers' board and the parents' committee/association; it is brought to the attention of the local public administration authorities and the school inspectorate
- Preparing, in accordance with the law, job descriptions for subordinate personnel
- Being responsible for the selection, employment, periodic evaluation, training, motivation and termination of employment of the staff in the unit, as well as the selection of non-teaching staff
- Showing appreciation to the teaching staff, during inspections for obtaining teaching degrees, as well as for awarding merit grades
- Coordinating the collection of statistical data for the national system of education indicators, transmitting these to the school inspectorate, and being responsible for entering the data into the Integrated Information System of Education in Romania (SIIIR)
- Approving the kindergarten service schedule of auxiliary teaching and/or non-teaching staff
- Specifying their duties in the organisation and operation regulations of the educational unit
- Controlling, with the support of the managers of the methodological commissions, the quality of the instructive-educational process, by checking documents, assisting in classes and participating in various extracurricular educational activities.

In the course of a school year, the director performs four weekly periods of teaching assistance, so that each teacher is assisted at least once per semester. The director also monitors the continuing professional development of the staff in the unit (National Education Act – amended 2022, Art. 97, 45).

The Director (or deputy director) of a kindergarten is usually selected through a competition. Applicants are required to meet new formal requirements set out in the Education Act 1/2011 and subsequent regulations issued by the MEN: a higher education award (Bachelor's degree), a minimum of four years' professional experience in the field and membership in the National Registry of Management Specialists. To be registered as a management specialist, a person must

have competencies in educational management and administration acquired through initial or continuing professional education.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

There are no centre-based posts of responsibility in **nurseries/crèches** beyond the Centre Leader and the core staff.

In **kindergartens** (and schools), the position of Mentor Teacher is a designated post. These Pre-primary Teachers have a contract with the university responsible for the initial professional education of prospective kindergarten teachers. They are remunerated for the time spent with students during their workplace-based learning periods.

There has been some debate relating to the qualification and tasks of these teacher with a mentorship role. An occupational standard was developed at national level and there was an attempt to build a national registry of mentor teachers. However, lack of financial resources at the MEN have hindered this initiative. However, some effects can be seen, despite the fact that the formal status of mentors has not yet been clarified. One example is at the University of Bucharest where a new Master's programme in *Mentoring in education* has been offered since 2015, preparing interested teachers from schools and kindergartens for this work.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

In the early education system in Romania, there are supervisory and coordinating staff, and the roles may vary according to the administrative levels. County School Inspectorates and the Ministry of Education and Research have monitoring and coordination responsibilities at national and county level. At the level of individual institutions such as kindergartens, school inspectors and educational counsellors provide support and guidance.

Educational counsellors are appointed through County Educational Resource and Assistance Centres (*Centrul Județean de Asistență și Resurse Educaționale – CJRAE*) or, in the case of Bucharest, the municipality. Kindergartens have access to the services of a counsellor from one of these offices, who in general have a Master's degree in one of the following: school counselling, educational counselling, career development, educational management, psychological counselling. The county offices and the municipality of Bucharest offices provide counsellors with support and guidance in their specialty and evaluate their activities with educational institutions such as kindergartens.

The responsibilities of educational counsellors in kindergartens vary depending on the specific needs of the institution and community. In general, these responsibilities can include: individual and group counselling to both children and parents to address specific aspects of child development; working as a team with teachers to identify children's needs and concerns and develop appropriate strategies and resources; identifying potential problems of children and developing appropriate intervention plans; providing support for children transitioning to kindergarten or experiencing significant changes in their educational environment; providing information and resources to parents to help them support children's development at home and deal with various challenges; creating and delivering programmes or activities that support children's social-emotional development; providing support in crisis situations, such as behavioural problems or traumatic events; working with other professionals or organisations to provide additional support and resources when needed.

The "Inspectors for Pre-school Education" carry out two types of inspection in the nursery and kindergarten. The first is a specialised thematic inspection twice a year, during which an evaluation of the professional competences/professional activity of the teaching staff is carried out

at the level of the discipline/studies taught or the educational activities they support. The focus is on the quality of teaching activities and professionalism.

The second type is the general inspection. This focuses on the general evaluation of the performances of different educational institutions in terms of educational policy goals and the standards for their implementation. The main objective of the general school inspection of pre-university education units is the entire activity of the specific unit as a provider of educational services.

The pre-school education inspectors have knowledge of the ECEC system through information sent to the inspectorates by the Romanian Ministry of Education.

2.5 Specialist support staff

Both nurseries/crèches and kindergartens can benefit from the services of professional support staff, mostly hired from County Centres for Educational Assistance and Resources. In rather exceptional cases, these support staff are employed directly by ECEC providers.

Profesor logoped (Logopaedic/Speech Therapy Teachers), with professional studies in special needs education, psychology or pedagogy, support the staff, as well as children and families.

Profesor consilier (Counselling and Guidance Teachers**)** with a professional higher education degree in educational sciences, psychology, sociology or social work may provide psycho-pedagogic support, counselling and guidance directly for children, but also for regular staff and families.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

As a consequence of the pandemic and the corresponding lack of specialists to compile statistical information, the most recent statistical data on early childhood education and the qualification of staff in Romania were collected in 2019–2020.

Table 2

Romania: Structural composition of ECEC workforce, 2019/20

Categories	Year/proportion of staff, in %
Staff with a specialist three-year (or longer) higher education degree	No systematically compiled national data for core pedagogues in nurseries and kindergartens Kindergarten heads: **96.2***
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary, post-secondary)	No systematically compiled national data for core pedagogues in nurseries and kindergartens Kindergarten heads only, including those of kindergartens attached to schools: **3.8***
Staff with a non-relevant qualification	Kindergartens only: **8.4***
Unqualified staff	No national data available
Male practitioners	2016: **0.4%** of total staff in nurseries and kindergartens (144 out of 35,084)*
Staff with a minority ethnic background or a 'background of migration'	No systematically compiled national data

Source: INS 2021 *Data for the local/county level (Bucharest) only.

In the 2019-2020 school year, of the 55.3 thousand persons working in early childhood education centres, 66.3% were teaching and auxiliary teaching staff, and 33.7% were non-teaching staff. Of the total teaching staff in kindergartens, 2.6% also held management positions. In addition, about 500 persons were management staff in kindergartens without teaching duties. Of the 34.9 thousand teaching staff in early childhood education (0.9% more than in the previous school year), 97.0% were qualified teaching staff (INS 2021, 26).

64.1% of teaching staff worked in urban and 35.9% in rural areas. The highest age bands among Pre-primary Teachers were 40-44 years (17.2%) and 35-39 years (15.0%). On average, each teacher was responsible for 15 children in the 2019-2020 school year; in urban areas for 14 children and in rural areas for 18 children. For the duration of the pandemic, no reliable data were collated on the structural composition of the ECEC workforce.

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Despite the fact that staff with a wide variety of qualifications are still working in the ECEC field, the current official requirements for initial professional studies for ECEC staff in Romania have been narrowed down to two main routes:

- For those working in nurseries/infant-toddler centres (*educator–puericultor*) this is the Pedagogical High School upper secondary vocational route or a post-secondary vocational study route for graduates of non-pedagogical high schools. After passing an entrance examination, graduates from these two routes can study for a Bachelor's degree (Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-primary Education).
- For those working in kindergartens (*Profesor pentru învățământul primar și preșcolar*) this is the higher education route (Bachelor's degree) offering a double specialisation for work in kindergartens and primary schools; graduates are also eligible for a position as Educator (*educator-puericultor*) in a nursery/infant-toddler centre. Support staff (Speech Therapists, Counsellors), who are mostly employed by county administrations and provide services for ECEC provision in their area, are also required to have a higher education level qualification.

It is still possible to work as a Caregiver (*îngrijitor*) in settings for under-threes without having a formal qualification, and sometimes also as auxiliary support staff in kindergartens, mainly in those with an extended-day programme (7:30 to 16:00-18:00).

The main IPE programme for ECEC staff in kindergartens is the Bachelor's degree in Pedagogy for Primary and Pre-primary Education (three years, 180 ECTS credits). The majority of kindergarten staff now has this level of qualification, since special pathways offered by universities attracted non-Bachelor professionals to complete their studies with a higher education diploma. Moreover, the management of ECEC settings has been offering staff with higher education qualifications a higher salary.

Table 3

Romania: Educator – Early Years

Job title in Romanian: *Educator-puericultor* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional with infant-toddler focus
Entry requirements: Completion of compulsory education and a successful 'eligibility exam'
Professional studies: 4 years Pedagogical High School, specialisation as *educator–puericultor*
Award: Upper secondary school leaving certificate (*Baccalaureate*) ***plus*** certification as an *educator-puericultor*
ECTS credits: n/a **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011:** 3 or 4
Main ECEC workplace: Nurseries/crèches, infant-toddler centres, kindergartens organising crèche groups for infants/toddlers
Note: Also eligible for this job are higher education graduates (Bachelor, Pedagogy in Primary and Pre-primary Education).

Table 4

Romania: Childcare Educator

Job title in Romanian: *Îngrijitor copii* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: Completion of compulsory education and passing an 'eligibility exam'
Professional studies: 4 years pedagogical high school, upper secondary level
Award: Upper secondary school leaving certificate (*Baccalaureate*); certification as Childcare Educator
ECTS credits: n/a **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011:** 3
Main ECEC workplace: Nurseries/crèches, infant-toddler centres, kindergartens organising crèche groups for infants/toddlers

Table 5

Romania: Primary and Pre-primary Teacher

Job title in Romanian: *Profesor pentru învățământul primar și preșcolar* **Profile**: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: Upper secondary school leaving certificate (*Baccalaureate*) and university entrance examination
Professional studies: 3 years of study in Educational Sciences (Pedagogy for Primary and Pre-primary Education)
Award: Bachelor's degree and teaching licence in Pedagogy for Primary and Pre-primary Education (double specialisation)
ECTS credits: 180 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6
Main ECEC workplace: Kindergartens (3-6 years) and primary schools (6-11 years). Graduates are also eligible to work in nurseries / infant-toddler centres.
Note: Since 2005 this is now the main route of professional qualification for kindergartens and primary schools.

Table 6
Romania: Educator

Job title in Romanian: *Educatoare* **Profile**: Pre-primary Education Professional
Until 2005: **Entry requirements:** completion of compulsory education and an 'eligibility exam' **Professional studies:** 5 years of study at a Pedagogical High School **Award**: upper secondary school leaving certificate (*Baccalaureate*) ***plus*** certification as an *educatoare* **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011**: 3, 4 **Main ECEC workplace:** Kindergartens (3–6 years) The above route still exists, but there is no possibility to become a tenured teacher working full time without completing the following step: *Since 2005:* **Entry requirements**: Upper secondary school leaving certificate *Baccalaureate*, university entrance examination **Professional studies:** 3-year university study route in educational sciences, specialising in Pedagogy for Primary and Pre-primary Education **Award:** Bachelor's degree and teaching licence in Pedagogy for Primary and Pre-primary Education (double specialisation) **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main ECEC workplaces**: kindergartens (3–6 year-olds) and primary schools (6–11 years old) and sometimes in crèches

Table 7
Romania: Elementary Teacher

Job title in Romanian: *Institutori* **Profile**: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: Upper secondary school leaving certification: *Baccalaureate* and higher education entrance examination **Professional studies:** 3 years of study at a *Colegiul Universitar Pedagogic de Institutori* (University Pedagogical College for Elementary Teachers) – short-term university degree (pre-Bologna system) **Award**: Certificate as an Elementary Teacher (Pre-school and/or Primary) **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011**: 5 **Main ECEC workplace:** Kindergartens (3-6 years) and primary schools (6-11 years). ***Note***: An alternative route to obtain this qualification used to be successful graduation from a Pedagogical High School (*Baccalaureate* + professional certificate) and a course of studies at any type of higher education institution (Bachelor level). This route was closed in 2005, when the Bachelor's degree for Pre-primary and Primary Teachers was established.

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in initial professional education programmes

This section refers to the current qualification routes for core pedagogues in nurseries (*educator-puericultor)* and in kindergartens (*Profesor pentru învățământul primar și preșcolar*).

Educator – early years (*Educator-puericultor*)

This upper secondary vocational qualification was strengthened by the Government Decision (1252/2012) on the organisation and functioning of nurseries and other early childhood education institutions, which specifically required that this should be the minimum requirement for pedagogical staff. The duration of vocational high school studies is four years and the leaving certificate has two components: the Baccalaureate (final exam at the end of high school and prerequisite for accessing higher education) and the professional certificate (professional examination granting access to qualified jobs in nurseries/crèches).

The main responsibilities expected to be carried out by these professionals are:

- Caregiving and stimulating activities to increase the child's autonomy
- Activities focused on the social-emotional development of the child
- Training and development of oral expression
- Activities focussing on enhancing the child's attention span and receptivity
- monitoring and documenting the developmental progress of the children;
- Active cooperation with parents/legal representatives of the children.

Curricular areas:

This IPE route comprises a combination of classic general subjects, allowing graduates to take their Baccalaureate exam and eventually go on to higher education studies, and also professional subjects and professional practice in ECEC institutions.

The first two years of study comprise curricular areas such as language and communication, mathematics and sciences, but also social-humanistic disciplines, including general psychology, child and family psychology, pedagogy, early childhood education, and professional practice. More specialised professional subjects are included in the last two years of study: hygiene and child growth/care, child pathology (0–3 years), play and learning, special needs education, psychology of education, child protection and children's rights. All these are complemented with practice-oriented educational/learning activities in different areas: language, sciences, technology, arts, music and drama. Field-based placements take place for at least three to four hours per week and can also be organised as compact week(s) during the semester.

Primary and Pre-primary Teacher (*Profesor pentru învățământul primar și preșcolar*)

In Romania, all teachers in the pre-university education system have to have a higher education qualification. The profession of Pre-primary (and Primary) Teacher is regulated by law and preceded by a three-year Bachelor's degree in Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-primary Education. The degree can be offered by public and private higher education institutions if they have been accredited by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, according to the official standards approved in 2016 (see ARACIS 2016). The agency has stringent compulsory criteria and quality indicators for these degree programmes in terms of curriculum, human resources, facilities etc.

Competences/didactic approaches:

The key competences to be acquired are described in the table below. They are based on a national framework, using the example of the University of Bucharest. The objectives of the Bachelor programme for prospective Primary and Pre-primary Teachers comply with identified professional needs and with the roles and specific competences that define the activity of educational science specialists (see also the pedagogical perspective outlined by Stan 2014). Since the academic year 2013–2014, the study programme has focused on professional and transversal competences, in accordance with the standards defined at national level by the Romanian National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Table 8

Romania: Primary and Pre-primary Teacher – Competence specifications (University of Bucharest, based on NQF)

General competences
– Planning and developing educational programmes adapted to the primary and pre-primary education levels and to the target group – Assessing educational programmes for primary and pre-primary education – Group / classroom management and capacity to manage educational projects specific for primary and pre-primary education – Offering counselling, guidance, psychological and pedagogical assistance to different stakeholder groups (children, families, teachers, employees, etc.) – Self-assessment and continuous improvement of professional practices and career evolution.
Instrumental competences
– Utilising pedagogical knowledge appropriately in designing educational and instructional activities: concepts, models, methods, techniques, scenarios and educational alternatives – Identifying and using educational concepts, models and strategies for appropriate pedagogical methods – Identifying and comparing theories, models and specific techniques and instruments necessary in educational assessment – Analysing specific concepts, theories, models and techniques for designing targeted interventions in counselling, guidance and psychological and pedagogical assistance of various target groups – Conducting pedagogical research to inform theory and practice and reflecting on professional practices aiming at continuing improvement – Interpreting and explaining various pedagogical theories, models and contexts from an educational manager's perspective – Promoting reflective practice based on students/children's learning and on one's own professional development – Creating educational projects/programmes regarding the efficient organisation of the learning environment and of the resources used, in accordance with the principles and specific functions of the educational management.
Interpersonal competences
– Conducting educational programmes through the appropriate use of specific concepts, theories and methodologies, adapted for different age-groups – Applying standard methods of assessment in educational activities with children / adults and using these to improve process quality. – Analysing, interpreting and explaining evaluation data both at the individual and institutional levels – Designing educational programmes in order to identify, analyse and respond to specific educational needs

– Developing good professional practices and being involved in the process of drafting research projects, taking into account specific methodological norms and principles.
Systemic competences
– Analysing, interpreting and correlating intra-/interdisciplinary practices and applying pedagogic knowledge in the designing of educational activities and didactic resources on different levels (macro, meso, micro) – Explaining and interpreting educational contexts/situations and converting the knowledge, abilities and skills into pedagogical planning – Analysing and interpreting various educational contexts through the use of scientific concepts, paradigms and theories regarding persons with special educational needs – Carrying out educational activities in a methodologically appropriate way in accordance with the National Curriculum framework – Designing and applying evaluation tools, analysing and interpreting the results; providing arguments for the choice of methods, techniques and the instruments employed – Transferring the results of an evaluation into practice to support institutional or individual development – Creating alternative evaluation strategies for specific teaching and learning processes.

The following competences can be seen as the expected synthesis of the learning processes at the BA programme level:

- Designing, carrying out and assessing teaching and learning activities
- Designing, carrying out and assessing extracurricular activities and educational partnerships
- Psychological and pedagogical assistance for the pupils in a situation regarded as at risk, single parent families, parents who work abroad, parents with very low wages etc.)
- Accomplishing the optimal collaboration between the school and the families of the children, as well as with the local community
- Performing management and resource management at class level
- Institutional management and marketing
- Design and evaluation of social and educational projects
- Expertise in designing and implementing the curriculum and the initial and continuous training programmes.

Curricular areas:

The curriculum of this programme is strongly regulated by the National Agen- cy for Quality Assurance in Higher Education through a set of specific standards. The most re- cent standards, approved in 2016 and covering around 75% of the total study programme, create a common national curriculum framework. Approximately 25% of the programme content is decided on by each university. The standards state some basic/fundamental subjects, valid for all degrees in educational sciences, but also a large number of study areas/disciplines specific to this particular degree. Practical training should cover at least 15% of the total duration of the study programme.

Table 9

Romania: IPE curriculum for prospective Primary and Pre-primary Teachers – first year of studies (University of Bucharest, Department for Teacher Education, Study programme in Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-primary Education)

Subject	ECTS credits
I. Basic disciplines	
Fundamentals of Psychology	5
Fundamentals of Pedagogy	5
Fundamentals of Special Psycho-Pedagogy	5
Information and Communication Technologies	4
Curriculum Theory and Practice	5
Early Childhood Education	4
II. Domain disciplines	
Psychology of Personality	4
Developmental Psychology	4
Romanian Literature	4
Psychology of Education	5
Mathematics	5
Psycho-Pedagogy of Learning Difficulties	4
Professional Practicum (Pre-School and Primary Education)	2
III. Complementary subjects	
Foreign Languages	4
TOTAL ECTS CREDITS	**60**
Optional (elective)	
Physical Education	4

Table 10

Romania: IPE curriculum for prospective Primary and Pre-primary Teachers – second year of studies (University of Bucharest, Department for Teacher Education, Study programme on Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-primary Education)

Subject	ECTS credits
I. Basic disciplines	
Instruction: theory, research and practice	4
Evaluation: theory and methodology	4
Methodology of Educational Research	4
Educational Theories	3
II. Specialism disciplines	
Computer Based Learning	4
Class/Group Management	4
Primary School Education	4
Contemporary Romanian Language	5
Didactics of Languages and Communication (Pre-school Education)	4
Children's Literature	4
Mathematics	4
Didactics of Mathematics and Sciences. Mathematics (Pre-school Education)	3
Didactics of Mathematics and Sciences. Sciences (Pre-school Education)	3
Professional Practicum (Pre-school Education)	4
Professional Practicum (Primary School)	4
III. Complementary disciplines	

Subject	ECTS credits
***One optional*- Package A** Sociology of Education (elective) Educational Management (elective)	2
TOTAL ECTS CREDITS	**60**
Optional (elective)	
Theory, Solfeggio, Dictation (elective)	4
Foreign Languages (elective)	4

Table 11

Romania: IPE curriculum for prospective Primary and Pre-primary Teachers – third year of studies (University of Bucharest, Department for Teacher Education, Study programme on Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-primary Education)

Subject	ECTS credits
I. Specialism disciplines	
Contemporary Romanian Language	3
Psycho-pedagogy of Play	4
Didactics of Romanian Language and Literature	4
Didactics of Arithmetic	4
History and Didactics of History	4
Geography and Didactics of Geography	4
Didactics of the Arts: Musical Education	4
Didactics of Physical and Psychomotor Education	4
Didactics of Civic Educational Activities	4
Didactics of the Arts: Creative Education	4
Environmental Education/ Didactics of Natural Sciences	4
Didactics of Practical Abilities	4
Professional Practicum (Pre-school Education)	5
Professional Practicum (Primary Education)	5
II. Complementary subjects	
***One Optional* – Package B** Intercultural Education Educational management	3
TOTAL ECTS CREDITS	**60**

Students are awarded an additional 10 ECTS credits for the Bachelor of Arts Degree final examination. For successful finalisation of studies, they need to pass a written exam on fundamental knowledge of primary and pre-primary education (curriculum, instructional design, evaluation and assessment, communication and group management), and to defend a research-based Bachelor dissertation paper in front of a committee.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

From the moment in which the profession of **Teacher for Primary and Pre-primary Education** was regulated, the flexibility of the routes decreased.

Regarding the ***educator-puericultor*** in crèches/infant-toddler centres, persons who have not completed the classical route of four years Pedagogical High School but have graduated from a different kind of high school and have a *Baccalaureate* diploma, can enrol for two years at a 'post-high school' offering the same specialisation. These post-high schools are not permanent, but are organised on demand, when employers are in need of professionals. The main issue in

Romania is that service provision for the under-threes is extremely low, and kindergartens, although they can form nursery groups since 2012, are reluctant to do so, as local authorities are not sufficiently financing this cycle of education. So this particular position, if available in nurseries, is open also to other higher education graduates in educational sciences; however, the take-up is low, mainly because of the very low salary level.

In terms of the **Primary and Pre-primary Teachers**, some flexibility is offered through open and distance learning programmes, which also have to be accredited by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, and also through professional reconversion programmes. The latter can be organised by universities for professionals working in kindergartens (or primary schools) who have a teaching certification in a different domain (i.e. teacher of biology, geography, languages, etc.) and therefore work as 'unqualified' staff in a kindergarten or primary school. These studies take two years to complete and are awarded 120 ECTS credits. They are organised as modules in a blended learning approach.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Educator – Early Years (*Educator – puericultor*)

The IPE programme for Educators includes three to four hours per week compulsory workplace-based learning/professional practice in the field (three hours in the first two years and four hours in the last two years of study). The structure and content of this field-based practicum relates to the progressive stages of professional development: first observational practice, then practising professional skills under supervision, and finally designing and delivering educational activities under supervision. There are no clear standards regarding workplace-based learning in IPE for this level. The weekly hour allocations can also be organised as compact modules.

Primary and Pre-primary Teacher (*Profesor pentru învățământul primar și preșcolar*)

For Primary and Pre-primary Teachers, national standards require a minimum of 15% professional practice in the IPE curriculum and the ECTS credits allocated. This means that in order to meet the standard requirement, every study programme should have at least 27 ECTS credits allocated to professional practice. It is common for kindergarten placements to take place in specified institutions selected jointly by the university as the training provider, and the local school inspectorate as the main beneficiary of qualified staff. Professional practice periods are coordinated by an academic from the university side, who assists students in all stages and evaluates them at the end, but also by a mentor teacher from the kindergarten, who has a contract with the university and is remunerated for his/her work with the prospective kindergarten teachers. All universities providing the Bachelor's degree have their own network of placement kindergartens with experienced mentors. Nevertheless, the students do not have a sufficient number of sustained periods of time during their studies for working in these placement kindergartens. Workplace-based learning at IPE level tends to be fragmented and thus lacking in impact in the long run.

Key skills and competences to be acquired during professional practice include (but are not necessarily limited to) the following:

- Understanding group dynamics and developing strategies for high quality interactions with children
- Designing and adapting learning experiences according to specifications in the curriculum, delivering and assessing them
- Developing reflective practice skills to improve one's own professional practices.

In general, students are asked to maintain a portfolio to document both their observational and research skills, but also their capacity to take responsibility for working professionally with children. The teacher mentor in the kindergarten assesses the student's performance and informs the academic supervisor at the university. The university tutor then undertakes the final evaluation of the student based on the mentor's evaluation, the quality of the portfolio and the progress made over the course of the semester (professional practice is assessed each semester).

There are two significant current debates and prospective reforms in Romania. The first is related to the **qualification and role of Teacher Mentors** in the kindergartens. An occupational standard was developed at national level with multiple roles for mentors and there was even an attempt to build a national registry of mentor teachers. But the initiative is not being followed up because of the lack of financial resources at the MEN. However, some effects can be seen, despite the fact that the formal status of mentors has not yet been clarified. One example is at the University of Bucharest where a new Master's programme in *Mentoring in education* has been offered since 2015, preparing interested teachers from schools and kindergartens.

The second debate has started at the policy level, refocusing attention on a provision in the Education Act 1/2011 which called for a change in the institutional model for teacher education by introducing *didactic Master programmes*. One of the key ideas of these programmes is to spend the final semester as a **compulsory internship** in an educational institution. One reason for this could be the current procedures for newly qualified teachers, who have to wait for two years in order to take a final qualifying exam which confers teacher certification and makes them eligible for taking up a permanent teaching position.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Continuing professional development for educational professionals working in services for the under-threes is not regulated at the national level but remains the decision of each institution and local authority. Taking into account the very low coverage of this service and the limited number of staff hired, a broader framework is possibly not yet needed. However, the various CPD opportunities available for Pre-primary and Primary Teachers do not apply to the pedagogical staff in nurseries/infant-toddler centres, where CPD is mostly offered in form of various projects and not as a coherent system. Moreover, the participation in CPD is unequal and there are still some professionals who avoid it (see Lucian Ciolan 2014, 57).

Primary and Pre-primary Teacher (*Profesor pentru învățământul primar și preșcolar*)

The CPD of Primary and Pre-primary Teachers is located within a broad and comprehensive system organised and coordinated at the national level by MEN.

According to the Education Act 1/2001, CPD is **both a right and an obligation** for teachers, and can be realised in the following ways:

- Programmes and activities for the continuous improvement of scientific, pedagogical and didactic skills
- Training programmes in the area of management, leadership and evaluation of education
- Training courses and exams for teaching awards II and I (see below)
- Professional reconversion programmes for persons with a non-specialist background
- Studies corresponding to a degree specialisation.

Both pedagogical and management staff in pre-university education are **required to participate in credit-awarding training programmes every five years** after passing the final qualifying exam (*definitivat*) which confers teacher certification.

Accumulating credits has an impact both on salaries and **career advancement**. For instance, participation in CPD and credit accumulation is one of the key criteria for awarding teachers a salary supplement, called 'merit award' (*gradație de merit)*. This is obtained through an open competition and is based on the teacher's professional achievements over the last five years. The stipend adds around 25% to the salary for a duration of five years.

In order to accumulate credits, teachers have to participate in accredited training courses. At the national level, MEN has a specialised accreditation body for teacher and management training courses in pre-university education: This *Specialised Commission for Accreditation* is composed of twenty independent experts appointed through an open call for a duration of five years, with the possibility of two mandates. These experts work closely with the permanent staff in the Ministry of National Education responsible for CPD (Directorate for Continuing Training). The Commission is asked to evaluate the course proposals submitted by different providers. Once accredited, these courses are included in the register of accredited training providers and are assigned a specific number of professional transferable credits.

Graduates of the study programme *Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-primary Education* can benefit from CPD activities in public institutions, primary and pre-primary education units, County Teachers' Centres (regional CPD provider), professional associations and trade unions. According to the regulations in force, the **CPD provider** can be an educational institution, public or private, a non-governmental organisation or even a private company specialising in CPD. The training courses they submit for accreditation to the national responsible body should comply with the professional standards for the teaching profession and with the regulatory framework for accreditation of training providers, provided by Ministerial Order no. 5561/2011 *Methodology for accreditation and periodical evaluation of CPD providers and their programmes*.

Teachers' Centres (known as 'Teacher Training Houses' – *Casa Corpului Didactic*) are important CPD providers at the local/county level and are part of a national network financed by Ministry of National Education.

In synthesis, the offer of accredited CPD should fall under one of the programmes for different categories of personnel (mostly for Pre-primary Teachers) described in the table below.

Table 12

Romania: CPD courses for Pre-primary Teachers

Year	Name of the course	Description	Targeted personnel	ECTS credits
2020-2021	Family–school communication management A creative approach to the curriculum in early education	Workshop on how time constraints are the biggest obstacle to the level of parental involvement. Good communication with the teacher to find suitable and collaborative ways to improve this situation.	Pre-primary Teachers and auxiliary teaching staff	15
2020-2021	A creative approach to the curriculum in early education	Curriculum for pre-school education involves planning early education based on the diversity of contexts and areas of development.	Pre-primary Teachers	12
2020-2021	Digital tools for online work with young children	The course responds to the need to ensure optimal conditions for Pre-primary Teachers to carry out online activities and to have a consistent set of digital tools so that they offer young children a variety of learning contexts.	Pre-primary Teachers	10
2020-2021	Designing and carrying out activities integrated in early education	The course responds to the need to develop the skills of Pre-primary Teachers in the design and development of activities according to the current Curriculum for early education.	Pre-primary Teachers	12
2020-2021	Online teaching methods, tools and strategies in early education	The training programme aims to support teachers in carrying out teaching – learning – assessment activities in the online environment by identifying important aspects regarding the design of online activities, the utilisation of online teaching resources and platforms, as well as by identifying and practising some methods, means and strategies of carrying out curricular and extracurricular activities in the online environment.	Pre-primary Teachers	10
2020-2021	Modern guidelines in pre-school education	Developing the professional skills of teachers in order to design and carry out educational activities appropriate to the age and individual needs and potentials of young children.	Pre-primary Teachers	25
2020-	Creativity and innovation	Creativity and innovation are	Pre-primary	22

Year	Name of the course	Description	Targeted personnel	ECTS credits
2021	in the instructional-educational process	broad, complex and multifaceted concepts that can be applied in several fields. Their multi-disciplinarity, variety of approaches and conceptualisations are covered.	Teachers	
2019	Communication strategies at the level of the educational unit	Two situations are identified: supporting children to develop optimally and helping them to overcome a crisis situation.	Pre-primary Teachers Auxiliary teaching staff Management, guidance and control staff	16
2020	Net Time – Useful, creative, safe use of the Internet	The training and development of pre-university teaching staff in digital competence and the skills needed for useful, safe and creative use of the Internet and smart technologies in teaching, as well as in the overall instructional-educational process	Teaching staff in pre-university education including Pre-primary Teachers and auxiliary teaching staff in early education	15
2019	INDOOR and OUTDOOR non-formal education	Outdoor education is an organised form of education and prepares the child for outdoor life, based on the philosophy, theory and practice of experiential education and environmental education.	Pre-primary Teachers	22
2021-2022	Learning management based on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary principles	Article 68 of 1 of Law 1/2011 stipulates that education should have as its essential objective the formation of fundamental skills, including skills in the field of methods and strategies for managing didactic activities. In order to transmit these skills to children, pre-university teachers must acquire a series of related methods, techniques and strategies.	Pre-primary Teachers	22
2020	Learning through play and exploration workshop	The purpose of the workshop programme is to contribute to the development of cognitive, affective, psychomotor skills and to the development of students' motivation for learning	Pre-primary Teachers Primary School Teachers	18
2020-	Inclusive early education	Inclusive education is quality,	Pre-primary	22

Year	Name of the course	Description	Targeted personnel	ECTS credits
2021		accessible education that fulfils its purpose of addressing all children without discrimination.	Teachers Primary School Teachers	
2020-2021	Prevention of language disorders in pre-schoolers and young schoolchildren	In order to promote the education and development of pre-schoolers' verbal expression, it is necessary that the educational activity is carried out in such a way that the pre-schoolers are stimulated to participate in the activities both verbally and mentally.	Pre-primary Teachers Primary School Teachers	10

Overall, however, the number of courses specifically targeting ECEC staff is not extensive, particularly courses funded by the national or local authorities. Public investment in CPD in recent years mostly took the form of Structural Funds projects, but this situation created considerable disparities in terms of access, which was much easier for professionals working in large cities than for those in rural environments. The financing of CPD is currently a critical issue. Investment at the national level is restricted to projects and the modest funding of the Teacher Training Houses. Investment at the local/institutional investment is very limited and staff participation in CPD is compromised by the very low level of their income.

Considering the need for continuing professional development for implementing the Early Education concept, the situation regarding the development of training programmes within the School Inspectorates is in most cases not at an up-to-date level. Recent research shows that in some School Inspectorates no training projects for early education have been carried out since 2015 or even 2011, which does not correspond to the ideal of guiding Pre-primary Teachers towards supporting the holistic development of the child at an early age in reaching their maximum potential, or in the innovative use of resources for enhancing the quality of teaching.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

In the last three years, statistics have shown that fewer and fewer graduates of pedagogical high schools and later graduates of primary and pre-primary education study programmes choose to stay in education, one of the prime reasons cited being the salary.

Currently, teachers are paid according to the Salary Law No. 153/2017, which includes the salary of all budget categories. Salaries are very low compared to other budget categories.

The most recent data, presented in the specialised media by the authorities, show that the lowest monthly salary in pre-university education would be 2,647 lei (€542), for a teacher with short-term higher education and teaching degree I. The highest, without increments and other benefits, such as that of a teacher with long-term higher education and teaching grade I, is 4,709

lei (€965) per month. The annual average gross starting salary of a Pre-primary Teacher working at ISCED 02 level is €8,027 and for a teacher at the top of the range €15,644 (Salary Law No. 153/2017, art.45).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

The majority of professional staff employed in ECEC works on a full-time basis, since there is little flexibility in terms of employment regulations. The regular working week comprises 40 hours, whereas the time for direct interaction with children varies according to the type of institution and the way the service is regulated. For instance, both short programme (around four hours per day) and extended programme (around eight hours per day) kindergartens exist. In the latter case, professional staff may work in shifts if the opening hours exceed the regular working hours of the staff. There are no national statistical data available specifically on full-time and part-time employment in nurseries and kindergartens.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

In the light of new policy initiatives related to the teaching profession, the induction of newly qualified teachers/educators is under debate again. After taking up their first job, teachers usually have a probationary period of two years (see end of *Chapter 5*), after which they take an examination called *definitivat,* which is both the final certification as a professional, and also the first step in career development. However, because of the lack of investment in this area, the amount of support they receive in the workplace varies considerably. After graduation and hiring, there is a mentorship system dedicated for entry level professionals called *mentorat pentru stagiatură*. Although not very structured and regulated, this approach is institution-based and supports the integration and improvement of professional practices during the teacher's early career.

7.4 Non-contact time

The contractual obligations of both professional staff working in nurseries/crèches and in kindergartens include responsibilities which are not necessarily related to direct contact with children, such as participation in training and professional development activities, mentoring for other newly employed professionals, etc. In fact, staff responsibilities, mostly in kindergartens, diversified considerably in recent years, creating an increasing workload and pressure for the profession. There are no compiled national data available, but it can be estimated that a kindergarten teacher spends an average of two hours per day on this type of activity.

7.5 Current staffing issues

In terms of ECEC services for children under 3 years of age there is both a shortage of available provision and a shortage of qualified staff. The main reasons for the latter are the low salaries and the challenging work conditions.

In kindergartens/pre-primary education, the share of qualified staff is rather high, giving the system a certain level of stability. Basically, there is no shortage of qualified staff at the national level, particularly if the large number of study programmes in Pedagogy for Primary and Pre-primary Education accredited over the last few years are taken into account. However, the staffing situation in small urban and more isolated rural areas is a different matter, where providers have difficulties to recruit qualified staff. The main problem is twofold: one is related to the low level of income, and the other one is the inequality of qualified staff supplies in different areas.

Statistics show that of the total staff in pre-university education (290,087 persons), 19% work in early childhood/pre-school education). 208,642 are teaching staff, 20,941 auxiliary staff, and 7,484 administrative staff (World Vision 2022).

According to experts, the high level of aging of the teaching staff reflects a social phenomenon that the entire economy will feel in the next 10-15 years.

An overloaded or unsuitable curriculum, bureaucratic obligations, low support from the Ministry of National Education and insufficient digital equipment for schools are problems indicated by teachers as the main obstacles to performance in the World Vision survey (2022).

The greater majority (96%) of the surveyed teachers stated that they wished to be consulted through questionnaires regarding decisions in the field of school education (75% to a great extent and 21% to an average extent). To respond to this need, World Vision launched the "Civic School Inspectorate" project through which it will create the first integrated online consultation platform for teachers, students and parents in Romania. As part of the project, the organisation created a first online consultation questionnaire, completed by 375 of the 570 teachers registered in the first week after the launch. According to World Vision: "For the respondents to the questionnaire, the main obstacles that prevent them from achieving higher performance with students are "loaded schedule" (46%) or "inappropriate schedule" (20%), "bureaucratic obligations" (35%) or "low support at the ministry level (decisions, frequent disruptive changes)" (24%), the insufficiency of "schools' digital equipment" (30%), but also the "lack of a stimulating environment" (30%). Last but not least, teachers mention the "lack of parental involvement" (25%) and the "socio-economic problems of the families" (25%)" (World Vision 2022).

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

A number of recent events, studies and documents strengthen confidence in the increasing importance of and support for the early education sector, not only at the level of governance, but also at the level of strategic partners, mobilisers with expertise and enabling agencies. Some examples:

- The Government Ordinance article 9, paragraph (2) has been amended and now specifies that the state provides basic funding for preschoolers, both in state education and in accredited private and denominational education (as for students in accredited private and confessional compulsory general education). Funding is based on the standard cost per preschooler or per pre-school, depending on calculations made according to the methodology developed by the Ministry of National Education.
- Delegates from Romania participate in the European Commission ECEC Working Groups such as the "EC Thematic Working Group for Early Childhood Education and Care". The latter aimed to support Member States to implement the 2019 Council Recommendation for high-quality ECEC systems and its main component, the EU Quality Framework for ECEC. It mainly supports peer-to-peer learning in quality measurement, monitoring and evaluation and will follow up the ET2020 working group which focused on inclusion, staff professionalisation and managing the COVID-19 pandemic in the early education and care sector. The most recent Working Group runs from 2021–2025 (European Commission 2023).
- In 2021, the Government's Emergency Ordinance (GEO) no. 100 of 10.09.2021 (Portal Legislative 2021) specifies that "with subsequent amendments and additions, it is regulated that

the pre-school level is part of early education, more than that, nurseries established by decision of the local council, under its subordination, are part of the public educational system. As a result of these legislative changes, the takeover of nurseries within the education system is to be carried out starting from the 2019-2020 school year." According to GEO 100/2021, administrative, financial, and managerial measures are needed to support the proper functioning of nurseries within the national education system. Without these, the legitimate right of parents/ legal representatives to enrol children in fully functioning nurseries within a reliable education system may be negatively affected.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

There has been little large-scale funding of research on early childhood education and care in Romania. UNICEF Romania continues to support reports and studies about this age level which are very much needed and appreciated; however, they tend to be mostly policy-focused rather than practice-focused.

Effects of a teacher-focused educational intervention on children's wellbeing

***Source*:** Rodawell – Romanian-Danish Centre for Children's Wellbeing 2017, research and development project coordinated by the University of Bucharest, 2016-2019) (see *References* for further details)

Aims and background: The aim of this investigation was to devise, implement and measure the effects of a multi-component educational intervention targeted at 4 to 10 year-old children recruited from two kindergartens and two primary schools located in areas of Bucharest that are lower-than-average in terms of socioeconomic living conditions. This was a longitudinal research study that compared the wellbeing and academic performance of children enrolled in two state education settings. In the first group the children were exposed to enhanced educational intervention; in the second (control) group the age-matched children did not experience the intervention programme. The intervention built on the success of the RODACIE programme that was developed by Romanian and Danish education experts and piloted during 2011-2015 with economically-disadvantaged pre-schoolers. The project was conducted by members of the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences at the University of Bucharest in collaboration with a team of educational researchers and trainers from VIA University College in Denmark.

***Procedure*:** One of the main goals was to provide teachers with intensive training sessions in key areas which address both the content taught in class and the learning and relational environment. During the 12 months of intervention teachers were offered opportunities for "formative evaluation" while the intervention team offered on-going and direct support for transferring new skills to students in class. Design: Two groups: control and intervention; Pre-(baseline), mid-term (six months into the intervention) and post-intervention measurement (at the end of the programme). Sample: 247 children in the intervention group (89 in kindergartens; 158 in primary schools); 191 children in the control group (93 in kindergartens; 98 in primary schools). Instruments: Well-validated and widely-implemented instruments were used to assess the children's emotional, behavioural and social functioning.

Findings and implications: This research produced a comprehensive final report on the wellbeing of children at risk in nursery and primary schools. The final conclusions particularly emphasised a high level of vulnerability in emotional and social indicators. The research data led to the creation of a "Wellbeing Barometer" to be used as a self-assessment and diagnostic tool in kindergartens and primary schools in Romania.

National and European impact study on early childhood education

Source: ACEDO – Association Centre for Education and Human Rights 2022 (see *References* for further details)

Aims: In the Effective Social Dialogue project for Alternative Public Policies in Early Education (2014-2020) the documentation activity began with a study at the national level, to understand the needs, opportunities and current situation of early education. Early education in Romania is a priority for public policies, but currently faces insufficient funding and a new curriculum adapted to the 0–3 age group but put into practice by teachers unprepared to carry out educational activities for this age segment. The study also addresses children's access to early childhood education services, especially in rural areas.

Procedure/Methods: 200 discussions with education experts, carried out through interviews and questionnaires. In parallel to the survey, examples of inspiring practice from Europe are presented, where early education is a basic pillar in the growth and education of the future adult, being a service developed through the contribution of the community.

Selected findings: The national and European impact study on the early education of children in nurseries identified the main characteristics and needs of early education in Romania. During the interviews with early education specialists, we identified that there is a desire for involvement at the national level. The quantitative study highlighted the fact that early education in Romania is on a good path, although it requires attention to address aspects related to: infrastructure, curriculum, staff qualifications, access to early education and social inclusion.

Implications: Among the examples of inspiring practices from other countries that would benefit nursery provision in Romania are the following:

1. Italy – Reggio Emilia model of early education – pedagogy of listening, encouraging children to discover and undertake activities on their own
2. Spain – Inter-generational projects with the involvement of grandparents/elderly in the activities of children aged 0-3 years
3. France – Stimulating the creation of private nurseries by private companies
4. Slovenia – Language workshops for the integration of immigrants or inclusion of vulnerable groups
5. Finland – Flexible programme, where nurseries offer the possibility to use their services during the evening, night or weekend.

Project for Early Education Reform (P.R.E.T.)

This is a national project co-financed by the Government of Romania and the Development Bank of the Council of Europe (BDCE), with a budget of 105 million Euros. Originally, P.R.E.T. it was supposed to take place between 2007 and 2016, but the duration of this programme was extended until 31 Dec. 2021.

Source: P.R.E.T. 2023. The project for the reform of early education (2017-2021) (see *References* for further details)

Aims: The main objective of this project is to improve the infrastructure of the most disadvantaged kindergartens, so that they reach a minimum standard of operation, as well as to ensure the necessary spaces for the units that suffered from the process of retrocession of nationalised buildings. The project will finance the rehabilitation and furnishing of underprivileged kindergartens, as well as the construction and furnishing of new kindergartens in certain locations. The possibility of equipping preparatory classes with special equipment will also be analysed.

Within the project, approximately 53,000 children across the country will benefit from the renovation and construction works. The further training and professional development of kindergarten staff (managers, teachers, nurses, administrators and other categories) is also included.

More specifically, the Early Education Reform Project aims to:

- To improve the current infrastructure of the early education system for children from 3 to 6/7 years by renovating and developing kindergarten settings
- To improve the quality of early education by supporting teaching staff and providing appropriate teaching materials
- To make the educational system more efficient by creating Resource Centres for Education and Development, as well as through developing the educational management system of the Ministry of Education.

Procedure/Methods:

- Equipping kindergartens with: didactic material (maps, boards, models); educational games; books/brochures
- Establishment of the network of Resource Centers for Education and Development (CRED)
- Establishment of specific services for children aged 0-6/7 with disabilities and special needs
- Increasing the capacity of medical staff and local authorities to monitor, evaluate and develop educational policies.
- Specific training modules will be organised for educators (approx. 35,000 people), ECEC staff – carers/assistants/medical staff (approx. 13,000), managers (approx. 2,500) and parents.

Intended outcomes:

The results and effects of the programme were monitored and evaluated with the help of indicators that reflect key aspects of programme implementation, such as:

- Improving kindergarten management
- Improving visibility by raising the level of parents' knowledge about their children's performance
- Improving the existing infrastructure through renovation works
- Improving teaching staff practices in the system
- increasing the quality of educational services
- Renovating 340 kindergartens and equipping them with specific equipment, as well as with special access paths for children with disabilities
- The construction of 410 new kindergartens, equipped with specific equipment, as well as with special access paths for children with disabilities
- Providing CPD sessions for all Pre-primary Teachers
- Providing training for all kindergarten directors
- Providing training of all caregivers/assistants/administrators etc. in kindergartens
- Establishing 318 Resource Centres to offer a complex package of services in support of the community

- Monitoring/tracking the proportion of the 13,000 kindergartens equipped with didactic material, games, etc.
- Monitoring/tracking the number of children from urban and rural environments who benefit from rehabilitation works/new constructions.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

If we analyse the current challenges in the field of early childhood education and care in Romania, at least three key aspects need to be highlighted:

- Romania faces an **aging workforce**, which reflects a social phenomenon that the entire economy will feel in the next 10–15 years. However, the situation is particularly alarming since there do not seem to be any affirmative measures in place to compensate the situation in the future. This situation is leading to a fluctuation in numbers and also to a low level of new entries into the education system (Economedia.ro 2022).
- **Qualification requirements for staff working with children under 3 years of age**. Here the challenge is to clearly define and regulate the type of professional, their level of study and their responsibilities in nurseries as a result of the new regulatory framework, which situates nurseries within the national education system under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Do all professionals working with this group need a higher education qualification? What will the envisaged new degree in early childhood education look like? How will a motivational structure to attract young persons into the profession be developed and implemented? There are many questions on the table of decision-makers, who are currently working towards a new Education Act.
- **Continuing training and career progression for early childhood professionals**. At the moment ECEC staff are working in a rather chaotic system, comprising legacies and remaining elements of the past, but also integrating new realities, some of them being still under construction. This issue links to the need to enhance the attractiveness of the profession and also to create a clear and quality-oriented system for continuing training and professional development.

The early education system in Romania is at a crossroad. Currently an object of large-scale investments, of regulatory framework changes and of high public pressure for good quality service delivery, ECEC in Romania stands a good chance of making progress and contributing to social stability, economic development, family wellbeing and good quality education in early childhood.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

ROMANIA

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC provision are **nursery** (*creșă*, 0–2) and **kindergarten** (*grădinița*, 3–5)[1]. Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Romania

1866	Legislation on elementary, primary and secondary and higher instruction contained for the first time specific norms on setting up *gradina de copii* (kindergartens).
1881	First kindergarten based on Froebelian principles established
Up to 1909	133 kindergartens work according to Froebel's philosophy.
1910	– First curricular framework for early childhood education is issued. – Introduction of free enrolment and compulsory attendance for 6 year-olds
1939	In the Act on the Organisation and Operation of Primary and Regular Education, the term *gradina de copii* is explicitly used for kindergartens that are compulsory for children between 5 and 7 years of age.
1955	Around 19% of 3 to 6 year-olds attend a kindergarten.
Up to 1970s	Expansion of early childhood provision to accommodate growing demand
1974	– Enrolment rates rise to 42%. – A curriculum for educational and instructional activities in kindergarten is developed and issued at the national level
1981	75% of 3 and 4 year-olds and 90% of 5 and 6 year-olds attend a kindergarten.
1990	Reform of the education system – introduction of new educational standards and move away from the ideological legacy of communism
1990-1994	The first kindergarten groups based on alternative pedagogies are set up: Jena, Montessori, Waldorf, Step by Step.
1995	The first Education Act after the collapse of communism (Law 84/1995) comes into force, consolidating the statute of kindergartens as part of the pre-university education system for 3 to 7 year-olds.
2000	A new framework curriculum and 'lesson plans' for the three kindergarten age groups is adopted and the statute of preparatory groups for school is consolidated.
2003	New legislation extends compulsory education in Romania to 10 years, including a pre-primary year preceding school entry.
2005	Professionals working in kindergartens are qualified at higher education level as 'teachers for pre-primary and primary education', having the same statute as other teachers within the education system.
2011	A new National Education Act comes into force.
2012	Integration of the compulsory preparatory class for 6 year-olds into primary schools, effectively lowering the statutory school age by one year
2019	A new curriculum for the entire ECEC phase (0 to 6 years) is introduced.
2020	– The year preceding school entry is made obligatory for 5 year-olds. – Early childhood education and care is included in the National Defence Strategy 2020-2024.

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years, as in Romania.

2021	– Amendments to the Education Act come into force. – Nurseries now become part of the national pre-university education system and offer children between the ages of 3 months and 3 years integrated services of education and care. Childcare workers from the state nurseries that fall under the auspices of the Ministry of Education from the school year 2021-2022 can access (up to 2025) the position of Childcare Educator if they comply with the conditions stipulated in the formal recognition and certification of professional skills for this position issued by the Ministry of Education.

Sources: Ciolan et al. 2018; Eurochild 2021; Ministry of National Education 2021

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Early childhood education and care in Romania comes under the responsibility of different ministries. While kindergartens for children aged 3 years to school entry are assigned to the Ministry of National Education (*Ministerul Educației Naționale* – MEN), responsibility for the care sector for under 3 year-olds is organised in a more complex way. Responsibility for nurseries (*creșă*) is shared by the Ministry of Education with the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice (*Ministerul Muncii și Justiției Sociale*), the Ministry of Health (*Ministerul Sănătății*) and with local authorities.

In cooperation with the Ministry of National Education, the District School Inspectorates (*Inspectoratul Școlar Județean*) monitor and coordinate the kindergartens (*grădiniţă*) and the preparatory class and are also responsible for the evaluation of the education system and partly for funding. However, this is primarily in the hands of the municipalities, as is the management and organisation of the facilities, including staff, materials and equipment.

General objectives and legislative framework

Overarching social policy goals, in addition to ensuring equal opportunities and social inclusion, are access to education without discrimination and the right of all – including national minorities – to their identity and culture. Education is based on dignity, tolerance and respect for fundamental rights.

The main laws governing the early childhood sector are the National Education Act (*Legea educaţiei naţionale*, No. 1/2011, with amendments of 2021; Ministry of National Education 2021) and the Social Work Act (No. 292/2011). The two main sets of regulations are the Methodology for the Organisation of Nurseries and Other Pre-Primary Institutions (No. 9/2018) and a revision of the Regulations on the Organisation and Operation of pre-Kindergarten Education Institutions, presented to the public in draft form in 2019.

By including early childhood education and care in the National Defence Strategy (2020–2024), the government highlighted the importance of early childhood education. This comprehensive legislation codifies and operationalises previous laws, and also includes compulsory preparatory classes (Eurochild 2021).

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Romania provided orientation on legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Since September 2020, ECEC attendance is compulsory for 5 to 6 year-olds and voluntary for under 5 year-olds. As from September 2023, compulsory enrolment will also apply to 4 year-olds and from 2030 to 3 year-olds.

In Romania, there is currently no legal entitlement to a place in an ECEC setting for children under 5 years of age. There is also no national policy to guarantee a place for every child. However, the Education Act (2011, as amended) states that municipalities and school inspectorates must ensure that sufficient places are available.

Primary schooling begins at the age of 6.

Main types of provision

According to national statistics, in 2022 there were only 45 free-standing nurseries in Romania, compared to a total of 1,241 kindergartens, of which more than 88.9% and 92.7% respectively were located in urban areas. However, the national statistics also report a considerable number of 'other' nursery and kindergarten/pre-primary education units attached to schools. If these 'other' units are included, then 92.4% of all nursery settings are located in urban areas and only 31.4% of kindergarten settings. 7,164 of the 'other' kindergarten settings are in rural areas (INSSE 2023a, SCL101D).

Childcare sector

Nurseries (*creșă*) admit children from 3 months to 3 years, who are usually placed in same-age groups. Nurseries are mostly privately run and are primarily found in cities. Some facilities also accept older children to ensure the continued employment of their staff. They are coordinated and financed at the local level.

Since 2007, it has been regulated by law (Law No. 263) that children in nursery settings experience age-appropriate educational activities based on their individual needs and that the relevant health and safety standards are met. Professionals work closely with parents, offering support and helping to identify potential risks to children at an early stage. Most nurseries are open between 7:00 and 17:00, but opening hours can also be adapted to parents' needs.

Education sector (ISCED 02)

Kindergartens (*grădinița)* are attended by children between 3 and 6 years of age, who learn and play in same-age groups. The regular programme in a kindergarten usually lasts five hours per day, the extended programme ten hours, including meals and rest breaks. Beyond the regular provision, there are also a few settings which provide for overnight stays from Monday to Friday.

Provider structures

If all units are counted together, then 93.8% of nursery settings and 94.3% of kindergarten settings are publicly funded. To open private facilities, an individual or legal entity must sign a contract with a school inspectorate and go through an accreditation process. After that, they too can benefit from state subsidies. They must also comply with the same legal regulations as public settings.

Table 1

Romania: Number and distribution of ECEC settings by provider type, 2022

Setting	Provider type	Number of settings	Total	Relative share in %*
Nursery	Public	31	45	68.9
	Private	14		31.1
'Other' nursery units attached to schools	Public	363	375	96.8
	Private	12		3.2
Kindergarten	Public	748	1,241	60.3
	Private	493		39.7
'Other' kindergarten/ pre-primary educa-tion units attached to schools	Public	9,223	9,336	98.8
	Private	113		1.2

Source: INSSE 2023a, SCL101A, *own calculations

Table 2

Romania: Number and proportion of children in ECEC settings by provider type, 2022

	Provider type	Number of children	Relative share in %*
Nurseries	Public	26,385	97.7
	Private	615	2.3
	Total	**27,000**	
Kindergartens	Public	482,363	92.4
	Private	39,463	7.6
	Total	**521,826**	

Source: INSSE 2023a, SCL103H, *own calculations

Participation rates in regulated ECEC settings

According to Eurostat data, only roughly 12% of children under 3 years of age attended ECEC settings in 2022. This share nearly doubled since 2010. The proportion of children between the ages of 3 and 6 attending ECEC settings increased only slightly, from two-thirds in 2010 to 67.8% in 2022. The low attendance rate of children under 3 years of age can at least partly be explained by the lack of available provision.

Table 3

Romania: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2010–2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2010	1 to 29 hours	4	49
	Over 30 hours	3	17
	No enrolment in ECEC	92	34
2015	1 to 29 hours	4.2	50.9
	Over 30 hours	5.2	7.3
	No enrolment in ECEC	90.6	41.8
2022	1 to 29 hours	8.0	50.7
	Over 30 hours	4.3	17.1
	No enrolment in ECEC	87.7	32.2

Source: Eurostat 2023b; slight deviations in the sums due to rounding

In 2020, national statistics indicate the attendance rate of 0 to 2 year-olds at 5.7% and at 76.9% for 3 to 5 year-olds (INSSE 2023a, SCL102A).

Table 4

Romania: Number and enrolment rates of children in nurseries and kindergartens, by age, 2022

Age	Number of children in nurseries	Enrolment rates in nurseries, in %	Number of children in kindergartens	Enrolment rates in kindergartens, in %
1 year-olds	6,295	3.3		
2 year-olds	17,684	9.0		
3 year-olds	3,021	1.5	157,574	77.3
4 year-olds			160,083	76.7
5 year-olds			170,538	82.1
6 year-olds			33,631	16.4

Source: INSSE 2023a, SCL103A, *calculated based on INSEE – POP105A

Compared to the previous school year, there was an increase of 1.7% in the enrolment rate in nurseries and kindergartens in 2022/23 (INSSE 2023b).

Financing and costs for parents

In 2019, 0.4% of GDP was spent on early childhood education (OECD 2023). In 2020, only 2.8% of the gross domestic product was spent on education as a whole, the lowest share in the EU (Eurochild 2021).

Early education facilities are usually financed through municipal budgets. Kindergartens are also partly financed through state budgets (e.g. salaries), whereas salaries in crèches come exclusively from the municipalities.

The funding of so-called pre-university educational institutions (including kindergartens) comprises basic funding, supplementary funding and additional funding. Basic funding comes from the state budget and covers, among other things, salaries, materials and operating costs, and is based on the standard costs for each child. Supplementary funding comes from municipal budgets and includes for example, costs for evaluations or for health and safety. Additional funding is paid as a lump sum by the Ministry of Education to institutions which have provided special services.

Since 2021/22, private ECEC settings also receive basic funding from the state. In addition, institutions – including public ones – can fall back on their own sources of income, such as donations or sponsors.

According to the Education Act, public ECEC settings are free of charge for parents – but they pay for meals (between €2 and €4 per day) if enrolment is for 10 hours per day or in weekly programmes. For disadvantaged families, these fees are reduced or waived. For private, non-subsidised facilities, fees are set by the provider and cover the costs of staff salaries, equipment, meals, etc.

Since 2020, special credits are available to companies that cover childcare costs for their employees up to €300 per month, as part of an amendment to the tax code (Eurochild 2021).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 7% of net household income on childcare costs[3] (OECD.Sstat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

In both nurseries and kindergartens, children are usually grouped according to their age. 'Junior groups' (*grupa mică*) include children from 3 months to 1 year in nurseries and 3 to 4 year-olds in kindergartens. 'Middle groups' (*grupa mijlocie*) include 1 to 2 year-olds in nurseries and 4 to 5 year-olds in kindergartens. 'Senior groups' (*grupa mare*) include 2 to 3 year-olds in nurseries and 5 to 6 year-olds in kindergartens. 2 year-olds enrolled in kindergartens can either attend a group with only 2 year-olds if there are enough children of that age, or they are included in the group with 3 year-olds. In some cases, mixed-age groups are formed if same-age grouping is not possible.

If there is a child with special educational needs in a group, the group size is reduced by three children. In groups where there are only children with special educational needs, the group size is eight to 12 children. If children with severe disabilities are among them, smaller groups of four to eight children are formed.

Table 5 shows the maximum number of children in a group per qualified professional.

Table 5
Romania: Number of children per group and qualified professional

Age	Maximum number of children per group	Maximum number of children per qualified professional
Under 1 year	7	4
1 year-olds	9	5
2 year-olds	9	6
3 to 5 year-olds	20	20

Source: Eurydice 2023, 4.2

As a rule, one qualified professional is responsible for a group, regardless of the age of the children. In ECEC settings that are open 10 hours a day, two professionals work in five-hour shifts. In private facilities, the staffing ratio may be lower if there is also an assistant or two professionals per group at the same time.

Curricular framework

In 2019, a new early childhood curriculum (*Curriculum Pentru Educaţia Timpurie*) was introduced (Ministerial Decision No 4694/02), addressing for the first time the early childhood phase from birth to 6 years as a whole. Professionals can adapt it to the specific interests, needs and potentials of the children.

The following basic principles form the fundamental values of the curriculum: child-centred education; respect for children's rights; active learning; integrated development; interculturality; equality and equity; education as interaction between professional and child.

[3] The calculation is based on the following fictitious model: two parents working full-time (average income); two 2 and 3 year-old children in full-time care; relevant care allowances included.

Five learning areas are outlined: (1) physical development, health and personal hygiene, (2) socio-emotional development, (3) cognitive development and knowledge about the world, (4) language development, communication and initial literacy skills, and (5) learning skills and attitudes. All learning activities are based on play.

For children under 3 years of age, the focus is on thematic activities, routines and transitions as well as games and activities of choice. These are offered for a certain number of hours in the centre depending on the age of the children. For example, for children under 1½ years of age, two hours of child-initiated play are provided daily, 2½ to three hours of routines and transitions are provided on two to three days, and 10 to 15 minutes of thematic activities are provided daily, initiated by the professional while taking into account the interests and reactions of the children.

For children in kindergartens, the focus is on experiential learning, games and activities of choice and personal development activities. Again, these activities are offered to the age groups for a specific number of hours and are aligned with the children's interests. The professionals decide on the organisation of the learning activities and the methods used.

Digital education

The acquisition of digital competences is not explicitly mentioned in the new education plan. However, it is recommended, as far as the available resources allow, to address this in the activities of the ECEC centre.

Monitoring – evaluation

The responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the entire education system lies in the hands of the Ministry of Education. Quality standards for the early education system, which are also the basis for external evaluations, are developed by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance (*Agentia Romana de Asigurare a Calitatii in Invatamantul Preuniversitar* – ARACIP) and implemented on the basis of government decisions. The agency is also responsible for the accreditation of new settings and for external evaluations in terms of structural issues, which are carried out at least once every three years. The district school inspectorates are responsible for evaluation of educational processes.

Child-related assessment

The assessment of children's progress from birth to 6 years is based on the reference standards approved by the Ministry of Education.

In **kindergartens**, an initial assessment is carried out during the first two weeks of each kindergarten year. For this purpose, the staff make a note of their observations and conversations with children and parents. They also record their assessments during the year and discuss them with the parents. On an everyday basis, staff use a variety of methods to assess each child's activities. At the end of the kindergarten year, a final evaluation is carried out. Based on these final evaluations, decisions are made about the planning for the next year. At the beginning and at the end of the kindergarten period, staff fill out a standardised form for each child, which describes the respective stage of development and which is also used during the transition to primary school. This long-term evaluation form is given to the parents and can also be viewed by the primary school teacher.

Centre-level internal assessment

Internal evaluations are carried out by the Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance (CEAC). This exists in all educational institutions and consists of representatives of staff, trade union, community, children and parents. CEAC produces an annual report and makes recommendations for quality improvement. This report is also published on the website of the Quality Assurance Agency.

Criteria for self-evaluation procedures include the organisational development of the institution, the educational programme, curricular and extra-curricular activities, the quality of teaching-learning processes, staff training, community relations and European dimensions in education. There are no prescribed methods for self-evaluation, the results are used at the institution level for further planning. At the regional level they are used, among other things, for the use of financial resources and they are also included in the annual reports of the external evaluations.

External evaluation

External evaluations – for public and private educational institutions and, since 2019, also for nursery settings – are carried out by the Agency for Quality Assurance (ARACIP) on the basis of national quality standards. There are three types of external evaluation: (1) for the preliminary accreditation of a setting; (2) for accreditation after completion of an entire educational cycle. After that, the educational institution receives all the rights established by law; (3) a regular evaluation every five years enables the assessment of the quality level of the educational institutions, comparing the minimum level standards for educational activities with the optimal level reference standards.

During each external evaluation visit, two to four evaluators assess the level of quality using documents, statistics, observations, interviews or questionnaires. Prior to the visit, the institution must send data and documentation proving that the standards have been observed. ARACIP analyses the data and the evaluation team, which must be from a different district than the institution being evaluated, visits the institution for two to three days. They assess the building, the management, the learning activities and the staff and conduct interviews with the stakeholders. The regular external evaluation of ECEC settings is carried out on the basis of an "efficiency/value-added index", which shows the evaluation results taking into account the specific context, socio-economic background of the institution, infrastructure, etc. An evaluation report is then prepared and published on the ARACIP website, which is the basis for the final evaluation. The settings receive a quality certificate.

Since 2020, a simplified, de-bureaucratised and also digitalised evaluation for ECEC settings has been in force.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

Children with special educational needs or disabilities can attend a regular or a special group in a mainstream ECEC setting or separate special education facilities. For the latter, they undergo a detailed assessment. However, the accompaniment and support of the children is always aimed at being able to place them in a mainstream setting.

If necessary, and if supported by a specialist's diagnosis, a child can be assigned a support worker. Regional education boards also coordinate language therapy centres for several schools

and institutions and also employ certified language therapists to provide methodological support to professionals working with children with language difficulties. Above all, more attention should be paid in future to ensuring that professionals are well prepared to integrate children with special educational needs, to involve their parents and to provide an appropriate infrastructure in the institution.

The Draft Pre-University Education Act 2022 (Art. 48, Paragraph (2), 34) provides for a National Centre for Inclusive Education, subordinate to the Ministry of Education, with its own budget, financed from its own revenues and from subsidies from the state budget (Proiect Legea 2022).

Children with a migration background – children from Roma communities

Of the total population in Romania in 2022, only 1.3% had a non-Romanian citizenship; of these, 8.3% came from other EU27-countries. In the case of children under 5 years of age these shares were 1.1% and 10% respectively (Eurostat 2023c). According to the Education Act, ethnic minorities have a right to receive education also in their home language. However, learning Romanian is compulsory for all. The most common additional language in both age groups is Hungarian.

In the national statistics for 2022, only 235 children (0.05%) in kindergartens are listed as Romani-speaking, Romanian is the family language of 92.7%. The majority (94.4%) of children in day nurseries also speak Romanian, with only 5.6% speaking Hungarian (INSSE 2023a, SCL103B). However, it is known that the attendance rate of Roma children is particularly low. Already in 2015, 63% of Roma children aged 3 to 6 years were not enrolled in a kindergarten, compared to 33% of non-Roma children. The project "Ready Set Go!" was implemented from 2014 to 2018 in 11 municipalities in Romania. The main aim was to improve the attendance rate of Roma children through special support and information. By the end of the project, 570 Roma children who previously had no opportunity to attend a kindergarten had attended for two years (Vandekerckhove et al. 2019).

Parental leave arrangements[4]

Maternity leave (*concediul de maternitate*) is granted for 18 weeks. 63 days maximum can be taken before birth. Six weeks after birth are compulsory. The maternity allowance is paid at 85% of the gross income of the last six months before the birth – with an upper limit of 12 times the national minimum gross salary per month, if social security was paid during this period. The birth allowances of RON 2,500 (€505.01) introduced by the city of Bucharest in 2017 will continue, and several cities and municipalities have developed similar programmes.

Fathers are entitled to ten days of fully (without upper limit) paid **Paternity leave** (*concediul de paternitate*). If the father can prove that he has completed a course on child care at an accredited state institution, Paternity leave can be extended further five days.

Parental leave (*concediul pentru creșterea copiilor*) is a family entitlement and lasts until the child is 2 years old. It is paid at 85% of the net household income of the last year before the birth, with a minimum of RON 1,495 (€302) and a maximum of RON 8,500 (€1,717.03) per month. If both parents take Parental leave, one parent must take two months, otherwise the entitlement to paid time is reduced to 22 months. If the parent returns to work before the child is 6 months old, he or she receives a monthly insertion incentive of 1,794 RON (302.40€) or RON 777 (€156.96) until the child's 3. birthday if he/she return to work when the child is 2 years old

[4] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Romania by Raluca Popescu and Rosa Maria Radogna in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

No data are currently available on the take-up of Paternity leave. In terms of insertion incentive, a slight increase has been observed since 2021 (86,071 persons in January 2023 vs. 83,678 in 2021), but the pre-pandemic level has not yet been reached (91,176 in 2020).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Romania

*Country expert assessment by **Laura Ciolan***

The main current challenge for the ECEC system in Romania is the very **low level of coverage and provision for the age group 0–3 years**. This is due to a number of issues presented in the ECEC Workforce Profile for Romania. Following the transfer of financing and all logistical matters to the local authorities, without sufficient preparation, some municipalities have not been able to secure resources for this service or they have neglected it. In our view, this low number of services, combined with rather poor educational quality, is directly impacting on the daily lives of the families, on early child development, but also, indirectly, on the national economy. Uniting the delivery of early childhood services for the youngest children, coordinating the educational function of these institutions and securing the necessary funding are the key measures needed for ensuring a better system.

Securing highly qualified professionals for the earliest years represents the second main challenge, since currently the personnel in infant-toddler centres do not necessarily have the appropriate education and training as professionals. Moreover, the providers of IPE are not highly motivated to organise such programmes since there are not many working places available. This vicious circle could be broken if education for the age group 0–3 was clearly regulated and funded and if the institutions were staffed with high quality professionals. Further challenges in this respect can be found in the ECEC Workforce Profile report.

Demographic data

***Please note:** For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Romania was 19,042,455. It has thus steadily decreased over the past 20 years (2000: 22,455,485; 2010: 20,294,683; 2020: 19,328,838) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total birth rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total birth rate of the 33 SEEPRO3-countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.81, Romania was well above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[5].

[5] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Children under age 6

Table 6
Romania: Number of under 6 year-olds in the total population, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year-olds	173,783
1 year-olds	188,474
2 year-olds	197,312
3 year-olds	203,772
4 year-olds	208,681
5 year-olds	207,827
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**1,179,849**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 2.9% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, 6.2% were children under 6 years of age. These proportions are above the EU27 average. The shares of children under 3 years decreased in the last 20 years, whereas those of children from 3 to 6 years increased slightly.

Table 7
Romania: Distribution of under 6 year-olds in population by age compared with EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Romania/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Romania	3.1	3.1	6.2
	∅ EU15[6]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Romania	3.1	3.1	6.2
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Romania	2.8	3.0	5.9
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Romania	2.9	3.3	6.2
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations; slight deviations in the sums due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, just under half of households in Romania (46.6%) with children under 6 years of age were couple households. Households headed by a single parent accounted for only 1.2% of all households, almost all being single mother households (1.1%).

Table 8
Romania: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %+
Total households	1,954,000	
Couple households	852,000	43.6
Other types of households	1,079,300	55.2

[6] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %+
Total single households	22,700	1.2
Single households, women	20,900	1.1
Single households, men	1,800**	0.1

Source: Eurostat 2023i, *Own calculations; ** data computed

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Romania in 2022, the employment rate (15-64 years) of men as a whole was 76.1%, that of women 57.3% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 46.3% of women and 78.5% of men with children under 6 were in employment (18-64 years). The shares of employed fathers were thus well below the average (87.2%) of the 27(2020) EU countries, as were those of mothers than the EU average (63.6%) (Eurostat 2023f).

Table 9a

Romania: Employment rates of parents with children below age 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 and 2022

	2010	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %
Romania	57.0	82.4
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[7]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 32.7	Latvia: 74.8
	2022	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %
Romania	46.3	78.5
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU- countries [8]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023f

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in Table 9b.

Table 9b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %	Women, in %	Men, in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
+Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9

[7] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %	Women, in %	Men, in %
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023f, 2023j

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[9]

In 2022, more than one third (36.3%) of children under 6 in Romania were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was significantly higher than the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 34.4% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 20.5% of children under 6 suffered from severe material deprivation – also well above the EU27 average of 6.1%. For the total population, it was 14.3% (EU: 4.3%) (Eurostat 2023g, i).

In 2021, the National Alliance for Zero Child Poverty was launched, working in partnership with different social actors to reduce child poverty (Eurochild 2021).

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- *SCL101D – Education units, by categories of units, urban/ rural area*
- *SCL102A – School-age population enrollment rate in education, by gender*
- *SCL103A – Enrolled population, by level of education, ages and gender*
- *SCL103B – Children and pupil enrolment in pre-university education, by level of education, languages, macro-regions, development regions and counties*
- *SCL103H – Enrolled population, by level of education, ownerships, macroregions, development regions and counties*
- *POP105A – Usually resident population by age group and ages, sex, urban/ rural area, macroregions, development regions and counties at January 1st*

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

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1. ECEC governance in the Russian Federation

The contemporary system of education in the Russian Federation consists of curricula and state educational standards and administrative regulations for different levels. It also comprises management organisations, both non-departmental and subordinate institutions. Early childhood education and care – mostly called pre-school education in this report – is the first stage in the formal education system of the Russian Federation. The state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of pre-school education is therefore an integral part of the national education system.

According to the federal law "On Education in the Russian Federation" (Parliament of the Russian Federation 2012), pre-school education can begin when children reach the age of 2 months. Primary school education begins when children reach the age of 6 years and 6 months. At the request of the parents or legal representatives, children can be admitted to primary school at an earlier or later age. For example, they may start later in the case of health reasons, but no later than 8 years of age.

In 2013, on the basis of the Federal Education Act, a Federal State Educational Standard for Pre-school Education (FGOS, Ministry of Education and Science 2013a) was approved.

The main mechanisms for the implementation of state measures are defined in the Federal Education Act (Part 2 of Article 89), which states that the management of the education system, among other things, includes:

- Building a network of federal executive authorities, executive authorities of the Russian Federation and local self-government bodies
- Implementing strategic planning for the development of the education system
- Adopting and implementing federal and regional reform programmes aimed at developing the education system.

All educational programmes at pre-school, primary general, basic general and secondary general education levels build on each other. By order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation No. 1028 dated November 25, 2022, the federal educational programme for pre-school education was approved. The Federal Educational Programme for Pre-school Education is a standard that was developed in order to create a unified federal educational framework for the upbringing and development of pre-schoolers and to provide children and parents with equal and high-quality conditions for pre-school education throughout Russia. The programme came into force on January 1, 2023 and will be followed by all kindergartens as from September 1, 2023 (Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation 2022).

Individual pre-school settings independently develop and adapt their educational programmes in reference to the Federal State Educational Standard (FGOS) and in accordance with the requirements of the Federal Educational Programme for Pre-school Education. Different programmes can be developed for different groups of children with different lengths of attendance as well as adaptive programmes for children with special needs. The specific content depends on the age and individual characteristics of children and can be implemented in various types of activities (communication, play, cognitive research activities).

Attending a pre-school setting is not compulsory.

Although the legal framework is in a state of flux, ECEC is currently a unified system beginning at the age of 2 months. ECEC for children aged 0–3 years is now officially part of the system and

its regulations and comes under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Since 2018, the Ministry of Education and Science is split into the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Article 67 of the Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" declares that enrolment in an ECEC institution can begin when children reach the age of two months (Parliament of the Russian Federation 2012).

Controlling organs are now separated into different state agencies:

- Responsible for the quality of education (legal regulations, control and supervision of educational activities, recognition of foreign qualifications) is the Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science (*Rozobrnadzor*), a sub-division of the Government of the Russian Federation.
- The Federal Service for Supervision of Consumer Rights Protection and Human Welfare (*Rospotrebnadzor*) inspects kindergartens regarding nutrition, hygienic standards, rooms and equipment. It also checks the documentation (e.g. medical certificates of staff) of an ECEC institution.

In the education system of the city of Moscow (Moscow has the status of a city of federal significance), there are some significant differences from the general all-Russian education system and from 2022, the city is developing its own educational standard.

As part of the implementation of the Decree of the Government of Moscow No. 86 dated March 22, 2011 (Government of Moscow 2011), an organisational reform was held which created so called “educational complexes”. These units comprise (several) schools (sometimes including vocational education and training schools) and pre-school institutions located in the same neighbourhood. In some cases, an educational complex may consist of up to 10,000 children. The term “school” refers to all the buildings included in the educational complex. Currently (2023), all (municipal) kindergartens are part of an educational complex. The main goal of such a structural model is to create, in a single educational space, a system of continuous development, education and upbringing of children from 2 months or 1½ years (depending on the form of early childhood education chosen by the family) to 18 years of age. Pre-school children continue to attend a kindergarten building in this “school” complex (Belousova and Volkova 2023).

The director of such an educational complex is the director of the lead school in the complex, and a senior methodologist is appointed to manage the pre-school groups (kindergartens). Mostly these are former kindergarten directors who changed job positions after the establishment of such a complex (Volkova et al. 2021).

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Education sector

The ECEC workforce in educational institutions (kindergartens) comprises the following categories of staff: Educators (= Kindergarten Teachers), Senior Educators (= Senior Kindergarten Teachers), Music Teachers, Physical Education Instructors, Speech Therapists, Special Needs Teachers, Educational Psychologists and other pedagogical workers.

The **Kindergarten Teacher/Pre-primary Teacher** (*pedagog doshkol'nogo obrazovaniy/vospitatel*) – often called ‘Pre-school Teacher’ in official translations – is directly responsible for the everyday activities and health of the children. They plan and hold classes and organise games,

walks and leisure time activities according to the children's age. They establish conditions in the group for a successful implementation of the curricular framework. Together with the Music Teacher and Sports Teacher, they prepare festive days, entertainment and sports activities. In addition, they work with parents on issues of bringing up children and motivate them for active cooperation with the kindergarten. They also coordinate the preventive vaccinations which children receive in the pre-school institution with parents.

In 2013, an Order was issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Russian Federation (No. 544n dated October 18, 2013, revised 2021) "On approval of the Professional Standard 'Teacher'", which applies to pedagogical work in all educational institutions, including kindergartens and includes a section on the "Pre-school Teacher" (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Russian Federation 2013). In accordance with the current legislation since January 1, 2017 the Professional Standard has to be applied by employers in the following areas: development of personnel policy and personnel management, organisation of training and certification of employees, the conclusion of employment contracts, the development of job descriptions and the establishment of wage systems (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Russian Federation 2014). In everyday practice, when hiring Pre-school Teachers, employers are more often guided by the unified qualification handbook of positions of managers, specialists and employees, section "Qualification characteristics of positions of education stuff" (Ministry of Health and Social Development of the Russian Federation 2010 (revision 2011). Currently, the Professional Standard "Teacher" (and the requirements that Pre-school Teachers must meet) tends to be applied only when certifying educators.

Junior Kindergarten Teacher / Kindergarten Teacher Assistant (*mladshiy vospitatel' / pomoshchnik vospitatelya*)

Junior Kindergarten Teachers support Kindergarten Teachers in their work (including participation in conducting classes organised by the Kindergarten Teacher), whereas the Kindergarten Teacher Assistants do not participate in educational activities. The latter often only have a school leaving certificate. Otherwise, their duties are similar:

- Wet cleaning of the group, locker rooms, sleeping areas and other premises twice a day
- Ventilating the group and sleeping area in accordance with the established schedule, observing the quarantine disinfection regime
- Helping the caregiver change children's clothes for sleeping time, physical education and holiday activities
- Under the guidance of an educator, encouraging cultural and hygiene skills and habits in children, cleaning the play area, tidying beds
- Preparing material for classes with children together with educators, cleaning up after them, helping to take children to clubs, classes and other activities
- Controlling the cleanliness of children's bed linen, towels and replacing them according to schedule
- Monitoring the safety of the property of the group and the kindergarten
- Making requests in a timely manner if malfunctions of furniture or plumbing equipment are detected
- Checking that no food or household chemicals are in places accessible to children
- Conducting group and sleeping room window cleaning twice a year
- Sanitising carpets according to schedule
- Helping in the kitchen if no kitchen worker is available
- Performing the duties of caregivers occasionally in their absence
- Staying with the children during quiet hours if the educator is, for example, at a meeting

- Helping to look after the outside area of the kindergarten (e.g. gardening)
- Cleaning outside play areas during the summer
- Assisting in the preparation of matinees (calendar-themed holidays) and various events
- Monitoring their own appearance and that of the children.

Music Teachers (*pedagog po musike*) organise and conduct music classes, literary and musical matinees or evenings; identify musically gifted children and work with them individually and in a group; participate in morning gymnastics, physical education and entertainment; provide musical accompaniment to organised games for children in the second half of the day; conduct musical and didactic, theatrical and rhythmic games.

Sports Teachers conduct physical education classes, during which they are fully responsible for the safety of pupils; supervise the physical activity of children during the day; control the hygienic conditions for the classes together with the nurse; organise information sessions with parents on issues of physical education. Like other teachers, the Physical Education Teacher is guided by approved programmes that take into account the age level of the children and the individual capabilities of each child.

Swimming Instructors (if the kindergarten has a swimming pool) conduct classes in the pool in accordance with the programme. Very young children are taught not to fear water, and from middle pre-school age they begin learning different styles of swimming (crawl, breaststroke, "dolphin"). The instructor is responsible for the safety of the children in the water. Together with the nurse, he/she controls the hygienic condition of the pool. The instructor helps children with undressing and taking a shower and accustoms them to strict adherence to hygiene requirements.

Childcare sector

Public nursery centres (*yaslye*) are integrated into kindergartens and in these particular settings the children are educated and cared for by **Kindergarten/Pre-primary Teachers** (*doshkolnyj pedagog/vospitatel*) and **Junior Kindergarten Teachers** or **Kindergarten Teachers' Assistants**. This means that these children have access to the same qualified staff as older children. However, in privately-run childcare settings, the staffing situation is different as most of these settings do not have to adhere to government regulations. On the one hand, some of these elite settings attract highly educated staff through higher salaries. On the other hand, some of the very small private settings employ staff who have little more than an Assistant qualification.

Childcare worker/Nanny: By the Order of the Russian Ministry of Labour dated December 05, 2018 No. 769n (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Russian Federation 2018), the Professional Standard 'Nanny (Child Care Worker)' was approved. These workers belong to the category "Supervising and caring for children in organisations and at home" (i.e. caring for infants up to the age of 1; caring for young children from 1–2 years; looking after children of pre-school age from 3–6 years; babysitting and caring for children of pre-school age with disabilities). However, this position does not apply to kindergarten staff.

Nurses (non-teaching staff) must have a secondary education specialising in "Nursing" or "General Medicine" with an additional certificate "Nursing in Paediatrics". The Head Nurse may need additional certificates, determined by the leader of the pre-school setting. They can work in nursery centres or in kindergartens.

Table 1 shows the whole range of staff employed in ECEC settings in both the education and childcare sectors and also categorises the core professionals (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at end of this section).

Table 1

Russian Federation: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	**Main ECEC workplace settings and age range**	**Main roles and positions**	**Main age-range focus of initial professional education**	**Minimum qualification requirement** **ECTS credits**[1] **EQF level** **ISCED level**
Pre-primary education sector				
Kindergarten Teacher / Pre-Primary Teacher *Doshkolny pedagog/Vospitatel* *Profile*: Pre-primary Education Professional	*Detskij sad* **Kindergarten** public and private 2/3–5/6 years[2] *Gruppy kratkovremennogo pribyvanija* **Sessional services** 1½–4 years	Core pedagogue with group responsibility	2–7 years	3-year post-secondary vocational qualification in the field of pedagogy and early childhood education ECTS credits: n/a[3] EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 4 Optional, not required: University degree ECTS credits: n/a in Russia EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 6
Junior Kindergarten Teacher / Kindergarten Teacher Assistant *Mladshiy vospitatel'/pomoshchnik vospitatelya*	*Detskij sad* **Kindergarten** public and private 2/3–5/6 years	Non-specialist co-worker	2–7 years	3-year post-secondary vocational qualification or only a school leaving certificate and professional training in the field of education and pedagogy (for Kindergarten Teacher Assistant)

[1] Some parts of the Russian higher education system are not aligned with the Bologna system (e.g. ECTS credits). Also, references to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) or the International Standard Classification for Education (ISCED) are not commonly used. The ISCED levels stated in this report are estimated classifications.

[2] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In the Russian Federation the corresponding formats are **0–2** years and **3–5/6** years since children usually start school when they are 6 years of age. But it is also possible to start earlier or later.

[3] n/a = not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits[1] EQF level ISCED level
				ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 4 / 3
Speech Therapist *Logoped* **Psychologist** *Psykholog*	*Detskij sad* **Kindergarten** public and private 2/3–5/6 years	Regular con-tact staff with specialist qualification who work alongside the Kindergarten Teacher	Age-range de-pends on spe-cialisation	3 years post-secondary vocational qualification in the field of pedagogy ***or*** 4-year university de-gree plus 2 years of work experience in ed-ucational settings ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 4 or 6
Pedagogical Supervisor *Metodist*	*Detskij sad* **Kindergarten** public and private 2/3–5/6 years	Supervision of teaching/ learning pro-cesses and quality assur-ance	2/3–6/7 years	Qualified Kindergar-ten/Pre-primary Teacher with at least 2 years of work experi-ence in kindergarten settings ***or*** 4-year university de-gree plus 2 years of work experience in ed-ucational settings ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 4 or 6
Special Needs Teacher *Defektolog* **Special Needs Assistant** *Tjutor*	*Detskij sad* **Kindergarten** public and private 2/3–5/6 years	Specialist support staff	Age-range de-pends on spe-cialisation	University degree plus 2 years of work experi-ence in educational settings ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 6
Sport/Music/Art Teachers *Vospitatel fiskul-tury/musiki/tvor-chestva*	*Detskij sad* **Kindergarten** public and private 2/3–5/6 years	Specialist support staff	ca. 2–7 years	3-year post-secondary vocational educa-tion/training in the field of pedagogy ***or***

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits[1] EQF level ISCED level
				University degree (*diploma* or *diploma* plus *magistratura*) ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 4 or 6
Social Pedagogue *Socialny pedagog* *Profile:* Social and Child-hood Pedagogy Professional	*Detskij sad* **Kindergarten** public and private 2/3–5/6 years	Work with children/fami-lies in special social condi-tions (vulner-able groups or families with more than 3 chil-dren); position not obligatory	n/a	3 years post-secondary vocational qualification ***or*** university education (*diploma* or *diploma* plus *magistratura*) in the field of pedagogy or social pedagogy ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 4 or 6
Coordinating Teacher *Pedagog organisator*	*Detskij sad* **Kindergarten** public and private 2/3–5/6 years	Special post for organising events and coordinating with social services and community; position not obligatory	n/a	3 years at post-second-ary vocational college *Award*: Diploma ***or*** University education (*diploma or diploma plus magistratura*) in the field of Pedagogy ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 4 or 6
Kindergarten Head/ Deputy Kindergar-ten Head *Direktor destkogo sada/Zamestitel ru-kovoditelya*	*Detskij sad* **Kindergarten** public and private 2/3–5/6 years	Centre Lead-ers with man-agerial tasks, not working directly with children		4-year university de-gree ("Government and municipal manage-ment") plus 5 years of work experience ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 6 or 7
Childcare sector				
Educator *Vospitatel*	*Yasli* Nursery 0–2 years	Core practi-tioner with group respon-sibility	0–2 years	3-year post-secondary vocational qualification in the field of pedagogy

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits[1] EQF level ISCED level
Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional (with nursery specialism)	*Gruppy kratkov-remennogo prib-yvanija* **Sessional services** 1½–4 years			and early childhood ed-ucation ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 4 Optional, not required: University degree (*di-ploma* or *diploma* plus *magistratura*) ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 6
Junior Kindergar-ten Teacher / Kindergarten Tea-cher Assistant *mladshiy vospi-tatel'/pomoshchnik vospitatelya*	*Detskij sad* **Nursery group in kindergarten** public and private 0–2 years	Non-specialist co-worker; junior posi-tion	n/a	3-year post-secondary vocational qualification or only a school leaving certificate and profes-sional training in the field of education and pedagogy (for Kinder-garten Teacher Assis-tant) ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 4 / 3
Nurse *medsestra*	*Detskij sad* **Kindergarten** public and private 2/3–5/6 years *Yasli* **Nursery** 0–2 years	Non-teaching staff	n/a	3-4 years post-second-ary education in "Nurs-ing" or "General Medi-cine" with an addi-tional certificate "Pae-diatric Nursing" ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: n/a ISCED 2011: 4

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neu-man 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)

- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

The administration of the pre-school institution includes the Kindergarten Head, the Senior Educator (Kindergarten Teacher) and the Deputy Head.

According to the Federal Act on Education, Centre Heads/Principals perform managerial tasks and are responsible for pedagogical, financial and legal issues. They are not involved in the daily educational programme. An important duty includes managing the work with parents, who can, for example, seek advice from the Principal and propose own initiatives for working with children in terms of safety precautions or for organising additional educational services and activities.

The recently established "educational complexes" in the Moscow area (see *Chapter **1***) are managed by one director – the director of the School. Heads become administrators/heads of preschool units, senior methodologists, etc. according to the specific structure of the organisation. As with all staff positions, they have to have the appropriate certification/attestation to prove their knowledge and skills.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Senior Kindergarten Teachers are responsible for supervising the implementation of educational programmes and educational/pedagogical processes in the kindergarten. Together with the Kindergarten Head, Senior Kindergarten Teachers are responsible for managing the kindergarten team, including:

- Participating in the selection of personnel, in the development and implementation of development programmes and pedagogical plans
- Providing groups with teaching aids, games, toys
- Organising cooperation with other early childhood institutions, schools, children's institutions, museums, etc.

Senior Kindergarten Teachers conduct professional development activities for the teaching staff: open classes for pedagogical workers, seminars, individual and group consultations. In addition, they participate in work with parents.

Deputy Head for Educational Work: In some cases, this position can be found in the staff list of a kindergarten instead of a Senior Kindergarten Teacher. However, there is a difference: a Senior Teacher deals exclusively with issues relating to the educational process whereas the focus of the work of a Deputy Head is on administrative and management issues.

The **Deputy Head of the administrative and economic department (supervisor)** manages the maintenance of the kindergarten. They monitor the condition of the premises, are engaged in the purchase of furniture, utensils, equipment and toys. They also supervise work on the improvement and landscaping of the territory and monitor the implementation of fire prevention measures and safety conditions for children and adults. Before taking up such a position, the relevant attestation is needed.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Representatives of various state authorities (labour inspection, fire supervision, prosecutor's office and police, education committees) are authorised by the regulator to implement methods

of monitoring the quality of work in kindergartens. The federal government agency *Rospotrebnadzor* is responsible for assessing pre-school educational organisations for compliance with established standards.

2.5 Specialist support staff

Educational Psychologists have the task of supporting the intellectual, somatic and social well-being of children in pre-school institutions. This work includes:

- Helping children, parents and teaching staff to solve specific problems
- Conducting psychological diagnostics, determining the degree of disorders (mental, physical, emotional) in the development of pupils, identifying violations of social behaviour development
- Providing the relevant psychological and pedagogical support
- Participating in the planning of developmental and remedial educational activities
- Promoting the development of creatively gifted students
- Shaping the psychological culture of teachers, as well as children and their parents.

Speech Therapists are responsible for:

- Ameliorating disorders in the development of children's speech
- Examining pupils to determine the characteristics of disorders
- Conducting group and individual remedial sessions.

In some kindergartens, this position is held by a teacher with qualifications in another specialist field (sport, ecology, fine arts, theatre and drama, rhythmics, teaching a foreign language, etc.). They are part of the regular staff of a kindergarten and may receive a bonus for extra work.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

In 2022, 75.3% of pre-school education teaching staff in Russia were Kindergarten Teachers. They are the core professionals in terms of the educational work with children in pre-school educational institutions. The remaining 24.7% of qualified staff are specialist support professionals such as Speech Therapists, Sports Teachers, Coordinating Teachers, etc.

Table 2a indicates that in 2022, just over half of regular Kindergarten Teachers and the greater majority of Senior Kindergarten Teachers had a university degree. In terms of the specialist support staff, the greater majority had a higher education qualification. *Table 2b* shows the absolute numbers of ECEC staff.

Table 2a

Russian Federation: Structural composition of the workforce in the pre-primary education sector

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce, 2022, in %	
Kindergarten staff with university degree	Kindergarten Teachers	**51.4**
	Senior Kindergarten Teachers	**89.5**
Specialist support staff with university degree	Special Needs Teachers	98.1
	Speech Therapists	97.9
	Educational Psychologists	96.6
	Foreign Language Teachers	92.8
	Social Pedagogues	75.7

	Other pedagogical staff	78.1
	Teachers with other special field	72.2
	Coordinating Teachers	71.3
	Physical Instructors	64.2
	Music Teachers	53.2
Kindergarten staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	Kindergarten Teachers:	48.1
	Senior Kindergarten Teachers:	10.5
Specialist support staff with post-secondary vocational qualification	Music Teachers	46.2
	Physical Instructors	35.2
	Coordinating Teachers	28.2
	Teachers with other special field	27.1
	Social Pedagogues	23.2
	Other pedagogical staff	20.9
	Foreign Language Teachers	5.2
	Psychologists	3.3
	Speech Therapists	2.0
	Special Needs Teachers	1.8
Staff with non-specialist qualification	No data available	
Staff with no formal initial professional qualification	No data available	
Male staff	No data available	
Staff with a background of migration	No data available	

Source: Rosstat 2022b

Table 2b

Russian Federation: Numbers of ECEC staff, 2022

Staff categories	Number of pedagogical staff
All pedagogical staff	665,900
Kindergarten Teachers	501,100
Senior Kindergarten Teachers	24,400
Music Teachers	41,100
Physical Education Instructors	23,400
Educational Speech Therapists	37,600
Special Needs Teachers	7,100
Educational Psychologists	19,200
Social Pedagogues	1,300
Coordinating Teachers	400
Foreign Language Teachers	500
Teachers with other specialisation	5,200
Other pedagogical staff	4,700

Source: Rosstat 2022b

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Education sector

In accordance with Part 1 of Art. 46 of the Federal Law of December 29, 2012 No. 273-FZ "On Education in the Russian Federation" (Parliament of the Russian Federation 2012), persons with a secondary vocational or higher education and meeting the qualification requirements specified in the qualification reference books (Ministry of Health and Social Development of the Russian Federation 2010) and (or) professional standards (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection 2013) have the right to engage in pedagogical activities.

Qualification requirements for the positions of "Educator" (Kindergarten Teacher) and "Junior Kindergarten Teacher (Kindergarten Teacher Assistant)

In 2010, a Unified Qualification Directory for the positions of managers (Kindergarten Heads), specialists (Kindergarten Teachers and specialist support staff) and employees (non-pedagogical workers) was approved through an Order of the Ministry of Health and Social Development of Russia dated August 26, 2010 No. 761n. The section in the Directory on "Qualification requirements for the positions of Educators" states the following requirements for Educators, Senior Educators and Kindergarten Teacher Assistants:

Educators (Kindergarten Teachers) – a higher vocational education or secondary vocational education in the field of Education and Pedagogy and no requirements for previous work experience (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Russian Federation 2016)

Senior Educators (Senior Kindergarten Teachers) **–** higher professional education in the field of study "Education and Pedagogy" and relevant work experience for at least five years

Junior Kindergarten Teachers / Kindergarten Teacher Assistants – completed secondary general education and vocational training in the field of education and pedagogy without specific requirements for work experience. The Kindergarten Teacher Assistants/Junior Kindergarten Teachers belong to the category of 'educational support personnel'.

Currently, the activities of Kindergarten Teachers are regulated by two main documents: The Professional Standard 'Teacher' (section Professional Standard 'Pre-school Teacher') and the Federal State Educational Standard for Pre-school Education (FGOS DO).

The **Professional Standard 'Teacher'**, which was approved in 2013 (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Russian Federation 2013), is used by employers to organise and manage all aspects of employment (see *Chapter **2.1*** for details). It regulates the work of kindergarten teaching staff and the requirements for professional knowledge and skills, including a description of performance competences needed to carry out job duties. It also includes requirements regarding compliance and mandatory duties.

Requirements for job applications as Kindergarten Teacher according to the Professional Standard 'Teacher'

Option 1: Higher or secondary vocational professional education in "Education and Pedagogical Sciences" (profile pedagogical education).

Option 2: Relevant general higher or secondary vocational education plus additional professional education with a specific profile.

Specific prerequisites for taking up employment are the absence of a criminal record and diseases (with the permission of the medical commission).

The following gives a brief description of the initial professional education of Kindergarten Teachers, Kindergarten Heads and specialist support staff in the kindergarten sector.

Table 3

Russian Federation: Kindergarten/Pre-primary Teacher

Job title in Russian: *Pedagog doshkol'nogo obrazovani /Vospitatel* **Profile**: Pre-primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: 9 years of compulsory schooling with school leaving certificate *(attestat ob osnovnom obshem obrasovanii)* **Professional studies:** 3 years at a post-secondary vocational education and training college (*sredneje professionalnoje obrazovanie chilishche*) specialising in Pedagogy **Award**: Vocational diploma *(diplom o srednem professionalnom obrasovanii*) (= university entrance qualification) **ECTS credits**: n/a **EQF level**: n/a **ISCED 2011**: 4 **Main ECEC workplaces:** *Detskij sad* (kindergarten), 2/3–6/7 years; *gruppy kratkovremennogo pribyvanija* (sessional services), 0–6 years **or** (not mandatory) **Entry requirements:** University entrance qualification **Professional studies:** 4-year university study programme in Education, Pedagogy, Psychology, Speech Therapy, either full-time presence (*ochno*) or online (*zaochno*) **Award**: University degree (Bachelor equivalent) **ECTS credits**: n/a **EQF level**: n/a **ISCED 2011**: 6 **Main ECEC workplaces**: see above

Table 4

Russian Federation: Kindergarten Head/Deputy Kindergarten Head

Job title in Russian: *Direktor destkogo sada/Zamestitel rukovoditelya* **Profile:** Pre-primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: University entrance qualification **Professional studies:** 4-year university study route in Government and Municipal Management plus 5 years work experience in a management position *or* 5 years work experience as a Kindergarten Teacher **Award**: University degree (Bachelor equivalent) **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** n/a **ISCED 2011**: 6 **Main ECEC workplaces:** *detskij sad* (kindergarten), 0–6/7 years

Table 5

Russian Federation: Educational Psychologist/Speech Therapist

Job title in Russian: *Specialist Psyholog/ Specialist Logoped*
Entry requirements: (for both positions) University entrance qualification **Professional studies**: 4-year university study route, specialty Psychology / Defectology **Award**: University degree (Bachelor equivalent) **ECTS credits**: n/a **EQF level**: n/a **ISCED 2011**: 6 **Main ECEC workplaces:** *Detskij sad* (Kindergarten), 2/3–6/7 years; *gruppy kratkovremennogo prib-yvanija* (sessional services), 1–6/7 years or (for Educational Psychologist only) **Entry requirements**: 9 years compulsory school with school leaving certificate (*attestat ob osnovnom obshem obrasovanii*) **Professional studies**: 3 years at a post-secondary vocational education and training college *(sredneje professionalnoje obrazovanie chilishche*) specializing in pedagogy and psychology. **Award**: Vocational diploma (*diplom o srednem professionalnom obrasovanii*) (= university entrance) **ECTS credits**: n/a **EQF level**: n/a **ISCED 2011**: 4 **Main ECEC workplaces**: see above

Table 6

Russian Federation: Pedagogical Supervisor /Senior Educator

Job title in Russian: *Metodist/Starshiy vospitatel'* **Profile**: Pre-primary Education Professional
Entry requirements: University entrance qualification **Professional studies**: 4-year university study route in specialising in Education and Pedagogy (plus 2 years of work experience in educational settings before taking up the post) **Award**: University degree (Bachelor equivalent) **ECTS credits: n/a** **EQF level: n/a** **ISCED 2011: 6** **Main ECEC workplaces:** *Detskij sad* (kindergarten), 2/3–6/7 years; *gruppy kratkovremennogo prib-yvanija* (sessional services), 1½–5 years

Table 7

Russian Federation: Kindergarten Teacher Assistant/ Junior Kindergarten Teacher

Job title in Russian: *Pomoshchnik vospitatelya / mladshiy vospitatel'*
Entry requirements: (for both positions) 11 years of full (complete) schooling with school leaving certificate (*attestat o srednem (polnom) obshem obrazovanii*) **Professional studies:** professional training in the field of education and pedagogy without presenting requirements for work experience. **Award**: Certificate of professional training in education and pedagogy

Job title in Russian: *Pomoshchnik vospitatelya / mladshiy vospitatel'*
ECTS credits: n/a **EQF level**: n/a **ISCED 2011**: 4 **Main ECEC workplaces:** *Detskij sad* (kindergarten), 2/3–6/7 years; *gruppy kratkovremennogo pribyvanija* (sessional services), 0–7 years ***or*** (only for Junior Kindergarten Teacher) **Entry requirements**: 9 years of compulsory schooling with school leaving certificate (*attestat ob osnovnom obshem obrasovanii*) **Professional studies:** 3 years at a post-secondary vocational education and training college *(sredneje professionalnoje obrazovanie uchilishche*) specialising in Pedagogy **Award**: Vocational diploma (*diplom o srednem professionalnom obrasovanii*) (= university entrance requirement) **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** n/a **ISCED 2011**: 4 **Main ECEC workplaces:** see above

Childcare sector

Although the childcare sector for under 3 year-olds is not as regulated as the pre-primary sector and a three-year post-secondary vocational education is sufficient for working in settings for under-threes, staff mainly have the same qualifications as their colleagues working with older children in order to be more flexible in terms of job opportunities.

Table 8

Russian Federation: Educator/Childcare Worker

Job title in Russian: *Doshkolny pedagog/Vospitatel* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: 9 years compulsory schooling with school leaving certificate *(attestat ob osnovnom obshem obrasovanii)* **Professional studies:** 3 years at post-secondary vocational education and training college (*sredneje professionalnoje obrazovanie chilishche*) specialising in Pedagogy **Award**: Vocational diploma *(diplom o srednem professionalnom obrasovanii*) (= university entrance requirement) **ECTS credits**: n/a **EQF level**: n/a **ISCED 2011**: 4 **Main ECEC workplaces:** *yaslye* (nursery*)*, 1½-2 years; *gruppy kratkovremennogo pribyvanija* (sessional services), 1½–5 years ***or*** (not obligatory) **Entry requirements:** University entrance qualification **Professional studies:** 4-year university study route in education, pedagogy, psychology, speech therapy either in full-time study courses (*ochno*) or as a distance education course (*zaochno*) **Award**: University degree (Bachelor equivalent)

Job title in Russian: *Doshkolny pedagog/Vospitatel* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
ECTS credits: n/a **EQF level**: n/a **ISCED 2011**: 6 **Main ECEC workplaces**: see above

Table 9

Russian Federation: (Deputy) Centre Leader

Job title in Russian*: Direktor destkogo sada/Zamestitel rukovoditelya*
Entry requirements: University entrance qualification **Professional studies:** 4-year university study route in Government and Municipal Management plus 5 years work experience in a management position ***or*** 5 years work experience as a Kindergarten Teacher **Award**: University degree (Bachelor equivalent) **ECTS credits**: n/a **EQF level**: n/a **ISCED 2011**: 6 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Primarily *Detskij sad* (kindergarten), 0–6/7 years; also childcare settings

Table 10

Russian Federation: Nursery Educator Assistant /Junior Kindergarten Teacher

Job title in Russian: *Pomoshchnik vospitatelya / mladshiy vospitatel'*
Entry requirements: (for both positions) 11 years of full (complete) schooling with school leaving certificate (*attestat o srednem (polnom) obshem obrazovanii*) **Professional studies:** Professional training in the field of education and pedagogy without proof of work experience. **Award**: Certificate of professional training in education and pedagogy **ECTS credits**: n/a **EQF level**: n/a **ISCED 2011**: 4 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Kindergarten 0–6/7 years; *gruppy kratkovremennogo pribyvanija* (sessional services), 1½–6/7 years ***or*** *(*only for Junior Kindergarten Teacher) **Entry requirements**: 9 years compulsory school with school leaving certificate (*attestat ob osnovnom obshem obrasovanii*) **Professional studies**: 3 years at a vocational education/training college (*sredneje professionalnoje obrazovanie uchilishche*) specialising in Pedagogy **Award**: Diploma (*diplom o srednem professionalnom obrasovanii) (= university entrance qualification*) **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** n/a **ISCED 2011**: 4 **Main ECEC workplaces:** see above

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

The Professional Standard (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Russian Federation 2013) contains a description of the professional activities and competences of Kindergarten Teachers as well as the knowledge and skills necessary to perform job duties. These are summarised below.

Professional duties of Kindergarten Teachers[4]

According to the Professional Standard 'Teacher', Kindergarten Teachers have the following professional duties:

- Regulating children's behaviour to ensure a safe educational environment
- Implementing modern, interactive forms and methods of educational work
- Setting educational goals that contribute to the development of children, regardless of their abilities and character
- Designing and implementing educational programmes
- Providing educational opportunities for various types of activities for children (educational, play, work, sports, artistic, etc.)
- Designing situations and events that develop emotions and values (the culture of experiences and value orientations
- Creating and maintaining the atmosphere and traditions of life in an educational organisation
- Developing children's cognitive abilities, independence, initiative, creativity; an attitude of citizenship, ability to work and live in the conditions of the modern world; a healthy lifestyle culture
- Developing tolerance and behaviour skills in a changing multicultural environment.

To perform these duties they need **competences** such as:

- Providing educational activities for children, taking into account cultural differences, gender, age and individual characteristics
- Communicating with children, respecting their dignity, understanding and accepting them
- Managing a group in order to involve children in the process of education and upbringing, motivating their educational and cognitive activities
- Analysing requirements in the group, maintaining a professional, friendly atmosphere in the children's group
- Protecting the dignity and interests of pre-schoolers, helping children who find themselves in a conflict situation and / or adverse conditions
- Finding the value aspect of educational knowledge and information, ensuring its understanding by children
- Organising excursions, etc.
- Collaborating with other educators and specialists in order to solve educational problems
- Utilising constructive educational efforts of parents (legal representatives)

[4] Author's summary based on the Professional Standard 'Teacher', section "Pre-school teacher" (Edition 2021).

– Supporting families in solving issues of bringing up children.

Tasks of Kindergarten Teachers when implementing early education programmes

– Participating in the development of the main general educational programme of the setting in accordance with the Federal State Educational Standard (FSES) of pre-school education
– Participating in the creation of a safe and psychologically comfortable educational environment; sustaining the emotional wellbeing of the child
– Planning and implementation of educational work in a group in accordance with the FSES of pre-school education
– Organising and carrying out pedagogical monitoring of children's development based on the educational programme
– Participating in the planning and adaptation of educational tasks (together with a psychologist and other specialists) based on the results of monitoring, taking into account the developmental characteristics of each child in the group
– Implementing the pedagogical recommendations of specialists (psychologist, speech therapist, special needs teacher, etc.) in working with children who experience difficulties in mastering the programme
– Supporting psychological readiness for schooling
– Organising activities for young children: topics, cognitive tasks, games and role-playing, establishing rules, creating diverse opportunities for the development of children's free play, including the provision of time and space for playing
– Organising constructive interaction among children in various activities; creating conditions for children to freely choose activities, participate in joint activities, share materials.

As a prerequisite for this, Kindergarten Teachers need the following **competences:**

– Organising appropriate activities for young children
– Supporting children's physical, cognitive and personal development in accordance with the educational programme
– Utilising the methods and means of analysing psychological and pedagogical monitoring assessing the developmental results of educational programmes in children and the appropriate support necessary for the next levels of education;
– Performing all types of developmental activities for pre-schoolers (playing, productive, cognitive, discovery-oriented)
– Building partnerships with parents, utilising methods and means for their psychological and pedagogical education
– Using information and communication technologies necessary and appropriate for the planning, implementation and evaluation of educational work.

In accordance with the Professional Standard 'Teacher' (2013 version), Kindergarten Teachers must have the following knowledge and take it into account in their professional activities:

– Fundamentals of legislation on the rights of the child, laws in the field of education and the Federal State Educational Standard for Pre-school Education
– History, theory, patterns and principles of education systems, the role and place of education in the life of the individual and society

- Fundamentals of the methodology of educational work, the basic principles of the activity approach, types and techniques of modern pedagogical technologies
- Specifics of pre-school education and the fine points of organising work with young children
- Main psychological approaches: cultural-historical, activity and individual; fundamentals of pre-school pedagogy, including classical systems of pre-school education
- General patterns of child development in the early years
- Features of the formation and development of children's activities in the early years
- Fundamentals of the theory of physical, cognitive and personal development of children in the early years
- State of the art trends in the development of pre-school education.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Persons with a non-pedagogical diploma who wish to work as a Kindergarten Teacher in a kindergarten have to take professional retraining courses lasting between 1½ and 10 months, depending on the programme and intensity of training. The minimum number of hours is 250.

Professional retraining courses include the following curricular areas: pedagogical basics; theory and methods of education; Federal Standard for Education; didactics and methods of education research and science; pre-school pedagogy; psychology of the early years; methods of teaching in kindergarten.

Persons with a pedagogical diploma without a specialisation in pre-school pedagogy can also be employed in a kindergarten. In reality, they often require specialised training which can take place both online and offline. The minimum length of the advanced training programme is 16 hours, whereas the minimum number of hours for a complete professional retraining programme is 250, as already stated (Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation 2013b).

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Guided workplace experience is an integral part of the initial professional education of prospective Kindergarten Teachers.

There are several types of practica for students:

1. **Educational and fact-finding**. These allow the student to move from theory to real experience and actually learn how the daily work of a Kindergarten Teacher is conducted. The main tasks of the student are to get acquainted with the institution; to understand how the work is organised; to observe how the teacher works with children. At the end of the practicum, the student is expected to conduct several independent classes with children under the supervision of the Kindergarten Mentor. The main purpose of this type of practice is to gain initial work experience.
2. **In-depth**. This kind of practicum involves a deeper study of the activities of the teacher; considerable participation of the student in the process of working with children and self-reflection of this involvement.
3. **Pre-diploma.** The student's final practicum is mainly focused on developing the necessary knowledge and skills for writing and defending a graduation project for the diploma award.

The first two types set similar goals and objectives for trainee Kindergarten Teachers. The main tasks are:

- Acquaintance with the educational institution and legal documentation
- Acquisition of knowledge on safety management
- Acquaintance with the daily routines in kindergarten
- Evaluation of educational processes in kindergarten
- Study of job descriptions of Kindergarten Teachers
- Observation and analysis of the work with children
- Study the documentation of the group
- Participation in the educational process as an assistant teacher
- Learn about the tasks of Kindergarten Heads.

The third type of practicum pursues other tasks than educational:

- Obtaining the necessary experience to start a professional activity
- Checking the readiness of a student for independent work as a Kindergarten Teacher
- Preparation for writing a graduation thesis.

As a result of this final practicum the student will be expected to:

- Be able to carry out independent professional activities in kindergarten
- Effectively set and competently solve pedagogical problems
- Know and be able to use the basic pedagogical methods and techniques
- Effectively and rationally use the material and methodological base of a particular kindergarten
- Know how to interact with parents
- Use a creative approach when planning educational work with children
- Use psychological and pedagogical knowledge when interacting with individual children and the team
- Develop an individual style of teaching
- Develop scripts for matinees and theatrical performances.

Individual practicum plan: The plan for the implementation of practical activities is drawn up jointly by the supervisor and the student and is approved by the Kindergarten Head or Deputy Head.

The supervisor prescribes in detail in the plan on what dates and days the trainee must complete certain tasks:

- Master the theoretical part of the practice (get acquainted with the structure of the kindergarten, study regulatory documents, undergo safety briefing, etc.)
- Carry out practical work (classes on motor skills, logic, modelling, physical exercises, development of musical abilities, etc.)
- Analyse their activities within the period of work in kindergarten and write a report.

The result of the implementation of the individual plan is a **practicum diary**, which is an extended calendar plan, confirmed by the personal signature of the supervisor from the kindergarten.

The terms of the practicum are established by the IPE institution in accordance with their curricula. The evaluation of practical activities is carried out on the basis of a written report of the student trainee and the report of the responsible supervisor from the kindergarten.

Stages of student practice: The student's practice period is divided into three stages:

- **Orientation**. This is the period of student familiarisation with the practicum programme and a specific pre-school educational institution, the trainee's adaptation to the professional and pedagogical environment: children, teachers, kindergarten administration.
- **Basic**. This implies solving the professional and pedagogical tasks of the student which are reflected in the practicum plan. As a rule, a student needs to conduct five different classes for pre-schoolers (for physical, environmental, mathematical, artistic and speech development), conduct pedagogical communication with children on a daily basis and demonstrate the ability to organise and supervise a role-playing game, a walk, an evening of entertainment.
- **Analytical**. Summing up the results of teaching practice, writing a detailed report on practical activities.

Practicum reports comprise a diary; feedback or details from the Kindergarten Supervisor; written report of the trainee. The practicum diary is an extended practicum schedule with student comments and a supervisor's signature under each completed item. The evaluation then is written by the Kindergarten Supervisor and certified by seal and signature of the Kindergarten Head.

The student's report on the practicum must contain the following sections:

- Details of the kindergarten: name and address, types of groups and age category of pupils, priorities and mission, principles of work, material and technical equipment. Optional attachments are the Kindergarten Teacher's job description and other documents.
- Description of work in the kindergarten for the practicum period: plan of each lesson, lesson objectives, children's wellbeing, results, teacher's comments, shortcomings during the process of holding the lesson, amendments
- Analysis of the educational and pedagogical process in a particular pre-school educational institution. Suggestions for its improvement. This section is only required for the third type of practicum (pre-diploma).

Place of internship and labour regulations: Students who combine education with work activities have the right to undergo educational, industrial, including pre-diploma practice, at the place of work. The corresponding contract for training is drawn up in an agreement between the educational institution that sends a student to practice and the placement kindergarten. The specified contract determines the procedure for the internship. At the same time, in the organisation to which the student is sent for internship, it is recommended to issue an order for the student to undergo internship.

An obligation to pay for the practicum of a student is not established by law. The legislation allows for the possibility of the absence of an employment contract between a student-trainee and an organisation. In accordance with paragraph 15 of the "Regulations on the practice of students mastering the basic professional educational programmes of higher education", if there is a vacant position in the organisation (in this case a kindergarten) where the work meets the requirements for the content of the practice, a fixed-term employment contract can be concluded with the student to fill such a position (Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation 2015)

When deciding whether it is necessary to sign an employment contract with a student trainee, one must proceed from whether labour relations actually arise between the organisation and the student, or whether the student is only studying during the internship and whether there is a vacancy in the organisation. If, during the internship, the student is entrusted with a specific

type of assigned work in a vacant position and undertakes to adhere to the internal labour regulations, such relations, subject to Article 15 of the Labour Code of the Russian Federation, must be qualified as labour in accordance with the requirements of the current legislation by concluding an employment contract. In such a case, the student receives remuneration (Articles 15, 135 of the Labour Code of the Russian Federation 2001 (Parliament of the Russian Federation 2001). However, if a student is only studying, an employment contract is not concluded.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Legislation and regulation

All teachers, including Kindergarten Teachers, are required by law to participate in CDP courses (also through remote study) of at least 16 to 250 hours' duration once every three years. The duty is enshrined in the Order "On approval of the Procedure for organising and implementing educational activities for additional professional programs" (Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation 2013b). In accordance with the law "On Education in the Russian Federation", pedagogical workers have the right to additional professional education in the field of pedagogical activity at least once every three years (article 47, part 5 Parliament of the Russian Federation 2012). The same law (paragraph 5, part 3 of Art. 28) states that the organisation of additional professional training for teachers is within the competence of an educational organisation. According to the Labour Code of the Russian Federation, in order to exercise the right to additional training, employer and employee enter into an agreement for receiving education on the job or with a break from work (Article 198 of the Labour Code of the Russian Federation 2001; Parliament of the Russian Federation 2001).

Main types of CPD

There are different types of advanced training for Kindergarten Teachers. They can take place both online and offline. For example:

- Short lectures and seminars up to 24 hours
- Short courses up to 72 hours dealing with highly specialised topics. In general, the courses use an integrated approach in which theoretical lessons alternate with practical exercises.
- Long courses from 100 hours: These are more general programmes that address a large number of issues.
- Internships and joint scientific activities. This format implies a practical part.

At the end of any formal training, certification is carried out. If the teacher successfully passes it, they receive a certificate of advanced training.

CPD providers

These may be any of the following:

- Government chartered centres and institutes of continuing professional education: These offer various topics with a narrow and general focus. Usually, both the lecturers and developers of such institutions are practitioners, conveying pedagogical experience and not only theoretical knowledge.

- Private providers for educational services: They need to be licensed by the local ministry of education.
- Higher educational institutions: such institutions teach doctoral candidates and post-doctoral fellows who are engaged in research and development in the field of advanced education. Most programmes require presence in person.
- Research institutes, laboratories and research centres: They offer a large selection of short courses. The emphasis in these courses is on the theoretical part. When choosing a course, it is important to make sure that the course programme complies with the federal state education standard (FSES) and professional standards.

Leave entitlement

Teachers try to take their refresher courses during working time. These may be on-the-job courses (for example, in the evening after work or at weekends); or leave with a break from work, when the employer provides teachers with additional study leave for the duration of their studies. All teaching staff have more vacation than employees in other sectors – between 42 to 56 calendar days. Teachers working in a regular kindergarten are granted 42 days of leave. If the teacher works with groups of children with disabilities and other special needs, the leave is increased to 56 days. Teachers working in the Far North and areas equated to it are granted an additional 16 to 24 days.

Obligatory or optional?

Kindergarten Teachers can take advanced training courses at their own request (optional) or at the request of the Centre Leader (obligatory). They are obliged to participate in CPD as often as required by the employer and go through programmes directed by the administration. The training programme is chosen by the management, taking into account their own plans and strategies for the development of the pre-school institution. Attendance at CPD courses is a mandatory prerequisite for submitting an application for a status and salary upgrade.

Funding support

For all forms of mandatory advanced training as required by law, the costs are covered. For advanced training required by the management of the pre-school organisation, the costs are paid and the Kindergarten Teacher retains the position and average salary if absence from the workplace is necessary. If the Kindergarten Teacher wishes to participate in an additional programme on a specific topic, but there is no obligation or need on the side of the employer, then teachers have to cover the costs themselves.

Access to CPD

The Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" (§ 5, part 3 of Art. 28) states that the organisation of additional professional training for teachers is within the decision-making competence of an educational organisation. Teachers can take advanced training courses at their own request or at the request of the kindergarten management. Only those educators who have a higher pedagogical education or a post-secondary education in the field of Pedagogy can take advanced training courses. Those with lower or non-pedagogical qualifications do not have these rights. Instead they can take professional retraining courses, which are another type of professional education.

Content focus

The content of seminars differs according to the profile of the CPD provider and by region.

Current popular topics are:

- Implementation of the federal state standard for pre-school education
- Work profile of educators in the education and upbringing of children with special health conditions in the context of the implementation of the federal educational standard
- Psychological and pedagogical support for young children
- Working with education quality assessment tools
- Technologies of effective communication in the work of an Educator

Topics which are gaining in importance are health prevention, physical wellbeing and burnout prevention

CPD and career advancement

Attestation of teachers

Attending formal CPD courses plays an important part in preparing for the teacher´s attestation. All teaching staff must be certified for suitability for the position held. This procedure is mandatory for all teaching positions. Attestation is carried out in order to establish the so-called first qualification category or the highest qualification category. This is performed on initiative of the employee and confirms their professional level. The procedure for assigning a category is determined by an order of the Ministry of Education.

The main goal of the attestation of teaching staff is to motivate teachers for professional growth and maintain the quality of education. In addition, the Ministry of Education identifies several more specific tasks:

- Stimulating continuous improvement of the level of qualifications of teachers
- Identifying the need for additional education among employees
- Increasing the efficiency and quality of teaching activities
- Developing mentoring and methodological assistance.

The qualification category is the main indicator of a teacher's professionalism and a prerequisite for career advancement. It reflects the teacher's competence and influences the level of payment. Employers pay special attention to the category when a candidate applies for a vacancy.

Career beginners start with the status of a **young specialist**. This is seen as the entry level. After starting work, a Kindergarten Teacher can apply for an upgrade and for the attestation. The attestation commission pays attention to which advanced training courses the teacher has taken, participation in professional pedagogical competitions (for example, the All-Russian professional competition "Pre-school Teacher of the Year of Russia" or other intracity, regional professional events), participation together with children (sometimes also with their parents) in any sports and creative competitions, availability of articles in specialised publications and awards additional points for such kind of activities and achievements.

The qualification categories are approved by a commission affiliated to the regional ministry of education. The decision on assignment is made at the regional level. In the city of Moscow, for example, the centre of independent diagnostics of the Moscow Centre for Educational Quality is responsible for assessing and testing professional competences (suitability for the position held). This assessment is a useful tool for both self-evaluation and for motivating teachers to

improve their skills level. The results are published on the Centre's website. Qualification categories are documented in the work book and are retained until their expiry date when transferring to another organisation, including one located in another region of the Russian Federation.

It stimulates the employee to pay attention to continuing professional development over a longer period of time. It is much easier to apply for a job in a private kindergarten for a well-paid position if you are highly qualified. Moreover, to work in a private kindergarten with a specific pedagogical approach, such as the Montessori system or Waldorf pedagogy, certified proof of suitability can be studied in advanced training programmes.

In addition to the fact that advanced training is provided for by law, it is also useful for the teachers themselves. Specialists who regularly attend refresher courses provide more professional services and receive higher pay for their work.

Advanced training allows Kindergarten Teachers to:

- Feel more confident at work
- Extend work responsibilities, e.g. organising classes in drawing or English for an additional fee
- Work with children with special needs. These Educators receive 15-20% more salary and 14 additional vacation days.
- Get a job in a private kindergarten, where the salary level can be higher than in a public institution
- Take up a post in a specialised kindergarten – for example, in a kindergarten that works according to the Montessori system
- Upgrade basic qualifications.

From 1st September 2023, a new order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation "On approval of the procedure for attestation of teaching staff of organisations engaged in educational activities" came into force (and is valid until the end of August 2029).

In accordance with the new order, the following changes have been made to the attestation procedure for teaching staff:

- Qualification categories established from September 1, 2023 will be valid with no fixed term of duration.
- Qualification categories established prior to the entry into force of the Order are retained for the period for which they were established. If a Kindergarten Teacher is in the first qualification category, the deadline for applying for the highest qualification category is now without a specific time limit for the application to be made. In cases of a refusal to establish the highest qualification category, the employee retains the first qualification category, being able to apply for the highest category after one year. The basis for establishing the first and highest qualification categories has not changed.
- Attestation for compliance with the position held for employees who do not have qualification categories is, as before, mandatory and takes place within the educational organisation every five years.
- Attestation commissions consist of at least five people, excluding the Centre Head. For the first and highest qualification categories the commission should include at least seven people, including a representative of the relevant trade union and specialists to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the professional activities of teachers.
- New qualification categories have been introduced: "Teacher-Methodologist" and "Teacher-Mentor".

- The list of information specified in the application has been updated. Teachers now have to indicate information about the level of education (qualification), the results of professional activity, the available qualification categories, and also indicate the position for which they want to be certified for compliance with the position held for employees who do not have qualification categories.
- The presence of awards, titles, insignia, information about awards will need to be confirmed. Conducting attestation in order to establish the qualification categories of employees with titles and awards, or who are winners of skills competitions for pedagogical workers, is carried out on the basis of supporting information.
- Information about the established qualification category is entered by the employer in the work book. Qualification categories are also the basis for differentiation of remuneration of educators (Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation 2023).

At the moment, applications for attestation by all teaching staff are submitted to regional authorities in the field of education or the certification commission; this includes the opportunity of submission of an application through the web governmental Portal of State and Municipal Services ("Gosuslugi"). However, the service of filing an application through State Services is not available in all regions and the organisation of the process may vary in the regions.

For example, each teacher in the Moscow education system has their own personal electronic account on the portal of the Moscow e-school. Moscow e-school is the unified educational platform for teachers (including Pre-school Teachers), children and parents and is integrated into the portal of Moscow city services ("Mos.ru"); accordingly, the teacher submits an application through this portal and complete their teaching portfolio digitally.

According to the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation the amendments should help to restore order in the field of advanced training of teachers and retraining of personnel, to build a unified system of scientific and methodological support for teaching staff in order to increase the prestige of the profession and ensure the quality of educational outcomes (Rg.ru 2020).

Research on CPD

The quality of education in a pre-school organisation largely depends on the teacher's professional competence (see Volkova and Mansarliyskaya 2020).

The Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science (*Rosobrnadzor*) collects, processes and analyses information in terms of monitoring quality in the education system and identifying violations (Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation dated August 05, 2013 No. 662). Since 2014, pre-school settings all over Russia have been monitoring their educational activities with various instruments – but the procedures and requirements are highly variable in different regions. *Rosobrnadzor* initiated a national study on the quality of pre-school education in 2016–2018. In a longitudinal study the international tool "ECERS-R" (Rating scale for a comprehensive assessment of the quality of education in pre-school educational organisations) was used. The authors correlate the assessment of the quality with educational activities and conditions of the educational environment, focusing on the needs of children and ways to meet these needs. The findings of the study indicate various problems with the quality of educational activities, the quality of work with the children's families and other work issues of a pre-school setting. Now what is needed is a management system that specifically focuses on the evaluation and monitoring of quality in the pre-school education field.

In 2020, the Federal State Budget Scientific Institution "Institute of Developmental Physiology Russian Academy of Education" conducted a study on the knowledge and professional competences of teachers of pre-school educational organisations concerning the main patterns of age-related development and appropriate educational activities.

The conclusions of the study indicate a low level of knowledge regarding psychophysiological patterns of child development necessary for solving pedagogical problems. In recent years, the cycle of disciplines that provided the Kindergarten Teacher with knowledge about the patterns of age development, about age characteristics, about the physiological and psychophysiological foundations of the educational process and other important issues that the teacher needs to know has been reduced (see Volkova 2022).

Currents debates on CPD

Taking into account the analysis of the current state of the CPD system (including advanced training and retraining) of teachers in the Russian Federation and the need to improve it, in the summer of 2022 the federal government approved new "Concepts for the training of pedagogical personnel for the education system for the period up to 2030" (Government of the Russian Federation 2022a, b).

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

According to Rosstat (2022a), the average salary of a Kindergarten Teacher in 2022 was 42,912 RUB (€580) an increase from 35,714 RUB (€410) in 2020. However, there are 59 regions which fall below this level. There are strong regional disparities due to economic strength but also location. While salaries in the High North (Chanti Mansisk or YAMAO) are far above the average (72,808 RUB (€981) and 89,435 (€1,205), in other areas such as the Northern Caucasus region they are at 25,435 (€342) (Dagestan) and 28,725 (€387) (Ingushetia) (Rosstat 2022a).[5]

Periodically, the salary of teachers at all levels of education is indexed in accordance with changes in the country's economy.

The difference in the amounts by region depends not only on the economic situation in the country and in the selected regions. When calculating wages, several factors that affect the final result are taken into account: work experience (after 3 years, the salary of a kindergarten employee increases by 5%, after 5 years by 10%), number of shifts and actual hours worked.

Salary indexation for state employees was carried out in 2021. According to the "Main Directions of the Budget, Tax and Customs Tariff Policy for 2020 and for the planning period of 2021 and 2022 prepared by the Ministry of Finance (Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation 2019), the federal budget is calculated taking into account the annual increase in the salaries of certain categories of state employees (since January 1) for the forecasted increase in the average monthly salary.

[5] It must be noted that the actual rouble exchange rate is very volatile and politically dependent. The real purchasing power is currently difficult to predict. Russia's minimum wage currently stands at 13,890 RUB (€188) a month. Therefore, the following values are used for conversion:

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
1 Euro =	74,2 RUB	87,2 RUB	82,7 RUB	72,5 RUB	74 RUB	65,9 RUB

Russian Federation: Expenditure on ECEC, 2012–2020 (in RUB)

This increase in wages applies to employees who work in the public sector, specifically noted among others in Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 597 of 05.07.2012 (President of the Russian Federation 2012). In particular, these include teachers, doctors, kindergarten teachers, scientists, etc.

In accordance with the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation (Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation Decree No. 3544-r of December 11, 2021), more than 2.9 billion roubles (€28,2 Mill.) were allocated from the federal budget to increase the salaries of employees of educational institutions (Government of the Russian Federation 2021).

Calculation of the teacher's salary

In order to calculate the salary of an educator (Kindergarten Teacher), it is necessary to know the basic salary, general pedagogical and continuous work experience, additional education, quarterly bonuses, incentives, regional allowances ranging from 15 to 35%, qualification category. These factors are calculated by the local self-government authorities. This means that they differ according to region. The qualification allowance is calculated according to the qualification group.

The following factors influence the salary increase:

- Working hours up to 12 hours for five days a week (if the teacher works in two shifts, replacing another employee)
- Conducting group meetings, additional classes
- Night shifts in boarding schools
- Organising and holding foreign language classes with children
- Work in specialised groups (speech therapy, ophthalmology) – an allowance of 15-20%
- Part-time job with another position – an increase in salary of 10%.

Besides the official statistics there is also a low income sector in the ECEC field. This includes mainly low or non-qualified staff or part-time workers. These jobs are published in private job portals such as www.gorodrabot.ru and others. Salaries offered for 2022 indicate a median of 28,564 RUB (€477 a month), with the majority earning around 15,000 RUB (€250) per month.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

In Russia, nearly all Kindergarten Teachers work full time; part-time posts are rare, but may be established. In accordance with the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science (2014), norms of hours of pedagogical work for the wage rate and on the procedure for determining the teaching load of pedagogical workers, a reduced duration of no more than 36 hours per week was established for pedagogical workers. The duration of the working time of a regular Kindergarten Teacher is 7 hours 12 minutes a day.

If the kindergarten is fully staffed, each group is accompanied by two teachers who work in close cooperation to each other. A teacher has a seven-hour working day and can work in two shifts: the first shift starts early in the morning – from 7:00 to 14:00, the second starts at 12:00 and ends at 19:00. In the period from 12:00 to 14:00 both Kindergarten Teachers work together. During this time, the teacher, who works in the morning, reports about the first half of the day: who needs additional attention, which of the children have been vaccinated, what issues to discuss with parents, etc. The duration of the working time of the pre-school teacher of the general developmental group is 7 hours 12 minutes a day.

At the same time, a **Kindergarten Teacher's Assistant** is allocated to each teacher, who deals with cleaning the premises, as well as caring for children.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

At the regional level, support for ECEC staff is organised through special centres set up by the regional governments (e.g. by the state ministry of education) that provide, for example, psychological advice or crisis intervention. Training on the job, when entering the employment market directly from initial professional education, is organised within the organisation. Mostly the Pedagogical Supervisor gives help and advice. To support teachers there are opportunities for professional growth through advanced training at the expense of the employer and the mentoring system.

7.4 Non-contact time

Preparation and reporting is mainly done during the sleeping time of the children. Officially there is no extra time calculated in working contracts to fulfil non-teaching duties. Budget permitting, bonuses may be granted for tasks outside the regular kindergarten activities.

7.5 Current staffing issues

Young people are attracted to professions which provide a certain amount of stability in status and income, particularly in times of economic constraints, which has been the case since the early 1990s. The profession of Kindergarten Teacher is neither a high status profession (Yurchenko 2013), nor do these teachers have a steady and nation-wide or region-wide regulated income. There is no overall Russian remuneration system for Kindergarten Teachers. Attendance rates in kindergartens have been rising, leading to a stronger demand for qualified staff. These shortages are being addressed by providing possibilities for the 'requalification' of professionals who lack knowledge and experience in early childhood pedagogy.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

1. With the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation (2022a) of June 24, 2022 N 1688-r, a new "Concept for the training of pedagogical personnel for the education system for the period up to 2030" was approved. This concept defines the goals, principles, tasks, main activities and mechanisms for implementing the state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of training teachers for the education system, including Kindergarten Teachers.

   The concept was developed in order to implement the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of July 21, 2020 N 474 "On the national development goals of the Russian Federation for the period until 2030" and the basic principles of the national system of professional development of teachers of the Russian Federation, including the national system of teacher growth, approved by the order Government of the Russian Federation dated December 31, 2019 N 3273-r.

   This concept is the basis for organising learning activities of educational organisations of: higher education; vocational education; teacher professional development; federal executive authorities and executive authorities of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation in charge of educational organisations.

2. An Order of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Russian Federation dated April 19, 2021 No. 250n "On approval of the Professional Standard 'Head of an educational organisation (management of a pre-school educational organisation and a general educational organisation)'" came into force on March 1, 2022 and is valid until March 1, 2028.

Further recent Orders relating to the Professional Standard 'Teacher' (on specialist staff and the utilisation of digital technologies) do not specifically refer to the work of Kindergarten Teachers.

Reducing the bureaucratic burden on Kindergarten Teachers (educators)

The Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science conducted a study in 60 constituent entities of the Russian Federation and analysed working documents, mostly compiled by Kindergarten Teachers (educators) during their professional activities. The list included 52 documents that the educator was expected to fill out and prepare (children attendance tables, thematic planning of work with children, an annual work plan, various reports and monitoring, personal teaching portfolio for certification, etc.). This increase in paper work detracts from the immediate task of working with young children.

Specialists from the Federal Service for Supervision of Education and Science consider it necessary to reduce the volume of documentation and monitoring procedures.

It is expected that by November 1, 2023, amendments will be made to Federal Law 273 (The Education Act "On Education in the Russian Federation") on establishing the powers of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education to authorise reference documentation and other requested information), and by December 1, 2023, Orders will be issued by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the Ministry of Education, Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science (*Rosobrnadzor*) on establishing lists of documentation, monitoring, information systems. From March 1, 2024, an abbreviated list of documentary evidence will be issued for institutions of early childhood education and care (kindergartens), schools, institutions of secondary vocational education and universities (Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science 2023).

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

The problem of staffing Russian kindergartens

Source: National Research University "Higher School of Economics" 2017 (see *References* for full details).

Aims and background: To investigate problems of staffing and the quality of qualifications of Kindergarten Teachers

Methods: Series of in-depth interviews on staffing issues with heads of pre-school educational organisations and representatives of educational authorities.

Selected findings: The first part presents an analysis of the material security of the employees in ECEC settings; the characteristics of their age and skills level are given. In the second part, on the basis of in-depth interviews, it is shown how the heads of pre-school educational institutions

and representatives of educational authorities assess the current situation, how the load is distributed on Kindergarten Teachers in pre-school education, how the load and payment has changed over the past three years.

Implications: The profession of Kindergarten Teacher in public kindergartens remains a low-paid profession. Moreover, young teachers earn noticeably less than their older counterparts. Despite the fact that they are facing increased demands and expectations, their salary level remains at the same low level. In private kindergartens, wages are somewhat higher. A slightly higher salary attracts more dynamic and qualified staff. In private kindergartens, staff tend to be younger (30-40 years old) and mostly with higher education. Less high workloads are another significant advantage of private kindergartens – on average, there are one and a half times fewer children in a group.

The system of pre-school education during the pandemic COVID-19 in Russia

Source: Centre for Socialisation and Personalisation of Children's Education FIRO (Federal Institute for the Development of Education) at RANEPA (Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration under the President of the Russian Federation), 2020 (see *References* for full details: Tarasova and Pestrikova 2020).

Aims and background: Studying the readiness of educational staff to organise remote activities of pre-school educational institutions in conditions of quarantine and self-isolation.

Methods: 8,815 people took part in the anonymous online survey: teachers, teaching staff and specialists of pre-school educational organisations from 83 administrative regions of the Russian Federation. The survey participants included 5,695 Kindergarten Teachers (65% of the sample), 796 Centre Heads (9%), 1,160 Methodology Teachers (13%) and 1,164 other pedagogical workers (13%) – comprising 446 Speech Therapists, 284 Music Teachers, 252 Educational Psychologists and 162 specialists in physical education.

Selected findings: An analysis of the survey data confirms that pre-school workers demonstrate a fairly high level of activity and responsibility in the performance of their professional duties in the changed working conditions. At the same time, they lack experience in implementing this format of pre-school education and appropriate methodological support.

Implications: The research indicates that an in-depth analysis is required which takes into account the risks of implementing educational programmes for young children remotely, highlights factors affecting the effectiveness of online learning and identifies the possibilities of various methods, techniques and technologies of distance learning in kindergartens. Moreover, the findings suggest that kindergarten staff need appropriate CPD provision focusing on this issue.

The level of knowledge of teachers of pre-school educational organisations about the main patterns of age-related development and appropriate educational activities

Source: Institute of Developmental Physiology Russian Academy of Education 2020 (see *References* for full details: Volkova 2022)

Aims and background: The study aimed to analyse the knowledge and professional competences of Kindergarten Teachers regarding the psychophysiological patterns of child development in educational work.

Methods: A survey was conducted in ten regions of the Russian Federation. The study involved 2,691 Kindergarten Teachers (educators), as well as 52 Primary School Teachers of different ages. The work experience of teachers varied from less than 5 to 20 years or more.

The results of the survey were processed using the STATISTICA 10 statistical package. Descriptive statistics, frequency statistics, and the cross-tabulation method were used (to describe associations between age and teaching experience). The correlation between age, teaching experience, the choice and number of correct answers was computed using the Spearman rank correlation coefficient and Cramer's V coefficient. When analysing the responses to the open-ended questions, a descriptive research method was used.

Selected findings: In the course of the analysis of teachers' answers, "risk zones" were identified in the professional competences of teachers regarding knowledge related to the main patterns of the child's age-related development, the rational and effective organisation of the educational process, the formation of school-significant functions and knowledge of the psychophysiological foundations of school readiness. The results of the study showed that the level and quality of knowledge of Kindergarten Teachers do not depend on their age and teaching experience. Kindergarten Teachers have a fairly high level of knowledge on general issues of pre-school pedagogy, developmental psychology and physiology. However, an insufficient level of knowledge was revealed in matters of integrating knowledge of developmental physiology and psychology with the influence of sociocultural conditions of growing up. A very low level of knowledge was noted in matters of age-related psychophysiology concerning the preparation and readiness for schooling.

Implications: In order for Kindergarten Teachers to fully understand how children develop, how their cognitive abilities are formed, how the brain develops, a focus on age-related psycho-physiology and pedagogical physiology should continue to be included in the initial professional education of Kindergarten Teachers.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

In accordance with the "Concept for the training of pedagogical personnel for the education system for the period up to 2030" (approved by order of the Government of the Russian Federation (2022a, b) of June 24, 2022 N 1688-r), the network of higher education institutions that implement initial teacher education/training programmes is developing, implementing and translating “best practices” in pedagogical settings. During the implementation phase in 2014–2017 this became a comprehensive issue for the modernisation of teacher education. Within the framework of new federal state educational standards for higher education, study programmes in modular design were developed, the practical subject and research components of pedagogical education and its educational orientation were strengthened, and a system of independent assessment of the professional competences of graduates was proposed.

All this is the base of the requirements of the federal state educational standards of general education and the Professional Standard ‘Teacher’.

At the same time, the content, technologies, management and infrastructure of Kindergarten Teacher education require constant transformation associated with the changes taking place in the general education system and with the need to ensure the outstripping pace of changes in the teacher training system. Challenges remain to ensure the quality of teaching staff, including:

- Imbalance in the quality and conditions of initial professional education (IPE) in different educational organisations and the lack of unified approaches to the mechanisms and tools for assessing quality

- The gap between the pace of renewal of the content and infrastructure of IPE and the pace of renewal in the general education system
- Lack of advanced scientific research in the field of education for shaping modernised content in the IPE of pedagogical personnel
- Insufficient correspondence of the results of the training of a graduate (young teacher) to the current needs of the education system, society and state
- Weak involvement of employers, including regional education systems, in the process of training teachers
- Shortage of teaching staff, insufficient level of training of graduates of educational institutions of higher education in the IPE programmes for teaching staff
- Lack of comprehensive measures for the early career guidance of school pupils for the teaching professions.

