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Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe

2023

Early childhood education and care



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Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe 2023

Early childhood education and care

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of the 2023 data collection on the structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in the area of early childhood education and care.

The report contains indicators on key policies in the three following areas.

1. Access (place guarantee and affordability).
2. Staff (initial qualification requirements and continuing professional development).
3. Educational guidelines (including a full list of documents).

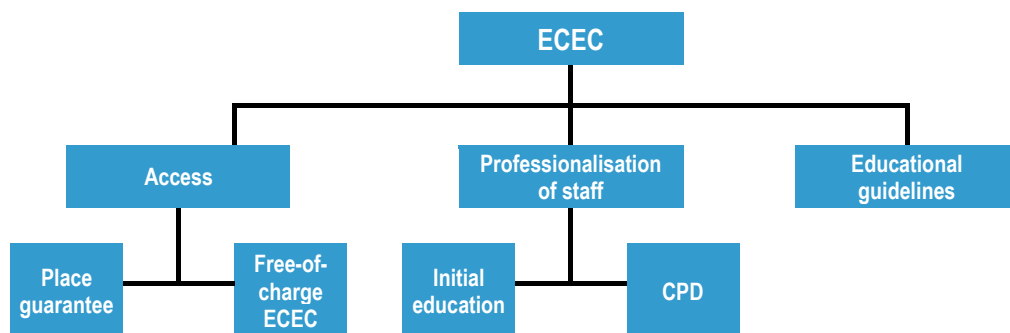
The report contains information for the 2022/2023 school year. Participating countries include the EU Member States, along with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Türkiye ⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ This report is based on information from 38 European education systems. Switzerland does not participate in the project on *Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe*.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

The structural indicators in this report provide an overview of some key features of early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems. The choice of indicators was based on current research and the factors listed in the recommendation of the Council of the European Union on high-quality ECEC systems ⁽²⁾. The recommendation identified five main aspects of quality in ECEC: access, staff, curriculum, evaluation/monitoring and governance/funding.

However, considering the vast range of possible system-level information and bearing in mind the limitations of scope and time, only several essential and robust indicators have been chosen for yearly monitoring. The diagram below indicates the ECEC structural indicators covered in the Eurydice data collection.



ECEC refers to provision for children from birth through to compulsory primary education that falls within a national regulatory framework, i.e. which must comply with a set of rules, minimum standards and/or undergo accreditation procedures. Only centre-based provision is considered. Home-based provision or child-minding services are out of scope. The definition goes beyond the education programmes classified as International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 0 (early childhood education), as it includes all registered ECEC services, not only those with a defined educational component. In many European countries, the ECEC provision for children under age 3 does not qualify as ‘early childhood educational development’ (ISCED level 010), but it still offers an important service for children and their families.

Many European countries structure ECEC services according to the age of the children. Usually, the transition from the first to the second phase takes place when children are around 3 years old. In order to reflect the different regulations, a distinction is often made between the provision for children under 3 years old and for children of 3 years and over. However, it is important to keep in mind that in some countries the transition can be as early as 2.5 years or as late as 4 years of age.

Some European countries have several types of ECEC. The indicators show if a certain measure is available in the main type of ECEC for each age group.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, pp. 4–14. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_2019.189.01.0004.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2019:189:TOC.

1. Access

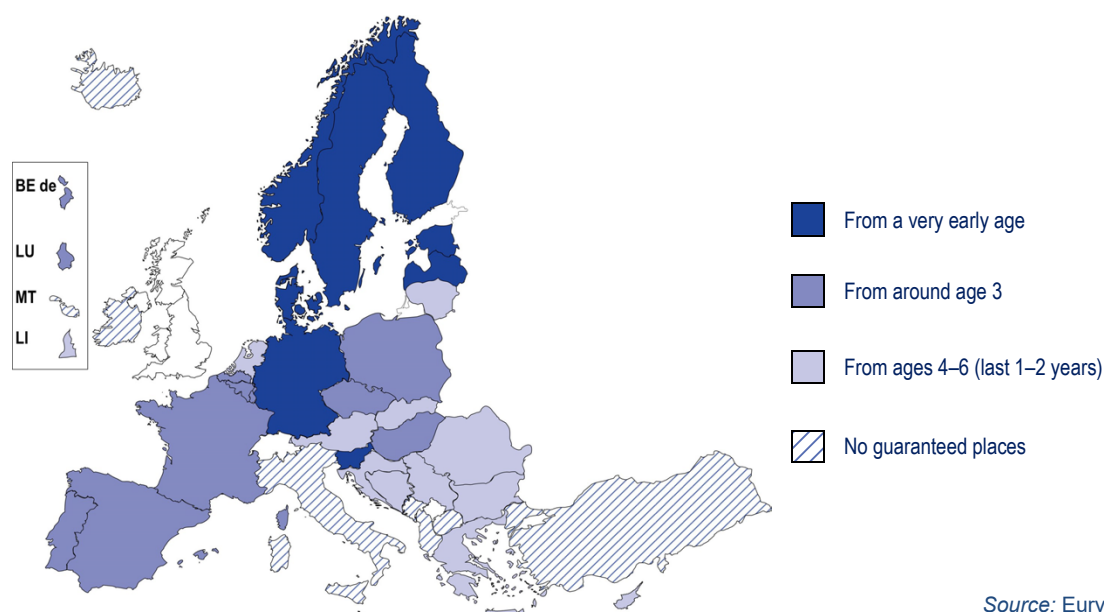
Ensuring access to ECEC is a primary concern of national and European Union decision-makers when developing policies for young children and their parents. The European Pillar of Social Rights ⁽³⁾ established the right to affordable ECEC of good quality for all children. However, this right is not yet enshrined in the legislation of many Member States.

Place guarantee: two ways of ensuring the right to ECEC

Currently, in Europe, there are two approaches to ensuring universal access to ECEC. Some countries provide a **legal entitlement** to an ECEC place, while others make ECEC attendance **compulsory**. Each approach requires public authorities to commit to guaranteeing a place in ECEC. However, there are some fundamental differences. A legal entitlement means a child has a right to ECEC, but when it is compulsory, a child has a legal obligation to attend. The nature of the place guarantee therefore differs. Under the legal entitlement, public authorities have to guarantee a place for any child in the age range covered whose parents request it. In contrast, in countries where ECEC is compulsory, public authorities must guarantee a sufficient number of places for all children in the age range covered by the legal obligation.

To provide an overview, Figure 1 groups both these access measures together and shows the earliest age from which a place guarantee is available: either as a legal entitlement or compulsory ECEC (detailed breakdown is displayed in Figure 2). The map reveals significant differences in the age at which children have a guaranteed place in ECEC in Europe. Only seven EU Member States (Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden) as well as Norway guarantee a place in ECEC for each child from an early age (6–18 months), often immediately after the end of childcare leave (see Figure 2). A place in publicly subsidised ECEC is guaranteed from the age of 3 years or a little earlier in the three Communities of Belgium and in Czechia, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Hungary, Poland and Portugal. Around a third of European countries guarantee a place only for the last 1–2 years of ECEC.

Figure 1: Age from which a place in ECEC is guaranteed, 2022/2023



Source: Eurydice.

Country-specific note

Portugal: since the extension of legal entitlement from age 4 to age 3 in 2018, demand has still not been met in some large cities.

⁽³⁾ Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017/C 428/09).

Few European countries have no legal framework to ensure a place in ECEC. Only three EU Member States (Ireland, Italy and Malta) have not formally established legal entitlement or compulsory ECEC. In practice, places are available in these countries from around age 3. For example, in Italy and Malta, the majority of ECEC centres for children from age 3 are combined with primary schools and are therefore considered as an integral part of the education system. Ireland offers a universal free early childhood care and education programme of 15 weekly hours from around this age. In Iceland, demand meets supply from an earlier age. The right to ECEC is widely described in laws and regulations without referring to a specific age or number of hours, but the participation rates in ISCED 0 are very high from age 2.

In contrast, the absence of a legal place guarantee is reflected in the lower availability of ECEC in Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Türkiye.

Gap between childcare leave and place guarantee in ECEC

The policies governing support for families with babies and young children are complex and are often interlinked. Therefore, when considering the differences in the starting age of the guaranteed place in ECEC, it is important to take into account another important family policy measure, namely the length of childcare leave.

The length of 'well-paid' childcare leave (later in text 'childcare leave') varies greatly in Europe. The data from the International Network on Leave Policies and Research (Koslowski et al., 2022) reveals that almost half of European countries provide an opportunity for families to stay off work and raise their children for around 1 year or more. Families may take care of their children without facing financial risk up to 2 years after their birth in Czechia, Hungary and Romania. Estonia comes next, with the childcare leave available up until the child reaches 1.5 years of age. In contrast, more than a quarter of European countries provide well-paid childcare leave for less than 5 months. Notably, in Ireland and Bosnia and Herzegovina, no period of leave is paid at a high earnings-related level.

In order to show the degree of separation between the policies, the **ECEC gap** indicates the amount of time a child is not covered either by childcare leave or a guaranteed place in ECEC. This is the period when families with young children have to make difficult decisions about whether to stay at home, whether to turn to informal care, or whether and how to pay for expensive, private ECEC.

