European Commission

EURYDICE REPORT

Key data on **early childhood education and care** in Europe

2025

School education

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European Education and Culture Executive Agency

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Key data on

early childhood education and care in Europe

2025

Eurydice report

Foreword

Our shared future depends on how we support and teach our children. The early years are decisive for a child's personal growth, social development, and learning essential skills. Caring for and educating our children is much more than providing a service, it is a commitment to ensuring that no child is left behind and that every child can thrive.

Early childhood education and care is a cornerstone of educational equity and a powerful driver of social justice. It reduces poverty and social exclusion, while strengthening the bonds that bring our communities together. Early childhood education and care empowers parents, especially women, by enabling them to pursue professional careers. For children, it is a vital step towards acquiring basic skills such as literacy and numeracy as well as crucial socio-emotional skills, including learning how to learn with enthusiasm through playing. Investing in high-quality early childhood education and care is the first step to a ensuring a fairer, more competitive, cohesive, and inclusive Europe.

Legislation commits the European Union to ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has access to affordable, high-quality early childhood education and care. This commitment is a key part of our broader initiative, the European Education Area, which aims to deliver increased opportunities for all learners by 2030. The European Child Guarantee strengthens this vision by ensuring that children in need have access to essential services, including free and effective early childhood education and care, as part of a comprehensive strategy to combat social exclusion.

The present report, Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe - 2025, provides comprehensive insights into the current state of early childhood education and care across our Union. The analysis is structured around the five key dimensions of quality agreed upon by the Member States: access, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, and governance and funding.

The findings are both encouraging and sobering. Many European countries have made notable progress in expanding access to early childhood education and care. However, the universal right to early education is still not fully guaranteed, and the quality of services varies significantly

across and within countries. While the essential role of educators and caregivers is undeniable, staff shortages, the need for better professional development and improved working conditions remain pressing challenges. If we are to meet our ambitious goals, we must take bold, innovative, and collective action.

This report not only provides the current state of play, but it also charts a way forward. I hope it will inspire policymakers, educators, and everyone invested in the future of our children to continue their efforts with renewed enthusiasm. Because investing in early childhood education and care is more than just taking care of our youngest citizens—it is laying the foundation for a brighter, more equitable Europe for all.

Roxana Mînzatu

Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills,
Quality Jobs and Preparedness

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Codes and abbreviations

Country codes

EU	European Union
EU-27	27 Member States of the European Union
BE	Belgium
BE fr	Belgium – French Community
BE de	Belgium – German-speaking Community
BE nl	Belgium – Flemish Community
BG	Bulgaria
CZ	Czechia
DK	Denmark
DE	Germany
EE	Estonia
IE	Ireland
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FR	France
HR	Croatia
IT	Italy
CY	Cyprus
LV	Latvia
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
HU	Hungary
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands
AT	Austria
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
FI	Finland
SE	Sweden

EEA and candidate countries

AL	Albania
BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CH	Switzerland
IS	Iceland
LI	Liechtenstein
ME	Montenegro
MK	North Macedonia
NO	Norway
RS	Serbia
TR	Türkiye

Statistics

:	data not available
–	not applicable

Terms

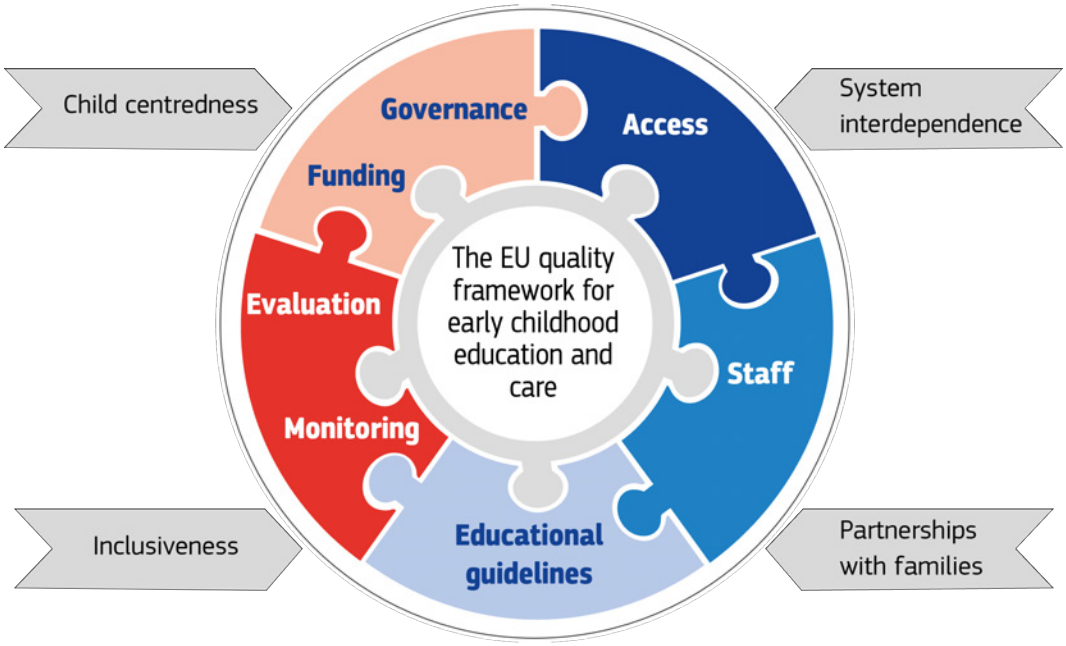
CPD	continuing professional development
EACEA	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
ECEC	early childhood education and care
EU-SILC	EU statistics on income and living conditions
GDP	gross domestic product
ISCED	international standard classification of education
PPS	purchasing power standard
SEN	special educational needs

Summary

'Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality.'

European Pillar of Social Rights, principle 11

Chapters and underlying themes of the report



Source: Eurydice.

Quality of early childhood education and care: the backbone of the report

The five core dimensions of early childhood education and care (ECEC) quality have been agreed by the EU Member States and signed as the Council recommendation on high-quality early childhood education and care systems, adopted in May 2019 ([1]). The *Key data early childhood education and care in Europe - 2025* report is organised according to these topics. Four transversal issues underlie the report's methodological approaches: child centredness, system interdependence, partnerships with parents and inclusiveness.

Child centredness – the child should be always placed at the centre of ECEC policies.

System interdependence – the report analyses the ECEC system as a whole, covering both childcare and early education services. It shows the interconnections between regulations and structural organisation, even when they cross the boundaries of ministerial responsibility.

([1]) Council recommendation of 22 May 2019 on high-quality early childhood education and care systems (OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4), 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.

Partnerships with families – parents and guardians are the most important partners in ECEC; their support is crucial if settings are to provide the optimum conditions for children's learning and development.

Inclusiveness – the report primarily addresses the general ECEC provision available to all children. However, some children need additional, targeted support measures to access and actively participate in mainstream ECEC activities.

The ECEC gap indicates the need to establish the right to ECEC in many countries

The right to ECEC means a guaranteed place in ECEC at the end of childcare leave. This necessitates building bridges between different policy areas, such as social or family rights, as well as education. Currently, the right to ECEC for every child is still an aspiration in many European countries.

Few European education systems guarantee ECEC immediately at the end of childcare leave

Source: Eurydice.

In Europe, there are significant differences in the age at which children have a guaranteed place in ECEC. Only six EU Member States (Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden) and Norway have no ECEC gap, ensuring a place in ECEC for each child around the end of their parents' childcare leave ([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 (although Portugal is still concentrating efforts on providing enough places for 3-year-olds). Around a third of European countries guarantee a place only for the last 1–2 years of ECEC.

([2]) Only 'well-paid' childcare leave is considered, which means earnings-related payment of 66 % of earnings or more. It includes post-natal maternity, paternity and parental leaves.

Despite a drop in the number of children in Europe, expenditure on ECEC has increased

Over the past decade, the number of children has declined in most European countries. In 2023, 25 million children under age 6 lived in the EU. This represents a decrease of more than 2 million in the number of young children in Europe in 10 years.

Children under age 6 in EU-27, in millions

Source: Eurydice based on Eurostat.

Moreover, the population forecast shows that the trend is expected to continue, with 1 million fewer children in the ECEC age range living in the EU-27 by 2030 than in 2023.

Despite the decline in the number2013 of children in most European countries, a rise in expenditure can be observed, which signals the increasing relative importance being given to ECEC. In the EU, the average total public expenditure on ECEC rose from 0.67 % of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2014 to 0.71 % in 2021.

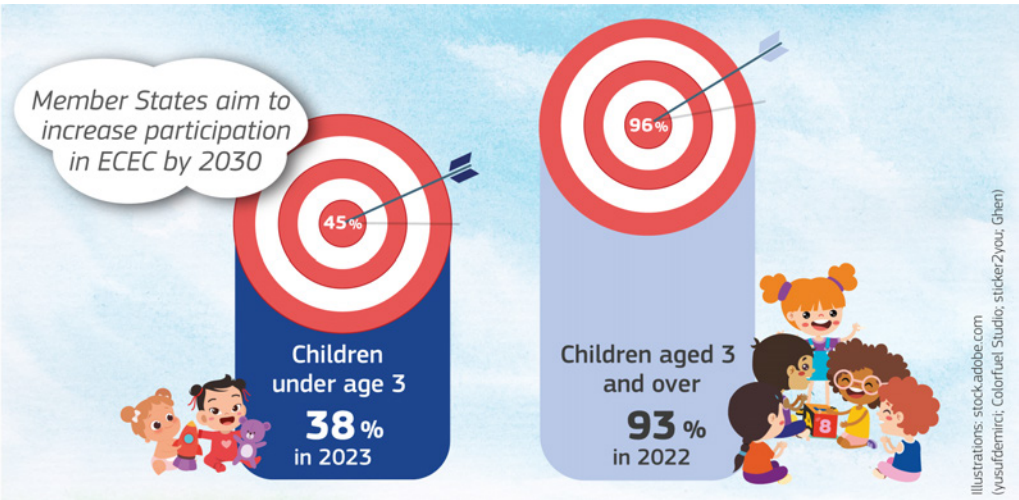
During recent years, the highest ECEC funding growth has been observed in Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Switzerland and Iceland, with each increasing public expenditure by 0.20 percentage points or more between 2014 and 2021. Among European countries, Sweden and Iceland invest the most in ECEC, exceeding 1.6 % of their GDPs. In contrast, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus and Türkiye spent less than 0.30 % of their GDP on ECEC in 2021.

ECEC should be available, accessible and affordable for all

Ten Member States and Norway have already reached and surpassed the target of 45 % of younger children participating in ECEC. Denmark and the Netherlands stand out with the highest participation rates of those aged under 3 in ECEC, reaching 70 % or over in 2023. In contrast, fewer than 5 % of younger children attend ECEC in Czechia, Slovakia and Türkiye.

The participation rate of children aged 3 and over is currently above 96 % in nine countries: Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, Lithuania, Portugal, Sweden, Iceland and Norway. Within the EU, the lowest participation rates are in Greece (68.8 %), Romania (74.8 %), Slovakia (78.6 %) and Bulgaria (80.4 %).

EU targets on ECEC participation



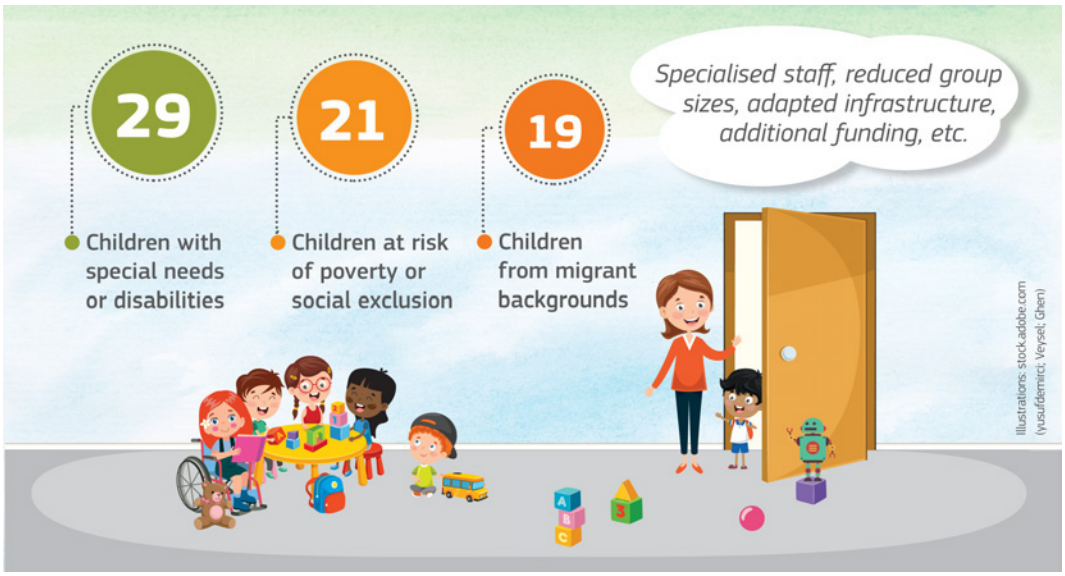
Source: Eurydice based on Eurostat.

With nearly one in four children in the EU being at risk of poverty or social exclusion, most education systems try to ease access to mainstream ECEC for children facing barriers

In 2023, the share of children under age 6 at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU was 23.5 % (5.6 million children). In other words, nearly one in four children in the EU face numerous challenges (e.g. related to nutrition, healthcare and educational opportunities) that can significantly affect their development and well-being. The EU is strongly committed to addressing these challenges through various policy initiatives, such as the European child guarantee, encouraging and supporting Member States to take specific measures to enhance equal opportunities in ECEC for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Few countries guarantee universal access to free ECEC for children from the earliest years. Instead, many have put in place targeted policies and measures to promote ECEC access for children and families. Ensuring fee reductions and priority admission are the main targeted measures for children under the age of 3. These measures are available in 33 education systems, especially for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, children with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities and children with siblings in ECEC or the same setting.

Targeted policies promoting access to mainstream ECEC for children aged 3 and over



Source: Eurydice.

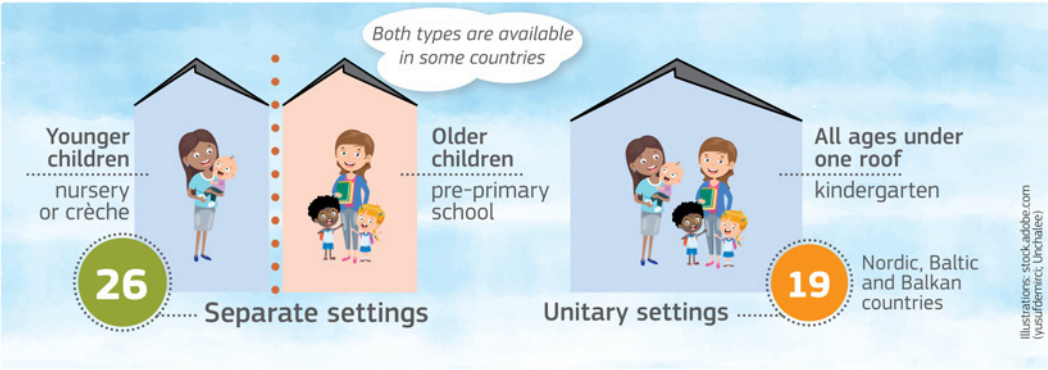
An increasing number of European countries are providing free and universally accessible ECEC places to children from age 3. To encourage attendance, particularly for children facing barriers, many education systems implement additional targeted measures. These initiatives include dedicated funding to improve accessibility and infrastructure to accommodate children with SEN/disabilities in mainstream ECEC settings, additional staff to facilitate the integration of children from migrant backgrounds, and reduced group sizes to facilitate the inclusion of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Separate ECEC settings are the most common set-up in Europe, but governance is integrated

In most European countries, ECEC is provided in two separate types of setting according to children's ages. Children starting centre-based provision at an early age begin in a childcare-type setting before moving to an education-type setting. Usually, the transition from one setting to the next takes place when children are around 3 years old. When ECEC is delivered in a single unitary setting, children attend the same setting until they reach primary school age.

The organisation of ECEC provision and the rules that apply largely depend on the nature of its governance. Assigning the responsibility for the entire ECEC phase to a single ministry or top-level authority may help promote consistent policies and ensure higher-quality services.

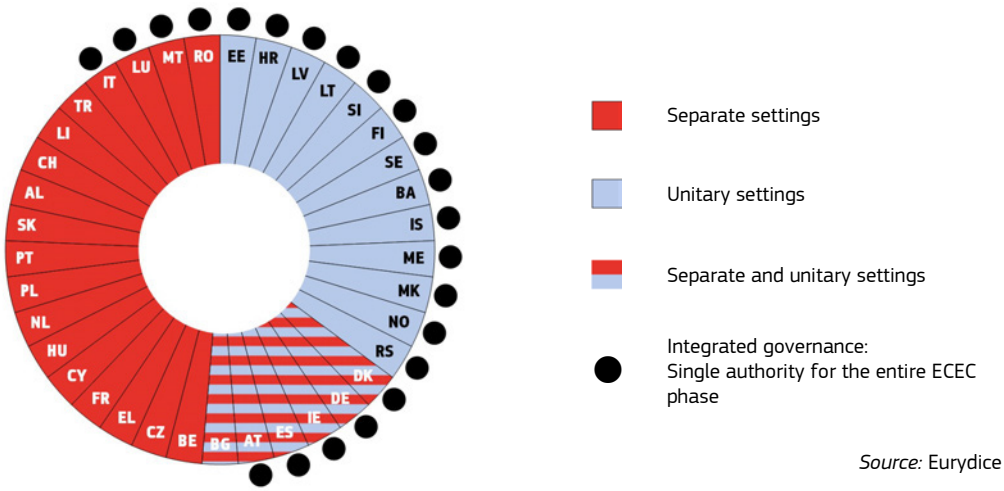
Types of centre-based ECEC settings



Source: Eurydice.

Both integrated and split governance are common in Europe. However, integrated governance, with one leading ministry in charge, prevails in all countries with unitary settings and in most countries with mixed settings. Notably, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania, which employ separate settings, have recently shifted ECEC responsibility to their ministries of education.

Figure 1: Setting structure and governance, 2024/2025

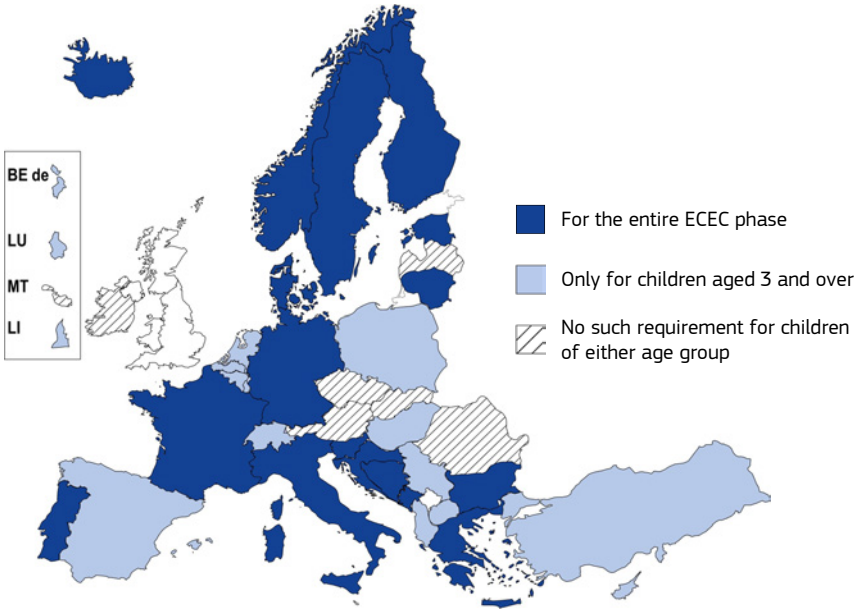


Source: Eurydice

Staff are not required to have at least a bachelor's degree in all education systems

ECEC staff play a crucial role in fostering children's development, safeguarding their health and overall welfare, and facilitating their engagement in daily routines and activities. The quality of children's experiences is influenced by the competence of the staff. Currently, fewer 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 (at least at bachelor's level). In another 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 (childcare or early childhood educational development). 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.

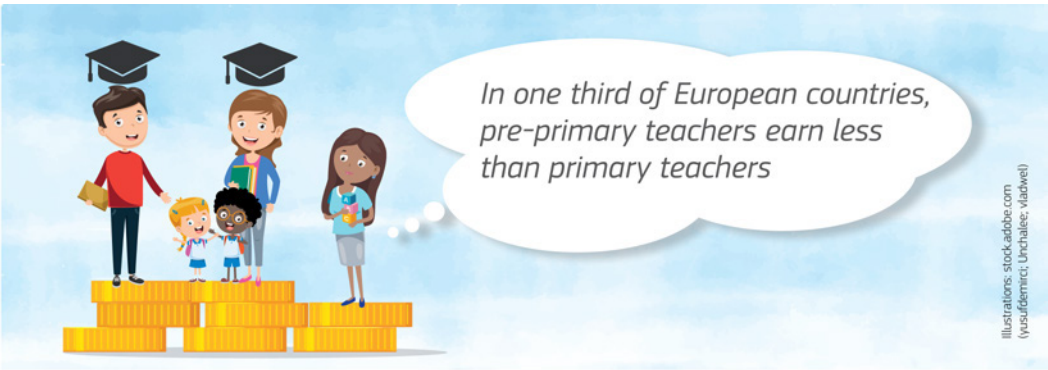
Figure 2: Staff with a minimum of a bachelor's-level qualification, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

Media, policy documents and research frequently highlight the issue of low earnings in the ECEC sector. While this is commonly reported for staff working with younger children, comparable international data on this specific group is lacking. However, information is available about pre-primary teachers working with older children.

Pre-primary and primary teachers tend to receive the same starting salary for the same level of qualification



Source: Eurydice.

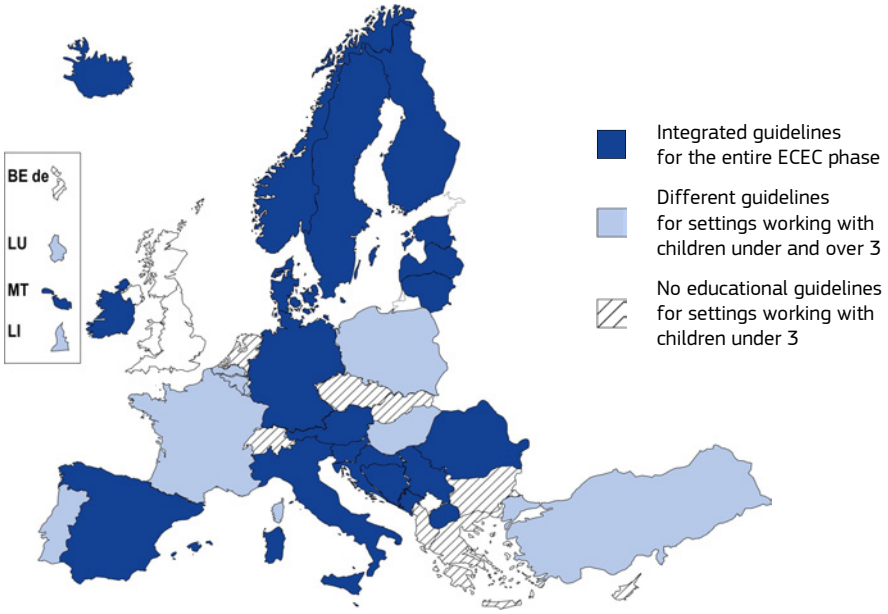
In two thirds of the European education systems, pre-primary and primary education teachers are required to have the same minimum level of qualification. In most of these education systems, the minimum statutory starting salary is the same. However, in a few countries (Denmark, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland and North Macedonia), the salaries are lower for pre-primary teachers than for primary teachers, although the minimum qualification level is the same.

Adjusted for the standard of living, pre-primary teachers receive the highest starting salaries in Luxembourg and Switzerland. In contrast, the starting salaries are lowest in Latvia, Slovakia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

One quarter of European education systems have no national curriculum for pedagogical work with younger children

The importance of ECEC as the foundation of children's learning and development is now widely acknowledged ([3]). All European education systems have issued official guidelines to ensure that educational content is delivered in ECEC settings. The content of these guidelines varies, but they generally include developmental or learning goals, pedagogical principles and, sometimes, suggested learning activities.

Figure 3: Top-level educational guidelines for ECEC settings, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

However, there is still progress to be made in providing educational guidelines for the early years. In a quarter of education systems, curricula are exclusively directed at settings for children aged 3 and over. In such cases, ECEC governance falls under two different authorities depending on age groups, and the split between care-oriented provision for younger children and pre-primary education for children from around age 3 prevails. The framework for younger children in these systems primarily addresses norms related to health, safety and staffing, rather than educational aspects.

On the other hand, eight other education systems with dual authorities have established educational guidelines for the whole age range, sometimes very recently (Poland and Portugal).

([3]) Council recommendation of 22 May 2019. See footnote ([1])

In these cases, an educational component is emphasised from the start of ECEC, but different frameworks apply to settings for younger and older children. While educational guidelines exist for both age groups, it remains crucial to align these steering documents and ensure that the transition from one type of setting to another is adequately supported.

In contrast, 21 education systems have integrated educational guidelines, in which educational objectives and content are set for the entire ECEC period. These are all education systems where a single authority is in charge of the whole ECEC phase.

Sustainability education already starts in ECEC in the vast majority of education systems

Most education systems emphasise fostering environmental awareness and sustainable behaviour in young learners, incorporating two sustainability competences in line with the EU-level competence framework in this area ([4]): valuing sustainability and promoting nature. Meanwhile, the adaptability competence, which focuses on identifying and promoting environmentally conscious behaviours such as recycling, is less widespread in the educational guidelines for ECEC settings. In addition, the scope of sustainability education varies significantly, in depth and level of detail, between education systems. For instance, the promoting nature competence can range from a brief statement, such as 'exposure to nature allows children to know, respect and love it', to more comprehensive learning outcomes and experiences, including understanding the impact of human actions on nature, observing animals or gardening.

Sustainability education in ECEC

Source: Eurydice.

Sustainability education is often integrated within thematic fields that deal with natural sciences, knowledge of the world and environmental knowledge. A few countries consider sustainability one of the primary areas of learning or a cross-curricular theme: Denmark, Germany, Cyprus, Finland, Iceland and Norway. In contrast, in Ireland, Croatia, the Netherlands, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, sustainability is either not addressed in the top-level educational guidelines or not a compulsory area.

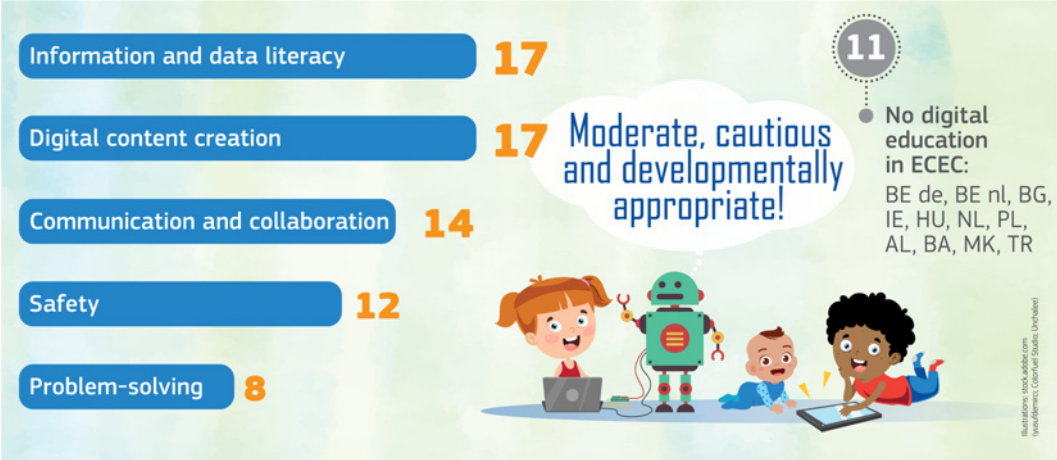
([4]) European Commission's GreenComp framework (European Commission: Joint Research Centre et al., 2022).

Sustainability education often begins at an early age, as it is a common practice in countries that have integrated educational frameworks for the entire period of ECEC. However, a few countries with separate guidelines for younger and older children also include some references to sustainability in guidelines for settings for children under 3: France, Luxembourg, Hungary and Portugal. Conversely, in a few other countries with split ECEC systems (e.g. Belgium, Poland and Liechtenstein), sustainability is exclusively addressed in the guidelines for pre-primary education.

A majority of countries include digital competences in ECEC

While digital education is a key priority in Europe for all levels of education ([5]), European countries have emphasised the need to make young children better understand the risks and opportunities of the digital world during ECEC through developmentally age-appropriate methods ([6]). A majority of education systems outline digital competences to be developed in their top-level educational guidelines for ECEC, aligning with the EU-level competence framework in this area ([7]). The two competences most commonly referred to are 'information and data literacy' and 'digital content creation', followed by 'communication and collaboration', 'safety' and 'problem-solving'.

Digital education in ECEC



Source: Eurydice.

A dozen education systems have established limits on the introduction of digital technologies in ECEC, advocating cautious and moderate use, and prioritising unplugged activities and social interactions to build digital competences. Moreover, countries such as Denmark and Sweden are taking steps to further restrict the use of digital technologies in ECEC by revising their legislation and other steering documents.

([5]) Commission communication – Digital education action plan 2021–2027: Resetting education and training for the digital age (COM(2020) 624 final), https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en.

([6]) Council recommendation of 23 November 2023 on improving the provision of digital skills and competences in education and training (OJ C, C/2024/1030, 23.1.2024), ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/1030/oj.

([7]) DigComp 2.1 framework (European Commission: Joint Research Centre et al., 2017).

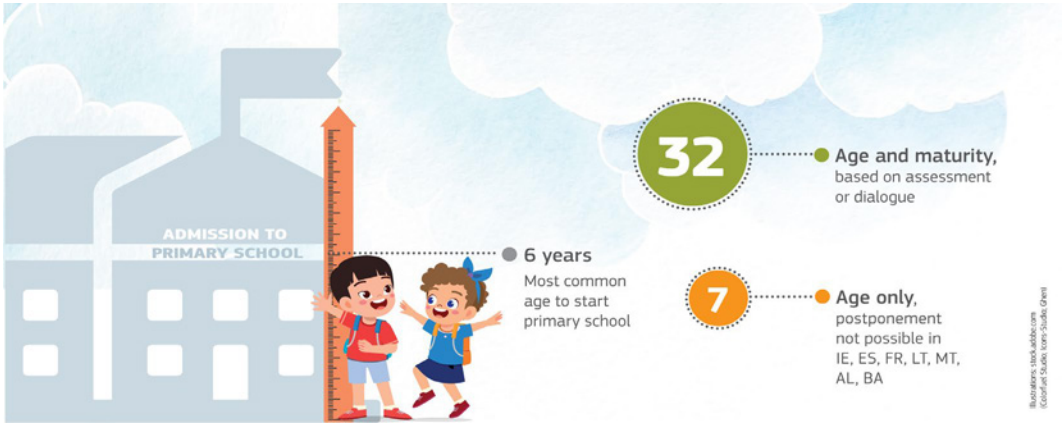
More measures are recommended to ease the transition from ECEC to primary education than between ECEC settings

For a young child, any change – from home or home-based provision to centre-based provision, from one setting to another, or from an ECEC setting to a school – is an important step for which they need to be carefully prepared to ensure a smooth transition. Top-level education authorities may recommend certain measures to ease this change.

In countries that have separate ECEC settings for younger and older children, some children may need to move from a childcare-type setting to an education-type setting around age 3. Recommendations on how this change should be addressed are made in 14 of the education systems where a structural transition occurs. These may include visiting the new setting, gradually increasing the time spent in the new setting or encouraging parents to spend some time with their children in the new setting during the first few days. However, 10 education systems with split settings do not have any top-level recommendations on how to help children and their families with such changes.

The transition from ECEC to primary education can also be challenging, as the two environments can be very different physically and pedagogically. Recommendations on how this transition can be facilitated are issued in 27 education systems. These mostly include measures for collaboration between ECEC and primary education settings and staff, and meetings and exchanges with parents on their role in the transition phase.

Criteria for admission to primary education



Source: Eurydice.

In Europe, children usually start compulsory primary education at 6 years old. In seven education systems (Ireland, Spain, France, Lithuania, Malta, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina), reaching the official age is the only condition for admission to primary school and postponement is not possible. In all other European education systems, additional criteria may be applied and, if a child does not meet the necessary conditions, entry may be deferred. The decision is usually taken based on an assessment of the child's level of maturity or school readiness, involving the parents, educators/teachers and other experts such as paediatricians or psychologists.

Comprehensive external evaluation of ECEC settings is more common in the pre-primary stage

A third of European education systems conduct comprehensive external evaluations across the entire ECEC phase. These evaluations address both structural quality, such as compliance with health and safety norms, and process quality, such as staff–child interactions to promote children's well-being and development. This includes a range of education systems where ECEC governance falls under one single ministry.

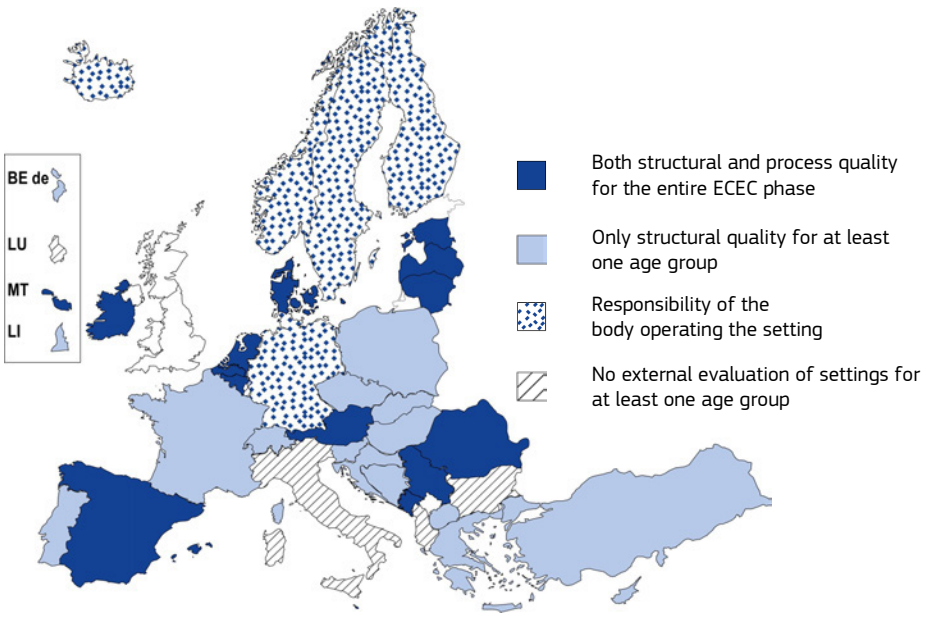
In contrast, in most countries where the governance is split across two authorities by age group, comprehensive evaluations are dedicated to pre-primary schools, while settings for younger children are assessed based on norm compliance. This situation often arises because there are no ECEC curricula for younger children or educational guidelines for this age range have been only recently introduced.

Interestingly, a few education systems with integrated governance (Germany, Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway) have adopted a decentralised approach throughout the entire ECEC phase. Delegating evaluation and monitoring responsibilities to setting providers (such as local authorities, non-governmental organisations or other private bodies) brings these processes closer to local needs but also diversifies the approaches and makes them more difficult to analyse.

In the rest of the countries, either the external evaluation concentrates solely on adherence to norms or there are no regulations regarding this matter.

A few education systems with recent reforms diverge from this pattern. For example, Belgium (French Community) and Romania have just broadened the scope of evaluations to include process quality in settings for younger children.

Figure 4: Main focus of external evaluation of ECEC settings, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Regulations on internal evaluation are also linked to ECEC governance. Most countries with a single leading authority have regulations on internal evaluation that are consistent during the entire ECEC phase. However, in several education systems with split governance, the requirements on internal evaluation are weaker for settings for younger children. Internal evaluation is

not regulated, or is only recommended, during the whole ECEC period in Italy, Cyprus, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Türkiye. In Austria, arrangements are determined at *Bundesland* level.

System integration as a measure of ECEC quality

Assessing ECEC quality is complex, as it involves multiple dimensions that cannot be measured in a straightforward manner. To evaluate the quality of ECEC systems, four key characteristics have been combined into a single, comprehensive overview. Systems with fully integrated policies receive the highest scores, while fewer points are awarded if certain groups of children are excluded or if regulations vary by age group.

Figure 5: Dimensions of ECEC policy integration

Integrated governance	1: Same ministry or top-level authority responsible for the entire ECEC 0: Different ministries responsible
Access: a place is guaranteed	3: From an early age (6–18 months) 2: From 3 years of age 1: For the last 1–2 years of ECEC 0: No place guarantee
Staff with at least bachelor's qualification	2: For the entire ECEC phase 1: For working with children over age 3 0: Qualification lower than bachelor's is required
Educational guidelines	2: Integrated framework for the entire ECEC phase 1: Different curricula for settings working with younger and older children 0: No curriculum for the first phase of ECEC

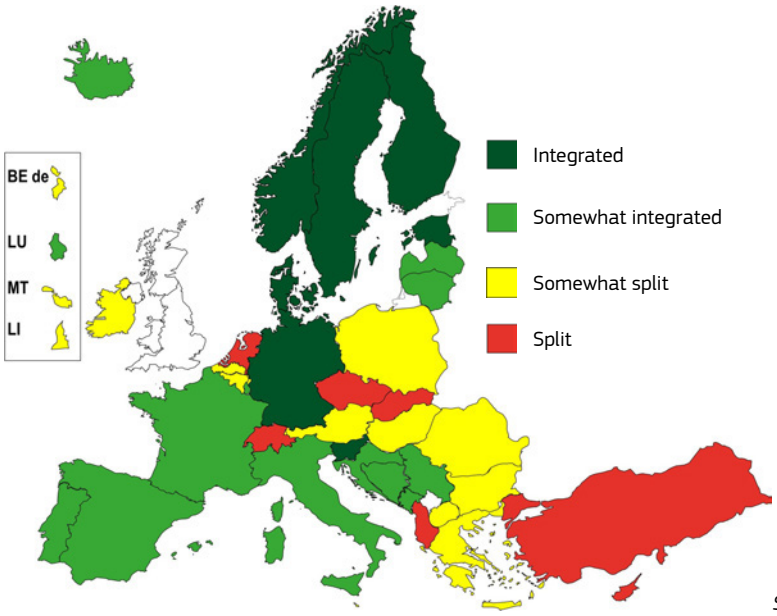
Source: Eurydice.

In Figure 6, each European country is positioned along a continuum ranging from integrated to split ECEC systems. This analysis reveals the different ECEC environments children in Europe experience. Only seven European countries have fully integrated ECEC systems. Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and Norway are the only countries that fulfil all four quality dimensions: integrated governance under one leading authority; entitlement to a place from an early age for every child; staff holding a bachelor's degree in education working with every group of children; and consistent educational guidelines during the entire ECEC phase.

In the typical split ECEC systems, a division between childcare and early education is apparent in most areas. In Czechia, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Albania and Switzerland, different ministries are responsible for ECEC for younger and older children, highly qualified staff are required only in the pre-primary stage (or low requirements are set throughout the entire ECEC phase), there are no top-level guidelines for younger children. These countries do not provide a place guarantee from an early age and have a significant ECEC gap.

All other European countries have one or several aspects in which to improve.

Figure 6: Degree of ECEC system integration, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

Integrated = all four criteria (8 points); somewhat integrated = 5 or 6 points; somewhat split = 3 or 4 points; split = fewer than 3 points. The breakdown of points by each dimension is available in Annex A.

The reforms that have taken place during the last 10 years reveal that European countries have put a lot of effort into expanding the legal frameworks enabling access to ECEC. Reflecting the targets that focus on preparation for school, one third of EU Member States recently introduced an obligation to attend the last year(s) of ECEC, and several are planning such reforms in the near future.

Increasingly, ECEC systems are incorporating 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, Poland, Portugal and Liechtenstein.

There have been some reforms integrating governance. In Italy, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania, the responsibility for services for younger children was transferred to the ministries overseeing education in order to ensure greater policy coherence. Responsibility for childminding services is being moved to the same authority as responsibility for centre-based ECEC in a few countries.

However, substantial investments are still required to raise the minimum qualification requirements for ECEC staff. Important reforms aimed at improving staff qualifications have only been introduced in Italy and Finland.

*

European education systems are seeking ways to improve the accessibility and quality of ECEC for all children. This *Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe* report highlights some of the advances already made in countries and the direction of travel in others. It offers detailed supporting evidence and a wealth of examples of policies from all over Europe in key dimensions of ECEC – on governance and funding, access, staff, educational guidelines, and evaluation and monitoring. It therefore provides a solid foundation for future policymaking and research.

Introduction

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is at an intersection of several important EU policy areas. It is considered a children's right and the foundation for lifelong learning, and a means to encourage female labour market participation and to reduce inequalities.

EU leaders have established ECEC as one of the core social rights of European citizens. One of the 20 key principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights states that 'children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality' ([1]). Moreover, it emphasises that 'children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities'. Although it is still an aspiration in many countries, this interinstitutional proclamation gave impetus to the establishment of the EU quality framework for ECEC and the European child guarantee.

The Council recommendation on high-quality early childhood education and care systems, adopted in May 2019 ([2]), consolidates the concept of high-quality ECEC around five essential dimensions: access, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, and governance and funding. That model is the basis for this report's structure.

The third edition of the *Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe* builds on the 2014 and 2019 editions. It provides an analysis of policy advancements over the past decade and introduces new indicators to address policy trends emerging since the second edition.

The European education area target on ECEC has been updated for 2030 and continues the focus on expanding access, raising the target percentage ([3]): at least 96 % of children between 3 years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in ECEC by 2030.

In 2021, a Council recommendation established a European child guarantee ([4]). This aims to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing that children in need have effective access to a set of key services, including free ECEC and at least one healthy meal per school day.

Other important policy developments since the publication of the last edition of *Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe* are the adoption of the European care strategy ([5]) and the subsequent revision of 'the Barcelona targets' in 2022. The revised targets for 2030 ([6])

([1]) Interinstitutional proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights (OJ C 428, 13.12.2017, p. 9). It was signed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on 17 November 2017 in Gothenburg, Sweden.

([2]) Council recommendation of 22 May 2019 on high-quality early childhood education and care systems (OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4), 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.

([3]) Council resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European education area and beyond (2021–2030) (OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226(01).

([4]) Council recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European child guarantee (OJ L 223, 22.6.2021, p. 14), http://data.europa.eu/eli/reco/2021/1004/oj.

([5]) European Commission (2022), Commission communication on the European care strategy (COM(2022) 440 final).

([6]) Council recommendation of 8 December 2022 on early childhood education and care: The Barcelona targets for 2030 (OJ C 484, 20.12.2022, p. 1), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H1220(01).

aim for at least 45 % of children below the age of 3 to be participating in ECEC ([7]). The targets reiterate the European education area target for older children (96 %) and emphasise the importance of ensuring accessible, affordable and high-quality ECEC.

This new edition aims to feed into these processes providing essential indicators on current ECEC structures and regulations across Europe. It supports evidence-based initiatives and the development of well-informed policies catering to the evolving needs of the ECEC field.

Coverage

ECEC encompasses educational or developmental programmes as well as childcare services for children from birth to the start of compulsory primary education.

The definition used in the report goes beyond the education programmes classified as International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 0 (early childhood education). It includes all registered ECEC services that fall under national (top-level) regulations, not only those with an explicitly defined educational component.

The report covers publicly regulated centre-based and home-based ECEC services. The public, private and voluntary sectors are included. However, the focus is on regulations in public and publicly subsidised sectors.

Centre-based ECEC (also known as a nursery, crèche, kindergarten, daycare centre, pre-primary school or preschool) is defined as ECEC provision that is delivered in dedicated facilities primarily intended for the care and education of young children. These facilities may be stand-alone buildings or part of larger institutions, such as schools or community centres. Centre-based ECEC typically operates in a group setting, with trained staff members supervising and guiding children's activities.