To solve these problems, it is necessary to implement a set of measures related not only to improving the system of training teachers, but also with measures to support teachers at all stages of the life cycle of the profession, including those provided for in the implementation of the basic principles of the national system for the continuing professional development of teachers in the Russian Federation, approved by the Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of December 31, 2019 N 3273-g.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Key contextual data

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the term used in this report for the main type of centre-based ECEC provision is **kindergarten** (*detskije sady*, 0–6/7)[1]. Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Russia

1860	The first, mostly private, kindergartens are established in Russia from this time onwards, some of them attached to schools, and strongly influenced by the pedagogical ideas of Pestalozzi and Froebel.
1866 – 1917	The first non-fee-paying "people's kindergarten" is established in St. Petersburg in 1866, as well as the first fee-paying private kindergarten for children of the educated classes. Since this time, Western pioneers such as Friedrich Froebel and later Maria Montessori had a continuing influence on the professional work of early childhood educators.
1917	– Even before the October Revolution, attempts were made to establish a public education system. After the revolution, all institutions are nationalised. – "Declarations on early education" – Between 1918 and 1920 the number of kindergartens rises from 400 to 4,823.
1920s and 1930s	– Lev Vygotsky's ideas start to influence the philosophical principles of (early childhood) education – and continue to do so up to the present day. – Children start school when they are 8 years old.
From 1927 to early 1950s	During the period of Stalinist rule, many progressive thinkers are repressed and deported. Education, including early childhood education, becomes increasingly influenced by propaganda.
1932/34	First national curricular guidelines for kindergartens to ensure continuity between early education and school.
1930s and 1940s	The humanist ideas and moral ("character") education approaches of A.S. Makarenko, one of the most influential Soviet pedagogues, contribute towards the shaping of the education system in the context of communist ideals. He developed the idea of collective learning processes which included new group structures, combining various stages of development, and integrating methods of aesthetic and activity education. He is considered to have established the structure of the Soviet education system.
1950s and 1960s	In 1959, a new type of early childhood educational institution is established – the nursery-kindergarten (*yasly–sad*), which, at the request of parents, children can attend from 2 months to 7 years. During the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, resources are allocated towards building a competitive science and research sector.
1964	A new comprehensive education programme becomes mandatory for kindergartens.
1980-2010	School entry age is reduced to 7 years (optionally also for 6 year-olds).

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. For Russia, the relevant formats are **0-2** years and **3-5/6** years. Whereas children usually start school at 6, earlier or later enrolment is also possible.

1985	The Standard Educational Programme for Kindergartens (*Tipovaya Programma Vospitaniya v Detskom Sadu*, 1962) is revised and specifies for all Soviet kindergartens what children learn as well as the didactic-methodological approaches of the professionals.
1989	Another revision of the curricular programme under *perestroika* allows under the "new vision for early childhood education" (*Novaya Kontseptsiya Doshkol'nogo Vospitaniya*) more variation in terms of educational content and methods.
Early 1990s	Alternative educational programmes that place more emphasis on play and creativity appear, such as Golden Key (*"Zolotoy klyuchik"*), Step by Step (*"Shag za shagom"*), Waldorf or Montessori.
1990s until 2005	– In the context of *perestroika* and economic upheaval, investment in education falls, as did the social level and status of the skilled workers. – A new curriculum for kindergartens (1989) is introduced. This is the basis for the 1992 Early Education Act and the 1996 amendments regarding the "quality and function of early educational institutions and the development of children's psychological and physical health, their intellectual and personal development and care for the emotional well-being of each child". At the same time, under Boris Yeltsin, the first steps towards inclusion are taken – Many private, fee-paying settings are founded.
2012	– The Education Act "On Education in the Russian Federation" codifies the right of all citizens to education. – Children from the age of 2 months to 7 years are legally entitled to a free place in an early education setting. – Children can start school between 6½ and 8 years of age.
2013	Ministerial Order "On the Validation of a Federal State Standard for Early Childhood Education".
2014	– The state programme "On the Development of Education" puts a special emphasis on early childhood education. – The Federal Standard (FGOS OV2) changes the policy agenda for children with special needs to full inclusion.
2018	The Ministry of Education and Science is divided into two separate ministries: the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.
2022	Ministerial Order "On the validation of the federal educational programme for preschool education"

Sources: Volkova 2018; Bodrova and Yudina 2018; Shiyan et al. 2018; Baskaeva and Tatrova 2020

ECEC system type and auspices

The system of early childhood education and care in the Russian Federation is characterized by multi-level governance. Responsibilities are divided between the Ministry of Education (*Ministerstvo prosveshcheniya Rossiyskoy Federatsii*) and the regional ministries of education of the administrative units or so-called 'subjects' of the Federation (provinces, republics, regions (*kraja, oblasti*), autonomous republics, autonomous districts (*avtonomnye okruga*), cities of federal significance).

The Ministry of Education is responsible for issuing and implementing state regulations and legislation for educational provision, including ECEC settings, as well as for the development of quality assessment methods (Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation 2019).

The regional ministries of education are responsible for implementing national education strategies through steering and management strategies and by allocating funds. The municipalities are responsible for the organisation and co-funding of kindergartens. Each

kindergarten is responsible for the implementation of the education programme (Bertram and Pascal 2016, 115).

Kindergartens are the main form of educational provision up to school entry age. The Education Act stipulated that early education can start from the age of 2 months. However, most parents do not send their children to kindergarten until the end of paid parental leave, i.e. when they are 18 months old.

General objectives and legislative framework

Supporting vulnerable children and reducing social disadvantages and inequalities is seen as an important goal of the early childhood education system. ECEC settings are also seen as support measures for balancing parental employment with family duties. Preparation for school and citizenship are also stated goals (Bertram and Pascal 2016, 24, 160). Article 63 of the Education Act (No. 273, Parliament of the Russian Federation 2012, see also below) confirms the early education sector as the first, non-compulsory, stage of general education.

The aims of early childhood education in general are to promote the development of motor, intellectual, moral, aesthetic and personal characteristics; educational programmes should take into account the age-appropriate individual characteristics of children (see also chapter *Curricular Framework*).

The relevant legislation for the early childhood education of 3 to 7 year-olds (ISCED 02) is the Education Act 2012 No. 273 "On Education in the Russian Federation", with amendments from 2023 (Parliament of the Russian Federation 2012). It forms the basis for all education policies and sets out the general and curricular regulations for the education system. Among other things it also emphasises the need for the ongoing reform of regulations and legislation, taking into account the needs of individuals and society (Federal Centre for Educational Legislation 2021).

Based on the Education Act, the main document which regulates early childhood education is the Federal Standard for Early Childhood Education (Ministerial Order No. 1155) 17 October 2013, *Federal'nyye gosudarstvennyye standarty obshchego obrazovaniya*, known as FGOS DO; Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation 2013), which is based on the Russian Constitution and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It sets mandatory requirements and regulates the activities of ECEC settings in general. These include the implementation of the education programme which can be adapted in individual cases. The overall focus is on equality of opportunities, including children with special needs and supporting families.

Goals of the Federal Standard for Early Childhood Education (FGOS DO) are to:

- Raise the social status of early childhood education
- Work towards creating equal opportunities for each child (including taking into account the rights of children with a non-Russian background and children with disabilities)
- Guarantee a high level of overall quality in early childhood education
- Create a unified system of early childhood education and care based on the unity of mandatory requirements for the implementation, structure and outcomes of educational programmes for ECEC.

Educational activities in kindergartens are carried out according to the main general educational programmes for Preschool Education (Order No. 373, 2020). The new, unified, Federal Educational programme (Order No. 1028, 2022) came into force in 2023 and is the basis of work for all kindergartens from September 1, 2023. The purpose of this programme is the flexible development of the child during the preschool years, taking into account age and individual characteristics, based on the spiritual and moral values of the multinational peoples of Russia

and on historical and national cultural traditions (Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation 2022).

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

All children from the age of 2 months have a right to a place in an early education setting; however, most parents are not yet aware of this and therefore rarely take advantage of it (Bagirova 2021). This means that, as a rule, the early childhood education system in Russia begins at the age of 3. Attendance is free of charge and not compulsory.

Compulsory schooling usually starts at age 7, but may vary between 6½ and 8 years.

Main types of provision

Although all children from 2 months to 8 years have a legal right to a place in a public ECEC centre, there is no publicly funded full-time provision for the under 2 year-olds. Altogether, there are hardly any stand-alone settings for this age group. Since these few settings are exclusively in the private sector, they tend to be cost-prohibitive for parents.

In accordance with paragraph 29 of the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation of October 27, 2011 No. 2562 "On Approval of the Model Regulations on a Preschool Educational Institution" (Ministry of Education and Science 2011), "the number and ratio of age groups of children in a preschool educational institution is determined by the founder." This means that the founder, represented by the municipality (city authorities), has the right to decide who to admit to kindergarten and nursery and who not to admit. (Aif.ru 2014).

ECEC settings/groups for children under 7 years of age can have a general developmental *or* compensatory *or* health-promoting *or* a combined orientation. In this section, the regular forms of ECEC provision (kindergartens) are presented first, followed by commercial and home-based ECEC settings and ending with a brief description of the specialised early childhood education programmes.

Kindergartens (*detskije sady*) are the main form of ECEC provision for children aged 3–6/7 years. They also exist as multi-age centres (2 months to 7 years). Although parents can apply to enrol their child in a kindergarten from the age of 2 months, most of the younger children in kindergartens (public and private) are at least 1½ years old.

Most kindergartens offer full-day, part-time and extended hours services and are open 12 hours a day. Basically, there are five models: up to 5 hours per day (short day), 8 – 10 hours per day (extended short day), 10½ – 12 hours (full day), 13 – 14 hours (extended day), and around the clock. At the request of the parents, it is possible to organise the work of the groups also on weekends and holidays. However, only groups that are open for longer than three hours work according to the educational programme.

Kindergartens vary greatly in size, with nearly half attended by no more than 75 children. A full-day programme (from 7:00 till 19:00) includes 1½ to 3 hours of quiet time, four meals, outdoor activities twice a day, and a combination of educator-initiated activities in accordance with the objectives of the educational programme and free play. Children play and learn together in same-age groups.

According to a Parliamentary report, 240 kindergartens were built in 2022 and more than 1,000 in the past three years that provided more than 150,000 children with a place in an ECEC institution. Plans are underway to establish 69 settings (13,200 places) in 2023 for children under 3 years of age and 36 settings (5,400 places) for 3 to 7 year-olds as well as 2,000 places in private settings. This will contribute towards reducing the shortage of places and increase availability for families. The Ministry of Education notes that the accessibility of pre-primary education for children aged 3 to 7 years is currently 99.6%. For children aged 2 months to 3 years, the availability rate has increased over the past year and exceeded 98% (Aif.ru 2023). These accessibility rates include *all* forms of publicly registered childcare, including those in home-based family kindergartens or those in short-stay groups.

Part-time or short-stay groups in kindergartens (*grupy kratkovremennoe pribyvanieya*) cater mainly for children between 1½ and 5 years of age. They are usually organised in mixed-age groups (1½ to 3 years and 3 to 5 years). For children from 1½–3 years, these short-stay groups are provided for three to four hours/day with lunch (9:00–12/13:00), sometimes together with a parent. However, only a relatively small number of kindergartens have such a group with a special programme for the youngest children.

They are set up both as preparatory groups prior to kindergarten attendance and as an alternative to full-day attendance. These groups are also attended by children with special needs who are unable to attend full-day kindergarten. Most special needs groups are supervised by special education teachers who support the development of social and communicative skills in relationships with other children and adults. Although attendance times are shorter, these groups must also adhere to the Federal Standard (FGOS DO) and take into account specific age structures and developmental differences.

Part-time programmes are provided in both public and private institutions; some are offered only in the evening or at weekends or during holidays. So-called "clubs" (see chapter *Provider structures*) also offer such part-time programmes. These then belong to the rather loosely regulated system of supplementary education and provide either activities that are rarely offered in kindergartens, such as foreign languages or dance, or activities that complement the educational programme, such as mathematical or linguistic activities. They are also used by children in addition to regular kindergarten attendance (Bodrova and Yudina 2018).

Family kindergartens (*semeynyi detskiy sad*) are a form of home-based provision for children from 2 months to 7 years. This form of ECEC is part of public ECEC provision. In large families with three or more children between 2 months and 7 years of age, additional children of the same age can be cared of in the family home. This form of provision was created in 2007 and became popular all over Russia, also as a means of social support. They are usually registered as a section of a municipal kindergarten. If the parents have a pedagogical qualification they are considered educators and have to submit reports on their work; they receive the same salary as an educator in the kindergarten to which they are affiliated. If they do not have a pedagogical qualification their duties are only supervision and caring of the children and their salaries are lower (Volkova and Chervova 2011; Tsapenko et al. 2012).

Private-commercial childcare settings are generally run fully through private funding, but there are also some examples of a mixed-funding model (public subsidies and private financing). The Ministry of Education is investigating possibilities to subsidise places in private institutions if there are not sufficient places in a public one. These private settings do not offer the official educational programme and are open between 3 to 5 hours and 24 hours. Because the sector is only lightly regulated, different business models have been able to proliferate and large franchises now offer childcare provision across the country.

Certified nanny. The project "Professional nannies (babysitters) for children!" provides for the issuance of a certificate to parents with children from 1.5 to 3 years old to receive services from a certified specialist. At the same time, the task of the state is to train and certify those who wish to work as a nanny. This project was initiated by the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation and realised since 2018, so that, with the assistance of the state, babysitting services become available to a wide range of families. Certification of babysitting services provides a guarantee the quality of care and supervision of children. In 2020-2021, 28 regional centres for the training of professional nannies were established; 350 nannies were trained and 161 nannies were certified, respectively (Oprf.ru 2021).

Early development centres. There are many early development centres (mostly fee-paying ones), precisely because the state kindergartens do not provide opportunities (or too few) for young children under 3 years old. Parents can also sign up for such centres and choose a development topic through the public services web portal, where a navigator for various early development centres is offered.

Early childhood specialist provision

Besides regular kindergartens, there are a number of other kinds of educational provision for young children:

- Kindergartens prioritising one or several directions of child development (intellectual, artistic and aesthetic, physical etc.)
- Health support kindergartens prioritising health improvement measures and procedures, particularly for children with a long-term illness
- Compensatory groups attended by children with special needs and children with disabilities
- Combined groups attended by healthy children and children with disabilities together
- Child development centres – kindergartens which emphasise the physical and psychological development, and adaptation and health improvement of all children in the centre
- Consultation points in government kindergartens where specialists provide psychological and pedagogical support for parents of children not attending preschools
- Early child care services which provide medical/social and psychology support for young children with developmental delays or from disadvantaged/vulnerable families
- Children´s support centres, which provide pedagogical work directed to the early ages from 6 months to 3 years; these centres are mainly affiliated to kindergartens
- *Legotheka*, open for children from 2 months to 7 years not enrolled in the public preschool system because of health or developmental problems who need support in psychosocial, health or pedagogic issues.

Provider structures

Most ECEC settings are publicly funded settings provided by regional governments or municipalities. There are some private facilities run by organisations or legal entities. These must be licensed and are not subsidised through government funds. They are regulated in terms of health standards, the centre-specific educational programme and regional criteria. Private facilities are usually more flexible in their daily programme and also in terms of curriculum. However, private institutions that offer both care and education are subject to stricter rules. This is why many private facilities register under the name "club" – which is supposed to offer only care, but also includes educational elements (Bodrova and Yudina 2018). There are no national statistical data for this type of setting.

From 2015 to 2017, the number of private settings increased by 78% (from 8,166 to 14,547). They often provide various additional activities compared with regular kindergartens – more recently digital technology or parent-child activities such as yoga (Seliverstova 2021).

In 2019, a total of 2.6% of kindergartens had a private provider. The demand for private kindergarten places increased by 23% – mainly also due to the Corona pandemic (Invest Foresight 2021).

Although private kindergartens are eligible for state support if they offer places to children who cannot be admitted to a municipal kindergarten, they tend to avoid doing this because of the increased monitoring this may involve.

In 2022, a Ministry of Education report stated that a total of 139,296 children of different preschool ages were enrolled in private ECEC institutions or development centres. Most of these children (132,452 children; 1.89% of the age group) attended settings, which are licensed to carry out educational activities (not just development activities), whereas 6,844 children attended services that did not follow an educational programme (Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation 2023a, 15-16).

Participation rates in regulated provision

Following a decline between 2005 and 2010, enrolment rates for under 3 year-olds started to increase again, reaching 19% in 2017 and 24.2% in 2019 (Rosstat 2022a), although with considerable regional differences (Baskaeva and Tatrova 2020). While in 2021, overall 26.9% of under 3 year-olds were enrolled, the rates ranged from 53% in the Komi Republic to only 7.5% in the Republic of Dagestan (Rosstat 2022a).

In 2021, 73.2% of children aged 1–6 years were enrolled in early childhood education institutions. Again, regional differences are significant: while in the Ural Federal District 82.9% attended an ECE institution, the share in the North Caucasian District was only 51.6% (Statista 2023c). Whereas in 2021, 7.34 million children were enrolled in a kindergarten, indicating a slight decrease since the previous year (Statista 2023b), by 2022 numbers had decreased further to just over 7 million children (see *Table 1*).

Table 1

Russian Federation: Number of children enrolled in ECEC institutions, 2019 to 2022

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of children in organisations providing preschool education programmes and childcare services	7,606,700	7,442,900	7,340,600	7,008,100
Number of children in private settings	n.d.	n.d.	109,234	105,028
Enrolment rate: under 3 years	24.2%	25.2%	26.9%	n.d.
Enrolment rate: 3–6 years	84.9%	85.5%	87.8%	n.d.
Enrolment rate: 1–6 years	69.4%	70.7%	73.2%	n.d.

Source: Rosstat 2022c, Tab 1,6,11 (data sets incomplete in May 2023)

According to the report of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation on the implementation of strategic planning documents for 2022, on average the coverage rate of available and publicly provided preschool education (including family kindergartens and short-

stay groups) for children aged 1½–3 years as of January 1, 2023 was 98.19%, a rise of 1.94% since January 2022

The total number of children aged 1½–3 years registered in state or municipal kindergartens was 623,312 on January 1, 2023, 12.93% less than one year earlier. Measures to achieve accessibility for this age group in all regions of the Russian Federation are being carried out primarily through the creation of additional places in preschool institutions within the framework of both federal state and national projects.

On average in the Russian Federation, the indicator of accessibility of preschool education for children aged 3 to 7 years as of January 1, 2023 was 99.66%, a slight rise (0.08%) since January 2022. The number of children aged 3 to 7 years who are not provided with a place in kindergartens amounted to 19,236 in January 2023, 5,653 (22.1%) less than at the beginning of January 2022 (Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation 2023, 11-14).

Financing and costs for parents

In 2019, 3.7% of GDP was spent on education. In 2020, spending increased to 4% and fell again to 3.6% in 2021 (Rosstat 2023c, 189). The share spent on early childhood education and care 0–6 years is not specified.

Overall, public institutions are financed through state and municipal budgets. Current policy tries to make educational institutions less dependent on state subsidies and to initiate competition among them. Therefore, in many regions, salaries are dependent on national assessments of educational institutions and successful management of available financial resources (Volkova 2018). Private non-profit kindergartens are operated within a state educational institution and financed with public and private funds.

Government funding – both in public and independent settings – is used primarily for salaries, materials, and building maintenance. It also subsidises reduced fees for parents. Parents receive at least 20% of the average parental contribution for the first child, 50% for the second and 70% for the third and each additional child (Bertram and Pascal 2016, 61).

Educational sessions in kindergartens are free of charge for parents of children aged 3 years and over. This includes meals and materials and the basic educational programme, and also applies to some programmes for under 3 year-olds. Care services as well as additional activities such as dance, foreign languages etc., as well as support from speech therapists or psychologists, have to be paid for. For children with special educational needs, foster children, children from military families and low-income families, the costs are subsidised (Bodrova and Yudina 2018).

Fees for public full-day kindergartens are fixed and cost between RUB 1,900 and 2,700 (€28,82 to €40,96[2]) per month in 2017, depending on the region. Parents have to pay fees for private institutions, as they do not receive any state subsidies. In contrast to state-run facilities, staff salaries are higher, child groups are smaller and fees are significantly higher (up to €1,000 or €1,500 per month).

Although private facilities are significantly more expensive, there are indications that many parents are willing to bear these costs and/or pay for additional hours (Seliverstova 2021).

In 2018, a couple with two children spent about 2% of net household income on childcare costs[3] (OECD.Stat 2023).

[2] Average exchange rate in 2017: 65,91 RUB/EUR

[3] The calculation is based on the following fictitious model: two parents working full-time (average income); two 2 and 3 year-old children in full-time care; relevant care allowances taken into account.

In terms of consolidated government spending on ECEC, a monthly average of RUB 197.150 bn (approx. €2,01 billion)[4] was spent between January 2005 and July 2022 (CEIC 2022).

Table 3 shows the allocation of expenditure for childcare and early education. In particular, expenditure on early childhood education programmes such as short-stay groups and family kindergartens has increased in recent years.

Table3
Russian Federation: Expenditure on ECEC, 2012–2015–2020 (in RUB)

Year	Expenditure on early education	Expenditure on childcare	Total expenditure
2012 (1€ = 30,84 RUB)	RUB 144.737.400.000 EUR 4.693.171.206	RUB 254.509.000.000 EUR 8.252.561.608	RUB 399.246.400.000 EUR 12.945.732.815
2015 (1€=60,93 RUB)	RUB 166.317.700.000 EUR 2.729.652.060	RUB 306.944.000.000 EUR 5.037.649.762	RUB 473.656.800.000 EUR 7.773.786.312
2020 (1€=82,7 RUB)	n.d.	n.d.	RUB 987.000.000.000 € 11.934.703.748

Source: Gokhberg et al. 2022; OECD 2023

Staff to child ratios and group size

Currently, the number of children per group is determined by the size of the rooms and not by the number of professionals. A typical kindergarten is divided into four room areas: living/playing/learning; sleeping and resting; washing; and cooking/household. According to the regulations of the Sanitary Rules SP 2.4.3648-20 "Sanitary and epidemiological requirements for organisations of education and training, recreation and rehabilitation of children and youth" (Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation 2020) at least 2.5 square metres of space must be available for a child up to 3 years of age, and at least 2 square meters for a child from 3 to 7 years of age, not including furniture in each case. That is, the larger the room the more children can be accommodated (up to 25 and more). Furthermore, there might be extra rooms for music, sport, laundry room, eating. Other regulations regarding the staff to child ratios do not exist at present.

In a 12-hour day, two professionals usually work in two shifts (7:00–14:00 and 12:00–19:00) in one group. During the two-hour overlap the teacher who works in the morning informs the teacher who works in the afternoon about important issues.

Each professional has an assistant (assigned to the junior staff) who is responsible for cleaning, ensuring that hygiene rules are observed, preparing materials or supervising the children when the group leader is absent.

As a rule, an additional teacher (for music or sport) is present, which reduces the number of children per staff member somewhat.

In 2021, one kindergarten teacher was responsible for an average of 14 children (Statista 2023f).

Surmounting the challenge of large group sizes and high child-adult ratios suggests that teachers will need to master instructional strategies designed for working with large groups of children (Bodrova and Yudina 2018, 68).

[4] Please note that the exchange rates are average rates that differ considerably due to high volatility/ political situations.

Curricular framework

On November 25 2022, a new Federal Educational Programme for Preschool Education was approved by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation and came in force in January 2023 (Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation 2022). From September 2023, all kindergartens are obliged to work according to this programme. This new Federal Educational Programme for Preschool Education is also designed for working with children from 2 months to 3 years. Age categories according to the programme are: 2 months to 1 year; 1 to 3 years and 3 to 7 years.

In 2013, the Federal Standard for Early Childhood Education (FGOS DO) was adopted as the basis for curricular work in **kindergartens**. Within this framework, a broad and balanced approach to the curriculum is encouraged, including personal and emotional development as well as respecting diversity and individuality; social development and citizenship; learning dispositions; physical and health education; language and communication; reading and literacy; mathematical skills; understanding the natural world; science; technology and the digital world; and second/foreign language acquisition.

The general pedagogical approach foregrounds play-based learning, creativity, communication and experiential learning. Parental involvement is encouraged. Recognising specific developmental and learning difficulties at an early stage also constitutes an important goal of early childhood education. Activities are appropriate to the age and needs of the children and also take into account ethnic-cultural aspects. Based on these principles, each institution develops its own curriculum, supported by guidelines published by the Ministry of Education.

This framework represents a clear departure from the teacher-led pedagogy that prevailed in most Soviet and post-Soviet institutions.

The Federal Standard also defines the conditions for positive child development: Direct communication with each child ensures emotional well-being, children are free to choose activities, friendly interactions prevail between children regardless of their cultural or religious background, each child's individual development is evaluated and parents are involved in educational issues (Shiyan et al. 2018).

Digital education

The project "Modern Digital Educational Environment in the Russian Federation" is included In the State Programme of the Russian Federation "Educational Development" for the period 2018 to 2025 (No. 1642, 2017) – based on the Education Act (No. 273, Parliament of the Russian Federation 2012) and the State Education Standard FGOS DO. Digital media are mentioned as a means of interaction between professionals, children and families. The organisation of a modern digital environment in ECEC settings is seen as contributing to the implementation of the key principles, goals and objectives of the Federal State Standard for Preschool Education (FGOS DO). However, there are no concrete statements on the promotion of digital competences before school enrolment.

During the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian ECEC system accumulated extensive experience in interacting with families and children through digital technologies, including forms of online teaching with children through multi-media (Volkova and Mansarliyskaya 2020).

Monitoring – evaluation

Child-related assessment

Following the adoption of the Federal Standard for Early Childhood Education (2013), it is explicitly forbidden to use data on children's performance in the evaluation of the quality of the educational programme. The assessment of children is reserved for formative purposes only (Bodrova and Yudina 2018). However, there are explicit expectations of what a child should be able to do at a certain age (see chapter *Curricular Framework*).

Centre-based self-evaluation

Instruments for self-evaluation by professionals are currently being developed, as well as instruments that allow outsiders (e.g. parents) to assess the programmes (Bodrova and Yudina 2018). For example, several kindergartens are piloting the ECERS-R rating scale to assess the learning environment, team self-reflection or staff-child interaction. Another initiative uses observations, parent surveys and document analysis to assess, among other things, programme content, staff qualifications, how inclusive the setting is, or the quality of the buildings (Bodrova and Yudina 2018).

External evaluation

Federal and regional supervisory agencies are responsible for inspections.

The main authority at the federal level is the Federal Education Supervision Agency (*Federalnoe agenstvo po obrasovaniyu)*. It has three main tasks: to ensure that the federal standards are met; to issue licences; and to carry out state accreditation. Each level of administration reports to the next higher level. Quality assurance is a legal duty of regional administrations. Inspections of kindergartens and schools focus on compliance with regulations (room size, heating, equipment, meals, safety aspects) and on educational standards (organisation of daily routines and learning processes), management and financing. The results are communicated to the institutions and providers and also published on the internet. Professionals usually consider this kind of administrative monitoring as a bureaucratic burden, as the reports are not used to set up a system of quality improvement, but only to make sure that the regulations of the Federal Standard is followed.

The Federal Agency for Supervision in Education and Science *Rospotrebnadzor* carries out planned inspections in kindergartens. A commission consisting of a representative of the agency, an education inspector, an expert in the field of early childhood education and an observer mainly inspects the kitchen in kindergartens as well as the food, its preparation and storage with regard to hygienic and health-related aspects. Furthermore, the size of the rooms, lighting, sports equipment as well as medical and training certificates of the professionals and the bookkeeping are checked.

According to the Regulation on Monitoring the Education System (2013, No. 662, §5), *Rospotrebnadzor* is responsible for collecting, processing and analysing information regarding the quality of education. From 2016-2018, the agency conducted a longitudinal study in kindergartens using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) to measure quality. It was found that, for example, the quality of the educational activities carried out or the quality of the work with parents is not satisfactory – which is partly due to the fact that kindergartens have been using a variety of their own monitoring instruments since 2014. However, in order to improve the quality of education in ECEC settings, it will be necessary to create a uniform monitoring system based on reliable data and which involves all stakeholders.

Inclusion agenda

Social inclusion – children with special educational needs and disabilities

During the Soviet period, the state stimulated and supported the deepening of differentiation in the system of education for children with disabilities. There was a well-developed compensatory system to support the development and education of children with special needs, with disabilities and child invalids. In recent years the integration of children with disabilities into the general education system has been underway. Therefore, 'inclusion' is often narrowly understood, only as the joint education of children with developmental disabilities with normotypical children (Volkova and Hentschel 2020).

Moving towards developing the country's educational sector in line with an inclusive ideology and acceptance of differences and diversity, Russia ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012 (Bahdanovich Hanssen and Erina 2021). Early childhood education for children with special needs and disabilities is also governed by a Federal Standard (FGOS-DO). The Ministerial Decisions of 19.12.2014 (No 1598 and 1599) published by the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, officially ended the segregation of children with special educational needs. Article 28 of the National Education Law ("On Education in the Russian Federation," 2012) details the role of state and municipal authorities providing for these children, as well as the conditions of educational activities for children with special/complex needs (Bahdanovich Hanssen and Erina 2021). Every child with special needs has the right to attend a regular kindergarten, and kindergartens, like schools, are obliged to accommodate children with special educational needs at the request of parents. Nevertheless, the number of inclusive settings is relatively small. In addition, the term "inclusion" is interpreted in different ways (Bodrova and Yudina 2018) and is mostly defined in medical terms; inclusion in a broader sense is only gradually being accepted by society at large (see Volkova and Hentschel 2020).

Concerning the historical development of Russia and its multi-national population, the multi-cultural/multi-confessional component of 'inclusivity' can be considered quite well developed. Russia is a multi-national (multi-ethnic) state, as reflected in the Constitution of the Russian Federation (Volkova and Topaj 2020), with four main religions: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and with a freedom of choice of religion in general. Due to this historical path of the country, living with cultural diversity has a long tradition. However, in terms of understanding inclusion as the joint education of normo-typical children and children with disabilities, there have been certain difficulties along this path in Russian society. Russian educational organisations have encountered a number of problems when wishing to implement inclusive practices. These include a lack of teachers' special needs qualifications, a lack in teachers' attention to normatively developing children and a lack of acceptance of children with disabilities by healthy children (Volkova and Hentschel 2020.)

Before children with special educational needs are enrolled in a kindergarten, a medical diagnosis of their needs is made, based on which the child then receives appropriate support, e.g. from speech or physiotherapists, psychologists or other specially trained staff. Children with severe physical and/or mental disabilities are assisted by a support worker who is paid by the state. Mobility and access to the building is also provided.

Kindergartens can choose their own strategies and approaches – based on the national curriculum. For children with disabilities, adapted, individual educational programmes are created. In addition, the "National Action Strategy for Children 2012-2017" (President of the Russian Federation 2012a) was adopted in 2012, in which, among other things, child protection and equal opportunities for all are high priorities. One of the goals concerns reducing the number of separate special needs institutions in order to promote inclusive education.

Regional psychological-medical-educational commissions diagnose the child's condition and expected to assist families in creating conditions for the comprehensive support of children with disabilities. Also, regional state organisations work with parents to assess each child's needs and provide appropriate support, such as the State Psychological and Pedagogical Centre in Moscow. The main goal of the Centre's activity is to provide high-quality psychological, pedagogical, and social support, free of charge, including complex assistance to children with disabilities.

Non-governmental organisations also support parents in their demand for quality education for children with disabilities (Bahdanovich Hanssen and Erina 2021). The parents of children with special needs can apply to support services provided by these non-governmental organisations. These are available on the website of the "general government services" (*gosudarstvennykh I munitcipalnykh uslug* (Public services 2023), accredited by each regional government. Such organisations provide both free and paid services, depending on the family situation. In accordance with the law, paid social services are aimed primarily at citizens who have no grounds for being provided with free social services (Parliament of the Russian Federation 2013).

The regional ministries of education are currently involved in the implementation of these Decisions and organising training for professionals. In rural areas there are still problems with access, but in large cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg the inclusion agenda is well organised – from early childhood to adulthood.

The psychological-medical-pedagogical commission also determines the conditions according to which the education of children with disabilities is organised, such as the support of visually impaired, hard of hearing or physically disabled children by assistants or by the provision of certain materials. The following specialised support staff can be included in the staff calculation: Specialists for learning disabilities, for education of the deaf and visually impaired, for speech therapy as well as psychologists and assistants for each group. Each group is also supported by at least one tutor.

According to Bahdanovich Hanssen, and Erina (2021), networks and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been formed to develop parental involvement capabilities and promote inclusion in education. For example, NGOs support families with children with SEN, developing parent awareness of various aspects of inclusion and in independently monitoring legislation implementation (UNESCO 2021, 138); and the All-Russian Organisation of Parents of Disabled Children (VORDI), a public association created in 2018, helps to implement parents' initiatives to create decent living conditions in society and social and educational inclusion of children with disabilities. With the support of the government, it implements federal projects on social support for families with children and adults with disabilities or holds competitions inviting non-profit organisations whose activities are aimed at supporting families raising children and adults with disabilities. (VORDI 2020, 2023).

In 2022, a total of 86,863 children up to 7 years of age with disabilities were enrolled in early education settings. Out of a total of 7 million children in ECEC settings, this corresponded to 1.2% (Rosstat 2023f). In 2020, 21.8% of ECEC settings had a barrier-free environment (Rosstat 2022h, 23).

In compensatory groups, a certain maximum number of children per group should not be exceeded (see *Table 4*).

Table 4

Russian Federation: Maximum number of children in compensatory ECEC settings

Groups with …	Below 3 years	3 years and above
Children with severe speech disorders/ visual impairment	6	10 (6 for blind children)

Groups with …	Below 3 years	3 years and above
Children with phonetic speech disorders		12
Children with hearing impairment	6	8
Children with visual impairment	6	10
Deaf children	6	6
Children with disorders of the musculoskeletal system	6	8
Children with intellectual disabilities	6	10 (8 in the case of severe mental disability)
Children with autism / with complex multiple disabilities	5	5

Source: Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation 2020

In combined groups attended by children with and without disabilities, there should be no more than 10 children under and over 3 years of age, of which no more than three should be children with disabilities. If there are 15 children over the age of 3 in a group, there should be a maximum of four children with disabilities, and if there are 17 children, there should be a maximum of five. Care must be taken to ensure that the children in a group do not belong to more than three different disability categories. When combining children with various developmental disabilities, the orientation of the adapted educational programmes of preschool education and the possibility of their simultaneous implementation in one group are taken into account.

It is allowed to organise different-age groups of compensatory or combined orientation for children from 2 months to 3 years and from 3 years and older, taking into account the possibility of observing a daily schedule corresponding to the anatomical and physiological characteristics of children of each age group, with a maximum occupancy of 6 and 12 children, respectively (Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation 2020).

Table 5
Russian Federation: Number of children with disabilities in state-subsidised early childhood settings, 2020

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year	90
1 year-olds	458
2 year-olds	3,360
3 year-olds	8,495
4 year-olds	14,766
5 year-olds	19,745
6 year-olds	22,657
7 year-olds and above	13,878
Total	**83,449**

Source: Rosstat 2021b

The multi-national indigenous population of Russia and children with a migration background

Citizens of Russia historically have different ethnic origins, officially 193 different ethnic groups (nationalities). In 2020, the four largest minority groups were Tatars (3.6%), Ukrainians (1.3%), Bashkirs (1.2%) and Chuvash (0.8%) (Rosstat 2023d, 97). According to the 2021 census, 71.7% of the population is ethnically of Russian origin – a decrease of 6% since the 2010 census (The Jamestown Foundation 2023).

In accordance with the “Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2025", one of the priorities is preserving the ethnocultural and linguistic diversity of the Russian Federation (President of the Russian Federation 2012b).

The 193 ethnic groups use – alongside Russian as the state language – approximately 277 languages (according to other sources 295) and dialects (Koryakov et al. 2022; Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation 2021). At the same time, 105 languages are used in the state education system, of which 24 are used as the language of instruction and 81 as a subject language (President of the Russian Federation 2012b). According to data on language proficiency among residents of the Russian Federation, excluding Dagestan, about 56-57 indigenous languages are used in Russia. And taking into account the 24 languages of Dagestan, this number increases to about 80. Local languages in the regions of the Russian Federation also include: Ukrainian, Kazakh, Azerbaijani, Armenian, Finnish, German (Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation 2021).

Both during the period of the Soviet Union and in modern Russia, there are public kindergartens with an ethno-cultural component in order to maintain the culture and language of native ethnic groups and regional nationalities. Kindergartens provide a number of support programmes for children of ethnic minority groups (Bertram and Pascal 2016, 79). Educational activities can also be offered in a minority language or in a foreign language if they are aligned with the educational programme.

Since 2013, early childhood education has been offered along the nomadic routes in the north in so-called nomadic camps. In 2018, 64% of children from indigenous ethnic minorities were prepared for school (UNECSO 2022).

In accordance with the guidelines for the implementation of the new Federal Educational Programme for Preschool Education (Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation 2022), the implementation of the federal programme is also possible in the native language of students.

Migrant population in Russia

In 2021, 667,922 persons in the total population were of non-Russian (citizenship) origin (0.5% out of 146,171,015) (Rosstat 2023d and own calculations). These included:

- 606,190 persons from CIS (“commonwealth of independent states”) countries (mostly from Tajikistan (126,840), followed by Ukraine (122,669)
- 8,250 persons from EU countries (mostly from Germany (2,404), followed by Latvia (1,193); and
- 53,482 persons from other countries, mostly from India (7,132), followed by Georgia (6,506), China (6,465), and Vietnam (5,426) (Rosstat 2023c, 90, 108).

According to the "Concept of the State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation" for the period up to 2025 (President of the Russian Federation 2018), priority tasks are to assist migrants (adults and children) in the process of their social and cultural adaptation and integration. For educational institutions this includes teaching children the Russian language and creating an infrastructure to facilitate their adaptation and integration into the host culture (Volkova and Topaj 2020).

In addition to supportive, educational initiatives, there are also a number of social measures, including those related to language. In the Moscow Metro, for example, signs are duplicated in Uzbek and Tajik to make it easier for labour migrants from these countries to navigate.

The number of specifically ethnic or religious kindergartens for migrants is low. Immigrants often live and work illegally in Russia. Enrolment in a kindergarten is always linked to the place of registration. However, since most immigrants are not legally registered, their children are not

entitled to attend kindergarten or school. The only alternative is private institutions, but these are usually too expensive.

Curricular guidelines to support staff in this area primarily address children with a migration background and bilingual children (UNESCO 2021, 97).

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Maternity leave (*otpusk po berennosti I rodam*) is not mandatory and lasts 140 days (70 days before and 70 days after birth). In the case of a difficult birth or a twin birth, this period is extended to 156 and 194 days respectively. During this period, the average income of the last two years is paid, up to a monthly limit of RUB 83,299 (€842.54), with a minimum of RUB 16,252 (€164.38).

There is no legal entitlement to **Paternity leave**.

3 years of **Childcare leave** (*otpusk po ukhodu za rebenkom*) after birth is a family entitlement. 40% of average earnings during the two years preceding the birth are paid until the child is 18 months old (minimum RUB 8,591.47 (€86.90) and maximum RUB 33,281.80 (€336.63). Since 2023, unemployed persons receive a minimum childcare benefit of RUB 8,591.46 (€86.90) per month if their household income does not exceed the regional subsistence minimum. Beyond receiving the allowances during the childcare period, it is also possible to work part-time.

Women can apply for the so-called **Maternity capital** (*materinskij kapital*), which in 2023 was 586,946.72 RUB (€5,963.78) for the first child and 188,681.53 RUB (€1,908.45) for the second child. This amount is not paid in cash; it is used e.g. for improving housing conditions or for the education of the children. In some regions, also a regional maternity capital is paid.

Only 9.4% of mothers took three or more years of Childcare leave in 2019 (Seliverstova 2021). 2% of the persons taking parental leave were men in 2019. Beyond that, no detailed information on take-up is available.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Russia

*Country expert assessment by **Tatiana Volkova***

Creating a stable remuneration system and improving working conditions

According to government sources, 1,623 kindergartens for 235,100 children were built and put into operation between 2019 and 2023 (Government of the Russian Federation 2023). This has made it possible to significantly reduce the shortage of places in kindergartens in the regions and increase their availability for families.

On the one hand, considerable attention is being paid to the expansion of early childhood education and care. On the other hand, the problem of kindergarten teachers' salaries remains.

According to Rosstat, teachers in preschool institutions in Russia receive approximately 46,000 roubles (approx. €525[6]) per month. However, this amount is nominal, while the real salary in different areas varies between 14,000 and 30,000 roubles (€160–€342). In cities with a population of one million, the recorded average slightly exceeds the average for the country as

[5] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for the Russian Federation by Anna Bagirova in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

[6] Conversion rate May 2023

a whole: in St. Petersburg – 59,441 roubles (€678); in Novosibirsk – 46,512 roubles (€531) (Kp.ru 2023).

The work of an educator is undoubtedly a socially important work. This profession is one of the most popular and in demand. However, working conditions are often harsh and staff turnover high. Difficulties often encountered include: large groups due to staff shortages, with only one kindergarten teacher working from 7:00 to 19:00 and sometimes without an assistant (meaning that clearing up and cleaning also fall on the teacher); documentation tasks; frequent psychological discomfort due to parents' expectations regarding preparing children for school; issues of traumatised children; a frequent lack of professional qualifications among educators to work in inclusive groups (for normotypical children and children with disabilities). This leads to high levels of burnout among educators. Unfortunately, the work in early childhood settings is viewed by policy makers to be more of a “mission” or a “vocation” rather than an appropriately remunerated profession.

Ensuring quality in the initial professional education of early childhood staff

In the current socio-economic situation, the need for newly qualified pedagogical staff is leading to a focus on secondary vocational education rather than on higher education. It is necessary to establish a nationwide system of assessing the quality of education not only in preschool settings but also in the institutions responsible for the initial professional education of teachers.

In accordance with the "Concept for the training of pedagogical personnel for the education system for the period up to 2030" (the concept was approved by Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of June 24, 2022 N 1688-r (Government of the Russian Federation 2022), the current network of **higher education institutions** implementing teacher education/training programmes has a productive experience in the development, implementation and translation of best practices in pedagogical and general education. This experience was in part gained, during the implementation of a comprehensive project for the modernisation of teacher education from 2014–2017. Within this framework and on the basis of the requirements of the Federal State Educational Standards of general education and the Professional Standard of the teaching profession, new standards of higher education were developed. These included a modular programme design, improving the practical orientation and research components of pedagogical education, and proposing the independent assessment of the professional competences of graduates.

At the same time, the content, technologies, management and infrastructure of teacher education require constant adaptation and transformation associated with the changes taking place in the general education system. Challenges remain to ensure the quality of teaching staff. These include addressing the:

- Imbalance in the quality and conditions of initial professional education (IPE) in different educational organisations (vocational and higher education) and the lack of unified approaches regarding mechanisms and tools for assessing quality
- Gap between the pace of renewal of the content and infrastructure of teacher preparation and the pace of renewal of general education
- Lack of advanced scientific research in the field of education for reforming the content of the IPE of pedagogical personnel
- Insufficient correspondence of the results of the training of a graduate (young teacher) to the current needs of the education industry, society and state
- Weak involvement of employers, including regional education systems, in the process of training teachers

- Shortage of teaching staff and insufficient training of higher education graduates working in teacher education programmes
- Lack of comprehensive measures in the early career guidance of school leavers directing them towards the teaching professions.

To solve these problems, it is necessary to implement a set of measures related not only to improving the system of initial professional education, but also to supporting teachers at all stages in their professional life cycle. This includes the basic principles of the national system of professional growth of teachers in the Russian Federation, approved by the Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of December 31, 2019 N 3273-g (Government of the Russian Federation 2019).

Issues of social inclusion and readiness of teachers to work under new conditions

Inclusive education is both a promising and a problematic area of work for modern educational organizations which is rapidly developing in large cities in Russia. Whereas previously, children with developmental disabilities were isolated and pupils allocated to groups according to their abilities, the modern practice of education calls for inclusiveness (Volkova and Prochukhayeva 2019).

A Russian psychologist and defectologist and a member of the Russian Academy of Education, V. I. Lubovsky, has referred to the dismantling of the correctional system that was successfully developed in the Soviet education system (Lubovsky 2017). At the beginning of the implementation of inclusive principles in education, problems of rejection and aggression on the part of both parents and teachers arose, who did not know how to act under the new conditions and expectations.

One of the serious tasks of modernising preschool education and developing inclusion is to find optimal models for the readiness of educators to work with children with special needs. In this regard, the readiness of educators to carry out professional activities in the context of the implementation of the Federal State Educational Standards for Preschool Education is of great importance. The issues of readiness of a teacher to support children with special needs are reflected in a number of documents such as the Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation”, “On the Social Protection of Disabled Persons in the Russian Federation”, “National Strategy for Action in the Interests of Children for 2012-2017”, Federal State Educational Standards for Preschool Education. These emphasise the importance of supportive conditions, goals, objectives, means and methods of working with children with special needs in a regular preschool educational environment.

Beyond this, there are problems of working conditions and the prevention of professional burnout of teachers in ECEC settings. In the context of modern trends in education, when the principles of the tolerance and an inclusive approach are at the forefront, it is important for teachers to have both meta skills and the ability to solve several problems at the same time, using an interdisciplinary approach. To do this, teachers need to constantly learn, develop and improve their level of professional competence, to know the main stages, patterns of development and features of the psychophysiology of children, including pupils with developmental disabilities (Volkova 2020).

Demographic data

Please note: For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.

Total population

During the times of political and economic transformation during the 1990s, the birth rate dropped drastically and, in connection with a high mortality rate, led to a significant drop in population figures. Since about 2009, population numbers have started to rise again, although during the last few years they have decreased slightly (2000: 146,890,128; 2005: 143,474,219; 2010: 141,914,509; 2015: 146,443,000; 2020: 146,443,000). In 2021, the total population in Russia was 145,764,000 (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), and the lowest in Malta (1.13)[7] (Eurostat 2023b). At 1.50, the Russian Federation was slightly below the EU27 average in 2021 (The World Bank 2021). The birth rate fell steadily from 1988 (2.12) to 1999 (1.25), after which it rose again. After a renewed decline in 2016 it rose again (Rosstat 2022d) and has remained stable since 2019 (macrotrends 2023). Through the Maternity Capital (see section on Parental Leave), the state has tried to make having children more attractive to women. However, the latest official demographic data recorded the largest drop in the birth rate in Russia's modern history. According to Rosstat, only 96,131 children were born in the country in April 2023. This is the country's lowest figure since the beginning of the 21st century (Rosstat 2023e).

Children under age 6

Table 6

Russian Federation: Number of children under 3 years and 3 to under 6 years, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year	1,393,821
1 year-olds	1,433,365
2 year-olds	1,478,871
3 year-olds	1,602,814
4 year-olds	1,688,798
5 year-olds	1,886,882
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**9,484,551**

Source: Rosstat 2022e

In 2022, the share of children under 3 years of age was 2.7%, that of under 6 year-olds 6.5%. These proportions were well above the EU27 average.

[7] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/).

Table 7

Russia: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population, compared with the average of the EU27(2020) countries, 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Russia/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2022	Russia	3.0	3.6	6.5
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, Rosstat 2022e, * own calculations, deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

No national data are available on the number of single-parent households with children under 6 years of age.

Based on the results of the 2020–2021 All-Russian Population Census, there are 4,854,000 single mothers and over 1,128,000 single fathers in Russia raising children under 18 years of age (Rosstat 2022f, 28).

According to the same Census, there are 27.7 million children under the age of 18 in Russia. 88% of these children live with parents, of whom 61.5% live with both parents, 31.3% with their mothers and 7.3% with their fathers. Since the 2010 census, the proportion of single families increased: the share of single mothers rose from 28.9% to 31.3% and that of single fathers almost doubled from 3.7% to 7.3% (Tinkoff Bank 2023).

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In the Russian Federation, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-70 years) was 70.4% and for women 55.6% (BRICS 2023). These relatively low overall employment rates are due to the fact that not all economic activities are registered in the statistics.

In 2021, 67.1% of women with preschool-aged children were employed (Rosstat 2022h, 29). This share is above the EU-average (64% in 2021) (Eurostat 2023c, own calculations). There are no data available on employed fathers with children under 6 years.

Table 8a

Russian Federation: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with EU countries, 2010 and 2021

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Russian Federation*	63.3	n.d.
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[8]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2021	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Russian Federation (women with preschool aged children)**	67.1	n.d.
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[9]	Netherlands: 80.5	Malta: 95.8
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Rep.: 42.3	Romania: 81.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e; *Rosstat 2022g, 22; **Rosstat 2022h, 29

[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

For other SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022 – like the Russian Federation – data are displayed in *Table 8b.*

Table 8b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023c, 2023e

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

[+][SSSU] State Statistics Service of Ukraine. 2022*. Employed population in 2021, by age group, sex and place of residence.* https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2017/rp/eans/eanse/Archznsmve.htm

[++]Statista. 2023. *Employment rate in the United Kingdom from June 1971 to January 2023, by gender*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/280120/employment-rate-in-the-uk-by-gender/

[+++]Office for National Statistics. 2023. *Families and the labour market, UK: 2021.* https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2021

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion

The number of persons earning the minimum wage (January 2023: RUB 16,242 (€185), Statista 2023d), decreased in 2022 to 9.8% (from 13.5% in mid-2019) of the population; subjectively 72% assessed their income as being below it. In a Rosstat survey, 29.6% described their material situation as (very) poor (Russian Analytical Digest 2021). 60% of those living below the subsistence level are families with children. This means that about a quarter of children live below the poverty line (The Borgen Project 2021).

According to national statistics, in 2019, 23.6% of children under 18 lived in families with less than the subsistence minimum (RUB 11,653, €136 in 2019). The most affected by poverty were children from large families (48.3%), followed by children in rural areas (44.5%) and children from low-income families (32.8%) (Rosstat 2021a, 2023a; Reshetova 2021).

In January 2023, the monthly subsistence minimum was 15,669 RUB (€180) for the working age population and 14,375 (€165) on average (Statista 2023e). The population with incomes below the poverty line in the second quarter of 2022 amounted to 17.6 million people, or 12.1% of the country's population (Rosstat 2023b).

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

SERBIA

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report author

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*
Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.
https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*
A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education
https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*
An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.
http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

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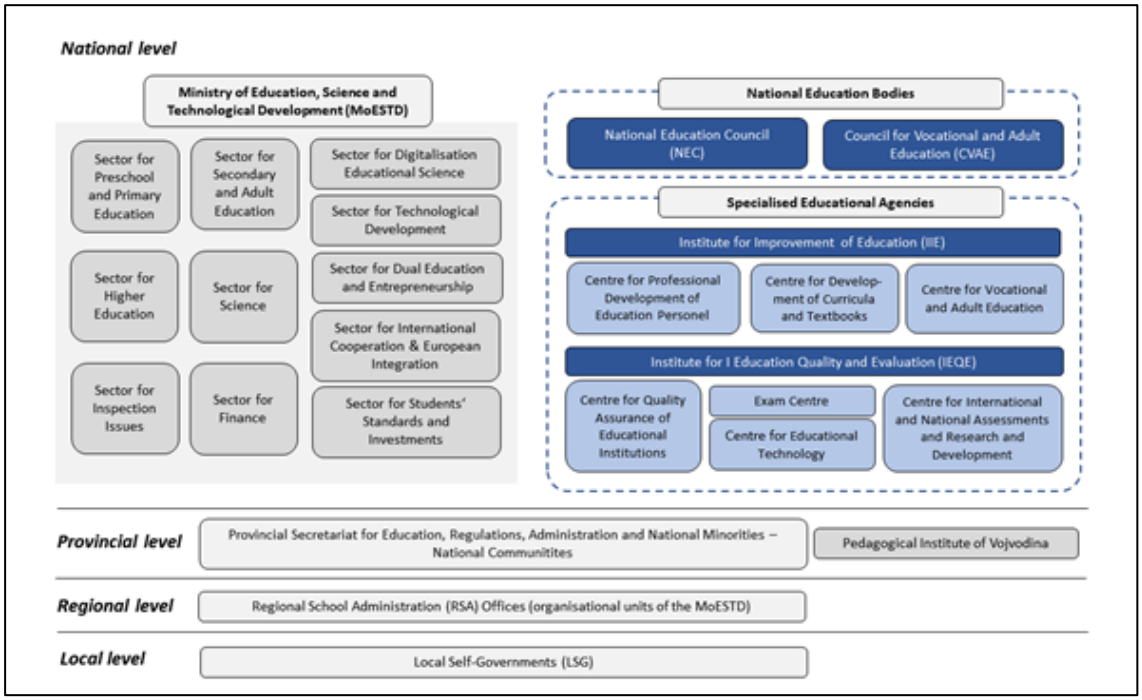
1. ECEC governance in Serbia

Serbia has an administratively integrated system[1] of Early Childhood Education and Care – ECEC (*predškolsko vaspitanje*) under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MoE). Since the adoption of the Law on the Foundations of the Education System (LFES) in 2003 (Official Gazette 2021g – 2003 with amendments in 2021), ECEC is an integral part of the education system and the first phase of formal education.

The jurisdiction over ECEC at the national level is unified under the MoE (*Figure 1*) (LFES, Official Gazette 2021g), with specialized units within the Ministry. Agencies and institutes with special jurisdictions in monitoring, development and advancement of the education system at the national level are the National Education Council – for Preschool, Primary and Secondary General and Artistic Education (NEC), the Institute for Improvement of Education (IIE) and the Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation (IEQE). Institutes are responsible for "developmental, advisory, research and professional activities in preschool education at the national level" (Official Gazette 2021g).

Figure 1

Serbia: System of Education Governance



Source: MoESTD 2018

Beside general regulations applied to each level of education (see *Figure 2*), the Law defines the ECEC curricular framework as well as guidelines for diversified types of services and programmes, duration of ECEC, enrolment of children, roles of ECEC teachers and other staff in the ECEC sector, their qualifications, working conditions and professional development. Under the

[1] At the same time, the ECEC settings are separately organised and the qualification requirements for staff working with children up to three years of age differ from those for staff working with 3 to 6 year-olds.

Law on Preschool Education (LPE, Official Gazette 2021h), the work of ECEC institutions is multifunctional and besides early education and care, which is its main function, it includes child nourishment, prevention and health care, and social care of the child and family.

Early childhood education and care in Serbia is delivered by ECEC institutions (*predškolska ustanova*) that are founded on the municipality level by the government, provincial government or local-self government (LSG), with the status of public ECEC institutions, or by other public or private bodies with the status of private ECEC institutions. ECEC institutions can comprise a number of facilities in which ECEC centres are established. The number of centres within one ECEC institution can differ (from one to more than twenty), depending on the number of preschool children, family needs and local resources. As an exception, ECEC can be realised in the primary school if there is no other ECEC facility in the local community.

Figure 2

Serbia: Structure of the Education System including ECEC

<table>
<tr><th>ISCED 2011</th><th>Age</th><th>Level</th><th colspan="6">STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN SERBIA</th></tr>
<tr><td>8</td><td></td><td rowspan="3">Higher Education</td><td>III Cycle</td><td colspan="5">PhD Studies (180 ECTS)</td></tr>
<tr><td>7</td><td>19-23/24</td><td>II Cycle</td><td>Master Academic Studies (60-120 ECTS)</td><td rowspan="2">Integrated Academic Studies
(First and second Cycle)</td><td>Specialist Academic Studies (60 ECTS)</td><td>Master Applied Studies (120 ECTS)</td><td>Specialist Applied Studies (60 ECTS)</td></tr>
<tr><td>6</td><td>19-22/23</td><td>I Cycle</td><td>Bachelor Academic Studies (180-240 ECTS)</td><td></td><td colspan="2">Bachelor Applied Studies (180 ECTS)</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td>18-19</td><td></td><td colspan="4"></td><td colspan="2">Post-secondary education (Specialist/Craft Education)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">3</td><td>15-19</td><td rowspan="2">Secondary Education</td><td colspan="6">Secondary
4-year education
(Grammar schools and secondary vocational schools)</td></tr>
<tr><td>15-18</td><td colspan="6">Secondary
3-year education
(Secondary vocational schools)</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>11-15</td><td rowspan="2">Primary & Lower Secondary Education (Compulsory)</td><td colspan="4">Primary school
Grades 5-8
(Subject-based teaching)</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2">Total duration
8 years</td></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>7-11</td><td colspan="4">Grades 1-4
(Class-based and subject-based teaching)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">0</td><td>5.5-6.5/7</td><td rowspan="3">Early Childhood Education and Care</td><td colspan="4">Pre-primary Programme
(Compulsory)</td><td colspan="2">Duration: minimum
9 months</td></tr>
<tr><td>3-5.5</td><td colspan="4">Kindergarten (vrtić)</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>0.5-3</td><td colspan="4">Nursery (jaslice)</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Baucal, A. et al. 2016

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) covers children from 6 months to 6½ years of age. The only obligatory part is the year before starting school for children aged 5½ to 6½ years.

An ECEC centre can be organised in the following way in terms of the hours of attendance:

- All-day – from 9 to 12 hours per day
- Half-day – 4 hours per day in the obligatory year before starting school
- Half-day – up to 6 hours per day in regular settings
- Half-day – up to 6 hours per day, up to three times a week
- 24-hour service – overnight stays over a period of several days (Official Gazette 2021h).

ECEC for children from 6 months up to 3 years are organised in nurseries (*jaslice*), for children from 3 up to 6½ years of age in kindergartens (*vrtić*) and compulsory attendance for children from 5½ to 6½ years of age in a kindergarten (full day or half day) or, in some cases, in a primary school on a half-day basis.

The same curricular framework, adopted in 2018 ("Years of Ascent", Official Gazette 2018a), applies to all ECEC setting types (see Key Contextual Data report for more details).

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

In Serbia, different professionals are eligible to work in ECEC institutions. The legislative framework regulates their educational background, qualifications and professional development. Pursuant to the Law on Preschool Education, Teachers, Nurses/ Nursery Teachers, Expert Associates, Associates and Pedagogical Assistants are eligible to work in ECEC institutions (LPE, Official Gazette 2021h). Professionals engaged in ECEC are:

- ECEC Nurses (working with children aged 6 months – 3 years)
- ECEC Teachers (working with children aged 3 – 6.6 years)
- Expert Associates (specialist support staff: Pedagogue, Psychologist, Speech Therapist, Pedagogue for visual/music arts and physical education);
- Associates (Social Worker, Nutritionist, Nurses for preventive health care; Defectologist (in developmental – special needs – educational groups).

A breakdown of the employees' professional profiles, areas of work and qualifications is presented in *Table 1*, which also categorises the core professionals (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at end of this chapter).

Table 1
Serbia: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
ECEC Nurse *Medicinska sestra vaspitač* *Profile:* Health Care Profes-sional	*Predškolske ustanove* **Nurseries** 6 months–2 years[2]	Core professional with group re-sponsibility	6 months–2 years	Completed vocational secondary school edu-cation, paramedical track ECTS credits: n/a[3] EQF level: 3 ISCED 2011: 3
ECEC Teacher (sometimes called Kindergarten Teacher) *Vaspitač* *Profile*: Pre-Primary Education Professional	*Predškolske ustanove* **Kindergartens** 3–6 years	Core professional with group responsibility	3–6 years	3 or 4 years at a higher education institution *Award:* Bachelor's degree (professional/ applied) ***or** (optional)* Second degree of university studies • Master's degree • Specialist academic degree • Specialist professional studies ECTS credits: 180/240/300 EQF level: 6/7 ISCED 2011: 6/7
Special Needs Teacher *Defektolog-vaspitač*	*Predškolske ustanove* **Kindergartens** 3–6 years	Education of children with disabilities	3–6 years	Master's degree (4+1 years, university) ECTS credits: 300 EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Pedagogist (Expert associate) *Stručni saradnik – pedagog*	*Predškolske ustanove* **ECEC centres** 6 months–6 years	Enhancement and support of educational work and pro-vision of expert assistance to	Broad focus (children and adults)	Master's degree (4 +1 years, university) ECTS credits: 300 EQF Level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7

[2] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children en-rolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In the case of Serbia, these formats are **0–2** and **3–6** years because school generally starts at age 7.
[3] n/a not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
		children, parents, caregivers and teachers		
Psychologist *Stručni saradnik – psiholog*	*Predškolske ustanove* **ECEC centres** 6 months–6 years	Enhancement of educational work and pro-vision of ex-pert assis-tance to chil-dren, parents, caregivers and teachers	Broad focus (children and adults)	Master's degree (4 +1 years, university) ECTS credits: 300 EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Speech Therapist *Stručni saradnik – logoped*	*Predškolske ustanove* **ECEC centres** 6 months–6 years	Specialist support staff	Broad focus (children and adults)	Master's degree (4+1 years, university) ECTS credits: 300 EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Pedagogue for visual arts / musical arts / physical education *Stručni saradnik –*	*Predškolske ustanove* **ECEC centres** 6 months–6 years	Enhancement and support the field of creativity / physical de-velopment	Broad focus (children and adults)	Master's degree (4+1 years, university) ECTS credits: 300 EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Social Worker *Saradnik – socijalni radnik*	*Predškolske ustanove* **ECEC centres** 6 months–6 years	Enhancement and support in child and family social welfare	Broad focus (children and adults)	Master's degree (4+1 years, university) ECTS credits: 300 EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Nutritionist *Saradnik – nutricionista*	*Predškolske ustanove* **ECEC centres** 6 months–6 years	Enhancement and support regarding pre-ventive medi-cal protection and nutrition	Broad focus (children and adults)	Master's degree (4+1 years university) ECTS credits: 300 EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Nurse *Medicinska sestra*	*Predškolske ustanove* **ECEC centres** 6 months–6 years	Qualified co-worker, particularly in care and preventive protection	Broad focus (children and adults)	3 years at university *Award:* Bachelor's de-gree ECTS credits: 180 EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Pedagogical Assistant *Pedagoški asistent*	*Predškolske ustanove* **ECEC centres** 6 months–6 years	Additional as-sistance and support to children	Broad focus (children and adults)	Completed secondary school education

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				plus completion of a further education pro-gramme ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 4

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neu-man 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

Table 1 illustrates how many different professionals work in Serbian ECEC institutions, but the core professional staff specifically qualified for working with children up to 6½ years of age and who work with them full-time are the ECEC Teachers (*vaspitači*).

The activities of ECEC are conducted by a teacher and expert associates, while the activities re-garding nutrition, care, preventive health and social protection, are conducted by associates.

Everyday pedagogical work is conducted by ECEC Teachers (*vaspitači*), ECEC Nurses and Special Needs Teachers. Specialist support staff – Pedagogists, Psychologists, Pedagogues for visual arts, musical arts and physical education and Speech Therapists, implement quality-improving activities. Their task is to enhance educational processes through advisory work and other activ-ities, to provide professional support to children, parents, legal guardians and teachers on edu-cation issues, and to engage in other forms of support.

Activities regarding child care, nutrition, health and social care in a preschool institution are performed by a Health Care Professional, Nutritionist and Social Worker.

Pedagogical Assistants provide help and additional support to children concerning their needs, cooperate with the teachers and professional staff, parents and legal guardians.

Teachers and expert associates holding relevant educational degrees and a completed work in-duction programme and those who have passed the license exam are entitled to a work license in ECEC (Official Gazette 2021g). Pursuant to the Law on the Foundations of the Education Sys-tem, after a minimum of one year and/or a maximum of two years of internship, teachers and expert associates employed in an ECEC institution or those who completed an internship in an ECEC institution are eligible to take the license exam. The Rulebook on Work Permits for Teachers, ECEC Teachers and Expert Associates (Official Gazette 2022) regulates the following: the work induction programme for ECEC teachers and expert associates, the verification method and procedure for candidates' mastering the programme, the programme for acquiring the work

permit (license), the method for verification of the candidate's command of that programme, the licensing exam costs and the administrative authority before which the licensing exam is to be taken, licensed teachers' register content and method of register keeping, and the license form for ECEC Teachers and expert associates.

Persons with an illegal or criminal record are banned from working with young children.

2.2 Centre leader

Qualifications, election and duties of the director of the ECEC institution are defined by the Law on the Foundations of the Education System (Official Gazette 2021g).

The director of an ECEC institution can be a person who has:

- An appropriate education as an ECEC teacher or expert associate (Master's academic studies, Master's professional studies, Specialist academic studies in the field of pedagogical sciences or interdisciplinary; multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary second-degree studies that combine units and corresponding scientific, i.e. professional, or pedagogical sciences fields)
- Completed training and has successfully passed an exam for becoming the director of an ECEC institution
- At least eight years of work in the institution in the field of education.

In accordance with the LFES, the standards are applied to the licensing procedure for directors. They are also the basis for developing training programmes, examination programmes for directors and for self-evaluation.

In the Rulebook on Competence Standards of Directors of Educational Institutions, directors' competences are defined as "functionally integrated knowledge, capacities, skills and a system of values which are the basis for carrying out work and tasks in ECEC institutions, primary and secondary schools" (Official Gazette 2013). According to the Rulebook, competence standards for directors were designed to establish criteria which would provide successful management, organisation, implementation and supervision of work in the education institutions.

The standards are divided into six groups: (1) Managing the process of care and learning of children in an ECEC centre/institution, i.e. managing the pedagogical and educational process; (2) Planning, organisation and supervision of work at an education institution; (3) Monitoring and improving the work of the employees; (4) Developing cooperation with parents/carers, the executive body, the relevant workers' union and the wider community; (5) Managing the finances and administration of the education institution; (6) Ensuring that the educational institution is run according to the law. There is a short description of every standard and a list of indicators which define competences in more detail. Assessment of whether the standards have been met depends on the fulfilment of the indicators.

The standards and indicators are designed for the Heads of all types of education institutions. A distinction between standards for the directors of ECEC institutions and school principals is made only in the first group of standards, which outline differences between working in the different types of education institutions.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Posts of responsibility are defined by the Law of Preschool Education (Official Gazette 2021h). They refer to tasks regarding work with children with special educational needs and disabilities (ECEC Teacher with the support of expert associates and a Special Needs Teacher), with children of national minority groups or children from migrant families (ECEC Teacher together with social welfare associates).

Social work in an ECEC institution includes the following tasks: prevention activities, identification of the child's social context; support to parents so that they can adequately realise their parental function and improve the quality of family relations; monitoring of family needs for adequate forms of ECEC in their local communities; creating conditions for increasing the coverage of children in local communities with various diversified programmes; support to parents and children with developmental difficulties in their exercising of rights to protection and support in all the social welfare systems (social protection, child protection, medical care, etc.) and in the process of their inclusion in ECEC institutions; participation in the process of developing an inclusive approach in ECEC institutions and in the community; coordination of the implementation of the General and Special Protocol on Child Protection from Violence, Abuse and Neglect; work with families in which domestic violence, abuse and neglect have been detected; cooperation with local self-government and relevant institutions on all the issues related to the realisation of the social function of ECEC institutions.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Inspection and expert pedagogical supervision of education institutions and institutes are defined by the LFES. Inspection and expert pedagogical supervision of education institutions, including ECEC, are carried out by the MoE. Regional School Administration Offices are established within the MoE, "for the purpose of performing expert pedagogical supervision, external evaluation of the work of institutions, support for development planning and improvement of the quality of the work of institutions, planning and quality assurance" (Official Gazette 2021g, art. 31). There are 16 Regional School Administration Offices in Serbia, and each office has jurisdiction over one to three administrative units (districts). A community or municipal education authority carries out inspection and supervision of ECEC centres and schools within the authority and jurisdiction stipulated by the law. This means that inspection and supervision are performed by an education inspector.

2.5 Specialist support staff

Expert associates – Pedagogists, Psychologists, Pedagogues for visual arts, musical arts and physical education and Speech Therapists – implement professional activities to improve the educational work of the ECEC institution. According to the Rulebook on the programme for all forms of work as an expert associate in an ECEC institution (Official Gazette 2021b) the goal of the work of an expert associate in an ECEC institution is to develop the culture of the preschool institution as a learning community and the quality of educational practice.

Qualification requirements for expert associates are defined by the Law on Preschool Education: Master-level studies, postgraduate academic studies and postgraduate specialist studies (Official Gazette 2021h).

The number of expert associates engaged by an ECEC institution is determined in the Rulebook on Detailed Conditions for the Beginning of Work and Pursuit of Activities in ECEC Institutions (Official Gazette 2019a). According to this Rulebook, **each ECEC institution should have an expert associate** – a Pedagogist or a Psychologist. ECEC settings comprising between 24-48 educational groups, full or half day, may engage an additional Pedagogist or Psychologist. ECEC institutions with more than 48 groups, full or half day, may engage another expert associate with a different profile: Speech Therapist or a Pedagogue for visual arts, musical arts and physical education. According to the Catalogue of jobs and titles in the public sector (Official Gazette 2018c), the role of a Speech Therapist as an expert associate in a preschool institution is defined as follows: "The Speech Therapist, by applying theoretical and practical knowledge, contributes

to the realisation and improvement of educational work in the institution in accordance with the goals and principles of ECEC."

The Rulebook on Competence Standards for expert associates in ECEC institutions and their professional development defines expert associates' competences as the unity of knowledge, skills and values. "Knowing, doing and being are dimensions that are integrated in the daily professional practice of an expert associate" (Official Gazette 2021a). In the same document, the competence of an expert associate is defined through the following areas: (1) strategic (developmental) planning and monitoring of ECEC practices; (2) cooperation and togetherness; (3) development of reflective practices in ECEC institutions; (4) developing the quality of the current real programme; (5) own professional activity and professional development.

The presence of highly qualified Pedagogists and Psychologists as expert associates in ECEC institutions provides the possibility of improving the quality of ECEC. However, practice has shown that the existing situation of a single expert having to cover a large number of groups, combined with the spatial "dispersion" of settings of a single service provider and deficiencies in the initial professional education of expert associates impedes the potential of these specialist support staff for enhancing quality (Baucal et al. 2016).

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

In the 17 municipalities of the capital city of Belgrade, there are 17 ECEC institutions. All other cities and municipalities have one ECEC institution per city/municipality. According to national data for 2022/23, there are currently 461 ECEC institutions (163 state-owned and 298 private) with 2,853 facilities (2,417 state-owned and 418 private) in 11,511 educational groups (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2023).

In these 461 ECEC institutions, there are 32,084 employees, including 15,775 ECEC Teachers and 5,362 ECEC Nurses. By way of contrast, in 2014 there were about 25,000 employees who were employed to deliver ECEC services to 189,304 children. Alongside the Teachers and ECEC Nurses, 3% of the workforce comprised expert associates and 31.1% other employees.

The ECEC profession is still predominantly female. The data is indicative of an insufficient number of male teachers in the ECEC institutions, which account for less than 2% of employed teachers. The structural composition of ECEC employees in Serbia is presented in *Table 2*.

Since the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia does not follow all the data related to different kinds of ECEC employees, the data shown in *Tables 2* and *3* represent the number of persons employed in public ECEC institutions.

Table 2

Serbia: Persons employed in public ECEC institutions, by staff qualifications and gender, 2022/23

Staff categories	Total	Women, in %	Men, in %
ECEC Teachers	15,775	98.2	1.8
ECEC Nurses	5,362	99.8	0.2
ECEC Special Needs Teachers	120	93.3	6.7
Expert associates	972	91.3	8.7
Associates	813	86.1	13.9

Staff categories	Total	Women, in %	Men, in %
Pedagogical and other assistants	201	85.6	14.4
Administrative staff	1,386	82.1	17.9
Technical support staff	7,455	90.1	9.9
Total	**32,084**	**95.3**	**4.7**

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2023, own calculations

Due to the fact that the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia does not follow all the data related to the structural composition of the ECEC workforce and no reliable national data is available on the qualifications of staff in public ECEC institutions, the data shown in *Table 3* represent only the total number of staff in each category for 2015 (no more recent data available). Staff with a vocational education work predominantly as ECEC Nurses, administrative and technical staff. Support staff such as cooks, cleaners or janitors are predominantly non-qualified persons.

Table 3

Serbia: Structural composition of ECEC workforce in public ECEC institutions, 2015

Staff categories	Total
Staff with higher education degree	17,834
Staff with specialist higher qualification	10,181
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	889
Staff with secondary vocational school (upper secondary)	9,444
Staff with non-specialist qualification	3,118
Male staff (including male administrative staff)	
Staff with a background of migration	No systematically compiled national data

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2023, own calculations

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

ECEC Teachers (*Vaspitač*)

According to the Law on Higher Education (LHE), ECEC Teachers acquire the necessary education to work with children through academic and applied studies based on accredited study programmes (Official Gazette 2021c). Study programmes for the first degree level are basic academic studies, basic applied studies and specialist applied studies. Study programmes for the second degree level are master academic studies, master applied studies and specialist academic studies. Tertiary institutions carrying out higher education for the ECEC Teacher profession are the following: Academies of Applied Studies, Colleges and Colleges of Applied Studies and University Faculties. An Academy of Applied Studies may provide basic applied studies, master applied studies and specialist applied studies if having at least five accredited study programmes for applied studies in at least two fields. Colleges of Applied Studies refer to independent higher education institution that provide basic applied studies, specialist applied studies and

master applied studies. University Faculty refers to higher education units within a university carrying out academic study programmes and developing scientific and artistic research, i.e. professional work in one or more areas.

Since 2005, studies for prospective ECEC Teachers in Serbia have been transformed significantly through the implementation of the Bologna process. The major change was raising all initial ECEC Teacher education programmes to the tertiary level.

Since then, Serbia has a binary higher education system, meaning that initial education of ECEC Teachers is realised through two different types of studies:

(a) applied studies consisting of programmes leading to a professional qualification offered by 5 colleges (*Visoka škola strukovnih studija*) and 5 academies of applied studies (*Akademija strukovnih studija*); and

(b) academic studies are conducted solely at six faculties in five universities.

Applied studies for ECEC Teachers are divided into the following categories (LHE, Official Gazette 2021c):

- Undergraduate applied studies lasting three years and granting, upon their completion, 180 ECTS credits
- Master applied studies, lasting two years and awarding at least 120 ECTS credits if the scope of the first degree course of studies of at least 180 ECTS credits has been realised (total 300 ECTS credits)
- Specialist applied studies, lasting at least one year and granting, upon their completion, at least 60 ECTS credits.

Academic studies for ECEC Teachers are divided into the following categories (LHE, Official Gazette 2021c):

- First cycle undergraduate academic studies, lasting four years and granting, upon their completion, 240 ECTS credits. A student who completes first-degree academic studies with at least 240 ECTS credits acquires the professional title of Bachelor with Honours.
- Master academic studies, lasting at least one year and granting, upon their completion, at least 60 ECTS credits. A student who completes these second-degree academic studies acquires the academic title of Master.

This practice has resulted in a great variety of educational profiles and titles. Additionally, it has resulted in inconsistencies among the study programmes according to their types, duration and content, as well as in the quality, taking into account the available staffing potential compared with a large number of schools and faculties (see *Tables 4a* and *4b*). In a recent situational analysis (Baucal et al. 2016), this issue was emphasised as one of the weaknesses of the ECEC system, as was the necessity to introduce measures aimed at the mutual alignment of study programmes and defining competencies that the students need to acquire to become professional teachers.

Table 4a

Serbia: Initial education for ECEC Teachers in colleges and academies by types of study programme[4]

Colleges and Academies of Applied Studies	Type and duration of study programme	ECTS credits	Title upon completion of studies
Preschool Teacher Training College, Novi Sad	Basic applied studies 3 years (6 semesters)	180	**Bachelor of Applied Science** Vocational ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 6
	Master 2 years (4 semesters)	120	**Master of Applied Science** Master ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 7
College of Applied Studies for the Education of Preschool Teachers and Sports Trainers (Nutritionists and Professional ECEC Nurses), Subotica	Basic applied studies 3 years (6 semesters)	180	**Bachelor of Applied Science** Vocational ECEC Teacher Vocational ECEC Nurse EQF/ISCED 6
	Master applied studies 2 years (4 semesters)	120	**Master of Applied Science** Master Vocational ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 7
Academy of Educational-Medical Vocational Studies, Department in Aleksinac	Basic applied studies 3 years (6 semesters)	180	**Bachelor of Applied Science** ECEC Teacher ECEC Nurse EQF/ISCED 6
	Specialist applied studies 1 year (2 semesters)	60	**Specialist of Applied Science** ECEC Teacher – Specialist for Pre-Primary Programme EQF/ISCED 6
	Master applied studies 2 years (4 semesters)	120	**Master of Applied Science** Master vocational ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 7
Academy of Educational-Medical Vocational Studies, Department in Kruševac	Basic applied studies 3 years (6 semesters)	180	**Bachelor of Applied Science** ECEC Teacher Vocational teacher in infant nurseries EQF/ISCED 6
	Specialist applied studies 1 year (2 semesters)	60	**Specialist of Applied Science** ECEC Teacher – Specialist for work with children from vulnerable groups ECEC Teacher – Specialist for Pre-Primary Programme EQF/ISCED 6
	Master applied studies 2 years (4 semesters)	120	**Master of Applied Science** Master ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 7
Preschool Teacher Training and Business Informatics College of Applied Studies – Sirmium, Sremska Mitrovica	Basic applied studies 3 years (6 semesters)	180	**Bachelor of Applied Science** ECEC Teacher ECEC Nurse EQF 6
	Specialist applied studies	60	**Specialist of Applied Science**

[4] The data shown in the table represent data from the official websites of the Colleges/Faculties

Colleges and Academies of Applied Studies	Type and duration of study programme	ECTS credits	Title upon completion of studies
	1 year (2 semesters)		Vocational specialist ECEC Teacher for early inclusion EQF 6
	Master applied studies 2 years (4 semesters)	120	**Master of Applied Science** Master ECEC Teacher EQF 7
Academy of Applied Studies – Department of studies for Preschool Teachers and Nursery Teachers, Šabac	Basic applied studies 3 years (6 semesters)	180	**Bachelor of Applied Science** Vocational ECEC Teacher, Vocational ECEC Nurse EQF 6
	Master applied studies 2 years (4 semesters)	120	**Master of Applied Science** Master Professional ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 7
Academy of Technical – Preschool Teacher Education Applied Studies – Department in Pirot	Basic applied studies 3 years (6 semesters)	180	**Bachelor of Applied Science** Teacher in ECEC institutions EQF/ISCED 6
	Specialist applied studies 1 year (2 semesters)	60	**Specialist of Applied Science** Vocational specialist ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 6
	Master applied studies 2 years (4 semesters)	120	**Master of Applied Science** Master Professional ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 7
Academy of Vocational Studies South Serbia, Department of the College of Applied Studies for the Education of Preschool Teachers, Bujanovac	Basic applied studies 3 years (6 semesters)	180	**Bachelor of Applied Science** Vocational ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 6
	Specialist applied studies 1 year (2 semesters)	60	**Specialist of Applied Science** Vocational specialist ECEC Teacher for Pre-primary Programme EQF/ISCED 6
Preschool Teacher Training College „Mihailo Palov“, Vršac	Basic applied studies 3 years (6 semesters)	180	**Bachelor of Applied Science** Professional ECEC Teacher Professional ECEC teacher with specific competencies for work with toddlers Professional ECEC Teacher with specific competencies for work with socially deprived children Professional ECEC Teacher with specific competencies for work with children in the English language EQF/ISCED 6
	Master applied studies 2 years (4 semesters)	120	**Master of Applied Science** Master Professional Preschool Teacher EQF/ISCED 7
College of Applied Studies for Teacher Education in Kikinda	Basic applied studies 3 years (6 semesters)	180	**Bachelor of Applied Science** Vocational ECEC Teacher Teacher of traditional games EQF/ISCED 6

Colleges and Academies of Applied Studies	Type and duration of study programme	ECTS credits	Title upon completion of studies
	Master applied studies 2 years (4 semesters)	120	**Master of Applied Science** Master Professional ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 7

Table 4b

Serbia: Initial education for ECEC Teachers in universities by types of study programme[5]

Faculties	Type and duration of study programme	ECTS credits	Title upon completion of studies
Faculty of Education in Jagodina, University of Kragujevac	Basic academic studies, 4 years (8 semesters) Master academic studies, 1 year (2 semesters)	240 60	**Bachelor's degree:** Teacher in ECEC institutions EQF/ISCED 6 **Master's degree** Master Preschool Teacher in ECEC institutions EQF/ISCED 7
Faculty of Education in Užice, University of Kragujevac	Basic academic studies, 4 years (8 semesters) Master academic studies, 1 year (2 semesters)	240 60	**Bachelor's degree** ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 6 **Master's degree** Master ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 7
Teacher Education Faculty Belgrade, University of Belgrade	Basic Academic studies, 4 years (8 semesters) Master academic studies, 1 year (2 semesters)	240 60	**Bachelor's degree** ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 6 **Master's degree** Master ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 7
Faculty of Education in Sombor, University of Novi Sad	Basic academic studies, 4 years (8 semesters) Master academic studies, 1 year (2 semesters)	240 60	**Bachelor's degree** ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 6 **Master's degree** Master of Arts in ECEC Teacher Education EQF/ISCED 7
Faculty of Teacher Education in Prizren – Leposavić University of Priština – Kosovska Mitrovica	Basic academic studies, 4 years (8 semesters) Master academic studies, 1 year (2 semesters)	240 60	**Bachelor's degree** Teacher in ECEC institutions EQF/ISCED 6 **Master's degree** Master Teacher in ECEC institutions EQF/ISCED 7
Pedagogical faculty in Vranje, University of Niš	Basic academic studies, 4 years (8 semesters) Master academic studies, 1 year (2 semesters)	240 60	**Bachelor's degree** ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 6 **Master's degree** Master ECEC Teacher EQF/ISCED 7

[5] The data shown in the table represent data from the official websites of the Colleges/Faculties

For all above-mentioned undergraduate studies, an entrance condition for enrolment in a Bachelor's study programme is to have a high school leaving certificate, approved entrance examination scores, and acceptance to the study programme. Rules for entrance examinations and admission are set in connection with the Statute of College/Academy or Faculty (at most faculties and colleges the entrance exam contains a test of general knowledge and testing speech, physical and musical abilities. The capability testing is eliminatory).

An entrance condition for enrolment in a follow-up Specialised Professional Studies or Master's study programme is the completion of study in a Bachelor's programme (180 or 240 ECTS credits). Rules for entrance examinations and admission are set in connection with the College or Faculty statutes.

Table 5

Serbia: ECEC Nurse

Job title in Serbian: *Medicinska sestra vaspitač* **Profile**: Health Care Professional
Entry requirements: Completed compulsory education or completion of 4 years at vocational secondary school and final exam **Professional studies**: 4 years upper secondary/vocational qualification, ending with vocational baccalauréat *Optional:* 3 years applied studies at a college **Award**: ECEC Nurse Optional: Bachelor – Vocational nursery teacher in infant nurseries **ECTS credits**: n/a (with Bachelor – 180 ECTS) **EQF level**: 3 (with Bachelor – EQF 6) **Main ECEC workplace**: ECEC settings, 6 months–2 years

Table 6

Serbia: Specialist support staff (1)

Job title in Serbian: *Stručni saradnik*
Entry requirements: completion of 4 years at gymnasium or vocational secondary school and final exam **Basic Academic Studies:** 5 years of study at a university (undergraduate and graduate study programme in Pedagogy, Psychology, Visual Arts, Musical Arts, Physical Education or Education and Rehabilitation Sciences) **Award:** Master's degree **Total ECTS credits**: 300 (240 + 60) **EQF level:** 7 **ISCED 2011:** 7 **Main ECEC workplaces:** As Pedagogues, Psychologists, Pedagogue for visual arts, musical arts and physical education, Experts in inclusive education and rehabilitation or Speech Therapists in ECEC institutions, 6 months–6½ years old. Graduates also may work in schools, public sector services, state institutions and local and regional self-governing institutions (with children, youth and adults).

Table 7

Serbia: Specialist support staff (2)

Job title in Serbian: *Saradnik*
Entry requirements: completion of 4 years at gymnasium or vocational secondary school and final exam **Professional studies:** 5 years of study at university (undergraduate and graduate study programme in Social Work, Health Prevention and Nutrition) **Award:** Master's degree **Total ECTS credits:** 300 (240 + 60)

Job title in Serbian: *Saradnik*
EQF level: 7 **ISCED 2011:** 7 **Main ECEC workplaces:** As Social Worker or Nutritionist in ECEC institutions, 6 months – 6½ years old. Graduates also may work in public sector services, state institutions and local and regional self-governing institutions (with children, youth and adults).

Table 8
Serbia: Nurse

Job title in Serbian: *Viša medicinska sestra na preventivi*
Entry requirements: completion of 4 years at gymnasium or vocational secondary school and final exam (= university entrance exam) **Professional studies**: 3 years of study at a college of applied sciences **Award**: Bachelor **Total ECTS credits**: 180 **EQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011**: 6 **Main ECEC workplaces**: Working with children, parents and professionals in the field of protection of children's health and a healthy environment.

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

In Serbia, all institutions of higher education must have a work permit for pursuing higher education and comply with the standards and procedures defined by the Law of Higher Education and Regulation for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions.

The list of general and subject-specific competences is the integral part of Standards for Accreditation of study programmes of the first and second levels of higher education (National Council for Higher Education 2019).

Standard 4. Competences of graduated students By mastering the study programme, students acquire general and course-specific skills needed for good quality professional, scientific and artistic activities. The qualification description stemming from the study programme corresponds to a certain level of the National Qualifications Framework.
Guidelines for the application of standard 4: 4.1 By mastering the study programme, the student acquires the following general abilities: – Analysis, synthesis and foreseeing/predicting solutions and consequences – Mastering methods, procedures, and research processes – Development of critical and self-critical thinking and approaches – Application of knowledge in practice – Development of communication skills and abilities, as well as cooperation with a narrower social and international environment – Professional ethics 4.2 By mastering the study programme, the student acquires the following course-specific abilities: – Basic knowledge and understanding of the discipline of the relevant profession – Solving concrete problems using scientific methods and procedures – Linking basic knowledge from different fields and their application – Monitoring and application of new development in the profession – Development of skills and abilities in the use of knowledge in the appropriate field – The use of information and communication technologies in mastering the knowledge of the respective area

4.3. Learning outcomes are described according to descriptors of learning outcomes of the National Qualifications Framework (ibid)

Ten Colleges and Academies of Applied Sciences (*Visoka škola strukovnih studija/Akademija strukovnih studija*) and six Faculties (5 Universities) (listed in *Table 4a*) provide Bachelor-level studies for future ECEC Teachers. All colleges and faculties in Serbia have adapted the list and publish their own list of competence specifications for graduates. Most study programmes emphasise professional and subject-specific competences to enable students to acquire concrete and applicable knowledge and skills in a particular field.

The conceptual frameworks for individual study programmes in colleges and faculties (goals and mission, competence specifications, intended outcomes) for most of them are presented on the institution websites. One example is given for each type of study here. The others can be accessed via direct links.

ECEC Teachers (*Vaspitač*) – Bachelor Applied programme

Competency specifications

Preschool Teacher Training College „Mihailo Palov" Vršac

This college offers a study programme for future ECEC Teachers which was designed and accredited within the Teach programme *Harmonization of Preschool Teacher Education Curricula in Serbia* 2013 – 2016. supported by the European Commission (EACEA) within the Tempus project (VSS 2016).

General competence specifications (VSS 2019)

The basic competence that future educators need to develop is **self-reflexivity**; this enables self-evaluation and the adaptation of practice to the context and changes in it and aims at modifying practice in line with changes in pedagogical concepts and current social opportunities.

At the end of their course of studies, graduates are expected to apply knowledge in educational work with children of preschool age and to refer to the appropriate professional literature. Specified general competences are to:

- Analyse, synthesise and foreseeing solutions and consequences
- Compile and interpret contemporary theoretical knowledge in the field of pedagogy, psychology, methodology, and have the ability to reflect on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues related to pedagogical processes
- Master the methods, procedures and processes of research
- Develop critical and self-critical thinking and approaches
- Link basic knowledge from different fields and their applications in working with children of preschool age
- Have developed the capability for teamwork and be able to transfer knowledge to others
- Solve concrete educational problems using scientific methods and procedures.

Subject-specific competence specifications (ibid)

By mastering the study programme, the student acquires the following subject-specific abilities:

- Knowledge of the appropriate profession
- Application of scientific methods and procedures in solving certain problems
- Planning educational work
- Efficient and flexible organisation of time and space: the layout of the classroom for a variety of activities (places for play and for quiet activities), the appropriate choice of teaching and didactic materials, flexible scheduling of activities and transitions between them
- Organisation of learning and teaching

- Pedagogical guidance of the group
- Monitoring effects of the educational process
- Applying and linking knowledge from different fields
- Applying and monitoring innovations in the profession
- Information and communication skills.

ECEC Teachers (*Vaspitač*) – Master (applied programme)

Academy of Technical – Preschool Teacher Education Applied Studies – Department in Pirot

"The purpose of the master's vocational study programme is to educate a Master Educator who will develop existing programmes through an integrated curriculum at the institutional level by organising … activities in accordance with the life context of the child, changes in society, kindergarten and to the family, thus creating a stimulating the environment for achieving the planned goals. Based on framework documents, the future Master Educator will to be able to produce original and constructive solutions to specific problems in educational practice." (Academy of Technical Educational Vocational Studies 2022).

General competence specifications (ibid)

Upon completion of a Master Applied programme students will achieve following competences:

- The ability, knowledge and skills of leading, organising and coordinating educational activities and developing an integrated curriculum in a preschool institution and competence for innovative and modern ways of solving specific problems in educational practice
- The ability to plan, design, create, implement and evaluate an open curriculum model for educational work based on an integrated and holistic approach
- Communication skills and the ability to communicate analytical and research results from the domain of the organisation of educational work
- Knowledge and skills about the teacher's professional ethics and active contribution to the development of the social community
- Knowledge of methodology, pedagogy, psychology and methods in order to conduct research and use research methods in educational work.

Specific competence specifications (ibid)

Upon completion of a Master Applied programme students will achieve following competences:

- Knowledge and skills related to the coordination of work with children with developmental disabilities and approaches for encouraging creative expression
- Interpret evaluation data and be able to implement the implications for further work
- Critically observe and interpret the latest trends in the theory and practice of their profession, linking new scientific knowledge to the previously acquired and applying them in practice
- The ability to spot problems or the need for changes, plan changes, organise a team and provide adequate conditions for implementing changes, coordinate individual activities within the team, create an action plan and, based on objective possibilities, ensure the necessary conditions for its implementation
- Knowledge and skills of transforming and modelling content, activities and different strategies in order to construct an integrative curriculum
- Develop skills in conducting research projects and approaching the methodology of research, interpretation and conclusions; the ability to write and publish articles.

ECEC Teachers (*Vaspitač*) – Bachelor Academic programme

Competency specifications

Faculty of Education in Jagodina, University of Kragujevac (2020)

„The study programmes at the Faculty of Education of the University of Kragujevac, Jagodina are designed according to examples of good practice in European higher education institutions (following primarily the Finnish educational system, but also the Slovenian and Greek ones). The main goal of the study programme is to provide the necessary knowledge about modern theoretical concepts about childhood, learning and children's development in the early years and professional competences that will enable teachers to carry out high-quality educational work in preschool institutions."

General competence specifications (ibid)

The student:

- Knows and understands the theoretical achievements in the field of preschool education
- Develops skills and flexibility in the use of knowledge from the field of preschool education
- Is capable of solving specific educational problems using scientific methods and procedures
- Uses information and communication technologies to master the necessary professional knowledge
- Monitors and implements innovations from the profession.

ECEC Teachers (*Vaspitač*) – Master (academic programme)

Faculty of Education in Sombor, University of Novi Sad (2022)

The Master of Arts in Preschool Teacher Education study programme aims at providing students with extensive knowledge of relevant scientific and professional fields, as well as the implementation of contemporary didactic and teaching methodologies in their independent research and scientific work. They are aware of the need to master various modes of independent study and permanent professional development.

Competence specifications (ibid)

The general competences of ECEC Teachers include developing critical and self-critical thinking, analysis, synthesis and foreseeing solutions to any problem in the educational process, development of communicative skills and cooperation with the narrow social and international environment, as well as mastering the methods, procedures and processes of scientific and professional research.

The following general and subject-specific competences of the Master of Arts in Preschool Teacher Education result from the above mentioned objectives of this study programme:

- Ability to independently obtain knowledge and profoundly understand relevant concepts of the broader domain of didactic and teaching methodology sciences in the area of preschool education
- Ability to competently and rationally plan, create and successfully implement educational activities in an ECEC institution
- Ability to plan as a team and organise teaching methodology research (to generalise results and improve educational activities of an ECEC institution)
- Keeping up with and implementation of innovations in the area of didactic and teaching methodology science in solving educational problems in teach preschool children;
- Successful usage of contemporary IT in the process of education

– Establishing successful cooperation and communication with the environment of the ECEC institution (cooperation with parents in order to keep them well-informed and improve the level of the children's education culture).

Curricular areas

The credit system at the colleges and faculties conforms to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). One academic year corresponds to 60 ECTS credits. The study courses correspond to 3 – 14 ECTS credits, while the elective section of the study programme corresponds to 48 ECTS credits, which is 20% of the entire study programme. Study programmes consist of compulsory and elective subjects. The study programme contains subjects from the group of academic-general (approximately 15%), theoretical-methodological (approximately 20%), scientific and professional (approximately 35%) and professional-applicative (approximately 30%).

A total of 60 ECTS credits per year corresponds to the average total student engagement within the 40-hour working week during a school year. Student engagement consists of:

– Active classes (lectures, exercises, practica, seminars, practical lessons, mentoring, consultations, presentations, projects, etc.)
– Independent work
– Colloquium
– Exam
– Other forms of engagement in accordance with the general statutes of the College/Faculty (methodical and professional practice, publishing activity, etc.).

Approximately, 45% of the programmes are made up of lectures, 15% seminars, while 40% are allocated to practical experiences in ECEC settings. However, each faculty has its own study programme, with specific courses, learning outcomes, structures and quality criteria.

Table 9 presents a selection of curricular areas from the 16 higher education institutions in Serbia.

Table 9
Serbia: Curricular areas of relevant study programmes (selection)

	Group of courses
Bachelor applied studies	
Compulsory courses	**Academic General** General Pedagogy, Preschool Pedagogy, General Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Psychology of Childhood and Adolescence, Inclusive Pedagogy, Serbian Language and Communication, Children's Literature, Professional Identity, Philosophy, Foreign Language, Ethics, ICT in early education, Health Education, Physical and Medical Education, etc.
	Theoretical-Methodological Organisation and Structure of the Educational Process, Methodology of Pedagogy Research, Introduction to Scientific Work, Integrated Preschool Curriculum, Integrative Approach to Educational Content, Children`s Play, etc.
	Scientific, e.g., Artistic-professional Sociology of Childhood, Anthropology of Childhood, Visual Arts, Music Arts, Kinesiology, Drama in Education, Vocal-instrumental teaching, Orchestra, etc.
	Professional Applicative Methods of Arts Education, Methods of Speech Development, Methods of Introducing Environment, Methods of Music Education, Methods of Physical Education, Methods of Initial Mathematical Concepts, etc.
Elective subjects	Art workshop, Child and Computer, Visual Culture, Games Workshop, Drama Workshop, Preschool as an Open System, The Inclusion of Socially Deprived

	Group of courses
	Children, Pedagogic Documentation, Child Subculture, Team Work, Models of Preschool Teacher Professional Development, etc.
Bachelor academic studies	
Compulsory courses	**Academic General** General Pedagogy, General Psychology, Serbian Language and Communication, Foreign Language, Preschool Pedagogy, Developmental Psychology, Family Pedagogy, Inclusive Pedagogy, Philosophy, Health Education, Physical and Medical Education, Philosophy of education, etc.
	Theoretical-Methodological Pedagogy/ didactics, Theory of Education, Basics of Methodology of Pedagogical Research, Pedagogical Methodology, Research in Pedagogy, Action Research in Preschool Education, Methodology of Qualitative and Quantitative Pedagogical Research, etc.
	Scientific, e.g., Artistic-professional Sociology, Visual Arts, Music Arts, Kinesiology of a child, Drama in Education, Vocal-instrumental teaching, Orchestra, Vocal-instrumental practicum, etc.
	Professional Applicative Didactics of Art Activities, Preschool Didactic, Methods of Arts Education, Methods of Speech Development, Methods of Introducing Environment, Methods of Music Education, Methods of Physical Education, Methods of Initial Mathematical Concepts, etc.
Elective subjects	Ethics, ICT in Early Education, Media Education, Culture of Speech and Communication, Fundamentals of Natural Sciences and Ecology, Play and Dance, Puppet and Stage Art, Multimedia Techniques in Education, etc.
Specialist/Master Applied studies	
Compulsory courses	Educational work with children with developmental disorders, Observing Children's Development, Organisation and Structure of the Child's Play, Inclusion of Children in Need of Health Support, Methodology of Pedagogy Research, Introduction to Research Work, Methods of Arts Education, Methods of Speech Development, Methods of Introducing Environment, Methods of Music Education, Methods of Physical Education, Methods of Initial Mathematical Concepts, Specialist/Master Thesis, etc.
Elective subjects	Performing Arts with children, School Readiness, Self-evaluation and development planning in inclusive practice, Values of childhood, Corrective Gymnastics, Spatial Expression Capabilities of Preschool Children, Comparative Study of Education, Academic Writing, etc.
Master academic studies	
Compulsory courses	Theoretical Problems of Didactics, Comparative Approach to Methodology in Primary and Preschool Education, Methodology of scientific and technical research, The curriculum of preschool education, ICT in teaching, Foreign language learning, Methodology for the development of scientific and technical work, Contemporary methodology of preschool education, Research work, Master's thesis, etc.
Elective subjects	Selected thematic units on (adapted): Teaching methods of speech development, teaching Preschool Mathematics, methods of Presentation and Display, methodology of Music Teaching, methodology of Visual Arts Teaching, Academic Writing, methods of physical education, ICT as a Didactic Tool, etc.

Pedagogic-didactic approaches

Based on insights from the study programmes presented, we can conclude that there is a defined list of competences as isolated sets of knowledge, skills and attitudes and emphasis is on their accumulation. Competency acquisition is the individual responsibility of students and

subject teachers. Student assignments become more demanding during each year of study, but the competences to be developed remain more or less the same. This reflects the technocratic approach to the practice of education based on the discourse of competences based "on the division of theory and practice which involves the production of a professional knowledge corpus through theoretical considerations and research transmission of knowledge (through initial education and training) and then appliance in practice, which is seen as regulated and controlled on the basis of scientific evidence (evidence-based practice)" (Pavlović Breneselović 2014). However, competency should not be seen as the sum of isolated knowledge, skills and attitudes, but as praxieological theory built through a reflexive reconsideration of theory, practice, and interpretative framework in a given context. "The basis of competency is autonomy and critical reflection, so competency develops primarily through research of one's own practice, professional networking, collaborative actions in the practice, and not through external training by experts" (Pavlović Breneselović 2014).

Moreover, curricular areas of study programmes are structured according to the disciplinary model, which is not in line with contemporary approaches, theoretical settings and programmes of early childhood education based on a holistic approach to the child, integrated and situational learning aimed at promoting the well-being of the child (Krnjaja and Pavlović Breneselović 2013). Disciplinary knowledge is translated into curriculum subjects through educational outcomes and is not in line with competences defined for the whole study programme.

The content and methods (pedagogy) of the study programmes for the initial professional education of ECEC teachers in Serbia has not been aligned with the postulates of the professional roles of teachers, with the concept of the ECEC educational programme given in the ESD goals 2020 and in the National ECEC Curriculum Framework, according to which: the teacher is the creator and researcher of the programme; the curriculum is to be developed and evolved and not prescribed; the emphasis is placed on the openness of the ECEC setting to the local community and to families; the need to diversify the programme and the forms of ECEC is of primary interest (Baucal et al. 2016).

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Formal opportunities for moving up and across qualifications frameworks, as well as alternative pathways of entry into ECEC work, are not developed in Serbia. ECEC workers can continue their professional development by entering advanced formal education study routes or through life-long learning activities, without possibilities of changing their professional position or work-place.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Since the profession of an ECEC Teacher is a regulated profession, the minimum amount of field-based studies is set by law and has to be taken into account when drawing up the curriculum and in the accreditation process of the programme in general. The Law on Higher Education (LHE, Official Gazette 2021c – 2005 and amendments in 2008, 2010, 2012, 2017 and 2021) provides a legal basis for the full implementation of the Bologna Declaration and the Lisbon Convention. The curriculum of each higher education institution for each study programme is defined at the institutional level according to criteria for the accreditation of study programmes for teacher education.

The mandatory accreditation system for study programmes of colleges and faculties in Serbia is implemented by the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQAThe CAQA was formed in 2006 as an independent body of the National Council for Higher Education. It is the only formally recognised body responsible for the external quality assurance for higher education in Serbia. The CAQA carries out two types of evaluation processes: the accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes and the external quality control of higher education institutions (auditing). The CAQA prepares the standards for all evaluation processes (accreditation at institutional and study programme level, auditing, initial accreditation, and self-evaluation of HEIs) that have been adopted by the National Council for Higher Education.

The Law on Higher Education introduced the ECTS as the mandatory credit system to be used by all higher education institutions in all degree programmes, for both credit transfer and accumulation. The ECTS system is fully implemented in all HEIs. Every study programme contains a precise description of the courses and the number of ECTS. This is based on the student workload required to achieve the expected learning outcomes. Each methodology course has some classes directed to field-based learning (between 15 and 45 per semester).

There are two main forms of placement, which vary slightly according to the HEI:

- *Integrated practice* takes place throughout the three or four years under the supervision and monitoring of higher education teachers.
  Students are expected to be in an ECEC setting one day per week and undertake specific assignments (e.g. observation of different aspects of educational processes, analysing, visits, interviews)
- *Block practika* take place during each semester (from one to four weeks during the final year).

These placements in ECEC settings are organised as a separate course which takes place outside the regular teaching process. Students choose the setting for the practicum individually. The time they spend at the workplace is supervised and evaluated by an experienced teacher (mentor) in the ECEC setting and by higher education teachers at the college/faculty. The mentor is expected to support the work of the student through planning, preparing and evaluating the student's activities. Specific qualifications or working conditions for this position have not been developed. This mentoring role is taken on by motivated ECEC teachers who coach students voluntarily, i.e. without additional payment.

All students are obliged to provide documentation as defined in the course syllabus. The mentor is obliged to evaluate the quality of the student's practice through a written report. At the end of the practicum, the student hands in the various forms of documentation to the responsible higher education teacher, who checks whether all obligations have been fulfilled. This is the only formalised procedure of self-evaluation and evaluation of the student's practice. However, each higher education teachers can give the students special assignments connected with specific lectures or courses.

Despite the differences that exist in defining competences that students should develop during professional practice, common to all is to provide students with the practical application of acquired knowledge, skills, strategies and working methods related to the future occupation. Students are expected to:

- Carry out educational work in the ECEC setting independently (organise the physical and social environment, plan and perform activities with children)
- Demonstrate their ability to monitor and evaluate children's activities and well-being
- Apply the knowledge and skills acquired during their IPE-in an integrated way
- Develop a capacity for continuously evaluating and self-evaluating their own work and that of the teachers
- Demonstrate their sensitivity for children, parents, colleagues and other professionals who work in the ECEC setting.

Work placements are also part of some Specialist and Master applied and Master's academic study programmes. The main aim at this stage is for students to qualify themselves for independent working with specialist methodological knowledge and skills, as well as for the reflection and improvement of ECEC theory and practice. For example, at the Faculty of Education in Užice, University of Kragujevac (2020), during the second year of study, students spend 165 hours (4 weeks or 20 days) in an ECEC setting (6 ECTS credits). During the practicum, students are expected to develop the ability to:

- Implement activities in pre-school institutions independently and critically reflect on their own pedagogical practice
- Improve their own work based on the results of their own research and research of others
- Master the techniques and "tools" of further personal education and training using modern IT tools and
- Master academic writing skills.

It can be concluded that workplace-based learning in the IPE of core practitioners is not sufficiently defined in Serbia. This can be deduced from the low and unsynchronised number of ECTS credits allocated for this part of IPE, from the lack of formal procedures for organising and evaluating these processes, and from the lack of qualification requirements for field-based mentors, who are not well recognised and supported.

Based on some particular insights, available research and analyses, we can conclude the following:

- ECEC teacher education reflects the weaknesses of the education system in general in Serbia: it is based on decontextualised learning and on a division between theory and practice, where the emphasis is placed on acquiring theoretical knowledge instead of competency development. The research study entitled "Harmonization of Educational Programs for Educators in Western Balkans Countries" (Panić 2008) has confirmed insufficient levels of practicum in the study programmes for educators (from 10% to 15%), assessed as inadequate for the development of professional competences.
- The current structuring of the programmes of initial professional education according to a disciplinary model and teaching methodologies and the lack of integration of field-based experiences are not in compliance with contemporary approaches, theoretical postulates and programmes of preschool education based on a holistic approach and on integrated and situational learning aimed at strengthening the child's well-being and the development of learning dispositions.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

The Law on the Foundations of the Education System (2003) defined the system of professional development in Serbia for the first time (LFES, Official Gazette 2021g – 2003 with amendments in 2004 and 2009 with amendments in 2010, 2013 and 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021.). The Law also created an institutional framework for PD by establishing a Centre for Professional Development (CPD), which initially functioned as an independent institution. Through the amend-

ments of the LFES in 2004 it has now become an organisational unit of the Institute for Improvement of Education (IIE). Regional Centres still have an important place in the system of professional development.

PD reflects the concept of lifelong learning and the EU priorities relating to PD, Key Competences[6], and Education and Training 2020[7] (Eur-Lex 2016).

Under the Law, there are three main institutions that have the mandate to conceptualise and implement the system of professional development:

- MoE: Development of the regulatory framework
- Institute for Improvement in Education: Strengthening of the continuous competence improvement and professional development system of employees working in ECEC, elementary and secondary education
- Regional Centres: Investment in the delivery systems of CPD and other services.

The professional development system has the following main components:

- **Accreditation** of CPD activities and other skills-building interventions
- **Standards for teachers' licensing** which require teachers to participate in CPD activities
- A **mentoring system** to support newly-qualified teachers
- A **career advancement system**, which provides incentives for teachers to progress.

The framework for the CPD system is set up by the Rulebook on the Continuing Professional Development and Career Advancement of Teachers, Educators and Expert Associates (Official Gazette 2021d).

Main principles

- CPD is obligatory
- CPD is part of career advancement and personal development
- The teacher has autonomy in the planning of professional development
- The CPD system is market-oriented.

Main forms of CPD

(1) Professional training programmes

(2) Specialist meetings, such as: congresses, one-day meetings, conferences, counselling, symposia, roundtables, webinars

(3) Summer and winter schools

(4) Professional study trips.

The concept of professional development consists of professional training courses and career advancement to acquire a certain professional title: Pedagogical Counsellor, Independent Pedagogical Counsellor, Senior Pedagogical Counsellor and Superior Pedagogical Counsellor. Hence, the concept is reliant on the educators themselves and their "individual professionalism" (Hargreaves 2000). This concept sets professional development apart from the development of practice in an ECEC centre and apart from changes in the system shaped by educational policies.

[6] Key competences in the shape of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to each context are fundamental for each individual in a knowledge-based society. They provide added value for the labour market, social cohesion and active citizenship by offering flexibility and adaptability, satisfaction and motivation. Because they should be acquired by everyone, this recommendation proposes a reference tool for the European Union (EU) countries to ensure that these key competences are fully integrated into their strategies and infrastructures, particularly in the context of lifelong learning.

[7] "Education and Training 2020" (ET 2020) is a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (Eur-Lex 2009). It provides common strategic objectives for Member States, including a set of principles for achieving these objectives, as well as common working methods with priority areas for each periodic work cycle.

In general, there are no specific forms of CPD for different core practitioners and qualified co-workers (Nurses, Teachers, Expert associates, Associates). The forms for the qualified workers who do not have regular contact with children in the classrooms (such as Psychologists, Pedagogues, Social Workers etc.) are the same as those mentioned above. In many cases, CPD is provided for all of them at the same time, especially if the CPD activity is **workplace-based** and out of working hours. In the case of CPD activities outside the workplace, ECEC providers have to cope with certain problems regarding the replacement of staff during CPD attendance and the costs for travelling.

The Rulebook defines professional development as the "continuous development of competences of teachers, preschool teachers and expert associates to improve the quality of their work, the advancement of children's and students' development and the levels of students' outcomes" (Rulebook on Continuing Professional Development and Career Advancement of Teachers, Educators and Expert Associates, Official Gazette 2021d). This definition ignores the four pillars of professional development, which have been defined as: (1) Reflective practitioners who develop by and through continuously reflecting on their practices; (2) Professional development as part of the education system which is in a continuous state of transformation; (3) Professional development as the development of partnerships and different roles; (4) The ECEC centre as a learning community where professional development takes place and at the same time contributes to the development of the ECEC centre as a community (Krnjaja and Pavlović Breneselović 2013).

The Rulebook promotes formal CPD programmes, as these are the only kind which can award credit points. This means that ECEC Teachers and Expert Associates cannot earn points for any form of CPD which they undertake together with their colleagues within the context of their practice.

According to the Rulebook, compulsory CPD activities are defined in the first and second group of forms (see Main forms of CPD). Within a five-year period, an ECEC teacher is obliged to earn at least 100 points by participating in different CPD activities, out of which at least 80 points should be earned by completing accredited formal programmes Official Gazette 2021d). To fulfil this requirement, an ECEC teacher has the right to a 24-hour paid leave from work within a one-year period. According to the Rulebook, various forms of CPD at the ECEC centre are considered to be the duty of every ECEC teacher and Expert Associate within the 40-hour working week.

For the formal training programmes, quality criteria have been set out and the procedure of programme accreditation is carried out by the Institute for the Improvement of Education (IIE) in compliance with the Standards for In-service Training Programmes' Accreditation and issues a Programme Catalogue for teachers, ECEC teachers, expert associates and principals.

In accordance with the Rulebook, an ECEC Teacher cannot earn any points by undergoing forms of CPD focused on developing an ECEC setting into an open system and which emphasise the importance of reflective practice embedded in action research, projects, study visits, creating a pilot ECEC centre or developing innovative approaches in the ECEC settings. This means in effect that the Rulebook and the Programme Catalogue are not in compliance with the Law on Pre-school Education.

The Rulebook is also not in compliance with the concept of mentoring, envisaged as a stage in professional development, with a process which includes critical thinking about one's own work, or with developing partnerships and experience-based and reflexive learning. Transformation of the roles of the mentor and the inductee into work, which is a vital part of the mentoring concept, is not supported through the points system of CPD as set out in the Rulebook. It means that learning together with other colleagues is devalued.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

There are two main differences between ECEC Teachers and other teachers in Serbia. Firstly, the qualification requirement for primary and secondary school teachers is a Master's degree, whereas for ECEC Teachers it is a Bachelor's degree. Secondly, the salaries of teachers in schools are the same across the country, whereas the salaries of ECEC teachers are highly variable.

Traditionally and according to public perception, the social status of the ECEC Teachers' profession is ranked lower than that of the school teachers and professors. Teachers in schools (primary and secondary) are paid at a nationally agreed level, whereas ECEC Teachers are paid according to local regulations (because municipalities are responsible for ECEC in Serbia). This means that the source of salaries for teachers in schools is the national budget, while the sources of salaries for ECEC teachers are municipal budgets which fund the specific ECEC institution. In both Strategies of Education Development 2020 and 2030, the poor social standing and low economic status of the profession were pointed out as key issues producing additional ramifications on the quality of candidates interested in taking up this profession.

Provisions of the Law on Preschool Education lay down that the basis for salary calculations and payment in ECEC institutions cannot be lower than those for primary school education, but that they could be increased from the funds of the institution or of the local self-government unit. Since ECEC teachers' salaries are provided by the local self-government, substantial inequalities at the regional level mean that the net salaries of ECEC Teachers range from RSD 50,234 (approx. €428) to RSD 75,030 (approx. €640) (Infoplate Serbia 2023).

Pursuant to the Regulation on Coefficients for Calculation and Payment of Employees' Salaries in Public Services (Official Gazette 2021e), the Government prescribed the wage rates and coefficients for educational degree levels and jobs in ECEC in the same way as for the primary and secondary education teachers' professions.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

A full-time job in Serbia amounts to 40 hours per week. The structure of the working hours of teachers, expert associates and associates in ECEC institutions are regulated by the Law on the Foundations of the System of Education and bylaws. According to this law, within the framework of weekly full-time work, the pedagogical norm for ECEC teachers is 30 hours per week pedagogical and educational work and activities with children (75% of the working hours).

The structure and schedule of ECEC Teachers', Pedagogues' and Psychologists' obligations within the working week are determined by the institution in its annual work plan. 82% of teachers in ECEC settings across Serbia work full-time.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Pursuant to the LFES (Official Gazette 2021g), upon expiry of a minimum of one year and/or a maximum of two years of internship, teachers and expert associates employed in the ECEC institution or those who completed internship in the ECEC institution may take the license exam.

The Rulebook on Work Permits for Teachers, ECEC Teachers and Expert Associates (Official Gazette 2022) regulates the following: the work induction programme for ECEC Teachers and expert associates, the verification method and procedure for the candidate's mastering of the programme, the programme for acquiring the work permit (license), the licensing exam costs and the administrative authority before which the licensing exam is to be taken, the licensed teachers' register content and the method of register keeping for ECEC Teachers and expert associates and the license form.

A mentor is appointed to work with the trainee. A senior teacher or expert associate with the same degree and type of education as the intern, who has a license and one of the prescribed titles or at least five years of work experience in the field of education and training, can be appointed as a mentor by the director of the institution. The mentor introduces the trainee to the job by providing assistance in the preparation and implementation of educational work; by observing educational work for at least 12 hours during the internship; by analysing the educational work in order to monitor the trainee's progress; by providing assistance in preparation for checking the mastery of the programme (Official Gazette 2022).

Pursuant to the Rulebook, the licensing exam is taken before a commission of four members comprising a representative of the relevant higher education institution, two education advisors of the Ministry or an advisor-coordinator of the Institute for the Improvement of Education/Institute for Quality Evaluation of Education, or an advisor or expert associate and a person from the legal profession employed by the MoESTD. The exam comprises a written account of an activity with children in the case of a teacher or an essay in the case of an expert associate. It also includes an oral exam to verify the acquired knowledge, skills and capacities levels for independent educational work, the ability to cope with concrete situations in practice, as well as the candidate's knowledge of the relevant legislation in the field of education.

7.4 Non-contact time

As stated previously, acording to LFES, ECEC Teachers work in direct contact with children for 30 hours per week. The rest of the time (ten hours) is allocated for the planning, programming and evaluating of work, preparation, organisational and material resources, collaboration with parents and other participants of ECEC processes and for professional development.

7.5 Current staffing issues

Reliable national data regarding staff shortages, recruitment and the age distribution in the workforce are not available.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Even though the initial professional education (IPE) of teachers in the Western Balkans has gained importance in previous years and has been undergoing substantial reforms, colleges for ECEC Teacher Education in Serbia have not fully entered into these processes. As a result, this educational sector faces numerous challenges in aligning its study programmes to the European education area and is failing to introduce the necessary innovations in teaching methodology and practical learning. The sector is characterised by heterogeneous curricula and substantial differences in approaches to teaching methodology and training.

Policy reforms and initiatives relating to IPE

One fairly recent reform initiative was realised through the TEACH project *Harmonization of Pre-school Teacher Education Curricula in Serbia* 2013 – 2016, supported by the European Commission (EACEA) (VSS 2016). The TEACH project focused on the harmonisation of the IPE programmes of four colleges of applied studies for ECEC teacher education in Serbia. Specific project objectives were: to harmonise curricula and have them certified at all participating colleges through re-accreditation and the enrolment of a new student intake; to improve the transversal skills of teachers through the training of trainers and improve the teaching methodology and entrepreneurial competences of teachers through identifying learning outcomes and methods of achieving them.

In June 2021, the Government of Serbia adopted the Strategy for the Development of Education (SDE) in Serbia by 2030, which is a step towards the harmonisation of education policies with policies relating to science, technical and technological development in contemporary society. The SDE in Serbia 2030 has two general goals. The first refers to pre-university education, and the second to higher education:

- Increasing the quality of teaching and learning, equity and accessibility of pre-university education and upbringing, and strengthening the effectiveness of educational institutions
- Increasing the quality and improving the relevance and equity of higher education.

In 2021, the Law on the National Qualifications Framework was adopted. The National Qualifications Framework of Serbia (NQFS) has 8 levels and 4 sublevels and defines four qualification types:

- General basic education and secondary education
- Vocational education and adult education
- Academic higher education
- Vocational higher education.

The National Qualifications Framework enables the regulation of the system of qualifications in the Republic of Serbia for all levels and areas of education, thus achieving greater flexibility and accessibility, above all within different levels of education. Establishing a National Qualifications Framework ensured the comparability and recognition of qualifications obtained in the Republic of Serbia with those in other countries.

Despite this, more serious reforms of the initial professional education of ECEC Teachers have not been made. There is a need to reform the system and curricular framework for the IPE of ECEC teachers (both in structure and content) in accordance with contemporary approaches towards early childhood education, the profession of an ECEC Teacher, the practices in ECEC institutions and the ECEC programme. At the curricular level, changes in content and pedagogical approach in initial education of teachers need to be aligned with contemporary postulates on key competences of professionals in education for the 21st century (e.g. through practitioner inquiry and ongoing exchange, enhancing the capacity for self-evaluation as a continuous process of developing the quality of practice and not as a technical issue according to the model of external evaluation, transforming the culture of the preschool institution into a community of learning), as well as with contemporary understandings of childhood, children and learning.

Policy reforms and initiatives relating to ECEC staff

Piloting the new ECEC Curriculum Framework "The Years of Ascent" (2016 – 2018) (Official Gazette 2018a), conducted by the Institute of Pedagogy and Andragogy at Belgrade University, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the Institute for the Improvement the Education and UNICEF.

The project's objective was to improve the quality of early childhood education through the development of a new ECEC Curriculum Framework. It is being piloted in three ECEC settings (Novi Sad, Čačak, Zemun) with the following aims and stated outcomes:

- Developing and finalising the ECEC Curriculum Framework
- Developing training programmes for teachers and centre leaders regarding the implementation of the new curriculum
- Developing competence standards for ECEC Teachers
- Preparing guidelines for the implementation of "The Years of Ascent".

The initiative **Support to preschool education system reform – SUPER (2019 – 2021)** (Vlada Republike Serbije 2019) was commissioned by the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, implemented by Particip GmbH in a consortium with IB (Internationaler Bund), VBJK in Belgium and the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), and financed by EU funds.

The purpose of this project was to contribute to the reform of the ECEC system by providing support to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and Local Self Governments to develop ECEC as part of lifelong learning through planning and managing ECEC more effectively at the local level and implementing modem pedagogical approaches. The stated outcomes are:

- Strengthening the professional capacities of local governments to plan and manage early childhood education and care
- Strengthening the professional competences of ECEC staff for delivering high-quality and inclusive pre-primary education and
- Advancing the legislative framework in the field of early childhood education and care.

The Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care project (2019 – 2022) (MoESTD 2022) is being implemented by the Ministry of Education and financed from loan proceeds of the World Bank. The objective of the project is to improve access to quality early childhood education and care services for all children aged 3 to 6½ years, especially those from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The project is expected to directly benefit children aged 0 to 6½ years and their families, ECEC institutions, local communities (local self-governments, health care centres, social work centres, etc.), government institutions involved in preschool education and care, etc. Major components of the ECEC project are: Expanding the supply of available places; strengthening the quality of ECEC services; and supporting young children and families. The component on strengthening the quality of ECEC services is focused on enhancing the quality of the ECEC system, characterised by a holistic approach to supporting the learning, development and well-being of children. It comprises the following activities:

- Support to the implementation of the new ECEC Curriculum Framework
- Improvement of the initial professional education of ECEC Teachers, professional development and advancement opportunities for practitioners in ECEC settings, as well as the improvement of leadership competence in the settings
- Improvement of monitoring and evaluation, aimed at better informed data-based decision-making, including the improvement of the Education Management Information System (EMIS), of self-evaluation and external evaluation procedures, of technical assistance in developing a strategy for offering more diverse ECEC services and regulating them at the local level.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

There are three research institutes in Serbia primarily pursuing educational research: the Institute for Pedagogical Research in Belgrade[8], the Institute for Psychology at the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy, and the Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy at the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy. Research projects in the field of education are also implemented within the Department for Pedagogy of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Novi Sad, the Teacher Education Faculty in Užice, the Centre for Pedagogical Research at the Department for Pedagogy of the Faculty of Philosophy in Nis, and the Teacher Education Faculty in Belgrade.

However, there is no consolidated database on institutions and organisations conducting research in the field of ECEC, or a consolidated database on the projects implemented in this field. This is a consequence of a non-transparent system and the lack of a single ECEC portal; the weak recognition of developmental projects in the field of scientific research; the lack of transparency in the work of the research institutions; and insufficient networking among the research institutions and projects.

There are few research studies to report on that were conducted during the past five years. These first three studies therefore draw on slightly older research focusing on ECEC staff, whereas the three projects presented in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic are more recent.

Children as co-researchers in ECEC settings

***Source*:** Pavlović Breneselović 2015, conducted by the Institute of Pedagogy and Andragogy (see *References* for full details)

***Aims*:** To investigate children's perspectives on the quality of kindergarten practices and to develop a child-led perspective of quality.

***Procedure*:** A participatory research methodology that involved children as co-researchers using the Mosaic approach. The research relied on participative research techniques and involved 50 children (30 girls and 20 boys) aged 5–7 years from 30 ECEC centres in different regions of Serbia and in Belgrade (25 children from 11 Belgrade kindergarten and 25 from 19 kindergartens throughout Serbia).

***Selected results*:** The study presented a synthesis of kindergarten practice quality, taking into account data obtained through consulting with children, regarding kindergarten 'schoolification', segregation, child well-being and (non)differences. The study identified the school-oriented kindergarten practice both ideologically (kindergarten as preparation for school) and pedagogically (clear division of play and learning activities and reducing the understanding of learning to teaching). The analysis indicated that contemporary kindergarten practices do not sufficiently support any of the three dimensions of well-being (subjective, psychological and social) and illustrated gender stereotypes and gender typology as well as discriminative practice regarding both boys and girls.

***Implications*:** The study provides guidelines on quality development in ECEC setting practices through changes in the structural dimensions (group size, child/teacher ratio and space), through an enhanced curricular framework, through a change in the culture of the institution in

[8] Projects realised by the Institute for Pedagogical Research are predominantly focused on school education. There is no data on the Institute's web site on any projects implemented in the field of early childhood education and care.

the direction of a learning community, through strengthening child participation, through the joint participation of children and adults and through reflexive practice.

Mentorship as practitioner collaboration

***Source*:** Miškeljin 2016, conducted by the Institute of Pedagogy and Andragogy (see *References* for full details)

***Aims*:** Perceiving and understanding the perspective of the mentors involved in the project "Kindergarten without borders 2 – quality inclusive pre-school education in Serbia" at several levels: the practice of preschool upbringing and education, their role in the team in the ECEC institution and in the local community, their role in the programme and the project, and the given concept of mentors in the project.

***Procedure*:** Research methodology involved nine mentors using a focus group interview and a semi-structured questionnaire.

***Selected results*:** The study showed that mentors recognise a developed mentoring and support system for ECEC centres as important in the processes of introducing and initiating changes in everyday ECEC and developing quality.

***Implications*:** The conclusion states that it is necessary to change the concept of professional development in order to ensure support in the process of changing practices and developing quality in all dimensions of ECEC settings.

ECEC Teachers' perspectives on professional development

***Source*:** Pavlović-Breneselović, and Krnjaja 2012, conducted by the Institute of Pedagogy and Andragogy in partnership with the Serbian Association of Preschool Teachers (see *References* for full details)

***Aims*:** To analyse the perspective of educators on the practice of professional development from the point of view of a systemic approach and develop a model of transformation of the professional development system.

***Procedure*:** A survey technique using a questionnaire containing closed and open-ended questions and an assessment scale (total of 11 items). Questionnaires were filled out by 130 teachers from kindergartens throughout Serbia, randomly selected during student internships and at a professional meeting of ECEC teachers.

***Selected results*:** The study showed that the existing system of professional training (CPD) in Serbia has the characteristics of a mechanistic approach to the improvement of essential skills. It is being realised solely through seminars; it is detached from teachers' everyday practice; it is characterised by a patronising approach on the part of the experts; and it is detached from implementation and the improvement of practices.

***Implications*:** The existing system of professional training in Serbia has essential characteristics of the industrial model of training: implementation through seminars, separation from practice, expert patronage, individual responsibility and lack of connection with changing and improving the practice of kindergartens. The improvement of the system of professional training is a matter of comprehensively defining and establishing four mutually connected and conditional dimensions: (1) professional training, (2) professional progress, (3) improvement of practice and (4) education policies that promote a culture of change and development at the level of the entire education system. Proper professional development is not a matter of personal achievement – it is inseparable from improving kindergarten practice. It is possible only if change, development and improvement are the backbones of education policy in all segments.

Projects related to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak

In the midst of the global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade launched the research project “Humans and Society in Times of Crisis” in 2020 with the aim of examining the implications of the current crisis on various aspects of human life and different spheres of social reality. In addition, based on the consideration of crises that have occurred in the recent or distant past and in different social contexts, the aim of the project is to reflect on possible solutions to the current crisis and formulate visions of the so-called post-COVID society. The “times of crisis” in the project heading can thus equally represent time that has passed, the time in which we live, but also the time that awaits us. One of them – "Education in the time of the COVID-crisis: where we are and where to go next" (University of Belgrade 2021) – consists of 16 research papers authored by teachers and researchers of the Study Group for Pedagogy of the Faculty of Philosophy. It focuses on the field of education in the time of the COVID-19 crisis, a time that in a drastic way shows the sensitivity and vulnerability of education as a social practice, the weaknesses of existing educational systems and the limitations of institutional educational practices. At the same time, it has reanimated the awareness of the vital importance and potential of education that we count on precisely in times of crisis.

Regarding ECEC there are four significant research projects:

ECEC in the time of the corona virus crisis: physical isolation and the "tunnel effect"

***Source*:** Krnjaja 2021 (see *References* for full details)

***Aims*:** The paper analyses the attitude towards children in ECEC settings during the corona crisis.

***Procedure*:** Thematic analysis was used in the research conducted by 23 students of the third year of bachelor studies in Pedagogy together with their subject teacher, as part of the research student work on the subject Preschool Pedagogy during March and April 2021. The research collected various e-publications and materials in a digital form intended for children, which deal with the coronavirus and which were prepared or recommended by educators and professional associates: worksheets/picture books for children (5), manuals for children (2), a poster for children (1), songs written by educators (5), suggestions for games/experiments for parents and children to play together (3), stories written or recommended by educators (4) and video clips (3). In the study, e-publications for children were analysed: *Korona's playroom in the „Forest Villa”*, *The story of the shell and the butterfly: the coronavirus and me*, *Petra against the virus*, *Korona's picture book* and *The day when everything stopped*.

***Selected results*:** Incoherence and absence of conceptualisation regarding a consistent and correct interpretation of the term "coronavirus" were observed in four of the five analysed e-publications. In only one e-publication, the coronavirus is interpreted as "an invisible organism transmitted between people". In terms of the participation of teachers/authors, insufficient willingness was observed to share their feelings and experience with the child as participants in the community facing a problematic situation and then to provide protection and support for the child's safety. Only in one picture book are children instructed to strengthen self-regulation to feel safe. The participation of the teachers/author is dominantly accompanied by an advisory and didactic attitude towards the child.

***Implications*:** Facing the unexpected during the corona crisis in preschool education, we see the necessity of critically reviewing attitudes towards children and identifying ways to overcome perceived weaknesses. The culture of using e-publications requires a clear articulation of what we strive for in education and what we expect from the child.

Remote kindergarten in the time of the COVID-19 crisis from the children's perspective

***Source*:** Mitranić 2021 (see *References* for full details)

***Aims*:** To explore the children's perspective on the "remote" kindergarten during the corona pandemic through activities in which the children were engaged; peer relations; relations with the teacher.

***Procedure*:** Consultations with 13 children: 6 boys and 7 girls – aged 5–7 years, from different kindergartens and cities in Serbia, on the issues of activities that were realised through digital platforms in the specified period, the ways in which relationships with peers and kindergarten teachers were established and the suggestions that children would make for a possible transformation of work in a digital environment.

***Selected results*:** Most of the activities realised for the children were not meaningful – neither did they decide on the activities, nor did they find meaning and purpose in them. Even in certain activities that thematically touched on the pandemic situation (such as the lengthy "Everything will be fine"), children did not recognise the connection with life experience – with their environment, their understanding of the world and the current situation. By talking about the possibilities in the event of re-isolation, the children indicate the necessity of breaking out of established patterns and "quick solutions" when devising ways of working and the importance of creating, imagining, researching, and playing as experiences that they want to experience and share with us.

***Implications*:** The children's perspective of the "remote" kindergarten in the time of crisis shows us, again and again, the intertwining of actions with the question of the quality of relationships. In relationships with others, children create and express themselves and develop a sense of purpose and meaning. This research raises the following question: Is the lack of purpose and meaning that children show about the "remote" kindergarten experience mainly due to the lack of feedback and reactions from peers and adults and the absolute lack of dialogue about what we can do and why. From the conversation with the children, it is recognised that "it is not the same" when the peers and the teacher are not there – the kindergarten group is not just an organisational unit. It is a community and learns as such, living and transforming.

Approaches of educational policy to preschool education in times of crisis

***Source*:** Miškeljin 2021 (see *References* for full details)

***Aims*:** Starting from an understanding of early childhood education as a holistic process of care, education and support involving the development of individual potentials and achieving continuity of human culture and social progress, the paper analyses the policy approaches to preschool education during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of two key measures taken by education policymakers: closing and opening ECEC institutions.

***Procedure*:** In order to understand the approaches, as well as their variations in the design of immediate measures in relation to preschool education and education, the research focuses on looking at the broader European context through a cross-national presentation of educational policy measures for the prevention of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to preschool education in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany and Italy.

The criteria for selecting countries were: an integrated approach to ECEC, an approach based on the principles of equality and respect for diversity, unified jurisdiction for ECEC and availability of data on official websites. In the second part of the study, the educational policy approaches regarding preschool education and education during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis are analysed through the adopted measures of the educational policymakers in Serbia.

The approach in the research is based on the settings of the narrative analysis of the educational policy in a time of crisis concerning two key events: the closing and opening of preschool institutions.

***Selected results*:** In a cross-national presentation of educational policy measures in relation to the closure and opening of ECEC institutions, the following approaches are distinguished: equal opportunities and the right to preschool upbringing and education; caring for children of working parents; medical model of care; and accessibility. In adopting a set of recommendations and guidelines specifically intended for ECEC institutions, educational policymakers in Serbia, focusing on procedural issues such as disinfection of spaces, accessories and equipment, not using toys that cannot be washed and disinfected, delegated expertise to practitioners, which provided little help in deciding of the implementation of direct educational work in the changed circumstances caused by the current situation.

***Implications*:** Emphasising "lost learning opportunities" and the transmissive model of information and knowledge transfer, "a well-known and safe pedagogical format", leads to schooling, and not to promoting support, care for others, connection and "living together" as essential functions of early childhood education.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Based on the analyses presented, one of the key workforce challenges in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system in the Republic of Serbia is related to the great variety and confusion among different educational profiles and job titles of staff in ECEC. Furthermore, the discrepancy between educational practice on the one hand, and the initial professional education of future ECEC teachers on the other, shows that norms that are a measure of the relationship between theory and practice are expressed in diametrically opposite meanings, e.g. abstract or concrete, universal or specific, generalised or situational, true or unverifiable, objective or subjective, formal or informal, proven or possible (Korthagen 2010 cited in Krnjaja 2019). As presented in one research study (Krnjaja 2019), practitioners and students often feel they are not offered the theory they need to prepare for their practice and often seem unable to integrate the provided theory with their approach. Hence, the theory remains an incomprehensible language for them with no direct relation to their daily practice (Krnjaja 2019).

On that note, one more challenge is directly related to the above and refers to the guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of ECEC Teachers. This is an essential dimension of the professional development of both students and their teacher-mentors. It is an integral part of the practice of ECEC, where prospective teachers get to know their profession practically through active participation in various daily activities in the ECEC institution. However, this topic is insufficiently researched, and little is written about it in our professional and scientific community. Bearing in mind that quality in ECEC is seen as a system (Pavlović Breneselović 2014), the proposals could go in the direction of establishing a dialogue between the ECEC institution and the colleges/faculties in which they strive to build a joint, shared vision of the role of professional practice in the initial education of ECEC teachers.

As a final challenge, but by no means the least important, we would like to highlight the inertness and slowness in the process of transformation and harmonisation of the initial professional education of ECEC Teachers in accordance with contemporary approaches to preschool education and the profession of an ECEC Teacher as outlined in the ECEC Curriculum Framework ”Years of

Ascent" (Official Gazette 2018a) as well as in the Standards of competences of ECEC teachers and their professional development (Official Gazette 2018b).

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

SERBIA

Key Contextual Data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC provision are **nursery** (*jaslice*, 0–2), **kindergarten** (*dečji vrti,* 3–5½) and **preparatory pre-primary programme** (PPP, *pripremni predškolski program*, 5½–6)[1]. Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Serbia

1844	– First custodial institution for young children established in Subotica, Vojvodina – First Froebel-inspired 'playschool' opens in Subotica.
1891	The Child Protection Act includes 2 years of training for playschool educators in Hungary (to which Vojvodina belonged at the time).
1890	Goals and activities of playschools are officially defined for the first time in the "Guidebook of Serbian Religious Playschools". The focus is on preparing children for school entry (at age 7) and their physical development. However, playschools are still welfare institutions rather than educational ones.
1898	Under the National Schools Act, a Curriculum for Playschools was prescribed based on the Froebel and Montessori pedagogical concepts – playschools now have a mandate to prepare children between the ages of 5 and 7 for school through play and organised activities.
Up to 1914	Gradual expansion of playschools
1918 to 1945	Playschools become secular institutions and are no longer affiliated to the church.
1929	The Public Education Act – kindergartens become an integral part of the education system.
As from 1940	A one-year training for educators in the Serbian language is introduced and becomes obligatory.
1948	Regulations on the establishment of ECEC centres
1950	The magazine "The Pre-school Child" was established and published quarterly
1952	Rulebook for preschool institutions foresees two types of regulated institutions for children: (1) nursery settings involving daily attendance, and (2) pre-primary settings involving a half-day educational programme.
1957	Under The Republican Law on Kindergartens, the two types of preschool institutions are merged into one and renamed 'kindergartens'.
Post WWII	ECEC is influenced by the Soviet programmes and Soviet pedagogy, including Vygotsky's theories. Kindergartens become public (state) institutions.
1961/62	Pre-school Pedagogy is included as a scientific discipline at Belgrade University.
1970s and 1980s	Enrolment rates rise gradually.
1971	"The Pre-school Child" – a practice-oriented magazine – is reissued in a new format, now publishing scientific articles alongside more practical ones.
1972	The Early Education Act is adopted.
1974	The Child Protection System is introduced – Kindergartens develop into institutions providing support appropriate to the needs of families and children and are

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. The SEEPRO-3 editors have chosen the following age-inclusive format: **0–2** years for settings **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for pre-primary settings in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 (3, 4 and 5 year-olds). In the case of Serbia, these formats are **0–2** and **3–5½** years.

	defined as part of a unique system of child protection. The Early Education Act characterises a state and centrally regulated system both at the federal level of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and at the republic level of the former Serbian Republic (being one of the six republics of Yugoslavia).
1975	A new official programme for ECEC is launched, following on from those in 1952, 1959 and 1968, each introducing specific 'reforms'.
1976	The *Framework Programme on teaching and educating children in preschool institutions and preparing children aged 6 to 7 years for primary school* is adopted, which highlights, among other things, the importance of play in children's learning and development.
1979 – 1982	A detailed evaluation study called "Basic characteristics of development and educational processes in kindergartens in Serbia" is published, the first programme evaluation ever to be carried out in Yugoslavia. It was funded by the Self-Management Community of Interest of Child Care in Serbia, which at that time was in charge of the overall policy of social childcare. It represents the first official policy in the field to draw on scientific research.
1984 – 1996	Based on the results of the evaluation study, a series of projects on different aspects of ECEC are conducted. Kindergartens start to envisage the child as an active, interactive, creative person; addressing the needs of individual children is emphasised.
1992	The Act on the Social Care of Children is adopted.
1994	A *Framework Programme for the preschool education of children up to 3 years of age* is adopted
1996	A *Framework Programme for the preschool education of children from 3 to 7 years of age* is adopted, giving an official choice between two programmes: Model A (constructivist approach, the curriculum applied in an open system of teaching and education) and Model B (cognitive-developmental programme approach).
1999	ECEC comes under the jurisdiction of three national ministries: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Health.
2003	ECEC becomes part of the formal education system and now falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. The Education System Foundations Act places a focus on democratic principles, respect for children's rights, age equity, and protection against discrimination.
2005	A general strategy of 'Quality education for all' is introduced – but there is still a lack of understanding of the value of early childhood education.
2006	The preparatory preschool programme (PPP) becomes compulsory for all children and free if children participate in a daily 4-hour programme, in accordance with the amendments of the Education System Foundations Act.
2006	Revised *Framework Programme for preschool education* is adopted, divided into three interconnected units for (1) Children up to 3 years, (2) Children from 3 years up to the preparatory programme and (3) The Preparatory Preschool Programme.
2007	The 2-year professional education course for educators is extended to 3 years, with the option of completing an additional year for a specialisation.
2010	The Early Education Act is adopted with the goals of supporting overall child development, strengthening the educational role of families, creating equal access opportunities, and promoting democracy and openness.
2011	In the document 'Development and improvement of quality in pre-school, primary and general secondary and arts education – 2010-2020', quality assurance through standardisation and assessment are emphasised more than quality development.
2012	The 'Strategy for the development of education in Serbia up to 2020' aims to create good conditions for the well-being of all children before they enter school. The 'Policy on evaluation and self-evaluation of pre-school institutions' contributes towards improving setting quality.