Figure 2 shows the difference between the end of the maximum childcare leave and the earliest start of the universal place guarantee in ECEC. The European countries are listed according to the length of the ECEC gap. At the left side, where no gap is indicated, are the countries with well-coordinated childcare leave and ECEC policies. Only six EU Member States (Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden), along with Norway, have no ECEC gap. All these even have some overlap, where parents are still entitled to childcare leave but a place in publicly subsidised ECEC provision is already guaranteed. The overlap offers families flexibility during the transition to ECEC. Countries with no ECEC gap grant long childcare leave (on average 13 months) and have unitary ECEC systems providing a legal right to a subsidised, but not free place.

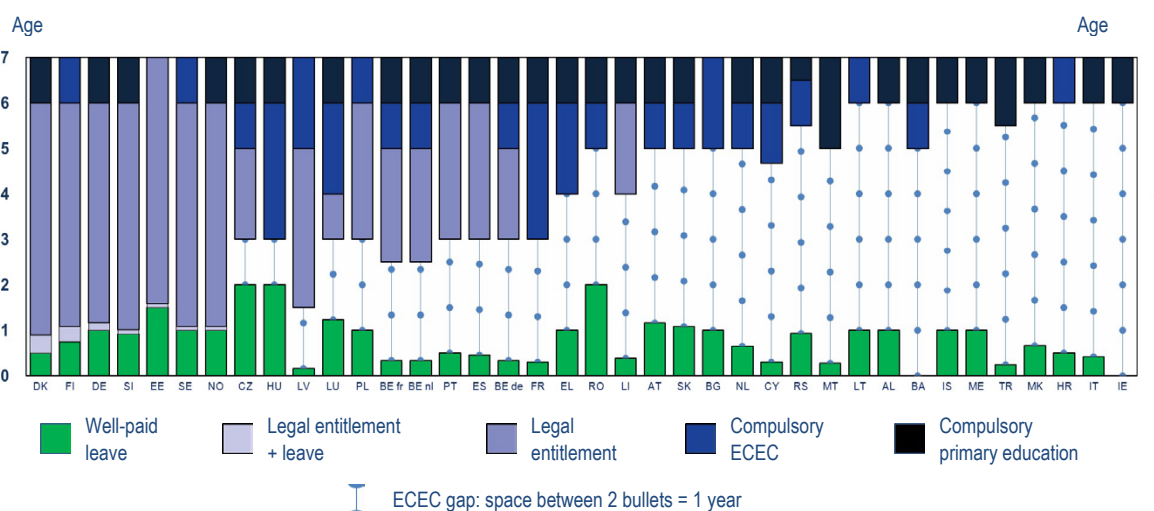
When there is an ECEC gap, it lasts for a minimum of 1 and maximum of 6 years. The difference between the well-paid childcare leave and the start of the legal entitlement is between 1 and 2 years in Czechia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Hungary and Poland. Most of these countries grant long, well-paid childcare leave (1–2 years) and a guarantee to an ECEC place from age 3. Latvia features as an exception.

In **Latvia**, the universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised ECEC starts at age 1.5. Maternity leave with an allowance of 80 % of previous earnings is granted for 16 weeks. Afterwards, a parental allowance is made available with two options: until the child is 1 year old with 60 % of the previous salary allowance; or until the child is 1.5 years old with 44 % of the previous salary allowance. In addition, a person caring for a child up to 1.5 years of age receives a childcare allowance (EUR 171 per month).

The ECEC gap is between 2 and 3 years in Belgium, Spain, France and Portugal. These countries offer a relatively short period of childcare leave (4–6 months) but guarantee a place in ECEC from around age 3 or earlier.

In the remaining countries, the period with no childcare leave and no entitlement to ECEC lasts 3 years or longer. From the legal rights point of view, 10 European countries have an ECEC gap of 5–6 years: Ireland, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Türkiye. Most of the countries with a long childcare gap have either no guarantee to an ECEC place or have only 1–2 years of compulsory ECEC before the start of primary education. However, as already discussed, the childcare gap might be *de facto* shorter, as publicly subsidised ECEC is almost universally available from around age 3–4 without a legal entitlement *de jure*.

Figure 2: Gap between childcare leave and place guarantee in ECEC, 2022/2023



Source: Eurydice.

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU
Leave	0.3	0.3	0.3	1	2	0.9	1.2	1.6	-	1	0.5	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.2	1	1.2	2
Legal entitlement	2.5	3	2.5	-	3	0.5	1	1.5	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	1.5	-	3	-
Compulsory ECEC	5	5	5	5	5	-	-	-	-	4	-	3	6	-	4.7	5	6	4	3
Compulsory primary	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	7	6	6	7	7	6	6
	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Leave	0.3	0.7	1.2	1	0.5	2	1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1	-	1	0.4	1	0.7	1.1	0.9	0.3
Legal entitlement	-	-	-	3	3	-	0.9	-	0.8	1	-	-	-	4	-	-	1	-	-
Compulsory ECEC	-	5	5	6	-	5	-	5	6	6	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	5.5	-
Compulsory primary	5	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	7	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6.5	5.5

Explanatory note

The ECEC gap is the difference between the maximum length of well-paid leave and the earliest start of a universal place guarantee in ECEC (legal entitlement or compulsory ECEC). When there is no guaranteed place in ECEC, the gap is calculated until the start of compulsory primary education. Most of the data on well-paid leave comes from the International Network on Leave Policies and Research and refers to April 2022 (Koslowski et al., 2022, pp. 53–58). It includes post-natal maternity, paternity and parental leaves. ‘Well-paid’ means earnings-related payment at 66 % of earnings or above. The total amount of ‘well-paid’ leave available to parents expressed in child’s age in months was converted to years by dividing the number by 12.

Country-specific notes

Albania, Liechtenstein, Montenegro and North Macedonia: leave data provided by Eurydice.

Netherlands: the [new regulation](#) in force since August 2022 increased the well-paid leave to 34 weeks.

Portugal: since the extension of the legal entitlement from age 4 to age 3 in 2018, demand has still not been met in some large cities.

Finland: the family leave system reform entered into force in August 2022, increasing the total length of well-paid leave from 12

to approximately 13 months. The figure and table show the most [recent regulations](#).

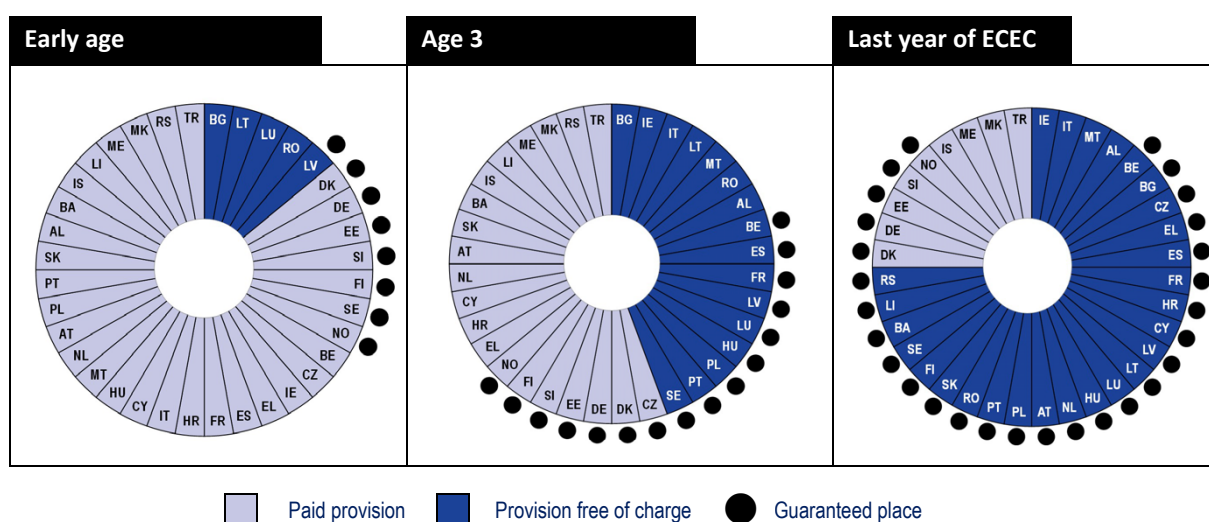
Bosnia and Herzegovina: ECEC in the year before starting primary school is mandatory in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the Republic of Srpska, ECEC is not compulsory, but all children attend a 3-month pre-primary programme nevertheless.

Free of charge ECEC

Affordability is a very important factor in ensuring that the highest possible number of children have access to ECEC. Figure 3 examines the most robust measure taken to ensure that every family can afford to place their child in ECEC, where all places are offered free of charge. However, affordability must be discussed in relation to availability, since without a place guarantee, free ECEC in public settings may be limited and waiting lists may be long with complex priority rules. Therefore, Figure 3 shows the availability of free ECEC in relation to a guaranteed place for three broad age groups:

1. early age (under age 2);
2. around age 3 (more than age 2, less than age 4);
3. last year of ECEC (age 4, 5 or 6, which varies by education system).