Home-based ECEC (also referred to as a childminding service or family daycare) is defined in this report as publicly regulated ECEC that is delivered in a provider's home or a similar place. Home-based ECEC is usually provided to a small group by one childminder. Sometimes, two or three childminders deliver their services together.

The report focuses on 'mainstream' provision, or the most common types of ECEC provision that take place during the main part of the day. The report does not cover:

- ECEC that operates outside regular hours (e.g. breakfast clubs, after-school activities or holiday camps);
- ECEC delivered in hospitals, orphanages or other such institutions;
- specialised settings for children with special educational needs or disabilities;
- pilot, experimental or temporary ECEC provision;
- 'open' early childhood education services organised for families, where a parent must be present (e.g. playgroups, parent–child centres or workshops);
- individual care that occurs in the child's own home (e.g. live-in and live-out nannies and babysitters, care by relatives).

([7]) Specific targets apply to some Member States. More information is given in Chapter B 'Access', Section III 'Participation'.

The report covers 37 European countries, encompassing 39 distinct education systems: the 27 Member States of the EU and Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Türkiye. Notably, Belgium is represented by its three education systems: the Flemish, French and German-speaking Communities.

Content and structure

The report is structured into two main sections: (1) an international comparison, which provides a broad picture of the European ECEC landscape, and (2) national system information sheets, which present the essential data of individual countries' ECEC systems and may serve as a convenient reference point. This structure ensures a comprehensive understanding of both the broader trends and specific nuances within the realm of ECEC across Europe.

PART I – INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

Chapter A – Governance and funding

The chapter on governance presents the main structural elements of the ECEC systems in Europe. It describes how centre-based ECEC is delivered – either in a unitary setting or in two age-dependent settings. It also outlines the extent of the availability of home-based ECEC or childminding services. The chapter examines the governance and financing mechanisms of ECEC, supported by recent data depicting actual spending on ECEC. Finally, the chapter presents insights into the significance of the government-independent private sector within the broader ECEC landscape.

Chapter B – Access

Availability and affordability are the central themes of the first section of this chapter. The section starts by describing the key measure: the place guarantee – the age at which a place in ECEC is ensured for all children. An indicator of the ECEC gap reveals that families in most European countries face a lengthy period without well-paid childcare leave and with no ECEC place guarantee. The section goes on to analyse the availability of ECEC free of charge for children and their families and the level of fees. A summary indicator shows the demand for and supply of ECEC places at three points: at an early age, around age 3 and during the last year of ECEC.

There is a dedicated section on inclusiveness, highlighting targeted measures implemented by countries when universal provisions are insufficient to ensure accessible and affordable ECEC for the most vulnerable children. This section covers criteria for priority admission, fee reductions and strategies to address barriers for specific groups, including children with special educational needs or disabilities and those from migrant backgrounds, promoting equitable access to ECEC across Europe.

The final section on participation is based on Eurostat data. It highlights countries that have successfully achieved the European targets on participation and those that need to make further efforts. By presenting trends over the past decade, this analysis reveals some progress in ensuring access to ECEC services.

Chapter C – Staff

The first section of the chapter on staff composition examines the initial qualifications required for core practitioners and assistants, which are the foundation of their roles in ECEC. It then reviews the regulations on continuing professional development for both core practitioners and assistants, which aim to ensure their ongoing growth and expertise in the field. Two indicators focus on the qualifications needed for heads of ECEC settings, highlighting the importance of strong leadership positions. In addition, the chapter describes the diverse range of professionals and specialised educators available to support ECEC staff and children, ensuring comprehensive learning experiences and targeted support. An overview of ECEC staff shortages is also provided, outlining the challenges and potential workforce gaps that need to be addressed.

The second section of the chapter focuses on the working conditions of ECEC staff, beginning with an analysis of top-level regulations on group sizes and child–staff ratios. It then discusses the salaries of pre-primary teachers and school heads, comparing them with remuneration at the primary level.

Chapter D – Educational guidelines

The term 'educational guidelines' is used to include all the various steering documents, particularly curriculum documents, which may differ in status, detail and function but still stress the educational aspects of ECEC. The chapter addresses the guidelines issued by top-level authorities, examining first the general framework before focusing on specific guidelines in three areas: learning for sustainability, digital education and second languages.

The first section describes the nature and scope of the educational guidelines for centre-based and regulated home-based provision and indicates whether they are binding. It shows that educational guidelines have not yet been issued in all systems for ECEC settings for children under age 3.

The second section discusses measures to ease transitions. It presents a variety of measures at the setting level that facilitate children's transitions between ECEC settings and from ECEC to primary education. The section also presents the official criteria for children's admission to primary education.

The last section is on support measures and shows where top-level regulations exist to improve children's language development. Due to increasing multilingualism in Europe, a distinction is made between measures provided to develop children's skills in the language of the service, for those who speak a different language at home, and those aiming to improve children's skills in their home language. It also addresses the support offered to parents, providing examples of practices across Europe, including parenting programmes, home-learning guidance and home visits.

Chapter E – Evaluation and monitoring

This chapter explores the essential elements of quality assurance in centre-based ECEC provision. Looking through the prism of governance, it provides a typology of the approaches to the external and internal evaluation of ECEC settings. It highlights that in several countries external evaluation of ECEC settings focuses on checking compliance with regulations and not on the quality of teaching and learning. The chapter presents the ways in which parents are involved in evaluation and monitoring processes. Finally, it analyses the methods used to evaluate the ECEC system as a whole in order to generate suggestions for improvements.

PART II – NATIONAL SYSTEM INFORMATION SHEETS

The national system information sheets at the end of the report provide a concise overview of the key features of each country's ECEC system(s). These national sheets include a visual representation of the principal elements of the ECEC structure in the form of a diagram, a description of the main types of ECEC services, participation rates by age and type of setting, and a short summary of the main current reforms.

Age categories

Many European countries structure ECEC services according to the age of the children. Usually, the transition from the first phase to the second takes place when children are around 3 years old. In order to reflect the different regulations, a distinction between provision for children under 3 years and for those aged 3 years and over is often made. However, it is important to keep in mind that in some countries the transition can be as early as 2-and-a-half years or as late as 4 years of age ([8]). The national system information sheets at the end of the report identify which centre-based settings cater for each age group in each country. The terms 'settings for younger children' and 'settings for older children' are used as substitutes in some cases.

Some indicators highlight a situation at a particular age or distinct time points. The 'early age', 'around age 3' and 'during the last year of ECEC' categories are used in Chapter B 'Access', while Chapter C 'Staff' in some cases presents the regulations that apply to children aged 2 and 4 years.

The category 'early age' refers to the age of children at the end of their parents' childcare leave (see Figure B3). The 'last year of ECEC' refers to 5-year-olds in most education systems, but to 6-year-olds in eight countries ([9]) and 4-year-olds in Malta.

Sources

This report analyses top-level (national) regulatory frameworks – in other words, rules and standards that ECEC services must follow to ensure quality levels and compliance. The main sources of information are the Eurydice national units, which have provided information on ECEC policy and practice. A few indicators are based on Eurostat data.

Information on policies and measures issued by top-level education authorities has been gathered by the Eurydice network using questionnaires prepared by the Platforms, Studies and Analysis Unit of the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Commission jointly with national units in the network. Official documents (regulations, recommendations, national strategies, action plans, etc.) that have been issued and/or are recognised by top-level authorities are the prime sources of information for answering these questionnaires.

The reference year for most policy information is the 2023/2024 school year. Some stable structural indicators refer to the 2024/2025 school year.

([8]) The transition happens at age 2-and-a-half in Belgium and at age 4 in Greece, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

([9]) Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland and Sweden.

Chapter A: Governance and funding

Good governance and coherent policies are essential if high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) is to be made available to every child. As ECEC provision involves many stakeholders, it is crucial that policymakers create a regulatory framework that encourages an integrated approach and a high standard of quality in services across the sector. Strong governance frameworks are necessary to ensure sufficient funding, appropriate accountability and effective use of resources (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2014, 2024; Kaga et al., 2010; OECD, 2015, 2021a; UNICEF, 2019).

First, this chapter outlines the essential context by examining the fluctuations in the population of young children across European countries. It shows that the numbers of children in Europe are decreasing, and this trend is forecast to continue. While this may offer opportunities for the ECEC sector to provide enough places for every child and increase quality, it also presents challenges in ensuring equitable access across remote and sparsely populated regions.

This chapter goes on to describe the way centre-based ECEC is delivered: either in a unitary setting or in two separate, age-dependent settings. It also outlines the extent of availability of home-based ECEC or child–minding services, examining how these options vary across countries and complement centre-based care.

In addition, this chapter analyses governance mechanisms, focusing on whether a single ministry or multiple authorities are responsible for different stages of ECEC, providing insights into coordination and policy integration. It also examines funding frameworks, supported by recent spending data, to shed light on policy and resource allocation. Finally, it discusses the role of the independent private sector, showing its varying prevalence across countries: while significant in some regions, it remains relatively limited in most of Europe.

The numbers of young children are decreasing in Europe

Europe is aging, with more people living longer than ever before and fewer children being born. As of 1 January 2023, 25 million children under age 6 live in the EU ([1]). In comparison with the situation a decade ago, there has been a decrease of more than 2 million young children in Europe (see Figure A1). Moreover, the population forecast shows that the trend is expected to continue, with an additional 1 million fewer children in the ECEC age range living in the EU-27 by 2030.

Meanwhile, the total population in the EU-27 has been growing ([2]). Combining these trends, the proportion of children aged 0–5 among the total population in the EU-27 decreased by 0.6 percentage points, from 6.2 % in 2013 to 5.6 % in 2023. The diminishing number of children in society could lead to less attention being paid to children's needs or, conversely, could prompt a heightened focus on growing birth rates through family-friendly policies. The overall increased expenditure on pre-primary education as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) (see Figure A6) seems to suggest that most countries are moving towards the second option: prioritising access and high-quality ECEC.

In 2023, the percentage of children in the EU-27 was 8.1 points lower than it was in 2013. Over the past decade, the numbers of children aged 0–5 have declined in most European countries. This overall pattern masks notable differences among European countries. As shown in Figure A1, the most significant proportional declines are in Greece and Spain, where

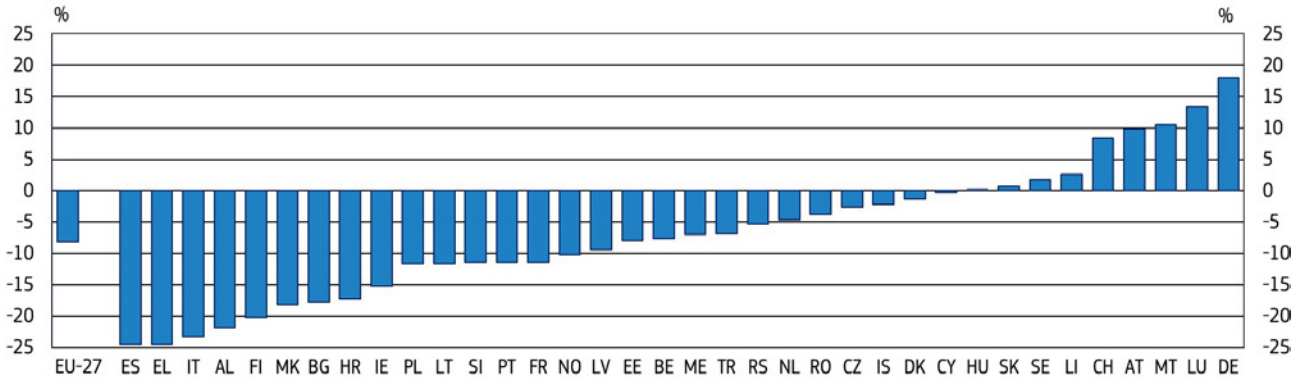
([1]) ECEC provision typically targets this age range. In most European countries, compulsory primary education starts at the age of 6. There are only a few exceptions. Compulsory primary education starts at age 5 in Malta. In eight other countries, primary education starts at the age of 7 (Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland and Sweden) (see Figure B3).

([2]) In 2023, the total population in the EU-27 was 448.8 million, compared with 441.3 million in 2013. See Eurostat (demo_pjan).

the population of children aged 0–5 was almost 25 percentage points lower in 2023 than in 2013. Italy, Finland and Albania show a decrease in the child population of at least 20 percentage points. This alarming trend extends to many other countries. In terms of the number of young children, Italy and Spain saw the largest declines in their young populations, with over 700 000 fewer children between 2013 and 2023. France and Türkiye experienced declines of 550 000 and 515 000 children, respectively, during this period.

Several countries deviate from this overarching trend. The numbers of children in the ECEC age range have remained relatively stable during the last decade in Denmark, Cyprus, Hungary, Slovakia and Sweden. In certain countries, there has been a substantial increase. In Germany, the population of children within the ECEC age range has surged by 18.0 percentage points (equivalent to 736 000 children) over the past decade. Moreover, Luxembourg and Malta have experienced growth of 13.3 and 10.5 percentage points, respectively. In Austria and Switzerland, the numbers of young children have increased by 9.9 and 8.4 percentage points, respectively.

Figure A1: Percentage change in the numbers of children aged 0–5, 2013–2023



The table below lists the populations of children aged 0–5 in thousands, in 2023 and 2013; percentage difference between those two time points (taking 2013 as a basis); and projections of the population of children aged 0–5 for 2030 in thousands.

	EU-27	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY
2023 (thousands)	24 938	722	346	681	374	4 822	84	361	493	2 203	4 280	210	2 552	59
2013 (thousands)	27 150	782	421	700	379	4 086	92	426	652	2 920	4 832	254	3 300	59
Difference (2013 as basis) (%)	–8.2	–7.7	–17.7	–2.7	–1.3	18.0	–7.9	–15.2	–24.4	–24.5	–11.4	–17.2	–23.3	–0.3
2030 projection (thousands)	23 923	691	318	608	388	4 543	69	374	464	2 228	4 366	192	2 619	63
	LV	**LT**	**LU**	**HU**	**MT**	**NL**	**AT**	**PL**	**PT**	**RO**	**SI**	**SK**	**FI**	**SE**
2023 (thousands)	112	157	41	558	27	1 044	523	2 152	517	1 166	117	349	291	698
2013 (thousands)	123	178	36	558	24	1 095	476	2 437	584	1 213	132	346	364	686
Difference (2013 as basis) (%)	–9.5	–11.6	13.3	0	10.5	–4.6	9.9	–11.7	–11.5	–3.8	–11.5	0.7	–20.2	1.8
2030 projection (thousands)	88	136	40	530	30	1 095	502	1 769	504	916	101	296	275	718
	AL	**BA**	**CH**	**IS**	**LI**	**ME**	**MK**	**NO**	**RS**	**TR**				
2023 (thousands)	161	:	524	27	2.3	43	113	337	377	6 967				
2013 (thousands)	205	:	483	28	2.2	46	138	375	398	7 482				
Difference (2013 as basis) (%)	–21.8	:	8.4	–2.2	2.6	–7.0	–18.2	–10.2	–5.3	–6.9				
2030 projection (thousands)	:	:	514	30	2.2	:	:	353	:	:				

Source: Eurydice calculations based on Eurostat population statistics (demo_pjan (last updated 28 November 2024) and proj_19np (last updated 28 August 2023)).

Country-specific notes

France: Provisional data for 2023.
Poland and **EU-27**: Estimated, provisional data for 2023.
Romania: Estimated for 2023.
Bulgaria, **Hungary**, **Poland**, **North Macedonia** and **Serbia**: There is a break in the time series.

Changes in the proportion of children reveal large-scale demographic shifts that affect various aspects of life in Europe. For ECEC systems, tracking the actual number of children in the age range of their services is highly pertinent. The table below Figure A1 displays the number of children aged 0–5 in thousands, which varies significantly among European countries and mirrors variations in the overall population size. Notably, two Member States have the highest numbers of young children in the ECEC age range, namely, Germany, with 4.8 million, and France, with 4.3 million. Of all analysed countries, Türkiye has the largest population, and the highest number of young children (6.9 million). At the other end of the spectrum, there are fewer than 100 000 children aged 0–5 in seven of the less populated countries (Estonia, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Montenegro).

Given Member States' commitments to achieve specific target rates for children's participation in ECEC by 2030 (see Chapter A 'Access', Section III 'Participation in ECEC'), it is crucial to anticipate future changes. The table below Figure A1 includes population projections for 2030. The trend is expected to persist, with the population of children under age 6 in the EU projected to decrease by an additional 1 million by 2030. The most significant declines in child populations are predicted in Estonia, Latvia, Poland and Romania, with an estimated decrease of around 20 percentage points. In Czechia, Lithuania, Slovenia and Slovakia, the child population is projected to decline to a slightly lesser degree, by 10–15 percentage points. Conversely, some growth, albeit less pronounced, is forecast in Cyprus, Malta, the Netherlands, Iceland and Norway.

The changes in the numbers of children can have significant implications for ECEC systems. A decline in the child population may lead to underutilisation of existing ECEC facilities, potentially resulting in closures of ECEC centres. This could accentuate disparities in access to high-quality ECEC services, particularly in rural or less populated regions. However, the demographic shifts may also serve to rebalance supply and demand (see Figure B6).

Increasing the coverage of compulsory preschool education in **Bulgaria** is one of the country's key educational goals. Equal access is ensured through designated 'central' and 'protected' kindergartens and schools. A central kindergarten serves children from areas without kindergartens or schools and is located in the nearest populated area. A protected kindergarten, which is essential for access, cannot be closed. This policy addresses Bulgaria's demographic challenges, preventing the closure of kindergartens in areas with declining populations.

Due to the forecast decrease in the number of children in **Estonia**, the pressure to create more preschool and childcare service places for children under the age of 3 is expected to reduce. On the assumption that the proportional use of preschools and childcare services remains unchanged, the number of ECEC places available in 2020 will be sufficient in 2030 at the country level. However, if urban sprawl continues, the rural municipalities and regions bordering bigger towns may continue to experience a growing number of children at the expense of further reducing numbers in other local authorities and regions ([3]).

In **Spain**, one of the effects of demographic movements is the depopulation of certain areas. Current education legislation states that the state must promote territorial cooperation programmes. One key initiative ([4]) is a programme aiming to create places in ECEC centres for children under age 3. This programme prioritises sparsely populated or dispersed areas to prevent total depopulation and is a key funding priority. Another priority of this programme is increasing the ECEC on offer in urban areas with high concentrations of migrant populations, particularly in neighbourhoods with lower housing costs and limited basic services ([4]).

In **Norway**, the kindergarten strategy towards 2030 addresses the challenges municipalities face in aligning ECEC provision with demographic changes, particularly due to low birth rates, depopulation and centralisation ([5]). To tackle these issues, as of 1 August 2023, the government has lowered ECEC prices in certain sparsely populated municipalities and introduced ECEC free of charge in some areas in northern Norway.

The reduction in ECEC enrolment could affect the workforce, potentially leading to job losses or reduced employment opportunities for ECEC professionals. On the positive side, however, with lower group sizes and child–staff ratios, ECEC staff may experience more manageable workload and reduced stress. An overall improvement in working conditions could reduce challenges in recruiting and retaining ECEC staff.

([3]) https://centar.ee/failid/alushariduse_raport/summary.html.

([4]) https://www.educacionfpydeportes.gob.es/mc/sgctie/cooperacion-territorial/programas-cooperacion/primer-ciclo-infantil.html.

([5]) https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/5bf0d0ed9f7442cdbe630c749abb8959/no/pdfs/barnehagen-for-en-ny-tid.pdf.

In **Germany**, forecasts indicate a significant need for additional qualified staff in ECEC and after-school care in western Germany until 2030. In response, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth has developed the Federal strategy for skilled labour in daycare and after-school care, published in May 2024 ([6]). Conversely, in eastern Germany, the decreasing number of children may allow the existing pool of skilled educators to improve quality and staffing in both ECEC and other child and youth welfare fields.

Separate ECEC settings with a transition around age 3 are the most common

From the child's perspective, the place where they attend ECEC serves as a crucial point of attachment and stability. This environment significantly influences their emotional security and developmental progress. In Europe, ECEC settings are organised in two main ways:

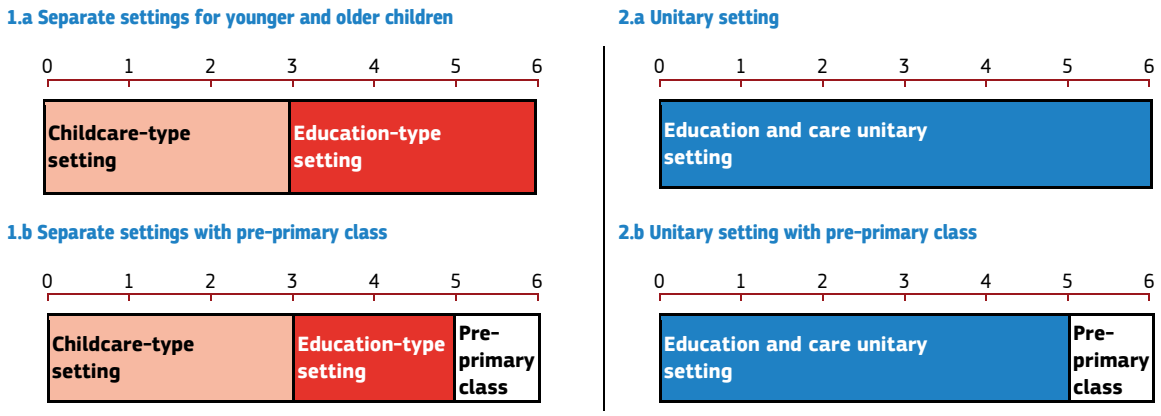
- **separate settings** for younger and older children,
- **unitary settings** for the whole age range, up until the start of primary education.

In addition, in some countries, children are required to undertake a pre-primary class for the last year (or two) before the start of primary education, regardless of whether ECEC provision is organised in unitary settings or separate settings. Figure A2a shows how ECEC systems can vary across European countries.

In a typical split system – where ECEC provision is organised in two phases – children starting centre-based provision at an early age begin in a childcare-type setting (often called nurseries or crèches) before moving to an education-type setting (e.g. pre-primary schools, preschools). Usually, the transition from one setting to the next takes place when children are around 3 years old. One advantage of separate settings is that they can provide a more age-appropriate environment, ensuring that very young children receive care and education tailored specifically to their developmental needs. On the other hand, moving from one type of setting to another is a key transition period for both children and their families, as it often means a change in group format/size, different staff, new rules and different types of activities.

In a typical integrated system – where ECEC is delivered in a unitary setting – children stay in the same setting until they reach primary school age (or, in a few education systems, until they start a pre-primary class). These unitary settings provide programmes with a defined educational component, but also emphasise the importance of holistic approaches and care.

Figure A2a: Types of centre-based ECEC settings in Europe



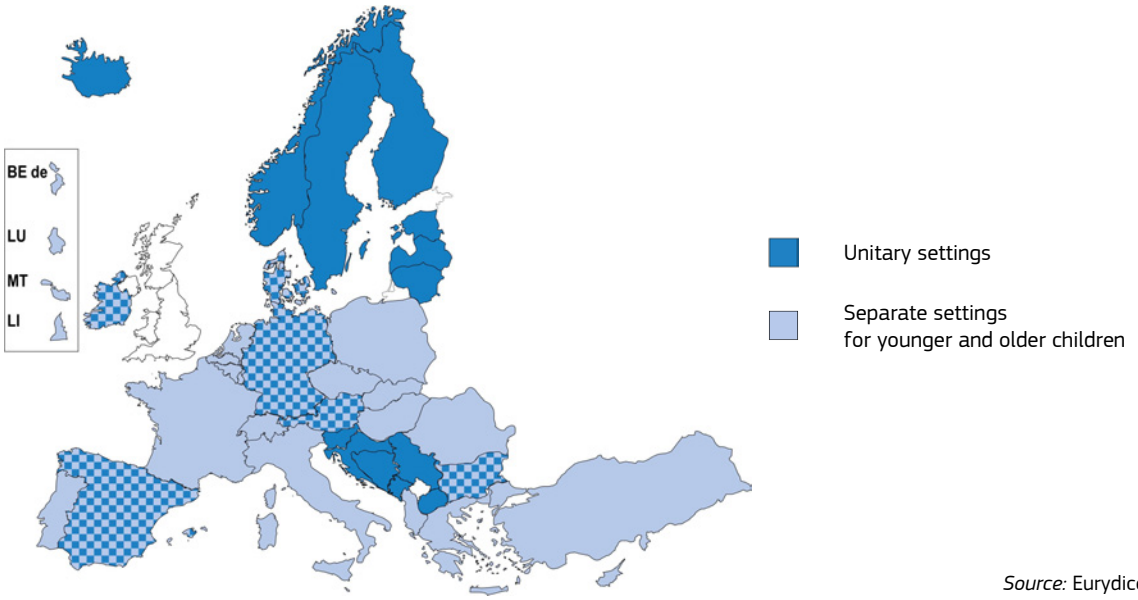
Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

These models show the typical length of the ECEC phase in Europe – namely, 6 years – but the starting and ending ages and the age of transition from a childcare-type setting to an education-type setting in a type 1 organisation vary between education systems. For information on the organisation of ECEC structures and ages for a specific education system, please see the national system information sheets at the end of the report.

([6]) https://www.fruehe-chancen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF-Dateien/Gesamtstrategie_Fachkr%C3%A4fte/Empfehlungspapier_Gesamtstrategie_barrierefrei.pdf.

Figure A2b: Organisation of centre-based ECEC settings, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

For information on the specific structure of ECEC and age ranges in each country, please see the national system information sheets at the end of the report.

Country-specific notes

Estonia: There is also a childcare service outside the education system, but this caters for only 2 % of children (mostly under the age of 3).
Ireland: Children can start infant classes in primary school at the age of 4 or 5, with compulsory attendance starting at 6. The school programme for 4- to 5-year-olds is classified as ISCED 1 and involves the use of the primary school curriculum.
Malta and **Portugal**: The figure shows the situation in the public sector. In the private sector, unitary settings also exist.

Figure A2b reveals that in most European countries, centre-based ECEC is provided in two separate, age-dependent settings. This is observed in Belgium, Czechia, Greece, France, Italy, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Albania, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Türkiye.

The division reflects a split between childcare services and early education provision. The second cycle has clear educational priorities and is classified as pre-primary education (ISCED 02) according to the ISCED 2011 ([7]). In contrast, the first cycle, typically for children under age 3, often falls outside ISCED classification criteria, as it primarily focuses on care rather than formal education. In 14 European education systems, childcare services for children under age 3 are not classified as educational programmes ([8]). Conversely, in eight systems with separate settings for children under and over 3, programmes in nurseries are classified as early childhood educational development (ISCED 01). This applies to Belgium (Flemish Community), Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, Romania, Liechtenstein and Türkiye.

The transition between these two settings typically occurs at the age of 3. However, it can happen earlier, such as at 2-and-a-half years old in Belgium, or later, at around 4 years old, in countries such as Greece, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. These age brackets can be either strictly enforced or somewhat flexible. For instance, some pre-primary schools may admit younger children, extending their coverage to include 2-year-olds.

In **Czechia**, the municipality is obliged, based on parental interest, to ensure pre-primary education in a nursery school for children from age 3. However, 2 years olds may also attend. According to Eurostat, in 2021, 11.3 % of 2-year-olds were enrolled in pre-primary schools.

In **France**, from age 3, it is compulsory to attend pre-primary education (*enseignement préélémentaire*) in pre-primary schools (*écoles maternelles*). Admission from the age of 2 is possible and is encouraged in schools located in disadvantaged social areas. In

([7]) https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf.

([8]) This applies in Belgium (French and German-speaking Communities), Bulgaria, Czechia, Ireland, France, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Albania and Switzerland.

2022, 10.3 % of 2-year-olds were enrolled in *écoles maternelles* (Eurostat, provisional data).

In **Italy**, some pre-primary schools (*scuole dell'infanzia*) are able to accommodate children aged 24–36 months in a special 'spring section' (*sezione primavera*). According to Eurostat, in 2021, 12.7 % of 2-year-olds were enrolled in pre-primary schools.

In **Hungary**, in the year in which a child reaches the age of 3 (by 31 August), they must attend kindergarten (*óvoda*) from the beginning of the school year. Children who will reach the age of 3 within the next 6 months may also be admitted to *óvoda*, subject to availability.

In around one third of European countries, centre-based ECEC is exclusively provided in unitary settings. This is predominantly observed in Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway), the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and some of the western Balkans (Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia).

Unitary and separate settings coexist in six countries: Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Spain and Austria.

Overall, in around two thirds of European education systems, some children are required to navigate a transition to a new setting, thereby crossing a structural boundary within the ECEC system. It is worth noting that top-level recommendations on how to manage this change are offered in only half of these countries (see Figure D6 for details).

In some European countries, children must attend a pre-primary class in the last 1–2 year(s) of ECEC before primary education (see the national system information sheets). According to the definition used in this report, this ECEC phase is compulsory and provides a specific educational programme that is distinct from the main pre-primary education programme (see Annex D on educational guidelines). The pre-primary class aims to smooth the transition from holistic and play-based ECEC programmes to primary education that teaches fundamental skills in reading, writing and mathematics (i.e. literacy and numeracy). Pre-primary classes may be organised within centre-based ECEC settings or in primary schools. They are more common in countries with unitary settings (e.g. Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia). In education systems that organise ECEC in two separate phases, pre-primary classes are less common (e.g. in Luxembourg).

Regulated home-based provision is widespread in only a few European countries

Alongside the ECEC provision in centre-based settings, the legal framework for ECEC may also provide for regulated home-based ECEC services, which must conform to established rules and quality standards.

Home-based ECEC (also referred to as a childminding service or family daycare) is defined in this report as publicly regulated ECEC provision that is delivered in a provider's home or another home-like place. Home-based ECEC is usually provided to a small group by one childminder. Sometimes, two or three childminders deliver their services together. Home-based ECEC excludes individual care that occurs in the child's own home (e.g. live-in and live-out nannies and babysitters, care by relatives).

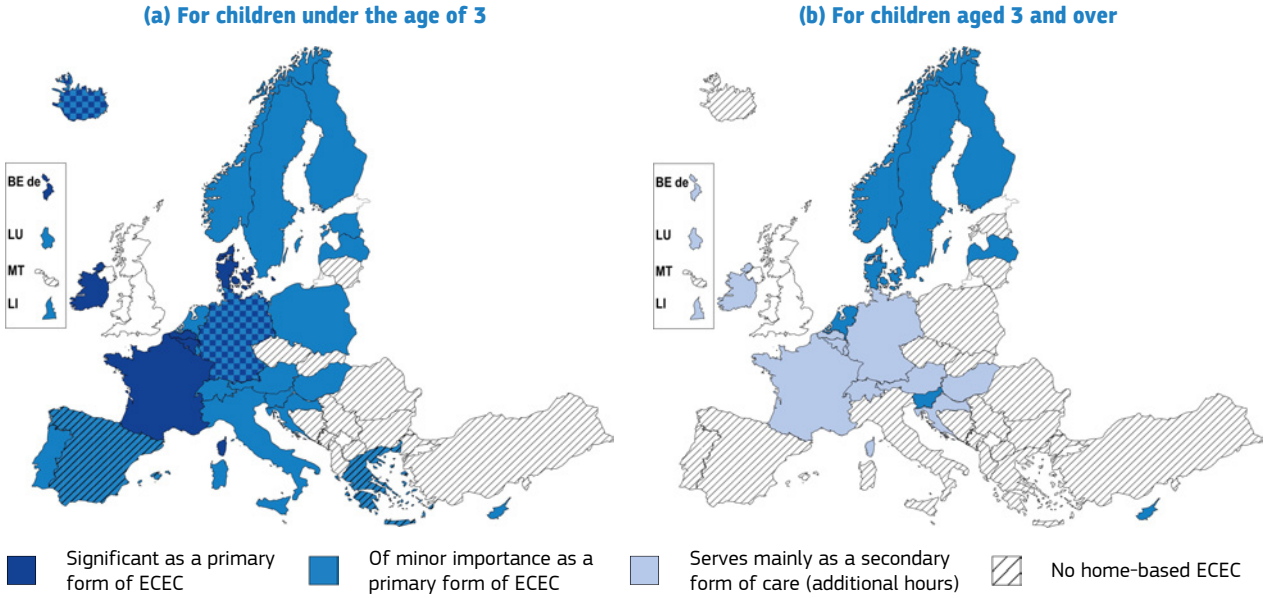
Home-based ECEC may be chosen by families who prefer their children to experience an environment mirroring that of their own home. Childminders, often managing a smaller number of children than nursery facilities, are perceived by parents as offering more tailored attention, closer bonding and greater stability, and catering better to individual needs. Home-based ECEC typically accommodates mixed-age groupings, thereby allowing the offering of services for siblings and the streamlining of logistical arrangements.

Overall, the role of home-based ECEC in Europe is minor. In several countries, childminding services still function as an alternative for younger children, particularly in cases where regular centre-based ECEC options are unavailable or insufficiently flexible. For older children, home-based ECEC is mainly used as an after-hours or secondary form of care when the opening hours of centre-based settings are insufficient.

In **Germany**, family daycare for children under 3 is considered equal to centre-based ECEC by law (Social Code Book, Child and Youth Act, Book VIII, Article 24). The legal entitlement to a publicly subsidised place in daycare from the age of 1 may be used in home-based provision until children reach the age of 3. From age 3, childminding services are mainly used as an additional option if the opening hours of ECEC institutions do not suit the needs of parents.

In **Luxembourg**, childminding serves as an option alongside crèches for children aged 0–3 years and after-school care for children aged up to 12 years.

Figure A3: Regulated home-based ECEC, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The significance of home-based provision is determined by national statistics and expert assessments. When data is available, home-based ECEC is deemed significant if a minimum of 10 % of children participate in it.

Country-specific notes

Czechia and **Slovakia**: Legislation allows for home-based ECEC, but it is very rare.
Germany: Home-based ECEC is present in all *Länder*, but is of varying importance. It is less prevalent in eastern *Länder*, such as Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia.
Greece: Home-based ECEC operates on a pilot basis in 61 out of 332 municipalities.
Spain: Regulated home-based provision exists in 3 out of 17 autonomous communities: Madrid, Navarre and Galicia.
Montenegro: The legal framework for home-based ECEC has been established. However, this type of service has not yet been implemented in practice.
North Macedonia: The Law on Child Protection allows for the possibility of home-based ECEC. However, in practice, it is almost non-existent.

Figure A3 highlights the importance of home-based ECEC for children both under and over 3 years old in Europe. Childminding services are considered significant if they are the primary source of ECEC during the main part of the day for a minimum of 10 % of children.

Home-based ECEC is available for younger children in almost three quarters of European education systems. For children aged 3 and over, childminding services are permitted in around half of the European countries, usually as a secondary or complementary form of care for 'after' hours. Belgium's German-speaking Community and France are the only two European education systems where home-based childminding is the dominant form of ECEC for those under 3.

In **Belgium (German-speaking Community)**, in 2022, 36 % of children under 3 were in home-based ECEC (*Tagesmütterdienst/ Tagesväterdienst*) compared with 7 % in centre-based nurseries (*Kinderkrippen*) ([9]).

In **France**, in 2022, the theoretical capacity to accommodate children under 3 years old was estimated to be 32 % of places in home-based childminders (*assistant(e)s maternel(le)s*), 23 % of places in centre-based crèches and other collective structures (*crèches et autres structures collectives*) (CNAF, 2023), and approximately 3–4 % of places in pre-primary schools (*écoles maternelles*). In 2023, the government announced that a public early childhood service will be available from January 2025, with an objective of creating additional 35 000 places by 2027 ([10]).

In addition, across six education systems (Belgium (French and Flemish Communities), Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Iceland), a significant proportion (more than

([9]) Eurydice calculations based on the numbers of children in ECEC (https://ostbelgienstatistik.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-5876/10047_read-41118/) and the numbers of children (https://ostbelgien.inzahlen.be/jive?workspace_guid=abaeb058-57d8-4838-b80c-6c6a3d37e596).

([10]) https://www.caf.fr/sites/default/files/medias/cnaf/Nous_connaitre/qui%20sommes%20nous/Textes%20de%20r%C3%A9f%C3%A9rence/COG/COG%20Etat-Cnaf%202023-2027.pdf.

10 %) of children under the age of 3 receive care from childminders. However, in these countries, the majority of children still attend centre-based ECEC.

In **Belgium (French Community)**, home-based care is delivered by either childminders who work independently (*accueillantes d'enfants indépendant.e.s*) or childminders affiliated with specific childminding organisations (*accueillantes d'enfants conventionnées ou salariées*). Home-based care generally takes place in the childminder's home, or in a specially equipped space in the home or a space made available by the municipality or a local association. Home-based ECEC comprises roughly 25 % of available childcare places for children under 2-and-a-half, equating to an 11 % participation rate.

In **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, 17 % of children under 3 participate in home-based ECEC (*gezinsopvang*), while 36 % attend centre-based ECEC (*groepsopvang*) (see Opgroeien, 2024).

In **Denmark**, home-based ECEC provides one quarter of ECEC places for those under 3. In 2022, 14 % of 0- to 2-year-olds were in home-based *dagpleje*, while 40 % attended centre-based *daginstitutioner* (see Statistics Denmark ([11])).

In **Germany**, family daycare plays an important role in many *Länder*. In 2023, a total of 135 033 children (5.7 % of those under 3 or 15.8 % of those in ECEC) were enrolled in family daycare in Germany. There is, however, a high level of variation across *Länder*. Whereas in North Rhine-Westphalia 10.5 % of children under the age of 3 make use of childminders, it is just 1.2 % in Saxony-Anhalt (Federal Statistical Office (Statistisches Bundesamt – Destatis), 2022).

In **Iceland**, home-based ECEC plays a significant role for 1-year-olds – in 2022, 17.8 % of children of this age were with *dagforeldrar*. This accounts for one in four of all ECEC places for this age group. The proportion drops significantly from age 2, when 95 % of children are in centre-based ECEC settings ([12]).

For younger children, regulated home-based ECEC does not exist in eight European countries, which are mostly clustered in central and south-east areas (Bulgaria, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Türkiye). Furthermore, Czechia, Slovakia, Montenegro and North Macedonia fall into a similar category, as, although home-based ECEC is legally established, its implementation remains limited or exceptionally uncommon.

For children aged 3 and older, home-based childminding is uncommon as the primary form of ECEC (see Figure A3b). A compulsory pre-primary programme is rarely allowed to take place through these service providers. In several European countries, childminders may function as a supplementary form of care, offering additional hours when primary, centre-based ECEC services do not provide full-time coverage.

Overall, the significance of home-based ECEC has been diminishing over time in many European countries. Notable changes have been observed in several countries.

In **Malta**, although home-based provision was allowed according to the 2006 National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities, it is not included in the childcare standards in force since 2021.

In **Finland**, participation rates in home-based family daycare (*perhepäivähoito/familjedagvård*) have been steadily declining. During its peak in the 1990s, over 90 000 children attended family daycare. However, by 2022, this number had plummeted to fewer than 10 000.

In **Norway**, the recent peak for children enrolled in home-based *familiebarnehage* was in 2005, reaching over 10 000. However, this number has steadily declined each year, dropping to fewer than 2 500 children by 2023 ([13]).

Notwithstanding the general trend of a decrease in the number of home-based ECEC services, certain countries are enacting legislation to introduce or enhance the regulation of childminding services.

In **Greece**, home-based ECEC has been recently established on a pilot basis. The neighbourhood nannies programme was launched in 2021 under Law 4837/2021 (*Government Gazette* 178/A), aiming to facilitate childcare for infants aged 2 months to 2 years and 6 months. The programme enables childcare either in the parents' residence or in the home of a childminder in 61 out of 332 municipalities ([14]).

In **Ireland**, childminders were until September 2024 excluded from regulation as a result of exemptions in the Child Care Act, 1991, and there was no access to subsidies for parents who choose childminders for their children's care and early learning. According to 2022 census data ([15]), 22 644 children aged 0–4 (7.7 % of children in this age group) were cared for by a childminder (in the

([11]) https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/borgere/husstande-familier-og-boern/boernepasning.

([12]) Statistics Iceland 2024 data on children in pre-primary schools in December 1998–2022 (https://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Samfelag/Samfelag__skolamal__1_leikskolastig__0_lsNemendur/SKO01000.px/) and 2023 data on children in daycare in private homes by age of children 1998–2022 (https://px.hagstofa.is/pxen/pxweb/en/Samfelag/Samfelag__felagsmal__felagsthjonusta_sveitarfelaga__3_dagvist/HEI09300.px/).

([13]) https://www.ssb.no/utdanning/barnehager/artikler/utvikling-av-familiebarnehager-og-apne-barnehager-de-siste-20-arene and https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/14220/.

([14]) https://ntantades.gov.gr.

([15]) https://data.cso.ie/.

childminder's home), but very few childminders (fewer than 80) were registered with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Under the National Action Plan for Childminding (2021–2028) ([16]) in September 2024 regulations commenced for home-based ECEC, and home-based ECEC providers have a 3-year transition period (to September 2027) before registration becomes mandatory.

In **Spain**, home-based ECEC was formalised in 2022 in the autonomous community of Galicia, catering to rural settlements with populations of fewer than 5 000 inhabitants, although its implementation began in 2016 ([17]). Home-based ECEC is available in another two autonomous communities, namely, Madrid and Navarre.

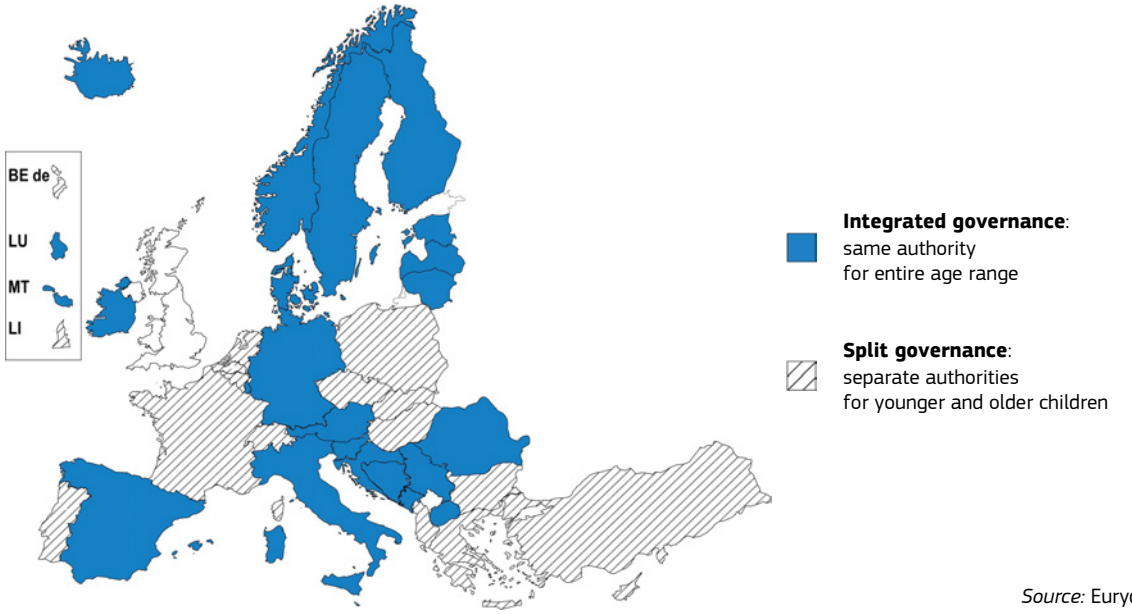
A single ministry governs ECEC in most European countries

The organisation of ECEC services and the regulatory frameworks they adhere to are intricately tied to their governance structures. The mapping of the authorities in charge gives an insight into the way governments approach ECEC.

There are two main ECEC governance models: split and integrated. In some countries, ECEC governance is split between two distinct ministries or top-level authorities. One authority oversees provision for younger children, typically those under the age of 3, while another manages ECEC for older children, typically around age 3 and above. In other countries, the governance is integrated, with a single authority responsible for ECEC provision for the entire age range.