2018	– The *Preschool Curriculum Framework 'Years of Ascent'* is adopted – founded on contemporary theoretical perspectives on childhood, early childhood learning and development, contemporary curriculum theories, cross-national analysis of ECEC curricular documents and examples of inspiring high-quality preschool education programmes worldwide. It defines the approaches necessary for early childhood education and care (see section on *Curricular Framework*). – *Guidelines of various pre-school education programmes* are updated to include current theories on education in (early) childhood and relevant international reports. – *Rulebook on Competence Standards for ECEC teachers* is adopted.
2019	Amendments to the Early Education Act are adopted.
2020	Amendments to the Education System Foundations Act are adopted.
2021	– 'Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia by 2030' is adopted. – Rulebook on competence standards for Expert Associates (specialist support staff) in preschool institutions adopted – Rulebook on programme of all forms of work of Expert Associates in preschool institutions adopted – Rulebook on conditions for realising educational programmes and other forms of work and services provided by the preschool institution adopted – Professional guidelines for the further development of preschool programmes adopted

Sources: Pešić et al. 2001; Stojanović et al. 2018; Eurydice 2023

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Serbian ECEC is organised as an integrated system[3] for children between 6 months and 6 years. Since 2003, overall steering policies for ECEC institutions (*predškolsko vaspitanje i obrazovanje*) come under the jurisdiction of the national Ministry of Education (*Ministarstvo prosvete*).

Local government authorities are responsible for the provision of ECEC services. Local government assemblies set up a network of state ECEC institutions according to the criteria specified in the Education System Foundations Act (*Zakon o osnovama sistema obrazovanja i vaspitanja,* Official Gazette 2021b). With regard to the organisation and implementation of educational activities, municipalities and ECEC institutions can also make their own decisions.

General objectives and legislative framework

The overarching goals of early childhood education are to support:

- The overall development and well-being of young children, by stimulating their potential and enhancing their experiences of and knowledge about themselves, others and the wider environment
- The upbringing role of the family
- Integration into society
- The development of children's potential as a crucial factor of individual and societal progress.

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Serbia provided orientation on legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

[3] Not, however, in terms of staffing requirements for work with under 3 year-olds and 3 to 6 year-olds.

The following principles of ECEC are referred to in legislation: availability, democracy, openness, a holistic approach, authenticity, development of various forms of ECEC provision (Bogovac 2018).

Based on the Education System Foundations Act (Official Gazette 2021b), the field of early childhood education is regulated mainly by the Early Education Act (*Zakon o predškolskom vaspitanju i obrazovanju*) (Official Gazette 2021a). The preparatory preschool programme (*pripremni predškolski program* – PPP), which has been compulsory since 2006/2007, is regulated by a by-law issued in 2006.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory enrolment age

There is no legal entitlement to a place in a nursery (from 6 months to 3 years of age) or kindergarten (from 2 to 5½ years of age). Attendance at both ECEC settings is voluntary, whereas the preparatory pre-primary programme (PPP) is compulsory for the year preceding primary school. Primary schooling begins at 7 years of age.

Main types of provision

"ECEC institutions" (*predškolska ustanova*) in Serbia offer **multi-purpose, integrated services** for young children and families. According to the Early Education Act, each ECEC institution has to provide education, care, social and health protection and a compensatory pre-primary programme. Besides early childhood education for different age groups of children (nurseries, kindergartens, pre-primary groups), nutrition, preventive health care and social protection of children are provided within the institution/settings. The specific options are determined by the needs of children and their parents, institutional capacities and resources provided by the local authorities. The umbrella term "ECEC institution" thus covers a wide range of facilities for young children and families with multiple functions These services are available in each municipality.

Local government in Serbia is realised within local government units (municipalities, cities and Belgrade city) (Vujadinović et al. 2016). ECEC institutions are public services established and founded by the government, province government or local self-government. However, they may also be founded by a separate legal entity or an individual and then have the status of private ECEC provision. One ECEC institution (*predškolska ustanova*) may include different numbers of ECEC settings with a minimum of 5 and up to 100 educational groups. The number of ECEC centres within one ECEC institution can differ (from one to more than twenty), depending on the number of preschool children, family needs and local resources. The early childhood settings (*dečji vrtić*) include:

Nurseries (*jaslice*) for children aged between 6 months and 3 years, who attend on a full-day or half-day basis. A full-day programme lasts between 9 – 12 hours per day; half-day programmes are open for up to 6 hours.

Kindergartens (*dečji vrtić*) for children from 3 to 5½ years of age, who also attend on a full-day or half-day basis.

Preparatory pre-primary programme (PPP – *pripremni predškolski program*): compulsory pre-primary groups for children in the year before starting primary school between 6½ and 7 years of age. In order to attend this programme, children must be at least 5½ years old. The programme lasts for a minimum of nine months for 4 hours a day and can be offered either in kindergartens or in schools. It aims to ease the transition between early childhood education

and primary school, to address socio-cultural differences among children, and to provide children with activities for enhancing their social and cognitive skills. In 2022, there were 1,749 groups offering a 4-hour/day programme and 1,796 offering a full-day programme (SORS 2023a).[4]

Private ECEC provision is available and is usually organised in settings with mixed-age groups, except for the pre-primary groups (PPPs). They include some Waldorf and Montessori settings.

In 2022, there were 461 ECEC institutions altogether, maintaining 2,835 facilities (2,417 public, 418 private) and 11,511 educational groups – a significant increase since 2005, when there were 289 ECEC institutions and 1,873 facilities (SORS 2023a, b).

There are no national statistics which differentiate between settings for under 3 year-olds and over 3 year-olds.

Provider structures

Most ECEC settings are public services; at the same time, there are also a number of facilities managed by private entities. Public services are established by the local governments. Private service providers of the compulsory preschool programme (PPP) must be accredited by the Ministry of Education.

In 2022, most children (88.1%, 201,885) attended public provision (SORS 2023b).

Although there are more private service providers than public ones, they maintain significantly fewer centre-based settings. The number of children attending public services is approximately 7,5 times larger than those attending private provision.

Recently, the number of private facilities has been increasing, also because of increased demand. In 2017, 172 private providers ran 203 ECEC settings attended by 11,078 children (Bogovac 2018). By 2022, numbers had increased to 298 private ECEC institutions, with 418 facilities attended by 27,145 children (see *Table 1*).

Table 1

Serbia: Number of centre-based settings and children enrolled by provider type, 2022

	ECEC institutions	Centre-based facilities	Children enrolled
Public	163	2,417	201,885
Private	298	418	27,145
Total	461	2,835	229,030

Sources: SORS 2023a, b

Participation rates in regulated provision

In 2022, 25.1% (57,478) of children under 3 years of age and 74.9% (171,552) of 3 to 6 year-olds attended an ECEC setting. Almost all children in the relevant age-group (97.3%, 62,958) attended the pre-school preparatory programme. More than half (59.5% in 2021) attended the full-day programme (SORS 2023b). In 2022, 6,983 children were unable to attend an ECEC setting due to a lack of places (SORS 2023a).

[4] All statistical indicators in this report refer to Serbia excluding Kosovo.

However, attendance rates vary greatly by children's backgrounds: in 2018, while 63.9% of children had access to early childhood education, this was the case for only 27% of children from rural areas, 9% from low-income families, and 6% of Roma children (UNICEF 2019).

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds, or children of single parents, are generally given priority for admission or their parents pay lower fees (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 61).

Table 2

Serbia: Number of children and attendance rate in ECEC settings by age, 2022

Age group	Number of children	Attendance rate, in %
6 months – under 2 years	25,977	25.1
2 to 3 year-olds	31,501	
3 to 4 year-olds	39,358	74.9
4 to 5 year-olds	41,476	
5 to 5.5 year-olds	29,016	
5.5 to 6.5 year-olds	58,116	97.3
6.5 to 7.5 year-olds	3,586	
Total	**229,030**	

Source: SORS 2023a, b

In 2021/22, over two thirds of children (68.1% – 152,296) attended an ECEC setting for more than 9 hours per day; only 7,425 (3.3%) children attended for less than 6 hours. 28.5% (63,719) attended a pre-primary programme; nearly 60% of these attended the fee-paying full-day programme (37,889, SORS 2023a, own calculations).

According to Eurostat data, in 2021, more than 80% of children under 3 years of age were not enrolled in an ECEC setting. Those enrolled usually attended for more than 30 hours per week. The share of children from the age of 3 until compulsory school age who do not attend a centre has decreased slightly over the last seven years, but still amounted to over 40% in 2021. In this age group, more than a third of children spend more than 30 hours a week in a centre (*Table 3*).

Table 3

Serbia: Participation rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2015 to 2021

Year	Weekly attendance rate	Under 3 year-olds, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2015	1 to 29 hours	2.0	19.7
	Over 30 hours	12.0	33.1
	No enrolment in ECEC	86.0	47.2
2021	1 to 29 hours	2.7	23.9
	Over 30 hours	15.3	34.5
	No enrolment in ECEC	82.0	41.7

Source: Eurostat 2023b

Financing and costs for parents

In 2017, 3.98% of the gross domestic product was spent on education, 0.65% on the ECEC sector (Eurydice 2023).

The funding model for ECEC institutions is decentralised and predominantly covered by the local self-governments. Full-day programmes in public ECEC services are usually funded up to 80% by the local government and up to 20% by parents. For children without parental care and children with disabilities, participation is covered by the national level and for children from materially deprived families, participation is covered by local self-government (LSG). The four-hour compulsory preparatory pre-primary programme is financed at the national level.

Private institutions do not receive state subsidies; they are financed solely through parental contributions, although there may be local government support for subsidising the costs of some private institutions in some local communities (e.g. Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš).

Parents pay income-related monthly fees for enrolment in public institutions ranging from 5,950 to 9,705 RSD (between 50 and 80 €). Participation in the full-day ECEC programme costs 7,770 RSD (65€). The cost for attending private ECEC settings ranges from €150 to €400 per month) (Eurydice 2023).

The compulsory pre-primary programme is free of charge.

Staff to child ratios and group size

The composition of the groups in the ECEC settings may be same-age or mixed-age – except in the pre-primary groups (PPP), which are only attended by children between 5½ and 6½ years of age. The number of groups depends on the number of children and is determined by the respective management and varies from 5 to more than 100 depending on the institution.

The maximum group size supervised by two qualified member of staff depends on the age composition of the children:

Table 4

Serbia: Maximum group size in ECEC settings by age

Age group	Maximum group size
6 months to 1 year	7
1 to 2 years	12
2 to 3 years	16
3 to 4 years	20
4 to 5½ years	24
5½ to 6½ years	26

Source: Eurydice 2023

Exceeding the group sizes by up to 20% is still in accordance with the law (Bogovac 2018).

In a regular group, the number of children with disabilities is limited to two. The total number of children in the group is then reduced by three children for each child with a disability.

Curricular framework

In Serbia, there has been a national-level curricular framework for ECEC settings since 1976. Educational activities in each ECEC centre are carried out in line with the national curricular framework. Children with special educational needs and disabilities are entitled to an Individual Education and Care Plan developed by the ECEC centre staff.

In 2018, a new conceptual framework for ECEC *(Years of Ascent – Pre-school Curriculum Framework*) was developed by the Institute of Pedagogy and Andragogy at the University of Belgrade, in cooperation with the Institute for Improvement of Education, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, and UNICEF (MoESTD 2018). The detailed document is structured in two main parts:

(1) 'Conception of the Preschool Curriculum Framework', which includes the underlying theoretical postulates and values, the overall educational goals and child-focused goals and

(2) 'From the Curriculum Framework to the Real Curriculum', which focuses on three areas central to developing the curriculum in practice: Supporting children's well-being (relationships, participation in different kinds of activities); contextual factors (physical environment and key persons – peers, family, community, teacher); and key teacher strategies (planning, teamwork, monitoring, documentation and evaluation).

The Framework is founded on theoretical postulates of socio-cultural theory, sociology of childhood and post-structuralism. These share the common perception of childhood as a visible social category and as being valuable *per se* and is based on the holistic idea that all children have unique abilities and equal rights to have their uniqueness recognised and acknowledged. Children are seen as competent individuals whose potential is nurtured through supportive and stimulating relationships with adults; as active participants in the community of peers and adults; and as creative and playful beings who are eager to learn. Whereas children were traditionally seen as "vulnerable and in need of protection" and the programme as "child-centred" or "educator-centred", the emphasis is now shifting towards a practice based on the quality of relationships and shared participation (Bogovac 2018; Krnjaja and Pavlović-Breneselović 2014). Based on a democratic and inclusive approach, education is understood as an integrated process of education and care embedded in each segment of joint cooperation between adults and children and an orientation towards long-term goals. The focus of evaluation is not primarily on the learning outcomes of the children, but rather on the quality of the key elements of the curricular framework.

The aims of the curriculum include ensuring that all children have equal opportunities for learning and development; feel accepted and safe; can build trusting and respectful relationships; develop basic skills for lifelong learning (e.g. curiosity, resilience, self-confidence, positive identity); and have the opportunity to explore a wide range of learning areas. Ensuring that families can actively participate, and that the well-being of all children is supported are two further aims.

Key specified competences for lifelong learning in ECEC include:

- Communication in the mother tongue (e.g. through early literacy)
- Communication in a foreign language (e.g. by embedding a foreign language in different activities)
- Mathematical, scientific and technological skills (e.g. by promoting logical thinking, encouraging exploration)
- Digital literacy
- Learning to learn (e.g. through reflective practice)
- Social and civic competences through the development of a sense of community
- Initiative and enterprise (e.g. through free play, support in problem solving)
- Cultural awareness and expression (e.g. by developing a cultural identity, encouraging expression of different ideas)-

Digital education

Digital literacy is included as a key competence in the newly developed Pre-school Curriculum Framework (*Years of Ascent*). It is seen to develop through a meaningful use of digital technologies as tools that empower children to access information, as a means for expression and representation, and for the documentation of different activities. Digital competence also includes developing an appropriate attitude towards the culture and use of digital technologies.

Monitoring – evaluation

In general, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the monitoring of educational institutions and supervises the work of the Institute for the Improvement of Education and the Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation, which are in charge of external evaluations of educational institutions.

Quality standards for ECEC centres were defined and adopted by the National Education Council. The role of the quality standards for ECEC centres in Serbia is to provide "an equal and objective assessment of the quality of work in ECEC centres and to enable high quality, consistent and effective implementation of the legal requirements" (Rulebook on evaluating the quality of the institution's work 2019, Official Gazette 2019). The quality framework in Serbia contains standards and indicators both for external and internal evaluation based on national quality standards, including four areas of evaluation, 15 standards and 64 indicators (Quality Standards of the Institution's Work 2018, Official Gazette 2018). In the recently issued Preschool Curriculum Framework *Years of Ascent* (MoESTD 2018), monitoring and evaluation in early education settings are referred to as the documentation and assessment of children's work. The quality of curriculum implementation is evaluated according to the following key dimensions: learning environment; quality of relationships; learning through participation; inclusion, diversity and democratic values; and cooperation with the family and the local community. Self-evaluation does not serve to assess the work of the ECEC Teachers or Expert Associates (specialist support staff), but instead, the data obtained in this way are the basis for a joint re-thinking and changing of practices (MoESTD 2018).

Child-related assessment

For ECEC programmes, there are no official regulations for formative or summative child-related assessment, and there are no specific recommendations for settings for under 3-year-olds. In settings for the 3 to 6-year-olds, the emphasis is not so much on children's performance but on a holistic understanding of their development and learning. "The purpose of monitoring children is not to assess their development capacities and achievements but to obtain a more complete understanding of children's development and learning and provide further support for their well-being" (Preschool Curriculum Framework Years of Ascent 2018, MoESTD 2018). The methods suggested are documenting observations, children's 'products', photos, picture books or video clips in the child's portfolio. Importance is placed on the children's own views and those of their parents.

Centre-level assessment

In Serbia, internal self-evaluation is strongly framed (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 128). Internal evaluation is required for all educational institutions as the results are used for external evaluation. It is carried out in predetermined intervals, in accordance with internal

educational institution plans. Self-evaluation standards and procedures are defined by the Ministry and other responsible bodies (Eurydice 2023). They include the following key dimensions: educational work, support to children and family; professional learning community; leadership and organisation.

Internal quality assurance is a continuous process of re-thinking and re-evaluation of current practices, of identifying ways for improvements, further development and management. It is performed each year for some areas of evaluation (specific areas in focus), while an overall quality assurance procedure (with all areas of evaluation included) is conducted every four to five years. The internal evaluation covers a whole set of inputs provided by the institution leadership, ECEC teachers, other staff, parents, children and the local community. The Internal Evaluation Team is in charge of the internal evaluation process (data collection, planning, reporting, etc.). Support to the Team is given by the district school authority and the Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation.

External evaluation

External evaluation is carried out through expert pedagogical supervision at least once every five years in cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation (Rulebook on evaluating the quality of the institution's work, 2019, Official Gazette 2019). In practice, external evaluation is done by members of the Institute who have been trained for external evaluation. All the areas of quality which are defined by quality standards for work of centres are evaluated and graded, ranging from 1–4. It is also prescribed that the centre should draw its Plan for Quality Improvement based on the external evaluation report it has received from the Institute (Baucal et al. 2016; Bogovac 2018).

Inclusion agenda

Children with disabilities have a right to enrolment in a regular ECEC setting, the right to an individual education plan and to the provision of additional support. Not more than two children with disabilities can be included in one ECEC group. In such a case, the regular group size of children is reduced by 3.

In some cases, ECEC centres have to cope with an insufficient number of expert associates compared with the number of groups and children. At the same time, ECEC teachers and specialist support staff are often insufficiently empowered to enact inclusive practices in the early years. There is a lack of instructional guidance for practitioners on social inclusion and for the early identification of developmental disorders and disabilities, of methodology for appropriate stimulation as well instructions on strengthening resilience in early childhood.

The inclusion of children from vulnerable populations (children with disabilities, children from migrant families, national minorities) needs to be increased in ECEC institutions and diversified programmes. Inclusive education in ECEC needs additional systemic and comprehensive efforts through inter-sectorial collaboration. It would be extremely important to develop institutional learning and professionalise the decision-making process at all levels of the system in order to meet the needs of different vulnerable groups of children and to provide sustainable impact on their development and learning in early years (Baucal et al. 2016).

Two recent policy initiatives will be presented below which have focused on improving the entire ECEC system, including the inclusion of children with special educational needs and disabilities.

The first is the "Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care" project launched in 2018 by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (Ministry of Education 2023). This policy initiative primarily seeks to improve equality of access to high quality early childhood education and care services for all children aged 3 to 6½ years, especially those from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. With 47 million euros, conditions are to be created through:

- Improving access to ECEC services for all children ages 3 to 5½ years, with a focus on the most disadvantaged ones, by increasing the supply of high-quality preschool places in at least 30 municipalities
- Enhancing the quality of an ECEC system characterised by a holistic approach towards supporting the learning, development and well-being of children through the implementation of the new Preschool Curriculum Framework
- Improving the initial education of ECEC teachers, professional development and career advancement of practitioners in ECEC institutions
- Improving the competences of principals in ECEC institutions
- Improving ECEC monitoring and evaluation.

Grants were awarded to at least 30 municipalities to be used for funding projects in the local communities aimed at improving coordination and cooperation among relevant actors in providing ECEC services.

The second (EU funded) policy initiative "Support to Preschool Education System Reform in Serbia – SUPER" was launched by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in 2019 (Government of the Republic of Serbia 2019). This project aims to improve the quality of inclusive preschool education in 50 local municipalities through improved access, in particular for vulnerable groups. Strategies include:

- Locally adapted action plans that respond to community needs, particularly to the needs of vulnerable groups
- Improving networking capacities to optimise the use of available resources
- Providing awareness-raising material to promote ECEC services, particularly to increase the inclusion of vulnerable groups
- Strengthening the professional competences of ECEC staff through appropriate CPD for ECEC Teachers and Expert Associates
- Harmonising the Preschool Curriculum Framework and the new bylaw for pedagogical documentation
- Capacity building for self-evaluation (recognised as a challenging issue in ECEC in Serbia)
- Developing the legislative framework in accordance with the new laws and Preschool Curriculum Framework.

Based on a systematic approach towards implementing the SUPER project, special attention was paid to ensuring internal and external coherence, synergy, and effectiveness to ensure sustainability. This was achieved through various synergy efforts. These included the implementation of the activities of the project "Inclusive early childhood education and care" and the EU-funded project "Equipment of ECEC facilities", as well as support of the curriculum implementation process This made it possible to provide furniture, IT equipment and didactic resources to all 50 institutions involved in the SUPER project, as well as to five institutions that were designated as cluster centres within the framework of the inclusion project.

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

Inclusive education has been actively pursued since 2010/11. The Education System Foundations Act (2003, last amended 2020) stipulates that there must be no discrimination or segregation,

that Individual Education Plans are drawn up and that children with special needs should be included in regular ECEC provision as far as possible. However, they may also attend a so-called development group if they can only receive the appropriate educational, health or social support there.

Children with a migration background – Children from Roma communities

According to the 2011 Census, Serbia is a relatively ethnically homogeneous society: ethnic Serbs accounted for 83% of the total population, while ethnic minorities included Hungarians (3.5%), Romani (2.1%) and Bosnians (2%) (OECD Library 2020).

Children from national minorities may attend pre-school and childcare settings in their national language or a dual-language setting.

In terms of legislation, there are no different categories for migrants and refugees in Serbia. After the refugee wave of 2015, persons from Syria constituted the largest group, followed by immigrants from Iraq and Afghanistan. Since the closure of the Balkan route, it is now primarily single men from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Algeria and Morocco who seek asylum in Serbia.

In September 2017, approximately 700 children from families with a migrant background started their schooling in Serbia, 130 of them in one of the 12 primary schools in the country capital, Belgrade (Feinstein International Center 2018).

There are no accessible data available regarding the number of children in ECEC settings with a non-Serbian background.

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Maternity leave (*porodiljsko odsustvo*) lasts 28 compulsory days before the birth and three months afterwards. This period is remunerated at 100% of the former average income on which social security contributions were paid during the 18 months prior to this period. The minimum pay is 39,866.67 RSD (€340.05).

A supplementary **Childcare leave** (*odsustvo sa rada radi nege deteta*) per family can be taken after the end of maternity leave for the first and second child for 8.2 months – it ends 365 days after the start of maternity leave. With the mother's consent, this time can also be transferred to the father, but it cannot be taken at the same time by both parents. Under special circumstances (long term illness of a child of a child needing special care), one parent may stop working or work part-time until the child is 5 years old. This time is compensated in the same way as Maternity leave or with salary compensation for hours not worked. Otherwise, an unpaid period can be taken until the child is 3 years old, during which time the health insurance, including the employer's payments, continues.

There is no legal entitlement for either **Paternity leave** or **Parental leave**.

In 2022, only 14 fathers received Maternity leave benefits and only 373 took the Supplementary childcare leave. Further statistical data on take-up is not available.

[5] The brief summary in this section is based on the country note for Serbia by Marian Pantelić in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Serbia

*Country expert assessment by **Lidija Miskelijn***[6]

The systemic approach that education policy in Serbia has adopted towards improving the ECEC system, as well as building inclusive early childhood education and care of high quality, has enormous potential in terms of sustainable education reform. At the same time, it carries challenges and risks because it requires coordinated action at all levels of the system. The concept of a competent ECEC system implies taking responsibility at every level of the system. Implementing shared responsibility would mean:

- Ensuring the coherence of reform initiatives and measures through coordination and harmonisation of all projects and activities in the field of early childhood education and care
- Focusing on strengthening the internal capacities of the ECEC institutions for ongoing development and change. This includes transforming the culture of the ECEC institution into a community of learning and establishing model centres of inspiring practices as centres of horizontal learning and dissemination.
- Focusing on the continuing professional development of practitioners, with an emphasis on strengthening the capacity for reflective practice; enhancing the capacity for self-evaluation as a continuous process of developing the quality of practice and not as a technical issue according to the model of external evaluation; harmonising the CPD programme offers with the contemporary approach and the Preschool Curriculum Framework.
- Reform of the initial education of ECEC Teachers (both in structure and content) in accordance with contemporary approaches towards early childhood education and care, the profession of an ECEC Teacher, institutional practices and programme.
- Ensuring the inter-departmental and inter-sectoral cooperation and coordination at the central (various ministries) and the local level (social protection, health care and employment) regarding ECEC, i.e. strengthening co-operation between the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government to act in line and to issue harmonised instructions to the Local Self-Governments regarding ECEC
- Ensuring coherency and coordination between the Ministry of Education with Local Self-Governments to align different relevant legal provisions (e.g. sanitary inspections, etc.) regarding ECEC as well as a coherent and regular communication between the Ministry of Education, the LSGs and the ECEC institutions to implement the policy priorities and reform initiatives set by the Ministry of Education.
- Focusing on strategic development and planning of the ECEC system at the local level: this would mean supporting LSGs to better plan their ECEC services and networks in terms of implementing different measures aimed at ensuring accessibility, equity and quality in ECEC as well as enhancing the overall responsibility of local self-governments regarding early childhood education and care (Pavlović-Breneselovic and Miskeljin 2021).

[6] Adapted from the Final Project Report –-- Support to preschool education system reform SUPER

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population of Serbia was 6,797,105. Over the last 20 years it has consistently decreased slightly (2000: 7,527,952; 2010: 7,306,677; 2020: 6,926,785) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average of the total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate in the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). With 1.52, Serbia is exactly on average (Eurostat 2023c)[7].

Children under 6 years of age

Table 5

Serbia: Children under 6 years of age according to age group, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under age 1	61,887
1 year-olds	61,367
2 year-olds	64,065
3 year-olds	63,623
4 year-olds	64,515
5 year-olds	64,313
0 to under 6 year-olds, total	**379,770**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

The share of children under 3 in the total population in 2022 was 2.8%, that of children under 6 5.6%. These proportions were approximately in line with the EU 27 average.

Table 6

Serbia: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population compared with EU average, 2000 to 2022, in %

	Comparison Serbia/EU	Under 3-year olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Serbien	2.8	3.2	6.0
	∅ EU15[8]	3.2	3.2	6.4

[7] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

[8] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

	Comparison Serbia/EU	Under 3-year olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2005	Serbien	3.1	2.9	6.0
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Serbien	2.8	2.8	5.6
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Serbien	2.8	2.8	5.6
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, over one third (35.1%) of households with children under 6 were couple households. Households with single parents accounted for only 0:6% – almost exclusively single mothers.

Table 7

Serbia: Households with children under age 6, 2022*

Household type	Total households	Share of total households, in %+
Households – total	811,400	
Couple households	284,400	35.1
Other types of households	522,000	64.3
Single households, total	5,000	0.62
Single households, women	4,500	0.55
Single households, men	500	0.06

Source: Eurostat 2023g, * own calculations.

Employment rates of parents with children under age 6

In Serbia, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 71% and for women 57.9% (Eurostat 2023e).

In 2022, 64.4% of women and 78.3% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Compared with the average of the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were thus below the EU-average (87.2%); those of mothers corresponded with the EU-average (63.6%) (Eurostat 2023d).

Table 8a

Serbia: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Serbia	43.6	72.0
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[9]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7

[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

	2022	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Serbia	64.4	78.3
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[10]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1

Source: Eurostat 2023d

For other SEEPRO-3 countries that, like Serbia, were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 8b:*

Table 8b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023d

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

***Rosstat. 2022. *Statistical annex SDG in Russia 2022.* https://eng.rosstat.gov.ru/sdg/report/document/70355;
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[+][SSSU] State Statistics Service of Ukraine. 2022*. Employed population in 2021, by age group, sex and place of residence.* https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2017/rp/eans/eanse/Archznsmve.htm

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[10] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[11]

In 2021, 23.9% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was above the EU27 average (23.5%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 28.4% (EU: 21.7%). In 2020, 10.3% of children under 6 and 8.8% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023e, f), and 8.2% of the children lived in extreme poverty (Eurochild 2021).

Single parent households and households with more than three children are at higher risk of poverty (41.6% and 51.9% respectively) (Eurochild 2021).

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[11] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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1. ECEC governance in the Slovak Republic

A split system characterises ECEC in Slovakia. Since 2017, the care and education of children up to 3 years of age (ISCED 01) has fallen within the remit of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family[1], which is responsible for the management and financing of childcare provision for this age group. "Childcare settings for children up to three years of age" (Act 448/2008, NR SR 2008b) are set up to reconcile work and family life. Alongside centre-based provision, more informal services may be arranged by a childcare provider in different settings: in the child's home, in the provider's home, in a setting organised by the parents' employer, or in a unit attached to a childcare centre. This social service is provided by municipalities, self-governing regions (VUC)[2] or natural persons.

ECEC for children aged three years and older (ISCED 02) is provided by kindergartens (Act 245/2008, NR SR 2008a), which come under the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. The Ministry of Education regulates legal measures, develops national education programmes, monitors quality and provides funding. Children aged 3 to 6 are admitted to kindergartens. If there is free capacity, 2 year-olds may also be admitted. A kindergarten may be established by a municipality, self-governing region, regional school administration office, state-recognised church or religious society, another legal entity or natural person, or central government authority.

Since September 2021 (Act 209/2019, NR SR 2019a), pre-primary education has been compulsory for all 5 year-old children, i.e. for those due to attend primary school one year later. The introduction of compulsory attendance means that ECEC providers have had to expand their capacities. Grants from European funds have been earmarked for this purpose (*Increasing the Capacity of Kindergarten Infrastructure*). However, capacity remains insufficient and many younger children are still unable to attend kindergarten.

Compulsory pre-primary education may also be provided during the transitional period from 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2024 in "*pre-primary education settings*" that are registered in the pre-primary education settings database administered by the Ministry of Education.

All kindergartens included in the Slovak Republic's network of schools and school settings are financed from tax revenues received by municipalities and self-governing regions (Act 371/2020, NR SR 2020).

[1] Nursery settings used to fall under the health portfolio, but were separated from the health system in the 1990s through reforms and legislative changes. Conditions for the management of nursery provision have not been adequately regulated in legislation for several years.

[2] The Slovak acronym VUC (*Vyšší Územný Celok*) stands for 'higher territorial units', a new administrative (legal) term enshrined in the Constitution which was created after the division of powers between the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic (formerly Czechoslovakia).

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Specific job categories are regulated by legislation for staff working directly with children in settings for under 3 year-olds (Act 40/2017, NR SR 2017) and for staff in kindergartens (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b).

Table 1 provides an overview of staff working in direct contact with children in these settings. The core practitioner (Kindergarten Teacher/Pre-primary Teacher) is also categorised according to one of five profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at the end of this section).

Table 1

Slovak Republic: Regular staff in ECEC settings in direct contact with children

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range[3]	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Kindergarten Teacher / Pre-primary Teacher *Učiteľ/ka materskej školy, Učiteľ/ka predprimárneho vzdelávania* *Profile*: Pre-primary Education Professional	*Materská škola* **Kindergarten** 3–5 years *Základná škola s materskou školou* **Primary school with kindergarten** 3–5 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility Kindergarten Head Deputy head of primary school	3–5 years	***Route 1*** 4 years upper secondary vocational school (*stredná pedagogická škola*) specialising in pedagogy *(pedagogická a sociálna akadémia; pedagogická a kultúrna akadémia)* *Award:* School leaving exam certificate with stated specialisation *(vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške)* ECTS credits: n/a[4] EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 354 ***Route 2*** School leaving exam certificate of general secondary or secondary vocational education *(vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške)*

[3] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In justified and professionally assessed cases, this may be 7 years of age in the Slovak Republic.

[4] n/a: not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range[3]	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				plus 2 years upper secondary studies specialising in pre-primary pedagogy (*stredná pedagogická škola, pedagogická a sociálna akadémia; pedagogická a kultúrna akadémia).* *Award:* School leaving exam certificate with stated specialisation (*vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške)* ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 454 ***Route 3:*** **Optional, not required** 3 years at university *Award:* Bachelor in Pre-primary and Primary School Education (can be followed up with MA and PhD) ECTS credits: 180 (BA) 120 (MA). 180 (PhD) EQF level: 6 (BA), 7 (MA), 8 (PhD) ISCED 2011: 655 (BA), 767 (MA), 864 (PhD)
Kindergarten Teacher / Pre-primary Teacher for children with special educational needs *Učiteľ/ka materskej školy pre deti so špeciálnymi výchovno-vzdelávacími potrebami* *Profile*: Pre-primary Education Professional (Special Needs)	*Špeciálna materská škola* **Kindergarten for children with special educational needs** 3–5 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility Centre leader (principal, head) of kindergarten for children with special educational needs	3–5 years	4 years upper secondary vocational school specialising in pedagogy ***plus*** 2 years upper secondary study in special pedagogy *Award:* Certificate of Final Examination (*vysvedčenie o záverečnej skúške)* ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 454

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range[3]	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Childcare Worker, Caregiver *Opatrovateľ/ka* *Profile:* Social Care/ Health Care Professional	*Zariadenie starostlivosti o deti do troch rokov veku dieťaťa* **Childcare settings for children up to 3 years of age**	Core practitioner	0–2 years (social service) 0–5 years *Note:* Since the beginning of 2017, facilities that provide care for under 3 year-olds and at the same time for children up to 6 years of age (if these make up at least 75% of the total number) are no longer considered to be a social service.	***Route 1*** Completed upper secondary vocational education specialising in preschool pedagogy or in health and care *Award:* School leaving exam certificate with stated specialisation *(vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške)* ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 354 ***Route 2*** Completed general secondary education with school leaving exam certificate *(vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške)* **plus** 220 hours accredited course for Childcare Workers *Award:* Certificate of course completion ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 344 or 454
Teaching Assistant *Assistant učiteľa*	*Materská škola* **Kindergarten** 3–5 years *Základná škola s materskou školou* **Primary school with kindergarten** 3–5 years *Špeciálna materská škola* **Kindergarten for children with special needs** 3–5 years	Qualified co-worker	3–5 years	***Route 1*** 4 years upper secondary vocational education (without pedagogical specialisation) ECTS credits: n/a EQF: Level 4 ISCED 2011: 354 ***Route 2*** **Optional, not required** 3-year university study programme *Award:* Bachelor

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range[3]	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Assistant Educator *Pomocný vychovávatel**	*Materská škola* **Kindergarten** 3–5 years *Základná škola s materskou školou*, **Primary school with indergarten** 3–5 years *Špeciálna materská škola* **Kindergarten for children with special needs** 3–5 years	Qualified co-worker, Non-teaching staff	3–5 years	Completed secondary education, including lower secondary vocational education (without pedagogical specialisation) ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 354
Health Professional *Zdravotnícky asistent*	*Materská škola* **Kindergarten** 3–5 years *Základná škola s materskou školou*, **Primary school with indergarten** 3–5 years *Špeciálna materská škola* **Kindergarten for children with special needs** 3–5 years	Qualified co-worker, Non-teaching staff	3–5 years	Completed secondary education, including lower secondary vocational education with health specialisation (without pedagogical specialisation) *Award:* School leaving exam certificate with stated specialisation *(vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške)* ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 354

*The same qualification requirements apply to Health Professionals.

Childcare sector

According to relevant legislation, the main duties of **Childcare Workers** in settings for children up to 3 years of age are: Providing a service to support the reconciliation of family and work life for children´s parents; supporting physical and intellectual development in the child´s best interests; performing specialist activities in the scope of social services established by law appropriate to the child´s age and health condition, individual needs and abilities; developing a child's abilities and personal characteristics and guiding them in their upbringing and socialisation. They

cooperate in education and care for children with their parents or legal representatives (Act 448/2008, NR SR 2008b).

Education sector

Kindergarten Teachers provide education according to the kindergarten curriculum and are responsible for the quality of that process. They support the all-round personal development of children, develop their abilities and skills for life, and provide specific guidance in accordance with the child's individual and age-related characteristics (Act 245/2008, NR SR 2008a). They work on the basis of current scientific knowledge, values and goals of education. They direct and evaluate education, and provide counselling and specialist assistance related to education (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b).

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Childcare sector

In **ECEC settings for children up to the age of 3**, statutory representatives (service providers) are required to have a Level 2 university education, as they are providing social services in a group setting where proper operating conditions have to be ensured. These include sufficient staffing, materials, technical equipment and financing; moreover, they are responsible for the safety, protection and appropriate care of children, while unconditionally respecting their rights. For persons who were working in existing settings up to the end of February 2017, a full secondary general or vocational education is sufficient as a qualification requirement (Act 448/2008, NR SR 2008b). Centre Leaders coordinate the provision of ECEC to children up to three years of age according to the children´s needs and the conditions of the setting. In doing so, they have to comply with legislation issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Family and the Ministry of Health that governs the organisation and conditions for children's activities and protects their health and safety.

Education sector

Centre Leaders or head teachers in **kindergartens** (from now on referred to as Kindergarten Heads) have to meet the following requirements (§ 39 [3] Act 138/2019b):

– They must have the qualifications needed for the relevant teaching or specialist category and subcategory, the minimum being a full secondary vocational education (Decree 1/2020 MŠVVŠ SR 2020).

- They must fulfil the conditions to be classified at the career level of an independent teacher or independent specialist[5] (§ 29 Act 138/2019b) (see Table 7 for a breakdown of career levels).
- They must fulfil the conditions for acquiring the professional competences necessary to be employed in senior teaching staff or senior specialist staff positions.

Formal training for a Kindergarten Head's position is designed to develop professional senior teaching staff and/or senior specialist staff competences (§ 47 Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b). On its website, the Ministry of Education publishes a list of professional development providers of courses designed to qualify teachers for managerial functions (www.minedu.sk). The list may include:

- Universities offering school management study programmes
- Methodology and pedagogy centres
- Catholic methodology and pedagogy centres
- Registered churches or religious societies that have founded centres.

Professional development courses for designated posts or functions are organised for a duration of at least 220 hours. The programme is structured as a basic module and extension modules. Applicants must complete the basic module before they can take up a position as a Kindergarten Head. The extension modules may be completed no later than five years after taking up the position. The professional development programme ends with the defence of a final thesis and passing a final examination before a three-member board appointed by the provider's statutory body. Graduates receive a certificate of completed education for managerial functions. Transitional provisions applied until the end of 2022 (§ 89 Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b), during which successful completion of the basic module was not required.

Another requirement for applying to be a Kindergarten Head is at least five years' teaching experience. Applicants are also required to meet the conditions of integrity, medical fitness and have to be proficient in the Slovak language (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b). The Kindergarten Head is appointed by the founding entity, who also sets out employment conditions for the term of the position and determines salary conditions. A Kindergarten Head's term of employment is usually five years. The founding entity can also dismiss the head of a kindergarten.

Kindergarten Heads are responsible for the management of the setting, handling both administrative and pedagogical tasks. Their job description can be divided into several areas. Duties in the area of **management and organisation** include supervising compliance with legislation related to school funding regulations, children's health, occupational safety and other activities. They are responsible for both teaching and non-teaching staff involved in the running of the kindergarten. Kindergarten Heads are obliged to create appropriate personnel, material and social conditions for their employees. They supervise all employees and evaluate the results of their work, analysing the educational work of employees through their own observations and on the basis of inspections and reports from representatives (if any). These are discussed with the employee concerned and conclusions are drawn about the employee's further activities.

In the **education process**, Kindergarten Heads are responsible for the admission of children to kindergarten and for creating the appropriate conditions for their education and learning. They

[5] Of the four career levels in the Slovak Republic, **newly qualified** staff (teachers or specialist staff, first level) are all graduates who are starting their careers and carry out their work under the supervision of the service provider. An **independent teacher** (second level) has successfully completed adaptation education or has practised for at least two years in an educational facility abroad or in Slovakia. This employee can carry out his/her work independently. The third and fourth career levels comprise teaching or specialist staff with **1st or 2nd certification** respectively.

ensure that educational activities are carried out in accordance with the national curriculum (State Pedagogical Institute 2016). On the basis of its principles and objectives, they develop, in cooperation with other teaching staff, a centre-specific curriculum that takes into account the kindergarten's local conditions. Kindergarten Heads constantly strive to raise the level of education the kindergartens provide, motivate teaching staff to seek further education and coordinate projects within the setting. They create conditions for providing education opportunities for children with special needs.

Kindergarten Heads are responsible in the area of **management and handling the kindergarten budget** for the efficient and effective use of budgeted funds. They are responsible for the appropriate management of property administered by the kindergarten setting. Depending on whether the kindergarten has legal subjectivity status[6] or not, Kindergarten Heads also require a certain degree of economic and legal competence when working with the founding entity (service provider).

Kindergarten Heads also **work directly with children on a regular basis**. Direct teaching time depends on the number of groups the kindergarten has (*Table 2*). In ECEC, hours are defined as 60 minutes, whereas at all other school levels, an hour is defined as 45 minutes (Government Regulation 201 /2019, Government of the Slovak Republic 2019).

Table 2

Slovak Republic: Kindergarten Heads' direct working hours with children according to the number of kindergarten classes

Type of setting	Number of kindergarten classes	Hours of direct work with children per week
Kindergarten	1	23
	2	20
Kindergarten for children with special educational needs	3 – 4	17
	5 – 6	14
	7 – 10	12
	11 – 12	10
	13 – 14	9
	15 – 16	8
	17 – 18	7
	19 or more	6

Source: Annex 6 to Government Regulation 201/2019 (Government of the Slovak Republic 2019)

Kindergartens with four or more classes/groups also have a designated **Deputy Kindergarten Head** position (Decree 541/2021, MŠVVŠ SR 2021b). While the appointment and dismissal of Kindergarten Heads are covered in education legislation, there are no provisions in the case of Deputy Kindergarten Heads. This position is created by the kindergarten itself and governed by generally binding labour legislation.

Kindergarten management is the lowest level of management in education. The way a kindergarten is managed depends largely on the personality and approach of the Kindergarten Head. Although the Kindergarten Head is hierarchically at the top of the organisational structure, kindergarten management can take on various features. In practice, democratic, liberal and authoritarian management styles can be observed. The choice of a particular style also depends on

[6] These are mainly state-owned kindergartens which have extended competences defined by the founder in the field of legal, labour and economic management.

how the school's staff is structured, their level of maturity and acquired professional competences. The professional development modules for senior teaching staff (mentioned earlier) also focus on staff management and team leadership.

The two bodies advising a Kindergarten Head – the Pedagogical Council and the Methodological Circle (see *Chapter **2.3***) – provide a basis for ensuring that the kindergarten is managed democratically (§ 2 Decree 541/2021, MŠVVŠ SR 2021b). The School Council as a self-governing body consisting of representatives of the service provider, legal representatives of children (parents, legal guardians), and the staff of the kindergarten also contributes to democratic governance. These three advisory bodies are described in more detail in the next section.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

There are a number of designated posts of responsibility in Slovak kindergartens (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b). They include the following focus areas:

Class leaders: There are usually two teachers in each kindergarten class, both teachers are fully qualified practitioners, but only one of them is designated by the kindergarten head as the **class teacher**. Each kindergarten class has its own class teacher. One teacher cannot be the class teacher for more than one class. Teachers may rotate in this role. They receive a supplement for this function. The *class* teacher is responsible for teaching and coordinating activities in the respective kindergarten class/group. Tasks include keeping pedagogical records and creating conditions for the development of positive relationships among the children and between children and staff. The class teacher also cooperates in an advisory role with legal representatives and with other teaching and specialist staff.

Induction of newly qualified staff: The person responsible for supervising the probationary period of newly qualified staff may be an induction teaching staff member or a *specialist staff member for induction.* Induction into practice cannot be made across professions, only within the scope of one's own qualification (teacher to teacher, special educator to special educator, school psychologist to school psychologist, and so on). The induction person provides an assessment at the end of the period detailing the extent to which the newly qualified member of staff has acquired the necessary professional competences.

Supporting children from socially disadvantaged milieus: The kindergarten *specialist in education* provides educational activities for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. They guide colleagues in helping and assisting these children, obtaining the necessary information in this area. They also organise the training of kindergarten core practitioners.

Sport: The *specialist in sport* supports the development of children's sports skills and the basic acquisition of a particular type of sport in accordance with the kindergarten curriculum. The position is occupied by a teaching staff member who meets the qualification requirements for teaching physical education and sport, has completed specialised training in the relevant sport or has acquired professional competence in the relevant field according to a special regulation.

***Team support*:** The *support team coordinator* coordinates staff activities; supports cooperation of teaching and specialist staff with legal representatives and employees of counselling and prevention facilities; plans individual and group activities for children for the kindergarten support team to implement, evaluates their effectiveness and ensures and assesses interaction between members of the kindergarten support team and other teaching staff.

Digital education: The digital coordinator provides advice and expert assistance in introducing new digital methods in the work with children, gives feedback to staff on the application and use of digital tools in education, and provides training in the use of digital content or forms of work with digital content.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

The pedagogical work in kindergartens is coordinated and related tasks are distributed according to continuously updated guidelines from the Ministry of Education. They respond to societal needs and issues, such as measures during the COVID-19 pandemic and currently the refugee crisis resulting from the war in Ukraine. The development of inclusive practices is also topical. It is in these areas that internal advisory boards are helpful for the decision-making of the Kindergarten Head, and each kindergarten has these boards of collective responsibility.

Three examples of internally coordinated activities:

1. **Pedagogical Council**: Members include all the teaching staff working in the setting. The council discusses both educational and organisational matters, such as proposals related to improving the quality of the kindergarten, reflecting on the current demands of parents and the community. All staff have the opportunity to shape the mission of the kindergarten and participate in the development of its curriculum and project plans. They may also comment on management issues and staff assessments (Decree 541/2021, MŠVVŠ SR 2021b).
2. **Methodological Circle:** This is established if the kindergarten has at least two classes. It comprises all teaching and specialist support staff and is led by a teacher with at least five years of teaching experience. The methodological circle focuses primarily on didactic issues of working with young children. It focuses on opportunities for innovation and also on developing professional competences among the staff. At joint meetings, the head of the circle coordinates activities so that staff can develop their knowledge and skills in a wide range of areas to meet current needs. Areas for improvement are diverse and include promoting inclusive education, strategies for working with children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, developing pre-reading literacy, strengthening media literacy, communicating with parents, counselling and prevention, providing constructive feedback, and formative assessment. If a methodological circle cannot be established, the Pedagogical Council discusses such pedagogical and didactic issues (Decree 541/2021, MŠVVŠ SR 2021b).
3. **Kindergarten Council:** A Kindergarten Council is established in each setting as an initiative-taking, advisory and self-governing body which promotes the public interests of the children, their parents, teachers and other kindergarten staff. Consisting of 5–11 members, neither the Kindergarten Head nor the Deputy Kindergarten Head can be on the council. The council publicly scrutinises the kindergarten's activities, commenting on them and on the service provider's activities in terms of kindergarten-specific issues. It comments on both the setting's conceptual plans and on possible closure of the setting. The greatest power vested in the Kindergarten Council is the election and petitioning for the removal of the Kindergarten Head (Act 596/2003, NR SR 2003; Decree 291/2004, Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic 2004).

External specialised coordination activities support and improve the educational process for children and staff. They are provided by institutions and facilities established by the Ministry of Education. The National Institute of Education and Youth, established on 1st of July 2022, unites into one entity several institutions, including: the *National Institute for Education in Bratislava* (www.statpedu.sk) and *The Methodology and Pedagogy Centre* in Bratislava with branches across Slovakia (www.mpc-edu.sk). Support is also provided by counselling and prevention facilities (Decree 24/2022, MŠVVŠ SR 2022). For many years, Slovak kindergartens cooperated primarily with the *Centre for Counselling and Prevention*, which provides comprehensive psychological, special educational, diagnostic, educational, counselling and preventive care for children and youth throughout the Slovak Republic. Kindergartens mainly use the centre's counselling

services, while specialist support staff, such as speech therapists, are invited to regular speech therapy screenings to identify and correct speech problems of kindergarten children as early as possible.

The State School Inspectorate inspects the pedagogical management at the national level (www.ssi.sk). It monitors the quality of education, including the inspection of compliance with binding legal regulations, and it inspects the spatial conditions and material equipment of the setting and the professional development of teaching staff. The SSI contributes to the external evaluation of the education system. Its remit also includes providing counselling and expertise in remedying identified deficiencies.

2.5 Specialist support staff

In **ECEC settings for children up to the age of three**, Centre Leaders recruit specialist support staff depending on the services they decide to provide for children.

Other specialist staff who may work in **kindergartens** include the following (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b), although it must be said that they are more likely to work in schools than in kindergartens. A team comprising all the listed professional staff is the exception rather than the rule. However, if some of these staff do work in a kindergarten, their activities are coordinated by the pedagogical or professional staff member supervised by the Kindergarten Head.

Psychologist (§ 24 [1]): This position is tied only to counselling centres, the psychologist is not part of the kindergarten staff. Psychologists diagnose psychological issues in special educational settings, school educational counselling and prevention or social assistance settings; provide individual or group psychological counselling, prevention and intervention to children and pupils with a focus on education; and provide psychological counselling to legal representatives, teaching and specialist staff and families.

School Special Pedagogue (§ 21 [3]): These specialist support staff carry out diagnostic activities; provide special educational interventions to children in kindergarten; provide professional advice and consultation to children, parents and pedagogical staff; contribute to the creation of the child's individual learning programme; carry out direct educational activities and cooperate with professionals from the centres of counselling and prevention.

Kindergarten Psychologist (§ 24 [2]): Diagnoses psychological issues in kindergartens and ECEC settings apart from school educational counselling and prevention settings; provides individual, or group psychological counselling, prevention and intervention to children and pupils with a focus on education; provides psychological counselling to legal representatives, teaching staff and specialist staff; works to overcome barriers in education and upbringing of children.

Special Education Pedagogue (§ 25 [1]): Diagnoses psychological issues in a special educational setting, school educational counselling, prevention or social assistance setting; engages in special education diagnostics and provides individual or group counselling and intervention to children and pupils with special educational needs and to children with developmental risks; provides curative education for children with learning and behavioural disorders; and provides special pedagogical counselling to legal representatives, teaching staff and specialist staff. He/she is not an employee of the kindergarten, but of the counselling centre.

Special Education Field Pedagogue (§ 25 [2]): These specialist support staff are not employed by the kindergarten but by the counselling centre. They make regular visits to education institutions in the region and may also visit children in the home environment. They engage in special pedagogical, diagnostic, counselling, preventive, educational and methodical activities for children with disabilities; in methodological activities; and provide consultations and special pedagogical counselling to legal representatives.

Speech Therapist and School Speech Therapist (§ 27 [1]): Diagnoses speech therapy issues, provides intervention and counselling to children and pupils with impaired communication skills, and provides speech therapy counselling to legal representatives, teaching staff and specialist staff.

Therapeutic Pedagogue (§ 27 [2]): Provides therapeutic educational assistance to children and pupils with at-risk psychological, emotional or social development and behavioural disorders, as well as therapeutic educational assistance and counselling to legal representatives, teaching staff and specialist staff.

Social Pedagogue (§ 27 [3]): Engages in preventive activities; provides counselling and intervention with a focus on children and pupils with at-risk behaviour, at risk of socio-pathological phenomena and from socially disadvantaged backgrounds; provides counselling to legal representatives, teaching staff and specialist staff; diagnoses socio-pedagogical issues in the environment and of relationships; raises awareness and engages in other socio-economical activities.

An amendment to the Education Act approved by the National Assembly in May 2023 provides for the introduction of a new position in schools, that of a **Social Worker**. The role of the Social Worker will be to support children and parents in disadvantaged/precarious social situations.

3. Structural composition of the ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Childcare sector

Childcare Workers comprise the main component of the workforce in **childcare settings** for children under 3 years of age. Most of the settings are private and the number of the qualified staff varies considerably. In 2021, 490 full-time staff (92.2% of whom were women) cared for 1,768 children under 3 years in non-public settings. In public settings, with a total of 855 children, 278 full-time staff were employed (see *Tables 3* and *4*).

Table 3

Slovak Republic: Number of providers and children by provider type, 2019-2021

Year	Public providers[7]				Non-public providers		
	Number of providers		Number of children		Number of providers	Number of children	
	0–1 year	1–3 years	0–1 year	1–3 years	0–3 years	0–1 year	1–3 years
2019	6	40	18	853	170	1,918	
2020	3	39	7	736	141	36	1,665
2021	6	43	15	840	157	52	1,716

Source: MPSVR SR 2021a, 2021b

Table 4

Slovak Republic: Number of full-time staff in 0–3 settings by provider type and gender, 2019-2021

Year	Public providers		Non-public providers	
	Total	Women	Total	Women
2019	266	264	363	357

[7] Municipalities and superior territorial units (regions)

2020	243	242	368	358
2021	278	277	490	452

Source: Personal communication with Alexandra Bublišová, Department of Social Services, Social Policy Section, Ministry of Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, in June 2023

Education sector

Table 5

Slovak Republic: Structural composition of staff in kindergartens (qualifications, gender, ethnicity) **2021/2022**

Staff categories	Kindergarten Teachers	Teaching assistants and specialist staff	Total	Proportion of workforce, in %
Staff with specialist higher education degree (BA)	322	21	343	**1.8**
Staff with specialist higher education degree (MA)	711	218	929	**5**
Staff with specialist higher education degree (PhD)	23	0	23	**0.2**
Staff with specialist upper secondary education (Complete secondary education)	1,351	17	1,368	**7.3**
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	31	0	31	**0.2**
Staff with non-specialist qualification/ Unidentified qualification	15,507	476	15,983	**85.5**
Unqualified staff	None – all staff must meet the statutory qualification requirements			
Men	**0.3%**			
Staff with a background of migration	No systematically compiled national data			

Source: Based on data from the information system of Ministry of Education; personal communication with Juraj Ždiňák in April 2023 (Ždiňák and MŠVVŠ SR/Sekcia informačných technológií 2022)

Statistical data on the **pre-primary education** workforce are collected on a regular basis. The *Centre for Scientific and Technical Information* of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Education are responsible for collection and processing these data. This may lead to a distorted picture of reality because some of the data do not have to be entered into the Ministerial information system. For example, data related to the qualification levels in the previous SEEPRO-R report reported that ECEC staff included 10.5% of teachers with a Bachelor's degree and 17.6% with a Master's degree, whereas recent data from the Ministry of Education suggests that only 1.8% of staff have a Bachelor's degree and 5% a Master's degree and that 85.5% of staff had not provided information about their qualification level (see *Table 5*).

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Childcare sector

Childcare Workers employed in settings for under 3 year-olds require a completed secondary vocational education focused on childcare (Decree 64/2015, MŠVVŠ SR 2015) or a completed secondary education not focused on childcare plus the completion of an accredited course of childcare for children up to three years or up to six years lasting at least 220 hours. Childcare Workers, as well as teaching and specialist staff members in the education system, have to meet the basic requirements of integrity, medical fitness and a good command of the Slovak language.

Table 6

Slovak Republic: Childcare Worker

Job title in Slovak: *Opatrovateľ/ka* **Profile**: Social Care/ Health Care Professional
Entry requirements: Completed general or vocational upper secondary education
Professional studies: Upper secondary vocational education specialising in pre-primary pedagogy **or** in health and care **or** completed secondary general education plus 220 hours accredited course for Childcare Workers
Award: School leaving exam certificate *(vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške)* **or** certificate of completion of the course above
ECTS credits: not applicable **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011**: 344, 454
Main workplace settings: ECEC settings for children under 3 years (centre-based and home-based)

Education sector

Kindergarten Teachers meet the qualification requirements if they have completed a secondary vocational education in teacher training for kindergartens or a Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral degree in teacher training or pedagogical science (Decree 1/2020). *Table 7* illustrates possible qualification pathways.

Table 7

Slovak Republic: Kindergarten / Pre-primary Teacher

Job title in Slovak: *Učiteľ/ka materskej školy, Učiteľ/ka predprimárneho vzdelávania* **Profile**: Pre-primary education professional
Route 1:
Entry requirements: Completed lower secondary education, entrance exam (music, art, language, physical education)
Professional studies: 4 years of upper secondary vocational studies at a secondary pedagogical school or pedagogical and social academy or pedagogical and cultural academy *(stredná pedagogická škola, pedagogická a sociálna akadémia, pedagogická a kultúrna akadémia)* specialising in pre-primary pedagogy
Award: School leaving exam certificate *(vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške)* [1]

Job title in Slovak: *Učiteľ/ka materskej školy, Učiteľ/ka predprimárneho vzdelávania*
Profile: Pre-primary education professional

ECTS credits: not applicable
EQF level: 4
ISCED 2011: 354
Main workplace settings: Kindergarten (m*aterská škola*), 3-5 years; primary school with kindergarten (*základná škola s materskou školou*), 3-5 years; kindergarten for children with special educational needs (š*peciálna materská škola*), 3-5kin years; school clubs for children, 6-15 years

Route 2:
Entry requirements: Completed upper secondary education
Professional studies: 2 years' post-secondary studies at a secondary pedagogical school or pedagogical and social academy or pedagogical and cultural academy specialising in pre-primary pedagogy
Award: School leaving exam certificate *(vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške)*[1]
ECTS credits: not applicable
EQF level: 4
ISCED 2011: 454
Main workplaces: see above

Route 3:
Entry requirements: Completed upper secondary education *(vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške)*[1] and university admission procedures
Professional studies: 3 years at university[2]
Award: Bachelor in Pre-primary and Primary School Education; can be followed with a 2-year Master's degree programme (Master in Pre-primary Education) and a 3-year doctoral programme (Doctor of Philosophy in Pre-primary Education)
ECTS credits: 180 (BA), plus 120 (MA), plus 180 (PhD)
EQF level: 6 (BA), 7 (MA), 8 (PhD)
ISCED 2011: 655 (BA), 767 (MA), 864 (PhD)
Main ECEC workplaces: see above. Graduates with a Master's degree can work as centre leaders of kindergartens, inspectors, methodological experts; graduates with a Doctoral degree mainly work at universities or other specialised institutions.

[1] The school leaving certificate is a condition for higher education

[2] Students specialising in special education/ pedagogy may work in the classes/schools for children with special educational needs

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Childcare Workers: competences and course content

The courses followed by Childcare Workers usually focus on child care, basics of health and hygiene requirements, legal awareness and practical teaching skills. Specific competences acquired relate to childcare in settings and home environments, methods and forms of educational activities, basic knowledge in pedagogy, psychology and patho-psychology, principles of preventing injuries and child safety, first aid, care of a sick child in the home environment, acquisition of hygienic habits, principles of a good lifestyle, ethical principles in childcare work and requirements for working with children in centre-based settings.

Kindergarten Teachers: competences and course content at upper secondary level

The initial professional education of Kindergarten Teachers at upper secondary level includes the fundamentals of pedagogy, psychology and didactic theory and their practical implementation. The specific skills teachers acquire are focused mainly on the all-around development of a child's personality, methods and methodologies of education, human rights and diversity, responsible use of information, specific education of disadvantaged children, applying skills in practice, design, organisation, implementation of educational activities, evaluation, hygiene and safety, health care, creating and protecting the environment, kindergarten culture, pro-social behaviour, creativity, independence, professional communication and cooperation, self-regulation, self-control and professional development.

Kindergarten Teachers: competences and course content at university level

At its core, IPE at university level includes systematic knowledge about the phenomena of pedagogical reality, educational processes and their influencing factors, education determinants, recognising and evaluating pedagogical reality, pedagogical and didactic approaches and concepts, knowledge of solving various pedagogical situations and reflecting on relevant psychological and social science knowledge. It includes scientific knowledge of the disciplines in selected educational areas. The main topics focus on the education system; legal and curricular provisions; inclusive education; development of scientific, cultural and language literacy; methodical and methodological competences; digital technologies and the application of diagnostic, intervention and evaluation tools.

The pedagogical and didactic approaches found in the IPE programmes are based on humanistic pedagogy and psychology; democratic values in society and in education; human rights and freedoms; inclusive approaches; responsibility; and on personal and social constructivism. They develop the areas and range of knowledge, skills and competences relevant to the teacher´s professional competence according to the relevant level of the Slovak National Qualifications Framework. With these foundations, Kindergarten Teachers can practice their profession at a high professional and scientific level.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

People in different professions can also become Childcare Workers or Kindergarten Teachers if they follow one of two qualification routes within the vocational or higher education and training system.

- **A two-year post-secondary qualification** is an alternative to obtaining a secondary-school pre-primary school qualification at pedagogical and social academies. These prepare graduates with minimum qualification requirements for working in the ECEC field.
- **A two-year post-university qualification** is organised as an **extension course** (§ 43 Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b). It is an alternative path for obtaining a university qualification to become a teacher in pre-primary or primary education. It is provided by universities with the relevant accredited study programme. The condition for admission to the extension course is a completed Master's degree in teaching and non-teaching study programmes with a completed two-year supplementary course on pedagogy. It ends with a final exam.

Opportunities for men and women to prepare for the profession and in professional development are equal. They can progress equally in their careers according to legislation (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b). However, interest by men in the teaching profession has always been generally low. This is especially true for kindergartens, where only 0.3% of teaching and specialist staff are men.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

In the IPE of prospective childcare workers in ECEC settings for children up to three years of age, there is no practicum specified by law.

Guided workplace experience in kindergartens – *teaching practice* – takes place mainly at "training kindergartens". Public vocational schools and universities preparing teaching professionals conclude a cooperation agreement with these kindergartens; however, there is no legislation governing this practice. Teaching and specialist staff at training kindergartens do not have to complete a specific qualification course to guide students during practice teaching. However, they have to be independent teaching or specialist staff at the first or second certification level (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b).

Remuneration for supervising teaching practice in kindergartens

A performance agreement governs remuneration. Kindergarten Teachers are remunerated for supervising and supporting trainee Kindergarten Teachers as provided in the conditions stipulated in the agreement with the training institution or with a trainee Kindergarten Teacher. The amount is regulated by the budget issued by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. The methodology for allocating subsidies for the relevant year is published on the Ministry of Education's website. According to the regulations for 2022 (MŠVVŠ SR 2021a), the amount is set at €10.63 per hour. The financial remuneration for conducting practice teaching can also be assigned by a Kindergarten Head. Such remuneration is usually paid at the end of a calendar year when service providers release funds for this purpose. In the case of a state kindergarten with a legal subjectivity or in private kindergartens, funding may be set aside in the budget for this purpose by the Kindergarten Head.

Teaching practice in upper secondary training programmes for Kindergarten Teachers

Guided workplace experience is provided by both secondary schools and secondary vocational schools throughout the programme. In the 1st year, students spend two weeks (10 days) in a kindergarten class/group. Students are allocated five teaching hours per day and complete a total of 50 teaching hours for the entire continuing teaching practice. In the 3rd year of study, trainee teachers have guided workplace experience lasting three weeks (15 days). One day comprises six teaching hours, 90 hours in total.

Teaching practice in university study programmes for Kindergarten Teachers and Teaching Assistants

Guided workplace experience as offered by universities is reflexive and oriented towards the profile of the study programme graduate (Act 131/2002). There are several types of practice teaching for students. They take place according to agreements and plans in cooperation with or university. *Table 8* shows an example of the practicum component in the Bachelor study programmes for Preschool and Primary Education at two universities.

Table 8

Slovak Republic: Characteristics of teaching practice in two Bachelor's degree study programmes for Kindergarten Teachers and Teaching Assistants

Matej Bel University, Faculty of Education (Banská Bystrica)				**University of Prešov, Faculty of Education** (Prešov)			
Type of teaching practice	**Year of study**	**Hours**	**ECTS credits**	**Type of teaching practice**	**Year of study**	**Hours**	**ECTS credits**
Initial teaching practice in kindergartens	1st	13	3	Initial teaching practice in kindergartens	1st	60	3
Continuing teaching practice in kindergartens 1	2nd	39	3	Continuing teaching practice in kindergartens 1	2nd	60	3
Continuing teaching practice in kindergartens 2	2nd	52	3				
Assistant practice teaching in the 1st year of a primary school**	3rd	39	4				
Continuing teaching practice in kindergartens 3	3rd	80	6	Continuing teaching practice in kindergartens 2	3rd	60	6*

* Credits are earned either for continuing practice teaching in a kindergarten or in a children's school club.

** BA study programmes also prepare students to be a Teaching Assistant in both primary schools and kindergartens

Skills and competences of kindergarten trainees at university level

The skills and competences expected from kindergarten trainees are determined by the profile of a graduate with a Bachelor's degree in teacher training and pedagogical science.[8] Trainee Kindergarten Teachers who have completed guided workplace experience should be able to do the following:

- Identify the developmental and individual characteristics and educational needs of a child
- Accept the individuality of a child
- Have basic practical experience in identifying psychological and social factors of their learning
- Accept the diversity of students in a socio-cultural context.

The trainees are familiar with:

- Generally binding legal regulations related to the work of a teacher
- Pedagogical and other documentation
- Other conceptual and strategic documents and materials of a kindergarten.

The trainees:

- Can record, analyse and solve various pedagogical situations
- Have the skills to plan, design, manage and organise the educational process effectively
- Have basic methodological skills in the profile educational areas or specialisations

[8] For more information, go to www.portalvs.sk – (https://www.portalvs.sk/sk/studijne-odbory/zobrazit/ucitelstvo-a-pedagogicke-vedy#details-level-p)

- Can use information and communication technologies in the educational process effectively
- Can apply an appropriate method of pedagogical assessment and evaluation
- Can modify their activities and make them more efficient
- Can communicate and cooperate with parents, foster parents, community, etc. efficiently.

Evaluation of teaching practice

Several forms of self-assessment and external evaluation of students are used during teaching practice. Secondary school students use more methodologically oriented evaluation procedures. University students reflect on pedagogical practice in more detail and at a deeper theoretical level. The main means for (self)assessment of a kindergarten trainee is a **portfolio** that contains, for example, features of the training kindergarten (philosophy, profiling, environmental characteristics), an overview of binding pedagogical documents, records and transcripts from observing educational activities, analysis of didactic procedures, design and implementation of teaching situations/educational projects, analysis and reflection of their own teaching, professional development plan for newly qualified teachers, and personal SWOT analyses of strengths and weaknesses in teaching skills.

A student's own **reflexive diary** during teaching practice is also a means of (self)assessment. Students are continuously assessed by the supervisory training teacher. When their guided workplace experience is completed, a structured final evaluation is prepared. It mainly assesses the quality of the particular student´s outputs, preparation and reflection during teaching practice. A student's active participation in the colloquium is also included in the final evaluation, which is conducted in the form of a focus group. The students reflect on their own work during teaching practice and actively assess the relationship between study and practice.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Legislation and regulation

The Slovak Republic has a highly regulated system of CPD for pre-primary education, located within the same regulatory framework that applies to primary schools. There is no such framework for staff working in childcare centres for children up to 3 years of age.

Act 138/2019 (NR SR 2019b) on teaching and specialist staff provides both the **right** and **obligation** for continuing education as part of professional development. CPD enables the acquisition, deepening, improving and expanding of diverse professional competences. These include acquiring competences for carrying out specialised activities or for qualifying for the post of Centre Leader or Kindergarten Head, acquiring competences needed for promotion to higher career levels, or meeting the qualification requirements needed for additional responsibilities.

Professional development programmes for teaching and specialist staff in the school system are provided by Professional Development Teachers. They are not employees of schools, but of the Methodology and Pedagogy Centres, which are directly managed by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic. Professional Development Teachers participate in the development of programmes and professional standards based on research, provide counselling and cooperate with kindergartens in professional development. They manage related certification audits and serve on examination and certification boards. Professional Development Teachers lecture on teaching; their role includes being a professional development methodologist and they consult

on the teacher certification procedure (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b). They must likewise meet the set qualification requirements of at least the 2nd level of university education in the field and the second certification (see *Table 9*).

Professional development plan

CPD takes place within the kindergarten's approved professional development plan. It is issued by the Kindergarten Head and approved by the Pedagogical Council. The training plan can be supplemented and modified for as long as it remains valid in accordance with the setting's current possibilities and needs. The maximum time frame is five years.

Providers and main types of CPD

The professional development of teaching and specialist staff takes place through CPD courses, scientific research, publishing, or creative and artistic activities as well as through self-education. CPD in the educational system is organised as training to qualify for specialised posts of responsibility and includes adaptive, pre-certification, innovation and refresher training.

Refresher training is designed according to the needs of the school's founding entity to maintain or refresh the professional competence required for a specific position, to acquire new knowledge and information about changes in legislation, educational programmes, pedagogical documentation and other documentation and to acquire new knowledge and skills in a specific area of work. Either the school or the founding entity of a kindergarten provides refresher training. It is organised as a simple programme approved by the Kindergarten Head. The academic supervisor is a teaching or specialist staff member with a 2nd certification.

Certain kinds of CPD are offered free of charge in Methodology and Pedagogy Centres. Act 138/2019 (NR SR 2019b) determines the requirements of training programmes accredited by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. Particular types of training may be provided by a university or organisation established by the Ministry of Education or another government agency, a Catholic education and catechetical centre, a school, a school setting, a social assistance setting, an employer granted a certificate of competence to provide practical training in the system of dual education and by other legal entities that have education in the scope of their activities. Participants receive a state recognised certificate of completion for each type of professional training.

Various other types of professional seminars, courses, trainings and activities are also available for the ECEC sector employees. They are usually organised by commercial and third sector entities. They are not coordinated by state standards and a completion certificate is not issued.

Leave entitlement for CPD

Teaching and specialist staff are entitled to five working days' paid leave for professional development per calendar year, another five working days' leave to prepare for and take the first or second certification examinations, and yet another five working days' leave to participate in a career advancement module to become a Kindergarten Head or another managing role. Employers may allow teaching staff to take a sabbatical for a maximum of one school year if they have been employed for a minimum of ten consecutive years. They are not entitled to a salary or pay while they are on sabbatical, but their return to the position they held when they went on sabbatical is guaranteed (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b).

Releasing employees for training is most difficult in one-class kindergartens and when there is a higher rate of illness among staff. Online training minimised this problem during the COVID-19 pandemic because it took place mostly after the teachers' working hours.

Financing CPD

Some types of professional development training are self-financed by staff. These include the costs for taking the basic module for career advancement if the teacher had not completed it during the pre-certification period. Teachers also pay for adaptive education if it is not provided by the kindergarten, but instead by an organisation established by the Ministry of Education. The kindergartens' founding entities will pay staff for extended study if it is part of the setting's professional development plan. The law provides for other forms of education within the professional development plan financed by employers. Professional development is also supported by financial benefits when training is completed. Teachers receive supplemental pay amounting to 6% for extension studies, 12% for state language examinations passed, 3% for specialised training and 3% for innovation training. Supplemental pay for professional development is for seven years to a maximum of 12%, of which a maximum of 9% is for innovation training.

CPD and career advancement

In the professional development of teaching staff (also Kindergarten Teachers) and specialist staff, there are opportunities for career progress according to qualifications frameworks, career levels and positions (see *Table 9*).

Table 9

Slovak Republic: Career levels and positions of teaching and specialist staff

Career level	a) **Newly qualified** teaching or specialist staff
	b) **Independent** teaching or specialist staff
	c) Teaching or specialist staff **with 1st certification**
	d) Teaching or specialist staff **with 2nd certification**
Career positions	Specialised activities of **teaching staff**
	Induction teaching staff, class teacher, leader of methodological circle, supervisor, school support team coordinator
	Specialised activities of **specialist staff**
Staff head	**Teaching staff head:** Headteacher, deputy headteacher, head educator
	Specialist staff head: Headteacher, deputy headteacher, specialist department head

Source: Own processing according to Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b

Main topics of CPD

Act 138/2019 (NR SR 2019b) recommends focusing the content of refresher training in kindergartens on school curriculum changes, inclusive education, and the digitisation of education and training.

The State School Inspectorate (Štofková Dianovská et al. 2021) requires the focus to be on improving the quality of educational activities, the activities and tasks of the Kindergarten Head's advisory bodies and school management, and inclusive education and teamwork, including cooperation with families. In view of the pandemic, it was important to focus on online education through various forms of active remote learning. An analysis of teaching staff needs (Methodology and Pedagogy Centre 2013) carried out for the *Inclusive Model of Education at the Pre-primary Level of the School System*, a national project, shows teachers wishing to be educated in such topics as adapting learning tasks to individual needs and abilities of children from marginalised Roma communities (MRC); creating teaching resources (tools, worksheets, etc.) individually adapted to the needs and possibilities of MRC children; preparing children for adverse life

situations of MRC children; connecting kindergarten education with life experiences of MRC children; teaching children using materials available in an MRC child's home environment while also planning educational activities; how to facilitate problematic adaptation and socialisation of MRC children; child diagnostics; and knowledge of socially and culturally conditioned behaviours of MRC children.

At present, the focus has shifted to the acceptance of Ukrainian children in the kindergarten environment, where attention needs to be paid to communicating with children and family members, explaining to the children the situation in Ukraine and taking note of the flood of information on how to help them adapt ('Slovak Government – Children from Ukraine are Coming to Your School, What to Do/For School Headteachers', Verejná Správa SR 2022) and identifying their educational needs, among other things.

Research projects on CPD

The Methodology and Pedagogy centre, working in cooperation with the National Institute for Education, was involved in implementing Professional Development of Teachers (TEACHERS), a national project. Its main goal was to support the professional development of teaching and specialist staff in introducing and implementing changes in kindergartens and schools, including crisis and post-crisis situation management and the impact caused by interruptions in kindergartens due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The project was completed on 31 December 2022.

Current debates on CPD

The issue of professional development is still topical, especially in a period of upcoming changes and amendments to laws and decrees dealing with the issue. Professional organisations such as the Slovak Committee of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (*SV OMEP*), the Society for Preschool Education (*Spoločnosť pre predškolskú výchovu*), the Kindergarten Development Council (*Rada pre rozvoj materských škôl*) and the Slovak Teachers' Chamber regularly comment on proposals for changes in the legal status. Sometimes compromise agreements are successfully reached, but at other times proposals and well-founded arguments are not accepted.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Remuneration of staff in kindergartens and primary schools is regulated by 2019-18526:1-B2001 on salary tariffs of teaching and specialist staff (MŠVVŠ SR 2019). Its annexes list pay classes depending on the length of credited experience. Kindergarten Teachers and specialist staff are remunerated under the same rules as their primary and secondary school colleagues. In terms of remuneration, it makes no difference at what level of school and education teachers work, but rather what initial professional education they have, their pedagogical experience in education and what career level in professional development they have achieved. Salaries includes variable components, such as supplemental pay for a specific career position and function, working shifts, running classes and management. Bonuses can be paid from the founding entity's budget, usually allocated at the end of a calendar year.

At the end of 2021, the average monthly salary in Slovakia for teachers was €1,211 (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2022). The salary earned by a newly qualified teacher has been

€881.50 since 1 September 2019, with the tariff rate (€831.50) + 6% supplemental pay amounting to €50 (MŠVVŠ SR and The Education Policy Institute 2019).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

Direct educational activities of teaching and specialist staff are regulated by Government Regulation 201/2019 (Government of the Slovak Republic 2019). They may work full time or part time for a definite or indefinite period as set out in the employment agreement with the kindergarten's founding entity or statutory representative. They can be employed by several kindergartens and schools, up to a maximum of 48 hours per week. Time spent teaching includes two components: direct educational activities and education-related activities. The base work week for a kindergarten teacher's direct educational activities teacher is 28 hours, with each hour lasting 60 minutes. Usually, two teachers in a class take turns in alternating their working hours between morning and afternoon shifts. Statistically, both teachers are reported as one full-time teacher in one class. Part-time employment is very rare and not statistically documented.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

According to Act 138/2019 (NR SR 2019b) *adaptive training* is intended for newly qualified teaching staff or specialist staff who have completed a post-secondary qualification (see *Chapter **4.3***). Newly qualified teachers have to work under the supervision of a staff member responsible for induction, whose supervision lasts a minimum of six months and a maximum of two years. Newly qualified teachers can get further help from colleagues in the kindergarten support team. At least once a year, their employer may offer preventive psychological counselling and counselling aimed at managing aggression, self-knowledge and conflict resolution (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b). Mentoring and coaching are not established by law. It depends on the founding entity whether and in what quality they are provided to their staff.

A simple induction programme is established that is approved by the Kindergarten Head or a statutory representative of a government education agency. The academic supervisor of adaptive training is the Kindergarten Head or the Professional Development Methodologist (see *Chapter **2.3***). Training starts no later than five days after the date of hiring, regardless of whether the new employee is qualified for the position or not. It ends with a recommendation for the newly qualified or specialist staff member before a three-member examination board as outlined in the adaptive training programme, and a report. The newly qualified staff member then becomes an independent employee ("independent teacher").

Teaching and specialist staff have the same protective status as other public sector employees in connection with the performance of work activities. Their right is to be provided with the conditions required for their jobs, in particular protection against acts of violence by children, legal representatives and other persons, against socio-pathological behaviour of management staff, founding entities, legal representatives and other persons and unprofessional interference while they are working.

7.4 Non-contact time

A Kindergarten Teacher is granted 9.5 hours out of the paid working time of 37.5 hours per week for non-teaching activities. The time is usually spent preparing for educational activities, providing a learning environment, collecting and creating tools, keeping pedagogical documentation, personal files and portfolios of children, providing consultation and pedagogical counselling, cooperating in the school support team and with legal representatives, working in a Methodical

Circle (see *Chapter* ***2.4***), participating in operational work briefings and meetings of the Pedagogical Council, managing the school library, if any, improving and decorating the school premises and participating in the city's, municipality's or community's pedagogical activities. They carry out these activities according to current kindergarten management requirements and also following the kindergarten curriculum and its regulations.

7.5 Current staffing issues

In terms of staff recruitment, employers are obliged to advertise teaching and specialist staff vacancies by publishing information about them on their websites, or on the website of the founding entity or regional office. There is usually a selection procedure for the employer to select from registered applicants. Some regions, especially those with high living costs like Bratislava, have a shortage of teachers. Employers in these regions mainly have a recruitment process, not a selection process, but this is a matter for the founding entities and not a systemic national solution. Therefore, it is usual for teachers to work until retirement age. Most teachers are women aged around 50 years (CVTI SR 2021). Teaching's attractiveness among young people is declining in the light of low salaries and high demands on competences and responsibilities in the profession.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Political reforms and initiatives related to ECEC staffing and professionalisation are based on the *National Programme for the Development of Education* (MŠVVŠ SR 2018), which was prepared from tasks outlined in *Learning Slovakia* (Burjan et al. 2017).

One of the programme's priorities is to increase the quality of education and strengthen the social status of teachers in the context of international comparisons and global trends. This also applies to pre-primary teachers. There has been a long-term professional discussion about whether secondary-level education is sufficient for the performance of this profession, and whether, within a reasonable time horizon, such as 10 years, it would be desirable to achieve qualification requirements for the 1st or 2nd level (Bachelor or Master) of university education. This is a topical question, especially with regard to the compulsory part of pre-primary education. At the same time, finding a solution is difficult because of the declining attractiveness of the teaching profession. The current challenge is to ensure an overall sufficient number of qualified kindergarten teachers.

Another ECEC initiative is the *Recovery and Resilience Plan* (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic 2021), which also includes a reform aimed at "preparing and developing teachers for new content and forms of teaching". Its grant programme for universities (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic 2022) will support new teacher training programmes in the field of inclusive teaching, teaching pupils with different home languages and the development of digital competences. At the regional level, it will finance the establishment of regional teacher support centres.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Attitudes of Kindergarten Teachers to professional development

***Source**:* Hall, Renáta, Peter Dráľ, Petra Fridrichová, Miroslava Hapalová, Stanislav Lukáč, Jozef Miškolci, and Katarína Vančíková 2019 (see *References* for full details)

***Aims**:* To define problems in Slovak education and propose an internally coordinated reform of the entire education system – from pre-school, through primary, secondary and higher education, to lifelong learning, based on detailed research findings.

***Methods**:* More than 400 individual and 20 group interviews, together more than 500 respondents; questionnaires with approximately 5,000 respondents (teaching and specialist staff in education in Slovakia and abroad).

***Selected findings**:* The study analyses the overall state of education in Slovakia. ECEC staff related findings suggest that Kindergarten Teachers have different attitudes regarding compulsory professional training. One third of the respondents attend CPD voluntarily, one third under certain conditions and one third are not interested in continuing professional development. Salary increases motivate several teachers to learn. However, they criticise the insufficient choice of accredited programmes free of tuition fees. They see a problem in the insufficient funding of programmes that attract their interest (mostly by non-profit organisations). The teachers have management support for further education, but they feel they cannot respond flexibly to the choice of courses. These are taken according to a plan aligned with the school's operation and vision. The findings of the study have also affirmed a strong feminisation in the ECEC sector, with the teachers experiencing excessive workload and little social appreciation.

***Implications**:* The authors of the study have proposed a set of measures for the entire education system in Slovakia. Their study has initiated a discussion among professionals and ordinary people, provided stimuli for changes in the content and forms of education, and stimulated the need for changes in preparation for the teaching profession and the further education of teachers.

Inclusive education in kindergartens

Source: Alberty Ladislav, Peter Dráľ, Vladimír Klein, Emil Komárik, Milena Lipnická, Alica Petrasová, Viera Šilonová, and Miron Zelina 2019 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: To promote inclusive education, to provide equal access to quality education by improving the professional competences of teaching staff and specialist staff and to improve children's outcomes.

***Methods*:** Separate questionnaires for learning about the views of Kindergarten Heads, Teachers and Teaching Assistants on the conditions for an inclusive model of education in the kindergarten environment. 48 directors of the 50 participating kindergartens took part in the first evaluation phase and 43 Kindergarten Heads and 64 teaching staff in the second evaluation phase.

Selected findings: According to the final report (Alberty et al. 2019), in the 2nd evaluation, both Centre Leaders and Teachers expressed the opinion that, in practice, the national project had significantly strengthened in kindergartens the personnel, material-technical and curricular conditions of inclusive education of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Centre leaders expressed the importance of the education of teaching staff and staffing ratios in the inclusive education of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Kindergartens need Special Pedagogues (Heads 79.59%; Teachers 76.56%), School Psychologists (Heads 67.35%; Teachers 65.08%), and to a lesser extent Social Pedagogues (Heads 55.10%; Teachers 62.50%). More than

half of the Kindergarten Heads (55.10%) and Teachers (50.76%) expressed the opinion that the number of teachers in inclusive education of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds should be increased to three per class and the number of children in such classes should be reduced to 16 children or less per class. They require teamwork in pre-primary education.

Implications: The National Institute for Education is currently developing a system of inclusive education support measures that would implement continuing education programmes for teaching and specialist staff. The project continues in two national projects: *Assisting Professions in the Education of Children and Pupils* and *Professional Development of Teachers (Teachers)*.

Professional development of Kindergarten Teachers

Source*:* Methodology and Pedagogy Centre/ State Pedagogical Institute – Metodicko-pedagogické centrum/ Štátny pedagogický ústav[9] 2020 (see *References* for full details) [10]

Aims: To support the professional development of teaching and specialist staff in the implementation of changes in schools and kindergartens, including crisis and post-crisis situation management and impacts related to school interruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods: Online questionnaire, group interviews (focus groups), 291 respondents including 60 Kindergarten Teachers were involved

Selected findings*:* The final report of the preliminary survey (Methodology and Pedagogy Centre/ State Pedagogical Institute 2021) states that within further education, Kindergarten Teachers are most interested in the topics of pedagogical diagnostics, the use of inclusive approaches in the educational process, educating children with special educational needs, creating and developing a positive climate in the classroom, team teaching, ICT teaching, self-reflexive and self-assessment competences and self-development topics (such as dealing with difficult communication and conflict situations), managing stress, fatigue and burnout, emotional intelligence, professional portfolios. For CPD activities, teachers prefer morning working hours and in-person teaching. They consider exercises, trainings and experiential forms of education, workshops, creative workshops, demonstrations and exchanges of experience between participants to be effective. In remote education, they mostly used the website "We teach at a distance" and materials from the National Institute for Education and The Methodology and Pedagogy centre. Education during the pandemic has also confirmed the need to train teachers for remote forms of learning.

Implications: University study programmes are currently being harmonised in teacher training according to new accreditation rules. These also reflect requirements for the development of digital competences in kindergarten teachers and for the flexible implementation of various forms of professional development.

[9] From 1.7.2022 the two organisations merged. Currently they operate under the name of the National Institute of Education and Youth.

[10] For more information about the project see the implementer's website (www. mpc-edu.sk/sk/project/teachers/o-projekte) and (www.statpedu.sk/sk/o-organizacii/projekty/narodny-projekt-profesijny-rozvoj-ucitelov-teachers/)

10. Workforce challenges – country experts' assessment

Potential challenges for workforce development in early childhood education and care in Slovakia include the following:

- **High quality inclusive pre-primary education.** To educate teachers in this area and prepare them practically for the pedagogical consideration of children's diverse educational needs as well as to cooperate in school support teams and with legal representatives for the children and the community.
- **Institutionalised education and care for children from 0 to 3 years** of age, with special attention to children from marginalised Roma communities. To prepare teachers for various forms of non-formal education and participation in school, health and social activities as well as in communities.
- **Adequate remuneration**. Appropriate salaries in education are seen as a strong motivating factor for joining the profession and keeping young teachers in it. This is an important factor to attract talented students for the study route as a kindergarten teacher.
- **University educated teachers** in compulsory pre-primary education to ensure a smooth transition of children from pre-primary to primary education. The teachers should have the competences for the process that requires a higher level of scientific and critical thinking.

In the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, the Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia and the Union of Slovak Cities are discussing the current state of education with several professional organisations. These include the Slovak Committee of the World Organisation for Early Childhood Education (SV OMEP), the Society for Preschool Education, the Council for Kindergarten Development, and the Slovak Chamber of Teachers.

Discussions are also being held within the above organisations. In particular, the SV OMEP (www.omep.sk) and the Society for Preschool Education are organising professional and scientific conferences and workshops for employees in the ECEC sector. Thus, they are contributing to the dissemination of knowledge, inspiring them with examples of practice from abroad and enabling them to reflect upon their own work.

The most recently discussed topic is the planned introduction of a legal right to a place in kindergarten for all children from 4 years (2024) and 3 years (2025) of age.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note:

The terms used for the main forms of centre-based ECEC settings in this report are **childcare centre** (formerly: *detské jasle*, currently: *zariadenia starostlivosti o deti do troch rokov veku dieťaťa*, 0–2) and **kindergarten** (*materské školy*, 3–5)[1]. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Slovakia

1829	First children's care home founded by Countess Therese Brunswick
1872	First childcare institution founded – with a focus on child protection, instilling a sense of cleanliness and orderliness and the development of age-appropriate skills.
1881	The Hungarian Act XV states that 3 to 6 year-olds are to attend an ECEC institution if their parents are unable to care for them at home on a regular basis.
1913-14	Towards the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire there are 416 ECEC institutions in the Slovak region.
1918	After the founding of the Republic of Czechoslovakia an expansion phase follows, but by 1937 the number of ECEC settings had decreased to 160.
1948	At the onset of the communist regime there are 1000 ECEC institutions in Czechoslovakia.
1952	Childcare centres for under 3 year-olds come under the auspices of the Ministry of Health.
1950s and 1960s	Age-integrated centres are set up for 3 to 6 year-olds and under 3 year-olds under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.
1970s and 1980s	Employer-based childcare facilities and co-operatives are set up.
1970	There are 561 childcare centres and 2645 kindergartens in the Slovak region.
1980	Ten years later the total has risen to 973 childcare centres and 3723 kindergartens.
1989	At the time of the collapse of the communist regime, 92 % of 3 to 6 year-olds are enrolled in one of the 4052 kindergartens.
1993	Childcare centres for under 3 year-olds are removed from the auspices of the Ministry of Health.
1994	Over a period of 5 years, the number of kindergartens decreases by 709 to 3343.
2001-2006	330 ECEC services are closed down, mostly those for under 3 year-olds.
2008	– Kindergarten (*materská škola*) becomes the first stage in the education system. – ECEC settings for under 3 year-olds come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family.
2009	Fundamental changes introduced in the professional and career development of teachers. Lifelong learning is made compulsory.
2014 -2016	– Expansion of provision begins: by 2015/16 there are 2935 kindergartens. – Demand exceeds supply and there is an extreme shortage of places.
2019	Amendments to the Education Act regarding kindergartens – the professional development system for teachers is updated, including compulsory and non-compulsory forms

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3-, 4- and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In justified and professionally assessed cases, this may be 7 years of age in the Slovak Republic.

2021	Amendments to the Education Act – Attending a kindergarten one year before school enrolment becomes compulsory for 5 year-olds. Compulsory pre-primary education can also be organised in an individual form in the home environment.
2023	On 9 May 2023, deputies of the National Council of the Slovak Republic approved a major amendment to the Education Act[2]. – As from the 2024/2025 school year, all 4 year-olds are entitled to a place in kindergarten. As from the 2025/2026 school year, this will also apply to all 3 year-olds. – A new profession – Social Worker – is established as a support team member. – Kindergarten Teachers will be obliged to complete compulsory innovative training in the field of pre-primary education pedagogy in the range of 50 to 100 hours; it must be completed the teachers within seven years from the beginning of their employment as a pedagogical employee.

Sources: Oberhuemer et al. 2010; Baďuriková 2018;-Melikantová et al. 2020; Eurydice 2023, 14.1

ECEC system type and auspices[3]

In the separately organised system of early childhood education and care, kindergartens for children aged 3–5/6 years come under the auspices of the Slovak Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport (*Ministerstvo školstva, vedy, výskumu a športu*). The Ministry is responsible for overarching regulations relating to educational goals, supervision, evaluation and financial budgets. Organisation at the local level is the responsibility of the municipalities or private and religious founders of kindergartens.

Until 1993, day nurseries for under 3 year-olds came under the auspices of the Ministry of Health. Between 1993 and 2017, no ministry was responsible for the few, almost exclusively privately run ECEC facilities for this age group. Since March 2017 (Act No. 448/2008), settings for under 3 year-olds are now the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (*Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny*) (2021c). The providers of ECEC are state, private or church affiliated. Municipal facilities receive financial subsidies from the Ministry and can also support private ECEC settings through their own resources.

General objectives and legislative framework

Childcare centres for under 3 year-olds are subject to the Act on Social Services (*zákona o sociálnych službách,* 2008), updated in 2021. These childcare facilities for children up to 3 years of age provide routine childcare and upbringing. This is a service that enables working and studying parents to reconcile work and family life. The service is also provided for children with disabilities up to 7 years of age.

Equal opportunities and lifelong learning are fundamental principles of the education system, including kindergartens for 3 to 6 year-olds. Everyone has a right to education, including ethnic minorities, whose culture and language must be taken into account in education provision.

Kindergartens are regulated by the Education Act (*školský zákon*), as amended in 2021. The most important change is that the so-called 'zero classes' for 5 year-olds, a substitute provision mainly for children with a socially disadvantaged background who had not attended kindergarten, lost

[2] Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport 2023

[3] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Slovakia provided orientation on legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

their relevance with the introduction of compulsory education for 5 year olds in kindergarten and were abolished.

Following the introduction of compulsory pre-primary education, Decree No. 541/2021 (*vyhláška o materskej škole*) was amended to provide for a changed organisation of pre-primary education.

However, Slovak education is facing further changes. On 9 May 2023, deputies of the National Council of the Slovak Republic approved a major amendment to the Education Act which still has to be approved by the President of the Slovak Republic. Under the amendment, "introductory classes" may be established in primary schools from the 2023/2024 school year (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport 2023).

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

In the Slovak Republic, there was no legal entitlement to a place in an ECEC setting for children under 5 years of age before 2023.

The above-mentioned amendment to the Education Act introduces entitlement for the first time. The Ministry of Education has thus responded to the demands of parents to ensure access to quality and affordable pre-primary education for all children. In the 2024/2025 school year, all 4 year-olds will be eligible for admission, and from the 2025/2026 school year, all 3 year-olds.

Since September 2021, attendance has been compulsory for children who are 5 years old by 31 August. Statutory primary education starts at the age of 6.

Main types of provision

Childcare centres (*detské jasle*) admit children aged 6 months to 3 years. In 2016, the Ministry of Labour changed their name from 'nurseries' to 'childcare services for children up to 3 years' (*zariadenia starostlivosti o deti do troch rokov veku dieťaťa*). Under 3 year-olds can also be cared for in mother-and-child centres or in **home-based provision** (*opatrovateľ detí*) run and managed by private individuals, parents' associations or local authorities. The respective providers decide on opening hours and daily schedules.

Kindergartens (*materské školy*) accept children between 3 and 6 years of age in full-day groups (up to 12 hours) or half-day groups (up to 5 hours). If capacities allow, 2 year-old children are also accepted. Most kindergartens are open from 6:00 to 18:00. Kindergartens are usually self-contained institutions, but they may also be integrated into primary schools (*základná škola s materskou školou*). The kindergarten year runs from 1 September to 31 August. During the school holidays, the opening hours are agreed with the parents. However, due to staff holidays and renovations, they remain closed for at least three weeks during the summer. For children with special educational needs who cannot attend a regular institution, there are separate special needs kindergartens (*špeciálna materská škola*). Zero grades in primary schools were abolished as from 2022/2023. 5 year-old children are required to attend compulsory pre-primary education in kindergartens. Compulsory pre-primary education can also be organised individually in the home environment with a partial supervision by the kindergarten. Children not able to attend kindergarten because of a disability receive full support by the kindergarten.

Some kindergartens follow specific approaches to pedagogy such as forest or nature kindergartens, or Montessori kindergartens; a pilot programme for the latter was completed in 2016.

In 2022, there were a total of 3,137 kindergartens in Slovakia attended by 178,830 children. Of these, 60,630 children were enrolled in compulsory pre-primary education (CVTI 2023a).

Provider structures

Municipalities are the providers of most kindergartens; some are state-owned, others are established by the local education authority. Private kindergartens can be established by individuals or legal entities, or by churches or church organisations registered with the state. Private providers play a significant role in facilities for under 3 year-olds (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 42).

If private kindergartens are included in the network of schools and educational institutions under the Ministry of Education, they receive funding from the state budget. They must implement pre-primary education in accordance with the applicable legal standards. This means that education must also be carried out in accordance with the national curriculum. Since 2007, private kindergartens receive funding from the municipalities (Act No. 564/2004 Coll.) and since September 2009-they have been bound to the national curricular programme. The provider is responsible for the educational programme specific to the institution.

The majority of the 3,137 kindergartens in Slovakia in 2022 (89.0%) were publicly funded and operated as full-day settings (96.7%). Only 7.4% were run by private providers and 3.6% by church-affiliated providers (see *Table 1*). Private settings receive state subsidies but may also set fees for parents. 93.7% of enrolled children attended the settings full day (CVTI 2023a).

Table 1
Slovakia: Number of kindergartens and number of children enrolled by provider type, 2022

Provider type	**Kinder-gartens**	**Distribution of Kindergartens by provider***	Full-day Kinder-gartens	**Children enrolled**	Children attending full day	**Distribution of children by full-day attendance***
Public	2,793	89.0	2,702	162,254	151,583	93.4
Private	232	7.4	227	10,169	9,687	95.3
Church-affiliated	112	3.6	112	6,407	6,220	97.1
Total	**3,137**		**3,041**	**178,830**	**167,490**	**93.7**

Source: CVTI 2023a *own calculations

Participation rates in regulated ECEC settings

Until 2010, only very few children under the age of 3 were enrolled in an ECEC setting, which can at least partly be explained by the comparatively long parental leave (see chapter on *Parental leave*). Another reason is the fact that most of the childcare centres for under 3 year-olds had closed down in the 1990s. Between 2010 and 2022, the proportion of children attending ECEC settings fell from 3% to 2.4%). However, the proportion of children between the ages of 3 and school entry who attended an institution rose significantly from 67% to 85% between 2005 and 2022 (see *Table 2*).

Table 2

Slovakia: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and weekly duration of attendance, 2005–2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	0	10
	Over 30 hours	3	57
	No enrolment in ECEC	97	33
2010	1 to 29 hours	0	8
	Over 30 hours	3	64
	No enrolment in ECEC	97	28
2015	1 to 29 hours	0.2	14.0
	Over 30 hours	0.9	53.6
	No enrolment in ECEC	98.9	32.5
2022	1 to 29 hours	0	11.3
	Over 30 hours	2.4	73.7
	No enrolment in ECEC	97.6	15.0

Source: Eurostat 2023b, slight deviations from 100 % due to rounding

Table 3

Slovakia: Number of children in kindergartens by age and provider type, 2022

Age	Public	Private	Church-affiliated	Total
Under 3 years (in childcare centres)	6,573	1,276	297	**8,146**
3 year-olds	36,566	2,593	1,457	**40,616**
4 year-olds	43,842	2,624	1,765	**48,231**
5 year-olds	50,793	2,572	2,019	**55,384**
6 year-olds	23,746	1,074	856	**25,676**
7 year-olds and older*	734	30	13	**777**
Total	**162,254**	**10,169**	**6,407**	**178,830**

Source: CVTI 2023a

*7 year-olds in kindergarten are children for whom compulsory school attendance has been deferred, based on assessment and recommendation by experts in the Centres for Educational Guidance and Prevention

Broken down by age group, the highest attendance rates in 2022 were among 5 year-olds, followed by 4 year-olds (see *Table* 4).

In 2021, there were 157 non-public ECEC-settings for children under 3 which were attended by 1,796 children. Most of them were between 1 and 3 years old, only 52 children under age 1 were enrolled (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family 2021a). In the same year, 45 public ECEC-settings provided for 855 children (15 under age 1) (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family 2021b).

Table 4

Slovakia: Number of children and enrolment rates in kindergartens by age, 2022

	Number of children in the population*	Number of children in kindergartens**	Share of children in kindergartens, in %***
Under 1 year-olds	55,087	8,146	4.8
1 year-olds	57,527		

	Number of children in the population*	Number of children in kindergartens**	Share of children in kindergartens, in %***
2 year-olds	58,365		
3 year-olds	59,683	40,616	68.1
4 year-olds	60,493	48,231	79.7
5 year-olds	60,650	55,384	91.3
6 year-olds	59,629	25,676	43.1
7 year-olds	58,366	777	1.3

Source: * Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2023, ** CVTI 2023a, ***own calculations

In 2022, a total of 178,830 children were cared for by 17,811 qualified teachers and 612 teachers' assistants. The majority of them worked in public settings (89.1%), only 7.4% in private and 3.5% in church-affiliated institutions (CVTI 2023a, own calculations). In 2023, an additional 527 qualified staff worked in special kindergartens; among this group of teachers, 358 are qualified in special pedagogy, 59 were assistants (CVTI 2023b).

Financing and costs for parents

In 2020, government spending on 'education' in Slovakia was 4.6% of GDP, of which 'pre-primary and primary education' accounted for 1.3% of GDP (Eurostat 2023i). In 2019, a total of 0.65% of GDP was allocated to the early education sector, approximately 0.5% to the kindergarten sector and only 0.1% on the childcare sector for under 3 year-olds (OECD 2023).

Childcare centres are funded by private providers and by municipalities as founders, not through the state budget. Kindergartens are financed through state budgets (of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior) or by the municipalities; they are also funded by private or church-affiliated providers. The municipalities receive subsidies through tax revenues and pass some of these on to private and church providers – mostly for staff salaries.

According to the Kindergarten Funding Act (597/2003 Z. z.) the sources of funding for church schools and private schools are:

(a) Funds from the State budget under the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior

(b) Funds from other individuals and legal entities for renting the premises and equipment of schools when they are not used for the educational process

(c) Profit from business activities

(d) Contributions from founders

(e) Contributions from parents or any other person who has a maintenance obligation towards the pupil, to cover the costs of education and training

(f) Contributions from employers and employers' associations

(g) Donations

(h) Other sources according to a special regulation.

Even if the founder of the kindergarten is a church, it does not automatically mean that the founder is a non-profit entity.

Childcare centres set their fees locally, which can vary greatly from region to region. However, parents are entitled to apply for a childcare allowance. Fees are also charged for the first two years of kindergarten, which are set by the municipality in the case of public facilities and by the provider in the case of private facilities. The final compulsory year of kindergarten is free of charge – in private facilities the amount is partly covered by state subsidies. Meals are paid for

by the parents; in the last year of kindergarten, the state contributes €1.40 (May 2023) to the daily costs (Eurydice 2023, 3.1).

Since 2017, only EU funds have been used for the expansion of kindergarten places through programmes of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic.

According to OECD data, in 2022, a couple with two children spent about 7% of net household income on childcare costs[4] (OECD.Stat 2023). However, Act 245/2008 (§ 28) stipulates that for the attendance of a child in a municipal kindergarten, the parents/guardians contribute to the partial reimbursement of kindergarten expenses per month in an amount not exceeding 7.5% of the minimum subsistence level for one dependent child. The amount of the parents' contribution shall be determined by the founder of the kindergarten (city, municipality, legal or private person).

Staff to child ratios and group size

Since 2020, the regulated group size in **childcare centres** is 12 children, with no more than five children per qualified member of staff (amendment and supplement to Act No. 455/1991 on Trade Activities). At least 75% of staff must be professionals.

In **kindergartens**, children can be allocated to same-age or mixed-age groups. The requirements for group size are: a maximum of 18 children aged 2 and 3 years, 20 children aged 3 to 4 years, 21 children aged 4 to 5 years, 22 children aged 5 to 6 years or 21 children aged 3 to 6 years. These numbers may be exceeded by up to three children by the management under certain circumstances and if space allows. In all-day facilities, two professionals alternate shifts. If there are more than ten children under 3 years of age, three professionals work alternately with the support of an assistant. As a rule, two fully qualified teachers are allocated per kindergarten class, one working in the morning and one in the afternoon.

In a kindergarten group, a maximum of two children with special needs may be admitted; in this case, the number of children is then reduced (Act No. 245/2008 Section 28).

As a rule, the staffing ratio in private ECEC settings is more favourable than in public or church-affiliated institutions (CVTI 2023a), see *Table 5*.

Table 5

Slovakia: Calculated staff to child ratios in kindergartens by provider type, 2022

Provider type	Number of children enrolled	Number of staff (including centre leaders)	Calculated staff to child ratio*
Public	162,254	15,865	10.2
Private	10,169	1,324	7.7
Church-affiliated	6,407	622	10.3
Total	**178,830**	17,811	10.0

Source: CVTI 2023a, *own calculations

Note: Although there are usually two teachers per class, they rotate in shifts and there are only about two hours of overlap in their work with the children. In some one-group kindergartens, this may be even less than an hour.

[4] The calculation is based on the following fictitious model: two parents working full-time (average income); two 2 and 3 year-old children in full-time care; relevant care allowances taken into account.

Curricular frameworks

There are no legal regulations or recommendations regarding an educational programme for **childcare centres**. The respective provider is only obliged to comply with health and safety regulations issued by the Ministry of Health, which emphasise quiet time, outdoor activities in all weather conditions and physical exercise for the children.

The State Education Programme for Kindergartens (*Štátny vzdelávací program pre predprimárne vzdelávanie v materských školách*), which was revised in 2016 and 2022, is the mandatory basis for the pedagogical work in **kindergartens** and is coordinated with the curriculum of primary schools. In addition, each kindergarten develops its own educational programme based on this National Curriculum. Special focus is placed on the evaluation of educational goals in the kindergarten as well as on inclusive education.

Kindergartens support the socio-emotional, intellectual, physical, moral and aesthetic areas of children's development. The aim is to prepare them 'for life' in an age-appropriate manner. Before entering compulsory school, the children receive a certificate of completion.

The curriculum is divided into seven learning areas: (1) language and communication, (2) mathematics and handling information, (3) people and nature, (4) people and society, (5) people and work, (6) art and culture, (7) health and movement. Educational and achievement standards are formulated for each of these areas that also play a role in evaluation procedures. The professionals can decide on materials and learning approaches themselves, but play should be the predominant form.

Digital education

Digital technologies available in every kindergarten should be used in play and in the activities chosen by the children. The National Curriculum states that a child should acquire basic digital skills in kindergarten. For example, digital games should be used to learn the concept of numbers and relations. The methods chosen by the staff should include not only print media, but also digital texts on the internet and digital educational programmes. Children should be supported in using different age-appropriate digital games and also learn to operate different electronic devices such as keyboard, mouse, tablet, interactive board (National Institute of Education and Youth 2022).

In 2020, the Ministry of Education established a central repository for digital educational content "Viki" to support interactive teaching in kindergartens and schools. The website (https://viki.iedu.sk/resources/browser/verejne) contains, among other things, publicly available educational content for kindergartens, which is much used by kindergarten professionals. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, professionals worked on documents and materials from home and kept in touch with children and parents via Facebook groups and video conferences.

Monitoring – evaluation

In **childcare centres** for under 3 year-olds, no mandatory evaluations or other assessments are required.

Child-related assessment

In **kindergartens,** the children are assessed by the pedagogy professionals, the lead staff and the kindergarten supervisor, mostly through observations, in order to determine the individual stage of development, to assess the effectiveness of the educational activities and to evaluate and improve the individual work with a child. In addition to observations recorded in writing by the staff, drawings or handicraft work of the child, for example, are also included in the evaluation. The teacher cooperates closely with the parents and informs them regularly about the child's development. The results of the pedagogical observation are recorded in diagnostic sheets. Each child has its own portfolio in which the results and the current development of the child are documented.

In order for a child to transfer to primary school, “school readiness" is meant to be assessed (Melikantová et al. 2020, 46). This can be done by the Centre of Counselling and Prevention, but this is not carried out in all kindergartens and not for all children. The final decision on school enrolment lies with the parents.

Centre-based internal evaluation

All educational institutions, i.e. also **kindergartens**, carry out annual, obligatory self-evaluation measures and submit a report to the school supervisory authority and the responsible body. This focuses in particular on the children, the staff team and their continuing professional development, the educational activities, projects, cooperation with other institutions, material and financial resources, as well as the goals that are being pursued. The educational processes and the children's achievements are also taken into account. These reports are prepared by the centre leaders in cooperation with the staff and also include the results of the external evaluation of the school supervisory authority as well as the children’s own perspectives (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 104).

External evaluation

If external evaluations take place at all in **childcare centres**, they are conducted within the framework of the annual evaluation plan of the Ministry of Labour or when there have been complaints (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 125).

In **kindergartens**, the school inspectorate, as an independent external body, controls the quality of the pedagogical management, the personnel, spatial and material conditions as well as the educational process according to certain criteria, which can be viewed for each type of educational institution on its website. This is done, for example, by means of observations, questionnaires, checklists, document analyses, inspections of the facilities and interviews with the professionals. These aspects are summarised in a report which is discussed with the management and which also contains recommendations for improving quality.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

The Education Act requires that children with special educational needs receive the support they require. They can either attend mainstream ECEC settings or separate support institutions. Special education facilities are established primarily for children with multiple disabilities who, despite supports, are unable to attend mainstream kindergarten. In regular kindergartens, special groups can be set up for these children, or they join a regular group with the other children. Specialised professionals or psychologists are called in as support and an individual educational

plan is developed for each child, which is, however, based on the national curriculum framework.

In 2023, a total of 2,485 children were cared for by 527 professionals in 333 special needs kindergartens, with 208 children enrolled in 28 special classes in regular kindergartens (CVTI 2023b).

Children with a migration background and children from Roma communities

Slovakia belongs to the countries with the highest proportion of other ethnic and minority populations in the Central European region. The territory of Slovakia with its present borders was defined when the Czechoslovak Republic was established in 1918. Until then, the territory was part of the Kingdom of Hungary (from around 1000 to1867) and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867-1918). Until 1918, Slovakia was not understood as a state formation, but as the territory where Slovaks lived. This territory was also inhabited by other ethnic groups. At the turn of the 9th and 10th centuries, Old Hungarian tribes penetrated a significant part of the area of today's Slovakia. In the 16th to 18th centuries, Roma, Croats, Serbs, Czechs, as well as Germans, Jews, and Ruthenians arrived. At the end of the 19th century, Bulgarians were added, and by the beginning of the 20th century, Czechs as well (Botík et al. 2020).

Nowadays, the population of national minorities has predominantly Slovak citizenship. The Constitution guarantees national minorities the right to education in their own language (national schools). For example, in the school year 2022/2023, there were 258 kindergartens in the Slovak Republic in which the language of instruction was Hungarian only. In 2022, there were 2,760 children in kindergartens in Slovakia who did not have Slovak citizenship (see *Table 6*). Only these children can be assumed to have an immigration background. However, based on the available statistics, we cannot identify the nationality of these children.

In 2022, only 1.2% of the total population held a non-Slovak citizenship, of which 60% came from other EU27(2020) countries. Among the under 5 year-olds, the respective shares are 0.2% and 62.1% (Eurostat 2023c).

According to the 2021 Census, 16.2% of the population belonged to minority ethnic groups, Hungarians made up the largest group (7.7%). Roma comprise the second largest group, who make up just under 1.2% of the total population (Eurydice 2023, 1.3). However, it is assumed that these figures are actually higher. Since many Roma do not declare their ethnicity in census and other surveys, their numbers are generally not correctly reflected in statistical data. Data from the Roma communities themselves speak of 7.5% of the total population (Melikantová et al. 2020, 19). Data from compiled national and local authority surveys estimate a total number of approximately 400,000 Roma in Slovakia, whereas the results of the 2021 census indicate the number of Roma in the Slovak Republic to be 67,179 (Eurydice 2023, 1.3).

In 2021, the government approved the "Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2030" (*Stratégia pre rovnosť, inklúziu a participáciu Rómov do roku 2030*). Priority areas are employment, education, health and housing, with special emphasis on increasing the attendance rate of Roma children in kindergarten, non-discrimination and strengthening measures to combat anti-Roma racism (Ministry of the Interior 2021). To better connect with Roma communities, professionals also make home visits to familiarise families with early education opportunities (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 120).

For children whose family language is not Slovak, there are a number of kindergartens where national minority languages are represented. In 2022, Hungarian was the most common language in public kindergartens (in 258 kindergartens), followed by Slovak-Hungarian (75). Other languages were spoken in four kindergartens. In the private sector, there was one kindergarten

each where German and Hungarian were spoken and seven with other languages. Hungarian was spoken in 22 church-affiliated kindergartens.

Among all children in kindergartens with a nationality other than Slovak, children with Hungarian nationality are the most frequent (94.4%), followed by 0.5% children with Czech/Silesian and 0.4% with Roma nationality. Most children with other nationalities attend public kindergartens (90.8%), followed by church-affiliated kindergartens (7.9%) and private kindergartens (1.3%) (see *Table 6*, CVTI 2023a, own calculations).

Table 6

Slovakia: Children in kindergartens by citizenship, nationality and provider type, 2022

Children in kindergartens	**Public**	**Private**	**Church affiliated**	**Total**
By citizenship				
With Slovak citizenship	160,139	9,669	6,262	**176,070**
With non-Slovak citizenship[5]	2,115	500	145	**2,760**
By nationality	**Public**	**Private**	**Church affiliated**	**Total**
Slovakian	150,599	9,536	5,427	**165,562**
Hungarian	9,059	52	804	**9,915**
Roma	84	1	19	104
Czech, Moravian-Silesian	71	6	4	81
Ukrainian	59	10	1	70
Ruthenians	51	1	2	54
German	17	4		21
Polish	6		2	8
Others	193	59	3	255
Total number of children with a non-Slovak nationality	**9,540**	**133**	**835**	**10,508**

Source: CVTI 2023a

Parental leave arrangements[6]

Maternity leave (*materská dovolenka*) is 34 weeks, of which six to eight weeks are taken before birth. 14 weeks, six of which are taken after the birth, are compulsory. During this time, 75% of the former average income is paid, with an upper limit of €1,851. A total of 270 days of health insurance contributions must have been paid during the previous two years. No work with the former employer is allowed when on Maternity leave, though working with another employer is possible. Single mothers receive 37 weeks of maternity protection.

Paternity leave lasts 28 weeks after birth; it is remunerated during two weeks within the first six weeks after birth to the same conditions as maternity benefit. Fathers are also entitled to a non-transferable maternity benefit throughout the period of Paternity leave. However, both parents cannot receive this allowance at the same time. While the father is taking Paternity

[5] Calculated from the difference between the total number of children in kindergarten and the number of children with Slovak citizenship. Children with another nationality (e.g. Hungarian) may also have Slovak citizenship.

[6] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Slovakia by Zuzana Dančíková in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

leave, the mother cannot receive Parental leave benefit either. Single fathers are entitled to 31 weeks of Paternity leave.

Parental leave (*rodičovská dovolenka*) can be taken by both the mother and the father – even simultaneously – until the child is 3 years old. It is an individual, non-transferable entitlement. All employed parents permanently or temporarily residing in the Slovak Republic and caring for at least one child under 3 years in the same household of age are entitled to receive a **Parental allowance** (*rodičovský príspevok*) of €413 per month if they previously received Maternity leave pay and €301 if they did not. Only one parent can claim this amount even when both parents are on leave which can be interrupted several times. It is also possible to work.

Parents of under 3 year-olds who are in employment or studying are entitled to a **Childcare allowance** (*príspevok na starostlivosť o dieťa*): €80 per month for enrolment in a kindergarten attached to a school, €280 for care in other public institutions and €41 for other persons or relatives taking care of the child.

In 2019, 24% of fathers, especially those with higher incomes, made use of their share of maternity benefit. In February 2023, parental allowance was paid to 138,969 parents, of whom 97% were women.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Slovakia

*Country expert assessment by **Monika Miňová, Zuzana Lynch and Milena Lipnická***

Although pre-primary education has received increased attention in the Slovak Republic in recent years, there are many problem areas that need to be addressed. We face a number of challenges and the following are issues that we see as needing urgent attention.

Qualified and motivated teachers: The teaching profession is not sufficiently attractive in the Slovak Republic. There are risks of an ageing workforce and teacher shortages. Financial motivation is insufficient. International comparisons show that teachers in Slovakia have some of the lowest salaries in OECD member states (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2021). The remuneration system does not reflect the quality of teaching. It depends on the level of education attained, the career stage and the number of years of service in education. There is also a need to improve working conditions and to increase the social status and recognition of their work. Moreover, in line with European trends, kindergartens need to be staffed by teachers with a university degree. In the Slovak Republic, vocational secondary education is still the regular qualification requirement.

Pre-primary education available for all children: The introduction of compulsory education from 2021 for all 5 year-olds has been a major challenge until recently. This has increased pressure on municipalities to focus on building or expanding kindergarten places, but some are currently under-used, e.g. in the Košice Autonomous Region the average occupancy rate of newly created capacities was 76%. Particularly in marginalised Roma communities, it is difficult to get parents to bring their children to kindergarten. It is therefore necessary to work more with Roma parents to help them appreciate the benefits of pre-primary education. However, the introduction of compulsory pre-primary education has prevented many younger children from attending kindergartens as the 5 year-olds now have priority because of their required enrolment. However, the 2023 amendment to the Education Act requires municipalities to create sufficient capacity for 4 and 3 year-olds.

ECEC for children up to 3 years of age. A system of joint nursery and kindergarten facilities operated in our country until the 1990s. For vulnerable groups of children, such as children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, marginalised Roma communities, children with disabilities,

institutional conditions for their cognitive, physical, social and emotional development have not yet been created by the State. Instead, the State supports early childhood care with social services (including in facilities for children up to 3 years of age). The State also makes financial contributions to parents, legal guardians for the proper care of children in the family. It is therefore not seen as necessary for them to entrust early years children to ECEC settings. Currently, there is no national curriculum for this age group of children. Supporting the development of children under 3 years of age should become one of the country's key priorities. It should not just be about placing children in institutions.

Inclusive education and teamwork. In order for education in the Slovak Republic to be open to all, it is necessary to create adequate organisational, staffing and spatial conditions through increased funding. The lack of specialist support staff (special educators, school psychologists, social educators) contributes to the inability of pre-primary settings to respond to the diverse needs of children and pupils. Slovak teachers are used to working individually in the classroom, but an inclusive environment requires developing the competence to work with others, as a team. The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic has decided to address the pressing issues in this area. The proposed direction is set out in a document called Strategy for an Inclusive Approach in Education and Training (*Stratégia inkluzívneho prístupu vo výchove a vzdelávaní*, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport 2021).

Professional staff and new non-teaching staff positions. Developing the potential and considering the diverse needs of children is another goal in our ECEC system. This requires the coordinated work of professionals in pre-primary support teams. It is not common practice in Slovakia for specialist staff to be employed in mainstream kindergartens. The number of teaching assistants is also very low. Teachers have to manage many duties alone, often in the isolation of their own classroom, without the teamwork and support of teaching assistants and professional staff. Helping to provide compulsory pre-primary education to children with disabilities or children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds is the most recent role of the assistant teacher.

Informatisation and digitisation of education. In the past, this area has been underestimated and the global pandemic COVID-19 caught education unprepared. This unpreparedness was reflected not only in the lack of technical equipment in kindergartens and schools, but also in the underdeveloped digital competences of teachers for distance learning, especially during the first wave, which started in March 2020. At the same time, however, we have also seen increased efforts by teachers themselves to deal with the situation and face new challenges. On social media, teachers have been supporting each other and giving each other support and professional advice. In the context of the digitalisation of education, funding has also been earmarked for teacher education/training. A new post of digital technology coordinator has been created, with the task of helping teachers and pupils improve their work with digital technologies. Although children are supposed to learn and play mainly in natural environments, we cannot completely ignore new digital technologies in education. Integrating them in a meaningful way is a challenge for today's kindergarten.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population of the Slovak Republic was 5,434,712 inhabitants; thus, the population has increased slightly from 2005 to 2021 (2000: 5,598,657, 2005: 5,372,685, 2010: 5,390,410; 2015: 5,421,349; 2020: 5,457,873) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.63, Slovakia was above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[7].

Children under age 6

Table 7

Slovakia: Number of under 6 year-olds in the total population, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year	57,032
1 year-olds	57,400
2 year-olds	59,066
3 year-olds	60,111
4 year-olds	60,788
5 year-olds	60,465
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**354,862**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 3.2% of the total population were children under the age of 3, and 6.5% were children under the age of 6. These proportions are significantly above the EU27 average.

Table 8

Slovakia: Distribution of under 6 year-olds in population by age compared with EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Slovakia/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Slovakia	3.2	3.4	6.6
	∅ EU15[8]	3.2	3.2	6.4

[7] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

[8] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Year	Comparison Slovakia/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2005	Slovakia	2.9	3.0	5.9
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Slovakia	3.1	3.3	6.4
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Slovakia	3.2	3.3	6.5
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, more than half (56.5%) of households in the Slovak Republic with children under 6 years of age were couple households Single parent households accounted for only 1.3% – almost exclusively single mothers.

Table 9

Slovakia: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %+
Total households	693,000	
Couple households	391,200	56.5
Other types of households	292,800	42.3
Total single households	9,000	1.29
Single households, women	8,900	1.28
Single households, men	100**	0.01

Source: Eurostat 2023k, *Own calculations, ** data calculated

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In the Slovak Republic, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 79.8% and for women 72.2% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 64.8% of women and 85.3% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were slightly below the EU EU-average (87.2%) and those of mothers were slightly above the EU-average (63.6%) (Eurostat 2023f).

Table 10a

Slovakia: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Slovakia	36.8	82.2
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[9]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7

[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

	2021	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Slovakia	64.8	85.3
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[10]	Netherlands: 80.5	Malta: 95.8
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Rep.: 42.3	Romania: 81.5

Source: Eurostat 2023f

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 10b.*

Table 10b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023f, 2023j

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[10] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[11]

In 2022, 24.9% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, which was lower than the EU27 average (23.3%). The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 16.5% compared to 21.6% for the European average. 3.4% of under 6 year-olds and 3.2% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation in 2020 (EU average 6.1 % and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023g, k).

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

SLOVENIA

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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1. ECEC governance in Slovenia

In Slovenia, early childhood education and care provision is organised as a unitary system. Since 1993, the age-integrated ECEC institutions for children aged 11 months up to statutory schooling, generally at age 6, come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education (*Ministrstvo za vzgojo in izobraževanje*).

Slovenia was the first of the post-communist countries to transfer responsibility for early childhood education from the then Ministry of Health, Family and Social Security to the then Ministry of Education and Sport (Krek 1995, 37). The government's concrete responsibilities include issuing relevant legislation and providing an ECEC curriculum. Municipalities have a duty to provide sufficient places and to ensure that the national curricular framework is implemented.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Table 1 gives an overview of the main staff categories working in centre-based settings. Core professionals (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) are also categorised according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 at end of this chapter).

Table 1
Slovenia: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Early Childhood Teacher/ Kindergarten Teacher *Vzgojitelj/ vzgojiteljica predšolskih otrok* *Profile:* Early Childhood	*Vrtec* **ECEC centre/ Kindergarten** 11 months–5 years[1]	Core professional with group responsibility Leader of an ECEC setting Head of an ECEC unit in a primary school	11 months – 5/6 years	3 years of higher education *Award:* Bachelor's degree (Professional Bachelor) ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for settings for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for pre-primary settings in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In the case of Slovenia, the relevant format is **0–5** years. However, some 6 year-olds may also attend kindergarten if they were born before September 1st.

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Pedagogy Professional	*Osnovna šola* **Basic school**[2] 1st grade 6–7 years	Core professional with group responsibility (works along Primary School Teacher; Early Childhood Teacher teaches half of the lessons)	0–5/6 years	
	Bolnišnica **Hospital** 0–5 years	Core professional with small group responsibility	11 months – 5/6 years	
Early Childhood Assistant Teacher[3] *Vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok – pomočnik vzgojitelja / vzgojiteljica predšolskih otrok – pomočnica vzgojiteljice*	*Vrtec* **ECEC centre/ Kindergarten** 11 months–5 years	Qualified co-worker – works with core professional or alone with group during absence of Early Childhood Teacher, e.g. rest time for children, morning assembly, pick-up time, etc. [4]	11 months – 5/6 years	4 years upper secondary/vocational qualification *Award:* Vocational *Matura* ECTS credits: n/a[5] EQF level: 3 ISCED 2011: 3
Early Childhood Teacher for early intervention *Vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok za zgodnjo obravnavo*	*Vrtec* **ECEC centre/ Kindergarten** 11 months–5 years	Individual work with children in need of additional support	11 months–5/6 years	University degree in a relevant subject area[6] ECTS credits: 240/180 EQF level: 7 or 6 ISCED 2011: 7 or 6 3-year Professional Bachelor's degree course ECTS credits: 180

[2] Unified school for primary and first stage of secondary education, ISCED 1 and 2 (Eurydice 2023a)

[3] The job title changed from Early Childhood Teacher's Assistant (previous) to Early Childhood Teacher – Teacher's Assistant (valid from 01.09.2018). For reasons of readability we have chosen the title **Early Childhood Assistant Teacher** for this report.

[4] A Preschool Teacher's Assistant, as a member of the kindergarten staff, may also organise an ECEC programme for under 3 year-olds in their own home.

[5] n/a = not applicable

[6] Defectology, Pedagogy, Psychology, Social pedagogy or Special and rehabilitation pedagogy (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 85/22); some study programmes are credited with 180 ECTS, some with 240 ECTS

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6 Master's degree in relevant subject area[7] ECTS credits: 120 (2 year programme) 60 (1 year programme) EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Early Childhood Teacher for children with special needs *Vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok s posebnimi potrebami*	*Vrtec* **ECEC centre/ Kindergarten** 11 months– 5 years	Individual work with children in need of additional support	11 months – 5/6 years	University degree in relevant subject area[8] ECTS credits: 240/180 EQF level: 7 or 6 ISCED 2011: 7 or 6 Master's degree in relevant subject area[9] ECTS credits: 120/60 EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Early Childhood Teacher for communication in Slovenian sign language *Vzgojitelj za komunikacijo v slovenskem znakovnem jeziku*	*Vrtec* **ECEC centre/ Kindergarten** 11 months– 5 years	Individual work with children in need of additional support	11 months – 5/6 years	3-year Professional Bachelor's qualification as Early Childhood Teacher ***plus*** additional qualification as an instructor of Slovenian sign language.[10]
Early Childhood Teacher for working with the deaf-blind *Vzgojitelj za delo z gluhoslepimi*	*Vrtec* **ECEC centre/ Kindergarten** 11 months– 5 years	Individual work with children in need of additional support	11 months – 5/6 years	3-year Professional Bachelor's qualification as Early Childhood Teacher ***plus*** additional qualifications as an interpreter for the deaf-blind and as a

[7] Inclusive pedagogy, Inclusion in education, Speech therapy and deaf pedagogy, Pedagogy, Psychology, Social pedagogy or Special and rehabilitation pedagogy (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 85/22); some study programmes are credited with 60 ECTS, some with 120 ECTS.
[8] Defectology or Special and rehabilitation pedagogy (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 85/22); some study programmes are credited with 180 ECTS, some with 240 ECTS.
[9] Special and rehabilitation pedagogy, Speech therapy and deaf pedagogy, Inclusive pedagogy or Inclusion in education (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 85/22); some study programs are credited with 60 ECTS, some with 120 ECTS.
[10] Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 85/22.

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				specialist in working with the deaf-blind.[11]

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Public kindergartens are managed by Principals/Centre Heads. They assume two roles: that of a pedagogical leader and that of an executive manager.

Anyone who meets the conditions for an Early Childhood Teacher or school consultant, has at least five years of work experience in education, holds the title of Senior Councillor, Councillor or Adviser or has held the title of Mentor for at least five years and has passed the principal's exam (see below) can be appointed as the director of a public kindergarten (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 141/22).

Principals/Centre Heads are appointed by a kindergarten council comprising five representatives of kindergarten's staff, three representatives of a founder (municipality), and three representatives of parents (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007, Article 46).

Responsibilities of the Principal of an ECEC centre are described in the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007, Article 49). The ECEC Principal performs the following tasks:

- Organises, plans and manages the work of the kindergarten
- Prepares a kindergarten development programme
- Prepares a proposal for the annual work plan and is responsible for its implementation
- Is responsible for realising the rights of children and the rights and duties of adults
- Leads the work of the Teachers' Council
- Creates a proposal for above-standard programmes
- Promotes lifelong education and the training of professionals
- Organises mentoring for students during work placements/practicum
- Participates in the educational work of EC teachers, monitors their work and advises them
- Proposes the promotion of staff to job titles
- Decides on the promotion of employees to pay grades
- Monitors the work of the advisory service

[11] Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 85/22.

- Takes care of the institution's cooperation with parents (parental meetings, 'speaking' hours and other forms of cooperation)
- Informs parents about the work of the kindergarten and about changes in the rights and obligations of pupils, apprentices and students[12]
- Ensures the enforcement of decisions of state bodies
- Represents the kindergarten and is responsible for the legality of the work
- Determines the systematisation of workplaces
- Decides on the employment relationships and on the disciplinary responsibility of employees
- Is responsible for ensuring and determining quality through self-evaluation and preparing an annual report on the self-evaluation of the kindergarten
- Performs other tasks in accordance with laws and other regulations.

During absence from the centre the ECEC Principal may authorise in writing specific members of the kindergarten staff to carry out tasks within their competence.

A candidate who has not taken the leadership exam can also be appointed, but must complete it no later than one year after the beginning of the mandate. If the ECEC Principal does not pass the exam within the year, the mandate is terminated by law. An ECEC leader's mandate lasts five years (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007, Article 53).

Leadership is predominantly understood as hierarchical (ECEC leader as the main person to make decisions, to sign official papers, etc.); however, in most cases ECEC leaders make decisions based on discussions made with their deputy leaders and/or consultants (basically with persons close to them; so in this sense leadership is also to some extent shared).

As part of a full-time workload, the ECEC Principal is obliged to carry out

- Three hours of work with children, or four hours of counselling work per week in a kindergarten with 10 or 11 playrooms or
- One and a half hours of work with children, or two hours of counselling work per week in a kindergarten with 12 or 13 playrooms.

In a kindergarten with 14 or more playrooms, the Principal does not have the obligation to work with children or to do consulting work as part of his full-time work obligation (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 27/2014, 54/21, Article 3).

Specific qualification requirements for ECEC centre leaders

The education and training programme for the leadership exam and the content of the exam are determined by the minister on the proposal of the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education.

A completed postgraduate study programme can also be recognised in lieu of the leadership exam, for which the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education determines that it provides the knowledge specified for the exam (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007, Article 106).

Content of the leadership exam

- Introduction to educational management (globalisation and trends, introduction of changes)
- Theory of organisations and management (educational institutions as organisations, management, decision-making, organisational climate and culture)

[12] Children 0-6 are not mentioned in the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007).

- Planning (planning and evaluation, aspects of quality in education, financial operations)
- People in the organisation (motivation, communication, meeting management, conflict resolution)
- The principal as a pedagogical leader (newer insights into student and professional learning, leadership strategies for learning, assessment of annual work performance, monitoring and observation of lessons, professionalism and professional development)
- Legislation in education (systemic regulations in the field of education, sectoral laws and by-laws, employment relations, inspection)
- Optional subjects (current subjects in the field of leadership in education).

The goal of the "Headship Licence Programme" is to train participants for the tasks of managing and governing schools and kindergartens, defined in school legislation, and to develop knowledge and skills that contribute to personal and organisational efficiency. It is based on modern theoretical views on management in education, on international and national research on the management of educational organisations and on the previous experience with the work of Principals (National School for Leadership in Education 2023).

In 2021, the National School for Leadership in Education (NSLE) was deleted from the court register, and was attached to the National Institute for Education. The Ministry's argumentation was the realisation of the goals of the coalition agreement. The former NSLE's director disagreed with the "purely political" decision to attach the NSLE to the National Institute for Education (Delo 2021). ECEC leaders are also not satisfied with the situation; many argue that they miss the specifically targeted support for ECEC leaders.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Slovenia has an exceptionally highly structured system of credit point acquisition for continuing professional development and career advancement. This enables both Early Childhood Teachers and ECEC Centre Principals to acquire different levels of recognised expertise and posts of responsibility.

Education staff may be promoted to the job titles Mentor, Adviser and Councillor, and from September 2023 on, a fourth title is in use: Senior Councillor (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 141/22). From 2022 on, Early Childhood Assistant Teachers can be promoted to the job titles of Mentor and Adviser (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 115/22). For this, they must have sufficient work experience, demonstrate good work performance, complete further education and training programmes in education or otherwise obtain additional functional knowledge and perform various additional professional work.

Titles gained are permanent and do not have to be reviewed or renewed.

Early Childhood Teachers who act as mentors during students' workplace-based learning do not need any formally acquired training or qualification for this post. Centre leaders are in charge of choosing a mentor for each of the students undertaking workplace-based learning.

Article 60 of the Collective Agreement does not specify special conditions for the post of mentor from which it can be concluded that the mentor can also be an employee who does not have a title as designated mentor to the trainee, but it probably makes sense for the mentor in such cases to be a person who knows the field of work well (e-Ravnatelj 2022).

The mentor is credited for working with the trainee for four hours per week (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 27/2014, 54/21, Article 13).

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

In public kindergartens there is an on-site counselling service for children, staff and parents which cooperates with staff and management in planning, monitoring and evaluating the development of the kindergarten and the educational work. The Councillors are in most cases employed at one ECEC centre; in some cases, they may have a working contract with two ECEC centres (working part-time job at each centre). In Slovenia, it is not the case that Councillors would be generally responsible for a number of centres (there is no "Pedagogical Co-ordinator" as, for example, in some regions of Italy).

The counselling service participates in the preparation and implementation of individualised programmes for children with special needs, however they do have also other work obligations. Staff are Psychologists, Pedagogues, Social Workers, Social Pedagogues and Defectologists (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007, Article 67).

Professional workers must master the written Slovenian language, have the appropriate education/qualification specified by law and other regulations, and pass a legally required professional exam (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007, Article 92, paragraph 3).

The basic educational goal of the kindergarten, and in this context also of the counselling service in the kindergarten, is the optimal development of the child regardless of gender, social and cultural origin, religion, nationality, and physical and mental constitution. The counselling service in the kindergarten supports the basic purpose that all participants in the kindergarten are as successful as possible in realising both the fundamental and systemically specified general and special educational goals. The counselling service performs interdisciplinary professional work. On the basis of their specialist knowledge, through a consultative relationship and in a professionally autonomous manner, the counselling staff involve themselves in the complex solution of pedagogical, psychological and social issues of educational work in the kindergarten by helping and cooperating with all participants and, if necessary, also with relevant external institutions. The counselling service in the kindergarten or school is therefore a professional *colleague* in the kindergarten and not a professional kindergarten *service* (Nagode 2008, 5).

There are no special supervisory staff employed by the centre provider. The Centre Leader is responsible for monitoring the work of the staff and advising them (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007, Article 49).

The external evaluation of the educational system and educational organisations in Slovenia takes place in parallel with the self-evaluation of educational institutions (for more details, see the twin document: *Slovenia – Key Contextual Data*).

2.5 Specialist support staff

Specialist support staff are listed in *Table 1*. Specialist staff are in most cases understood as being connected to children with special needs, ensuring them appropriate support in order to develop their potential. The majority of children with special needs attend regular kindergartens, where they are offered various forms of assistance, such as Early Childhood Teachers for Early Intervention. The organisation and manner of implementing programmes are adjusted according to their needs. From June 2022 onwards (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 85/22), EC Teachers for Early Intervention, EC Teachers for additional professional support or other appropriately qualified professional staff may also support the children's development in kindergartens. Children might also get assistance from a sign language specialist or a specialist in adapted communication and work with deaf-blind children.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Table 2 gives a breakdown of the ECEC workforce in Slovenia according to qualification and gender.

Table 2
Slovenia: ECEC staff in centre-based settings, 2022/2023

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce, in %
Staff with a specialist three-year (or longer) higher education degree	**58.8** (7,979 of total 13,564 ECEC staff)
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary, post-secondary)	**43.2** (5,585 of total 13,564 ECEC staff)
Staff with a non-relevant qualification	No data available
Trainee staff	No data available
Unqualified staff	No data available
Specialist support staff (e.g. speech therapists) who work on site on a regular basis	**4.4*** (599 of total 13,564 practitioners in kindergartens) *consultants and other professionals
Male practitioners (387 of total 13,564 ECEC staff) 14 out of a total of 372 were centre leaders 133 out of 7,057 were core pedagogues 211 out of 5,536 were auxiliary staff/assistants	**2.8** **3.8** **1.9** **3.8**
Staff with a minority ethnic background or a 'background of migration'	No official data available[13]

Source: Statistical Office RS 2023c

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Table 3 describes the initial qualifying route for prospective Early Childhood Teachers. The study route is open for those who have finished general secondary education with a university entrance exam (*matura*) ***or*** for those who have completed vocational secondary education with a *vocational matura* or final exam, and for those who finished the 4-year upper secondary programme before 1st June 1995. The course of study lasts three years; candidates must acquire 180 ECTS credits from the compulsory and optional parts of the programme. Credits obtained at other higher education institutions or achieved on the basis of recognised knowledge and

[13] In the 2017/2018 school year, 12 Roma professionals were employed in kindergartens, including one teacher, three teacher assistants and eight Roma assistants (Bozovičar 2019).

skills may also be considered. The course of study concludes by presenting and defending a written Bachelor thesis. If successful, the candidate is awarded the title of *diplomirana vzgojiteljica/diplomiran vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok* (State-approved Early Childhood Education Teacher).

Table 3
Slovenia: Early Childhood Teacher

Job title in Slovenian: *Vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: General *matura*, vocational *matura* or final exam or a 4-year upper secondary vocational programme completed before 1 June 1995. In the case of enrolment limitation, the candidates are selected according to: (1) overall performance in the general *matura*, the vocational *matura* or the final exam: 70 % of credits awarded; (2) overall performance in grades 3 and 4 of the secondary education programme: 30 % of credits awarded. **Professional studies:** 3 years of higher education; candidates must acquire all the required ECTS credits (180) from the compulsory and optional part of the programme. Credits obtained at other higher education institutions or achieved on the basis of recognised knowledge and skills may also be considered. The course of study concludes by presenting and defending a Bachelor thesis. **Award:** State-approved Early Childhood Education Teacher (Bachelor) **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011**: 6 **Main ECEC workplace:** A graduate Early Childhood Teacher can be employed in any organisation engaged in early learning and teaching; most often this means in ECEC settings and the first grade of the nine-year compulsory school. The graduate Early Childhood Teacher can also work in hospital units for young children.

The initial qualifying route for Early Childhood Assistant Teachers is presented in *Table 4*. The route is open for anyone who has successfully completed compulsory education (9 years) or lower vocational education or the equivalent qualifying route under previous regulations. The route is at the upper secondary vocational level and is of 4 years' duration. Students are awarded the vocational *matura* after successful completion of the course. The mandatory part of the vocational *matura* involves taking a written and oral examination in the Slovene language on the education of young children. An optional part is a written and oral exam in a foreign language or mathematics, or exam performances and their defence. Successful candidates are awarded the title of an Early Childhood Assistant Teacher (*vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok – pomočnik vzgojitelja / vzgojiteljica predšolskih otrok – pomočnica vzgojiteljice*) and with this qualification they can be employed in a co-worker role in kindergartens. Persons with a vocational *matura* can either enter employment or continue their initial professional studies at a higher education programme of early childhood education, other professional programmes, and various university programmes (after completing a specific subject at *matura* level).

Table 4
Slovenia: Early Childhood Assistant Teacher

Job title in Slovenian: *Vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok – pomočnik vzgojitelja*
Entry requirements: Completed compulsory education (9 years) or lower vocational education or equivalent education under the previous regulations. In the case of enrolment limitation, candidates are selected according to the final assessment of the compulsory subjects in the 7th, 8th and 9th grade.