Figure 3: ECEC free of charge and guaranteed places, 2022/2023



Starting age of ECEC free of charge and the number of free of charge hours per week

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	
Age (years)	2.5	3	2.5	0.3	5	-	⊗	-	2.7	4	3	3	6	3	4.7	1.5	0	1	3	
Weekly hours	23	23	23	Δ	Δ	-	⊗	-	15	Δ	25	24	(4-7)	Δ	Δ	⊗	20	20-26	Δ	
	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR	
Age (years)	2.75	4	5	3	3	0	-	5	6	3	3	5	-	4	-	-	-	-	5.5	-
Weekly hours	30	25	20	25	25	Δ	-	Δ	20	(15)	20	(4-5)	-	21	-	-	-	-	Δ	-

⊗ No top-level regulations Δ No restrictions (full day)

Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

In the table, when the weekly hours are shown in brackets, the number is the approximate weekly value.

Country-specific notes

Germany: Berlin, Hamburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern offer free ECEC for all children. In Rhineland-Palatina, ECEC is free from the age of 2. Bremen, Hessen and Niedersachsen waive the fees from age 3. North Rhine-Westphalia and Thuringia offer free ECEC for all children during the final 2 years, while Brandenburg offers free ECEC during the final year before starting primary education. ECEC is not free of charge in Baden-Württemberg, Bayern, Saarland, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt and Schleswig-Holstein.

Portugal: currently, a gradual extension of free-of-charge ECEC for all children is being introduced. From 1 September 2022, there are no fees for all children entering the first year of crèche. In 2023, this measure will be extended all children entering the first year of crèche and proceeding to the second year. In 2024, all children will attend ECEC free-of-charge. See [Law No 2/2022, 3 January](#).

In Europe, most families pay fees for ECEC for the youngest group of children. The availability of ECEC free of charge increases noticeably at age 3, and this trend continues with each year of age, becoming almost universal across Europe during the last year before primary education starts. Free

public ECEC for all children from the earliest years is offered in five countries: Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Romania. Latvia is the only European country that guarantees a free public ECEC place from as early as 1.5-years-old.

In **Latvia**, if a place in an educational institution run by the local government is not offered and the child attends a preschool educational programme in a private educational institution, the local government must cover some of the costs of the private service provider. The costs covered correspond to the average cost of a child on a pre-primary education programme at the local government educational institution (Education Law, Section 17) ⁽⁴⁾.

In the four other countries (Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Lithuania and Romania), there is no legal guarantee to ensure the availability of free ECEC from an early age. Lithuania and Luxembourg offer free ECEC for 20 hours per week, while Bulgaria and Romania fund free full-time places.

In **Bulgaria**, the collection of fees in the ECEC sector was abolished in April 2022.

In **Lithuania**, the state offers free ECEC for 20 hours per week. If the child attends for longer than 20 hours per week, parents (guardians) pay for the additional hours. Parents (guardians) also pay for the child's meals. From 2020–2021, all 6-year-olds attending compulsory pre-primary classes are provided with a free lunch.

In **Luxembourg**, since 1 October 2017 children aged 1 to 4 may benefit from 20 hours of free child-care in the non-formal education sector (*service d'éducation et d'accueil*). Fees for additional hours are charged. From age 3, the preschool programme lasts 26 weekly hours (*éducation précoce et éducation préscolaire*) and is free of charge.

In **Romania**, ECEC is free of charge for both the normal (10 hours per day) and the short programme (5 hours per day).

In the remaining European countries, either all or some parents pay fees for ECEC in the earliest years, although the costs vary considerably between countries (see European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2019). From around age 3, almost half of European countries offer free ECEC. In many countries, this is a period of transition when children change from a childcare-type to an education-type setting. Most of these countries combine free ECEC with a place guarantee (Belgium, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Hungary, Poland and Portugal).

For the last year of ECEC, the distribution of free and fee-paying ECEC provision is reversed compared with the earliest years. Most European countries offer at least 1 year of free pre-primary education. The exceptions are Denmark, seven *Länder* in Germany, Estonia, Slovenia, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway and Türkiye, where some parents contribute to costs during the entire period when their child attends ECEC.

Many countries have been extending the universal place guarantee in ECEC

Since 2014/2015, when the structural indicators on ECEC were first gathered, there have been substantial changes in the **legal framework that guarantees access** to ECEC in several EU Member States. Eight countries have introduced compulsory ECEC for 1 year prior to starting primary education, and another three countries have prolonged the period of mandatory attendance to 2–3 years. Moreover, a few countries are extending the ages of the legal right to ECEC for every child.

Attending the last year of ECEC has been made **compulsory** in Belgium (since September 2020), Czechia (2017), Croatia (2014), Lithuania (2016), Romania (2020), Slovakia (2021), Finland (2015) and Sweden (2018).

Three countries have made compulsory attendance longer than 1 year. In Hungary, ECEC has been compulsory for children from the age of 3 since September 2015. In France, the starting age of compulsory education has been lowered from age 6 to 3 since September 2019. Greece has gradually lowered the starting age of compulsory pre-primary school attendance from age 5 to age 4 (2021). Bulgaria is progressively introducing compulsory education for 4-year-olds (with the aim of this being implemented in all municipalities by 2023–2024). Cyprus is planning to establish compulsory

⁽⁴⁾ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/50759-izglitiba-likums>.

education for 4-year-olds from 2025. In Romania, the age of compulsory ECEC will be extended to 4-year-olds from September 2023.

A **legal entitlement** to ECEC has been introduced or extended in Czechia, Poland and Portugal. These countries have imposed a statutory duty on ECEC providers in a catchment area to secure publicly subsidised ECEC for all children of a certain age whose parents request a place. Czechia and Poland have been gradually extending the entitlement to age 3 (fully implemented in Poland from 2017 and in Czechia from 2018). Portugal lowered the start of universal preschool education (ISCED level 020) to age 3 from September 2018, and a strategy was implemented adjust the preschool network to parents' needs. A gradual expansion of the universal guarantee to preschool education has been adopted in Lithuania. According to this plan, 4-year-olds will have a place guaranteed from September 2023, and this will be lowered to 2-year-olds in 2025. In Slovakia the preparation of legal entitlement for 4-year-olds since 2024 and 3-year-olds since 2025 is under way.

Several countries have reforms concerning the starting age of primary education, which in turn affects the total length of the ECEC period. In 2020, Cyprus raised the primary education age to 6 years. Consequently, the length of compulsory ECEC was extended to 1 year and 4 months ⁽⁵⁾. Sweden has launched a government inquiry on whether to introduce a 10-year primary school by changing the preschool class (last year of compulsory ECEC) to year 1 of primary education. If the government decides to implement this, it will be applicable from 2026 ⁽⁶⁾.

Overall, data reveal that compulsory ECEC has become a more common measure than the entitlement to it. A legal right to a place in ECEC is currently granted in 15 European countries, while ECEC is compulsory in 20 countries. A few education systems provide both a legal entitlement to ECEC and compulsory ECEC. In Belgium, Czechia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Finland and Sweden, children have a right to get a place in ECEC from around age 3, but all children must attend ECEC during the last 1–2 years before the start of primary education.

2. ECEC staff

ECEC staff support children's development, ensure their health and well-being and guide them in their daily routines and activities. The kinds of experiences children have largely depend on the people who are in charge. Highly qualified staff are more likely to use appropriate pedagogical approaches, create stimulating learning environments as well as provide good care and support. High minimum qualification requirements for ECEC staff are also important for raising the status and pay of the professionals who play such a key role.

In many countries, teams of people work together in ECEC rather than a single professional in charge of a whole group of children, as is often the case in primary schools. Some countries have set the same minimum qualification requirement for all staff members; others have varied job profiles and require different qualifications for different positions. In order to account for these different approaches, this report makes a distinction between two broad categories of staff: 'core practitioners' and 'assistants'.

A **core practitioner** is an individual who leads a group of children at the class- or playroom-level and works directly with children and their families. Core practitioners may also be called pre-primary, kindergarten or early childhood teachers, pedagogues, educators, childcare practitioners, pedagogical staff, etc.

⁽⁵⁾ Decision nr: 84.078, date of publication: 09.01.2018, see [http://www.cm.gov.cy/cm/cm.nsf/All/8BE7AAD0082913CAC22583E5002AC80D/\\$file/84.078.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.cm.gov.cy/cm/cm.nsf/All/8BE7AAD0082913CAC22583E5002AC80D/$file/84.078.pdf?OpenElement).

⁽⁶⁾ 'A ten-year compulsory school – Introduction of a new Year 1 in compulsory school, compulsory school for pupils with learning disabilities, compulsory special needs school and Sami school, SOU 2021:33', see <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/f0785293473f4488ad7132aa06fbb1a1/en-tioarig-grundskola-sou-202133/>.

An **assistant** is an individual that supports the core practitioner with a group of children or class on a daily basis. The job title usually explicitly indicates that the role has an assistance function (e.g. *pædagogmedhjælper* in Denmark) or that it is childcare-related (e.g. *Kinderpfleger/-innen* in Germany).

The first section of this chapter examines the initial qualifications required for core practitioners and assistants. It then explores the requirements for core practitioners and assistants to undergo continuing professional development (CPD).