The top-level governance of the ECEC system has a significant impact on the quality of the services provided. While a split system may have benefits – such as providing age-appropriate environments, a focused curriculum and targeted training for staff – an integrated system tends to offer seamless coordination, mixed-age interaction, stability and a sense of belonging without structural transitions before children enter primary school. Integrated systems focus on viewing children as learners from birth, moving the emphasis from minding to education for younger children. Assigning the responsibility for the entire ECEC phase to a single ministry or top-level authority may also help promote coherent policies and ensure better quality services (Kaga et al., 2010).

Figure A4a: Governance of centre-based ECEC, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

The list of responsible authorities is provided in Annex B.

Country-specific notes

Germany, **Spain** and **Switzerland**: The figure represents the most common situation across regions.
Estonia: The figure shows the situation for preschools (*koolieelne lasteasutus)*, in which most children spend the whole ECEC phase. Currently, the Ministry of Social Affairs is in charge of childcare services (*lapsehoiuteenus*), but this responsibility will transition to the Ministry of Education and Research in 2025.

([16]) https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/df207-national-action-plan-for-childminding-2021-2028/.

([17]) https://www.xunta.gal/dog/Publicados/2024/20240514/AnuncioG0762-260424-0004_es.html.

Both integrated and split governance are common in Europe, as Figure A4a shows. However, integrated governance prevails, with one leading ministry being in charge of ECEC in all countries with unitary settings and in most countries with mixed settings. Notably, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania, which employ separate settings, have recently shifted ECEC responsibility to the ministries in charge of education.

Commonly, in an integrated governance model, an education authority oversees the entire centre-based ECEC phase.

In **Lithuania**, ECEC falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. Local authorities and the Ministry co-finance education and maintenance costs, but it is up to the municipalities to implement ECEC programmes and monitor the quality of education.

In **Malta**, all types of ECEC provision fall under the responsibility of the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation.

In some countries, the main ministry responsible for ECEC shares some of its responsibility with another ministry.

In **Ireland**, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is the main department responsible for the statutory framework and binding rules relating to non-school settings for children under 6 years, although it cooperates with the Department of Education in relation to curriculum development and oversight. The Department of Education is responsible for infant classes for 4- and 5-year-olds in primary schools.

In **North Macedonia**, the educational part of ECEC activities falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science, whereas the care and organisation of the work of the preschool institutions falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in cooperation with the municipalities.

In 17 education systems, the governance of centre-based ECEC is split between two authorities, based on age groups. Generally, the education authority handles pre-primary education for children aged 3 and above, while a distinct authority, often responsible for social affairs, labour or health, oversees ECEC provision for younger children.

In **Czechia**, ECEC for younger children is regulated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Responsibility for pre-primary education (*předškolní vzdělávání*) falls under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.

In **Greece**, the Ministry of the Interior shares authority with the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family in overseeing ECEC for younger children. Compulsory pre-primary school (*nipiagogeio*) falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports.

It is important to note another dimension regarding governance that is not ECEC-specific: some European countries are federal or decentralised states (Belgium, Germany, Spain, Italy, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Switzerland). In most of these countries, ECEC governance appears to be integrated, but responsibility for ECEC provision in practice may be shared between different levels of government – for example, central and regional governments may act as top-level authorities in different areas – or it may be fully devolved, with the central government playing a minimal coordination role or setting minimum requirements. Belgium and Switzerland are unusual in having ECEC governance split by age within a decentralised environment. Belgium has two authorities responsible for ECEC across its three communities. In Switzerland, the governance structure is similarly divided between cantonal ministries responsible for social affairs and those responsible for education across its 26 cantons.

In **Germany**, at the federal/national level, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth is responsible for framework legislation for ECEC. At the *Land* level, it can be either the ministry in charge of family affairs or in charge of education that has a regulatory, supervisory and supplementary funding role. The provision of ECEC is within the remit and overall responsibility of the municipalities.

In **Spain**, the most widespread situation is that both cycles of ECEC are under the responsibility of departments, usually those in charge of education, at the level of the autonomous communities. The only exceptions are the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, where both cycles of ECEC are under the responsibility of the central Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports.

In **Italy**, the Ministry of Education and Merit finances the development of the integrated system for those aged 0–6 and issues the educational guidelines for the entire phase. In other aspects, the regions and local authorities are responsible for centre-based ECEC provision for children under the age of 3 and for regulated home-based provision.

In **Austria**, governance of the ECEC system is highly decentralised; the main responsibility lies within the *Bundesländer*. In all *Bundesländer*, educational authorities formulate policies for centre-based ECEC provision.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, ECEC falls under the overall responsibility of 12 responsible Ministries of Education: one for the entity the Republic of Srpska, one for each of the 10 cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and one for the Brčko District.

In **Switzerland**, the cantons are responsible for governing ECEC provision and implementing the existing top-level requirements in their territories. These requirements mainly concern certification and supervision of settings. In most cases, ECEC provision for children under the age of 4 is under the responsibility of the cantonal ministries in charge of family and social policy. The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Social Affairs assumes a coordinating role. ECEC provision for 4- and 5-year-olds falls under the responsibility of the ministries of education of the cantons, while the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education assumes a coordinating role.

Home-based ECEC usually falls under the responsibility of the same authority as centre-based ECEC (see Figure A4b). In countries with split governance for the two ECEC phases, childminding is typically governed by the same authorities as centre-based ECEC provision for children under 3 years old.

In **France**, infant care (*accueil du jeune enfant*) falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Solidarity. This includes childminders (*assistant(e)s maternel(le)s*), and nurseries (*crèches*) and other group settings (e.g. *jardins d'enfant*). From age 3, compulsory pre-primary education (*enseignement préélémentaire*), is overseen by the Ministry of National Education.

In **Portugal**, home-based and centre-based care for younger children falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security. Pre-primary education (*educação pré-escolar*) in centre-based *jardins de infância* falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation.

When it comes to integrated governance, home-provision is covered by the same authority that oversees centre-based ECEC provision in Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Austria, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and Norway.

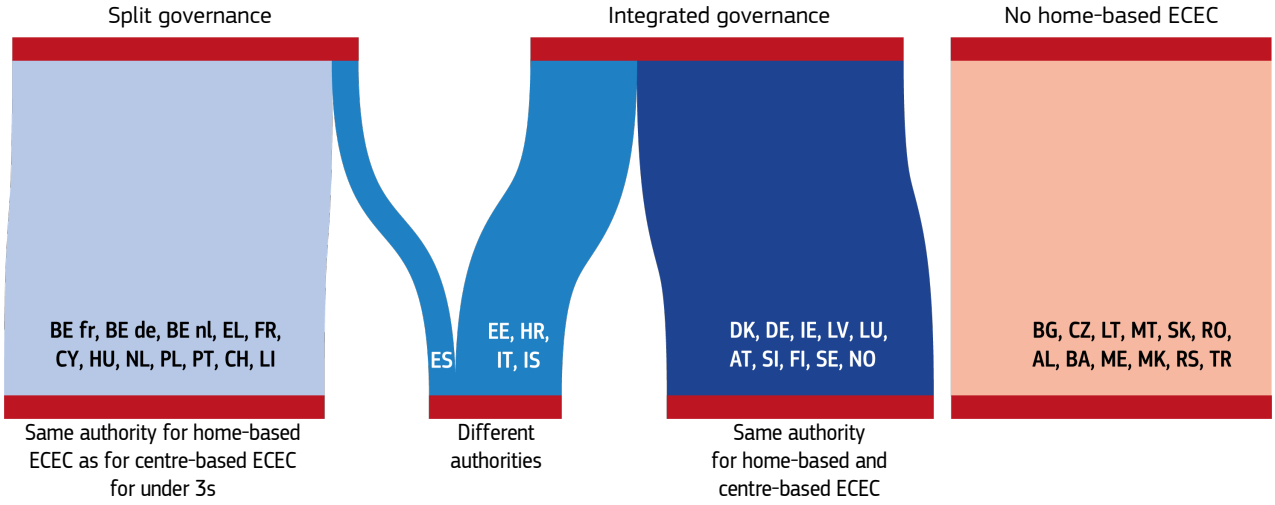
In **Ireland**, home-based ECEC is entirely managed by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The Department of Education, which cooperates with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in curriculum development and oversight of centre-based ECEC, has no involvement in home-based ECEC.

In **Latvia**, centre-based ECEC falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science. The State Education Quality Service, a subordinate body of the Ministry of Education and Science, is responsible for the register of child supervision services (*bērnu uzraudzības pakalpojums*).

In **Slovenia**, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the entire ECEC sector.

In **Finland**, early education centres (*päiväkoti/daghem*) as well as regulated family daycare (*perhepäivähoito/ familjedagvård*) fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Figure A4b: Comparison of home-based and centre-based ECEC governance, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

There are, however, a few exceptions.

In **Estonia**, the Ministry of Education and Research oversees the preschools (*koolieelne lasteasutus*) for children from the age of 1 to 7. Currently, the Ministry of Social Affairs manages the childcare service (*lapsehoiuteenus*), catering mostly for children from birth to the age of 3, which may be centre- or home-based. This responsibility will transition to the Ministry of Education and Research in 2025.

In **Spain**, home-based ECEC (*atención temprana en casa*) is governed by the social policy administrations of the three autonomous communities where this type of provision is available: Madrid, Navarre and Galicia.

In **Croatia**, centre-based settings fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Science, Education and Youth and the founders (local self-governments and/or private individuals). Local self-governments are responsible for most of the financing and provision of services. Home-based ECEC is overseen by the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy.

In **Italy**, whereas the central government establishes the overall framework for ECEC, regional and local authorities are responsible for managing and administering home-based ECEC services.

In **Iceland**, preschool centres (*leikskóli*) fall under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Children. The regulated and publicly subsidised home-based provision (*dagforeldrar*) is overseen by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

There have been some recent reforms integrating governance. In Luxembourg and Malta, the responsibility for services for younger children was transferred to the ministries overseeing education in order to ensure greater policy coherence (in 2012 and 2017, respectively). In Romania, since 2021/2022, the Ministry of Education has been responsible for the entire ECEC phase, and the nurseries (*creşă*) have become school institutions. Italy has gone through a major restructuring of its ECEC system. An integrated ECEC system from birth till age 6 has been introduced: the two components of ECEC (nursery services and preschools) are being integrated into a single system overseen by the Ministry of Education and Merit, with the aim of enhancing quality, effectiveness and the number of providers all over the country. Latvia has transferred responsibility for home-based ECEC to the same authority as responsibility for centre-based ECEC. Estonia will undergo a similar transition in 2025.

ECEC funding oversight is usually shared by top-level and local authorities

Governance mechanisms that promote high-quality ECEC services are inextricably linked to appropriate funding. Education authorities can use funding as a key tool to ensure that high-quality ECEC services are available to and affordable for all families and their children. The distribution of ECEC funding between the top, regional and local levels provides insights into which level holds the main responsibility for ECEC provision.

The most common pattern for financing ECEC is a **combination of top-level and local funding**. This approach is used in 22 education systems for financing ECEC for children under the age of 3, and in 27 education systems for supporting ECEC settings for children aged 3 and over. Although there are many variations across countries in terms of the authority levels responsible for the different costs, local-level authorities generally provide funding for infrastructure (especially building maintenance/repairs), utilities and educational materials (e.g. toys, books, art supplies, music instruments), while top-level authorities determine or contribute to the salary of the core ECEC staff, especially in settings for older children.

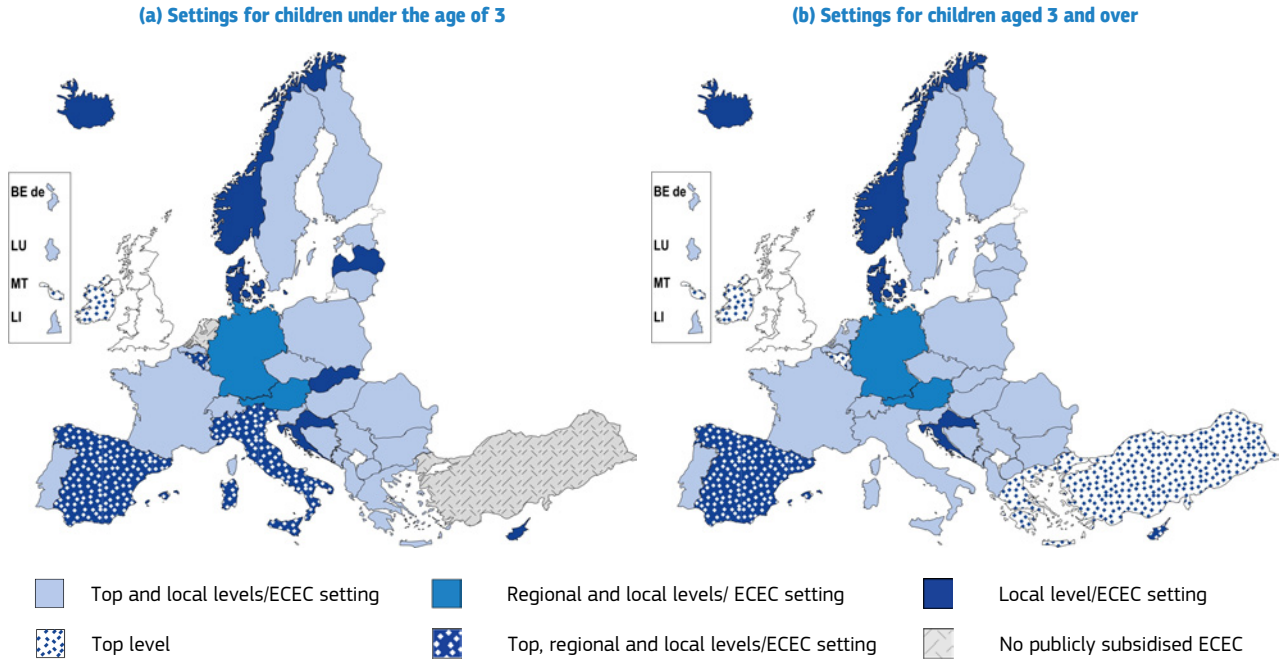
In **Estonia**, the primary responsibility for ECEC funding lies with local governments. The salaries of ECEC teachers are established at the local level. The state supports local governments in harmonising the salaries of ECEC teachers with the teachers' minimum salary established by the government. In addition to ECEC teachers' pay, the salaries of support specialists are also topped up from this subsidy to ensure the availability of such services.

In **Portugal**, ECEC provision for children under the age of 3 is financed by local authorities and through top-level funding that is not earmarked (lump sum funding). In settings for children aged 3 years and over, the core practitioners' salaries are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation and are set in accordance with the Teaching Career Statute (by the index 'length of service'), whereas the salaries of assistants are the responsibility of local authorities in accordance with Decree-Law 21/2019 of 30 January. Building maintenance/repairs and educational and recreational equipment are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, local authorities and Commission for Regional Development and Coordination. Utility expenses are the responsibility of the institutions' budgets.

In **Slovenia**, the municipality covers the costs of ECEC services and provides funds for investments, equipment and maintenance. The ECEC fees cover the costs of education, care and meals. The municipal budget provides kindergartens with funds equal to the difference between the costs of the services and the fees paid by parents. The state budget provides some of the funds for the provision of Roma classes, educational activities and infrastructure in ethnically mixed areas, and covers part of the fees for parents with two or more children in the same kindergarten.

In **Sweden**, the municipalities are the main authorities responsible for financing and running preschools (and schools). The state contributes to the institutions' funding, including through targeted state grants – for example, the state grant for quality-enhancing measures in preschool in 2023. This grant can be used to adapt the size of children's groups, to maintain or recruit staff in preschools or provide skills development for preschool teachers and other staff.

Figure A5: Authority levels responsible for funding/governance of centre-based ECEC, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

Country-specific notes

Belgium and **Switzerland**: The French, Flemish and German-speaking Communities and the cantons, respectively, are considered the top-level authorities in these countries.
Germany and **Spain**: The *Länder* and autonomous communities, respectively, are considered the regional-level authorities in these countries.

ECEC funding derives solely from the **top-level budget** in Ireland and Malta. Top-level authorities also entirely fund pre-primary education for older children in the French Community of Belgium and in Türkiye. In some cases, the resources are distributed by top-level schemes that provide a certain number of hours of ECEC for free for every eligible child.

In **Ireland**, there are no public ECEC service providers. However, 98 % of all registered ECEC services are subsided by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth ([18]).

Similarly, in **Malta**, most of the childcare centres are privately owned, but the government funds the free childcare scheme for children between ages 3 months and 3 years for working/studying parents. The funding covers most of the operating costs, staffing costs and costs for other necessary resources.

Conversely, **local authorities** are the sole authority level funding the entire ECEC phase in Denmark, Croatia, Iceland and Norway. They are the only level supporting the settings for younger children in Cyprus, Latvia and Slovakia.

In **Norway**, public grants for kindergartens are financed through the municipalities' unrestricted income (framework funding (lump sum) and tax revenue). It is up to the individual municipality to decide how much funding will be allocated to kindergartens. The municipalities also provide grants to approved private kindergartens.

([18]) Calculation made by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth using administrative data.

Regional authorities play an important role in ECEC funding in Germany, Spain and Austria (note that the *Länder* in Germany and the autonomous communities in Spain are considered the regional-level authorities in this report). In Cyprus, the regional school boards allocate the budgets for public kindergartens for 3- to 6-year-old children, which are approved by the top-level authorities.

In **Germany**, the regional level (i.e. the 16 *Länder*) and the local level share the main responsibility for financing ECEC services. The local authorities are responsible for fulfilling the legal entitlement to a childcare place, and they bear almost half of the public expenditure for the provision of ECEC. The 16 *Länder* contribute a further 43 % of total ECEC public funding. The funding role of the national (federal) level is constitutionally limited. Since 2008, however, the federal government has taken on a role in co-financing the expansion of ECEC provision and targeted quality improvements on the basis of contractual agreements with the *Länder*. Financial support for the *Länder* through investment programmes and operating cost subsidies will amount to more than EUR 14 billion by the end of 2024.

All three levels are involved in funding ECEC in Spain. The same is the case for settings for younger children in Belgium (French Community) and Italy, and for supporting education for older children in Cyprus.

In **Belgium (French Community)**, depending on the type of ECEC setting, the funding for settings for children under the age of 3 may derive from the public Office of Birth and Childhood (Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance) or regional social funds (for specific positions). The ECEC setting can also be the direct responsibility of a municipality or a non-profit organisation that covers costs using its own funds.

In **Spain**, decisions regarding the basic salary for core practitioners in early childhood and pre-primary education are made by the central government and by the education authorities of the 17 autonomous communities (regions). Furthermore, the regional education administrations provide funding for educational and recreational equipment. Finally, (lump sum) funding that has not been earmarked is mainly provided by the autonomous communities. At the same time, the municipalities are responsible for the upkeep, maintenance and inspection of buildings used for public early childhood education centres, reaching agreements with the autonomous communities for the highest maintenance and repair expenses when they are not able to cover them. Some municipalities also contribute on an ad hoc basis to expenditure related to education (equipment, projects that complement and improve the educational service, technological innovation, etc.) when they consider it appropriate under their public policies, although they are not legally obliged to do so.

Public expenditure on ECEC as a percentage of gross domestic product has increased across Europe

Funding serves as an important mechanism for ensuring the availability and affordability of high-quality ECEC. Moreover, the Heckman Curve ([19]) shows that investing in early childhood development provides greater success in more children and reduces social spending for society.

Exploring the level of expenditure on ECEC indicates how much countries invest in achieving these objectives. Although it is difficult to find clear and meaningful ways of comparing expenditure over time across different countries with different economies, currencies and standards of living, the common measure of expenditure as a percentage of GDP provides some insights. However, it is heavily influenced by fluctuations in GDP. Therefore, when GDP shrinks, the same annual expenditure represents an increased percentage of GDP. Moreover, in rich economies with high GDPs, rather small proportions of expenditure on ECEC in relation to GDPs might mean higher investments in absolute terms than higher proportions in poorer countries.

Comparing expenditure on ECEC is further complicated by complex governance structures. In countries where the responsibility for ECEC is split between two distinct top-level authorities (see Figure A4a), data on expenditure for children under 3 is often not available. However, focusing solely on pre-primary education (ISCED 02) means that a significant portion of expenditure remains concealed, especially for those countries that heavily fund ECEC for the younger age group.

Figure A6 therefore draws all available data together and shows trends in total public expenditure on ECEC for the whole ISCED 0 level for those countries that provide information on early childhood educational development programmes (ISCED 01). In other countries, only expenditure on pre-primary education (ISCED 02) is indicated.

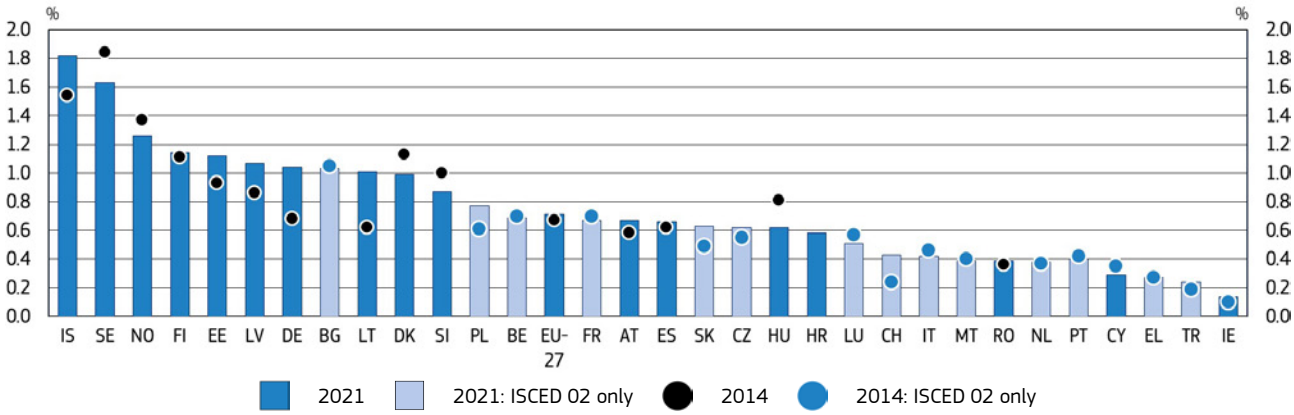
([19]) https://heckmanequation.org/resource/the-heckman-curve/.

Bearing in mind the limitations of this indicator, it can be observed that, on average in the EU, expenditure on ECEC as a percentage of GDP increased between 2014 and 2021. In the EU, the average total public expenditure on ECEC rose from 0.67 % of GDP in 2014 to 0.71 % in 2021. The increase is especially notable when considering the overall decrease in the number of children in the EU (see Figure A1). In other words, despite the decline in the number of children in most European countries, the rise in expenditure signals an increasing relative importance being given to ECEC.

The highest increases (of around 0.20 percentage points or more between 2021 and 2014) are seen in Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Switzerland and Iceland, while the greatest decreases (of around 0.10 percentage points or more) are seen in Denmark, Hungary, Slovenia, Sweden ([20]) and Norway. However, in the unitary systems of Denmark, Slovenia, Sweden, Iceland and Norway, expenditure on ECEC was still higher than the EU-27 average in 2021. Expenditure as a percentage of GDP also slightly decreased in Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Italy, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta and Portugal.

There are large differences in the relative investment in ECEC provision across European countries. In 2021, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus and Türkiye spent less than 0.30 % of their GDPs on ECEC. In Ireland, this can be explained by the fact that many 4- and 5-year-olds are in non-compulsory junior classes in primary school (classified as ISCED 1), which reduces the ISCED 0 investment levels. In contrast, Sweden and Iceland stand out for having total public expenditure on ECEC of more than 1.60 % of their GDPs. Belgium, Czechia, Spain, France, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia are in the middle of the spectrum, with spending levels of 0.60–0.90 % of their GDPs on this level of education in 2021. Among the countries with data only on pre-primary education (ISCED 02), Bulgaria stands out with the highest expenditure in both 2021 and 2014.

Figure A6: Trends in total public expenditure on ECEC (ISCED 0) as a percentage of GDP, 2021 and 2014



	EU-27	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
2021	0.71	(0.69)	(1.03)	(0.62)	0.99	1.04	1.12	0.14	(0.27)	0.66	(0.67)	0.58	(0.42)	0.29	1.07	1.01	(0.51)	0.62	(0.39)
2014	0.67	(0.70)	(1.05)	(0.55)	1.13	0.68	0.93	(0.10)	(0.27)	0.62	(0.70)	:	(0.46)	(0.35)	0.86	0.62	(0.57)	0.81	(0.40)
	NL	**AT**	**PL**	**PT**	**RO**	**SI**	**SK**	**FI**	**SE**	**AL**	**BA**	**CH**	**IS**	**LI**	**ME**	**MK**	**NO**	**RS**	**TR**
2021	(0.38)	0.67	(0.77)	(0.40)	0.39	0.87	(0.63)	1.14	1.63	:	:	(0.43)	1.82	:	:	:	1.26	:	(0.24)
2014	(0.37)	0.58	(0.61)	(0.42)	0.36	1.00	(0.49)	1.11	1.84	:	:	(0.24)	1.54	:	:	:	1.37	(0.06)	(0.19)

Source: Eurydice based on Eurostat (educ_uoe_fine06) (last updated 29 July 2024).

Explanatory notes

The table gives the values in brackets when only ISCED 02 is reported.

Country-specific notes

Greece: Table shows 2019 instead of 2021 data.
Malta: Definition differs between 2014 and 2021.
Türkiye: Table shows 2020 instead of 2021 data.

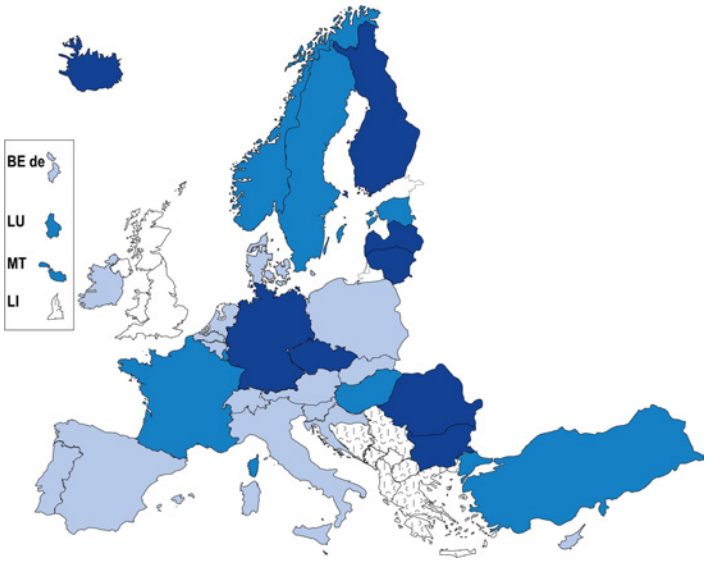
([20]) However, in Sweden, the expenditure on ECEC in absolute terms increased between 2014 and 2021.

Per capita expenditure at pre-primary level is the same or lower than at primary education level in most of the countries

Another way to assess expenditure on ECEC across different countries is to examine annual public expenditure per child. Direct public expenditure per child generally tends to increase with educational level in most countries ([21]).

When looking at the difference between the cost of pre-primary (ISCED 02) and primary education (ISCED 1) across Europe, it emerges that the annual cost per child in pre-primary education is lower than the annual cost per pupil in primary education in 13 countries (see Figure A7). In Cyprus, for example, the annual public expenditure per child is less than half of the cost of a pupil in primary education. The difference may be related to the expenditure on teaching staff, as it is, for example, in Spain. Primary education employs more specialist teachers, resulting in a higher average child–staff ratio; therefore, expenditure is greater than in pre-primary education.

Figure A7: Public expenditure per child in pre-primary education (ISCED 02) compared with expenditure per child in primary education (ISCED 1) in public educational institutions, 2021



Compared with expenditure on primary education, expenditure on pre-primary education is:

- Higher
- About the same
- Lower
- Data not available

Source: Eurydice calculations based on Eurostat (educ_uoe_fine09)(last updated 1 August 2024).

Public expenditure on education per child based on full-time equivalent, by education level (national currency)

Expenditure	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT	NL
ISCED 02	8 157	6 606	107 465	66 887	9 700	5 269	6 369	:	4 850	7 097	2 609	5 784	2 840	3 570	4 297	20 054	1 052 227	6450	8 698
ISCED 1	9 556	5 378	101 746	92 859	8 868	5 387	7 564	:	5 320	6 992	3 194	7 996	8 041	3 352	3 631	19 889	1 068 307	6361	9 369
ISCED 02 as a % of ISCED 1	85.4	122.8	105.6	72.0	109.4	97.8	84.2	:	91.2	101.5	81.7	72.3	35.3	106.5	118.3	100.8	98.5	101.4	92.8

Expenditure	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	CH	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
ISCED 02	8 346	14 020	3 371	8 204	4 814	3 590	11 141	125 390	:	:	17 653	2 642 569	:	:	:	155 733	:	8 482
ISCED 1	10 708	18 616	5 269	5 440	6 251	4 738	9 442	124 849	:	:	21 401	2 360 031	:	:	:	161 646	:	8 647
ISCED 02 as a % of ISCED 1	77.9	75.3	64.0	150.8	77.0	75.8	118.0	100.4	:	:	82.5	112.0	:	:	:	96.3	:	98.1

Explanatory notes

The indicator is based on calculating the expenditure on pre-primary education (ISCED 02) as a percentage of expenditure on primary education (ISCED 1). Expenditure on pre-primary education is considered lower if it is less than 95 % of that on primary education, it is considered about the same if it is between 95 % and 105 % of that on primary education, and it considered higher if it is more than 105 % of that on primary education.

Country-specific notes

Estonia, **Ireland** and **Croatia**: In these countries, ISCED 0 data was used to calculate expenditure per child, as the data is not reported separately for ISCED 01 and ISCED 02.
Ireland: Table shows 2020 instead of 2021 data.

([21]) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Educational_expenditure_statistics.

Annual public expenditure per child in pre-primary education is about the same as that per child in primary education in eight countries: Estonia, France, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Sweden, Norway and Türkiye. In Estonia, over the past decade, spending on ECEC has increased at a higher rate than expenditure on primary education, bringing per-child expenditure to similar levels (Aaviksoo, 2024, pp. 25 and 29).

In nine countries – Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Finland and Iceland – the cost per child in pre-primary education is higher than the cost per pupil in primary education. For example, this is the case in Czechia and Finland, where the higher expenditure per child in ECEC than per child in primary education can be attributed to the higher staff–child ratio in ECEC settings. In addition, the average opening hours of ECEC settings may be longer than those in primary schools, for example in Finland a child can spend up to 10 hours per day in ECEC, while in Czechia or Latvia even up to 12 hours.

The independent private ECEC sector is significant only in a few countries

ECEC may be provided by public or private bodies. Public settings are owned and operated by public authorities (usually by local authorities). They are not profit-driven but aim to provide a public service. Private ECEC settings may be owned and operated by businesses, which are profit-oriented, or by the voluntary (non-profit) sector, which includes charitable organisations, such as churches, trade unions or employer-sponsored organisations. Private settings may be government dependent or government independent. The terms 'government dependent' and 'independent' refer to the degree of a private institution's dependence on core funding from public sources. 'Core funding' refers to the funds that support the basic services of the institutions. It does not include funds received for ancillary services, such as lodging and meals.

- A government-dependent private institution is one that receives more than 50 % of its core funding from public sources (government agencies, regions, municipalities).
- An independent private institution is one that receives less than 50 % of its core funding from public sources (government agencies, regions, municipalities).

The distinction does not consider the degree of government direction or regulation. However, the share of support from public sources may still have some implications for ECEC access, affordability and quality. Quality standards, available resources, services offered and the extent of monitoring and evaluation may also vary between these sectors.

Figure A8 shows the importance of the independent private ECEC sector as a provider of ECEC places. Figure A8b shows its importance for pre-primary (ISCED 02) education for children aged 3 and over, based on Eurostat data. However, the data for children under 3 is not available from most European countries. Therefore, Figure A8a provides a generalised overview based on Eurostat data (when available), national statistics or reports and expert estimates. As this is not survey data but a summary of records from various sources and a range of reference years, the situations are not directly comparable and should be seen as an indication only.

Furthermore, it is important to note that both parts of Figure A8 focus not on the overall rate of ECEC participation, but specifically on the proportion of private ECEC within the total ECEC places available. As a result, the same category may reflect different realities in different countries. In countries with exceptionally low ECEC participation rates, a 'significant' private sector may represent only a small number of ECEC places and have a limited presence within society.

On the other hand, the seemingly equal importance of the private sector in ECEC for both younger and older children shown in Figure A8 for some countries may obscure a significant difference in the number of ECEC places available, as older children tend to attend ECEC at much higher rates than those under 3. For example, in mainland Portugal in 2022, private government-independent *creches* for children under age 3 and *jardins de infância* for children aged 3 and over provide approximately 17 % of ECEC places. However, this equates to an 8 % participation rate for children under age 3 and a 17 % participation rate for children aged 3 and over.

The independent private sector does not exist in seven countries: Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway. In these countries, all ECEC centres receive significant proportions of public funding.

In **Germany**, nearly two thirds of children attend private ECEC. Usually, these settings receive 50 % or more public funding.

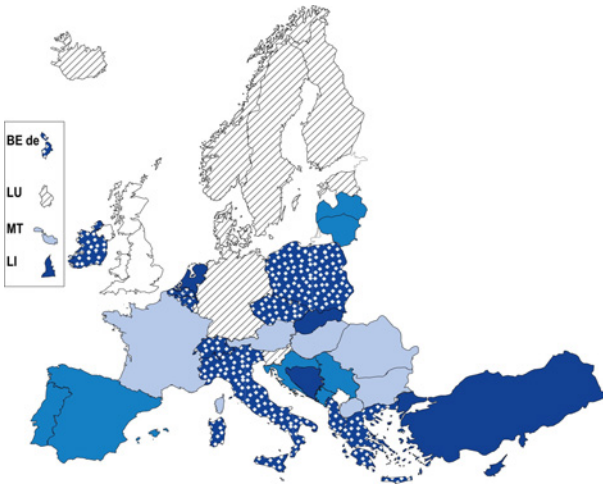
In **Finland**, ECEC is a licensed activity, and the same legislation and core curricula apply to both public and private services. As a general rule, even private ECEC service providers receive the majority of their funding from public sources.

In **Sweden**, it is quite common to attend private ECEC, where around 22 % of all children who attend ECEC are enrolled (Skolverket, 2024, pp. 12-13), but these settings receive 50 % or more public funding.

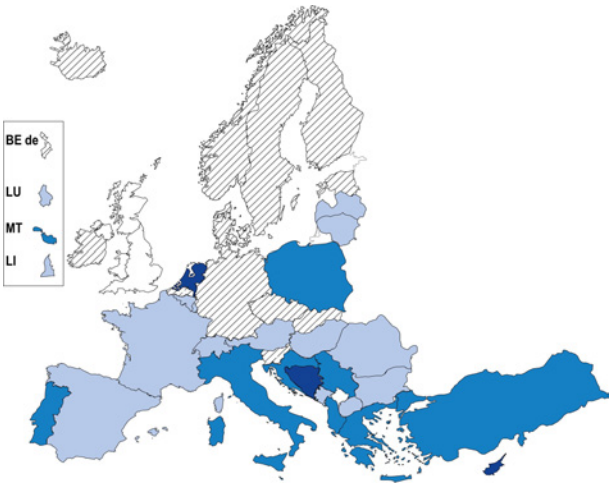
Iceland is shown in the same category, as all typical ECEC settings for children aged 1 and over receive more than 50 % of their core funding from their municipalities. However, there are a few cases of independent private (co-funded) settings (called *ungbarnaleikskóli*) that cater to babies aged 9 months to 2 years for which the parental contribution is many times that of the rest of the sector.

Figure A8: Significance of the independent private sector in ECEC

(a) Settings for children under the age of 3



(b) Settings for children aged 3 and over



The independent private ECEC sector is:

Significant: 30 % or more of ECEC places

Medium: 10–29 % of ECEC places

Minor: fewer than 10 % of ECEC places

The independent private ECEC sector exists, but no data is available on its size

All centre-based ECEC is at least 50 % publicly funded

Source: Eurydice.

Proportion of children in ISCED 02 (aged 3 years and over), by sector

2022	EU-27	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
Private, independent	30.8	0.2	2.6	:	:	64.5	:	:	13.7	3.8	0.4	18.3	27.4	42.1	9.5	6.9	8.6	4.1	17.7
Private, government dependent		52.8	:	4.4	22.3		4.7	99.1	:	28.4	13.4	:	:	8.1	:	:	:	9.2	10.3
Public	69.2	47.0	97.4	95.6	77.8	35.5	95.3	0.9	86.3	67.8	86.1	81.7	72.6	49.8	90.5	93.1	91.4	86.7	72.0
2022	**NL**	**AT**	**PL**	**PT**	**RO**	**SI**	**SK**	**FI**	**SE**	**AL**	**BA**	**CH**	**IS**	**LI**	**ME**	**MK**	**NO**	**RS**	**TR**
Private, independent	31.5	28.7	23.1	17.4	7.1	:	:	:	:	14.2	35.2	4.1	:	2.8	3.1	3.8	:	10.8	17.9
Private, government dependent	:		4.9	28.4		5.2	8.8	12.9	18.7	:	:	0.9	14.9	:	:	:	48.9	:	:
Public	68.5	71.3	72.0	54.1	92.9	94.8	91.2	87.1	81.3	85.8	64.8	95.0	85.1	97.2	96.9	96.2	51.1	89.2	82.1

Source: Eurydice, based on Eurostat (educ_uoe_enrp01) (last updated 19 June 2024).

Explanatory notes

Figure A8a provides a generalised overview based on Eurostat data (when available), along with national statistics, reports and expert estimates. Since this is a summary compiled from various sources and different reference years rather than survey data, the situations depicted are not directly comparable and should be interpreted as indicative only. Figure A8b is based on Eurostat data, except data for the Belgian communities and for Germany and Austria, for which the values are Eurydice estimates. Where a distinction by dependence on government funds is not available, the table shows only one value in a merged cell.

Country-specific notes

Belgium: There is no government-independent private pre-primary sector (ISCED 02) in the German-speaking and Flemish Communities.
Montenegro: Table shows 2021 instead of 2022 data.

In two countries (Luxembourg and Malta), most ECEC for younger children is funded through parental subsidies, but there are some independent private preschools for older children.

In **Luxembourg**, the ECEC service voucher scheme (chèque-service accueil) provides an important funding source for private ECEC. The amount that the government contributes to childcare (for children under 12) is dependent on parents' income and is directly paid to the service ([22]). The non-profit providers have an agreement with the government that guarantees the coverage of their deficits.

In **Malta**, most childcare centres catering for children under 3 are private. However, out of 192 childcare centres, 187 participate in the free childcare scheme, through which the government funds most of the childcare costs of parents/guardians who work or are in education ([23]).

In addition, Belgium (German-speaking and Flemish Communities), Czechia, Ireland and Slovakia have independent private ECEC for children under age 3, but all pre-primary schools for older children are either public or at least 50 % publicly subsidised. However, in Ireland, public funds fully cover only 15 hours per week. For the remaining hours, a combination of public and private funding is used.

The independent private sector is minor throughout the entire ECEC phase in Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Austria, Romania and North Macedonia. For example, in Bulgaria, 119 licensed private kindergartens functioned in the 2022/2023 school year. They enrolled 5 977 children, or 2.8 % of all children in kindergartens ([24]).

The independent private sector constitutes a significant proportion of ECEC provision for children under the age of 3 in Cyprus, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein and Türkiye. This might also be the case in some of the countries where this sector exists but from which enrolment data is not available (Belgium, Czechia, Greece, Italy, Poland, Albania and Switzerland).

In **Cyprus**, 66 % of ECEC places, or 20 % of children under age 3, attended government-independent private ECEC in 2021. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, 41 % of ECEC places were in this sector ([25]).

In **the Netherlands**, the ECEC system combines a demand-driven market structure for children under 4 with publicly financed arrangements for all children aged 4 and over. There is some publicly financed ECEC provision for disadvantaged children from age 2-and-a-half.

The government-independent private sector provides 10–29 % of ECEC places in seven European countries for children under 3 years old.

In **Spain**, 12 % of children under age 3 were enrolled in government-independent private sector ECEC in 2022; this sector provides 29 % of ECEC places for this age group.

In **Croatia**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania** and **Serbia**, 4–6 % of children under age 3 attend government-independent private sector ECEC, translating to approximately 10–20 % of ECEC places ([26]).

The independent private sector is less prominent in pre-primary education for children aged 3 and over. It represents over 30 % of available places for this age group in only three countries: Cyprus, the Netherlands, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, this sector accounts for 10–29 % of ISCED 02 places in nine countries: Greece, Croatia, Italy, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Albania, Serbia and Türkiye.

([22]) https://men.public.lu/en/systeme-educatif/enfance/02-gratuite.html.

([23]) https://www.servizz.gov.mt/en/Pages/Education_-Science-and-Technology/Education-Services/Early-Education/WEB544/default.aspx.

([24]) https://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/Children2022.pdf.

([25]) This is a Eurydice calculation based on Eurostat data. The participation rate in private government-independent ECEC was calculated by dividing the number of children enrolled in such facilities (category PRIV_IND of the indicator educ_uoe_enrp01) by the total number of children in that age range (demo_pjan).

([26]) Ibid.

Chapter B: Access

Section I – Structures

Ensuring access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a primary concern of national and EU decision-makers when developing policies related to young children and their parents. The European Pillar of Social Rights emphasises that 'children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality' ([1]).

Availability and affordability are the central themes of the first section of this chapter. It starts by describing the key measure: the place guarantee – the age at which a place in ECEC is ensured for all children. An indicator on the ECEC gap reveals that families in most European countries face a lengthy period with no well-paid childcare leave and no place guarantee. The section analyses the availability of ECEC free of charge for children and their families, and the level of fees. A summary indicator shows the demand for and supply of ECEC places at three points: at an early age, around age 3 and during the last year of ECEC.

A dedicated section on inclusiveness highlights targeted measures implemented by countries when universal provisions are insufficient to ensure accessible and affordable ECEC for the most vulnerable children. This section covers the criteria for priority admission, fee reductions and strategies to address barriers for specific groups, including children with special needs and migrant children, promoting equitable access to ECEC across Europe.

The final section on participation is based on Eurostat data. It highlights countries that have successfully achieved the European targets on participation and those that need to make further efforts. By presenting trends over the past decade, this analysis reveals some progress in ensuring access to ECEC services, especially for younger children.

In most countries, children are entitled to ECEC for at least a year

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 for each child. However, there are some fundamental differences. A legal entitlement means that 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 a place.
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 B1 groups both these access measures together and shows the earliest age from which a place guarantee is available, either as a legal entitlement or through compulsory ECEC (a detailed breakdown is displayed in Figure B3). The map reveals significant differences in the age at which children have a guaranteed place in ECEC in Europe. Only seven Member States (Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden) and 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 B3). 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 (although Portugal is still

([1]) Interinstitutional proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights (OJ C 428, 13.12.2017, p. 9).