Job title in Slovenian: *Vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok – pomočnik vzgojitelja*
Professional studies: 4 years upper secondary/vocational qualification, ending with vocational *matura*. The mandatory part of the vocational *matura* is a written and oral examination in Slovene language and early childhood education (2 subjects). The optional part (2 subjects) is a written and oral examination in a foreign language or mathematics, and exam performances (three performances) and their defence. *Note:* The vocational *matura* award qualifies for employment or continuing education, e.g. higher education programme in early childhood education, other professional programmes, various university programmes (after completion of one subject at *matura*). After successful completion of a one-year *matura*-course, it is also possible to enrol for any kind of university studies. **Award:** License as Early Childhood Assistant Teacher / Vocational *matura* **ECTS credits:** not applicable **EQF level:** 3 **ISCED 2011**: 3 **Main ECEC workplace:** ECEC setting (in a co-worker role) or home-based childcare setting (as core practitioner).

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Early Childhood Teacher – higher education route

Competency specifications

In Slovenia, three universities (University of Maribor, University of Ljubljana, University of Primorska) provide Bachelor-level *studies* for future EC Teachers. Each university publishes its own list of competence specifications for graduates of the Faculty of Education. Here, one example is presented (University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education 2023b). The other two can be accessed via direct links in the References list (University of Maribor 2023; University of Primorska 2023a).

Early Childhood Teacher study programme, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education

The fundamental goal of the programme is to train students for quality educational work with children 0–6 and children in the first grade of the nine-year Basic compulsory school and for cooperation with their parents, colleagues and other professionals.

In the process of education, students of pre-school education become familiar with different conceptions of childhood and education and acquire basic theoretical and practical knowledge from individual areas of activities in kindergarten (Ministry of Education 2020). Graduates of the programme must know how to communicate with children and adults and be able to plan, implement and critically analyse educational work. The programme's electives encourage students to get more in-depth training for those areas of kindergarten work for which they have a particular interest and ability. An important goal of the study programme is the acquisition of basic and broadly transferable knowledge which will enable graduates to search for resources and ways to acquire the specific knowledge and skills they need at work in the process of lifelong learning.

The Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana has adapted the list of general and subject-specific competences developed by an international working group for the field of educational science and the TUNING (*Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*) teacher education programme supported by the European Union within the Socrates–Erasmus programme (http://www.unideusto.org/tuning/) and used it for developing new study programmes.

General competence specifications

- Knowledge and understanding of social systems (in particular the education system)
- Sensitivity/openness to people and social situations
- Knowledge and understanding of developmental principles, differences and individual needs
- Knowledge of educational concepts, their philosophical and historical foundations
- Knowledge of and compliance with the institutional frameworks of work (requirements, legislation, documentation requirements, legal aspects of educational work)
- Ability to research in education
- Organisational and management skills in education, mentoring students and trainees
- Use of ICT in education
- Understanding individual values and value systems, management of professional-ethical issues
- Knowledge, understanding, focusing on inclusive, non-discriminatory work, multiculturalism.

In addition to these competences, students also gain wider general competencies, acquired by students of *all* higher education programmes, irrespective of the course of study:

- Knowledge and understanding of social systems (especially processes in education)
- Sensitivity/openness to people and social situations
- Knowledge and understanding of developmental laws, differences and individual needs
- Knowledge of educational and educational concepts, their philosophical and historical foundations
- Knowledge and consideration of the institutional framework of work (requirements, legislation, documentation needs, legal aspects of educational work)
- Qualification for research in education
- Organisational and managerial skills in education, mentoring of students and interns
- Use of information and communication technology in education
- Understanding individual values and value systems, mastering professional-ethical issues
- Knowledge, understanding, orientation towards inclusive, non-discriminatory work, multiculturalism.

Subject-specific competence specifications

- Knowledge of the content and didactics of the field
- Understanding and application of curriculum theories and general and didactic knowledge in the subject area
- Interdisciplinary integration of contents
- Use of special-pedagogical skills to work with children with special needs
- Pedagogical classroom management and/or group management
- Organising active and independent learning, supporting effective learning strategies
- Ability to verify and evaluate the skills and achievements of pupils and developing feedback information
- Communicating with professionals from various educational fields
- Cooperation with parents
- Understanding the relationship between the educational institution and the social environment. Systemic vision and action
- Knowing and understanding the theoretical foundations of counselling
- Creation of a comprehensive assessment of the needs of a child or a group of children, their strong and weak areas taking into account environmental factors (physical, social, cultural) with the appropriate procedures and instruments
- Applying knowledge of management procedures and principles of counselling, planning and implementation of intervention programmes

- Ability to establish and maintain partnerships with other users or groups (parents, local community, advisory services, economy, etc.)
- Promoting such changes of a system that ensure basic rights and needs of a user/group
- Knowledge, critical assessment and application of theories of childhood development and learning in the planning, implementation and evaluation process of educational activities.
- Knowledge of forms, contents and methods of work and autonomous implementation of the curriculum for kindergarten and first grade curriculum of primary school
- Knowledge of all early childhood curricular areas and first grade subjects and their (interdisciplinary) integration in the learning process
- Efficient and flexible organisation of time and space: the layout of the classroom for a variety of activities (places for play and for calm activities), the appropriate choice of teaching and didactic materials, flexible scheduling of activities and transitions between them
- Observing and monitoring the achievements, progress and development of children
- Identifying and taking into account individual needs and other differences among children (in personality, abilities, cognitive styles, family or socio-cultural environment, ...) at educational work
- Providing emotional safety of children and the promotion of autonomy in accordance with their maturity
- Nurturing curiosity of children, taking into account the intrinsic motivation and interests, spreading interests and promoting exploratory and active learning
- Knowledge of teamwork and co-operation in a team with a teacher or teacher's assistant, work in a collective or professional team
- Effective communication with parents and knowledge and use of various forms of cooperation with them.

Curricular areas

Tables 5 and *6* present an overview of the compulsory and optional content in the curricula of the three Slovenian universities.

Table 5

Slovenia: Early Childhood Teacher study programmes – compulsory curricular areas/subjects, 2023

Curricular Area	Subjects under specific curricular area		
	University of Maribor (2023a)	**University of Ljubljana** (2023b)	**University of Primorska** (2023a)
Pedagogic/ didactic	Pre-school pedagogy	Pre-school pedagogy	Basics of pedagogy
	Didactics	School pedagogy with didactics	Pre-school pedagogy
	Theory of education	Theory of education	Didactics
Psychology	Developmental psychology	Developmental psychology	Developmental psychology
	Educational psychology	Educational psychology	Educational psychology
Pedagogical methodology	Introduction to the methodology of pedagogical research	Pedagogical methodology	Pedagogical research
Language and literature	Slovene language	Slovene language	Slovene language I, II / Italian language I, II[14]

[14] The programme has two majors: *Preschool education major* and *Preschool education major for institutions with Italian as language of instruction*. For students who choose the Preschool education major for institutions with an Italian language of instruction, the courses will also be conducted (10 contact hours each) in the Italian language.

Curricular Area	Subjects under specific curricular area		
	University of Maribor (2023a)	**University of Ljubljana** (2023b)	**University of Primorska** (2023a)
			Early learning of Slovene / Italian language
	Children's literature	Language and Literature	Children's literature
	Didactics of language education		Language activities in kindergarten
Mathematics	Mathematics education	Early learning of mathematics	Early learning of mathematics
Art	Elementary art educational practice	Art education	Art activities
	Didactics of visual art activities		
Theatre	Puppetry – drama education	Puppets, drama, media	Puppets, theatre, film
Technics	Didactics of technical education	Technical education	Technical activities
Music	Vocal-instrumental practicum I	Music	Musical language
			Child and music
			Music activities
	Didactics of music education	Music in early childhood	Musical activities
Dance	Dance education didactics	Dance expression	Dance activities
Motor development	Didactics of physical education	Movement	Child's motor development
	Children's motoric	Children's motoric	Motor-sport activities
	Motor practical course		
Natural sciences	Didactics of early science	Early natural sciences – chemistry	Early learning of natural science
	Principles of natural sciences	Early natural sciences – physics	
		Early natural sciences – biology	
Social sciences	Didactics of introduction into social environment	Child in society	Early learning of social studies
		Social studies	
	Sociology of the family and the pre-school child	Sociology of education	Sociology of education
Philosophy	/	Selected topics in Philosophy	Philosophy of education
Inclusive/special pedagogy	Special pedagogy	Inclusive education	Inclusion in a kindergarten
ICT	/	/	Educational technology
Health	/	/	Taking care of the health of kindergarten children
Practicum	Practical training I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII	Practicum in the first age group classrooms (children up to 3 years old)	Practical training I, II, III
		Practicum in the second age group classrooms (children 3–6 years old)	
		Practicum in the first grade of compulsory school	
Elective courses	Elective course 1, 2, 3, 4	Professional elective	Elective course – foreign

Curricular Area	Subjects under specific curricular area		
	University of Maribor (2023a)	**University of Ljubljana** (2023b)	**University of Primorska** (2023a)
		course I, II, III	language
		General elective course I, II	Elective course I, II, III
Graduation	Graduation project	Graduation project	Graduation thesis
Other	/	Cross-curricular connections – projects	/

Table 6

Slovenia: Preschool Education study programmes – elective courses

Curricular Area	Subject areas in three universities		
	University of Maribor (2023a)	**University of Ljubljana** (2023b)	**University of Primorska** (2023a)
Media	/	Media education	Communication and media in contemporary society
Dance	Dancing dramatisation in the kindergarten	Dance theatre	/
		Artistic movement and dance pedagogy	
		Stage of Faculty of Education	
Puppets	Preparing and realizing a puppetry project – performance	Puppets in pedagogical process	Puppetry
Nature	Children's play and inquiry in natural environment	Nature in kindergarten, kindergarten in nature	Learn to read nature
		Nature and young children	
Mathematics	Learning mathematics through play	Mathematical challenges in kindergarten	Mathematical plays
		Mathematics through English	
Language and literature / literacy / communication	Slovenian oral texts	Children's literature	Teaching Slovene at pre-school level
	Family literacy	Family literacy	Writing fairy tale texts
	Language activities in kindergarten	Interpersonal communication	Communication skills in education
	Interpretation of texts in juvenile literature		
Technics	/	Creative technical workshops	Selected topics in technical activities
Music	Music activities in kindergarten	Choir III	Musical interpretations I
	Playing instruments – Orff instruments	Communication with music	Musical didactical games
Experiential pedagogics	/	/	Experiential pedagogy
Children with disabilities	/	Special pedagogy	Basic methods of working with pre-school blind and visually impaired children

Curricular Area	Subject areas in three universities		
	University of Maribor (2023a)	**University of Ljubljana** (2023b)	**University of Primorska** (2023a)
Psychology	Useful psychological approaches in pre-school education	Development, teaching and learning in early childhood	Family Psychology
	Children's play and attachment		
Motor development / sport activities	Sensory motoric	Movement – a method of play	Physical sports activities in nature – swimming
	Physically talented children	Movement – a method of play for all periods of life	Sport for relaxation – tennis
		Mountaineering	Sports for relaxation – aerobics
	Sports in outdoor education	Swimming	Sport for relaxation – volleyball
		Basic physical education	
Foreign Language	Teaching English at pre-school level	English language I – Strategies for learning a foreign language	Teaching English language at an early stage
			Learning Italian in the pre-school period
		English language II – linguistic abilities	Foreign language
			Early learning of Italian language
Art	Artistic expression and space	Artistic creativity	/
	Visual art activities in the museum and gallery	Embodied approaches to creativity and learning	
Pedagogical methodology	Methodology of qualitative and quantitative pedagogical research	Research in education	/
Pedagogy	Educational Concepts in Theory and Practice	Pedagogical speech in kindergarten	Alternative pedagogical concepts in theory and practice
	Moral education and ethics		
	Pedagogical communication and partnership between kindergarten, school and family		
Other	Adult's role in child's introducing into social environment	Children with experience of violence	Education for diversity and social justice
		Children in the animals' kingdom	
	Team work in kindergarten and in school	Play and natural sciences	Italian as a professional language
		Kindergarten – a democratic community	
		Mathematical art picture book and didactic materials	Children's rights in kindergarten

Pedagogic-didactic approaches

In line with general academic practice, higher education teachers are autonomous regarding the choice of content, literature and other resources for a particular course. In general, they are expected to adopt an interdisciplinary approach, including innovative and well-established procedures in the profession based on research evidence and theories of pedagogy.

Based on data accessible in the course syllabuses of study programmes at the University of Maribor (2023a) and the University of Primorska (2023b) (the University of Ljubljana does not have a course syllabus published on its website), higher education teachers use the following learning and teaching methods: lecture, discussion, documents analysis, theoretical and empirical research, project work (individual and in groups), discourse, cooperative learning, individual learning, teamwork, laboratory work, seminar work, problem based learning, individual presentations of lessons, e-learning, multimedia presentations.

In courses where specific didactics are required, higher education teachers use varying didactic approaches depending on the subject they teach (e.g. music workshops, musical methods of teaching and learning, public performance (music), display of planned motor/dance activities (motor development, musical education), homework assignments (art), exercises in a swimming pool or in the sea (outdoor activities – swimming), integrated practice etc.

Early Childhood Assistant Teacher– vocational route

Goals of the vocational programme

The 2020 version of the "Educational programme Pre-school education" (Portal MIZŠ 2023a) defines the goals of the study programme rather than competence specifications. These include enabling students to:

- Systematically acquire general and basic knowledge for understanding the principles in nature, society and profession
- Develop skills for successful work and professional growth and ability to understand human relationships
- Learn how to analyse specific technical problems in the workplace, and to plan measures to address them effectively
- Develop personal skills (responsibility, communication skills, creativity and innovation, empathy and openness, and persistence) and values (honesty, act in accordance with ethical principles), which are important for the education context
- Learn about interdisciplinary expertise and acquire knowledge of the basic principles of teamwork
- Develop motivation for education, training and lifelong learning
- Develop a willingness to discover and follow new developments in the professional field
- Master the basic professional terminology and know how to use scientific literature
- Use modern information technology to work in the professional field and to work with the resources
- Acquire the basics of entrepreneurship, making it easier to adapt to changes in the workplace and the labour market, and to successfully plan and manage his/her own career
- Develop social skills, independence and responsibility
- Actively take care of their own health and the health of the children entrusted to them and to develop a positive attitude towards a healthy lifestyle
- Work safely and ecologically aware, to act as responsible citizens, and know how to properly protect and preserve nature
- Know about and link theoretical and practical knowledge about development and education of children

- Master theoretical and practical knowledge of individual educational fields, the methodology and didactics of these areas, educational resources, tools and materials
- Effectively and creatively plan and implement educational work in the group
- Know how to organise a stimulating educational environment for the all-round development of children
- Learn how to observe, monitor and evaluate the child's development and progress
- Learn to communicate with children and adults and to learn about the methods and forms of cooperation with parents
- Learn to evaluate their own work through self-reflection and self-regulation.

Curricular areas

The vocational education programme consists of various mandatory and optional modules. The following are included in the 2020 version of the "Curriculum Pre-school Education" (Portal MIZŠ 2023b).

General education subjects: Slovenian; mathematics; foreign language; arts; history; geography; sociology; psychology; physics; chemistry; biology; physical education.

Professional modules: Communication skills; pedagogy and pedagogical approaches in the preschool period; development and learning of young children; safe and healthy environment; early childhood curriculum; games for children; creative expression; maths for young children; linguistic expression of children; nature for children; social studies for children; information and communication technology; artistic expression; musical expression; dance expression; sports for children; multimedia.

The emphasis is also on practical training (practicum in ECEC settings), optional (elective) courses and an open curriculum.

Pedagogic-didactic approaches

The teacher is autonomous in determining the number of hours devoted to addressing the individual learning topics and determining the sequence of learning content. Orientation goals oblige the teacher to motivate the student to find the most innovative and feasible ideas and also projects.

Lessons should be conducted using various methods: brainstorming, explanation, guided discussion, demonstration, practical student activities, method of using resources, etc. The teacher is the moderator in the lesson, directing it to the students' activities and enabling reflection of experience, autonomy in thinking, critical analysis and creativity. Explanation and demonstration are problem-oriented (e.g. Gimnazija in srednja šola Rudolfa Maistra Kamnik 2023).

Vocational schools emphasise experiential learning, the importance of internships in kindergarten, give students additional knowledge of alternative pedagogies, and at the same time enable them to gain concrete experience abroad, in the Erasmus+ programme (practical training with work abroad).

Part of the lessons are conducted in the form of cross-curricular workshops for children, which will be held either at school or in the other relevant organisations in the community (e.g. museum), or in kindergartens, and in the form of courses in the field of sports (hiking, rollerblading, skating, swimming, skiing) (e.g. Gimnazija Celje – Centre 2023).

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

For graduates with related academic qualifications

The University of Primorska (University of Primorska 2022) and the University of Ljubljana (University of Ljubljana 2022) both offer Programmes for educational improvement. These are study programmes that upgrade, deepen and expand the acquired education and are determined by law or by-laws as a condition for carrying out the educational work.

The *Programme for Pedagogical Training in Preschool Education* is a training programme that allows graduates of programmes that train teachers and graduates of other related study programmes to obtain qualifications for employment in kindergarten.

Graduates from the following study programmes can enrol:

- University study programmes where graduates have obtained the professional title of a teacher
- University study programmes in the field of education, arts, social sciences or humanities
- Higher education professional or university study programme in social work
- Second-cycle Master's study programme in the field of education, arts, social sciences or humanities
- Second-cycle Master's study programme in social work, social inclusion and justice in the field of handicap, ethics and gender or social work with the family.

Candidates who have completed equivalent education abroad can also enrol in the programme.

After completion, the participant receives a public document proving the appropriate qualifications for employment as an Early Childhood Teacher.

The programme lasts for one academic year and comprises 60 ECTS credits.

For non-qualified co-workers

See below – "career changers".

Formal opportunities for moving up

Early Childhood Assistant Teachers can continue their studies by attending an Early Childhood Teacher Bachelor's degree programme (1st cycle) at one of the three universities with this programme.

Qualified Early Childhood Teachers can continue their studies in a 2nd cycle Master's study (e.g. *'Early Learning'* at the University of Primorska Faculty of Education or *'Pre-school education'* at the University of Ljubljana Faculty of Education and the University of Maribor Faculty of Education). Studies last two years (120 ECTS).

Besides employment in ECEC settings and primary schools, post-graduates with this qualification (Master's degree) can find employment in all institutions/organisations connected with early learning and teaching as well as in organisations which indirectly deal with children or with providing a stimulating environment for young children. Due to their broad professional profile, the graduate will be able to get a job and perform (University of Primorska 2023c):

- Work and tasks of providing professional assistance in working with children in various public institutions (e.g. in schools and kindergartens) and those organisations that deal with activities for children
- The work and tasks of the Assistant Principal and the Principal of the kindergarten
- Work and duties of a Kindergarten Teacher
- New, innovative forms of work with students in free time, extended stays, societies, centres, etc.

- Work and tasks of a professional worker in a mobile teaching service
- With an additional and appropriate qualification, the work and duties of an assistant in study programmes that are related content-wise to early learning and teaching
- Organisation and management of animation programmes for children
- Work and tasks of professional consulting in the preparation of children's programmes on RTV
- Participation in editorial and expert commissions of printed and electronic media for children
- Cooperation with manufacturers of equipment, lessons and toys intended for younger children.

The interdisciplinary Master's programme at the University of Ljubljana Faculty of Education (2023a), also provides a comparative approach. During studies, students are encouraged to get involved in development and research projects at the faculty and in ECEC centres. Students acquire competences for researching preschool education, managing and developing the quality of kindergartens, and competences in special didactic areas.

Master graduates of the programme at the University of Maribor Faculty of Education (2023b) are able to work as:

- Principal or head of kindergarten
- Pedagogical adviser and professional associate; professional assistance in working with children in various public institutions (e.g schools and kindergartens) and those organisations that deal with activities for children
- Assistant in editorial and professional commissions of printed and electronic media for children
- Assistant (with an additional and appropriate qualification) in study programmes that are substantively related to preschool education
- Associate or consultant in other public institutions responsible for development and research in the preschool field (Institute for Education, Office for Education, Pedagogical Institute ...)
- Contractor on individual projects in various research and evaluation teams
- Job holder for new, innovative forms of work with children in their free time, extended stays abroad, associations, centres, etc., organisation and management of animation programmes for children
- Associate or consultant at equipment manufacturers, teaching aids and toys for young children.

Formal opportunities for moving across qualifications frameworks

Early Childhood Assistant Teacher

Anyone who is about to or has already passed the vocational *matura* examination has the opportunity to take an additional subject of the general *matura* examination (the so-called 5th subject). If they pass this additional exam, graduates have the opportunity to enrol in most university study programmes; however, without the 5th subject they are permitted only to enrol in post-secondary programmes.

Completion of the 5th *matura* exam is possible *in parallel* with the completion of the vocational *matura* exam or *after* completing the vocational *matura* exam.

Early Childhood Teacher

A qualified Early Childhood Teacher (1st cycle) can continue studies for a Master's degree in most 2nd cycle programmes after having passed the exams specified by individual study programmes.

Options for men and women with non-specialist qualifications (career changers)

A candidate who has finished a general (gymnasium) or vocational programme for obtaining secondary professional education can enrol for a vocational course *'Early Childhood Education'* (60 ECTS) (CPI 2023).

The candidate is awarded the professional title Early Childhood Teacher, and can be employed as an Early Childhood Assistant Teacher.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Regulation and cooperation

Each university's Faculty of Education develops its own programme of workplace-based learning as a part of the initial study programme which must be accredited by the National Agency of Republic of Slovenia for Quality in Higher Education (*NAKVIS – Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije za kakovost v visokvem šolstvu*).

Since the profession of an Early Childhood Teacher is a regulated profession, the minimum amount of field-based studies has to be taken into account when drawing up the curriculum, and in the accreditation process of the programme in general.

For the envisaged number of enrolled students, each Faculty of Education must have signed agreements of collaboration with an adequate number of ECEC services.

Duration of workplace-based learning

University of Maribor, Faculty of Education

The study programme foresees workplace-based learning in all three academic years. The scope of workplace-based learning is 660 hours or 22 ECTS, the share in the entire programme is 12.2%. Workplace-based learning (practical training) 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 is carried out in the form of *integrated* practice. Integrated practice is carried out in all three academic years under the guidance of university teachers and is awarded 10 ECTS credits. The student is expected to carry out concrete tasks one day a week in kindergarten or 1st grade of elementary school (planned observation of various aspects of educational work, analyses, visits and getting to know institutions, etc.) (University of Maribor Faculty of Education 2023a).

Practical training units 5 and 8 are carried out in the form of 'block' practice. Condensed practice is carried out in the second and third academic year to the extent of 12 ECTS credits. In the second academic year, the condensed practice lasts two weeks (4 ECTS) and is carried out in kindergarten, in the third academic year it lasts for four weeks (8 ECTS) and is carried out three weeks in the kindergarten and one week in the 1st grade of primary school (University of Maribor, Faculty of Education 2023a).

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education

Workplace-based learning takes place during the second semester of each academic year and amount to a total of 360 hours (12 ECTS credits). In the first year, students spend their workplace-based learning in ECEC centres in groups with children aged up to 3 years (3 ECTS credits). In the second year, students spend their workplace-based learning in the first class of an elementary school (3 ECTS credits), and in the third year they spend their workplace-based learning in groups with children aged from 3 to 6 years (6 ECTS credits) (University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education 2023b).

University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

Workplace-based learning takes place during the second semester of each academic year. In the first and second academic year, 3 ECTS are allocated for each year (6 ECTS together). In the last academic year, 6 ECTS are allocated (University of Primorska, Faculty of Education 2023d).

Table 7

Slovenia: Number of ECTS credits allocated to workplace-based learning in the professional study routes for core pedagogues

University	Workplace-based learning			TOTAL
	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	
Ljubljana (2023/2024)	3 ECTS credits	3 ECTS credits	6 ECTS credits	12 ECTS credits
Maribor (2023/2024)	4 ECTS credits	7 ECTS credits	9 ECTS credits	20 ECTS credits
Primorska (2023/2024)	3 ECTS credits	3 ECTS credits	6 ECTS credits	12 ECTS credits

Skills and competences students are expected to develop during workplace-based learning

University of Maribor, Faculty of Education (2023a)

- To be able to define basic pedagogical terms and explain relations between them.
- To analyse, from the aspect of upbringing, the different roles of educator/teacher and child/student and other pedagogical workers.
- To learn the importance of kindergarten and school documentation.
- To be able to plan, realise and evaluate pedagogical work in kindergarten and the 1st grade of primary school.
- To lead the group independently in carrying out activities in all subject areas of the curriculum.
- To know how to solve educational problems.

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education (2023b)

The purpose of workplace-based learning is “to use the acquired theoretical knowledge in practical work and to critically reflect on one's own and others' decisions and actions”. As part of the integrated practice under the mentoring of the providers of the study programme, which takes place approximately once a week, students “will observe children, educators and kindergarten, experiment with the implementation of pedagogical work and participate in field studies in the outdoor environment”.

University of Primorska, Faculty of Education (2023b, 148-151)

Workplace-based learning contributes to the development of both generic and specific competences throughout the three years of study.

General competences

- Understanding the significance of reflective practitioner
- Qualification to thoughtfully performance and for critical analysis and improvement of educational work (professional development)
- The ability to actively participate in research projects aimed at improving educational practices
- Evaluation of the role of Preschool Teacher.

Specific competences

- Developing reflective approach to educational work
- The ability of self-reflection and of planning changes
- The effectiveness of collaboration with colleagues, the participants in the learning process, and with the environment
- The ability of observing and monitoring the performance of colleagues
- Educational leadership of a section, group, or individuals
- Knowledge of adequate preparation and presentation on a chosen topic or part of a teaching unit.

Forms of student self-evaluation and external evaluation

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education

No data available.

University of Maribor, Faculty of Education (2023a)

As conditions for admission to the exam, the following are mentioned:

- 100% compulsory participation in practical training
- A positive evaluation of the Report of practice/work
- Submission of all the necessary documents.

University of Primorska, Faculty of Education (2023b, 48; 107; 151)

The assessment of students in practical training includes the following:

- 1st academic year: student's project work; report on Practical Training 1 with self-evaluation
- 2nd academic year: report on Practical Training 2
- 3rd academic year: completed and presented obligations, i.e. shorter written products (e.g. lesson plans, reflections, journals, etc.) collected in teaching practice portfolio.

Submission of adequate documentation in compliance with mentor's instruction and with that of the corresponding services of the faculty is prerequisite for entering the course grade in student's resume.

Working conditions of mentoring/supervising staff in ECEC centres

The workplace-based learning of students is regulated by the Collective Agreement for the Education Sector in the Republic of Slovenia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 52/94, 11/23). In Article 59 it is stated that students are accepted by the principal of the setting and that the practicum is carried out according to the programme of the Faculty that sends students. The ECEC setting and the faculty sign a special cooperation contract.

Article 60 of the Collective Agreement stipulates that a mentor is assigned to the pupil or student. The student's mentor monitors, guides and supervises the student during the internship, and at the end also evaluates their work.

Mentoring/supervising staff in ECEC settings do not have a designated role, with a specific time allocation and specifications for mentoring. The roles of mentoring/supervising staff in ECEC centres differ from faculty to faculty. Faculties may introduce these roles at special meetings with ECEC leaders, or students bring the allocated specifications for mentoring with them in the ECEC centre when they start their workplace-based learning.

Mentoring staff are not remunerated for their work with students, but they do receive a certificate (with credits), which they can use when seeking job promotion (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 54/2002, Article 17).

The still relevant White Paper on Education (Krek and Metljak 2011, 488-489) proposed the following solutions in the area of mentoring: *"The practical training of students in educational institutions (compact and integrated practice) should be carried out under the expert guidance of a mentor (teacher, educator or councillor) who acquires a permanent license through a CPD programme for which at least 3 credits are awarded. Practitioners with this title agree to cooperate with higher education institutions during the students' practical placements and contribute towards improving this area through further education and training."*

The White Paper 2011 also proposes that "The work of mentors and partner institutions must be systematically regulated, given the technical and financial evaluation." From 2018-2022, the project MUNERA3 addressed the practical training of mentors (Ministry of Education 2023d).

In her master's thesis, A. Maravič (2016) notes that ECEC settings receive instructions for implementing workplace-based learning from universities. In principle, the instructions include guidelines for the implementation of pedagogical practice. However, according to the results of Maravič's research, the way in which the mentor implements or leads the mentee to new knowledge and experience is missing. More emphasis should also be given on the preparation of mentors for mentoring a student before the actual beginning of workplace-based learning.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Frameworks for regulating the CPD of ECEC personnel

The CPD framework for ECEC staff is guided by general national regulations regarding in-service training for all educational professionals, i.e. also for school teachers (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 23/2023a). The overall aims of CPD are the provision of professional competences for carrying out specific specialist work, supporting a professional education system and thus improving its quality and efficiency.

In 2022, an amendment to the Act on Organisation and Financing of Education was adopted, with an aim to complement the career development of professionals in the field of education and to enable further career development by introducing the fourth title – Senior Councillor (Early Childhood Teachers – Teachers' Assistants can be promoted as Mentor and Adviser only).

Main forms of CPD

"There are many high-quality programmes for further education and training available to education staff. By way of a public call for proposals, the Ministry selects professional training programmes to be published in the Catalogue of further education and training programmes for education staff (KATIS) and determines conditions for co-funding such programmes. Every year,

the Ministry also publishes a public call for applications for grants to subsidise the further education of education and other staff in kindergartens and schools providing public services" (Ministry of Education 2023a).

Further education and training of professionals is carried out in different ways (Ministry of Education 2023b):

– *Programmes for improving education*

Programmes for the improvement of education upgrade, deepen and expand the education of professional workers. They are defined by law and regulations as a qualifying condition for carrying out the educational work of an individual professional worker.

– *Career development programmes*

Career development programmes enable the continuing professional development of professionals, training for the implementation of new public educational programmes and the achievement of the goals of new curricula or knowledge catalogues and exam catalogues, continuous updating of disciplinary and professional knowledge, familiarisation with effective educational practices and successful approaches for professional management of the educational process and increasing its efficiency. These are:

- Professional training programmes (shorter forms of career development programmes, which are intended for the professional and disciplinary development of individual professional workers or professional assets, and are selected through a public tender)
- Thematic conferences (shorter forms of career development programmes that are intended for education and training of all staff members of a certain organisation)
- Singular programmes (organised as a quick, concrete and operative response to sudden or unpredictable problems in education)
- Project programmes are implemented in accordance with the regulations governing the use of European cohesion policy funds. They are intended for the implementation of new pedagogical practices.

From 2023 onwards (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 23/2023) also

- Programmes of public institutions (also study groups and mentoring networks) and
- Programmes of higher education institutions.

In general, there are no specific forms of CPD for different core professionals and qualified co-workers (EC Teachers and EC Assistant Teacher). The forms for those qualified workers who do not have regular contact with children in the classrooms (such as Psychologists, Pedagogues, Social Workers etc.) are the same as those mentioned above. In many cases CPD is provided for all of them at the same time, especially if the CPD activity is workplace-based and out of working hours (e.g. a thematic conference).

In the case of CPD activities outside the workplace, ECEC providers have to cope with certain problems regarding the replacement of staff during CPD attendance and the costs for travelling. At the setting level, the most popular form of CPD is the so-called thematic conference where ECEC Centre Heads can choose the topic either independently or from the providers' CPD programme, and these workshops usually take place at the ECEC workplace, and in after-school hours.

Conditions of CPD

According to the Collective Agreement for the Education Sector in the Republic of Slovenia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 52/1994, 11/2023, Article 53), workers have the right to continuing professional training. For those workers with at least an intermediate education at least five days of professional training per year are obligatory or 15 days every third year; for

other workers at least two days per year and six days every third year. As both Early Childhood Teachers and Early Childhood Teachers – Teachers' Assistants have an intermediate or higher level of education they are guaranteed five days per year for professional training during working hours (the same applies for ECEC centre leaders).

The ECEC Centre Head is obliged to plan trainings and other CPD activities for practitioners within the yearly work plan and to enable them to participate (usually, ECEC centre leaders plan some of the CPD activities as obligatory for all staff, some are left up to the personal/individual choice of staff members). At the same time, it is also the practitioners' obligation to participate in these activities. CPD is thus both obligation and entitlement.

Providers of ECEC provision cover the costs for CPD activities, which are incorporated into the programme budget.

Main providers of CPD

The main providers of CPD include higher education institutions (Faculty of Education, Faculty of Arts, Faculty for Social Work), the National Education Institute, the Educational Research Institute, the National School for Leadership in Education (from 2021 part of the National Education Institute) and non-profit and private providers. Each year these providers are invited to submit their programmes to the Ministry of Education in order to receive accreditation (and co-financing if relevant) for the training formally recognised for career advancement.

The legislation only defines who can apply to the public call for tenders for the selection of further education and training programmes, on the basis of which the Ministry of Education selects the training programmes for co-funding. The basic conditions for the co-financing of education and training programmes are determined on the basis of an evaluation of the programme providers from the previous calendar year, and on the basis of the priority themes set by the Ministry in cooperation with the development and advisory institutes for each school year (Kovšča 2021, 49).

The basic conditions for applying for the public call are, in particular (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 23/2023a, Article 8):

- The applicant (organisation) has an education activity specified in its act of establishment.
- The programmes applied for are in line with the aims of education in accordance with the law governing the organisation and financing of education and with these rules.
- The programmes applied for have been prepared in accordance with the provisions of the public call.

Formal recognition of CPD

If the CPD activity is accredited by the Ministry of Education, staff are awarded credits which are taken into account for advancement opportunities (i.e. promotion to Mentor, Adviser or Councillor, Senior Councillor). In order to achieve these titles, they collect credits defined by the Collective Agreement for the Education Sector (mostly for participation in trainings, projects, professional conferences, publishing articles, organising events with children, etc.). The awarded titles are permanent and influence the salary to some extent but not the working obligations.

For the programmes that are published in the *Catalogue of further education and training programmes for education staff* (KATIS), there is no doubt that they would not be recognised. For programmes that are not part of the KATIS, the Ministry of Education decides on their recognition.

CPD and career advancement

As previously mentioned, the CPD system in Slovenia enables career advancement through credit point acquisition. This enables Early Childhood Teachers, Early Childhood Assistant Teachers and ECEC Principals to acquire different levels of recognised expertise and posts of responsibility.

Education staff may be promoted to the job titles Mentor, Adviser and Councillor, and since September 2023 on, a fourth title is in use: Senior Councillor (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 141/22). From 2022 on, Early Childhood Assistant Teacher can also be promoted to the job titles of Mentor and Adviser (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 115/22).

Funding

ECEC employers cover the costs of attending CPD activities (the costs for CPD activities are incorporated into the programme costs). However, in some cases it might happen that an EC Teacher wishes to attend a CPD activity, which is (maybe) expensive or it follows a personal (not institutional – based on a yearly work plan) need; in such cases EC Teachers pay for participation in such a CPD activity themselves (if not agreed differently with their employer).

Challenges

The main problem is that ECEC settings do not have enough replacement staff available on a regular basis, especially if other staff are off on sick leave at the same time. This is nowadays the main reason that not only one member of staff cannot participate in CPD activities, but that the complete ECEC team is unable to attend a certain event due to shortage of staff. This is also the main reason that many CPD activities take place in the late afternoon after the children have left, or even on Saturdays.

Contents

Each year, the Ministry of Education suggests priority topics for CPD which are accepted by the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education. Priority topics for the school year 2023/24 are (for the entire educational system, including secondary schools): teaching, learning and evaluation of achievements in the learning and study process with an emphasis on modern learning technologies and innovative approaches; sustainable development and active citizenship; giftedness in the educational process and the upbringing and education of children with special needs (sensitisation and training for the use of new pedagogical methods and approaches); implementing lifelong career orientation and ensuring equal opportunities with an emphasis on vulnerable groups; social-emotional competence and well-being in education and the empowerment of professionals to deal with the topics of mental health and addiction; consulting work in the educational and study process; development of communication skills in the Slovenian language, bilingualism/multilingualism and media literacy. The practitioner voice is not present in the selection of priority topics process.

Apart from priority topics, there are also general topics: preschool education, elementary school, music education, upbringing and education of children and adolescents with special needs, secondary general education, secondary vocational and professional education, higher professional education, adult education.

In the *Catalogue of further education and training programmes for education staff (KATIS),* for early childhood area, there were seven CPD courses offered in the 2022/23 school year. Topics of the programmes that had the most participants were: learning environments and formative

assessment (a one-day conference), digital literacy (a thematic conference in an ECEC setting); cooperation with parents (thematic conference in an ECEC setting).

The topics, emerging as issues for the near future in the context of CPD, are the renewal of a preschool curriculum, starting with its implementation in September 2025 (planned). CPD activities will need to be implemented before that date. Professionals will receive trainings related to the introduction of the new curriculum, but at the moment it is not yet clear what these trainings will be, what they will include and who will attend them (only EC Teachers, or both professionals, or maybe only ECEC centre leaders?).

Currently, a substantial project entitled "Digit-sustainable teacher" (Training of professionals and managers in education to strengthen their digital competences, competences for sustainable development and financial literacy)[15] just started with its implementation and activities. The aim of the project, financed from the National Resilience and Recovery Plan, is to successfully train at least 20,000 professionals and managers. Currently, this is the project, involving the highest number of targeted professionals through the entire educational system.

Although digital education is important and Early Childhood Teachers and staff are the least educated group in this topic, there are also other topics that would need greater awareness and targeted support, for example: (self-)reflection skills; competences for shared learning within the team(s); the transition from kindergarten to schools; how to support families with children with any kind of disabilities/coming from challenging background(s). In general, there is a lack of CPD activities that would enable continuous professional support after attending a CPD course, e.g. professional learning communities where staff discusses and share experiences and challenges on newly implemented concepts, topics, activities, etc. Such activities[16] are implemented only in kindergartens where ECEC leaders are aware of the importance of ensuring professional support to their staff after the attendance at the CPD activity (with an aim that knowledge, gained at the CPD activity, will remain sustainable).

Research on the CPD activities of ECEC personnel

Using the SICRIS (Slovenian Current Research Information System) database, very few projects are listed on the topic of ECEC, and none explicitly on the topic of the CPD of ECEC personnel (Institute of Information Science & Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency 2023).

The professional development of ECEC teachers is discussed in many diploma and master's theses; however, large-scale projects on this topic are not common.

CPD for ECEC staff is an issue in regards to not having enough staff who would supplement absent staff (those who attend CPD activities). This is a big challenge in ECEC centres, and very often ECEC centre leaders cancel the participation of their employees at the last moment because they do not have enough replacement staff available.

On the other hand, not enough attention is paid to CPD activities which would increase process quality of educational work. There are also other topics that would need greater awareness and targeted support, for example (self-)reflection skills, competences for shared learning within the team(s), the transition from kindergarten to schools, supporting families with children with any kind of disabilities/coming from challenging background(s). There is also a lack of CPD activities that would enable continuous professional support *after* the attendance at the training.

[15] Project's budget is a little less than 17.6 mio EUR.

[16] Professional learning communities were introduced to Slovenian kindergartens, members of *Step by Step Network for Changing Quality*, managed by Educational Research Institute, Step by Step Centre for Quality in Education. Centre ensures continuous support to ECEC leaders and professional learning community leaders.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

When starting to work, core pedagogues in ECEC start on the same wage grade as Primary School Teachers. However, differences appear in the wage grades over the years: EC Teachers can progress to a maximum of the 44th wage grade, whereas a Primary School Teacher (and also Early Childhood Teachers who work in the 1st grade of primary school) can progress up to the 46th wage grade.

Table 8

Slovenia: Lowest and highest basic salaries, from October 2022[17]

	Min. (per month)		Max. (per month)	
	Salary grade	Basic salary (gross)	Wage grade	Basic salary (gross)
Early Childhood Assistant Teacher	26	€ 1,226.82	36	€ 1,815.99
Early Childhood Teacher	32	€ 1,552.31	46	€ 2,485.30
Basic School Teacher	32	€ 1,552.31	48	€ 2,688.10

A little over 22% in contributions for social security and income tax (from 16 to 41%) is deducted from the gross salary.

Living as a single parent and being a teacher in a major city is a challenge, especially if you do not own an apartment/house. It is even more difficult to live on the salary of an Early Childhood Assistant Teacher (pre-2023, the salary of Teacher Assistants was under the minimum wage).

Posts of responsibility mostly bring an increase in salary. The minimum wage grade of ECEC Centre Leaders is 48 (€ 2,907.45 gross), the maximum 54 (€ 3,678.86 gross) (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 157/22). Deputy leaders' minimum wage grade is 37 (€ 1,888.62 gross and the maximum 50 (€ 3,144.70 gross) (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 11/2023; Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 139/2022).

Mentors to students during workplace-based learning do not receive a higher wage, however mentors to trainees (newly qualified staff) are credited four hours per week (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 27/14, 54/21).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

In the school year 2021/2022, nearly all (96.53%) ECEC staff – EC Teachers, EC Assistant Teachers, Centre Leaders, consultants and other professionals – worked full-time in public kindergartens (Statistical Office RS 2023a). Full-time posts comprise 40 hours/week.

In Slovenia, on average, Early Childhood Teachers are in direct contact with children in playrooms for 1,344 hours a year, which is more than the average in OECD countries (987 hours) (Eurydice 2022).

[17] Eurydice 2023b *Conditions of service for teachers working in early childhood and school education.* Last update: 31 August 2023. Data for Early Childhood Assistant Teachers were obtained from Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 139/22.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Induction measures for newly qualified staff

No specified regulations exist regarding induction measures for newly qualified staff. However, they may be supported by mentors if the Ministry of Education opens a call for applications for this post. Otherwise early childhood centres do their best to support new employees, although they are not officially classed as trainees.

In March 2023, the Ministry of Education published an open call for mentoring trainees for 30 EC Teachers and Councillors, and for 50 EC Assistant Teachers. Places for the latter were filled before the open call deadline.

Depending on the Ministry's call for applications, a trainee is allocated to an ECEC centre in order to be under the guidance of a mentor. The mentor's role is to support them so that they can work independently when the probation time is over. Probation periods are conducted on the basis of a signed employment contract with an ECEC centre.

Voluntary probation was abolished in 2014 (Ministry of Education 2023c).

Appointment and tasks of a Mentor

A mentor is appointed by the Centre Head and must meet the conditions defined by law. Mentors perform the following tasks:

- Develop a programme of traineeship
- Advise the trainee to perform the tasks in accordance with the programme
- Cooperate with the Principal, Councillors, relevant expert working groups and other expert bodies in a kindergarten or school on the organisation and implementation of a traineeship programme
- Advise the trainee in the planning, organisation and implementation of practical presentations and other forms of direct educational work, and also monitor and analyse this work and provide the trainee with feedback
- Monitor the trainees' preparation and his/her logbook regarding the development of the traineeship programme
- Report on the trainees' skills for independent work and prepare an assessment of their practical work or written assignments necessary for admission to the professional examination
- In cooperation with the Principal, report on the completed traineeship
- Perform other tasks related to the traineeship programme (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 23/2006, 70/2022, Article 19).

Each practical assignment, monitored and evaluated by a mentor and the ECEC Centre Leader lasts one hour. The trainee is given the topic of the assignment by the mentor at least three days beforehand (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 23/2006, 70/2022, Article 22).

7.4 Non-contact time

The full-time working obligation for Early Childhood Teachers and Early Childhood Assistant Teachers is 40 hours per week. Legally, the EC Teacher's work with children should not exceed 30 hours per week and the Assistants' work 35 hours per week (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 100/2005, 18/2021, Article 41.

Early Childhood Teachers thus have 7.5 hours/week non-contact time, and Early Childhood Teachers' Assistants 2.5 hours/week. The remaining time is intended for breaks (0.5 hour/day).

7.5 Current staffing issues

In Slovenia, we currently face a great staff shortage, especially of Early Childhood Assistant Teachers. The main reason lies in (too) low salary, and on the other hand the responsibility is very high. The shortage of staff was also one of the reason that Ministry of Education published an open call for internship after quite a long period of time. Places for the job position of EC Teacher – Teacher's Assistant were already filled already before official closure of the call.

Regarding the age distribution in the workforce in public kindergartens in school year 2022/23, the situation is presented below:

Table 9

Slovenia: Age distribution of ECEC staff (Teachers and Assistant Teachers)

Age range (years)	Number
15-19	-
20-24	647
25-29	1,360
30-34	1,894
35-39	2,179
40-44	2,078
45-49	1,649
50-54	1,287
55-59	1,312
60-64	290
65 +	10
Total	**12,730**

Source: Statistical Office RS 2023b

Weaknesses in the system still exist. Newly qualified graduates often have difficulties in finding a job as an Early Childhood Teacher when they first enter the labour market. Most of them start as an Assistant, and subsequently they may be in danger of losing their initial drive to be productive, innovative and to develop new ideas. Young graduates often have to wait until an Early Childhood Teacher retires before being offered a post.

There is also increasing anecdotal evidence which suggests that many ECEC settings are not satisfied with the level of knowledge and skills, the values and reflective abilities of 'career changers'.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Until 2017, the position of Teacher's Assistant was classified in the starting salary grade 19. After salary anomalies were eliminated, a new job position (Early Childhood Assistant Teacher) was determined, with placement in the initial 21st salary class. Since January 2019, the position of Early Childhood Assistant Teachers has been classified in the 22nd starting salary class. With this change, the starting salary was raised by three salary classes. Until 2022, it was possible to advance by ten salary grades, up to the 32nd salary grade. From 2022, EC Teachers' Assistants can be promoted to the job titles of Mentor and Adviser (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia

115/22), which includes a salary rise. From 2023, the initial salary wage grade of Early Childhood Assistant Teachers is 26 (NGO and trade union initiatives strongly supported this).
In 2022, an amendment to the Act on the Organisation and Financing of Education was adopted, with an aim to complement the career development of professionals in the field of education and to enable further career development by introducing a fourth title – Senior Councillor. The minister at the time stated that the purpose of the fourth title is to establish additional motivation in the career development of professionals, extend the period of career advancement and enable expansion and deepening of knowledge. The law entered into force on 1 September 2023 (National Education Institute Slovenia 2022).
As already mentioned, the Ministry of Education published an open call for internship for 30 EC Teachers and Councillors, and for 50 Early Childhood Assistant Teachers in order to stimulate students to make a swifter transition to the labour market and to some extent to fill the gap regarding the shortages of staff.
In 2021, with the Recovery and Resilience Plan, Slovenia committed to renovating the education system. This began in 2022 and should last until completion in 2025. The introduction of the new curriculum for kindergartens is scheduled for September 1, 2025, and for the initial professional education of staff is expected to take place by then. It is not yet known what they will be.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Research on the educational process in preschool education and its effects during the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Jager et al. 2021 (see *References* for full details)

Aims and methods: Research funded by the Ministry of Education on the educational process in early childhood education during the COVID-19 epidemic took place between March and August 2021 and was designed as an observation of the preschool education of an individual child from several parallel levels: the institution kindergarten, the kindergarten group and the child's home environment. For each level, we determined the target population of people (ECEC leaders, professional staff in kindergarten classrooms and parents of children), from whom we collected information, opinions and explanations of the situation and challenges they faced. 155 ECEC leaders, 580 ECEC staff (EC Teachers), and 2,816 parents participated in the research study.

Selected findings: Findings indicated that kindergartens felt neglected, forgotten during the pandemic, as if they were not part of the education system. They missed the support of leading and responsible institutions, as well as two-way communication and the involvement of preschool education experts in decision-making.

Both ECEC leaders and EC teachers expressed that the designation "*emergency care*" that was in use during the time of closure of public life was inadequate, and were concerned about the marked dominance of the medical-hygiene paradigm over the educational paradigm. At the expense of compliance with hygiene recommendations, the volume of work, especially for ECEC leaders and administrative staff, increased significantly, while EC Teachers' compliance with hygiene recommendations reduced the time for direct work with children. Also, due to the organisation of work, which required work in so called "*bubbles*", the simultaneous presence of ECEC staff in the group of children was reduced, which undoubtedly affected the quality of work in

the classrooms. In relation to the concept of "*emergency care*", it was found that kindergartens did not provide only "care", but an integrated education and care process.

Preschool teachers found the work in so-called "*bubbles*" a positive measure, but in the sense of working in smaller groups of children, in which they could adapt to the individual needs and interests of the children to a greater extent. However, "*bubbles*" were not understood as a positive measure in the context of children's social development.

The closure of the kindergartens did not have a significant financial impact on their operation; the financial consequences were very high costs for disinfectants, cleaners, protective equipment, and covering sick leaves.

Professional development activities moved to online platforms, the availability of professional training was also greater, kindergartens had less expenses to cover in terms of travel costs.

According to the parents, the time of the epidemic affected the children in the direction of reduced adherence to rules, which, in addition to reduced persistence, resulted in problems with concentration, less independence in dressing, difficulties in resolving conflicts, understanding instructions and fine motor skills – which EC Teachers also found.

Competences for the use of ICT proved to be very important and necessary. Preschool teachers reported that during the epidemic they raised their own competences in this area, but despite everything, the need for additional training remains, as does the need for better equipment of kindergartens.

Almost all kindergartens made additional contact with families at least once during the closure period, but only a small percentage of kindergartens made an inquiry regarding the needs of families during the epidemic.

Last but not least, it must be noted that support for vulnerable groups is a distinctly undernourished area even during the time of unchanged conditions, but during the epidemic this has only deepened.

Implications: As part of the research, an expert group of different ECEC professionals was formed, resulting in the preparation of *Recommendations for measures and systemic solutions in the field of preschool education after the experience with the COVID-19 pandemic* (Bozovičar et al. 2021).

The document can be of help to the leading institutions in the country in formulating measures in the case of the need again for online education (distance learning), and for ECEC leaders and professionals as guidance to maintain supportive education and care even in emergency situations.

Transition from kindergarten to primary school

Source: Jager, J. et al. 2022 (see *References* for full details)

Aims and methods: In recent years, we have seen an increase in the postponement of children's enrolment in the first grade of elementary school. For a successful transition from kindergarten to school, it is necessary to ensure professional, developmental and pedagogical continuity (OECD 2017). The research project "Ensuring a smooth transition between kindergarten and primary school", funded by the Ministry of Education, was focused on gaining insight into the provision of all three continuities by looking at the perspectives of the various stakeholders involved in the research: children, parents, professionals, leaders and advisory workers of kindergartens and primary schools.

The research aims were to:

- Identify activities, approaches and methods in kindergarten and first grade of primary school that contribute to pedagogical, developmental and professional continuity

- Gain insight into the understanding of the image of the child by professionals in kindergartens and primary schools and how this is reflected in their pedagogical practice
- Identify the mutual expectations of professional, advisory and leadership staff of kindergartens and schools and parents in relation to ensuring a smooth transition of children from kindergarten to primary school
- Gain insight into the reasons for postponing schooling and the possibilities for reducing them
- Gain insight into children's experience of transition.

The research was based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative pedagogical research and triangulation between methods. In the context of quantitative research, descriptive and causal non-experimental research methods were used; and in the context of qualitative research, observations with reflective interviews and focus interviews with children.

149 ECEC teachers from Slovenian public kindergartens (from 30 ECEC centres) and 50 classroom teachers (from 45 schools), children enrolled in kindergarten in the last year before entering school (88 children) and children in the first grades of primary schools (57 pupils) were included in the research, as well as advisory staff (15 from ECEC centres, 41 from schools) and leaders (8 from ECEC centres, 32 from schools).

Selected findings: The results obtained through questionnaires show the relative uniformity of pedagogical educational approaches at the level of interactions, teaching strategies and the learning environment in kindergartens and the first grades of elementary schools; results obtained through observation in kindergartens and schools, however, do not fully confirm this.

Implications: In order to ensure continuity and, as a result, a smooth transition from kindergarten to primary school, it is crucial to ensure systemic professional continuity (at the level of study programmes that educate/train for the profession of EC Teachers and Primary School Teachers), as well as developmental and pedagogical continuity, which kindergartens should be able to develop and provide. ECEC centres and schools ideally need to be connected in learning communities with the possibility of shared learning, self-reflection and with collegial support in the context of changing practices.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Lack of relevant staff

ECEC centres face great challenges finding appropriate staff for job positions they advertise. The most wanted staff are in the Assistant category. However, the very low salary (only a little above the minimum wage) does not make this an attractive job.

There is also difficultly in recruiting Early Childhood Teachers, while various providers of additional professional help for children with special needs in kindergartens have been missing for a long time, such as Special Rehabilitation Pedagogues and Speech Therapists.

Professional staff in kindergartens are underpaid for very responsible work they carry out. According to data from the Ministry of Public Administration, in 2022 the average gross salary of preschool teachers and other professional staff in ECEC centres was € 1,669 gross. *"The level of payment shows the devaluation of the work of educators",* stated the president of the Association of Kindergartens Slovenia, Silvija Komočar. *"A Primary School Teacher is ranked higher in*

wage grades than an Early Childhood Teacher, but the work of an Early Childhood Teacher is no less demanding than that of a School Teacher."

Internal support to EC Teachers and EC Teacher Assistants and quality improvement

Not enough attention is paid to internal support groups in which ECEC staff could reflect on and plan future work. There are some ECEC centres where staff have regular time slots (paid) for reflection and planning together as a group (in some cases once per month), but in most cases there are the most three staff meetings during the whole year, at which ECEC centres organise different CPD events. However, regular and frequent organised meetings in ECEC centres at which staff can focus on the reflection of their work, make plans for improving the quality of their work and can support each other in the process of becoming and being a reflective practitioner are very rare.

It is also important that researchers and other field experts are actively connected with practitioners in co-constructing new knowledge and practices and in evaluating them, taking into account both the perspectives of the children's development and well-being and the needs of families and communities.

Continuing professional development

In-service education is not regulated externally, but the choice of CPD providers who deliver a training is under the autonomy of each ECEC leader. The question is how CDP providers are selected, and what competence they have. Courses of some CPD providers are co-financed by the Ministry of Education if providers apply to a certain public call. This takes place each year, meaning that at least references and general aims and methods are checked by a professional group of experts. However, there is a vast group of CPD providers who do not undergo any kind of assessment but can still offer CPD activities to public (and private) ECEC centres.

Inter-institutional collaboration

In order to ensure a smooth transition from the ECEC centre to primary school and to learn from each other, these two organisations need to establish regular and formalised ways of collaboration. By forming an inter-institutional professional learning group, Primary School Teachers from the first three grades can learn about the approaches, didactics and concepts ECEC staff are using and promoting in early childhood education. Allocated time for peer-to-peer observation and reflective discussion are also essential, with the aim of converging approaches and practices between the two institutions and thus ensuring a smooth transition from the ECEC centre to school.

Promotion system

Although from 2022 Early Childhood Assistant Teachers can be promoted to the title of Mentor and Adviser and since 1 September 2023 a fourth title has been in effect to stimulate professional career development of core professionals, the promotion system still does not reward practitioners who are striving to improve the process quality of their work, but focuses only on credits and certificates received at trainings, conferences, or through extra work such as participating in a project, since no one knows how this person is performing in the classroom, since for a promotion no direct classroom observations are required. This kind of system does not support efforts to improve the quality of work, but rewards only those who know how to wisely collect certain credits/certificates.

Professional titles

All professional titles (Mentor, Adviser, Councillor, and from 2023 on Senior Councillor) are permanent – no renewal procedures are required, as is the case in higher education. In other words, professional titles are not limited to a certain period of time and no checks are made to ensure that the teacher is still fulfilling the requirements.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

SLOVENIA

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the term chosen in this report for the main form of centre-based ECEC settings is **kindergarten** (*vrtec*, 0–5)[1], sometimes referred to as **ECEC centre**. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Slovenia

1756	First kindergarten on Slovenian territory, in Maribor.
1834	First "children's shelter" is established in Ljubljana and financed by charities and church organisations (mainly for children of working parents from poorer backgrounds).
1863	First kindergarten established according to Froebelian principles (mainly for children from wealthier families)
1869	The Public School Act determines that children's shelters and recreation centres, which had become the concern of the state and municipalities and were only organised in larger cities and industrial areas, can be attached to elementary schools.
1872	Three documents relevant to kindergartens are published. They state that pre-school education is an important part of education for everyone.
1883	The Gorizia Association "*Sloga*" introduces a course for kindergarten management at the Women's Teacher Training College.
1914-18	During the First World War, refugee kindergartens and shelters are established for parentless Slovenian children. Besides taking in orphans, the kindergartens are attended by children whose fathers are in the army and whose mothers are employed. The emphasis is on child protection rather than early childhood education.
1929	The National Schools Act (1929), in Article 7, states that kindergartens, now called "amusement centres," are also part of the national school system. Municipalities are obliged to establish amusement centres in the larger towns and cities, or, at the request of parents or the municipality, in other places, provided that at least 30 children are enrolled. Boys and girls aged 4 are admitted. Beyond these centres, there are "day shelters for infants and children" up to the age of 4, "day shelters with an amusement centre for children aged 4–7", and "school day shelters" for children up to the age of 16.
1933	The Ministry of Education issues a Decree that amusement centres and shelters had to work according to specific programmes; each child had to have six to eight square metres of space, and groups of thirty to forty children had to have at least two rooms, one for the amusement centre, the other for dining and resting. Children up to the age of 4 were educated by female carers, older children by kindergarten/school teachers, and the rest of the time by nannies (children started compulsory schooling at the age of 7). Younger children were kept in shelters, from where they were sent to day-amusement centres.
1939-1945	During the Second World War, when what is now Slovenia was divided between Germany, Italy and Hungary, the kindergartens were characterised by a period of alienation. From 1941 to 1945, kindergartens were opened at harvest time for children

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. For Slovenia, the relevant format is **0–5**.

	whose parents were at work. By the end of the war, 69 kindergartens and 34 auxiliary kindergartens had been opened.
Post-1945	– Expansion of early childhood provision in the light of increasing maternal employment – Immediately after the war, the Ministry of Social Policy of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is responsible for ECEC institutions and, as early as 1945, organises a course for educating female teachers.
1946	The kindergartens are transferred to the Ministry of Education, and in the same year a course for Kindergarten Teachers of one year's duration is established at the Ljubljana Teacher Training College.
1948	Legislation is adopted to regulate nurseries and kindergartens. Nurseries are for children up to the age of 3, and kindergartens from the age of 3 up to the start of school. Companies, public offices and institutions can set up nurseries and kindergartens. Kindergartens, which also start admitting school children after school, are renamed "play and work homes". In these institutions, children are cared for and educated during the day, and sometimes also cared for at night.
1949/1950	A four-year secondary vocational school for female educators, a one-year school for assistant educators and a five-month course for auxiliary educational staff are established.
1950–1960	During this period there is little progress in the field of early childhood education. Maintaining kindergartens becomes expensive, as education is taken over by state institutions. Parents remove their children from kindergarten in large numbers because of the high costs. Even meals are abolished to cut costs.
1958	ECEC settings come under the auspices of the Secretariat for Family and Social Protection.
After 1960	After 1960, the situation in early childhood education begins to improve. In 1961, the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia adopts a Resolution which foresees a unified system of childcare, laying down the basic principles of childcare, the roles of parents and other social factors. The number of kindergartens grows, as the number of children increased dramatically between 1950 and 1960 (from 12,700 to 22,500). Nurseries were staffed by nursery carers trained in two-year vocational school courses.
1961–1972	From 1961 to 1972, vocational secondary schools are set up in Ljubljana, Koper, Celje and Idrija.
1965/66	School preparation activities (so-called "small school") are explicitly included in curricular guidelines, but are not compulsory.
1970s	– First moves towards decentralisation – Due to the high level of maternal employment in socialist Slovenia, the need for ECEC provision for children increases
1971	First legislation comes into force providing for age-integrated kindergartens. The Act on Educational and Care Activities for Pre-school Children is adopted. The basic tasks of pre-school education in kindergartens are: to promote the intellectual, personal and physical development of children; to prepare children for school; child nutrition, care and health; and to combine family and social education. In the kindergarten groups with children up to 2 years of age, the educational-care work is conducted by paediatric nurses; in the groups with children aged 2–3 years by nurses and pre-school teachers; and in groups with children over 3 years of age, by Kindergarten Teachers.
1979	The first national Curriculum for the Education and Care of Preschool Children is adopted, introducing uniform and compulsory guidelines for work in kindergartens.
1980	– Act on the Education and Care of Preschool Children is adopted.

	– 4 sections are established in kindergartens: up to the age of 2, 2–3 years, 3 years up to one year before school entry, and school preparation activities. Age-combined sections are also possible (from 2 years to the age of one year before school entry). – Developmental groups are established for children with special needs. – Teachers have to qualify at upper secondary or higher education institutions. – A vocational school for Childcare Workers is established. In the under-2 sections, either teachers or paediatric nurses are employed.
1979/80	– Kindergartens become part of the general education system by law. – The final year in kindergarten is made mandatory. – The first early childhood curricular framework particularly emphasises preparing children for school.
1981	The Educational Programme for the Preparation of Children for Primary School, aimed at children aged 6–7, or one year before entering school.
1985	The initial professional education (IPE) of early childhood core pedagogues for work with 4 to 6 year-olds is raised to university level.
1987	Children have a legal entitlement to a kindergarten place from the age of 11 months.
1993	ECEC centres (0 to 6 years) are placed under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.
1995	A White Book sets out conceptual strategies for a reform of the entire education system, including early childhood education and care.
1996	– School entry age is lowered from 7 to 6 years. – The final kindergarten year is no longer compulsory. – The legal basis for the ECEC sector is set out in the Kindergarten Act and in The Organisation and Funding of Education Act. – According to the 1996 Act on the Organisation and Financing of Education and Training, public kindergartens are established by local authorities.
1999	Introduction of the first national curricular framework for early childhood education.
2002–2006	Following documents are adopted by the Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education – Supplement to the Kindergarten Curriculum in ethnically mixed areas (19.12.2002) – Supplement to the Kindergarten Curriculum for work with Roma children (19.12.2002) – Curriculum Guidelines for Kindergartens in Programmes with Adapted Provision and Additional Special Needs Support for Children with Special Needs (17.4.2003) – Curriculum for adapted programmes for pre-school children (22.6.2006)
2008	Act on Amendments and Additions to the Act on Kindergartens introduced the position of childminder/home-based childcare provider for pre-school children.
2011	The White Paper is updated, including e.g. organisational aspects of the kindergarten, revising the curriculum, more emphasis on language development.
2012	Abolishment of free kindergarten for second and subsequent children as a result of government austerity measures.
2015	A new Kindergarten Act comes into force.
2016	Amendments to The Organisation and Funding of Education Act
2017	Act Regulating the Integrated Early Treatment of Preschool Children with Special Needs
2018 – 2019	– Short-term educational programmes (240 hours/year) for children not enrolled in a kindergarten are subsidised by the state. – From January 1, 2018, all employees working as an Early Childhood Teacher's Assistant continue their work in the position of “Early Childhood Teacher – Teacher's Assistant”.
2021	A parent of two children is entitled to free kindergarten if both children are enrolled in kindergarten. The parents are exempt from paying for the younger child.

	Parents of three or more children are entitled to the benefit in any case, i.e. if the first and second children are enrolled in primary school and the third child is enrolled in kindergarten, the parents are exempted to pay the kindergarten fees for the last child (and each child thereafter).
2022	– 4th promotion title is adopted: "senior councillor". The purpose of this fourth title is to establish additional motivation in the career development of professionals, extend the period of career advancement and enable the expansion and deepening of knowledge. Only Early Childhood Teachers can be promoted to the 4th title. – Early Childhood Teacher – Teacher's Assistant can be promoted to the title "mentor" and "advisor" for the first time.
2023	The ministry and the relevant union agree on raising the salaries of Early Childhood Teachers – Teachers' Assistants from the 22nd to the 26th salary grade. Meanwhile, the Institute March 8 (NGO) announced that more than 20,000 people had signed their petition to further raise Early Childhood Teachers – Teachers' Assistants salaries.

Sources: Oberhuemer et al. 2010; Batistič Zorec 2012; Devjak et al. 2012; Naumann et al. 2013; Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2017; Vonta und Jager 2017; Official Gazette 2018, 2023; Government Office for Legislation 2022

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Early childhood education and care in Slovenia is organised as an integrated system in the education sector. Since 1993, ECEC provision for children from 11 months to 6 years has been under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education[3] (*Ministrstvo za vzgojo in izobraževanje*).

The government is responsible for legal foundations and general regulations as well as for the curricular framework of early childhood education. It is the task of the municipalities to provide sufficient places and implement the curriculum.

General objectives and legislative framework

The seminal White Paper of 1995 (with amendments of 2011) laid down a fundamental reform of the education system, including early childhood education. Above all, equal opportunities and equal treatment of all persons were emphasised.

The main objectives of kindergartens (*vrtec* = "little garden") are to provide age-appropriate learning and social experiences for every child. Kindergartens are seen as complementary to the family; they support families in creating appropriate developmental conditions for children. Not only learning mutual respect is important for children, but also developing their imagination and independence. The most important principles are democracy, pluralism, equal opportunities and diversity.

The overarching legislation in early childhood education are (1) the Kindergarten Act (*Zakon o vrtcih* 1996/2021) and (2) the Act on the Organisation and Financing of Education (*Zakon o organizaciji in financiranju vzgoje in izobraževanja* 1996/2023). The latter describes the principles of democracy and pluralism, autonomy, competences and responsibilities of professionals, and equal opportunities for children and parents. It emphasises diversity among children, the right to free choice and various aspects of children's motor and intellectual development. The law describes, among other things, the optimal development of an individual regardless of gender,

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Slovenia provided orientation on legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

[3] Until June 2022: Ministry of Education, Science and Sport

ethnicity or social or cultural background; education for mutual tolerance; the development of linguistic competences, especially in the Slovenian language and the promotion of national identity.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Since 1987, all children aged 11 months and over have a legal entitlement to a place in full-day ECEC provision. However, many municipalities have problems providing the necessary places. Children who have to be placed on the waiting list of a public kindergarten can be cared for in groups of six children by childminders (*varuh predšolskih otrok*), who are legally entitled to funds from the municipality (20% of the price of the programme in a public kindergarten) to co-finance parents' fees (Kindergarten Act 1996/2021).

Attending an ECEC setting is not compulsory. Compulsory primary schooling starts at the age of 6.

Main types of provision

According to national statistics, there were 992 kindergartens in Slovenia in 2022/23, attended by a total of 86,177 children (including 27,204 under 3 year-olds). They were cared for by 13,564 professionals (SiStat 2023c).

Kindergartens (*vrtec*) are early childhood education settings for children until they enter school. The youngest children are usually 11 months old and are admitted after the end of Parental Leave. Educational activities in full-day kindergartens usually last six to nine hours per day, in half-day settings four to six hours. 98% of children are enrolled for a full day (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 50). As a rule, kindergartens are open between eleven and 12 hours a day to accommodate parents' working hours. During holidays, some units may close. During this time, children are either cared for in a mixed-age group or attend a unit associated with the kindergarten.

Private kindergartens, including those with a specific educational approach such as Steiner or Montessori, must adhere to the same structural regulations and hygiene standards as public settings. In 2020/21 there were 45 such institutions. Bilingual facilities also exist on the Italian and Hungarian borders (Eurydice 2023, 4.5).

Short-term education programmes (*krajši programi*) are offered mainly in remote areas. They comprise 240 to 720 hours of ECEC per year and are primarily intended to increase the enrolment rates of 5 year-olds who do not otherwise attend an ECEC setting. Since 2018/19, the government has been subsidising attendance for 240 hours/year (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 62).

A maximum of six children can also be cared for in an **education and care family** (*vzgojno-varstvena družina*) registered with the Ministry of Education. In 2022/2023 however, there were only 22 children in four groups. Children can also be cared for temporarily at home by registered (334 in 2022/2023) childminders (*varuh predšolskih otrok)* whose training does not entitle them to implement the education programme, but who have a short-term training in childcare. However, they must be registered with the Ministry of Education. For children who cannot attend an ECEC centre due to illness, there is also the option of ECEC provision at the child's home (*predšolska vzgoja na domu*) (Eurydice 2023, 4.4).

Provider structures

Kindergartens can be run by public (municipalities) or private providers (established by individuals or legal entities). Sometimes concessions are granted by public provider networks to private providers to meet demand. The majority of early childhood centres (kindergartens) in Slovenia are public.

Almost all enrolled children (94.3%) attended a public kindergarten in 2022/23 (SiStat 2023d).

Table 1

Slovenia: Number of children in ECEC settings (kindergartens) by age-group and provider type, 2022/23

Provider type	Under 3 year-olds	3 to 6 year-olds	Total	
			Number of children	Relative share by provider type, in %*
Public	42,260	38,958	81,218	94.3
Private	2,879	2,080	4,959	5.7
Total	45,139	41,038	86,177	

Source: SiStat 2023d; *own calculations

Participation rates in regulated ECEC settings

The youngest children attending an ECEC centre are usually 11 months old, marking the end of parental leave. The proportion of under 3 year-olds enrolled in an ECEC setting has increased significantly since 2005: While in 2005 24% of this age-group attended a kindergarten, by 2022/23 the attendance rate had reached 71,1%. The enrolment rates of children between the ages of 3 and 6 years also increased considerably: from 77% to 93.1%. The overall enrolment rate was 84.6% (SiStat 2023a).

According to Eurostat data, in 2022 almost half of the under 3s and almost 90% of the children over 3 years spent more than 30 hours in an ECEC setting (see *Table 2*).

Table 2

Slovenia: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age-group and duration of attendance, 2005–2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	2	10
	Over 30 hours	22	67
	No enrolment in ECEC	76	23
2010	1 to 29 hours	4	14
	Over 30 hours	33	77
	No enrolment in ECEC	64	9
2015	1 to 29 hours	2.5	8.8
	Over 30 hours	34.9	82.1
	No enrolment in ECEC	62.6	9.1
2022	1 to 29 hours	2.6	6.4
	Over 30 hours	49.7	89.1
	No enrolment in ECEC	47.7	4.6

Source: Eurostat 2023b

Table 3

Slovenia: Number of children and enrolment rates in kindergartens by age, 2022/23

Age	Number of children in kindergartens	Enrolment rates in kindergartens, in %
1 year-olds or younger	11,237	58.5
2 year-olds	15,967	83.9
Under 3 year-olds	**27,204**	**71.1**
3 year-olds	17,935	90.5
4 year-olds	18,860	93.5
5 year-olds	19,888	95.2
6 year-olds	2,290	10.9
0 to 6 year-olds	**86,177**	**84.5**

Source: SiStat 2023a, b, d

Financing and costs for parents

In 2022, 5.69% of GDP was spent on education, 1.10% of this for the early education sector (0 to under 6 years) (SiStat 2023g).

Parents' fees for kindergarten vary greatly across the country. This is primarily due to staff costs, which are based on qualifications and working hours and account for more than 80% of the costs. A survey showed that the costs for the under-3s are currently highest in Brežice (€624 per month), Radovljica (€609.04), Ig (€598.94), Žalec (€591.34) and Ormož (€588.47) (Celje.info 2022).

For all children, at least 23% of the costs are subsidised by municipalities (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 61). The costs are covered by public funds, funds from the providers, donations and income-based parental contributions. Parents with two children attending a kindergarten pay only for the older child, each additional child is then free of charge.

Short-term educational programmes are also free of charge for parents. Otherwise, fees are set according to income: In 2022/23, parents in lowest income bracket (up to €221,46 per month) receive €135,44 childcare allowance for the first child and have to pay nothing for the programme, whereas parents in the highest income bracket (from €1.008,94 to €1.218,08 per month) receive €27,11 and have to pay 77% of the programme price (Gov.SI 2023a, 2023b, Eurydice 2023, 3.1).

In 2023/24, the average cost of all-day provision for under 3 year-olds in a public kindergarten is €585.37, for over 3 year-olds €451.91, in multi-age groups €473.82, in developmental classes €1,130.07 and in Education and care families €512.90 (Gov.SI 2023c). Private kindergartens set the fees themselves and receive funds from the municipalities amounting to 85% of the costs of public kindergartens. This means that the parents' fees are subsidised, but can still differ from those of a public institution in the same municipality.

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 7–8% of their net household income on childcare costs[4] (OECD.Stat 2023).

[4] The calculation is based on the following fictitious model: two parents in full-time employment (average income); two 2 and 3 year-old children in full-time care; relevant care allowances taken into account.

Staff to child ratios and group size

The number of groups and the number of children per group are determined by the kindergartens in agreement with the provider and legislative requirements. Children are divided into two age groups: the first with children from 11 months to 3 years and the second with children from 3 to 6 years or until they start compulsory school. Children of one age group, children only from the first or second age group or mixed groups from both age groups can also be combined.

The group sizes vary depending on the age composition: in same-age groups with children under 3 years of age there are nine to 12 children, in mixed-age groups there are at least seven and a maximum of ten children. Same-age groups of children between 3 and 4 years have a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 17 children; groups between 4 and 6 years have a minimum of 17 and a maximum of 22 children. Mixed-age groups between 3 and 6 years have a minimum of 14 and a maximum of 19 children. A group with all age groups has a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 17 children. Group size is reduced when children with special needs are present – a maximum of two children with special needs may be in a group (Eurydice 2023 4.2, 12.1).

In certain circumstances, the maximum number of children in a group may be increased by two, which is already regular practice in many cases (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 86).

In a full-day programme, two professionals are present at the same time in a group with under 3 year-olds for at least six hours, and for over 3 year-olds for at least four hours. In half-day programmes, the times of joint attendance are reduced to three or two hours. During shared attendance, the staffing ratio is 1:7 in groups with 3 year-olds and 1:11 or 1:12 in groups with over 3 year-olds.

According to national statistics for 2022/23, a kindergarten was attended by an average of 86.9 children, and the staff to child ratio averaged 1:6.8 (SiStat 2023e).

Curricular framework

In 1999, the Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education introduced a national curriculum for early childhood education. It was created – in cooperation with experts – as an open and flexible document, which contains possibilities for adaptation to different circumstances. The curriculum is not prescribed in detail: With reference to the national curriculum, each institution develops its own individual educational plan. Since then, the Council of Experts has published various amendments and supplementary documents, e.g. on working with Roma children, working in ethnically mixed areas, guidelines on caring for children with special needs and guidelines for the inclusion of immigrant children in kindergartens and schools (Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education 2002a, 2002b, 2003; Education Institute of the Slovenian Republic 2012). Also, the kindergarten curriculum to be used in developmental groups was adapted in 2006 and in 2016 the supplement for children with autistic disorders and children with a long-term illness (Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education 2006, 2016a, 2016b). The curriculum is mandatory for both public and private kindergartens. It is based on the principles of democracy and pluralism, equal opportunities and diversity, and emphasises cooperation with parents and the community.

The National Curriculum applies to work with both the under 3 year-olds and older age groups and covers six areas of learning: (1) physical activity, (2) language, (3) the arts, (4) society, (5) science and (6) mathematics. Separate objectives and illustrative examples are given for each of these learning areas. The content can be adapted to the daily routine and care is taken to alter-

nate guided activities with free play. However, no specific time frames are given for the individual areas; the professionals are expected to use their own methods. They draw up an annual work plan (on which monthly and/or weekly plans are developed) in which their activities in the group are recorded.

The curriculum's overarching goals are: learning to understand and respect others and oneself; developing emotional competence; fostering perception, expression, curiosity, inquisitiveness and imagination; intuition and independent thinking; communicative skills and artistic expression; initial reading and writing skills; motor skills. Overall, the education plan emphasises the individuality of the children and their freedom of choice as well as the importance of play.

Although Kindergarten- and Basic School curricula were created in the same comprehensive reform in the 1990s and include similar topics, they differ considerably. The Kindergarten curriculum is more flexible with an open structure while the Basic School curriculum is subject-based with compulsory areas.

Digital education

Even though the acquisition of digital knowledge and skills usually begins in primary school, the area of technology does feature in the early education curriculum. When the curriculum was created in 1999, examples were included to motivate children to handle digital objects (at that time digital scales, thermometers etc.) (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2021a). Today, children take their first steps into the digital world by playing computer games, drawing digitally or taking digital photos (Wechtersbach 2008).

Since Slovenia is in the middle of national curricular renewal, the Kindergarten Curriculum will also undergo this process. The starting points for a revised Kindergarten Curriculum (Cotič Pajntar, Marjanovič Umek and Zore 2022, 14) highlight "digitally supported learning, which makes sense to include thoughtfully and professionally in work with children, but only in cases where the use of modern technology also means added value to the use of other approaches to promote children's development and learning. This also requires greater digital literacy of professionals in the kindergarten".

Monitoring – evaluation

Child-related evaluation

The curriculum does not specify knowledge or skills that children should master by a certain age. However, the professionals observe the children and encourage them to learn. They communicate progress verbally to parents. Individual records of the children's development are in most cases kept for children with special needs, however more and more core practitioners tend to use formative monitoring for all children in a group.

Centre-based international evaluation

The head/leader of each ECEC centre is legally obliged to carry out one self-evaluation per year. This serves the quality development of the setting itself and is not forwarded to higher authorities. It is up to each ECEC setting to decide exactly how self-evaluation is carried out. This is challenging for the staff as there are no guidelines for implementation which are focused on process quality in kindergarten. Only some uniform tools (reference frameworks and indicators) for carrying out self-evaluation and introducing improvements in pedagogical work exist, with

no focus on specifics of the work in kindergarten. As a rule, the staff, the parents' board (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 40) and children take part. The kindergarten council, which exists in every institution, learn about the results and can propose measures. The focus should be primarily on the evaluation of the educational process and the findings can be compared with those of the external evaluation. Instruments, methods (e.g. questionnaires, rating scales) and the areas that are evaluated can be chosen by the ECEC settings themselves. In most cases, the professionals assess the implementation of the curriculum and the management assesses structural aspects, team cooperation and the area of staff CPD. Depending on the institution, parent surveys are also conducted.

External evaluation

The external evaluation of the educational system and educational organisations in Slovenia takes place in parallel with the self-evaluation of educational institutions.

The external evaluation of the educational system takes place in the following ways:

- Through national evaluation studies that last from 12 to 24 months
- Through large-scale international comparative assessments carried out under the auspices of the OECD and the International Association for the Study of the Effects of Education (IEA)
- Through formal procedures for updating educational work in Slovenia
- Through the external evaluation of schools, which is carried out by the Inspectorate for Education and Sports. The aim of the school inspection is to ensure compliance with the law and thereby protect the rights of the participants in education.
- Through the external evaluation of educational organisations responsible for assessing the quality of work in kindergartens (space, staff, programme) and schools under the ministry of education (Gov.SI 2023d).

External evaluations also include the accreditation process that private institutions have to go through.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

The concept of inclusion in ECEC is underpinned by legislation (*Zakon o celostni zgodnji obravnavi predšolskih otrok s posebnimi potrebami*, 2019). The main focus here is on early identification of difficulties and support for families (European Commission 2020, 64). Children with special educational needs generally attend mainstream institutions.

Placement committees at the National Institute of Education Slovenia and counselling services decide on the best way to support children with special needs (including children with learning and physical disabilities as well as children with autism, speech disorders and chronic illnesses) and their parents. Children can be placed in regular or developmental groups (*razvojni oddelek*). In both cases, their needs are addressed individually. A separate educational plan is prepared for each child. Depending on the needs, an individual support worker is assigned to the child on a temporary or full-time basis. In addition, group size in developmental groups is limited to six children and one child is supported by a relevant specialist (European Commission 2020, 60f). In regular groups, a maximum of two children with special needs can be included.

The National Curriculum addresses in detail the concerns and support of children with special needs through several additional documents (European Commission 2020, 76).

In Slovenia, there are also several separate support institutions; these take in kindergarten children who cannot be adequately supported in mainstream institutions.

In 2022/23 there were 295 children under 6 with disabilities enrolled in a primary school setting; most common were multiple disabilities (93) and speech and language problems (109) (SiStat 2023h).

Children with a migration background – Children from Roma communities

According to Eurostat, 8.2% of Slovenia's population in 2022 had a non-Slovenian citizenship, of which the majority (87.7%) came from countries outside the EU27(2020). In the group of under 5 year-olds, these proportions were 8.4% and 95.2% respectively (Eurostat 2023c).

National statistics indicate that in 2022/23, 8.2% of children (7,027) in kindergartens had a non-Slovenian citizenship; 47.5% of these were children under 3 years of age, 52.5% were between 3 and school entry age (SiStat 2023d, f, own calculations). 15.4% of the non-Slovenian children held a Kosovan citizenship, followed by those with Macedonian (8.7%), Serbian (5.3%) and Bosnia-Herzegovina citizenship (5.2%). 4.8% were citizens of other EU countries (SiStat 2023i, own calculations).

The rights of ethnic minorities are enshrined in law and included in supplements to the curriculum. The Roma Community Act in the Republic of Slovenia (*Zakon o romski skupnosti v Republiki Sloveniji,* 2007) sets out the rights of Roma. In the Roma Education Strategy (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2021b), the measures are mainly focused on increasing the participation of Roma children in kindergartens through the introduction of free and shorter kindergarten programmes in the year before school entry for children who are not enrolled in kindergarten; revision of the Kindergarten Curriculum; cooperation with parents; inclusion of Slovene and Roma culture and language in all programmes; providing organised transportation for all Roma children who are enrolled in full-day kindergarten programmes; employing Roma parents as drivers or children's companions; providing quality children's literature in the Romani language. There is also a call to consider co-financing informal preschool education activities (e.g. TOY library).

To strengthen the connection with Roma communities, home visits are also carried out to emphasise the importance of early childhood education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 120). The *TOY for Inclusion* project, implemented in nine EU countries, including Slovenia, focuses primarily on younger children from Roma families, from families with a migrant background or from ethnic minorities. It focuses in particular on flexible solutions to reach these families and their children through low-threshold meeting centres (European Commission 2020, 76, 92). The recent National programme of measures of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Roma for the period 2021-2030 (Gov.SI 2021) defines the following strategic goals to be achieved by 2023: higher enrolment rates of Roma children in ECEC programmes, with subgoals: acquisition of basic social and language skills before entering primary school; strengthening the knowledge of the Slovenian language, as well as the Romani language and culture among Romani children; regular participation of Roma children in learning processes and completed primary school education.

On the borders with Italy and Hungary there are bilingual ECEC settings where children learn Slovene either as a first or second language. For such ethnically mixed areas, a supplement was made to the curriculum so that these institutions receive extra funding for the further training of professionals. In addition, they usually have smaller group sizes and the staff have higher qualifications. For children with a migrant background, it is also generally recommended that they should be able to speak their family language in the ECEC settings (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 115f).

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Maternity leave (*materinski dopust*) is granted for 15 weeks, four weeks before and 11 weeks after birth. 15 days are compulsory. The full average salary from the previous 12 months is paid. Allowances and extras are not included. There is no upper limit, the lower limit is at least €628.61. If the mother is unable to care for the child, a maximum of 77 days of Maternity leave after the birth can also be transferred to the father or another person caring for the child.

Fathers are entitled to 15 fully paid calendar days of **Paternity leave** (*očetovski dopust*), up to a maximum of 2.5 times the average gross salary per month of the previous year (€5,059,80). It can be taken full or part time until the child is 3 months old.

Parental leave (*starševski dopust*) is granted for 160 fully paid calendar days per parent under the same conditions as for paternity leave. 100 days may be transferred to the other parent. The specific use of the Parental leave must be recorded in writing 30 days before the end of Maternity leave. Parental leave must be taken as a continuous full-time or part-time leave: if taken in part time, the duration is not extended proportionately. One of the parents must take it immediately after Maternity leave. Up to 60 non-transferrable days per parent may be taken at any time until the child's age of 8 (full time or part time), but not more than twice a year, with each section lasting at least 15 days. If combined, Parental leave may be taken by both parents at the same time (20 hours per week for the mother, 20 hours per week for the father).

On average, roughly 93% of fathers took close to 15 days of Paternity leave in 2022. While most mothers take Parental leave, the share of fathers increased from 4% in 2021 to 9% in 2022. Reasons for fathers' persistently low participation may be found in the traditional division of tasks within the family.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Slovenia

*Country expert assessment by **Jerneja Jager***

1. The main challenge facing the ECEC system in Slovenia is the **lack of staff**, namely the lack of qualified Early Childhood Teachers and EC Teacher Assistants. Kindergartens from various Slovenian regions report that it is difficult to recruit suitable staff when they advertise vacancies. Very often, these are candidates without relevant qualifications and those who are qualified apply for vacant positions less often. The general reason is that salaries are too low for the very responsible work, although the Union of Education, Science and Culture of Slovenia (SVIZ) has agreed with the government on raising the salaries of EC Teacher Assistants. In general, however, field experts believe that the work of EC Teachers and EC Teacher Assistants is underpaid.
2. In 2021, with the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP), Slovenia committed to **revising the national curriculum** documents. This began in 2022 with the adoption of the starting points of the renewal and is expected to last until the end of 2025, when all curricula will be revised. The Kindergarten Curriculum has not changed since it was adopted in 1999.
   The process of modernising early childhood education and care is likely to pose some challenges. Changes to curriculum documents usually take place after conceptual/theoretical foundations are developed and prepared, followed by changes in the system and only then by substantive (curricular) solutions. In the case of Slovenia, however, all three processes are

[5] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Slovenia by Nada Stropnik in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

taking place at the same time. You could even say that we started at the end, which might result in inadequate and thoughtless solutions.

3. Modernising the Kindergarten Curriculum foresees that alongside schools, ECEC will also have a greater focus on **digitalisation**. However, it is not clear what this means: does it mean that staff will be educated to develop digital skills or that kindergartens will be digitally better equipped, or that young children will spend (more) time behind digital screens?
   One of the aims of the *Revision of educational programmes project with the renewal of key programme documents is*: "to equip children in kindergartens and staff with competences important for facing current and future challenges (competences for sustainable development, digital competences, entrepreneurship competences that include financial literacy, creativity, collaboration and experiential learning), to strengthen the resilience of the education system (Education Institute of the Slovenian Republic 2022). There is vocal concern that the traditional focus on different kinds of play between children will be transferred to digital education/screens.
4. The enrolment of **vulnerable groups in ECEC programmes** is still a challenge, especially in the case of Romani and migrant/refugee children. ECEC centres started to offer hastily put together short programmes for children not enrolled in ECEC. There is a tendency to think that they were introduced only to increase the statistical data of enrolment of 4 and 5 year-old children in ECEC programmes, since Slovenia still did not meet the 95% Bologna target for of 4 and 5 year-olds (in the last 5 years, national data report somewhere between 93% – 94.5%).
5. The enrolment rate of under 3 year-olds is very high compared to other EU countries (71.1% in 2022/23, SiStat 2023a), however the **child: adult ratio** in these groups (under 3 years) remains too high.
6. **Parental fees** are among the highest in Europe, and Slovenia needs to do something in this respect in order to make early childhood education accessible to all children/families.
7. Legislation demands that each ECEC leader is responsible for annual **self-evaluation**. However, no clear instructions are given on how to do this. Therefore, it would be essential that the revised Kindergarten Curriculum include a chapter on self-evaluation.
8. There is a high number of deferred primary school enrolments: from 5.3% in 2014 to 11.1% in 2022/23 *(data received by email from Ministry of Education).* There are several challenges that lead to this situation. The most obvious is the lack of preparation on behalf of the school for children (and their families) starting school. The majority of schools are not very active in terms of getting to know their future pupils, in terms of getting to know about the work that kindergartens and what Kindergarten Teachers are doing, about the approaches kindergartens are using, and so on. There is low or no pedagogical continuity between institutions, inter-institutional meetings (professional learning communities composed of Early Childhood and Primary School Teachers) are very rare. There are also very few opportunities for staff of both institutions to observe a colleague in the other institution, and to reflect jointly on what they have seen, what could be transferred to the other educational level.
   In order to ensure a smooth **transition between one learning environment and another**, it would be necessary to advocate and find ways for the Kindergarten Teacher to move between schools[6] as this provides meaningful support for children in their first year of schooling, and (on the other hand) enables the Kindergarten Teacher to sustain contact with her primary professional role.

[6] Early Childhood Teachers accompany children from kindergarten to school, stay with them for one school year, and then return to work in the kindergarten. If the children are distributed between different schools, the EC Teacher works in the one admitting the majority of school beginners.

On the other hand, there are also many different parental experiences with their own schooling, and schools should be more sensitive when approaching towards parents.

9. The final challenge – also highlighted in the 2017 SEEPRO study – is still relevant: **Initial professional education** will need to be more fully connected with practice and to include the changes occurring in contemporary ECEC, such as involving diverse families and communities in the life of ECEC settings. This demands intensive team working, critical reflective thinking, and a life-long approach towards learning and professional development. This kind of initial professional education needs to focus not only on knowledge transmission but also to strengthen the processes that support the construction of professional values and skills.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022/23, the total population in Slovenia was 2,107,180. It has thus increased continuously over the last 20 years (2000: 1,987,755; 2005: 1,997,590; 2010: 2,046,976; 2015: 2,06,2874; 2020: 2,095,861) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries (EU27+6) was in France (1.84), and the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.64, Slovenia was above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023c[7]).

Children under age 6

Table 4
Slovenia: Number of under 6 year-olds in the total population, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year-olds	18,968
1 year-olds	18,866
2 year-olds	19,582
3 year-olds	19,932
4 year-olds	20,685
5 year-olds	20,820
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**118,853**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

[7] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

The proportion of children under 3 years of age in the total population was 2.7% in 2022, and that of children under 6 years of age was 5.6%. While these shares were below the then EU15 average in 2000, they were slightly above it by 2015. In 2022, they correspond with the respective EU averages (see *Table 5*).

Table 5

Slovenia: Distribution of under 6 year-olds in population by age-group compared with EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Slovenia/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Slovenia	2,7	2,9	5,6
	∅ EU15[8]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Slovenia	2,7	2,7	5,4
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Slovenia	3,1	3,3	6,2
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Slovenia	2,7	2,9	5,6
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

More than three quarters (77.3%) of households with children under 6 in Slovenia were couple households in 2021. Single parent households accounted for only 0.8% – almost exclusively single mothers (0.7%).

Table 6

Slovenia: Households with children under age 6, 2021

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %*
Total households	199,800	
Couple households	154,500	77.3
Other types of households	43,700	21.9
Total single households	1,600	0.8
Single households, women	1,400	0.7
Single households, men	200**	0.1

Source: Eurostat 2023k, *Own calculations, ** data calculated

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Slovenia, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 79.2% and for women 72.9% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 79.6% of women and 91.3% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), both of the shares of employed fathers and mothers were well above the EU-average (63.6% and 87.2% respectively) (Eurostat 2023g, own calculations).

[8] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Table 7a

Slovenia: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 and 2022

	2010	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Slovenia	78.7	91.1
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[9]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**
Slovenia	79.6	91.3
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[10]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023g

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 7b.*

Table 7b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023g, 2023j

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[10] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[11]

In 2022, 9.5% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, which was significantly lower than the EU27 average (23.3%). The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 13.3%, compared to the European average of 21.6%. 3.8% of the under 6 year-olds and 3.1% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation in 2020 (EU averages 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023h, i).

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[11] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

SPAIN

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report author

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

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1. ECEC governance in Spain

In Spain, an integrated approach to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) was adopted by the 1990 Organic Law on Education (*Ley Orgánica General del Sistema Educativo* – LOGSE). Since that time, ECEC has come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, currently called the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (*Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional* – MEFP). This national law explicitly recognised that, from early childhood onwards, ECEC provision constitutes the first stage of the Spanish education system (ISCED level 0[1]). It precedes compulsory education, which starts at the age of 6. Children aged 0–5 years are enrolled in ECEC, including those with special educational needs and those who are socially disadvantaged. ECEC is governed by the principles of normalisation and inclusion, ensuring non-discrimination and equal access to and continuity in the education system. To promote the wellbeing of children and further eliminate inequalities, a new Ministry of Youth and Childhood was established in November 2023 (*Ministerio de Juventud e Infancia*).

Spanish ECEC is divided into two three-year cycles: the first for children aged 0–2 years, and the second for children aged 3–5 years. ECEC can be provided either in separate settings (*centros incompletos de primer ciclo* and *colegios de educación infantil y primaria*, respectively) or in combined and integrated/unitary settings for children aged 0–5 years (*escuelas infantiles*).

Centre-based settings are the main form of provision, but home-based ECEC provision is also an option within the first cycle (0–2 years), taking place at the home of the service provider (childminder). It exists in only two of the 17 autonomous communities: the Community of Madrid and the Chartered Community of Navarre (Eurydice 2023a).

The state and regional educational bodies establish the educational guidelines that apply to both cycles of ECEC. The first cycle (ISCED level 010) is the responsibility of the regional Education Departments, except in the autonomous community of Galicia, where responsibility is shared with the Department of Social Policy. The second cycle (ISCED level 020) falls exclusively under the education departments. In the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training directly controls both cycles.

The Spanish education system operates as a decentralised governance system and responsibilities are distributed on four levels: central government, regional government, local authority level, and ECEC centre level (Eurydice 2023a). This means that the education departments of the autonomous communities are responsible for the running of pre-primary education in their territories; the local authorities contribute to the organisation of the first cycle of ECEC (0–2 years); and the centre leaders of ECEC institutions are responsible for managing them in economic, material and personnel terms, as set out in the Organic Law on Education 2/2006 (LOE), as amended by the Organic Law on Education 3/2020 (LOMLOE).

The education administrations of the autonomous communities are in charge of regulating the admission of children to both cycles of ECEC for public and publicly subsidised private settings, with two aims:

- To guarantee the right to education and access under conditions of equality and freedom of choice for parents or guardians
- To maintain an adequate and balanced distribution of children, without discrimination on ideological, religious, moral, social, sex, race or birthplace grounds. In the case of children

[1] International Standard Classification of Education 2011 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2012).

with specific needs for educational support, the educational administrations will establish a balanced proportion of these students who must be enrolled in either the public or the publicly funded private centres. Private settings have their own regulations.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

The 1990 Organic Law on Education (LOGSE) not only made provision for a complete restructuring of the education system for children aged 0 to 5 years but also for a reform and upgrading of the professional qualifications needed to work in this field. Since 1990 there are now two main groups of professional workers in early years settings:

- **Early Childhood Education Teachers** (*Maestro especialista en educación infantil*)**,** with a Bachelor's degree in pre-primary teaching (*Grado universitario de Maestro en Educación Infantil*)
- **Senior Technicians in Early Childhood Education** (*Técnico superior en educación infantil*) with an advanced vocational training diploma in early childhood education *(Ciclo Formativo de Grado Superior en Educación Infantil).*

In the first group, maestros are professionals who have a university degree in pre-primary education or in primary school teaching with a specialisation in pre-primary education (both corresponding to ISCED level 6). In the first cycle (*primer ciclo*, 0–3) professionals in the second group holding the Advanced Vocational Training Cycle in Early Childhood Education diploma (ISCED level 5) may teach or support maestros, as determined by the education authorities.

Broadly speaking, only the *maestros* work as group leaders in the **second cycle** of early childhood education (*segundo ciclo*, 3–5), whereas in the first cycle, either *maestros* or Senior Technicians in ECE may take on the role as core practitioner with group responsibility. Nevertheless, the second cycle classes that are taught by *maestros* can be supported by school teachers in other specialities/subjects if necessary or even can be assisted by *técnicos* if permitted by the education authorities. In infant-toddler centres for under-threes, at least one *maestro* must be part of the centre team. Following LOGSE (Organic Law 1/1990), the auxiliary worker training scheme was abolished.

Moreover, since the 2006 Organic Law on Education (*Ley Orgánica 2/2006 de Educación*, LOE), different types of professionals are responsible for support in the fields of education and/or health of young children. They are specialists who have been specifically trained to perform such duties. Early childhood provision may have all or some of these professionals on their staff depending on the institution's needs and/or features (Royal Decree 1630/2006) – see *Chapter **2.5*** for details of the specialist support staff.

Moreover, there may be a number of persons in **auxiliary roles** (see also *Table 1*).

Technicians in Education: Persons with a second-level vocational training certificate or equivalent qualifications who provide additional support to pupils with disabilities, assisting them on the school bus, helping them with their daily personal care and in the dining room, and in other similar situations. They also monitor hallways during classroom changes, students' toilets, classrooms (when the teacher is absent) and school playgrounds (during breaks) in coordination with the responsible teaching staff for such activities.

Infant Assistants help other staff working with pre-primary education pupils, especially in relation to their diet, their well-being and hygiene in the classroom.

Finally, there are professionals in charge of **administration** and the general **services** in schools. These include: administrative staff; library staff; ICT staff and service staff.

Publicly funded private schools and private schools employ their personnel by means of contracts. The categories of non-teaching personnel in private ECEC centres related to educational activities, administration and services are established in the Collective Agreements of publicly funded private schools and private schools respectively, both applicable throughout Spain.

Table 1 shows the main types of ECEC staff in centre-based settings in Spain and also categorises the **core practitioners** (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 at end of this chapter).

Table 1

Spain: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Early Childhood Education Teacher[2] *Maestro especialista en educación infantil* *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional *In some cases:* Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional	**Age-integrated early childhood education centre** *Escuela de educación infantil unificada* 0–5 years[3] (1st and 2nd cycle) **First cycle early childhood education centre** (separate nursery setting) *Escuelas de educación infantil primer ciclo* 0–2 years **Second cycle ECE centre** *Escuela de educación infantil segundo ciclo* 3–5 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility Centre head	0–6 years	4 years at university *Award*: Bachelor's degree *(Grado universitario de Maestro en Educación Infantil)* ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6

[2] Please note that, according to Spanish regulations, Primary education teachers can also work as an ECE Teacher and their profile is then Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional.

[3] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6 (as in Spain): **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds.

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
	Second cycle early childhood education unit in primary school *Colegio de Educación Infantil y Primaria* 3–5 years (in several Autonomous Communities (e.g. Comunidad Valencia, País Vasco) as from 2 years)[4]			
Senior Technician in Early Childhood Education *Técnico superior en educación infantil* *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	**Age-integrated early childhood education centre** *Escuela de educación infantil unificada* 0–5 years (1st and 2nd cycle) **First cycle early childhood education centre** (separate nursery setting) *Escuelas de educación infantil primer ciclo* 0–2 years (1st cycle) **Coordinated first cycle nursery units** *Unidades de primer ciclo en centros separados* 0–2 years **Second cycle ECE centre** *Escuela de educación infantil segundo ciclo* 3–5 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility (only for work with 0–2 year-olds) Otherwise: Qualified co-worker[5]	0–2/3 years 0–5/6 years	1,600 hours non-tertiary, post-secondary vocational *Award:* Diploma/Advanced Vocational Training Cycle in Early Childhood Education *(Ciclo Formativo de Grado superior en Educación Infantil).* ECTS credits: 120 EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 4

[4] see Ancheta-Arrabal et al. 2022

[5] Occasionally, in some regions they can work to support ECE teachers in early childhood units in primary school for children aged 2–5 years (Ancheta-Arrabal et al. 2022).

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
	Second cycle ECE unit in primary school *Colegio de Educación Infantil y Primaria* 3–5 years			
Senior Technician in Sociocultural and Tourism ani-mation *Técnico superior en animación sociocultural y turismo*	All ECEC settings, but not necessarily on-site	Qualified co-worker	All ages	Post-secondary Diploma/ Advanced Vocational Training Cycle in socio-cultural and tourism animation ECTS credits: 120 EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 4
Senior Technician in Social Integration *Técnico superior en integración social*	All ECEC settings, but not necessarily on-site	Qualified co-worker	All ages	Post-secondary Diploma/ Advanced Vocational Training Cycle in social integra-tion ECTS credits: 120 EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 4
Technician in education *Técnico en educación*	**Age-integrated early childhood ed-ucation centre** *Escuela de edu-cación infantil unfi-cada* 0–5 years (1st and 2nd cycle) **First cycle early childhood educa-tion centre** (sepa-rate nursery centre) *Escuelas de edu-cación infantil pri-mer ciclo* 0–2 years **Second cycle ECE centre**	Short-term qualified co-worker	All ages	6 months (100-150 hours depending on the autonomous com-munity) vocational education + 1-2 months (100-150 hours) in a work placement. ECTS credits: n/a[6] EQF level: 3 ISCED 2011: 3

[6] n/a not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
	Escuela de educación infantil segundo ciclo 3–5 years **Second cycle ECE unit in primary school**) *Colegio de Educación Infantil y Primaria* 3–5 years			
ECE Teacher's Assistant *Técnica / Auxiliar en educación infantil*	**Age-integrated early childhood education centre** *Escuela de educación infantil unificada* 0–5 years (1st and 2nd cycle) **First cycle early childhood education centre** (separate nursery unit) *Escuelas de educación infantil primer ciclo* 0–2 years	Short-term qualified co-worker	0–5/6 years	6 months (100-150 hours depending on the autonomous community) vocational education + 1-2 months (100-150 hours) in a work placement. ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 3 ISCED 2011: 3
Health Aid Technicians or Clinical Auxiliaries *Técnicos sanitarios o asistentes de clínica*	All ECEC settings, but not necessarily on site	Short-term qualified co-worker	All ages	6 months (100-150 hours depending on the autonomous community) vocational education + 1-2 months (100-150 hours) in a work placement. ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 3 ISCED 2011: 3

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

In the relevant Spanish legislation, ECEC settings for 3 to 5 year-olds come under the umbrella term of 'schools' because they are mostly located in primary schools, whereas settings for the under threes and the small number of age-integrated 0–5 settings are referred to as 'early childhood centres'. The terminology in this report will either refer to 'early childhood education settings' in general (0–2 *and* 3–5 years) or use the specific terms 'first cycle early childhood centre' (0–2) or 'second cycle early childhood centre' or 'school' (3–5) according to the context.

According to Article 34 of the Royal Decree 82/1996, which regulates early childhood and primary school education, and Article 33 of the Royal Decree 83/1996, the single-member governing bodies of **public early childhood education settings** are the members of the management team, most of whom also teach children. All members of the management team and any other positions defined by the educational authorities are career civil servant teachers and therefore their initial training is similar to that of other civil servant teachers. These include: Centre/School Head; Head of Curriculum; secretary; any other posts established by the education authorities such as Deputy Heads).

According to the relevant legislation (LOE 2006, LOMLOE 2020), 1st and 2nd cycle ECE setting management must combine organisation, administrative management, resource management and pedagogical leadership and development by means of a collaborative approach, seeking a balance between administrative and pedagogical tasks

Article 132 of LOE 2006, as amended by LOMLOE 2020, establishes that the competences of the leaders in early childhood education settings and heads in primary schools are as follows:

- To represent the centre/school and inform the educational authorities about the approaches, aspirations and needs of their educational community
- To supervise and coordinate the activities of the centre/school without detriment to the powers of the Teachers' Assembly and the School Council
- To be responsible for the pedagogical supervision, promote educational innovation and encourage plans in order to attain the goals of the School Development Plan
- To ensure that legislation and other regulations in force are observed
- To serve as the leader/head for the entire educational staff
- To promote a sense of community in the institution
- To promote collaboration with families, with institutions and with organisations that support the centre's relations
- To promote internal evaluations and collaborate in external evaluations and in the evaluation of the teaching staff

- To call and preside over the academic events and meetings of the School Council and the Teachers' Assembly and implement the agreements reached by such bodies
- To contract works, services and supplies, as well as authorise expenses in accordance with the centre/school budget, order payments and endorse the official school certifications and documents
- To formulate proposals to the education authority as regards the appointment and dismissal of members of the management team, subsequent to notification to both the Teachers' Assembly and the School Council
- To approve the School Development Plan, the management project and the centre/school organisational and operational rules
- To decide upon the admission of children
- To approve the allocation of additional resources
- To determine guidelines for the collaboration, for education and cultural purposes, with local authorities, other educational institutions, bodies and organisations
- To take on any other responsibility established by the education authority
- To adapt human resources to the needs of the institution.

The Head of Curriculum is the person responsible for all academic-educational matters in the early childhood educational setting or primary school, such as:

- Coordinating the educational activities
- Drawing up academic timetables
- Coordinating the work of tutors and department heads
- Participating in the proposal of the development plan and the yearly general programme, and promoting a sense of community at the educational setting.

The selection of the Centre Leader/School Head (*Director o directora de centro/ Jefe o jefa de estudios)* (requirements, procedure, appointment, dismissal and recognition of the management role) in **public early childhood education settings** is regulated in Articles 133-139 of the LOE as amended by the LOMLOE and carried out through a process in which the educational community and the educational administration are involved in a merits-based selection system in which the centre's/school's career teachers participate. Participants are required to present a management concept. The selection is carried out at the school by a committee made up of:

- Representatives of the education administration
- Representatives of the setting concerned. At least one third of the members of the committee shall be teachers elected by the teaching staff and another third shall be elected by and from among the non-teaching members of the School Council
- The Centre Leader/School Head of an early childhood educational setting that provides the same type of education.

Those who have passed the selection process must complete a training programme on competences for the performance of the management function.

Those civil servant teachers wishing to access the post of Centre Leader/School Head at an early childhood education setting or primary school may apply to the setting of their choice. The requirements for taking part in this selection process include at least five years of service as a civil servant teacher and the submission of a management concept demonstrating objectives, strategies and assessment procedures. The educational administration of the autonomous community may require completion of a management/leadership training programme, especially in schools that offer both primary and pre-primary education.

The selected candidate is decided upon democratically by all members of the committee. The candidate selected is the one who obtains the highest final score. Furthermore, the results of the admitted and excluded candidates (always including the reasons behind their exclusion) must be published in the school or institution for which they are competing. The committee proposes the selected candidate to the education authority or announces the lack of selected candidates. Under extraordinary circumstances, whenever there is a shortage of candidates or whenever a setting has just been opened or even if the corresponding committee has not selected any candidates, the education authority may appoint a civil servant teacher as a Centre Leader/School Head for a maximum of four years.

Prior to their appointment as heads, candidates must successfully complete a management training programme, as defined in Royal Decree 894/2014. Those holding a Master's degree or postgraduate degree in the leadership and management of educational institutions are exempt from taking the core modules as well as the specific modules the relevant education authority might establish, with the exception of the 'management concept' module.

Apart from the course previously mentioned, there is also a 60-hour course on the updating of management skills. Its characteristics are the same as those for the training course on the development of leadership, except for core modules which are:

- Module I. Updating of the regulatory framework for educational institutions
- Module II. Management of institutional approaches
- Module III. Efficient and effective management of school resources
- Module IV. Key factors for effective leadership
- Module V. Accountability and educational quality
- Module VI. Management concept/project.

Once the training course has been completed, the Centre Leader/School Head is appointed for a period of four years. The appointment may be renewed for another four-year term, depending on whether they have been positively assessed at the end of their first term of office.

Centre/School Leaders assessed positively obtain personal, professional and economic recognition throughout their time in office. The criteria and procedures for this evaluation are public and objective and include the results of the individualised evaluation on completion of previous studies.

Similarly, the education authorities may establish a maximum limit to the number of terms that heads may apply for renewal. Once the chances of renewal are no longer possible, the candidate must take part in a new merits competition in order to be appointed as Centre Leader/School Head again in the same or in a different institution. Once Centre Leaders/School Heads end their term of office, they return to their original teaching post. For this reason or cause, the education authorities may appoint a temporary head, who will carry out the corresponding tasks until the next selection period is over and a new director is appointed.

The Order of 9 October 269/1996 on the constitution and appointment of the governing bodies of **publicly funded private schools**, stipulates that Centre Leaders/School Heads are appointed by the employer or elected in accordance with the legislation in force. Their tasks are to manage, guide and supervise the educational activities, in addition to those other duties that may be entrusted to them.

Article 13 of the 10th National Collective Bargaining Agreement establishes that **private non-subsidised centres** have the autonomy to determine their organisation and functioning, and to establish the governing bodies they deem appropriate. The Centre Leader is responsible for managing, guiding and supervising the educational activities in all matters entrusted to him/her.

The duration of office is determined by the time that the employer entrusts the employee with the responsibilities associated with that position.

Article 37 of Royal Decree 82/1996 and article 36 of Royal Decree 83/1996, stipulate that, in general terms, Centre Leaders/School Heads have the same working hours and holidays as other teachers. However, their own specific headship tasks are included within their teaching hours, so their teaching load is reduced. The education authorities are the ones in charge of establishing the number of hours that are to be assigned to teaching and to headship tasks, which vary in accordance with the specific design of the post (if it is that of a School Head or any other leadership posts such as Head of Curriculum), of the level of studies taught at the institution and of its size (number of registered children), resulting in a different teaching load for heads from one autonomous community to another.

Centre Leaders/School Heads are evaluated at the end of the period for which they were appointed. If they obtain a positive evaluation they receive personal and professional recognition as is established by the education authorities, which are the ones that set up the assessment procedure and its characteristics. Regarding mobility, and as career civil servants, they have the possibility to apply for the state-wide transfer competitions regulated by Royal Decree 1364/2010, Order EFP/1015/2018 and regional regulations. These transfer competitions are organised by the education authorities to cover vacancies in schools.

The dismissal of any of the leadership members takes place whenever a serious offence has been committed, if they have renounced their Spanish nationality or if they have been banned from exercising any kind of professional activity. The management of such processes corresponds to a commission of administrative infractions and is dealt with through a common process for all public civil servants. Articles 93-98 of the Law on the Basic Statute of Public Workers (Royal Legislative Decree 5/2015), establish the grounds for dismissal.

In educational establishments which are wholly or partly publicly funded, the conditions of teaching staff are regulated in the relevant 7th Collective Bargaining Agreement.

The position of centre management or the task of conceptualising the centre programme can only be carried out by an Early Childhood Education Teacher, not by other members of staff.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

In Spain, there are no centre-based posts of responsibility rewarded with higher pay which are held by regular Early Childhood Education Teachers for specific pedagogical tasks within the early childhood educational setting. Such tasks could include: working with migrant families, developing inclusive practices, mentoring trainee teachers.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Articles 113 and 119 of the LOE as amended by the LOMLOE define the governing bodies of non-university education institutions such as early childhood education settings as follows:

A. Single-membership governing bodies:

   Management Team (see *Chapter **2.2***) and **Teachers' Assembly** (chaired by the centre/school head and made up of all the teaching staff working in the centre/school.

B. Mixed-membership governing bodies:

   School Council (comprising the centre leader as Chair, the head of curriculum, a representative of the city council, a group of teachers comprising not less than one third of the total number of members, representatives of the families and children, also comprising not less than one third of total members, and a representative of the school management and services staff.

School Counsellors belong to the internal and external guidance structures that intervene directly in education institutions. In early childhood and primary education there is usually, depending on the number of pupils, one educational guidance team assigned to several schools. The different educational authorities establish the counsellor's functions in Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education centres. Some of these responsibilities are:

- To coordinate academic and professional guidance activities
- To provide advice to the Pedagogical Coordination Commission
- To participate in the prevention and identification of learning issues
- To conduct the psycho-pedagogical evaluation of students in need of one
- To participate in the curricular adaptations of students with educational support needs
- To provide advice on the development of social guarantee programmes
- To provide support, advice and specific guidance to all students at non-university levels
- To cooperate with the educational establishments and their teaching staff in the development of projects for different activities, tutorials, and academic and professional guidance
- To be responsible for the psycho-pedagogical evaluation of students and contribute to the efforts of the Pedagogical Coordination Commission or similar body in the schools
- To advise families.

The **Pedagogical Coordination Commission** in ECE settings with more than twelve groups meets once a month to deal with key topics related to the curriculum. The Commission is chaired by the Centre/School Head and brings together the coordinators of each cycle, the Head of Curriculum and the School Counsellor. Its main tasks are focused on the design of educational content, the Diversity Attention Programme and psycho-pedagogical interventions.

The great diversity found in ECEC settings in terms of ownership, management and integration into primary schools makes it difficult to draw general conclusions about co-ordinating bodies or persons.

In terms of **supervisory staff**, the mechanisms for control and administrative inspection fall within the responsibility of the respective inspection services of the autonomous communities (Article 148 of Organic Law 2/2006 as amended by Organic Law 3/2020). These duties are carried out by **Education Inspectors**. Although their general responsibilities are defined at state level, the autonomous communities are in charge of establishing their specific duties. According to Article 151 of the LOE as amended by the LOMLOE, Education Inspectors are entrusted with the following tasks:

- To monitor, evaluate and control, from a pedagogical and organisational point of view, the functioning of educational institutions, as well as the projects and programmes they develop; supervise teaching practice, the management function and collaborate in its continuous improvement
- To participate in the evaluation of the education system and all its elements
- To ensure that the institutions comply with the laws, regulations and other provisions in force, and that the principles and values set out in the LOE as amended by the LOMLOE, are observed and applied, including those aimed at fostering real equality between men and women
- To advise, guide and inform the educational community about their rights and duties
- To guide management teams in the adoption and monitoring of measures that favour coexistence, participation of the educational community and resolution of conflicts, promoting and participating, when necessary, in mediation processes.

Inspectors do not teach in educational institutions; they issue the reports requested by the respective educational authorities or which are derived from the knowledge of the reality of educational inspection.

To carry out these duties effectively, Education Inspectors must have direct knowledge of the activities carried out at educational institutions, to which they have free access; assess and check the academic and administrative documentation of the setting, and receive from the various members of the educational community the necessary collaboration to carry out their tasks.

Education Inspectors are civil servant teachers, which means that their initial training is similar to that of the rest of civil servant teachers (see *Chapter **4***). However, in terms of inspecting early childhood education centres, they are not required to have a specialist qualification. The selection process is regulated by Articles 43-48 of Royal Decree 276/2007. Candidates take a competitive examination in order to access the inspectorate of the autonomous communities. Likewise, there is a traineeship period which is part of the selection process and lasts between three months and one year. Furthermore, candidates must meet the following specific requirements to take part in the publicly announced competitive recruitment: (a) belong to one of the bodies that make up the public teaching service with at least eight years' experience; b) hold a PhD, a Master's degree, a Bachelor's degree, or an equivalent qualification (but not specifically in Early Childhood Education); (c) go through the corresponding selection process; (d) prove knowledge of the co-official language of the autonomous community of destination, in accordance with its regulations.

Once appointed, they are obliged to take part in the competitions for the provision of inspector positions that are announced until they achieve a fixed post in their preferred autonomous community.

2.5 Specialist support staff

Pedagogical work in ECEC settings comprises many support activities beyond teaching which are carried out by staff holding a range of qualifications. These are professionals in the fields of **education and/or health**, depending on the specific needs of the children enrolled in each institution. In terms of their qualification, these staff members may include:

- Higher education graduates such as *Licenciados* (those who graduated before the Bologna process was adopted), with duties corresponding to their respective studies
- Intermediate graduates such as Registered Nurses (who monitor and care for pupils who fall ill, supervise the administration of prescribed medication, etc.); specialist support staff such as teachers specialised in Community Services and Therapeutic Pedagogy; Physiotherapists; or Occupational Therapists (see below) (Eurydice 2023b)
- Other professionals such as Senior Technicians in Sociocultural and Tourism Animation or Senior Technicians in Social Integration (see below).

The education authorities determine the necessary specialists in each educational institution. These may be teachers with a specialisation in Community Services, Therapeutic Pedagogy, or Hearing and Speech Therapists who provide specific treatment for disorders in coordination with other professionals involved in each case. These teachers are part of the educational and psycho-pedagogical guidance teams for early childhood and primary education (Eurydice 2023b). They are specialists with a specific qualification for the tasks they are assigned, such as:

- ***Speech Therapists***, who provide specific treatment for speech disorders or problems related to the articulation of language in coordination with other professionals involved in the case
- ***Occupational Therapists***, who provide specific treatment for the functional recovery of children by instructing on the handling of aids and prostheses, by training specific activities and by designing or making adaptations which help pupils to carry out their activities. They are

also responsible for monitoring and evaluating the treatment pupils undergo, in coordination with other professionals working at the institution;

- ***Senior Technicians in Sociocultural and Tourism Animation***, who cooperate with the *maestro* to plan leisure and free time activities. They are responsible for carrying out such activities and assisting pupils during such activities; they coordinate and monitor extracurricular teaching and cooperate in monitoring pupils' schooling, liaising between the institution and families, etc.
- ***Senior Technicians in Social Integration***: In cooperation with the ECEC core practitioner in context of social intervention, they can be family workers, special needs educators or attend to community mediation, support for educational intervention, first aid or promotion of personal autonomy, among others. They carry out socio-educational interventions. Their work is aimed at dealing with marginalised children and/or those at risk of social exclusion (ethnic minorities, disabled students, pupils with chronic diseases, pupils suffering from child abuse, etc.). They are in charge of programming, organising, developing and evaluating activities for the prevention of such adverse situations by promoting social integration, taking into account the information derived from the evaluation to determine which strategies and techniques are the most adequate for the development of the pupils' autonomy and their occupational integration under these circumstances
- ***Health Aid Specialists*** or ***clinical auxiliaries*** are professionals with training in intermediate vocational education/training cycles in the field of health care. They perform the tasks entrusted to them by a physician/paediatrician or a registered nurse, who supervises their work.

These specialists can be based at the centre for regular support if the educational authorities so decide, work in special centres or special units, or they can be allocated in individual cases by a local counselling or advisory service.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

The 2006 Organic Law on Education (LOE) stipulates that only qualified staff may work with children aged 0–6 years. However, there are no systematically compiled data in Spain on the breakdown of the workforce according to the qualification level of the staff (see *Table 2*).

Table 2:
Spain: Structural composition of ECEC workforce, 2021

Staff categories	Year / Proportion of workforce in 2021
Staff with specialist higher education degree	No systematically compiled national data – but since a Bachelor's degree is required for working as a core practitioner in the second cycle (3–5), and an Advanced Vocational Training qualification in the first cycle (0–2) of early childhood education, a high proportion can be assumed.*
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	No systematically compiled national data**
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	No systematically compiled national data**
Staff with non-specialist qualification	No systematically compiled national data
Unqualified staff	n/a ***

Staff categories	Year / Proportion of workforce in 2021
Specialist support staff (e.g. Speech Therapists)	**0.9%** off-site*
Male staff	**2.3%** total* **6.6%** centre heads or administrators*; unknown for core practitioners; unknown for qualified co-workers**
Staff with a background of migration	No systematically compiled national data

*Data from 2020/2021 school year (MEFP 2022a).
** Disaggregated data for this category are not available. The official data from the MEFP do not specify the percentages among professionals working in formal ECEC services by type of qualification, as all ECEC professionals need to be qualified to work.
*** The only relevant data are the percentage of staff working with children from 0–3 in non-formal ECEC (with professional careers or other careers with no remuneration), which was 18% in 2014.

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

In order to teach in the different non-university programmes established by Article 100 of the Organic Law 2/2006 (LOE) as amended by the Organic Law 3/2020 (LOMLOE), it is necessary to hold the corresponding academic qualifications and to acquire the pedagogical and didactic training established by the Government for each programme. The model of initial professional education is mainly concurrent, so it combines theoretical and practical training related to teaching with training and studies in the key content areas.

In Spain, both Early Childhood Education Teachers and Primary School Teachers are required to have a Bachelor's degree. This is considered to be generalist qualification. For all other levels of education needing a certain subject specialisation, a Master's degree is required.

Today, following the reform instigated by the 1990 Organic Law on Education (LOGSE), there are two main kinds of ECEC qualified professionals working with young children:

(1) **Early Childhood Education Teachers** who are university trained with a focus on early childhood education

(2) **Senior Technicians in Early Childhood Education** trained at post-secondary level for work mainly with children aged 0–2 years.

The following tables outline the professional qualifications and fields of work of the professional groups who work directly and on a daily basis with young children.

Early Childhood Education Teacher *(Maestra especialista en educación infantil)*

A four-year university-level degree with a specialisation in early childhood education is the required qualification for Early Childhood Education Teachers wishing to work in both public and privately run ECEC provision (Royal Decree 476/2013). The initial qualification route was transferred to university colleges specialising in teacher preparation in 1970, and the post-1990 route for prospective Early Childhood Education Teachers (*maestros especialistas en educación infantil*) stipulated higher entry requirements. The professional education/training syllabus was reformed in accordance with the Bologna Process, and currently the study route takes four years to complete and comprises 240 ECTS credits. Today, the IPE programme takes place at university-based teacher education faculties and qualifies for work with the age group 0–5 years. It is a Bachelor-level qualification (*primer ciclo de formación universitaria*), in contrast to the

Master's degree, which is the requirement for teachers working in all stages of the education system except pre-primary and primary.

Table 3
Spain: Early Childhood Education Teacher

Job title in Spanish: *Maestra en educación infantil* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Since 2006: **Entry requirements:** 10 years of compulsory schooling (up to 16) + 2 pre-university foundation years from 16 to 18; school leaving certificate – *Bachillerato.* **Professional studies:** 4 years higher education at a university faculty for teacher training (*Facultad universitaria de formación de profesorado*) – specialised training for work with 0- to 6-year-olds **Award:** Bachelor's professional degree as Teacher in Early Childhood Education (*Grado en Maestro/a en Educación Infantil*) **ECTS credits:** 240 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011**: 6 **Main ECEC workplace:** First and second cycle early childhood education centres, 0–2 years, 3–5 years; age-integrated ECE centres, 0–5 years; early childhood education and primary school (*Escuela de Educación Infantil y Primaria*), 3–5 and 6–12 years

Senior Technician in Early Childhood Education *(Técnico superior en educación infantile)*

A number of transition regulations applied up to 2000 for those who had a job before the 1990 legislation came into force. In 1987 and 1993, a specific form of training was developed for practitioners working in first cycle early childhood centres without formal qualifications. This qualifying route was designed to take into account previously accumulated work experience and to enable them to continue working as an early childhood centre employee. The 2006 Organic Law LOE stipulates that only qualified staff may work with children aged 0–5 years.

Table 4
Spain: Senior Technician in Early Childhood Education

Job title in Spanish: *Técnico superior en educación infantil* **Profile**: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Since 2006: **Entry requirements:** 10 years of schooling (6 to 16 years) + 2 years' pre-university foundation; school leaving certificate (*Bachillerato*) ***or*** a successfully completed access test for higher professional training (minimum age 20 years) **Professional studies:** Approx. 1½ years (1,600 hours) post-secondary, non-tertiary vocational education + 3 months (400 hours) in a work placement. Focus on age-group 0–2 years. **Award:** Advanced Vocational Training Cycle in Early Childhood Education, *Técnico Superior en Educación Infantil* **ECTS credits:** 120 **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011:** 4 **Main ECEC workplace:** Age-integrated early childhood education centres (*escuelas de educación infantil unificadas*), 0–5 years; coordinated first cycle nursery units (*unidades de primer ciclo en centros separados),* 0–2 years. Occasionally, in some regions they may work to support ECE teachers in early childhood units in primary schools for children aged 2–5 years (Ancheta-Arrabal et al. 2022) or as a home-based ECEC provider.

ECE Teacher's Assistant *(Técnica/Auxiliar en educación infantil)*

The *Técnicos* or *Auxiliares en Educación Infantil* assist other staff to look after early childhood education pupils, especially in relation to their diet, their well-being and personal care. Mostly, they are specifically in charge of children's hygiene in the classroom or accompanying them during meal times. There is no national regulation for this professional profile. The 2006 Organic Law LOE stipulated that only qualified staff may work with children aged 0–5 years. However, the *Infant Assistant* certificate is partly recognised, not on a national basis by the MEFP, but by some of the autonomous community employment services, and it is mainly offered in agreement with certain private IPE institutions.

The professionalisation of this sector has been and still remains an important reform to improve the quality of the provision, especially for the first cycle of the stage and in order to guarantee the equality of attention in terms of integrating vulnerable groups, which represents a challenge within ECEC provision.

Table 5
Spain: ECE Teacher's Assistant

Job title in Spanish: *Técnica/Auxiliar en educación infantil*
Since 2006: **Entry requirements:** 10 years of schooling (6 to 16 years) (minimum age 16 years) **Professional studies:** 6 months (100–150 hours depending on the autonomous community) vocational education + 1–2 months (100–150 hours) in a work placement. **Award:** Certificate – Infant Assistant in Early Childhood Education*, Técnica/Auxiliar en Educación Infantil* **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 3 **ISCED 2011**: 3 **Main ECEC workplace:** First cycle ECE centre (*escuela de educación infantil*), 0–2 years; second cycle ECE centre, 3–5 years; co-ordiinated nursery units (*escuelas de educación infantil primer ciclo*), 0–2 years (1st cycle)

Senior Technician in Sociocultural Animation *(Monitor/Animador de ocio y tiempo libre*) – commonly known as Play Workers

Play Workers are not specialists in early childhood education, but in leisure and free time activities in various educational institutions. They generally work independently with children before and after school hours and during the break times. However, in the case of settings for children below age 3, they may also sometimes work alongside the teacher, or even as a substitute for the teacher, particularly in private settings.

In Spain, the IPE of professionals in the leisure and free time field began in the 1960s with courses for Play Workers and managers of leisure time. Later, in 1988, the qualification was regulated on a national basis (Figueres and Morros 2005), but the IPE for Sociocultural Animators still faced some complications, as they received very little practical learning against a very broad theoretical syllabus and little time to explore and extend this knowledge (Morros 2008). Since 2013, the certificate of Play Worker is recognised as a vocational education route on a national basis by the MEFP as the Advanced Vocational Training Cycle in Sociocultural Animation, but the competence to establish the IPE route lies in the responsibility of the education authorities of each autonomous community (Institut Valencià de la Juventut 2002:7).

Table 6
Spain: Play Worker/Senior Technician in Sociocultural Animation (IPE)

Job title in Spanish: *Técnico Superior de Animación Sociocultural*
Since 2013: **Entry requirements:** 10 years of schooling (6 to 16 years); minimum age 16 years **Professional studies:** 1–2 years (2000 hours), (1,600 hours) post-secondary, non-tertiary vocational education + 3 months (400 hours) in a work placement, but hours are depending on the autonomous community. **Award:** Certificate of Advanced Vocational Training Cycle in Sociocultural and Tourism Animation **ECTS credits:** 120 **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011:** 4 **Main ECEC workplace:** All first and second cycle early childhood education settings. *Since 2006:* **Entry requirements:** 10 years of schooling (6–16 years); minimum age 16 years **Professional studies:** 6 months (100–150 hours depending on the autonomous community) vocational education + 1–2 months (100–150 hours) in a work placement. **Award:** Certificate of Play Worker for leisure and free time, *Monitor/Animador de ocio y tiempo libre*. **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 3 **ISCED 2011**: 3 **Main ECEC workplace:** all first and second cycle early childhood education centres, 0–2 years, 3–5 years; ECE unit in primary school

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP 2021) sets the requirements for university Bachelor's and Master's degrees in teaching, vocational training and specialised education (artistic and sports education). Universities autonomously establish the Bachelor study programmes and second cycle degrees in line with the minimum requirements established in the state regulations, which are evaluated by the relevant bodies.

Early Childhood Education Teacher *(Maestra especialista en educación infantil)*

Competence specifications: Prospective ECE Teachers will be expected to acquire competencies related to the implementation of curricular goals and content. These include addressing diversity; knowledge of ICT; school organisation; learning to live together both inside and outside the classroom; addressing language learning within multicultural and multilingual contexts; working effectively with families; reflecting on classroom practice; and knowledge of quality improvement models (Oberhuemer et al. 2010). Specifically, legislation regulating the university bachelor degrees in early childhood and primary education establishes the competences and abilities to be acquired by students (Royal Decree 1594/2011):

- Being familiar with the goals, curricular contents and evaluation criteria of early childhood/pre-primary education
- Designing and regulating learning environments in diversity contexts attending to the individual educational needs of children, gender equality, equity and respecting human rights

- Promoting a sense of community in and outside the classroom and dealing with the peaceful settlement of conflicts; being able to observe systematically learning and coexistence contexts and to be able to reflect on them; reflecting in the group on the acceptance of rules and respect for others; promoting children's autonomy and individuality as factors for educating emotions, feelings and values in early childhood
- Knowing about language development during early childhood, being able to identify possible dysfunction and ensure the right intervention; dealing with situations for learning languages in multicultural and multilingual contexts; mastering the use of different techniques of expression in oral and written language
- Knowing about the educational implications of Information and Communication Technologies and of television in early childhood
- Knowing about the foundations of child nutrition and hygiene
- Knowing the foundations of early attention, psychological, learning and personality-building processes during early childhood
- Knowing about the organisation of ECEC centres
- Viewing teaching as a professional activity needing continuous improvement and adaptation according to scientific, pedagogic and social changes
- Acting as a counsellor for parents regarding family education with children aged 0–6 years and mastering social abilities in the treatment and relationship with the family of each child and with all families
- Reflecting on class practices in terms of innovating and improving teaching work
- Acquiring habits and skills for autonomous and cooperative learning and promoting this among children
- Understanding the function, possibilities and limits of education in current society and the key competences that affect ECEC centres and their professionals
- Knowing about models for improving quality in educational institutions
- Mastering the Castilian language equivalent to level C1 (in those autonomous communities with a co-official language, the co-official language equivalent to the level C1) apart from a foreign language equivalent to the level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Curricular areas

The initial professional study route for prospective ECE Teachers is organised in three curricular areas or modules: (1) theoretical frameworks, (2) didactic and discipline-oriented training, and (3) practical work placement/field-based studies.

Based on current State regulations (Order ECI/3854/2007, ANNEX), the Bachelor study programmes are required nationwide to include the following modules and contents, without prejudice of the universities' autonomy (Royal Decree 1027/2011):

- **Basic education**: Education processes, learning and personality development (0–5 years old); learning difficulties and developmental disorders; society, family and school; childhood, health and food; organisation of the school room, materials and teaching abilities; systematic observation and contexts analysis; pre-primary education school/ECEC centre.
- **Didactic and discipline-oriented education**: Natural sciences, social sciences and mathematics; languages and reading and writing literacy; music; modelling; body language.
- **Practicum**: Periods spent in educational institutions and the preparation of the Bachelor thesis project.

- **Qualifying mention** (*mención cualificadora*): Special subject/topic (e.g. working with children with special needs, children with autism) proposed by the university when the students choose and develop their Bachelor thesis project.

Apart from these common core subjects, in all study programmes there are compulsory subjects to be included according to each specialisation. In addition to these subjects, which are called common core compulsory subjects and common core specialised subjects, each university is entitled to establish other compulsory as well as optional subjects. The pedagogic-didactic approach of the Bachelor studies emphasises independent work of the students through experiential learning. The IPE study route for Early Childhood Education Teachers was conceptualised under this approach, hence the realisation of field-based studies and work experience in early childhood education centres settings has an important place in the overall studies. According to Eurydice (2022b), 50 ECTS credits are allocated to practical work experience, representing around one fifth of the total (BA=240 ECTS credits), starting during the first semester of the study programme. The remaining credits are allocated to modules of basic education (100 ECTS credits), didactic and disciplinary education (60 ECTS credits), and the qualifying mention (*mención cualificadora*) (30-60 ECTS credits) which means that the student can obtain a specialised degree after acquiring a minimum of 30 ECTS credits.

Senior Technician in Early Childhood Education *(Técnico superior en educación infantil)*

The Royal Decree 1394/2007 (18 July) set out the conditions for this advanced vocational qualification. In addition, each autonomous community established a regulatory framework for the examinations required. Intermediate and higher vocational training may be provided in institutions exclusively devoted to vocational education/training, or in regular schools with a specific upper secondary vocational route. In the latter case, the vocational training is organised independently, but personnel and material resources may be shared. According to the Royal Decree 1538/2006, all these institutions must meet a series of requirements and conditions which apply throughout the whole of Spain.

The qualifying route for the *técnico superior* (Advanced Vocational Training Cycle in Early Childhood Education) is short and emphasises the birth to 3 age phase. It was upgraded considerably following LOGSE in 1990, and again in 2006 when the course length was extended from one year to 1½ years, with an additional three months (400 hours) spent in a work placement. This may be in the nursery unit of an early childhood education centre, in a children's hospital ward or in other childcare and social institutions.

Competence specifications: Senior Technicians in Early Childhood Education are expected to acquire the following competences during their IPE (Royal Decree 1394/2007):

- Organising resources according to the children's needs and characteristics
- Developing the programme activities, employing the appropriate resources and methodological strategies and creating a climate of confidence
- Designing and applying appropriate action strategies with families related to the goals and procedures of the ECEC institution
- Coping with uncertainties regarding people, resources or environment transmitting security and confidence
- Evaluating the intervention process and the results achieved; preparing and managing the documentation associated with the process, with the goal of improving the quality of the service

- Updating research and technical knowledge regarding their professional activity, using the available resources for lifelong learning
- Maintaining relationships with the children, their families, community groups and other professionals
- Managing cultural diversity and providing solutions to the conflicts that may occur
- Creating safe environments; respecting the regulations and security protocols in the planning and development of activities
- Exercising their rights and complying with their obligations under the current labour relations agreements
- Managing their professional career, analysing work opportunities, self-employment and earning
- Creating and managing a small enterprise; carrying out a products feasibility study; planning the production and marketing
- Participating actively in economic, social and cultural issues, with a critical and responsible attitude.

This study route is organised into modules based on the minimum teaching standards established at state level according to ANNEX I of Order ESD/4066/2008, which establishes the curriculum of the Advanced Training Cycle corresponding to the qualification of Senior Technician in Early Childhood Education. These modules must include, as a minimum, the following areas (see Eurydice 2023b):

Table 7
Spain: Curricular areas of the modules *(Técnico superior en educación infantil)*

Curricular areas	Hours	ECTS credits
Didactics of early childhood education	125	14
Personal autonomy and child education	105	12
Children's play and methodology	105	12
Expression and communication	100	11
Cognitive and motor development	105	12
Social and emotional development	75	8
Social abilities	60	6
Intervention with families and attention to children at social risk	60	6
Projects to become familiarised with alternative services in early childhood education and care	25	5
First aid	35	3
Work training and guidance	50	5
Enterprise and entrepreneurial initiative	35	4
Placements in various workplaces	220	22
Total	**1100**	**120**

These studies are fully or partly provided, and some vocational modules are delivered in different formats: in person, at a distance, or mixed. The number of credits allocated to this qualification is 120 ECTS credits. 20% of the time is spent in a work placement, and just over 18% of the ECTS credits are awarded for work placements.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Both levels of initial vocational education/training (intermediate and higher) are open to applicants who do not have the usual academic requirements, provided they pass a specific test proving that their background in the area will enable them to take full advantage of such training. In order to gain access to intermediate vocational training, pupils must hold the *Graduado en Educación Secundaria Obligatoria* certificate. Pupils successfully completing these studies are awarded a *Técnico* certificate, with which they have access to Bachelor studies such as the degree of *Maestro en Educación Infantil*.

Also, a system for evaluating and accrediting knowledge and skills acquired through experience or non-formal means and for adapting and updating vocational qualification routes according to real market needs has been established. The 2002 Organic Law on Qualifications and Vocational Training (Organic Law 5/2002, LOCFP) aimed to organise a comprehensive system of vocational training, qualifications and accreditation that provides a solution to social and economic demands through different types of training, including in-company and occupational training, and training addressed to the integration and reintegration of workers into the labour market. In this respect, among other measures, a system of grants and financial assistance was put in place for workers between 18 and 24 with no vocational training qualification to be able to combine their employment with the training activities required for obtaining that qualification (Royal Decree 1224/2009).

More recently, the Spanish Qualifications Framework[7] has been implemented as an internationally recognized instrument that guides the coherent levelling of qualifications for their classification, relationship and comparison and that also serves to facilitate the mobility of people in the European space and in the international labour market.

The Spanish Qualifications Framework defines the unique Vocational Training system as a whole, for the first time, articulated and compact that:

- Identifies the professional skills required by the employment market
- Ensures suitable training offers
- Enables the acquisition of the corresponding training or, where appropriate, its recognition, and
- Offers a guidance service and professional accompaniment that allows the design of individual and collective training pathways.

Access to a career guidance system within the framework of the Vocational Training system is incorporated into the training process and into the accreditation procedure of skills gained through work experience.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

The IPE institutions have a great degree of autonomy in terms of organising the amount of time devoted to the theoretical and practical components of study programmes within the framework set by the relevant education authorities (Eurydice 2023b). The practical component of both ECE Teachers and Senior Technicians in ECE includes periods spent in educational settings

[7] For further information see MEFP 2022b

and the preparation of a final project, which is necessary to get the qualifying mention (see *Chapter **4.2***). The "practicum module" of the Bachelor teaching degree in Early Childhood and Primary Education amounts to 55 ECTS credits (whereby the proportion allocated to the "Final Bachelor's Project" within this module may vary) and the "work placement" module for prospective Senior Technicians in Early Childhood Education amounts to an average of 22 ECTS credits (the exact number of credits assigned by each autonomous community varies).

Work placements are field-based studies supervised by a mentor at the institution where the practicum takes place and by an academic tutor of the university or the vocational training centre. Their main objective is to enable students to apply and complement the acquired knowledge in their theoretical training.

Table 8 compares the practicum in the IPE of core practitioners in its different dimensions:

- Whether this element of IPE is regulated by national and/or regional and/or provider guidelines and how explicit these are about the cooperation between and the complementary roles of IPE institutions and ECEC centres
- The length of time spent overall in the workplace (in weeks or days) throughout the course of studies and how the time blocks are structured
- The number of ECTS credits allocated to workplace learning in the professional study routes for core practitioners
- The skills and competences students are expected to develop in the workplace
- Forms of student self-evaluation and external evaluation
- Whether mentoring/supervising staff in ECEC centres are *expected to* or *have to* complete a specific qualifying course for the task of supporting students in the workplace
- Whether mentoring/supervising staff in ECEC centres have a designated role, with time allocation specifications for mentoring, and whether/how they are remunerated for their work.

Table 8
Spain: Characteristics of guided workplace experience (practicum)

	Early Childhood Education Teachers	**Senior Technicians in ECE**
Regulation/Provider	Public and private provider agreements*	Public and private provider agreements**
Length/time blocks	First and last year of studies 1 semester	Final year of studies 3 months
ECTS credits awarded	50	22
Skills/ competences	Practising professional activities; facilitating their occupation; encouraging their entrepreneurial ability	n/a
Self-evaluation and external evaluation	Bachelor project with mentor at the IPE institution	Final project with mentor at the IPE institution
Mandatory course for mentors	No	No
Specified time allocation/remuneration for mentoring	No	No

* Royal Decree 1027/2011; ** Royal Decree 1543/2011; *** Order ESD/4066/2008

Recent reforms, trends and debates

There are no recent reforms or debates on this issue, but a worrying trend is emerging due to the 2011 reform of employment and labour in Spain which includes a new type of contract called "in placement" (*Contrato en prácticas*). This particular type of contract and the time students spend in the ECE institution during the practicum are being used by ECE providers to cover their needs for staff during certain periods of the school year. This is having an impact on the quality of ECE provision and of the work placements. One negative effect is the lack of staff in the institution who can take on a mentoring and supervising role with the students; another is that students are being used as substitute staff during their placement and are left to work alone with no supervision, despite the fact that taking on responsibility for a group of children is not permitted.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

National, regional and/or provider framework for regulating the CPD of ECEC personnel

National regulations regarding the CPD of ECEC personnel have been provided only for fully-qualified teachers. Professionals with lower qualifications are encouraged to pursue further studies in order to improve their initial professional education and to gain access to jobs in the public sector, which in turn guarantee free access to CPD.