Qualification requirements for ECEC staff

Analysis of the minimum qualification levels for core practitioners reveals large differences between regulations for work with younger and older children (see Figure 4). Less than half of European education systems require that at least one of the team members caring for a group of children, regardless of age, be highly educated. The minimum is set at Bachelor's level (ISCED 6) throughout the entire ECEC phase in Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Croatia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Norway. It is set at Master's level (ISCED 7) in Portugal and Iceland. In Italy and France, it is set at Bachelor's level (ISCED 6) for children under 3 and at Master's level (ISCED 7) for children aged 3 and over. However, sometimes the situation is more complex than the minimum requirements reveal. For example,

In **France**, the minimum requirement is set at ISCED 6 for core practitioners working with younger children (i.e. early childhood educator – *éducateur de jeunes enfants* and paediatric nurse – *puéricultrice*). Article R2324-42 of the Public Health Code sets out that at least 40 % of the staff must be state-qualified paediatric nurses or nurses, early childhood educators, psychometricians or assistant child nurses. These levels of qualification range from ISCED level 3 to ISCED level 6. Pre-primary teachers (*professeur des écoles*) working with older children need to have full teacher training with ISCED 7 qualification. However, the requirements have been lowered in 2023–2026 for pre-primary schools experiencing recruitment difficulties ⁽⁷⁾.

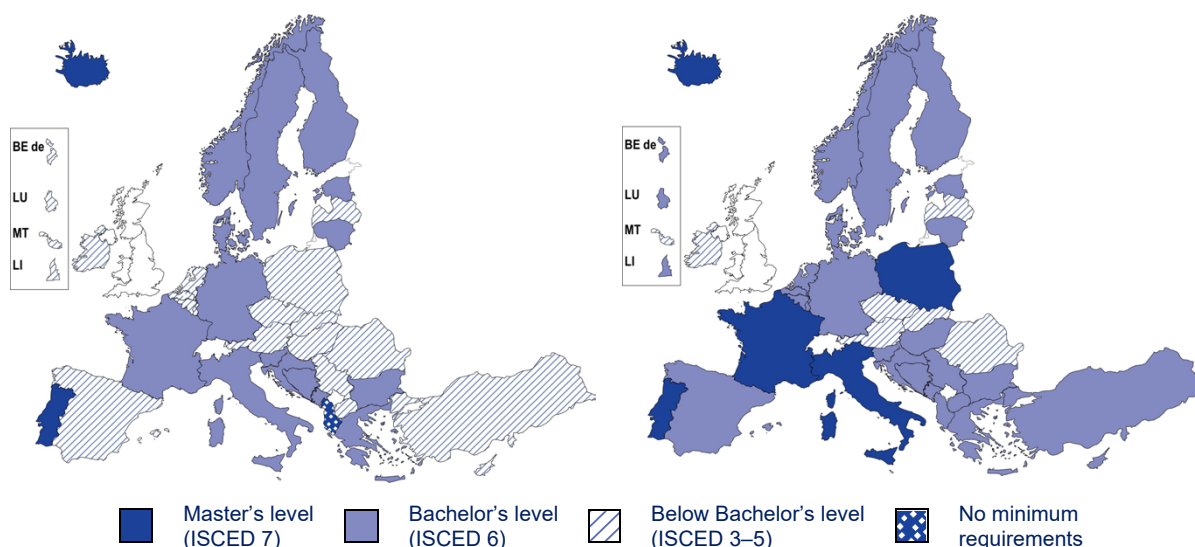
In one third of the education systems, a high qualification level is considered essential during the second phase of ECEC (pre-primary education), but not during the first phase (early childhood educational development or childcare) in groups of children under age 3. This is the case in Belgium (all three Communities), Spain, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Albania, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye.

⁽⁷⁾ See <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000046829206> and <https://www.devenirenseignant.gouv.fr/cid98467/les-textes-officiels-reference-sur-les-concours.html>.

Figure 4: Minimum qualification levels required to enter the ECEC core practitioner profession, 2022/2023

a) Settings for children under the age of 3

b) Settings for children aged 3 and over



ISCED level required to become a core practitioner in centre-based ECEC settings

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU
Under age 3	4	3	4	6	3	6	6	6	4	6	5	6	6	6	5	5	6	4	4
3 years and over	6	6	6	6	3	6	6	6	4	6	6	7	6	7	6	5	6	6	6
	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Under age 3	4	3	5	3	7	3	6	3	6	6	○	6	7	3	6	3	6	3	3
3 years and over	4	6	5	7	7	3	6	3	6	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	6	6

○ No minimum requirements

Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

For the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), see [here](#).

The rows are merged when the same type of staff with the same minimum qualification work throughout the entire ECEC.

Country-specific note

Poland: the minimum requirements for employing pre-primary teachers in nursery schools (ISCED 02) are still defined as ISCED 5, although programmes that trained teachers at this level were phased out in 2016 (college programmes). The percentage of pre-primary teachers currently employed with ISCED 5 qualifications is 0.2 %.

In seven European countries (Czechia, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Austria, Romania and Slovakia), the minimum qualification level required to work as a core practitioner during the entire ECEC phase, with any age group, is below Bachelor's level.

In **Czechia**, there are two types of ECEC with different requirements for core practitioners. Pre-primary teachers that work in nursery schools (with children aged 2 years and over) are required to have completed upper secondary education (ISCED 354) in the study field of pre-primary pedagogy. For childcare workers employed in children's groups (that cater to children from the age of 6 months till primary education), upper secondary education (ISCED 354) in the study field of pedagogy or health services or social services is the minimum qualification required.

The minimum qualification requirement to work in ECEC in **Ireland** is ISCED 4, which typically requires a 1-year training course. As part of the ECCE free preschool programme, which provides free preschool for 3–5-year-olds, there is a contractual requirement that the lead educator (i.e. teacher) with each group of children should have a relevant ISCED 5 qualification.

In **Latvia**, preschool teachers and sports teachers are required to have completed a short cycle in tertiary education (ISCED 5) in pedagogy and professional teacher's qualification (including in-school placement, final examinations and diploma thesis). For music teachers, ISCED 6 qualification is required.

In **Malta**, an ISCED 4 education diploma and the successful completion of a 1-year probationary period are required to work as kindergarten or childcare educator ⁽⁸⁾.

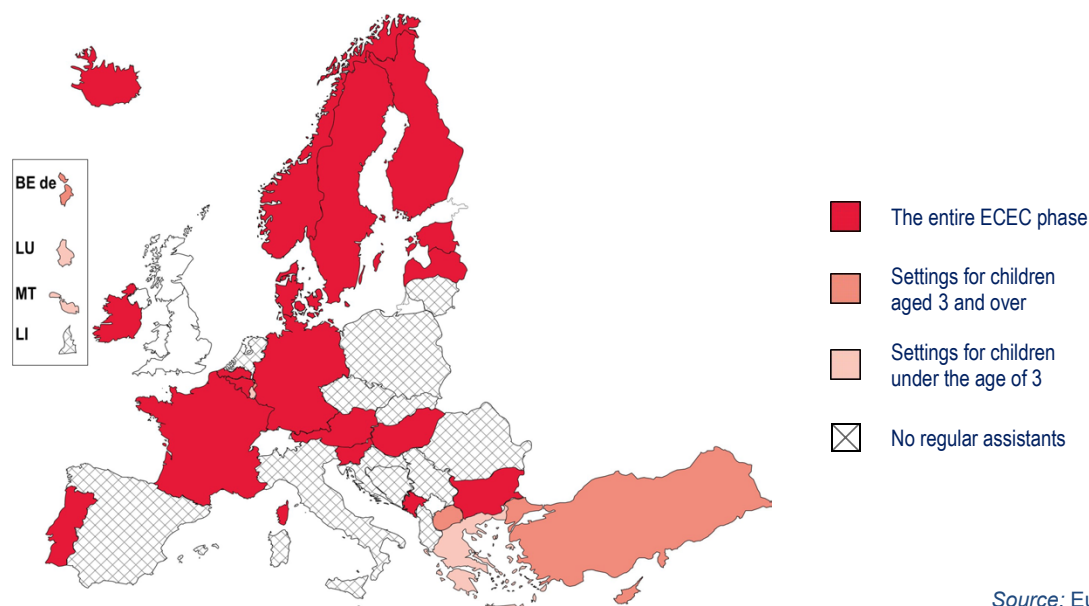
⁽⁸⁾ Call for Applications for Kindergarten Educators issued on 18/11/2022 available online at: https://recruitmentadmin.gov.mt/attachments/circulars/33f175ce-6734-4f77-b2d7-865f5dc88583_p.pdf.

In **Austria**, a pre-primary teacher (*Elementarpädagogin/-pädagogin*) needs to be a graduate of an educational institution for elementary education (ISCED 5).

In **Romania**, both early childhood educators (*puericultor*) working in settings for children under age 3 and pre-primary teachers are required to have a secondary education degree (ISCED 3). However, the majority of staff working with children aged 3 and over hold a Bachelor's degree (ISCED 6).

In **Slovakia**, upper-secondary vocational education (ISCED 3) in the study field of pre-primary pedagogy is required for pre-primary teachers (*učiteľ materskej školy*) that work with children aged 3 years and over. The minimum qualification for core practitioner that works with children under (*opatrovateľ detí*) is upper secondary education (ISCED 3) and further education of at least a 220-hour accredited course in providing care for children of up to 3 years of age.

Figure 5: Regular assistants in ECEC, 2022/2023



Source: Eurydice.