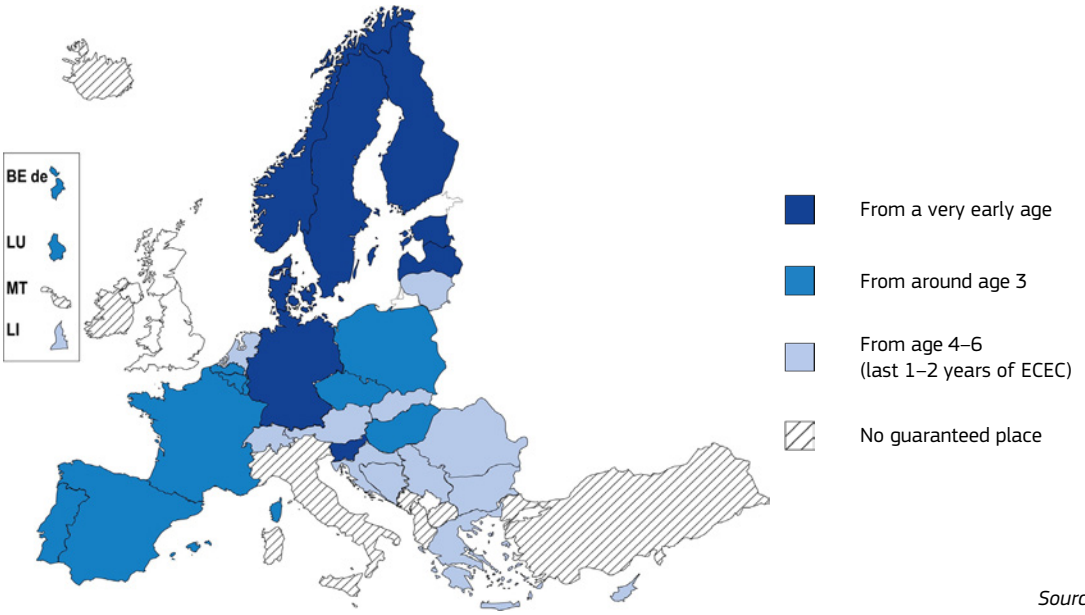
concentrating efforts on providing enough places for 3-year-olds). Around a third of European countries guarantee a place only for the last 1–2 years of ECEC.

Few European countries have no legal framework to ensure a place in ECEC. Only three Member States (Ireland, Italy and Malta) have not formally established a legal entitlement or compulsory ECEC. In practice, places are available in these countries from around the age of 3 years. 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 an integral part of the education system.

Ireland offers a universal free ECEC programme of 15 weekly hours from around this age. Also in Iceland, demand meets supply from an earlier age. The right to ECEC is broadly described in laws and regulations without referring to a specific age or number of hours, but the participation rates are very high from age 2.

In contrast, the absence of a legal place guarantee is reflected in the lack of ECEC supply and lower participation rates in Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia (see Figures B6, B10, B11 and the national system information sheets at the end of this report).

Figure B1: Age from which a place in ECEC is guaranteed, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

The figure shows the legal framework, not the actual availability.

Country-specific note

Portugal: Despite the extension of legal entitlement from children aged 4 to children aged 3 in 2018, demand has still not been met for 3-year-olds in some large cities. The legal entitlement is fully enforced from age 4 onwards.

Compulsory ECEC is more common than legal entitlement

Increasing access to ECEC has received significant attention in recent years. Since 2012/2013, there have been substantial changes in the legal framework that guarantees access to ECEC in most European countries.

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

Several countries have made attendance compulsory for more 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 was lowered from age 6 to age 3 in September 2019. Greece lowered the starting age of compulsory pre-primary school attendance to age 4 in 2021. Bulgaria progressively introduced compulsory education covering 3 years (for all children aged 4–6 years). In Romania, the length of compulsory ECEC was extended to 2 years (from age 4) in September 2023. Cyprus is gradually extending its compulsory ECEC programme to cover 2 years (for 4- and 5-year-olds); ECEC will be compulsory for 4-year-olds by 2031/2032. Public grants are provided to cover tuition fees in community kindergartens when public kindergartens are full.

A legal entitlement to ECEC has been introduced or extended in Belgium (German-speaking Community), Czechia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia. These countries have imposed a statutory duty on ECEC providers to secure publicly subsidised ECEC for all children of a certain age whose parents request a place in ECEC. In Latvia, since August 2011, local self-governments have been required to ensure equal access to preschool education institutions for children from the age of 1-and-a-half within their administrative territories. Germany lowered the legal entitlement age from 3 to 1 in 2013. Czechia and Poland have gradually extended the entitlement to age 3 (fully implemented in Poland from 2017 and in Czechia from 2018). Portugal lowered the start of universal preschool education to age 3 in September 2018, and a strategy was implemented to 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, as of September 2023, 4-year-olds have a place guaranteed, and this will be lowered to 2 years in 2025. In Slovakia, the legal entitlement for 4-year-olds was introduced in September 2024 and the preparation of a legal entitlement for 3-year-olds in 2025 is under way. In 2024, legal entitlement was extended by 6 months in Belgium's German-speaking Community (from age 3 to age 2-and-a-half).

Several countries have introduced 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 6 months ([2]). Sweden plans to introduce a 10-year primary school by changing the preschool class (the last year of compulsory ECEC) into the first year of primary education in 2028 ([3]).

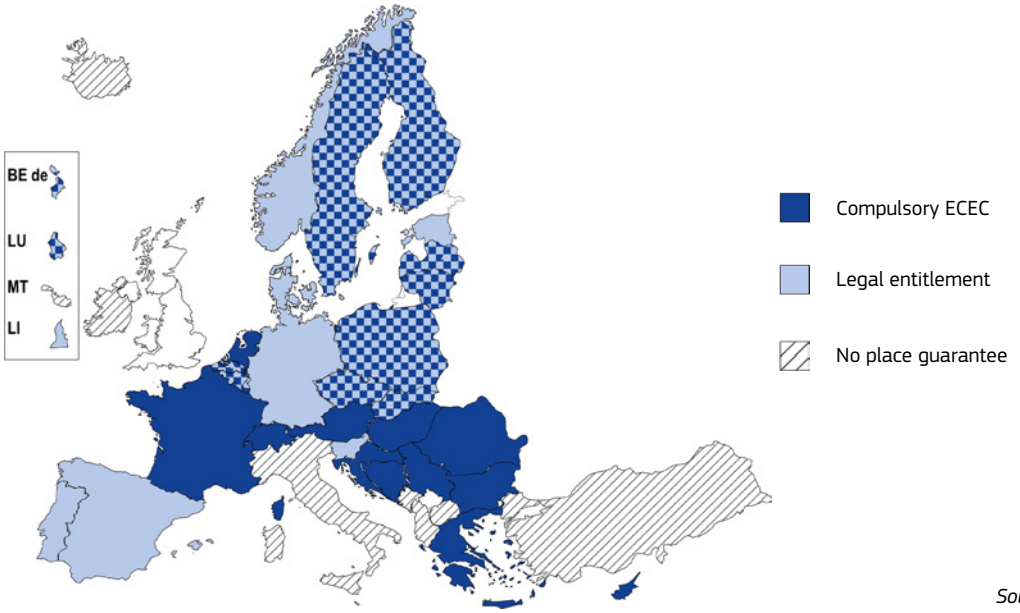
Overall, data reveals that compulsory ECEC has become a more common measure than entitlement to it. A legal right to a place in ECEC is currently granted in 16 European countries, while ECEC is compulsory in 21 countries. Some countries provide both a legal entitlement to ECEC and compulsory ECEC. In Belgium, Czechia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden, young children first have the right to a place in ECEC, but all children must attend ECEC during the 1 or 2 years before they start primary education.

The reforms taking place over the last 10 years reveal that European countries put a lot of effort into expanding their legal frameworks enabling access to ECEC. Reflecting the targets that focus on the preparation for school, one third of Member States recently introduced an obligation to attend the last year(s) of ECEC and several are planning to introduce such reforms in the near future.

([2]) Decision No 84.078 of 9 January 2018, http://www.cm.gov.cy/cm/cm.nsf/All/8BE7AAD0082913CAC22583E5002AC80D/$file/84.078.pdf?OpenElement.

([3]) https://www.regeringen.se/artiklar/2024/09/regeringens-budgetsatsningar-pa-skolan-2025/.

Figure B2: Legal entitlement and compulsory ECEC in Europe, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

Weekly ECEC hours, by type of guarantee, 2024/2025

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
Legal entitlement	23	23	23	-	Δ	⊗	⊗	Δ	-	-	25	-	-	-	-	⊗	Δ	26	-	-
Compulsory ECEC	23	23	23	4–8.5	20	-	-	-	-	25	-	24	(4–7)	-	26	⊗	20	26	20	-
	NL	**AT**	**PL**	**PT**	**RO**	**SI**	**SK**	**FI**	**SE**		**AL**	**BA**	**CH**	**IS**	**LI**	**ME**	**MK**	**NO**	**RS**	**TR**
Legal entitlement	-	-	25	25	-	30–45	Δ	Δ	(15)		-	-	-	-	21	-	-	Δ	-	-
Compulsory ECEC	⊗	20	25	-	25	-	20	20	(15)		-	(4–5)	10–20	-	-	-	-	-	20	-

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

Explanatory notes

The figure illustrates weekly hours of ECEC as defined by legal entitlement and compulsory ECEC regulations. Refer to Figure B3 for information on the age(s) from which the legal entitlement and compulsory ECEC apply in each country. Where the table shows weekly hours in brackets, the number has been calculated by dividing the annual hours of entitlement indicated in regulations by 38 – the most common number of weeks in a school year.

Country-specific notes

Belgium: 28 periods of 50 minutes.
Bulgaria: Weekly time by age group is as follows: 4-year-olds, minimum of 13 pedagogical activities for 15–20 minutes per week; 5-year-olds, 15 pedagogical activities for 20–30 minutes per week; 6-year-olds, 17 pedagogical activities for 20–30 minutes per week. The maximum total weekly number of pedagogical activities for each age group cannot exceed the minimum total number by more than five for full-day programmes, or by more than two for half-day and part-time programmes.
Germany: Top-level legislation states that the extent of daily care is based on the child's individual needs – 10 of the 16 *Länder* have specifications, ranging from a guaranteed 4 hours a day up to 10 hours a day.
Poland: In preschool units (*punkty przedszkolne*) and preschool centres (*zespoły wychowania przedszkolnego)*, the number of hours varies depending on the size of the group (with a minimum of 12 hours in exceptional cases). The minimum free provision is 25 hours. The majority of ECEC settings (*przedszkola*) run for up to 50 hours a week (full-time).
Finland: The compulsory pre-primary education programme in the year before school is at least 700 hours. Children in pre-primary education are also entitled to complementary ECEC.
Sweden: The 525 yearly hours were divided by the common length of a school year (178 days) and then multiplied by 5 to reach a weekly figure. This refers to the minimum hours if parents do not work or are on parental leave with other children. Entitlement is full-time if parents work full-time. According to Swedish law (Skollag (2010:800)), 'preschool shall be offered to the extent necessary with consideration to the parents' employment or studies, or if the child has its own need due to the family's overall situation' ([4]).
Bosnia and Herzegovina: The number of yearly hours varies from 150 to 180 depending on the canton. There is no compulsory ECEC in the Republic of Srpska, but most children attend a 3-month pre-primary programme.
Switzerland: Cantonal regulations vary. In some cantons, the number of weekly hours exceeds 20.

([4]) https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skollag-2010800_sfs-2010-800/#K8.

The type of ECEC guarantee – a legal right to a place or compulsory attendance – influences the way in which the number of guaranteed hours is prescribed. The legal entitlement defines the number of guaranteed, publicly subsidised (or free of charge) ECEC hours that every family can claim. A child may use less ECEC than they are entitled to by the guarantee. In contrast, compulsory ECEC specifies the minimum number of ECEC hours that a child is required to attend. In most cases, as explained later, the child may still benefit from additional (top-up) hours of ECEC that are not guaranteed for everyone.

The legal entitlement to ECEC varies widely in terms of hours (see table below Figure B2), from more hours than a full working week (more than 40 hours) to just 10 hours per week. In contrast, children in European countries are never required to attend ECEC full-time; compulsory ECEC is usually a shorter programme with a maximum of the same number of hours as school. Cyprus and Luxembourg have the highest weekly hours of compulsory ECEC (26 hours).

Countries that guarantee part-time ECEC (up to 20 hours per week) often do so with a view to ensuring that children have some pre-primary education in preparation for school. In a few countries, a short pre-primary programme is compulsory for children during the last year before starting primary education, with the explicit aim of preparing children for school.

Most European countries guarantee 20–26 weekly ECEC hours (i.e. school-time hours). This time organisation typically reflects the situation in ECEC systems with separate settings (see Figure A2b), where ECEC for children aged 3 and over is provided in a school-type establishment or even on the same site as the primary school. Therefore, the organisation of the week is similar, with defined educational hours ('lessons' or educational activities) and breaks in between. Likewise, the pattern of the school year is adopted, with a long summer holiday and holiday breaks in each season.

In **Liechtenstein**, the daily timetable in kindergarten is (partly) regulated by the Ordinance on the Organisation of Public Schools (6 July 2004, *Landesgesetzblätter*, No 154) and explicitly aligned with that of primary schools ([5]). Kindergartens offer a maximum of 28 lessons of 45 minutes per week. Education at kindergarten cannot start before 08:00. Lunch breaks should be at least 75 minutes. There should be a break of at least 20 minutes in the morning and at least 15 minutes in the afternoon.

The guarantee of full-time ECEC usually aims to relieve some work–life balance challenges faced by working parents. The services are arranged to cover the full-time working week and sometimes even some additional hours to make up for commuting time. In the countries that either guarantee full-time ECEC or impose no restrictions on the maximum number of hours a family can claim, education and care activities are typically blended. Although morning hours may be devoted to more demanding 'education-type' activities, there is no clear-cut division between educational and care activities: children play, learn and relax throughout the day. In countries where ECEC settings operate full-time, the place guarantee may not stipulate the number of hours assured. The guarantee in such cases implies that a child/family is entitled to access the full operational hours of ECEC settings.

In **Denmark**, there are no specific legislative demands regarding opening hours in ECEC, except that it should be available every weekday. However, the Guidelines on Daycare etc. state that the opening hours must take the purposes of ECEC into consideration and the opening hours must cover local needs for flexible childcare ([6]). Opening hours are typically from 06:30 to 17:00 on weekdays.

In **Slovenia**, 98 % of children attend full-time kindergarten programmes, offering 6–9 hours per day (30–45 weekly hours). Half-day programmes (4–6 hours) and short programmes (240–720 hours per year) are also available.

In **Finland**, the Act on ECEC (Section 9) states that 'the daily duration of ECEC may not exceed 10 consecutive hours, excluding shift care, where the daily duration is set to suit the needs of the child' ([7]). Most ECEC settings are open from morning to early evening, but they may also operate in the evenings, at night, on weekends and during holidays. Municipalities have a statutory duty to provide flexible ECEC schedules as needed for children whose parents are employed or studying.

For full-time working and studying parents, the ECEC guarantee of school-time hours or fewer may pose serious problems when balancing work and care. Therefore, countries that provide a guarantee of

([5]) https://www.gesetze.li/konso/pdf/2004154000?version=12.
([6]) https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/retsinfo/2015/9109.
([7]) https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2018/en20180540.pdf.

school-type hours often organise afternoon activities or the option of out-of-school-hours care, which families can take up if needed. However, before- and after-school care is often administratively and organisationally distinct from other care, with different staff, different groups of children or even a different location. In some countries, out-of-school-hours care may be offered by childminders or in settings that offer childcare for those under 3 (see Figure A4b). This may mean a divided day for children. Moreover, families may experience accessibility barriers, such as a general lack of places or lack of provision for specific target groups (e.g. children with special (educational) needs), cost and quality issues (Eurofound, 2019).

In many countries, school-time compulsory ECEC programme can be extended to full-time for a group of children in the same setting.

In **Bulgaria**, the law defines the minimum and maximum times for pedagogical activities that are spread over a half-day or full-day programme. The most widespread form of preschool education is full-day programmes.

In **Czechia**, compulsory programme is 20 hours, but nursery schools (*mateřské školy*) provide free-of-charge ECEC up to 60 hours per week (12 hours per day).

In **Greece**, 25 weekly hours are compulsory for 4- and 5-year-olds. There is an optional full-day programme with an extended timetable until 16:00, providing 20 additional weekly hours. Moreover, classes for children arriving before the start of regular activities are available.

In **Cyprus**, optional all-day public pre-primary schools function on a voluntary basis from September until June, with additional afternoon periods each weekday, until 15:00 or 16:00. This time is used for rest, consolidation of morning educational goals, remedial teaching for children with learning difficulties, play and creative activities.

In **Hungary**, children must attend 4 hours of ECEC per day, but there is no maximum. The *óvoda* are open for a minimum of 8 hours per day and the usual availability is 10 hours per day.

In **Slovakia**, 5-year-old children must attend compulsory ECEC for at least 4 hours per working day, but they can spend the full day in the kindergarten for free. Kindergartens are usually open on a full-day schedule, from 07:00 till 17:00 (~ 50 hours per week).

In **Romania**, ECEC hours are regulated by the curriculum for early childhood education. Options include short programmes (5 hours per day) and full-day programmes (10 hours per day). In full-day programmes, afternoons feature relaxation and thematic play to reinforce learning activities from the morning.

Only seven countries have no gap between childcare leave and the ECEC place guarantee

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 ages for guaranteed places in ECEC, it is important to take into account another important family policy measure – namely, the length of childcare leave.

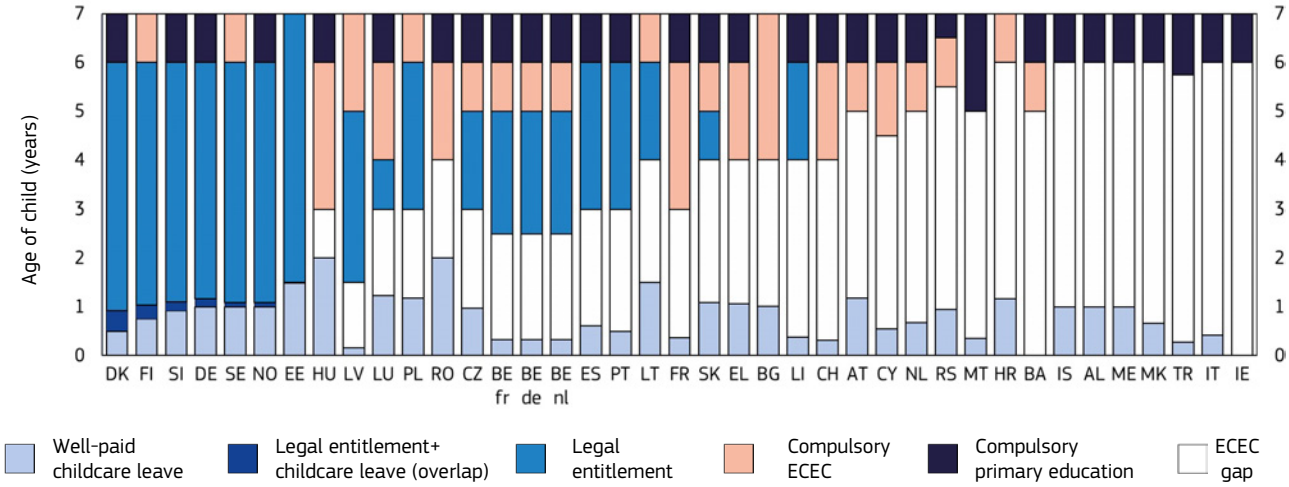
The length of well-paid childcare leave (where 'well-paid' means earnings-related payment of 66 % of earnings or more) varies greatly in Europe. Data from the International Network on Leave Policies and Research (Dobrotić et al., 2024) reveals that almost half of European countries provide an opportunity for families to stay off work and raise their children for around 1 year or more. Families may care for their children without facing financial risk for up to 2 years after the child's birth in Hungary and Romania. Lithuania and Estonia come next in terms of length of leave, with childcare leaves available up until the child reaches 1-and-a-half 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 in 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 by either well-paid childcare leave or a guaranteed place in publicly subsidised 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 B3 shows the difference between the end of the maximum well-paid childcare leave and the earliest start of the universal ECEC place guarantee. The European countries are listed according to the length of the ECEC gap. On the left, where no gap is indicated, are the countries with well-coordinated childcare leave and ECEC policies. Countries with no ECEC gap grant long well-paid childcare leave (on average 13 months) and have unitary ECEC systems that provide a legal right to a subsidised, but not free, place. Only six Member States (Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Slovenia,

Finland and Sweden), along with Norway, have no ECEC gap. Most of these countries even have some overlap, during which parents are still entitled to childcare leave but a place in publicly subsidised ECEC is already guaranteed. The overlap offers families flexibility during the transition to ECEC. However, even with an overlap according to the legal framework, children born during certain months of the year might need to wait till admission. For example, in Norway, children's admission to kindergarten typically starts in August, but for those born in autumn, it is possible at the end of the month they turn one year old.

Figure B3: Gap between childcare leave and ECEC place guarantee, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

		BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
Leave duration		0.3	0.3	0.3	1.0	1.0	0.9	1.2	1.5	0.0	1.1	0.6	0.4	1.2	0.4	0.5	0.2	1.5	1.2	2.0	0.4
Start of	Legal entitlement	2.5	2.5	2.5	x	3	0.5	1	1.5	x	x	3	x	x	x	x	1.5	4	3	x	x
	Compulsory ECEC	5	5	5	4	5	x	x	x	x	4	x	3	6	x	4.5	5	6	4	3	x
	Compulsory primary	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	7	6	6	7	7	6	6	5

		NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE		AL	BA	CH	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Leave duration		0.7	1.2	1.2	0.5	2.0	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.1		1.0	0.0	0.3	1.0	0.4	1.0	0.7	1.1	0.9	0.3
Start of	Legal entitlement	x	x	3	3	x	0.9	4	0.8	1		x	x	x	x	4	x	x	1	x	x
	Compulsory ECEC	5	5	6	x	4	x	5	6	6		x	5	4	x	x	x	x	x	5.5	x
	Compulsory primary	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	7	7		6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6.5	5.75

Explanatory notes

The ECEC gap is the difference between the maximum length of well-paid leave and the earliest start of a universal ECEC place guarantee or compulsory primary education. Only universal measures available to all children are considered. Most of the data on well-paid leave comes from the International Network on Leave Policies and Research and refers to April 2024 (Dobrotić et al., 2024, pp. 23–26). It includes post-natal maternity, paternity and parental leave. 'Well-paid' means earnings-related payment of 66 % of earnings or more. The total amount of leave available to parents (expressed in child's age in months) was converted to years by dividing the number by 12. The table shows values in years.

Country-specific notes

Spain: An extension of parental leave is planned. The Minister of Social Rights, Consumer Affairs and 2030 Agenda has announced that he will take this measure to parliament ([8]).

Portugal: Despite the extension of legal entitlement from children aged 4 to children aged 3 in 2018, demand has still not been met for 3-year-olds in some large cities. The legal entitlement is fully enforced from age 4 onwards.

Albania, **Liechtenstein**, **Montenegro** and **North Macedonia**: Leave data was provided by Eurydice.

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

Switzerland: In all cantons except Grisons, attendance of pre-primary education is compulsory. In Grisons, where pre-primary education is not compulsory, children are legally entitled to a publicly subsidised place from age 4. Pre-primary education is compulsory from age 5 (for 1 year) in eight cantons (Appenzell Innerrhoden, Appenzell Ausserrhoden, Lucerne, Nidwalden, Obwalden, Schwyz, Uri, Zug). In the remaining 17 cantons, ECEC is compulsory from age 4 (for 2 years).

([8]) See the website of the Ministry of Social Rights, Consumer Affairs and 2030 Agenda: https://www.agenda2030.gob.es/en/comunicacion/noticias/derechos-sociales/20240320-bustinduy-congreso-renta-crianza.htm.

When there is an ECEC gap, it lasts for a minimum of 1 year and a maximum of almost 6 years. The gap is between 1 and 2 years in Czechia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Poland and Romania. Most of these countries grant long periods of 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-and-a-half. 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, an allowance of 60 % of the previous salary allowance; or, until the child is 1-and-a-half years old, an allowance of 44 % of the previous salary allowance. In addition, a person caring for a child aged up to 1-and-a-half years receives a childcare allowance (EUR 171 per month).

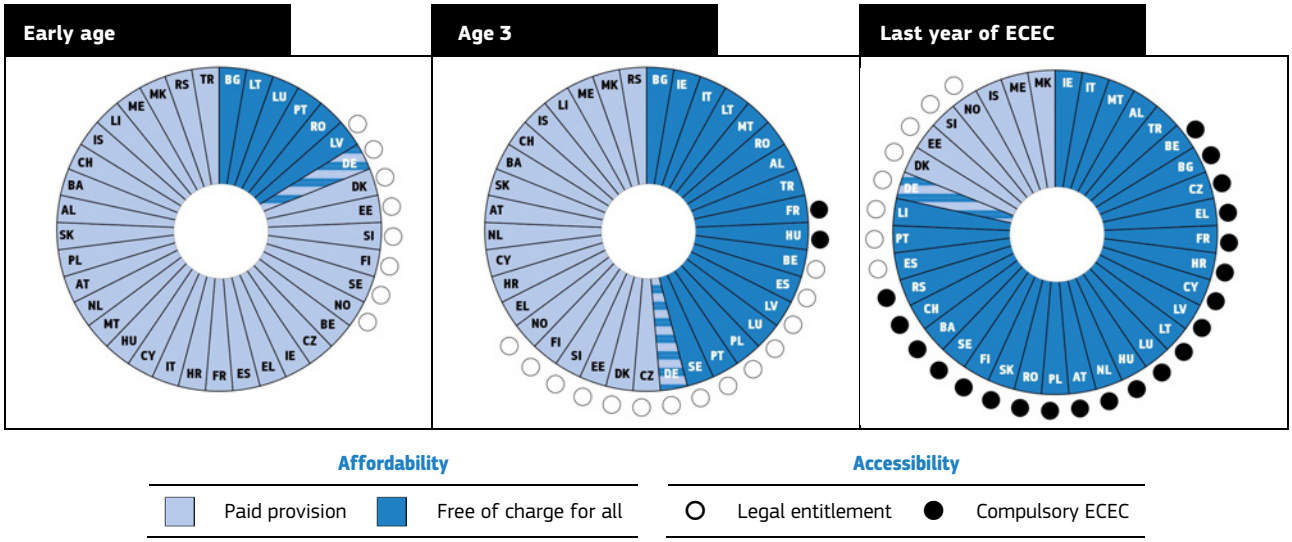
The ECEC gap lasts more than 2, but less than 3 years in Belgium, Greece, Spain, France, Lithuania, Portugal, and Slovakia. In the remaining countries, the period with no childcare leave and no entitlement to ECEC lasts 3 years or longer. From a legal rights point of view, 10 European countries have a very long ECEC gap (around 5 years or more): Ireland, Croatia, Italy, Malta, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Türkiye. Most of the countries with a long ECEC gap either do not guarantee 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* (e.g. in Ireland, Malta, Italy and Iceland).

Free of charge ECEC in the last year before primary education is widespread

Affordability is a very important factor in ensuring that the highest possible number of children have access to ECEC. Figure B4 examines the most robust measure taken to ensure that every family can afford to place their child in ECEC: 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 and have complex priority rules. Therefore, Figure B4 shows the availability of ECEC free of charge in relation to a guaranteed place for three broad age groups:

1. early age (under 2);
2. age 3 (over 2, under 4);
3. last year of ECEC (4–6, depending on the education system).

Figure B4: ECEC free of charge and guaranteed places, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

Starting age of ECEC free of charge for all children 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	MT
Age (years)	2.5	2.5	2.5	0.3	5	-	⊗	-	2.7	4	3	3	6	3	4.5	1.5	0	1	3	2.75
Weekly hours	23	23	23	Δ	Δ	-	⊗	-	15	Δ	25	24	(4–7)	Δ	Δ	⊗	20	20–26	Δ	30
	NL	**AT**	**PL**	**PT**	**RO**	**SI**	**SK**	**FI**	**SE**		**AL**	**BA**	**CH**	**IS**	**LI**	**ME**	**MK**	**NO**	**RS**	**TR**
Age (years)	4	5	3	0	0.3	-	5	6	3		3	5	4	-	4	-	-	-	5.5	3
Weekly hours	25	20	25	Δ	Δ	-	Δ	20	(15)		20	(4–5)	10–20	-	21	-	-	-	Δ	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, Brandenburg, Hamburg and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania offer ECEC free of charge to all children. In Rhineland-Palatinate, ECEC is free of charge from age 2. Bremen, Hesse and Lower Saxony waive the fees from age 3. North Rhine-Westphalia and Thuringia offer free ECEC to all children during the final 2 years before primary education. ECEC is not free of charge in Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Saarland, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Schleswig-Holstein, but there are fee reductions or fee subsidies.
Portugal: A gradual extension of free ECEC to cover all children has taken place. Since 1 September 2022, there have been no fees for all children entering the first year of *creche*. In 2023, this measure was extended to all children entering the first year of *creche* and proceeding into the second year. In 2024, all children attend *creche* for free. See Law No 2/2022 of 3 January ([9]).
Iceland: The right to ECEC is broadly described in laws and regulations without referring to a specific age or number of hours, but the fees are heavily subsidised and low.

In Europe, most families pay fees for ECEC for younger 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. This trend is accelerated by the increasing availability of public services, especially in ECEC systems with split governance (see Figure A4a), where ECEC becomes part of the education system from around age 3. Free compulsory ECEC is introduced for the last year before primary education in many European education systems.

Free of charge public ECEC for all children from the earliest years is offered in six countries: Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal and Romania. Latvia is the only European country that guarantees a place in free public ECEC from as early as 1-and-a-half 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 cost of the private service provider. The cost covered corresponds to the average cost of a child in a pre-primary education programme at the local government educational institution (Education Law, Section 17) ([10]).

In the five other countries (Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Portugal and Romania), there is no legal guarantee to ensure the availability of free ECEC from an early age. Lithuania and Luxembourg offer ECEC free of charge 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 ECEC free of charge for 20 hours per week. If the child attends for longer than 20 hours per week, government and municipalities fund the additional hours. Parents (or guardians) pay for the child's meals and a small amount for educational materials. All 6-year-olds attending compulsory pre-primary classes are provided with a free lunch.

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

In **Portugal**, the majority of *creches* catering for children under the age of 3 are open 5 days a week for up to 12 hours per day. Children usually attend for 6–10 hours per day. The organisation of that time is the responsibility of the establishment management, which, as a rule, adjusts the number of hours per week to meet the families' needs. For children aged 3 and over, 25 hours are

([9]) https://files.dre.pt/1s/2022/01/00100/0000500005.pdf.
([10]) https://likumi.lv/ta/id/50759-izglitibas-likums.

distributed as 5 hours per day. In addition, there are paid activities that ensure the monitoring of children before and/or after the daily period of educational activities and during periods when these activities are interrupted.

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

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 Figure B5). From around age 3, almost half of European countries offer free of charge ECEC. In many countries, this is a period of transition when children change from a childcare-type setting to an education-type setting. Most of these countries combine free ECEC with a place guarantee (e.g. Belgium, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Hungary, and Poland).

For the last year of ECEC, the distribution of free-of-charge 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, six *Länder* in Germany, Estonia, Slovenia, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Norway, where some parents contribute to costs over the entire period when their child attends ECEC. However, it is essential to note that a significant proportion of parents in these countries do not pay any fees. Slovenia, for instance, calculates fees based on nine wealth brackets, considering income, property and family composition. Families in the lowest-income group and some families with multiple children are exempt from paying fees (see Figure B8).

ECEC fees are heavily subsidised in most countries

As discussed in the previous section, the best way to ensure affordability is to provide ECEC services free of charge. However, it is mainly during the last year or two of ECEC that children in Europe can attend ECEC at no cost to their families. Most families need to pay fees for younger children (see Figure B4). In such cases, the levels of fees largely influence the accessibility of ECEC.

Figure B5 shows an overview of the level of fees in Europe, grouping the countries into several large categories (very low, low, medium and high fee levels). The analysis is based on national statistics, national surveys and expert evaluations. As this is not survey data, but a summary of records from various sources and covering a range of reference years, the fees are not directly comparable. Figure B5 should be seen as an indication only.

To facilitate international comparison, fees have been converted from national currencies into purchasing power standards (PPSs). The PPS is an artificial common reference currency unit used to express the volume of economic aggregates for the purpose of spatial comparisons in such a way that price level differences between countries are eliminated.

Many European countries regulate ECEC fees in the public and publicly subsidised sectors. Often, governments set the fee ceiling at a specific figure, but the limit may be expressed as a proportion of family income or ECEC costs.

In **Denmark** and **Iceland**, parents' fees must not make up more than 25 % of a setting's estimated gross operating expenditure.

In **Estonia**, the amount covered by parents per child cannot exceed 20 % of the minimum wage ([11]).

In **Finland**, since August 2024, the maximum monthly fee has been set at EUR 311 (PPS 243). Over half of the children are exempt from paying any fees ([12]).

In **Sweden**, households pay fees for ECEC based on a percentage of their total income, capped at a certain level depending on the number of children in the household. In 2023, the ECEC fee ceiling for children under age 3 was 3 % of the total household income or a maximum of PPS 122 per month for the first child, 2 % or a

([11]) The Preschool Child Care Institutions Act, 18 February 1999, Art. 27, https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/527092023002/consolide.

([12]) https://vipunen.fi/fi-fi/_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/fi-fi/Raportit/Varhaiskasvatus%20-%20asiakasmaksut%20-%20kuntien%20asiakasmaksut%20maksuluokittain.xlsb.

maximum of PPS 82 for the second child and 1 % or a maximum of PPS 41 for the third child. Preschool attendance for children aged 3–5 years includes 15 hours per week free of charge. The fees for additional hours are capped using similar rules. For the first child, the fee ceiling was 2 % of total household income or a maximum of PPS 82; for the second or third child, the fee ceiling was 1 % or a maximum of PPS 41. Families with more children in ECEC pay no fees for any of their children ([13]).

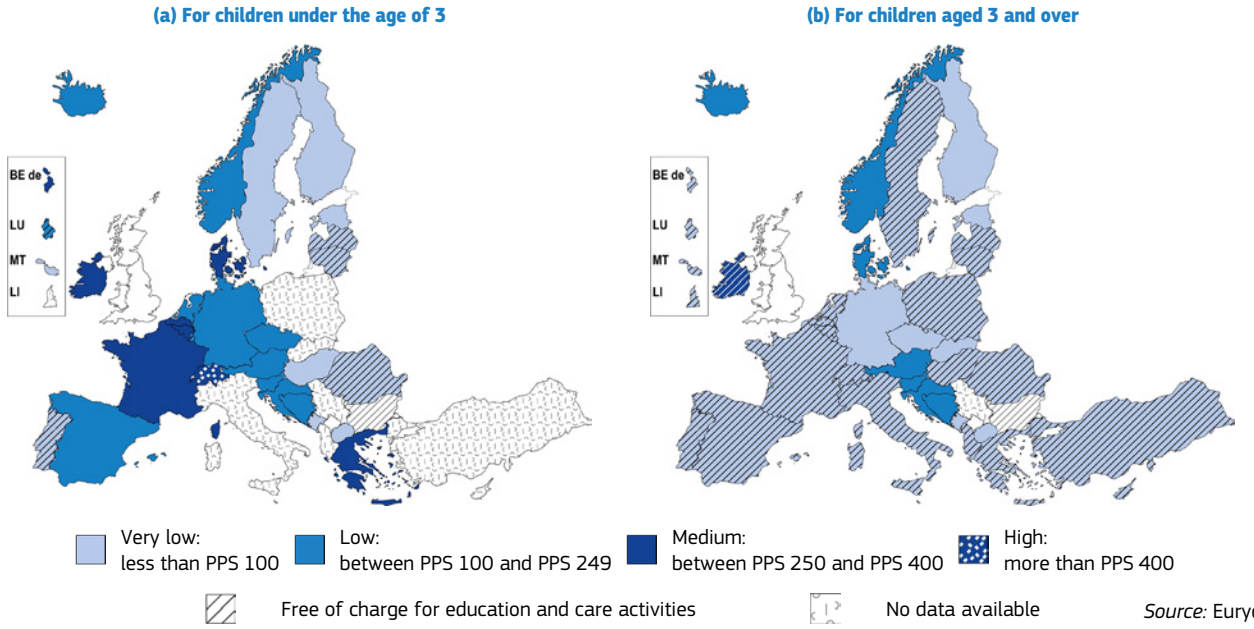
In **Norway**, fees for a place in kindergarten are limited to 6 % of a household's income. In 2023, the national maximum price for a full-time kindergarten per month, which applies to all institutions (public and private government dependent), was NOK 3 000 (PPS 221). As of 1 August 2024, the national maximum price for a full-time kindergarten place per month has been reduced to NOK 2 000 (PPS 129) and the government has introduced an extra low maximum price (NOK 1 500; PPS 97) for the least populated municipalities. Some northern municipalities offer kindergarten free of charge for all children.

ECEC fees for children vary greatly across European countries and across different types of provision, especially for children under age 3. There are no fees for at least 20 hours of ECEC per week for all children under age 3 in six EU countries: Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal and Romania (see the table under Figure B4). In Bulgaria, all children's meals are also free of charge ([14]). In the rest of these countries, parents may still pay some fees for meals or additional hours.

In **Lithuania**, ECEC is provided free of charge to families for 20 hours per week. However, if children attend for more than 4 hours per day, parents are required to pay a small fee. For instance, in the Vilnius City Municipality ([15]), parents pay EUR 1 per day towards the educational component, totalling approximately EUR 22 (PPS 30) per month. In addition, meal costs vary depending on the duration of the child's stay in the ECEC facility. Specifically, for children attending less than 4 hours a day, monthly meal expenses amount to around EUR 50 (PPS 67). However, for extended stays of approximately 10.5–12 hours per day, meal expenses are estimated to be approximately EUR 60 (PPS 81) per month. Meal fees are slightly reduced for children under the age of 3.

In most European countries, charges are incurred for ECEC services for children under the age of 3. Estonia, Hungary, Malta ([16]), Finland, Sweden, Montenegro and North Macedonia typically impose very low charges, often less than PPS 100. Meanwhile, in Czechia, Germany, Spain, Croatia, the Netherlands, Austria, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland and Norway, the average fees range between PPS 100 and PPS 249. Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Greece and France tend to have moderately high fees, falling between PPS 250 and PPS 400. Notably, in some of these countries, a small proportion of children from wealthy families attend very expensive (with fees higher than PPS 500) private ECEC.

Figure B5: Average monthly fees for ECEC, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

([13]) https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/statsbidrag/statsbidrag-for-maxtaxa-2023.
([14]) Since 1 April 2022, with an amendment to the Local Taxes and Fees Act.
([15]) https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/d6ccc6d01b8b11eaa4a5fa76770768ee/asr.
([16]) Parents who are not in employment or education.

Average monthly fees for ECEC for children aged under 3

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR
PPS	300	153–765	260	No fees	Max. 245	329	182	44	339	Max. 472	Max. 246	230–284	160
National currency	353	180–900	306	No fees	Max. 4 720	3 600	200	41	491	Max. 400	Max. 240	246–304	110
	IT	**CY**	**LV**	**LT**	**LU**	**HU**	**MT**	**NL**	**AT**	**PL**	**PT**	**RO**	**SI**
PPS	:	:	No fees	67	137	41	0–99	178	0–473	:	No fees	No fees	135
National currency	:	:	No fees	50	209	10 000	0–90	215	0–550	:	No fees	No fees	119
	SK	**FI**	**SE**	**AL**	**BA**	**CH**	**IS**	**LI**	**ME**	**MK**	**NO**	**RS**	**TR**
PPS	:	64	0–120	:	187	54–1 404	126	:	63	41–62	187	:	:
National currency	:	82	0–1 645	:	200	100–2 600	31 000	:	35	1 200–1 800	2 894	:	:

Average monthly fees for ECEC for children aged 3 and over

	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	HR	CY	LT	LU	AT	PL
PPS	21	183	55	44	228	160	44–127	81	34	0–473	48
National currency	403	2 000	60	41	331	110	42–120	60	52	0–550	130
	SI	**SK**	**FI**	**SE**		**AL**	**BA**	**IS**	**ME**	**MK**	**NO**
PPS	104	16	64	0–80		31	187	139	64	41–62	187
National currency	92	13	82	0–1 097		2 000	200	31 000	35	1 200–1 800	2 894

No fees for education and care activities: BE, BG, EL, ES, FR, IT, LV, HU, MT, NL, PT, RO, CH, LI, TR.

No data: RS.

Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The data refers to monthly fees after deduction of social security and tax benefits. To facilitate international comparison, fees have been converted from national currencies into purchasing power standards (PPS). The PPS is an artificial common reference currency unit used to express the volume of economic aggregates for the purpose of spatial comparisons in such a way that price level differences between countries are eliminated. The PPS values are obtained by dividing the national currency unit by the purchasing power parity. Eurostat data on purchasing power parities (EU-27 = 1) (prc_ppp_ind) for 2022 was used (last updated 26 March 2024), specifically the analytical category 'actual individual consumption'.

When no data on actual averages exists, the estimates were calculated based on full-time attendance (minimum of 25 hours) if not stated otherwise. Weekly fees are converted to a notional monthly fee by multiplying by a factor of 4.345. Range is indicated when average figures are not available. The range shows the minimum and maximum fees if not stated otherwise in the country-specific notes. When the table shows a range, the figure is based on Eurydice expert estimations.

Whenever possible, all ECEC sectors are taken into account. In countries where public ECEC dominates and a small percentage of children attend very expensive, independent private ECEC, only public fees are shown, to reflect the most common situation. The countries with no fees for education and care are shown as 'very low', as there might be some fees for meals or some activities. Bulgaria is the only country that has no fees for meals.

Figure B5b shows data if fees are collected during at least 1 year in the period 'aged 3 and over'. Please see country information on the age at which free ECEC starts for all children in Figure B4.

Country-specific notes

Denmark: In 2023, in home-based ECEC (*dagpleje*), the average fees were PPS 283.
Germany: Meals are not included. The figures refer to an 'expanded half-day place' (26–35 hours per week) in centre-based ECEC. In home-based ECEC (*Tagespflege*), fees for 'expanded half-day places' for children under 3 range between EUR 150 and EUR 350, with an average of EUR 270 (PPS 136–319; average PPS 246). There is considerable variation in the fees between the regional (*Länder*) level and the local level (municipalities). See the notes under Figure B4 on which *Länder* offer ECEC free of charge.
Spain: For children under 3 years old, fees for public and private government-dependent institutions vary depending on the autonomous community. For example, in Aragon and Cantabria, there are no educational fees in these institutions, while Andalusia and Navarre do impose fees. The table indicates the maximum possible fee in the autonomous community with the highest fees.
France: The range in the table indicates the fees for families with resources equivalent to three times the minimum wage after direct and indirect subsidies are deducted (for full-time childcare). The minimum indicates the fees in public centre-based *crèches*, and the maximum shows fees for home-based *assistant(e)s maternel(le)s*. There is considerable variation in fees according to income and family structure: EUR 40 for a single parent with resources of half the minimum wage in public centre-based crèches and EUR 460 for a couple with resources five times the minimum wage (up to EUR 710 in microcrèches). The reform ([17]) provided for by the Financing Law for 2023 will align the costs of care in a crèche and by an *assistant(e) maternel(le)* (entering into force on 1 September 2025).

([17]) https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/article_jo/JORFARTI000046791873.

Italy: ECEC is offered free of charge in public and publicly subsidised sectors, which account for approximately 73 % of all available spaces for children aged 3–6.
Lithuania: Fees for meals and educational activities complement the 20 hours of free ECEC.
Luxembourg: Monthly fees for ECEC attendance are for at least 25 hours per week.
Malta: Around 80 % of the children under 3 use the free childcare scheme ([18]). The higher end of the range indicates the average fees for those who are not eligible for the scheme (both parents not working and not studying). No data is available on the independent private sector.
Netherlands: Calculations are based on 2022 average hourly fees and monthly attendance hours (89 hours for centre-based ECEC, 70 hours for home-based ECEC), factoring in income-dependent subsidies to determine parents' actual average payments.
Austria: The values indicate the minimum and maximum in some *Länder* for full-time attendance.
Poland: For children aged 3 and older, the data includes average fees for extra hours beyond the free 5 hours per day. Parents pay extra for their children's meals, but this is not covered in the data.
Iceland: The municipalities determine fees, which are generally comparable. The data shows the prevailing ECEC fees for a typical day (8 hours) with the standard meal package (three meals a day) for a two-parent family in Reykjavík, the largest municipality, in October 2023.
Switzerland: The maximum is the median for high-income families with no subsidies.
Norway: The average cost encompasses all age groups and institutions, covering free places, meal expenses and other supplementary charges.