Early Childhood Education Teachers have a right and an obligation to pursue lifelong learning (Article 102, Organic Law on Education 2/2006). Continuing professional development is thus a responsibility for the education authorities and educational institutions. ECE Teachers and Senior ECE Specialists are expected to continually update their knowledge in the areas of early childhood research, didactics and professional issues. However, participation in CPD activities is voluntary.

Article 103 of the LOE (Organic Law 2/2006) establishes that the education authorities shall plan teacher training activities for the teaching staff working in public schools, including ECEC provision. They guarantee a diversity of offers which are available free of charge, and take the necessary measures to foster teacher participation in these activities. There are financial supports available for participants wishing to attend activities offered by other institutions.

CPD programmes for ECE Teachers are planned according to the priorities of the specific autonomous community and to the professional development needs expressed by teachers themselves. The autonomous communities are free to establish their own priority guidelines, considering the training needs of the teaching staff within their jurisdiction. This implies that both the content of the training and the institutions in charge of its provision differ from one autonomous community to another.

They are required to provide teachers with a range of activities and cater for their training needs, as well as establishing other training priority guidelines.

The National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teacher Training (INTEF – *Instituto Nacional de Tecnologías Educativas y de Formación del Profesorado*) is the unit within the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training responsible for the integration of ICT and teacher training. Its tasks include (Eurydice 2023b):

- Developing, promoting and disseminating curriculum materials
- Drafting of models for the training of teaching staff

- Designing and implementing specific programmes aimed at the scientific and didactic updating for teachers
- Developing and disseminating digital and audiovisual materials
- Implementing, in collaboration with the autonomous communities, specific programmes for the development of digital competence.

Main forms of CPD for ECE Teachers

According to article 5 of Order EDU/2886/2011, there are five main formats for CPD activities: courses; seminars; working groups; training projects in institutions; and conferences. They are also classified according to whether they are attendance-based or not (Eurydice 2023b):

(a) **Face-to-face** courses and seminars may include non-face-to-face periods, provided that the total duration of the activity is at least twenty hours, and the non-face-to-face hours do not exceed 20% of the total. These periods must be evidenced by the submission of an individual or group report or project. As a general rule, face-to-face sessions shall not exceed eight hours per day.

(b) **Online** activities may include a face-to-face session for their co-ordinations.

(c) **Blended activities** combine face-to-face and online phases. In general, the face-to-face phase may not be of less than ten hours.

Teachers can take part in these activities during their teaching hours, during the compulsory time of on-site work in the setting or during working hours if they are carried out outside the educational institution.

CPD activities can be grouped according to three basic types (Eurydice 2023b): (1) courses requiring attendance or participation in online courses, (2) seminars and (3) teamwork. CPD also takes place on-site. This form is considered an effective tool for meeting the training needs of a team or group of practitioners who work at a particular early childhood education setting, and it is aimed at the theoretical and practical training of ECE Teachers. On-site CPD includes issues such as centre administration, management and organisation, innovative projects and their development, and so on. The Spanish Institute for Education Technologies and Teacher Training (INTEF) also establishes the relevant agreements with other institutions to this end.

CPD courses are organised according to the specific age-level and specialisation (e.g. ECE). The autonomous communities regulate the announcements, validations, certificates, activities registrations, equivalences between research activities and university degrees, priority lines in lifelong learning, and so on. After taking part in these activities, educators receive attendance certificates.

The MEFP, in collaboration with the 17 autonomous communities, is responsible for fostering the international mobility of public school teachers, post-to-post teacher exchanges and visits to other countries.

Leave entitlement specifications

The educational administrations of the autonomous communities encourage and grant paid study leave for teaching staff in the public ECEC centres they manage (Article 105.2.d, Organic Law 2/2006, LOE). The purpose of these leaves is to promote their participation in activities regarding training and educational research and innovation. CPD provided by public institutions is free of charge, whereas CPD offered by other types of institution is fee paying, but teachers receive financial support for participation. Terms and conditions are determined by the corresponding authority with competencies in the field of education in each autonomous community,

and the amount of financial support depends on the available budget, so there is a significant variety (Eurydice 2023b).

Official internship periods are granted through a selective process and, if successful, teachers receive leave for this time.

Main providers of CPD for ECE Teachers

The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP), through the National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teacher Training (INTEF), establishes on a yearly basis the priority areas to which continuing teacher training plans must adhere. It also offers State Continuing Professional Development programmes and it establishes the appropriate agreements with other institutions to this end. The education authorities of the autonomous communities can:

- Establish their own priority guidelines for continuing training, taking into account the training needs of the teaching staff within their jurisdiction
- Establish the content of the training
- Decide on the institutions in charge of its provision.

All autonomous communities have a network of institutions which provide CPD activities. Although they have different names, the most widespread term is **Teachers' and Resource Centres** and they are the main institutions responsible for providing formal CPD activities. Each institution is responsible for a variable number of schools, including ECEC settings, to which they provide support in relation to professional development, promote inter-institutional working teams supporting the dissemination of knowledge, provide resources to the teaching staff and contribute to the development of their teaching activity and the improvement of settings through educational innovation.

In all the autonomous communities there are also other institutions involved in the continuing professional development of teachers, such as university departments, institutes of education, professional associations, unions or educational reform movements.

Finally, there are numerous private associations, groups or institutions (such as official professional associations, unions, pedagogical reform groups, foundations, etc.) whose aim is to foster in-service teacher training; Education authorities may grant these institutions financial assistance to help them achieve such an objective.

Formal recognition of CPD

Undertaking CPD activities has a direct impact on teachers' professional careers, since they are regarded as merits in competitive examinations (merit for transfers, secondments, management of educational institutions) or as a necessary requirement to be eligible for a salary bonus. The amount and name of this bonus varies in the different autonomous communities.

The Resolution of 16 February 2011, by the Directorate General for Evaluation and Territorial Cooperation establishes the recognition, within the area of competence of the different education authorities, of additional allowances for teachers linked to the completion of training activities. Undertaking continuing teacher training is optional but has specific effects on teachers' professional careers like merits in public competitive examinations or receiving an additional payment. Agreements between the Ministry of Education and the education authorities of the autonomous communities (2011) regulate the recognition of teachers training activities. The education authorities recognise the training activities, research and innovation carried out by the teaching staff out of the jurisdiction of the target education authority, providing that they have been previously accredited by the education authority in charge of offering such training.

The recognition of such activities is considered a merit in any call including the assessment of continuing professional development activities.

Recognition of additional payments related to the implementation of training activities refers to specific additional remuneration for continuing professional development (bonus for every five-year and six-year period in service): recognition of the training activities carried out by teachers out of the jurisdiction of the target education authority, as long as they have been previously recognised by the education authority where they were implemented; certification and recognition by the relevant education authority of the number of bonuses for every 6-year period in service; certification and recognition by the target education authority of the training activities carried out during the current six-year term in service, to those teachers moving for work to such education authority. The recognition of these training activities is carried out according to the regulations and criteria on continuing professional development activities of the education authority to which teachers belong. It has effect on all the calls, competitions or administrative actions considered to assess them (Eurydice 2023b).

Content of CPD courses

The 2013 Act on the Improvement of Quality in Education (Organic Law 8/2013), which modifies the 2006 Organic Law on Education, lays down several guidelines for the CPD programmes offered by the education authorities of the autonomous communities. These include:

- Adapting knowledge and methods to accommodate recent research findings and specific teaching methodologies
- Offering training related to coordination, guidance, tutorship, attention to diversity and school organisation
- Establishing training programmes in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and foreign languages
- Promoting educational research and innovation programmes
- Providing specific training as regards equal opportunities between men and women, and coeducation.

In addition, each Community offers specific guidelines for different groups of teachers, depending on the demands and needs of the particular stage of education in which they are working (e.g. early childhood education). In fact, CPD for Early Childhood Teachers in Spain tends to be distinctly diverse since so many different entities offer such professional learning programmes and there has been little specific regulation in this regard (Úcar Martínez et al. 2007).

There have been no large-scale research projects on the CPD activities of ECE personnel over the past five years. Smaller-scale studies have included the following topics:

- Collaborative reflection on ECE to improve transition
- Citizenship in CPD for ECE teachers
- Digital competency and the use of ICT in ECE professionals.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

Conditions of service for **Early Childhood Education Teachers** vary depending on the education level and the ownership of the educational institution. Both the national and regional education

authorities, are responsible for regulating these conditions. The 2013 Act on the Improvement of Quality in Education (Organic Law 8/2013) establishes that the education authorities must ensure that teaching staff receive consideration, treatment and respect which reflect the social importance of their task. This has led to new measures aimed at the social recognition and support of teachers and the improvement of their working conditions.

The **Senior Technicians in ECE** have been campaigning for years for improvements in their working conditions, including being placed in a higher professional level or category within public administration. The Senior Technicians in ECE belong to the so called 'technical category' for which only a baccalaureate or vocational training is required and as a professional group they are thus categorised at a lower level than Early Childhood Education Teachers. However, they argue that a majority in fact have higher degrees, usually a university degree, but the differences in the qualifications required in the first and second cycle keeps them in a lower professional category (Cadena Ser 2017), since there is still no equity between the conditions of work with under 3 year-olds and over 3 year-olds. According to a survey by Sánchez Muliterno (2009) this is more of an economically based justification than a professional one since it is commonly accepted that the younger the children, the less qualified the staff need to be. In fact, Senior Technicians in ECE work in regular and specialised services and perform a wide range of duties. That is the reason for claiming more recognition of the job category itself and for wishing to clarify schedules, duties and other working conditions.

One issue to reconsider is the fact that, both in the IPE and CPD of ECE Teachers, there is insufficient focus on self-evaluation which are central to the quality of ECEC (Ancheta-Arrabal et al. 2022). This is not a trivial issue, since studies that included the views of parents came to similar conclusions about the gaps in initial professional studies regarding the role and perspectives of families, and about the conditions which undermine the quality of ECE, such as the high teacher-child ratios in the groups, the constantly changing national ECE policies, or the lack of resources (Sánchez Muliterno 2009, 59). Therefore, further analysis should focus on the causes of these social and professional understandings, which can be related to the current working conditions and social status of ECE teachers.

However, according to Organic Law 4/2019 on the improvement of teaching and learning conditions in non-university education, working conditions may vary depending on (Eurydice 2023b):

- Ownership of the workplace: public or private
- Contractual relationship with the administration or educational institution (e.g. in public schools being a civil servant, interim or labour staff)
- Educational level they teach
- Employment category (for example, in public schools, belonging to the Secondary Teachers' Corps or to the Faculty Corps)

Even for public educational institutions, there can be differences amongst the various autonomous communities.

7.1 Remuneration

In Spain, ECE Teachers' salaries can vary depending on the ownership of the educational institution. They are paid the same as Primary School Teachers. With this salary it is possible to live without additional support, even as a single parent in a major city.

The salaries of civil servants are classified into basic and supplementary, according to the Royal Legislative Decree 5/2015, which approves the revised text of the Law on the Basic Statute of

Public Workers. Career civil servant teachers in public educational institutions, including ECEC centres, can receive the following (see Eurydice 2023b):

a) **Basic rewards**: These are paid according to the secondment of their body or category and to their seniority. They are:
   - *Basic payment*: includes the monthly allowance of basic payment corresponding to the specific professional classification group or subgroup, and the supplementary remuneration (applicable allowance to the post and certain components of the specific additional remuneration)
   - *Additional payment*: Paid according to the characteristics of the jobs, the professional career or the development, performance or results achieved by the civil servant.

b) **Additional bonuses:** General component (based on the above-mentioned levels); individual component (related to the specific conditions of each position.); continuing professional development component (amount allocated for every five or six years in service, which varies in each education authority).

According to the monthly figures in euros provided for in the 2021 State Budget, ECE Teachers in **public pre-primary settings** are placed in Group B/Subgroup A2, level 21 on the salary table of career civil servant teachers. With three years' working experience they earn a gross basic salary of at least €1,881.8 per month. With additional payments they can earn between €2,400.13 and €2,646.34 per month. For a detailed salary table, see Eurydice 2023b.

The salary of teaching staff on a contract basis is established in line with national labour laws, the applicable group agreement and the employment contract. Interim civil servants receive the basic remuneration and extra pay corresponding to their assigned body, as well as most of the additional remuneration earned by career civil servants.

The payment system for teachers in **private schools** is regulated by the various labour conventions and agreements. In **publicly funded private schools**, the minimum salary for the staff in the jurisdiction of these agreements is set in their salary tables, and it comprises: basic salary, additional rewards, bonus for every three-year or six-year period in service and other supplements (regional salary supplement; temporary incapacity supplement; residence allowance; two extraordinary payments, each equivalent to one month's salary, seniority and specific supplements). These payments vary according to the autonomous community and they are paid by the corresponding education authority as delegated payment and on behalf of the owner of the institution.

The awards of the staff in the 9th collective agreement on **private education** without grant-aided or subsidised levels comprise: basic salary; a teaching productivity bonus; a supplement for professional development and improvement allowance (which is paid for the training and knowledge acquired in each five-year period, with a minimum of 100 hours of training during this period) dedication allowance, to be paid in full to teachers with a working day of 60% or more; teachers with a working day of less than 60% receive it in proportion to their working day; temporary allowance for government posts, to be paid to teachers who hold the posts of Centre Leader/Director, Deputy Director, Head of Curriculum and Head of Department; insularity bonus, for those workers who work in Ceuta, Melilla, the Balearic and Canary Islands; a supplement for the completion of the Baccalaureate, equivalent to 14% of the basic salary, is paid to teaching staff serving in the final year of the baccalaureate; three special payments, each equivalent to one month's basic salary, professional development allowance, allowance for the completion of the baccalaureate and temporary government allowance, if any (Eurydice 2023b).

In general terms, the conditions of service for Centre Leaders/School Heads, Heads of Curriculum and secretaries in public schools are similar to those of other career civil servant teachers, with some exceptions listed below. Centre Leaders/School Heads have the status of civil servant

teachers, which means that they have an indefinite contractual relation with the education authorities.

The salary for heads in public institutions is established in the same way as for the rest of civil servant teachers, according to the adscription to the body or scale to which they belong, to a certain professional subgroup or group, to their seniority (three-year work period), to their category or professional level and the specific post they hold.

The General State Budget only influences the common salaries for all teachers in Spain. This remuneration includes the basic salary, the three-year bonus payments, the additional remuneration attached to a post, the extra pay salary and the extra pay three-year bonus. The autonomous communities, in turn, determine the complement for management positions.

The annual salary ranges can be found in the different autonomous communities, but in smaller pre-primary and primary education centres (specific size according to autonomous community) the minimum annual wage is €34,363 and the maximum wage is €47,816; while in the largest pre-primary and primary centres (specific size according to autonomous community) the minimum wage is €41,480 and the maximum wage is €53,933 (Eurydice 2023b).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

Both working time and holidays vary between the autonomous communities and whether the early childhood education settings are publicly or privately owned. In general, a full working week in public educational institutions is 37.5 hours, 30 of them must be spent at school and 25 on teaching time (Organic Law 3/2020, LOMLOE). All ECE Teachers in the **public sector** work full time.

Concerning **publicly funded private** schools/ECEC settings, the 7th Collective Bargaining Agreement for private education companies fully or partially supported by public funds defines the working hours of teachers in these institutions: hours devoted to the teaching activity; and hours devoted to non-teaching activities (preparation, in-between periods, evaluation meetings, etc.) (Eurydice 2023b).

The annual working time of the teaching staff is 1,180 hours:

- 850 hours are devoted to teaching (a maximum of 25 hours per week)
- 330 hours are devoted to non-teaching activities (distributed over the school year)
- Temporary workers have to work an additional 40 hours a year.

The annual working time of the teaching staff in the 1st cycle of pre-primary education (0–2 years):

- 1,362 hours for Early Childhood Education Teachers (a maximum of 32 hours per week)
- 1,620 hours for Senior ECE Specialists (a maximum of 38 hours per week).

In **private schools/ECEC settings**, the 10th National Collective Bargaining Agreement for general regime private institutions or formal education institutions without any educational agreement or public financial support states that 27 hours per week plus 237 additional teaching hours a year can be distributed over the year, providing that the overall working time does not exceed 8 hours per day (teaching hours included). Moreover, 50 hours a year are devoted to training and updating. Subject to agreement between the company and the worker, the annual working time may be increased by a maximum of 90 hours. This increase, freely offered and voluntarily accepted, is preferably offered to **part-time staff** (Eurydice 2023b). However, there are no disaggregated data available specifically about part-time employment in early childhood educational settings.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

In public educational institutions there are several general supporting measures, targeted at all the teachers, amongst them early career teachers and newly qualified staff in their first post.

During their first year of teaching, candidates who have passed both phases of the selection process to access the teaching profession must complete a final 'on-the-job' qualifying phase before they are appointed as civil servants. During this probation phase, and as a support measure for newly appointed teachers, they are monitored by experienced teachers so that responsibility for the trainee teacher's teaching plan is shared. This induction phase, including professional development activities, ranges from a minimum length of three months to a maximum of one school year. Education authorities are responsible for the regulation and organisation of the final 'on-the-job' qualifying phase. Applicants take and pass a traineeship period which differs according to the ownership of the educational institution where they are teaching.

Traineeship period in public ECEC settings

Article 23 Royal Decree 276/2007 regulates the traineeships that are part of the process for accessing the **public service** before being appointed career civil servant teachers; this includes a tutored and paid period before joining teaching. Each autonomous community regulates it and sets its length, which can range between three months and a school year; trainee teachers elaborate a final report assessing the difficulties found and the support received.

The tutor of the traineeship period must be an experienced teacher, with whom the trainee teacher shares the responsibility for planning and teaching; a teacher belonging to the same body and speciality as the applicant and, preferably, to the body of senior teachers. The functions of this tutor are to assess the trainee teacher in every relevant aspect for the appropriate development of the teaching activity, as well as to monitor and evaluate this period.

The activities carried out by trainee teachers, apart from teaching, can be regular meetings for discussing progression or problems with the tutor; monitored activities regarding classroom programming, students teaching and assessment; participation in the drafting of the institution documents; meeting with the families.

Training aimed at trainee teachers

The autonomous communities establish the mandatory or non-mandatory nature and the themes of these training courses. Their length varies between the different education authorities and they can be provided in different formats:

- Classroom-based at the educational institution
- Blended or distance
- At the Teachers` and Resources Centres.

The trainee teacher can participate through observations in other teachers' classrooms and, mainly, in the classroom of the teacher-tutor.

The evaluation of the traineeship period is carried out at the end of the traineeship period; applicants are evaluated in terms of 'pass' or 'non-pass':

- Positive evaluation, 'pass': the trainee is appointed as a career civil servant. This assessment is carried out by the traineeship tutor, the head of the establishment and the assigned inspector.
- Negative evaluation ('non-pass'): the education authority can allow the repetition of this phase only once. Those who do not incorporate or do not pass it for the second time lose all rights to be appointed as career civil servant teachers.

The education administration can grant exemption from the traineeship period to those candidates who have passed the phase of competitive examination based on merits and who prove that they have taught, at least, for a school year.

Traineeship period in private ECEC settings

Publicly funded private schools: there is a probation period lasting four months for all the new teaching staff, as set out in the Collective Agreement for private education providers financed in whole or in part by public funds.

Private schools receiving no public funds: In accordance with the National Collective Bargaining Agreement for general regime private institutions or formal education institutions without any educational agreement or public financial support, this period lasts three months.

At the end of the probationary period, the candidate's teaching ability is assessed and he/she is declared eligible/not eligible. If a candidate is considered not eligible, education authorities may allow the candidate to retake this final phase. Those who do not take up their post or are declared not eligible for a second time lose their right to be appointed career civil servants.

7.4 Non-contact time

The working time of teaching staff in the **civil service** varies according to the education authority they are ascribed to. In general, the working day for teachers in *Educación Infantil* is similar in all autonomous communities and is currently around 37.5 hours per week, with approximately one hour of each five hours dedicated to the work without children (see *Table 9*).

The non-contact hours are used for meetings, talks with parents, assessment sessions, and so on. Seven and a half hours of the weekly working time can be used at discretion outside the setting. They are used for continuing professional development, preparation, meetings, evaluations or extracurricular activities.

Table 9

Spain: Working hours, including non-contact time, of ECE staff according to setting providers

	Public settings	Publicly funded private settings	Private settings
Teaching hours*	25 hours per week 875 hours per year	25 hours per week 875 hours per year	27 hours per week (32 hours availability on-site)
Non-teaching hours (non-contact time)	1 out of 5 hours (7,5 hours per week can be spent off-site)	330 hours per year	Up to 287 hours per year
Hours to be spent in the setting**	25-30 hours per week up to 1,140 per year	1,180 hours (2nd cycle) 1,362 hours (1st cycle, ECE Teachers) 1,620 hours (1st cycle, Senior ECE Specialists)	32 hours per week (1st cycle) 27 hours per week (2nd cycle)
Average working week in hours	37.5 hours	32 hours (1st cycle, ECE Teachers) 38 hours (1st cycle, Senior ECE Specialists)	37.5 hours

Source: adapted from Eurydice 2023b

*The calculation of teaching hours is made up of the minimum number of school days in the Organic Law on the Improvement of Quality in Education, 175 school days, although in the calendars established by the education authorities this number is increased with slight differences depending on the autonomous community.

** The hours to be spent at school and the global working day are calculated taking into account the 190 days between September 1st and June 30th, without including Christmas and Holy week and bank holidays.

In **publicly funded private schools** 850 hours are devoted to teaching (a maximum of 25 hours per week) and 330 to non-teaching activities (distributed over the school year). The annual working time of the teaching staff in the first cycle (0–2 years) is 1,362 hours for Early Childhood Education Teachers (max. of 32 hours per week) and 1,620 hours for Senior ECEC Specialists (max. of 38 hours per week).

The workload of teachers in **private-sector** schools depends on the Collective Agreement which covers them. The Agreement for pre-primary education establishes 32 hours of availability at school per week.

7.5 Current staffing issues

A significant structural feature of the Spanish education workforce in general is that it is an ageing workforce. However, teachers in ECE and primary education show a younger profile than those in other levels of education. The largest group is between 40 and 49 years (31.6%), followed by those between 30 and 39 years (28.9%) and those between 50 and 59 years old (24.7%). Moreover, a considerable percentage of teachers are under 30 years of age (8.6%) (MEFP 2022a, 55).

In Spain, there are currently more ECE Teachers than needed, so the widespread European phenomenon of staff shortages does not apply here. Many teachers now seek an additional qualification as Senior Technician in ECE, since there are more jobs available in the private sector settings for children aged 0–2 years. However, this means that they are placed in a lower salary category and experience less favourable working conditions than they would in a public sector setting.

General processes of recruitment vary in relation to the ownership of the educational institution and to the educational level provided (Eurydice 2023b):

- **Public centres/schools**: This is subject to passing a competitive examination established for each of the teaching staff categories, in accordance with the provisions of the Regulation on entry, access and acquisition of new specialisations.
- **Publicly funded private centres/schools**: The selection criteria for teachers have a public nature and are established by the School Board, the school head and the owner of the school. The selection process is carried out by the owner of the centre together with the director, according to the established selection criteria, as indicated in Article 60 of Organic Law 8/1985 on the Right to Education (LODE). Each educational administration verifies that this procedure complies with the established criteria and is entitled to elaborate on the conditions for its implementation.
- **Non-publicly funded private centres/schools**: the selection process is carried out by the owner of the school and their recruitment adapts to the provisions of the Workers Statute.

Another consistent issue is that Senior ECE Specialists do not have similar CPD options in different parts of the country, that they have fewer options than Early Childhood Education Teachers and even fewer if they work in the private sector.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

In 2008, with the aim of improving educational care for the first cycle (0–2 years), the Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (MEPSyD) launched the **Educa3 Programme.** This was a programme to expand the provision of places for the 0–2 years age group and to improve quality through the continuing professional development of staff (Consejo de Ministros extraordinario, 2009). This involved: expanding the vocational training for Senior Technicians in ECE, depending on the specific situation in the autonomous community; starting to recognise previous work experience and providing specific training modules offered through distance learning or based in an institution; promoting exchanges of experience between ECEC centres and supporting the improvement of educational quality, e.g. through the establishment of a website for professional training and a family education website including information about resources and didactic materials and providing a framework for exchange of experiences. One outcome was the implementation of the Royal Decree on the recognition of professional competences acquired through work experience (Royal Decree 1224/2009).

On January 19, 2021, the Organic Law on Education 3/2020 (LOMLOE) which amends Organic Law 2/2006 became effective and the former Organic Law 8/2013 on the improvement of quality in education was repealed.

This reform initiative aims at tackling the following challenges in the Spanish education system:

- Improving the level of competence of all children, compensating for initial disadvantages
- Regaining the equality lost during crisis years
- Updating the teaching profession to lead curricular and didactic innovation
- Improving the scope and quality of 0–2 education and its curricular framework
- Increasing STEM vocations, especially among female students.

The Ministry of Education proposes the following general changes in Early Childhood Education, in accordance with the existing challenges and the objectives set out in the education reform:

- The first cycle 0–2 will be educational in nature with certain minimum requirements and a pedagogical proposal.
- The educational stage will be aimed at compensating for the effects of inequalities of cultural, social and economic origin on children's learning.
- Early detection and early attention to support needs will be encouraged.

The specific changes this new law introduces in Early Childhood Education are the following (Eurydice 2023c):

A. *Educational provision*

The administrations will gradually increase the offer of public places in the first cycle in order to meet the demand for places for children up to age three. All centres 0–6 years will require authorisation by the educational administration for their operation. The Government will regulate the curriculum and the minimum requirements of the two cycles of this stage, that is, the qualifications of all professionals, the staff to child ratio, the facilities, and the number of school positions.

B. *Aims and principles*

- At this stage, emotion-management, education for responsible and sustainable consumerism, and health promotion and education are pedagogical principles.

- The promotion of gender equality is a new objective in Early Childhood Education.
- At this stage, the effects of cultural, social and economic inequalities on children's learning and development will be compensated for.

C. *Evaluation and orientation*

- Early detection and early attention to specific educational support needs will be a priority.
- At the end of the stage, a report will be issued on the development and needs of each child.

Since this legislation came into force, an implementation process has begun that will conclude in the 2023/2024 academic year. In order to achieve greater equity in the educational system, one of the fundamental objectives set by the LOMLOE (Organic Law 3/2020) is the universalisation of enrolment from 0 to 2 years. To achieve this objective, new forms of cooperation between the MEFP and the autonomous communities are necessary. A cooperation programme to finance the creation of public places for the first cycle of Early Childhood Education, endowed in 2021 with 200 million euros, was presented to the General Education Commission. The first annuity will allow the creation of more than 21,000 new places in ECEC provision. Nevertheless, the sustainability of the ECEC Spanish system needs to be addressed also in terms of quality, which involves giving institutional priority to its workforce and conditions (Ancheta-Arrabal 2022).

LOMLOE also seeks to improve the social recognition of vocational training tracks to bring Spain closer to the rates of students who choose this path in other European countries.

The Law on the Organisation and Integration of Vocational Training (2021, Organic Law 3/2022) consolidates Vocational Training into a single system at the service of students, workers and unemployed. This new system will integrate the VET of the educational system and the VET for employment. The implementation of this Law will establish a unique, modular and flexible provision of Vocational Training. It will be organised in training itineraries that allow progression through five ascending degrees: partial accreditation of competences (Grade A), Certificate of Professional Competence (Grade B), Professional Certificate (Grade C), Training Cycles (Grade D) and Specialisation Courses (Grade E). The entire offer in cycles of Grades C, D and E will have a dual character and will be divided into two types: General Dual Vocational Training or Advanced Dual Vocational Training. Regarding the accreditation of competencies, the new text also streamlines the system of accreditation of professional competencies acquired through work experience and non-formal training channels. The new Vocational Training Law regulates the relationship between Vocational Training and university education, promoting mutual recognition, such as higher education credits, to facilitate the establishment of training itineraries that recognize previously acquired training in both directions. A Catalogue of Professional Competence Standards replaces the current National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications.

Lastly, the Royal Decree 62/2022 on the Modernisation of Vocational Training aims to relax the requirements for obtaining vocational training qualifications, professional certificates and other awards currently linked to the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications. Likewise, it aims to progress in terms of the expansion and flexibility of vocational training courses. This norm applies to authorised high schools, both public and private, which offer vocational training qualifications, professional certificates and other awards. In this respect, it complements and expands the assumptions provided for in Royal Decrees 34/2008 and 1147/2011 as requirements for vocational training.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Evaluation of CPD programme on collaborative reflection on early childhood education

Source: Vizcarra, M. T., E. López-de-Arana, and R. Gamito 2021 (see *References* for further details)

Aims: This research analyses the process of collaborative reflection carried out by the professionals of the Municipal Network of Early Childhood Schools of Vitoria-Gasteiz to define key aspects of the transition from home-based ECEC to centre-based ECEC and their understandings of the adaptation process. The aim was to identify the main aspects related to this period of transition, in order to jointly construct the professional knowledge for improving the work in this crucial stage for the children.

Procedure*:* An action research approach was adopted in four phases. In this article the third phase is presented, reflecting on current practices during the adaptation period and how language and modes of action should be transformed in the future. In the study, 115 early childhood professionals, 12 researchers and 6 senior ECE specialists participated in eight working groups to reconstruct knowledge through different strategies.

Findings*:* The study is a pioneer in its field. The conclusions show that the reception time, as opposed to the adaptation period, implies accepting the emotional affordances that each girl and boy brings with them, so that new bonds can be created that give them security, instead of forcing them to adapt to a rigid, pre-set structure.

Implications: The study suggests the need to rethink the settling-in stage when children enter the institutional framework of an early childhood setting for the first time.

Construction of citizenship in the initial professional education of ECE Teachers

Source: García Pérez et al. 2020 (see *References* for further details)

Aims: The severe social and environmental problems in our world demand a model of education for a global, participative and critical citizenship. This requires training future teachers as educators in citizenship, developing awareness in relation to these problems and attitudes of social commitment, with a teaching model that favours the construction of this model of citizenship in the children they will be working with.

Procedure*:* Against this background, a qualitative research study was developed. Group interviews were held with 36 students in 12 groups in 2014/15 and 64 students in 15 groups in 2015/16. Participants analysed the process of construction of citizenship in students of the Early Childhood Education Teacher study programme at the University of Seville. The research is based on the monitoring of the development of teaching the subject "City and citizenship in Early Childhood Education", through the statements of the students involved.

Findings*:* The results show an evolution of the conception of citizenship in students towards a more participative model linked to social commitment. An important factor in this development was the didactic model applied by the university teacher. In the interviews, the impact of certain activities on the students' awareness of socio-environmental problems was highlighted. Likewise, reflections on the possibilities offered by the official curriculum to educate for citizenship and, above all, knowledge about education projects for children for citizen participation were important. The study concluded with the design of a project or proposal for didactic intervention by the student work groups, to consolidate the link with the reality of teaching. Moreover, the

students were able to perceive the role of the teacher as a reference for building a model of desirable citizenship.

Implications: In this sense, there are explicit implications for the everyday application of the didactic model that the subject intended to transmit, confirming that really significant learning is developed by living the said model in daily learning experiences and complementing this with personal experiences of citizen participation in real social contexts.

Vocation in the identity of the Early Childhood Education Teacher: a review of the last decade

Source: Romero-Sánchez et.al. 2020 (see *References* for further details)

Aims: The review study of research over a period of ten years aims to constitute an approach to the role played by vocation in building the professional identity of the Early Childhood Education Teacher. To do this, a systematic review of research from 2010 to 2019 was conducted. Although teaching as a vocation is a topic that has been widely studied and investigated in the past, the novelty of this study lies in the fact that it currently does not feature in research. This review intended to present an updated analysis of the contemporary status quo of the issue. The study therefore aims to identify the main contributions of studies on the importance that the concept of vocation has in the process of professionalising the Early Childhood Education Teacher and to find out what additional elements influence the construction of the teaching identity of these professionals.

Procedure: To this end a systematic review of Spanish-language research studies on this topic over a period of ten years was carried out. Out of the 909 studies located, 40 were finally selected. Out of these 40 studies, 33 were research articles and 7 were doctoral theses.

Findings: Results show that a great number of research studies – predominantly qualitative – were carried out during the ten-year period, mostly in Spain. Among the topics addressed were: the influence of vocation on the choice and enactment of the profession; the practicum in initial professional education; and working conditions of the teaching profession.-The least researched topics were: the impact of gender on the construction of the identity; the role of the family in the choice of profession and professional orientation of the teacher.

Implications: The article concludes with the recommendation to continue researching aspects such as responsibility, illusion and motivation to reinforce the vocational component of the teacher.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

One of the recent workforce challenges in the teaching profession in general has been and still is: **achieving a balance between the teaching and administrative duties of core practitioners**. A survey of practitioner views focusing specifically on ECEC services in Spain (Sandstrom 2012) noted that an excessive bureaucratic workload has a negative impact on the practitioners' practice, reducing the time available for reflection, meetings, planning or participation in CPD. The study also showed that the over-enrolment of children led to teachers relying more on lesson books and worksheet activities as a way to control a large class.

At the same time, the previous Organic Law (8/2013) on the Improvement of Quality of Education stipulated that for the second cycle of pre-primary education the Government is responsible for establishing:

- The objectives, skills and evaluation criteria of the core curriculum, which will represent 55% of the school timetable in the autonomous communities with a co-official language and 65% in the rest
- The foundations for multilingual education.

These requirements imply additional tasks for ECEC professionals working in the second cycle.

Whether the implementation of this Organic Law achieved the desired balance is a question that remains without a clear response, due to a lack of relevant policy measures or research.

Thus, a second challenge that needs to be addressed by the authorities is the identification and recognition of these conditions and the **funding of research** to help improve them. On the one hand, given the high variability in the administration of ECEC provision in Spain (departments, city councils, consortiums, autonomous communities, etc.), it is necessary to point out that the legal regulations sometimes only refer to one type of educational centre, since the others are regulated in a particular way by each city council. This makes it difficult to draw conclusions about ECEC settings in general and the conditions of ECEC professionals in a specific region. On the other hand, improving the availability and accessibility of information is essential. Available official statistics still do not show, for example, the proportions of professionals in ECEC by type or level of qualification. This is also the case for vulnerable groups related to lower professional positions, such as the number of Assistants from ethnic cultural minority groups. One thing is for sure, the requirements to access the private sector (the predominant sector for 0–2 provision) are becoming higher and higher (such as having an education degree/training in English language or other languages, etc.), even for posts as Assistants. This situation, added to the financial crisis that Spain has been experiencing, has made it even more difficult for minority groups to gain access to higher levels of education or even to finish their compulsory education, meaning that the chances to access this kind of employment are very limited. However, it cannot be assumed that in most cases people coming from ethnic minority groups are Assistants in ECEC services. They tend to be more represented as caregivers in home-based ECEC provision, as "the changes in demographic, economic, socio-cultural and health foster the emergence of a new set of caregivers: the hired caregiver, covered generally by immigrant women" (Ruiz López and Moreno Preciado 2013, 86).

Concerning the **right to CPD**, guaranteeing the principle of non-discrimination among ECEC professionals needs to be emphasised, since the public offer of CPD is mainly addressed to ECE teachers in public ECEC services. The possibilities to develop further as a professional thus rely too heavily on the economic circumstances of the practitioners and their personal situation in terms of participation in further education. Moreover, this is also related to the varying working conditions: for ECE teachers in public provision, accessing CPD is both a right (with dedicated work time and reimbursement of costs) and can also facilitate a reward (as a merit or even to get extra payment bonuses). However, for ECE teachers working in the private sector or for other ECEC practitioners this is not the case.

Finally, as already outlined in *Chapter **8***, there is a need to reconsider the fact that both the initial professional education and continuing professional development of ECE Teachers focus insufficiently on **quality issues in ECEC** compared with other areas. For instance, one of the main challenges that the new Law on Education (Organic Law 3/2020, LOMLOE) presents for the ECEC workforce is how to develop the competences to deal with **diversity** and how to handle an **inclusive intervention**, thus making it vital to extend the training and education of ECEC professionals to include the specific needs of educational support (Lao et al. 2022). This is, among other

things, a key issue for research – to explain a societal and professional perspective that fails to value the professional status of early childhood education and thus hinders the development of the profession and effective CPD policymaking (Ancheta-Arrabal, 2018). Further analysis needs to examine the causes for this. In line with the Decent Work Agenda (ILO, 2013) this is a responsibility shared among social and economic actors, including social scientists and practitioners. Hence, a new space for debate, study and reflection around the status of the **self-image and self-perception of ECE professionals** in Spain and its consequences for the improvement of the profession should be encouraged from the highest authorities in education to the professionals that work and dedicate their daily attention to the youngest citizens of our society (Ancheta-Arrabal 2019), in order to recognise and value their education for what it really is: a human right.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

SPAIN

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC settings are: **first cycle early childhood education centres** (*primer ciclo*, 0–2) and **second cycle early childhood education centres** (*segundo ciclo*, 3–5)[1]. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Spain

1838	– Pablo Montesino founds the first 'infant school' (*escuela de párvulos*) at the primary school in the village of Virio in the province of Asturias. – The first Education Act (*Ley de Someruelos*) refers to these schools as the lower level of primary school education[2].
1849	Just 10 years later, 100 such children's schools have been established, but they are not publicly funded.
1857	*Escuela de párvulos* are recognised by law (Moyano Law) as the first stage in the education system and are mainly established in areas with more than 10,000 inhabitants.
From 1878	– New educational ideas (e.g. Froebel) stream into early education. – In 1884, there are 864 institutions attended by about 25% of 3 to 6 year-olds.
From 1890s	Funding problems and poor quality lead to a reduction in the number of ECEC settings.
1901	In a primary reform (the Royal Decree of October 26, 1901 (32) the *Escuelas de párvulos* are considered as the first grade of primary education.
Early 20th century	Following a phase of expansion at the beginning of the century, a strong slump in provision follows during the Spanish Civil War.
1945	Primary Education Act: early education is a non-compulsory stage of school.
1960s	Increasing maternal employment leads to a renewed expansion of the ECEC sector. In 1966, however, no more than 25% of the 2 to under 6 year-olds attend an ECEC setting.
1970	The General Education Act confirms the voluntary nature of early education, but divides it into two phases: (1) childcare centres for 2 to 3 year-olds and (2) preschool classes in primary schools (or 'kindergartens' in big cities) for 4 to 5 year-olds.
From 1975	Expansion of the now state-funded early childhood education system
1978	The Spanish Constitution allows for cooperation with the Church in the field of education and authorises subsidies for Catholic ECEC settings.
1980–1990	Experimental plans for the new ECE settings that the 1990 Education Act then embraces
1990	– Education Act: introducing the basic right to education – ECEC settings for under 3 year-olds and 3 to under 6 year-olds are integrated and organised in two cycles.
1991	Transfer of responsibility for ECEC from the National Government to the Autonomous Communities regarding the regulation of the curriculum for the first cycle (0–3).

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6 (as in Spain): **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds.

[2] Ministry of Education 1985

1995	The Act on Participation, Evaluation and Governance (9/1995) gives ECEC settings more autonomy.
2002	Law on improving the quality of education
2004/05	Gradual introduction of waiving parental fees for 0 to 3 year-olds in ECEC centres
2006	Education Act confirms the integrated approach towards early childhood education.
2008	The Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport (MEPSyD) launches the *Educa3 Programme* aimed at expanding the provision of places for the 0–2 age group and improving programme quality through complementary continuing professional development activities for staff working with the youngest children.
2021	The amended 2020 Education Act comes into force.
2022	The Royal Decree 95/2022 regulates the general and pedagogical principles of ECEC as well as organisational requirements and basic curricular and competence requirements.
2023	Establishment of a Ministry of Youth and Childhood (*Ministerio de Juventud e Infancia*)

Sources: Ancheta-Arrabal 2018; Willekens and Scheiwe 2020; Eurydice 2023 1, 4, 14.1

ECEC system type and auspices[3]

Responsibilities for the education system in Spain are shared between the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (*Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional*) and the education authorities of the Autonomous Communities. The Ministry is responsible for the overall organisation of the education system, while management and operation are the responsibility of the education authorities of the Autonomous Communities. In this respect, the structure of the Spanish early childhood education and care system can be described as both integrated and decentralised.

ECEC settings for under 3 year-olds (1st cycle, ISCED 01) are primarily the responsibility of the municipalities, except in the Autonomous Community of Galicia, where responsibility falls within the remit of the Department of Social Policy (*Consellería de Política Social*). ECEC settings for the over 3 year-olds (ISCED 02) are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training or the education authorities of the Autonomous Communities. In the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, the Ministry of Education has oversight of both cycles (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 175).

A new Ministry of Youth and Childhood (*Ministerio de Juventud e Infancia*) was established in November 2023 (Government of Spain 2024). It is responsible for proposing and carrying out government policy on matters of young people and the protection of minors. The main aim is to promote children's wellbeing and to address the inequality gap.

General objectives and legislative framework

Overarching principles are the right to education, equal access and freedom of choice for parents regarding the institution. The overall aim of early childhood education is to promote the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of children in close cooperation with the family. Respect for cultural diversity and preparation for active participation in society and public life also play a major role.

[3] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Spain provided orientation on legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

The Education Act (*Ley Orgánica* 3/2020, *de 29 de diciembre, de Educación*), which came into force in 2021, is the basic legal framework for the education system in Spain. Early childhood education is defined here as the first stage of the education system with two cycles: one for under 3 year-olds and one for 3 to under 6 years-olds. Amendments to the Education Act included measures to increase places for children up to 3 years of age and promote gender equality in early education. The implementation process of the new law will last until 2024. Another important legal basis is the Law for Improving the Quality of Education (*Ley Orgánica* 8/2013, *de 9 de diciembre, para la mejora de la calidad educativa*), which, among other things, sets out the objectives of the core curriculum.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Spanish legislation (article 15.2 of Organic Law 2/2006 on Education [LOE], as amended by Organic Law 3/2020 [LOMLOE]), guarantees every child over 3 years of age a legal right to a free place in an early childhood education institution for 25 hours per week. Some Autonomous Communities are also extending this entitlement to 1 and 2 year-olds. If public facilities cannot meet the demand for places, then private facilities are subsidised (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 46). Attending an ECEC setting is voluntary for children below compulsory school age. However, the second cycle has become widespread throughout the country, so that, at present, practically 100% of children aged 3–5 years attend an ECEC setting.
Compulsory schooling starts at the age of 6.

Main types of provision

In Spain, the system of early childhood/pre-primary education – *educación infantil* ('infant education') – is organised in two cycles. Early childhood education may be offered either in **unitary pre-primary schools** – *escuelas infantiles* ('infant schools') – for children aged 0–5 years or in **separate pre-primary centres** – *centros de educación infantil* ('infant education centres') for the younger age group (0–2/3 years, depending on the Autonomous Community) and pre-primary and primary education centres (*centros de educación infantil y primaria*) for the 3–5 age group, mostly located in the same building as primary schools.
First cycle ECE centres (*primer ciclo*) for children under 3 years of age are usually open between ten and eleven months a year and the opening hours are mostly based on the needs of the families.
Second cycle ECE centres (*segundo ciclo*) for children between 3 years and school entry are open on 178 school days and have the same holiday periods as primary schools. Both cycles can be offered either in separate settings, or together in one self-contained setting, or be attached to a primary school.
Public educational institutions that offer both cycles or only the 2nd cycle are open five hours a day and offer additional care during off-peak hours. In the case of public institutions offering only the 1st cycle, each municipality regulates the opening hours individually; however, children may not be present for more than eight hours a day. The same applies to private facilities.
Currently, the demand for places for under 3 year-olds is greater than the available places almost everywhere in Spain; in the 2nd cycle, demand and supply are balanced (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 63). If there are not enough places available, preference is given to children who have siblings in the facility, who are disabled, whose parents live nearby or who have a low income (Ancheta-Arrabal, in press).

In two Autonomous Communities – the Community of Madrid and the Chartered Community of Navarre – **home-based ECEC provision** is also an option for children aged 0–2 years.

Provider structures

According to national statistics, there were a total of 99,539 groups in 22,510 ECE settings for children under 6 in 2020/21; almost two-thirds of these were under public management. 10,192 settings offered first cycle education; slightly more than half of which were private whereas of 14,106 settings offering second cycle education, only 25.9% were private (INE 2023, D1).

Table 1

Spain: Number of ECEC settings, groups and enrolled children by provider type, 2020/21

Provider type	Number of settings	Relative share by provider type in %	Number of groups	Relative share by provider type in %	Number of children	Relative share by provider type in %
Public	14,697	65.3	63,766	64.1	104,4503	64.4
Private	7,813	35.7	35,773	36.9	57,7595	35.6
Total	**22,510**		**99,539**		**162,2098**	

Quelle: INE 2023, D1

In 2023/24, the number of **first cycle ECE centres** had increased overall to 9,169. Just over half (4,620) were publicly funded and 4,549 were privately run settings (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training 2023, 19). In 2020/21, 1,651 of the private settings were private-subsidised and 2,764 private non-subsidised (Eurydice 2023, 2.8).

Participation rates in regulated ECEC settings

The proportion of children under the age of 3 attending ECEC settings has increased since 2005 from 37% to almost half of the children (48.6%) in 2022. The proportion of children aged 3-6 years, which was already very high in 2005 at 94%, rose to 96.1% by 2022.

Table 2

Spain: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2005–2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	24	53
	Over 30 hours	13	41
	No enrolment in ECEC	62	6
2010	1 to 29 hours	19	45
	Over 30 hours	18	48
	No enrolment in ECEC	63	7
2015	1 to 29 hours	19.1	46.6
	Over 30 hours	20.6	45.4
	No enrolment in ECEC	60.3	7.9
2022	1 to 29 hours	25.9	51.6
	Over 30 hours	22.7	44.5
	No enrolment in ECEC	51.4	4.0

Source: Eurostat 2023b, slight deviations from 100 % due to rounding

In 2021, almost all 3 to under 6 year-olds attended an ECEC setting, as did more than half of 2 year-olds. *Table 3* shows the number of children and attendance rates by age.

Table 3
Spain: Number and enrolment rates of children in 1st and 2nd cycle ECE centres by age, 2021

Age	Number of children In 1st cycle ECE centres	Enrolment rates in 1st cycle ECE centres, in %	Number of children in in 2nd cycle ECE centres	Enrolment rates in 2nd cycle ECE centres, in %
Under 2 years	173,880	24.7		
2 year-olds	214,873	56.2		
3 year-olds	224	0.1	384,361	94.1
4 year-olds			416,436	96.5
5 year-olds			430,815	97.2

Source: Eurostat 2023f, g

In 2022/23, attendance rates were 14.7% for children under age 1, 49.6% for 1 year-olds, 71.3% for 2 year-olds and 95% for 3-year-olds (children with special educational needs included) (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training 2023, 20).

In 2023/24, a total of 1,600,564 children were enrolled in ECE centres, 490,308 children in first cycle institutions and 1,110,256 children in the second cycle (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training 2023, 5).

Financing and costs for parents

In 2019, 0.47% of GDP was spent on the 2nd cycle of early childhood education (OECD 2023). In 2021, 34% of public expenditure on education was spent on early childhood education institutions, primary schools and special education (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training 2023, 12).

In general, the providers of **1st cycle ECE centres** set the fees themselves, linked to criteria such as family income, the number of siblings already in the setting or the number of hours the child spends there. Sometimes maximum fees are set by the Autonomous Communities. The maximum cost for full-time attendance can vary from below €100 to well over €200 per month, depending on the Community and the benefits for which a family may be eligible.

Attendance at public **2nd cycle ECE centres** is free of charge except for meals. However, private settings charge fees; these may be subsidised by the education authorities of the Autonomous Communities.

The financing of public institutions is generally the responsibility of the state. The Ministry of Education allocates funds to the Autonomous Communities for the operation of ECE centres. They enjoy a high degree of financial autonomy and decide themselves on the exact distribution of the budgets. The municipal authorities receive funds for establishing and maintaining ECE facilities from taxpayers' money as well as budgets from the state and the communities. Private facilities that have a contract with the local education authority and meet certain criteria can also be subsidised by state funds.

To address the disparities between Autonomous Communities in terms of access to a place for under 3 year-olds, funding was made available by the national government through the *Educa3-Programme* – although this was used differently by the Autonomous Communities (Ancheta-Arrabal and Zhang 2016).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 5% of net household income on childcare costs[4] (OECD.Stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

In both cycles, the children are divided into same-age groups. If there are not enough children of one age, mixed-age groups are formed. If possible, the same ECEC professional accompanies the children through an entire cycle.
The maximum number of children in a group and per professional is regulated as shown in *Table 4*.

Table 4
Spain: Maximum number of children per group/professional in ECE centres by age

Age	Max. number of children per group/per professional
Under 1 year	8
1 to 2 years	10 to 14
2 to 3 years	16 to 20
3 to 4 years	25
4 to 5 years	25
5 to 6 years	25

Source: Eurydice 2023, 4.2

In the community of Madrid, one home-based ECEC provider ('day mother, day father') must have at least completed the advanced vocational training cycle in Early Childhood Education (ISCED level 5), and can care for four children. In the Chartered Community of Navarre, the respective minimum requirement is a training in caring for children under the age of 3 years, or experience/specific training in caring for minors. Regarding the staff to child ratio, the maximum number of children per educator is four which can be increased to five in exceptional and justified circumstances (Eurydice 2023, 4.4).

Curricular framework

The curriculum for early childhood education is compulsory for both cycles, whereby on the basis of the Education Act which came into force in 2021, the framework for the 1st cycle is drawn up by the government in cooperation with the Autonomous Communities. For the 2nd cycle, the Ministry of Education draws up a core curriculum and describes the objectives and content as well as evaluation criteria, which are subsequently supplemented or adapted by the education authorities. This adaptation by the Autonomous Communities is nevertheless handled very differently: some draw up the same education plan for both cycles, others a separate one for each cycle and still others only one for the 2nd cycle.
The Education Act (2/2006 with amendments of 2020) sets out the organisation and pedagogical principles of both education cycles. Subsequently, the Royal Decree 95/2022 sets out the regulations and content of early education in more detail. These refer, for example, to supporting children's development in multiple dimensions (physical, emotional, sexual, affective, sociological, cognitive and artistic) as well as promoting personal autonomy, a positive self-image and education in civic values (Ancheta-Arrabal, in press).

[4] The calculation is based on the following fictitious model: two parents working full-time (average income); two 2 and 3 year-old children in full-time care; relevant care allowances included.

Objectives of the early childhood curriculum include acquiring key skills and competences in the following domains (Eurydice 2023, 4.3):

- Getting to know their own body as well as others' and learning to respect differences
- Observing and exploring their family, natural and social environment
- Progressively acquiring autonomy in their regular activities
- Developing their emotional and affective capacities
- Interacting with others on an equitable basis and progressively acquiring basic guidelines for coexistence and social relations, as well as practising the use of empathy and peaceful conflict resolution, avoiding any kind of violence
- Developing communication skills in different languages and forms of expression
- Being introduced to logical-mathematical skills, to reading and writing, and to movement, gesture and rhythm
- Promoting, applying and developing social norms that foster equality between men and women.

The professionals are free to choose their own materials and methods, with an emphasis on play.

In the second year of the 2nd cycle (5 to 6 year-olds), a foreign language; reading, writing and basic numeracy; information and communication technologies; and visual and musical expression are usually introduced. The teaching of religious content is offered voluntarily by the religious communities. Books and other materials used in the institutions are inspected by the education authorities.

Digital education

The guidelines for the national education plan emphasise the pedagogical use of digital technologies to support learning processes, but without going into more detail about the digital competences to be developed. For example, reading digital books, using digital devices such as webcams and computer games are recommended (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 100).

Nevertheless, there is no consensus among ECE professionals on the suitable level of integration of these technologies. The reasons for this are, on the one hand, the students' own competence with regard to digital technologies (Alberola-Mulet et al. 2021), and on the other hand, that ethical problems are not addressed in the development of digital competencies during their initial professional education (Novella-García and Cloquell-Lozano 2021).

Monitoring – evaluation

Not all Autonomous Communities evaluate both cycles of the early childhood education system.

Child-related assessment

Criteria established by the Ministry of Education and adapted by the Autonomous Communities serve as a reference framework for the assessment of children. At the beginning of the settling-in phase, an initial assessment is carried out within the framework of the respective institution's development plan, followed by continuous assessments. At the end of the year, a final evaluation takes place, which describes the children's skills and abilities. The education authorities schedule three formal evaluations per year, the results of which are communicated to the families in a written report. Observations are the main form of assessing the children, as well as

interviews with the families. Screening instruments may also be used to identify possible developmental delays.

Centre-level internal evaluation

Centre-based self-evaluation measures and their implementation are the responsibility of the ECE centres. In some Autonomous Communities there are also guidelines for self-evaluation, which is usually carried out annually.

External evaluation

External evaluations are the responsibility of the State Inspectorate of Education, the inspection authorities of the respective Autonomous Communities, the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (subordinate to the Ministry of Education), and evaluation authorities of the Autonomous Communities. The National Institute for Educational Evaluation produces a system of educational indicators that are regularly adapted. In 2019, it consisted of 17 indicators in three dimensions (educational environment, financing, educational outcomes).
Inspections carried out by officials from the Education Inspectorate are designed to check compliance with legal regulations and to determine the rights and obligations of all those involved in the learning process. They also examine the day-to-day operation of an educational setting and its education programme. Inspections and evaluations ultimately serve to improve the quality of education; they are also intended to increase transparency and effectiveness. The frequency of implementation depends on the resources of the respective Autonomous Community. In two Autonomous Communities (Cataluña and Valencia; in Andalusia only for the 2nd cycle), the perspectives of children and parents are also included in the evaluation process. Instruments to capture their perspectives have been designed for both self-evaluation procedures and external evaluation by the Education Inspectorate (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 20, 131f).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

The principle of diversity is included in both the new Education Act (2020) and the Education Quality Improvement Act (2013). According to this legislation, all children should receive the support that best suits their needs. Children with special needs usually attend mainstream ECE centres. They are enrolled in a special education setting only when their needs cannot be met in a regular ECE centre. The specific arrangements for this are determined by the regional education authorities.
In 2021/22, 1.3% of children in the 1st cycle had special educational needs and 3.2% in the 2nd cycle (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training 2023, 9).
The National Strategy for the Prevention of Poverty and Social Exclusion (*Estrategia nacional de prevención y lucha contra la pobreza y la exclusión social*, 2019-2023) has a special focus on inclusive education and early education for under 3 year-olds, especially for families from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Children with a background of migration – children from Roma communities

In 2022, 11.4% of the total population had a non-Spanish citizenship, of which more than two thirds (67.8%) came from countries outside the EU27(2020). In the age-group up to 5 years,

15.1% children were of non-Spanish origin, of which three quarters (75.4%) are from non-EU countries (Eurostat 2023c).
In 1st cycle ECE centres, a total of 160,188 children, were of non-Spanish origin in 2020/2021. Of these, 17.9% came from the EU27(2020) countries, 15.5% from Latin American countries and 23% came from African countries (INE 2023, E5).
There are bilateral agreements with some countries, e.g. Portugal, to promote their family language and thus their culture and identity. For example, in the Autonomous Community of Extremadura there is a "Portuguese Language and Culture Programme" in ECE centres and schools (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 115).
The second EU Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIDS II; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2016) showed that the attendance rate of Roma children in Spain (between 4 years old and school entry) was very close to the European target of 95% (European Commission 2020, 134). However, as ethnic identification is not allowed in Spain, there is no accurate and up-to-date data on the number of Roma in the country. The Council of Europe estimated in 2012 that there were approximately 705,000 Roma (about 1.6% of the population) (Carrasco and Poblet 2019).

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Birth and childcare leave for biological mothers (changed terminology since March 2019) (*permiso y prestación por nacimiento y cuidado del menor*) is granted for 16 weeks, of which six are compulsory and must be taken in full time after the birth. Full salary continues to be paid up to a maximum of €4,495.50 per month if the mother has paid into a social insurance scheme for at least 180 days during the past seven years. Mothers who do not meet this requirement receive a lump sum of €600 per month for 42 days.
Working fathers are granted 16 fully paid weeks of **Birth and childcare leave for persons other than biological mothers** (*permiso y prestación por nacimiento y cuidado del menor del progenitor distinto de la madre biológica*) under the same conditions as mothers (excluding the lump sum). Six weeks after birth are compulsory.
Parental leave (*excedencia por cuidado de hijos*) can be taken as an individual and non-transferable entitlement by either parent for up to three years after the birth. In the first year, the return to the same job is guaranteed. Apart from social security contributions, the time is unpaid. Currently, four of the 17 Autonomous Communities pay monthly lump sums, mainly for low-income parents.
According to a survey by Meil and colleagues in 2021, 89.6% of mothers took childcare leave for their youngest child. In 66.7% of births, an average of 110.1 days of leave were taken. 90% of mothers took these in fulltime. In 2021, 73.7% (in relation to the number of births) persons took "birth and childcare leave for persons other than biological mothers". 51% of fathers took this time – unlike mothers – in different blocks of time. In 2021, 11.1% of people (in relation to the number of births) took parental leave, of which 12.6% were fathers. 19.8% of mothers took an average of 6.1 months off, while 6.5% of fathers took 5.7 months.

[5] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Spain by Gerardo Meil and colleagues in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Spain

*Country expert assessment by **Ana Ancheta-Arrabal***

In Spain there are currently a number of **support mechanisms for families** in relation to early childhood, but they are quite limited, as they are addressed to support the most vulnerable families in economic terms, i.e. only for those who live below the extreme poverty line, whereas those who live in a situation of moderate poverty are neglected. Moreover, other vulnerable groups, particularly in rural areas, are not receiving the policy priority needed in many different regions, thus resulting in significant disparities for families and their children across the country. Spanish administration of the education sector is mainly decentralised, especially for the first cycle of ECEC, creating significant differences in terms of opportunities and costs between the different Autonomous Communities, as well as wide and persistent regional disparities in key educational and social indicators. It is therefore crucial to address **inequality of access** among vulnerable groups who may find it challenging not only to pay the fees often required, but to get available services (e.g., in rural municipalities). Previous decades have seen even larger disparities in terms of equity of access to high quality ECEC in the individual Autonomous Communities than were traditionally the case (Ancheta-Arrabal and Zhang 2016). Moreover, current efforts are not likely to ameliorate the lack of equitable access in some regions of the country. The differences in quality between ECEC institutions in Spain are also reproduced through the personnel who work in ECEC in terms of inequities in career regulations and working conditions (see the ECEC Workforce Profile for Spain, Ancheta-Arrabal 2024).

As concluded in the SEEPRO-r study in 2018, we can say that the **tension between quality and equity** in ECEC is still relevant and a main challenge to be solved in the diverse territories of Spain. This inequality undermines the principle anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to guarantee education for all children as one of the ratified rights (Ancheta-Arrabal 2011). The incomplete and under-developed societal dialogue surrounding ECEC, which mirrors the discourses at other levels of the education system, still remains a policy challenge in terms of the sector's further development.

ECEC must be accessible to all without any type of discrimination based, for example, on race, colour, ethnic origin, sex, language, religion, economic or social situation. But, especially for the most vulnerable groups in society, including families in poverty, immigrants, the disabled and ethnic minorities, positive discrimination measures should be adopted to eliminate existing discrimination. Right now, discrimination may not officially exist in education legislation and regulations, but the reality is quite different and the fact is that if centres that are not governed by guidelines from the responsible educational authorities, these guarantees are not provided. However, the cultural and educational capital of families should not be a hindrance in guaranteeing learning opportunities or attending to diversity where, for example, in the most problematic situations, access to technology may impede the participation of families (Ancheta-Arrabal et. al. 2022).

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Spain was 47,432,893 and has been increasing steadily for over 20 years (2000: 40,470,182; 2010: 46,486,619; 2020: 47,332,614) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.19, Spain had one of the lowest rates among the SEEPRO-3 countries (Eurostat 2023d)[6].

Children under age 6

Table 5
Spain: Number of under 6 year-olds in total population, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year-olds	337,549
1 year-olds	345,218
2 year-olds	366,776
3 year-olds	384,994
4 year-olds	411,344
5 year-olds	434,163
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**2,280,044**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 2.2% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, 4.8% were children under 6 years of age. During the last two decades these proportions always were only slightly below the respective EU averages. In 2022, particularly the proportion of the under 3 year-olds fell considerably below the EU average.

[6] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Table 6

Spain: Distribution of under 6 year-olds in population by age compared with EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Spain/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Spain	2.8	2.7	5.5
	∅ EU15[7]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Spain	3.1	2.9	6.0
	∅ EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Spain	2.8	3.1	5.9
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Spain	2,2	2,6	4,8
	∅ EU27(2020)	2,7	2,9	5,7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

Almost three quarters (72%) of households with children under 6 in Spain were couple households in 2022. Single parent households accounted for only 2.7% – almost exclusively single mothers (2.2%).

Table 7

Spain: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Relative share of all households, in %*
Total households	3,984,600	
Couple households	2,868,300	72.0
Other types of households	1,007,900	25.3
Total single households	108,400	2.7
Single households, women	87,700	2.2
Single households, men	20,700	0.5

Source: Eurostat 2023l, *Own calculations

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Spain, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 78.2% and for women 69.9% (Eurostat 2023k).

In 2022, 60.9% of women and 82.2% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were below the EU-average (87.2%), as were those of mothers (EU-average 63.6%) (Eurostat 2023h, own calculations).

Table 8a

Spain: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010–2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Spain	56.0	77.1
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[8]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7

[7] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

	2022	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Spain	60.9	82.2
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[9]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023h

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 8b.*

Table 8b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023h, 2023k

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[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[10]

In 2023, almost one third (31.3%) of children under 6 in Spain were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was significantly higher than the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age-group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 26% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 6.8% of children under 6 suffered from severe material deprivation – this proportion was higher than the EU27 average of 6.1%. For the total population, it was 3.4% (EU: 4.3%) (Eurostat 2023i, j).

In 2021, the National Alliance for Zero Child Poverty was launched, working in partnership with various social actors to reduce child poverty (Eurochild 2021).

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[10] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation).

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seepro3

Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

SWEDEN

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

About the author

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1. ECEC governance in Sweden

ECEC in Sweden is part of a unified education system covering the ages 1–19 years. Since 1996, the Ministry of Education and Research (*Utbildningsdepartementet*) has had overall responsibility for early childhood services. The National Agency for Education (*Skolverket)* and the National School Inspectorate (*Skolinspektionen*) are responsible for providing support and monitoring quality.

The Swedish education system for children aged 1–6 years includes preschools[1] for children aged 1–5 years (*förskola*), preschool classes (*förskoleklass*) for children aged 6 years and school-age educare[2] settings (*fritidshem*) for children from 6 years of age before and after school hours to supplement the education in the preschool class and the compulsory school (SFS 2010:800 § 1). Different curricular frameworks exist for the preschool, and the preschool class and school-age educare setting. There are municipal (*kommunala*) and independent (*fristående*) preschools. Most registered children (78.6%) attend municipal preschools (Skolverket 2023a).

The preschool class is in a transition phase. In 2018, the preschool class became compulsory. In 2020, the Government commissioned an inquiry on a 10-year compulsory school where the preschool class would be included as year 1 (SOU 2021). Although no decision has been made by Parliament and there is no explicit policy on this up till now, the preschool class is likely to become officially integrated into the primary school system in the future.

ECEC also includes facilities termed Pedagogical Care (*Annan pedagogisk verksamhet*) such as home-based ECEC provision and open preschools (SFS 2010:800, chapter 25).

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Two main groups of qualified staff work in preschools: *Förskollärare* (lit. Preschool Teachers) with a university degree and *Barnskötare* (Childcare Workers) with a specialist upper secondary vocational education. Currently, well over 35% of ECEC staff lack a specialist qualification in ECEC or are unqualified. Only about 60% of the workforce have a specialist qualification out of which 40.7% are certified Preschool Teachers and 17% qualified Childcare Workers *(*see *Table 2* in *Chapter **3**)*.

Preschools have long opening hours. There is some variation, but most preschools are usually open from 6/6:30 in the morning to 18:30/19:00 in the afternoon. Staff work in teams (*Arbetslag*) on a rotating scheme. The full complement of staff is usually on site between 10:00 and 14:00 hours. According to the Education Act, preschools must have qualified Preschool Teachers in the work team, but it does not stipulate how many per group of children or per department. Childcare Workers are not explicitly mentioned in the Education Act. It is however stated that in addition to Preschool Teachers, staff with relevant training and/or experience may also work in the preschool as long as they can support children's development and learning and work towards reaching the goals in the curriculum (SFS 2010:800).

[1] 'Preschool' is the official translation of *förskola* in government and other administrative documents.

In order to apply for a permanent position Preschool Teachers must be certified. Certification requirements do not apply to Childcare Workers. With the persistent lack of qualified Preschool Teachers and Childcare Workers, municipalities employ staff with various qualifications, even unqualified staff. These may be given a position as *Outbildad barnskötare* (Unqualified Childcare Worker) or – for those with a university degree other than a teaching degree – as *Lärare med annan inriktning* (Teacher with an alternative specialisation). It is the responsibility of the individual municipality to decide about the various positions, hence there may be considerable variation across the country.

In recent years, because of the lack of qualified staff, municipalities have introduced a new position to support the regular staff. There is variation between municipalities across the country also in this respect. Some municipalities have defined qualification requirements for the support staff. In the municipality of Gothenburg *Förskoleassistenter* (Preschool Assistants) have been employed. The Preschool Assistants are part of the work team and have a complementary role to assist and help with the practical care work in line with the curriculum for the preschool (Skolverket 2019).

The qualification requirements for this group are:

- 9-year compulsory schooling or equivalent
- Personal competence suitable for work in the preschool such as being attentive to children's needs and able to establish good relations with both children, their guardians, and colleagues
- Ability to communicate orally and in writing in the Swedish language.

To apply for a permanent position Preschool Assistants must complete course modules equivalent to about 40% of the vocational programme for Childcare Workers with the ambition that they will eventually complete the entire 3-year programme and become fully qualified Childcare Workers. Staff without this qualification can only be temporarily employed (Rebas and Enbågen 2022).

In addition to these staff categories, staff with other qualifications such as *Grundlärare med inriktning mot arbete i fritidshem* (Primary Teacher specialising in school-age educare) and *Grundlärare med inriktning mot arbete i förskoleklass och grundskolans årskurs 1–3* (Primary Teachers specialising in Preschool Class and Primary School Grades 1-3), may also belong to the workforce. They work in school-age educare settings, in primary schools and in some cases also in preschools.

Table 1 shows the ECEC staff in centre-based settings in Sweden and categorises the core pedagogues (i.e., staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at the end of this *chapter*).

Table 1
Sweden: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	**Main ECEC workplace settings and age-range**	**Main roles and positions**	**Main age-range focus of initial professional education**	**Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level**
Preschool Teacher/ ECEC Teacher	*Förskola* **Early childhood**	Core practitioner with group responsibility	1–6 years	3½ years university education

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age-range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Förskollärare *Profile*: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	**centre/preschool** 1–5 years[3] *Förskoleklass* **Preschool class in schools** 6 years *Öppen förskola* **Open preschool** 1–5 years *Fritidshem* **School-age educare setting** 6–12 years			*Award:* Bachelor's degree ECTS credits: 210 EQF level 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Childcare Worker *Barnskötare*	*Förskola* **Early childhood centre/preschool** 1–5 years *Öppen förskola* **Open preschool** 1–5 years	Qualified co-worker	Broad-based pedagogical and social care approach 1-10 years and beyond	3 years upper secondary vocational education specialising in pedagogical work ECTS credits: n/a[4] EQF level 3/4 ISCED 2011: 3
Primary Teacher – specialising in School-age Educare *formerly* Leisure-Time Pedagogue *Grundlärare med inriktning mot arbete i fritidshem*	*Fritidshem* **School-age educare setting** 6–12 years *Grundskolan* **Primary school** 7–12 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility in school-age educare settings *In schools:* Specialist teacher for practical / aesthetic subjects	6–12 years	3 years at higher education institution specialising in school-age educare and practical/aesthetic subjects *Award:* Bachelor's degree ECTS credits: 180 EQF level 6 ISCED 2011: 6

[3] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in pre-primary settings. In Sweden, the relevant formats are **1–5** and **6–7** years.

[4] n/a = not applicable

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Up until June 30, 2019, the title for staff with leadership responsibility in the preschool was *Förskolechef* (Preschool Head). As of July 1, 2019, this was replaced by the title *Rektor* (Principal), the same as for compulsory school. This was an important change and marked a step forward to equate the work in preschools with the work in primary schools. Only those with the required education and experience can be employed as Principals. A Deputy Principal may be appointed.

A Preschool Principal is usually responsible for several preschools, especially in the larger municipalities, and a majority do not work directly with children. The mean number of preschools per Principal is 2.6 in municipal preschools compared to 1.2 in independent ones. In municipal preschools, about 6% of the Principals combine this position with working with children. The corresponding figure for independent Preschool Principals is 73% (Skolverket 2023b).

The Principal is responsible for the internal organisation, for the budget and for allocating resources according to children's conditions and needs. With a special focus on pedagogical work, the Principal is responsible for coordinating and developing education in the preschool. A member of staff at a preschool with sufficient knowledge and expertise may be appointed to support the Principal, make decisions, and take responsibility for certain management tasks.

Qualification requirements for Principals include a compulsory university education comprising 30 ECTS at advanced level over 3 years. The costs for education are shared between the state and the municipalities. The education is mandatory for those Preschool Principals who took up the post after July 1, 2019. They are required to start their training within two years of taking up their duties. The education must be completed at the latest within five years of taking up the position of Principal. Those who were active as Preschool Heads on July 1, 2019 are not covered by the obligation (SFS 2010:800; Skolverket 2021a). This also applies when changing employers. Job specifications for these posts may vary between municipalities. However, the criteria usually focus on both *personal leadership skills*, e.g. communication, cooperation and social competencies, and *formal leadership skills* such as familiarity with legal aspects, exercising authority, etc.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Since municipalities are responsible for the organisation and running of all education settings, including early childhood education, there may be variation between preschools and municipalities across the country. Some municipalities in rural areas may only have a limited number of settings with implications for special posts of responsibility.

Special assignments may be allocated within the preschools, such as responsibility for digitalisation, gender equity, language and literacy, multilingualism and other areas that need development to align with the curriculum goals (Skolverket 2019). These special responsibilities are often, but not exclusively, linked to Government initiatives and usually require training within the specific knowledge domain. All salaries are individually negotiated so there may be a variation between members of the staff regarding salaries. However, rather than increased salaries, staff with these responsibilities are assigned hours to carry out their work, leading to a reduction of hours working directly with children.

There are also positions as *Förstelärare* (First Teachers). *First Teacher* and *Senior Teacher* (*Lektor*) positions were introduced by the Government following the reform (2011) of teacher education programmes (Utbildningsdepartementet 2012). The intention was to make use of the expertise of certified teachers considered to be highly qualified who had demonstrated excellence in their work over at least four years in the workplace. This initiative did not involve Preschool Teachers. However, some municipalities have introduced 'First Teacher´ positions also for Preschool Teachers. The task of the First Teacher is to be designed according to local needs and based on the development areas identified in the systematic quality work**.** The First Teacher may be appointed to support the principal and take responsibility for certain management tasks (Skolverket 2021b). The position often entails a salary increase.

In settings where students are placed during practicum, *VFU-lärare* (On-site Supervisors) are responsible for the supervision of students**.** Certified Preschool Teachers and Primary Teachers specialising in school-age educare can take a special course for supervisors at universities comprising 7.5 ECTS credits. This qualifies them to work as on-site supervisors in preschools and school-age educare settings (see also *Chapter **5***).

Furthermore, there are mentor positions (*mentor*) for newly qualified and certified Preschool Teachers. During their first year of employment, newly qualified Preschool Teachers have a personal mentor whose role is to provide support for their professional development (SKOLFS 2014:44) (see also *Chapter **7***).

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

The accountable local preschool authority may establish different preschool positions with a coordinating and/or supervisory responsibility. The titles for these positions vary across the country, e.g. Pedagogical Leader, Development Educator, Development Leader, Process Leader and *Pedagogista* (in Reggio Emilia-inspired preschools). The various preschool authorities determine their competence requirements, areas of responsibility and tasks. In some municipalities they work centrally, in others they are placed under the Principal.

A Pedagogical Leader (*Pedagogisk utvecklingsledare*) is responsible for different aspects of the work in the preschool such as quality assurance, professional development, etc. Pedagogical Leaders usually have special training of shorter or longer duration within specific knowledge domains and often work across several preschools. They have a counselling, coaching and support role focusing on the work team to further develop the competence of teachers and the overall quality of the preschool. They may also organise on-site or regional continuing professional development activities. 'Pedagogistas' have taken university courses in so-called Reggio Emilia-inspired pedagogy. After completion, they may be responsible for implementing this pedagogical approach in several preschools.

At the national level, the National School Inspectorate is responsible for monitoring quality. At the municipal level, the overall preschool administration is responsible for quality assurance. At the preschool level, the Principal is responsible for systematic quality work and for ensuring that the education aligns with the intentions of the curriculum (Skolverket 2019).

2.5 Specialist support staff

Children in need of extra support are integrated into regular preschools. Children who, for physical, mental, or other reasons, need special support in their development shall be given the support that their special needs require. It is the responsibility of the Principal to ensure that the child is given such support. The child's guardian must be given an opportunity to participate in the design of the special support measures. However, unlike in compulsory schools, for preschools there are no provisions for action programmes. The documentation of support measures in preschool is decided at the local level (SFS 2010:800, chapter 8, §9).

Preschools have access to so-called resource teams to guide and support teachers in their everyday work such as Speech Therapists, Psychologists etc. These specialists are not based at the preschools and do not usually work directly with children in the preschool. Children can be referred to different specialists who have individual consultations with guardians and children regarding, for example, delayed speech development. There are also some preschools for children with specific disabilities such as hearing impairment and autism who need additional educational or practical support. In these preschools, Special Education Teachers (*Specialpedagoger*) often work together with the regular Preschool Teacher and Childcare Worker. The Children's Health Centre (*Barnavårdscentralen, BVC*) has overall responsibility and provides support to parents regarding children's medical health, well-being, growth, and development. In several municipalities, staff from BVC meet Preschool Teachers and Principals once or twice annually to discuss, support and advise on general issues regarding children's development.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Table 2 shows the proportion of various staff categories in all preschools, both municipal and independent, according to their structural composition.

Table 2
Sweden: Structural composition of ECEC workforce in municipal and independent centre-based settings 2022

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce	
Staff with a specialist higher education degree in ***municipal*** *preschools*	**42.9%**	Preschool Teacher
	1.6%	Compulsory School Teachers
	0.4%	Primary Teachers specialising in School-age Educare*
Staff with a specialist higher education degree in ***independent*** *preschools*	**30.5%**	Preschool Teachers
	2.0%	Compulsory School Teachers
	0.5%	Primary Teachers specialising in School-age Educare
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary) in ***municipal*** *preschools*	**17%**	Childcare Workers
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary) in ***independent*** *preschools*	**15.3%**	Childcare Workers

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce
Staff with a specialist higher education degree in ***municipal*** *preschool classes*	**46.2%** Preschool teachers **27.6%** Compulsory School Teachers **5.0 %** Primary Teachers specialising in School-age Educare
Staff with a specialist higher education degree in ***independent*** *preschool classes*	**33.3%** Preschool Teachers **28.1%** Compulsory School Teachers **2.9%** Primary Teachers specialising in School-age Educare
Staff with some pedagogical education** *in* ***municipal*** *preschools*	**18.1%**
Staff with some pedagogical education *in* ***independent*** *preschools*	**19.8%**
Staff with no relevant or no formal IPE *in* ***municipal*** *preschools*	**20.1%**
Staff with no relevant or no formal IPE in ***independent*** *preschools*	**21.9%**
Specialist support staff (e.g. support for children with disabilities integrated into regular preschools)	**5%** approx.
Male staff	**4.2%** of all staff in preschools (approx. 4% in municipal preschools and 6% in independent preschools. 41.9% of all male staff have a preschool teacher degree) **8.4%** of all staff in preschool classes **32.1%** of all staff in school-age educare settings **6.0%** of all ECEC principals
Foreign-born (*utomlands födda*) staff members	Preschools: No systematically compiled national data Preschool class: **13.6%** in the school year 2022/2023

Sources: Skolverket 2023a, b, c

***Note**:* Although the official term for students who graduate from the current teacher education programme is *Primary Teacher specialising in School-age Educare,* the former term (Leisure-Time Pedagogue – *fritidspedagog*) is still in current use, for example in statistics from the National Agency. A considerable proportion of the staff working in school-age educare settings may have the former qualification as Leisure-time Pedagogue.

****Note**:* According to the National Agency for Education '*some pedagogical education'* equals unfinished courses with no degree or final award from any of the specialisations listed above.

Table 3

Sweden: Proportions of the ECEC workforce qualifications according to provider in %, 2022

	Qualified Preschool Teachers	Qualified Primary Teachers* (Leisure Time Pedagogues)	Qualified Teachers	Upper secondary specialist vocational education (Child Care Workers)	Some pedagogical education	No formal pre-service education for working with children
Municipal preschools	42.9	0.4	1.6	17	18.1	20.1
Independent preschools	30.5%	0.5	2.0	15.3	19.8	21.9

Sources: Skolverket 2023a, b, c

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

The three main groups of staff in ECEC follow different qualifying routes. Preschool Teachers and Primary Teachers with a specialisation in School-age Educare are educated at university level; Childcare Workers have an upper secondary vocational education specialising in pedagogical work. *Tables 4–7* set out the details of these different routes.

According to legislative probations in 2011, all teachers must be certified or licensed *(legitimerade*) with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) from the National Agency for Education to work in preschools and schools. Since December 2013, only Preschool Teachers and Primary Teachers who have QTS are accepted for permanent posts (SFS 2011:326).

Table 4

Sweden: Preschool Teacher

Job title in Swedish: *Förskollärare* **Profile**: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Since 2011 **Entry requirements*:** 12 years of schooling (9 years compulsory schooling, 3 years upper secondary level) + matriculation **Professional studies:** 3½ years (7 semesters) at a higher education institution/university for the education of teachers. Students specialise in early childhood education (0 to 6 years) **Award:** Bachelor of Arts in Preschool Education (*Förskollärarexamen, grundnivå*) *Since 2013:* Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) necessary for permanent employment **ECTS credits**: 210 **EQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011**: 6 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Early childhood centre/preschool (*förskola),* full-day provision for 1 to 5 year-olds; preschool class in schools (*förskoleklass*) mainly for 6 year-olds, open 3 hours daily. Also: open preschool (*öppen förskola)* for parents, family day carers and children aged 1 year and older; school-age educare settings (*fritidshem*) for children aged 6–12 years as a complement to the preschool class, open before and after school hours and during holidays.

***Note:** There are two kinds of admission criteria for all university study programmes, *basic admission criteria* (mainly grades from upper secondary education) and *special admission criteria*. Both are related to the programme chosen. There are also three main selection groups for admission into university: (1) based on grades (a minimum third of available places), (2) based on results on the Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test, *Högskoleprovet* (a third of available places) and 3) selection decided by universities or university colleges themselves (maximum third of the places) (UHR 2022).

Table 5

Sweden: Childcare Worker

Job title in Swedish: *Barnskötare*
Since 2011 **Entry requirements**: 9 years compulsory schooling with school leaving certificate. **Professional studies**: 3 years upper secondary level of comprehensive school in the childcare and leisure-time education programme – specialisation in *pedagogical work* (including 15 weeks in practical placement). **Awards**: Matriculation Certificate – *Pedagogical Work* awarded by the school authorities.

Job title in Swedish: *Barnskötare*
Students who have passed the exam and have taken courses in Swedish and English are qualified to apply for university education. **ECTS credits**: n/a **EQF level**: 3 or 4 **ISCED 2011**: 3 **Main ECEC workplace**: Early childhood centre/preschool (*förskola*), full-day provision for 1 to 5 year-olds, as auxiliary worker; open preschool (*öppen förskola*) for parents, family day carers and children aged 1 year and older, as auxiliary worker.

Note: Some Childcare Workers who have been in the workforce for many years and who completed their professional training before 1992, when a two-year upper secondary programme specialising in childcare only was introduced, may have shorter-length qualifications. *Barnskötare* (Childcare Worker) is not a **protected/certified title**. Hence, in addition to the three-year vocational programme there are still courses of varied duration, some of only ten weeks' duration.

Table 6

Sweden: Primary Teacher – Extended School

Job title in Swedish: *Grundlärare med inriktning mot arbete i fritidshem* **Profile**: Primary Teacher specialising in school-age educare and practical/aesthetic subjects
Since 2011 **Entry requirements**: 12 years schooling (9 years compulsory schooling, 3 years upper secondary level) + matriculation **Professional studies**: 3 years (6 semesters) at a higher education institution for the education/training of teachers/university department of child and youth studies, specialisation in leisure-time pedagogy and practical/ aesthetic subjects with children 6 to 12 years. **Award**: Bachelor of Arts in Primary Education – Extended School. (*Grundlärare med inriktning mot arbete i fritidshem, 180 högskolepoäng, grundnivå*). **ECTS credits**: 180 **EQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011**: 6 **Main workplaces**: School-age Educare settings (*fritidshem*), 6–12 years – most centres are integrated within school premises; primary school (*grundskola*), 7–12 years, practical/aesthetic subjects. Some may also work in preschool classes although their current education does not qualify for work in the preschool class (see *chapter **3** Table 2*).

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Teacher education since 2011

Since 2011, teacher education programmes are related to distinctive age specialisations. Currently, teachers who specialise in early childhood education in preschools and teachers who specialise in school-age educare and in practical/aesthetic subjects follow two different programmes:

1. Preschool teacher education for work in preschools (children aged 1–5 years), comprising seven semesters (210 ECTS credits).
2. Primary teacher education. This programme has four distinct specialisations. The programme for work in school-age educare settings and for teaching practical/aesthetic subjects in the first years of compulsory school for children aged 6–12 years) is one of the specialisations. This programme comprises six semesters (180 ECTS credits).

The overarching aims and competences required for a degree in both programmes are regulated in the Higher Education Act/*Högskolelagen* (SFS 1992:1434) and the Higher Education Ordinance/ *Högskoleförordningen* (SFS 1993:100; SFS 2021:1335). Graduates must demonstrate the knowledge and skills required for independent work as Preschool Teachers/Primary and Leisure-time Teachers in preschools, school-age educare settings and schools. The overarching aims are then further specified under the headings: *knowledge and understanding; competence and skills; judgement and approach.*

Four principles characterise the current approach to teacher education: a) a scientific and critical approach, b) a historical perspective, c) an international perspective, and d) IT as an educational resource. Based on these principles, three domains of knowledge make up the content of the IPE of both Preschool Teachers and Primary Teachers working in school-age educare settings and primary schools:

- Educational sciences
- Subject knowledge including subject didactics
- Work placement – practicum.

In addition, students must produce a professionally relevant degree project of 15 ECTS credits.

The Swedish Higher Education Authority (*Universitetskanslerämbetet [UKÄ])* has overall responsibility for monitoring the quality of higher education, and for reviewing HEI's resource utilisation and compliance with laws and regulations.

In Sweden, universities have a high degree of autonomy. As long as they abide by the overarching aims and guidelines such as the Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434) and Higher Education Ordinance (SFS 1993:100) individual higher education institutions (HEI) can choose to focus on certain domains of knowledge. It is the local Faculty Board of Studies for initial teacher education programmes at respective universities that are responsible for translating the overall aims and guidelines in the Government Bill and Higher Education Act and Qualifications Ordinance to local curricula and syllabi. Therefore, it is not possible to give detailed information about curricular areas and pedagogic-didactic approaches for the education of teachers across all HEI institutions in Sweden. The following information reflects the programmes offered by the University of Gothenburg.

The two programmes are different in length, with 210 ECTS credits for Preschool Teachers and 180 ECTS credits for Primary Teachers specialising in school-age educare. The work placement also takes place in settings that are professionally relevant for the two groups, that is, preschools and school-age educare settings and schools. In addition, the subject studies are oriented toward the future profession. Education for sustainable development is central to the University of Gothenburg and a distinctive feature throughout the programmes.

Box 2

Sweden: Course modules – Preschool Teacher programme, University of Gothenburg

Preschool Teachers have a university degree of 3½ years' duration with the possibility to extend this to 4 years. The overarching principles and domains of knowledge that make up the content are translated into different themes/course modules (Göteborgs Universitet 2023).

1. **Educational sciences** (60 ECTS credits)
   Seven integrated and overlapping themes make up this domain of knowledge:
   - The history, governing, conditions and founding values – including democracy and human rights of preschool and school
   - Curriculum theory and didactics
   - Theory of science, research methodology
   - An interdisciplinary perspective on development and learning including cognitive science and special education

- Social relations, conflict resolution and leadership
- Follow-up and analysis of learning and development for Preschool Teachers
- Evaluation and developmental work.

2. **Subject studies: Preschool pedagogy** (120 ECTS credits)
   including subject-related didactics within the domain of early childhood education (105 ECTS credits) and a degree project/dissertation (15 ECTS credits)
   Six themes make up this domain of knowledge:
   - Children's play, communication, language and literacy
   - Children's mathematical learning
   - Play, learning, and care
   - Co-operation with guardians, the preschool class, the school-age educare setting and the school
   - Aesthetic learning processes
   - Nature, environment, and technique/technology.

   All modules in semesters 1–5 and the two first modules in semester 6 are at initial level and comprise 7.5 ECTS credits each. The degree project comprises 15 ECTS credits.

   In the final semester (7), there are two distinct course modules at advanced level comprising 15 ECTS credits each. One is compulsory (*Sustainable Development and Global Perspectives*) and one is optional, focusing on one of the themes above.

3. **Work placement – practicum**, 20 weeks (30 ECTS credits)
   The practicum, supervised work placement, is organised as four distinctive course modules comprising a total of 30 ECTS credits.

Table 7
Sweden: Semester schedules – Preschool Teacher programme, University of Gothenburg

Semester 1	Learning, development and pedagogy 1 Play, learning and care 1 Practicum 1 Children's language and communication 1
Semester 2	Children's language and communication 2 Mathematics in early childhood education 1 Social relations, conflict management and leadership 1 Steering, Organisation and Value Systems 1
Semester 3	Practicum 2 Collaboration Learning, development and pedagogy 2 The teaching profession and theory and methods of science 1
Semester 4	Children's language and communication 3 Arts, aesthetics and learning Steering documents, assessment and evaluation 2 Practicum 3
Semester 5	Play, learning and care 2 Science, environments and technologies Mathematics in early childhood education 2 Social relations and special educational perspectives 2
Semester 6	The teaching profession and scientific work Practicum 4 Degree project
Semester 7	Education for sustainable development and global perspectives Optional module

Box 3

Sweden: Programme for Primary Teacher – specialising in school-age educare
Course modules, University of Gothenburg

The same domains of knowledge apply to the programme for students qualifying for work in school-age educare settings and schools (Göteborgs Universitet 2022).

1. **Educational sciences** (60 ECTS credits)
   - Learning, development and didactics
   - Curriculum theory, organisation, follow up and assessment of learning and development
   - Leadership, special education, social relations, and conflict management
   - Theory of science, research methodology, evaluation, and developmental work.

2. **Subject studies** (90 ECTS credits)
   including subject-related didactics within leisure-time education (75 ECTS credits) and a degree project dissertation (15 ECTS credits)
   The subject studies include five themes:
   - Leisure, play and relations in school-age educare settings
   - Children's upbringing and leisure time in the local environment
   - Children's digital media cultures
   - Outdoor Education
   - Language and creative processes for teachers in leisure-time centres.

   In addition to the above students are expected to specialise in one or more of the following subjects a) arts, b) home economics, c) sports and health and d) music.

3. **Work placement – practicum,** 20 weeks (30 ECTS credits)
   The practicum, supervised work placement, is organised as four distinctive course modules comprising a total of 30 ECTS credits.

Upper secondary vocational programme for Childcare Workers, 3 years

Childcare Workers are required to follow a three-year upper secondary vocational programme specialising in pedagogical and social work. The overarching aim of the IPE is to prepare students for working primarily alongside Preschool Teachers in early childhood settings. The education comprises both compulsory and optional courses focusing on children's development, needs and rights as well as on various educational activities and the professional role. The programme includes 15 weeks of work placement/practicum and prepares students for work in the preschool or for work as student assistants in schools. In addition to assessing the theoretical courses, the student's abilities to perform common tasks in the professional field are assessed.

This programme is also offered as an **apprenticeship**. It provides the same knowledge and the same vocational qualification as the regular programme, but approximately 50% of the education takes place in one or more workplaces (Skolverket 2023d).

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

A large group of staff members in the preschools lacks any formal or pre-service education for working with children. The Education Act stipulates that the work in the preschool should be carried out by certified Preschool Teachers (SFS 2010:800 chapter 2, §13). According to the curriculum Preschool Teachers are responsible for education and teaching in the preschool. They have management and leadership responsibility in relation to the work team to ensure that the work is carried out in accordance with the overarching goals in the curriculum (Skolverket 2019). Such a high number of uneducated staff causes concern when it comes to overall quality in the preschool. To attract students to the profession, HEIs offer a variety of alternative qualification routes to become Preschool Teachers.

Since 2007, experienced Preschool and Primary Teachers with an incomplete degree from a Swedish university or a degree from a foreign university but lacking a formal teaching qualification, are offered an alternative route (SFS 2008:1101). The supplementary programme usually comprises 120 ECTS credits (30 ECTS credits of which are practicum) depending on the educational background the programme may need to be complemented with an additional 30 ECTS in Swedish or English. Through individual validations of previous course modules taken, the length of study can be shortened (Göteborgs Universitet 2020).

Experienced Childcare Workers/equivalent with five years of full-time or eight years of part-time work experience in preschools can qualify as Preschool Teachers by taking supplementary education full-time or part-time at higher education institutions. At the University of Gothenburg, the programme comprises 150 ECTS credits over 2.5 years for full-time students. For part-time students, the programme takes 5 years to complete.

There is a large degree of flexibility for the individual student regarding the pace of study. The mode of delivery is online study. The content is largely the same as in the regular programme. In this programme, students are credited with 15 ECTS credits of practicum. Furthermore, Educational Science is reduced by 19.5 ECTS credits and Subject Studies by 10.5 ECTS credits (Göteborgs Universitet 2023) (see also *Chapter **2*** – Preschool Assistants).

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Workplace-based learning comprises an important part of all teacher education in Sweden. It is in the workplace that students can acquire essential professional skills and competences that university-based courses alone cannot provide (Karlsson Lohmander 2015). The relation between the two parts of teacher education was highlighted in the two most recent teacher education reforms (SOU 1999:63; SOU 2008:109). Following a discussion between the Government, representatives from the teachers' union and municipalities, the Government decided that a five-year trial period with selected practicum schools and preschools would be implemented (SFS 2014:2). From 2014–2019, the University of Gothenburg (together with 14 other universities across Sweden) participated in the so-called Practicum Preschool Project (*Övningsförskoleprojektet)*. This proved to be successful (Berlin 2018; Fröborg, Wimmerstedt, Steele, and Svensson 2020) and the system with selected practicum preschools and schools has now been introduced in all teacher education programmes (SFS 2021:1335).

Since the main form of ECEC provision is preschool education and the largest group of core professionals are Preschool Teachers, the following will focus on workplace-based learning (practicum) for this group. However, the overall structure and organisation apply to the education of Primary Teachers specialising in School-age Educare in schools and in school-age educare settings as well.

With a clear focus on the age group 1–5 years, students spend approximately 20 weeks (corresponding to 30 ECTS credits) in the workplace. During the practicum, students are organised into small groups and placed in the same preschool in a particular area during all workplace-based course modules. To ensure that students gain experience and knowledge of a variety of preschool contexts, they have field studies in preschools in other areas.

Principals of preschools (*rektorer*) and Placement Coordinators *(VFU-samordnare)* nominate the most appropriate preschools in the field and the most qualified Preschool Teachers to act as On-site Supervisors (*VFU-handledare*] to safeguard high-quality workplace-based learning.

The focus of the work placement modules is on *investigating, implementing* and *synthesising*, indicating gradually increasing complexity – from novice in the first module to competent professional in the fourth and last module. Work placements take place in four different course modules comprising 7.5 ECTS credits each in semesters 1, 3, 4 and 6. 100% attendance at the workplace is required, which corresponds to the normal working hours of a full-time employee. Exceptions are made for time scheduled for participation in lectures, seminars, and exams.

> ***Module 1, semester 1****:* Observations focusing on the overall organisation and everyday practice, and on children's learning and own professional development. Investigating how the steering documents, including curricular frameworks and theoretical perspectives, are implemented.
>
> ***Module 2, semester 3****:* Central to this module is the didactic planning, implementation, and documentation of theme-oriented work with children integrating mathematics, language and communication.
>
> ***Module 3, semester 4****:* This module aims to develop knowledge and understanding of pedagogical leadership and its importance for social relationships and conflict management. The focus is on systematic approaches towards promoting children's development and learning, including aesthetic learning processes. Students are encouraged to gradually 'replace' the Preschool Teacher and take independent responsibility for planning and implementing different activities such as arts, drama, dance, and music with children and to collaborate with the work team and parents/guardians.
>
> ***Module 4, semester 6****:* This module focuses on the importance of pedagogical leadership and the professional role to manage the complexity of preschool education from a societal and sustainable development perspective in relation to children's differing needs and sometimes unequal preconditions. Central to this module are children's perspectives and own pedagogical-didactical perspectives related to the curriculum.

For each practicum period, students are expected to keep a reflective journal (logbook) and participate in introductory lectures, praxis seminars and exams. They also have to submit individual written assignments. Students who fail a workplace-based learning course module have the right to a second placement.

Both the university and the preschools participate in the planning of the workplace-based learning periods. On-site supervisors (*VFU-lärare*), university-based teachers/workplace-based course module teachers (*VFU-kurslärare)* and students form teams throughout the four modules. The team reflects on possible amendments and developments of the various modules in terms of safeguarding high quality. The university-based teachers visit students during the practicum in semesters 2 and 6. Together with the on-site supervisor they assess the performance of the students and discuss with them areas for development and need for support during the weekly meetings. Furthermore, the university-based teacher will also consult and discuss the performance of each student with the on-site supervisor before reporting the grades.

The on-site supervisors do not receive specific remuneration. However, taking on the responsibility of on-site supervision is an important criterion when negotiating salaries at annual appraisal meetings. The time allocated for supervision depends on the needs of the individual student. Some students may need more support to reach the goals in the course module syllabus while others are more independent. A common recommendation is one hour per week.

To become On-site Supervisors, prospective candidates must be qualified and certified Preschool Teachers and have a minimum of two years' work experience. They are obliged to complete a qualifying course at the university "Tutoring in Teacher Education" (*Professionshandledning för VFU-handledare)* comprising 7.5 ECTS credits.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Municipalities have the main responsibility for the organisation and management of preschools.

There is currently no national coherent and transparent system which includes formal, informal, and centre-based forms of CPD. Consequently, CPD activities may vary between municipalities across the country. However, the establishment of a national merit-/qualification system for Principals, School Teachers, and Preschool Teachers *(Nationellt professionsprogram för rektorer, lärare och förskollärare)* to strengthen and develop their competence, enable career advancement and make the teaching profession more attractive will be introduced in 2025 (Regeringskansliet 2023a).

Principals have overall responsibility for quality issues in the preschool, including CPD. They are responsible for ensuring members of staff are well qualified for the work. They decide the kind of CPD activities needed for the preschool, for different categories of staff and for individual members of the work team. There is no regulation regarding the number of days per year granted for CPD. Preschools are usually closed two days per semester for planning the work in the setting and for CPD. The individual Preschool Teacher's/Childcare Worker's need for competence development is discussed at the annual appraisal meetings and formulated in the competence development plan (*Kompetensutvecklingsplan*).

Concerning the content focus of CPD activities, at the national level the government may outline and target domains of knowledge for CPD and allocate money to municipalities to organise this. One example was the 'Boost for Preschool' programme (*Förskolelyftet*) in 2009 and 2011 where preschool staff were offered advanced courses of varying lengths, with shorter courses for Childcare Workers than for Preschool Teachers and Preschool Principals. This was linked to the revision of the curriculum in 2010 where subject knowledge was included for the first time. The focus was on children's development in language, mathematics, natural sciences, and technology. Another example was the 'Boost for Reading' (*Läslyftet*) initiative from 2017–2021 where the National Agency was commissioned by the Government to organise CPD activities focusing on the didactics of language, reading, and writing for Preschool Teachers and 'provide preschool teachers with scientifically informed and proven working methods for developing children's linguistic and communicative abilities' (Skolverket 2021d, 3). There is still a strong focus on language and literacy. Since autumn 2022, the Swedish National Agency for Education has offered various language-promoting and competence-enhancing initiatives for staff in preschools such as Vocational Swedish for preschool staff *(*see also *Chapter **8***) (Skolverket 2023e).

Apart from the above-mentioned government initiatives, the most common forms of CPD are study days for all members of staff where the focus is on current issues often linked to the curriculum. These include topics such as leadership, teaching in preschool, language and literacy, multilingualism, pedagogical documentation, science and technology, sustainable development in the preschool, the professional role, etc. In some municipalities, there is a strong focus on 'Reggio Emilia pedagogy' and this has been a recurring focus for CPD in many preschools. Childcare Workers may be offered supplementary training which will deepen and expand their professional competences and skills. Likewise, unqualified workers such as Preschool Assistants may receive education to make them more professionally competent (see *Chapter **2.1***).

As part of the national school development programme, the National Agency for Education provides funding for courses for preschool staff organised in the municipality and linked directly

to local needs. Courses comprising 7.5 ECTS credits are delivered online by higher education institutions appointed by the National Agency for Education (Skolverket 2023f).

The following are examples of courses offered to Preschool Teachers during 2023:

- Teaching in preschool
- Challenging and supporting children's development
- Science and technology
- Documenting quality
- Multilingualism.

For Principals, the following course is offered:

- To lead and organise the systematic quality work – the principal's responsibility for preschool quality.

CPD activities during working hours are organised and funded (total or partial costs) by the individual preschool, the municipality or the government and are compulsory for those members of staff who are invited/nominated to participate. The cost for any CPD that is not approved by the Preschool Principal must be covered by the individual and must take place outside working hours.

There is a multitude of CPD formats and activities available. These include seminars, conferences, lectures, and courses (on-site or online) addressing various domains of knowledge. In recent years the variety of providers has increased substantially. In addition to the National Agency for Education, universities, municipalities, regional development centres, and the Teachers' Union, there are many independent private providers who offer CPD activities, often at very high costs. Municipalities/preschools are free to choose the topic and provider that suits them.

Regularly occurring problems regarding access opportunities to CPD have to do with the overall economy; the funding usually set aside for CPD for each practitioner is very small. At the same time, costs for attending various forms of CPD may be very high, which makes it difficult to participate. Another problem is the shortage of staff. Even if there is funding available it still might not be possible for practitioners to attend because of the lack of substitute staff to replace them.

Concerning formal recognition of CPD in terms of promotion and career advancement, participation in CPD activities can qualify the individual Preschool Teacher for specific tasks or posts of responsibility within the setting. As mentioned (see *Chapters **2** and **5***), there are qualifying university courses at regional levels for On-site Supervisors who are responsible for the supervision of student teachers during practicum and at the national level for mentors responsible for newly employed Preschool Teachers during their introductory year.

In addition to the assignments and positions mentioned in *Chapter **2*** (First teacher, Pedagogical Leader, On-site Supervisor, Mentor), participation in CPD can also qualify for principal positions in the preschool. Furthermore, with the aim to include valuable expertise from experienced Preschool Teachers and School Teachers in teacher education, to strengthen the cooperation between work settings and the university, practising Preschool Teachers can be appointed as Adjunct Teachers (*Adjungerad Universitetsadjunkt)* at the university. They are usually employed on a part-time basis while working concurrently in preschools and schools. Long-term competence requirements for employment as an Adjunct Teacher responsible for workplace-based course modules in the university study programme usually include the following:

- Certified Preschool Teacher including on-site mentoring experience
- A course on 'Tutoring in Teacher Education' (7.5 ECTS credits)

– A course on 'Teaching and Learning in Higher Education' (7.5 ECTS credits).

Particular importance is attached to pedagogical skills such as experience in supervising students during practicum and participation in the development of work-place based learning modules in the regular programme.

There are also other study routes such as Master, Licentiate and Doctoral degree programmes. Participation is usually not supported by state or employer funding although there have been some exceptions in the form of so-called National Research Schools which was part of the 'Boost for Teachers' initiative (*Lärarlyftet*) where students studied part-time while working concurrently. Participation was funded through Government grants to municipalities and universities. After completion, students were awarded a *Licentiate* degree (Riksdagen 2016).

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Preschool Teachers do not usually receive the same salary as Compulsory School Teachers. One of the justifications given for this difference is that the length of initial professional education differs. However, salaries are individually negotiated and, given the shortage of qualified Preschool Teachers and Childcare Workers, there can be considerable variation between different parts of the same city and between municipalities across the country depending on, for example, work experience, level of qualification and lack of qualified Preschool Teachers. An average introductory salary for a newly qualified Preschool Teacher is approximately SEK 31,500 (€2,743.19)[5] per month; more experienced Preschool Teachers receive approximately SEK 36,000 (€3,135.08) per month, with a variation of SEK 31,800–45,200 (€2,769.32–3,936.26). The average salary across the country is approximately SEK 34,900 (€3,039.28).

Some municipalities may offer higher salaries to attract Preschool Teachers to vacant positions. Staff may also receive higher salaries for posts of responsibility such as Pedagogical Leader or First Teacher. While mentors for newly qualified Preschool Teachers usually receive a salary increase, Preschool Teachers who take on the responsibility for the supervision of students do not automatically receive this. It is considered an important criterion when discussing salaries at the annual appraisal.

Salaries for Childcare Workers are also individually negotiated and may vary across the country. The salary per month for Childcare Workers varies from approximately SEK 26,000 to 30,100 (€2,264.22–2,621.27) with an average salary of SEK 26,649 per month (€2,320.74). It is possible to live on this salary, although much depends on the living costs and family composition (e.g. single parents and number of children) and the area of residence. Through the publicly funded Swedish Social Insurance (*Socialförsäkringen*) all families receive allowances for each child until the child's sixteenth birthday. There are also housing allowances to support families with children who need help paying rent or monthly fees for their housing (Försäkringskassan 2023).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

Full-time employment for Preschool Teachers in Sweden means 40 hours of paid work per week. Part-time employment can involve different percentages up to full time, e.g. 50% or 75% of full-

[5] Conversion rate November 2023

time employment. Staff with young children under the age of 12 years are entitled to work part-time. Working six hours a day for five days is a common solution for many.

In terms of permanent or temporary employment, a total of 119,386 employees work in the preschool which corresponds to 100,753 full-time permanent posts. The remainder is employed on a temporary basis (Skolverket 2023d).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Newly qualified staff are entitled to an introductory period when they first start working after graduation. The introductory period usually lasts a whole academic year during which new employees can further develop and become more secure in their professional role. The introductory period should begin immediately after the new employee starts working. The Principal is responsible for nominating licensed Mentors with sufficient work experience and must ensure that the Mentor gets the appropriate preconditions for the work. To qualify for the mentoring responsibility experienced and professional Preschool Teachers and Primary Teachers must attend a specially designed national online mentoring course comprising 7.5 ECTS credits at advanced level. The Mentor is responsible for supporting the new employee during the introductory period. In addition to providing professional, personal and social support in the workplace, and stimulating professional development, the aim of the introductory period is also to develop an understanding of schools and preschools as workplaces and of their role in society (SKOLFS 2014:44).

7.4 Non-contact time

Non-contact time is not regulated but the Teachers' Union recommends four hours per week for Preschool Teachers. There is no recommendation for non-contact time for Childcare Workers or other members of staff. It is up to the local preschool authorities to decide about and regulate in local agreements non-contact time for this staff category. All staff members attend workplace meetings. Furthermore, Mentors have time set aside for regular meetings with new employees.

7.5 Current staffing issues

As previously mentioned, there is currently a huge lack of qualified Preschool Teachers and Childcare Workers in the preschool (see *Chapter **2***); recruitment and retention of qualified preschool staff are in crisis.

One reason is the number of teachers approaching or taking retirement, resulting in an estimated future shortage of Preschool Teachers and Childcare Workers. According to the Teacher Prognosis 2021 (Skolverket 2021c), the total need for qualified Preschool Teachers is estimated to be 37,000 full-time positions (approximately 2,500 annually) up to 2035. The corresponding figure for Teachers in School-age Educare settings is 5,800 (approximately 400 annually) (Skolverket 2021c).

Over the past decades, many recruitment strategies have been introduced. Since 2016 the Government has been allocating funding to municipalities to raise teacher salaries, the so-called 'Teacher Salary Boost'(*Lönelyftet*) for specially qualified Schoolteachers and Preschool Teachers. The aim of this initiative is to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession and thereby improve outcomes in schools (SKOLFS 2016:61). In addition, various new career posts have been introduced (see *Chapters **2** and **5***) and a new national merit-/qualification system for Principals, Teachers, and Preschool Teachers has been suggested (see *Chapter **6***).

The National Agency for Education (Skolverket 2021c) proposes several measures to counteract the shortage of qualified teachers. In this respect teacher education is crucial. The number of places in preschool teacher education programmes has increased in recent years and efforts are being made to encourage students (including male students) to apply and ensure they complete their education.

To safeguard teacher education of high quality the Government has also invested in Research Schools/doctoral programmes for Teacher Educators to strengthen research links where, after completion, students are awarded a *Licentiate* or, alternatively, a *Doctoral Degree*. One example is the Research School '*Educating for Play-Responsive Teaching in Early Childhood Education for Social and Cultural Sustainability* (PRECEC SCS') (2019–2024) which is organised by a consortium of universities and funded by the Swedish Research Council. Students study part time (80%) while working concurrently in preschool teacher education programmes (20%). In this case, students are awarded a Doctoral Degree.

While there has been an increase in CPD opportunities, according to the National Agency it is crucial to continue investing in qualifying CPD, further education and flexible study routes for unqualified staff to safeguard access to equal preschool education of high quality across the country. The need for CPD is estimated to be the case for approximately 2,400 Preschool Teachers and 5,700 Primary Teachers/Leisure-time Pedagogues. To retain preschool staff, Principals must also systematically work towards ensuring a good working environment (Skolverket 2021c). This is particularly important since stress and health issues seem to be increasing (Persson and Tallberg Broman 2019) and are a matter of concern to the Teachers' Union, Preschool Principals, and preschool administrations all over the country.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

For decades, education has been and still is high on the political agenda and a recurring topic in both political and public debate. Several reforms and initiatives have been suggested and implemented to further develop education in general, including preschool and teacher education. In addition to the initiatives and reforms already presented such as increased CPD opportunities, the introduction of a national merit-/qualification system for Principals, Schoolteachers and Preschool Teachers, and the 'Teacher Salary Boost' (see *chapter **6)***, there are also other initiatives.

Some of these initiatives include:

- Strategies to *develop teacher and preschool teacher education* (Regeringen 2023)
- Investment in continuing education *to improve the knowledge of the Swedish language among staff in preschools* (Skolverket 2023e)
- Strategies to increase attendance in the preschool *among foreign-born young children for improved language development in Swedish*
- Investment in continuing education for Preschool Teachers and pedagogical staff in preschool to *strengthen their digital competence* in the preschool field.

Recently, the use of digital tools in preschool has been debated. The Government has commissioned the National Agency for Education to review the curriculum for the preschool (Skolverket 2019) regarding digitalisation with the intention that the use of digital tools be

informed by research and provide documented added pedagogical value. The review is to be reported in June 2024 (Regeringskansliet 2023b).

According to the report from the Government Inquiry on *Förskola för alla barn – för bättre språkutveckling i svenska* (Preschool for all children – for better language development in Swedish) (SOU 2020:67), about 4% of all children in the age group 3–5 years were not enrolled in preschool, with children from weak socio-economic backgrounds being overrepresented. As a consequence, the Education Act was amended to include an obligation for municipalities of residence to contact the guardians of children through outreach activities and inform about the purpose of preschool and the child's right to preschool education (even without any request for a preschool place from the child's guardian) if: (1) the child was born abroad and has been resident in Sweden for a maximum of five years, or (2) the child's guardians who are resident in Sweden were born abroad and have resided in Sweden for a maximum of five years (SFS 2022:833).

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

There is a large and growing body of research on preschool with a mixture of both small-scale and large-scale projects. Many research studies/projects conduct praxeological research with a focus on different aspects of the listed domains of knowledge in the preschool curriculum (Skolverket 2019) or other aspects of everyday practices in the preschool. In these projects, the role of teachers is often addressed. Some projects focus on issues of professionalism in a direct way. The research projects below are examples of important areas relating to staffing issues in the preschool.

Dilemmas in the assignments of Preschool Teachers (2017–2019) (*Dilemman i förskollärares uppdrag*)

Sources: The main publication from this project is by Persson and Tallberg Broman (2019). Key findings from the project have also been reported in various book chapters, e.g. Tallberg Broman 2020 (see *References* for full details).

Background and aim: In 2017, the Malmö City Preschool Administration, Department of Quality and Supervision, providing funding and commissioned researchers at Malmö University to conduct a professions-oriented study about dilemmas in the mission of Preschool Teachers assignments and highlight different staff members' perceptions and experiences of contributing causes to high sick leave and increased mental health issues. The aim of the study was a) to create in-depth knowledge about dilemmas in Preschool Teachers', b) to compile statistics and exemplify research concerning conditions for Preschool Teachers' assignments and work situation and c) to present and discuss possible measures and actions to deal with the problem.

Methods: The study included both documentary research and interview studies. The documentary research included annual reports from Malmö City as well as reports and situation assessments from the Preschool Administration in Malmö. It also included 30 preschool reports and 30 quality reports and quality plans from preschools in seven preschool areas where sick leave was particularly high in 2017, as well as national and local statistical reports. The interview study comprised 13 interviews with 46 staff members from Malmö Preschool Administration, Preschool Principals, and Preschool Teachers from areas with high and low sick leave.

Selected findings and implications: Findings indicate that several factors related to staffing and the work environment contribute to the current increasing sick leave and health issues, e.g. the lack of qualified Preschool Teachers, high staff turnover and a shortage of staff for children in need of special support. Another important factor is the changing role, the extended responsibility, and the legitimacy for Preschool Teachers to take on a leadership role in relation to colleagues in the preschool. Some of the suggested support measures and actions that need to be taken into account to improve the situation include: increased autonomy and control for Preschool Teachers, support for their leadership responsibility, reduction of the workload and sufficient staffing.

Play-Responsive Early Childhood Education and Care (PRECEC) (2019–2022)

Sources: The main publication from the project is Pramling et al. (2019) which is available through Open Access (see *References* for full details). Another key publication is Pramling (2022).

Background and aim: The background of this project funded by the Swedish Institute for Educational Research is the recent increased emphasis on teaching and education in the Swedish preschool curriculum and how this pedagogical practice can be understood in the context of ECEC with its holistic goals and play as central for children's learning and development. The aim of this research project was to contribute an empirically grounded theorisation of teaching that does not exclude but instead is inclusive of play.

Methods: A combined research and development project was conducted, an example of praxeological research where researchers and preschool personnel collaborate in generating new knowledge of relevance to research (theory) and to preschools (pedagogical principles). Preschool Teachers documented joint activities with children. These films were then discussed at seminars at the university in terms of what could be learned from these activities and how they played out and could be developed. The films were subsequently analysed by the researchers to theorise the observations. This work eventually led to the theorisation of Play-Responsive Early Childhood Education and Care (PRECEC), encompassing teaching as responsive to play.

Findings and implications: The findings are primarily theoretical, in the form of Play-Responsive Early Childhood Education and Care (PRECEC). This theorisation, in very brief terms, conceptualises teaching as activities jointly co-constructed by staff and children where there is responsivity to play. It provides a number of concepts that serve as analytical principles for understanding co-constructive activities in ECEC (and beyond). The project also contributed to pedagogical principles – such as being responsive to play, and to different modes of participating, co-constituting narratives (imaginary scenarios, in and from which children can play and learn also what goes beyond play) and shifting between and relating fantasy and reality through meta-communication. Additionally, there were contributions given in the form of establishing a network for ECEC personnel and researchers, exchanging experience, and generating and disseminating new knowledge.

A Sustainable Preschool – A development and research project (2021-2024) *(En hållbar förskola- ett utvecklings- och forskningsprojekt)*

Sources: Two main publications from the project are Engdahl et al. (2021) and Ärlemalm-Hagsér et al. (2023) available through Open Access (see *References* for details).

***Background and aim*:** The background of this combined development and research project is the revision of the national preschool curriculum (Skolverket 2019), where the concept of sustainability is central, both in the fundamental values and tasks sections, and in specific goals.

The aim of the development part of the project is to develop Preschool Teachers' competence and skills on how to work with sustainability with young children. The aim of the research project is to study how teachers, and their leaders, develop their education and teaching towards sustainability. Another aim is to follow how the participants, over 100 Preschool Leaders and 200 Preschool Teachers, implement a 'Whole School Approach' into their management and organisational strategies.

Methods: The following methods were used: 1) An initial survey on how the participating preschools handled and understood Education for Sustainable Development (ESD); 2) All teachers evaluated their work with ESD using the OMEP ESD Rating Scale; 3) Systematic conversations with children; 4) Group discussions about the ongoing work with sustainability; 5) Interviews with leaders and preschool teachers about promoting a sustainable leadership in Early Childhood Education (ECE). A final survey will be conducted to study the development of knowledge and the processes of development and changes in the preschools and in the organisations.

The data has mainly been generated and uploaded by the participants themselves, mostly as text documents. Furthermore, the researchers are conducting interviews with process leaders, Preschool Teachers, and Principals, aiming at developing theoretical and pedagogical strategies that offer opportunities for enhancing Education for Sustainability (EfS) in ECE.

Findings and implications so far: Findings indicate that teachers are interested in EfS. Initially, common content areas were linked to Nature and to waste sorting, reuse, and recycling. Less common content was linked to the economic dimension of sustainability, consumption patterns, budgeting, and money. Thus, the teachers identified a need for professional competence to initiate relevant EfS content and activities. Furthermore, participants recognised that children's participation for a sustainable present and into the future is a decisive element if change is to occur.

The project was initiated by the Swedish institute Ifous (2021) and funded by the collaborating partners; Ifous, the nine participating municipalities/providers, Mälardalen University and University of Gothenburg.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Recruitment and retention of qualified ECEC staff is a significant challenge for the Early Childhood Education workforce in Sweden and has been for several years. Currently, there is a substantial shortage of certified Preschool Teachers, with an estimated need for 37,000 full-time positions up to 2035 due to upcoming retirement among practising Preschool Teachers (Skolverket 2021c). There is also a growing shortage of qualified Childcare Workers. Given the crucial role staff qualifications play in children's development and learning (see, for example, Sylva et al. 2011), it is problematic that the number of staff lacking relevant professional or formal education of any kind currently working in preschools is very high. Moreover, *Barnskötare* (Childcare Worker) is **not a protected/certified title**. In addition to the three-year vocational programme there are courses of varied duration, such as ten-week courses offered by private providers. Therefore, even if employed Childcare Workers may have undergone some training, the **acquired qualifications and skills may vary substantially**, with implications for the overall quality of the education provided.

Linked to the challenge of staff qualification and shortage of staff is the issue of **group size in preschools and the staff to child ratio**. A recommended benchmark for children aged 1–3 years is 6–12 children. For 4 to 5 year-olds the benchmark is 9–15 children. According to the Teachers' Union, approximately 49% of preschools have larger group sizes than the recommendation for groups of 1 to 3 year-olds. In the age group 4–5 years, the corresponding figure is 47%. Both the union for Preschool Teachers and the union for Childcare Workers demand that group size be regulated by law (Sveriges lärare 2022, Kommunal 2023).

A lack of qualified staff and large groups of children implies a **worsening of working conditions**, of the conditions needed (e.g. non-contact time) to take on the overall responsibility for pedagogical work aligned with the curriculum, including planning, documentation and cooperation with parents (Williams, Sheridan, and Pramling Samuelsson 2016). Individual children's achievements are not assessed in the preschool. However, according to the curriculum, preschool staff should 'continuously and systematically follow, document and analyse each child's development and learning...´ (Skolverket 2019, 19), which is challenging. It requires qualified, competent staff and time, neither of which are always available (Skolverket 2023). Furthermore, preschools have long opening hours (6:00/6:30 – 18:30/19:00), with staff working in teams on a rotating scheme. The full complement of staff is usually on-site between 10:00 and 14:00 hours. Because of the lack of regular staff as well as substitute staff children might not receive the attention, support and trust needed for their development, wellbeing and learning. The youngest children are especially vulnerable in this respect (Skolinspektionen 2016).

Over time, with the goal of increasing the quality of education in the preschool, the roles and responsibilities of staff members have been differentiated. The curriculum demands enhanced responsibility for Preschool Teachers (Skolverket 2019). In addition to being responsible for children's education, they now have a **leadership responsibility** in relation to their colleagues without a clear formal mandate for it (Eriksson 2014). In many cases, it can be a single Preschool Teacher who must supervise and support a work team with very varied qualifications, including staff members with no relevant education at all. This has implications for preschool education and the workforce in that it is very time-consuming and may cause stress and other health issues (Persson and Tallberg Broman 2019). Preschool Teachers need support for their leadership and management responsibility. Leading other adults, especially their colleagues, is different from the leadership role they otherwise have for the children. The preconditions for high-quality preschool education are insufficient and health issues and sick leave are increasing.

As in many other countries, the number of foreign-born families in Sweden has increased in recent years. Yet another challenge is how to support these children and families in the most appropriate way. Preschool Teachers need more knowledge about family backgrounds, language and cultural traditions. They need to develop skills and competences regarding how to **work with multilingual groups of children and their families** (Harju-Luukkainen and Kultti 2017). Furthermore, it is important to offer **CPD focusing on linguistic and cultural diversity and inclusion** and to support both children's and staff members' development in the Swedish language (Skolverket 2023e; SOU 2020:67). With the strong focus on language and literacy (Skolverket 2019) it may be a challenge **to support children's language development in both Swedish and their home language** especially if staff with the appropriate educational and linguistic qualifications and competencies are lacking. Practitioners also need basic skills to support children in developing **digital competency**, including the role of media in society, to ensure the use of digital tools is informed by research and provides added pedagogical value (Regeringskansliet 2023b)**.**

The Government has initiated several reforms already reported, such as the Teacher Salary Boost (SKOLFS 2016:61), increased CPD opportunities and career advancement strategies.

Furthermore, strategies to increase attendance in the preschool among foreign-born young children for improved development in the Swedish language have also been initiated.

Taken together these initiatives and reforms are hoped to make the teaching profession more attractive, counteract the recruitment and retention problem, ensure a qualified workforce in preschools and school-age educare settings and equal and accessible high-quality preschool education across the country.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

SWEDEN

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC settings are **preschool** (*förskola,* 0–5) or **ECEC centre** and **preschool class** (*förskoleklass,* 6–7)[1]. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Sweden

1854	Opening of first crèche in Stockholm for the children of poor working mothers. Early establishments were run by foundations and churches.
1896	First Froebelian kindergartens (*barnträdgården*) opened, providing part-time education for middle class families.
1904	First public kindergarten opens at the Froebel Training College in Norrköping; it is open for all children and with low or no costs for parents.
1932	Alva Myrdal proposes an integrated form of publicly funded provision with well-educated staff, to provide for children of *all* working mothers.
1944-45	First state grants are issued for provision and training; main responsibility for ECEC expansion comes under the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and the National Board of Health and Welfare.
1950s	Majority of mothers at home; if kindergartens are used, mostly only for three hours in the morning or afternoon.
1960s	– Women start returning to the labour market in the context of a fast-growing economy. Beginning of significant expansion of ECEC provision. – The first state-run training institute started in Malmö (south of Sweden) 9 May 1962.
1968 – 1972	A major report issued by the National Commission on Child Care (*barnstugeut-redningen*) sets out the goals, organisation, content and practices of early childhood education for the first time, proposing the integration of day care centres and kindergartens.
1974	Introduction of paid parental leave – one of the first countries to do so.
1975	Preschool Act (*förskolelagen*) guarantees all 6 year-olds 525 hours per year of state-funded early education provision provided by the municipalities (*kommuner*).
1985	Children of parents in employment or study are guaranteed a place in public childcare from the age of 18 months.
1991	Local Government Act; decentralisation and increased responsibility for the municipalities
1995	New Childcare Act: *kommuner* are obliged to provide an ECEC place for all children from age one whose parents are working or studying, within four months of application.
1996	Responsibility for ECEC transferred from national Ministry of Social Affairs to Ministry of Education and Research.
1998	First preschool curriculum introduced (*Läroplan för förskolan, Lpfö98*); preschool classes set up in schools for 6 year-olds (voluntary attendance).

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3-reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in pre-primary settings in countries where the school staring age is 6 years. In Sweden the relevant formats are **1–5** and **6–7** years.

1999/2000	Introduction of the 'universal preschool' (*allmän förskola*) for 15 hours/week. Full-time provision is available only for children whose parents work or study.
2002	Maximum cap (*maxtaxa*) on parental fees introduced; restricted access right to public childcare for the children of the unemployed, the non-employed and those on parental leave
2003	Free universal ECEC provision for 4 and 5 year-olds (525 hours/year)
2006	First revision of the preschool curriculum (minor revisions)
2010	– Free universal preschool provision extended to 3-year olds – Second revision of the preschool curriculum (major revisions, e.g. inclusion of subject domains and clarification of the role of teacher)
2016	Third revision of the preschool curriculum (moderate revisions) issued
2018	– Fourth revision of the preschool curriculum comes into force. – The preschool class becomes compulsory.
2020	Children's rights (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC) were incorporated into Swedish law and as a fundamental value in the curriculum for the preschool.

Sources: Karlsson Lohmander 2004, 2018; Kaga, Moss, and Bennett 2010; Naumann et al. 2013; Willekens and Scheiwe 2020

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

Early childhood education and care in Sweden is part of the public education system. ECEC is organised as a unitary model with two main levels of governance: national and local (municipality). At the national level, since 1996, both centre-based and the less common home-based provision for children aged 1 to under 7 years come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Research (*Utbildningsdepartementet)*. Through the Swedish National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*), the main administrative body at the national level, the government is responsible for setting out policy goals and guidelines and funding frameworks relating to early childhood provision. However, the system itself is highly decentralised. At the local level, the 290 municipalities (*kommuner*) are responsible for the planning and organisation of public ECEC provision and for ensuring that the relevant steering documents are implemented. The providers of independent preschools (*fristående förskolor*), which are attended by 21% of 1 to 5 year-olds living in Sweden, are responsible for their management (Eurydice 2023; Vallberg-Roth 2015; Skolverket 2023a).

General objectives and legislative framework

National goals are drawn up by the Swedish parliament (*Riksdag*) and the Swedish government. 'Preschools' (*förskolor*) for 1 to 5 year-olds and 'preschool classes' (*förskoleklasser*) for 6 to 7 year-olds, are the two core forms of provision and are regulated by the Education Act (Skollagen, SFS 2010:800), which sets out objectives for the education system as a whole. Communication and interaction are seen as particularly important in early childhood education in order to learn new skills in a playful way and to develop a social and cultural identity (Williams et al. 2018).

Principles, goals and values for early childhood education and care are more explicitly specified in the Curriculum for the Preschool (*Läroplan för förskolan Lpfö18*), which was revised in 2018. The document states that education should convey and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based. Specifically, "…preschool

[2] The Eurydice ECEC country report on ECEC in Sweden provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

education should reflect the values expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" (Skolverket 2019, 5). A holistic approach to care, development and learning is another fundamental principle. The UNCRC was incorporated into Swedish law on 1 January 2020 (EASNIE 2020).

The Education Act places a duty on the self-governing municipalities to provide ECEC services and school-age educare settings (formerly: leisure-time centres) for children aged 1 to under 13 years. These settings are offered to children during the part of the day when they are not attending school and during school holidays (Education Act, SFS 2010**:**800).

Municipalities must ensure that parents receive a place within four months of their application.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Children have had a statutory entitlement to a place in publicly subsidised ECEC provision since 1999, beginning when they are 1 year of age. From the age of 3 up to school entry at age 6, this entitlement is free of charge for at least 525 hours per year (at least 15 hours/week) and applies not only to parents who work or study, or whose child needs special support, but also to children of unemployed and non-working parents (Garvis and Lunneblad 2018, 27; Education Act, SFS 2010:800).

There is no obligation for 1 to 5 year-olds to attend an ECEC centre. Since 2018, attending a preschool class (*förskoleklass*) has become mandatory, starting in the autumn of the year children turn 6 (Eurydice 2023).

Parents of 6 year-olds who are working or studying and whose child attends a preschool class have the right to a subsidised place in a school-age educare setting (*fritidshem*).

By making the preschool class compulsory, the school starting age was effectively lowered from 7 to 6 years in 2018.

Main types of provision

ECEC centres (*förskolor*) or '**preschools',** as they are called in official translations of Swedish documents, are usually unitary, age-integrated settings and are the main form of provision for children aged 1 to under 6 years. They are generally grouped in two broad age bands: 1 to 3 year-olds and 3 to under 6 year-olds. However, there are also settings with same-age groups, mostly in ECEC settings following the philosophy of Reggio Emilia. Most centres are open from 6:00/6:30 in the morning until 18:30/19:00 in the evening, with staff working in teams (*Arbetslag*) on a rotating scheme. The full complement of staff is usually on site between 10:00 and 14:00 hours.

Although the number of children in preschools has increased steadily over the years, after peaking in 2011 the number of ECEC settings has in fact decreased since then. In 2022, there were 9,310 preschools in Sweden (Skolverket 2023a).

Preschool classes (*förskoleklasser*) were traditionally one-year transition classes located in schools for 6 to 7 year-olds. They are now, since 2018, compulsory. Municipalities have a duty to ensure that a place in a preschool class with a minimum of 525 hours of tuition during the school year is available for all children (Eurydice 2023, 4). Most children start preschool class in the August of the year they turn six and the first grade in the compulsory school in August of the year they turn seven. In 2022/23, 3,573 schools offered preschool classes (Statista 2023).

Open-door preschools (*öppna förskolor*) are community drop-in and advisory centres for parents and children who are not attending any other form of provision, and also for home-based childcare providers. They are funded by the municipalities and generally supervised by a fully qualified Preschool Teacher (*förskollärare*), although as a form of 'pedagogical care' (*pedagogisk omsorg*) there are no specific requirements regarding the professional qualification of staff. Across the country there were 507 open-door preschools in 2022 (Skolverket 2023b).

Home-based ECEC settings (*familjedaghem*) are a form of pedagogical care which takes place in the provider's home (see also Skolverket 2012).

There are no specific curricular regulations and no required form of professional qualification for those working as home-based childcare providers. Although pedagogical care is not considered part of the education sector, in the Education Act (SFS 2010:800, Chapter 25 §2) it is stated that pedagogical care "…should stimulate children's development and learning". These facilities are for children aged 1–12 years (but mostly used by families with children up to age 3) and are provided by registered home-based day carers (*dagbarnvårdare*).

School-age educare settings (*fritidshem*) offer activities, care and education for children attending school before and after school opening hours and during the school holidays. They are open for children aged 6–12 years. Children whose parents work or study or need extra support are entitled to a place. In 2022, there were 4,380 centres in the country catering for 480,000 children (Skolverket 2023c, 9).

Provider structures

The majority of ECEC settings are provided and run by the municipalities. However, since the early 1990s, independent, grant-aided provision (organised by parent or staff co-operatives, foundations, for-profit companies, and other entities) has increased steadily. Grant-aided independent schools (*fristående skolor/förskolor*) are subject to the same legal and regulatory frameworks as publicly funded ECEC provision).

In 2022, 83.6% of school-age educare settings were also municipally owned (Skolverket 2023c, 9).

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of ECEC provision according to provider type.

Table 1
Sweden: Number of ECEC settings according to provider type, 2022

Type of setting	Public/municipal	Independent, grant-aided	Total
ECEC centre/preschool (*förskola*)*	6,540	2,770	9,310
Preschool class (*förskoleklass*)**	2,964 (11 of these are state-run)	592	3,573
Open-door preschool (*öppen förskola*)***	472	35	507

Source: Skolverket *2023f, **2023g, ***2023b

Participation rates in regulated provision

In 2022, 85.8% of children aged 1 to 5 years attended a *förskola* (see *Table 2*) and almost 96% of 4 year-olds were participating in ECEC (Skolverket 2023d).

Table 2

Sweden: Number of children and enrolment rates in ECEC centres (preschools) according to age and provider type, 2022

Age group	Number of children	Total enrolment rates in %	Relative share in public settings in %	Relative share in private setting in %
1 year-olds	59,107	51.0	39.9	11.1
2 year-olds	105,815	91.3	71.7	19.7
3 year-olds	111,731	94.5	74.1	20.4
4 year-olds	115,309	95.6	75.5	20.5
5 year-olds	116,092	95.5	75.6	20.0
(6 year-olds)	787	0.6	0.5	0.1
1–3 years	164,922	79.0	62.0	17.1
1–5 years	508,842	85.8	67.5	18.4

Source: Skolverket 2023d

In 2022, a total of 124,327 children (representing an enrolment rate of 96.7% of all 6 year-olds) attended a preschool class (Skolverket 2023g).

The participation rates of children under age 3 in centre-based settings have increased only marginally since 2010, from 51% to 54.4% in 2022 (see *Table 3*). During the same period, the proportion of children aged between 3 and 6 years in ECEC provision rose from 84% of the age-group to 97.7%.

Table 3

Sweden: Participation rates according to duration of attendance in centre-based settings by age-group, 2010-2022

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	22	35
	Over 30 hours	31	52
	No enrolment in ECEC	48	13
2010	1 to 29 hours	18	29
	Over 30 hours	33	65
	No enrolment in ECEC	49	6
2015	1 to 29 hours	21.4	25.9
	Over 30 hours	42.8	70.3
	No enrolment in ECEC	36.0	3.8
2022	1 to 29 hours	16.3	27.1
	Over 30 hours	38.1	70.6
	No enrolment in ECEC	45.6	2.3

Source: Eurostat. 2023b; slight deviations from 100% due to rounding

Financing and costs for parents

According to OECD data, total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 1.56% of GDP in 2019: 1.0% for provision for under 3 year-olds and 0.6% on

provision for 3 to under 6 year-olds. This put Sweden in second place among the OECD countries after Iceland in terms of expenditure on the education sector in 2019 (OECD 2023).

The funding of ECEC provision is shared between the state and the municipalities. A block grant is transferred from the national level to the municipalities and complemented by funding through tax revenues at the local level. However, there is considerable variation in the allocation models used across the municipalities. Each municipality then allocates resources to individual settings, which also charge fees to cover part of the costs. Funding is not determined by provider type. Each ECEC setting has its own budget and in some municipalities preschool principals have to calculate how many children are to be allocated to each group to cover costs (Garvis and Lunneblad 2018). At the local level, fees are regulated according to income and the number of siblings attending. They may vary according to provider. However, a fee cap (*maxtaxa*) is set annually at the national level to ensure affordability. The maximum fee system is voluntary for municipalities but has been adopted by all and the Swedish government compensates for any loss of income (European Commission 2020, 51).

From the age of 3, at least 15 hours per week are free of charge. The time the child spends in the setting beyond these three hours is subject to a fee. No fees are paid for attending the preschool class.

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 3% of net household income on childcare costs[3] (OECD. Stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

Swedish ECEC provision is internationally well-known for its favourable staff-child ratios. However, there are no national requirements, neither for preschools nor for preschool classes. Instead, the municipalities and sometimes the ECEC settings are responsible for regulating criteria for group size and the number of children per staff member. The practised ratios may vary across settings, depending on the group composition, e.g. the number of children with special educational needs, or the number of immigrant children with special language needs. The monitoring of staff-child ratios is compulsory and part of ongoing evaluation policies.

Skolverket, the Swedish National Agency for Education, has made recommendations for group size: six to 12 children for the ages 1–3 years and nine to 15 children for the ages 4–5 years (Williams et al. 2018). However, municipalities are not obliged to adhere to them, and there are no national recommendations about adult/child ratios.

Although the groups are usually organised so that 1 to 3 year-olds and 3 to 5 year-olds are in one group, there has been a recent trend towards same-age grouping. Also, sometimes two traditional groups are combined so that about 40 children are cared for in one group by eight adults. This is to increase flexibility for both children and professionals (Williams et al. 2018). Although large teams and groups with many children are less prone to staff absences, a strict structure is needed to “manage the chaos”. As a result, and contrary to the intentions of increased flexibility, the children's wishes and influences are limited. The organisation of large and complex groups involves a lot of planning, administration and bureaucracy at the expense of the time spent with the children (Karlsson Lohmander and Pramling Samuelsson 2020).

In 2022, the most common number of children in preschools was 13-15 (in a quarter of groups), but in 9% of groups there were 22 children or more. In groups with under 3 year-olds there were

[3] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

12.6 children on average, compared to 16.2 in groups with 4 to 5 year-olds. In the ECEC centres, there were on average 5.1 children per full-time professional (Skolverket 2023a, 13f, 17).

Curricular framework

ECEC centres/preschools and preschool classes in primary schools are regulated through two different curricula.

The *Curriculum for the Preschool* (*Läroplan för förskolan, Lpfö 18*), first issued in 1998, was revised in 2006, 2010, 2016 and in 2018 (Skolverket 2019). All centre-based settings for children aged 1 to 5 years in Sweden are required to work according to this document.

In the original document (1998), the goals set down were formulated at a relatively abstract level, and the areas for development and learning were not specified in detail.

The 2010 version included more specific objectives for children's development in language and mathematics, and in natural sciences and technology. The guidelines for staff responsibilities were clarified, both at individual teacher level and at team level. New sections referred explicitly to documentation, evaluation and quality development, and also to the responsibilities of centre heads.

The 2018 version is divided into two equally long sections: one on the fundamental values and task of ECEC, the other on 'goals and guidelines' for both the children's learning and staff responsibilities. Care, development and learning are seen as mutually enhancing and inter-related. Play is regarded as the foundation of development, learning and wellbeing. Education in preschools should take its starting point both in the curriculum and in respecting children's needs, experiences and interests (Skolverket 2019). At the same time, the concept of 'teaching' has been introduced for the first time, to illustrate that preschools are part of the school system. As part of a system of policy steering by goals, regional and centre-specific educational plans complement the national curriculum. In addition, there was a greater focus on literacy, mathematics and science and technology, but also on cooperation with parents (Williams et al. 2018).

For the **preschool classes**, goals and guidelines are set down in the curriculum for compulsory schools, preschool classes and school-age educare settings (*Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet Lgr22*). Core learning areas include: language and communication; creative and aesthetic forms of expression; mathematical reasoning and forms of expression; nature, technology and society; games, physical activities, and outdoor excursions.

The goals in both preschools and preschool classes continue to be goals to aim for and not goals to be achieved.

Digital education

The revised curriculum also emphasises the challenges posed by the information society. Children's learning should be understood in the context of these challenges (Williams et al. 2018).

In alignment with the Swedish government's national digital strategy, the most recent version of *Curriculum for the Preschool* (Lpfö 18) states that children should be given the opportunity to "…develop digital skills through an understanding of the digitalisation that they encounter in their daily lives". ECEC staff are responsible for each child being able to explore technology and use digital tools in a way that stimulates development and learning (Skolverket 2019, 15f).

However, the use of digital tablets in preschool has been debated. The Government has commissioned the National Agency for Education to review the curriculum for the preschool (Skolverket 2019) regarding the use of digital tools in the preschool. The review is to be reported in June 2024 (Regeringskansliet 2023a).

Monitoring – evaluation

According to the Education Act and the Swedish Preschool Curriculum, the quality of all preschools must be regularly and systematically documented, reviewed and evaluated, and steps for further improvement developed. Sweden has a mixed approach towards monitoring and assessment, combining national quality audits with locally appropriate quality control.

Child-related assessment

Children's achievements and educational outcomes are not evaluated formally in **preschools**. Activities and support are provided in a flexible way to account for each child's perceived needs and current situation. Dialogues with the parents on the child's well-being, development and learning of the child are held regularly, both informally and formally. The staff monitor the children's progress regularly, but there are no formal regulations on how this is to be conducted.

Since 2019, when revisions to the Education Act came into effect, **preschool classes** are required to regularly inform parents/guardians about their child's development. Another requirement is that a special assessment of knowledge development relating to Swedish, Swedish as a second language and Mathematics should be made with the help of mapping support materials developed by the Swedish National Agency for Education. If this assessment shows an inability to meet the knowledge requirements, support measures are to be planned or the Preschool Principal should be notified.

Centre level assessment

Centre-level self-assessment is not regulated at the national level. ECEC settings can decide whether it should take place, although Preschool Principals are expected to encourage this. Self-evaluation instruments vary from municipality to municipality may also vary depending on the needs of the ECEC setting. According to the curriculum (Skolverket 2019, 19, 21), "all members of the work team must, based on their roles, provide education in accordance with the national goals and investigate what measures need to be taken". The Principal "has special responsibility for planning, following up, evaluating and developing the education systematically and continuously, thereby promoting increased achievement of goals".

The emphasis of evaluations at the centre level is on overall quality enhancement. Criteria may include deciding on which curricular areas and goals they should be focusing on to meet the needs and interests of the children, whether the goals they set themselves for the previous evaluation have been achieved, and how the current evaluation phase will be assessed (documentation, parent survey, discussions with the children).