Minimum ISCED level required to be employed as assistant in ECEC settings

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU
Under age 3	3	x	3	3	x	○	3	○	4	4	x	3	x	x	x	○	x	○	2
3 years and over	4	3	3	3	x	○	3	○	4	x	x	3	x	x	3	○	x	x	3
	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Under age 3	3	x	3	x	3	x	3	x	3	3	x	x	○	x	4	x	○	x	x
3 years and over	x	x	3	x	3	x	3	x	3	3	x	x	○	x	4	3	○	x	3

○ No minimum requirements x No assistants

Explanatory note

Assistants recruited for specific purposes such as to provide extra support for groups that have children with special needs, or for other local needs, are not taken into account.

For the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), see [here](#).

To gain a more complete picture of staff whose duties involve ECEC, it is necessary to look beyond the core practitioners. Different types of staff usually work together with groups of children in ECEC. Assistants support the daily work of core practitioners in more than half of European education systems (see Figure 5). Assistants usually supervise children in the playground or during outdoor activities and attend meals and various activities planned by core practitioners. Often, assistants have lower qualification requirements.

In **Germany**, core pedagogic staff (*pädagogische Fachkräfte*) in ECEC are trained at Fachschulen for youth and community work for 3 years or at higher education institutions for 4 years (both ISCED 6). In some *Länder*, supplemental pedagogic staff, especially nursery assistants (*Kinderpflegerinnen* and *Kinderpfleger*), are employed. Usually, these staff are required to have a 2-year training course at Berufsfachschulen, full-time vocational schools (ISCED 3).

In **Slovenia**, preschool teachers with a Bachelor's degree in preschool education (ISCED 6) and preschool teacher assistants manage classroom activities together. Assistants are required to have upper secondary degree in the education of preschool children or have completed an upper secondary general school (*gimnazija*) and a vocational course for ECEC (ISCED 3).

In some education systems, assistants are available only in the first or in the second phase of ECEC. In Greece, Luxembourg and Malta, assistants support core practitioners in settings for children under age 3, while in the German-speaking Community of Belgium, Cyprus, North Macedonia and Türkiye, they only work in settings for older children.

There are no regular assistants in ECEC sector in 13 countries (Czechia, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein and Serbia). However, there might be some additional staff employed to support children with special education needs, and there might be several core practitioners working together as a team in one group.

Usually, upper secondary qualification (ISCED 3) is required to be employed as an assistant in ECEC centres. This typically means having an upper secondary educational qualification in ECEC or having completed general upper secondary education and a 1-year vocational course for ECEC. Assistants must have completed post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 4) in the French Community of Belgium (when working with children over age 2.5), Ireland, Greece and Montenegro.

There are no minimum qualification requirements for assistants throughout the ECEC phase in Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Iceland and Norway, as well as in Luxembourg (where non-qualified staff are employed only in settings with very young children). Some countries might still employ assistants with qualifications.

In **Denmark**, two types of assistants can be employed: a pedagogic assistant (*pædagogisk assistent*) with a vocational ISCED 3 qualification and an assistant (*pædagogmedhjælper*) with no minimum qualification requirements. In 2021, among the staff in the municipal and self-governing institutions, 6 % had completed ISCED 3 education to become a pedagogical assistant, while 36 % had no pedagogical education. In private institutions, the proportions were respectively 5 % and 42 %. Overall, 55 % of staff in the municipal and self-governing institutions and 50 % of staff in private institutions had received a pedagogical education (ISCED 6) ⁽⁹⁾.

In **Luxembourg**, in ECEC settings for children under the age of 3, unqualified staff may constitute at most 10 % of the staff and must complete a specific 100-hour training ⁽¹⁰⁾.

In **Norway**, there are two types of assistants: child and youth workers with an ISCED 3 vocational qualification and other assistants without any minimum qualification requirements. The child and youth workers constitute 23 % of staff in ECEC, while assistants with a different background constitute 31 %. Overall, staff with kindergarten teacher or other pedagogic/higher education comprise 46 % of ECEC staff ⁽¹¹⁾.

Continuing professional development regulations for ECEC staff

Establishing the initial qualification requirements for staff working with children is only the starting point in ensuring a well-qualified workforce. Continuing professional development (CPD) is also crucial as it allows employees to upgrade their knowledge and skills throughout their career.

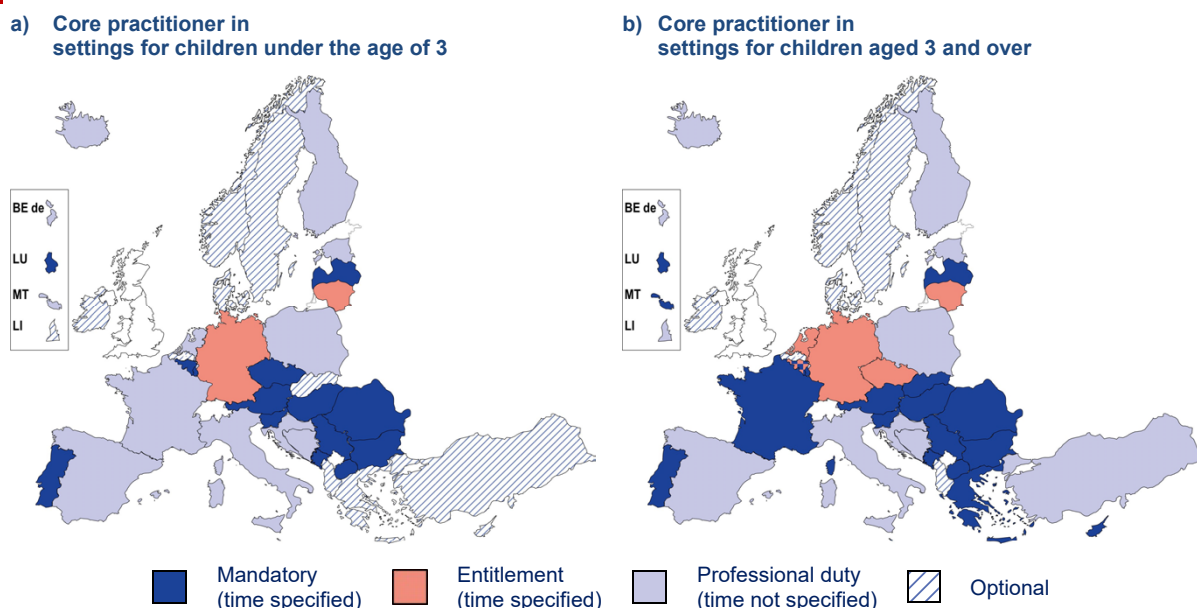
Countries regulate the CPD of ECEC staff in different ways (see Figure 6). The most fundamental distinction is whether the CPD is considered a professional duty or an optional activity. For the purposes of this report, CPD is considered a professional duty if participation is explicitly defined as such in top-level regulations. It is considered optional if there is no statutory obligation in top-level policy documents for ECEC staff to participate in CPD or if CPD is not mentioned.

⁽⁹⁾ Statistics Denmark BOERN1 and PBOERN1.

⁽¹⁰⁾ <https://www.enfancejeunesse.lu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/RGD-SEA-version-coordonnee.pdf> (Art. 7. (1) 3).

⁽¹¹⁾ Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2022. See <https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/statistikk/statistikk-barnehage/ansattes-utdanning-andel/>.

Figure 6: Continuing professional development status of ECEC core practitioners, 2022/2023



Minimum number of defined CPD hours (h) or days (d) for the given number of years (y).
Mandatory time is shown in bold blue, while entitlement is in regular dark red.

Core practitioners

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU
Under age 3	2d /1y	duty	○	36h /4y	8h /1y	○	5d /1y	duty	○	○	duty	duty	duty	duty	○	36h /3y	5d /1y	32h /2y	70h /4y
3 years and over	3d+5d /1y	duty	○	36h /4y	12d /1y	○	5d /1y	duty	○	24h /1y	duty	18h /1y	duty	duty	2d /1y	36h /3y	5d /1y	16h /1y	90h /7y
	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Under age 3	duty	duty	2d /1y	duty	50h /4y	270h /5y	15d /3y	○	duty	○	○	duty	duty	○	36h /5y	10h /5y	○	60h /1y	○
3 years and over	28h /1y	83h /1y	1y	duty	50h /4y	270h /5y	15d /3y	20h /1y	duty	○	○	duty	duty	duty	36h /5y	20h /5y	○	60h /1y	duty

Assistants

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU
Under age 3	2d /1y	x	○	duty	x	○	○	○	○	○	x	duty	x	x	x	○	x	32h /2y	○
3 years and over	2d /1y	duty	○	○	x	○	○	○	○	x	x	2d /5y	x	x	○	○	x	x	○
	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Under age 3	duty	x	○	x	○	x	15d /3y	x	duty	○	x	x	○	x	36h /5y	x	○	x	x
3 years and over	x	x	○	x	○	x	15d /3y	x	duty	○	x	x	○	x	x	10h /5y	○	x	○

○ CPD is optional x No assistants

Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

Mandatory: CPD is compulsory and the minimum amount of time to be spent on it is specified.

Entitlement: there are specific hours, days or credits that staff are entitled to take, and settings are obliged to provide the opportunity to pursue CPD.

Professional duty: CPD is described as such in the regulations; alternatively, it is deemed compulsory but the amount of time to be spent on it is not specified.

Optional: there is no statutory obligation to participate in CPD.

The rows are merged when the same type of staff with the same minimum qualifications work throughout the entire ECEC.

Country-specific note

Romania: regulations state 90 credits per 5 years. In the table, 8 ECTS are considered to be equivalent to 24-hour CPD.