Fees are highest in Switzerland: average monthly fees in public or private ECEC for children up to age 4 can reach more than PPS 1 600. Public subsidies to offset parental costs are generally income dependent.

For children aged 3 and over, ECEC costs for families drop significantly in many European countries (see Figure B5b). Pre-primary education is free of charge for at least a few hours per day in almost half of European countries (for more details, see Figure B4). In the rest, the average fees for meals and educational activities rarely surpass PPS 100.

Independent private ECEC centres, which sometimes offer around one quarter of ECEC places, particularly for younger children (see Figure A9), often set their fees at higher rates. This trend is especially notable in cases where there is no legal entitlement and demand exceeds supply (see Figure B6a). However, obtaining comprehensive data on these fees remains challenging, leading to difficulties in cross-country comparisons across Europe. Some countries provide partial compensation for fees paid by families for private provision.

In **Cyprus**, since 2022/2023, parents who receive social welfare allowance have received financial aid to partly cover the costs of an ECEC place in a private ECEC setting.

In **Lithuania**, in some municipalities, parents whose child is not given a place in a public ECEC setting receive financial support of EUR 120–150 per month to partly cover the cost of an ECEC place in a private ECEC setting.

In **Finland**, families can opt for private ECEC with the help of a private care allowance awarded by the state or opt for vouchers provided by many municipalities. When a family has opted for a private ECEC place and the private care allowance, the fees can be much higher than in municipal ECEC ([19]).

In **Slovakia**, the last year of pre-primary education is compulsory and free of charge in public preschools. The fees in private kindergartens (*materské školy*) for the last pre-primary year are reduced by the amount of the state contribution.

It is important to note that fee structures tend to align across the entire ECEC range in several countries with unitary settings. The charges remain consistent for each year within the ECEC age range until the start of compulsory education in Estonia, Croatia, Austria, Finland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Norway.

ECEC demand is unmet for younger children, but balanced for the final year

The balance between the demand for and supply of publicly subsidised ECEC places stands as a key outcome measure of the policies on access discussed in this chapter. Yet it is crucial to consider this indicator alongside data on participation rates. Factors such as cultural norms and traditional family values may contribute to a lower demand for ECEC among very young children. Demand may also be affected by perception of the quality of ECEC; families who deem ECEC provision to be of low quality may opt for other childcare arrangements and may therefore not even request a place.

Figure B6 presents an overview of the estimated balance between demand and supply across three age groups: very young children, those around age 3 and older children in their final year of ECEC. This assessment encompasses all forms of public and publicly subsidised ECEC services, including home-

([18]) https://www.childcaremalta.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/fcsbrochurewebuse2023.pdf.
([19]) https://vipunen.fi/fi-fi/varhaiskasvatus/Sivut/Maksutiedot.aspx.

based ECEC, which plays a crucial role in meeting demand in several countries (as illustrated in Figure A3). It provides a generalised overview based on reports, surveys and expert estimates. Systematic disbalances, when there is a shortage of places in some areas but oversupply in others, are denoted by a chequered pattern. It is important to note that the analysis does not account for individual cases where a child may not secure a place in their preferred setting.

The demand for places in ECEC is met satisfactorily from the earliest age in Denmark, Estonia, Malta, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and Norway. Most of these countries ensure a legal entitlement to ECEC from an early age for all children (see Figure B1), while Malta provides generous targeted childcare entitlements for working and studying parents.

In **Malta**, there have been no instances of parents failing to secure a place for their child in the 0–2 age group. Concerning pre-primary education for children aged 3 and above, the government possesses the necessary means and resources to accommodate demand by opening as many classes as required.

In **Slovenia**, at the national level, demand and supply are balanced and there are no major discrepancies between certain areas. Information on places available in each public and government-dependent private kindergarten is updated monthly on the Ministry of Education's website ([20]).

In two countries where access to ECEC is legally ensured from a young age, Germany and Latvia, there are still notable gaps in the availability of publicly subsidised ECEC places.

In **Germany**, an analysis of ECEC provision in 2020 revealed a notable disparity between the participation rate (35 %) and expressed parental needs (49 %) in relation to children under 3 years old, resulting in a national gap of 14 percentage points. For children aged 3 and over, this difference diminishes to 4.5 percentage points. Notably, considerable variations exist across *Länder*, with western German states consistently exhibiting a more substantial disparity between demand and supply in ECEC services ([21]).

Some countries note that access to ECEC has been improving for younger children.

Spain has been increasing the offer of public places in the first cycle of ECEC for children under age 3. In line with the objectives outlined in Organic Law 2/2006, amended by Organic Law 3/2020 ([22]), over 60 000 places will be created by 2025; this has already resulted in an increase of 3.9 percentage points in the ECEC participation rate for children under 3 during the 2022/2023 school year compared with the previous year ([23]). There has been widespread improvement across all autonomous communities, reducing some regional differences ([24]). In the second cycle of ECEC (for children aged 3 years and over), demand and supply are balanced in all autonomous communities.

In **Hungary**, the percentage of children under 3 years lacking access to nearby nursery care has steadily declined, dropping from 26 % in 2017 to 17 % in 2023 ([25]).

In more than half of the European education systems, demand and supply reach equilibrium by age 3. Typically, the demand is fulfilled from the age specified by the legal entitlement. In countries with split governance structures (see Figure A4a), demand tends to align with supply as ECEC integrates into the education system. Typically, enough places are provided in pre-primary schools even in countries with no explicit legal entitlement. However, some countries still admit difficulties.

In **Portugal**, despite the extension of legal entitlement from children aged 4 to children aged 3 in 2018, demand has still not been met for 3-year-olds in some large cities. The legal entitlement is fully enforced from age 4 onwards.

In several countries, supply and demand are met during the last year(s) of ECEC. Czechia, Germany, Ireland, Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Liechtenstein and Türkiye satisfy the demand for ECEC places during the last year of ECEC, which is often legally guaranteed or compulsory.

([20]) https://paka3.mss.edus.si/temreg3/vrtci.

([21]) https://www.dji.de/fileadmin/user_upload/erik/Berichte/FB%20II/ERiK_Forschungsbericht_II_E-Book.pdf, p. 9.

([22]) https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2006-7899#a15.

([23]) Eurydice calculations based on the EDUCAbase: https://estadisticas.educacion.gob.es/EducaJaxiPx/Tabla.htm?path=/no-universitaria/alumnado/matriculado/series/gen-alumnado/l0/&file=alumnado_2_03.px&L=0.

([24]) https://boe.es/boe/dias/2021/12/29/pdfs/BOE-A-2021-21761.pdf; https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/prensa/actualidad/2023/11/20231107-fondoscmin.html.

([25]) https://www.ksh.hu/s/helyzetkep-2023/#/kiadvany/kisgyermekek-napkozbeni-ellatasa/azoknak-a-3-even-aluli-gyermekek-szama-es-aranya-akik-a-lakohelyukon-napkozbeni-ellatashoz-nem-fernek-hozza.

In **Lithuania**, with the gradual expansion of the universal legal entitlement, municipalities are currently investing in the creation or modernisation of new places/groups for children aged 3 and over. The further expansion for 2-year-olds in 2025 will require higher financial allocations due to lower child–staff ratios ([26]).

There is unmet demand in some areas across the entire ECEC phase in Bulgaria, Italy, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia. In addition, Albania and Serbia cannot estimate the demand and supply.

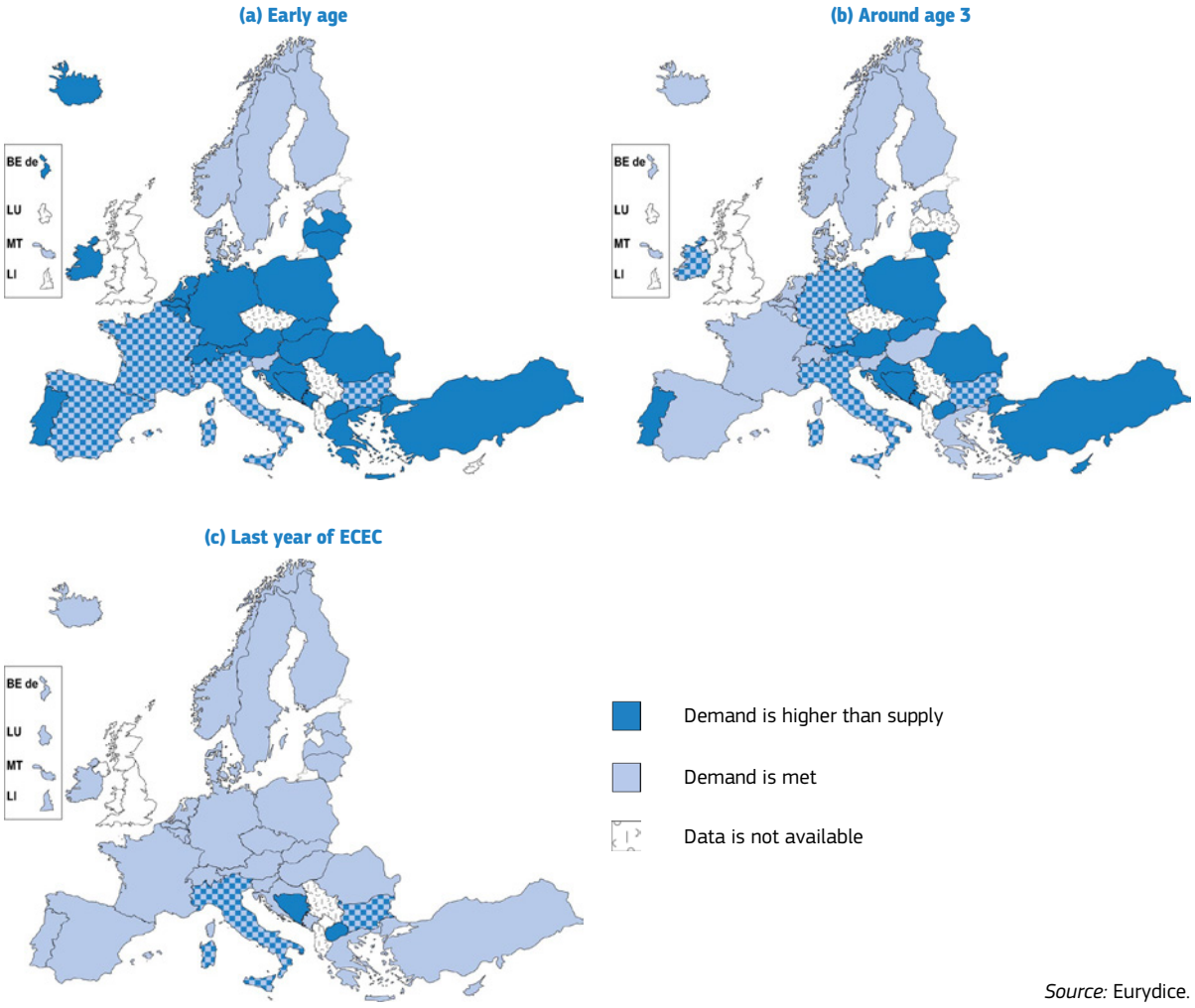
There are significant regional imbalances in some countries.

In **Bulgaria**, demand and supply are unbalanced. While some areas have vacancies, other regions face stark shortages, with not a single place available to accommodate children seeking enrolment.

In **France**, there are strong disparities among *départements* in terms of ECEC capacity: between 11 (French Guiana) and 85 places (Vendée) for 100 children under 3 years old ([27]). Overall, data shows that 84 % of families were able to obtain their desired form of childcare for this age group in 2021 ([28]).

In **Italy**, certain regions experience a shortage of educational services for children aged 0–2, an issue particularly evident in the north, where employment rates are high. However, due to falling birth rates, a balance between supply and demand has been reached in some regions, while in others the supply now exceeds the demand.

Figure B6: Demand for and supply of ECEC places, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

([26]) https://www.nsa.smm.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Ikimokiklinio-ugdymo-infrastrukturos-pletra-studija-2022-08-12.pdf.

([27]) See Rapport d'évaluation des politiques de sécurité sociale – Annexe 1: Famille, 2024 edition, p. 93, https://evaluation.securite-sociale.fr/files/live/sites/Repss/files/Médiathèque/Rapports/PLACSS%202023%20-%20REPSS%202024/PLACSS%202023%20-%20REPSS%20Famille%202024.pdf.

([28]) See Baromètre de l'accueil du jeune enfant 2021, L'e-ssentiel, No 209, p. 3, https://www.caf.fr/sites/default/files/medias/cnaf/Nous_connaitre/Recherche_et_statistiques/Essentiel/209_2022_ESSENTIEL-_Barometre_jeune_enfn_2021_CNAF.pdf.

Explanatory note

This figure provides a generalised overview based on reports, surveys and expert estimates. The indicator mainly concerns public and publicly subsidised ECEC, but some countries provided an overall assessment. Both centre-based and home-based ECEC are included.

Country-specific notes

Czechia: No exact data is available for 3- to 4-year-old children. According to the Czech School Inspectorate, most children whose parents had applied for a place for them were admitted to a nursery school (*mateřská škola*). As the capacity utilisation of nursery schools varies locally, problems with the placement of 3-year-old children in nursery schools may occur in large cities, or in the vicinity of large cities.
Greece, **the Netherlands**, **Switzerland** and **Liechtenstein**: For these countries, Figure B6b should be read as covering the category 'around age 4'.
Luxembourg: the ECEC sector for children under 3 years is subsidised to such an extent that the supply of ECEC places for very young children almost meets the demand. No official data is available.

Apart from factors such as age and place of residence, several additional reasons contribute to variations in the demand and supply of ECEC places. Different types of ECEC may experience varying levels of demand, with public centre-based provision often being the most sought after. Often, home-based ECEC is used when the demand for centre-based ECEC is unmet. For instance, a recent survey (DREES, 2023) in France revealed that about one quarter of children are being cared for by a childminder due to a lack of alternative solutions. In nurseries, this was the reason in only 6 % of cases. Nevertheless, the survey reported higher ultimate satisfaction among parents when children are looked after by a childminder (86 %) compared to a day-care center (74 %).

Where there are insufficient places in public ECEC settings, public subsidies may be directed towards private providers. For example, in Latvia, if public preschools cannot accommodate children, municipalities must subsidise parents' fees for enrolment in private preschool education programmes ([29]). In Lithuania, certain municipalities offer financial support for private ECEC to families whose children are on waiting lists for public preschools. In addition, in various countries, the independent private ECEC sector plays a significant role in meeting the demand for ECEC services (see Figure A8).

Furthermore, there may be unmet demand for full-time ECEC places or inadequate supply of ECEC places tailored to children with special needs or those at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Section II – Targeted measures for vulnerable children

Children who are vulnerable due to any personal or socioeconomic characteristics may face numerous challenges that can significantly affect their development and well-being. Economic instability within households may lead to inadequate access to necessities such as proper nutrition, healthcare and educational opportunities. A lack of dedicated support for special needs or to overcome language, cultural and economic barriers may increase these challenges (UNESCO, 2021). ECEC can play a pivotal role in breaking the cycle of disadvantage if it offers equal opportunities for all children, regardless of their personal or socioeconomic backgrounds, thus promoting social inclusion and cohesion ([30]).

Providing support to vulnerable children so that they can access ECEC is therefore crucial for ensuring their participation and long-term success. Early education lays the foundation for cognitive, social and emotional

([29]) The regulations on the methodology for determining the costs and the procedure for the municipality to cover the costs of the pre-school education programme of a private educational institution in accordance with the average costs determined by the municipality are available in Latvian: https://likumi.lv/ta/id/278801-noteikumi-par-izmaksu-noteiksanas-metodiku-un-kartibu-kada-pasvaldiba-atbilstosi-tas-noteiktajam-videjam-izmaksam-sedz-pirmssko.

([30]) Council conclusions on early childhood education and care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow (OJ C 175, 15.6.2011, p. 8), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011XG0615(04); Commission recommendation of 20 February 2013 – Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage (2013/112/EU) (OJ L 59, 2.3.2013, p. 5).

development, yet vulnerable children often face challenges such as limited access to high-quality programmes, resources or family support. By offering targeted interventions, inclusive programmes and additional resources, these gaps can be bridged, fostering equal opportunities for all children to thrive and reach their full potential. Moreover, early support not only benefits the individual child but also strengthens communities and reduces future social inequalities (Heckmann, 2006).

The EU is strongly committed to addressing the challenges faced by children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, through various policy initiatives aiming to supporting Member States at the national, regional and local levels. The European Pillar of Social Rights, adopted in November 2017, established the right to affordable ECEC of good quality as one of the 20 key social rights ([31]). It emphasises that '[c]hildren from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities'. Although still an aspiration in many countries, this interinstitutional proclamation gave impetus to the establishment of the EU quality framework for ECEC and the European child guarantee.

The European Pillar of Social Rights action plan (European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2021) includes the target of lifting at least 5 million children under age 18 out of poverty by 2030. Complementing this effort is the European child guarantee, which was adopted in 2021 by a Council recommendation ([32]). It aims to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing that children in need have effective access to a set of key services, including ECEC free of charge and at least one healthy meal per school day. Through the European child guarantee, the EU encourages Member States to develop and implement comprehensive action plans that address the needs of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, with a particular emphasis on early intervention and prevention measures.

The European Commission Toolkit for inclusive early childhood education and care (2021b) recalls political commitments made, e.g. in the European Pillar of Social Rights, and presents a set of practical solutions and measures to inspire ECEC policy makers at the national, regional or local level, as well as ECEC practitioners. It includes examples of good practice in ECEC settings and identifies useful ideas and resources to inspire leaders and staff across Europe to progress towards practice that is more inclusive.

The indicators in this section first outline the share of young children at risk of poverty or social exclusion across the EU countries. This is followed by an analysis of the main target groups that benefit from fee reductions and priority admission in centre-based ECEC settings for children under age 3. The last indicator presents an overview of some other top-level policies and measures promoting access to mainstream ECEC for vulnerable children aged 3 and older.

Around 24 % of children under age 6 in the EU are at risk of poverty or social exclusion

In 2023, in the EU-27, the share of children under age 6 at risk of poverty or social exclusion was 23.5 % (see Figure B7). This constitutes 5.6 million children. According to Eurostat definitions, children are considered at risk of poverty or social exclusion if they are in at least one of these three situations:

- they live in households with income that is below the at-risk-of-poverty ([33]) threshold (set at 60 % of the national median income);
- they suffer from severe material and social deprivation ([34]), meaning their families cannot afford at least 7 out of 13 deprivation items, in other words items that are considered by most people to be desirable or even necessary to have an adequate quality of life (which include being able to keep their homes adequately warm, being able to replace worn-out clothes with new ones,

([31]) Interinstitutional proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights (OJ C 428, 13.12.2017, p. 9). It was signed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on 17 November 2017 in Gothenburg, Sweden.

([32]) Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European child guarantee (OJ L 223, 22.6.202, p. 14), http://data.europa.eu/eli/reco/2021/1004/oj.

([33]) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:At-risk-of-poverty_rate.

([34]) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Severe_material_and_social_deprivation_rate_(SMSD).

having two pairs of properly fitting shoes and going on a 1-week holiday away from home on an annual basis);

- they live in households with low work intensity ([35]).

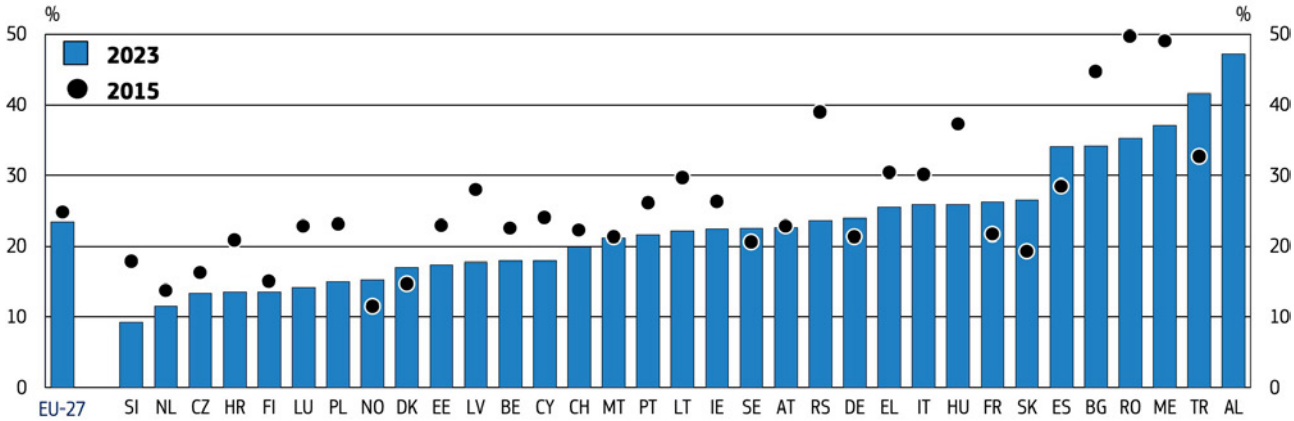
These three situations may overlap and interact with other sociodemographic characteristics. Among the children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe, it is common to find those with at least one parent with a disability, those from migrant backgrounds (at least one parent born outside the EU) and children living in single-parent households ([36]).

Among Member States, in 2023, the highest proportions of children under age 6 at risk of poverty or social exclusion were reported in Romania (35.3 %), Bulgaria (34.2 %) and Spain (34.1 %). Some neighbouring countries register even higher values (e.g. Albania, Montenegro and Türkiye). Slovenia is the only European country that registers fewer than 10 % of children under age 6 at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The proportion is around 12–15 % in Czechia, Croatia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Finland and Norway.

The data indicates that the percentage of children aged 0–5 facing poverty or social exclusion has declined in most European countries since 2015. Serbia and Romania stand out with reductions of 15.3 and 14.4 percentage points, respectively. Notable reductions in child poverty and social exclusion are also observed in Bulgaria, Latvia, Hungary and Montenegro.

In contrast, the proportion of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion has increased by 8.9 percentage points in Türkiye since 2015. The proportion of children under age 6 at risk of poverty and social exclusion grew by approximately 3–7 percentage points in Germany, Spain, France, Slovakia and Norway between 2015 and 2023.

Figure B7: Children under age 6 at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2015–2023 (percentage)



	EU-27	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
2023	23.5	18	34.2	13.4	17	24	17.4	22.5	25.6	34.1	26.3	13.6	25.9	18	17.8	22.2	14.2	25.9	21.2
2015	24.8	22.6	44.7	16.3	14.7	21.3	22.9	26.3	30.4	28.5	21.7	20.9	30.2	24.1	28	29.7	22.8	37.3	21.3

	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	CH	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
2023	11.6	22.7	15	21.6	35.3	9.2	26.6	13.6	22.6	47.2	:	19.9	:	:	37.1	:	15.2	23.7	41.6
2015	13.7	22.8	23.1	26.1	49.7	17.9	19.3	15.1	20.6	:	:	22.3	15.4	:	49	47.4	11.5	39	32.7

Source: Eurydice, based on Eurostat population statistics (ilc_peps01n) (last updated 30 August 2024).

Country-specific notes

France, **Croatia**, **Luxembourg**, **Finland** and **Norway**: There are breaks in the time series for these countries.
Albania: Country values use 2021 instead of 2023 data.
Switzerland, Montenegro, Serbia and **Türkiye**: Country values use 2022 instead of 2023 data.

([35]) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Persons_living_in_households_with_low_work_intensity.

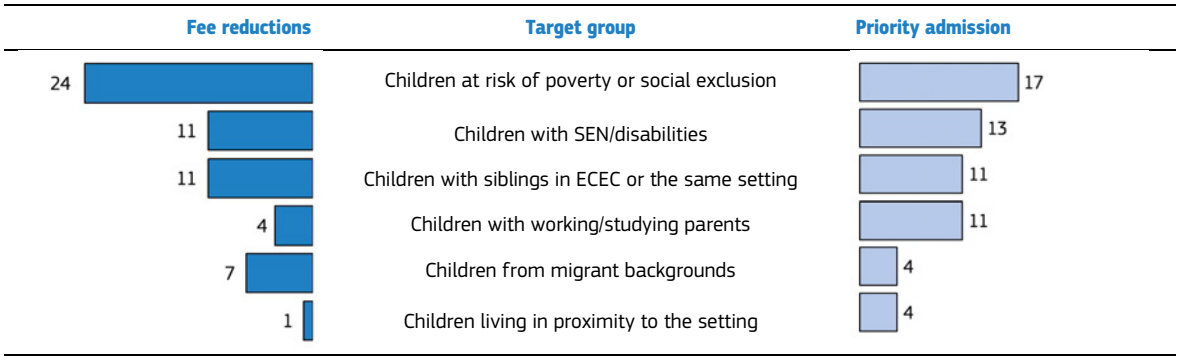
([36]) See the first version of the joint monitoring framework for the European child guarantee: https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=27275&langId=en.

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion are the main target group for fee reductions and priority admission

Very few European countries guarantee universal access to ECEC free of charge for children from the earliest years. As summarised in Figure B4, fees for ECEC are charged for children aged under 3 in all but six of the European countries analysed. Only eight countries guarantee a place in ECEC for all young children. Latvia is the only country that guarantees free public ECEC for all children from the age of 1-and-a-half. Instead of granting a right to ECEC free of charge for all children, most other countries have put in place targeted policies and measures to promote ECEC access for certain children and families.

Figure B8 shows some of the main groups that benefit from fee reductions and priority admission – two of the most common targeted measures for children under the age of 3. Overall, a similar number of countries promote targeted measures to increase affordability (fee reductions) and accessibility (priority admission). Countries, including those charging no fees for education and care activities, may also offer free meals to certain vulnerable children. The indicator includes those benefits as 'fee reductions'.

Figure B8: Target groups for fee reductions or priority admission in centre-based ECEC settings for children under age 3, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The category 'children at risk of poverty or social inclusion' includes children from families with low income, low levels of parental education or low parental employment status, children whose parents have physical/mental disabilities, those in single-parent families, children in foster care, children of women in shelters (fleeing violence at home), homeless children and children who have lost a parent in military service, a terror attack or similar circumstances. Children from migrant backgrounds includes Ukrainian children, those from regional or ethnic minority backgrounds and Roma children.

For each type of targeted measure, the number on the bar indicates the number of education systems addressing the group of children in their official documents. There are 39 education systems in total; information by country and system is available in Annex A.

Only a few countries offer no fee reductions and/or no priority admission (see Annex A for information on each country). This includes some of the countries that have a universal ECEC place guarantee from an early age (Figure B1) and some of those where supply meets demand (Figure B6). Moreover, in some countries, targeted measures are decided at the local or setting level (some country examples are given below).

When countries offer fee reductions and/or priority admission, children at risk of poverty or social exclusion are the most targeted group. Family income is a widespread criterion in this context. Recipients of certain welfare benefits might also be offered ECEC fee reductions (or exemptions) and/or priority admission. Common recipients also include children of single parents and children whose parent(s) have physical or mental disabilities. Having a child with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities is another important factor in relation to fee reductions and priority admission, as is the number of siblings in ECEC. Education systems often try to ease family life by giving priority to the siblings of children who already attend the same ECEC setting.

In many families with young children, both parents need to work, study or progress their careers. Seeing ECEC as a tool to promote female employment, around one quarter of European countries give priority to children from families where both parents work or study. Some also offer fee reductions to facilitate work–life balance and to increase incentives to work or study.

Several countries have targeted measures for children from migrant backgrounds. In particular, Ukrainian children are offered fee reductions and/or priority admission in Czechia, Ireland, France, Hungary, Portugal, and Romania. In Montenegro, ECEC attendance is free for Ukrainian children. In Poland, reduced crèche fees and free nursery school places are offered to children of Ukrainian refugees; local governments have received additional funds from the central budget to subsidise ECEC fees for these children. Greece and Croatia have specific measures facilitating access for Roma children.

Proximity to the setting is listed as a criterion for priority admission that has been established by top-level authorities in three countries (Croatia, Portugal and Romania). In others, this might be adopted at the local or setting level.

In general, many targeted approaches are interlinked. Some countries use complex scales and rules to determine fee reductions or exemptions.

In **Ireland**, the national childcare scheme ([37]) is designed to help parents to meet childcare costs for children aged over 6 months and up to 15 years old. It is a progressive scheme, meaning that the subsidy increases as household income decreases. A universal award is granted to all families, even those reaching the highest income threshold. The scheme offers income-assessed awards for parents in work or study: 20 hours for a standard award (based on income) or 45 hours for an enhanced award (requiring both parents, or one in single-parent families, to be working or studying). Families with more than one child receive additional discounts. A change in legislation was brought about to ensure Ukrainian children could access the schemes on the same footing as Irish nationals from the point of arrival.

In **France**, increasing the rate of ECEC attendance of children living in poverty is one of the priorities of the national strategy for preventing and combating poverty (launched in 2018) ([38]). The hourly fees are calculated according to the parents' income and the number of dependent children, between a minimum and maximum amount. Families with children who have disabilities receiving education allowances benefit from reduced fees. For families eligible for other benefits (e.g. active solidarity income ([39]), allowance for disabled adults ([40])), hourly fees are set at the minimum amount. Moreover, children of jobseekers benefit from priority admission.

In **Hungary**, by law, certain groups receive free care: children receiving regular child protection benefits (whose family income is below the legal minimum level), children raised in large families, children with chronic illness or disabilities and children in temporary care, foster care or protective care. For other groups, fees are determined based on income, with statutory maximums. The fee per child in nursery institutions cannot exceed 25 % of the regular monthly income of the child's family (20 % if the child receives free institutional meals).

In **Slovenia**, ECEC fees are determined on the basis of the national scale, which ranks parents by income brackets. The fees for the kindergarten programme are subsidised by the municipality by at least 23 %. The subsidy may be up to 100 % for parents in the lowest income bracket and children in foster care. If a second child attends ECEC simultaneously, parents do not pay fees for them or any subsequent children. In exceptional cases, the Centre for Social Work may apply additional reductions of the fee due to specific circumstances that threaten the social security of people or for other important reasons. For example, parents with temporary protection who are entitled to cash assistance are fully exempt from kindergarten payments for the duration of this right.

In **Finland**, the Act on Client Fees in Early Childhood Education and Care ([41]) lays down provisions on the fees for ECEC services provided by municipalities at early education centres and in family daycare. Fees are calculated on the basis of family size, income and the number of hours a child attends ECEC. For families with multiple children in municipal ECEC, fees are reduced for younger siblings. If a child participates in ECEC for at most 20 hours per week, the monthly fee is capped at 60 % of the full-time fee.

([37]) https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/pre-school-education-and-childcare/national-childcare-scheme/.
([38]) https://solidarites.gouv.fr/les-cinq-engagements-de-la-strategie-pauvrete.
([39]) https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/N19775.
([40]) https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F12242.
([41]) https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2016/20161503.

It is important to note that fees and priority rules are also often governed at the local or institutional level. The criteria used usually correspond to those listed in Figure B8.

In **Estonia**, local municipalities have the obligation to provide an ECEC place to all children aged 18 months to 7 years old living in the municipality. The rural municipality or city council establishes the fees to be covered by parents, which may vary depending on the age of the child, the management costs of ECEC institutions or other circumstances. The definition of low income differs from municipality to municipality, and it is most often related to minimum wage (e.g., to be eligible for fee exemption, the net income of the first family member must be less than the applicable minimum wage and that for each subsequent family member must be less than 80 % of the minimum wage). Fee exemptions (or reductions) are often applied for families with two or more children.

In **the Netherlands**, childcare benefits are income-dependent, with low-income households with two working parents receiving 96 % of the costs back. It is mandatory that both parents work or study in order to qualify for this.

In **Switzerland**, ECEC fees generally depend on the family income. Fee reductions are regulated at the cantonal or local level and therefore vary. Besides family income, the most common criteria for fee reductions are the number of siblings and the total number of children.

Specific rules may apply in some countries for government-dependent private ECEC institutions.

In **Bulgaria**, private kindergartens included in the system of state financing must provide the opportunity for no fewer than 20 % of the children enrolled, including children with SEN or gifted children, to be educated for free. In municipal kindergartens, priority admission can be awarded to different groups of children, including children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, those with siblings in ECEC, those with working/studying parents and those living in proximity to the setting.

In **Türkiye**, the establishment, operation and procedures of private kindergartens, daycare centres and private children's clubs are conducted by 81 provincial directorates under the supervision of the Ministry of Family and Social Services. To ensure access for all children, legislation mandates 'free care services', reserving 3 % of total capacity in private kindergartens and care centres for vulnerable children, in line with the principle of equal opportunity.

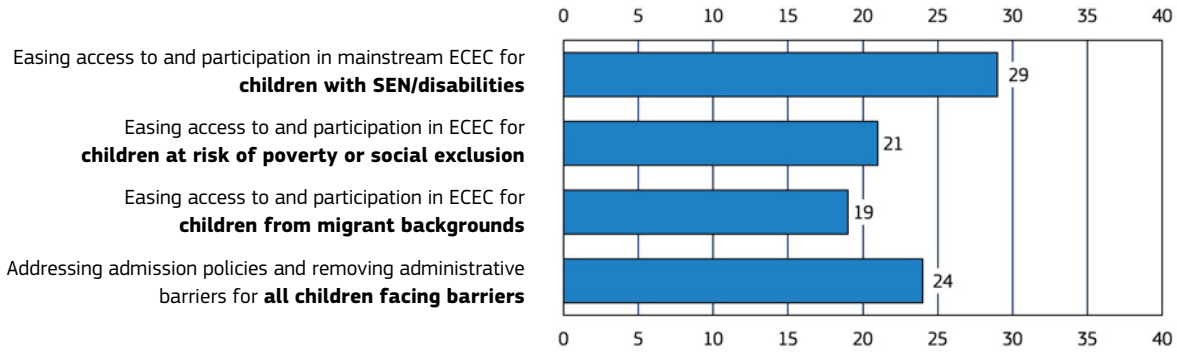
Policies for easing access to mainstream ECEC mainly target children with special educational needs / disabilities

Ensuring fee reductions and priority admission are the main measures to promote ECEC access for vulnerable children under the age of 3 (see Figure B8). While these measures may also be of importance to some children who are 3 years and older, the availability of ECEC free of charge increases across Europe at around that age (see Figure B4) and more and more countries provide a legal entitlement to ECEC or compulsory ECEC towards the last years of ECEC (see Figure B1). Therefore, other policies and measures may be promoted by top-level education authorities to ease access to mainstream ECEC for vulnerable children aged 3 and older (see Figure B9). As the policies and measures promoting access to mainstream ECEC for vulnerable children aged 3 and older may also apply to younger children, a detailed overview of the information by country and by age range is presented in Annex A.

Across Europe, the majority of policies and measures that promote access to mainstream ECEC for vulnerable children aged 3 and over target those with SEN or disabilities, followed by children experiencing poverty and social exclusion and then children from migrant (including refugee) backgrounds (see Figure B9). Addressing admission policies and removing administrative barriers to increase access and participation of vulnerable groups of children are also widespread measures, promoted in around half the education systems.

When it comes to easing access to mainstream ECEC for children with SEN or disabilities, one of the main measures promoted by education systems is the assignment of additional staff – SEN teachers, assistants and/or other specialists, such as psychologists or speech therapists – and the reduction of group sizes. Both measures are related to the number of children with SEN or disabilities in the ECEC setting or in a group.

Figure B9: Targeted top-level policies and measures promoting access to mainstream ECEC for children aged 3 and over facing barriers, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

Easing access to and participation in mainstream ECEC for children with SEN/disabilities includes the assignment of additional or specialised staff, reduced group sizes and top-level funding for improving physical accessibility and infrastructure. Easing access to and participation in ECEC for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion includes additional top-level funding for settings that have a high proportion of children at risk, the assignment of additional or specialised staff and reduced group sizes. Easing access to and participation in ECEC for children from migrant backgrounds (including refugee children) includes the assignment of additional or specialised staff, reduced group sizes, admission regardless of residence status and the provision of interpretation/translation for communication with parents. Addressing admission policies and removing administrative barriers targets all children facing barriers; it includes making non-discrimination rules explicit in admission policies, offering various methods of enrolment (paper, online, in person) and the use of quotas (to improve diversity among ECEC settings).

For each type of targeted measure, the number on the bar indicates the number of education systems promoting the measure for this age group in their official documents. There are 39 education systems in total; information by country and system is available in Annex A.

In **Bulgaria**, the Pre-school and School Education Act ([42]) obliges kindergartens (and schools) to accept up to three children (and students) with SEN per group or class. In situations without an alternative group or class, class size may be increased with approval from the regional educational office. If more students are added, an assistant teacher is assigned. The education and care of children with SEN is assisted by a resource teacher / special pedagogue, as well as other specialists (psychologist, pedagogical advisor, speech therapist) according to the children's individual needs.

In **Czechia**, specialised staff (teachers or assistants) can be assigned if children with SEN or disabilities or children from lower socioeconomic or migrant backgrounds are attending the class. In some cases, other educational staff, defined by the Decree on Providing Guidance in Schools and School Guidance Facilities ([43]), can be employed, such as SEN specialists and psychologists. Moreover, the Decree on Pre-primary Education ([44]) stipulates that, if children with SEN are enrolled in the class, the maximum number of children in a class decreases.

The assignment of additional staff is also widely encouraged by top-level education authorities in order to facilitate access to and participation in ECEC for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion and children from migrant backgrounds, including refugee children. For example, in Cyprus, kindergartens are entitled to additional support staff (e.g. a second teacher) to support children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and children from migrant backgrounds or with mother tongues other than the language of the setting. Similarly, in some countries, such as Slovakia and Finland, education authorities provide funding that allows ECEC settings to employ additional staff to support these groups of children.

In **Slovakia**, as part of the call 'Assistant educators for kindergartens' ([45]), schools can ask the Ministry of Education for a subsidy to cover costs connected with employing an assistant carer in pre-primary education to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds or with disabilities.

In **Finland**, the Ministry of Education and Culture has made discretionary government grants available for educational equality. Municipalities can use these, for example, for the recruitment of assistants from migrant backgrounds to support the inclusion of migrant children.

Some education systems also provide additional top-level funding so that ECEC settings can support children facing barriers as needed; in other words, the

([42]) https://lll.mon.bg/uploaded_files/ZAKON_za_preducilisnoto_i_ucilisnoto_obrazovanie_EN.pdf.
([43]) https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-72.
([44]) https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-14 - p2.
([45]) https://www.minedu.sk/vyzva-pomocny-vychovavatel-pre-materske-skoly-vyhodnotenie/.

money is not dedicated to one specific purpose (e.g. for additional staff). ECEC settings can receive larger funds, for example to provide educational support to children with SEN or disabilities (e.g. in Ireland, France, Lithuania, Hungary and Poland).

In **Ireland**, under the access and inclusion model ([46]), specialised equipment, appliances or capital grants for minor building alterations can be provided to ensure a child's meaningful participation in preschool. These alterations can include a hoist, hearing aid or wheelchair ramp. The model's support also provides additional funding to preschools that have a child requiring extra support. Providers can use this funding either to reduce the child–staff ratio in the preschool room or to fund an extra staff member as a resource shared with other children in the ECEC setting.

In **France**, two operating grants have been available since January 2019 to promote the ECEC access of vulnerable children and families: the Disability Inclusion Grant ([47]) and the Diversity Grant ([48]). These grants are calculated per place and per year, are cumulative and apply to all places in the setting ([49]). The aim of the Disability Inclusion Grant is to increase the share of children with SEN or disabilities enrolled in mainstream ECEC settings by compensating for any additional costs for their inclusion. The Diversity Grant applies when the fees received by ECEC settings that serve a larger share of socioeconomically disadvantaged families are insufficient to cover the costs that they incur in adapting the ECEC offered to the specific needs of the families and children.

In **Hungary**, in terms of financing and state support, children with SEN or those who are eligible for early intervention are taken into account by a factor of two (i.e. counted twice) in terms of the number of children in care, in order to ensure that special treatment and attention are allocated to them. Moreover, a differentiated special education supplement was introduced in 2020 for early childhood educators and special education teachers working in settings that provide care for children with SEN.

Municipalities or ECEC settings may also receive an increased budget depending on the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion enrolled (e.g. in Germany, France, Cyprus, Hungary and the Netherlands) or to provide additional support (e.g. language support) to children from migrant backgrounds who have a different mother tongue from language of the setting (e.g. in Czechia and Estonia).

Moreover, interpreting services are made available by education authorities to support communication between staff in ECEC settings and parents (e.g. in Czechia, Spain, Malta and Finland). In some countries (e.g. in Czechia, Slovenia and Slovakia), additional top-level funding is set out to support, in particular, the inclusion of Roma children in ECEC.

In **Germany**, a federal programme implemented in 2017–2022 ([50]) promoted access for refugee children and children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. It promoted services that provide low-threshold access to daycare facilities for children. Each funded ECEC setting received up to EUR 150 000 per year. The programme helped create a level playing field for all children and improve equal opportunities in early education. Federal funding has now ended, but some local authorities have taken over and continue working with the established structures.

In **the Netherlands**, municipalities and ECEC settings receive funding from the top-level education authorities to combat educational disparities. The funding takes into account the children's backgrounds (including parental education level, country of origin and length of stay in the country). Based on this data, an estimated 'deprivation score' for a municipality is calculated and the appropriate budget is determined. Schools and municipalities receive a higher amount for children with a higher risk of educational disadvantages.

A few countries report large-scale programmes or legal frameworks aiming to promote the inclusion in ECEC of any children who face barriers – that is, actions with no particular focus on one target group.

In **Czechia**, since 2016, the Education Act ([51]), guarantees the provision of free specific educational support for all pupils who need it, regardless of the nature of their disadvantages. Support measures consist of a wide range of pedagogical, organisational, personal, material and content modifications to education, and the provision of services that correspond to the educational needs, health state, cultural environment and other life conditions of the child, with the aims of balancing out disadvantages, facilitating access to good education and ensuring conditions for universal development.

([46]) https://aim.gov.ie/.

([47]) https://www.caf.fr/sites/default/files/medias/cnaf/Nous_connaitre/qui%20sommes%20nous/Textes%20de%20r%C3%A9f%C3%A9rence/Circulaires/Avant%202021/C2020-011_Bonus_inclusion_handicap_financement_eaje.pdf.

([48]) https://www.caf.fr/sites/default/files/medias/161/Partenaires/Enfance-Parentalite/Petite-Enfance/EAJE/LC-2018-002_Bonus-inclusion-handicap-mixite-sociale.pdf.

([49]) https://www.caf.fr/sites/default/files/medias/cnaf/Partenaires/bareme_national_2024/LR%202023-223%20_%20Annexe%20Baremes%202024%20(1).pdf.

([50]) https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/service/publikationen/bundesprogramm-kita-einstieg-bruecken-bauen-in-fruehe-bildung--118650.

([51]) https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-561#f2873674.

In **Spain**, the programme for guidance, advancement and educational enrichment in centres of special educational complexity (PROA+ programme) ([52]), which was launched in 2021 and will run until at least 2028, responds to the need to improve school success and ensure continued ECEC attendance in areas where a high percentage of vulnerable children are concentrated. This targets publicly funded preschools where at least 30 % of children enrolled are educationally vulnerable in a global sense, as well as rural and/or island preschools located in depressed or depopulated areas. Vulnerable children are understood in a broad sense as those with welfare needs (food, housing and basic supplies, etc.), educational needs (favourable family climate, digital divide, school materials, etc.), socioeducational needs (complementary activities, extracurricular activities, etc.), SEN, specific learning difficulties, learning difficulties due to unmet needs, etc.

Finland implemented an ECEC reform in 2022 that strengthened support for children, set guidelines for inclusive practices and provided support services, such as assessments, interventions and administrative procedures. The Ministry of Education and Culture has allocated special government grants to promote inclusive ECEC practices through various projects.

Apart from financial and resource-related support from the education authorities to support children and families facing barriers, countries try to address admission policies and remove administrative barriers by referring to national legislation against discrimination in general or specifically in ECEC. In the majority of countries, national education legislation explicitly states that, in the context of the admission of children to education – including ECEC – there must be no form of discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, sex, religion, disability or any other personal or social condition or circumstance. Some countries explicitly underline children's right to admission to ECEC, regardless of their residence status, by referring to all children (e.g. in Spain), children of asylum seekers (e.g. in Malta) or children from Ukraine (e.g. in Czechia, Latvia and Hungary).