The Principal's responsibilities also include developing cooperation with the preschool class, the school and school-age educare settings and providing staff with the opportunity to develop their competences in order to carry out their tasks in a professional manner.

External evaluation

The Swedish National Agency for Education has the task of ensuring that the municipalities and the private providers comply with the legislation and regulations relating to early childhood

education and care. The Swedish School Inspectorate has supervisory and external monitoring responsibility for all levels of the education system, including preschools. This includes a self-evaluation by the municipality regarding various aspects of the quality in preschools.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

According to the Education Act (SFS 2010:800), a basic principle of each level of education is access to an equivalent education for all. Children with disabilities or in need of special support are therefore not treated or defined as a group that is any different from other pupils and their rights are not stated separately. Consequently, they are integrated into mainstream early childhood provision, either in a regular group or in a special group with fewer children and access to specialist staff (e.g. psychologists, speech therapists). The municipalities are responsible for providing the necessary resources, and children with disabilities have a right to priority access to early childhood provision. They should receive education and care according to their specific needs. Children with severe and multiple disabilities are entitled to personal assistance. For each child in need of special support, a continuously evaluated action plan is drawn up by teachers, in consultation with the children, their parents and specialist support teachers.

The Education Act also specifies that municipalities should attempt to offer care to children according to their needs outside the normal opening hours of preschools and school-age educare (e.g. during the evenings, nights and at weekends). The Swedish government has introduced a state grant to encourage municipalities to increase this kind of provision (European Commission 2020, 45).

Children with a migration background – children from Roma communities

In preschool classes, the number of children with a home language other than Swedish rose from 21,067 in 2012/13 to 30,315 children in 2022/23. This accounts for 24.5% of all children. Of these, the home language of most was Arabic (23.6%) followed by Somali (6.5%) and English 86.3%) (Skolverket 2023h, Tab 3a, b).

Children from asylum seeking families have the same entitlement to a place in an ECEC institution as other children living in Sweden.

With the aim of supporting active bilingualism and the children's bicultural identity, many municipalities have a policy of providing home language tuition for these children. Roughly one third of municipalities offer this provision for 21.5% of immigrant children in preschools.

In 2022, around 26% of children under age 7 in Sweden had a background of family migration, considerably more than the proportion in the overall population (3.9%). *Table 4* shows different groupings of children according to whether the child and/or the parents were born in Sweden or elsewhere.

Table 4

Sweden: Children 0–7 years and total population according to child's and parents' place of birth, 2022

	Under 7 years	Share of under 7 year-olds in %	Total population	Share of total population in %
Foreign born	34,109	4.1	2,145,674	3.0
Born in Sweden with two foreign born parents	180,999	22.0	681,448	0.9

	Under 7 years	Share of under 7 year-olds in %	Total population	Share of total population in %
Born in Sweden with one parent born in Sweden and one foreign born parent	114,206	13.9	816,209	1.1
Born in Sweden with two parents born in Sweden	494,307	60.1	68,978,225	95.0
Total	**823,621**		**72,621,556**	

Source: Statistics Sweden 2023, own calculations

86% of children with a Swedish background aged 1–5 attended preschool in 2022. The corresponding figure for Swedish-born children with two foreign-born parents is 82%, while only 73% of foreign-born children were enrolled. Foreign-born children have the lowest enrolment rate across all age groups. The difference is largest among 2 year-olds, where the difference in attendance rate is 29 percentage points between foreign-born children and children with a Swedish background (Skolverket 2023a, 10).

Looking at the child population under 5 years of age, 9.3% had a non-Swedish citizenship in 2022. More than a half of them (58.8%) came from countries outside the EU27(2020). The respective shares for the total population were 8.4% and 63.2% (Eurostat 2023c).

Sweden has a long-term Roma inclusion strategy that is effective for 20 years up to 2032. Roma are one of the five recognised national minorities with their own acknowledged language, Romani Chib (Regeringskansliet 2023b). The overall objective is to ensure that young Roma persons have the same opportunities in life as non-Roma persons. The strategy covers the areas of education, employment, health, housing, culture/language and civil society (*empowerment*). The main responsibility for the implementation lies with the local and regional authorities. In 2011, at the start of the strategy, the Council of Europe estimated that approximately 42,500 Roma live in Sweden (0.46% of the population). Most Roma children did not attend an ECEC centre (European Commission 2021).

Parental leave arrangements[4]

Maternity leave (*graviditetsspenning*) is compulsory for two weeks before or after delivery. Under certain circumstances, pregnant women can take indefinite leave at 77.6% of their previous monthly earnings. Pregnant women who have a physically demanding or risky work may be entitled to a pregnancy benefit starting 60 days before delivery (Försäkringskassan 2023, 20231115)

Temporary leave (*tillfällig föräldrapenning*) for family duties in connection with the child's birth ('baby time') is an entitlement which can be taken for 10 days, to be present at the birth or to care for other children in the family. This leave is also paid at a rate of 77.6% of previous earnings (max. SEK 393,750 €33,075.73 per year). Leave can be used at any time during the first 60 days after childbirth. To care for a sick child (from 8 months to 12 years) each parent can receive compensation for a maximum of 120 days per year (Försäkringskassan 2023)

Sweden is well known across the world for its generous parental leave.

Parental leave (*föräldrapenning*) benefit for 240 days can be granted to either parent until their child is 18 months old. 90 days cannot be transferred to the other parent (so called mother's or

[4] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Sweden by Ann-Zofie Duvander and Niklas Löfgren in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

father's quota). Up to 30 days can be taken by both parents simultaneously (*dubbeldagar*) until the first birthday of the child.

195 days per parent are income-based (77.6% of earnings up to a ceiling of SEK 525,000, €44,100.97 per year), 45 days are paid at a flat-rate of SEK 180 (€15.12) per day. There is an extra pension supplement for the parent who earns the lower income during the child's first four years. Same-sex parents have the same rights as opposite-sex parents. Rights to leave and benefit are based on custody.

Since the beginning of 2014, either form of paid leave can be taken up to the child's 12th birthday. However, only 96 days may be taken after the child's 4th birthday. Paid leave days can be taken full-time, part-time, quarter-time, or one-eighth time, with the length of leave extended accordingly (e.g. one day of full-time leave becomes four days of quarter-time leave).

The majority of parents take the main part of the leave before their child reaches the age of 2 years. As from the child's 1st birthday, there is an entitlement to ECEC, either in a centre-based or home-based setting, on a full-time basis for employed parents or on a part-time basis if they are not employed.

In 2022, 28% of eligible women received pregnancy benefit for an average of 63 days. 77% of all eligible persons took temporary leave, on average for 9.7 days of the ten available days. Only 1.4% were women.

Whereas in 2002, fathers took about 12% of all Parental leave days used in that year, by 2022, it had increased to 30%. On average, women took 78 days, men 39.5. 19.4% of couples shared Parental leave equally between them during the first 24 months of the child's life.

In 2020, most Parental leave days were taken by women during the first year of the child's life, while men tended to take leave when the child was between the ages of one and three.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Sweden

*Country expert assessment by **Maelis Karlsson Lohmander***

The first and foremost challenge in Sweden relates to **staffing shortages** (see also the ECEC Workforce Report, Karlsson Lohmander 2024). The current lack of qualified staff has led to major differences within and between municipalities and preschools across the country when it comes to staffing, positions and organisation. This has severe implications for the overall quality of early childhood education and for the possibility of offering equal education of high quality across the country. This also impacts the staff working in the preschools, who are faced with less favourable working conditions and increased pressure which may reduce job satisfaction. One consequence is an observable rise in the number of staff on sick leave.

Therefore, to ensure access to equal preschool education across the country, recruitment and retention of qualified staff, not only licensed Preschool Teachers but also Childcare Workers, are major problems which policymakers at the municipal and national level are struggling to solve. Moreover, *Barnskötare* (Childcare Worker) is not a **protected/certified title.** There is a variety of courses of different lengths from the three-year vocational programme to courses of only ten weeks' duration offered by private providers. Some municipalities employ all their unqualified staff as Childcare Workers, which may impact the quality of the education. Protecting the title and determining job-related criteria/qualifications is a demand made by the Childcare Workers' Union (Kommunal 2023).

Another challenge has to do with **enhancing the attraction of the profession**. This is particularly necessary for those teachers working in certain urban areas with a high number of families needing additional support.

The Government has increased the number of places in preschool teacher education. However, the number of applicants has decreased in recent years and many of those who are admitted do not complete their education. To improve the quality of the programmes and the status and attractiveness of the professions the Government has commissioned an inquiry on teacher education to ensure that those admitted to the programme have the prerequisites required to complete the programme and become skilled teachers and preschool teachers (Regeringen 2023:11).

In the light of **increased migration** and growing numbers of foreign-born families living in Sweden, a national challenge is how to best provide preschool education for the children of asylum seekers and migrants. Linked to this challenge is the need for increased and improved cooperation between the various actors and public services in the Swedish welfare system to facilitate migrant families' inclusion in society. Preschools are often the first place of encounter with this system. According to the inquiry on participation in preschool education and language development (SOU 2020:67), approximately 4% of all children in the age group 3–5 years did not attend preschool or pedagogical care. The inquiry proposed strategies to increase participation in preschool education among newly arrived children and children needing improved language development. Following the inquiry, the Education Act was amended. Since July 2022 municipalities of residence are obliged to contact the guardians of children who are to be offered a place in the preschool 'through outreach activities … and who do not have a place in the preschool and inform them about the purpose of the preschool and the child's right to preschool' (SFS 2022:833, chapter 8 §12a).

To further support preschool staff, the Government has invested in continuing education to improve the knowledge of the Swedish language in preschools (Skolverket 2023e).

Although CPD provision is increasingly focusing on such challenges, Preschool Teachers and Childcare Workers also need supportive working conditions in order to maintain the special character of participatory pedagogy with a holistic perspective on care, wellbeing and learning as shared meaning-making processes.

Group size in preschool has been a recurring topic in public debates. Over the years, and as a consequence of various reforms such as children's entitlement to a place in preschool, group size has increased. In 2016, in response to the debate, the National Agency for Education proposed recommendations for group size: 6-12 children for the ages 1–3 years and 9-15 children for the ages 4–5 years (Regeringskansliet 2016). The municipalities are free to adjust group size according to local needs. Over the past year, average group size has in fact decreased by one child per group. However, preschools have long opening hours and the full complement of staff is usually on site only between 10:00 and 14:00 hours. This means that although group size on average has decreased with the lack of both regular and substitute staff in individual preschools it can be difficult for a staff member to manage 15 children.

To safeguard high, even and equal quality in preschools across the country and to counteract these structural factors the Government has initiated and invested in several reforms. One example is the new national merit/qualification system (Regeringskansliet 2023c). It is hoped that these reforms will make the profession more attractive and reduce the shortage of preschool staff.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the population in Sweden totalled 10,425,326. Since 2000 (8,816,426), there has been a slight but steady increase in the total population (2005: 9,011,392; 2010: 9,340,682; 2015: 9,747,355) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average of the total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate in the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). With 1.67, Sweden is well above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[5].

Children under age 6

Table 5

Sweden: Children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under age 1	114,663
1 year-olds	115,050
2 year-olds	117,612
3 year-olds	120,049
4 year-olds	121,060
5 year-olds	125,441
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**713,875**

In 2022, children under age 3 comprised 3.3% of the total population, and children under 6 years of age 6.8%. Particularly during the past seven years, these shares have been significantly higher than the respective EU-average.

Table 6

Sweden: Distribution of under 6 year-olds in population by age compared with EU averages, 2000 to 2022/23, in %*

Year	Comparison Sweden/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Sweden	3.0	3.5	6.6
	∅ EU15[6]	3.2	3.2	6.4

[5] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/); data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

[6] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional

Year	Comparison Sweden/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2005	Sweden	3.3	3.1	6.4
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Sweden	3.6	3.6	7.2
	Ø EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Sweden	3.3	3.5	6.8
	Ø EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a; * own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, 94.4% of households in Sweden with children under age 6 were couple households. Single households accounted for only 2.5% of all households. The majority of these were single mother households (1.8%).

Table 7

Sweden: Households with children under 6 years old, 2022

Household type	Number of households	Households in per cent+
Households total	1,037,800	
Couple households	979,800	94.4
Other types of households	32,000	3.1
Single parent households, total	26,000	2.5
Single parent households, women	18,200	1.8
Single parent households, men	7,800	0.8

Source: Eurostat 2023i, *own calculation

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In 2022, the total employment rate for men in Sweden aged 15 to 65 years was 85.5%, for women 81.3% (Eurostat 2023 h).

In 2022, 81.5% of women and 95.1% of men with children under 6 were in employment. The share of employed fathers was thus the highest among the EU27(2020) (average: 87.2%), that of mothers the second highest (average: 63.6%) (Eurostat 2023e, own calculations).

Table 8a

Sweden: Employment rates of parents with children below age 6 compared with SEEPRO-3 countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Sweden	75.2	91.6
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[7]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7

EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

[7] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

	2022	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Sweden	81.5	95.1
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU- countries [8]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 8b.*

Table 8b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023h

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[9]

In 2022, 21.4% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was slightly below the EU27 average (23,3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 18.6% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 5% of children under 6 and 2.5% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023f, g).

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[9] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

SWITZERLAND

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education.

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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Introduction

Switzerland is a federal state with 26 cantons and 2,136 municipalities (Federal Statistical Office 2023a) and is divided into three language regions: German-speaking Switzerland, French-speaking Switzerland (Romandie) and Italian-speaking Switzerland (Ticino). Because each canton and, in some cases, each municipality handles the area of early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children up to age 4 differently, it is difficult to find comparable data and make valid statements for all regions of Switzerland (kibesuisse 2015; Stern et al. 2022). Where necessary and possible, this report presents information for German-speaking, French-speaking and Italian-speaking Switzerland separately.

1. ECEC governance in Switzerland

Switzerland is a federally organised country and responsibilities for the system of early childhood education and care (ECEC) are shared between federal government, cantons and municipalities. The term **early childhood education and care** was introduced in Switzerland with the "Orientation Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care" of the Swiss UNESCO Commission and the Swiss Childcare Network (Wustmann Seiler and Simoni 2016).

In Switzerland, ECEC for children **before the age of 4** is the responsibility of either canton or municipality, or the joint responsibility of both. Children between the **ages of 4 and 6** attend **kindergarten**, which is part of the Swiss education system and is the responsibility of the respective canton. Since kindergarten is part of the school system, all children from the age of 4 (or 5 in a very few cantons) attend free of charge. In the canton of Ticino (Italian-speaking Switzerland), kindergarten can be attended (voluntarily) from the age of 3.

Since kindergarten does not provide facilities for care before and after school or during lunch break, municipalities are obliged to offer **out-of-school care** if there is sufficient demand. They are responsible for the organisation of out-of-school care and for its quality and qualification requirements. Out-of-school care centres offer care for kindergarten and school children throughout the day from about 7:00 to 18:00 outside of regular school hours. In many cases, care during school holidays cannot be guaranteed. There is no legal entitlement in Switzerland to a place in an out-of-school care centre financed by the state. In addition, there are no specifications or standards by cantons, or specific quality criteria for out-of-school care. This is largely because there is no umbrella organisation or nationwide association for out-of-school care in Switzerland (Stamm 2017).

Slightly more than a third of children in Switzerland aged 0–12 years (35.6%) and also of children under 3 years of age (34.3%) are cared for in ECEC and out-of-school care, although the duration of attendance differs. While 46.1% of 0–12 year-olds and 19% of under 3 year-olds spend less than 10 hours per week in a childcare setting, 38.7% and 56.2% respectively attend between 10 and 30 hours per week (Federal Statistical Office 2023b). In French-speaking cantons, urban cantons such as Basel-Stadt and Geneva, and cantons with a large city such as Zurich, more than 70% of parents use childcare services, mainly the institutionalised forms, especially childcare centres for under 4 year-olds and out-of-school care. In the more rural cantons of German-speaking Switzerland and in Ticino, non-institutionalised childcare is the main option. Here, parents primarily rely on grandparents (Federal Statistical Office 2023c).

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children up to 4 years of age

Early childhood education and care settings are called *Kindertagesstätte* (*Kita*) in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, *crèche* in the French-speaking part and *nido dell'infanzia* in Italian-speaking Switzerland. The federal government imposes a licensing and supervisory obligation on cantons or municipalities for childcare institutions, whereby the responsibilities of both, as well as the responsibilities of social and/or education departments, are regulated differently (kibesuisse 2015; Stern et al. 2022). According to an evaluation study commissioned by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Social Directors (*Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Sozialdirektorinnen und Sozialdirektoren*, SODK), all cantons have issued requirements for the quality of childcare services. These include submitting a pedagogical concept when applying for a licence, staff qualification requirements or staff to child ratio. However, requirements and topics covered in pedagogical concepts remain vague and are not regulated (Ecoplan 2020). As Switzerland has a legal minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave, which is very short compared to other countries, there is often a need for care facilities for babies, which require high ratio levels (Stern et al. 2015).

Childcare and education services for children aged 0 to 4 are not available in all regions of Switzerland and the demand for ECEC exceeds the supply in most regions. Furthermore, there are differences between language regions; there are better conditions for childcare for the first years of life in French-speaking Switzerland than in German- and Italian-speaking Switzerland (Faeh and Vogt 2021). Across the country, around 90% of all childcare facilities are organised as associations, limited liability companies, foundations, or company-run centres, with the association being the most common type of provider.

In German-speaking Switzerland, an average of two-thirds of the costs for childcare services is paid by parents, while in French-speaking Switzerland, parental contributions account for only one third (Stern et al. 2015). Two thirds of the providers run one to three childcare centres. Strategic management is often a voluntary board of directors, while business and pedagogical management is usually in the hands of a childcare Centre Director. In larger organisations, operational management is increasingly separated from pedagogical management (kibesuisse 2015).

Working conditions in childcare institutions are set autonomously, in accordance with the legal requirements and regulations of cantons and municipalities. Only the canton of Vaud (French-speaking Switzerland) introduced a collective labour agreement in the childcare sector in January 2019 (*Convention collective cantonal de travail dans le secteur de l'accueil de jour de l'enfance*) (Faeh and Vogt 2021).

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children over 4 years of age

The focus in *kindergarten* (German-speaking Switzerland), *école enfantine* (French-speaking Switzerland) and *scuola dell'infanzia* (Italian-speaking Switzerland) is on the children's education. Pedagogical approaches are mainly based on guided play and activities as well as free play. Cantons determine curricula and timetables and determine teaching materials. A nationally harmonised curriculum at regional language level (*Plan d'étude romand (PER)* in French-speaking cantons, *Piano di studio* in Italian-speaking cantons, and *Lehrplan 21* in German- and multilingual cantons) supports pedagogical quality in kindergartens throughout Switzerland. The curriculum emphasises the needs of the individual child, promoting learning through play and a focus on children's competences. Municipalities organise relevant settings, which allows for locally adapted solutions.

Clear strengths of ECEC from the age of 4 in Switzerland are the anchoring of kindergarten in the education system, the legal requirement that kindergarten must be offered throughout the

country, as well as the strong pedagogical perspective and play-oriented curriculum (Faeh and Vogt 2021). While kindergartens in German-speaking Switzerland have traditionally been more socially oriented with free play and holistic support, *école enfantine* in French-speaking Switzerland and also *scuola dell'infanzia* in Ticino have long been dominated by a school readiness approach, prioritising cognitive-oriented activities (Stamm 2017).

Kindergarten Teachers usually teach children in mixed-age classes (first and second kindergarten year - respectively children from 4 to 6 years) alone. They plan, teach and reflect on their lessons; they observe, accompany and support children in guided and free choice sequences. Kindergarten Teachers work together with other specialist staff (Special Education Teachers, Second Language Specialists, Speech Therapists) who support children in or alongside kindergarten activities. Kindergarten Teachers are also responsible for working with parents at parents' evenings, development and transition meetings, as well as for dealing with any problems that may arise. Another field of activity is the school unit: Kindergarten Teachers belong to a team of teachers of one or more schools, which is led by a principal (Faeh and Vogt 2021).

Out-of-school childcare

Out-of-school care as a form of supplementary family care is offered by municipalities for the time before and after classes and over lunch break. With regards to the standards for out-of-school care, only the defined minimum structural quality characteristics of the Ordinance on the Admission of Foster Children (PAVO) are met (Faeh and Vogt 2021). Throughout Switzerland, there is a lack of standardised principles for out-of-school care, as well as missing framework conditions; there are only recommendations (kibesuisse 2021a). Moreover, the qualifications of educators working in out-of-school care vary greatly (Faeh and Vogt 2021). This will be discussed in *chapter* ***2***.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC care

In the field of early childhood education and care, educators with basic professional qualifications (Childcare Specialists, *Fachpersonen Betreuung - FaBe*) and educators with higher professional qualifications (Childhood Pedagogues, *Kindheitspädagoginnen/-pädagogen - HF*[1]) work together. With increasing responsibility, the required competence profile also increases. It is considered desirable to combine educators with both basic and higher professional qualifications, apprentices, students and assistants (kibesuisse 2020). Due to historically different developments in initial professional education, the proportion of educators with higher professional qualifications is higher in French-speaking Switzerland (Dubach et al. 2018). In German-speaking Switzerland mainly Childcare Specialists work as qualified staff and possibly also as group leaders, whereas in French-speaking Switzerland these positions are filled with staff holding *HF* qualification.

Trainees are also in contact with children. They work under the supervision either of qualified Childcare Specialists (*FaBe*) with an additional qualification as vocational trainers or of *HF* Childhood Pedagogues. In addition, there are non-qualified staff in the ECEC sector who also work

[1] HF = *Höhere Fachschule* (higher vocational college, upper secondary level)

with children. There are again regional differences in the ratio of qualified and non-qualified staff: In German-speaking Switzerland, a minimum proportion of 50% of qualified childcare staff is required, while in French-speaking Switzerland at least two thirds of the staff must hold a recognised qualification (Ecoplan 2020).

In **kindergartens**, a qualified Kindergarten Teacher with a Bachelor's degree (formerly Kindergarten teaching diploma) works with the children. At the beginning of the school year or when there is a heavy workload in a class, a Classroom Assistant may be present. Classroom Assistants are either students of a teacher training college (in training), staff without formal qualifications, or staff with proof of a completed course of several days as a Classroom Assistant (for example: St.Gallen University of Teacher Education: PHSG n.d.).

Ideally, Social Pedagogues *FH*[2] or *HF*, Childhood Pedagogues *HF* or Childcare Specialists *FaBe* work in direct contact with children in **out-of-school care**. Pedagogical staff are supported by employees and assistants (in training as Pedagogues *FABE* or Childhood Pedagogues *HF*; without initial professional education; interns or community service workers). The operational management is in the hands of the Centre Directors (kibesuisse 2022), who can be Social Pedagogues or Childcare Specialists on the one hand, or occasionally non-qualified staff on the other. There is no minimum percentage of pedagogically trained staff for out-of-school care.

Table 1 below provides an overview of staff with direct contact with children in Switzerland. Staff in initial education/training (trainee *FaBe* as well as trainee Childhood Pedagogues) who work as non-qualified assistants are not listed here.

Table 1
Switzerland: ECEC staff in centre-based settings (childcare, pre-primary, out-of-school)

Job title	**Main ECEC workplace settings and age range**	**Main roles and positions**	**Main age range focus of initial professional education**	**Minimum qualification requirement** **ETCS credits** **EQF level** **ISCED level**
Childcare sector				
Childcare Specialist *Fachperson Betreuung (FaBe) – Fachrichtung Kinder* *Profile:* Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional	**Childcare centre** *Kindertagesstätte* *Crèche* *Nido dell'infanzia* 0–3 years[3] **Out-of-school care** *Hort* 4–12 years	Group leader (core professional) Qualified co-worker	0–12 years with specialisation in early childhood	3 years of dual education/training at a vocational school (*Berufsfachschule*), spending 3½ days in a childcare setting *Award:* Federal certificate of proficiency (EFZ) With additional study time also:

[2] FH = *Fachhochschule* (university of applied sciences, tertiary level)

[3] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports in countries with a school entry age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In Switzerland the corresponding formats are **0–3** and **4–5** years.

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
				Vocational baccalaureate (*Berufsmatura*) ECTS credits: n/a[4] EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 3
Childhood Pedagogue *HF* *Kindheitspädagogin/ Kindheitspädagoge HF* *Profile:* Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional	**Childcare centre** *Kindertagesstätte* *Crèche* *Nido dell'infanzia* 0–3 years **Out-of-school care** *Hort* 4–12 years	Group leader (core professional) Sometimes leader of a childcare centre or setting (core professional)	0–16 years (with focus on early childhood)	2 to 4-year professional education/training (depending on prior education) with at least 50% in employment *Award:* Diploma *HF* ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5
Social Pedagogue *HF* *Sozialpädagogin / Sozialpädagoge HF* *Profile:* Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional	**Out-of-school care** *Hort* 4–12 years	Centre director Group leader	Multi-age	2-4 years at higher vocational college (depending on prior education) *Award:* Diploma *HF* ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5
Social Pedagogue *FH* *Sozialpädagogin / Sozialpädagoge FH* *Profile:* Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional	**Out-of-school care** *Hort* 4–12 years	Centre director Group leader	Multi-age	3 years, university of applied sciences *Award:* Bachelor (BA/BSc) ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Education sector				
Kindergarten Teacher *Kindergartenlehrperson BA*	**Pre-primary class** *Kindergarten* *École enfantine - Cycle 1* *Scuola dell' infanzia* 4–5 years	Class leader (core professional)	4–6 years	3 years at university of applied sciences *Award:* Bachelor (BA) ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6

[4] n/a = not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
Profile: Pre-primary Education Professional	(first 2 years of compulsory schooling)			ISCED 2011: 6
Classroom Assistant *Klassenassistenzkraft*	**Pre-primary class** *Kindergarten* *École enfantine - Cycle 1* *Scuola dell' infanzia* 4–5 years	Non-qualified co-worker		None

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Childcare sector

For the position of Centre Director of a **childcare centre** (*Kindertagesstätte/crèche/nido dell'infanzia*), no specific federal-level qualification is required. Childcare Specialists with relevant work experience are permitted to manage a facility, as are Childhood Pedagogues *HF*, the latter mostly in the case of larger centres. Most Centre Directors attend some kind of further training for this task, but there are regional differences: In French-speaking Switzerland, in addition to work experience, a tertiary education is usually a prerequisite for managing a childcare centre, while in German-speaking Switzerland, further education in management or business administration is more likely to be required (Ecoplan 2020; SODK and EDK 2022).

Various training institutions offer professional development courses in leadership. These include specific training in childcare management, or a higher professional examination for a managerial position in the social and socio-medical field, or further training in leadership to the level of a CAS[5] at a university of applied sciences (e.g. CAS "Leadership in daycare structures" at the Lucerne University of Teacher Education). In childcare, however, certificates and diplomas that are tailored as industry certificates to the qualifications of managers in this field still dominate

[5] CAS = Certificate of Advanced Studies

(Dubach et al. 2018). In Ticino, the CAS "*Il nido dell'infanzia in coordinamento pedagogico e organizzativo*" for childcare centre managers was launched in 2008 (Stamm 2017).

As there is no job description in Switzerland for the position of Centre Director in ECEC; understanding of leadership, type of tasks and possible contact with children are also not defined. Depending on the size of the setting, the Centre Director has more administrative than pedagogical tasks to fulfil. In the German-speaking part of Switzerland, Childhood Pedagogues *HF* sometimes take over the pedagogical management (the pedagogical programme, support plans, annual plans, etc.) or the site management in larger facilities. However, there are still many staff without leadership qualifications in management positions (Dubach et al. 2018). In eight cantons, a management qualification is only expected from a certain size of childcare setting, in three cantons, longstanding professional experience is considered equivalent to obtaining a management or leadership position, while in twelve cantons, training with a management qualification is required (Faeh and Vogt 2021). The *SODK* and the *EDK*[6] (2022) recommend hiring people with pedagogical and business skills, as well as leadership skills and personal aptitude for management positions in early childhood education.

In some cases, managers of **out-of-school care** facilities have a higher level of training. However, there are no cantonal qualification requirements, which is why some out-of-school care is also managed by *FaBe* Childcare Specialists.

Education sector

For **kindergarten** (pre-primary class), management lies with the school to which the kindergarten belongs. The School's Principal is responsible for pedagogical quality, staff management, budget and infrastructure planning and represents the school externally. School Principals have a nationally recognised diploma in school leadership (SDBB n.d.).

2.3 Centre-based positions of responsibility

Childcare sector

The only designated position of responsibility in childcare centres is that of supporting apprentices in the centre. Besides a completed apprenticeship and at least two years of professional experience, a 5-day course for vocational support staff is compulsory. Such a position can be accompanied by higher pay, but this is not guaranteed.

Education sector

Similarly, the only position of responsibility in kindergartens is that of guiding or **mentoring students** during their field practice. For this purpose, Kindergarten Teachers can attend a further training course of several days (e.g. training as a field practice teacher/mentor at the University of Teacher Education St. Gallen). However, this is not a prerequisite. Internship teachers receive additional compensation for their supervisory task.

[6] EDK = Swiss Conference of Cantonal Educational Directors (*Schweizerische Konferenz der Kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren/-direktorinnen*)

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Childcare sector

There are three quality labels for **childcare centres** in Switzerland: (1) QualiKita, (2) Education and Learning Stories (*Bildungs- und Lerngeschichten,* BULG) and (3) Infans. Centres with such a quality label are regularly visited and evaluated (kibesuisse 2015).

- *QualiKita* is a certification procedure with a focus on pedagogical quality, awarded by kibesuisse[7] and the Jacobs Foundation[8]. *QualiKita* covers all quality dimensions of a childcare centre with a focus on pedagogical quality. It aims to measure, describe, and further develop the quality of an institution. To date, 107 Swiss childcare centres have been awarded the label, and 27 further centres are in the process of being labelled (kibesuisse 2015, QualiKita 2022).
- *Education and learning stories* is a narrative approach towards documenting and supporting individual children's educational pathways based on close observation. The Marie Meierhofer Institute for the Child (n.d.) implemented this approach in 25 childcare centres in German-speaking Switzerland from 2009 to 2013 and accompanied and evaluated the children's learning stories with various studies (kibesuisse 2015).
- *Infans* offers a qualification framework for educational professionals in childcare centres (Bildungskrippen.ch 2016). The German version was adapted for Switzerland (Hofmann and Toberer n.d.) and has been introduced in 48 childcare centres so far. *Infans* focuses on the thematic interests of children, on their bonding needs, the relationship with their parents, as well as paying attention to their developmental needs and tailoring pedagogical activities to meet these accordingly (kibesuisse 2015). Childcare centres that work according to the *Infans* or *education and learning stories* approaches are grouped together in the "Network Education" (Netzwerk Bildungsort Kita n.d.), which offers training and further education.

In **out-of-school care**, the Ordinance on the Admission of Foster Children (PAVO) stipulates that the supervisory authority should carry out inspection visits as often as necessary, but at least every two years, to assess the welfare and quality of care for children. Providers, whether private companies, non-profit organisations, or public services, have no influence on how the supervisory authority carry out these inspections. The supervisory authority must ensure that the requirements for granting a licence are met and that providers comply with the legal provisions and conditions (PAVO 2017).

Education sector

In **kindergartens**, the School's Principal is responsible for supervisory tasks. In the context of personnel management, they visit Kindergarten Teachers annually, observe class activities and discuss these with the teacher.

2.5 Specialist support staff

Specialists provide support for children in childcare centres and out-of-school settings as needed (e.g. early preventative education).

Since kindergarten is part of the Swiss school system, kindergarten children benefit from screening examinations and, if necessary, receive support during or alongside lessons in the form of

[7] The Swiss Childcare Association *kibesuisse* is the Swiss professional and trade association for childcare services.

[8] The Jacobs Foundation invests in the future of young people so that they can become socially responsible and productive members of society.

special needs education, second language instruction, speech therapy and psychomotor therapy (Faeh and Vogt 2021).

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

According to a study on the demand for skilled workers in social professions (IWSB 2016), 42% of employees in the **childcare sector** are trained professionals, 11% obtained similar training, 18% are *FaBe* trainees, 18% have no formal qualifications, and 11% are students in training. This means that in Switzerland, the number of qualified professionals with formal training is nearly the same as the number of employees without training (IWSB 2016). The SODK and EDK (2022) recommend a proportion of caregivers with professional qualifications of at least 60% of the total number of staff, and a target value of 80%.

Table 2
Switzerland: Number of employees in childcare settings according to occupational title and qualification status (IWSB 2016, 5, no more recent data available)

Occupational title	Formal qualification	Similar qualification	Apprentice trainees (*FaBe*)	Without formal qualification	Student in training	Total
Childcare Specialist – (*FaBe*)	18,300 (42%)	4,800 (11%)	8,100 (18%)	7,800 (18%)	4,900 (11%)	43,800
Childhood Pedagogue *HF*	3,300 (59%)	500 (10%)	600 (11%)	400 (8%)	700 (12%)	5,600
Social Pedagogue *HF/FH*	14,000 (70%)	1,300 (7%)	2,100 (11%)	1,100 (5%)	1,500 (7%)	20,100

In the summer of 2020, 2,778 Childcare Specialists graduated; 2,323 were women and 455 men. Although the male apprenticeship entry rate for the years 2018 to 2020 was 16%, only 8% of childcare and out-of-school care staff in Switzerland are men (SAVOIRSOCIAL 2020b; 2020c). The figure is even lower for the pre-primary sector. According to SAVOIRSOCIAL, it is still difficult for men to access and remain in the field due to multi-layered prejudices.

In 2020, 556 women and 238 men graduated as Social Pedagogues *HF*. In 2020, of the 437 graduates in Childhood Pedagogy *HF* (formerly Child Educators *HF*), 401 were women and 36 men (SAVOIRSOCIAL 2020c).

The IWSB study (2016) mentions for the social sector an above-average rate of women as well as many younger employees, a high part-time rate, and a rather low rate (12%) of employees with a migration background. The authors explain the latter by the fact that minimal language skills are required in these professions. It is also noticeable that up to one third of the staff does not hold the corresponding formal education (IWSB 2016). This applies equally to management staff, group leaders and pedagogical staff (Faeh and Vogt 2021).

Since most Swiss teacher education colleges train **Kindergarten** Teachers not only for the kindergarten level but also for the first two to three years of primary school, no information can be derived for the number of men in kindergarten; however, in the academic year 2021/22, 94.5%

of teachers in Swiss kindergartens were women (Federal Statistical Office 2023d). Data on the migration background of Kindergarten Teachers were compiled for 2014. At that time, only 3% of Kindergarten Teachers were not Swiss nationals (Federal Statistical Office 2016). It can be assumed that most Kindergarten Teachers in Switzerland hold a relevant diploma or acquired post-qualification.

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

In Switzerland, staff in early childhood education and care, out-of-school care and pre-primary education have very different qualifications. These differences are due to the different work-specific requirements but can also be attributed to different training traditions or anchoring in voluntary work (Dubach et al. 2018).

Childcare Specialist (*FaBe Kinder*) (in French-speaking Switzerland: *assistent socio-éducatif / assistante socio-éducative*; in Ticino: *operatore / operatrice socioassistenziale con specializzazione in educazione della prima infanzia*) is a three-year apprenticeship leading to a federal certificate of proficiency. Trainees attend a vocational school one and a half days a week. The rest of the time they work in early childhood or out-of-school care, where they are supervised by a trainer. In addition, they attend so-called interdisciplinary courses on 20 days during the 3-year apprenticeship. *FaBe* are trained to work with children aged 0–12 years, but with a focus on early childhood. The main area of work for a trained Childcare Specialist is working with children as a co-educator or as a group leader. In the European comparison of qualifications (Swiss Confederation 2015), *FaBe* are classified at EQF level 4. The ISCED category is 3 (Federal Statistical Office 2015).

Table 3

Switzerland: Childcare Specialist

Job title in German: *Fachperson Betreuung Fachrichtung Kinder (FaBe Kinder)* **Job title in French**: *Assistent socio-éducatif / assistante socio-éducative* **Job title in Italian:** *Operatore / operatrice socioassistenziale con specializzazione in educazione della prima infanzia* **Profile**: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: Secondary school leaving certificate **Professional studies:** 3 years at vocational school – 1½ day per week in school, 3½ days in a childcare or out-of-school care **Award:** Swiss Federal Certificate of Proficiency (upper secondary level) • *Eidgenössischem Fähigkeitszeugnis* **EFZ** (German-speaking Switzerland) • *Certificat fédéral de capacité* **CFC** (French-speaking Switzerland) • *Attesto federale di capacità* **AFC** (Italian-speaking Switzerland) **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011**: 3 **Main fields of work:** Early childhood centre, out-of-school care

The degree programme for **Childhood Pedagogues *HF*** (*Höhere Fachschule*) can be completed following an apprenticeship with an EFZ/CFC/AFC, or with a general university entrance qualification or a subject-linked university entrance qualification. This professional education lasts two to four years (depending on previous education), during which time the Childhood Pedagogues work at least 50% in an early childhood or out-of-school care setting. One entry requirement is at least 800 hours of practical experience. The age range covered is 0–16 years.

There are regional differences in the professional category of Childhood Pedagogues *HF*. In French-speaking Switzerland (Romandie), a diploma from a higher technical college is a prerequisite for working as a co-educator or group leader (tertiary level of education), while in German-speaking Switzerland only a Federal Certificate of Proficiency (EFZ) is expected (secondary level of education) (kibesuisse 2015). In the German-speaking part of Switzerland, HF Childhood Pedagogues often work as early childhood centre directors or as pedagogical managers in larger organisations. In the European comparison of qualifications (Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft 2015), Childhood Pedagogues *HF* are classified at EQF level 5 and ISCED level 5 (Federal Statistical Office 2015).

Table 4

Switzerland: Childhood Pedagogue *HF*

Job title in German: *Kindheitspädagogin / Kindheitspädagoge HF* **Job title in French**: *éducateur de l'enfance / éducatrice de l'enfance ES*[9] **Job title in Italian**: *educatore dell'infanzia / educatrice dell'infanzia SSS*[10] **Profile:** Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: Apprenticeship proficiency certificate (EFZ, CFC, AFC) ***or*** general university qualification ***or*** vocational baccalaureate with between 400 and 800 hours of work experience
Professional studies: 2 to 4 years depending on previous education at a Higher Vocational College, at least 50% in a childcare setting
Award: Diploma in Childhood Education • *Diplom HF* (German-speaking Switzerland) • *Diplôme fédéral ES* (French-speaking Switzerland) • *Diploma federale SSS* (Italian-speaking Switzerland)
ECTS credits: n/a **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011**: 5
Main fields of work: Early childhood centres, out-of-school care

In Switzerland, Kindergarten Teachers receive their professional education at Universities of Teacher Education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*). Admission requirements are a general or subject-specific university entrance qualification, or a vocational training EFZ with a specialised preliminary course. The three-year programme qualifies students to teach not only in kindergarten but, in most cantons, also in the first two (or three) grades of primary school. Training at a University of Teacher Education is completed with a BA Pre Primary and Primary Education after attaining 180 ECTS credits. Kindergarten teachers are classified at EQF level 6 in the European comparison of qualifications (Swiss Confederation 2015). The ISCED category is 6 (Federal Statistical Office 2015).

[9] *ES École Supérieures* (French-speaking Switzerland)
[10] *SSS Scuole Specializzate Superiori* (Italian-speaking Switzerland)

Table 5

Switzerland: Kindergarten Teacher

Job title in German: *Kindergartenlehrperson* **Job title in French**: *enseignant / enseignante en école enfantine* **Job title in Italian**: *docente di scuola dell'infanzia* **Profile**: Pre-primary (and Primary) Education Professional
Entry requirements: General or subject-specific university entrance qualification or vocational training EFZ /CFC/AFC with a specialised preliminary course
Professional studies: 3 years at a University of Teacher Education
Award: Bachelor (BA Pre Primary and Primary Education)
ECTS credits: 180 **EQF level**: 6 **ISCED 2011**: 6
Main fields of work: Kindergarten – in most cases also for the first two-three grades of primary school

Ideally, a **Social Pedagogue HF** or **FH** would be responsible for the management of out-of-school care. The **HF** programme (*éducateur / éducatrice sociale ES, educatore / educatrice sociale SSS*) is similar to that of Childhood Pedagogue (see *Table 4*). The **FH** programme is usually a three-year full-time course at a University of Applied Sciences for Social Work and is completed with the federal diploma "Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Science in Social Work". Compared to the HF training, the scientific-theoretical content of the FH training outweighs the practical content (SDBB n.d.) Social Pedagogues HF are classified at EQF level 5 in the European comparison of qualifications (Swiss Confederation 2015). The ISCED category is 5. Social Pedagogues FH are classified at EQF level 6 (Swiss Confederation 2015). The ISCED category is 6 (Federal Statistical Office 2015).

Table 6

Switzerland: Social Pedagogue

Job title in German: Sozialpädagogin/Sozialpädagoge HF, FH **Job title in French:** *éducateur social / éducatrice sociale ES, HES*[11] **Job title in Italian:** *educatore / educatrice sociale SSS, SUP*[12] **Profile**: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: HF, ES, SSS – see *Table 4*. **FH, HES, SUP –** General or subject-specific university entrance qualification *or* Diploma HF
Professional studies: HF – see *Table 4.* **FH** – As a rule, 3 years full-time study at a University of Applied Sciences for Social Work
Award: Bachelor (BA/BSc) in Social Work
ECTS credits: n/a (HF), 180 (FH) **EQF level**: 5 (HF), 6 (FH) **ISCED 2011**: 5 (HF), 6 (FH)
Main field of work: Out-of-school care

[11] HES, *Haute École Sociale*

[12] SUP, *Scuola Universitaria Professionale*

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Childcare Specialist (*Fachperson Betreuung – Fachrichtung Kinder, FaBe*)

A Childcare Specialist FaBe accompanies children and their families as they settle into the new childcare situation. They care for infants and toddlers and develop a relationship with them that meets their needs. They accompany children in group situations and support the inclusion of children with disabilities in the group. They record educational and developmental processes and plan suitable offers and activities with co-workers. They use their broad repertoire of creative and musical tools to carry out these activities (SAVOIRSOCIAL 2020a). *Table 7* shows which competences are supported during professional education or apprenticeship.

Table 7
Switzerland: Childcare Specialist *FaBe*
Competence areas (SAVOIRSOCIAL 2020a, 8)

Applying transversal competences
– Act according to one's own professional role – Reflect on one's own work – Shape professional relationships – Communicate appropriately for the situation and target group – Collaborate to overcome conflict
Performing everyday routines
– Planning one's own work – Structuring the daily schedule with children – Protecting privacy and providing opportunities for retreat – Designing the daily environment – Carrying out household tasks – Preparing and accompanying mealtimes – Creating an environment that promotes movement – Supporting personal hygiene and personal care – Acting appropriately in accident, illness and emergency situations
Enabling autonomy and participation
– Enabling and accompanying participation in social and cultural life – Supporting children in decision-making processes – Supporting social contacts and relationships
Working in an organisation and a team
– Working together as a team – Working together inter-professionally with other professionals – Working together with relatives and other caregivers – Contributing to the quality management process – Carrying out general administrative tasks
Acting in specific support situations
– Accompanying children and their families during the settling-in period – Accompanying and shaping transitions in relation to children and groups – Forming relationships with infants and toddlers and carrying out personal care – Accompanying and supporting children in group situations
Supporting education and development, maintaining and promoting quality of life
– Assist in recording and documenting educational and developmental processes – Participate in the planning of educational and developmental support services – Stimulate and implement group and child-centred activities – Participate in analysing and evaluating the educational and developmental activities

Childhood Pedagogue *HF*

Childhood Pedagogues *HF* are trained to develop, reflect and further develop pedagogical concepts; to observe children and document their developmental steps; to create stimulating learning environments; to design transitions between children's learning stages; to contribute professional knowledge to the cooperation with other professionals; to involve parents and other caregivers in the daily care routine. In addition, Childcare Pedagogues are prepared for taking on leadership tasks such as the management of a childcare institution as well as the staff employed, organisational and administrative tasks and working on quality development (SDBB n.d.).

The IPE curriculum includes the following:

- Pedagogical and psychological basics
- Didactics and methodology
- Education, upbringing and development of the child
- Work with parents
- Cooperation with professionals
- Social, pedagogical, political environment
- Teamwork and leadership
- Administration and organisation
- Reflection on professional practice (function, role and tasks)

Table 8 shows the Swiss framework curriculum for courses at the higher vocational colleges *HF* for the study of childhood pedagogy.

Table 8

Switzerland: Framework plan for courses in "Childhood Pedagogy *HF*" at Higher Vocational Colleges – Competence areas (SAVOIRSOCIAL 2021a, 5)

1. Planning and implementation of pedagogy				
1.1 Recording and analysing the child's living environment	1.2 Analysing each child's educational and developmental pathways	1.3 Developing and advancing the pedagogical programme	1.4 Stimulating educational processes in each child and in the group	1.5 Initiating and maintaining educational partnerships
2. Guiding and supporting children in everyday activities				
2.1 Building and shaping a relationship with each child	2.2 Organising rooms and the spatial environment to promote learning in a safe and needs-oriented way.	2.3 Observing individual children and the group in everyday activities and adjusting pedagogical approaches accordingly	2.4 Working with groups of children and shaping the group situation to promote each child's development	2.5 Supporting transitions
3. Developing a professional identity				
3.1 Coping with challenging and changing situations	3.2 Understanding and reflecting on the professional role			
4. Process analysis and documentation				

4.1 Analysing pedagogical activities	4.2 Documenting pedagogical activities and processes			
5. Working in a professional environment				
5.1 Team work	5.2 Cooperating with other professionals and support services	5.3 Building and maintaining networks		
6. Advancing the profession				
6.1 Reflecting on one's own professional work in a socio-political context	6.2 Developing and implementing innovative ideas and approaches for one's own field of work	6.3 Advocacy for professional interests		
7. Participating in developing the organisation/institution				
7.1 Taking on leadership and tasks of responsibility	7.2 Developing and assuring quality	7.3 Developing and sustaining internal and external communication	7.4 Developing and leading projects	

Social Pedagogue *HF*

In the study of Social Pedagogy *HF*, competence specifications include joint planning and development of social pedagogical work, accompaniment and support in everyday and transitional situations, development of one's own professional identity, process analysis and documentation, work in a professional environment, and participation in the development of the organisation/institution (SDBB n.d.). According to the framework curriculum for Social Pedagogues *HF*, the following work areas and competences are acquired during the study programme (SAVOIRSOCIAL 2015):

- Accompanying people in coping with difficult life situations and support them in goal-oriented ways
- Sharing and helping to shape the daily lives of clients
- Enable, support and promote the social participation and integration of clients into society
- Developing and activating resources for shaping clients' lives
- Working with client systems
- Cooperate in the socio-educational team, with other professionals and in the organisation
- Know the legal and political environment and include it in the implementation of the socio-educational mandate
- Reflect on and further develop one's own person, professional identity and professional activities

Table 9
Switzerland: Draft framework curriculum for courses in "Social Pedagogy" at Higher Vocational Colleges *HF* – Competence areas (SAVOIRSOCIAL 2021b, 6)

1. Joint planning and development of socio-pedagogical work				
1.1 Taking note of the living context of	1.2 Determining support needs in a participative way	1.3 Planning and implementing goals	1.4 Cooperating with the family and the	

the accompanied person	and developing these together	and strategies together with the accompanied person or group	social environment	
2. Guidance and support in everyday and transitional situations				
2.1 Building and shaping a relationship to the accompanied person	2.2 Strengthening the self-efficacy of the accompanied person and promoting their self-determination	2.3 Support participation in social life	2.4 Organise the environment and conditions according to needs	2.5 Support group situations and involvement
2.6 Providing everyday support for accompanied persons according to needs	2.7 Accompanying in situations of transition and crisis			
3. Developing a professional identity				
3.1 Coping with challenging and changing situations	3.2 Understanding and reflecting on the professional role			
4. Process analysis and documentation				
4.1 Analysing and adapting socio-pedagogical processes and activities	4.2 Documenting processes and writing reports			
5. Working in a professional environment				
5.1 Working in a team	5.2 Cooperating with other specialists and support agencies	5.3 Building and sustaining networks		
6. Advancing the profession				
6.1 Reflecting on one's own work in a socio-political context	6.2 Developing and implementing innovative ideas and approaches in one's own field of work	6.3 Advocacy for professional interests		
7. Participating in the development of processes and projects				
7.1 Taking on leadership tasks and responsibilities	7.2 Developing and ensuring quality	7.3 Developing and ensuring internal and external communication	7.4 Developing and leading projects	

Social Pedagogue *FH*

In the social work degree programme at the Universities of Applied Sciences, topics such as upbringing and education, coping with everyday life, social work organisations, the welfare state

and social economy, neighbourhood work, and others are taught as elective modules. Practical training takes place in the professional field of social pedagogy. Theory and practice are interlinked and consolidated through project work (SDBB n.d.). *Table 10* shows the contents of the Bachelor's programme in Social Work at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) as an example, valid from 2019.

Table 10
Switzerland: Content of the Bachelor's degree programme in social work (ZHAW n.d.)

Compulsory modules in the main study programme	
Module 1	History and theories of social work
Module 2	Development and socialisation
Module 3	Basics of professional work
Module 4	Introduction to research work
Module 5	Portfolio 1
Module 6	Legal and ethical foundations of social work
Module 7	Social and political framework conditions of social work
Module 8	Social change, social problems, social inequality
Module 9	Organisations in the social sector
Module 10	Case study workshop
Module 11	Portfolio 2
Elective courses in the main study programme	
– Participation, involvement, integration – Social space, culture and community development – Phases of life, transitions and generations – Deviance, delinquency and crime prevention – Vulnerability and interventions	

Kindergarten Teachers

Kindergarten Teachers in Switzerland study at a University of Teacher Education (PH). They obtain qualified teacher status for work in pre-primary education and, depending on the university, for the first two or the first three primary school years. *Table 11* gives an overview of the study content, using the example of the study programme in kindergarten and primary education at the University of Teacher Education St. Gallen with a teaching qualification for kindergarten to third grade (PHSG 2019).

Table 11:
Switzerland: Content of the Bachelor study programme in pre-primary and primary education (PHSG 2019, 34)

	ECTS credits
Core studies	
Professional and study skills	4
Education and reference sciences	31
Languages	10
Nature, mankind and society/mathematics	20
Design, music and movement/sport	30
Learning an instrument	3
Focus studies	4
Thematic week: writing and learning in Regional Didactic Centres	1
Field studies	40
Specialist studies	16

Bachelor thesis	8
Self-directed studies	
Thematic weeks (3 weeks à 1 ECTS credit)	3
Optional subject studies or recognition of school-relevant achievements	7
Work in learning communities	3
Total	**180**

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Childcare Specialists (*Fachpersonen Betreuung – Fachrichtung Kinder, FaBe*) can complete a vocational baccalaureate either simultaneously (this increases the number of school days) or subsequently. Furthermore, after completing their vocational training, they can follow up with further studies to become a Childhood Pedagogue *HF*. The vocational baccalaureate or the qualification as a Childhood Pedagogue *HF* provides access to a university of applied sciences for a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Social Work and, with an additional specific preliminary course, to a study programme for a BA in Pre Primary and Primary Education at a University of Teacher Education.

Kindergarten Teachers with a BA in Pre Primary and Primary Education and Social Pedagogues with a BA/BSc in Social Work can complete a Master's programme as further education, for example the Master's in Early Childhood Studies (University of Teacher Education St. Gallen, PHSG), or the Master's in Early Childhood (University of Teacher Education Thurgau, PHTG).

What is missing is the possibility of a BA Early Childhood, which would offer a bridge to the Master's degree programmes in Early Childhood for Childcare Specialists with a vocational baccalaureate or for Childhood Pedagogues *HF*.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

In Switzerland's dual VET system, Childcare Specialists *FaBe* spend at least three days in a childcare setting (early childhood or out-of-school care) and Childhood Pedagogues *HF* at least 2½ days a week. Curricula for the respective training courses clearly specify which learning goals are to be worked towards at which learning site (training institution, childcare setting, interdisciplinary courses) (SAVOIRSOCIAL 2020a), whereby all learning goals are based on the defined competence specifications (see *chapter 4.2*). Learners/students are accompanied by vocational support staff (whose training is discussed in *chapter 2.3*). Whether those with a mentoring task are paid extra or allocated time for this work is not handled uniformly.

Students at the universities of teacher education sometimes have weekly field practice days and / or block practicum periods during their 3-year course of studies. At the University of Teacher Education St. Gallen, for example, 19 weeks are allocated to field studies and accompanying seminars, which together add up to 40 ECTS credits (PHSG 2019, p. 24). As explained in *chapter 2.3*, some field practice teachers have completed a CPD course focussing on the mentoring task and are additionally remunerated for accompanying students. Field practice is primarily about applying the theoretically acquired knowledge in practice. The specific content is defined individually by the universities of teacher education.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

In their study of continuing professional development offers in the field of childcare in German-speaking and French-speaking Switzerland, Geiss and Wallimann (2020) identified 40 training providers which, in 2018, advertised a total of 542 courses for childcare staff in early childhood and out-of-school care. These providers are either public (e.g. universities, universities of applied sciences and vocational schools) or private (e.g. limited liability companies, associations and foundations), with public providers accounting for almost 60% of the programmes offered. The CPD programmes can be divided into the following thematic groups: (1) *growing up* (e.g. babies, (language) development, health and nutrition); (2) *social* (e.g. everyday work, parental cooperation and pedagogy); and (3) *management, teamwork and organisational development* (e.g. administration, personnel management and reflection). Most of the training courses are full-day or multi-day courses (Geiss and Wallimann 2020).

CPD for Kindergarten Teachers may be school-based (SCHILF), courses offered at the cantonal level or courses offered by universities of teacher education. Teachers in the canton of St. Gallen, for example, are entitled to 3% of their working time (i.e. 57 hours per year for a 100% workload) for CPD (courses and peer observation) (Kanton St. Gallen, Amt für Volksschule 2021).

While entitlement to CPD is clearly regulated for Kindergarten Teachers, this is not always the case in the childcare sector. In several cantons, it is stipulated that providers should ensure accessibility to CPD for employees. In some cantons, attendance at CPD sessions is even a requirement, depending on the function. In their recommendations on the quality and financing of early childhood and out-of-school care, SODK and EDK (2022) emphasise that employees of childcare facilities should be enabled to attend regular training and further education courses. Time should be set aside for this in the calculation of the staffing ratio and the financing of CPD should be taken into account in the full costs per childcare place. Kibesuisse (2021b) recommends that its members offer three days per year for training and further education. Apart from these recommendations, there is no legal entitlement to days off and cost coverage for CPD in ECEC.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Wages for staff in the field of ECEC were below the average Swiss income of CHF 6,665 (€6,857) for the year 2020 (Federal Statistical Office 2022). The wage recommendations presented in *Table 12* for professional staff take into account the level of education, professional experience and additional tasks.

Table 12
Switzerland: Wage recommendations according to qualification (kibesuisse 2021b, 19-22)

Occupational group	**Annual income**
Childcare Specialist *FaBe*	52,000 – 76,099 CHF €53,498 – 78,291
Childhood Pedagogue *HF*	61,100 – 98,670 CHF €62,860 – 101,512

Occupational group	Annual income
Centre Director without a tertiary education (e.g. Social Pedagogue *HF*)	71,500 – 108,251 CHF €73,559 – 101,512
Centre Director with a tertiary-level qualification (e.g. Social Pedagogue *FH*)	78,000 – 115,401 CHF €80,247 – 118,725
Kindergarten Teacher (see Fehr 2020)	73,963 – 112,311 CHF €76,093 –115,546

In some cantons, Kindergarten Teachers still earn less than Primary School Teachers, even though they follow the same initial professional education (LCH 2018).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

In 2022, more than 75% of mothers in Switzerland worked part time (Federal Statistical Office 2023e) and an above-average number of women work in the social sector (IWSB 2016). It is therefore not surprising that part-time work is widespread in this sector. There are no nation-wide statistics on full- and part-time employment in the childcare sector. According to the latest figures from the Federal Statistical Office, 76.8% of Kindergarten Teachers in public schools and 19.3% in private schools work less than 50% of a full-time position. In public schools 14.6% and in private schools 42.3% are employed between 50% and 89% of a full-time position, and 8.6% of Kindergarten Teachers in public and 38.4% in private schools work more than 90% of a full-time position (Federal Statistical Office (2023d).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Measures to support newly qualified or newly recruited staff are not regulated in the childcare sector.

In the majority of cases, Kindergarten Teachers complete a form of induction and are assigned a teacher mentor who provides support during the first year of employment. Only a few cantons do not offer an induction procedure. This introduction into the profession is often carried out by the universities of teacher education in cooperation with the local primary schools where kindergartens are based (SKBF 2011).

7.4 Non-contact time

In its guidelines, kibesuisse (2020, 9) recommends adding 10% to the childcare ratio for indirect pedagogical work without children. However, this part of the work is not generally regulated. SODK and EDK (2022) also explicitly recommend including non-contact time in the staffing ratio for work that is not directly pedagogical (team meetings, training sessions, etc.).

The working time for Kindergarten Teachers is structured as follows (using the example of the Canton of St. Gallen): 88% teaching (planning, preparation, implementation, evaluation), 4% for pupils (counselling, support, work with parents), 5% school (pedagogical-administrative organisation of the school), 3% teacher (individual further education) (Canton of St. Gallen, Amt für Volksschule 2021).

7.5 Current staffing issues

In the childcare and education sector of ECEC, there has been a shortage of staff for some time (LCH 2021; SRF 2022). This is aggravated by the high turnover of staff, which makes both sustainable teamwork and continuous caring for individual children problematic. This turnover is at

least partly a consequence of the low pay and low prestige of the profession, as well as the high proportion of untrained staff. In addition, despite high popularity among trainees, the childcare professions get little social prestige (Stamm 2017). This is exacerbated by the fact that due to the shortage of teachers (LCH 2021) in Switzerland, more and more specialist staff are migrating from the early childhood sector to schools and kindergartens (ZLV 2022). The childcare sector consists of a noticeable number of younger employees, a high part-time rate and a low proportion of employees with a migration background. It is also worth noting that up to one third of staff do not have the appropriate formal education (IWSB 2016). Particularly revealing is the insight that in early childhood and out-of-school settings, direct work with children is usually carried out by staff who do not have relevant qualifications (Burger et al. 2017; IWSB 2016), as qualified staff are entrusted with management and training functions. Both wages and employment conditions in ECEC differ to such a large extent from canton to canton and from provider to provider that it is almost impossible to make nationwide statements (Stamm 2017).

In terms of the age distribution of Kindergarten Teachers, in public schools more than half of the teachers (51.6%) are between 40 and 60 years old, in private schools slightly less than half (44.4%) are in this age group. Only 15.8% (in public schools) and 18.2% (in private schools) are younger than 30 years (Federal Statistical Office 2023d).

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

In the last two decades the focus of ECEC in Switzerland has been on the expansion of childcare services. Currently, pedagogical quality is prominently discussed in research, practice, politics and society (Swiss UNESCO Commission 2019, Faeh and Vogt 2021). While in French-speaking Switzerland educators hold higher professional qualifications, in German-speaking Switzerland an increase in professional qualification levels is necessary. In order to improve pedagogical quality, educators should acquire a competence profile at tertiary level. Another focus of quality development should be continuing professional development of educators (Faeh and Vogt 2021).

As part of the research conducted by the Office for Labour and Social Policy Studies on behalf of SAVOIRSOCIAL (Dubach et al. 2018), the following qualification needs were identified in the field of early childhood policy:

Table 13
Switzerland: Qualification needs in the field of early childhood policy (according to Dubach et al. 2018).

Professionals without leadership function	Professionals with a leadership function
– Educational orientation – Accompaniment of children's learning and developmental processes – Inclusion and handling of diversity – Cooperation with parents – Reflection skills – Early language support	– Educational orientation – Provision of initial and continuing education – Using the available provision of initial and continuing education – Competence building through initial and continuing education – Conceptual work – Cooperation with parents – Professional and practical guidance of staff – Qualification needs of centre leaders

Dubach et al. (2018) came to the conclusion that an explicit educational mandate should be formulated for the institutions of the early years 0–3 and that adequate resources should be made available for this purpose. Based on the results of this study, SAVOIRSOCIAL has decided to strengthen the vocational baccalaureate (*Berufsmatura*) that can be acquired alongside initial education/training in order to promote permeability to the university level (e.g. to universities of teacher education that offer Master's degree courses in the field of early childhood) and thus contribute to the professionalisation of the occupational field, as well as to examine new CPD offers in the field of early language support. Furthermore, the HF degree in childhood pedagogy should be promoted in German-speaking Switzerland (SAVOIRSOCIAL 2019).

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

In Switzerland, central topics of ECEC, such as cooperation with parents and guardians, equal opportunities for all children and valuing diversity, are currently being explored in research and further training initiatives (Faeh and Vogt 2021). However, there is an acute need for more research and further training, as well as for the development of concepts for cooperation between professionals from childcare centres, Kindergarten Teachers and caregivers from out-of-school care. This is necessary to ensure process quality for the children throughout the day during the transitions from kindergarten to out-of-school care (lunch break), back to kindergarten, and then back to out-of-school care (Faeh and Vogt 2021).

Furthermore, continuous efforts to support the professionalisation of staff and to increase the level of qualification in ECEC are needed. Further training with a focus on interaction between educator and child is a particularly important aspect of enhancing process quality in ECEC. In addition, a common focus on process quality of all professionals (from childcare centres, kindergarten and out-of-school care) and close cooperation with parents and guardians is necessary to achieve better quality and thus equal educational opportunities for all children (Faeh and Vogt 2021).

In a recent Federal Council report on early childhood policy in Switzerland, existing gaps and potential for improvement regarding government activities in this area were summarised from the perspective of various stakeholders. A lack of statistical data, exchange of information and experience, coordination, access to services, quality and funding of services were identified (Swiss Confederation 2021). In the following, four current research projects focussing on ECEC staff are presented.

Quality development in childcare through web-mediated further training on supportive staff-child interaction in heterogeneous groups of young children (iQuaKi)

Source: University of Constance 2022, PHTG 2018 (see *References* for further details)

Aims and methods: In the first phase of the project, an online training course for educational professionals was developed. Training was aimed at professionals in childcare centres for children aged 0–4 years. Aim was to increase the quality of the staff–child interactions. This training was developed on the basis of established English-language formats and adapted for German-speaking countries.

The impact of the training was evaluated in the second project phase. For this purpose, 63 professionals participated in the training. They answered questionnaires before, immediately following and six months after the training, e.g. on their self-efficacy, reflective competence and pedagogical competence. Both professionals and parents answered questionnaires on children's social-emotional competences. In 30 facilities, standardised observations of quality of interaction according to CLASS Toddler (La Paro et al. 2012) were carried out at all three time points mentioned.

Selected findings: The evaluation shows that participants were very satisfied with the training. Professionals themselves perceive changes in their actions (e.g. more sensitive interactions) and their attitude (e.g. stronger consideration of the child's perspective). Initial analyses of the observations show that quality of interaction also improved after the training. In addition, findings confirm that a good quality of interaction between professional and child has a beneficial effect on their education: in particular, active learning support has a positive influence on children's learning behaviour (commitment and motivation).

Implications: The training will continue to exist as a CPD offer for pedagogical professionals after the end of the project and thus makes an important contribution to quality development in early childhood education. Furthermore, results of the study emphasise the relevance of quality of interaction and show how quality development can succeed through online training.

Mobilisation and development of interactional competences in professional relationships with parents: the context of child rearing *[Mobilisation et développement des compétences interactionnelles dans les relations professionnelles avec les parents: le contexte de l'éducation de l'enfance]*

Source: University of Geneva 2022 (see *References* for further details)

Aims and methods: The project aims to better understand how Childhood Pedagogues build relationships with parents in verbal interactions and how the skills to conduct such interactions can be developed in professional development programmes. The project uses video-ethnographic methods in two childcare centres in the canton of Geneva with different profiles in terms of socio-economic and geographical location.

Selected findings: Results are not currently available (April 2023).

Implications: The research findings will contribute to the professionalisation of Childcare Specialists and develop intervention and training methods based on the principles of interaction analysis in adult education.

Early language development: international research findings and a review of early language development in Switzerland

Source: Vogt, F., S. Stern und L. Filliettaz 2022 (see *References* for further details)

Aims and methods: The focus was on effective design of early language support for children aged from birth up to 4 years in Switzerland in the context of the various measures taken by cantons. The international research situation was presented based on around 700 scientific articles in German, English and French. Findings were condensed into a typology. Twelve case studies describe the different approaches in Switzerland.

Selected findings: Results show that attending an early education programme, e.g. childcare, parent-child group or playgroup, has a positive effect on school language skills. However, this is conditional on good pedagogical quality. Everyday integrated language support is more effective than separate groups and programmes. Parental education is also essential.

Implications: Further professionalisation of Childcare Specialists is urgently needed.

Coaching processes in language support in childcare settings

Source: PHSG 2022 - St.Gallen University of Teacher Education (see *References* for further details)

Aims and methods: This sub-project of the "Integrated support of German-language learning in childcare settings" study focuses on the research gap concerning effective coaching processes and the characteristics of successful coaching in ECEC. This research investigates how the coach (expert in German language development) and the coachee (professional caregiver) co-construct a common understanding of language development situation and professional practice that ensures a high quality of interaction in early childhood education. Of interest are specific situations that occur in the coaching interaction and how they are dealt with by coach and coachee. Coaches conduct an intensive coaching process with regular sessions every fortnight over one year. The 30 to 45–minute coaching sessions are conducted on-site in the childcare centres. During this process, three coaching sessions are recorded, and then individual interviews are conducted with the coach or coachee. Approximately 10 sessions will be studied. For data analysis, interaction analysis or grounded theory are planned.

Selected findings: Results are expected in 2025.

Implications: Providing new insights into coaching: showing a variety of different types of coaching and how coaching processes/conversations can be approached.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Professionalisation initiatives for those working in the early years sector (0–3 years) in Switzerland are urgently needed. There are prerequisite conditions, however. The first is the possibility of retaining professionals in their jobs for longer periods of time with better pay, as the current high staff turnover undermines professionalisation. Second, Childcare Specialists should be given the opportunity to obtain a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood. This would enable care professionals with a vocational baccalaureate (*Berufsmatura*) and Childhood Pedagogues *HF* to study at a university of applied sciences and, after obtaining a BA in Early Childhood, to complete a Master's programme. This way, suitable candidates for higher education would not migrate to the social services sector (with a BA/BSc Social Work) and thus partly leave the early childhood sector. This would be an important development, especially considering the fact that SAVOIRSOCIAL (2019) recommends explicitly promoting the vocational baccalaureate and the initial professional education of Childhood Pedagogues *HF* in German-speaking Switzerland. Professionalisation initiatives in the early childhood sector, however, also needs to include the provision of working time for professionals so that they can attend existing CPD courses and programmes during working hours. It would be important here – as called for by Faeh and Vogt (2021) – to offer courses focussing on improving process quality.

When looking at the **CPD topics** identified by Dubach et al. (2018) for professionals with and without leadership functions, it is striking that both groups have similar needs in terms of training. Above all, the topics of educational orientation, support for children's learning and development processes and cooperation with parents stand out. It is immanently important that educational orientation and monitoring of children's learning and development processes are not considered in isolation according to age group, but discussed in joint concepts for cooperation

between childcare centres, kindergartens and out-of-school care. Entering kindergarten, many children do not only switch from a childcare setting to kindergarten, but also from a childcare centre to an out-of-school setting. This double transition could be facilitated for children with a common educational orientation and concepts for cooperation. Guided transitions could take place with the involvement of parents, in institutions that have common understandings. In some communities, such transitions are better facilitated than in others (e.g. visiting days in out-of-school care with lunch, employees from out-of-school care as assistant workers in kindergarten). This type of cooperation between the three actors needs to take place more often and be explicitly promoted.

A **coordination of ECEC provision** as well as **national statistics for the early childhood sector** which provide information about use, financing, and above all, quality of provision, is a Swiss policy demand (Swiss Confederation 2021); it is particularly important for researchers in the field of early childhood, who depend on relevant statistical data and information as a basis for their studies. Switzerland has a broad and dynamic research practice in the field of early education in general and in early language development in particular, but what is missing is an institutionalised collaboration between the relevant training institutions (higher vocational colleges and vocational schools) and the higher education institutions conducting scientific research (universities of applied sciences, universities of teacher education and universities in general) (Vogt, Stern, and Filliettaz 2022). What early education staff in Switzerland need from research are, on the one hand, studies on the interplay of influencing factors in the course of development and, on the other hand, effectiveness studies on pedagogical approaches and measures. In addition, early education services should be reviewed and further developed across the country to ensure pedagogical process quality.

International Cooperation

Switzerland is represented in international expert committees such as the *OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care ECEC*, *Eurydice Network* and *European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education*. Swiss experts have contributed to a European project and reports on inclusive early childhood education and care (*Inclusive Early Childhood Education IECE*) of the European Agency (2017) as well as to the OECD study on *Quality Beyond Regulations* with an in-depth country report on the situation of early childhood education and care in Switzerland (Faeh und Vogt 2021).

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

SWITZERLAND

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Switzerland is a federal state with four language regions: German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic. German is the official language in 17 of the 26 cantons (mainly in north-west, east and central Switzerland) and there are additional official languages in four other cantons. French is the official language in four cantons (mainly in the west, i.e. Romandie), and in two others it is spoken in addition to other languages. Italian is an official language in Ticino and Graubünden, and Rhaeto-Romanic is an official language only in Graubünden (Infos Schweiz 2015).

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC provision are **childcare centre** (*Kindertagesstätte; crèche; nido dell'infanzia*, 0–3) and **pre-primary class** (*Kindergarten/Vorschule/Eingangsstufe; école enfantine/cycle 1; scuola dell'infanzia,* 4–5)[1]. Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Switzerland

1817	First custodial institution for young children established in German-speaking St. Gallen during the peak of widespread famine in Europe; five more are subsequently opened in Geneva and the canton of Bern.
1826	First childcare institution established in Geneva for working parents, based on the English infant school model
1830	The first infant school for poor children opened in Zurich.
1844	The first *scuola dell'infanzia* is established in Ticino based on Italian models.
1845	In German-speaking Switzerland, the first Froebel-inspired kindergarten opens in Riesbach near Zürich.
1848	In French-speaking Switzerland, *écoles enfantines* are included in the School Act.
1st half of 19th century	Infant schools and kindergartens develop as mass institutions, with up to 150 children (3 to 5 year-olds) being supervised by one person. In 1844 there were 127 such settings.
2nd half of 19th century	The first private facilities (crèches, school-age care) are established.
1870	First crèche is founded in Basel as a service for working-class families in which both parents have to work; the focus is on hygiene and care rather than educational activities.
1873	The first training institute for kindergarten pedagogues is opened in St. Gallen, offering a one-year professional education course.
1874	Compulsory primary education is introduced, but handled very differently depending on the canton.
1881	The Swiss Kindergarten Association is founded, through which the kindergarten pedagogues receive their diploma. The Association recommends extending the course of professional education to two years.
1907	The Swiss Crèche Association is founded, promoting the expansion of crèches/nurseries, especially in German-speaking Switzerland. Among the staff are paediatric nurses and nuns; the training is extremely varied and is not regulated. Attempts to standardise the training of staff remained unsuccessful until well into the 20th century.

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In Switzerland, the relevant formats are **0–3** and **4–5** years.

1942	The Kindergarten Association publishes a comprehensive set of criteria for professional education/training.
Pre-1960s	The traditional role of women sees them as home-makers and caring for children as their responsibility, which is why both the employment rates of women and the number of children to be cared for are declining. If children have to be cared for, this is mainly done by grandmothers.
1961	In Geneva, the *École de Jardinières d'Enfants* is founded for the training of staff working in crèches/nurseries.
1967	The Kindergarten Association publishes a framework curriculum for work in kindergartens, which is based on the primary school curriculum.
Post 1960/ 1970s	New kinds of facilities spring up, mainly to provide care for children with a migration background. Women's associations organise different approaches towards extra-familial care; these include new ideas about pedagogy and go beyond the mere supervision of children.
1972	The Crèche Association issues regulations for a two-year apprenticeship as an early childhood educator and opens its own vocational training school.
1973	Family day care associations are founded.
1970s and 1980s	All-day schools are established, enabling comprehensive services for school-age children. Crèches (now often referred to as "Kita") increasingly employ pedagogically trained staff.
1982	The kindergarten framework curriculum is revised and expanded.
1990-2000	Kindergartens come under the responsibility of the 26 cantons. Some cantons pass legislation regarding the funding of nurseries.
2003	A parliamentary initiative pushed through a kick-off financing family-supplementary care. New childcare places (crèches, day care, supplementary school care) are funded by law; by 2018, the law supports the creation of 57,400 new childcare places.
2007	Despite the expansion, there is still a lack of childcare options outside the family. According to a survey of parents, around 20% of children of pre-school and school age cannot be cared for to the desired extent.
2022/23	A parliamentary initiative calls for the transformation of the kick-off funding into permanent funding. In March 2023, the National Council approved. The Council of States still has to approve the matter.

Sources: Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz 2012; Geschichte der sozialen Sicherheit in der Schweiz 2019; Geiss and Westberg 2020

ECEC system type and auspices[2]

In Switzerland, the ECEC system is divided into a childcare sector for children under 4 years of age and an education sector for 4 to 6 year-olds consisting of pre-primary provision in schools.

The cantons and municipalities are responsible for childcare facilities, in most cases under the cantonal departments for family and social policy. The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Social Affairs (SODK) has a co-ordinating role between cantons on related issues.

The education system is decentralised, in line with the federal structures in Switzerland. The main responsibility for education lies with the 26 cantons, each of which has its own legal provisions. The cantonal department for education manages, coordinates and supervises the education system in the respective canton. The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) is responsible for coordination across cantons in education-related issues (EDK 2021a).

[2] The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Switzerland provided orientation on legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

General objectives and legislative framework

Childcare sector

In a joint declaration of the SODK and EDK on early childhood education and care (Childcare network 2018), it was stipulated that childcare provision should above all be needs-based, accessible and affordable and, in principle, open to all children. The two ministerial conferences intend to co-operate further in developing the quality of services and facilitating transitions between provision. The legal framework for the childcare sector for children under 4 years of age is provided by the Federal Law on Financial Aid for Extra-Familial Childcare (Fedlex 2021a) and the Ordinance on the Admission of Foster Children (PAVO) (Fedlex 2021b).

Education sector

In pre-primary settings, besides Christian, humanistic and democratic values, basic principles are promoting equal opportunities, gender equity and mutual respect (Curriculum 21). Under the Federal Constitution (1999, Art. 62 - Fedlex 2021c), the cantons are obliged to coordinate the education system. Through inter-cantonal agreements (2009), the Swiss school concordat HarmoS (Educa 2021) regulates the structures and goals of compulsory schooling, which also includes the pre-primary level for 4 to 6 year-olds. The EDK ensures the enactment of the concordat, supports the cantons in its implementation and reviews the educational goals achieved (EDK 2021a).

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Attendance at early childhood settings for children under 4 is voluntary. There is no legal entitlement to a place for under 4 year-olds - except in the canton of Basel-Stadt (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 52, 200).

For over 4 year-olds, attendance in pre-primary classes is usually, but not always, compulsory. The exact age at which children may enrol is determined by the cantons. In most cases, they are between 4 and 5 years old when they start pre-primary provision. Parents have a say regarding the age of entry if there are special reasons.

In some German-speaking cantons, attendance is not compulsory or is only compulsory for one year. Since 2015/16, the canton of Ticino has offered an additional optional year in addition to the two compulsory preschool years, meaning that 3 year-olds can also attend.

Primary school (grade 1) begins when the children are between 6 and 7 years old.

Main types of provision

Childcare sector

Childcare centres (*Kindertagesstätten, Kitas, Krippen / crèches / nidi dell'infanzia*)
For children from 3 months to 4 years of age, full-day or half-day ECEC centres are available and supervised by the respective canton.

Home-based settings (*Tagesfamilien / accueils familial de jour / familiglie diurne*)
In addition to centre-based settings, home-based childcare provision is also available, both for young children and for school-age children. In 2021, 5.6% of children under the age of 4 were cared for in home-based settings, 4.2% by nannies, au-pairs and babysitters (BFS 2023i).

There are few national statistical data available on the number of children attending centre-based settings for children under 4 years, or on the number of settings.

In Switzerland, **grandparents** are a widely used **informal** form of childcare. In 2021, 36.1% of children under 4 years of age were cared for by grandparents, compared with 34.3% attending centre-based settings and 10.3% by persons from the neighbourhood/extended family (excluding grandparents) (BFS 2023i).

Most centre-based settings are open 11 to 12 hours a day, usually from 7:00 to 18:00/19:00.

Education sector

Pre-primary classes (*Vorschulen, Kindergärten, erster Lernzyklus / écoles enfantine, cycle 1 / scuole dell'infanzia)*

Pre-primary classes for 4 to 6 year-olds are attached to primary schools. In some cantons, *cycle 1* is combined with the first two grades of primary school. In this organisational form, known as *Grundstufe / Basisstufe* in German-speaking areas or *cycle primaire 1* in the French-speaking regions, 4- to 7/8 year-olds are taught together (Eurydice 2023).

Table 1

Switzerland: Number of pre-primary units and children in pre-primary classes, 2005 – 2022

	Pre-primary units 4 to 6 year-olds	Number of children in pre-primary classes*
2010/11	4,994	148,879
2015/16	5,457	170,576
2021/22	5,436	181,158

Sources: BFS 2023a, *BFS 2023f

Provider structures

In both the childcare and education sectors, there are public and private ECEC settings, or facilities that employers set up for their employees.

In 2021/22, the majority of **pre-primary units** (4 to 6 year-olds) were public (92.6% or 5,034). Just 7.2% (391) were private, non-subsidised facilities and only 11 (0.2%) were both private and subsidised.

Table 2

Switzerland: Number of pre-primary units according to provider type, 2021/22

Setting	Provider			Total
	Public	Private		
		Non-subsidised	subsidised	
Pre-primary units	5,034	391	11	5,436

Source: BFS 2023a

In 2015, 90% of **childcare centres** for children under 4 were privately organised as associations, limited liability companies, foundations, or company ECEC centres, with two-thirds of the associations operating one to three centres (Childcare network 2015, 5)[3]. No recent statements can

[3] The Childcare Network was dissolved in 2020 and is continued by Alliance Enfance: https://www.alliance-enfance.ch/

be made on the relationship between public and private services, as this information is often missing at cantonal level (Stern, von Dach, Fries, and Iten 2021).

In 2022, there were a total of 340 childcare centres (156 providers) for children under 4 years of age in Zurich, of which 312 were private with a contract (91.8%), 18 without a contract and only 10 were municipal. They offered 12,185 places in total (City of Zurich 2023, 4). Whether this ratio can also be observed in other parts of Switzerland cannot be statistically proven.

Participation rates in regulated provision

At the federal level, no consistent country-wide statistics are compiled on the number of childcare places or their usage. Also, not all cantons keep such statistics. In the national statistics database, data for under 4 year-olds are collected only for some aspects relating to childcare provision. In the education sector, data for 4 to 6 year-olds are generally subsumed under the wider age-group of 4 to 12 year-olds in primary education. Children between 4 years of age and the start of primary school are not listed separately.

National statistics report for 2021 that three-quarters (75.2%) of under-3s used *some kind of* extra-familial care for up to 29 hours per week, with 23% being cared for more than 30 hours; the shares of 4 to 12 year-olds were 89.7% and 9.1% respectively (BFS 2023j).

However, according to Eurostat data on Switzerland, which focus on *centre-based* settings, a quarter of children under 3 years of age attended a childcare setting for up to 29 hours per week in 2021, while over two thirds did not attend a facility at all, as did over one-third of the over-3s (*Table 3*).

A recent analysis of attendance rates in 1,890 centre-based settings receiving start-up funding revealed the extent to which childcare for under 4 year-olds in Switzerland primarily takes place in the family: 21% of children attended on only one day per week, 35% on two days, 22% on three days, 10% on four days and only 12% on five days per week, i.e. full time (EDI 2020, 7). National statistics show that approximately 40% of all children up to three years attended centre-based childcare in 2018, with most children attending two or three days per week (Faeh and Vogt 2021, 15).

Also, in 2021, 37.3% of children between 3 years of age and first grade of primary school (pre-primary class/kindergarten) did not attend a centre-based setting whereas half of them attended an institution for more than 30 hours per week. An OECD source based on 2020 data indicates that 50% of 3 to 5 year-olds were enrolled in ECEC programmes and pre-primary education in Switzerland, compared to 87% on average across OECD countries (OECD.Stat 2023a).

Table 3

Switzerland: Enrolment rates according to age and duration of attendance in centre-based settings, 2010 to 2021

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to 2 years, in %	3 years up to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2010	1 to 29 hours	21.4	62.0
	Over 30 hours	4.6	9.9
	No enrolment in ECEC	74.0	28.0
2014	1 to 29 hours	24.0	56.9
	Over 30 hours	5.8	9.1
	No enrolment in ECEC	70.2	34.0
2017	1 to 29 hours	19.6	40.3
	Over 30 hours	6.0	12.6

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to 2 years, in %	3 years up to minimum compulsory school age, in %
	No enrolment in ECEC	74.4	47.1
2021	1 to 29 hours	25.1	50.1
	Over 30 hours	5.4	12.6
	No enrolment in ECEC	69.6	37.3

Source: Eurostat 2023b, slight deviations in the sums due to rounding

Eurostat data according to age groups are only available for children over 3 years of age: These show that only very few 3 year-olds attended an institution in 2021, just under half of the 4 year-olds, but almost all 5 year-olds (see *Table 4*).

Table 4

Switzerland: Number and enrolment rates of children in kindergartens/pre-primary classes by age, 2021

Age	Number of children in pre-primary classes	Enrolment rates in pre-primary classes, in %
3 year-olds	2,144	2.3
4 year-olds	41,400	48.7
5 year-olds	84,115	97.5
6 year-olds	45,097	53.2

Source: Eurostat 2023h, i

Financing and costs for parents

According to OECD data, total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 0.49% of GDP in 2019 (OECD 2023).

Childcare sector

Fees for **childcare centres** are generally more expensive for parents than in other countries, as childcare provision is less heavily subsidised by public funds. On average, parental contributions cover about two-thirds of the total cost of a childcare place (Kibesuisse 2021).

For low-income families the canton of Bern, for example, provides childcare vouchers which cover almost all of the childcare costs. If the child has a disability, the parents additionally receive a lump sum. Parents with higher incomes who wish to continue working can also apply for vouchers, but at a lower level (European Commission 2020, 52).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 32% of net household income on childcare costs which was the highest among the OECD-countries[4] (OECD.Stat 2023b).

Education sector

Attendance at **pre-primary classes** is free of charge. 95% of pupils attend compulsory school in the public school in their residential area, which is free of charge for all children. Approximately 5% of children attend a private school for which a fee is charged.

Responsibility for compulsory schooling lies with the cantons, which are obliged by the Federal Constitution to harmonise important goals and structures nationwide. The municipalities organise school operation, which allows for adapted local solutions (EDK 2020).

[4] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

Staff to child ratios and group size

Childcare sector

Regulations on staff to child ratios and on the minimum of fully trained personnel in childcare centres are set by the cantons (Faeh and Vogt 2021, 42) and there are great variations. On average, the minimum requirement for the proportion of trained personnel is 50%, ranging from 100% in the canton of Jura and 33% in the canton of Ticino. Staff to child requirements for working with 0 to 1½ year-olds range from 1:3 to 1:5. In most German-speaking cantons the requirement for work with 1½ to 4 year-olds is 1:6. The French- and Italian-speaking cantons tend to differentiate more specifically according to age. For 4 to 6 year-olds in supplementary childcare the ratio in most cantons is 1:8, although in Jura (with 100% professionals) it is 1:15 (data based on table adapted from Ecoplan (2020, 30-31) by Faeh and Vogt (2021, 42-44).

According to the recommendations of the SODK and EDK (2022), one professional cares for two to three children up to the age of 18 months, and four to six children from 18 months until they enter kindergarten, ten to 12 children at the age of 4–8 years and 12 to 14 children at the age of 8-12 years. According to Kibesuisse (2020) mixed-age groups generally comprises ten to 12 children, whereby children under 18 months are weighted with a factor of 1.5, and children with special needs with a factor greater than 1 (depending on the kind of care required). No more than six children up to 18 months should be present at the same time.

Kibesuisse (2020) recommends the following (purely by calculation) staff-child-ratios for professionals with different qualifications (see *table 5*), with at least one pedagogically trained specialist for every 12 children.

Table 5

Switzerland: Recommended staff to child ratios by age of children and staff qualification

Age	**Care specialist** *(Fachperson Betreuung, Fachrichtung Kinderbetreuung, FaBeK)*	**Educator** (*Kindererzieher:in, HF*)	**Student or assistant**
	Concurrent number of children per staff		
Up to 1½ years	3	3.9	2.1
1½ - 3 years	5	6.5	3.5
3 – 4½ years	8	10.4	5.6
4½ – 6 years	10	13	7
6 years and over	12	15.6	8.4

Source: Kibesuisse 2020, 11

Education sector

The organisation of pre-primary classes is the responsibility of the cantons. As a rule, 4 and 5 year- olds are together in one class; the minimum and maximum number of children in a class is set by the cantons - usually between 22 and 24 children. However, group size varies greatly between cantons (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 88).

According to the recommendations of Kibesuisse (2019, 17), one pedagogically trained specialist and one assistant should be present for every 15 children in a pre-primary class.

The daily organisation of time is arranged by the municipalities or the schools themselves. For example, in "comprehensive block teaching" lessons are combined for at least three and a half hours on five mornings. The weekly number of hours is usually between 12 and 25 hours in the first year, and 20 to 25 hours in the second year.

In 2021, there were on average 18.6 children in a pre-primary class (BFS 2023b), and in 2021/22, one full-time equivalent professional was responsible for 17.8 children (BFS 2023c).

Curricular frameworks

Childcare sector

In Switzerland, there is no legally binding curricular framework for pedagogical work in settings for under 4 year-olds (Faeh and Vogt 2021, 39). However, a non-mandatory Orientation Framework for Early Childhood Education, Care and Upbringing in Switzerland, authored by C. Wustmann Seiler and H. Simoni, is available (Swiss UNESCO Commission and Childcare Network Switzerland 2016). It is relevant in the three language regions, i.e. German-speaking Switzerland, Ticino and French-speaking Switzerland. The document is used as a reference framework by cantons and municipalities, who may require a centre-based pedagogical concept as a basic prerequisite for accreditation.

Six guiding principles form the basis of the Orientation Framework:

1. Physical and psychological well-being (protection and security, needs- and age-appropriate support, reliable adults)
2. Communication (different ways of expression as a condition for making themselves understood by others)
3. Belonging and participation (being heard and being able to contribute)
4. Resilience and empowerment (acquiring a positive self-concept and self-esteem)
5. Inclusion and acceptance of diversity (appreciative recognition for all children)
6. A holistic approach and appropriateness (learning through the senses, stimulated by interests and experience).

In order to do justice to these guiding principles, professionals need to regularly observe, reflect on and document educational and developmental processes. By creating a stimulating learning environment geared to the individual interests of the children, they can moderate educational processes. The framework also emphasises the joint responsibility of educators and parents in supporting the child, e.g. during transitions.

Education sector

After the intercantonal agreement on the harmonisation of compulsory education came into force in 2009 (Educa 2021), teaching materials were created for the different language regions, new curricula were developed and national educational goals were set according to which all children should receive a basic education (languages, mathematics and natural sciences, social sciences and humanities, music, art and design as well as movement and health).

The pre-primary classes in the French-speaking cantons follow the "*Plan d'études romand*" since 2015, and in the Italian-speaking Ticino the "*Piano di Studio*" since 2018/19. All 21 cantons where German is spoken have adopted curricula based on the "*Lehrplan 21*". The curriculum is compulsory (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 200).

Compared to teaching in primary school, lessons in Cycle 1 are less oriented towards subjects or modules, but are strongly oriented towards the heterogeneous development of the children and are organised in an interdisciplinary way. Nine development-oriented approaches facilitate this planning:

1. Body, health and motor skills (e.g. development of motor skills, expressing feelings with the body);
2. Perception (e.g. practising close observation, focusing attention);

3. Temporal orientation (e.g. reflecting on daily structures, learning concepts of time);
4. Spatial orientation (e.g. exploring the living space, describing spaces);
5. Connections and regularities (e.g. learning everyday concepts, differentiating the world view);
6. Imagination and creativity (e.g. trying out different forms of representation, developing new solutions);
7. Learning and reflection (e.g. thinking about activities and goals, comparing new with known);
8. Language and communication (e.g. creating a variety of opportunities to speak, expanding vocabulary);
9. Independence and social action (e.g. developing confidence in one's own abilities, accepting responsibility).

Play and learning are seen as two sides of a coin in terms of exploring and extending personal competences. Learning materials build on perceived interests and stimulate curiosity for new things.

Digital education

Childcare sector

There is no reference to digital awareness or digital education in the Orientation Framework for Early Childhood Education, Care and Upbringing in Switzerland.

Education sector

In the curriculum for the first learning cycle in the German-speaking regions (Lehrplan 21 2016a, b) the module *Media and information technology* specifies a range of competences for 4 and 5 year-olds. These include: laying the foundations for reflecting with and about media, the interactive use of media, also the analysis of simple problems and the understanding of information processing systems. Both analogue and digital media open up a creative possibilities and playful experimentation. However, the curriculum also states that the use of media should not be in competition with real experiences in one's own environment, but should complement them.

Monitoring – evaluation

In both the childcare and education sectors, internal evaluation is usually mandatory and must be carried out regularly (every one to three years). This may be in the form of a development plan, an annual report or an updated pedagogical programme - although the focus may be different depending on the canton.

Childcare sector

In the childcare sector, there are relatively few requirements beyond the obligation to register and obtain authorisation and supervision, for which each canton is responsible. However, the federal-level 'ordinance on the admission of foster children' (PAVO) stipulates that monitoring visits should take place at least every two years (Faeh and Vogt 2021, 23). In recent years, quality issues have come more clearly into focus, especially with regard to structural and process quality; assessments of learning processes are also considered important (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 125f). According to the Orientation Framework for ECEC in Switzerland authored by Wustmann Sailer and Simoni in 2016 (see section on *Curricular frameworks*),

the written pedagogical programme of all childcare facilities should contain statements on ensuring the pedagogical quality of the facility, to be assessed through self-evaluation and external evaluation procedures. In the canton of Solothurn, for example, in addition to the Orientation Framework for ECEC in Switzerland (Swiss UNESCO Commission and Childcare Network Switzerland 2016), evaluators are required to adhere to the quality standards of the QualiKita association (QualiKita 2021), which also provides instructions for online self-evaluation.

Education sector

Due to the federalism in Switzerland, different regulations at the canton and school level apply in terms of quality assurance. Both external and internal evaluation procedures are partly compulsory, partly voluntary. However, external evaluators must always adhere to the respective cantonal guidelines.

In German-speaking Switzerland, quality is usually ensured through a combination of external evaluation, internal quality management and school supervision. In the French-speaking part of the country, performance tests are more common, both for the children and for the quality management of the institution. Overall, the presence of national educational goals and common regional language curricula have helped to standardise quality efforts in recent years.

Furthermore, since 2006, the EDK and the Confederation have been operating the "Swiss Education Monitoring" as a way of systematically collecting data on the quality of education (EDK 2021b). Since 2010, the Swiss Coordination Centre for Education Research (SKBF) has presented the "Swiss Education Report" every four years, which contains data on all levels of education (but does not refer to the childcare sector) (skbf/csre 2023).

Many cantons have included quality assurance and development in their school and education laws in the context of the harmonisation of compulsory education (Educa 2021, see also section on *Curricular frameworks*).

The integration of pre-primary classes into compulsory school has facilitated the transition to primary school. To ensure continuity between the levels, information about the children is passed between the professionals. As a rule, however, no grades are given in the pre-primary units. Instead, the children's abilities are recorded on observation sheets, which serve primarily to promote the development of each individual child. In some cantons, parents are also involved in the evaluation of facilities for children over 4 years of age (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 130).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

With the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1997, Switzerland committed itself to taking into account the special support needs of children with disabilities. Furthermore, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which came into force in Switzerland in 2014, strives for the full participation of people with disabilities in all areas of life and is a guiding principle for the inclusive orientation of all support services.

– Childcare sector

Since 2008, the cantons have been responsible for special educational measures for children and young people. In an “Inter-cantonal agreement on cooperation in the field of special needs

education" (*Sonderpädagogik Konkordat*) the EDK stated that childcare facilities (*Tagesstrukturen*) are part of the basic special needs education provision and that integrative solutions are to be preferred to an approach of separation.

With the KitaPlus programme, an initiative of the Kifa Switzerland Foundation and the *kibesuisse* Childcare Association Switzerland, specific conditions are created in regular institutions for children with special needs and disabilities so that they can be integrated into normal everyday life (KitaPlus 2021).

According to field experts and organisations, a comprehensive inclusive orientation is still a long way off. Support is needed from local authorities to implement the legal provisions, among other things to enhance networking between all those involved, and to ensure that specially trained educators are available for supporting the staff in childcare centres.

– Education sector

Due to the very different conditions in the cantons, inclusive developments in education can hardly be described from a national level perspective.

In the canton of Bern, for example, children with disabilities can attend either a special school or a regular kindergarten. For inclusive education, a psychological/psychiatric clarification and decision-making process is required, as well as a permit that has to be renewed every year. The regular institution helps to decide whether the child is accepted - the prerequisite is always that appropriate educational resources are available (Achermann et al. 2017).

Children with a migration background

In general, Swiss integration policy understands integration as a two-way process in which both the indigenous and the migrant population should participate. It is a core task of the state, in which all levels participate and which is oriented towards the principle of "promote and challenge" (State Secretariat for Migration 2020).

In 2022, 25.7% of the total population had a non-Swiss citizenship; almost two-thirds of them (64%) came from EU27(2020) countries. Among children under 5 years of age, the figures were 27.7% and 60.4% respectively (Eurostat 2023c).

– Childcare sector

In 2018, the EDK and the cantons agreed on five goals for the integration of refugees and temporarily admitted persons (Integration Agenda Switzerland). One of these goals states that 80% of children under the age of 4 from asylum-seeking families should be able to communicate in the language spoken in their place of residence when they start compulsory schooling (KIP 2021).

One example of promoting literacy, especially among children from home learning environments with low stimulation and with a migrant background, is a project called "Tell me a story". It is aimed at 2 to 5 year-olds and their families and involves, among other things, reading stories aloud in the languages of origin (European Commission 2020, 129).

– Education sector

Special support is also provided for children with a migration background via the Special Education Concordat (EDK 2007).

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Maternity leave (*Mutterschutz, congé et allocation de maternité*) lasts 14 weeks after the birth of the child, of which eight weeks are compulsory; leave before the birth can only be taken for medical reasons. For 14 weeks, 80% of earnings are paid, up to a maximum of 220 CHF (€225.48) per day, if contributions were paid into an old-age insurance scheme during the nine months before the birth. In most cases, mothers take more than the 14 weeks provided for, even if this extra time is not remunerated.

Paternity leave (*congé et allocation de paternité*), first introduced in 2021, lasts two weeks, and is paid in the same way as Maternity leave. It begins after the birth of the child and must be taken within six months; it can be taken in full or on a daily basis.

There is no legal basis for **parental leave**. A few private companies grant unpaid leave (from a few days to 24 months)

In 2021, the average number of Maternity leave days taken by recipients was 79 (out of 98). On average, CHF 130 (€133.24) was paid, well below the upper limit. Initial analyses show that in 2021, about 70% of eligible fathers received childcare allowance and took an average of 14 days off.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Switzerland

*Country expert assessment by **Janine Hostettler Schärer***

From expansion to quality issues

Until recently, the main focus in Switzerland was on increasing the provision in the early education and care system, as demand still exceeds supply. This has been politically supported since 2003 with start-up funding for supplementary family childcare. In recent years, however, there has been a paradigm shift from *care* to *education*, from structural to pedagogical quality. Every child has a right to high-quality early education, which should lead to inclusion and more equal opportunities for all children. However, this quality must also be financed. Since 2022, there has been a political push to move from start-up funding to continuous funding for supplementary family childcare in order to strive for quality improvement. National standards are needed to promote process quality (Faeh and Vogt 2021). Concepts and internal quality development processes are needed for their implementation and review. Active learning support for children, more dialogue between professionals and children, and coaching of professionals (Reyhing et al. 2019) are indispensable prerequisites for this.

Shortage of staff and skilled workers

Another challenge is the shortage of staff and professionals in Switzerland. This is exacerbated by the current shortage of primary school teachers, as professionals from the early childhood sector are migrating to the better-paid school sector. In order to retain staff in the ECEC field, better remuneration and better working conditions are needed. For example, paid continuing professional development courses are needed, as well as remunerated leave entitlements and paid time for preparation and follow-up, meetings and supervision.

[5] The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Latvia by Isabel Valarino and Rahel Aina Nedi in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Career opportunities

Efforts are underway in German-speaking Switzerland to create more training places for HF Childhood Pedagogues (see also Hostettler Schärer 2024). This is important in order to offer career opportunities to ECEC staff so that they can be retained in the profession. Above all, however, this should increase the pedagogical quality in the facilities.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the population in Switzerland totalled 8,738,791. This is a further indication of a steady increase over the past 20 years (2000: 7,164,444; 2010: 7,785,806; 2020: 8,606,033 (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.52, Switzerland is in line with the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[6].

Children under 6 years of age

Table 6

Switzerland: Number of under 6 year-olds according to age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Up to 1 year	88,200
1 year-olds	85,795
2 year-olds	86,922
3 year-olds	88,825
4 year-olds	88,828
5 year-olds	90,261
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**528,831**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

The proportion of children under 3 years of age in the total population was 3.0% in 2022, and that of children under 6 years of age was 6.1%. These shares were slightly above the EU27 average.

[6] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

Table 7

Switzerland: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population from 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Switzerland / EU	Up to 3 years	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Switzerland	3.3	3.4	6.7
	Ø EU15[7]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Switzerland	2.9	3.0	6.0
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Switzerland	3.0	3.0	6.1
	Ø EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Switzerland	3.0	3.1	6.1
	Ø EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations; deviations due to roundings

Single households with children under 6 years of age

86% of households with children under the age of 18 were couple households in 2021. Households with single parents accounted for 14%. Information on households with younger children was not available.

Table 8

Switzerland: Households with children under 18 years of age, 2021

Household type	Number	Share of total households, in %*
Households – total	867,522	
Couple households	746,454	86
Single households, total	121,068	14

Source: BSF 2023h, * Own calculations.

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Switzerland in 2023, the employment rate of men (15 to 64 years) was 83.5% overall, that of women 61.1% (Eurostat 2023k).

In 2022, 46.9% of women and 95.3% of men with children under 6 were in employment (BFS 2023g). The rate of employed fathers was thus above the EU27(2020) average (87.2%) and that of mothers significantly below (average: 63.6%) (Eurostat 2023e).

Table 9a

Switzerland: Employment rates of parents with children below age 6 compared with seepro3 countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Switzerland	36.8	98.6
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[8]	Denmark: 82.7	Switzerland: 98.6
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 32.7	Latvia: 74.8

[7] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

	2022	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Switzerland	46.9	95.3
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU(2020) countries[9]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU(2020) countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Sources: BFS 2023g; Eurostat 2023e

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022 – like Switzerland – data are displayed in *Table 9b*

Table 9b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
**Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
[+++]United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	[++]72.3 [++]72.1 (2023)	[++]79.2 [++]79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023k

**Rosstat. 2022. *Statistical annex SDG in Russia 2022.* https://eng.rosstat.gov.ru/sdg/report/document/70355;
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[++]Statista. 2023. *Employment rate in the United Kingdom from June 1971 to January 2023, by gender*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/280120/employment-rate-in-the-uk-by-gender/

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[10]

In 2021, 23.3% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was in line with the EU27 average (23.5%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 17.6% (EU: 21.7%). In 2020, 2.8% of children under 6 and 1.8% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023f, g).

[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

[10] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

UKRAINE

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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1. ECEC governance in Ukraine

Ukrainian legislation on early childhood education and care is based on the Constitution of Ukraine and comprises the Law of Ukraine "On Education" (Verkhovna Rada 1991; 2016), the Law “On Preschool Education” (Verkhovna Rada 2001); the draft of the Law “On Preschool Education”, 2021 and other regulatory acts. ECEC is high on the government agenda.

Ukraine has a partially unified system of early childhood education and care. Both centre-based settings for the under-threes – nurseries and nursery-kindergartens – and preschool/ pre-primary education for children from 3 to 6/7 years of age come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (*Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrayiny*). The latter are part of the state education system.

Home-based childcare settings and health support childcare centres for children under 4 years of age fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health (*Ministerstvo okhorony zdorov'ya Ukrayiny).*

National ECEC policies are determined by the legislation mentioned above, and regional state (*oblast*) administrations (including Kyiv city administrations, local executive and self-governing bodies) are responsible for the management of ECEC settings. Almost 99% of ECEC settings are funded and managed by local authorities.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

According to the Law on Preschool Education, staff in ECEC settings comprise:

Early Childhood Teachers (*vykhovatel*). These are the core practitioners, and they have to have a higher education degree (minimum Bachelor’s degree, optional Master’s) to work with children aged 0 to 6 years in centre-based settings.

In 2016, the new position of **Early Childhood Teaching Assistant** was introduced for inclusive settings, with one post being allocated to each inclusive classroom (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2016b; Ministry of Education and Science 2016). According to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (2019), Early Childhood Teaching Assistants help to provide a child-centred focus in the educational process, participate in the development and realisation of the child’s individual development programme and help to make necessary adaptations.

Both Early Childhood Teachers and Early Childhood Teaching Assistants receive an additional 20% to their salaries for their work in inclusive classrooms (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2004).

Based on the recommendations of the Inclusive Resource Centre and at the parents` request, ECEC settings can include a post as **Child Assistant**. Child Assistants are responsible for the social support of children with complex disabilities. Child Assistants do not refer to pedagogical positions. Their training is provided by the regional (*oblast*) centres of social services. The duration of their training should be no less than 60 academic hours. After training and medical tests, an

agreement is reached between the kindergarten and the Child`s Assistant according to the parents` requests (Law of Ukraine "On Comprehensive General Secondary Education", Verkhovna Rada 2020).

Each preschool classroom, including inclusive classrooms, is allocated a post of (technical) **Teaching Assistant** *(Pomichnyk vykhovatelya)* – one per classroom. The basic requirements for this position are a minimum age of 18 years and quarterly medical testing. Teaching Assistants *(Pomichnyk vykhovatelya)* work under the supervision of the Early Childhood Teacher.

Table 1 distinguishes between different types of contact staff and also categorises the core practitioners (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at the end of this chapter).

Table 1
Ukraine: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Early Childhood Teacher *Vykhovatel* *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	*Yasla / dytyachyy sadok* **Nursery/ nursery-kindergarten** 2 months–5(6) years[1] *Doshkil'nyy navchal'nyy zaklad* **Early childhood education setting/ kindergarten** 3–5(6) years *Spetsial'nyy doshkil'nyy navchal'nyy zaklad* **Special early childhood education setting/kindergarten** 2–5(6) years *Tsentr rozvytku dytyny* **Child development centre** 5–6(7) years	Core practitioner with group responsibility Centre Leader	2 months–5(6) years	Bachelor, 4 (or 3) years university study route ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. However, in the Ukrainian legislation, the age range is stated as 3–6(7); children with SEND may start school one year later.

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Early Childhood Teaching Assistant *Asystent vykhovatel*	*Yasla – dytyachyy sadok* **Nursery/ nursery-kindergarten** 2 months–5(6) years *Doshkil'nyy navchal'nyy zaklad* **Early childhood education setting / kindergarten** 3–5(6) years	Qualified co-worker in inte-grative groups/set-tings	2 months – 5(6) years	Bachelor, 4 (or 3) years university study route ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Early Childhood Technical Assistant *Pomichnyk vykhovatelya*	*Yasla – dytyachyy sadok* **Nursery/ nursery-kindergarten** 0–2 years 2 months – 5/6 years *Doshkil'nyy navchal'nyy zaklad* **Early childhood education setting/ kindergarten** 3–5 (6) years *Spetsial'nyy dosh-kil'nyy navchal'nyy zaklad* **Special early child-hood education set-ting** 2 – 6 (7) years	Unqualified co-worker	n/a[2]	No formal IPE requirements
Child Assistant *Asystent dytyny*	*Doshkil'nyy navchal'nyy zaklad* **Early childhood education setting/ kindergarten** 3–5 (6) years	Support of children with complex disa-bilities in inte-grative groups/set-tings		Minimum 60 hours (2 ECTs credits)

[2] n/a not applicable

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

According to the Law of Ukraine "On Preschool Education" (Ministry of Education and Science 2015), the management of early childhood institutions/kindergartens is provided by the **Centre leader/Director** *(zaviduvach)*. A Director should have Ukrainian citizenship, be fluent in Ukrainian, have a Master's degree (full higher pedagogical education) and a minimum of three years of practical experience, possess organisational skills and have the physical and psychological prerequisites for fulfilling this professional function. The setting founder/provider has the right to nominate a person for the position of Director and to sign a contract.

Successful candidates can be assigned as a Centre leader/Director regardless of the type and provider of the institution. In most cases an experienced Early Childhood Teacher Methodologists becomes a Centre leader/Director. Job descriptions of the Directors are specified in the regulations of the early childhood institution. The Director nominates all other positions according to the relevant legislation.

According to the Law "On Preschool Education", the governance bodies include the Director of the early childhood setting/kindergarten, who is responsible for the management of the setting and the Pedagogical Board.

The **Pedagogical Board** is a collegiate governance body which acts according to the relevant ECEC legislation. Members include all pedagogical staff, medical workers, other specialists, the representatives of parents` committees and other relevant persons involved in the educational process. The Pedagogical Board can invite representatives of non-governmental organisations, secondary school teachers and parents to its meetings. All invitees have an advisory vote. The head of the Pedagogical Board is the Director of the early childhood institution/kindergarten.

The functions of the Pedagogical Board include the following:

- Approval of the educational programme of the kindergarten, evaluation of its implementation and implementation of the educational standards
- Developing a system of internal monitoring of the quality of education
- Developing the work plan of the kindergarten
- Approval of the annual plan of continuing professional development of the ECEC Teachers and their reports during the process of attestation
- Developing ways of cooperation between the kindergarten and families
- Initiating institutional audits, and other issues.

Early childhood institutions/kindergartens may also have other governance bodies:

- Self-governance bodies of the pedagogical staff
- Self-governance bodies of parents
- Self-governance bodies of other stakeholders in the educational process.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

The Law of Ukraine "On Preschool Education" does not provide for specific qualification requirements for different kinds of teaching position (a decree, which had approved this, was repealed). It just states the names of the positions and number of hours per week they should work.

It is the responsibility of the Director to develop and approve the job descriptions for each post according to the National Classification of Professions (2010), in particular for nine types of posts, which refer to pedagogical assignments: Early Childhood Teacher, Early Childhood Teaching Assistant, Early Childhood Teacher Methodologist, Teacher Defectologist (Special Needs Pedagogue), Speech Therapist, Educational Psychologist, Music Teacher, Sports Instructor, and Handicraft Teacher.

The Centre Leader/Director can also make use of the Professional Standards for Early Childhood Teachers and Directors approved in 2021.

2.4 Coordinating and supervisory staff

Co-ordination and supervision are provided by the **Early Childhood Teacher Methodologist** (*vyxovatel-metodyst/ starshyj vyxovatel*) whose main responsibilities include the following:

- Providing methodological support to teachers, including developing the teachers' plans
- Supervision of teachers' educational activities
- Providing necessary information about child development to parents
- Organisation of the planning process (monthly, quarterly, annual)
- Organisation of the didactic-methodological unit in the early childhood institution/ kindergarten
- Supporting the development of teachers' professional communities, moderating the exchange of "best" professional practices and analysing these
- Organising the mentoring process for young ECEC Teachers and during the students' pedagogical practicum
- Cooperating with other educational institutions, especially with primary schools to ensure a smooth transition between early childhood and primary education.

2.5 Specialist support staff

According to the Law of Ukraine "On Preschool Education", the following positions are in most cases part of the regular on-site staff alongside the Early Childhood Teaching Assistants and Child Assistants:

- Social Pedagogue
- Educational Psychologist
- Music Teacher
- Sports Instructor
- Special Needs Teacher
- Speech Therapist
- Handicraft Teacher.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

According to the Statistical Bulletin, the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, at the end of 2021 the ECEC workforce comprised 138,772 persons working in a pedagogical capacity and 172,996 persons working in a non-pedagogical capacity – see *Table 2*.

Table 2

Ukraine: Total number of persons in the ECEC workforce

Directors of early childhood institutions/kindergartens	11,359
Early Childhood Teachers	90,833
Methodologists / Pedagogical Advisers	4,832
Educational Psychologists	4,525
Social Pedagogues	375
Teaching Assistants	4,781
Other pedagogical staff	22,067
Total number of pedagogical staff	**138,772**
Medical staff	11,523
Technical staff	161,473
Total number of persons in ECEC workforce	**311.768**

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2021

The ECEC workforce comprises 136,951 women. Among them are 37,572 women under 35 years of age, 87,816 women aged 36–60 years and 13,384 women aged 61 years old and older.

In terms of qualifications at the end of 2021, 41,668 Early Childhood Teachers from a total of 138,772 were staff with a Junior Bachelor's degree and 94,096 of the remaining staff also had a higher education degree (Bachelor/Specialist/Master).

Table 3

Ukraine: Structural composition of ECEC workforce – qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Staff category	**Year/provision/proportion of workforce***
Staff with specialist higher education degree	2021: **30%** Junior Bachelor degree (see *Chapter **4.1***) **70%** Bachelor's or Master's degree
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	n/a
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	n/a
Staff with non-specialist qualification (other qualification)	No data available
Unqualified staff	No data available
Specialist support staff (e.g. special needs teachers)	No data available
Male staff	No data available
Staff with a background of migration	No systematically compiled national data

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2021

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

According to the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education" (Verkovna Rada 2014), professional education, including teacher education, is provided according to four levels of higher education. These are the beginning level (short cycle); the first level (Bachelor's degree); the second level (Master's degree) and the third level (Doctoral degree).

After completing relevant educational programmes at each of the levels, graduates are awarded the following diplomas/degrees:

1) Beginning level – Junior Bachelor diploma (120 ECTS credits)
2) First level – Bachelor's degree (180-240 ECTS credits)
3) Second level – Master's degree (90-120 ECTS credits)
4) Third level – Doctoral degree (PhD)

Initial professional education courses for prospective Early Childhood Teachers are offered by Pedagogical Colleges (beginning level (Junior Bachelor) or the first level (Bachelor)), Pedagogical Institutes, Pedagogical Universities and classic Universities, which can provide Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

The minimum admission requirement of *Pedagogical Colleges* for Junior Bachelor or Bachelor degree programmes is a completed secondary education. Some of the pedagogical colleges have signed transfer agreements with pedagogical universities or classic universities. According to these agreements, holders of Junior Bachelor diplomas from pedagogical colleges are granted priority and may enter university level teacher education studies in the third semester. *Pedagogical Universities* train teachers for lower and upper secondary schools and for colleges. However, many of the pedagogical universities along with the pedagogical colleges provide training programmes for Early Childhood and Primary School Teachers. Bachelor degree holders may continue their pedagogical education at universities to pursue a Master's degree.

Universities provide training for teachers within the study programme "Education"; classic universities may have pedagogical institutes as part of their structure. Bachelor degree programmes at universities have a nominal study length of four years (three years for persons with the Junior Bachelor diploma). Master's degree programmes normally take one year to complete; in some cases, the Ministry of Education and Science has approved a length of 1½ years. The duration of the Master's degree programme for the holders of a Bachelor degree may be determined individually, based on the differences between Bachelor and Master's degree curricula.

Persons with a basic secondary education and sufficient knowledge and skills in ECEC activities may enrol in a **Junior Bachelor** study programme (2½ to 3 years) to obtain a Junior Bachelor's degree. The usual length of a higher education **Bachelor** programme is four years (240 ECTS credits), although for the early childhood field only 180 ECTS credits are required. In ECEC settings all graduates perform the same duties and tasks.

Table 4
Ukraine: Early Childhood Teacher

Job title in Ukrainian: *Vykhovatel* **Profile:** Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: Completed secondary education (9 or 11 years of schooling) **Professional studies**: 4 years at a *Pedagogical College* for students with 9 years of secondary education; 3 years for those with 11 years of secondary education. The regular length of studies for Bachelor degree programmes at pedagogical colleges is 4 years for full-time students and 5 years for part-time students and remote learning courses. ***or*** 4 years (3 years for persons with the Junior Bachelor diploma) study route "Education" at a *University* This study route can be followed by a 1-(or 1½-) year of Master Degree programme. **Award:** Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education **ECTS credits:** 180 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2011:** 6 **Main ECEC workplaces:** Nurseries/nursery kindergartens (2 months–5(6) years), early childhood education settings/kindergartens (3–5 or 6 years, special kindergarten (2–6 or 7 years), child development centre (5–6 or 7 years).

Note: Higher education institutions are not required to provide employment for all graduates. Graduates are free to apply for a post of their choice, with the exception of those studying with the support of state funds or local budgets. These graduates are obliged to work at the proposed post in accordance with a procedure established by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (1996). They sign an agreement with the administration of a higher educational institution to work in the state sector for at least three years on completion of their studies. Graduates who agree to work for at least three years in rural areas or towns are provided free housing, heating and electricity by the state within the established legal norms (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2011). If graduates refuse and do not wish to take up the proposed employment, they must reimburse the full cost of their education to the state budget (Paragraph 2 of the Presidential Decree 1996).

Centre Leaders/Directors of Early Childhood Centres and Pedagogical Advisers (Early Childhood Teacher Methodologists) follow the same study route as Early Childhood Teachers (see above, *Table 4*).

At the beginning of the 2021/2022 school year, the following number of students studied the specialist area of "Preschool Education":

Table 5
Ukraine: Number of ECEC students by educational level

Educational level	**Number of students as of 2021/2022 school year**	**Number of graduates from initial professional education institutions in the 2021/2022 school year**
Young Specialist	542	470
Junior Bachelor	1,222	-
Bachelor	126	15
Master	3,676	477

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2022

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Early Childhood Teacher (*Vykhovatel)*

Competences

Competences to be acquired by Early Childhood Teachers are generally structured according to subject specific (professional) competences and general competences (generic competences, transferable skills).

There are also other equally important, universal competences that students learn to master during the IPE programmes. These apply to all levels of the teaching profession and include:

- Learning to learn
- Mastering a foreign language and basic information technologies
- Communicating with children, parents and colleagues
- Being able to look for and use information independently
- Following the strategy of life-long learning
- Being able to reflect
- Taking into account the individuality of children
- Being able to organise materials and present them appropriately
- Determining the child's developmental level
- Establishing a stimulating and age-appropriate environment for the children without forcing or accelerating the learning process.

Graduates of the Bachelor's study route on early childhood education should be able to:

- Analyse socially significant problems and processes and be able to use research methods in professional and social activities
- Organise their work on a scientific basis, using the newest methods
- Have a basic knowledge of employment relations
- Cooperate with colleagues and work in a team
- Know the basics of pedagogical skills
- Reflect on their own experience and analyse personal capabilities
- Acquire new knowledge, using modern information technologies
- Implement the most appropriate teaching approaches in their daily work with children
- Improve their own personal and professional competences and teaching skills and
- Provide appropriate approaches for children with developmental difficulties, disadvantaged children or those who are experiencing or have experienced crisis and conflict situations.

Professional Standards – Early Childhood Teacher

In October 2021, standards for the profession of Early Childhood Teacher were issued and approved by the Ministry of Economics of Ukraine (2021).

The Professional Standards describe the main goals of the professional activities of the Early Childhood Teacher. They set out the working conditions and admission procedures to the profession; they list documents which verify the professional and educational qualifications acquired through initial and continuing professional education as well as the legislation which regulates professional activities; and they describe general and professional competences.

General competences of the Early Childhood Teacher/Educator include the following:

- Civic competence

- Social competence
- Cultural competence
- Leadership competence
- Ethical competence.

The professional competences are structured according to specific tasks or functions and include the following:

A. Organising, providing and implementing the educational process.

- Prognostic (the ability to plan and predict the outcomes of the educational process; to document professional activities)
- Organisational (the ability to provide early childhood education in the Ukrainian language; to select effective methods according to the needs of children and their parents; to provide conditions of acquiring early childhood education for children with special needs)
- Evaluative-analytical (ability to conduct and to interpret the results of the monitoring of educational activities in order to make necessary changes according to the needs and opportunities of children; ability to identify the level of children's competence development according to the educational standards), and
- Subject-methodological (ability to develop the key competences according to educational standards).

B. Participating in the development of a healthy, safe and inclusive educational environment.

- Health protection (ability to organize a physically and psychologically safe educational environment) and
- Project management (ability to organise activity centres based on universal design principles[3] and appropriate furnishings).

C. Partnerships with participants in the educational process

- Psycho-emotional (ability for self-control, interacting tolerantly, reacting flexibly to changes, resilience)
- Pedagogical (ability to cooperate and communicate effectively; ability to involve all participants linked to the educational process based on the principles of partnership and mutual responsibility; ability for teamworking)
- Moral-ethical (ability to consider individual cultural, religious, social and language characteristics of families and to challenge stereotypes and discrimination).

D. Professional development

- Life-long learning (ability to reflect and self-assess, to plan professional development)
- Informational-communicational (ability to use ICT and e-resources effectively in the educational process, to be aware of and use safety rules in the digital environment).

All competences described in the Professional Standards are translated through the specific knowledge and skills. They are now used widely used in the CPD programmes for Early Childhood

[3] See UN 2006. "Universal design" means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. "Universal design" shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed (UN 2006, 4).

Teachers. All CPD providers are expected to include them when developing their training programmes. They also can be used by initial professional education institutions, by the Directors of early childhood institutions/kindergartens and by other stakeholders.

Professional standards – Directors of Early Childhood Institutions (Centre leaders)

In September 2021, Professional Standards for the Directors of early childhood institutions were issued and approved by the Ministry of Economics of Ukraine (2021).

The Professional Standards for Directors are structured according to the same goals as those for the Early Childhood Teacher and include the following professional tasks/functions and competences:

A. Organising a healthy, safe and inclusive learning environment.

- Heath protection (ability to provide a physically and psychologically safe learning environment and ability to organise the work of psychological and social-pedagogical services in the kindergarten)
- Planning (ability to plan and analyse the effectiveness of the educational process).

B. Managing an early childhood institution/a kindergarten

- Operational management (ability to secure the financing of the kindergarten, organisation and control of nutrition and medical services in the kindergarten, management of human resources)
- Organisational-methodological (ability to organise the educational programme, the work of the psychological-pedagogical support team, the methodological support of the pedagogical staff)
- Communication (ability to communicate effectively with all participants involved in the educational process and other stakeholders).

C. Ongoing personal and professional development

- Life-long learning (ability to reflect and self-assess, to plan professional development)
- Informational-communicational (ability to use ICT and e-resources effectively in the educational process, to be aware of and use safety rules in the digital environment).

D. Leadership and partnership

- Leadership (ability to present the early childhood institution/kindergarten, to show resilience and flexibility, to support conflict resolution and the prevention of professional burn-out)
- Emotional-ethical (ability relating to self-regulation, to display tolerance, to conduct constructive and sustainable interactions with the participants of the educational process).

E. Strategic development

- Strategic governance and strategic development (ability to conduct strategic planning, to develop a strategy for the kindergarten, to develop a system of quality control)
- Strategic communication (ability to present the kindergarten to different stakeholders)
- Normative-legal (ability to use legal documents in the professional activities).

The Professional Standards for the Directors of early childhood institutions/kindergartens are – like those for Early Childhood Teachers – widely used by different CPD providers. They may also be used by the initial professional education institutions and other stakeholders.

The recommendations (in Ukrainian) about how to use these Professional Standards were issued in 2022 by the Ministry of Education and Science and shared on the websites of the Ministry and the Ukrainian Institute of Education Development.

Curriculum – Bachelor study route

The Bachelor study route comprises different educational blocks. The first is a general section aimed at the overall development of personality, the formation of values, leadership skills, self-knowledge, and a child study. The second block comprises general pedagogical knowledge and includes psychology and pedagogy. During this block a course on early childhood pedagogy begins which includes the intellectual development of the child and possibilities of influencing children's development.

Graduates of the Bachelor degree programme on early childhood education should have knowledge about:

- Basic sciences in the field of humanities and social-economical sciences, as well as ethical and legal standards that govern people's relationship to society, the environment
- The nature and social significance of their future profession
- A holistic view of the processes and phenomena occurring in society and nature; the ability to use these principles when deciding appropriate educational objectives
- Scientific understanding of healthy lifestyles, the ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle
- Cultures and laws of thinking.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

In Ukraine, core pedagogues working in ECEC institutions need the full formal qualification as an Early Childhood Teacher. There are no alternative qualifying routes apart from the ones described above which allow for a more flexible approach or accept alternative entry requirements. Men and women without a formal qualification are only permitted to work as Early Childhood Technical Assistants. Technical staff usually receive some form of on-the-job training while working in a kindergarten.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

The form, duration and organisation of workplace-based learning in the IPE of ECEC core practitioners are defined in the curricular framework provided by the Ministry of Education of Ukraine (1993). According to the *Concept of the Development of Pedagogical Education* (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2018) the pedagogical practicum is a compulsory part of IPE, and should include a minimum of 30 ECTS credits in the Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes, starting from the first year of study. At least half of the duration should include practical professional activities.

Each HEI (college/institute/university) develops internal regulations regarding the pedagogical practicum. These include the general goal and the objectives, the types of pedagogical practica and schedules, the responsibilities of trainee teachers, supervisors from the HEI and supervisors from the early childhood institutions, a description of the assessment process, documentation examples, etc.

In most cases there are three types of practicum: (1) educational, (2) pedagogical, and (3) pre-diploma practicum.

Table 6

Ukraine: Types of ECEC practicum

Type of practicum	Semester	Number of weeks
Educational	5	2
Pedagogical		
– In classrooms for children up to 3 years of age	6	2
– In classrooms for children of preschool age (3–5 years)	7	5
– Pre-diploma (mainly at the place of the student's future employment)	8	6
– Pre-diploma with additional specialisation	8	2

Source: Ivano-Frankivsk College 2015.

Mentoring support

There are two types of mentorship in early childhood education settings/kindergartens: (1) for newly-qualified teachers and (2) for all team members through a Pedagogical Mentor/ Teacher Methodologist (see *Chapter **7.3***). These tasks are included in the annual plan of the ECEC centre. Specific mentoring arrangements for students who spend their practicum in a kindergarten are provided by the head of the host setting.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Continuing professional development used to be regulated by the *Regulation on the Certification (Attestation) of Teaching Staff* **(**Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2010**).** Certification (attestation) of teaching staff was obligatory and had to be conducted once every five years. The purpose was to confirm the current qualification level of each teacher or to achieve a higher one. The main condition of teachers` certification was their participation at the compulsory courses at specialised departments of teacher training institutions, institutes, and universities, or at advanced training and retraining institutes and at In-Service Teacher Training (INSETT) institutions at least once every five years. There was no clearly defined annual allocation of time that should be devoted to professional development.

The new **Regulation on the Certification (Attestation) of Teaching Staff** was developed in September 2021 and is in the process of approval (Ministry of Education and Science 2021b). The main difference between the two sets of regulations in 2010 and 2021 is the specification of minimum hours for CPD as a requirement for teachers` certification (attestation). According to the 2021 Regulation, the minimum hours of CPD to be completed within five years by Early Childhood Teachers should be no less than 120 hours (4 ECTS credits). For Primary School Teachers it is 150 hours (5 ECTS credits) every five years. It was recommended that teachers should participate in professional development activities annually, but without a clear distribution of credits for each year. The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (2019) specified that all pedagogical staff should participate in continuing professional development on a permanent

basis and have the right to choose both the provider and the form of CPD services (demonopolisation of INSETTs).

The professional development of pedagogical workers, including Early Childhood Teachers, is set out in the CPD plan approved by the educational institution in which they work. At the same time, teachers also have a right to make use of opportunities beyond this plan.

CPD providers should be officially registered and publish the current programme on their websites. Each programme should include the number of allocated credits, a list of the competences aimed for as well as other information.

Recommendations on the implementation of the Professional Standards for the Directors of early childhood institutions issued by the Ministry of Education and Science (2022a) mention that CPD providers should focus their programmes on the competences included in the Professional Standards. Although recommendations on the implementation of the Professional Standards for Early Childhood Teachers have not yet been approved, they include a similar recommendation regarding focusing on the competences listed in the Professional Standards.

Paragraph 1.7 of the *Regulation on the Certification of Teaching Staff* **(**Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2010) stipulates that teachers should be assessed and certificated once every five years or, if a teacher wishes to achieve a higher status more quickly, she/he can apply to be assessed out of turn, but not earlier than one year after the previous assessment. This procedure is called *re-certification.*

In order for Early Childhood Teachers to receive a **promotion** they are required to attend a formal CPD course which, since 2019, they may select themselves.

Since the beginning of the 2020 school year, **Certification Commissions** organise the certification process at three different levels: at the 1st level they are established at the early childhood institutions/kindergartens; at the 2nd level at the local educational authority; and at the 3rd level at the Ministry of Education.

Certification Commissions are organised for one year and their responsibilities are as follows: At the 1st level they are responsible for the certification of teachers; at the 2nd level they supervise the certification of the Directors of educational institutions; and at the 3rd level they are responsible for the certification of the governing bodies.

Certification Commissions of the 1st level (up to March 15th of any one year) are expected to familiarise themselves with the professional experience of teachers who applied to participate in the certification process by attending their lessons, studying their documentation and professional activities and also items developed by the Director of the educational institution. The final decision regarding the professional qualification is made during a meeting of the Certification Commission where the teachers give a presentation and can provide additional information.

Formal CPD courses for all levels of the teaching profession have similar objectives**:**

- Developing standards oriented towards the modernisation of the professional development and further training of teachers and school leaders
- Implementing modern technology in the professional development and training of educational, scientific and pedagogical staff in the educational system according to the requirements of innovative developments in education
- Ensuring the proactive nature of the training of educational, scientific and pedagogical staff to meet the needs of education reform and the challenges of modern social development (Decree of the President of Ukraine 2013).

Teachers' professional development is financed through regional and municipal budgets. Changes in the process of **funding CPD** started in 2019 after the Resolution of the Cabinet of

Ministers № 800 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2019) had been approved. According to the Resolution, the planning process includes two stages:

(1) During the first stage the educational institution is expected to develop a plan of professional development based on the teachers' proposals. These should include the directions of their professional development, CPD providers and the cost of their services. Such plans should be developed by December. If the plan is approved by the Pedagogical Board, it is then uploaded on to the website of the educational setting. Training providers (INSETT) which are funded through the regional (*oblast*) budgets make their financial applications based on the plans of the educational institutions, taking into consideration the number of teachers who have declared their willingness to participate in such courses.

(2) The second stage of the planning is provided by the Director of the educational institution, who has to include costs for professional development into the institution`s annual plan and budget.

In all Ukrainian educational institutions, including kindergartens, CPD is considered an integral part of their professional work. However, CPD activities **do not take place during working hours** but after closing hours or during school holidays.

Teachers appreciate the on-site activities carried out by the CPD providers in their kindergartens. This **kindergarten-based training** is very popular, especially among teachers living in rural areas; it means they can benefit from the CPD programme without having to leave their families. Also, through this model, kindergarten teams can ask the provider to design a programme which corresponds to a specific problem or to the latest local or government policy initiatives. Consequently, the training takes into account the teachers' interests and thus contributes towards improving the quality of professional development. Sometimes courses are also organised for ECEC Technical Assistants.

There are no problems regarding **participation** in professional development courses, since in most cases access depends entirely on the person's own wish. CPD activities are acknowledged in terms of **career advancement**.

Starting from 2020, when quarantine requirements caused by COVID-19 were introduced in many regions of Ukraine, CPD courses and the certification process were provided online.

Reforms regarding the continuing professional development of staff in ECEC provision

Since independence in 1991, the Ministry of Education has paid a lot of attention to reforming the system of teacher education/training to accommodate the needs of a society marked by social, economic and cultural changes. In particular, in 2011 the State programme "Teacher" was developed (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2011). It envisaged coordinated efforts to improve the quality of IPE and CPD in Ukraine.

The latest reforms in the education system, known as "New Ukrainian School" reform (which also influence early childhood education and care) are related to the adopting of the new Law of Ukraine "On Education", which came into force in September 2017 (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2017).

After the Law of Ukraine "On Education" was approved, the *Concept of Development of Pedagogical Education* was developed (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2018). The main goal of the Concept was to improve the system of the initial professional education of teachers and to develop alternative forms of teachers' professional development. The concept emphasised the following aspects of the reform: developing a qualifications framework and professional standards, including standards on digital competence; developing an internal system of

quality enhancement in education; key objectives of each level of higher education (in total four levels); increasing the amount of time allocated to the pedagogical practicum.

One of the main reforms foreseen by the Law "On Education" is the *decentralisation of the system of in-service training* (Cabinet of Ministers 2019). Until that time, teachers (both from kindergartens and schools) were encouraged to improve their professional knowledge only through courses at the regional INSETT institutes, which were free of charge for them. The frequency of such in-service training was once every five years.

The new Law of Ukraine "On Education" envisaged extending the introduction of structural reforms to the ECEC system, introducing new educational standards for preschool education called the Basic Component of Preschool Education (approved by the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science (2021a); and the Professional Standards for Early Childhood Teachers and Directors of early childhood institutions/kindergartens described in *Chapter **4.2***.

Another important reform in the CPD field was the reform of existing network of Methodological Centres and establishing a network of Centres of Professional Development for Teaching Staff (2020) in local communities. The main goals of the Centres of Professional Development are to promote CPD the of teaching staff in local communities, providing psychological support and consultations. More specific tasks include the following:

- Summarising and sharing information related to professional development
- Coordinating professional learning communities
- Sharing the data base of CPD providers (programmes, participant' feedback) and other resources
- Providing psychological support to teaching staff
- Organising and conducting consultations to teaching staff on such issues as: individual professional development plans; certification issues; strategic planning and other issues.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

In accordance with the Law on Education, the Accreditation Regulations (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2010) state that a teacher is subject to assessment and certification once every five years, the results of which determine the teacher category level and thus directly affect the teacher's salary.

As from January 2017, official salary tariffs were changed (Resolution No 1037, Cabinet of Ministers 2016a). As a result, new salaries are based on the 1st tariff category established regarding the subsistence minimum for able-bodied persons on 1 January 2017 which was at that time 1,600 UAH (€54,57) per month.

Beginning with the "New Ukrainian School" reform in 2018, teachers' salaries were increased by 10% from two main sources: (1) educational subvention and (2) national or local budgets (Resolution of Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2018). Since Early Childhood Teachers are not directly involved in the school reform, the issue of increasing their salaries depends on local budgets.

In 2022, the salaries of early childhood staff were as follows:

Table 7

Ukraine: Salaries of early childhood staff per month, February 2022

Position	UAH	Euros* (as in February 2022)
Centre Leader/Director of early childhood institution	7,464	233
Early Childhood Teacher (without category)	5,265	165
Early Childhood Teacher (1st category)	5,699	178
Early Childhood Teacher (2nd category)	6,133	192
Early Childhood Teacher (highest category)	7,701	241
Inclusive classrooms		
Early Childhood Teachers of all categories + 20% according to categories		
Early Childhood Teacher Assistant	5,265 – 5,699	165-178

*The exchange rate in February 2022 was 1 Euro/32 UAH, as of September 2022 it was 1 Euro/40 UAH
Source: Onyshchenko 2022

Pedagogical and scientific-pedagogical employees of schools and educational institutions receive a monthly retirement premium corresponding to a certain percentage of their salary, depending on the length of educational work: over 3 years – 10%; over 10 years – 20%; over 20 years – 30% (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2005).

Early Childhood and School Teachers' wage rates are identical. While School Teachers are also paid for checking copybooks, classrooms, Early Childhood Teachers are not.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

An Early Childhood Teacher usually works 30 hours per week with the children (whereas a School Teacher's workload is 23 hours per week). There is no information available about full-time and part-time employment.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

There are two types of mentorship in early childhood education institutions/kindergartens:

(1) Newly-qualified Early Childhood Teachers are supported during their first year of work by a mentor who is a qualified Early Childhood Teacher Methodologist. Support includes planning lessons, answering their questions, observing teachers` practice and providing feedback.

(2) A Pedagogical Adviser (Early Childhood Teacher Methodologist) supports all in-service teachers, e.g. by helping them to prepare lessons or to cope with developmental issues in certain children. The Pedagogical Advisers review literature and pass on knowledge about innovative approaches. They also make observations in the groups and provide feedback – this is one of the most important aspects of a mentor's work.

There is no additional payment provided for taking on the task of mentor.

7.4 Non-contact time

There is no official non-contact time for Early Childhood Teachers in Ukraine. Time spent for work 'without children', i.e. for planning, meetings with parents, participation in professional networks, is not remunerated.

7.5 Current staffing issues

Due to the war and the resulting migration of the population, there are many concerns regarding the reduction of employees of Early Childhood institutions. Because of this, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (2022c) issued the letter regarding the preservation of the network of ECEC centres and the protection of the rights of staff.

To preserve the network of ECEC centres and teaching staff, the Ministry suggested number of recommendations:

- Organising (re-organising) the number of classrooms depending on demographic situation in the regions
- Maintaining the network of special education classrooms
- Promoting the expansion of private ECEC centres/kindergartens
- Organising short-term groups (Sunday groups, evening groups) for children with parents, especially internally displaced families.

In order to implement these suggestions, the Ministry has recommended:

- Providing two Early Childhood Teachers per shift/per classroom (in total four Early Childhood Teachers per classroom in two shifts) and two Technical Teaching Assistants per classroom;
- Increasing the number of children in the classrooms – 10 children up to 3 years of age in the early age groups, 15 children aged 3–5 years in kindergarten classrooms;
- Providing a flexible daily schedule (from 2 to 12 hours a day)
- Using different educational formats (offline, online, blended).

Re-organisation or closing of the early childhood institutions should be based on local communities' decisions.

The letter (Ministry of Education and Science 2022c) referred to the Agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science and the Central Committee of the Trade Union of Educators for the period 2021-2025 to provide teaching staff`s right to receive their payment regularly. If case teaching staff are unable to work (damaged kindergarten buildings or other circumstances) they should receive two-thirds of their salaries.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

The main changes relating to ECEC staffing come from adopting the amendments to the Law "On Preschool Education", which introduced the concept of "inclusive education" as well as the position of Early Childhood Teacher Assistant in 2015.

This position is included in the list of pedagogical and scientific-pedagogical staff as approved by the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (2015) and follows the staff norms of kindergartens (Ministry of Education and Science 2016).

If there is at least one inclusive group in a kindergarten, an Early Childhood Teacher Assistant can be employed.

The position of Child`s Assistant (social worker/parents of children with special needs/other persons) was introduced by the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine in 2017. The relevant Order of the Ministry of Social Policy includes requirements for this position, which is funded by the departments of social protection. Child`s Assistants are introduced in the inclusive classroom at

the request of parents of a child with special needs and the relevant recommendations of the Inclusive Resource Centre.

Other recent policy reforms are related to the development of Professional Standards – for Early Childhood Teachers (Order of the Ministry of Economics 2021) and for Directors of early childhood institutions/kindergartens (Order of the Ministry of Economics 2021) – see *Chapter **4.2*** for more details.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Improving the quality of early childhood education and care in Ukraine

***Source**:* Peeters, J. 2019 (see *References* for further details)

Background: The study was conducted by Jan Peeters of the VBJK in Ghent/Belgium and funded by UNICEF-Ukraine in 2018. Reasons for conducting the research were changes in the legislation, in particular: the draft of the Law of Ukraine "On Preschool Education", Basic Component of Preschool Education (educational standards) and the "New Ukrainian School" concept.

Aims and procedures: The general goal of the research was to study the quality of early childhood education and care in Ukraine according to the criteria of the European Quality Framework (2015) and to develop recommendations which would strengthen the early childhood education system in Ukraine within the context of educational reforms. The study focused on the following aspects: access to ECEC; workforce; curriculum; monitoring and evaluation; governance. The study included visits to early childhood institutions, interviews and focus groups with educational policy representatives, tutors in IPE and CPD and early childhood teachers.

Findings and implications: The aspect **"**workforce" included the following general recommendations: existing professional education for teachers is focused mainly on theory and lacks an appropriate practical focus; teacher educators are not sufficiently aware of the latest international studies in the field of early childhood education and care and have difficulties in working with children of early age (0–2 years) and their parents. It is therefore recommended to increase the number of hours allocated to the pedagogical practicum of student teachers, starting from the first year of their studies.

Another recommendation was focused on the role of teacher-methodologists who can play an essential role in improving the quality of early childhood institutions and supporting Early Childhood Teachers in the introduction of innovative teaching methods and approaches. It was emphasised that the training of mentoring skills is critical for teachers-methodologists.

The low salaries for both Early Childhood Teachers and Teacher Educators were highlighted as an issue of serious concern for the quality of early childhood education.

Criteria of quality in early childhood education – Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation

Source: UNICEF in Ukraine and Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation 2019 (see *References* for further details)

Background and aims: The research was conducted by the Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation in partnership with the Kyiv International Institute of Sociological Studies, with funding support from the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and UNICEF Ukraine. It was part of an international project aiming to specify "International quality criteria for centre-based childcare"

and was conducted in 2018–2019. Following countries took part: China, Chile, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Russia, Spain, Ukraine, and Vietnam.

The main research questions were: "How important are criteria of quality of early childhood education for different target groups?" and "Which criteria are the most/the least important?"

Procedure: The basis of this research was the third edition of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-3), an instrument for assessing the quality of early childhood education programmes for children aged 2–5 years. The research focused on: interactions between teachers and children (28 criteria)

1) Interactions between teaching staff and parents (11 criteria)
2) Pedagogical orientation (7 criteria)
3) Educational structure (6 criteria).