CPD may also be defined in terms of the time that is allocated to each teacher for various training activities. A recent Eurydice report entitled *Teachers in Europe: careers, development and well-being* revealed that teachers tend to participate in more types of CPD in the countries where time for CPD is defined for every teacher (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2021, pp. 91–94).

Two types of time allocation are considered: mandatory and/or entitlement. CPD is considered mandatory if there is a specified minimum amount (hours, days, credits, etc.) of CPD required during a certain period (usually during a school year or a few years). When CPD is defined as an entitlement, a certain amount of CPD time is granted for staff during or outside of teaching (working) hours. However, it is not compulsory for staff to use these hours.

One third of the education systems make CPD mandatory for core practitioners working with younger children, specifying its minimum duration over a defined period of time (see Figure 6a). A few more, but still less than half of the education systems, require CPD for core practitioners working with older children (see Figure 6b). Mandatory CPD usually means that support is offered to staff to participate in these activities, for example CPD is provided during working time or the costs of courses and travel are reimbursed. This is not always the case in education systems where CPD is considered a professional duty or is optional.

Most commonly, teachers are required to carry out 1 to 3 days of CPD per year. Several countries require more.

In **Slovenia**, according to the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (Articles 105 and 119), professional education and training is one of a teacher's mandatory tasks. Regulations stipulate that teachers are required to carry out a minimum of 5 days of CPD a year or 15 days over 3 years. The Collective Agreement for Education stipulates that unjustified refusal of participation in CPD is a minor violation of work obligations (Article 65). The Ministry responsible for education opens invitations for in-service training for pedagogical staff and co-finances the programmes that are in line with the priority themes of the Ministry.

In **Serbia**, the Law on the Education System Foundations requires that all ECEC and school staff – licenced and non-licenced alike – participate in CPD. According to the Bylaw on Continuing Professional Development of Teachers and Education Staff, all ECEC and school staff are obligated to complete at least 44 hours of CPD in their own institution each year, participate in at least one CPD programme (minimum 8 hours) and take part in at least one expert meeting (e.g. a conference, round table, summer school), which usually lasts 8 hours (1 day) or more.

In several education systems, CPD is considered an entitlement, with a set amount of time specified in top-level regulations or collective agreements. The most common practice is to grant approximately 5 working days for CPD per year, but several countries recommend more than that.

In **Czechia**, the Act on Education Staff sets an obligation for all education staff, including pre-primary teachers working in settings with older children (*učitel mateřské školy*), to participate in CPD in order to renew, strengthen and supplement their qualifications. In-service training of education staff is organised by a school head in accordance with a plan of in-service training. One of the ways to fulfil the legal obligation to participate in CPD is via self-study. All teachers employed in the public sector are entitled to 12 working days off per school year for self-study unless it is prevented by serious operational reasons⁽¹²⁾. According to the amendment to the Act on Providing Childcare in a Children's Group in force since October 2021, all care providers for younger children are obliged to provide the childcare staff (*pečující osoba*) with at least 8 hours of training per year and a first aid course once every 2 years. The childcare staff must provide proof of completion of the CPD⁽¹³⁾.

In 14 **German Länder**, legislation allows employees to attend continuing education courses, granting paid educational leave for up to 5 working days per year with no loss in earnings, provided that certain conditions are fulfilled.

In **Lithuania**, all teachers, including pre-primary, have a duty and an entitlement to engage in CPD activities for at least 5 days per year.

For staff in support roles, CPD is usually optional. There are few exceptions. In Slovenia and Montenegro, the same requirements for CPD apply to all staff, including mandatory CPD for assistants. Belgium (French Community) encourages CPD for all staff and sets higher requirements for educational staff.

⁽¹²⁾ Act on Education Staff (563/2004) § 24, see <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-563#p24>.

⁽¹³⁾ Act on Providing Childcare in a Children's Group (247/2014) § 5c, see <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2014-247#p5c>.

In **Belgium (French Community)**, all ECEC staff, including those working in private and public settings for children under age 3, must take part in a minimum of 2 days of mandatory CPD. Pre-primary teachers need to complete 6 half days of compulsory CPD spread over the school year. In addition to mandatory training, teachers may also engage in voluntary CPD activities during or outside the working hours. During their working hours, teachers are entitled to take 10 half days per year for training.

Several countries have introduced structural reforms concerning staff qualification or CPD. Ireland, Italy and Finland have raised or are in the process of raising a minimum qualification requirement for all or for a large proportion of staff working with children. However, the process of staff professionalisation is still ongoing.

In **Bulgaria**, from January 2023, a pre-primary teacher (*detski uchitel*) may work not only in groups with older children, but also in nurseries (*detska yasla*) or in nursery groups within kindergartens (*detska gradina*). However, at least one medical specialist needs to be employed in each nursery. Before the amendment, in groups for children under age 3, a nurse (*meditsinska sestra*) and a babysitter (*detegledachka*) were employed (14).

In **Czechia**, staff providing childcare services for under 3-year-olds are required to do 8 hours of CPD per year since October 2021.

In **Ireland**, 'Nurturing skills: the workforce plan for early learning and care and school-age childcare 2022–2028' commits to strengthening the availability of and support for CPD for ECEC staff (15).

In **Spain**, in 2022, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training presented a document on the improvement of the teaching profession. The proposals affect initial training, access to the teaching profession, permanent training and professional development. It is currently being discussed with the Educational Unions and at the General Education Commission of the Autonomous Communities (16).

In **France**, a committee has been set up to prepare proposals to improve the recruitment and training of staff in the early childhood sector working with children under age 3 (17).

Italy raised the minimum qualification for early childhood educators (0–3 years) to a 3-years Bachelor degree (ISCED 6) in educational science. This requirement (18) is in force since the 2019/2020 school year, and the first students graduated from this 3-year education programme in 2021/2022.

In **Austria**, a new school type called 'school for pedagogical assistant professions' (*Fachschule für pädagogische Assistenzberufe* - ISCED level 3) has been operating since September 2018.

In **Finland**, a long-term reform to raise staff qualifications was adopted in 2018. The reform aims to improve quality in ECEC by raising the competences of personnel. As of 2030, 2/3 of core practitioners (currently 1/3) in centre-based ECEC must have a Bachelor's degree, and at least 50 % of them must have graduated in education (19).

The **Swedish** National Agency for Education has been tasked with developing the content of a national professional programme which will contain a national structure for competence development and a national qualification system. The ambition is for teachers and preschool teachers to be offered a structured competence development and the opportunity to have this competence recognised. The legislation will enter into force on 1 January 2025 (20).

(14) Art. 14(5), see <https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135608240>.

(15) See Pillar 3, pp. 74–75 at www.gov.ie/NurturingSkills.

(16) <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/serviciosdeprensa/notasprensa/educacion/Documents/2022/270122-Documento%2024%20propuestas.pdf>.

(17) Initial recommendations were made in June 2022, see https://sante.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/comite_de_filiere_petite_enfance_-_communiqu_e_du_29.06_2022.pdf.

(18) See Article 4, par. 1 and Article 14, par. 3 at <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/05/16/17G00073/sg>, and see Ministerial Decree no 378/2018, Article 2, p. 3 at <https://www.miur.gov.it/en/-/titoli-di-accesso-alla-professione-di-educatore-dei-servizi-educativi-per-infanzia-dlgs-n-65-2017>.

(19) See chapters 6 and 7 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018) <https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2018/en20180540.pdf>.

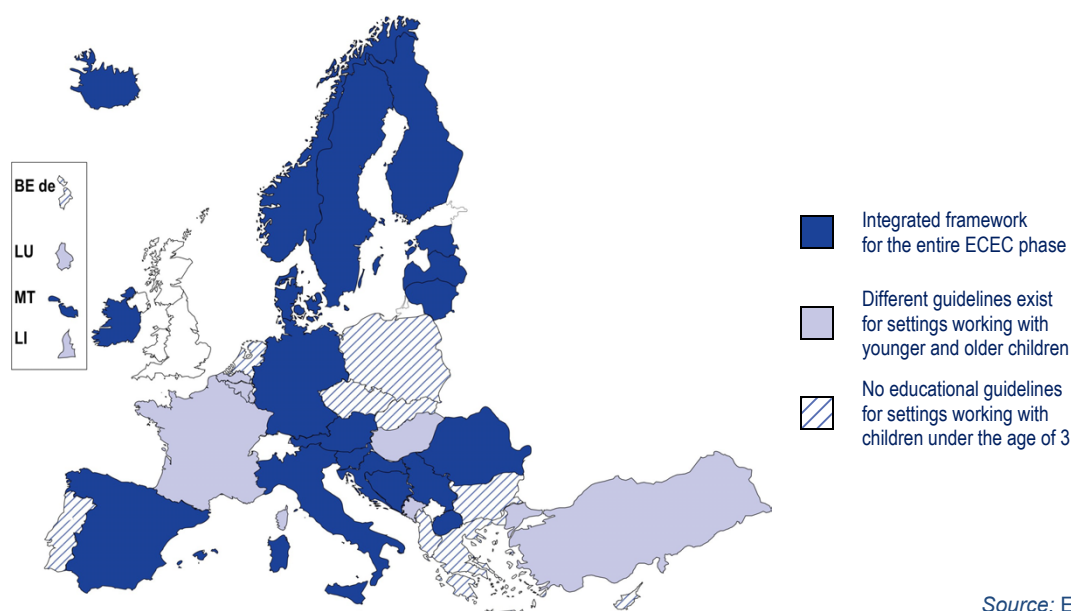
(20) <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2023/01/nationellt-professionsprogram-ska-ge-rektorer-larare-och-forskollarare-battare-kompetensutveckling-och-tydligare-karriarvagrar/>.