In order to support parents during the admission process, many countries provide different options for the enrolment of children. Applications for ECEC are mainly carried out electronically but can also often be completed in a written/paper-based format or in person. This diverse range of options is particularly beneficial for parents with limited digital literacy or literacy skills. Providing assistance or paper-based applications ensures accessibility for those who may prefer or require alternative methods due to technological barriers or language constraints.

In **Malta**, applications for the free childcare scheme ([53]) are accepted in both paper-based and online forms, depending on the operating procedure of the individual centre. The centres then electronically submit the paper-based applications to the Free Childcare Scheme Unit using designated software.

Section III – Participation in ECEC

Owing to the substantial benefits of ECEC, it is essential to ensure that the maximum number of children attend. Increasing ECEC participation rates has been a key priority on the European policy agenda for several decades. Currently, there are two targets:

- at least 45 % of children below the age of 3 should participate in ECEC by 2030;
- at least 96 % of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education should participate in ECEC by 2030.

There are also recommendations on the intensity of participation. The revised Barcelona targets urge Member States to make ECEC services available in a way that allows children to participate for at least 25 hours per week ([54]).

The two main targets on ECEC participation for older and younger children are often presented together, despite being measured using different instruments and methodologies. Data on older children comes from the combined United Nations Educational, Scientific

([52]) https://proa.educacion.es/.

([53]) https://www.servizz.gov.mt/en/Pages/Education_-Science-and-Technology/Education-Services/Early-Education/WEB544/default.aspx

([54]) Council recommendation of 8 December 2022 on early childhood education and care: The Barcelona targets for 2030 (OJ C 484, 20.12.2022, p. 1), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H1220(01).

and Cultural Organization, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Eurostat (UOE) education and training statistics, a compilation of administrative data from national education systems, primarily based on enrolment figures. Unfortunately, for children under 3, such data is unavailable in half of the European countries, where childcare services fall under the responsibility of family or social welfare authorities rather than education authorities (see Figure A4a and Annex B). Comparable data on ECEC participation for this age group in Europe has so far only been available through the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). This is a household survey that is designed to monitor and analyse the distribution of income, the extent of social inequalities and the overall well-being of individuals and households. Since ECEC is not the focus of EU-SILC, the data lacks depth and consistency across Member States, reducing comparability and limiting its utility for detailed ECEC policy analysis (European Commission: Joint Research Centre et al., 2012).

Bearing in mind the differences and limitations in the data sources, this section presents the participation rates for children under 3 and those aged 3 and over across European countries. The section also includes information on the average hours per week that children attend ECEC based on EU-SILC. For the most accurate national data by age, see the national system information sheets at the end of this report.

ECEC participation rates and their changes over time reflect the structural policies implemented by countries, as discussed in Sections I 'Structures' and II 'Targeted measures for vulnerable children' of this chapter. These rates can be seen as an outcome measure of the effectiveness of accessibility measures. The data indicates a considerable increase in the accessibility of ECEC in European countries during the last 10 years, especially concerning children under age 3.

38 % of children under the age of 3 in the EU attend ECEC

Childcare services for young children have been one of the central elements of European policies aiming to promote female employment and ensure equal opportunities for several decades. This focus was highlighted in 2002 when the European Council established the Barcelona targets. Member States committed to having at least 33 % of children under age 3 in ECEC by 2010. However, progress was slower than expected, with the EU-level target only being met in 2016 ([55]). Significant disparities continue to exist among and within Member States, especially for children from lower-income families, children from migrant background and those with special education needs or disabilities ([56]).

In 2022, the Council of the European Union revised the Barcelona targets. More focus was placed on early education and the quality of services. The current recommendation aims for at least 45 % of children under 3 to attend ECEC by 2030. Specific targets also apply to Member States that have not yet met the 2002 goals ([57]).

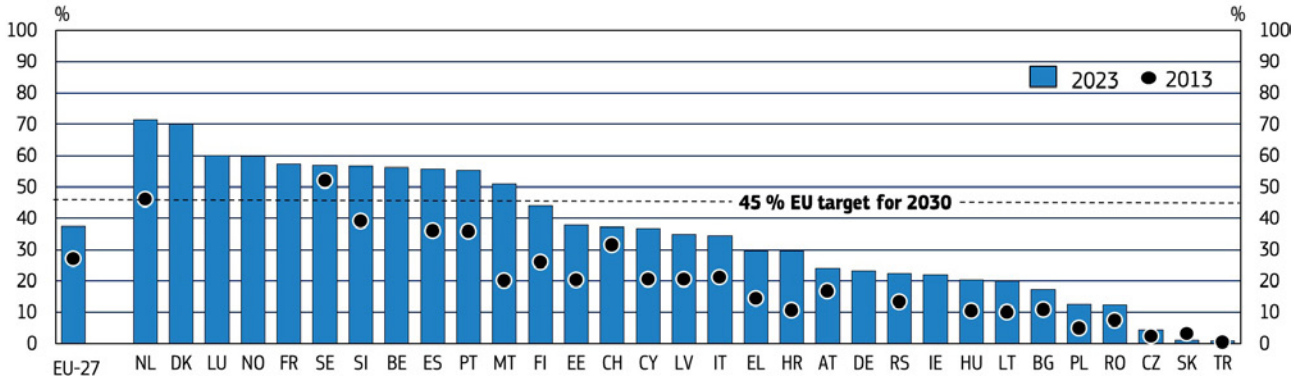
Survey data shows that, on average, 37.5 % of children under 3 attended ECEC in the EU-27 in 2023. Ten Member States and Norway have already reached and surpassed the revised Barcelona target of 45 %. Denmark and the Netherlands stand out with the highest participation rates of children under the age of 3 in ECEC, reaching 70 % or over in 2023. The rates are between 50 % and 60 % in Belgium, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden and Norway.

([55]) See the 2018 Commission report on the Barcelona objectives: https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2018-05/bcn_objectives-report2018_web_en.pdf.

([56]) Council recommendation of 8 December 2022 on early childhood education and care: The Barcelona targets for 2030 (OJ C 484, 20.12.2022, p. 1), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H1220(01).

([57]) It is recommended that Member States that have not yet reached the target set in 2002 (33 % participation rate in ECEC for this age group) increase participation, by 2030, by (at least) a specific percentage in relation to their current participation rate: (1) by at least 90 % for Member States whose participation rate is lower than 20 %; or (2) by at least 45 %, or until reaching a participation rate of at least 45 %, for Member States whose participation rate is between 20 % and 33 %. The current participation rate is calculated as the average participation rate in ECEC of children below the age of 3 achieved in 2017–2021 according to EU-SILC data.

Figure B10: Participation rates in ECEC of children under age 3, 2023 and 2013



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC (tepsr_sp210) (last updated 4 October 2024).

	EU-27	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
2023	37.5	56.3	17.4	4.4	69.9	23.3	37.9	22.1	29.6	55.8	57.4	29.6	34.5	36.9	34.9	19.9	60.0	20.3	51.0
2013	27.0	45.7 b	10.8	2.4	64.9 b	27.5 b	20.4	20.5 b	14.5	35.9	39.0 b	10.6	21.1	20.6	20.5	10.0	46.5 b	10.4	20.2

	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	CH	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
2023	71.5	24.1	12.6	55.5	12.3	56.6	1.0	43.9	56.9	:	:	37.2	:	:	:	:	59.8	(22.5)	0.8
2013	46.1	16.7	4.8	35.8	7.4	39.2	3.1	26.1	52.1	:	:	31.6	43.6	:	9.0	9.9	46.3 b	13.4	0.5

Explanatory note

The letter 'b' in the table indicates a break in the time series during 2013–2023. The changes in these countries should be considered with caution and therefore are not shown in the figure.

Country-specific notes

Serbia: Data is for 2022 instead of 2023. Value is indicated in brackets in the data table.

In contrast, fewer than 5 % of young children attend ECEC in Czechia, Slovakia and Türkiye. Participation rates are also very low (between 10 % and 20 %) in Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland and Romania. It is important to note that, in some of these countries, childcare leave is among the longest (see Figure B3), which affects the participation rate for all children under 3. For example, families in Romania are entitled to 2 years of childcare leave, while those in Lithuania receive 1-and-a-half years, and those in Poland and Slovakia receive over 1 year.

Over the last decade, the average participation rate in ECEC for children under 3 in the EU-27 has significantly improved, rising from 27.0 % to 37.5 %. Among countries with reliable data (no breaks in the time series), the largest increases in ECEC attendance since 2013 are observed in Malta and the Netherlands.

93 % of children in the EU aged 3 and over attend pre-primary education

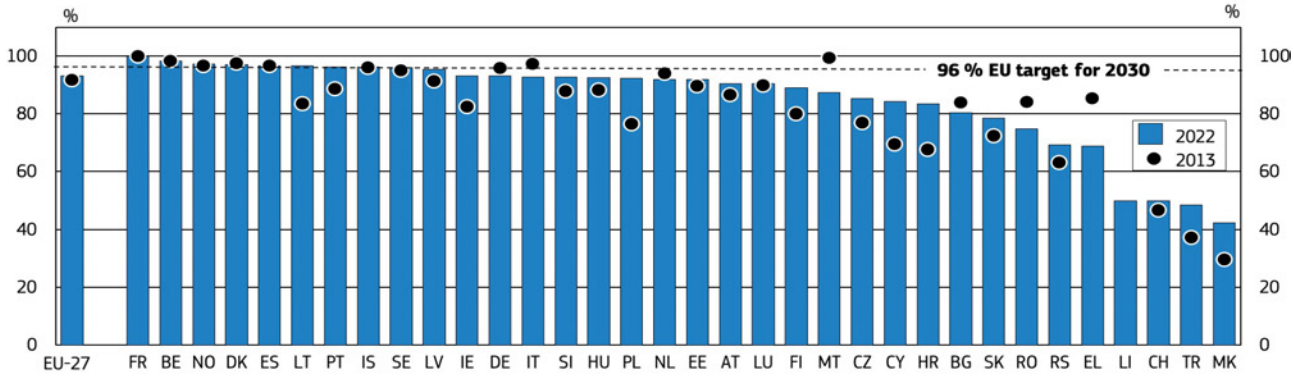
One of the general aims of ECEC is preparing children for primary education, and this becomes increasingly important in the educational process as children approach primary school age. The EU has been emphasising the necessity of early entry into the education system and has established several targets in recent decades to support this goal. In 2009, the Education and Training 2020 benchmark stipulated that by 2020 at least 95 % of children between age 4 and the starting age of compulsory primary education should be participating in early childhood education ([58]). At the EU level, this benchmark was reached in 2019 ([59]), although a few countries lagged behind ([60]).

([58]) Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') (OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2).

([59]) See Education and Training Monitor 2021 – Education and well-being: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/743550.

([60]) In 2020, among the EU countries, the lowest participation rates among children aged 4 and over were in Bulgaria (82.4 %), Romania (82.4 %), Croatia (83.2 %) and Slovakia (83.2 %). No data is available on Greece. See Eurostat (educ_uoe_enra10) (last updated 4 December 2023).

Figure B11: Participation rates in early childhood education of children aged between 3 years old and the starting age of compulsory primary education, 2022 and 2013



Source: Eurostat, UOE statistics (educ_uoe_enra21) (last updated 31 July 2024).

	EU-27	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
2022	93.1	98.3	80.4	85.3	97.1	93.1	91.9	93.2	(68.8)	96.7	100	83.5	92.7	84.4	95.5	96.7	90.5	92.6	87.5
2013	91.8	98.3	83.8	76.8	97.6	95.8	89.6	82.4	85.3	96.6	100	67.6	97.3	69.4	91.3	83.4	89.9	88.3	99.4
	NL	**AT**	**PL**	**PT**	**RO**	**SI**	**SK**	**FI**	**SE**	**AL**	**BA**	**CH**	**IS**	**LI**	**ME**	**MK**	**NO**	**RS**	**TR**
2022	92.0	90.6	92.4	96.3	74.8	92.7	78.6	89.0	96.1	:	:	50.0	96.3	50.1	:	42.4	97.4	69.2	48.6
2013	94.1	86.5	76.4	88.7	84.1	87.9	72.3	80.0	95.0	:	:	46.7	96.1	:	:	29.7	96.7	63.1	(37.3)

Country-specific notes

EU-27, **Ireland**, **Spain**, **Poland** and **Portugal**: During 2013–2022, the definition differs.
Belgium: Definition differs and there is a break in the time series.
Greece: Definition differs and data is for 2019 instead of 2022. Value is indicated in brackets in the data table.
France: There is a break in the time series.
Türkiye: Data is for 2014 instead of 2013. Value is indicated in brackets in the data table.

In 2021, Member States agreed to continue their efforts in expanding access to pre-primary education. The new European education area target on ECEC for 2030 ([61]) reiterates the same approach but widens the targeted age range and raises the bar. It aims for at least 96 % of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education to participate in ECEC by 2030.

It is worth noting that these targets address slightly different age groups across Europe. The starting age of compulsory primary education is generally around age 6 in Europe (see Figure B3), but there are a few exceptions. Children in Malta are the earliest starters, being required to begin compulsory primary education at 5 years old. In contrast, primary education starts at the age of 7 in Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland and Sweden.

According to the latest data, the EU-wide average is yet to reach the target for the 3-years-and-over age group (see Figure B11). In 2022, on average, 93.1 % of children in this age group in the EU-27 were enrolled in ECEC. The participation rate is currently above 96 % in nine countries: Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, Lithuania, Portugal, Sweden, Iceland and Norway. With rates around 50 % or below, several non-EU countries – Switzerland, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia and Türkiye – record the lowest ECEC participation rates among children aged 3 and over. Within the EU, the lowest participation rates are in Greece (68.8 %), Romania (74.8 %), Slovakia (78.6 %) and Bulgaria (80.4 %).

During the last 10 years, at the EU level, there has been a slight increase in the proportion of children attending pre-primary education. The participation rates of children aged 3 and over in ECEC rose by

([61]) Council resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European education area and beyond (2021–2030) (OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226(01).

1.3 percentage points between 2013 and 2022. However, there were large fluctuations in some countries. The greatest positive trends were observed in Croatia, Cyprus and Poland ([62]), where participation rates increased by 15–16 percentage points. The expansion of access for this age group was also pronounced (over 10 percentage points) in Ireland, Lithuania, North Macedonia and Türkiye. In contrast, the rate in Malta, one of the countries with the highest rates of participation among children aged 3 and over in 2013 (99.4 %), dropped to 87.5 % in 2022 (– 11.9 percentage points). The rate fell by more than 9 percentage points in Romania.

Children spend on average 6 hours per day in ECEC

The proportion of children attending ECEC reflects the overall accessibility and coverage of the ECEC services, but another important dimension is the intensity of participation. This can be considered one of the consequences of ECEC accessibility in general (Ünver et al., 2021). The length of time spent in ECEC each day has implications for children, parents and, in the case of publicly subsidised services, public funding. A longer day enables parents to engage in gainful employment or education. However, there is an ongoing debate in the research community regarding the impact of long hours on children's socioemotional well-being (Broekhuizen et al., 2017; van Belle, 2016). The Council recommendation on the revised Barcelona targets ([63]) encourages Member States to consider time intensity when assessing constraints on participation. Participation must be compatible with the child's well-being and development, while allowing for the meaningful labour market participation of parents, especially mothers. It is recommended that Member States take steps to make ECEC services available so that children can participate for at least 25 hours per week (minimum 5 hours per day).

Figure B12 shows the average hours of attendance in ECEC for children under and over age 3. This covers the time a child spends in any type of formal ECEC, including childcare at a daycare centre, education at a preschool and childcare at centre-based services before or after school hours. Therefore, the average number of hours that children attend ECEC may be longer than the guaranteed or subsidised hours (see Figure B2).

On average, in the EU, in 2023, children spent 30.6 hours per week in ECEC. This constitutes approximately 6.2 hours per day during the 5-day working week. The average number was the same for children under and over 3 years of age. Overall, there is a strong link between the number of hours spent in ECEC for the two age groups analysed at the country level as well. In countries where younger children spend fewer hours in ECEC, older children also tend to spend fewer hours in ECEC. In countries where younger children spend more hours in ECEC, older children also tend to spend more hours in ECEC. In half of the countries, the difference between the average weekly ECEC attendance for younger children and older children was not more than 2 hours (under half an hour per day).

In systems that provide the same structure for the entire age range – unitary settings – a strong alignment is natural. In Figure B12, all countries with only unitary settings cluster in the top-right corner, indicating more weekly hours of ECEC than the EU average for both age groups.

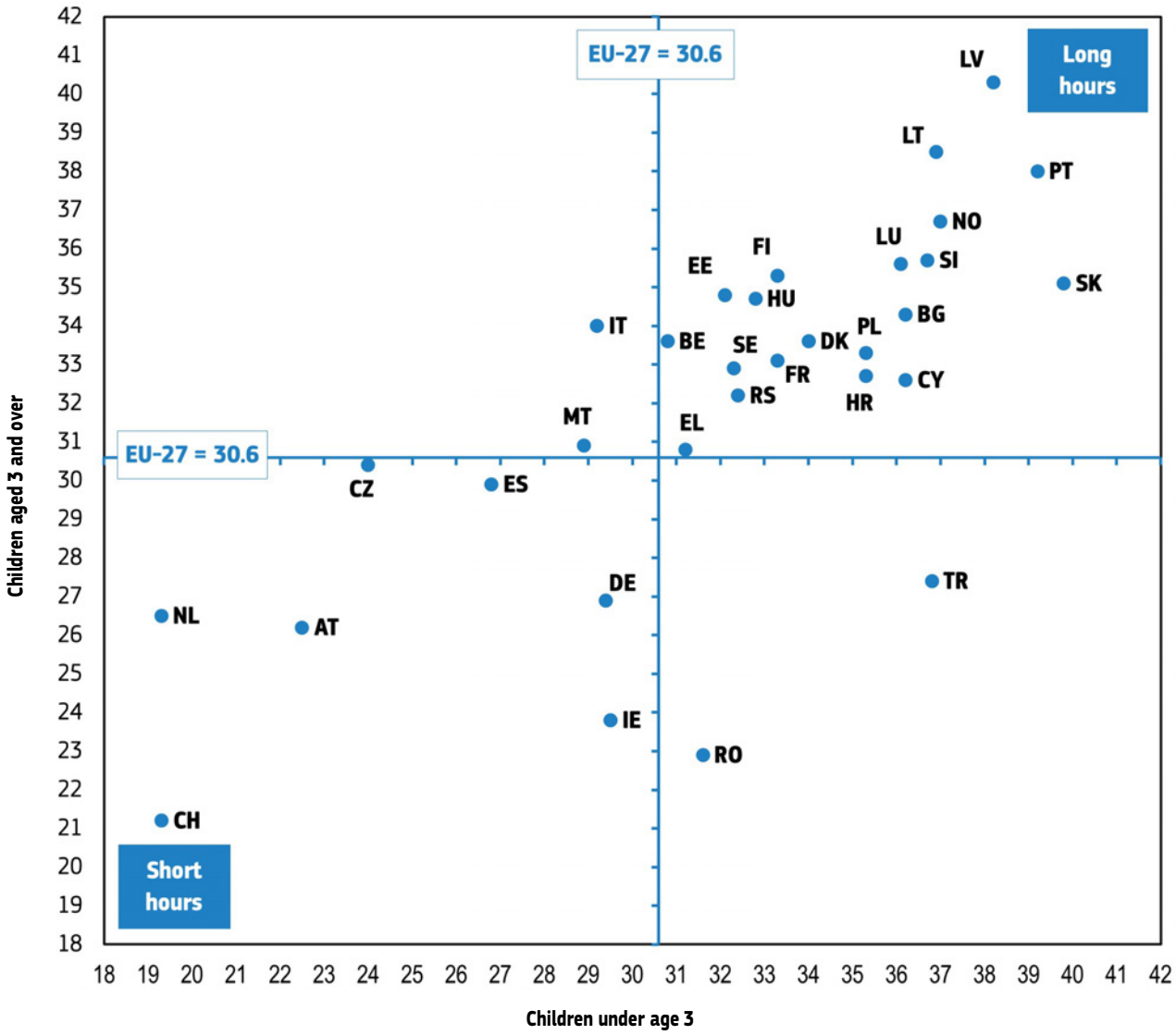
In several countries with split ECEC settings, there is a difference in attendance patterns between children under and over age 3. For example, in Romania and Türkiye, younger children spend longer hours in nurseries than children aged 3 and over spend in preschools. It is the opposite in the Netherlands, where younger children spend on average 19.3 hours per week in ECEC, while 3- to 5-year-olds attend ECEC for approximately 26.5 hours per week. Younger children also attend less ECEC than those aged 3 and older in Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, Spain, Italy and Austria.

The average is lower than the recommended 25 hours per week for both age groups only in Switzerland. Children also spend short days in ECEC in the Netherlands and Austria. In contrast, both younger and older children spend a comparatively long time in ECEC in Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Slovakia.

([62]) Definitions differ between these time points, so the difference might also be due to some changes in methodology.

([63]) Council recommendation of 8 December 2022 on early childhood education and care: The Barcelona targets for 2030 (OJ C 484, 20.12.2022, p. 1), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H1220(01).

Figure B12: Average number of weekly hours in ECEC, 2023



	EU-27	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
Under age 3	30.6	30.8	36.2	24.0	34.0	29.4	32.1	29.5	31.2	26.8	33.3	35.3	29.2	36.2	38.2	36.9	36.1	32.8	28.9
Age 3 and over	30.6	33.6	34.3	30.4	33.6	26.9	34.8	23.8	30.8	29.9	33.1	32.7	34	32.6	40.3	38.5	35.6	34.7	30.9
	NL	**AT**	**PL**	**PT**	**RO**	**SI**	**SK**	**FI**	**SE**	**AL**	**BA**	**CH**	**IS**	**LI**	**ME**	**MK**	**NO**	**RS**	**TR**
Under age 3	19.3	22.5	35.3	39.2	31.6	36.7	39.8	33.3	32.3	:	:	(19.3)	:	:	:	37.0	(32.4)	(36.8)	(19.3)
Age 3 and over	26.5	26.2	33.3	38.0	22.9	35.7	35.1	35.3	32.9	:	:	(21.2)	:	:	:	36.7	(32.2)	(27.4)	(21.2)

Source: Eurostat EU-SILC survey (ilc_camnforg0) (last updated 30 August 2024).

Explanatory note

Formal ECEC arrangements other than by the family during the usual week. The averages are based on values for children with at least 1 hour of ECEC.

Country-specific note

Switzerland, **Serbia** and **Türkiye**: Data is for 2022 not 2023. These values are indicated in brackets in the data table.

Chapter C: Staff

Section I – Staff composition

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) staff play a crucial role in fostering children's development, safeguarding their health and overall welfare, and facilitating their engagement in daily routines and activities. The quality of children's experiences is influenced by the competence of the staff. Establishing high minimum qualification standards for ECEC staff is imperative for enhancing the esteem and remuneration of these essential professionals (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2011, 2021, 2024; UNESCO and UNICEF, 2024; UNICEF, 2019).

In many countries, ECEC is delivered by teams of professionals, rather than a single individual overseeing an entire group of children, as is commonly seen in primary schools. Some countries apply the same minimum qualification requirements to all staff, while others differentiate job roles, requiring varied qualifications for different positions. To reflect these diverse approaches, this report distinguishes between two main categories of staff: 'core practitioners' and 'assistants'.

A **core practitioner** is a professional responsible for leading a group of children at the class or playroom level, working directly with both the children and their families. These individuals may hold various titles, such as pre-primary teachers, kindergarten teachers, early childhood teachers, pedagogues, educators, childcare practitioners or pedagogical staff, depending on the national context.

An **assistant**, on the other hand, supports the core practitioner in managing a group of children on a daily basis.

Annex C provides a detailed list of the job titles used in national languages and the qualification requirements for both core practitioners and assistants.

The first section of this chapter on staff composition examines the initial qualification requirements for core practitioners and assistants, setting the foundation for their roles in ECEC. It then reviews the regulations on continuing professional development (CPD) for both core practitioners and assistants, which aim to ensure their ongoing growth and expertise in the field. Two indicators focus on the qualifications needed for heads of ECEC settings, highlighting the importance of strong leadership positions. In addition, this chapter describes the diverse range of support professionals and specialised educators available to ECEC staff and children, ensuring comprehensive learning experiences and targeted support. An overview of ECEC staff shortages is also provided, outlining the challenges and potential workforce gaps that need to be addressed.

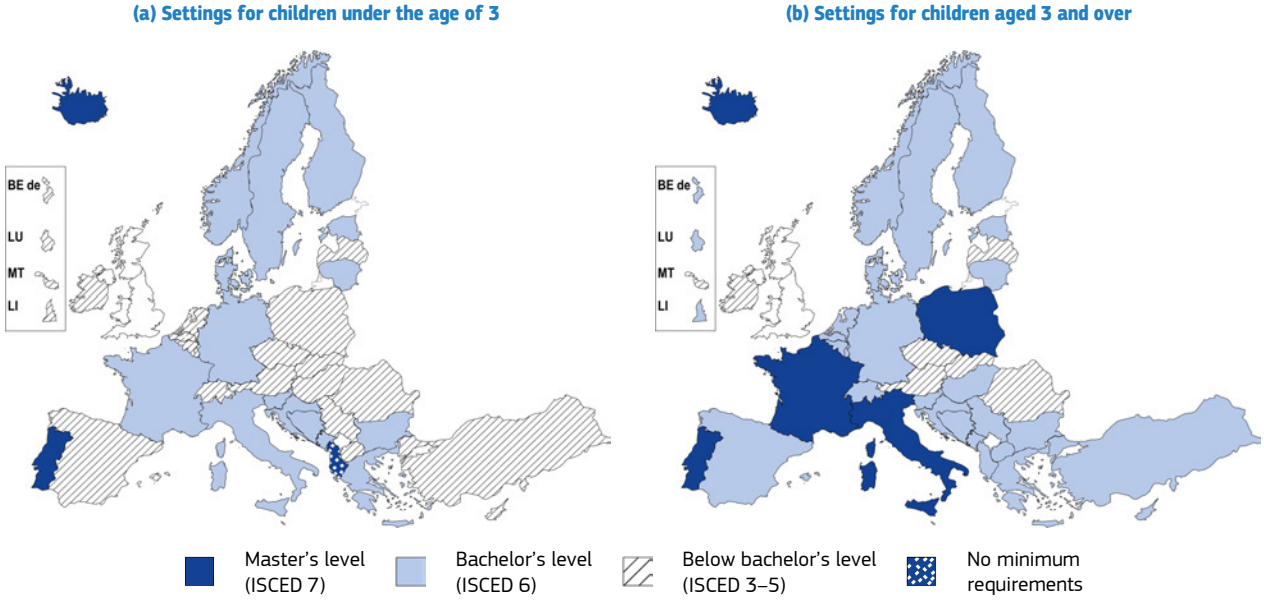
The second section of this chapter focuses on the working conditions of ECEC staff, beginning with an overview of top-level regulations on group sizes and child–staff ratios. It then delves into a discussion of the salaries of pre-primary teachers and school heads, comparing them with remuneration at the primary school level. This analysis highlights the importance of addressing working conditions, including salaries and staffing ratios, to ensure a high-quality ECEC system that benefits both children and educators.

One third of European countries set lower qualification requirements for staff working with children under the age of 3

Staff qualification requirements tend to reflect the governance set-up of ECEC systems (see Chapter A 'Governance and funding'). In integrated systems, with a single leading authority, the same type of professionals with similar minimum qualifications and remuneration are employed across different settings. However, in split systems, where responsibilities are divided, the requirements for working with younger and older children may differ, leading to variations in staff qualifications and potentially affecting the quality of ECEC provided.

About 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 the bachelor's level (International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 6) throughout the entire ECEC phase in Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Croatia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Norway. Master's-level (ISCED 7) qualifications are required in Portugal and Iceland. In France and Italy, the minimum is set at the bachelor's level (ISCED 6) for children under 3 and at the master's level (ISCED 7) for children aged 3 and over. However, sometimes the situation is more complex than the minimum requirements reveal.

Figure C1: Minimum qualification levels required to enter the ECEC core practitioner profession, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

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	MT
Under age 3	3	3	4	6	3	6	6	6	4	6	5	6	6	6	5	5	6	4	4	4
3 years and over	6	6	6		3					6	6	7		7	6			6	6	4
	NL	**AT**	**PL**	**PT**	**RO**	**SI**	**SK**	**FI**	**SE**		**AL**	**BA**	**CH**	**IS**	**LI**	**ME**	**MK**	**NO**	**RS**	**TR**
Under age 3	3	5	3	7	3	6	3	6	6		O	6	3	7	3	6	3	6	3	3
3 years and over	6		7		3		3				6		6		6		6		6	6

O No minimum requirements

Explanatory notes

The figure shows the minimum qualification levels according to top-level regulations. For the ISCED, see here ([1]).
The rows are merged when the same type of staff with the same minimum qualification work throughout the entire ECEC phase.

([1]) https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf.

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 (*puériculteur/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 3 to ISCED 6. Pre-primary teachers (*professeurs des écoles*) working with older children need to have full teacher training with ISCED 7 qualifications. However, the requirements have been lowered for 2023–2026 in pre-primary schools experiencing recruitment difficulties ([2]).

The analysis of the minimum qualification levels for core practitioners reveals significant differences between the requirements for working with younger and older children in one third of European education systems. In these countries – including Belgium (all three communities), Spain, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Albania, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye – a high qualification level is essential during the second phase of ECEC, which corresponds to pre-primary education, but not during the first phase, focused on early childhood educational development or childcare for children under the age of 3. In Spain, however, even in settings for younger children, there must be a tutor specialised in pre-primary education (ISCED 6) who works either full-time with one group or part-time across multiple groups. This professional is responsible for the pedagogical plan, ensuring collaboration and involvement from all practitioners in its development and follow-up.

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 the bachelor's level.

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

In **Ireland**, the minimum qualification requirement to work in ECEC is ISCED 4, which typically requires a 1-year training course. As part of the early childhood care and education scheme, which provides free preschool for 3- to 5-year-olds, there is a contractual requirement that the lead educator (i.e. teacher) for each group of children have a relevant ISCED 5 qualification.

In **Latvia**, preschool teachers and sports teachers are required to have completed a short-cycle tertiary education course (ISCED 5) in pedagogy and a professional teacher's qualification (including in-school placement, final examinations and diploma thesis). For foreign language teachers and music teachers in ECEC, an 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 a pkindergarten or childcare educator ([3]).

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

In **Romania**, both pre-primary teachers and early childhood educators (*puericultor*) working in settings for children under age 3 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 field of pre-primary pedagogy is required for a pre-primary teacher (*učiteľ materskej školy*) who works with children aged 3 years and over. The minimum qualification level for a core practitioner who works with children under age 3 (*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.

Some countries have recently introduced reforms regarding the qualification requirements for ECEC core practitioners.

In **Bulgaria**, as of 2023, a pre-primary teacher (*detski uchitel*) may work not only in groups with older children, but also in a nursery (*detska yasla*) or in a nursery group within a kindergarten (*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*) had been employed ([4]).

([2]) https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000046829206; https://www.devenirenseignant.gouv.fr/cid98467/les-textes-officiels-reference-sur-les-concours.html.

([3]) See the call for applications for kindergarten educators issued on 18 November 2022: https://recruitmentadmin.gov.mt//attachments/circulars/33f175ce-6734-4f77-b2d7-865f5dc88583_p.pdf.

([4]) See Regulation No 26 of 18 November 2008, Art. 14(5), https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135608240.

Italy has raised the minimum qualification for early childhood educators (0–3 years) to a 3-year bachelor's degree (ISCED 6) in educational science. This requirement has been in force since the 2019/2020 school year, and the first students graduated from this 3-year education programme in 2021/2022 ([5]).

Finland launched a long-term reform in 2018 to improve ECEC quality by enhancing staff qualifications and competences. As of 2030, two thirds of core practitioners in centre-based ECEC must have a bachelor's degree (currently one third do), and at least 50 % of them must have graduated with degrees in education ([6]).

Assistants often form part of ECEC staff teams

To gain a more complete picture of staff whose duties involve ECEC, it is necessary to look beyond the core practitioners. Assistants support the daily work of core practitioners in more than half of European education systems (see Figure C2). Assistants usually monitor children during playtime, support various activities planned by core practitioners, prepare materials and help children with daily routines. Studies on assistant roles in European education systems emphasise three types of tasks, which are often interlinked (Peeters et al., 2017; Van Laere et al., 2012).

- The caring role: assistants are responsible for children's hygiene, protection and emotional well-being so that the core practitioner can focus on what is perceived as the 'learning process'.
- The teaching role: assistants have a sociopedagogical role under the supervision of core practitioners or a supporting role in the learning process of individual children (the latter is the focus of Figure C6b).
- The bridging role: some assistants help vulnerable families from poor local communities or ethnic minority or migrant families to access services.

In most countries, assistants have lower qualification requirements than core practitioners. Usually, an 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 in ECEC. Assistants must have completed post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 4) in the French and Flemish Communities of Belgium (when working with children over age 2-and-a-half), Ireland, Greece (settings for children under age 4) and Montenegro.

In **Germany**, core pedagogic staff 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, 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 degrees in the education of preschool children or have completed their education at an upper secondary general school (*gimnazija*) and a vocational course in ECEC (ISCED 3).

There are no minimum qualification requirements for assistants in Belgium (German-speaking Community), Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. Some of these countries might still employ assistants with qualifications.

In **Belgium (German-speaking Community)**, the qualification requirements for assistants in pre-primary education (*Kindergarten-assistenten*) are primarily set at ISCED 3 (upper secondary school certificate). A certificate from the nursing association KPVDB training course or *Kindergartenhelfer* training plus 120 hours of additional training are also accepted. Both alternative qualifications are low-threshold training programmes that do not require prior school education for entry.

In **Denmark**, two types of assistants can be employed: a pedagogic assistant (*pædagogisk assistant*) 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 hold pedagogical degree (ISCED 6) ([7]).

([5]) See Legislative Decree No 65 of 13 April 2017, Arts 4(1) and 14(3), https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/05/16/17G00073/sg; and Ministerial Decree No 378/2018 of 9 May 2018, Art. 2, https://www.miur.gov.it/en/-/titoli-di-accesso-alla-professione-di-educatore-dei-servizi-educativi-per-infanzia-dlgs-n-65-2017.

([6]) 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.

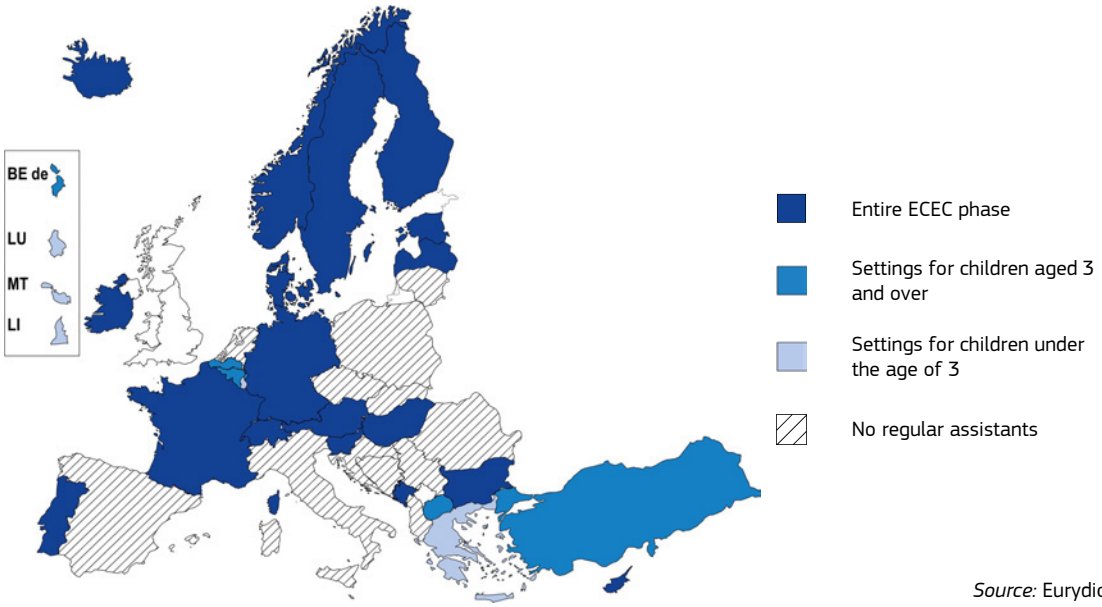
([7]) Statistics Denmark BOERN1 and PBOERN1.

In **Luxembourg**, in ECEC settings for children under the age of 4, unqualified staff may constitute at most 10 % of the staff and must complete a specific 100-hour training course ([8]).

In **Norway**, there are two types of assistants: child and youth workers with ISCED 3 vocational qualifications and other assistants, for whom there are no minimum qualification requirements. The child and youth workers constitute 23 % of staff in ECEC, while assistants with different educational backgrounds constitute 31 %. Overall, staff with kindergarten teacher qualifications or other pedagogic/higher education make up 46 % of ECEC staff ([9]).

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

Figure C2: Regular assistants in ECEC, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

Minimum ISCED level required to be employed as an 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	MT
Under age 3	x	x	x	3	x	O	3	O	4	4	x	3	x	x	3	O	x	O	2	3
3 years and over	4	O	4	3						x		3			3			x	3	x

	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE		AL	BA	CH	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Under age 3	x	3	x	3	x	3	x	3	3		x	x	O	O	O	4	x	O	x	x
3 years and over															x		3			3

O No minimum requirements x No assistants

Explanatory notes

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. The rows are merged when the same type of staff with the same minimum qualification work throughout the entire ECEC phase. For the ISCED, see here ([10]).

Country-specific notes

Belgium (French Community): Assistants (*puériculteurs/puéricultrices*) support pre-primary teachers in the first year of pre-primary education (*classe d'accueil*) with children aged 2–3 years.
Malta: In large classes of children aged 3 years and over, a learning support educator with a minimum of a qualification at ISCED 5 may be assigned. These professionals are not considered assistants, but typically support pupils with special needs.

There are no regular assistants in the ECEC sector in 12 European countries (Czechia, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia). However, there might be some additional staff employed to

([8]) https://www.enfancejeunesse.lu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/RGD-SEA-version-coordonnee.pdf, Art. 7(1)(3).
([9]) https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/statistikk/statistikk-barnehage/ansattes-utdanning-andel/.
([10]) https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf.

support children with special educational needs (SEN) (see Figures C6a and C6b), and there might be several core practitioners working together as a team in one group (see Figure C9).

Time for professional development allocated to pre-primary teachers, but rarely to assistants

Establishing the initial qualification requirements for staff working with children is only the starting point in ensuring a well-qualified workforce. CPD is also crucial, as it allows employees to upgrade their knowledge and skills throughout their career (Eurofound et al., 2015; European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2021).

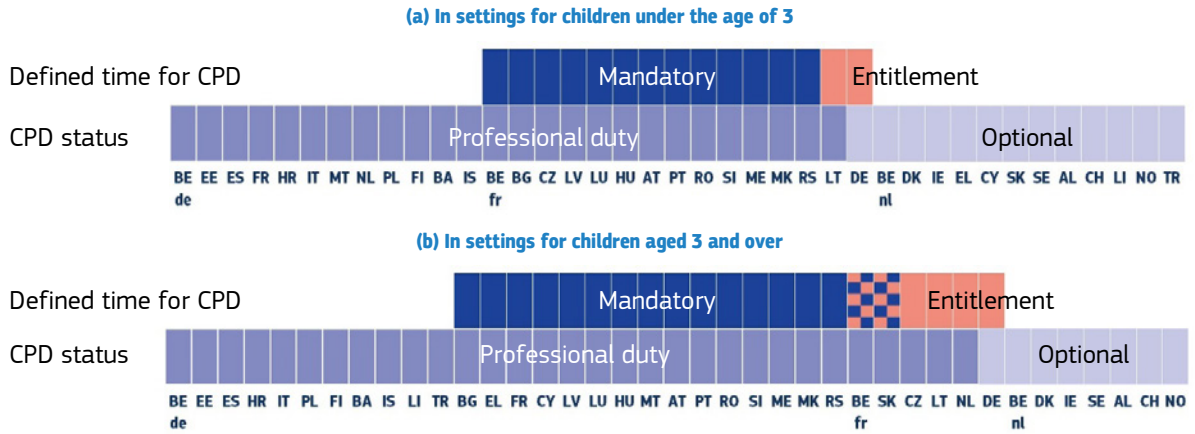
Countries regulate the CPD of ECEC staff in different ways (see Figure C3). The most fundamental distinction is whether the CPD is considered a professional duty or an optional activity. For the purposes of this report, CPD is considered a professional duty if participation is explicitly defined as such 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.

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 countries where time for CPD is defined for every teacher (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2021, pp. 91–94).

Whether CPD is considered a professional duty or optional, time can be set as an entitlement or not be defined at all. In this analysis, 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 to staff during or outside teaching (working) hours. However, it is not compulsory for staff to use these hours.

Only some countries in which CPD is a professional duty define the mandatory time allocated for it. 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. A few more, but still under half of the education systems, require CPD for core practitioners working with older children. Mandatory CPD usually means that staff are offered support 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 but there is no mandatory time allocation or where CPD is optional.

Figure C3: Regulations on continuing professional development of ECEC core practitioners, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

Minimum number of defined CPD hours (h) or days (d) for a given number of years (y)

Core practitioners

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
Under age 3	**2 d**/ 1 y	Duty	O	**36 h** /4 y	**8 h**/ 1 y	O	5 d/ 1 y	Duty	O	O	Duty	Duty	Duty	Duty	O	**36 h**/ 3 y	5 d/ 1 y	**32 h**/ 2 y	**70 h**/ 4 y	Duty
3 years and over	**3 d** + 5 d / 1 y	Duty	O		12 d/ 1 y					**24 h**/ 1 y	Duty	**18 h**/ 1 y		Duty	**2 d**/ 1 y			**16 h**/ 1 y	**90 h**/ 7 y	**28 h**/ 1 y

	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	CH	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Under age 3	Duty	**2 d**/ 1 y	Duty	**50 h**/ 4 y	**270 h**/ 5 y	**15 d**/ 3 y	O	Duty	O	O	Duty	O	Duty	O	**36 h**/ 5 y	**10 h**/ 5 y	O	**60 h**/ 1 y	O
3 years and over	83 h/ 1 y		Duty		**270 h**/ 5 y		**10 h** + 5 d/ 1 y			O		O		Duty		**20 h**/ 5 y		**60 h**/ 1 y	Duty

Assistants

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
Under age 3	x	x	x	Duty	x	O	O	O	O	O	x	Duty	x	x	O	O	x	**32 h**/ 2 y	O	Duty
3 years and over	**2 d**/ 1 y	Duty	O	O	x					x	x	**2 d**/ 5 y		x	O			x	O	x

	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	CH	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Under age 3	x	O	x	O	x	**15 d**/ 3 y	x	Duty	O	x	x	O	O	x	**36 h**/ 5 y	x	O	x	x
3 years and over	x		x		x		x			x		O		x	x	**10 h**/ 5 y		x	O

O CPD is optional x No assistants

Explanatory notes

Mandatory means that CPD is compulsory and the minimum amount of time to be spent on it is specified.
Entitlement means that 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 means that 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 means that there is no statutory obligation to participate in CPD.
In the tables, mandatory time is shown in bold black, while entitlement is in dark red. The rows are merged when the same type of staff work throughout the entire ECEC phase.

Country-specific notes

Romania: Regulations state 90 credits for every 5 years. In the table, 8 credits are considered to be equivalent to 24 hours of CPD.
Slovakia: A pre-primary teacher (*učitel' materskej školy*) with the minimum qualification (ISCED 3) must complete innovation education (50–100 hours) in preschool pedagogy within 7 years of starting work as a pedagogical employee and then repeat this every 7 years.