In Ukraine the survey included the following target groups, which represented four major regions (city/rural population):

- Representatives of local educational authorities
- Early Childhood Teachers from 50 early childhood institutions (one classroom, two Early Childhood Teachers)
- Children's parents
- Students of IPE institutions.

Methods included telephone interviews, email interviews and online surveys.

Main findings related to the workforce: All criteria related to workforce issues were assessed by the highest scores (on average more than 6 out of the maximum score of 7), which demonstrated the general understanding and recognition of the role of competent teaching staff by all stakeholders.

Assessing process quality in early childhood education institutions according to ECERS-3

Source: Ministry of Education and Science 2022d (see *References* for further details)

Background: In 2019, the Programme of Government was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, which included goals of different Ministries. One of the goals of the Ministry of Education and Science (2022b) was providing equal access to quality early childhood education for every child, including conducting the assessment of the quality of educational process in early childhood institution according to the international instrument Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-3). ECERS-3 is the third edition of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales (ECERS) developed by Thelma Harms, Richard M. Clifford, and Debby Cryer (2014) to assess classroom quality. The main aspects of assessment classroom quality include the following: space and furnishings; personal care routines; language and literacy; learning activities; interaction; programme structure.

Aims and procedures: In 2022, a study on the assessment of process quality in early childhood institutions according to ECERS-3 was conducted by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (Ukrainian Institute of Education Development, Institute of Educational Analytics), with funding support from UNICEF Ukraine and the Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation.

The main goals of the study were to pilot international instrument ECERS-3 and to assess process quality in Ukrainian early childhood educational institutions. The sample included 200 early childhood institutions, which represented 24 *oblasts* in Ukraine and Kyiv city.

The study was conducted by the local experts who passed the necessary training.

Findings and implications: One of the major conclusions of this study was that the "Early Childhood Teacher is a key person in providing quality in the educational process of early childhood

educational institutions" (Ministry of Education and Science 2022d, 129). Professional training should be focused not only on the acquisition of necessary knowledge and skills, but also on the development of personal qualities such as flexibility and the ability to adapt learning activities to better react to the individual characteristics of children. The role of Professional Standards for Early Childhood Teachers in developing the necessary competences was also emphasised.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

That the role of early childhood education and care is critical to the further success of each person has been emphasised both at the international and national levels. Since 2017, when the educational reform "New Ukrainian School" started, it has become clear that changes should start even earlier than primary school, namely at the level of early childhood education.

Many positive changes have happened. These include developing:

- A new draft of the Law of Ukraine "On Preschool Education" (2021)
- A revised version of educational standards for preschool education (Basic Component of Preschool Education 2021)
- Professional Standards for Early Childhood Educators and Directors of early childhood institutions (2021).

At the same time many challenges remain, in particular:

- The social status of personnel working in the early childhood system is much lower than that of staff working in primary and secondary schools.
- Primary and secondary teachers working within the educational reform "New Ukrainian School" get more financial support due to financial subvention from the state budget and also methodological support.
- There is no correlation between the quality of work and the allocated salary. The quality of work is measured only indirectly (according to the number of years of work, level of education, compulsory attestation). All this leads to a decrease in teachers' motivation.

The low social status of Early Childhood Teachers leads to the following problems:

- Students with a relatively low level of relevant knowledge who wish to get a higher education degree tend to enrol at pedagogical colleges/institutes because it is easier to complete these qualifying courses since the competition is not very high. However, after graduation, it is likely that they will not get a job because of their low grades.
- Moreover, some graduates with good degrees choose not to work in a kindergarten or work there for just a short time. One reason is the very low salaries of Early Childhood Teachers mentioned above; thus graduates prefer to seek better paid jobs.

The issue of initial professional education/training is also problematic. The majority of graduates who apply for work in ECEC institutions do not meet the expectations of directors and often find it difficult to work with parents. Possible explanations for this situation could be:

- The study programmes are too focused on theory
- The dominance of traditional learning methods such as lectures, seminars
- The absence of the practice of applied research
- A lack of pedagogical themes during the practicum.

Starting on 24 February 2022, when the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine, the country has been faced with a huge number of other problems.

As of 23 September 2022 (Institute of Educational Analytics 2022):

- 819 early childhood education institutions have been damaged
- 82 have been completely destroyed
- 4,798 institutions accept children (331,762 children are enrolled)
- 3,873 ECEC settings use various forms of remote working with parents and children (involving 276,777 children)
- 632 ECEC institutions work in blended format (involving 42,815 children)
- 35,419 institutions provide educational services for 19,289 preschool children among internally displaced persons (IDPs)
- 7,227 children with special educational needs study in 4,167 inclusive groups
- 192 preschool education institutions are used as reception centres for IDPs.

One of the biggest challenges is to collect information about teaching staff who have to leave war zones and move either to other *oblasts* in Ukraine or abroad. As of 01.08.2022, only 76 early childhood teachers (IDPs) have been employed in the safe areas of Ukraine. At the same time 7,781 of children of preschool age, including 280 children with special needs, from IDP families have been admitted to ECEC institutions in central and western parts of Ukraine.

Another challenge is providing psychosocial support to all participants engaged in the educational process. Although the Ministry of Education and Science has established special rubrics on its website, providing recommendations of psychologists and other relevant resources, more work is needed in this area with the involvement of international experience.

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

UKRAINE

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Preliminary remarks

As of 24.02.2022, a state of war prevails in Ukraine. This has and will have a strong impact on all areas of society, including the system of early childhood education and care.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of refugees who have fled Ukraine for other European countries because of the war amounted to 5,872,700 in August 2023, and to 358,300 for countries beyond Europe (ODP 2023). In addition, there are more than 5 million internally displaced persons (as of May 2023, UNHCR 2023).

Statistical data used in this report are those that were currently accessible. However, as these possibly do not accurately reflect current conditions, they must be interpreted with caution.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC provision are **ECEC centre** (*yasla-sadok*, 0–5/6) and **kindergarten** (*dytyachyy sadok* or *shkola-dytyachyy sadok*, 3–5/6)[1]. Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Ukraine

1917	The Central Council of Ukraine forms the General Secretariat of Education, renamed the Ministry of Education on January 9th, 1918, including a Department for Out-of-school Education and Preschool Education.
1918	The Department of Out-of-school Education and Preschool Education raises the issue of universal compulsory preschool education of children. "Regulations of Kindergartens" noted that "all children from the age of 3 years old shall attend kindergartens" – these should be "free everywhere and be established at the expense of the rural and urban self-governments."
1920	The basis of the Ukrainian System of National Education is the social care and education of children aged 3 to 15. Orphanages become the main child care establishment: kindergartens, schools, and out-of-school institutions have to merge into a "single social organism", i.e. an orphanage, even though not all children were parentless.
1930	Establishing local educational authorities which provided management of educational institutions
1955	3,713 regular ECEC settings are registered in Ukraine, providing for 215,700 children.
1959	Resolution of the Council of Ministers of Ukraine "On measures for the Further Development of Childcare Facilities, Improving Education and Health Care for Children of Preschool Age." This and other documents plan the expansion of a network of ECEC settings and the improvement of their financial security.
1960s	During the 1960s a stable growth takes place in the number of ECEC institutions and the number of children enrolled. By the end of 1970, the total number of kindergartens in Ukraine was 16,500.

[1] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for settings for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for pre-primary settings in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. The relevant formats for Ukraine are **0–5/6** years and **3–5/6** years.

1980s	Expansion continues during the 1980s and also qualitative measures are taken. In 1987, there are 23,100 kindergartens in the Ukraine catering for 2.7 million children, representing 60.3% of the total population of preschool-age children (69.3% in urban areas, 40.5% in rural areas).
1992	24,500 kindergartens operate in Ukraine – the highest figure so far. The number of children covered by the system of public ECEC reaches 2.2 million, representing 47% of the total population of preschool-age children. 268,000 teaching staff are involved, 97% of whom are fully qualified.
1990s	During the 1990s considerable progress is made in the conceptual and legal framework of early childhood education and care.
1993	Current views on ECEC are set out in the Concept for Preschool Education in Ukraine – a system of objectives and approaches based on humanism, democracy, national culture and humanistic values.
1991-1993	For the first time in the history of Ukraine, alternative preschool education programmes were started: 'Ukrainian Preschoolers' (1991); 'The child in the preschool years' (1991); 'Baby' (1992); 'Child' (1993).
1994	"The First Steps" Project (Step by Step Project since 1996) was launched by the International Renaissance Foundation with the support of the *Open Society Foundation and Children Resource International* (USA) – implementer: Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation
1996	Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of 3 November 1993 on the State National Programme 'Education' ('Ukraine of the XXI Century')
1998	Standards of education at all levels of educational institutions are set out, for ECEC institutions in the "Basic components of early childhood education in Ukraine".
2001	The legislation "On Early Education" launches a new stage of development of early childhood education and care in Ukraine.
2001	Legislation "On Child Protection" sets out the system of state and public measures to ensure a full life, comprehensive education and development of children as well as the protection of their rights.
2003	The Early Childhood Pedagogy team at the Dragomanov National Pedagogical University jointly with the Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation develops the programme 'Step by Step" in Ukraine based on the Step by Step project.
2008	The policy paper "On additional measures to improve the quality of education in Ukraine" provides the theoretical basis for early childhood education, defining functions, policies, principles, goals and objectives for modernisation up to 2016.
2013	National Strategy of Education Development till 2021 and Plan of its realisation (reopening ECEC institutions, which had been previously closed; plan to cover 100% of children 5–6 year-olds through diversification of ECEC forms)
2017	Amendments to the Education Act are passed.
2021	– Amendment to the Early Education Act – Revision of the early childhood curriculum ("Basic components of early education")
2022	As of 24.02.2022, a state of war prevails in Ukraine, which has and will have a strong impact on all areas, including the system of early childhood education and care.

Sources: Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 1993; Ulyukayeva 2004; Ministry of Education 2017; Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2021.

ECEC system type and auspices

Early childhood education is an independent but integral part of the education system in Ukraine (Early Education Act 2001, as amended in 2020). At the national level, the Ministry of Education

and Science (*Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrayiny*) is responsible for regular ECEC settings for young children. These are both multi-age facilities (*yasla-sadky*) for children from 2 months to school enrolment at 7 years of age and separate nurseries (*dytyachi yasla*) and kindergartens (*dytyachi sadky*) as well as school kindergartens (*shkola-dytyachyy sadok*) for 3 to 7 year-olds, which are attached to primary/secondary schools.

The Ministry of Health (*Ministerstvo okhorony zdorov'ya Ukrayiny*) is responsible for home-based ECEC settings and also for children's health centres (*budynok dytyny*) for orphans or children with disabilities up to the age of 4.

While the ministries are primarily responsible for legal regulations and the development of standards, the municipalities are responsible for the management and operation of the facilities (Putcha et al. 2018).

General objectives and legislative framework

Within the framework of the *National Economic Strategy 2030*, an education and social reform is underway, the aim of which is, among other things, to promote the quality of early childhood education in Ukraine as well as its accessibility (Government Portal 2021). In particular, this accessibility is to be made as close to home as possible (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2021).

Every child, regardless of origin, ethnicity, religion, language or other characteristics, should have free access to early education. Fundamental principles of the pedagogical processes are democratisation and child-centredness as well as equity. Special emphasis is also placed on co-operation with families (Ministry of Education 2019).

Another important aspect is the creation of a safe learning environment in which children with special educational needs and children from areas where there are armed conflicts can feel comfortable (Liapunova 2020).

The general operation of ECEC provision is regulated by the Constitution of Ukraine (1996, as amended in 2019) and by the Education Act of Ukraine (1991, as amended in 2017; Ministry of Education 2017). This states, among other things, that the right to education applies to all persons, disadvantaged groups as well as minority ethnic groups (Right to Education Initiative 2020).

The Early Education Act (*Zakon pro doshkil'nu osvitu*) (2001, as amended in 2021), the Child Protection Act (2001, as amended in 2016) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are the most important legal frameworks for ECEC. The amendments to the Early Education Act (Amendment No. 4604) focus mainly on ensuring accessibility to early childhood education for *all* children (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2021).

According to a decision of the Cabinet of Ministers ("On Approval of Licensing Conditions of Educational Activities of Educational Institutions" 2015), the Ministry of Education issues licences for regular ECEC settings. Children's health centres for children under 3 years of age are regulated by the "Standard Regulations of Children's Centres".

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

All children from the age of 2 months until they start school have a legal right to a place in a centre-based or home-based ECEC setting (CIS Legislation 2021). For 5–6/7 year-olds, early education is compulsory (Education Act, Art. 11, Ministry of Education and Science 2017), otherwise attendance is voluntary.

Primary schooling usually starts at the age of 6, for children with special needs also later (Ministry of Education and Science 2017).

Main types of provision

According to the Early Education Act (2001, with amendments 2020, Art. 12), there are different kinds of ECEC provision.

For the SEEPRO-3 study we have categorised them into three main types: (1) regular ECEC settings; (2) settings with combined regular and remedial or special education tasks; and (3) residential provision (children's homes for orphans; sanitoriums for children with long-term illnesses).

(1) *Regular ECEC settings*

These include:

Multi-age **ECEC centres** (*yasla-sadok* – lit. "nursery-kindergarten") for children between 2 months and 6/7 years are the most common form of provision.

Nurseries (*yasla*) for children from 1 to 3 years are usually part of a multi-age centre or a kindergarten. There are very few self-contained settings.

Kindergartens (*dytyachyy sadok*) for 3–6/7 year-olds are either separate facilities or attached to a primary or secondary school (*shkola-dytyachyy sadok* – lit. "school-kindergarten".

All regular ECEC settings are open from 7:30 to 17:00 (state and municipal facilities) or from 8:00 to 20:00 (private facilities).

(2) *Settings with combined regular and remedial or special education tasks*

Combined early childhood centres (*yasla-sadok kombinovanoho typu*) and **child development centres** (*tsentr rozvytky dytyny*) offer both regular and integrative groups for children between 2 months and 6/7 years as well as groups with remedial, special and rehabilitative provision. The pedagogical staff in these facilities work closely with speech therapists, psychologists, music teachers, sports educators and other types of specialist.

Children's health centres (*budynok dytyny*) are ECEC centres for under 3 year-olds (or under 4 year-olds with disabilities), offering medical services for orphans, long-term sick and severely disabled children (Puchta et al. 2018, 8).

Special needs centres provide for children between 2 and 7 years of age with various disabilities. They are only found in the larger cities (Puchta et al. 2018, 8).

(3) *Residential provision*

Children's homes are full-time residential settings, either for very young orphans or for children aged 3 and older. For these children, there are also **Family groups** (2 months–6/7 years) for them to attend until they start school. These are assigned to the Ministry of Social Policy.

Sanitoriums provide for children who need long-term medical care and rehabilitation measures.

During the summer season – June, July and August – all ECEC settings offer summer camps where children can either stay overnight or spend just one day there. These camps offer various educational and health care activities. They are not compulsory and can be taken up voluntarily depending on the parents' wishes.

In 2022, there were 13,900 ECEC institutions in Ukraine, with 1,047,000 places and 934,000 enrolled children (SSSU 2023a).[2]

916,144 children attended public institutions and 26,658 private or corporative institutions.

[2] All data reported below exclude the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol and temporarily occupied territories in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Provider structures

According to the Early Education Act and the Education Act of Ukraine, the providers of ECEC settings are the state, municipalities and private individuals; almost all are subsidised by the state or municipalities (Ministry of Education and Science 2017).

The private sector is relatively small (in 2015 there were only 177 privately run ECEC facilities); however, parents increasingly tend to enrol their children in private institutions because they are more flexible, use more modern methods and the group size is usually smaller (Putcha et al. 2018). Even in 2022, only 3.6% of the ECEC settings were private (SSSU 2023b).

As of 2016, the Ministry of Health regulations for establishing private provision have been relaxed, making it easier to set up a new private facility. Until then, for example, one and a half times more square metres had to be available per child than in the average international comparison, or each facility was obliged to maintain its own kitchen (OECD 2017). In addition, since 2015, private institutions have been legally exempt from taxation (Law "On Amendments to the Tax Code of Ukraine in Creating Favourable Conditions for the Provision of Educational Services of Early Childhood Education Institutions and Secondary Schools in Private Ownership"). Therefore, there is hope that these measures will increase the number of official registrations – especially in home-based settings.

At the end of 2022, 13,376 public (state and municipal) ECEC institutions provided 1,020,425 places and 499 private or corporative institutions 26,658 places (SSSU 2023b).

Participation rates in regulated provision

Because of the war, many parents (mostly mothers) had to leave the country with their children in the spring of 2022. The data reported here are those that were last accessible.

In 2020, according to national statistics, 1,150,500 children were enrolled in 15,335 ECEC centres with a total of 1,153,000 places. The overall enrolment rate was 63% (SSSU 2021a, 108f). Eurostat data (2023d) report that in 2021, 152,501 children attended ISCED 01 settings and 998,044 were enrolled in ISCED 02 settings.

Between 1990 and 2005, ECEC provision decreased significantly, not least because of a lack of funding, but also because demand was rather low due to high unemployment. Whereas there were 24,500 settings still open in 1990, by 2004, there were only 14,900. From 2010 onwards, the number began to slowly increase again (Putcha et al. 2018). However, according to national statistics, there were also only 13,900 facilities in 2022 (SSSU 2023a).

Enrolment rates and also the number of available places vary greatly from region to region. Across the country, there is a lack of places in most areas – which was and still is one of the reasons for corruption in the education sector. To address this problem, the so-called "electronic queue" was introduced to make the registration of children fairer and more transparent (Ministry of Education 2019). So far, however, this has only been partially successful, as it is up to the municipalities to decide whether or not to use the electronic system of registration (Putcha et al. 2018). Beyond this, technical and security shortcomings in the electronic waiting loop create opportunities to bypass it or to obtain a place through irregular means. In several cities, these ‘e-queues’ have therefore already been abolished. Since a place in an ECEC setting can also eventually lead to the desired place in primary and secondary school, many parents register their children at birth. Donations are also used to improve the chances of getting a place (OECD 2017).

By easing the hurdles for the establishment of new ECEC facilities, 74,675 additional places in preschool facilities could be created from 2017 to mid-2020 (Government Portal 2021).

Especially in rural areas, the low attendance rates are often due to the fact that the facilities are too far away from the homes and parents cannot bring the children there – especially because in rural areas often only short programmes are offered for a few hours a day. An effective strategy to increase attendance rates is still missing (Liapunova 2020).

National data show a drop in the number of ECEC settings between 2010 and 2015, with the subsequent increase by 2020 not yet reaching 2010 levels. The number of children enrolled, on the other hand, increased between 2010 and 2015, only to fall slightly below 2010 levels by 2021 – at the same time, attendance rates rose steadily from 53% to 60% between 2010 and 2021, and dropped again to 53.4% in 2022 (see *Table 1*). However, regional differences are significant: in 2020, the enrolment rate in rural areas was only 42%, while in urban areas it was 75% (SSSU 2021a, 108).

Table 1

Ukraine: Number of ECEC settings, enrolled children (0–6 years) and participation rates from 2010 to 2022

Year	Total number of ECEC settings	Total number of children enrolled	Participation rates across all types of ECEC provision, in %
2010	15,600	1,273,000	53
2015	14,813	1,291,200	55
2021	15,000	1,111,000	60
2022	13,900	934,000	53.4

Source: SSSU 2023a

Table 2

Ukraine: Enrolment rates by age, 2022

Age group	Enrolment rate, in %
0–2 years	12.3
3–4 years	77.2
5 years	65.6
3–5 years	73.0
6 years	7.8
3–6 years	55.2
Total 0 to 6 year-olds	**39.4**

Source: SSSU 2023b

Financing and costs for parents

In 2019, 5.4% of the gross domestic product was spent on education in Ukraine (The World Bank 2022). It is unclear what share early childhood education has here.

Since 2017, ECEC has been financed from the local budgets. In 2019, consolidated budget expenditure on education was 6% of GDP and 17.4% of the national budget, 15.1% of this being spent on ECEC (Institute of Educational Analytics 2021, 66f).

Starting from 2019, the educational subvention from the central budget to local budgets was introduced to cover additional needs of children with SEN in the inclusive groups.

Ukraine has been going through a decentralisation phase in recent years which entails the merging of regions into territorial communities (*terytorial'na hromada*), with all the necessary adjustments. For ECEC settings, this means that a previously centralised state financing system is changing to decentralised budgeting. As a result of this process of decentralisation of financial

resources, the municipalities have been responsible since 2015 for the financing of ECEC facilities. Attendance at a public setting is free of charge except for meals (Putcha et al 2018). Meals are free for orphans, for children in special needs institutions and for children from families with less than the minimum income set by the government. Church-affiliated early education institutions are not funded through the state or municipal budget. Private (commercial) facilities are self-sustaining, i.e. the costs are borne by the parents and the provider.

Private ECEC provision is very expensive: in 2017, a place in a private setting could cost up to UAH 12,000 (€392) per month, which is about twice the average household income (OECD 2017).

The previously mentioned differences between urban and rural areas relate not only to the resources allocated to a facility, but also the budgets allocated per child (Peeters 2019).

Since 2015, municipalities can receive financial state support if their local budget is not sufficient. Such education subsidies are intended mainly for staff and operating costs. The institutions are also allowed to accept donations, which usually come from parents (OECD 2017).

In public ECEC settings parents have to pay for meals, the amount of which is set annually by the local authorities and can vary from city to city: In Kyiv, in 2023, it amounted to between 45–58.8 UAH (1.1–1.46€) per day, depending on the age of the child (Chervonohrad.City 2023) whereas in Kremenchuk in 2022 it amounted to 21–29 UAH (0.52–0.72€) per day (Telegraf 2021). Low income parents, parents with children with special educational needs and parents participating in the war are exempt from payment.

Denominational ECEC settings are not financed through the state budget. Private (commercial) facilities are self-sustaining, i.e. the costs are borne by the parents and the provider. Municipal facilities have so far been partly funded by the local municipal or district budgets.

Staff to child ratios and group size

In most cases there are two professionals in a group, one of whom is responsible for five to ten children. In inclusive groups there may be up to 15 children, including one to three children with special educational needs. In private settings, the provider decides on the group size, which is usually smaller than in public facilities (Putcha et al. 2018). As a rule, the children are organised into four age-groups: 0 to 2 year-olds, 3 to 4 year-olds, 4 to 5 year-olds and 5 to 7 year-olds.

In the most frequently used type of provision (multi-age ECEC centres), the staff to child ratio is 1 : 12, with 24 children in a group (Peeters 2019). *Table 3* shows the estimated staff to child ratio in different kinds of settings in 2015 (no newer data available).

Table 3

Ukraine: Staff to child ratios, 2015

Setting type	Number of staff	Number of children	Staff to child ratio*
Self-contained nursery	15	36	1 : 2.5
Multi-age ECEC centre, 0–6/7 years	236,936	996,823	1 : 4.2
Kindergarten, ~~3–6~~/7 years	44,431	177,067	1 : 4.0
Other kinds of ECEC setting (e.g. 'School- Kindergarten')	27,531	117,281	1 : 4.3
Total	**308,913**	**1,291,207**	

Source: SSSU 2015, *own calculations

Curricular framework

The "The Basic Component of Early Education" (2012, as amended in 2020 and issued in January 2021) was prepared by experts from research and practice and, as a framework curriculum, represents the state (mandatory) standard for early education in Ukraine. It primarily describes the competences children should have acquired at the end of pre-primary education. Continuity between early education and school is a key feature. The competency-based document emphasises humanistic pedagogy, civic education and the shared educational responsibility of the state, municipalities, families and experts from the education and care sector. Learning areas include: personal development; sensory-cognitive experiences; nature; play; society; language development; the arts (Department of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports of Rakhiv City Council 2021).

Inclusive education is also a focus of the curriculum. A study sponsored by UNICEF found that many aspects of the curriculum are promising, but that more attention needs to be paid to strengthening cooperation between parents, professionals and the local community. The study also found that although there is a tendency towards a child-centred approach, teacher-initiated practices are predominant and room for free play is often neglected. Moreover, professionals may feel overwhelmed by the inclusive approach and exercise too little autonomy (Peeters 2019).

Digital education

The introduction of information technologies into early childhood settings is a very recent pedagogical phenomenon. At the same time, multimedia tools for ECEC settings are increasingly being produced for the early education sector (computer games, electronic lexicons, videos, etc.). In the revision of the "Basic Component of Early Education" of 2021, "the basics of computer literacy" was included as a new learning area with compulsory and optional competence specifications that addresses the acquisition of digital knowledge and skills by younger children. These include children's ability to use digital technologies to meet their individual needs, solve educational tasks and develop a positive attitude towards ICT and digitalisation.

The use of digital media in early education is mainly seen as an opportunity to create creative learning conditions, while ensuring that children also acquire awareness of possible harmful experiences. However, lack of funds and of motivation on the part of ECEC centre leaders to use digital media with the children mean that acquiring digital devices is often associated with difficulties. Moreover, the use of computers by preschool children, for example, is not provided for in the standards for "equipping educational institutions with computer technology" (Nosenko et al. 2016).

Monitoring – evaluation

According to the UNICEF study, there is no coherent system of monitoring and evaluation in the ECEC system in Ukraine. Moreover, a lack of trained staff and relevant evaluation instruments are common hindrances. Private, non-accredited ECEC institutions are not evaluated at all (Peeters 2019).

Child-related assessment

Most municipalities use an instrument developed by researchers to measure children's developmental progress. However, it is often not implemented due to time constraints; the results

are sometimes shared with parents, but the parents are rarely involved themselves (Peeters 2019).

Centre-based internal self-evaluation

There is no tradition of internal, centre-based evaluation in Ukraine. The UNICEF study suggests that ECEC staff need professional support here (Peeters 2019).

External evaluation

A quality management system for education is currently being developed in Ukraine to meet the requirements of ISO standards. The new concept for the further development of early education is to be part of the quality assurance. In addition to the Ministry of Education, representatives of UNICEF and the Ukrainian Step-by-Step organisation are also working on this project. The main referential base is the European Quality Framework (EQF). The pilot project launched in 2019 by the Institute for Educational Analysis to systematise statistics on early education is intended to improve monitoring. This was also linked to a study initiated by the Ministry of Education on the quality of early childhood education institutions, which examined education programmes, staff, number of children, materials and finances (Liapunova 2020).

In some municipalities, expert advisers or counsellors visit ECEC settings on a regular basis. UNICEF is working with the ministry to introduce the revised Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-3). However, data storage systems are often lacking (Peeters 2019). Professional counselling services carry out quality audits mainly with regard to pedagogical aspects. The professional supervision of the spatial environment and equipment in ECEC centres poses a number of difficulties, since many things do not directly fall under the responsibility of the settings themselves (e.g. changes regarding safety aspects, fire safety) and therefore there is no budget for improvements. External evaluation is not yet as important as it should be in quality assurance: there is a lack of specialised experts to carry out evaluations, and often a lack of funding in rural areas (Liapunova 2020).

The external evaluation of educational quality and educational standards is provided by the State Agency of Quality of Education (SAQE), which was established in 2017 by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. The Ministry provides its coordination. One of the main activities of SAQE is conducting institutional audits (State Service of Education Quality of Ukraine 2023).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

In Ukraine, inclusive education has been a priority since the 1990s. However, as the recent UNICEF study found, the definition of inclusive education still tends to focus on children with disabilities rather than, for example, children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Moreover, ECEC professionals are often not well-trained in this approach (Peeters 2019). The implications associated with the term were and still are very different: In a first phase (until about 2001), “inclusion” was primarily understood to mean medical models of ‘disabilities’ and was based on a deficit concept. In a second phase (until 2010), attempts were then made to integrate children with special educational needs into a system that remained largely unchanged. It was only in the subsequent third phase (from 2010) that attempts were made to implement the principle of inclusion based on the principles of non-discrimination, consideration of diversity and the inclusion of all participants in educational processes (Martynchuk et al. 2021).

Overall, the main attempt has been to broaden the definition of inclusion. In the 2017 Education Act, children to be supported through inclusive education/care are all children who need additional support, either permanent or temporary – this includes children from disadvantaged groups and children from ethnic minorities. In 2017, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted a new regulation on inclusive resource centres (*Inclyusyvno-resursnyi tsentr*), which replaces the abolished system of psychological-medical-educational consultations. The regulation specifically requires local authorities to establish such resource centres for every 7,000 children in rural areas and 12,000 children in urban areas. Their tasks include assessing the special needs of children and developing recommendations as well as providing psycho-educational services and methodological support for professionals. In addition, early intervention services for children from birth to 5 years of age have also been established in ten regions of Ukraine in recent years with the help of donor organisations. In order to support the transition of children from these services to development programmes, the Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation conducted a project in which various institutions participated.

In the ECEC settings themselves, as stated in the "Instruction on the organisation of inclusion groups in kindergartens" (*Instruktsiya z organizatsii inklyuzyvnyh grup u doshkil'nyh zakladah osvity*), parents or other persons may act as volunteer childcare workers. These accompany children with special educational needs throughout the day and provide support when needed. The only requirement for the job is a medical doctor's approval (Putcha et al. 2018).

With effect from 29 July 2015, the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers issued Decision 530 "On Amendments to the Regulations for Early Childhood Education Institutions", in which it endorsed the establishment of special needs and inclusion groups as part of ECEC centres for children with special needs.

Based on the conclusions of the Psychological, Medical and Pedagogical Commission (PMPC), inclusive early education centres can be opened at the request of parents in cooperation with the centre director. The latter then decides to establish an inclusive education group that takes into account the specific educational needs of the children.

During the past two years (as of 2020), the number of children with special educational needs attending inclusive early education groups doubled to 4,681 children (Government Portal 2021).

Initiatives to integrate children from families who have been displaced within Ukraine into ECEC settings have been very successful. Special training is available for professionals working with these children (Liapunova 2020).

Children with a migration background – Children from Roma communities

According to the law, linguistic minorities in Ukraine are divided into three categories: indigenous peoples, such as the Crimean Tatars, who speak indigenous languages; minorities who speak a European Union language; and minorities who speak a non-EU language, such as Russian. With the amendment to the Education Act 2017 coming into force, minority languages are only spoken as second languages in early childhood education institutions, which actually contradicts the Education Act as a whole and also the statement in the Constitution that every person has the right to be educated in their family language (Right to Education Initiative 2020).

In 2020, Ukrainian was spoken in almost all ECEC institutions (97.9%), and Russian in only 1.2% (SSSU 2021a, 111).

Statistics on migrants are not consistently collected in Ukraine – and where they are compiled, they may contradict one other depending on the source and definition of 'migration status' (VoxUkraine 2018). According to data from the International Organisation for Migration in Ukraine, only 293,600 foreigners (less than 0.7% of the population) lived permanently in Ukraine (and had an official entry permit) in 2020. In addition, there were 151,300 people who lived in

Ukraine only temporarily (students, seasonal workers) (IOM Development Fund 2021, 18). In 2021, 32,284 children under the age of 4 were of non-Ukrainian origin (SSSU 2022a). According to Eurostat data for the same year, this was 2.5% of the corresponding age group (Eurostat 2023a).

As in many countries, it is difficult to obtain accurate figures on the Roma community in Ukraine. While the 2001 Ukrainian Census reported 47,600 individuals and 20,000 children, estimates from Roma advocacy groups estimate the figure at least at 80,000 children, who generally have little access to early childhood education opportunities (UNICEF 2021, 37).

The implementation of the Roma Strategy up to 2020 did increase ECEC enrolments among by Roma children – which was mainly attributed to projects implemented by NGOs such as "Blago" or "Step-by-Step" (UN Women Ukraine 2019, 36, 59). Starting in 2021, a new Roma strategy is to contribute to the integration of Roma into society. This strategy is to be implemented by 2026; interim results were to be assessed in 2022 and 2024 (Council of Europe 2021) but will now take longer because of the war.

Parental leave arrangements

Fully paid **Maternity leave** covers 70 calendar days before the birth and 56 calendar days afterwards (Replicon 2022).

Parental leave can be taken up to the child's third birthday not only by the mother or father of the child, but also by grandparents or other relatives who care for the child while the parents work. As a rule, Parental leave is unpaid, unless the employer offers its own payments.

In 2021, the **Childcare Leave** Act 1401-IX came into force, which also grants up to 14 paid calendar days of **Paternity leave** to fathers or other relatives caring for the child. As a rule, however, employers do not pay more than the mandatory minimum amounts. If there are two or more children under 15 in the family, the parents are entitled to an additional ten days. Both parents can benefit from part-time arrangements at work during Parental leave (Willis Towers Watson 2021).

At the end of maternity leave, women employees are granted childcare leave until the child reaches 3 years of age. This leave may also be used either fully or partially by the child's father, grandmother, grandfather, or other relatives who are actually caring for the child (Replicon 2022).

The family receives financial support amounting to 41,280 UAH (€1,021)[3]. This is paid in two stages: 10,320 UAH (€255) just after the delivery followed by 860 UAH (€21) every month over three years. The maximum amount of the monthly child support for single mothers in 2023 was UAH 2,272 (€56). This monthly allowance has not been increased since 2014 and is currently just over half of the official subsistence level (UNICEF 2021, 81).

In addition, each family either receives a so-called "Baby Package" which includes necessary items for a newborn or a lump sum of 6,300 UAH (€155) (Fakty 2023).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Ukraine

*Country expert assessment by **Nataliia Sofii***

The most urgent challenges for the ECEC system in Ukraine are those caused by the Russian Federation, which started a full-scale war in February 2022.

[3] Conversion rate August 2023

As a result, 70 ECEC institutions have been destroyed totally, and 1,031 have been damaged (Trade Union of Pedagogical Workers of Ukraine 2023).

Additional financial investments are required for repairing these and building new ones.

At the same time, more information is required about possible alternative forms of accessing ECEC through exchanges with other countries. Implementing relevant forms in Ukraine will need to be accompanied by the development of appropriate legal and methodological documents.

Another challenge is to provide psychosocial support to young children and families who have had a stressful experience. Some children have lost their parents, had the experience of bombing and getting injured, or have had to move to another regions of Ukraine or to other countries.

They urgently need the support of their parents who are often suffering stress themselves or who do not fully understand their important role in this process. Therefore, more information for parents with examples of activities they can do with their children at home, in shelters or other places is essential.

On April 2023, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the Concept of Safety of Educational Institutions, where such important issues as psychosocial support, knowledge about how to behave in dangerous situations and in the face of cyber threats were included. The Concept can be an effective tool to make all educational institutions, including ECEC Centres, more safe for all participants of educational process.

The lack of sufficient ECEC institutions is one of the problems which breaks one of the main rights of a child – their right to quality care and education, especially for children from vulnerable groups, i.e. those: with special educational needs; from Roma communities and other national minorities; living in internally displaced families; from rural areas; under three years of age.

According to the State Agency of Statistics of Ukraine only 39.4% of young children were enrolled in ECEC institutions in 2022 (SSSU 2023a).

Another challenge concerns the support of private ECEC centres – at the end of 2022, private ECEC centres comprised only 3.6% of the total number of settings (SSSU 2023a).

Yet another challenge relates to the quality of early childhood education. Here the work of the State Agency of Quality Education is invaluable, in particular by providing institutional audits and methodological materials to ECEC institutions. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales (ECERS-3) study was conducted by Ukrainian Institute of Education Development with the support of the Ministry of Education, UNICEF and Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation. Methodological recommendations based on the results of the study can be a good resource for providing higher quality of ECEC (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2023).

After the main Law of Ukraine ”On Education“ was adopted in 2017, many relevant changes were made to Ukrainian legislation, also in the ECEC field. However, the new Law on Preschool Education has not yet been adopted.

There is a need for the further development of legal and methodological recommendations to support the implementation of key documents such as the Concept of Early Childhood Education, Professional standards for ECEC teachers and principals, and ECEC educational standards (Basic Component of Early Childhood Education).

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age – even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Ukraine was 40,997,698, showing a steady decline over the past 20 years (2000: 49,114,950; 2010: 45,782,592; 2020: 41,732,779) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1,13). At 1.16, Ukraine had the second lowest total fertility rate (Eurostat 2023b)[4].

Children under age 6

Table 4

Ukraine: Number of children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year	270,884
1 year-olds	292,596
2 year-olds	307,472
3 year-olds	334,231
4 year-olds	361,593
5 year-olds	394,094
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**1,960,870**

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 2.1% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, 2.7% were children between 3 and 6 years of age. While these shares were mostly slightly higher than the respective EU averages up to 2015, they were significantly lower in 2022, especially for children under 3 years of age.

Table 5

Ukraine: Share of children under 6 years of age in the total population from 2000 until 2022*

Year	Comparison Ukraine/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2010	Ukraine	3.2	2.8	6.1
	∅ EU25[5]	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Ukraine	3.3	3.3	6.6
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2

[4] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

[5] The data for 2010 (EU25) include the EU25-Länder at that time (AT, BE, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, HU, IE, IT, LU, LV, LT, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, UK). The 2015 data (EU28) include the EU25 countries and additional BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Year	Comparison Ukraine/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2022	Ukraine	2.1	2.7	4.8
	∅ EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations; differences in totals are due to roundings

Single households with children under age 6

In 2021, 6.1% of all households had children under 3 years of age, and 14.9% had children under 7 years old (SSSU 2021b, 11). Only one adult lived in 7.6% of households with children (without age specification). In a quarter (25.5%) of these lone-parent households there are children under 7 years of age (SSSU 2021b, 16f). The latter households in particular often struggle with a lack of financial resources, which do not allow them, for example, to buy necessary medication (34.2%) or pay for doctor's visits (31.5%) (UNICEF 2021, 58).

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In 2021, 69.9% of men and 60.7% of women of working age (15–70 years) were in employment (SSSU 2022b). The unemployment rate in 2020 was 9.1% for women and 9.8% for men (SSSU 2021a, 55).

There are no available data on the employment status of mothers and fathers with under 6 year-old children in Ukraine. However, the following two tables present information on the situation among EU countries (*Table 6a*) and among non-EU countries other than Ukraine (*Table 6b*) participating in the SEEPRO-3 study.

Table 6a

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 among EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[6]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[7]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e

Table 6b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)

[6] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[7] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
+++United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	++72.3 ++72.1 (2023)	++79.2 ++79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023f

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion

In Ukraine, three criteria are used to define poverty: (1) a person's total expenditure is below 75% of the total monthly per capita expenditure (median); (2) a person's per capita equivalent income is below 60% of the median according to the EU scale; and (3) the EU deprivation criterion, according to which a household has four of new deprivation characteristics. Child poverty is defined on the basis of the Living Conditions Survey.

In 2019, the relative poverty rate in a household with one child was 23.7%, with two children 37.7% and with three children 59.7%. Younger children in particular are more clearly affected by poverty: The relative poverty rate of children under 3 years old was 52.6%, that of 3 to 6 year-olds 46%. In addition, children in rural areas are more often affected by poverty than children in cities and more often when parents are not in employment (UNICEF 2021, 20ff). Overall, one third of households with children are in a situation of material deprivation, 19% in severe material deprivation – this situation is particularly aggravated among single parents (52.2% vs. 31.8%) (ibid, p. 28f).

Overall, the proportion of people living in poverty and receiving social assistance was 63% in 2015, rising to 70.9% in 2018 – falling to 57.4% in 2019 (ibid, p. 15).

For 2021, the overall share of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion was reported at 23.4% (Eurostat 2023c).

For the period from 2016 to 2020, the National Poverty Reduction Strategy was approved, which was supposed to alleviate the situation through increased employment opportunities or better access to social services, among other things. However, improvements could only be seen at a very low level, if at all. Since the strategy did not consider children according to age-groups, no statements can be made about a possible improvement in child poverty (UNICEF 2021, 73ff). For some years now, the inequalities between rich and poor families with children (data without age

specification) have been worsening: in 2019, rich families spent 5.1 times as much as poor ones (UNICEF 2021, 48).

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seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

THE UNITED KINGDOM

of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC Workforce Profile

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8.4 Northern Ireland: Recent policy reforms 1941

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff 1941
9.1 Research in England 1941
9.2 Research in Wales 1942
9.3 Research in Scotland 1943
9.4 Research in Northern Ireland 1945

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment 1946

References 1949

Appendix I: Acronyms and definitions 1954
Appendix II: Explanatory note on UK qualification levels 1956

Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

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Preamble

The UK, comprising England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, has a mixed economy in ECEC with most provision for 0 to 5 year-olds traditionally provided by the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector and an early start to compulsory schooling at 5 years (4 in Northern Ireland). More recently there has been an increase in state-funded provision for 3 to 5 year-olds (and latterly for disadvantaged 2 year-olds) in nursery and reception classes in primary schools, with almost all schools now adopting a 4+ admissions policy (in the September after the 4th birthday).

Politically, the UK has been undergoing a period of gradual change over the last 35 years with increasing devolution of responsibilities to its four constituent nations. Governance of ECEC services is amongst the devolved responsibilities. This has resulted in increasing divergence between education and social services policies and systems, including provision and regulation of services for young children and their families and associated workforce policies. This divergence has become more evident between Wales and Scotland and the rest of the UK over the last five years.

While the picture of the ECEC workforce across the UK is confused and confusing there remain some common overarching features across the four nations:

- A mixed economy of care; reflecting in part the UK's modified neo-liberal political and economic position in championing business/private enterprise and supporting social enterprise and voluntary organisations with state intervention for essential public services
- Higher status accorded to education than to care; based partly on historical associations between caring/mothering as 'women's work' for which no qualifications were necessary
- Teachers with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) enjoying significantly better pay, career structures, conditions of service and CPD entitlements than other workers due to the different status of education and care and strong unionisation of the teaching workforce combined with differential patterns of employment across the public/local authority and PVI sectors
- Absence of unionisation amongst the non-teaching workforce; poorly paid and poorly qualified women working in relative isolation in small private and voluntary settings are less likely to join unions
- Absence of men, particularly in work with the youngest children
- A predominantly white female workforce
- National specification, whether statutory or through guidance, of minimum standards and curriculum, partly as a means of standardising provision across what is – because of the mixed economy approach – a highly variable sector
- Regulation and enforcement regimes through inspectorates that act as mechanisms of control, standardisation and accountability and provide information to justify public expenditure
- Competence-based qualification requirements based on national standards and curriculum frameworks
- Despite stated aspirations towards graduate leadership, and progress in developing higher level qualifications, the minimum requirements for leadership of the majority of non-school ECEC settings remain at level 4 EQF/level 3 ISCED in England. In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland these have been raised to level 6 EQF/level 5 ISCED.

This report describes in detail the provision and governance of ECEC, workforce structures, qualification and competence requirements separately for each of the four nations. However, where features are largely shared and to avoid repetition, some sections have been integrated.

1. ECEC governance in the United Kingdom

1.1 England: ECEC governance

With a population of 56.5 million (ONS 2022), England is by far the largest of the four nations. Since 2010 there has been a shift in ECEC policy from an integrated policy framework to one focused on educational outcomes. The Department for Education (DfE) has overall responsibility for ECEC and compulsory schooling and Local Authorities in England have specific statutory responsibilities under the Childcare Act 2006 (Legislation.gov.uk 2006) and the Childcare Act 2016 (Legislation.gov.uk 2016a). These include securing sufficient childcare places in their area, providing information to parents, providing information and training to childcare providers and ensuring provision of free childcare entitlement (15 hours for vulnerable 2 year-olds; 15 hours for 3 and 4 year-olds and 30 hours for 3 and 4 year-olds of working parents).

The *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) (DfE 2023b) sets out the statutory curriculum framework and safeguarding and welfare requirements for provision from 0 up to 5 years and regardless of setting. *Development Matters* (DfE 2021a) is non-statutory curriculum guidance that sits alongside the EYFS.

In England, regulation and inspection of all services for children and young people, including early years, out-of-school and residential childcare as well as schools, is integrated under the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Ofsted is a non-ministerial government department that reports directly to parliament via the Select Committee on Education. This gives it some degree of independence from ministerial/political oversight by the Department for Education. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is legally required to provide an annual report on standards in schools and, since 2001, to report separately on standards and issues in early years services. Ofsted registers providers of early years education and childcare (other than schools) on either the Early Years Register (compulsory for provision that includes under-fives) or the Childcare Register (compulsory for provision for children from 5 to 8 years and optional for older age groups or activity clubs). Provision registered on the Early Years Register will be inspected within 30 months of registration and at least once within the next 6 years. Any setting that is judged as 'inadequate' with be inspected again within 6 months and those judged as 'requiring improvement' within a year. Ofsted will prioritise inspections where concerns have been expressed (Ofsted 2021).

Ofsted provides feedback on strengths and areas for development in relation to the inspection framework and explains areas for improvement. Local Authority early years advisory teams provide support to settings to develop their practice, though the extent of support varies across England. Many teams have been reduced as a result of funding cuts and the academisation[1] of schools. This has given schools more autonomy, downgraded the role of local authorities and led to a greater emphasis on mutual support between schools and early years settings through Teaching Schools and system leadership roles (networks of national, local and specialist lead teachers recognised for specific expertise).

Standards, qualifications and registration for teachers – those with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) – are under the direct control of the Department for Education. There is no register for Early Years Practitioners who are qualified at Level 3 on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) – equivalent to Level 4 EQF.

[1] Academisation is the process by which England is moving toward all schools becoming an Academy. These are independent but state-funded. They vary in size and the policy direction is for all Academies to be part of multi-academy trusts.

1.2 Wales: ECEC governance

Wales has a population of circa 3.1 million (ONS 2021). The National Assembly for Wales (commonly known as the Welsh Assembly) was established in 1999 and has legislative and administrative powers covering all forms of health, education and social services for young children and their families. The system is multi-sectoral, with early childhood education under the auspices of the Welsh Government Department of Education, Social Justice and Welsh Language whereas childminding (home-based childcare provision), day nurseries and parent support are the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Services. Considerable changes are currently underway to early years services, with policy focusing on creating a single high-quality approach to ECEC that is child centred (Welsh Government 2019).

Unlike in England, an overarching integrated policy framework was included in the Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan (Welsh Government 2017a) and continues to be reflected in the annual children's plan for Wales (Welsh Government 2022a) and in the development of the new Quality Framework for the sector.

Wales defines early years as the period from pre-birth to the end of the Foundation Phase. The statutory Foundation Phase curriculum framework covers 3 to 7 year-olds in both maintained schools (i.e. primary and nursery schools) and non-maintained settings (pre-schools, playgroups and day nurseries and Flying Start centres). Flying Start (Welsh Government 2017b) is a multidisciplinary programme based primarily on the universal Health Visiting service that targets extra Health Visitors time and resources on families with children under 4 living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Wales. Centre-based settings as well as early learning and language development sessions are part of the offer along with parent/family support and home visiting services provided according to assessed need.

In 2015, a statutory *Foundation Phase Profile* (Welsh Government 2016a) was introduced to ensure a nationally consistent baseline assessment during the reception year. This was part of the planned comprehensive *Early Years Development and Assessment Framework* across education and health sectors from birth to 7 years that had been introduced in 2013. The Foundation Phase Profile will also contribute evidence towards the new Early Years Outcomes Framework (Welsh Government 2016b) which provides a tool for results-based accountability that measure the effectiveness of local and national government policies across all aspects of children's health, care, development, wellbeing and safety. Following on from a review of the curriculum in Wales (Donaldson 2015), a new *Curriculum for Wales* for 3–16 year-olds (Welsh Government 2020a) and a *Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings* (Welsh Government 2022c) and new assessment arrangements are being developed.

The regulation of services for young children in Wales is not integrated under a single regulator as in England. Instead, Wales chose to keep separate regulation and inspection regimes with early education under ESTYN – the office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales – and day nurseries and family day care (home-based childcare provision, childminding) under the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) that operates a different set of quality indicators. Since 2019 the two organisations have worked together to undertake one inspection of care and education in regulated non-school settings up to the age of 12 and non-maintained settings that provide education to 3 and 4 year-olds that are eligible for part-time funding (ESTYN 2021).

Standards and qualifications for teachers (those with Qualified Teacher Status) and learning support staff are regulated by the Education Workforce Council (EWC 2022). Qualifications to work in early years settings other than schools are approved by Social Care Wales and are regulated by Qualifications Wales. They continue to relate to the national occupational standards set down by employers, workers and other stakeholders through the relevant authority for the sector –

Skills for Care and Development. Social Care Wales is also the registration body for qualified Social Workers; however, unlike in Scotland, there is currently no register of ECEC workers.

1.3 Scotland: ECEC governance

Scotland's legal, educational and qualifications frameworks have long been distinct from those of England and Wales. It has its own elected parliament that operates within a budget settlement determined under an agreed formula with Westminster and makes its own laws with the exclusion of UK-wide reserved matters such as defence, macro-economics and foreign policy. The Scottish Government governs a population of around 5.4 million (ONS 2022). After a close run referendum on independence in 2014, the Scottish parliament has received further delegation of responsibilities to include, for the first time, limited tax raising powers set out in the Scotland Act 2016 (Legislation.gov.uk 2016b).

Compulsory schooling in Scotland starts between 4½ and 5½ years of age. Children born in January and February (who would start aged 4½) have always been permitted to defer their school start date by one year. In 2021, the Scottish Government began a pilot scheme to enable children born from August who would normally start school aged 4½ to 5 to defer for an additional year in Early Learning and Childcare (Scottish Government 2020). It is planned that this will be fully implemented in 2023.

In Scotland, the term Early Learning and Care (ELC) is used rather than ECEC and the Scottish Government's early learning and childcare directorate leads on developing the sector in partnership with local authorities, agencies, the private and voluntary centre-based sector and childminders. Aspects of the provision, funding, staffing, regulation and inspection are split between the education and health and social care sectors.

There are two main bodies overseeing curriculum and practice in the sector: Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate. Staffing is predominantly governed by the Scottish Social Services Council which sets the standard for childhood practice qualifications and registers staff working in the sector.

National guidance for pre-birth to early primary school: *Realising the Ambition* (2020) was developed by Education Scotland (Education Scotland 2021). Early learning and care settings must also meet National Health and Social Care Standards, developed and inspected by the Care Inspectorate (Care Inspectorate 2017). In February 2022, the Care Inspectorate published *A quality framework for daycare of children, childminding and school aged childcare*, which sets out criteria linked to its health and social care standards (Care Inspectorate 2022). This framework is additional to Education Scotland's *How good is our early learning and childcare,* a self-assessment tool last updated in 2016 (Education Scotland 2016). *Curriculum for Excellence*, sets out education experiences and outcomes for children from age 3 to 18 (Education Scotland 2022).

All settings, including those in schools, must be registered with the **Care Inspectorate**. The Care Inspectorate conducts inspections in all early learning and childcare settings and in school-based early years settings inspects in partnership with Education Scotland, the agency responsible for school inspections. Partnership inspections include joint questionnaires, a joint self-assessment and reporting format and a care inspector present for inspection teams in early years settings that are part of primary schools. However, this partnership arrangement has been criticised in a recent consultation on education agencies (Scottish Government 2022b).

The Scottish Social Services Council sets the Standard for Childhood Practice and registers all leaders/managers of settings, practitioners and support workers. All practitioners are required to meet level 7 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, while managers must also gain a BA or Professional Development Award (PDA) in childhood practice (level 9 SCQF). A 'graduate apprenticeship' has been developed which qualifies staff to work at practitioner level but

enables them to add 60 credits of level 9 (SCQF) management modules credits in order gain manager or lead status. This new qualification is being run by the University of the West of Scotland and University of the Highlands and Islands.

It was announced in March 2022 that The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) will be replaced by a new agency in 2024. Until then the SQA accredits all qualifications and is the sole examination and awarding body for both academic and vocational awards outside of universities. Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) at levels 1 to 8 (levels 1–5 EQF) in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) are based on UK-wide national occupational standards. The SCQF has a total of 12 levels up to PhD with a Bachelor's degree with honours and a PDA at level 9 (level 6 EQF).

Early learning provision in schools may be overseen by senior school leaders, with Head Teachers registered as setting managers with the Care Inspectorate. Head Teachers are also registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) – the body that sets the standards for entry and career progression for the whole of the teaching profession and approves Initial Teacher Education courses leading to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) – and will have achieved the 'Standard for Headship qualification' (GTCS 2021). Some local authorities include teachers within their early years settings, or have Head Teachers as managers of multiple settings.

In March 2022, the Scottish Government announced the creation of three new education bodies: a **qualifications** agency (replacing the Scottish Qualifications Authority); a **professional learning, curriculum and assessment** agency and an **inspection** agency (the latter two replacing Education Scotland.) Following wide consultation, the planned operational date is 2024. Early learning and care were mentioned in relation to the importance of the new inspection agency setting a shared inspection framework with the Care Inspectorate (Scottish Government 2022a).

1.4 Northern Ireland: ECEC governance

With a population of over 1.9 million (ONS 2022), the six counties of Northern Ireland form the smallest nation of the UK. It has a complex and often fraught history of governance both from Westminster and self-governance through an elected Assembly based in Stormont. Northern Ireland now has a devolved power sharing arrangement through a National Executive in which the main political parties representing the dominant protestant/unionist majority and the catholic/republican minority have both been guaranteed ministerial appointments and influence. As with Scotland and Wales, the devolved powers of the Northern Ireland Assembly extend across education, health and social welfare. The Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) oversees all education services, including pre-school education and Sure Start. It delegates responsibility for administering early years grants and monitoring Sure Start to regional Childcare Partnerships.

The Sure Start programme provides a range of services for young children under 4 and their families including the Developmental Programmes for 2 to 3 year-olds. There are 39 Operational Sure Start Projects across Northern Ireland in the Top 25% Deprived Areas. Responsibility for Sure Start was originally transferred from the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety to the Department for Education Northern Ireland (DENI) in 2006 along with the rest of early years services including childminding and childcare in order to co-locate responsibility within a single department.

The Department of Education launched *Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning* (DENI 2013) that set out a strategy for 3 to 6 year-olds from a narrower educational perspective with progress overseen by an Early Years Stakeholder Group representing providers as well as government interests.

Given that the compulsory school starting age is set at the September after a child's 4th birthday (the earliest in the UK), and the preponderance (62%) of school-based nursery class places for 3 year-olds over funded places in the PVI sector (DENI 2013), early years provision outside of schools is largely restricted to day care 0 to 4 year-olds, pre-school groups of mainly 3 year-olds and wrap-around care. Funded places are available for all 3 year-olds and for disadvantaged 2 year-olds (proposed changes mean that target 2 year-olds are likely to have separate provision in future). This is set at a minimum of 12.5 hours per week for 38 weeks in Northern Ireland compared to 30 hours in England, since September 2017.

Staffing ratios for the PVI sector are broadly the same as in England at 1:8 for 3 to 4 year-olds with a level 3 qualified leader. However, this requirement is currently in a state of transition and new leaders are required to hold a level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Care, Learning and Development or the Playwork equivalent in the case of out-of-school care. Meanwhile at least advisory access to someone with a higher level qualification is considered essential but, unlike in Scotland and Wales, this does not have to be a qualified teacher.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) regulates qualifications and issues curricular guidance for pre-school groups (3 year-olds) with funded early education places and separate curricular guidance for the Foundation Stage (6 to 8 year-olds) in schools.

The pre-school version (CCEA 2018) offers guidance on planning, observation, assessment and record keeping and wider issues such as equal opportunities as well as a curriculum framework. This is broadly similar to other parts of the UK but an emphasis given upfront to the arts and creativity is distinctive.

The Foundation Stage (CCEA 2020) builds on and extends the Learning to Learn Framework from 2013. It introduces Religious Education for the first time as agreed with the four main Christian Churches in Northern Ireland and incorporates 'mutual understanding' into Personal, Social and Emotional Development. These features reflect the unique history and issues of Northern Ireland. Key Stage 1 builds on this, focusing on similar areas as those of the Foundation Stage.

There is a strong tradition of parent/community-run pre-school groups affiliated to Early Years. In addition, churches of both denominations have had a greater role in the provision of education at all levels than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Building on the previous policy for Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education, which sought to develop mutual understanding and respect between different communities, the Shared Education Act was introduced in 2016 (DENI 2016).

As in other parts of the UK, only qualified teachers with QTS are allowed to lead classes in maintained nursery and primary schools. Standards for teachers are determined by the General Teaching Council Northern Ireland (GTCNI) (which also regulates teacher registration, initial teacher education and teachers' continuing professional development).

Regulation and inspection of early years services are split. Inspection of funded pre-school education, together with all other phases of education and the safeguarding of pupils within them, is vested in the Education and Training Inspectorate for Northern Ireland (ETINI). However, unlike Ofsted in England, the Education and Training Inspectorate is not responsible for the registration of pre-school groups or for wrap around care, day nurseries, childminders and other children's services. These aspects of early years are deemed care and are registered and inspected on an annual basis by specialist Early Years Teams of Social Workers based with the five local Health and Social Care Trusts.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

In all four nations, classes in maintained (state-funded) schools and nurseries must be led by a Level 6 teacher with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), whereas the staffing requirements in the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector remain diverse, though there is specific guidance about staff qualifications and ratios. The following tables provide an overview of regular contact staff by nation, first in the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector (*Chapters **2.1.1** to **2.1.4***) and then in the Maintained sector (schools) (*Chapters **2.1.5** to **2.1.6***).

Note from the SEEPRO editors: In other country reports, the core professionals (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) in these tables are categorised according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see *Box 1* at the end of this section). However, since job titles and qualification requirements are so highly variable in the UK, particularly in the PVI sectors of the four nations, a descriptor has been allocated only in those cases where a clear profile is visible.

2.1.1 England: Regular contact staff in the PVI sector

Table 1
England: Regular contact staff in full-day and sessional care, children's centres, family hubs and out-of-school provision by staff type

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education (IPE)	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Family Hub/ Children's Centre Manager *Profile:* Variable **Early Years Teacher (EYTS)** *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	Family Hub/ Children's Centre (0–18 or up to 25 for young people with SEND)	Senior Manager	Variable depending on qualification	Usually Bachelor's degree or equivalent with relevant professional qualification in Social Work (e.g. QQSW), Nursing (e.g. RGN) or Teaching (e.g. QTS or EYPS/EYTS) ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Nursery	Day Nurseries* (0–4[2]) or	Setting Manager	0–5	***From 2014 onwards:*

[2] **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. For the SEEPRO-3 reports we have chosen the following age-inclusive format: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4, and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In the UK, the corresponding formats vary according to the diverse forms of provision, but in general they are **0–4** and **2–4**, since compulsory schooling starts at age 5 (4 in Northern Ireland).

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education (IPE)	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Manager or Person-in-Charge *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional Playgroup or **Preschool Manager** or Leader *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	Family Hubs/ Children's Centres (0–18 or up to 25 for young people with SEND) plus parent support). Mainly PVI sector Community***/ PVI playgroups and pre-schools (2–4) Children's Centres	Play-group/pre-school manager or Curriculum Leader		Early Years Educator award (see below) ECTS credits: n/a[3] EQF: level 4 ISCED 2011: 4/3
Group/Room Leader *OR* **Early Years Educator (EYE)** *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	Day Nurseries (0–4) or Family Hubs/ Children's Centres (0–18 or 25 for young people with SEND) plus parent support. Community/PVI playgroups and pre-schools (2–4)	Qualified early years core pedagogue able to work independently and supervise junior staff	0–5	Early Years Educator 2 years upper secondary education plus GCSEs in Maths & English (or equivalent) ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED: 3
Nursery Nurse *OR* **Playgroup Worker** *OR* **Early Years Practitioner** *OR* **Early Years Educator (EYE)**	Day Nurseries (0–4) or Family Hubs/ Children's Centres (0–18 or up to 25 for young people with SEND) plus parent support. Community/PVI playgroups and pre-schools (2–4)	Qualified early years core pedagogue able to work independently	0–5	Early Years Educator 2 years upper secondary education plus GCSEs in Maths & English (or equivalent) ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 3
Nursery Assistant *OR* **Playgroup Assistant** *OR* **Special Needs**	Day Nurseries (0–4) or Family Hubs/Children's Centres (0–18 or up to 25 for young people with SEND)	Paid assistant working under supervision.	Not applicable	None mandatory. But must hold RQF level 2 Certificate in Early Education and Care to count within required

[3] n/a = not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education (IPE)	Minimum qualifica-tion requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Assistant	plus parent sup-port Community/PVI playgroups and pre-schools (2–4)			50% ratio
Apprentice	Day Nurseries (0–5) or Family Hubs/ Children's Centres (0–18 or up to 25 for young people with SEND) plus parent support. Community/PVI playgroups and pre-schools (2–4)	Paid trainee working under supervision	Early Years (0–5)	Maths and English GCSE intermediate secondary RQF level 2 Working towards RQF level 3 (EQF 4) Early Years Educa-tor award
Parent Volunteer	Family Hubs/ Children's Centres (0–18 or up to 25 for young people with SEND) plus adult parent sup-port. Community/PVI playgroups and pre-schools (2–4)	Assistant across all areas work-ing under super-vision	Not applicable	Not applicable ****Disclosure and Barring Service check required
Play Leader *OR* **Play Worker** *OR* **Care Assistant**	Out-of-school care facility – before school breakfast club; after school club (3–10) Holiday Play scheme (3–10)	Leading group or activity in provision for young children out of school hours	Variable depend-ing on qualifica-tion. Playwork 5–16	None mandatory. Up to the manager to decide. Com-monly will hold NVQ level 2/3 or Di-ploma in Playwork (EQF 3 or 4)

Explanatory notes:

*In Day Nurseries that are part of chains, overall management responsibility may lie with a senior or area manager with day-to-day operation of the setting delegated to the local setting manager who may or may not have a substantial direct role with children. Proprietors of private nurseries are not required to hold any qualifications but must appoint a manager who does.

**Transitional arrangements apply to other relevant level 3 qualifications started before 2014.

***In community playgroups the management function for staff appointments, policy and budgets etc. is vested in a local community management committee with the Playgroup Leader having day-to-day responsibility for the operation of the group.

****The Disclosure and Barring Service provides checks against police records and the statutory lists of those barred from working with children. All those who work with children and/or vulnerable adults must be checked including regular volunteers.

2.1.2 Wales: Regular contact staff in the PVI Sector

Early education and childcare services for children under 12 outside of schools (i.e. day nurseries, childminders, pre-schools, playgroups, out-of-school/holiday play schemes and Flying Start Centres) are regulated and inspected by the Care Inspectorate for Wales (CIW) and are subject to the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare in Wales (Welsh Government 2016c). Staff ratio requirements are the same in Wales as in England. Because ESTYN inspects the funded early learning component in all types of setting, some provision is subject to both forms of registration and inspection. Social Care Wales has overall responsibility for the development of the non-school ECEC workforce and provides a range of training resources for ECEC workers.

Table 2

Wales: Regular contact staff in full-day and sessional care, Flying Start programmes and out-of-school provision by staff type

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Health Visitor *Profile:* Health Care Professional	May or may not be based in Flying Start Centre. Responsibility extends over whole programme including home visiting and parent support. 0–4 plus adults	Senior Manager	Lifelong (health) plus birth to 3 development	Usually Bachelor's degree in Nursing plus relevant professional qualification in Health Visiting ECTS credits: 180 EQF level. 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Flying Start Leader	Flying Start: day care and home visiting provision	Manager/ Leader	0–5	Diploma in Leadership for Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (Management) ECTS credits: n/a EQF level. 5 ISCED 2011: 5 Diploma**** in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development ECTS credits: n/a EQF level. 3 or 4 ISCED 2011: 3
Nursery Manager/Person in charge *OR*	Day nurseries (0–4)	*Setting manager		
Creche Manager *OR*	Mainly PVI sector	Setting manager		
Sessional Manager *OR*	**Community/PVI playgroups and pre-schools (2–4)			
Playgroup/ Pre-school Leader	**Community/PVI playgroups and			

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
OR	pre-schools (2–4)	Playgroup/ pre-school manager or curriculum leader		
***Cylch Meithrin Leader**	Welsh-speaking playgroup or pre-school (2–4)			
Deputy Manager *OR* **Advanced Nursery Practitioner** *OR* **Room Leader**	Day Nurseries (0–4) Community/PVI playgroups and pre-schools (2–4)	Senior practi-tioner with supervisory role	0–5	Diploma**** in Chil-dren's Care, Play, Learn-ing and Development or equivalent (such as Early Years degrees with Early Years Practi-tioner Status). ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 3 or 4 ISCED 2011: 3
Flying Start Practitioner	Flying start set-tings including home visiting	Core peda-gogue – able to work inde-pendently	Lifelong (health and parenting) plus birth to 3 development	To count within re-quired ratios 100% of Flying Start, 100% of Foundation Phase (3-7) practitioners, 80% of other day nursery staff and 50% of sessional care staff must hold Di-ploma**** in Children's Care Learning and De-velopment or equiva-lent (Such as Early Years degrees with Early Years Practitioner Sta-tus). ECTS credits: n/a EQF level. 3 or 4 ISCED 2011: 3
Nursery Practitioner *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Profes-sional	Day Nurseries (0–4) or Children's Centres (0–4 plus parent support).	Core peda-gogue – able to work inde-pendently	0–5	
Sessional/Play-group Practitioner	Community/PVI playgroups and pre-schools (2–4)	Core peda-gogue – able to work inde-pendently	0–5	
Flying Start Family Support Worker	Family homes and within Flying Start centres	Practitioner working pre-dominantly with families	Lifelong (health and parenting) plus birth to 3 development	Diploma**** in Chil-dren's Care Learning and Development None mandatory but Level 3 Diploma in Chil-dren's Care, Play, Learn-ing and Development needed to count in qualified ratios: 80% day care; 50% sessional care or equivalent (Such as Early Years degrees with Early Years Practi-tioner Status).
Nursery Assistant	Day Nurseries (0–4)	Paid assistant working un-der supervi-sion.	0–5	
Sessional or Play-group Assistant	Community/PVI playgroups and pre-schools (2–4)	Paid assistant working un-der supervi-sion	0–5	

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Creche Assistant **Cylch Meithrin Assistant**	Under eights crèche facility	Paid assistant working under supervision Paid assistant working under supervision	0–5 0–5	ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 2 or 3 ISCED 2011: 2 or 3
Apprentice	Day Nurseries (0–4) or Children's Centres (0–4 plus parent support) Community/PVI playgroups and pre-schools (2–4)	Paid trainee working under supervision	Early Years (0–5)	None mandatory**:** Intermediate/GCSEs advised. Working towards Level 2 Diploma in Children's Care Learning and Development
Parent Volunteer	Children's Centres (0–4 plus adult parent support). Community/PVI playgroups and pre-schools (2–4)	Assistant across all areas working under supervision	Not applicable	Not applicable ****Disclosure and Barring Service check required
Senior Play Leader/ Person in charge **Play Worker**	Out-of-school care facility: before school breakfast club; after school club and holiday play schemes (4–10)	Leading group or activity in provision for young children out of school hours	4–16	Manager/Leader: Level 3 Diploma in Playwork Playworkers: 50% must hold min. level 2 Diploma in Playwork ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 3 or 4 ISCED 2011: 3 or 4

Explanatory notes:

*In day nurseries that are part of chains, overall management responsibility may lie with a senior or area manager with day-to-day operation of the setting delegated to the local setting manager who may or may not have a substantial direct role with children. Proprietors of private nurseries are not required to hold any qualifications but must appoint a manager who does.

**In community playgroups the management function for staff appointments, policy and budgets etc. is vested in a local community management committee, with the Playgroup Leader having day-to-day responsibility for the operation of the group.

***Cylch Meithrin are Welsh-speaking playgroups offering total immersion in the Welsh language

****The Disclosure and Barring Service provides checks against police records and the statutory lists of those barred from working with children. All those who work with children and/or vulnerable adults must be checked including regular volunteers.

2.1.3 Scotland: Regular contact staff in the PVI Sector

In Scotland there are three types of professional registration for managing and working in early learning and childcare: Manager/lead practitioner; practitioner; support worker. *Table 3* below

provides an example of the range of professionals in these roles.

In early learning and childcare up to compulsory school age, all settings must be led by a SCQF level 9/EQF level 6 qualified manager, registered either with the Scottish Social Services Council or another professional body such as the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). For example, a Head Teacher of a primary school may be registered as the manager of a nursery within a primary school setting that provides childcare services. A local authority children's centre or standalone nursery, or a manager of a private or voluntary sector nursery manager must have, or must have a condition on their registration to gain, an EQF level 6 qualification (i.e. BA in Childhood Practice, Professional Development Award level 9). There is no requirement for a Qualified Teacher Status teacher to be present in any setting though teachers registered with the GTCS are present in some settings.

The language describing early learning and childcare settings varies according to historical identities and geography and services available. They include early years settings, children and family centres, nursery schools, and nursery classes. Some settings include children from birth to school age, some only those from 2/3–5 years, when funding entitlements begin. Some settings provide additional support for parents, such as parent/child groups.

Table 3
Scotland: Regular contact staff in full-day and sessional care

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Head of Centre, Manager	Nursery School, Children and Family Centre, Under 5s centre, Nursery	Manager/ head	0–5	EQF Level 6 – management qualifications as well as a practice qualification (see below) Management qualifications: BA Hons Childhood Practice (SCQF level 10) **or** PG Diploma or Masters in Childhood Practice (SCQF Level 11) Professional Development Award – SCQF Level 9 **or** Other professional registrations such as social work, nursing/midwifery, teacher, health professions council, community education, with 60 credits from BA childhood practice or PDA childhood practice. ECTS Credits: 120

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				EQF level: 6 or 7 SCQF level: 9, 10 or11 ISCED 2011: 6 or 7
(Senior or Lead) Early Years Practi-tioner/ Childcare Officer/ Child de-velopment Educa-tor	All early years set-tings: School based Nursery classes, Nursery school, Private and volun-tary sector set-tings, Children and fam-ily centres, Forest/nature kindergartens	May be in management role, may be working di-rectly with children full time, may combine both roles. May also work with parents in partnership with health and social care profes-sionals. Qualification also appropri-ate for out-of-school care and work in children's/ young peo-ple's residen-tial settings.	0–5	SVQ Social Services (Children and Young People) or HNC SCQF level: 7 EQF level: 5
Support worker **Assistant**	All early years set-tings: School based nursery classes, Nursery school, Private and volun-tary sector settings, Children and family centres, Forest/nature kindergartens	Working with children alongside practitioners. Qualification also appropri-ate for out-of-school care and work in children's / young peo-ple's residen-tial settings.	0–5	May register without qualifications, but must gain them within 5 years. National Certificate in Early Education and Childcare at SCQF Level 6 SVQ Social Services (Children and Young People) at SCQF Level 6 EQF level. 4

2.1.4 Northern Ireland: regular contact staff in the PVI Sector

A 'Home Childcarer' is a form of approved childcare introduced by the Government to allow parents to have approved childcare in their own home and to access childcare benefits and support that is made available by the Government against the cost. Equally families who have children with disabilities may benefit from childcare in their own home.

The minimum qualification requirements for staff working within the early years and childcare sector is set out within Standard 11 of the Minimum Standards for Childminding and Day Care for Children under Age 12. Level 5 qualifications are now established as the minimum attainment levels for Centre Leaders i.e. the person in charge/manager and deputy leaders in full-day care, crèche and sessional care (Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (CCPLD) and Playwork at level 5). Room Supervisors/Team Leaders and staff who could deputise for the leader working under the supervision of the Manager are required to hold at, the very least, a qualification at level 3 in Early Years or Playwork. 50% of all other childcare staff should have as a minimum a qualification at level 2 in Early Years or Playwork as appropriate to the setting.

Playwork is identified as the most appropriate qualification for staff working in school-age childcare services (SACC).

Childminders for the first time must complete Health and Safety, Paediatric First Aid and Child Protection training every 3 years and are also encouraged to work towards level 2 or level 3 qualifications in Children's Care Learning and Development or Playwork depending on their previous learning and experience.

It should be noted these are minimum qualification requirements and that staff holding higher Level qualifications as listed within the document are also deemed qualified and will meet regulatory requirements. A manager/leader who was currently employed prior to the publication of the Minimum Standards and who has an NVQ/QCF level 3 qualification in CCLD, Playwork or equivalent can apply for another manager/leader post without having to gain a RCF Level 5 qualification[4]. Those currently employed in a deputy manager or other childcare role are required to agree with the employer to undertake a level 5 qualification within an agreed period of time, if applying for the post of manager. In the event of a person acting in a manager or deputy manager role on a temporary basis, the planned arrangements for post holders to achieve their required level 5 qualification must be agreed with the Early Years Team in the local Registering Health and Social Care Trust Early Years team. All managers must have a current Safeguarding and Child Protection Certificate. If this is not the case, this must be achieved as part of the induction process and within one month of appointment. If the Manager is the Designated Child Protection Officer, evidence of certificated training must be in place prior to commencing duties.

2.1.5 England, Wales, Northern Ireland: Regular contact staff in the maintained sector (schools)

Given that the requirements for educational staff in schools derive from the same legislation and are broadly the same in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, *Table 4* applies to all three nations.

[4] This was to ensure that manager/leaders with legacy qualifications were recognised and did not have to meet the new requirements.

Table 4

England, Wales and Northern Ireland: Regular contact staff in nursery schools and in nursery and reception classes in primary schools by staff type

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education (IPE)	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Head Teacher *Profile:* Pre-primary and Primary School Professional	Nursery School (2–4) State or Independent sectors* Primary School (2–10) State or Independent sectors*	Senior Manager (may have some direct teaching responsibilities depending on size of school)	Nursery 2, 3–5 Primary 2, 3 or 4–11	Bachelor's degree with UK Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) **plus** (as a rule) National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH)** (PQH in NI) ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 or 7 ISCED 2011: 6 or 7
Head of Nursery Unit/Nursery *OR* **Reception Class Teacher** *OR* **Primary Teacher (QTS)**	Nursery School (2–4) State or Independent sectors* Primary School (2–10) State or Independent sectors*	Teacher in charge of nursery / reception unit *OR* individual class teacher/ group leader	Nursery 2, 3–5 Primary 2, 3 or 4–11	Bachelor's degree with UK Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) ECTS credits: 180 EQF level. 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Nursery Nurse *OR* **Nursery Assistant** *OR* **Classroom Assistant** *OR* **Teaching Assistant** *OR* **Special Needs Assistant**	Nursery School (2–4) State or Independent sectors* Primary School (2–10) State or Independent sectors*	Qualified assistant to class teacher working under teacher's direction	Early Years 0–5 Primary 5–16	**England**: from 2014 Early Years Educator plus GCSEs in Maths & English *OR* Certificate/Diploma Supporting Teaching and Learning in Schools **Wales & Northern Ireland**: Diploma in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development ECTS credits: n/a EQF level. 4 ISCED 2011: 3
Classroom Assistant *OR* **Teaching Assistant** *OR*	Nursery School (2–4) State or Independent sectors* Primary School	Support worker assisting teacher (may be assigned to a particular	Early Years 0–5 Schools 5–16	**England:** None mandatory but may hold certificate in: Supporting Teaching and Learning in Schools *OR*

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education (IPE)	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Special Needs Assistant	(2–10) State or Independent sectors*	child with SEN)		Specialist Support for Teaching and Learning in Schools **Wales and Northern Ireland**: None mandatory but may hold Diploma in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development
Apprentice	Nursery School (2–4) State or Independent sectors** Primary School (2–10) State or Independent sectors	Paid trainee working under supervision	Early Years 0–5	Maths and English GCSE secondary level Working towards level 3 award in relevant sector
Parent Volunteer	Nursery School (2–4) State or Independent sectors Primary School (2–10) State or Independent sectors*	Usually allocated particular tasks such as hearing children read	Not applicable	Not applicable ***Disclosure and Barring Service check required
Play Leader / Play Worker	Out-of-school care facility: before school breakfast club; after school club (3–10) Holiday Play scheme (3–10)	Leading group or activity in provision for young children out of school hours	Variable depending on qualification. Playwork 5–16	No compulsory requirement – decision to employ lies with manager. Commonly will hold level 2 or 3 or Diploma in Playwork.

Explanatory notes:

*Controlled/Maintained/Integrated/Irish Medium sector in NI

**Head teachers are expected to hold or be working towards the post National Professional Qualification for Headship prior to appointment or shortly afterwards.

***The Disclosure and Barring service provide checks against police records and the statutory lists of those barred from working with children. All those who work with children and/or vulnerable adults must be checked including regular volunteers.

2.1.6 Scotland: Regular contact staff in the maintained sector (schools)

Table 5

Scotland: Regular contact staff in nursery schools and in nursery and reception classes in primary schools by staff type

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education (IPE)	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Head Teacher *Profile:* Pre-primary and/or Primary Education Professional	Head Teacher of a primary school with responsibility for a nursery class or nursery May include children from birth to 5½ years.	Manager/ head	3–12 Early years to upper primary	BA Degree/Postgraduate degree Teaching qualification and registered with General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS) and hold the Standard for Headship, 60 credit post-graduate certificate at SCQF level: 11 EQF level: 7
Primary (Early Years) Teacher *Profile:* Pre-primary and/or Primary Education Professional	Nursery class in nursery school Nursery class in primary school 3–4 years Combined reception/nursery unit in primary schools 3–5 years	Class teacher *OR* Teacher in charge of Nursery/ Reception unit	3–12 **Note:** no specific requirement for early years training	Bachelor's degree with QTS. Registered with GTCS. ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Primary (Early Years) Teacher *Profile:* Pre-primary and/or Primary Education Professional	Reception class in primary school 4½–5½ Primary class in primary school 5½–12 years	Class Teacher	4½–5½ 5½–12	Bachelor's degree with QTS. Registered with GTCS. ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Classroom Assistant *OR* **Teaching Assistant** *OR* **Special Needs Assistant**	Reception class in primary school 4½–5½ Primary class in primary school 5½–12 years	Assistant to class teacher	n/a	No formal qualifications required. Advised: SVQ 2 (Level 4 EQF/level 3 ISCED) in Supporting Teaching and Learning in Schools
Apprentice	Nursery class in nursery or primary school 3–4 years	Trainee working under direction	n/a	Intermediate certificate/ National Award 2 or higher school certificate or SVQ2

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education (IPE)	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
	Combined reception/nursery unit 3–5 years Reception class 4½–5½ Primary class 4½–11 years			Working towards SVQ level 3 (EQF level 4) in Children and young people's services
Volunteer (usually parent)	Nursery class in nursery or primary school Combined reception/nursery unit Reception class in primary school	Usually allocated particular tasks such as hearing children read	n/a	**Police check from Disclosure Scotland only

Explanatory notes:

*Head Teachers are expected to have completed the 'Into Headship' programme prior to appointment or shortly afterwards. This is post-graduate in level but not sufficient in itself for the award of a Bologna second cycle degree.

**Disclosure Scotland provides checks against police records and the statutory lists of those barred from working with children. All those who work with children and/or vulnerable adults must be checked including regular volunteers.

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

All the four nations of the UK have different qualification requirements (see *Tables 1–5*), job descriptions and pay scales in the **PVI sector**. In Family Hubs/Children's Centres the Centre Leader will usually have responsibility for a multi-professional team from health, education and social care.

In the **maintained sector**, Nursery and Nursery School Leaders will be qualified teachers and have requirements to complete headship leadership programmes. Pay scales will vary as will the role of the head, depending on the type of setting it is. For example, some leaders are focused on management responsibilities only, whereas others have additional teaching responsibilities.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

All settings across the UK have people with specific responsibilities; the names, job descriptions and remuneration, if any, will vary from setting to setting. All settings will have practitioners responsible for safeguarding and special needs. Country specific information is given below.

England/Wales/Northern Ireland: The minimum qualification for any role of responsibility in the PVI sector in England is the level 3 Early Educator qualification or equivalent. In Northern Ireland and Wales, all Deputy Managers and Room Leaders require a level 5 qualification (Diploma in Leadership for Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development or equivalent). Although training qualifications are available in, for example, pedagogical lead, special needs and safeguarding, it is up to the individual settings to decide on remuneration. Deputy Head Teachers and classroom teachers in Maintained Nurseries or Schools will have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and may have specific responsibilities such as Foundation Lead, which would usually attract additional salary or remission. In Northern Ireland, if applying for the post of manager, persons currently employed in a deputy manager or other childcare role are required to sign an agreement with the employer to undertake a level 5 qualification within a specified period of time. In the event of a person acting in a manager or deputy manager role on a temporary basis, the planned arrangements for post holders to achieve their required level 5 qualification must be agreed with the Early Years Team in the local Registering Health and Social Care Trust Early Years team.

Scotland: All post holders with specialist responsibilities must have SVQ Social Services (Children and Young People) or HNC level 7 SCQF (EQF level 5) and in schools hold a teaching qualification.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Practice in this area varies across the UK, is setting dependent and can be fulfilled by both internal or external practitioners. For example, a PVI chain may have specific roles to coordinate training across all their settings, or regionally. Some local authorities will have advisory teams, often holding a teaching or equivalent qualification to support in certain areas, including improving practice. Those in settings usually hold level 5 qualifications in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland and Level 3 in England. In Northern Ireland, Room Supervisors/Team Leaders and staff who could deputise for the leader working under the supervision of the Manager are required to hold, at the very least, a qualification at level 3 in Early Years or Playwork. In Maintained nurseries and schools these roles usually require a teaching qualification.

2.5 Specialist support staff

There are a range of specialist roles within the early years. Some of these roles are setting-based, such as safeguarding, or specific roles in relation to, for example, special education or forest schools. Others are external to the setting, such as Health Visitors, Social Workers and Speech and Language Therapists. In schools, the person responsible for special needs (SENCo) must have mandatory training and all involved in safeguarding must receive regular training.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

3.1 England: structural composition of ECEC workforce

Table 6

England: Full-day care and sessional care in PVI Sector: all staff types and highest qualification

Staff categories	2023 / Proportion of workforce in all group-based care in %
Staff with at least a level 6 qualification (degree) EQF 6/ISCED 6	**11**
Staff with at least a level 5 qualification (Foundation Degree/Diploma/training qualification) (EQF/ISCED 5)	**4**
Staff with at least a level 4 qualification (post-secondary) EQF 4/ISCED 4	**5**
Staff with at least a level 3 qualification (Early Educator/A levels/training qualification) (upper secondary) EQF 4/ISCED 3	**85**
Unqualified staff	No data
Male staff	**2**
BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) staff or staff with background of migration	**18**

Source: Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2023 (DfE 2023a)

Table 7

England: Proportions of staff in school-based provision offering nursery and maintained nursery schools and classes by highest qualification achieved

Staff categories	2023 / Proportion of workforce	
	In primary schools, in %	In separate nursery schools, in %
Staff with at least level 6 qualification (degree)* EQF/ISCED 6	**34**	**25**
Staff with at least level 5 qualification (Foundation Degree/Diploma/training qualification) EQF 5/ISCED 5	**4**	**5**
Staff with at least level 4 qualification (post-secondary) EQF 4/ISCED 4	**5**	**4**
Staff with at least a level 3 qualification (Early Educator/A levels/training qualification) (upper secondary) EQF 4/ISCED 3	**85**	**83**
Volunteers	**21**	**38**
Male staff	**2**	
BME (Black and ethnic Minority) staff or staff with background of migration	**16**	

Source: Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2023 (DfE 2023a)

**Note:* Only those with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) may lead classes/units in maintained nursery and primary schools in the UK

3.2 Wales: Structural composition of ECEC workforce

It is difficult to gain a full picture of the qualifications, gender and ethnicity of the workforce in Wales. The *Childcare, Play and Early Years and Workforce Plan* (Welsh Government 2017a) estimated approximately 23,300 persons working in childcare and Foundation Stage settings, the majority of whom are women. According to the *Review of the Childcare Sector* (Welsh Government 2018) the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) is the key source for information, but their data is not always reliable. The review estimated that 60% of the workforce had a level 3 NVQ qualification (EQF 4/ISCED 3) with a similar percentage holding the qualification in Child's Care Learning and Development (CCLD). They estimated that only 1% of the workforce held a CCLD qualification at level 6 and they were mainly employed in full-day care settings.

School data is collected annually by the Education Workforce Council (EWC). In 2021, 0.1 % (39) of teachers and 0.2% (70) of registered learning support workers were employed in school-based nurseries. There are no specific data about gender or ethnicity for this phase of education, though overall data for registered teachers in Wales indicated that 91.6% were White, 0.5% of the were Asian/Asian British and 0.2% were Black/African/Caribbean/Black British.

3.3 Scotland: Structural composition of ECEC workforce

Table 8

Scotland: Structural composition of ECEC workforce

Staff categories	2021, Number/Proportion of workforce
Staff with highest qualification (BA Childhood Practice, Professional Development Award level 9) EQF/ISCED 6	This is a requirement for managers of day care for children, including out-of-school care. SSSC* data state that there are 3,304 registrations of managers in Scotland, 46% of which have registered to work towards a higher qualification. The 2021 School Census** states that there were 3,150 graduates (appropriate qualification) in early years settings providing Government-funded places, with 1,533 undertaking the Childhood Practice degree.
Head Teacher/Teacher QTS Degree	980 teachers are listed as working in the early learning and childcare sector. It is not clear whether these are working as practitioners in a setting with children or as managers, i.e. Head Teacher, unlikely to be working directly with children.
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary) SVQ 3 or Higher National Certificate HNC – level 7 SCQF – Equivalent to EQF level 5	This is a requirement for practitioners in day care for children – (this figure includes out-of-school care). There are 34,721 registrations of practitioners in Scotland, of which 16% have a registration with a condition, which suggests they are working towards a qualification at this level but are likely to have a lower qualification.
Staff with non-specialist qualification. Unqualified staff	Unknown. Only relevant qualifications are recorded. There are 8,979 registrations of support workers in Scotland, of which 56% have a non-specialist qualification and 4,015 (44%) have no qualification at all.
Male staff	**4%**

Staff categories	2021, Number/Proportion of workforce
Staff with a BME (black and minority ethnic) background	**1%** of staff reporting ethnicity
Staff with disability	**2%** of staff report having a disability.

Source:* SSSC 2021; * Source:* Scottish Government 2021

3.4 Northern Ireland: Structural composition of ECEC workforce

The way that publicly available statistics are held makes it difficult to disaggregate data for difference sections of the early years workforce in Northern Ireland.

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes – Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)

4.1.1 England, Wales and Northern Ireland: QTS qualifying routes

Initial Teacher Training/Education (ITT or ITE – both terms are in use) leading to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) is broadly similar, and is mutually recognised, across all the nations of the UK though the precise detail of routes and professional standards varies. ITT for England, Wales and Northern Ireland are presented here as one table while Scotland is presented separately due to the differences in nomenclature for entry requirements and degrees.

Table 9

England, Wales and Northern Ireland: Early Years/Primary Teachers with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)

Title: *Primary (Early Years) Teacher* (3–7) with QTS status* **Profile:** Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Entry requirements for all forms of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS): 12 years of schooling, school leaving certificate (A-levels/equivalent), intermediate school certificate passes (GCSE) in English, Maths and a science subject plus success in prescribed professional tests in English and Maths and rigorous interview. **Professional studies:** All study routes are conducted under the auspices of the relevant regulating authority for ITT*. All routes lead to the award of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS): (1) BEd or BA in Education: 3- or 4-year full-time undergraduate honours degree programme at HEI (Higher Education Institution) focusing primarily on education related subjects. Level 6 EQF (2) BA or BSc: 3 or 4-year full-time undergraduate honours degree programme at HEI focusing primarily on core curriculum subject. Level 6 EQF as precursor to routes 3,4,5, and 6 (3) PGCE – Professional Graduate Certificate of Education/Postgraduate Certificate of Education: One or 2 year full-time postgraduate course leading to QTS; postgraduate option includes some Master's level 7 (EQF) work, professional option undergraduate level 6 only. (4) SCITT/School Direct – school centred initial teacher training with QTS: Entrants must be graduates and undertake a one-year programme based on two schools (not available in Wales) (5) Teach First – innovative two-year salaried leadership development and teacher training programme run by charitable foundation in conjunction with partner HEIs for graduates with commitment to work in socially disadvantaged areas 6) Graduate Teacher Programme (Wales only): following agreed study/training programme in conjunction with one of the 3 approved ITT centres while employed as an unqualified teacher in a school.

Title: *Primary (Early Years) Teacher* (3–7) with QTS status* **Profile:** Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
(7) Postgraduate Teaching Apprenticeships (England only). This route allows trainee teachers to be employed in schools, combining paid employment and training funded through the Apprenticeship Levy. **Awards:** (1) Bachelor of Education (Hons) with QTS (2) Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Sciences (Hons) with QTS (3) PGCE – Professional Graduate Certificate of Education/Postgraduate Certificate of Education (4) QTS only. Must be linked to HEI for optional Professional Graduate Certificate (5) PGCE – Postgraduate Certificate of Education after one year. Option of Master's Degree in year two. (6) QTS only. Optional Professional Graduate Certificate **ECTS credits**: 180 or more, depending on route chosen **EQF** level: 6** or 7 **ISCED 2011**: 6 or 7, depending on qualification route. BEd/BAEd = ISCED 655; entry requirement for all other routes = ISCED 650. **Main ECEC workplaces**: nursery class in nursery school (2, 3 and 4 year-olds depending on school); nursery class in primary school (2, 3 and 4 year-olds depending on school); combined reception/ nursery unit in primary schools (3 to 5 year-olds); reception class in primary school (compulsory education, 4 to 5 year-olds); class leader, lead teacher/curriculum leader in children's centre, Flying Start Centre or supporting private, voluntary and independent sector settings (0–4 years).

Notes:
*Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) is awarded by the Department for Education in England, the Education Council (EWC) in Wales and the General Teaching Council in Northern Ireland (GTCNI). QTS confers 'License to Practice' as a teacher in maintained schools and other provision. Education, training and assessment for the status is solely via approved providers of Initial Teacher Training (ITT).
**Almost all undergraduate degree programmes in the UK are now at Honours level which means they comply with full requirements for 180 ECTS credits at EQF/ISCED level 6. Ordinary Degrees contain less than the full 60 ECTS credits equivalent at level 6 and are only awarded as a fall-back in exceptional circumstances. Theoretically, an Ordinary Degree is still acceptable for QTS.

4.1.2 Scotland: QTS qualifying routes

In Scotland, the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) regulates all aspects of IPE and subsequent stages of education and training for teachers, accredits university programmes leading to QTS, acts as a clearing house and administers the Teacher Induction Scheme. All teachers working in Scotland are required to register with the GTCS and the annual registration fee provides the regulator with an income. Once registered, teachers must adhere to the GTCS professional code of conduct. It has the power to investigate complaints/accusations of abuse and to remove a teacher from the register if found to be in serious breach of the code.

Table 10
Scotland: Primary/Pre-Primary Teachers with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) – registered with GTCS

Title: *Qualified Primary Teacher with QTS (4–12)* **Profile:** Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Entry requirements:* 12 years of schooling, *plus* (a) A National Qualification at SCQF level 6/7 (EQF level 3), for example Higher or Advanced Higher Award, one of which must be in English (SCQF 6) *and*

Title: *Qualified Primary Teacher with QTS (4–12)* **Profile:** Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
(b) A National Qualification Course Award at SCQF level 5 (EQF level 2), one of which must be Mathematics. In addition, all applicants must be members if the Protecting Vulnerable Groups Scheme following criminal record checks. **Professional studies:** There are **3 main routes** leading to the award of QTS: (1) **4-year full-time combined undergraduate degree at University leading to a named award which *includes* QTS Level 6 EQF/ISCED (2) **4-year full-time concurrent undergraduate degree leading to a named award *plus a separate* teaching qualification (3) a one-year (or equivalent part-time) Professional Graduate Diploma of Education following on from a successfully completed undergraduate degree programme. **Awards:** (1) ***" Master" of Education/Primary Education or BA Hons in Education /Primary Education (QTS fully integrated) (2) ****" Master" of Education /Primary Education or BA Hons in Education /Primary Education *plus* QTS (3) PGDE Professional Graduate Diploma in Education/ Primary Education **ECTS credits:** 180 or more, depending on route chosen **EQF level:** 6 or 7 **ISCED 2011:** 6 or 7, depending on qualification route (Routes 1 and 2 = ISCED 655. The entry requirement for PGDE = ISCED 650) **Main ECEC workplaces:** nursery class in nursery school **(**3 and 4 year-olds); nursery class in primary school (3 and 4 year-olds, depending on school); combined reception / nursery unit in primary schools (3 to 5 year-olds); reception class in primary school (5 year-olds); primary class in primary school (5 to 12 year-olds); Early Years Teacher (regular within setting or external/ad-hoc) in Local Authority or private and voluntary pre-school providers under partnership agreement (mainly 3 to 5 years).

Notes:

*Each university sets its own entry requirements which are normally higher than the minimum because of competition for places.

**Scottish undergraduate degrees are traditionally 4 years (compared to 3 in England and Wales). This is normally explained as being related to the greater breadth (and hence less subject specialisation) in the school leaving certificate (Scottish Higher system).

***In Scotland, by convention the older universities name their undergraduate degrees 'Masters', although they are not at Master's level and only comply with Bologna First Cycle Degrees at EQF level 6.

4.2 Initial qualifying routes (non-QTS)

4.2.1 England

Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) was introduced in England in 2013 as a replacement for the broader based Early Years Professional Status. It is awarded by the National Council for Teaching and Leadership (an executive agency of the Department for Education). EYTS does **NOT** confer QTS for employment in maintained schools throughout the UK. Those with EYTS may only be employed as unqualified teachers or support staff in maintained schools and are not subject to the same terms and conditions as teachers. However, those with EYTS may be employed as teachers in independent schools and also in the increasing number of state supported free schools and academies, as well as teachers/ leaders/ managers throughout the PVI sector. Education, training and assessment for the status takes place via approved providers of Initial Teacher Training (ITT).

Table 11
England: Early Years Teachers with EYTS

Title: *Early Years Teacher* (0–5) *with EYTS* **Profile:** Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: 12 years of schooling, school leaving certificate (A-levels/equivalent), intermediate school certificate passes (GCSE) in English, Maths and a science subject. **Professional studies:** All routes to EYTS (see below) are usually conducted in association with a higher education institution although some routes are provided by training providers. (1) *Undergraduate Entry:* BA (Hons) ECS: 3 or 4-year full-time undergraduate Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies course with EYTS at a University/ Higher Education Institute (level 6 EQF: 180 ECTS credits). (2) *Graduate Entry* One-year full-time postgraduate course at HEI leading to EYTS designed for graduates from any discipline with little or no experience of work with young children; postgraduate option includes some Master's level 7 (EQF) study, professional option includes undergraduate honours level 6 only. (3) *Graduate Employment-based:* For graduates with relevant or non-relevant degree plus experience: 9 -12 months of part-time study at HEI leading to EYTS while employed in relevant role. (4) *Undergraduate Route:* Three or four-year degree in early years that leads to award of EYTS. (5) *Assessment only route:* For graduates with relevant degree and extensive relevant experience: 3 months in which to demonstrate and be assessed across all aspects of EYTS standards. **Awards:** (1) *Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies or equivalent (min 3 year honours degree) with EYTS (2) PGCEYE – Professional Graduate Certificate of Early Years Education with EYTS /Postgraduate Certificate of Early Years Education with EYTS (3) EYTS only. Optional Professional Graduate Certificate (4) EYTS only. Must be linked to HEI for optional Professional Graduate Certificate (5) EYTS only **ECTS credits:** 180 or more, depending on chosen route **EQF level:** 6 or 7 **ISCED 2011:** 6 or 7, depending on route taken. BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies = ISCED 655. Entry requirement for other routes = ISCED 650 **Main ECEC workplaces:** nursery class, nursery school (2, 3 and 4 year-olds, depending on school); nursery class in primary school (2, 3 and 4 year-olds, depending on school, working under the direction of lead teacher); combined reception/nursery unit in primary schools (3 to 5 year-olds, working under direction of unit head); reception class in primary school (compulsory education, 4 to 5 year-olds; lead teacher in children's centre or private, voluntary and independent sector settings including those registered as schools (2–4 or 0–4 years); leader/manager in smaller pre-schools, playgroups and day nurseries (PVI sector, 2–4 or 0–4 years); curriculum leader in larger pre-schools, playgroups and day nurseries (PVI sector, 2–4 or 0–4)

Note:
*The undergraduate route to EYTS is linked to a BA degree that meets the subject benchmarking statement of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education related to Early Childhood Studies.

The Early Years Educator (see *Table 12*), introduced from 2013, is a RQF level 3 (EQF 4/ISCED 3) qualification that meets the prescribed standards and other requirements of the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) but is awarded by a range of independent awarding bodies (such as CACHE, Edexcel and City and Guilds) that are regulated by Ofqual. Relevant study can be undertaken at a broad range of schools and Colleges of Further Education or in employment. Assessment practice must be consistent with the assessment principles set down by the Skills for Care and Development – the relevant sector skills body.

Table 12
England: Early Years Educator

Title: *Early Years Educator* (core pedagogue with various job titles) **Profile:** Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: Minimum age 16. 10 years' schooling and intermediate school leaving certificate (GCSE) in at least 5 subjects including Maths and English. **Professional studies:** (1) *RQF level 3 Certificate* and *Diploma in Childcare and Education*. Designed as two years full-time study in a school or college of further education with extensive placements. License to practice. (2) *RQF level 3 Diploma in Early Years Education and Care* or *Level 3 Diploma for the Early Years Workforce* depending on options. May be studied part-time by those in employment. Equivalent to one – two years of full-time study. License to practice. **Awards:** (1) Nested suite of awards building sufficient credit points for admission to HE and award of Level 3 Diploma encompassing EYE license to practice (2) Single award of Level 3 Diploma encompassing EYE license to practice. **ECTS credits:** not applicable **EQF level:** 4 **ISCED 2011**: 3 **Main ECEC workplaces:** *Day nursery* (0 to 4 years); *Pre-school/playgroup* (2/3 to 4 years), *Children's Centre* (0 to 5 years)

Note:
Exact name of qualification depends on choice of Awarding Body and optional units which confer some degree of specialism around required core specified in qualification criteria by the Department for Education.

In 2020, the Government introduced T Levels (equivalent to 'A' Levels), with Education and Childcare being among the first to be launched. Embedded in the qualification are the Early Years Educator standards to ensure those with the T Level meet the full and relevant criteria for early years practice (HM Government n. d.)

There are no minimum qualification requirements for Teaching Assistants or Special Needs Assistants in maintained nursery or primary schools; however, the above EYE award or its predecessors might be considered relevant and helpful, particularly for the nursery age group.

4.2.2 Wales: Initial ECEC qualifying routes (non-QTS)

Level 4 and 5 Diplomas have been developed for leaders and managers of practice that build on, and provide a progression route from the established level 2 and 3 Certificate/Diploma in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development. Currently it is only compulsory for those leading Flying Start programmes in Wales.

Table 13
Wales: Lead practitioners/managers of early years services

Title: Leadership for Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development 0–19 **Profile:** Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: Minimum age 19. Other requirements at discretion of Approved Centre depending on experience. **Professional studies:** 1. Full time education and training route: 1 – 2 years in Further and Higher Education College with extensive work placements. Maybe taken as part of wider Degree or Higher National Diploma programme.

Title: Leadership for Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development 0–19 **Profile:** Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
2. Work-based route: Around 12–18 months part-time study (in-service training and/or distance learning or day release) while in full time employment. **Awards:** 1. Level 4 Diploma in Leadership for Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (Management) (Wales)* 2. Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (Management) (Wales and Northern Ireland) plus other HE credit-bearing awards 3. Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (Management) (Wales and Northern Ireland) **ECTS credits**: Depends on route chosen **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011**: Depends on route. **Main ECEC workplaces:** Flying Start/Sure Start children's centre (0 to 4 years plus parent support); Flying Start home visiting programme; family support programmes for parents with children 0–4 years. ***Level 4 is knowledge based and must be undertaken before completing the new Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (Management) (Wales).

The Level 3 (EQF 4) Diploma in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (*Table 14*) is the minimum requirement for counting as a qualified core professional in Wales and Northern Ireland. Relevant study can be undertaken at a broad range of schools and colleges or in employment.

Table 14
Wales: Early Years Services Practitioner (core professional)

Title: Children's *Care, Play, Learning and Development practitioner* (various job titles) **Profile:** Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: Minimum age 16. 10 years schooling. Other requirements at discretion of Approved Centre depending on experience. **Professional studies:** **1. Full time education and training route:** Two years in school or FE College as part of wider general/vocational education and training programme with work placements. Equivalent qualification can be obtained through studying an Early Years Bachelor's degree or Diploma of Higher Education with Early Years Practitioner Status (EYPS)*. **2. Work-based route:** Around 12–18 months of part-time study (in-service training and/or distance learning or day release) while in full time employment. **3. Apprenticeship route:** Normally 2 years of part time study and training as part of wider general or vocational education programme while employed as trainee. **Awards:** 1. Level 3 Diploma in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (Wales and Northern Ireland) – maybe combined with additional qualifications such as GCSEs and 'A' levels or other academic credit-bearing award. 2. Level 3 Diploma in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (Wales and Northern Ireland) only 3. Level 3 Diploma in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (Wales and Northern Ireland) – combined with additional generic education and skills awards. 4. BA Early Years Education and Care/Early Childhood with Early Years Practitioner Status*. 5. Higher Education Diploma in Early Years Education and Care/Early Childhood with Early Years Practitioner Status*. **ECTS credits:** n/a

Title: Children's *Care, Play, Learning and Development practitioner* (various job titles) **Profile:** Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
EQF level: 4 **ISCED 2011**: 3 **Main ECEC workplaces:** day nursery (0–4 years); pre-school/playgroup **(**2/3 to 4 years); *Flying Start* children's centre/home visiting programme (0–4 years)

**Note:* Precise name may vary depending on training provider and choice of options. Higher National Certificates (HNCs) are predominantly provided by Further and Higher Education Colleges for students continuing in full-time education and training but with a significant component of work placements.

As in England, there are currently no minimum qualification requirements for Teaching Assistants or Special Needs Assistants in maintained nursery or primary schools in Wales and Northern Ireland, however the above CCLD award might be considered relevant and helpful, particularly for the nursery age group, as well as qualifications in Supporting Teaching and Learning in Schools which are not detailed here.

4.2.3 Scotland: Initial ECEC qualifying routes (non-QTS)

Outside the school sector, all Childcare Workers in Scotland are regulated by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) which sets professional standards, registers suitably qualified workers and deals with complaints against individuals. There are three levels of registration: (1) Lead Practitioner/Manager – graduate (SCQF level 9 EQF level 6) standard in Childhood Practice for leading any service for children and young people; (2) Core/Independent Practitioner – SCQF level 7, EQF level 5; (3) Support worker – SCQF level 6, EQF level 4 – working under direction. Implementation of the new requirements will take some years, therefore the SSSC is currently dealing with legacy qualifications and allowing existing experienced managers/leaders to register on the basis of the qualifications that were relevant when appointed.

Table 15

Scotland: Children's and Young People's Services Lead Practitioner/Manager (Standard in Childhood Practice)

Title: *Children's and Young People's Services Lead Practitioner/Manager* **Profile:** Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Minimum entry requirements Flexible depending on previous experience and qualifications and chosen route. 1. Universities normally require 12 years of education and Scottish Higher/Advanced Higher Diplomas (SCQF 6/7; level 4 or 5 EQF) to include English and Maths 2. National agreements allow for Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (e.g. SVQ 4/HNC/HND – Higher National Certificate/Diploma) in relation to Childhood Practice degree programmes. 3. SVQ 4 or equivalent vocational qualification (EQF level 5) 4. Undergraduate Degree (EQF/ISCED level 6) **Professional studies:** 1. 4-year full-time undergraduate degree leading to named award with eligibility for graduate registration 2. SVQ 4 (or equivalent) followed by 2–3 years full-/part-time undergraduate degree leading to named award with eligibility for graduate registration 3. SVQ 4 followed by 3 to 4 years of part-time study while continuing in employment, with eligibility for graduate registration 4. Degree followed by graduate training programme in childhood practice **Awards:**

Title: *Children's and Young People's Services Lead Practitioner/Manager* **Profile:** Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional
1. BA Hons Childhood Practice 2. B BA Hons Childhood Practice 3. SCQF Level 9 Childhood Practice 4. Graduate Diploma Programme in Childhood Practice **ECTS credits:** 180 or more, depending on chosen route. **EQF level:** depends on route. BA Hons EQF level 6; BA Ordinary and SCQF Level 9 are EQF level 6 **ISCED 2011**: depends on route: 1, 2 and 3 are ISCED 550/650. Entry requirement for 4 is 650 **Main ECEC workplaces:** General/Day Care Manager in children's centre or private and voluntary day nurseries (2–4 or 0–4 years); Leader/Manager in LA partnership pre-schools, voluntary and community playgroups and day nurseries (2–4 years); Leader/Manager in out-of-school and holiday provision 5–12 years)

Table 16
Scotland: Children's and Young People's Services Practitioner

Title: *Children's and Young People's Services Practitioner*
Minimum entry requirements: For SVQ 3: None specified – at the discretion of local SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) approved centre (primarily a work-based qualification for existing employees) **For Higher National Certificate (HNC):** None specified – at the discretion of local SQA approved centre. Intermediate and higher certificates advised. **Professional studies:** 1. Scottish Vocational Qualification 3 in Children and Young People's Services 2. Higher National Certificate in Children and Young People's Services or similar* **Award:** depends on the route chosen. **ECTS credits:** n/a **EQF level:** 4 or 5 **ISCED 2011**: 4 or 5, depending on route chosen **Main ECEC workplace:** LA, Partnership and Private Day Nurseries (0–4); Private, voluntary and community/partnership pre-schools and playgroups (2–4); Out-of-school clubs (before and after school and holidays; 5–12)

Notes:
*Precise name may vary depending on training provider and choice of options. HNCs are predominantly provided by Further and Higher Education Colleges for students continuing in full time education and training but with a significant component of work placements.

As in England and Wales, there are no minimum qualifications for Teaching Assistants or Special Needs Assistants in maintained nursery/primary schools in Scotland, though they may hold or achieve a variety of qualifications not detailed here.

4.2.4 Northern Ireland: Initial ECEC qualifying routes (non-QTS)

The person in charge/manager and deputy should have at least a qualification at QCF Level 5 Diploma in Child Care, Play, Learning and Development or Playwork; or a relevant occupational qualification in early years' education, social work, nursing, teaching or health visiting; and 2 years' experience working with children aged 0–4 years.

Team leaders or supervisors should have at least a qualification at QCF Level 3 Diploma in Child Care, Play, Learning and Development or Playwork.

At least 50% of all other childcare staff should have a minimum qualification at QCF Level 2 Diploma in Child Care, Play, Learning and Development or Playwork. Other staff should be in the

process of gaining this qualification within a reasonable time. Where staff have previously attained Level 2, 3 or 5 NVQ qualifications in Early Years Care and Education, this will be an acceptable alternative to QCF Diplomas.

Table 17

Northern Ireland: ECEC Manager

Title: ***Leadership Full Day Care, Crèche and Sessional Care***
Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: Level 5 = minimum acceptable qualification*
Professional studies: 1. Full time education and training routes in Higher Education Colleges 2. Part-time work-based routes
Awards: 1. BA Hons. Degree in Early Childhood Studies 2. Playwork Degree 3. Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development – Management Pathway 4. Level 5 Diploma in Playwork 5. Professional Qualification in: Social Work, Nursing, Midwifery, Health Visiting, Teaching and at least two years' paid experience in employment working with children of the age group relevant to the setting they will be working in.
ECTS credits: not applicable **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011:** 655
Main ECEC workplaces: day nursery (0–3 years); pre-school/playgroup **(**2–3 years), children's centre **(**0–4 years)

*Based on Acceptable Qualifications for the Early Years, School Age Childcare Childminding Sectors and Home Childcarers in Northern Ireland (2016, updated 2020)

Table 18

Northern Ireland: Room Supervisor

Title: ***Room Supervisor Full Day Care, Crèche and Sessional Care***
Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: Level 3 = minimum acceptable qualification
Professional studies: 1. Full-time education and training routes mainly in regional colleges 2. Part-time work-based routes
Awards:** **1.** Level 3 Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development **2.** Level 3 Diploma in Playwork **3.** CACHE Extended Diploma in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development **4.** BTEC National Diploma in Children's Care Learning, Play and Development
ECTS credits: not applicable **EQF level:** 5 **ISCED 2011:** 655
Main ECEC workplaces: day nursery (0–3 years); Pre-school/playgroup **(**2–3 years); children's centre **(**0–4 years)

*Based on Acceptable Qualifications for the Early Years, School Age Childcare, Childminding Sectors and Home Childcarers in Northern Ireland (2016, updated 2020)

** Some qualifications require extra modules to be undertaken.

4.3 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

4.3.1 UK wide: Competence specifications and curricula

It has become clear from the above that a variety of approaches to qualifications for work with young children has evolved across the UK, dependent largely on the different governance and inspection regimes. The competency and curriculum requirements in turn reflect those differences. One aspect that is a common thread running through education and training programmes at all levels across the UK is a requirement to incorporate the core or generic skills essential for employment. These include amongst others: communication; application of number; use of information technology; problem solving; working with others/teamwork; managing own learning/ learning to learn.

The profile and level of core skills required for any particular job/subject area, and whether these are identified separately or embedded in other aspects, varies across the IPE programmes.

Competence specifications are based on national standards and curriculum frameworks. These not only differ between the nations (strongly educational in England, based on generic social care models in Wales and Scotland), but determine core professional requirements at different levels: currently at level 4 EQF and level 4 ISCED in England and at level 5 EQF/level 4 ISCED and level 6 EQF/level 5 ISCED in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (see *Appendix II* for explanatory note on UK Qualification Levels).

QTS competence specifications and curricula

Initial Teacher Training with QTS is delivered in three main educational phases: primary 3–11; middle 7–14 and secondary 11–19. Within the primary phase, some providers offer the opportunity to focus on lower primary/early years 3–7 (nursery, reception and Key stage 1) or upper primary (7–11). However, all ITT trainees are required to have a working knowledge of the key stages above and below in order to facilitate progression and to understand how key stages build on one another throughout the school curriculum to 19. Once qualified, a teacher with QTS may be deployed with any age range in the school system at the discretion of the Head Teacher.

Although ITT is similar in nature and its outcomes mutually recognised across the UK, the competency requirements for Teachers with QTS have developed in divergent ways to reflect the educational and cultural context of each nation. For ease of comparison, and to reduce repetition, the relevant information for qualified teachers with QTS across the four nations will be presented before other types of qualification are considered.

The curriculum is not separately prescribed outside the competency specification but is devised locally by each approved provider of Initial Teacher Training to ensure the underpinning knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to enable trainees to meet all aspects of the Teacher Standards.

A variety of pedagogic methods may be used in ITT depending on the approved local ITT provider (generally a Higher Education Institution (HEI) or school consortium linked to an HE provider) and chosen route. These may range from lectures and seminars to practical workshops and laboratory classes, demonstrations, teaching observations and work-based learning. Increasingly, ITT includes elements of distance learning and/or self-directed enquiry and problem solving. All ITT courses must include a minimum of around 50% placements/work-based learning as specified by the regulator.

An essential pedagogic/didactic feature of QTS (and also of EYTS) is building the capacity for

reflection and self-awareness in order to learn from experience. The ideal of the reflective and reflexive practitioner is one who constantly reviews what they have done and the impact it has had on themselves and others (both children and adults) within a cycle of continuous improvement. This is closely related to the highest level of the key/core skill of 'learning to learn'.

Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT, non-QTS) competence specifications and curricula

As with QTS, the curriculum is devised by local approved providers of Initial Teacher Training to provide the underpinning knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to support these detailed competence specifications. The core of the curriculum is based around children's development, learning, health and wellbeing in the context of family, culture and services (the ecological context), the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements and the teaching of early literacy and numeracy. The supporting advice issued by the Department for Education provides the same list of core content as for Qualified Teacher Status; however, the emphasis on ecological context expressed in wider documentation related to EYTS is distinctive, as is Standard 7 on safeguarding and promoting welfare. Early Years Teachers with EYTS specialise in the Early Years Foundation Stage from 0 to 5 covering babies and toddlers as well as pre-primary education and care and are required to have a working knowledge of primary school Key Stage 1, the phase above, in order to facilitate progression. They must also understand how the other key stages build on one another throughout the National Curriculum up to the age of 18.

General competence specifications and curricula (non-QTS)

The main focus of the curriculum is a holistic approach to young children's health, development and learning from birth to 5 (7 in Wales) and how best to support this. The principles and values of child-centred practice are introduced along with opportunities to implement principles, theories and approaches in practice.

A variety of pedagogic methods may be used across all forms of qualification for work in education and children's services, depending on level, curriculum focus and chosen route. These may range from lectures and seminars to practical workshops and laboratory classes, demonstrations, teaching/childcare observations, modelling, coaching and work-based learning. Increasingly, all training includes elements of distance learning and/or self-directed enquiry and problem solving and in addition all learners are encouraged to be reflective and reflexive in relation to their learning experiences and to be able to self-evaluate their strengths, weaknesses and ongoing learning and development needs. All of the programmes must include a substantial component of placements/work-based learning and assessment as specified by the relevant awarding body or regulator. For example, the Level 3 Diploma in Care, Learning and Development requires a minimum 700 hours of experience in real work settings as an employee or on placement, i.e. around 50% of all learning hours. Assessment methods include, for example: observation, reflective accounts, critical incident analyses, self and peer assessment, portfolios, learning contracts, case studies, projects and simulations/virtual environments as well as critical analysis of information and evidence from reading or lectures, particularly at higher levels. However, the larger part of assessment must be based on the trainee's experience and performance in work/placement settings.

4.3.2 England: Competence specifications for Teachers with QTS

Table 19
England: Competence Specifications for Primary (Early Years) Teachers (3–7) with QTS

Teachers' Standards
1. Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils
2. Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils
3. Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge: (if teaching early reading) demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics*; (if teaching early mathematics) demonstrate a clear understanding of appropriate teaching strategies*
4. Plan and teach well-structured lessons
5. Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all children
6. Make accurate and productive use of assessment
7. Manage behaviour effectively to ensure good and safe learning
8. Fulfil wider professional responsibilities

Notes: Standards and detailed criteria are generic to all teachers regardless of the age range. The two criteria with an asterisk are specific to teachers following an early years specialism (3–7). For a full list of Teachers' Standards and criteria see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1040274/Teachers__Standards_Dec_2021.pdf
Source: Department for Education 2021c

Table 20
England: Competency Framework –Teachers' Standards (Early Years) – non-QTS

Standards	Criteria An Early Years Teacher must be able to:
Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge all children	– Establish and sustain a safe and stimulating environment where children feel confident and are able to learn and develop – Set goals that stretch and challenge children of all backgrounds, abilities and dispositions – Demonstrate and model the positive values, attitudes and behaviours expected of children.
Promote good progress and outcomes by children	– Be accountable for children's progress, attainment and outcomes – Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how babies and children learn and develop – Know and understand attachment theories, their significance and how to promote secure attachments effectively – Lead and model effective strategies to develop and extend children's learning and thinking, including sustained shared thinking – Communicate effectively with children from birth to age five, listening and responding sensitively – Develop children's confidence, social and communication skills through group learning – Understand the important influence of parents and/or carers, working in partnership with them to support the child's wellbeing, learning and development.
Demonstrate good knowledge of early learning and EYFS	– Have a secure knowledge of early childhood development and how that leads to successful learning and development at school – Demonstrate a clear understanding of how to widen children's experience and raise their expectations – Demonstrate a critical understanding of the EYFS areas of learning and development and engage with the educational continuum of expectations, curricula and teaching of Key Stage 1 and 2 – Demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics in the teaching of early reading – Demonstrate a clear understanding of appropriate strategies in the teaching of early mathematics.

Standards	Criteria An Early Years Teacher must be able to:
Plan education and care taking account of the needs of all children	– Observe and assess children's development and learning, using this to plan next steps – Plan balanced and flexible activities and educational programmes that take into account the stage of development, circumstances and interests of children – Promote a love of learning and stimulate children's intellectual curiosity in partnership with parents and/or carers – Use a variety of teaching approaches to lead group activities appropriate to the age range and ability of children – Reflect on the effectiveness of teaching activities and educational programmes to support the continuous improvement of provision
Adapt education and care to respond to the strengths and needs of all children	– Have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit children's learning and development and how best to address these – Demonstrate an awareness of the physical, emotional, social, intellectual development and communication needs of babies and children, and know how to adapt education and care to support children at different stages of development – Demonstrate a clear understanding of the needs of all children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, and be able to use and evaluate distinctive approaches to engage and support them – Support children through a range of transitions – Know when a child is in need of additional support and how this can be accessed, working in partnership with parents and/or carers and other professionals.
Make accurate and productive use of assessment	– Know and act upon the legal requirements and guidance on health and safety, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child – Establish and sustain a safe environment and employ practices that promote children's health and safety – Know and understand child protection policies and procedures, recognise when a child is in danger or at risk of abuse, and know how to act to protect them.
Fulfil wider professional responsibilities	– Promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice – Make a positive contribution to the wider life and ethos of the setting – Take a lead in establishing a culture of cooperative working between colleagues, parents and/or carers and other professionals – Model and implement effective education and care, and support and lead other practitioners including Early Years Educators. – Take responsibility for leading practice through appropriate professional development for self and colleagues – Reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of provision, and shape and support good practice – Understand the importance of and contribute to multi-agency team working.

Source: Department for Education 2013

4.3.3 Wales: Competence specifications for teachers with QTS

New professional standards for teaching and leadership were introduced in Wales in 2017 and are the responsibility of the Education Workforce Council (EWC). There are five standards and five overarching values and dispositions. The standards form the framework for initial and ongoing professional development. Each standard is divided into a number of purposes and there are three descriptors for each of the teaching standards depending on whether in training, in the induction period or an experienced teacher:

- QTS
- Induction
- Sustained highly effective practice

There are two descriptors for the formal leadership standards:

- Sustained highly effective practice
- Effective formal leadership

Table 21
Wales: Competence specifications: Teachers/Teaching Assistants/Higher Level Teaching Assistants

Professional values and dispositions	
Welsh language and culture Rights to learn Literacy, numeracy and digital competency The professional learner The system role Professional entitlement	
Five Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership	
Pedagogy	The teacher consistently secures the best outcomes for learners through progressively refining teaching, influencing learners and advancing learning. The teacher in a formal leadership role exercises accountability for the pedagogy of others by creating and sustaining the conditions to realise the four purposes for learners and achieve the best for them in terms of standards, wellbeing and progress
Leadership	The teacher exercises leadership through all aspects of professional practice to support the efforts of others across the school and beyond to fulfil the educational ambitions for Wales. The teacher in a formal leadership role works intelligently to bring coherence, clarity and a shared commitment to realising the vision for pedagogy, learners, colleagues and the wider community.
Professional Learning	The teacher consistently extends knowledge, skills and understanding and can show how reflection and openness to challenge and support informs professional learning to progressively develop pedagogy. The teacher in a formal leadership role stimulates an appetite for professional learning that is valued, has impact upon pedagogy and supports professional growth across a learning community within and beyond the school.
Innovation	The teacher employs an innovative outlook which is exemplified through the controlled and measured development of techniques and approaches to improve pedagogic outcomes. The teacher in a formal leadership role ensures a positive climate for innovation that is coherent and manageable and outcomes are evaluated, disseminated and applied.
Collaboration	The teacher takes opportunities to work productively with all partners in learning in order to extend professional effectiveness. The teacher in a formal leadership role builds a climate of mutual support in which effective collaboration flourishes within and beyond the school to spread effective pedagogy.

Note: These standards have been abbreviated
Source: https://hwb.gov.wales/professional-development/professional-standards

4.3.4 Scotland: Competence specifications for teachers with QTS

In Scotland, professional standards for qualified teachers are regulated through the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) and were revised in 2021. There are four standards: (1)

Provisional Registration; (2) Full Registration; (3) Career-Long Professional Learning; (4) Headship. They are underpinned by a set of professional values: (1) Social Justice; (2) Trust and Respect: (3) Integrity.

The following table lists the standard for provisional and full registration with the GTCS applied at the end of the ITT programme and on successful completion of the probationary year respectively. The level of performance expected is differentiated through use of differential criteria at the two stages. Further details can be found in the relevant documentation (see *References* and *Acronyms*).

Table 22

Scotland: Competence specifications for Primary Teachers with QTS

1. Professional values and personal commitment	
Social Justice Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities now and in the future. **Trust and Respect** Trust and respect are expectations of positive actions that support authentic relationship building and show care for the needs and feelings of the people involved and respect for our natural world and its limited resources. **Integrity** Integrity is the practice of being honest and showing a consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles and values **Professional Commitment** Making a professional commitment to learning and learners that is compatible with the aspiration of achieving a sustainable and equitable world embodies what it is to be a teacher in Scotland.	
2. Professional knowledge and understanding	
Curriculum and Pedagogy	Have knowledge and understanding of – Pedagogical Theories and Professional Practice – Research and engagement in practitioner enquiry – Curriculum design – Planning for assessment, teaching and learning
Professional Responsibilities	Have knowledge and understanding of – Education system – Learning communities
3. Professional Skills and Abilities	
Curriculum and Pedagogy	– Plan effectively to meet learners' needs – Utilise pedagogical approaches and resources – Utilise partnerships for learning and wellbeing – Employ assessment, evaluate progress, recording and reporting as an integral part of the teaching process to support and enhance learning
The Learning Context	– Appropriately organise and manage learning – Engage learner participation – Build positive, rights respecting relationships for learning
Professional Learning	– Engage critically with literature, research and policy – Engage in reflective practice to develop and advance career-long professional learning and expertise

Please note – these standards have been abbreviated**.**
*Source***:** General Teaching Council for Scotland 2022

4.3.5 Northern Ireland: Competence specifications for teachers with QTS

The competence specifications for Pre-primary/Primary Teachers set down by the GTCNI (General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland), are presented in *Table 23* in a somewhat abbreviated form. For the exact wording, please see Department of Education (Northern Ireland)/General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland 2010.

Table 23
Northern Ireland: Competence specifications for Pre-Primary Teachers (3-4) and Primary Teachers (4-11) with QTS

General Teaching Council (NI) – Code of Values and Professional Practice	
Professional Values and commitments	Teachers should demonstrate that they understand and uphold the core values and commitments enshrined in the Council's Code of Values and Professional Practice. The core values of the profession are: **Trust, honesty, respect, fairness, integrity, tolerance, commitment, equality and service** Commitments are to:- **Learners** e.g. to maintain professional relationships that respect pupils as persons; respect each pupils' uniqueness, individuality and specific needs; motivate and inspire to help realize potential **Colleagues and others** e.g. work with others to create a professional community; promote collegiality; cooperate with external agencies; ensure respectful, trusting relationships with parents/carers; respect confidentiality unless legal requirement to disclose **The Profession** e.g. as reflective practitioners, contribute to review of policies and practices; assume responsibility for own ongoing professional development need
Professional knowledge and understanding: educational policies and contexts	– Teachers will have developed knowledge and understanding of: – Contemporary debates about the nature and purposes of education and the social and policy contexts in which the aims of education are defined – Significant features of pupils' cultures, languages and faiths and how to address the implications for learning arising from these – Their responsibilities under the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, the most common special needs and strategies to address these – Strategies for communicating effectively with pupils, parents, colleagues and personnel from relevant child and school support agencies – How to use technology effectively, both to aid pupil learning and to support their professional role – The interrelationship between schools and the communities they serve, and potential for mutual development and wellbeing – The statutory framework pertaining to education and schooling and their specific responsibilities emanating from it
Professional knowledge and understanding: curriculum	– Teachers will have developed a knowledge and understanding of: – Curriculum development processes, including planning, implementation and evaluation – How the learning area/subject(s) they teach contribute to the Northern Ireland Curriculum* – The curriculum requirements in preceding and subsequent key stages
Professional knowledge and understanding: methods	Teachers will have developed knowledge and understanding of: – Relevant learning area/subject(s), including strategies and initiatives to improve, literacy, numeracy and thinking skills – Sufficient linguistic and pedagogical expertise to teach the curriculum in Irish medium and other bilingual contexts

General Teaching Council (NI) – Code of Values and Professional Practice	
	– Factors that promote and hinder effective learning and the need to provide for the holistic development of the child – A range of strategies to promote and maintain positive behaviour, including an acknowledgement of pupil voice
Professional skills	– Set learning objectives taking account of what pupils know, understand and can do, and the Northern Ireland Curriculum requirements – Plan and evaluate lessons that enable all pupils, including those with special educational needs, to meet learning objectives – Deploy, organise and guide the work of other adults to support pupils' learning – Plan for out-of-school learning, including school visits and field work – Manage their time and workload effectively and efficiently and maintain a work/life balance – Create and maintain a safe, interactive and challenging learning environment – Use a range of strategies and resources, including eLearning, to enable learning and maintain pace within lessons – Employ strategies that motivate and meet the needs of all pupils, including those with special and additional educational and language needs – Promote a standard of behaviour that enables all pupils to learn, preempting and dealing with inappropriate behaviour
Professional skills: assessment	– Monitor pupils' progress and give constructive feedback to help pupils reflect on and improve their learning – Select from a range of assessment strategies to evaluate pupils' learning, and use this information in their planning – Assess pupils' attainment against relevant benchmarking data and understand the relationship between assessment and target setting
Wider professional role	– Keep curricular, subject and pedagogical knowledge up-to-date through reflection, self-study and collaboration with colleagues – Contribute to the life of the school, collaborating with teaching and support staff, parents and external agencies – Liaise with parents or carers on their child's progress and achievements

Source: Department of Education (Northern Ireland)/General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland 2010.

4.4 ECEC competence specifications and IPE curricula (PVI sector)

4.4.1 England

A range of qualifications from RQF Levels 3–6 are provided in Higher and Further Education institutions and by training providers. However, to be counted in the staff to child ratios, a qualification is needed that is 'full and relevant' at Levels 2 or 3 (DfE 2022a). Setting managers must have a level 3 qualification (Early Years Educator or equivalent). Degrees in Early Childhood Studies or a related degree with assessed placements or with the Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner Competences embedded in them can be counted in staff to child ratios at level 3. *Tables 24* and *25* show the six main qualification areas for the Level 3 Early Years Educator (see DfE 2019 for fuller details of the qualification criteria) and the nine competence areas for the Level 6 Early Childhood graduates (see QAA 2022 for fuller details).

Table 24

England: Early Years Educator Level 3 – Main Qualification Criteria

1.	Support and promote children's early education and development
2.	Plan and provide effective care, teaching and learning that enables children to progress and prepares them for school
3.	Make accurate and productive use of assessment
4.	Develop effective and informed practice
5.	Safeguard and promote the health, safety and welfare of children
6.	Work in partnership with the key person, colleagues, parents and/or carers or other professionals

Source: DfE 2019

Table 25

England: Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner Level 6 – Competence areas

1.	Advocating for young children's rights and participation
2.	Promoting holistic child development
3.	Working directly with young children, families and colleagues to promote health, wellbeing, safety and nurturing care
4.	Observe, listen and plan for young children to support their wellbeing, early learning, progression and transitions
5.	Safeguarding and child protection
6.	Inclusive practice
7.	Partnership with parents and caregivers
8	Collaborating with others
9.	Professional development

Source: Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) 2022

4.4.2 Wales: Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development: Level 5 and Level 3 competence specifications

Changes in Wales mean that the required qualification for leadership/management in Flying Start programmes – provision that is targeted at the most disadvantaged children and families – is higher (at level 5) than that for leading/managing day nurseries, play groups and other settings (where it remains at core pedagogue level 3) in less disadvantaged neighbourhoods. However, the volume of credit is not equivalent to that of a Diploma in Higher Education or a Foundation Degree in the Qualifications Wales Framework and therefore does not fulfil all the requirements for level 5. Several Higher Education providers in Wales have developed Early Years degree programmes which have embedded a practice competence element (Early Years Practitioner Status) aligning to the National Occupational Standards. These programmes have been approved by Social Care Wales and appear on their list of approved qualifications to work in the ECEC sector. These are an alternative route to a practice competence qualification to work in ECEC to those listed below.

Table 26a

Wales: Minimum competence specifications for Leader/Manager in Flying Start Children's Centre programme – level 4

Title: Level 4 Diploma – Preparing for Leadership and Management in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (Wales) **Age range:** 0–19 **Level 4** in *Qualifications for Wales and Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF):* 60 credits equivalent to 335 learning hours and a Total Qualification Time of 600 hours. **Structure:** 3 Mandatory units.
Entry requirements: None other than minimum age 18 years. Rest at discretion of local approved centre.
Consists of three modules, all mandatory 1. Leading child-centred practice 2. Theoretical frameworks for leadership and management 3. Understanding how to lead and manage effective team performance

Table 26b

Wales: Minimum competence specifications for Leader/Manager in Flying Start Children's Centre programme – level 5

Title: Level 5 Diploma – Leadership and Management in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development: Practice **Level 5** in *Qualifications for Wales and Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF):* Minimum 120 credits (equivalent to 415 learning hours and a Total Qualification Time of 1,200 hours including practice competence) **Structure:** Minimum of 90 credits from mandatory core, 30 credits from optional group	
Entry requirements: Must be over 19. Others at discretion of local approved centre. In Wales, Level 4 *Preparing for Leadership and Management in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (Wales)* must be completed prior to the Level 5 Diploma in *Leadership and Management in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (Wales)*	
Mandatory core units	**In a health and social care or children and young people's setting lead and manage:** – Child-centred practice – Effective team performance – Quality of the workplace/setting – Professional practice – Practice that promotes the safeguarding of children
Optional units	**In a health and social care or children and young people's setting lead and manage:** – Health, wellbeing and creative learning within childcare provision – The acquisition of a new language through immersion – Support for families to develop parenting skills – Speech, language and communication skills – Services for children with additional needs – Continuous improvement through the regulatory processes – Inter-professional working arrangements – Work with volunteers – Business planning and processes – A therapy team – Child health services – Study skills

Explanatory notes: Not all units are of equal size/credit value.
Source: Health and Care Learning Wales 2019

Although individuals with a wide range of qualifications may work in provision that includes young children under 12 in Wales and Northern Ireland, such as out-of-school and holiday play schemes, these are not recognised as core professionals in the ECEC sector and the alternative qualifications are not detailed here.

Table 27

Wales: Minimum competency requirements for core practitioner/senior practitioner/setting manager

Title: Level 3 Diploma in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development) **Age range:** 0–19 **Level 3 in** *Qualifications for Wales and Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)***:** 65 credits equivalent to one year of full-time study plus placement experience **Structure:** 16 mandatory units plus minimum of 16 credits from 5-6 optional units	
Entry requirements: None other than minimum age 16 years. Rest at discretion of local approved centre.	
Mandatory units	
Generic health and social care	**In settings for health and social care for children and young people** – Promote communication – Engage in personal development – Promote equality and inclusion – Principles for implementing duty of care*
Children and young people	– Understand child and young person development* – Promote child and young person development – Understand how to safeguard the wellbeing of children and young people* – Support children's and young people's health and safety – Develop positive relationships with children, young people and others involved in their care – Working together for the benefit of children and young people – Understand how to support positive outcomes for children and young people*
Early learning and childcare	– Context and principles for early years provision – Promote learning and development in the early years – Promote children's welfare and wellbeing in the early years – Professional practice in early years settings – Support children's speech, language and communication
Selected Optional Units – Work with babies and young children to promote their development and learning – Care for the physical and nutritional needs of babies and young children – Lead and manage a community based early years setting – Promote young children's physical activity and movement skills – Promote creativity and creative learning in young children – Work with parents to meet their children's needs – Work with parents, families and carers to support their children's speech, language and communication development – Engage fathers in their children's early learning – Promote children in early years settings acquiring a new language through immersion	

***Note*:** Not all units are of equal credit value.

*Units marked with an asterisk are knowledge only. All others must be demonstrated in practice.

Source: Health and Care Learning Wales 2019

Curricular areas

The curricular areas for the level 3, 4 and 5 diplomas in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development are determined by the need to underpin the competence requirements. However, as these qualifications are embedded within the wider Children and Young People's Services Sector, the focus is much broader than education. A substantial mandatory core covers the development health and wellbeing of children from birth to 19 in the context of their families and social circumstances and is underpinned by a children's rights approach.

4.4.3 Scotland: Competence specifications – Early Learning and Childcare

There are three sets of competences that must be met depending on the level of practice: Lead Practitioner/Manager in Childhood Practice (EQF level 6)[5], Core Practitioner Level 7 SQCF (EQF level 5 (*Table 28*) and Early Education and Childcare (EQF level 4).

Table 28

Scotland: Children and Young People (0–16): Competence specifications for core practitioner

Role: Core Practitioner Level 7 SQCF (EQF level 5)* (Meets requirements for registration with Scottish Social Services Council) **Title: Scottish Vocational Qualification in Social Services (Children and Young People 0-16)**	
Structure: Based on National Occupational Standards (Skills for Care and Development) Four mandatory/core units plus four optional units **Minimum entry requirements:** None specified (at discretion of local SQA approved centre). Current employment in a relevant childcare provider expected.	
Mandatory Units	
Promote effective communication	– Establish understanding about children's communication – Support children to interact through communication – Communicate effectively about difficult, complex and sensitive issues with children and key people – Communicate using records and reports
Promote health, safety and security in the work setting	– Maintain health, safety and security in the work setting – Promote health and safety in the work setting – Minimise risks arising from emergencies
Develop practice through reflection and learning	– Reflect on own practice – Take action to enhance practice
Promote the safeguarding of children and young people	– Maintain understanding and awareness of harm, abuse and safeguarding – Implement practices that help to safeguard children and young people from harm or abuse – Develop relationships that promote the safeguarding of children and young people – Promote rights and inclusion with children and young people – Work in ways that promote the wellbeing of children and young people – Support children and young people to keep themselves safe

[5] The SSSC standard for Lead Practitioner/Manager also acts as the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement recognized by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Scotland for BA degrees in Childhood Practice. The content of awards from universities is not prescribed but must cover the areas set out in the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Scotland (see above).

– Optional units for work in early learning and childcare include: – Promote the development of children and young people* – Plan and organise environments for children and families – Promote the health and physical development of children – Promote children's wellbeing and resilience – Implement frameworks for early education through the development of curriculum planning – Support early intervention for the benefit of children and families – Care for children at home – Promote the care, learning and development of children with additional requirements in partnership with their families – Empower families through the development of parenting skills – Use information and communication technology to promote children's early learning – Support the use of medication for children – Support children and young people through major transitions – Support children who have experienced trauma – Manage a small-scale childcare business – Work with a management committee
Once registered with the SSC, all workers must follow the **Code of Practice** below. Social service workers must: – Protect the rights and promote the interests of service users and carers – Strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers – Promote the independence of service users while protecting them as far as possible from danger or harm – Respect the rights of service users whilst seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people – Uphold public trust and confidence in social services – Be accountable for the quality of their work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills.

Please note: These standards have been abbreviated**.**
*Source***:** SQA- Scottish Qualification Authority 2021
* The format of the **HNC Childhood Practice (**Higher National Certificate) is being revised with a pilot of so called NextGen HNC underway in 2021/22

IPE curricular areas and approaches – SVQ

All those preparing for SVQs in the care sector cover the same core requirements, regardless of age band or setting. However, the rest of the curriculum depends on the chosen option modules that match the employment setting.

As SVQs are primarily designed for those already in relevant employment, the methods employed would be primarily through working under direction with modelling, observation and mentoring support from an experienced and qualified co-worker. This is normally supplemented by distance learning/self-study or day/block release to colleges for the underpinning knowledge, theory and methods.

4.4.4 Northern Ireland

Level 5 is now the minimum qualification for those working as the person in charge/manager/deputy leaders and room supervisors/team leaders who are able to deputise (Childcare Partnerships 2016).

Table 29

Northern Ireland: Level 5 competence specifications

Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development Management Pathway*	
Learners are required to successfully complete 90 overall credits, 72 credits from the mandatory units and a minimum of 18 credits from the optional units	
Mandatory units	– Support children's care, learning and development in the early years – Lead practice that supports positive outcomes for children's development – Develop and implement policies and procedures to support safeguarding of children – Promote professional practice – Develop health and safety and risk management policies, procedures and practices in early years settings – Work in partnership – Use and develop systems that promote communication – Develop own professional development – Champion diversity, equality and inclusion – Lead and manage a team – Manage induction – Develop supervision practice – Appraise staff performance – Professional and sustainable practice in delivery of service
Optional units	– Understand the speech, language and communication needs of children and young people with social, emotional and mental health needs – Promote creativity and creative learning in young children, work with parents, families and carers to support their children and young people's speech, language and communication development – Promote children in childcare settings acquiring a new language through immersion – Develop and evaluate operational plans for own area of responsibility – Recruitment and selection within health and social care or children and young people's settings – Facilitate coaching and mentoring of practitioners in health and social care or children and young people's settings – Manage quality in health and social care or children and young people's setting – Develop provision for family support

Source: NCFE 2022

4.5 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

UK-wide

The majority of entrants make the choice of a career in ECEC at 16 to 18 years while still in full-time education and training. Of these some will go into work-based apprenticeship schemes while the majority stay on at school or college, gaining work experience through practice placements. Those who achieve better grades in the level 3 Diploma (SVQ 3 in Scotland), often combined with other accredited studies, may then apply for higher education in a relevant subject area or on an integrated professional education and training course.

Other entrants follow more traditional academic studies (GCSEs and 'A' Levels, or Scottish Highers) before choosing a career in primary teaching on leaving school (B.Ed./BA Education) or choosing to study/work with the 0–8 age group (e.g. BA Early Childhood Studies or BA Childhood Practice in Scotland).

Direct entrants into employment need to work towards becoming qualified within two or three years of appointment and in Scotland become registered to work in the sector. It is possible for

16 to 17 year-olds to opt to go straight into employment as unqualified staff or on apprenticeship schemes, and employers may provide in-house work-based training programmes beyond induction with a pathway starting from level 2 Certificates and Diplomas (or SVQs in Scotland) and building up to level 3 or higher supported by day release to a college or distance learning resources. Others enter the ECEC workforce as mature adults after having had their own children, or as a career change.

The UK education, higher education and training sectors have become much more diversified and flexible in recent years. For level 3 (EQF level 4) qualified core practitioners, progression to and through higher education is possible via work-based and distance routes. Further and higher education institutions offer the level 5 (EQF 5) Diploma in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development or Higher National Certificates/Diplomas and Foundation Degrees (level 5) that in turn can be 'topped up' to a Bachelor's degree and full level 6 graduate status with an additional 12 to 18 months of work and study.