3. Educational guidelines

Children’s development and learning is central to the quality of ECEC provision. At the national level, policymakers seek to influence the quality of educational processes taking place in ECEC settings by issuing a shared framework of guiding principles or a curriculum. The content of these guidelines varies, but they generally include developmental or learning goals and age-appropriate activities, sometimes in the form of a standard curriculum. They are intended to help settings improve the quality of care and learning and ensure that high standards are found across all ECEC services.

Some countries provide one document that covers the entire phase of ECEC, but usually different aspects of educational guidelines are covered in separate publications. Regulations on ECEC content and teaching approaches may take the form of an education programme, a reference framework of skills, care and education plans, educational standards and criteria for developing local curricula or practical guidelines for ECEC practitioners. These documents may be issued by the same or several different public authorities. The complete list of documents that form ECEC educational guidelines in European countries is provided in Table 1.

Figure 7: ECEC curricula, 2022/2023



Source: Eurydice.

The analysis reveals that top-level authorities in all European countries have issued official guidelines to ensure that settings have an intentional educational component. However, in around a quarter of European education systems, curricula apply only to settings for children aged 3 and over (see Figure 4). In these countries, the split between ‘childcare’ and ‘pre-primary education’ remains. The educational framework is set in separate documents for younger and older children and issued by different authorities in Belgium (French and Flemish Communities), France, Luxembourg, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Montenegro and Türkiye.

The status of the top-level educational guidelines for ECEC settings varies between countries and, in a few cases, within countries according to age ranges (see Table 1). Some countries have issued several documents with different statuses. In these cases, main legal documents or core curricula are binding, but additional support documents may serve as recommendations.

In countries with integrated curricula for the entire ECEC phase, the documents are usually binding. The only exception is Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the guidelines for the implementation of common core curricula are non-binding across the whole ECEC phase.

Increasingly, ECEC systems are introducing learning components from the earliest age. During the last decade, educational guidelines have been introduced for ECEC settings with younger children in Belgium (Flemish Community), France, Italy, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein. Two countries have integrated the educational programme for settings working with younger and older children.

Romania adopted a new curriculum in 2019 that proposes a unitary approach to early education and care from birth to age 6, as there were previously different guidelines for each group.

In **Italy**, educational guidelines for the integrated system (for children aged 0–6 years) were issued at the end of 2021.

New ECEC educational guidelines are in place in several countries. Many countries changed their ECEC educational guidelines or introduced new areas of instruction. The following is a summary of the changes since 2020.

In 2020, **Belgium (French Community)** introduced a revised reference framework on the competences to be developed during the 3 years of pre-primary education.

In **Czechia**, the provision of language support to children with insufficient knowledge of the Czech language was added to the framework educational programme for pre-primary education as of September 2021.

In 2020, **Denmark** issued a new strengthened pedagogical curriculum for the whole ECEC phase.

In **Germany**, the common education framework of the *Länder* for the whole phase of ECEC was revised in 2022.

In **Greece**, creative engagement in English language and soft skills workshops have been included in the preschool curriculum (children aged 4 and over) from 2020/2021. A new national curriculum framework is being launched. During the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 school years, the Curriculum for Preschool Education was piloted in all experimental preschools in the country, in conjunction with the current curricula.

In **Spain**, the two main pieces of legislation on the pedagogical principles and teaching requirements in ECEC were updated in 2020 and 2022 respectively. Royal Decree 95/2022, which establishes the organisation and minimum contents of ECEC, now covers the entire phase from 0 to 6 years.

In **France**, new educational guidelines apply since 2020 for ISCED level 020 settings (targeting children aged 3 and over). Moreover, the areas of language and mathematical skills have each been strengthened (June 2021) in the pre-primary curriculum.

In **Cyprus**, the pre-primary education curriculum was recently restructured in 2020, with a greater focus on skills and support to the language development of young children.

Lithuania updated the curriculum for the last year of pre-primary education in 2022.

In 2022, **Slovenia** started the curriculum revision process, adopting the guiding principles ⁽²¹⁾.

Slovakia introduced a consolidated version of the educational programme for pre-primary education in 2022.

In **Finland**, the 2022 update of the core curriculum for ECEC mainly addressed support to children.

In **Sweden**, the curricula applying to the different phases of ECEC were revised either in 2018 or in 2022.

In **Liechtenstein** and **Montenegro**, the curriculum for ECEC for older children was updated in 2021 and 2023 respectively.

⁽²¹⁾ https://www.zrssi.si/pdf/izhodisca_za_prenovo_KZV.pdf.

Country	Table 1: Top-level educational guidelines, 2022/2023	Children < 3 years	Children ≥ 3 years	Pre-primary classes
<p>● Binding ○ Non-binding No pre-primary classes</p>				
BE fr	Quality Code for ECEC Centres (Code de Qualité de l'Accueil)	●		
	Psycho-pedagogical guide for quality childcare - Minding very young children, go for quality (Référentiel psychopédagogique pour des milieux d'accueil de qualité - Accueillir les tout petits, oser la qualité)	○		
	Guidelines for quality practices in ECEC (Meeting the families, Meeting the children, Supporting professionals) (Repères pour des pratiques d'accueil de qualité (À la rencontre des familles, À la rencontre des enfants, Soutien à l'activité des professionnels))	○		
	Initial Skills Reference Guide (Référentiel des compétences initiales)		●	
BE de	Activity plan for pre-primary education (Aktivitätenplan für den Kindergarten)		●	
	Decree of 26 April 1999 on regular basic education (26. April 1999 - Dekret über das Regelgrundschulwesen)		●	
BE nl	A pedagogical framework for childcare for babies and toddlers (Een pedagogisch raamwerk voor de kinderopvang van baby's en peuters)	○		
	Developmental aims of pre-primary education (Ontwikkelingsdoelen kleuteronderwijs)		●	
	Decree on elementary education (Decreet basisonderwijs)		●	
BG	Pre-school and School Education Act (Закон за предучилищното и училищното образование)			●
	Regulation N 5 for pre-school education (Наредба № 5 от 3 юни 2016 г. за предучилищното образование)			●
CZ	Framework Educational Programme for Pre-primary Education (Rámcový vzdělávací program pro předškolní vzdělávání)		●	
DK	Executive Order on pedagogical objectives and content in six curriculum themes (Bekendtgørelse om pædagogiske mål og indhold i seks læreplanstemaer)	●		
	The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (Bekendtgørelse af lov om dag-, fritids- og klubtilbud m.v. til børn og unge (dagtilbudsloven))	●		
	The strengthened pedagogical curriculum - Framework and content (Den styrkede pædagogiske læreplan Rammer og indhold)	●		
DE	Common Framework of the Federal States for Early Education in Child Care Centres (Gemeinsamer Rahmen der Länder für die frühe Bildung in Kindertageseinrichtungen)	●		
EE	The national curriculum of preschool institutions (Koolieelse lasteasutuse riiklik õppekava)	●		
IE	Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	●		
EL	A cross-thematic curriculum framework for compulsory education (διαθεματικό ενιαίο πλαίσιο προγραμμάτων σπουδών (δ.ε.π.π.σ.))		●	
	Pre-school Education Teachers' Guide (Οδηγός Νηπιαγωγού)		●	
	Curriculum for Pre-school Education (Προγραμμα σπουδών για την Προσχολική Εκπαίδευση)		●	
	Skills labs (Εργαστήρια Δεξιοτήτων)		●	
ES	Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December, which modifies Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education (Ley Orgánica 3/2020, de 29 de diciembre, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación.)	●		
	Royal Decree 95/2022, of 1 February, which establishes the organisation and minimum teaching of Early Childhood Education (Real Decreto 95/2022, de 1 de febrero, por el que se establece la ordenación y las enseñanzas mínimas de la Educación Infantil.)	●		
FR	National Charter for the care of young children (Charte nationale pour l'accueil du jeune enfant)	○		
	Pre-primary education curriculum (Programme d'enseignement de l'école maternelle)		●	
HR	National Curriculum for Early Childhood and Preschool Education (Nacionalni kurikulum za rani i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje)		●	