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

In **Slovenia**, according to the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (Articles 105 and 119 ([11])) and the collective agreement for the education sector (Article 53 ([12])), 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 stipulates that unjustified refusal to participate in CPD is a minor violation of work obligations (Article 65). The ministry responsible for education defines priority themes and co-finances in-service training programmes for pedagogical staff.

In **Serbia**, the Law on the Education System Foundations requires that all ECEC and school staff – licensed and non-licensed alike – participate in CPD. According to the By-law 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 ([13]).

In several education systems, time allocation for CPD is set as an entitlement, with a number of days, hours or credits 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.

([11]) https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO445.
([12]) https://pisrs.si/pregledPredpisa?id=KOLP19.
([13]) https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/pravilnik-strucnom-usavrsavanju-napredovanju-zvanja-nastavnika-vaspitaca-strucnih.html.

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 to renew, strengthen and supplement their qualifications. In-service training of education staff is organised by a school head in accordance with an in-service training plan. One of the ways to fulfil the legal obligation to participate in CPD is 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 ([14]). In contrast, 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 each childcare staff member (*pečující osoba*) with at least 8 hours of training per year and a first aid course once every 2 years. Childcare staff must provide proof of completion of CPD ([15]).

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 teachers, have a duty and are entitled to engage in CPD activities for at least 5 days per year.

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

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 their 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 CPD.

In **Czechia**, staff providing childcare services for children under 3 years old have been required to complete 8 hours of CPD per year since October 2021.

In **Ireland**, the publication *Nurturing Skills: The workforce plan for early learning and care and school-age childcare 2022–2028* sets out commitments to strengthening the availability of and support for CPD for ECEC staff ([16]).

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 and professional development. It is currently being discussed with the educational unions and at the General Education Commission of the Autonomous Communities ([17]).

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 ([18]).

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 aim is for in service teachers (including preschool teachers) to be offered structured competence development and the opportunity to have their competences recognised. The legislation will enter into force on 1 January 2025 ([19]).

Heads of ECEC settings are usually qualified at the bachelor's level or higher

Good leadership plays a key role in improving and maintaining the quality of ECEC services and in fostering a positive environment for staff, children and families (European Commission: Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2024). Heads of ECEC settings deal with a wide range of tasks. Not only are they required to organise educational provision, but they must also manage human and financial resources. In order to be able to meet all these challenges, heads should both be qualified at a high level (see Figure C4) and have undertaken specific training for the position (see Figure C5).

Heads of ECEC settings must be qualified at the bachelor's level (ISCED 6) or higher in most of the

([14]) Act No 563/2004 on Education Staff, Art. 24, https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-563#p24.

([15]) Act No 247/2014 on Providing Childcare in a Children's Group, Art. 5(c), https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2014-247#p5c.

([16]) See pillar 3, pp. 74–75, www.gov.ie/NurturingSkills.

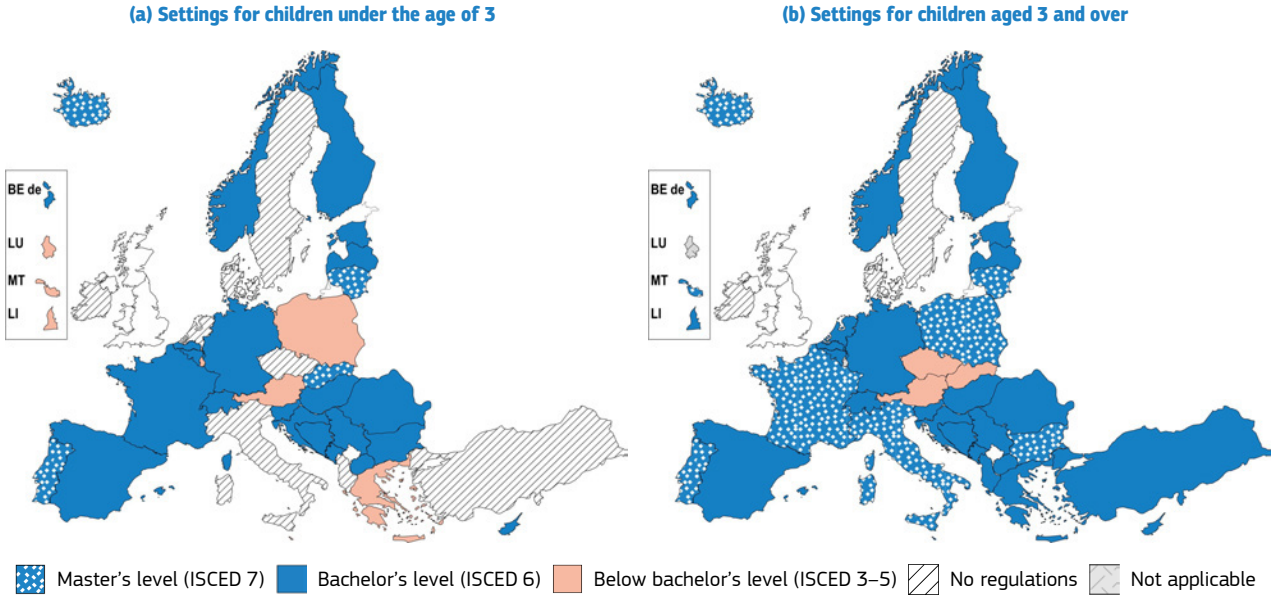
([17]) https://educagob.educacionfpydeportes.gob.es/comunidad-educativa/profesorado/propuesta-reforma.html.

([18]) Initial recommendations were made in June 2022; see https://sante.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/comite_de_filiere_petite_enfance_-_communique_du_29.06_2022.pdf.

([19]) https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2023/01/nationellt-professionsprogram-ska-ge-rektorer-larare-och-forskollarare-battre-kompetensutveckling-och-tydligare-karriarvagar/.

European education systems. This is the case in over half of the education systems in settings for younger children, and in over three quarters of systems in settings for older children. In nine education systems, the minimum qualification level for heads is even higher in at least one setting, being set at the master's level (ISCED 7). This applies to all heads in three education systems – Lithuania, Portugal and Iceland – but only to those managing settings for older children in France, Italy, Malta and Poland. In Bulgaria, heads of kindergartens (for children from 10 months to 7 years) need an ISCED 7 qualification; however, heads of nurseries for children from 3 months to 3 years need an ISCED 6 qualification.

Figure C4: Minimum qualification levels to become a head of a centre-based ECEC setting, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

ISCED level of qualification required to become a head of a centre-based ECEC setting

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
Under age 3	6	6	6	6	O	O	6	6	O	5	6	6	6	O	6	6	7	4	6	5
3 years and over				7	3					6		7		7				-		7

	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE		AL	BA	CH	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Under age 3	O	5	3	7	6	6	7	6	O		O	6	6	7	5	6	6	6	6	O
3 years and over	6		7		6		3				6				6					6

O No minimum requirements

Explanatory notes

The figure shows the minimum qualification levels according to top-level regulations. The qualifications required do not necessarily relate to ECEC or education.
For the ISCED, see here ([20]). The rows in the table are merged when the same ISCED qualification level applies to the heads of both types of setting or where there are unitary settings.

Country-specific notes

Bulgaria: Heads of kindergartens (for children from 10 months to 7 years) need an ISCED 7 qualification; however, heads of nurseries for children from 3 months to 3 years need an ISCED 6 qualification.
Italy: Requirements for heads in settings for younger children are a matter of regional autonomy.
Luxembourg: In pre-primary education, there is no school head. The president of the school committee is responsible for its management and the relationship with parents and the municipality.
Finland: As of 2030, the qualification criteria for the role of ECEC head will consist of a teacher or social pedagogue qualification and a master's degree in education (as well as sufficient leadership skills).

([20]) https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf.

Slovakia stands out as an unusual exception: while the minimum qualification level for heads in settings for younger children is set at the master's level, those managing pre-primary schools for older children require only an upper-secondary-level qualification (ISCED 3). This contrast is primarily attributed to the split system of governance (see Figure A5a for more information), in which the regulatory standards for establishments catering to children under the age of 3 are stipulated by social affairs legislation, while those concerning settings for older children fall under education legislation.

In eight education systems, the minimum requirement to be a head in settings for older children is a qualification at the bachelor's level or higher, but the requirement is not as high in settings for younger children. For heads in charge of settings for younger children, the minimum level is a short-cycle tertiary qualification (ISCED 5) in Greece, Malta and Liechtenstein; a post-secondary non-tertiary education qualification (ISCED 4) in Luxembourg; and an upper-secondary-level qualification in Poland. In Italy, the requirements for heads in settings for younger children are a matter of regional autonomy. In Czechia, the Netherlands, Albania and Türkiye, there are no minimum qualification requirements to lead the settings for younger children; however, in Türkiye, minimum experience of 2 years in the field of ECEC is required (see Figure C5). These 10 education systems all have separate settings for the different age groups.

Some countries do not set high initial education requirements for ECEC centre leaders. In Austria, the minimum qualification level required to become a head is the same across the whole ECEC phase (i.e. ISCED 5). Finally, in three education systems (Denmark, Ireland and Sweden), there are no top-level regulations on minimum qualification levels for heads in any centre-based ECEC setting. However, in Sweden, there is obligatory training for prospective heads (see Figure C5).

It is also interesting to compare the minimum qualification requirements for heads and core practitioners (see Figure C1) in countries where there are regulations on both. Previous experience as a core practitioner is a criterion for the recruitment of heads in several European education systems (see Figure C5). In addition, becoming a head may be a way for core practitioners to be promoted in some education systems. To become a head of a setting for younger children, a higher level of qualification is required than that needed to become a core practitioner in around one third of the education systems. In settings with older children, the same minimum qualification level is required for both posts in over two thirds of countries.

In over one third of European countries, heads of settings for older children must have specific training and previous professional experience

The workload of heads in ECEC settings usually involves many varied tasks, such as planning and organising teaching and learning activities, coordinating the learning and development plan, managing finances and human resources and dealing with logistics. In addition to the minimum qualification level (see Figure C4), other specifications may apply,

such as the completion of a specific training course for headship or previous experience in ECEC or education. Figure C5 examines the experience and training specifications for school head positions in ECEC and shows that, overall, there are more requirements specified for heads of settings for children aged 3 or older than those working in settings for younger children.

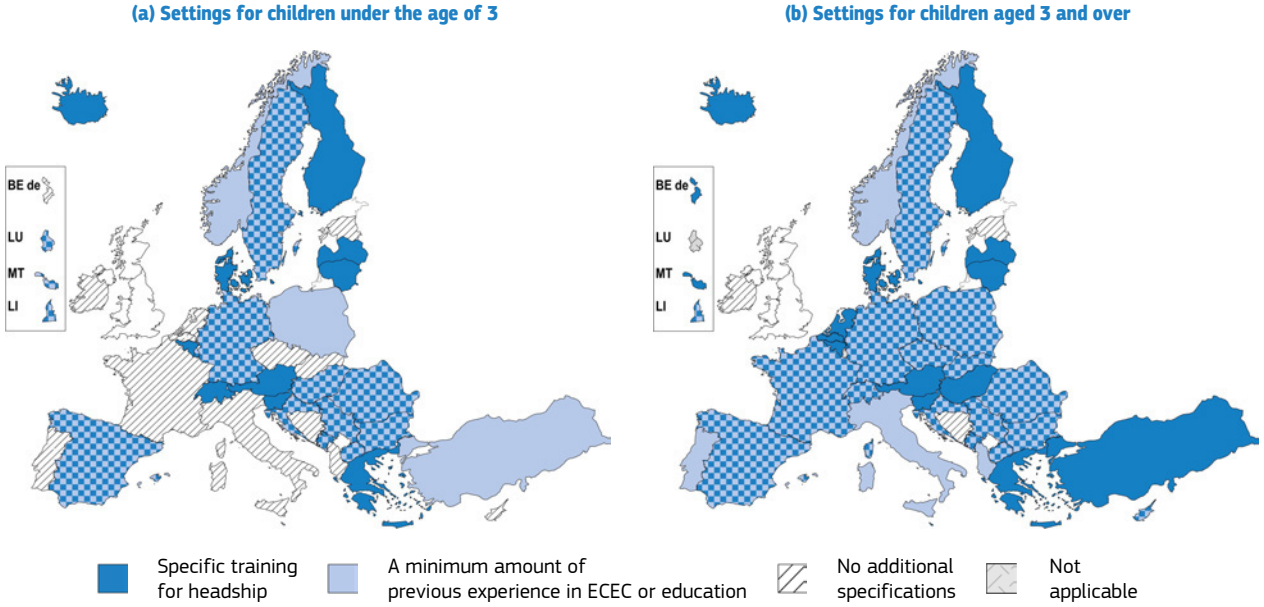
Specific training is required for all ECEC heads, irrespective of the type of setting, in over half of the education systems. It is also required in nine education systems (Belgium (German-speaking and Flemish Communities), Czechia, France, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia and Türkiye) for heads of settings for older children. The minimum duration of this specific training varies between a couple of days and several years.

The specific training for headship may lead to a full qualification.

In **Poland**, the head of a nursery school must have, in addition to an ISCED 7 qualification, a completed master's degree or postgraduate studies in management or a qualification course in educational management.

In **Iceland**, in addition to education at ISCED 7, ECEC heads should also have completed leadership education courses, completed at least 30 credits in school administration studies at the master's level or acquired comparable education.

Figure C5: Additional specifications to become a head of a centre-based ECEC setting, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure shows the additional specifications to become an ECEC head according to top-level regulations. The specific training for headship may or may not be compulsory. Only previous experience in ECEC or education is taken into account.

Country-specific notes

Germany: Overall, 10 out of 16 *Länder* require several years of professional experience; 4 require specific further training.
Italy: Requirements for heads in settings for younger children are a matter of regional autonomy.
Luxembourg: In pre-primary education, there is no school head. The president of the school committee is responsible for its management and the relationship with parents and the municipality.
Finland: The requirements for becoming an ECEC head include sufficient leadership skills.
Switzerland: The requirement for specific training for headship varies between cantons. For settings for younger children, specific training is required in around half of the cantons but is only recommended in the other half. For settings for older children, it is a requirement in most cantons.

In some education systems, the specific programme must be undertaken during the first years of employment.

In **Czechia**, the specific training requirement for heads of nursery schools (for children aged 3 years and over) is a qualification in the field of school management, which must be obtained by completing a study programme within 2 years of the day on which the person started acting as a school head. The study programme contains 100 lessons, ending with a final examination in front of a commission. The programme curriculum contains four basic modules: basics of law, labour law, school funding, and school management and the organisation of the pedagogical process. It also includes 3 days of practical training.

In **Cyprus**, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute provides mandatory training to newly promoted head teachers once a week, each session lasting approximately 5 hours, throughout the first year of their new role.

In **Romania**, Article 194 (4) of the Pre-university Education Law (Law No 198/2023) stipulates that the deputy head of a school institution should complete a management course in the first year of each management mandate.

In **Slovenia**, the training for headship can be completed before the appointment of headship or within the first year after the appointment. The training lasts 144 hours and includes an introductory module about the head teacher as a manager and as a leader and modules on organisational theory and leadership, planning and decision-making, head teachers' skills, human resources, and legislation.

In **Serbia**, heads of ECEC institutions must pass an exam within 2 years after being appointed. According to the law, a person who passes this exam obtains a licence to work as a director. Details on the training programme and conditions of enrolment are defined by the by-law on the training programme and licence exam for the heads of education institutions.

In some countries, the compulsory training programme for ECEC heads must be taken again after a certain time.

In **Spain**, prospective heads of ECEC institutions undergo a structured training process before assuming their roles. This includes a mandatory management skills training programme, followed by a refresher course 8 years later. These consist of both theoretical and

practical components and are modular in structure, with variable durations based on module contents. The minimum duration for core modules is 120 hours, excluding any specific modules established by education administrations. The programme and course cover a range of generic skills, such as leadership, team building and communication, as well as specific skills, including knowledge of regulatory frameworks, institutional document management and community engagement.

In certain education systems, specific training for headship is offered, but participation is not compulsory. This is the case in Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria and Finland. In Luxembourg and Liechtenstein, optional training exists for heads of settings for younger children; in Belgium (Flemish Community), Malta and the Netherlands, such training exists for heads of settings for older children.

In **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, most schools, including pre-primary schools, are organised in several large networks, which provide educational guidance services for their members. These school networks oversee the provision of CPD opportunities and may even mandate specific training for the heads of institutions.

In **Austria**, while training for ECEC heads is not compulsory, it is widely available. Over 100 teaching-related training units are offered, covering various essential topics, such as quality management, personnel management, team development and team leadership, conflict management, complaint management, communication, personality competence, legal and economic framework conditions for kindergarten operations, working with parents and public relations.

Previous experience in ECEC or education is a requirement in over half of all European education systems. All heads – regardless of the ages of the children in their institutions – must have this experience in 12 education systems (Bulgaria, Germany, Spain, Croatia, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway and Serbia). In Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta and Türkiye, this is required only for heads of settings for younger children. In eight other systems, it is required only for those managing a setting for older children (Czechia, France, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, Slovakia, Albania and Switzerland). The minimum number of years of experience in ECEC or education can vary between 1 year (e.g. in Malta and Türkiye) and 16 or even more years (in Cyprus).

In **Cyprus**, in order to apply for a promotion to an deputy head teacher role in public schools, there is a requirement of 13 years of experience as a kindergarten teacher in public schools. Applicants for a promotion to head teacher require 3 years of experience as a deputy head teacher.

ECEC teams are supported by various specialists, especially at the pre-primary stage

Effective collaboration with a range of professionals can significantly enhance the capabilities of ECEC teams. With the flexibility to cater to diverse groups of children or across various environments, specialised support staff can offer invaluable consultative services and targeted interventions, enriching everyday practices without excessive costs.

Figures C6a and C6b offer an overview of the most common support specialists available to children enrolled in ECEC settings across the 39 European education systems. Figure C6a provides an overview, while Figure C6b examines in greater detail the regulations concerning one specific role: special education assistants.

This data distinguishes between professionals employed within ECEC settings, even if only for a few hours per week, and those accessible through external services such as local pedagogical or support services and multidisciplinary family centres. The analysis is based on top-level regulations; however, several countries delegate such decisions to regional or local authorities. Consequently, the information should be viewed as an estimate. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that the roles and functions of the listed support professionals may overlap, and different titles may be used between countries.

The data reveals that more types of specialised professionals tend to be available for children aged 3 and above than for younger children. This trend is particularly noticeable in certain split ECEC systems. For instance, in Czechia, the legal framework does not stipulate any specific requirements for support professionals in children's groups (*dětské skupiny*) for younger children, but in pre-primary education a wide range of professionals are available, including psychologists, social pedagogues, social workers, speech therapists and special education assistants.

Psychologists/counsellors are the most common specialists in European ECEC systems. These professionals assess and support the psychological well-being of children from the earliest age in 25 education systems and during the pre-primary education phase in 28 education systems. Their role may include conducting developmental assessments, providing counselling and collaborating with ECEC teams and families to address developmental and behavioural issues. Psychologists/counsellors are often employed by larger ECEC settings or school clusters that include other levels of education; their expertise may also be accessible through external services.

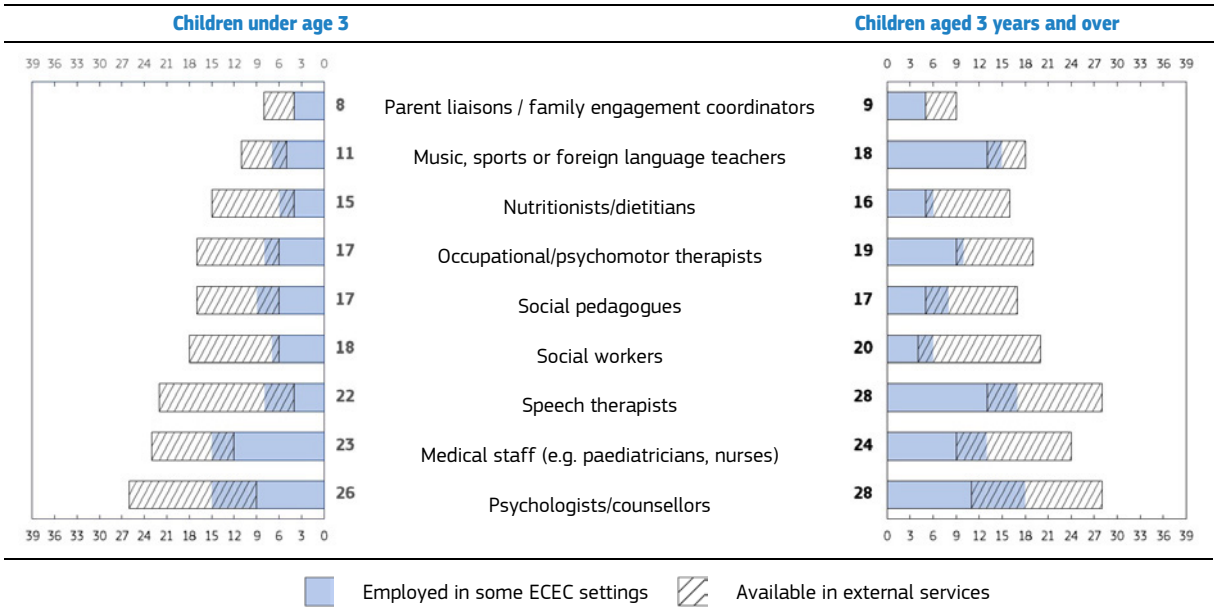
Medical staff (e.g. paediatricians, nurses), speech therapists, occupational/psychomotor therapists and social pedagogues are frequently present both within ECEC settings and externally. In contrast, social workers and nutritionists/dietitians tend to offer their support through external services.

In **Estonia**, in addition to the services of in-house speech therapists and SEN assistants, the services of support specialists are available through the network of educational counselling centres, Pathfinder (*Rajaleidja*). The network offers specialised advice from social pedagogues, special pedagogues, speech therapists and psychologists, supporting children with social, learning, speech and mental health challenges, and providing crisis assistance when needed ([21]).

In **Norway**, municipality pedagogical-psychological services play a crucial role in deciding on the use of external services for children needing special educational assistance, as mandated by the Kindergarten Act, Section 33. In instances where a child requires support such as speech therapy, decisions are made by competent authorities, often leading to assistance provided externally.

Family engagement coordinators and parent liaisons are not very common types of specialised support staff. These functions are often implemented by heads of ECEC settings or the ECEC teams themselves.

Figure C6a: Specialist and educational support staff in ECEC, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

For each age range, the number on the bar indicates the number of European education systems (out of the 39 in total) that have the listed specialist and educational support staff in ECEC. Information by country, including whether these specialists are available in all, most or some schools, is available in Annex A.

For descriptions of these specialist and support staff, please refer to the glossary.

([21]) https://rajaleidja.ee/.

Some education systems provide ECEC settings with a specialist covering several of the support roles.

In **Belgium (French Community)**, in ECEC settings for children under 3, one of the staff profiles is entitled 'psycho-sociomedical supervision staff'. These professionals accompany and support the childcare teams. Their roles encompass providing tailored psychological, medical and social support to children and families and serving as parent liaisons ([22]).

In **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, pedagogical coaches provide support to childcare workers in the ECEC sector working with children under 3 years old. They collaborate closely with childcare staff, whether as internal staff or contracted out, to offer pedagogical guidance, engage with parents and improve the overall quality of childcare through their expertise. Concerning ECEC for children aged 2-and-a-half and over, most pre-primary schools employ a care coordinator (*zorgcoördinator*), who develops the school's care policy, facilitates communication between stakeholders and collaborates with classroom teachers to support children's development. They may also provide individualised guidance and support for children, both in and outside the classroom.

In **Croatia**, most ECEC settings employ educationalists, who oversee educational activities, enhance efficiency and suggest innovations. They assist ECEC staff with professional development, collaborate with parents and promote teamwork within kindergartens.

Some countries require the involvement of a team of support professionals.

In **France**, according to the decree of 30 August 2021, ECEC services for children under the age of 3 must ensure – taking into consideration factors such as the number, ages and needs of the children they accommodate, as well as their educational and social project – that staff have the assistance of a multidisciplinary team comprising qualified professionals. This team should include experts in psychological, psychomotor, social, health, educational and cultural fields ([23]).

In **Slovenia**, public ECEC institutions are mandated by law to provide educational activities led by preschool teachers, preschool teacher assistants, counsellors, health and hygiene organisers, meal organisers and other support staff. Counsellors may hold qualifications in psychology, pedagogy, social pedagogy or social work. Institutions with 20 or more children's groups must employ at least one full-time counsellor, while smaller ones must engage them part-time. Typically, kindergartens have either health-hygiene regime organisers or nutritionists/dietitians, but larger ones (60 groups or more) may hire both. In kindergartens with several Roma children enrolled, a Roma assistant may be appointed. Moreover, technical staff, such as those in charge of learning technology or computer equipment maintenance, may also be employed.

In **Serbia**, all ECEC settings must employ a nurse. The ratios of other types of support staff are determined by the size of the ECEC institution. In institutions with up to 23 groups, one psychologist or pedagogue is required. The largest institutions must employ psychologists, pedagogues, specialists in preventive services, healthcare and social care, and a nutritionist. Institutions with at least 30 Roma children must have a pedagogical assistant for Roma children.

In several European countries, regions, local authorities or settings have a notable degree of autonomy regarding the provision of support to both ECEC staff and children. This autonomy allows local authorities to tailor their support systems to the specific needs and circumstances within their regions.

In **Denmark**, the Act on Daycare Facilities ([24]) mandates local municipal councils to provide necessary support to children with developmental needs in ECEC settings. Those requiring specialised support beyond what ECEC can offer must be provided with appropriate care by the municipality under the Social Services Act.

In **Germany**, the *Länder* determine the qualifications required for ECEC professionals. Social pedagogues and special education assistants are commonly recognised as pedagogical professionals and are often integrated into ECEC teams across many regions. Other staffing decisions are left to the providers and are typically aligned with the pedagogical framework of the ECEC centre.

In **Sweden**, for 6-year-olds in compulsory pre-primary classes, Swedish education law guarantees access to medical, psychological, psychosocial and special educational support provided by professionals such as school doctors, nurses, psychologists, counsellors and special educators ([25]).

Specialist music, sports or foreign language teachers are rarely employed in ECEC settings. Typically, ECEC core practitioners manage a diverse range of educational activities, effectively serving as generalist teachers. Their responsibilities often encompass organising sports and movement activities, fostering artistic development and facilitating language instruction. These specialised subjects are commonly integrated into the training of ECEC teachers.

([22]) https://www.one.be/fileadmin/user_upload/siteone/PRO/Milieux_accueil/Reforme/Profil-fonction-du-Personnel-d-encadrement-psycho-medico-social.pdf.

([23]) https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000043990581.

([24]) https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2024/55.

([25]) See Chapter 2, paragraph 25, and Chapter 9, https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skollag-2010800_sfs-2010-800/#K8.

However, ECEC settings in a few countries employ teachers specialising in sports, music or early foreign language activities. Sometimes, these specialised teachers have higher education levels than the generalist pre-primary teachers.

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

Specialists in early education in foreign languages are more common at the pre-primary stage.

In **Belgium (German-speaking Community)**, since 2022, each pre-primary setting receives 1 teaching hour from teachers specialising in foreign language activities for kindergartens for every full-time equivalent pre-primary teacher.

In **Spain**, in schools where both primary and pre-primary education are provided, primary specialists in music, physical education and English may teach these subjects in the pre-primary classroom with the pre-primary teacher present. This practice varies by autonomous community ([26]).

In **Greece**, English is taught by English teachers in cooperation with the class teacher, to ensure continuity between the areas of the curriculum. The integration of English lessons into pre-primary school curricula (from the 2021/2022 school year) was accompanied by a mandatory 24-hour English introduction course for all pre-primary teachers, English teachers and educational advisors. This initiative aimed to provide teachers with the foundational skills required to effectively teach English to young learners. The course covered various aspects of language acquisition, including specially designed educational scenarios and creative activities for preschool children.

In **Montenegro**, the preschool teacher is supported by an English language teacher and a healthcare technician working on preventive programmes.

Special education assistants are present in many ECEC groups

Special education assistants work with children who have special education needs (SEN) or disabilities, providing individualised support and accommodations to help them participate in ECEC activities. Figure C6b reveals a significant disparity in SEN assistant availability between younger children (under age 3) and those aged 3 and above, with assistants providing greater support and being better integrated into ECEC settings as children grow older. While external provision is common for both age groups, there is a noticeable shift towards employing SEN assistants in the ECEC settings for children aged 3 and above. This suggests an increased formalisation of education and a rising focus on inclusive education as children approach primary school age.

When regularly integrated into a children's group, special education assistants may play a multifaceted role, contributing to daily planning, facilitating small group activities and nurturing an enriching environment that benefits all children within the group. However, only a very few countries ensure the systematic availability of SEN assistants in ECEC settings from the earliest age. Only Estonia, Lithuania, Austria and Montenegro report widespread availability of SEN assistants directly within ECEC settings for the entire ECEC age range. As children reach the age of 3, the data indicates a shift towards more regular and integrated access to SEN assistants within ECEC settings. In addition to the four countries where SEN assistants are present for children from an early age, this support is available in most pre-primary schools in Belgium (German-speaking Community), Czechia, Spain, France, Italy, Hungary, Malta, Portugal and Switzerland.

In **Czechia**, in pre-primary schools a teacher's assistant (*asistent pedagoga*) works in groups where there is at least one child with special educational needs, following a recommendation from the school guidance and counselling facility. The assistant also works with the other children in the group, following the instructions of the pre-primary teacher.

In **Spain**, in all public settings for children aged 3 and older, there are two types of SEN assistants: hearing and language teachers and therapeutic pedagogy teachers. Hearing and language teachers focus on communication, language and speech from an educational perspective linked to the curriculum. Therapeutic pedagogy teachers assist with learning in areas such as reading, writing, mathematics and cognitive skills. The number of SEN assistants and their specific tasks are determined by the educational administration based on identified needs, always aiming for inclusivity. For children under age 3, these specialists are available via external services.

In **Montenegro**, for more than 10 years, teaching assistants have been available to assist children with special educational needs. A

([26]) For example, Cantabria generalises this measure (see Anuncio número 2022-5659), while in others the presence of music or physical education teachers is less common than English teachers (see wleg_pub - Comunidad de Madrid - madrid.org).

teaching assistant is appointed to the child by the commission for guidance of children with SEN, which is composed of a variety of experts: a paediatrician, a doctor with an appropriate specialty, a psychologist, a pedagogue and a special education teacher. According to current legislation, a teaching assistant is assigned to children with severe physical disabilities, moderate intellectual disabilities, complete hearing loss or no residual vision, and those on the autism spectrum, in accordance with the decision on guidance.

In several countries, SEN assistants are available in some settings, often following a decision of a dedicated expert group.

In **Croatia**, educational rehabilitation specialists identify and address difficulties facing children, particularly those with disabilities. They collaborate with pre-primary teachers and parents to create tailored inclusion plans, liaise with health and social welfare services and continuously improve practices for integrating children with disabilities into the community.

In **Poland**, preschool facilities must provide activities tailored to individual needs, including remedial, re-socialising and sociotherapeutic support. Special education teachers or assistants are additionally employed to coorganise the education of children with autism, Asperger's syndrome or multiple disabilities. For children with other special needs, additional teachers or assistants may be employed with the consent of the managing authority.

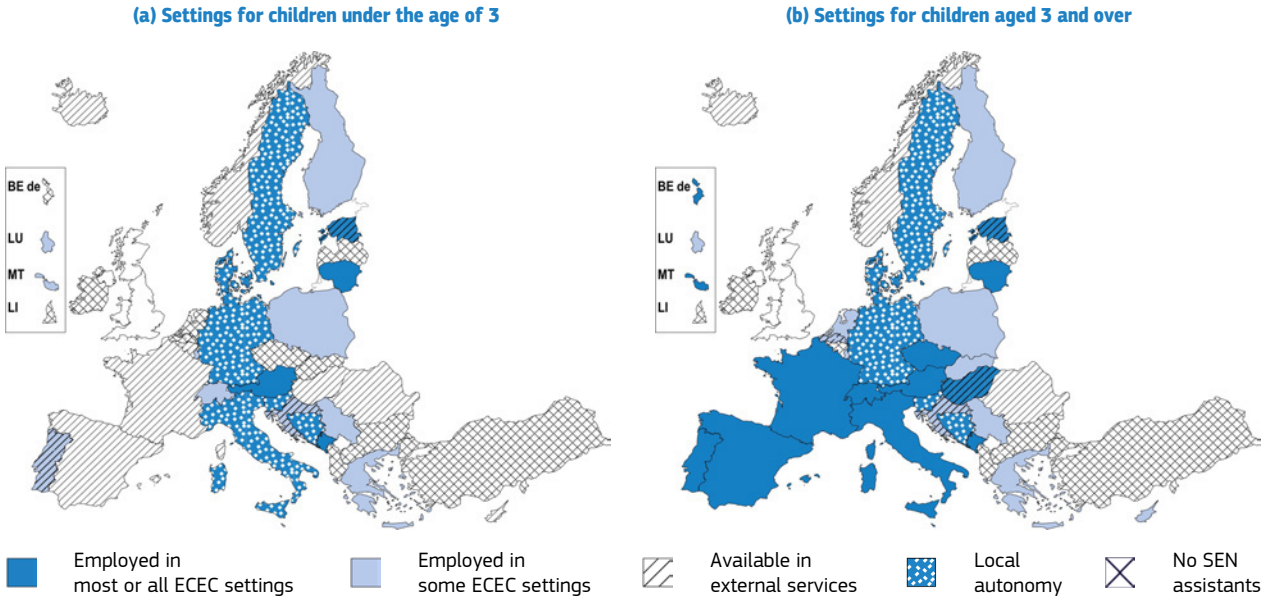
In **Slovenian** kindergartens, SEN assistants may be employed to support physically disabled children. Additional professional assistance, such as help from sign language specialists or adapted communication experts, is available for children with specific requirements. A multidisciplinary team may recommend a wide range of adjustments, such as lowering class sizes, to cater to the specific needs of these children ([27]).

In **Finland**, according to the Act on ECEC ([28]), children in ECEC have the right to support for their development, learning and well-being. When needed, this includes consultation with and instruction from a special education teacher, as well as necessary interpretation, assistance services and aids. A special education teacher in ECEC is a specialist in special pedagogy (ISCED 6). Special education teachers may work full-time in special groups or part-time consulting across several ECEC groups or settings. Their role includes assessing children's support needs and implementing support measures, in collaboration with ECEC staff, guardians and a broader support network.

In **Serbia**, any ECEC institution with at least 10 children with disabilities/difficulties has a pedagogical assistant who works with those children.

External services often provide guidance. For example, in Luxembourg, the resource centre *Incluso* has been set up to advise professionals on designing and implementing an inclusive approach throughout the entire ECEC phase.

Figure C6b: Special education assistants in ECEC, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

([27]) For more information, see the Slovenian government's web page on pre-primary education for children with special needs, https://www.gov.si/teme/predsolska-vzgoja-za-otroke-s-posebnimi-potrebami/.

([28]) https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2018/en20180540.pdf, Chapter 3a, Sections 15a–e.

Local decision-making plays a significant role in determining the availability of SEN assistants during the entire ECEC period in several countries. In Denmark, Germany, Slovenia, Sweden and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the availability of special education assistants can vary depending on the region or municipality. Local autonomy allows for tailored support that meets local needs, ensuring flexibility in SEN provision. However, it can also lead to unequal access, with some regions offering better services than others.

In **Denmark**, municipalities have very different approaches to the use of SEN assistants. Some municipalities offer children with disabilities/difficulties smaller units within larger regular daycare units. Such smaller units will often have regular access to special staff such as psychologists or physiotherapists, employed by the municipality, and will often be staffed by specifically trained pedagogical staff. Some municipalities offer ECEC in very small groups to children with disabilities/difficulties, often based in regulated home-based provision (*dagplejer*). These units will have regular support from professionals employed by the municipality, and the child minders in the regulated home-based provision will have particular training.

The **Swedish** education law states that it is a duty of the ECEC head to ensure that all children needing special support in their development must receive tailored assistance. Municipalities have local autonomy in implementing this law.

In some countries, top-level authorities and municipalities cooperate. For example, in Italy, requirements for special education assistants in pre-primary schools are set out in top-level legislation and these assistants are provided by municipalities. Law 104/1992 stipulates that classes with students who have certified disabilities are allocated support teachers (*insegnanti di sostegno*), who are provided by top-level authorities. These teachers work alongside assistants for autonomy and communication (*assistenti per l'autonomia e la comunicazione personale*), who are assigned by local authorities to provide individual assistance. Their roles include facilitating the pupil's integration, promoting relationships and enhancing social, verbal and non-verbal communication skills. According to Article 16 of Law 104/1992, local authorities must ensure such support for pupils with physical or sensory disabilities at all educational levels.

More than two thirds of European countries report shortage of ECEC core practitioners

Sufficient staffing is essential for maintaining high quality standards in ECEC settings. The shortage of staff may affect the availability and accessibility of ECEC services, leading to challenges such as reduced opening hours, long waiting lists and even the closures of settings. Most importantly, children's development may be hindered due to limited access to individualised attention and enriching learning experiences. Inclusive ECEC practices may be difficult to implement, impeding the integration of children with special needs. Moreover, staff shortages raise concerns about safety and contribute to workforce instability, resulting in elevated turnover rates and diminished job satisfaction among ECEC professionals. The economic ramifications of such shortages are substantial, affecting both parental workforce engagement and the long-term outcomes for children (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2021).

Currently, most European countries report some shortage of ECEC core practitioners. This shortfall is observed throughout the entire ECEC phase in countries such as Germany, Croatia, Lithuania, Austria, Portugal, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland and Norway.

In some regions with split governance ECEC systems, shortages are reported for specific ECEC phases. There is a significant lack of childcare staff catering for children under age 3 in Belgium (Flemish Community), Bulgaria, France, Romania and Switzerland.

In **France**, a 2022 survey of all daycare centres revealed significant staff shortages in the sector catering for children under age 3. At least 45 % of recruitment needs are for childcare assistants, while 17 % are for core practitioners and 1 623 management positions are unfilled. In total, 9 512 places in ECEC were permanently closed due to the lack of staff ([29]).

Among European countries, only Hungary, Poland and Liechtenstein reported balanced supply of and demand for ECEC core practitioners throughout the entire ECEC phase. Demographic shifts across European societies, marked by significant declines in the numbers of

([29]) https://solidarites.gouv.fr/sites/solidarite/files/2023-01/Restitution%20des%20r%C3%A9sultats%20de%20l%E2%80%99enqu%C3%AAte%20nationale%20p%C3%A9nurie%20de%20professionnels%20dans%20les%20%C3%A9tablissements%20d%27accueil%20du%20jeune%20enfant.pdf.

children (see Figure A1), are already affecting ECEC staff in some regions. Currently, Greece reports oversupply of ECEC staff in specific areas across all ECEC phases. Malta is experiencing a surplus of pre-primary teachers in some areas alongside a deficit of childcare staff for children under 3 years old. Luxembourg highlights a situation of imbalance, with insufficient staff in certain areas and an excess in others. Some countries face specific challenges that affect staff shortages.

In **Denmark**, according to some studies, the implementation of child–staff ratios, effective from 1 January 2024, is projected to result in increased demand, requiring 3 800 new full-time ECEC staff members ([30]).

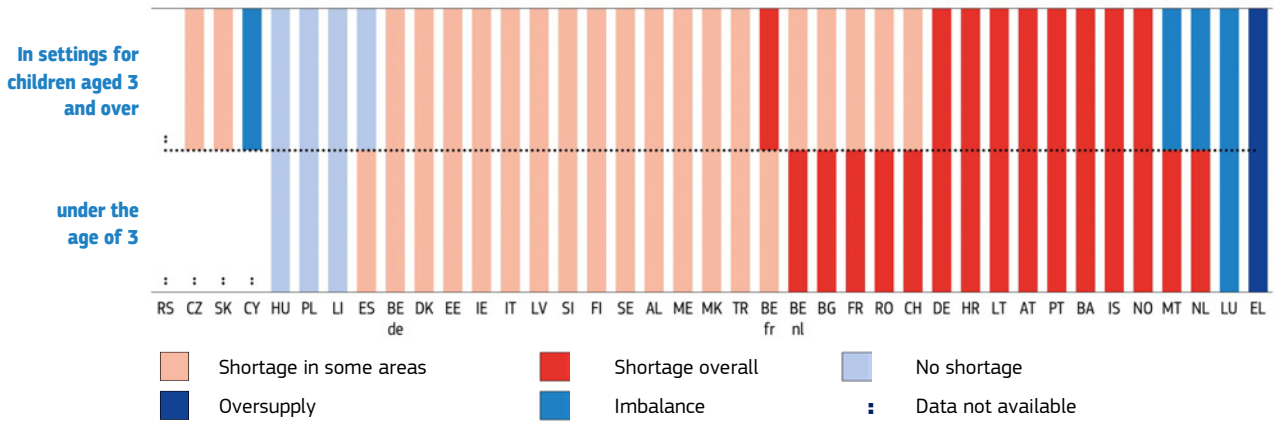
In **Spain**, the balance between supply of and demand for ECEC staff is generally maintained. However, disparities arise in urban areas with a high prevalence of privately managed ECEC settings for children under 3. The superior working conditions in the public sector contribute to staff shortages in private ECEC centres.

Some countries face shortages of staff proficient in the language of the ECEC services. For example, in **Estonia**, due to the transition to providing instruction in Estonian in preschools that previously taught in Russian, there will be a shortage of teachers meeting Estonian language requirements in two regions (Ida-Viru County and Tallinn). **Iceland** is experiencing a shortage of ECEC assistants fluent in Icelandic. In May 2024, a parliamentary resolution aiming to preserve and promote the Icelandic language was approved; it proposed fluency benchmarks for preschool support staff ([31]). The proposed action plan seeks to improve Icelandic language education and resources for immigrants, including on-the-job learning opportunities for ECEC staff ([32]).

The supply of and demand for assistants, heads of ECEC settings or other staff are also unbalanced in certain countries (see data complementing Figure C7 in Annex A). Portugal and Norway are grappling with a significant shortage of ECEC assistants across all stages of ECEC, while Bulgaria, France and Malta are experiencing shortages specifically within the childcare sector for children under the age of 3. There are systemic shortages of assistants in some areas in Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Iceland and North Macedonia.

Moreover, some leadership positions within ECEC settings remain unfilled in Belgium, Czechia, France, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria and Portugal.

Figure C7: Shortages of core practitioners in ECEC settings, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure is based on Eurydice experts' estimations. Data on assistants, heads of centre-based ECEC settings and other staff can be found in Annex A.

([30]) https://fm.dk/media/26380/mekaniske-fremskrivninger-af-udbud-af-og-efterspoergsel-efter-velfaerdsmedarbejdere_oekonomisk-analyse.pdf.

([31]) https://www.althingi.is/thingstorf/thingmalalistar-eftir-thingum/ferill/154/511/?ltg=154&mnr=511.

([32]) https://www.althingi.is/altext/154/s/0582.html.

Several countries highlight shortages of other crucial staff members supporting ECEC teams. For example, in Czechia, pre-primary schools are encountering challenges in securing funding to hire qualified psychologists and special pedagogues. France reports a shortage of school medical staff, including doctors, nurses and school psychologists.

Countries employ a wide range of strategies to tackle ECEC staff shortages. One common approach involves retraining individuals with diverse qualifications to enter the field. This may entail lowering entry requirements or extending the period for obtaining the necessary qualifications. In addition, countries often employ media campaigns to raise awareness and promote the appeal of ECEC professions. Some countries are implementing financial incentives. For instance, Latvia has increased the salaries of ECEC staff, while other countries have introduced specific scholarships, financial aid programmes or allowances to encourage individuals to pursue qualifications in ECEC.

In **Germany**, given the shortage of qualified staff, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth has started – together with the federal states, municipalities, social partners and experts – to develop a strategy to recruit and retain skilled staff in educational professions ([33]).

In **Estonia**, to alleviate the shortages of teachers and support specialists, 400 new study places for teachers have been created in teacher training universities, and the beginners' allowance has been expanded to cover support specialists (speech therapists, special pedagogues, psychologists, social pedagogues).