4.5.1 Formal opportunities for moving up and across qualifications frameworks

Horizontal mobility: In Wales and Scotland, permeability across the non-school workforce is encouraged through a shared code of ethics and values in care and qualification structures that have a mandatory common core for children and young peoples' and wider care services. Transfer between roles is thus possible through the addition of a few specific units. In England there is less transferability into and within the education sector because of the strongly educational focus of qualifications and the strict division between teachers with QTS and support staff roles.

Vertical mobility: The extended version of the RQF level 3 Diploma in Children's Care Learning and Development in Wales and Northern Ireland, and the EYE qualification in England have been rated by the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) in order to create the credits which are necessary for entry to Higher Education. However, vocationally oriented credits alone may not be sufficient in relation to the competitive requirements for entrance to some universities. Hence 16 to 19 year-olds in full-time education and training in schools and colleges are often advised to combine their vocational qualification with some additional academic studies. In the case of mature students with extensive practice experience, universities often exercise more discretion over entry requirements.

The relevant regulator controls the number of places for all forms of Initial Teacher Training in the nations of the UK and entry can be highly competitive. The range of full-time and part-time routes through ITT (leading to QTS) ensures that progression is possible by work-based routes. However, standard higher education fees (currently £9,250 per annum – €10.766[6]) are applicable for those requiring a degree. Although loans are available for first degrees, Higher Education Institution fees may still be prohibitive to many given the low pay characteristic of the sector.

4.5.2 Options for career changers

The ITT graduate entry routes for QTS provide opportunities for career change for graduates. However, the requirement for Maths and English (and Science in England) is GCSE (level 2) at a minimum of grade B in England (grade C in Wales).

For those at RQF/SVQ level 3 with related qualifications in playwork, health care or social care, career change is facilitated through the mandatory common core structure for the care sector that applies in Wales and Scotland. In England, the distinctively educational approach of the EYE makes transferability more difficult. Alternatively, individuals may use any existing RQF level 3 qualifications to apply for an undergraduate degree as a mature student.

[6] Conversion rate: July 2023

At any stage of the education and training system Accreditation of Prior Accredited or Experiential Learning (APL /APEL, sometimes referred to as RPL – Recognition of Prior Learning) is theoretically possible. However, it has proved extremely difficult to operationalise in practice as credit is usually transferred by matching learning outcomes to modules/units. What is commonly found is that the variation of content in modules and levels across different awarding bodies or Higher Education institutions makes an exact match impossible, meaning that it is easier for the individual to follow the whole programme rather than to try selectively to fill in apparent gaps. The exception to this is through recognition agreements with particular institutions or Awarding Bodies based on academic transcripts and mapping. These may allow, for example, an ITT collaborative provider to give the equivalent of 60 ECTS credits credit (first year of University, RQF level 4 studies) for a range of specified vocationally related qualifications.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Workplace-based learning is an essential component of all education and training programmes that lead to recognised qualifications for ECEC at EQF levels 4 to 6 across the UK. As all recognised qualifications for core practitioners and teachers are competence-based (interpreted as the effective implementation of skills and knowledge in action) rather than just knowledge-based, evidence for assessment must include demonstration of the competences claimed in an appropriate work environment. This is achieved through real work in the case of employees, or practice placements for trainees.

5.1 Regulation/guidance, duration and structure of work-based learning in IPE

The precise requirements for work-based learning are set down by the relevant awarding or regulating body and vary with sector, qualification and chosen route. In level 3 Diploma programmes placement/work experience must account for roughly half of the learning time and for those studying for the level 5 Diploma in Leadership in Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development this must include experience within a leadership role, albeit limited in extent.

ITT programmes must include a minimum of 24 weeks (120 days) of work experience, up to two weeks of which may be counted from before the main training programme begins. Experience of at least two different settings and ages/phases of the curriculum is also required.

5.2 ECTS credits allocation for IPE

Whether or not ECTS credits are allocated specifically to work-based learning within higher education programmes is dependent on the structure of the individual modules that make up the validated course specification which in turn depends on the policy of the Higher Education Institution. In some cases, designated placement modules carrying a given number of points are part of the course specification. In others, time spent in placement is integrated into the module specifications for different curricular/subject areas.

5.3 Skills and competences developed in IPE through work-based learning

In judging core/key skills, the UK system allows for the distinction between whether and where particular skills are taught, developed and assessed. In a fully competence-based qualification system, ideally all types and areas of skills and competences defined in the specification should

be developed through practice and assessed in the workplace, regardless of how they were originally taught. However, the methods of assessment may take many forms and simulation/alternative methods may be permitted under some circumstances (for example, in demonstrating aspects of competences associated with child abuse/protection or dealing with a difficult parent that might not occur in the course of everyday practice as a trainee).

Although teaching methods and techniques can be taught in the classroom and demonstrated through observation of video clips, it is widely recognised that their effective implementation in real group settings with children cannot be achieved without practice in a real-world setting. This is particularly true of managing children's behaviour and group/classroom management. Co-teaching or observation and coaching by an experienced practitioner are usually considered the most effective. However, pairing trainees to support each other is also used and can result in effective learning for both participants when combined with debriefing with an experienced teacher or tutor.

Similarly, learning to work with and supervise/mentor less well-qualified colleagues or to handle parents' concerns are skills that, although they may be simulated and rehearsed through role play, most students/trainees develop or hone through direct experience in the workplace at a later stage.

5.4 Forms of student self-evaluation and external evaluation

Although the expected level of evaluation varies with the level of qualification, for all ECEC trainees judging competence is not just about observing that a task has been carried out meeting certain criteria but ascertaining the reasoning and theory underpinning a trainee's actions. It is hence generally recognised that sound underpinning knowledge and understanding is essential to enable trainees to respond effectively in the unpredictable situations that are characteristic of work in ECEC. In England and Scotland, vocationally oriented degrees for those working with young children (such as BA Hons Early Childhood Studies or BA in Childhood Practice respectively) already allow for a mix of academic/theoretical knowledge and practical/practice-based credit. In Wales the EU Social Fund initiative called *'Progress for Success'* (Welsh Government 2017b) is providing opportunities for practitioners to extend their knowledge and skills to improve provision for children

Assessment items within the overall assessment strategy may include:

- Essays and assignments and written or oral examinations are used to test knowledge and understanding of relevant theories and procedures outside of the workplace.
- Child observations, including those undertaken as part of routine workplace records, are used by tutors to test understanding of stages of development and the ability to apply this in deciding the next steps in promoting development for a particular child.
- Work-based projects and assignments require students to plan and implement activities in order to promote a particular aspect of children's development. These are normally designed to fit within the wider curriculum plans/schedules of the workplace.
- Reflective logs and diaries while in work/on placement are used to help students identify and cope with the emotional impact of incidents that may arise in ECEC as well as to improve on their own learning and performance.
- Building on the above, students may be asked formally to evaluate/rate their own performance as part of professional dialogue with and grading by supervisors/mentors or tutors.
- Case studies may be used to demonstrate analytic and problem solving skills that draw on underpinning theory and knowledge that has not been adequately tested through a period of work-based learning.
- Research activities may be used to develop the trainee's capacity to make use of evidence in support of teaching and commitment to continuous improvement.
- In some cases, unseen written examinations or multiple choice tests may be used to assess aspects of knowledge.

All of these methods and more may contribute to the portfolio of evidence that students/trainees/employees accumulate in relation to the skills and competencies specified.

Self-evaluation on a formative basis is a feature of many assessment strategies as it is considered to be an effective means of encouraging self-reflection and the development of reflective practice. To be valid, any evidence from the workplace must be substantiated through the signature of the supervisor/mentor assigned to the student or by a visiting tutor.

In the case of ITT (including Early Years Teacher Status in England), although appropriately qualified and trained supervisors/mentors validate the work-based evidence of trainees and undertake their own observations, their judgements must be moderated through joint observations carried out with a visiting tutor/representative of the ITT provider who may carry out their own separate observations in addition. Independent external evaluation is also a requirement for effective quality assurance. Specifically, External Moderators with no connection to the ITT provider must themselves carry out a number of sample observations of trainees to confirm the accuracy of judgements made jointly by the supervising teacher and the visiting tutor/representative of the ITT provider.

For the level 3 diplomas and apprenticeships (EQF 4), the majority of judgements are made by the staff of local ECEC centres in which trainees/employees are based and/or by visiting tutors from the school or Further Education institution that has overall responsibility for their training programme. The judgements made by individual assessors are quality assured by an internal moderator who reports, via approved assessment centre arrangements, to the independent External Moderator representing the relevant awarding body.

5.5 Qualifying courses for mentors/supervisors

Supervisors/mentors must themselves be qualified at a relevant level and undergo specific training for the role provided by the ITT provider or Approved Assessment Centre. The form and length of training is not usually prescribed and the outcome of training is rarely formally assessed. However, an annual training and update event for mentors is considered good practice and some training providers offer modules in mentoring that can be counted towards related awards or Continuing Professional Development requirements.

The effectiveness of supervisor/mentor training can be evaluated during the moderation process by considering the consistency of application of procedures and judgements made by supervisors/mentors. In the case of ITT, representatives of the approved ITT provider must undertake regular visits to moderate and to carry out direct observations themselves as part of quality assurance.

5.6 Designated roles, time allocations and remuneration of mentors/supervisors

Mentoring/supervising staff in ECEC centres usually have specified roles in relation to students/trainees/junior employees that notionally require some remittance of their time to perform. These arrangements are formalised in guidance to ITT providers in which supervisors/mentors sign an agreement and payments are made by the ITT provider to facilitate their release. However, whereas regular formal hours of release from teaching may be achieved in a school, the reality for most small-scale ECEC settings is that the manager/group leader (who is often the only person in the setting sufficiently well qualified to act as supervisor/mentor) simply has to fit supervision into their already busy schedule and this may take them away from direct work with children.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) for ECEC staff

Throughout the UK, the only ECEC staff to have fully regulated CPD frameworks, prescribed CPD opportunities and standardised terms and conditions of service are Teachers with QTS in maintained schools. This is partly because teachers with QTS must all be registered with the relevant nation's organisation that sets down the standards for their training and continuing development and support needs, and partly because the teaching profession is well established and strongly unionised. This is not the case for other areas of the ECEC workforce.

In England, there is recognition of the importance of ongoing professional development in the early years sector and while there are no formal standards for CPD or registration of practitioners in England, the Government has made funds available under the COVID Recovery Plan (DfE 2022b) to provide whole setting support and mentoring for practitioners and coaching to leaders. They have also introduced the National Professional Qualification in Early Years Leadership (NPQEYL) (DfE 2022b). Furthermore, research by the Nuffield Foundation (Oppenheim, Rehill, and Batcheler 2022, 53) has highlighted the importance of "improving the system for accessing Continuing Professional Development through a central online hub for accessing quality-assured resources and courses as part of a single one-stop shop for career development in the sector."

In other parts of the UK, Wales is moving towards registration of staff working in the sector (see *Chapter **7**)* and in Scotland all staff working in settings registered by the Care Inspectorate must be registered or working towards registration with the SSSC. Staff are required to complete continuing professional learning – this is part of the codes of practice for social service workers. They are also required to confirm that they have recorded and completed the appropriate Continual Professional Learning (CPL) for their registration when they renew it. All registered support workers, practitioners and managers must complete 10 days or 60 hours CPL over 5 years.

It is also the case that regulatory and inspection authorities in all four nations are increasingly developing online training and CPD opportunities and/or best practice guidance as well as providing information about approved training and CPD opportunities elsewhere.

In Scotland, the SSSC describe CPL in broad terms, from learning for a qualification to reading a book or mentoring a colleague. The agencies regulating the sector provide online training resources and directories of learning resources. The Government has also invested in five online learning modules published in 2020 to accompany the workforce expansion. However, it is difficult for the workforce to get protected time for CPD and there is some emerging evidence that enrolment on online learning courses such as the Government CPL and SSSC's open badges increased during COVID-19 lockdown, when some early years professionals were unable to work in settings as usual and had time to spend on learning.

A further issue raised about the nature of CPD provision is the contrast between one-day/hours-based training sessions that focus on skills and the general aim for a degree-led workforce where deeper professional reflection is embedded (Dunn et al. 2018*).*

In the school sector, government policies across the UK, to a greater or lesser extent, have been to devolve budgets and decision-making down to school level. In England, this has probably gone furthest in terms of so-called Free Schools and Academies, which are not strictly bound by the national curriculum and can make their own decisions on appropriate qualifications for staff and may not be bound by national pay agreements. But more generally, the traditional role of local authorities as providers of in-service training and curriculum updates has diminished and all schools now control their own training/CPD budgets and are free to buy into services from whatever source as they see fit.

Table 30 attempts to encompass England, Wales and Northern Ireland while *Table 31* covers the same features for Scotland.

Table 30
England, Wales and Northern Ireland: Features of CPD by role/qualification type

Issue	Teacher in maintained nursery or primary school with QTS, level 6 EQF	Group/Flying Start Leader/Children's Centre manager with EYTS (RQF/EQF level 6 England); Diploma in leadership of CCPLD (EQF level 5 Wales)	Core practitioner RQF level 3 (EQF level 4) with EYE (England); CCPLD (Wales and Northern Ireland)
Regulatory frameworks for CPD	Newly qualified/probationary teacher year on 90% workload for support and CPD plus 4/5 days to attend ongoing professional development with ITT provider. Specialist qualifications and/or standards for senior teachers and leadership and management.	DfE and SCW (*Social Care Wales*) advise but do not require days for CPD. Regulatory standards require all staff to keep up to date with basic requirements.	Regulatory standards require all staff to keep up to date with basic requirements.
Main forms of CPD	– In-house whole school days – One-off training days and short courses – Longer modules and specialist or management awards – Postgraduate certificates and/or Master's Degrees	– One-off training days and short courses – Distance learning packages **Minority:** management or postgraduate certificate/diploma or Master's modules for graduates Top-up from level 5 to Bachelor's Degree	– One-off training days or short courses – Distance learning packages **Minority:** Advanced certificate/Diploma awards or Foundation Degrees (mainly self-funded)
Costs: who pays?	Individual school budget (includes element for staff CPD) Some specialist courses funded/provided by central government or regulators	– Employers – Individuals – Occasional LA subsidy	– Employers – Individuals – Occasional LA subsidy – Student loans for undergraduate degrees
Leave and CPD entitlement	Max. 190 teaching days per year (38 weeks) plus 5 non-teaching days	Statutory minimum leave entitlement 25 days	Statutory minimum leave entitlement 25 days
Obligatory activities	Participation in school planning or CPD on 5 non-teaching days	Mandatory training list for Flying Start	None specified

Issue	Teacher in maintained nursery or primary school with QTS, level 6 EQF	Group/Flying Start Leader/Children's Centre manager with EYTS (RQF/EQF level 6 England); Diploma in leadership of CCPLD (EQF level 5 Wales)	Core practitioner RQF level 3 (EQF level 4) with EYE (England); CCPLD (Wales and Northern Ireland)
	Evidence of CPD required at annual appraisal and performance review	Managers and Practitioners (Wales)	
Access problems	Supply teacher costs for additional days set against limited school budgets – prioritisation	Small employers lack resources. Costs prohibitive to low paid individuals. Cover arrangements often problematic for key personnel	Time out of setting; lack of resources cover arrangements often problematic geography/distance Costs prohibitive for low paid individuals
Main providers of CPD	Approved providers of ITT Higher Education Institutions Lead schools in network Local Authorities Government agencies Chartered College of Teaching	Further and higher education institutions Local Authorities Distance Learning packages	– Employers – Membership organisations (e.g. for playgroups) – Further Education institutions – Local Authorities
Recognition/ advancement	CPD often linked to specialist, lead teacher or management responsibilities with pay scale advancement or special responsibility allowances	None – up to individual employers	None – up to individual employers
Special provision for Heads of ECEC	For unit/phase management – optional senior teacher awards set down by regulator. For whole school management compulsory NPQH* (England and Wales)	None required beyond qualifications listed above	None required for pre-school group/day nursery managers
Specialist modules	Specialist teacher modules in range of curriculum subjects plus SEN, specified by relevant regulator	Optional specialist short course/modules may be available (e.g. SEN)	Optional specialist short courses/modules may be available (e.g. SEN,)

Explanatory Notes:
* NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship) is the qualification for all head teachers or aspiring head teachers in England and Wales.

Table 31

Scotland: Features of CPD by role/qualification type

Issue	Teacher QTS	Leader/Manager Childhood Practice	Core Childhood Practitioner
Regulatory frameworks for CPD	1. Standards set down by GTCS 2. Career Professional Development 3. Middle Management 4. Headship	Staff registered with SSSC are required to complete CPL – this is part of the codes of practice for social service workers. Staff are required to confirm that they have completed the appropriate CPL for their registration when they renew it.	Registered practitioners are required to complete CPL – this is part of the codes of practice for social service workers. Staff are required to confirm that they have completed the appropriate CPL for their registration when they renew it.
Main forms of CPD	2 & 3: – Guidance and resources from Education Scotland – LA training days and short courses 4: Flexible route via LAs or Scottish Qualification for Headship via Universities	Guidance from SSSC describes CPL in broad terms from learning from qualifications to reading a book and mentoring a colleague. The agencies regulating the sector provide online training resources and directories of learning resources. The Scottish Government invested in five online learning modules published in 2020 to accompany the workforce expansion.	Guidance from SSSC describes CPL in broad terms from learning from qualifications to reading a book and mentoring a colleague. The agencies regulating the sector provide online training resources and directories of learning resources. The Scottish Government invested in five online learning modules published in 2020 to accompany the workforce expansion.
Leave and CPD entitlement	National agreement: 35 days per year leave rising to 40 after 5 years of service. **CPD:** 5 required school planning/development days plus additional 5 obligatory CPD days.	No obligatory CPD entitlement	No obligatory CPD entitlement.
Obligatory activities	None specific: linked to annual performance appraisal and review	All registered leaders and managers must complete 10 days or 60 hours CPL over 5 years. Child protection training is required by local employers. The 'National Standard' requires staff to be kept up to date on child protection matters.	All registered support workers must complete 10 days or 60 hours CPL over 5 years. Child protection training is required by local employers. The 'National Standard' requires staff to be kept up to date on child protection matters.

Issue	Teacher QTS	Leader/Manager Childhood Practice	Core Childhood Practitioner
Costs: who pays?	Local authorities via school budgets	This is decided by local employers. As part of the Early Learning and Childcare expansion many local authorities have funded initial professional education. Local employer may fund other training at their discretion.	This is decided by local employers. As part of the Early Learning and Childcare expansion many local authorities have funded initial professional education. Local employer may fund other training at their discretion.
Access problems	School priorities (budgets include CPD element and supply teacher cover)	Cover difficulties; Setting budget constraints; Individual low pay; HEI fees	Cover difficulties; Setting budget constraints; Individual low pay; HEI fees
Main providers of CPD	Education Scotland Local Authorities University providers of ITT	Scottish Government CPL Scottish Social Services Council – online Open badges and open education resources Early Years Scotland * Children in Scotland* National Day Nurseries Association* Care Inspectorate Hub* Education Scotland early learning resources Care and Learning Alliance Froebel in childhood practice SQA Forest Kindergarten	Scottish Government CPL Scottish Social Services Council – online Open badges and open education resources Early Years Scotland * Children in Scotland* National Day Nurseries Association** Care Inspectorate Hub* Education Scotland early learning resources Care and Learning Alliance Froebel in childhood practice SQA Forest Kindergarten
Recognition/ advancement	Senior Teacher scales; Head Teachers' qualification supports application for headship.	None	None - but lead/manager practitioner registration supports applications for new role
Special provision for Heads of ECEC	'Into Headship' programme – generic to schools	Head Teachers must have either a BA Childhood Practice or PGdip or a Professional Development Award Generic leader/man-	

Issue	Teacher QTS	Leader/Manager Childhood Practice	Core Childhood Practitioner
		ager registration required	
Specialist modules for others	Froebel Early Years course for generic teachers; SEN and subject specialist modules.	SEN, interagency and early years specialist modules	SEN, interagency and early years additional modules

*Membership Organisations

Recent research into CPD across the UK

***Source*:** Rogers, S., C. Brown, and X. Poblete. 2017. *A Systematic Review of the Evidence Base for Professional Learning in Early Years Education* (the PLEYE review)

Purpose: The study had two main aims:

- Identify the most effective types of PDL approaches for improving outcomes for children in EYE
- Inform and have impact on policy and practice in the EYE sector as a necessary first step to developing PDL programmes that are effective in improving outcomes for children (Rogers et al. 2017, 14).

Methodology: Systematic review focusing on three main questions that emerged from the initial scoping exercise:

1. What evidence is there of impact of professional learning approaches for improving outcomes for children in EYE? Which approaches are more and less impactful?
2. What are the features of and the theory of action underpinning effective professional learning approaches in EYE?
3. What types of professional learning opportunities are available to EY practitioners and who provides them? How do these relate to 1. and 2. above? (Rogers et al. 2017, 19-20).

Key findings:

1. Reflection, feedback and follow-up matter: PDL programmes that provide opportunities for reflection, peer group discussion and regular feedback on learning and performance are effective at changing practice and improving outcomes for children.
2. Research-based interventions related to real world contexts are linked to improving practice and outcomes for children: Research-based interventions introducing new learning about children's development and learning, or content and pedagogical knowledge appear to be linked to positive outcomes for children particularly when they are linked to practitioners' professional contexts.
3. Combining research-based knowledge with knowledge of setting contexts supported by a coaching model of PDL appear to impact most positively on children's learning outcomes: Programmes that combine new knowledge and content (from research) with knowledge gained from the participants' own specific setting context appear to be most effective at achieving change to practice and positive impact on children's learning.
4. Duration, frequency and intensity of PDL are important factors in achieving impact on outcomes for children (Rogers et al. 2017, 11-12).

Recommendations for policy and practice:

1. Key stakeholders in the EYE sector should work together to develop a set of agreed guidelines or minimum standards for the quality assurance of PDL programmes.

2. Develop a strategy for investment in evidence-informed professional development and learning in EYE
3. Develop and evaluate sector-wide EYE PDL intervention (Rogers et al. 2017, 11-15).

Wales

The regulator for social care in Wales is *Social Care Wales*. They are proactive in addressing the CPD needs in early years. They commissioned a workforce survey in 2014 which found that the priorities for CPD differed considerably in the sector. The most popular form of CPD (57% of all staff), particularly in the PVI sector, was training provided by relevant membership organisations, such as the Pre-school Learning Alliance.

Since then, there has been an increased focus on CPD and registration (see *Chapter **7***) and Social Care Wales have affirmed their commitment to this area, stressing that it is individual workers' responsibility for their own professional development across their careers. They have developed a toolkit to support practitioners (Social Care Wales 2018) that provides a framework to guide ongoing development. It identifies seven steps for CPD:

1. Assessment of individual and organisational need
2. Identify development needs
3. Identify learning objectives, opportunities and resources
4. Plan development opportunities
5. Implement learning opportunities
6. Record outcomes
7. Review, accredit and refine learning

With the Welsh Government confirming its ongoing commitment towards registration of Early Years Practitioners (Welsh Government 2022b), the importance of CPD for the early years workforce contains to be the focus of policy.

Scotland

Source: Dunn, B., C. McDonald, and J. Johnson. 2018. "Evidence of Quality Professional Development: A Study in Childhood Practice", In *Professional Development in Education,* 44(3), 397-411.

Purpose: The BA Childhood Practice (BACP) degree is a work-based degree provided at seven universities in Scotland and is a requirement of those in senior leadership roles in early years. This study particularly focused on the professional and personal development of these students.

Methodology: The small-scale action research project was undertaken by three university providers of the degree. A phenomenographic approach was employed to identify how perceptions of 'learning and affective experiences' form research assignments, questionnaires and interviews.

Key findings:

The findings were grouped into three strands:

Professional skills and abilities:

- Knowledge in relationship to leadership and management became explicit rather than implicit and as a result facilitated changes in practice.
- Confidence in undertaking research meant research was integral to the students' practice.

Professional knowledge and understanding:

- Developing the skills in using theory to justify practice and confidence to debate practice issues.
- Recognising their role in disseminating knowledge
- Seeing issues from different perspectives.

Professional values and personal commitment:

- Participants reported they were better able to question the values and beliefs that underpinned practice.
- Increased understanding about the importance of reflection
- Increased confidence.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

The state-maintained school sectors across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have broadly comparable national agreements with the relevant long-established Teachers' Unions concerning the terms and conditions, remuneration and career structures for qualified Primary Teachers (Early Years) with QTS. The starting salary for a newly qualified teacher in the UK in 2022/23 will be around £28,000 – €32,590[7]) with an additional weighting payable in London as the most expensive area. In Scotland, incremental increases on an annual basis within each pay scale are almost automatic, though subject to satisfactory performance appraisal. Career structures allow for progression to higher pay scales on promotion and/or achievement of additional specialist or leadership and management awards. Senior Teacher rates start at around £42,000 (€48,885) while the pay for Head Teachers is based on the size of the school, with a minimum salary of around £54, 000 (€62,852) for even the smallest village school.

Those classified as support staff, including Classroom/Teaching Assistants and Early Years Teachers with EYTS, earn considerably less, even if they also hold a relevant graduate level 6 qualification. There are no nationally agreed pay scales and there is considerable variation across Local Authorities. The current government's policy is to encourage the establishment of Free Schools and Academies (state maintained but outside of Local Authority control), so increasingly pay and conditions are at the discretion of the individual school. According to the National Careers Service website, a full-time Teaching Assistant working 30–40 hours per week can expect to earn between £13,000 and £23,000 (€15,131 and €26,770) per annum, with some experienced Higher Level Teaching Assistants (a specialist level 5 qualification) eligible to earn slightly more, depending on the school.

Similarly, there are no agreed terms and conditions for ECEC staff in the PVI sector, which historically has not been unionised, although in Scotland the Government's induction resources list two unions staff may want to join. There are also pay differentials between the public and private sector. The Social Mobility Report (2020) found that the average wage across the EY sector is £7.42 (€8.64) per hour, which is similar to the retail sector (£7.09, €8.25), but far lower than the average pay across the female workforce (£11.37, €13.23) and total working population (£12.57, €14.63).

The particularly low average pay rate in the PVI sector is partly due to high turnover and a high

[7] Conversion rate July 2023

proportion of young workers and apprentices under 21 for whom the national minimum wage is less than normal. More experienced core practitioners are more likely to have supervisory responsibilities and hence to earn slightly more. Nevertheless, these levels of pay are not enough to support a family. As a result, staff with families are often in the position of claiming in-work benefits through Universal Credit. According to Archer and Oppenheim (2021), 45% of the workforce are in this position.

Across the PVI sector there is no systematic career structure or provision for annual increments or additional payments for achieving higher level qualifications and graduate status. In 2022, the average salary for a manager started at £23,000 (€26,770). In England, employers and nursery owners in the PVI sector argue that they cannot afford to pay more given that the government effectively restricts a large part of their income of PVI settings through the low hourly funding rate for provision of the free part-time ECEC entitlement for all 3 and 4 year-olds and an increasing number of 2 year-olds. In addition, day nurseries and pre-schools are under pressure from government and the public to keep fees low so as to keep costs down for working parents. Similar challenges exist in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

Working hours are variable but most full-time ECEC workers work for 36–40 hours per week. Shift work is particularly prevalent in day nurseries to accommodate opening from 8:00 to 18:00 for 48–50 weeks per annum. In contrast, many pre-schools and playgroups operate sessions within school hours of roughly 9:00–12:00 and 13:00–15:30/15:45 in school terms only (38 weeks per annum). As a result, part-time working is more common in sessional care. In Scotland data for the SSSC (2021) found that there was more part-time employment in the voluntary sector with a 46%/55% divide between part-time and full-time employment.

In the maintained schools sector the maximum hours worked by teachers are determined by national agreement as 1,260 per annum, but not all these need be on school premises. The majority of teachers are full time and teachers are paid 52 weeks per year. In contrast, Classroom/Teaching Assistants are more likely to be part time and often on hourly contracts that apply to term times only.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

All registered childcare settings across the UK are obliged by the relevant standards/framework to provide new staff with a basic induction programme covering areas such as health and safety and to allocate a supervisor/mentor to monitor and appraise their performance and identify additional training needs. Often this can be an informal arrangement with no specified time allowances for mentoring and support activities. How much is offered beyond this basic minimum is up to the local provider to decide.

The situation is different in Scotland. The National Standard for funding for 1,140 hours includes requirements for the management and leadership of staff to include appropriate induction tailored to the needs of individual staff. A national induction resource is available to support staff, particularly those new to the sector. Staff carry out work-based learning and are generally required to have a mentor to support them in their role. Local authorities may have local systems for mentoring or support within the workplace, but no national schemes exist.

The exception is for newly qualified/probationary teachers for whom national agreements specify reduced workloads, supervision and support arrangements during their first year while the probationer works to achieve the practising teacher's standards leading to full registration. During this

year the probationer also remains attached to an ITT provider for further training and development opportunities.

7.4 Non-contact time

In the case of qualified teachers, national agreements specify a maximum number of contact hours per week and that all staff must be allowed at least 10 hours from this for preparation and marking. Other specified activities are by negotiation with the Head Teacher but there is a clear expectation of remission from teaching to fulfil them.

Such allowances are not standardised in the PVI sector and staff are often expected to write up observations and reports during quieter periods when children might be asleep or supervised by another or participating in a larger group activity such as listening to a story. Supervisory staff may be allowed some time for their supervision and administrative work at the discretion of the setting manager who themselves may be involved in direct childcare in order to maintain statutory ratios. However, standards require that such activities must not take senior staff away from direct involvement with children too frequently.

7.5 Current staffing issues

Teaching as a profession is relatively stable and the mainly female pre-primary/primary workforce has good maternity leave arrangements that enable qualified teachers to return to work, should they wish. Teacher recruitment is controlled by central government for each nation through restricting the number of Initial Teacher Training places based on forecast births. Incentives are offered for specialist shortage subjects at secondary levels (e.g. Maths and Physics) but Primary Teacher recruitment has remained buoyant. However, wastage through drop out, career change and stress has increased in recent years and some areas (particularly the more rural and/or disadvantaged) have experienced shortages.

High turnover has long been recognised as a problem in the PVI sector. This is partly due to the preponderance of young staff; however, failure to retain the more experienced and better qualified is often related to low pay and poor career prospects.

This has worsened over the last few years with COVID-19, bringing greater challenge to the sector and there is a current crisis in recruitment and retention, despite ongoing investment by the four nations of the UK. Recruitment strategies to increase diversity have not been successful and ECEC continues to be staffed by a predominantly white female workforce. Changes in the free childcare offer to parents have also bought challenges. In Scotland, for example, the sector has expanded to meet the government's commitment to offering 1,140 hours, which was put back to 2021 following the COVID-19 pandemic. This has required recruitment across the sector – public and private. However, as in other parts of the UK, recruitment and retention were already an issue. The *Early Years and Childcare Workforce: Final Report* (Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities – COSLA 2019, 25) reinforced the challenges and the divide between public and private sector provision, with the "…independent sector employers much more likely to expect recruitment challenges in the next year (66%) than their third or public sector counterparts (50% and 37% respectively)."

The 1,140 hours' commitment has also raised issues in relation to funding, with Local Authorities paying more to public sector provision than to the private sector. The Scottish Government has pledged to increase funding to the latter sector to ensure the living wage could be achieved but research by the National Day Nurseries Association (2019) revealed that one in five local authorities will not be increasing the amount provided to the private and voluntary sector to ensure 1,140 hours.

The situation in relation to funding and its impact on recruitment and retention is echoed across

the other nations of the UK. In England, the Institute of Fiscal Studies (2021) noted that there had been ongoing increases in funding for the early years but that through the minimum wage and new taxes, the recent rise of 17p (20 cent) per child on the 30 hours 3 to 4-year offer would be insufficient in the context of rising costs.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

8.1 England: Recent policy reforms

The *Early Years Workforce Strategy* (DfE 2017, 6) stated that it aimed "…to support delivery of good quality early years provision for all children from birth to five years." The strategy focused on attracting more staff into the sector, continuing the development of specialist graduates with EYTS, improving the quality of training, increasing the diversity of the workforce, retaining and developing the workforce, developing career pathways, CPD and sector-led quality improvements. However, despite commitment to the importance of investing in the early years and despite ongoing investment, the workforce in England is currently facing considerable challenges that are compounded by the impact of COVID-19 and the lack of impetus to address the core issues of low pay, poor working conditions and low qualification levels (Bonetti 2020; Pascal et al. 2020).

These issues are reinforced by the Social Mobility report (2020) on the stability of the early years workforce and by the Nuffield Foundation research into early education's role in shaping life chances (Archer and Oppenheim 2021). The report draws attention to the average wage being £7.42 (€8.64) an hour in 2018 and that 45% of those working in the early years were claiming state benefits. It also highlights the fact that rather than qualifications improving, they are variable and between 2014/15 to 2018/19 the staff percentage with an NVQ level 3 qualification reduced from 83% to 52%. This had risen to 59% in 2023 (DfE 2023b).

Furthermore, the Early Years Alliance (2023) research into recruitment and retention in the workforce found that year on year the sector is unable to recruit staff, there is increased reliance on agency staff and more people are considering leaving their positions. The research indicated that 48% of respondents were considering leaving their jobs. However, expanding access to early years provision requires growth in the number of places available and indicates that with the combination of staff turnover and increased entitlement to places, 50,000 more staff will be needed in 2024 and the same growth in 2025.

One of the ways the Government has addressed the workforce challenges is by reducing the ratios in settings, from 1:4 to 1:5 for 2 year-olds, the same ratio as in Scotland. The DfE launched a consultation into the proposals in 2023 and while research by the Early Years Alliance (2022) found that only 2% of the 9,000 respondents were in favour of the changes, the new ratios were introduced in January 2024 (DfE 2023b).

In addition to changes to ratios, the requirement for those with a level 3 qualification to hold a mathematics qualification to be included in ratios has also been changed. Apprentices and students can now be counted in ratio at the level below they are studying if the manager of the setting assesses it is appropriate (DfE 2023a).

The DfE is also continuing to invest in the sector with the COVID Recovery Plan (DfE 2022c) and ongoing focus on apprenticeship routes for the workforce (Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Qualifications 2022). Additionally, the Government's commitment to expand childcare

entitlement for working parents has continued. Prior to the 2015 general election a commitment was made to extend free ECEC from 15-30 hours per week for 38 weeks, for working parents. The focus on free hours connected to working parents has continued and from September 2025 all working families with a nine month-old child will be entitled to 30 hours of funded ECEC. The changes are being introduced incrementally, starting in April 2024. However, while these changes are based mainly on economic arguments, their impact on outcomes for the children appear to be missing from political debates. The changes also bring with them considerable challenge for a sector that is struggling with recruitment, retention and funding models (Institute of Fiscal Studies 2023).

8.2 Wales: Recent policy reforms

Wales is currently in the middle of a number of major policy changes that significantly impact on ECEC services and workforce. Under the *New Deal for the Education Workforce,* which builds on recommendations of the Furlong (2015) and Donaldson (2015) Reports, both teachers and support staff will have a 'structured entitlement' to ongoing professional and leadership development. For teachers this will include access to new Master's degrees (level 7 EQF) in Continuing Educational Practice or in Educational Leadership dependent on their chosen route as a senior specialist practitioner or potential Head Teacher (see Welsh Government 2015).

In relation to the childcare workforce, the EU Social Fund project *Progress for Success* covering west Wales and the valleys currently underway has three strands for improving qualification levels and professionalisation of the ECEC workforce:

- Strand 1 will fund existing practitioners with no or low levels of qualification to achieve level 3 in early years and/or play work.
- Strand 2 is designed to improve the assessment infrastructure through providing qualified assessor training at level 3.
- Strand 3 aspires to fund selected practitioners through a new suite of qualifications in childhood practice (developed by the Social Care Wales in 2016) from level 4 to level 6 EQF or graduate equivalent (see Welsh Government 2017b).

In 2017, Welsh Government finalised the Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan (Welsh Government 2017c) setting out their aims for development of the ECEC workforce. The three key themes are:

- Attracting high quality new recruits
- Raising standards and skills
- Investing in building capacity and capability.

8.3 Scotland: Recent policy reforms

In 2021, 3 and 4 year-olds became entitled to 1,140 hours Early Learning and Childcare a year; this expansion from 600 hours was paused for a year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been accompanied by an expansion of staff and services, with a model referred to as 'Funding follows the child' with private and voluntary sector providers required to meet a 'National Standard' in order to gain Government funding.

In 2021, the Scottish Government began a pilot scheme to enable children born from August who would normally start school aged 4½ to 5 years to defer for an additional year in Early Learning and Childcare.

In March 2022, the Scottish Government announced the creation of three education bodies: A new qualifications agency (replacing the Scottish Qualifications Agency); a new professional learning, curriculum and assessment agency, and a new inspection agency (both replacing Education Scotland.) Early Learning and Care were mentioned in relation to the importance of setting a shared inspection framework with the Care Inspectorate.

8.4 Northern Ireland: Recent policy reforms

In July 2020, the Education Minister outlined the plans following the allocation of a £10.5 million (€12.5 million) funding package for the childcare sector in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Childcare Recovery Support package was allocated to help childcare providers to reopen, or remain open, and applied to ECEC and school age childcare settings, play groups and childminders. The package of measures included financial support to childcare providers to assist them to operate within the parameters of the Executive's childcare recovery plan, ensured as many providers as possible could open to assist parents returning to work and allowed for the continuation of the bespoke Approved Home Childcarer Scheme aimed at enabling parents to have their childcare needs met in their own homes

In January 2021, the *Children and Young People's Strategy* was published. This is the strategic framework through which departments work together to improve the wellbeing of all children and young people. It lists eight outcomes to be achieved for all children and young people, covering many aspects of children's lives including their physical and mental health, play and leisure, learning and achieving, safety and stability, economic and environmental wellbeing, contribution to society and rights and equality.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Professionalisation and what it means to be a professional have been major topics for debate across the UK.

9.1 Research in England

Childcare and early years providers survey 2023

Sources: Department for Education 2023a; Adams, L., S. Coburn-Crane, A. Hassan, and J. Taylor 2023 (see *Reference*s for further details).

Purpose: To monitor and evaluate childcare and early years provision to provide an insight into group-based providers, childminders and school-based provision.

Methodology: Large mixed-mode survey, completed online or by telephone, with 15,828 participants. The data gathered included staff to child ratios, children with special educational needs and disability (SEND), staff qualification and pay and information about the costs of providing care.

Key findings:

- There were an estimated 56,300 providers with at least one child aged 0–4 registered in England in 2023. These providers were offering over 1.5 million Ofsted registered childcare places.
- Early Years provision was delivered by an estimated 347,300 paid staff. Of these, 259,300 worked in group-based settings, 55,800 in schools and there were 32,200 childminders and childminder assistants.
- 19% of paid staff employed by all group-based providers were under 25 compared with just 8% of paid staff employed by school-based providers.
- 16% of staff in all group-based providers and 26% in school-based providers were 50 or older.
- The majority of paid staff in the Early Years' workforce were reported to be female (98%) and

White British (83% in schools-based providers and 81% all group-based providers).

- The majority of Early Years staff employed by both school-based (85%) and all group-based providers (80%) was reported to be qualified to at least Level 3.
- Graduates (Level 6): Slight rise since 2022 with a third (34%) of staff in school-based settings and 11% in all group-based settings. Senior managers in group-based settings and Head Teachers, Teachers and Early Years Co-ordinators in school-based settings were more likely to be qualified at this level.
- 11% of staff in all group-based providers and 5% in all school-based provision earn less than the National Living Wage.

ECEC and life chances

Source: Archer, N., and C. Oppenheim. 2021 (see *References* for further details).

Purpose: An exploration of the role of early education and care provision over the last two decades in England.

Methodology: Focused literature review from 2010 using peer-reviewed and grey literature.

Key findings relating to the quality of the workforce:

- Despite all the growing evidence about the importance of a quality workforce for improving young children's outcomes, qualifications are inconsistent, the workforce is undervalued and does not have the same status of others, such as schoolteachers.
- The workforce is marked by low pay and limited opportunities to progress. For example:
  - The average wage in the sector was £7.42 (€8.64) an hour in 2018, compared to £11.37 (€13.23) an hour across the female workforce
  - In 2019, 45% of childcare workers were claiming state benefits or tax credits
  - In the PVI sector there was a fall in NVQ level 3 qualifications (83% 2014/15 to 52% 2018/19).
- There is an apparent increase in staff turnover with the following factors being identified as key reasons:
  - Pay and responsibility
  - Lack of training
  - Lack of progression
  - Low status
  - Organisational culture
- Information about staff profiles is limited; the workforce is still predominantly white female, with a shift towards younger less qualified staff and there is little information about the level of roles held by staff from minority ethnic groups.
- Recruitment challenges
- Differences between qualification requirements in maintained sector (higher) than the PVI sector
- Despite the importance of CPD being recognised, its provision is increasingly fragmented.

9.2 Research in Wales

Independent workforce review

Source: Bonetti, S., and K. Cooper. 2022 (see *References* for further details).

Purpose: An independent review into the Child, Play and Early Years (CPEY) workforce to support the next steps for professional registration.

Methodology: Mixed-methods study that employed desk-based research, semi-structured interviews and a workshop with stakeholders.

Key findings:

Findings centred around three key themes:

- Defining the workforce and who should be included in a registry; practical elements of a registry.
  There was support for developing a professional register and considerable recognition that it could raise the professionalism of the workforce. There was also caution about the complexities of setting up a register; there needed to be clear communication and a slow developmental approach so that the register evolved over time rather than being a finished product at the start. In 2020-2021, the number of workers thought to be working in registered CPEY settings was 13,656, however estimating the exact size of CPEY workforce is difficult. While some individuals, such as teachers, are registered, the majority are not. Furthermore, play workers are part of the CPEY workforce, but work in a range of organisations, some of which are not registered with the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and work with older children and young people.
- Qualifications and continuing professional development
- Lack of knowledge about the qualifications of the workforce, working conditions and career trajectories. Additionally, challenges in recruitment that preceded COVID have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

While the interviews evidence agreement that all those that work in CPEY should be valued for their role in children's lives, there was less agreement of if all should be registered. Additionally, some workers have multiple roles and work titles are varied.

Implications: This review has informed the next steps for the Welsh Government for the registration of Early Years Practitioners (see Welsh Government 2022b).

9.3 Research in Scotland

Professional development in Childhood Practice

Source: Dunn, B., C. McDonald, and D. Johnson. 2018 (see *Reference*s for further details).

Aims: The study examined the contribution of the BA Childhood Practice work-based degree to professional and personal development, including leadership skills, analysed in relation to relevant models of professional development.

Methods: It drew upon evidence from three university providers, from research assignments, subsequent questionnaires and interviews with students. A phenomenographic approach was used to identify the perceptions of learning and affective experiences. In discussing the nature of professional development, the paper draws on theoretical frameworks and the Standard for Childhood Practice.

Selected findings: Findings revealed that characteristics identified in these models were evident in the degree, the most influential being knowledge and understanding, critical awareness, and changes to values and beliefs. These aspects promoted leadership and quality and underpinned increased self-confidence.

Implications: The main issue that emerged was the significance of a work-based model which promotes the development of higher level skills; this is relevant across professions

Documenting children's learning – resisting dominant discourses

Source: McNair L. J, C. Blaisdell, J. M. Davis, and L. J. Addison. 2021 (see *References* for further details).

Aims: This article highlights an action research project that sparked transformation regarding

how early years practitioners documented children's learning. The dominant discourse of standardisation and narrowing of early childhood education, encapsulated in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's International Early Learning Study, has resulted in the 'shaping' and 'testing' of young children around the globe. The OECD has become very interested in early childhood education and is an instrumental player today (Cohen et al. 2021). Consequently, the testing of young children has been instigated by governments to ensure children gain the accepted knowledge, skills and dispositions required to be successful learners.

Methods: Situated within this context of testing and standardisation, this article shares knowledge gained from a small action research project that took place in one Scottish early years setting. The study was stimulated by the early years practitioners of the setting, who strongly opposed the 'reductionist' formal 'tick-box' assessments produced by their local authority. These types of didactic formal assessments suggest that pedagogy is underpinned by a desire to tame, predict, prepare, supervise and evaluate learning. This article is of critical importance as it examines the imposition of didactic assessment from the practitioners' perspective. The practitioners in the study contested that 'tick-box' assessments diminished children's identities down to a list of judgements about their academic abilities, or lack thereof. The introduction of the 'tick-box' assessments presented a dilemma for the practitioners, in terms of the different views of the government and practitioners of what knowledge is worth knowing and what individuals and groups can learn.

Selected findings: Many of the practitioners from the Early Childcare and Learning setting positioned themselves and their work as being consciously different from what was going on in the wider sector. The setting introduced a new method to capture children's learning, which they named the 'Lived Story' approach. The article argues that Lived Stories are a form of narrative assessment designed to track children's progress whilst respecting the complexity of their learning, their position within the learning process, the flow/fluidity of their ways of being and their ability to act in radical, creative and innovative ways.

Implications: The article concludes that by using 'Lived Stories' practitioners were able to lessen the surety of the language they use. The article highlights that as practitioners write Lived Stories and assess children's progress they are freed to use terms such as 'wondering, puzzling, thinking, exploring', demonstrating that this language, and the ideas it enables, are on a continuum; a journey that spans a lifetime.

Transferring ECEC services to the education sectors in England, Scotland and Sweden

Source: Cohen, B., P. Moss, P. Petrie, and J. Wallace. 2021 (see *Reference*s for further details).

Between 1996–1998, England, Scotland and Sweden moved responsibility for all early childhood education and care (ECEC) and school-age childcare (SACC) services from welfare into education. Following an earlier study researching these reforms up to 2003, this article examines and compares subsequent developments and consequences of the initial reform, from 2003–2017. These differed widely. Sweden succeeded in achieving further integration and better access to services, while services in England and Scotland remained divided and fragmented. England's attempt at major reform did not survive political change; while Scotland's more ambitious universalist approach was constrained by lack of appropriate devolved powers and a clear vision of how ECEC and SACC might fit into the education agenda. Undue dominance of the school and the teaching profession posed risks in all three countries. The article considers possible reasons for the differing responses to a common policy change, including the different histories of ECEC and SACC prior to transfer, processes of subsequent policy development, and the effects of differing welfare regimes and path dependency.

9.4 Research in Northern Ireland

Strategies, systems and services in Northern Ireland

Source: McMillan, D. J., and B. McConnell. 2015 (see *References* for further details).

Background*:* Education in Northern Ireland has a particular distinctiveness and ECEC policy development has not always followed the lead of England. It is largely still a two-tier, split system of variable quality, with a voluntary and private sector childcare staffed by vocationally trained, poorly paid individuals and graduate teacher-led statutory early education provision. Attempts at a more integrated approach to ECEC policy development foundered after the draft Early Years (0–6) Strategy was rejected on consultation and the Department of Education reverted to a more easily manageable Learning to Learn strategy focusing on 3 to 6 year-olds.

Purpose: To explore issues of language and power in the NI government policy document *Learning to Learn: a framework for early years education and learning*

Methodology: Critical discourse analysis (after Ozga 2000) using a framework of context, texts and consequences to generate a text analysis protocol.

Findings: The article describes the source of the policy as rooted in the previous attempt at an integrated strategy which had generated huge interest and around 2,000 consultation responses, many in support of the principles and vision but not its focus on largely educational interventions rather than a more holistic approach recognising learning as beginning pre-birth that was apparent in the government's own commissioned evidence paper. The 'rights-based, inclusive language' (Mcmillan and McConnell 2015, 249) adopted by the 2013 framework reflected the advisory role of the early years stakeholder group and demonstrated awareness of wider global policies such as the UNCRC. Despite claims of egalitarianism special mention was given in the document, perhaps for political reasons, to Irish medium provision, although this accounted in reality for only a very small proportion of provision.

The Learning to Learn framework was intentionally realigned with the Department of Education's core objectives of raising standards and reducing underachievement in education. The school readiness agenda is, hence, central and only tempered somewhat by reference to the importance of the home learning environment and supporting parents. Care is notable by its absence and reference to the care/nurturing function only appears once in the document.

Ministerial endorsement refers to a two-strand approach with the second strand being cooperation with other departments and agencies to address wider family issues but the targets are vague and represent a considerable watering down from the previous strategy's ambition of integrated education and care within a framework of wider family support. On workforce issues, the Learning to Learn policy exhorts the PVI sector to make the best use of the expertise of qualified teachers (Early Years specialists in advisory roles), reinforcing the 'dominant discourse that statutory is best'. However, the article identifies a 'deafening silence' on the issue of raising workforce qualifications. The benefits of CPD are recognised but it is proposed that this is achieved through outstanding settings (mainly from the statutory sector) leading regional networks and making use of the Excellence in Early Education Fund.

The authors conclude that the recession has directly constrained government policy and prevented further expansion of early years provision or the pursuit of graduate leadership as a goal. In addition, the political and social context in which 'segregated education is the norm' and legislative changes require cross-party agreement, fosters insularity from global perspectives and mitigates against more radical change.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Over the last two decades the ECEC workforce in the UK has been the focus of ongoing investment, both in terms of workforce reform and of providing increasing hours of 'free' childcare for parents. There have also been significant developments in our knowledge of child development, in particular brain development and attachment; the impact of early trauma and the importance of infant mental health. However, these developments are often overshadowed by the ongoing challenges within the ECEC systems. Three broad barriers repeatedly appear in the literature: the mixed market of ECEC provision, funding, and the nature of the workforce (Nuffield 2022). This research also provided evidence confirming the rhetoric that those working in ECEC are passionate about their work but do not feel valued by policy makers.

There is also the ongoing debate about the purpose of early years provision. Is it about providing 'childcare' while parents work or about high-quality early learning experiences that all young children should have access to? The relationship between the cost of childcare and winning voters is evident in general elections and the decision by the English Government to reduce the staff to child ratios for 2 to 3 year-olds from 1:4 to 1:5 has been marketed as bringing England in line with other countries and driving costs down for parents (Lesh and Niemietz 2022). However, a purely economic debate misses the importance of high quality early learning experiences on lifelong outcomes, the importance of graduate leadership and integrated services.

Each of the four nations has, in different ways, recognised the importance of integrated services. Scotland and Wales have consistently been more proactive in this area and the approach is embedded in their ongoing workforce plans. However, the challenges of the separate interests of the wider health, care and education sectors in presenting barriers, especially in inspection and regulation systems, cannot be underestimated. For example, the evaluation of the *Integration Transformation Programme* (Welsh Government 2022d) highlighted that progress is being made but is impacted upon, in part, by organisational barriers.

In England, one of the aims of the *Childcare Act* 2006 was the integration of education and care. However, the change of Government in 2011 resulted in a greater focus on *school readiness* and outcome measures. The development of Children's Centres (hubs of integrated working) was also impacted upon by the change in Government and once funding stopped being ring-fenced they began to decline in numbers. At the same time, the recent *Best Start for Life* policy direction (Department of Health and Social Care 2021) has put integrated working formally back on the agenda, especially with the introduction of Family Hubs. The important point here is that families benefit from an integrated approach to services that they can easily access. The challenge is for the services involved in the early years is to learn from previous experiences and not repeat past mistakes.

Workforce

Employers and membership organisations have warned about a looming crisis in recruitment, staff shortages and availability of suitably qualified staff. This is partly due to low status, low pay and poor career prospects across the private, voluntary and independent ECEC sector. It has been exacerbated by competition for staff within the wider care sector. The uptake of training places for ECEC qualifications at level 3 (EQF level 4) and at graduate level 6 (EQF level 6) in England has also been affected by more stringent entry requirements for the Early Years Educator (EYE) and Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) qualifications. EYTS entry requirements were

aligned to those for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in 2013, yet they do not have the same employment benefits, nor a protected year for newly qualified teachers.

The ECEC staffing crisis had been brought to a head by the entitlement to free ECEC for 3 to 4 year-olds from roughly 15 hours to 30 hours per week. Given that many settings offer predominantly part-time places (e.g. morning or afternoon sessions), doubling the entitlement has required a major expansion in the number of places which has inevitably increased demand for qualified staff. This situation is being exacerbated further by the incremental changes from April 2024 for working parents to access 30 funded hours for infants from nine months old.

The pay and conditions in the PVI sector have also made it difficult to recruit more qualified practitioners and the last few years have seen recruitment and retention become more challenging. There is also an increasing number of settings closing or being concerned that they will continue to be viable businesses.

Research clearly identifies the benefits of a graduate led workforce in ECEC but the ongoing investment in graduate programmes, such as EYTS in England, has highlighted further the differences in pay, status and working conditions and benefits between those with EYTS and their teaching colleagues with QTS – a situation in which the Government has no will to intervene. This two-tier system between the private and public sector, resulting from the mixed economy of provision in ECEC, needs to be addressed alongside the other complex issues. Consequently, there needs to be a major overhaul of the early years system (Nuffield Foundation 2022). Furthermore, it is imperative that policy makers articulate a clear vision about the workforce. Work has been undertaken to raise the profile of the career routes open to those working in ECEC and to make the different qualifications clearer in England (DfE 2022b) but more needs to be done. Those working in the sector need to know there are opportunities for progression, a strong CPD system to support their development and pay scales that reflect their qualifications and experience, whatever part of the UK they work in.

The DfE in England has pledged £153 million (€174,3 Mill.) to develop the early years workforce, including developing an expert and mentoring programme (DfE 2022d). This is an important and much-needed step, but previous experience has shown that regardless of funding, the inherent problems of low pay, status and staff turnover are difficult to change. Arguably, the steps that have been taken more recently by the DfE to address workforce issues and improve CPD opportunities, get lost in the wider debates about sustainability and funding.

Funding

There has been an ongoing argument between the ECEC sector and governments that current rates of funding for the free entitlement are insufficient to cover the costs of providing high quality ECEC places, which need to be cross-subsidised through fees for additional hours and additional services such as meals. For some families meeting these costs is a prohibitive factor in taking up their 'free' hours, especially for those on the lowest incomes.

Funding for early years in England is complex, with the funds that each local authority receives, calculated through the Early Years National Funding Formula. Since 2019–20, local authorities have had to pay a universal base rate to all settings, then can add supplements if settings meet one or more of four categories, for example have a higher number of children with English as a second language (see Foster 2022).

Reports by different organisations have repeatedly warned about funding issues. In 2015, the Institute for Public Policy Research expressed concern that "… the government will significantly underfund the planned extension, and that this will result in a poorly delivered policy with negative outcomes for children and families and for the sustainability of the sector" (Cory 2015, 3). More recently the Institute of Fiscal Studies (2021) has drawn attention to the issue that the

increase in government funding for the 3 to 4 years offer in England will be consumed by increases in living costs. Following the announcement of the expansion of funded ECEC places in 2023, concerns were reaffirmed for the financial challenges that the sector faces (Institute of Fiscal Studies 2023). Furthermore, one of the reasons why the ECEC sector argue against changing staff to child ratios in England is that it will make little difference to business costs for several interrelated reasons, including recruitment issues, pay and staff turnover and the substantial increases in the cost of living.

A further area that impacts on funding is sufficiency and the fluctuations in take-up of places. As the Nuffield research (2022) into the impact of COVID-19 on the sector found, the pandemic shone a light on to the importance of ECEC, but with the increasing cost of living impacting on family budgets and settings having to navigate funding, staffing and sufficiency issues, action must be taken to shape a more resilient sector than is able to navigate the ongoing challenges it faces.

Mixed economy

There remain huge disparities in terms of status, pay, terms and conditions of service between those in maintained nursery/primary schools who hold QTS and the rest of the workforce, whether graduate or not. Governments across the UK have refused to address this issue and have maintained the position that rates of pay and terms and conditions of service of ECEC workers are up to individual employers to decide provided they comply with the legislative frameworks of employment rights and the requirements of a national minimum and living wage. In fact, there is also increasing evidence in England that larger chains are acquiring smaller settings (Lloyd and Simon 2022). If the purchasing chain is a for-profit organisation, staffing costs can be up to 14% lower than that for non-profit settings (Simon et al. 2022).

This neo-liberal approach of leaving it all to employers and individuals to fund simply does not work in a situation where settings are small scale and struggling to survive financially and in which the workforce is extremely low paid. This increasing shift to some smaller settings being purchased by large for-profit chains adds a new level of concern for a sector that is struggling. Staff retention is even more challenging and there are ongoing concerns in England and Scotland of graduate leaders moving into teaching or other careers because of the better pay and conditions. Furthermore, the drive to increase qualifications for setting managers and leaders in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland leaves practitioners questioning whether investing their time in training is worth it given the lack of financial recognition of their qualifications.

ECEC policy strategy

ECEC policy has developed differently across the four nations of the UK, with Wales and Scotland focusing of a raft of changes to strengthen the early childhood period, improve outcomes, raise the qualification level for leadership positions and support for families. None of these nations are finding the process easy and, as indicated before, the inherent challenges of pay, the mixed economy of provision and issues with the workforce all act as barriers to change. In Northern Ireland policy has also focused on raising the qualification for managers to level 5 and, like Wales and Scotland, recognise and promote 'play' as a crucial part of early years learning.

In England, early years policy remains politically contentious. Actions such as raising the entry requirements for EYE and EYTS qualifications and not granting QTS to Early Years Teachers with EYTS, alongside initiatives such as the extension of the free entitlement, do not appear to have been thought through in terms of the impact on recruitment and shortages of qualified staff. This situation has been compounded by COVID-19. Research evidences the importance of high-

quality early years experiences for young children, yet in England the ECEC sector has faced continual changes in ministerial responsibility. Despite COVID-19 highlighting how important ECEC is to the economy of the nation, the sector continually feels unheard, undervalued, underfunded, susceptible to policy changes and increasingly open to the challenges of acquisition by for-profit chains – a situation which perpetuates the view that those working in the ECEC sector are not as important as others working with children and families.

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Appendix I: Acronyms and definitions

UK wide

BME: Black or Minority Ethnic is the term most usually used in the collection of workforce statistics to represent staff who self-declare as being of non-white British heritage or those with a background of migration.

Childminder: A person who cares for children from birth to five in their own home for more than 2 hours a day and for reward. May also be funded to provide ECEC for 2/3 to 5 year-olds.

Children's Centres focus on a wide range of provision for children, often including day care, and parent support in a particular neighbourhood. Mainly associated with the Sure Start initiative in disadvantaged areas in England and Northern Ireland (or Flying Start in Wales). Children's Centres are on the decline in England (see Family Hubs).

Day Nursery: Provider of full-day care for groups of children under five, normally while parents work or study. Mainly private for-profit but also can be community-based or managed by a voluntary organisation. Usually from 18 months but some accept babies under one.

ITT/ITE: Initial Teacher Training or Initial Teacher Education are the terms used for the regulated training of teachers leading to Qualified Teacher Status.

LA: Around 150 Local Authorities distribute funding and provide local administrative services and support to local services, including children's services, throughout the UK. They are partly financed by national government grants and partly through local taxation based on private properties and business rates.

ONS: The Office for National Statistics is responsible for collecting, analysing and disseminating statistics about the UK's economy, society and population.

Nanny: A person employed by parents to care for one or more children in the child's own home.

Nursery School: State maintained or independent/private provider of pre-school education for children from 2–3 to 5.

Nursery Class: Class for 2, 3 or 4 year-olds that is part of a primary school.

Out-of-School Care/Clubs: Provision for school aged children (4–5 and over) before and/or after the school day begins, usually but not always on school premises.

Pre-School: Provider of mainly part-time ECEC for groups of children from 2–3 to 5. Often these are parent or community run and rely partly on parent volunteers.

PVI: The Private, Voluntary and Independent sector encompasses all types of providers of ECEC services outside of maintained schools. Private provision mainly includes day nurseries and childminders that are operated as private enterprises on a for-profit basis. This includes both privately owned single day nurseries and company owned chains of nurseries. Voluntary (sometimes known as voluntary and community) encompasses not-for-profit parent–run pre-school playgroups, community day nurseries and those operated by large voluntary organisations such as Action for Children. Independent refers to the independent schools sector that have nursery schools, classes or day nurseries attached.

QTS: Qualified Teacher Status is the qualification prescribed under the 1944 Education Act for all teachers in maintained schools and classes. Teachers with QTS must be registered and regulated by the relevant General Teaching Council (or equivalent) in each of the four nations. Standards, assessment, education and training requirements and the number of training places are also set down nationally.

England

CACHE: Council for Awards in Childcare and Education. https://www.cache.org.uk/

DBS: The Disclosure and Barring Service provide checks against police records and the statutory lists of those barred from working with children across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. All those who work with children and/or vulnerable adults must be checked including regular volunteers https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service

EYE: The Early Years Educator qualification at level 3 RQF (level 4 EQF) is based on standards set down by the National College for School Leadership for all those working in ECEC other than Qualified Teachers and those holding graduate Early Years Teacher Status. It replaces all other previously accepted qualifications at this level in England and is strongly education focused. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-educator-level-3-qualifications-criteria

EYFS: The Early Years Foundation Stage in England is the statutory framework that applies to all Ofsted registered providers for children from birth to 5 inclusive including childminders, nurseries and reception classes in schools. It sets out the minimum standards for health and safety as well as all aspect of children's development and learning.

EYTS: Early Years Teacher Status is a professional graduate qualification at level 6 EQF in England only. It is primarily education focused though aimed at all those who work with young children 0-–5., i.e. until the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. It is not recognised as equivalent to QTS for the purpose of employment in maintained schools. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-teachers-standards

Family Hubs: One-stop-shops for families and children 0–19 (up to 25 for young people with special needs and/or a disability). Core focus on 0–2 age group.

Ofqual: The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual

Ofsted: The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills regulates and inspects schools, and children's services including Early Years. https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

RQF: The Regulated Qualifications Framework replaced the Qualifications and Curriculum Framework providing a single simple system showing the level and size of all qualifications approved by Ofqual for use in schools and colleges across England. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/461298/RQF_Bookcase.pdf

Wales

CIW: The Care Inspectorate for Wales inspects all registered care provision including early years settings other than schools. www.cssiw.org.uk/?lan=en/

ESTYN is the Educational Inspectorate in Wales covering all schools and funded early education provision wherever it is offered. http://www.estyn.gov.wales

EWC: The Education Workforce Council for Wales carries out regulatory functions of the General Teaching Council for Wales. Its remit covers standards, registration, initial training and CPD of teachers in schools and further education, learning support staff and youth workers. https://www.ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/

Flying Start is part of the Welsh Government's early years strategy aimed at children under 4 living in disadvantaged areas. It provides an enhanced health visiting service, parenting programmes, centre-based part-time ECEC and access to speech and language support. http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/parenting-support-guidance/help/flyingstart/?lang=en

Qualifications Wales is the new regulator for qualifications, examinations and assessments in schools and colleges in Wales and maintains the Welsh Qualifications Framework (broadly equivalent to Ofqual in England). http://qualificationswales.org/?lang=en

SW: Social Care Wales registers all care provision Including early years settings other than schools and determines appropriate qualifications for employment at different levels http://www.ccwales.org.uk/early-years-and-childcare-worker/

Scotland

CIS: The Care Inspectorate for Scotland inspects (but does not register) all types of care provision, including early years settings other than schools. http://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/about-us

Disclosure Scotland provides checks against police records and the statutory lists of those barred from working with children in Scotland and liaises with the DBS in England. All those who work with children and/or vulnerable adults must be checked including regular volunteers. https://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk

Education Scotland is the education inspectorate responsible for all phases of education in schools and early years settings. http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk

ELC: Early Learning and Care – the term used in Scotland instead of Early Childhood Education and Care.

GTCS: The General Teaching Council (Scotland) is the registration and regulatory body for the teaching profession http://www.gtcs.org.uk/about-gtcs/about-us.aspx

SCQF: The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework sets out all the regulated qualifications available to schools and colleges in Scotland across 8 different levels and illustrates the interface with higher education awards from level 9 (EQF level 6; Honours graduate) to 12 (level 8 EQF or Ph.D.) http://scqf.org.uk/the-framework/

SQA: The Scottish Qualifications Authority is the body that regulates and awards all forms of vocational and academic qualifications in Scotland other than those offered by universities and maintains the SCQF. http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/70972.html

SSSC: The Scottish Social Services Council is the registration and regulatory body for social work, care provision and care professionals, including early years services other than schools. http://www.sssc.uk.com

Northern Ireland

CCEA: The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment is responsible for advising government and producing guidelines on the curriculum, approving qualifications and monitoring the standards of awards and also acts as an Awarding Body in its own right for a range of awards outside of Universities. http://ccea.org.uk

Childcare Partnerships: The five regional Childcare Partnerships bring together representatives from across the statutory, voluntary, community and independent sectors in order to support parents, providers and employers in providing and gaining access to high quality affordable childcare. Policy responsibilities include workforce strategy for the early years, childcare and playwork workforce and quality improvement. http://www.childcarepartnerships-ni.org

DENI: The Department of Education (Northern Ireland) has devolved responsibility for all forms of educational provision, including funded pre-school education and Sure Start to local authorities. https://www.education-ni.gov.uk

Early Years (formerly NIPPA – the Northern Ireland Pre-School Playgroups Association) is the largest membership organisation representing preschools, nurseries and other groups from the voluntary, community and independent sector in Northern Ireland. http://www.early-years.org

ETINI: The Education and Training Inspectorate in Northern Ireland inspects all phases of education wherever these are delivered including Pre-school and Foundation Stage http://www.etini.gov.uk

NI Direct is the Northern Ireland government website that explains how services are organised, regulated and inspected. https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/early-years-teams

Appendix II: Explanatory note on UK qualification levels

England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Of the nine qualification levels in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Gov.UK 03.10.2022), the following five are relevant to this report. The stated examples apply only to the education systems of the three nations.

Level 3: e.g. A level or International Baccalaureate Diploma; level 3 award/certificate/diploma

Level 4: e.g. Higher National Certificate; level 4 award/certificate/diploma/NVQ

Level 5: e.g. Higher National Diploma or Foundation Degree; level 5 award/certificate/diploma

Level 6: e.g. Bachelor's degree with/without honours; level 6 award/certificate/diploma

Level 7: e.g. Master's degree, postgraduate certificate in education, level 7 award/certificate/diploma

Scotland

There are three qualification levels relevant to this report in Scotland:

Level 6: e.g. Scottish Higher; National Certificate.

Level 7: e.g. Higher Level Certificate

Level 9: e.g. Bachelor's degree with/without honours

seepro3
Systems of early childhood education and professionalisation in Europe

THE UNITED KINGDOM

of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Key Contextual Data

Compiled by

Pamela Oberhuemer and Inge Schreyer

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

Terminology for the main forms of ECEC provision vary among the four UK nations. Descriptors used in this report for ECEC settings in the private, voluntary and independent sectors (0–4 years) and the state-maintained school sectors (2–4 years) reflect nation-specific usage.

Historical milestones in ECEC in the UK

1816	*Scotland*: Robert Owen opens the first "infant school" for the workers employed in his cotton mills in New Lanark, including children as young as 18 months.
1837	*England:* 20 years later there are roughly 150 infant schools in England, teaching morals, religion, reading, writing and arithmetic to poor children from 18 months to the age of 6–7.
1870/1872	*England:* Elementary Education Act: 5 years is established as the starting age for compulsory schooling.
1900	*England:* 40 years later, about 43% of 3 to 5 year-olds attend either a "baby class" (3-4) or an "infant class" (5-6) and early childhood education becomes an integral part of the school system. Enrolment rates fall to 23% by 1910 due to poor health environment and unsuitable teaching conditions (very large groups, rigid formal instruction).
1911	*England:* Rachel and Margaret Macmillan found an open day nursery school in London (Deptford), providing for physical, educational and social needs of 2 to 8 or 9 year-olds. Subsequent but limited expansion of nursery provision.
1914–1918	Expansion of day nurseries during WWI
1918	*England:* Fisher Education Act gives local authorities the power to establish "nursery schools" for 3 and 4 year-olds living in poverty; these receive state funding and are included in the schools inspection system, but expansion is slow in the following years.
1923	*England:* The Nursery School Association is founded.
1928	*Northern Ireland:* Arellian Nursery School opened in a church hall, based on the ideas of the McMillan sisters in London; re-opened in 1931 in new premises as the first purpose-built nursery school in N.I.
1939–1945	Further expansion of day nurseries in England and Wales during WWII, with numbers increasing from 194 (1941) to 1,559 (1944). *Wales:* It gradually became common practice, particularly in rural Wales, to include young children, from 3 years, in reception classes with children up to 7 years with no provision or curriculum specifically for these young children.
1944	*England:* Education Act requires that local authorities provide early education for 3 to 5 year-olds. After WW2 the requirement is changed to provide only for children in exceptional circumstances.
Post 1944	Gradual expansion of ECEC provision
1960s	Increasing admission of 4 year-olds into reception classes in primary schools; start of the parent-led and community-based voluntary pre-school playgroup movement across the UK
1970s	England: state maintained nursery schools and school-based nursery classes cover only 27% of children aged 3–4.
1980s	Rapid growth of private for-profit provision as maternal employment increases.
1989	*England:* Children Act (England) emphasises a targeted approach, i.e. ECEC provision only for families 'in need'. *Scotland*: A duty is also placed on local authorities in 1995 to provide for families in need.

	Northern Ireland: Northern Ireland Nursery Guidelines [1989] issued
1997	*England*: The New Labour government initiates policy initiatives to increase equality of opportunity and reduce child poverty: early childhood education and care becomes a government priority for the first time. Early Excellence Centres are launched, to provide models of high-quality, integrated services. *Northern Ireland:* First *Pre-school Curricular Guidance* published
1998	*England*: *Sure Start* is introduced – a targeted intervention programme for children under age 4 and their families, aimed at better co-ordination of services; extended in 2000 to reach more children living in poverty; introduction of entitlement to free part-time early education for 4 year-olds. Responsibility for childcare moved to Department for Education and Employment. *Northern Ireland:* Pre-school Expansion Programme [PEEP] launched
2000	*England:* Introduction of first curricular framework for work with 3 to 5 year-olds (Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage) *Wales:* Post-devolution: the National Assembly for Wales sets out its own vision for the education and care of young children.
2003	*England*: First official recommendations for work with under 3 year-olds (*Birth to Three Matters*) issued. Early Excellence Centres are renamed as Children's Centres. *Wales:* The *Foundation Phase* for 3 to 7 year-olds with a play based curriculum is introduced.
2004	*England:* Expansion of (Sure Start) Children's Centres (initially 32 in the most disadvantaged wards, later target 2,500); entitlement to free part-time early education extended to 3 year-olds; introduction of 10-year childcare strategy *Every Child Matters*
2005– 2010	*England:* The number of places in full-time childcare for under 5 year-olds grew further by 40 per cent (from 511,000 to 716,700). Despite the New Labour reforms, ECEC continues to be characterised by a marked class structure, with a divide between those families using public settings and those who can afford to use private provision (with the support of tax subsidies).
2006	*England*: First-ever Childcare Act, setting out plans for a combined curricular framework for work with 0 to 5 year-olds
2007	*England:* Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) created. *Scotland:* Entitlement to 'free early education' increased to 475 hours a year for 3 and 4 year-olds
2008	*England:* Introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) – curricular and structural standards for all approved settings for under 5 year-olds and the first (reception) year in primary schools *Scotland:* Introduction of a Common Framework with the local authorities (*Getting it Right for Every Child*) – a strategic 10-point programme to ensure all children the best start in life
2010	*Scotland:* Curriculum for Excellence for 3 to 18 year-olds introduced *England:* Target of 3,500 Children's Centres reached. Entitlement to 'free early education' extended to 570 hours per year for 3 and 4 year-olds and extended to most disadvantaged 2 year-olds. Major cuts in public funding initiated by new Conservative-led coalition government.
2012	*England:* EYFS revised and shortened, mainly for providers (EYFS Statutory Framework), with fewer learning goals and a greater emphasis on school readiness
2013/2014	*England*: Entitlement to free part-time early education extended to 2 year-olds, first to 20% and then to 40% of the most disadvantaged families
2014	*Scotland:* Children and Young People Scotland Act includes 'early education' extended to 600 hours. *England:* Plans announced for a reception baseline assessment (RBA) to measure the abilities of 4 and 5 year-olds at the start of school (retracted in 2015 following widespread criticism)

2015	*England:* 250 Children's Centres closed since 2010. *Scotland:* Review of Early Learning and Childcare Workforce and Out of School Workforce
2017	*England*: 15 hours of free provision per week extended to 30 hours for 3 and 4 year-olds whose parents work more than 16 hours. Revised EYFS introduced
2018	*England:* New Early Learning Goals introduced – revised EYFS piloted *Northern Ireland:* Revised *Curricular Guidance for Pre-school Education* published by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
2019	*England:* New attempt to pilot an RBA Department for Education launches a public consultation on revising the EYFS, including proposed changes to the Early Learning Goals and the EYFS profile assessment.
2021	*Scotland*: As from August 2021: commitment to 1,140 hours free Early Learning and Childcare a year for all 3 and 4 year-olds and eligible 2 year-olds *England:* Another revised version of the *Statutory Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage*, including 47 Early Learning Goals; Family Hubs are envisaged as part of easily accessible and coherent joined-up services in a policy document on "The best start for life: A vision for the 1,001 critical days" and are rolled out across Britain.
2023	*Scotland:* Proposal to reform the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Education Scotland: merging the curriculum and assessment function and removing inspection from Education Scotland. Care Inspectorate, which inspects early years settings, not included.
2024/2025	*England:* From April 2024: 15 hours of 'free childcare' to all children over 9 months with working parents From September 2025: Working parents with children under the age of 5 are entitled to 30 hours of 'free childcare'.

Sources: Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010; Naumann et al. 2013; Nawrotski 2015; Cohen et al. 2018; Siencyn 2019; Moss and Cameron 2020; Willekens and Scheiwe 2020; Scottish Government 2022; CCEA 2023a; DfE 2023a

ECEC system type and auspices

The systems of early childhood education and care in the constituent countries of The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland – traditionally varied in terms of detail, but overall they were essentially similar. However, in the context of devolution since the end of the 1990s and separate legislatures and executives in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland also responsible for education and family policies, growing divergence has become observable and this is increasing year on year.

England

Overall responsibility for the planning and monitoring of ECEC provision for children up to the start of compulsory schooling at age 5 (in reality usually age 4) lies with the Department for Education. Despite this unifying step, two sub-sectors of early childhood education and care still remain, each with differences in terms of access, service providers, funding conditions and staffing requirements: (1) the state-maintained sector and (2) the considerably larger private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector with a high proportion of private for-profit providers. "The childcare market has come to dominate the English ECEC system" (Lloyd 2020, 84). Responsibilities are shared between central government, local authorities and service providers in the non-state sector. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), which is not officially affiliated to a specific government Department, is responsible for regulating and inspecting all types of ECEC provision, including home-based settings.

At the neighbourhood level, the local authorities have the duty to ensure that there are sufficient places in ECEC settings available to meet demand. They are also responsible for ensuring that providers comply with national standards.

Wales

Early childhood education and care in Wales is regulated by two ministerial departments, i.e. it functions primarily as a bi-sectoral system. The Minister for Health and Social Services is responsible for ECEC provision for children under 3 years of age and outside of the maintained education system. The *Care Inspectorate Wales* (CIW) supervises compliance to the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for Children up to the age of 12 years (2016 under review in 2023), which cover home-based ECEC settings and private centre-based settings. Any childcare setting which runs for more than 2 hours must register with the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

State-maintained and approved private pre-primary institutions for 3 and 4 year-olds come under the portfolio of the Minister of Education (*Department for Education and Skills* – DfES.) *Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales* (Estyn) is responsible for the inspection of preschool settings and for the initial and continuing professional development of ECEC staff.

Scotland

Early childhood education and care in Scotland (Early Learning and Childcare – ELC) comes under the auspices of different ministerial departments. Overall responsibility for education lies with the *Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills*, with a *Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise* responsible for early education and childcare (Scottish Government 2023a). It has been described as a 'hybrid unitary system' (Cohen et al. 2018).

The workforce remains divided, with the majority of staff in early learning and childcare continuing to have lower qualifications and pay than those of teachers providing 'early education' in schools, despite the requirement for early years settings to be managed by Childhood Practice degree-qualified staff.

ECEC provision for under 3 year-olds is run by a variety of agencies. These include local authorities (50.9%), private for profit services (29.2%) and voluntary and not for profit services (19.9%) (Care Inspectorate 2023, 13). The private and voluntary sector similarly provides for roughly half of the settings for 3 to 4 year-olds.

In 2008, *The Scottish Early Years Framework* was introduced to strengthen co-operation and partnerships between providers, local authorities and families. *Education Scotland* is the inspection agency responsible for supervising educational institutions and curriculum development. The Care Inspectorate inspects early years and childcare settings. Early years settings for children aged 3 and over can be inspected by both agencies. Local authorities are responsible for the organisation and staffing of preschool settings and receive subsidies from the government and tax authorities.

Northern Ireland

Responsibility for different aspects of early childhood education and care was traditionally shared among a number of government Departments (Education; Health; Employment and Social Affairs). Responsibility for the ECEC phase now comes under the Department of Education in the Northern Ireland Executive, although the Department of Health continues to have some responsibilities for provision for children under 3 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019,

196). At the local level, The Education Authority (EA) supervises both centre-based and home-based private childcare facilities.

General objectives and legislative framework[1]

The 1989 Children Act set out the regulatory framework for all ECEC settings in the UK. Additionally, more specific legislation relates to early childhood education and care in each nation.

England

The Government's overarching aim is for ECEC (usually referred to as "Early Years" or "Early Education and Childcare") to be available through a diverse range of high-quality providers to suit parents' and children's needs. Improving disadvantaged young children's life chances by 'closing the gap' between them and their peers is one of five core goals outlined in the Department for Education's social mobility plan (2017), with a specific focus on key early language and literacy skills (Eurydice 2020a – no longer accessible), as well as the 'levelling up' agenda (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities 2022).

State-maintained ECEC provision (nursery schools and nursery and reception classes in primary schools) is regulated by the Education Act 2011. The Department for Education provides statutory guidance for English local authorities on their duties pursuant to the *Childcare Act 2006 and 2016* (see DfE 2023c for all current guidance).

The *Childcare Act* (2006 with amendments) sets out the arrangements for the provision, regulation and inspection of childcare in England and Wales. It places a duty on local authorities to regulate 15 hours per week of free ECEC provision for all 3 and 4 year-olds and disadvantaged 2 year-olds. In 2017, free provision was extended to 30 hours for 3 and 4 year-olds with working parents and for the 'most disadvantaged' 2 year-olds. From April 2024, working parents of 2 year-olds will have access to 15 hours of free childcare; by September this will be extended to children aged 9 months to 3 years and by September 2025 the offer will increase to full 30 hours (Gov.Uk 2023a). Furthermore, the government will provide additional funding to facilitate the expansion of the new free hours, to change the staff to child ratio for 2 year-olds, and to provide grants for childminders (Gov.Uk 2023b).

The *Children Act* (2004 with amendments) provides a legislative framework for ECEC primarily at the local level and established the office of a Children's Commissioner in England and Wales. Reforms set out in the *Children and Families Act* 2014 make provisions for families and also children with special educational needs or disabilities. All local authorities are required to report annually on how they are meeting the needs of working parents in terms of ECEC provision.

Wales

The Welsh Programme for Government 2016 to 2021 included the objective of increasing the offer of funded early years education and childcare from 10 to 30 hours per week, and from 38 to 48 weeks of the year for working parents of 3 and 4 year-olds. This offer began across the country in September 2020. Plans for a new model of 'Community Learning Centres' providing extended services such as childcare, parenting support, family learning, and community access

[1] The Eurydice reports on ECEC in the four nations of the United Kingdom initially provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects of the ECEC system. However, the UK is currently no longer included in the Eurydice database, therefore the Eurydice sources from 2020 and 2021 can no longer be accessed. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the *References* section.

to facilities built around the school day are also included in the Welsh government's strategy (Eurydice 2021b – no longer accessible).

The legal framework for placing a duty on local authorities to provide nursery education is set out in the *School Standards and Framework Act 1998*. Additionally, the *Childcare Act 2006* places a duty on local authorities to secure sufficient childcare places, including Welsh-medium provision, for working parents.

Under the Education Regulations *(Nursery Education and Early Years Development and Childcare Plans) (Wales) (Amendment)* issued in 2005, local authorities are obliged to offer free, part-time provision for children, starting in the term after their third birthday. Settings providing this early education entitlement are required to work according to the Foundation Phase Framework (see section on *Curricular frameworks*) and be inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales (Estyn) (Eurydice 2021b – no longer accessible).

Scotland

The Scottish Government's aims are: to give all children the best possible start in life through a high quality ECEC system which is flexible, accessible and affordable. ECEC is seen as a cornerstone for closing educational attainment gaps and eradicating child poverty. Expanding entitlement to ECEC is also viewed as an important tool to support long-term inclusive growth in Scotland's economy. Since August 2021, any setting delivering the Government's commitment to 1,140 funded ECEC hours for 3 and 4 year-olds is required to meet a new National Standard which includes a national set of quality criteria (Eurydice 2021a – no longer accessible).

In terms of childcare provision, *The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (with amendments up to 2020)* marked a significant step in ECEC regulation, setting out the duties and powers available to local authorities to support children and their families and to intervene when the child's welfare requires it. Early education provision is guided by the *Education (Scotland) Act 1996, amended 2016* which regulates the funding of early education institutions. Alongside making provision for children's rights, *The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014* sets down further regulations for the provision of early years services. It also provides a framework for creating a more integrated approach towards (childcare) provision for under 3-year olds and (education) provision for 3 and 4 year-olds and eligible 2 year-olds.

Northern Ireland

The *Draft Childcare Strategy 2015 to 2025* sets out two sets of aims. One is developmental: to give all children the best start in life, prepare them for lifelong well-being and achievement, and to create the basis for "a better, more prosperous future". The second is employment-related: to enable parents to join the workforce "and so enhance prosperity", and to improve gender equality. The main aim of ECEC is to provide equal opportunities for all children to develop and achieve their potential through high quality education and care. This includes equitable access to high quality ECEC services for all, support of individual development, and the identification of risks and their reduction. Particular emphasis is placed on affirming parents in their role as first educators and cooperating with them, as well as supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Relevant legislation includes the *Children (Northern Ireland) Order* 1995, which sets out duties of the local authorities regarding childcare, and the *Education (Northern Ireland) Act* 2014, which was the basis for replacing the previous five regional Education and Library Boards through an Education Authority. The Education Authority (EA) is responsible and accountable for all pre-school education and learning services funded by the government, including the planning of places and the co-ordination of pre-school admissions. The *Education (Northern Ireland) Order*

1998 defines the length of a full-time pre-school place as at least four-and-a-half hours a day, and a part-time place as at least two-and-a-half hours a day.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Legal entitlement is regulated differently in each of the four constituent countries. There is no universal ECEC entitlement for children younger than 3 years of age; however, targeted entitlement applies to 2 year-olds from disadvantaged families. 3 and 4 year-olds are entitled to between 10 and 30 hours of free 'early education', as are most disadvantaged 2 year-olds. These hours may be provided in a publicly funded setting (*school* or *nursery school*) or with a registered private or voluntary provider including home-based ECEC providers (termed *childminders*). In England and Wales, from the September following their 4th birthday, all children are entitled to a full-time (approx. 32 hours) place in a *reception class* in primary school (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 50).

Table 1

United Kingdom: Legal entitlement to a 'funded childcare' place in ECEC provision, 2023

England	Universal free early education entitlement of 15 hours per week for **3 and 4 year-olds** for 38 weeks a year. Children with working parents entitled to an extra 15 hours per week, i.e. 30 hours in total. **2 year-olds** whose parents are in receipt of benefits, or children who are disabled or looked after, are also entitled to 15 hours a week for 38 weeks a year. From April **2024**, working parents of 2 year-olds will have access to 15 hours of free childcare, by September to be extended to children aged 9 months to 3 years and by September **2025** the offer will increase to full 30 hours.
Wales	12½ free hours per week for 39 weeks a year for **2 to 3 year-olds** in deprived areas. 10 hours a week for all 3 and 4 year-olds, increased to 12½ hours for 3 year-olds in deprived areas. **3 and 4 year-olds** with working parents entitled to 30 hours per week to 48 weeks a year.
Scotland	From August 2021, all **3 and 4 year-olds and eligible 2 year-olds** receive 1,140 hours annually of funded early learning and childcare (30 hours a week during term-time, or 22 hours spread across the year).
N. Ireland	12½ free hours/week during school terms in the year preceding school entry (i.e. for **3 year-olds**). Pre-school education in all settings is accessible to children from all backgrounds, unlike the school system, which is organised along denominational lines.

Source: Coram Family and Childcare 2022 for England, Wales and Scotland; Gov.UK 2023a

Attending an ECEC setting is not compulsory in the UK. Statutory schooling begins at 5 in England, Wales and Scotland and at 4 in Northern Ireland.

In England, admission authorities have a duty to provide a full-time place for all children in the September following their fourth birthday. Children reach **compulsory school age** on three prescribed days following their fifth birthday (31 December, 31 March, and 31 August) (DfE 2021a, 25).

In Scotland, children can start school in August between the ages of 4.5 and 5.5. From August 2023 children who are eligible to start school but who are still aged 4 (with their 5th birthday between August and end of February) can defer entry to have an additional year of funded early learning and childcare (Scottish Government 2021b).

Main types of provision

England

Nurseries/day nurseries accept children from the age of 3 months up to 5 years. They may be run by local authorities, but the majority are private, voluntary or independent nurseries run by private (for-profit) companies, voluntary organisations such as charities, or independent schools. They are generally open for at least six hours a day, and most are open all day and all the year round.

'Preschools', originally called playgroups, are more informal not-for-profit childcare groups for 2 to 4 year-olds. They may be run by churches or community organisations and usually offer half-day sessions.

Nursery schools and **nursery classes/units** in primary schools (also in private schools) provide for 3 and 4 year-olds (and disadvantaged 2 year-olds). They are usually open for 38 weeks per year and for six hours daily, but where there are wrap-around facilities, opening hours may be extended to ten hours (8:00 to 18:00 hours).

Reception classes in primary schools are the first class of compulsory schooling. By law, children must start statutory education full-time at the beginning of the term following their 5th birthday. However, a large number of children are admitted to primary school in the September after their fourth birthday and spend a full year in reception class. As part of the school system, they follow the school year and are therefore open for only 38 weeks annually.

Children's centres were introduced in 1997/1998 within the Sure Start initiative as an integrated service model combining education for young children and a variety of support facilities for parents. Most are organised by both public and private, non-profit organisations. This innovative form of provision, which has inspired several other European countries to establish similar centres (e.g. Germany, particularly in North-Rhine Westphalia), has been suffering under radical cuts to the social budget, particularly since the Conservative government came to power in 2015.

Childminders (home-based child carers) are mostly registered with Ofsted, some with a childminder agency. They are subject to the same regulatory and inspection framework as centre-based providers. All childminders in England must be suitable to work with children, have first aid training (renewed every 3 years), undertake a safeguarding / child protection course and regular professional development.

Wales

As in England, a variety of settings are available which differ according to age and provider. For the youngest these are **day nurseries** (age-range varies) in the voluntary, private and independent sector or **registered childminders**. Some of the day nurseries (mostly privately run) are Welsh medium settings. The **Flying Start** programme is offered to parents of all eligible (disadvantaged) 2 to 3 year-olds for 2½ hours a day on 5 days/week for 39 weeks/year. An additional 15 sessions are provided during school holidays. 3 and 4 year-olds may attend a publicly funded or private-independent **nursery school** or **nursery class**. From age 4, children may attend a full time **reception class** in primary school before statutory schooling begins at age 5. Most of the state-maintained settings are accessible during school term-times only, i.e. 38 weeks/year, and are open for roughly six hours daily, whereas day nurseries are mostly open full day and around the year.

Scotland

ECEC provision for under 3 year-olds (e.g. **nurseries, playgroups, family centres, childminders**) is mainly run by private organisations; publicly funded places for the early education of 3 and 4 year-olds may also be offered in a private setting. **Nursery classes** for 3 and 4 year-olds are usually located in primary schools, and there are some stand-alone **nursery schools**. Most of the private sector settings align opening times to the needs of families. **Family/children's centres** are multi-purpose service centres for children and their families, including ECEC.

At the end of 2022, there were a total of 7,044 services, 3,530 of them offered by childminders, 3,514 in centre-based settings: 108 child and family centres, 33 nurseries and 33 holiday playscheme, 2,538 nursery classes, 682 out-of-school services and 120 playgroups (Care Inspectorate 2023, 12).

Northern Ireland

As in Scotland, ECEC provision for under 3 year-olds (**day nurseries, preschools/playgroups, childminders –** including Irish-medium settings) is run by private agencies. Disadvantaged 2 year-olds have the possibility of attending an ECEC setting attached to the government funded *Sure Start* programme, which provides a range of support services for parents and children under the age of four who live in disadvantaged areas across Northern Ireland (Eurydice 2020b – no longer accessible).

In the year preceding statutory schooling, which for all children except the 'summer born' begins at age 4, children can be enrolled in public or private **nursery schools, nursery units in primary schools, private nurseries** or **voluntary community playgroups**. Nursery schools are open for 38 weeks/year for at least 2½ hours daily. Privately-run provision is usually open full day all the year round. Some nursery units in primary schools have an opening hours' option of 4½ hours per day.

Three categories of childcare setting are defined and required to register with Health and Social Care Trusts:

1. **Childminders** are self-employed and work in their own homes to provide care and play for other people's children in a family setting. They may offer this service all year round for the full working day. Childminders are required to register when they look after one or more children aged under 12 for reward on domestic premises.
2. **Full-day care** is provided for children aged 0–12 years for a continuous period of four hours or more in any day in premises which are not domestic. The children do not necessarily have to attend for more than four hours, and the setting may provide for part-day care, but if the facility is open for longer than four hours, it is defined as a full-day care setting.
3. **Sessional day care** covers less than a continuous period of four hours in any day and covers crèches, pre-school sessional care (playgroups), out of school clubs (school-age childcare including breakfast clubs, also referred to as wrap around care). **Sure Start** also comes under the category of "sessional day care" and targets children aged 4 and under and their families in areas of social disadvantage to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of children. There are currently 39 Sure Start projects across Northern Ireland, covering a wide geographic spread. The Minimum Standards guidance also applies to early years and childcare staff within Sure Start projects providing the 2- to 3-year programme and crèche provision to support programme delivery.

Provider structures

England

Publicly funded nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools, which now also accept (disadvantaged) 2 year-olds, provide only a minority of places for 2 and 3 year-olds in England. The majority of providers of ECEC for children below the age of 4 in England are located in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector (see *Table 2*).

Following the introduction of the early education entitlement (see section on *ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance*), the PVI sector expanded exponentially. Private-for-profit and not-for-profit childcare businesses became eligible – alongside the state-maintained nursery provision – for direct public subsidies to provide this entitlement as long as specified quality and safeguarding criteria were met. This increase in the partial public funding of the private sector helped to fuel a rapid rise in private-for-profit childcare businesses, including corporate childcare chains with stock market listed shares (Lloyd 2020).

Table 2

England: Number and proportion of ECEC places (0 to 4 years) by provider type, 2023

Provider type		Number of places	Proportion in %*
Non-school centre-based ECEC settings (*group based providers)*	Private (mostly for-profit with state funding for specific number of early education hours)	764,200	67.0
	Voluntary (not-for-profit)	225,400	
	Others	54,000	
	All group based providers	1,043,600	
School ECEC settings (*school based providers*)	State-maintained and independent schools offering nursery provision	314,900	22.4
	State-maintained nursery schools	34,700	
	All school based providers	349,600	
Home-based ECEC settings (*childminders*)		164,900	10.6
Total		**1,558,100**	

Source: Gov.UK 2023e, *own calculation

Table 3 shows the spread of children with 15 and 30-hour entitlements registered with different provider types. Eligible 2 year-olds have a 15-hour funded entitlement to childcare, the greater majority (98,953) of which are enrolled in the PVI sector compared with 18,660 enrolments in maintained nursery schools and state-funded primary schools. This contrasts with the main providers for 3 and 4 year-olds, the majority of whom are enrolled in state-run primary schools (in nursery units/classes and reception classes), although the numbers in the PVI sector remain high.

Table 3

England: Number of providers and children, 15 and 30-hour entitlements, 2023

Provider type	Age group	15-hour funded entitlement		30-hour funded entitlement*	
		Providers	Children	Providers	Children
All providers	2 year-olds	20,991	124,211	0	0
	3+4 year-olds	46,187	1,196,031	35,258	362,982

Provider type	Age group	15-hour funded entitlement		30-hour funded entitlement*	
		Providers	Children	Providers	Children
Private and voluntary	2 year-olds	15,188	98,953	0	0
	3+4 year-olds	18,808	473,531	17,719	256,576
Independent schools	2 year-olds	130	667	0	0
	3+4 year-olds	815	25,722	442	5,823
Local authority day nurseries	2 year-olds	206	1,510	0	0
	3+4 year-olds	400	9,806	316	3,426
Maintained nursery schools	2 year-olds	316	6,604	0	0
	3+4 year-olds	383	28,347	373	9,565
State-funded primary schools (including governor-run schools)	2 year-olds	1,546	12,056	0	0
	3+4 year-olds	15,737	635,856	6,333	75,762
Childminders	2 year-olds	3,768	5,733	0	0
	3+4 year-olds	9,770	20,828	10,328	20,330

Source: Gov.UK 2023d, *own calculations

Wales

As in England, the majority of ECEC providers for children under age 4 in Wales are in the private, voluntary and independent sector, including home-based childminding services. Publicly funded provision (nursery schools, nursery classes and reception classes in schools) provide places for 3 to 4 year-olds and 4 to 5 year-olds; non-maintained settings can also provide funded provision for 3 to 4 year-olds. Welsh medium provision of childcare is delivered across all types of providers. Mudiad Meithrin is the lead organisation in Wales for supporting Welsh language immersion settings. Expansion of the Flying Start childcare programme (free childcare for 2–3 year-olds in areas of deprivation) and the Childcare offer (30 hours funded provision for 3–4 year-olds of working parents) is taking place from 2022–2025, placing an increased demand for and on the childcare sector in Wales.

Currently (2023) there are 3,434 childcare settings (including 1,589 childminders, 1,044 all-day settings, 418 sessional services and 330 out-of-school programmes) registered with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) providing 79,191 childcare spaces for children aged 0–12 years (Welsh Government 2023c).

Scotland

ELC in Scotland is provided both by local authority settings as well as private and voluntary providers working in partnership with local authorities. The main providers of ECEC settings for under 3 year-olds are private/voluntary, whereas funded ECEC for 3 and 4 year-olds is delivered by a wide range of providers from across the public, private and voluntary sectors as well as by childminders.

A number of nurseries are attached to private-independent schools. Employers may also provide a company nursery/kindergarten for the children of employees.

A National Standard ('Funding follows the child') is to help increase choice and flexibility for parents and carers whilst ensuring children benefit from high quality provision. It means that parents and carers – including those of eligible 2 year-olds – will be able to choose to use their

child's entitlement at any ECEC provider that meets the National Standard, has a place available, and is willing to enter into a contract with the local authority (Scottish Government 2018a).

Northern Ireland

There is no publicly funded ECEC provision for under 3 year-olds in Northern Ireland. Nurseries and childminders (or nannies) in the private sector have to be registered and are inspected annually by one of the five regional *Health and Social Care Trusts*. Free provision for 3 year-olds may be provided in the complete range of privately-run and publicly funded ECEC settings (see section on *Main forms of provision*). 4 year-olds are in statutory schooling.

Participation rates in regulated provision

***Note*:** The most recent data from Eurostat on enrolment rates are from 2018 - no further data are currently available.

Between 2005 and 2018, the proportion of under 3 year-olds attending centre-based settings increased from 29% to 38.6%, while the proportion of children between 3 years and compulsory school decreased from 88% to 78,1%.

Table 4

United Kingdom: Enrolment rates by age and weekly hours of attendance, 2005-2018, in %

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29	24.0	64.0
	Over 30	5.0	24.0
	No enrolment in ECEC	71.0	12.0
2010	1 to 29	31.0	67.0
	Over 30	4.0	22.0
	No enrolment in ECEC	66.0	11.0
2015	1 to 29	26.1	48.8
	Over 30	4.3	24.0
	No enrolment in ECEC	69.6	27.2
2018	1 to 29	31.6	29.2
	Over 30	7.0	48.9
	No enrolment in ECEC	61.4	21.9

Source: Eurostat 2023b

England

Almost three quarters (74%) of eligible 2 year-olds benefitted from the 15-hour entitlement in 2023 and 94% of 3 and 4 year-olds. In 2023, the number of 3 and 4 year-olds registered for the 30-hour entitlement (362,982) was the highest on record, although significantly lower than the number registered for the 15-hour programme (1,196,031) (Gov.UK 2023d).

The greater majority of eligible 2 year olds and most 3 year-olds registered for 15-hour funded programmes in 2023 attended settings in the PVI sector, whereas the greater majority of 4 year-olds were registered in maintained nursery and state funded primary schools. However, the overall number of PVI providers delivering the 15-hour entitlements (31,500) was down 3% from 2022 (Gov.UK 2023d), possibly reflecting the closure problems that nurseries are having in the face of staff shortages and the general rise in the cost of living.

Table 5

England: Number of children registered for state funded and expanded programmes by age and provider type, 2023

Setting		State funded entitlement (15 hours)	Expanded entitlement (30 hours) for eligible 3 and 4 year-olds	Total
All providers	2 year-olds	124,211	0	**124,211**
	3 year-olds	576,886	260,586	**837,472**
	4 year-olds	619,145	102,396	**721,541**
Private/voluntary/independent providers (PVI)	2 year-olds	98,953	0	98,953
	3 year-olds	352,811	184,139	536,950
	4 year-olds	120,720	66,614	187,334
Childminders	2 year-olds	5,733	0	5,733
	3 year-olds	16,537	15,747	32,284
	4 year-olds	4,291	4,583	8,874
State funded schools (including maintained nursery schools and special schools)	2 year-olds	18,660	0	18,660
	3 year-olds	192,661	57,090	249,751
	4 year-olds	471,542	28,237	499,779

Source: Gov.UK 2023d, and own calculations

Wales

The number of children accessing Flying Start childcare in 2021-2022 was 34,121 out of an expected 36,215 (Welsh Government 2022a). The Childcare Offer for 3 to 4 year-olds in Wales was accessed by 17,824 children in 2020–2021 and delivered by 2,252 providers – these included childminders, full day care and sessional care providers (Welsh Government 2022b).

A first phase of expansion started in September 2022, a second one from April 2023 and a third will follow in April 2025, aiming to provide high quality childcare to all 2 year-olds. By the end of March 2023, 3,178 children – 600 more than planned – could be reached. In the next two years it is envisaged that a further 9,500 2 year-olds could be supported (Welsh Government 2023b).

Table 6

Wales: Number of settings and places in non-maintained ECEC, 2023

	Settings	Places
Childminders	1,589	1,2820
Creches/nurseries	16	474
Full day care	1,044	40,510

Source: Welsh Government 2023c

Scotland

97% of eligible 3 or 4 year-olds and 13% of all 2 year-olds were registered in ELC settings in 2023, as well as 33% of those eligible for deferred entry to school.

Table 7

Scotland: Early learning and childcare registrations at local authority and partnership centres, by age, 2023

Under twos		2 year-olds		3 year-olds		4 year-olds		Deferred		Total
No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%**	No.	%**	No.	%**	
556	1	6,636	13	25,859	97	50,577	97	8,554	33	**92,182**

*of age group; **of those eligible

Source: Scottish Government 2023b, Table 6

Northern Ireland

In 2022/23, the share of 91% of 3 year-olds who were in funded pre-school education remained stable although their numbers in the population decreased (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2023, 5). As *Table 8* illustrates, 22,715 children attended funded ECEC, mostly in publicly funded nursery provision (15,495). Just under half that number (7,043) were enrolled in voluntary and private settings and 177 children attended a primary school reception class.

Table 8

Northern Ireland: Number of settings and children in funded centre-based care, 2022/23

	Number of settings	Number of children
Voluntary and private pre-school centres	349	7,043
Nursery schools	93	5,796
Primary school with funded places in nursery units	255	9,699
Primary school with funded places in reception classes	45	177
Total	742	22,715

Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2023, 19, 21, and own calculation

Financing and costs for parents

According to OECD data, total public expenditure in the UK on early childhood education and care amounted to 0.52% of GDP in 2020 (OECD 2023).

The UK central government has a *Statement of Funding Policy* for all policy areas in England and for the regional parliaments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Funding is transferred as a block grant and the national parliaments decide on their own budget priorities. In terms of early childhood education and care, the local authorities have a duty to fund the weekly hours of free entitlement set down by law. Otherwise, parents have to pay a heavy price in terms of childcare costs, particularly for under 3 year-olds (see *Table 9*). A survey of local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales from November 2022 to February 2023 showed that childcare costs (25 hours per week) for under 2 year-olds have increased by 5.6% per year – the increase was highest in England (5.9%), lowest in Scotland (1.6%) (Coram Family and Childcare 2023, 17). The childcare costs for an all-day place are above the thresholds of Universal Credit supports in 97% of local authorities (Coram Family and Childcare 2023, 13).

Table 9

Great Britain: Average weekly parental fees for under 3 year-olds in centre-based ECEC settings, 2023

Age	Great Britain	England	Wales	Scotland
	Full-time place (50 hours)			
Under 2 years	£ 285.31 € 325.99[2]	£ 289.98 € 331.33	£ 250.95 € 286.73	£ 227.17 € 259.56
2 year-olds	£ 279.60 € 319.47	£ 283.95 € 324.44	£ 249.24 € 284.78	£ 225.44 € 257.58
	Part-time place (25 hours)			
Under 2 years	£ 148.63 € 269.82	£ 150.89 € 172.40	£ 135.67 € 155.01	£ 118.14 € 134.98
2 year-olds	£ 144.01 € 164.54	£ 146.00 € 166.82	£ 134.92 € 154.16	£ 114.81 € 131.18

Source: Coram Family and Childcare 2023, 11, 13

Across Great Britain, nursery costs for under 2 year-olds are on average higher than the equivalent costs for a childminder (£285,31 and £247,19– €325,99and €282,44) for a full-time place respectively). Nursery costs in Wales are lower than in England and Scotland.

In all nations and regions, families pay considerably less for nursery childcare for **3 and 4 year-olds** compared to younger children. The main reasons for this are: (1) families receive a certain amount of free hours, resulting in lower fees; and (2) childcare providers are able to operate at lower staff to child ratios for older children, which often means that childcare costs less to provide (Coram Family and Childcare 2023, 14).

Since 2018, a scheme of Tax-Free Childcare for parents of children up to age 11 is available across the UK in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in which the government pays 20 per cent of childcare costs up to a set amount. Eligibility for the scheme depends on household income and circumstances.

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 16% of net household income on childcare costs[3] (OECD.Stat 2023).

The overall situation has been described by Polly Toynbee (2023) as follows:

"Costing an unaffordable average of just under £15,000 a year for a full-time place for a child under two, nurseries are closing in droves, unable to finance the government's so-called 30 free hours, with pay so low that childcare assistants flee elsewhere. The fact is, the sum the government pays to supposedly cover these hours is far too little, so nurseries struggle unless they can charge parents significant extras."

Staff to child ratios in centre-based settings and group size

England

From September 2023, one member of staff can look after five children (Gov.UK 2023c) which – regarding quality issues – is a deterioration from the current regulation of four children per staff.

[2] Conversion rate November 2023

[3] The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included.

Binding staff-child ratios are included in the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* 2021. Up to September 2023, these were:

Table 10

England: Staff to child ratios

Age range	Staff to child ratios
Under 2 year-olds	1:3** At least one member of staff must hold an approved NQF* level 3 qualification, and must be suitably experienced in working with children under two; at least half of all other staff must hold an approved level 2 qualification
2 year-olds	1:4 At least one member of staff must hold an approved NQF level 3 qualification; at least half of all other staff must hold an approved level 2 qualification
3 year-olds and over	1:8 In registered early years provision where a person *without* an NQF level 6 qualification works directly with the children: at least one member of staff must hold an approved level 3 qualification; at least half of all other staff must hold an approved level 2 qualification
	1:13 In registered early years provision where a person *with* an NQF level 6 qualification works directly with the children: at least one other member of staff must hold an approved level 3 qualification
	1:13 In maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained schools where at least one member of staff must be a qualified school teacher: at least one other member of staff must hold an approved level 3 qualification
4 and 5 year-olds	1 qualified teacher to 30 children Legislation on reception classes in maintained schools and academies limits the size of infant classes to 30 pupils per school teacher. Additional staff may include teaching assistants, higher level teaching assistants or other support staff.

*National Qualifications Framework; ** Up to September 2023
Source: DfE 2021b

Wales

Table 11

Wales: Statutory staff to child ratios in regulated childcare settings

Age range	Adult to child ratio
Under 2 years	1:3
2 year-olds	1:4
3 to 7 year-olds	1:8

Source: Welsh Government 2016

These ratios include any children of staff or volunteers and apply to any activity including escorting and transporting children. Regular volunteers can be taken into account in the normal staffing ratios (Welsh Government 2016). However, there is also a requirement in Wales – in line with September 2018 guidance – for all publicly funded settings providing for 4 year-olds in the Foundation Phase – including *reception classes* – to work towards a 1:8 ratio (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 89).

Scotland

The Scottish Care Inspectorate provides guidance about adult to child ratios in Early Learning and Care (ELC) settings.

There are no specifications about the number of qualified staff that should make up these ratios.

Table 12

Scotland: Staff to child ratios in registered ELC settings

Age range	Adult to child ratio
Under 2 years	1:3
2 to under 3 year-olds	1:5
3 year-olds and over*	1:8
Where children aged 3 and over attend facilities providing a session which is less than a continuous period of four hours in any day the adult to child ratio may be 1 : 10, providing individual children do not attend more than one session per day.	

Source: Care Inspectorate (Scotland) 2018

Northern Ireland

In PVI settings the Registered Person ensures that a minimum ratio of staff to children is followed (0–2 years 1:3; 2–3 years 1:4; 3–12 years 1:8). Minimum ratios of staff to children must be met and at least two members of staff much be on duty in each room within a setting at all times.

The recommended staff to child ratio in full-time *state-maintained* provision (nursery schools and nursery classes or units attached to primary schools) is two members of staff to 26 children. One of these must be a qualified teacher, the other a qualified nursery assistant.

Private and voluntary provision has to comply with the following legal requirements:

Table 13

Northern Ireland: Required staff to child ratios in private and voluntary ECEC settings

Age range	Staff to child ratios
2 to 3 year-olds	1:4
3 to 5 year-olds	1:8
A 'suitably qualified person' must be in charge at all times.	

Source: Eurydice 2020b (no longer accessible)

Curricular Frameworks

England

There is one statutory framework for the entire ECEC phase in England. Both public and private ECEC settings are obliged to work according to the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* which most recently became effective in September 2021 (DfE 2021b). Three sections refer to (1) the learning and development requirements, (2) assessment, and (3) the safeguarding and welfare requirements. The learning and development requirements focus on seven areas of learning:

- Communication and language (listening, attention and understanding; speaking)
- Personal, social and emotional development (self-regulation; managing self; building relationships)
- Physical development (gross motor skills; fine motor skills)
- Literacy (comprehension; word reading; writing)

- Mathematics (number; numerical patterns)
- Understanding the world (past and present; people, culture and communities; the natural world
- Expressive arts and design (creating with materials; being imaginative and expressive).

In each of the seven learning areas, Learning Goals are specified, 47 in all.

Recommended modes of learning are both adult-led and child-initiated. Particular emphasis is placed on play and exploration, active learning, and creative and critical thinking. There is no mention of children's rights, democratic practices or children's participation in decision-making.

Wales

There is no integrated curricular framework for the entire ECEC phase in Wales. The previous statutory curricular framework for work with 3 to 7 year-olds, the Foundation Phase Framework, applied to all ECEC settings serving children of that age group, whether maintained or non-maintained (Welsh Government 2015).

However, Wales is currently in the midst of fundamental changes to its statutory curriculum in the form of 'Curriculum for Wales', set out in the *Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021*, replacing the national curriculum set out in the *Education Act 2002* (Part 7). A duty is placed on funded non-maintained settings as well as schools to implement Curriculum for Wales and appropriate assessment arrangements (Gov.UK 2021).

From September 2022, the new statutory framework *Curriculum for Wales* replaced the Foundation Phase framework and applies through the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 for all learners aged 3–16 (Welsh Government n.d.). The new curriculum arrangements allow for schools to design their own curriculum around four core purposes:

- Ambitious, capable learners
- Enterprising, creative contributors
- Ethical, informed citizens
- Healthy, confident individuals

Within and across these four purposes are seven areas of learning and experience: Expressive Arts; Health and Wellbeing; Humanities; Language, Literacy and Communication; Mathematics and Numeracy; Science and Technology. The *Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021* includes a statutory duty for non-maintained settings delivering funded childcare to implement Curriculum for Wales. In response to this, a Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Settings (Welsh Government 2022c) and Assessment Arrangements for funded non-maintained settings (Welsh Government 2022e) have been developed through a co-construction process within the sector. The Curriculum for funded non-maintained settings has embedded the four purposes and seven areas of learning into five developmental pathways:

- Belonging
- Communication
- Exploration
- Physical Development
- Wellbeing.

The curriculum for funded non-maintained settings has a focus on child-centred practice and authentic and purposeful learning for children. *Cynefin* features heavily placing emphasis on a sense of place and belonging for children in Wales.

Guidance for approaches to supporting learning and development in ECEC and delivery of provision within non-maintained settings and schools sit around three key enablers (Welsh Government 2023a):

- Enabling adults
- Engaging experiences
- Effective environments.

A suite of professional learning and development support is in development to support the ECEC sector with curriculum framework changes across Wales.

The Flying Start initiative in Wales aims to provide under 4 year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds with a "flying start" to life. Flying Start focuses not only on educational aspects but also on supporting parents and health issues. Flying Start provision is expanding across 2022-2025 to provide childcare and services to more children aged 2–3 across Wales in areas of multiple deprivation.

Scotland

The Scottish *Curriculum for Excellence* is the statutory educational framework for children aged 3 to 18 years, regardless of the setting. The first stage of the Curriculum for 3 to 5 year-olds encompasses pre-primary education and the first stage of primary school (Scottish Government 2021a).

Principles for early education emphasise active learning through: spontaneous and purposeful play; investigating and exploring; events and life experiences; focused learning and teaching. Experiences and outcomes in eight curricular areas are emphasised for the age range 3-15: expressive arts; health and well-bring; languages (including literacy, English and a foreign language); mathematics (including numeracy); religious and moral education; sciences; social studies; technologies.

Realising the Ambition: Being Me is refreshed early years national practice guidance for Scotland (Education Scotland – National Improvement Hub 2020). It builds upon the original principles and philosophy of *Pre-Birth to 3* and *Building the Ambition.* It retains the relevant content from the previous guidance which it replaces, extending and strengthening it in line with current research and evidence about how children develop and learn. It is published by Education Scotland for anyone working in early learning and childcare and in early primary school.

Northern Ireland

The *Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education* (CCEA 2023a) applies to the preschool ECEC phase in Northern Ireland. All ECEC settings, both statutory as well as voluntary and private settings with funded places are obliged to follow this guidance (Department of Education 2021). An emphasis is placed on each child having the opportunity to develop his or her individual potential. A holistic approach serves towards promoting all aspects of children's development; developing self-esteem, self-control and positive attitudes towards others; developing language and communication skills to encourage the sharing of thoughts and feelings; and creating confident, independent and curious learners with a positive and problem-solving attitude to learning (CCEA 2023a). Six areas of learning are foregrounded: personal, social and emotional development; physical development; creative/aesthetic development; language development; early mathematical experiences; early experiences in science and technology; knowledge and appreciation of the environment (Department of Education 2021). There is no mention of children's rights, democratic practices or participation in decision-making.

The *Curricular Guidance* is the basis for the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) when evaluating the quality of provision and the outcomes for learners in all pre-school settings. The Foundation Stage (age 4–6) is the statutory curriculum framework for the first two years at primary school (CCEA 2023b).

Digital education

The term 'digital education' does not appear in the statutory ECEC curricular frameworks in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. The preferred term is ICT which is seen as a cross-curricular domain to be implemented in an age-appropriate way. However, there is little or no specific reference to digital practices before entering compulsory schooling except in the case of the Northern Ireland curricular guidance.

In **England**, there is no mention of digital literacy or digital learning in the *Statutory Foundation Stage Framework* (see section on *Curricular frameworks*) for work with children from birth to five.

In **Wales**, a non-statutory *Skills framework for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales* (2008) states that ICT is a cross-curricular domain and that children's ICT skills, knowledge and understanding should be developed through a range of experiences that involve finding and developing information and ideas and creating and presenting information and ideas (Welsh Government 2016). However, there is no specific reference to digital practices with 3 to 5 year-olds. Digital competence is embedded within and across the new *Curriculum for Wales* from September 2022 as part of the cross curricula skills – this elevates the importance of digital competence to align with literacy and numeracy within the Welsh curriculum.

In the *Curriculum for Excellence* for 3 to 18 year-olds in **Scotland**, 'ICT to enhance learning' is one of six areas listed in the Technologies section. Across the curriculum, skills in ICT are to be developed in the context of the learning and teaching as appropriate to the child or young person's maturity.

Realising the Ambition includes a section on 'Digital technology and the young child' which emphases the importance of learning 'with and through digital technology rather than about it, and recognises its presence within everyday lives, including the pedagogical documentation systems of early years settings (Education Scotland 2020, 78).

The *Curricular Guidance for Pre-school Education* in **Northern Ireland** has a section on ICT, emphasising that it can enhance educational opportunities when it is integrated and embedded in an age-appropriate way. It states that children need to see ICT used in meaningful contexts and for real purposes, with a firm emphasis on exploration. The children should have opportunities to "use digital resources, for example a camera, to enhance their own learning, deepen and consolidate observational skills and creativity; and explore and investigate a range of ICT resources safely, naturally and at their own pace" (CCEA 2023a).

Monitoring – evaluation

England

Child-related assessment

Assessments of individual children are recorded according to the seven learning areas (Early Learning Goals – ELGs) in the *Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)* curricular framework. Three assessments are obligatory: one for 2 year-olds in ECEC settings (*Progress Check at age two*), one during the child's first six weeks in the reception class in primary school (*Reception Baseline*

Assessment – RBA, Gov.UK 2022) and one at the end of the school year in reception class (*Early Years Foundation Stage Profile*) (DfE 2022a).

The 'progress check' made between the ages of 2 and 3 and is seen as a way of noticing potential developmental needs in order to provide additional support. ECEC providers are obliged to inform parents in a short written report about the progress of their 2 to 3 year-old children (particularly in the areas communication and language; physical development; and personal, social and emotional development). The report may also be passed on to the reception class teacher when the child starts school. Ongoing (formative) assessments by practitioners are considered to be an integral part of the learning and development process (DfE 2021b, 18).

The RBA, to be administered during the first weeks of reception class, "…is a short, interactive assessment…designed to take around 20 minutes. The assessment can be carried out by a teacher, teaching assistant, early years practitioner or any other trained education professional who should be familiar with the child taking the assessment" (DfE 2021b, 48).

The assessment instrument *Early Years Foundation Stage Profile* (EYFSP, DfE 2022b), that follows the regulations of the Standards and Testing Agency, must be completed at the latest at the end of June of the year in which the child turns 5. It provides an overview of the child's abilities and skills, his or her progress related to specific learning goals and an assessment of his or her 'school readiness'. All providers who receive state subsidies are obliged to complete the EYFSP. According to the Education Act 1996, the assessments should be sent to the local authorities who then pass them on to the Department for Education.

Centre-level internal evaluation

Self-assessments by ECEC staff are recommended, but are not mandatory (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 126).

External evaluation

External assessments of providers and staff are carried out at regular intervals by Ofsted (*Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills*) and include both structural and process quality. Providers are assessed according to four ratings: 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement', 'inadequate'. As at 31 August 2022, 96% of childcare providers had been judged good or outstanding, remaining stable since August 2019. The proportion of providers judged outstanding had decreased from 20% to 15% since 31 August 2019 (Ofsted 2023).

Wales

Child-related assessment

Since 2015, the National Curriculum requires a baseline assessment of children within six weeks of starting school, and again at the end of the first year in school.

Since 2022 and the introduction of the *Curriculum for Wales* and the *Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Settings* (Welsh Government 2022d), a new set of assessment arrangements are in development – particularly for children aged 3–16 who fall under the remit of *Curriculum for Wales*. Under the *Curriculum for Wales* assessment progresses from 1–5, with principles of progression and descriptors of learning under the seven areas of learning and experience. The progression steps are on a continuum not associated with specific age ranges to support individual progress and continuity within the curriculum from 3–16.

Settings in funded non-maintained settings and schools have a statutory duty to follow assessment arrangements for children, including initial and ongoing assessment. This duty is set out

within the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 (Gov.UK 2021). Draft Assessment Arrangements for funded non-maintained settings were published for consultation in 2022 (Welsh Government 2022c) with rollout expected for September 2023. The Draft Assessment Arrangements align to the principles of progression set out in *Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government, n.d.), supporting transition into and alignment with assessment arrangements in Curriculum for Wales in schools.

Centre-level internal evaluation

As in England, centre-level assessments by ECEC staff are recommended, but are not mandatory (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 126).

External evaluation

External inspections are carried out by Estyn, *Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wale*s for funded maintained settings, and include publicly funded nurseries. For the private non-maintained sector, the inspection framework of the *Care Inspectorate Wales* (CIW) places an emphasis on improving child development and wellbeing outcomes and has four core themes: well-being; care and development; environment; leadership and management (Welsh Government 2022b). Funded settings delivering the Curriculum for Wales for 3 to 4 year-olds are subject to a joint inspection by both Estyn and CIW. Many non-maintained settings align to external quality assurance programmes linked to umbrella support organisations including *PACEY Cymru (*Childminder's), National Day Nursery Association Wales (NDNA), Early Years Wales (sessional care) and *Mudiad Meithrin* (Welsh Medium nursery settings).

Scotland

Child-related assessment

Within the *Curriculum for Excellence* children's progress is continuously assessed, discussed with parents, and used in planning the next steps in their learning and development. Increasingly, early learning and childcare practitioners provide summative written reports for parents and the primary school to which the child transfers. Many local authorities have developed their own assessment procedures, including the children themselves reflecting on their own learning (Eurydice 2021a – no longer accessible).

Centre-level internal evaluation

There is no mandatory framework for centre-level assessment procedures.

External evaluation

External inspections of ELC settings are conducted by *Education Scotland*, which expects children to experience an appropriate balance across the eight areas of the *Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Government 2021a), and the Care Inspectorate, which focuses on national care standards, including learning environments and which has four key questions guiding inspections: 1: How good is our care, play and learning? 2: How good is our setting? 3: How good is our leadership? 4: How good is our staff team? (Care Inspectorate 2022). The 2022 review of Education Scotland and SQA noted: "As a matter of urgency the new independent Inspectorate should re-engage with the Care Inspectorate to agree a shared inspection framework designed to reduce the burden on early learning and childcare (ELC) practitioners and centres" (Scottish Government 2022).

Northern Ireland

Child-related assessment

There is no obligation for staff to assess children's progress during their time in ECEC provision before entering statutory schooling. However, both ongoing observations of and interactions with children in a range of situations over time and informing parents of progress are included as recommendations in the *Curricular Guidance*.

Centre-level internal evaluation

Self-evaluation procedures in ECEC settings are not obligatory.

External evaluation

External inspections of ECEC providers are carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) with the expectation that provision is in line with the *Curricular Guidance*. ETI also inspect preschool provision with funded places in the private and voluntary sector.

Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) Early Years Social Services Team use Minimum Standards for Childminding and Day Care for Children Under Age 12 (Department of Health, Social Security and Public Safety 2018) to register new facilities and carry out inspections. National Minimum Standards describe the minimum requirements for regulated early years and childcare settings.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

In the UK, children with special educational needs and disability (SEND) have traditionally been included in mainstream provision as far as possible. Special education institutions exist for those children who cannot be given the necessary support in regular provision.

England

According to the *Children and Families Act* 2014, local authorities (education and health departments) have a duty to ensure that each child with SEND can attend maintained provision, i.e. in the case of children below school age, maintained nursery provision. Each setting must provide each child the special educational provision which his or her particular needs demand and ensure that the child can engage in the general activities of the setting together with children who do not have special educational needs. Guidance published by the Department for Education and the Department of Health in 2015 (*Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years*) recommends a four-step procedure: assessing, planning, acting and evaluating. Each maintained setting has a *Special Educational Needs Coordinator, SENCO*) whose task is to sensitise and support the centre staff for this work and to co-operate closely with parents and external specialists.

However, government subsidies for ECEC providers calculated at a flat rate according to the Early Years National Funding Formula (ESFA 2021) fail to take into account the additional costs needed for appropriate provision for children with SEND. Local authorities are not always able to take over these costs within their austerity budgets, resulting in lack of access to publicly funded ECEC for 3 and 4 year-old children with SEND (Lloyd 2020, 87f).

Wales

In 2018, a new statutory framework was issued for supporting children and young people aged 0-25 with additional learning needs, the *Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal*

(Wales) Act 2018. It has been introduced in a phased approach since September 2020. The term 'additional learning needs (ALN)' replaces the existing terms 'special educational needs' (SEN) and 'learning difficulties and/or disabilities' (LDD). Under this legislation, maintained nursery schools are required to have a designated Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo). For children under compulsory school age not yet in a maintained setting, local authorities are required to appoint an Early Years ALN Lead Officer to help facilitate effective multi-agency collaboration (Welsh Government 2018). An Individual Development Plan will be created for each child with additional learning needs.

There is currently one special education nursery (up to 3 years) and pre-preparatory unit (4–7 years) in the same co-educational school in Cardiff.[4]

Scotland

Under the *Education Act (Additional Support for Learning), Scotland, Act 2004, amended 2009*), local authorities have a duty to identify, meet and keep under review the additional support needs of pupils for whose education they are responsible and to tailor provision according to their individual needs.

A government funded *Early Learning and Childcare Inclusion Fund* aimed to help children with additional support needs (ASN) to access their funded ELC entitlement.-The Fund was managed by Children in Scotland. Staff working in ELC settings could apply for funding for training, resources, equipment and adaptations to support children with ASN within their setting that was not provided by statutory services. From 2018–2021, up to £2 million was distributed to selected registered ELC providers (Children in Scotland 2021).

In 2023, a total 1,620 children (2%) were registered as having a disability (Scottish Government 2023b, Table 7).

Northern Ireland

Primary legislation, The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (NI) (2016), secondary legislation and a Code of Practice provide the legislative base for delivery of a SEN framework (Department of Education 2021).

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Order 2005, SENDO emphasises that these children should be included in mainstream schools wherever possible. Each child receives an annually reviewed *Statement of special educational needs,* which entitles him or her to the appropriate support. However, there is no specific reference to SEND in ECEC provision. The Department of Education has issued an Extended Early Years Special Educational Needs (SEN) Supplement as guidance for practitioners (Department of Education 2014).

Children with a migration background, Roma and Traveller children

In 2020/21, the five most common countries of birth of the non-British population living in Britain were India (896,000), Poland (682,000), Pakistan (456,000), Ireland (412,000) and Germany (347,000) (Statista 2023a).

In 2019, 9.3% of the population were of non-British origin. More than half (59.7%) of these came from EU28 countries. In the age group under 5 years, these shares were 7.6% and 64.5% respectively (Eurostat 2023c).

[4] www.specialneedsguide.co.uk

England

For children whose home language is not English, the Statutory Framework for the EYFS (2021) requires providers to "take reasonable steps to provide opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in play and learning, supporting their language development at home" (DfE 2021b). Providers are also expected to ensure that children have opportunities to reach a good standard in the English language during the EYFS. Practitioners are expected to assess children's skills in English.

Wales

In 2018, the Welsh Government published a strategy called "Enabling Gypsies, Roma and Travellers" which intends to raise awareness of the Foundation Phase free entitlement through improved communication between local authorities, ECEC providers and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents (Eurydice 2021b – no longer accessible).

Scotland

English as an additional language is specifically identified as a potential additional support need within the *Additional Support for Learning Statutory Guidance* (Scottish Government 2017).

In 2018, the Scottish Government published: *Improving educational outcomes for children and young people from travelling cultures.* Its purpose is to provide guidance about supporting Traveller children and young people and their families to engage in education so as to improve their life outcomes (Scottish Government 2018b).

In 2023, a total of 9,930 (11%) of children in local authority and partnership settings were registered as having a family language other than English. The local authorities provide English courses for children with a background of migration (Scottish Government 2023b, Table 7).

Northern Ireland

Settings which include Traveller children or children from Roma families are provided with additional subsidies from the Department of Education.

Parental leave arrangements[5]

Maternity leave is granted for 52 weeks and may start 11 weeks before the expected birth date. Two weeks after birth are compulsory. Six weeks are paid at 90% of the mother's average earnings, and either a weekly lump sum of £172,48 (€202,18) is paid for an additional 33 weeks or 90% of the weekly gross income, whichever is the lower. The remaining 13 weeks are unpaid. The requirement for payment of allowances is a 26-week period of continuous employment before the 15th week preceding the expected birth date and a minimum weekly salary of £123 (€142,26).

Since April 2015, employed mothers are entitled to transfer all Maternity leave to the father, except for the two weeks of obligatory leave, i.e. up to 50 weeks. This period of leave is termed '**Shared parental leave**' (SPL). SPL can only be taken in one-week (seven-day) blocks of time.

[5] The information in this section is primarily based on the country report by Margaret O'Brien, Jamie Atkinson and Alison Koslowski in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Fathers may take one or two weeks of **Paternity leave** paid with a weekly lump sum of £172,48 (€202,18) or 90% of average weekly income if this is lower. These two weeks must be taken in one part within 56 days of the child's birth.

Each parent is entitled to 18 weeks of unpaid and non-transferable **Parental leave** per child. However, these cannot be taken in one block. Not more than four weeks may be taken in any one year unless the parent's employer agrees to an alternative arrangement. This leave can be taken up to the child's 18th birthday.

Currently, no systematic statistical information about leave uptake is available.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in the United Kingdom

Country experts' assessment

The introduction to this section was written by **Liz Brooker** (†) in 2017 and continues to be relevant. **Eunice Lumsden** contributed updates in 2023 about the UK in general and the situation in England, with **Natalie MacDonald** adding Welsh perspectives and **Sarah Burton** Scottish perspectives.

Liz Brooker (†) (2017)

As this synopsis of key contextual data has shown, the four nations of the UK now find themselves differently positioned with regard to ECEC, as well as with regard to political, economic, social and cultural matters in general. Nevertheless, it remains the case that England, with over 55 million of the UK's total population of 65 million, faces the most complex and significant challenges, which are reported in this section. Whereas all four nations are struggling to meet the issues arising from funding constraints and rapidly changing professional roles and training, English ECEC finds itself in particularly challenging circumstances as a result of fundamental changes in ideology and policy on the part of successive governments.

1. Early childhood policy in the years from 1997-2010 was a key priority of the then Labour government, which invested in long-term and large-scale research projects (e.g. Sylva 2010, Mathers et al 2014) aimed at identifying the most 'effective' forms of provision in terms of young children's experiences and outcomes. The focus of these research projects became one of 'quality' and their findings were clear: children under 5 years of age benefited most from properly funded provision which combined education and care, which was led by trained teachers and which offered a balance of free play and adult-led activities. Legislation during these years resulted in a steady increase in teacher-led provision and a steady focus on children's experience. In the years since 2010, Conservative-led governments have reversed the focus on ECEC as a benefit for children, and have aimed instead to create services which allow parents to work. This change of direction is described in research reports, notably from the Sutton Trust (Waldfogel and Stewart 2017) as a shift from quality to quantity: children aged 3 and 4 whose parents are working are now entitled to 30 hours of free 'childcare' a week, to enable their parents to move into employment (children with a non-working parent are offered only 15 hours). But the nature of this 'childcare' no longer resembles the high-quality education and care standards set during the previous regime. The requirement for a teacher to be present in a non-school setting has been removed, and there is a move to allow nursery and reception classes in schools to be led by non-teachers. The Sutton Trust concludes that these moves are sharply increasing the inequality between more and less privileged groups of children, as the children of poorer working parents increasingly spend longer hours in poor-quality provision.

2. Government funding for the 30-hours free provision has been independently evaluated as well below the level required to create new places in existing settings, or to encourage the creation of new (PVI) settings. With the launch of the scheme in September 2017, it was reported that many existing settings had chosen not to offer the expanded provision, and in consequence that many parents were unable to find a place for their child.
3. Frequent changes to the IPE of those working in ECEC have failed to remedy the failings and shortages they were designed to address. The latest shift, from Early Years Professional Status to Early Years Teacher Status (without QTS) was intended to supply more 'teachers' without providing them with the same pay and conditions as Primary Teachers with an Early Years specialism. The intention was to expand the well-qualified workforce, but more cheaply than with a qualified-teacher workforce. However, the take-up of training for the new EYT status was slow, and has declined year on year, so that currently only 600 of the planned 2,500 training places have been taken up, and many HEI providers are closing their courses. ECEC in England is set to fall way below the proposed standards of qualification in the next few years.

Eunice Lumsden (2023)

Early Childhood Education and Care continues to be positioned differently in the four nations - as documented in the accompanying ECEC Workforce Profile (Lumsden 2024). In England, the three areas presented by Liz Brooker in 2017 continue to be dominant discourses, with the challenges they present exacerbated by the COVID pandemic (La Valle et al. 2022).

Research evidence on the importance of investing in early childhood has been recognised by policy makers in the UK. Since the pioneer investment era of the Labour Government (1997–2010), ECEC has continued to be a policy focus, with the 2023 Budget pledging to expand the 'free' childcare offer in stages by introducing as from April 2024-15 hours to all children over 9 months with working parents, rising to 30 hours for all children under five with working parents earning under £100,000 (€116,310) net income (DfE 2023a). While this direction must be welcomed, it does little to address the challenges for families unable to work or find employment that works around family life. This is despite the compelling evidence about the importance of high quality ECEC for child development and the fact that those children who would benefit most are less able to access it – a situation reinforced by the pandemic (see La Valle et al. 2022). As Moss and Cameron (2020) articulate, despite policy attention the fragmented nature of ECEC in England continues to drive a flawed system – a system, they argue, that has failed to pause and reflect on the purpose of ECEC and how it operates. Moreover, they suggest that the emphasis on 'school readiness', as well as the EYFS, and the focus on 'childcare' for parents, has arguably exacerbated the challenges for ECEC in England.

Investment in workforce development continues, with the Level 3 Early Educator (or equivalent) continuing as the mandated qualification in **England**. Investment in graduate leadership continues, but the transition from Early Years Professional Status to Early Years Teacher Status in 2013, without ensuring that employment conditions mirrored those of colleagues with Qualified Teacher Status, presents challenges to the recruitment and retention of those with EYTS. The number of providers of the EYTS qualification route continues to decline year on year. In 2022, 21% of the workforce held a Level 6 qualification (DfE 2022a) and in 2023, only 17 training providers were offering EYTS, 12 of which were HEIs (DfE 2023b) – a situation that compounds the fragmented nature of ECEC and the divide with Education (Moss and Cameron 2020).

In **Scotland**, the situation in relation to graduate leadership is different and the Childhood Practice degree is being taken up by the early years workforce such that Scottish Government data

shows an overall increase in staff who are degree qualified or undertaking a degree increasing by 17.8% between 2020 (5,015) and 2023 (5,906) (Scottish Government 2023b, 26).

It is not only graduate recruitment that is an issue, significant challenges of recruitment, qualification levels and staff shortages that have been a constant concern across the UK for employers, membership organisations and researchers, are materialising. The current situation for the ECEC workforce is extremely challenging and further exacerbated by the mixed economy of provision and, in England particularly, the marketisation and commercialisation of ECEC (Lloyd 2020). In the UK there are disparities in pay, working conditions and status between those with Qualified Teacher Status and the remainder of the ECEC workforce, disparities which have been sharpened by the current cost of living crisis across the country. In Scotland, for example, where most children attend publicly funded ECEC provision, the employment conditions and pay of practitioners and support workers who make up the largest proportion of staff in settings do not have qualifications or pay or career routes comparable to teachers. The dissatisfaction with pay levels led to potential strike action in September 2022 which was only cancelled when the pay rise offered was substantially increased.

In **England,** the number of settings closing or being acquired by larger companies has increased (DfE 2021c; Simon et al. 2021). While the Government promised several measures to support the sector in England,-the 2023 Budget (HM Treasury 2023) gave ECEC providers the option of relaxing staff to child ratios (aligning England to Scottish requirements), a highly contested issue in the sector, particularly since the requirements for graduate leadership differ between the two nations.

In **Wales,** the expansion of the 30 free hours scheme and expansion of the Flying Start provision will see a significant increase in nationwide demand for spaces. In an already struggling workforce due to the impact of the pandemic, this is a real concern.

The ten-year Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan is under review (2023) and the pandemic has impacted on the number of students being able to complete placement hours for the Childcare qualifications. Additionally, the number of practitioners able to deliver through the medium of Welsh is concerning and part of the Welsh Government's *2050 One Million Welsh Speakers* campaign which aims to increase the number of Welsh speakers across Wales. For early years this includes investment in Welsh-medium provision with a target of an additional 150 settings by 2028 and providing training to develop the Welsh language skills of the existing workforce (Welsh Government 2020).

Plans for workforce registration are in discussion, similar to those in Scotland, in a move to support the recognition of the workforce as a significant and important profession. Ongoing feelings of being undervalued and poorly paid are impacting on sector recruitment and retention similar to issues outlined across the other three nations. A key priority is the continued drive for recognition and upskilling across the sector, the value of graduate level practice qualifications and ongoing support for the ECEC agenda in Wales is essential to meet increased demand for quality provision (Welsh Government 2019b).

Despite the divergence in ECEC policy approaches across the four nations of the UK it is evident that there is instability and that – beyond those with Qualified Teacher Status – the workforce is undervalued and poorly recompensed, making it difficult to forecast the future. In England there is an urgent need for strong and committed leadership in Government, alongside substantial and sustained investment, to ensure that *all* our youngest children have access to high quality ECEC provision. A key cornerstone is a qualified, graduate-led workforce that is valued and invested in; this does not currently appear to be a high priority for the incumbent Government.

Demographic data

Please note: *For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

Population

In the year 2021 there were 67,026,300 persons resident in the United Kingdom. Over the past 20 years, the total population has risen continuously. The following national statistics of the total population shows the population of the constituent countries over time:

Table 14
United Kingdom: Overall population and population of constituent countries 2000-2021

	2000	2005	2015	2021
England	49,233,300	50,606,000	54,786,300	56,536,400
Wales	2,906,900	2,969,300	3,099,100	3,105,400
Scotland	5,062,900	5,110,200	5,373,000	5,479,900
Northern Ireland	1,682,900	1,727,700	1,851,600	1,904,600
United Kingdom	**58,886,000**	**60,413,300**	**65,110,000**	**67,026,300**

Source: ONS 2022b

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.75, the UK is well above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)[6].

Children under age 6

Table 15
United Kingdom: Number of children according to age, 2021

	Number of children
Under 1 year-olds	675,477
1 year-olds	701,987
2 year-olds	719,130
3 year-olds	732,469
4 year-olds	751,206
5 year-olds	774,709
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	**4,354,978**

Source: ONS 2022a

[6] Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/ and https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU).

In 2021, 3.1% of the total population in the UK were children under 3 years of age. Children up to school entry age accounted for 6.5%. This represents a higher proportion of young children than the respective EU average, and has done for the past 20 years.

Table 16

United Kingdom: Relative share of children under 6 years of age in total population compared with EU averages from 2000 to 2021, in %*

Yaer	Comparison UK/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	UK	3.6	3.7	7.3
	Ø EU15[7]	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	UK	3.4	3.4	6.9
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	UK	3.7	3.8	7.4
	Ø EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2021	UK**	3.1	3.4	6.5
	Ø EU27 (2021)	2.8	3.0	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, **ONS 2022a, * Own calculations, deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

In 2019, more than three-quarters (77.3%) of households with children under age 6 in the United Kingdom were couple households. Single households with under 6 year-olds accounted for 9.8% of all households. These were almost exclusively single mother households (9.1%).

Table 17

United Kingdom: Households with children under age 6, 2019

Household type	Total households	Total households, in per cent*
All households	7,208,800	
Couple households	5,572,900	77.3
Other household type	924,400	12.8
Single households, total	708,200	9.8
Single households, women	652,600	9.1
Single households, men	55,600	0.7

Source: Eurostat 2023i (data beyond 2019 not available), * Own calculations

Employment rates of parents with children under age 6

In the United Kingdom, in 2023, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 79.4% and for women 72.1% (Statista 2023b).

In 2021, 70.7% of women and 95% of men (18-64 years) with children between 3 and 4 years were employed. Although an exact comparison is difficult because the dependent children's ages are different, the share of employed fathers was significantly above the EU-average (87.5%)

[7] The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

as was that of mothers (EU-average 64%). This also applies for employed mothers and fathers with children under age 2 (72.4% and 93.1% respectively) (Eurostat 2023e, ONS 2022c).

Table 18a

United Kingdom: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2021

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
United Kingdom	58.2	87.6
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries[8]	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2021	
	Mothers, in %	**Fathers, in %**
United Kingdom (with children 3–4 years)*	70.7	95.0
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries[9]	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e, *ONS 2022c

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, like the United Kingdom, data are displayed in *Table 18b*

Table 18b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	**Parents with children under 6 years**		**Overall employment rate**	
	Mothers in %	**Fathers in %**	**Women in %**	**Men in %**
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023
[+]Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023f

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03

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[8] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK
[9] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion[10]

In 2018, 28.1% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was above the then EU28 average (22.7%). The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 22.8% compared to the EU average of 21.8%. 3.1% of children under 6 and 1.9% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation (EU28-average 5.3% and 4,0% respectively) (Eurostat 2023g, h – data after 2018 not available).

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[10] 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation

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