Country	Table 1: Top-level educational guidelines, 2022/2023	Children < 3 years	Children ≥ 3 years	Pre-primary classes
	● Binding ○ Non-binding No pre-primary classes			
IT	National guidelines for ECEC under 3 (Orientamenti nazionali per i servizi educativi per l'infanzia)	●		
	Educational guidelines for the integrated system 0-6 (Linee pedagogiche per il sistema integrato zerosei)		●	
	National guidelines for the curriculum of pre-primary education and for the first cycle of education (Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo d'istruzione)			●
	National guidelines and new scenarios (Indicazioni nazionali e nuovi scenari)		●	
CY	Preschool Education Curriculum (Αναλυτικό πρόγραμμα προσχολικής εκπαίδευσης)			●
LV	Regulations regarding the state guidelines for pre-school education and the model pre-school education programmes (Noteikumi par valsts pirmsskolas izglītības vadlīnijām un pirmsskolas izglītības programmu paraugiem)		●	
LT	Outline of Criteria for Preschool Education Curricula (Išimokyklinio ugdymo programų kriterijų aprašas)		●	
	Methodological recommendations for development of preschool curriculum (Metodinės rekomendacijos ikimokyklinio ugdymo programai rengti)		○	
	A description of the achievements of ECEC children (Išimokyklinio amžiaus vaikų pasiekimų aprašas)		○	
	General Curriculum for pre-primary education (Priešmokyklinio ugdymo bendroji programa)			●
LU	Curriculum Framework for Non-formal Education for Children and Youth (Cadre de référence sur l'éducation non formelle des enfants et des jeunes)	●		
	Framework plan for pre-school education (Cycle 1 – first year) (Plan Cadre pour l'éducation précoce)		●	
	Study Plan for Fundamental Education (Cycles 1 (2nd and 3rd years) to 4) (Plan d'études pour l'école fondamentale)			●
HU	National core programme of education and care in crèches (A bölcsődei nevelés-gondozás országos alapprogramja)	●		
	National Core Programme of Kindergarten Education (Az óvodai nevelés országos alapprogramja)		●	
MT	National Standards, Early Childhood Education and Care Services	●		
	A National Curriculum Framework for All 2012		●	
	Learning Outcomes Framework Levels 1 to 4		●	
	Early Childhood Education and Care (0–7 years) – national policy framework for Malta and Gozo		●	
	Educators' Guide for Pedagogy and Assessment: Using a Learning Outcomes Approach		●	
NL	Core objectives for primary education (Kerndoelen primair onderwijs 2006)		●	
AT	Statewide Framework Curriculum for ECEC Services in Austria (Bundesländerübergreifender BildungsRahmenPlan für elementare Bildungseinrichtungen in Österreich)		●	
	Live Values, Develop Values – Development of values in early childhood (Werte leben, Werte bilden: Wertebildung in der frühen Kindheit)		●	
	Module for the last year in early childhood services (Modul für das letzte Jahr in elementaren Bildungseinrichtungen)			●
	Language promotion for the transition from kindergarten to primary school (Sprachliche Förderung am Übergang vom Kindergarten in die Grundschule)			●
PL	Regulation by the Minister of National Education of 14 February 2017 on core curricula for pre-school education and core curricula for general education for primary school including for pupils with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities, general education for stage I sectoral vocational school, general education for special school preparing for employment and general education for post-secondary schools (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 14 lutego 2017 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej wychowania przedszkolnego oraz podstawy programowej kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły podstawowej, w tym dla uczniów z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w stopniu umiarkowanym lub znacznym, kształcenia ogólnego dla branżowej szkoły I stopnia, kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły specjalnej przysposabiającej do pracy oraz kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły policealnej)		●	
PT	Curricular Guidelines for Preschool Education (Orientações Curriculares para a Educação Pré-Escolar)		●	
RO	Curriculum for early childhood education for children from birth to 6 years of age (Curriculum pentru educația)	●		

Country	Table 1: Top-level educational guidelines, 2022/2023	Children < 3 years	Children ≥ 3 years	Pre-primary classes
	● Binding ○ Non-binding  No pre-primary classes			
	timpurie - copii de la nastere la 6 ani			
SI	Kindergarten Curriculum (Kurikulum za vrtce)	●		
	Supplement to the Kindergarten Curriculum for Roma children (Dodatek h Kurikulu za vrtce za otroke Romovh)	●		
	Supplement to the Curriculum for working in the bilingual areas (Dodatek h Kurikulu za delo na dvojezičnih področjihh)	●		
	Instructions regarding the Kindergarten Curriculum with adapted implementation and additional professional support for SEN children (Navodila h Kurikulu za vrtce v programih s prilagojenim izvajanjem in dodatno strokovno pomočjo za otroke s posebnimi potrebami)	●		
	Guidelines for the counselling service in kindergarten (Programske smernice za svetovalno službo v vrtcu)	●		
	Guidelines for the integration of immigrant children in kindergartens and schools (Smernice za vključevanje otrok priseljencev v vrtce in šole)	●		
SK	State Educational Programme for Pre-primary Education in Kindergarten: Consolidated version (Štátny vzdelávácí program pre predprimárne vzdelávanie v materských školách - konsolidované znenie)		●	
FI	National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2022 (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2022)		●	
	National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education 2014 (Esiopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014)			●
SE	Education Act (Skollag (2010:800))		●	
	Curriculum for the pre-school (Läroplan för förskolan, Lpfö 18)	●		
	Curriculum for the elementary school, pre-school class and after-school centres (Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet, Lgr22)			●
AL	Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education (Korniza Kurikulare e Arsimit Parashkollor)		●	
BA	Guidelines for the implementation of common core curricula and defined learning outcomes (Smejernice za implementaciju zajedničke jezgre nastaznih planova li programa i definirano na ishodima učenja)		○	
IS	The Icelandic national curriculum guide for pre-schools (Aðalnámskrá leikskóla)	●		
LI	Guidelines of the Office for social affairs for Approval and Quality assurance of extra-familial child care services (Richtlinien des Amtes für Soziale Dienste für die Bewilligung und Aufsicht in der ausserhäuslichen Betreuung von Kindern)	●		
	National Curriculum (Liechtensteiner Lehrplan)		●	
ME	Programme of care and educational work with children under the age of 3 years (Program njege i vaspitno-obrazovnog rada sa djecom uzrasta do 3 godine)	●		
	Programme for activity areas in preschool education (3–6-years-old) (Program za područja aktivnosti u predškolskom vaspitanju i obrazovanju (od 3 do 6 godina))		●	
MK	Standards for early learning development (Ран детски развој - Стандарди за рано учење и развој кај деца од 0 до 6 години)	●		
	Curriculum for early learning and development (Програма за рано учење и развој)	●		
NO	Framework Plan for Kindergartens (Rammeplan for barnehage)	●		
RS	Fundamentals of the Preschool Education Programme (Osнове programa predškolskog vaspitanja i obrazovanja)		●	
TR	Educational programme for children aged 0–36 months (0-36 Aylık Çocuklar İçin Eğitim Program Kullanım Kılavuzu)	○		
	Pre-school education programme (Okul Öncesi Eğitim Programı)		●	

Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

Pre-primary classes: a specific compulsory ECEC phase during the last 1–2 years of ISCED 020, which provides an educational programme that is distinct from the main ISCED 020 programme. Pre-primary classes may be organised within centre-based ECEC settings or in primary schools.

Country-specific notes

Ireland: the curriculum framework designed for the whole ECEC phase (Aistear) is not legally mandated but is binding for all centre-based settings under contractual agreement for receipt of public funding from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

Greece: the Curriculum for Pre-school Education was piloted in 2022/2023. It will be implemented in all kindergartens from 2023/2024.

Netherlands: there are no national curricula for ECEC for children until the age of 4 years. However, in order to be able to offer *voorschoolse educatie* (subsidised-based provision targeting disadvantaged children) for that age range (2.5 to 4 years), centre-based settings must apply an education programme that meet legal requirements.

Finland: the early education centres that participate in the trial (2021–2024) to extend the pre-primary education programme to 2 years use a separate pilot curriculum.

MAIN FINDINGS

This short report explored a few main aspects of the situation in Europe regarding the right to affordable early childhood education and care (ECEC) of good quality for all children. It reveals large variations between European countries regarding the public commitment to provide a place in ECEC, the requirements for staff and educational guidelines.

Only six EU Member States (Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden) and Norway have no ECEC gap. In these countries, the end of well-paid childcare leave coincides or even overlaps with the start of a place guarantee in ECEC. Families in the rest of Europe may face a gap of one or even several years when the well-paid childcare leave expires, but publicly subsidised ECEC provision is scarce.

The legal place guarantee and the availability and affordability of ECEC increase considerably when children reach the age of 3 years. In the last pre-primary year, almost all European countries offer either a place guarantee or free-of-charge ECEC.

During the last decade, many European countries have been introducing compulsory ECEC for the 1, 2 or even 3 years before the start of primary education. Currently, compulsory ECEC is a more widespread measure than legal entitlement.

The requirements for staff and educational guidelines reveal some aspects of ECEC quality. Currently, less than half of European education systems require that at least one of the team members caring for a group of children, regardless of age, be highly educated. In seven European countries (Czechia, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Austria, Romania and Slovakia), the minimum qualification level required to work as a core practitioner is below Bachelor's level. The requirements for assistants, who work in every ECEC group in more than half of European education systems, are lower. Usually, upper secondary qualification (ISCED 3) is required to be employed as an assistant in ECEC centres.

Continuing professional development (CPD) may compensate for the low initial education and allow employees to upgrade their knowledge and skills throughout their career. However, more European countries tend to allocate time for CPD to core staff working with older rather than younger children. For assistants, CPD is usually optional.

During the last decade, many countries have been revising their educational guidelines for the ECEC sector. Several ECEC systems introduced learning components from the earliest age. However, in 2022/2023, around a quarter of European countries do not have any educational guidelines for settings with children under the age of 3 years.

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This year's edition analyses more than 45 key structural indicators on education policies in early childhood education and care, key competences, digital competence, early leaving from education and training, the teaching profession, equity and higher education.

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