In **France**, the Ministry of National Education oversees a dedicated website entitled 'Become a teacher' ([34]). This platform serves as a comprehensive resource, providing access to various features, including the opportunity to engage with 'ambassadors of national education' and seek guidance. A video is being broadcast on various channels, including television networks ([35]).

In **Croatia**, if no qualified candidate applies for a preschool teacher position, someone with a teacher education background (specialist graduate, integrated undergraduate and graduate or 4-year graduate professional study) can fill the role. Within 2 years of starting employment, they must obtain the preschool teacher qualification through recognised learning outcomes and specialised training programmes.

Latvia has implemented a 23 % increase in the minimum salary for preschool teachers, effective from 1 January 2024.

In **Lithuania**, the pedagogical professions lack popularity among young people. To address shortages in ECEC, efforts are under way to retrain individuals from diverse backgrounds, particularly those with existing educational degrees.

In **Austria**, new training routes are available, particularly for career changers, and are currently being heavily promoted by the federal government through a campaign ([36]).

In **Portugal**, since 2022, efforts to address teacher shortages include allowing students who have completed the first cycle of higher education in education or related fields to apply for teaching positions, even without a master's degree in education. This initiative grants access to the national recruitment process, although it does not grant teaching qualifications or direct career access.

Slovenia has established trainee preschool teacher and trainee preschool teacher assistant posts for students who meet specific educational and other requirements.

Finland has significantly increased the number of places in ECEC programmes at universities. In addition, tailored training initiatives enable people with ISCED 3 qualifications who currently work as childcarers to further their education and attain teacher qualifications. This supports the staff reform that aims to raise the proportion of highly trained staff to 50 % by 2030.

The **Icelandic** government initiated the campaign 'Come and teach!' ('*Komdu að kenna!*') in 2020, which aimed to increase the number of students entering teaching education programmes ([37]). The campaign highlighted the benefits and opportunities of the teaching profession, such as the diversity, creativity, teamwork and impact of the work. The campaign also informed people about the (then) new legal framework on teaching education (Act 95/2019), which granted more flexibility to and incentives for prospective and current teachers, as teachers could now move up and down school levels in their profession, which had not been allowed before. It also introduced temporary scholarships for students who completed their studies swiftly.

([33]) See the recommendations and examples of good practice here: https://www.fruehe-chancen.de/themen/fachkraefte-und-qualifizierung/gesamtstrategie-fachkraefte-in-kitas-und-ganztag.

([34]) https://www.devenirenseignant.gouv.fr/.

([35]) https://www.devenirenseignant.gouv.fr/un-professeur-ca-change-la-vie-pour-toute-la-vie-1038.

([36]) https://xn--elementarpdagogik-zqb.klassejob.at/.

([37]) https://komduadkenna.is/.

Section II – Working conditions

The maximum number of children per staff member doubles between the ages of 2 and 4

Child–staff ratios and group sizes appropriate to children's ages are generally seen as essential if children's care and education is to be delivered effectively. They are also key factors in successfully managing and retaining staff and, consequently, crucial to maintaining high process quality in ECEC (for more information on this, see Chapter E 'Evaluation and monitoring'). Workload, in terms of the number of children per staff member, is particularly important. Moreover, low ratios and small group sizes help to ensure that every child gets enough one-to-one attention, which is important for children's social and emotional development, their physical well-being and their overall learning. Individual interactions with adults help children feel safe and reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed – for both children and adults. However, employing more staff, and especially highly qualified staff, entails higher costs. Therefore, the regulations regarding ratios and group sizes are a compromise between these competing priorities.

The majority of European countries have introduced top-level regulations on this issue for centre-based ECEC. Although, in practice, the actual numbers of children may be lower than the stated maximums, the levels set by these regulations provide a useful indication of the standards operating across Europe.

Top-level authorities have different ways of ensuring that sufficient numbers of staff are available for the education and care of each child. Many countries regulate both the maximum number of children per group and per member of staff. When different types of staff are employed, countries may define the ratios accordingly – for example, per core practitioner and assistant. In some countries, the maximum number of children per group is not specified, but the maximum number of children per staff member and/or core practitioner is defined. Others regulate the maximum number of children per group, leaving ECEC settings the freedom to determine which types of staff – core practitioners with or without assistants – to assign to the groups. The limits are usually formulated considering children's ages. As children get older and more independent, the maximum numbers are allowed to increase.

To provide an overview, Figure C8 shows the maximum number of children allowed per group, per core practitioner and per staff member (if assistants are employed) for children aged 2 and 4. These ages fall in the middle of the two main stages of ECEC (see more details in Chapter A 'Governance and funding'). Data for each individual year from age 0 to 5 is available in Annex A.

The maximum number of children allowed per group tends to be higher for 4-year-olds than 2-year-olds in many education systems. Typically, the maximum group size increases from around 15 children at age 2 to approximately 23 children at age 4. However, there are significant differences among European countries. For 2-year-olds, the maximum number of children per group ranges from 10 in Türkiye to 24 in Czechia. Meanwhile, for 4-year-olds, the recommended benchmark for maximum group size is lowest in Sweden, at 15, whereas the highest is 28 children per group in Bulgaria.

Only Czechia and Romania have set the same maximum group size for age 2 and age 4.

In **Czechia**, the maximum number of children is set at 24 for all groups of children older than age 1. However, for children under age 3, three staff members are required in each group. In groups of children aged 3–5, typically, one pre-primary teacher covers most of the day, with two teachers present simultaneously for at least 2.5 hours each day.

Between the ages of 2 and 4, the maximum child–staff ratio typically doubles. For 2-year-olds, teams of two (or sometimes even three) staff members are commonly assigned to work with groups. In contrast, at age 4, one or two individuals typically oversee an entire group (see Figure C9).

For children aged 2, the maximum number of children per staff member usually ranges from 6 to 8, but varies from 3 in Denmark and Norway to 20 in Spain and Romania. However, for 4-year-olds, the situation is significantly different. On average, the maximum number of children per staff member at this age is 15. Only three countries (Denmark, Finland and Norway) have set limits below 10 children per staff member.

Figure C8: Maximum number of children allowed per group, per core practitioner and per staff member in centre-based ECEC provision for children at ages 2 and 4, 2024/2025

Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure refers to the maximum number of children per group, per core practitioner and per staff member present at the same time during the core hours of a working day, as defined in regulations/recommendations. It does not take into account the regulations for age-heterogeneous groups or reductions when children with special needs are included in the group. Assistants recruited to support children with special education needs are not considered.

A specific methodology has been developed to convert the data available in the education systems into the format required for this figure (i.e. the child–staff ratio and the maximum number of children per group) (see Annex A).

Detailed information for all ages between 0 and 5 is available in Annex A.

Country-specific notes

Belgium (Flemish Community): In June 2024, child–staff ratios were introduced for the youngest children, with a grace period until the end of 2026 for providers to adapt. For 2-year-olds, maximum 8 children per staff member.
Ireland: For 4-year-olds, the data shows the maximum ratio for sessional ECEC (up to 3.5 hours per day) provided under the free early childhood care and education scheme. The ratio is 1:8 for all other ECEC services.
Greece: Data covers the public sector only. For 2-year-olds, the figure shows the situation for children aged under 30 months. Between 30 and 36 months, the maximum number of children per staff member is 13 and the maximum number per group is 25.
Spain: For 2-year-olds, the situation varies between autonomous communities. The figure shows the maximum values. More details on these variations can be found in Annex A.
France: For 4-year-olds, the maximum group size is regulated at the local (*département*) level.
Italy: For 2-year-olds, this is a matter of regional autonomy.
Cyprus: In groups for children aged 3–6 years old, one assistant is responsible for up to two groups of children.
Hungary: For 2-year-olds, there are two early childhood educators (*kisgyermeknevelő*) per group and one assistant (*bölcsődei dajka*) per two groups. For 4-year-olds, there is one core practitioner (*óvodapedagógus*) in the morning and another in the afternoon, with 2 hours' overlap. There is one assistant (*dajka*) per group and one pedagogical assistant (*pedagógiai asszisztens*) per three groups.
Malta: If classes of 4-year-olds ('Kinder 2') include more than 14 children, a learning support educator is assigned. These professionals are not considered assistants, but typically support pupils with special needs.
Austria: The situation varies between *Bundesländer*. The figure shows the maximum values. More details on these variations can be found in Annex A.
Slovenia: Municipalities can increase the maximum number of children per group by two, based on local community needs. In practice, the number of children per group is raised in about half of the groups.
Sweden: There are no regulations; the figure indicates suggested benchmarks.

In some education systems, the ECEC setting, the local authority or the region has the autonomy to decide grouping and staffing. There are no top-level regulations on group sizes or child–staff ratios in Germany, Latvia, Austria, Sweden (only benchmarks) and Iceland. In Italy and Albania, there are no top-level regulations for children under age 3, as this type of provision is managed at the regional and local levels, respectively. In France and the Netherlands, the top-level authorities regulate the child–staff ratios and/or group sizes for 2-year-olds but not for 4-year-olds.

In **Germany**, child–staff ratios are regulated or recommended at the *Land* level, with typical ratios per staff member ranging from 1:3 to 1:5 for children under age 3 and 1:8 to 1:12 for children aged 3–5 years.

In **France**, the maximum class sizes are defined at the local (*département*) level. For example, in 2022/2023, the maximum numbers of 4-year-olds per class in five *départements* around Bordeaux were as follows: Dordogne, 26; Gironde, 30; Landes, 28; Lot-et-Garonne, 31; and Pyrénées-Atlantiques, 33. At the start of the 2022/2023 school year, the national average class size for 4-year-olds in the public sector was 23 children ([38]).

In **Italy**, child–staff ratios and group sizes for children under age 3 are determined by each region. These ratios typically range between 1:5 and 1:10, varying based on the age of the children.

In **Latvia**, there is no specified maximum number of children in a preschool group. Instead, the regulations ([39]) delineate minimum space requirements per child, varying by age group. For children under 3 years of age, the group room should have 2.5 m^2 per child, and the bedroom should have 1.8 m^2 per child. For children aged 3 or more, the group room should have 3.0 m^2 per child, and the bedroom should have 2.0 m^2 per child. Typically, a preschool group is led by one preschool teacher and one assistant teacher.

In **Sweden**, there are no regulations regarding the maximum number of children per group or per staff member in ECEC settings. However, the Swedish National Agency for Education recommends that group sizes in preschools are between 6 and 12 children for ages 1–3 years and between 9 and 15 children for ages 4–5 years. In 2023, the average group size for children aged 1–3 years was 12.6, while for children aged 4–5 years it was 16.1 (Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket), 2024, p. 15). The average number of children per full-time staff member in preschool settings in 2021 was 5.1 (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, 2022, p. 24). This varied from 3.9 to 6.4 across municipalities.

Iceland removed the minimum requirements from the child–staff ratio in 2019, aiming to grant preschool heads greater autonomy. The decision-making is supported by a formula to calculate the number of 'child equivalents' (*barngildi*), which takes into account children's ages, the number of children with special needs and the number of hours per week children for which are registered. Currently, child–staff ratios in preschools typically range from 4 to 6 children per staff member.

A few education systems introduced child–staff ratios recently. In Belgium (Flemish Community), from the end of 2026, maximum 5 children under 12 months per staff member and maximum 8 children aged 12-36 months per staff member will be allowed. Denmark has standardised regulations across regions, thereby removing local autonomy. From 1 January 2024, one staff member per three children for ages 0–2 is required, and one adult per six children for ages 3–5 is required, averaged across all ECEC facilities within each municipality.

Teams usually work with groups of 2-year-olds, while one pre-primary teacher often deals with 4-year-olds

Analysis of team structure in ECEC may provide another crucial aspect to consider when evaluating working conditions. The number of staff members assigned to each group of children helps gauge workload intensity and potential for collaboration and support among staff members. Figure C9 illustrates whether there is typically one, two or three staff members working with standard groups of 2-year-old and 4-year-old children. These ages fall in the middle of the two main stages of ECEC (for more details, see Chapter A 'Governance and funding').

In Europe, it is typical for teams of two or more staff members to work with groups of 2-year-old children in ECEC settings. It is not common for one core practitioner to be the sole person in charge of the entire group of young children in ECEC. For groups of 4-year-old children, around half of European countries appoint one core practitioner as the leader, while the rest entrust teams – usually comprising one core practitioner and one assistant – with this responsibility.

([38]) Chapter 2.02, Table 4: https://www.education.gouv.fr/media/159894/download.

([39]) https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/260057-hygiene-requirements-for-the-providers-of-child-supervision-service-and-educational-institutions-implementing-a-pre-school-education-programme.

In some countries categorised as having one core practitioner, two educators operate in shifts to cover one group. This scheduling practice is common in full-time ECEC settings to prevent a single individual from working excessively long hours.

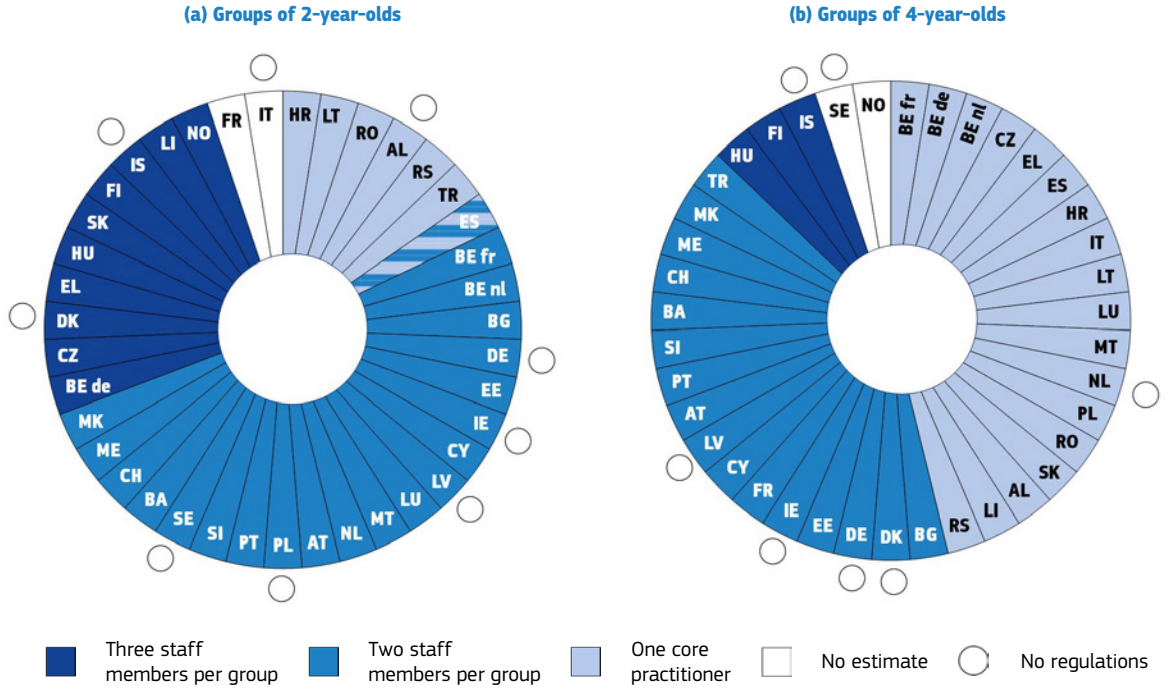
In **Italy**, most settings for children aged 3 and over typically operate on a 40-hour weekly timetable. In these settings, two teachers are available for each group, although they are not present at the same time, except during meals and some exceptional activities. Settings that apply a reduced timetable of 25 hours have only one teacher per group.

In **Poland**, two teachers typically work in shifts, jointly supervising one group of 4-year-olds. One teacher usually works until noon, while the other takes over for the afternoon.

In **Romania**, one teacher is assigned to a group of children, regardless of their age. However, for groups with extended hours (10 hours/day) or a weekly programme, two teachers rotate shifts, each working 5 hours per day.

In some countries – for example, Albania – nursery groups tend to be small and thus only one core practitioner is employed.

Figure C9: Typical number of staff members per group in centre-based ECEC settings, 2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

When the figure shows 'no regulations' overlapping with a certain category, the typical number of staff per group has been estimated. The categories 'three staff members per group' and 'two staff members per group' in some rare cases include situations where one staff member is shared by two or three groups. For example, the figure shows 'two staff members per group' when a core practitioner is always present and one assistant is shared by two groups. However, when the assistant is present for only a few hours per week, the figure indicates 'one core practitioner'.

Country-specific notes

Belgium (Flemish Community): Pre-primary teachers (Figure C9b) may have additional support from an assistant (childcarer (*Kinderverzorgster*)) for a few hours per week.
Spain: For 2-year-olds, regulations vary among autonomous communities. In all cases, there is at least one core practitioner, typically an infant education technician (*técnico en educación infantil*). In certain autonomous communities, two staff members are present, as an infant education teacher (*maestro o maestra de educación infantil*) joins the team.
France: For 2-year-olds, the child–staff ratios are calculated at the setting level.
Malta: If classes of 4-year-olds ('Kinder 2') include more than 14 children, a learning support educator is assigned. These professionals are not considered assistants, but typically support pupils with special needs.

Teams with two staff members per group usually include one core practitioner and one assistant.

In **Portugal**, one core practitioner and one assistant are present in all ECEC groups.

In **Slovenia**, both a preschool teacher and a preschool teacher assistant are present simultaneously during the typical full-day programme. When covering groups of 2-year-olds, they collaborate for a minimum of 6 hours daily, while for classes of 4-year-olds their joint presence is required for at least 4 hours daily. During rest time, supervision of the children is typically handled by either a preschool teacher or a preschool teacher assistant alone.

There might be shifts to cover the full day. For example, in Bulgarian kindergartens, there are two core practitioners with bachelor's degrees (ISCED 6) and one assistant with secondary education (ISCED 3) for each group of children, and staff work in shifts to ensure coverage throughout the day. Typically, one core practitioner works from 07:00 until 13:00, another from 12:00 until 19:00. An assistant works from 07:00 until 16:00. Both the core practitioners and the assistant work together from 12:00 to 13:00.

In some countries, two staff members with similar minimum qualifications are required (Belgium (all communities), the Netherlands, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia). However, they may still have different profiles.

In **Belgium (French Community)**, core practitioners working with children under age 3 (*accueillant(e) d'enfants*) can have three types of diploma at ISCED 3 – childhood auxiliary (*auxiliaire de l'enfance*), education agent (*agent(e) d'éducation*) or educator (*éducateur/éducatrice*) vocational certificates – and two types of qualification at ISCED 4: childcarerer (*puériculteur/puéricultrice; accueillant(e) d'enfants chef(fe) d'entreprise*).

In **the Netherlands**, for centre-based ECEC for children under age 4, there is a regulation that there must always be at least two people present for each group – the 'four-eyes principle'.

Certain countries permit both scenarios. For instance, in Estonia, a group may be covered by either one core practitioner (with two taking shifts) and one assistant, or two core practitioners simultaneously.

Teams of three members per group are more prevalent with groups of younger children than with older ones. In groups of 2-year-olds, three staff members are usually present in Belgium (German-speaking Community), Czechia, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Slovakia, Finland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

With 4-year-olds, three staff members are present per group only in Hungary, Finland and Iceland.

Three staff members per group covers a variety of situations. In some situations, the three core practitioners or staff members have the same minimum qualification.

In **Czechia**, for larger groups of 2-year-olds consisting of 13–24 children, a minimum of three staff members must be present. All childcare workers are required to hold qualifications in health, social care or education, with the minimum education level required being ISCED 3.

Sometimes there are two core practitioners supported by one assistant.

In **Liechtenstein**, for groups of 2-year-olds, there must be a minimum of one pedagogical staff member for every five children. The group is overseen by a qualified childcare specialist, kindergarten teacher or another trained pedagogical professional, along with a trainee or intern. Enough staff members must be present throughout the day to maintain the child–staff ratio of 1:5.

In some countries, there is one core practitioner and two assistants or other types of staff with lower qualifications.

In **Finland**, the staff responsible for upbringing, education and care in early education centres consist of qualified teachers, social pedagogues and childcarers. The maximum number of children per staff member is regulated by law. In early education centres, the ratio is 1:4 for children under 3 years, and 1:7 for children aged 3 or more. The number of children present in a group cannot exceed the number of children allowed to be supervised by three adults.

In others, two regular staff members are supported by assistants shared among two or three groups.

In **Hungary**, for children under the age of 3, each group is typically supervised by two early childhood educators (*kisgyermeknevelő*) and one assistant (*bölcsődei dajka*) for every two groups. For children aged 3 and over, there is one core practitioner (*óvodapedagógus*) in the morning and another in the afternoon, with a 2-hour overlap. In addition, each group is supported by one assistant (*dajka*), and there is an additional pedagogical assistant (*pedagógiai asszisztens*) shared among every three groups.

Core practitioners and primary teachers most often receive the same starting salary for the same level of qualification

The 2020 Council of the European Union conclusions stress that '[s]ufficient, effective and sustainable investment in teachers and trainers is investment in the quality of education and training. This encompasses various aspects, such as investment in opportunities for education and training of teachers and trainers, adequate infrastructure and learning spaces, tools and resources, as well as salaries' ([40]). Remuneration is a key element in making teaching and ECEC staff roles more attractive, along with other factors such as working conditions, career prospects, professional development opportunities and recognition, and intellectual and social motivation. Remuneration plays an important role in drawing people to the profession and in ensuring that serving teachers and ECEC staff feel valued and sufficiently driven to provide high-quality work and thus contribute to successful education systems. This issue has become increasingly important, as education authorities in many European countries need to address ECEC staff shortages (see Figure C7). Policies that improve the earnings and career prospects of those employed in the ECEC sector should therefore be an integral part of comprehensive and sustainable strategies to improve the attractiveness of the ECEC professions, both for serving staff and for potential candidates.

Media, policy documents and research often stress the low earnings in the ECEC field. Although comparable data on salaries of ECEC staff working with younger children is minimal, Eurydice data collection on teacher salaries covers pre-primary teachers working with children aged 3 and over (ISCED 02) ([41]). Based on this data collection, this section provides an overview of the differences in the salaries of pre-primary teachers and school heads, as well as some comparison with the situation in primary education.

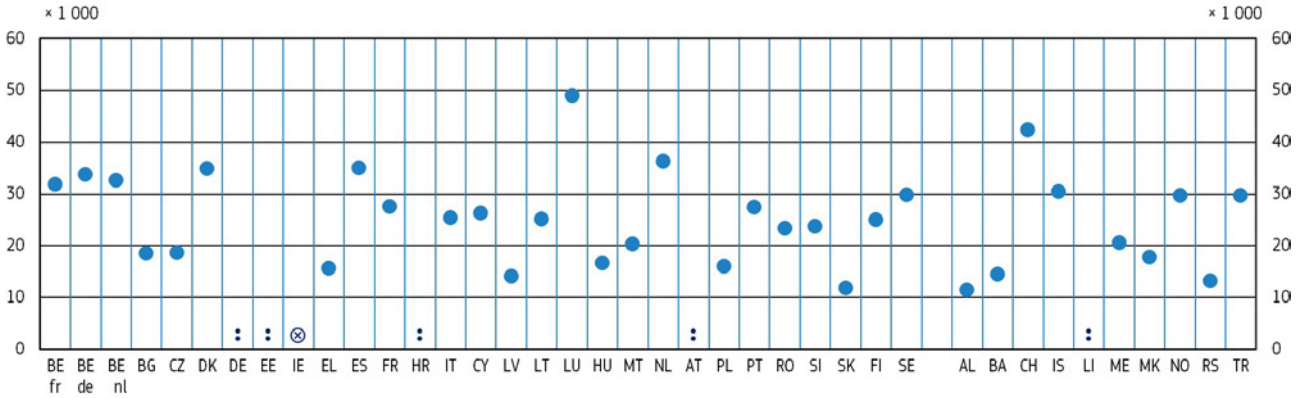
Figure C10a shows the minimum statutory starting salaries for core practitioners working in ECEC settings for children aged 3 and over – referred to as 'teachers' in pre-primary education (ISCED 02) in this section. Comparing statutory starting salaries provides an overview of the financial conditions newly fully qualified teachers are offered. To avoid bias and for the purpose of international comparison, salaries of full-time teachers are presented in purchasing power standard (PPS). PPS is an artificial common reference currency unit used to express the volume of economic aggregates for the purpose of spatial comparisons in such a way that price level differences between countries are eliminated.

The salary level is generally correlated with the standard of living and the required minimum qualification level. The minimum statutory starting salaries for pre-primary teachers range from PPS 11 440 in Albania to PPS 49 015 in Luxembourg. The average starting salary in the EU is around PPS 25 800. In 11 countries, the statutory starting salary of a pre-primary teacher is below PPS 20 000 (in Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia). It is above PPS 40 000 in Luxembourg and Switzerland.

([40]) Council conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future (OJ C 193, 9.6.2020, p. 11).

([41]) See the dedicated web-tool on teachers' and school heads' salaries and allowances available here: https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/data-and-visuals/teachers-salaries.

Figure C10a: Annual gross statutory starting salaries (in thousands of PPS) for full-time, fully qualified pre-primary teachers (ISCED 02) in public institutions, 2022/2023



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

Fully qualified teachers are those who have fulfilled all the training requirements for teaching (one or more subjects) and meet all other official requirements (e.g. completed probation period). Their professional tasks involve the planning, organisation and delivery of group or individual activities for a class of students with respect to the development of their knowledge, skills and attitudes. 'Teacher' at ISCED 02 corresponds, in the context of this report, to 'ECEC core practitioner working in settings for children aged 3 years and over'.

Annual statutory salary is the sum of the gross wages paid to full-time, fully qualified teachers according to statutorily defined salary ranges. It includes any additional payments that all teachers receive and that constitute a regular part of the annual base salary, such as the 13th month and holiday pay (where applicable). This gross amount excludes the employer's social security and pension contributions but includes those paid by employees.

To facilitate international comparison, salaries have been converted from national currencies into PPS. The PPS values are obtained by dividing the national currency unit by the purchasing power parity. Eurostat data purchasing power parities (EU-27 = 1) for 2023 for actual individual consumptions (prc_ppp_ind) were used (last updated 19 June 2024).

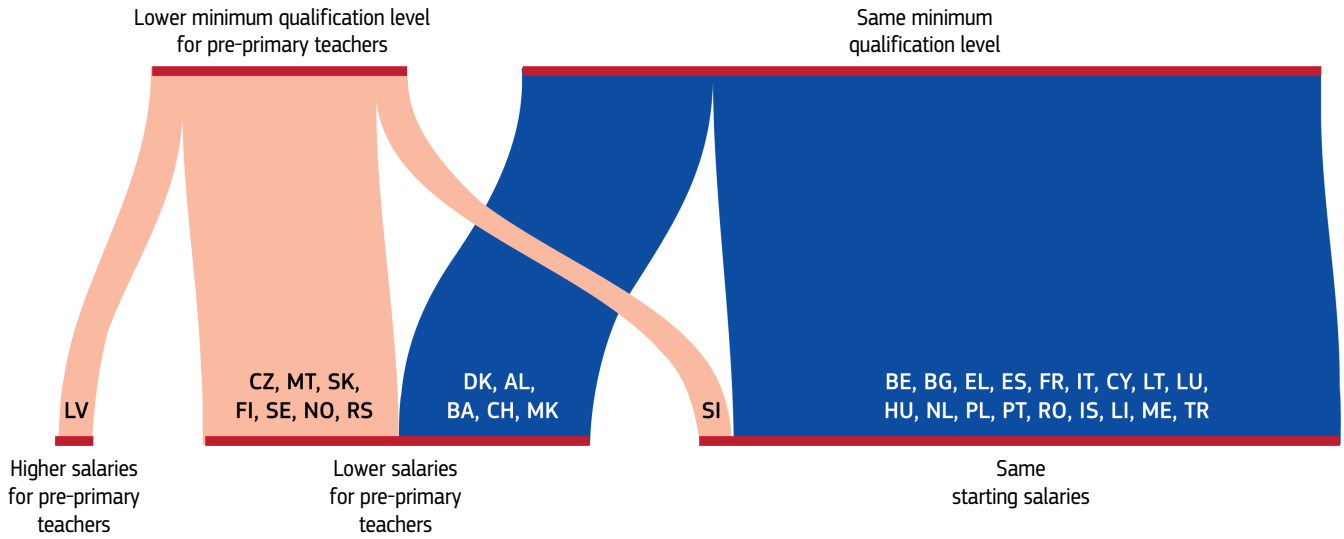
This information is collected yearly within a specific data collection on teachers' and school heads' salaries and allowances, managed jointly by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) / Eurydice and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Network for the collection and adjudication of system-level descriptive information on educational structures, policies and practices (NESLI). This data collection covers pre-primary, primary and general secondary education. More information, with visualisations and downloadable data, is available through a dedicated web-based tool available here: https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/data-and-visuals/teachers-salaries. More methodological and country-specific notes are provided with the tool.

Country-specific notes for Figures C10a and C10b

Denmark: Data shows the share of centrally defined statutory salaries. As stated in the collective agreements, part of the statutory salaries must be decided at the local level.
Germany: Salaries represent a weighted average of the data available at the *Land* level.
Estonia: For ISCED 02, salaries are established at the local level. For ISCED 1, there is no statutory starting salary based on the level of qualification and no progression based on years in service. However, the top-level authority defines a minimum statutory annual salary, considered here as 'starting salary'.
Ireland: ISCED 02 provision is organised by the private sector and salaries are set by the owners of the ECEC settings. The minimum qualification level indicated in the table to Figures C10a and C10b for ISCED 02 therefore relate to teachers in the private sector.
Spain: The statutory salaries shown are weighted averages of salaries at the regional (autonomous community) level.
Netherlands: For ISCED 02, only pre-primary teachers working in primary schools are considered. Teachers' salaries, placement and progression are determined at the school level.
Austria: ISCED 02 is mainly organised in kindergartens and regulated at the provincial level.
Poland: For ISCED 02 and ISCED 1, the new regulations on initial teacher education set the minimum qualification level at ISCED 7 for all newly qualified teachers who enter the teaching profession as of 2024/2025. In the reference year, the regulated minimum qualification is still ISCED 5, although almost all newly qualified teachers are recruited with ISCED 7 qualifications. For this reason, data on salaries corresponds to a qualification level at ISCED 7.
Sweden: There are no statutory salaries. Teachers' salaries are set individually and based on collective agreements. The reported salaries refer to actual salaries, including bonuses and allowances. Starting salaries correspond to the median values of the actual salaries of teachers with up to 2 years' experience in 2022.
Bosnia and Herzegovina: Salaries are weighted averages of the data available at all levels (the Republic of Srpska, the cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Brcko district).
Switzerland: The reported statutory salaries are weighted averages of statutory salaries at the regional (cantonal) level.
Liechtenstein: The Eurostat purchasing power parity is not available for this country. The annual gross statutory starting salary amounts to CHF 86 782 for ISCED 02 and ISCED 1. Only 12 % of salary progression is linked to years in service; the rest depends on budgetary decisions and performance.
Norway: For ISCED 1, the level of qualification considered here is the minimum level of qualification attained by students in the general teacher education programme. However, according to the recruitment regulations, the minimum qualification level required is at ISCED 6.

Comparing qualification requirements and remuneration for pre-primary and primary teachers may offer some insight into how educational systems value teaching at different levels of education. This analysis could also shed some light on possible implications for recruitment and retention. Figure C10b enables comparison between required minimum qualification levels and salaries of teachers in pre-primary education and in primary education – the latter usually being generalist teachers.

Figure C10b: Comparison of starting salaries and related qualification levels for pre-primary and primary teachers in public institutions, 2022/2023



Source: Eurydice.

Minimum qualification level for full-time, fully qualified pre-primary teachers (ISCED 02) and primary teachers (ISCED 1), and their annual gross statutory starting salaries (in PPS) in public institutions (data to Figures C10a and C10b)

		BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL
ISCED 02	Qualification level	6	6	6	6	3	6	6	6	4	6
	Salary (in PPS)	31 809	33 710	32 611	18 511	18 611	34 940	:	:	-	15 555
ISCED 1	Qualification level	6	6	6	6	7	6	7	7	6	6
	Salary (in PPS)	31 809	33 710	32 611	18 511	19 759	40 269	51 366	20 874	27 398	15 555
		ES	**FR**	**HR**	**IT**	**CY**	**LV**	**LT**	**LU**	**HU**	**MT**
ISCED 02	Qualification level	6	7	6	7	6	5	6	6	6	4
	Salary (in PPS)	34 948	27 565	:	25 373	26 203	14 114	25 139	49 015	16 631	20 351
ISCED 1	Qualification level	6	7	6	7	6	6	6	6	6	6
	Salary (in PPS)	34 948	27 565	22 128	25 373	26 203	13 095	25 139	49 015	16 631	30 370
		NL	**AT**	**PL**	**PT**	**RO**	**SI**	**SK**	**FI**	**SE**	
ISCED 02	Qualification level	6	5	7	7	3	6	3	6	6	
	Salary (in PPS)	36 337	:	15 982	27 377	23 374	23 723	11 826	25 003	29 857	
ISCED 1	Qualification level	6	6	7	7	3	7	7	7	7	
	Salary (in PPS)	36 337	36 048	15 982	27 377	23 374	23 723	14 644	27 726	30 115	
		AL	**BA**	**CH**	**IS**	**LI**	**ME**	**MK**	**NO**	**RS**	**TR**
ISCED 02	Qualification level	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	6	6
	Salary (in PPS)	11 440	14 455	42 374	30 450	:	20 528	17 751	29 705	13 247	29 723
ISCED 1	Qualification level	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	7	7	6
	Salary (in PPS)	12 063	16 400	45 724	30 450	:	20 528	18 254	36 480	15 496	29 723

In two thirds of the European education systems for which data is available for both pre-primary and primary education, the same minimum level of qualification is required for teachers. In most of these education systems, the minimum statutory starting salaries are the same for teachers working in pre-primary and primary education.

Slovenia stands out as an exception by offering equivalent salaries for pre-primary and primary teachers while requiring a higher degree for primary teachers (ISCED 7) than for pre-primary teachers (ISCED 6). The Public Sector Salary System Act guarantees equal pay in comparable posts and titles. On this basis, pre-primary teachers have the same statutory starting salary as teachers in basic education to compensate for the longer contact time in kindergartens (30 hours compared with 16.5–18.75 hours).

In the other third of the education systems, teachers have different statutory starting salaries depending on the education level at which they work. In seven countries, a higher salary for primary teachers is correlated with a higher required qualification level (in Czechia, Malta, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Serbia). In a few countries, however, the salaries are lower for pre-primary teachers than for primary teachers although the minimum qualification level is the same. This is the case in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland and North Macedonia. In Denmark, the variation in starting salaries stems from different specialisations and study duration within the same qualification level.

In **Denmark**, teachers in pre-primary education and in the first grade of basic education must have graduated with degrees in social education (3.5 years of study), whereas teachers in the upper grades of basic education (ISCED 1 – posts that have higher minimum starting salaries – must have the same level of qualification (ISCED 6) but in teacher education (4 years of study).

Latvia stands out as an exception from a regulatory standpoint.

In **Latvia**, the official regulations mandate a higher minimum starting salary for pre-primary teachers compared to primary teachers, although the qualification requirements are lower for pre-primary teachers (ISCED 5) than primary teachers (ISCED 6). This salary structure compensates for the greater weekly workload faced by pre-primary teachers, who work 40 hours per week, whereas other teachers in general education worked 30 hours per week in 2022/2023 (increasing to 36 hours beginning in September 2023).

Prospects for salary increases over the teaching career vary significantly across countries

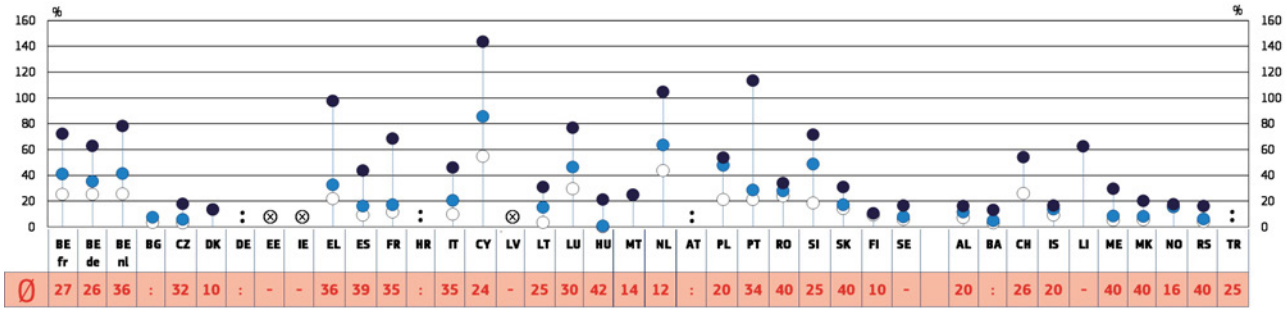
Although starting salaries are an important factor in attracting new teachers, they are not the only one to consider. Prospects for salary increases also matter. Significant pay rises throughout the career may contribute to ECEC staff retention, while small increases requiring a significant length of service might hinder recruitment and retention efforts. Conversely, if salaries rise quickly, then a low starting salary may not necessarily be an economic disincentive to becoming a pre-primary teacher.

Figure C11a shows the percentage difference between statutory starting salaries and salaries at different stages of the career, along with the average number of years to reach the salary at the top of the pay range.

Approaches to salary increases across Europe are complex and vary significantly. Even when considering only one aspect, such as the average number of years required to reach the salary at the top of the range, differences across systems are remarkable. Hence, while in Denmark and Finland it takes 10 years to be paid at the highest salary level, in Hungary it takes 42 years to reach the top of the pay range.

The analysis of salary progression across different countries reveals varying degrees of increases throughout teachers' careers, with notable differences in both the magnitude of advancements and the time required to reach the top of the pay range. In the EU, the average increase in a pre-primary teacher's salary between the start of their career and the top of the pay range is around half of the starting salary (56 %). In the majority of the European countries, there is only a modest increase over the career, with less than a 40 % increase. In nine of them, this progression is even below 20 % (in Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Norway and Serbia). Conversely, in four countries the salary almost or more than doubles over the career. The average number of years needed to reach this ceiling varies; it may be short – 12 years in the Netherlands and 24 in Cyprus – or longer – 34 years in Portugal and 36 in Greece.

Figure C11a: Percentage difference between the starting salaries of pre-primary teachers and their salaries after 10 and 15 years' service and at the top of the pay range, 2022/2023



○ After 10 years ● After 15 years ● Top of the salary range

Ø = Average number of years to reach the salary at the top of the range

Source: Eurydice.

Percentage difference compared with annual gross statutory starting salaries

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL
After 10 years	24.9	25.1	25.4	3.2	2.9	13.4	:	-	-	21.6
After 15 years	40.6	35.1	41.2	7.1	5.5	13.4	:	-	-	32.4
At the top of the range	71.9	62.5	78.0	:	17.5	13.4	:	-	-	97.3
	ES	**FR**	**HR**	**IT**	**CY**	**LV**	**LT**	**LU**	**HU**	**MT**
After 10 years	8.8	11.1	:	9.6	54.6	-	3.2	29.3	0.0	24.5
After 15 years	16.0	17.0	:	20.1	85.2	-	14.9	46.0	0.5	24.5
At the top of the range	43.4	68.3	:	45.8	143.3	-	30.8	76.7	21.0	24.5
	NL	**AT**	**PL**	**PT**	**RO**	**SI**	**SK**	**FI**	**SE**	
After 10 years	43.4	:	21.0	21.0	23.7	18.3	14.0	9.0	5.5	
After 15 years	63.1	:	47.3	28.2	27.5	48.6	16.8	10.1	7.5	
At the top of the range	104.4	:	53.5	113.1	33.6	71.3	30.6	10.1	16.4	
	AL	**BA**	**CH**	**IS**	**LI**	**ME**	**MK**	**NO**	**RS**	**TR**
After 10 years	6.8	3.0	25.6	8.8	:	4.8	5.1	15.4	4.0	:
After 15 years	11.3	4.5	:	13.6	:	8.2	7.8	15.4	6.0	:
At the top of the range	15.8	12.9	53.9	16.1	62.3	29.2	20.0	17.2	16.0	:

Explanatory notes

Fully qualified teachers and **annual statutory salary** are defined in the explanatory notes to Figure C10a.

In many countries, the number of years in service is not the only criterion for salary progression. Data for statutory salaries after 10 or 15 years in the career represents the most typical situation at these stages of the career.

This information is collected yearly within a specific data collection on teachers' and school heads' salaries and allowances, managed jointly by EACEA/Eurydice and OECD/NESLI. This data collection covers pre-primary, primary and general secondary education. More information, with visualisations and downloadable data, is available through a dedicated web-based tool available here: https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/data-and-visuals/teachers-salaries. More methodological and country-specific notes are provided with the tool.

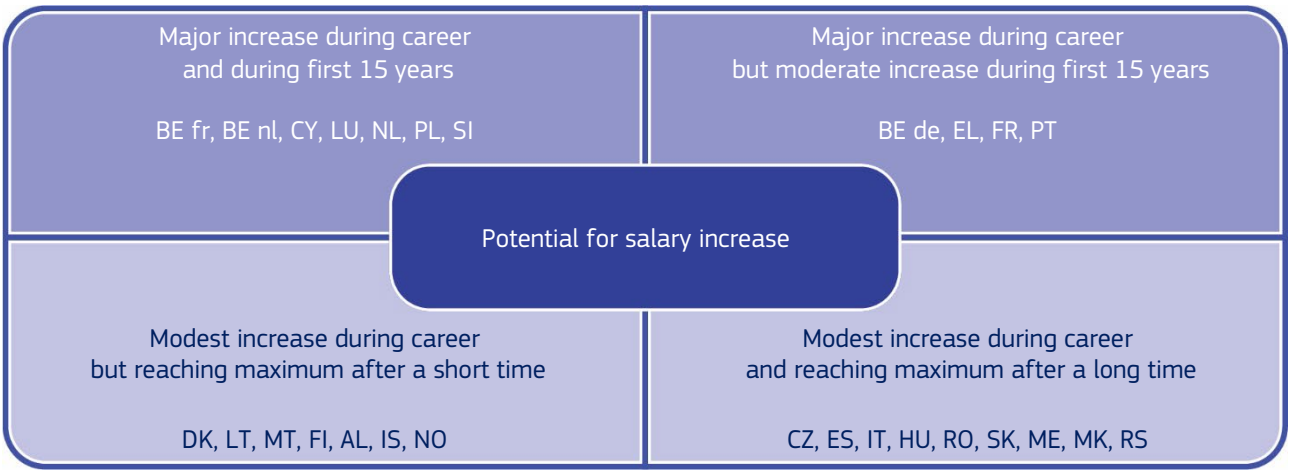
Country-specific note

See country-specific notes to Figures C10a and C10b.

Using the information presented in Figure C11a, Figure C11b categorises countries into four main approaches according to the amount and timing of salary increases related to time in service. There are education systems with:

- **a major increase during the career** (50 % or more over the whole career)
  - and a major increase during the first 15 years (40 % or more in the first 15 years)
  - but a moderate increase during the first 15 years (less than 40 % in the first 15 years)
- **a modest increase during the career** (less than 50 % over the whole career)
  - but reaching maximum after a short time (26 years or less)
  - and reaching maximum after a long time (more than 26 years).

Figure C11b: Potential for salary increases for pre-primary teachers, by the amount and time in service, 2022/2023



Source: Eurydice.

Country-specific notes

Bulgaria: This country is not classified, as some data is not available.
Germany, **Croatia**, **Austria**: No data is available for ISCED 02.
Estonia, **Ireland** and **Latvia**: This is not applicable.
Sweden and **Bosnia and Herzegovina**: These countries allow for a modest increase over the career but the average number of years to reach the salary at the top of the range is not available.
Switzerland and **Liechtenstein**: Teachers in these countries have a major salary increase during career but no data is available for salaries after 15 years' service.
Türkiye: No data on salary increases is available.

See also the country-specific notes to Figures C10a and C10b.

The size of the institution has an impact on the salary of pre-primary school heads in half of the countries

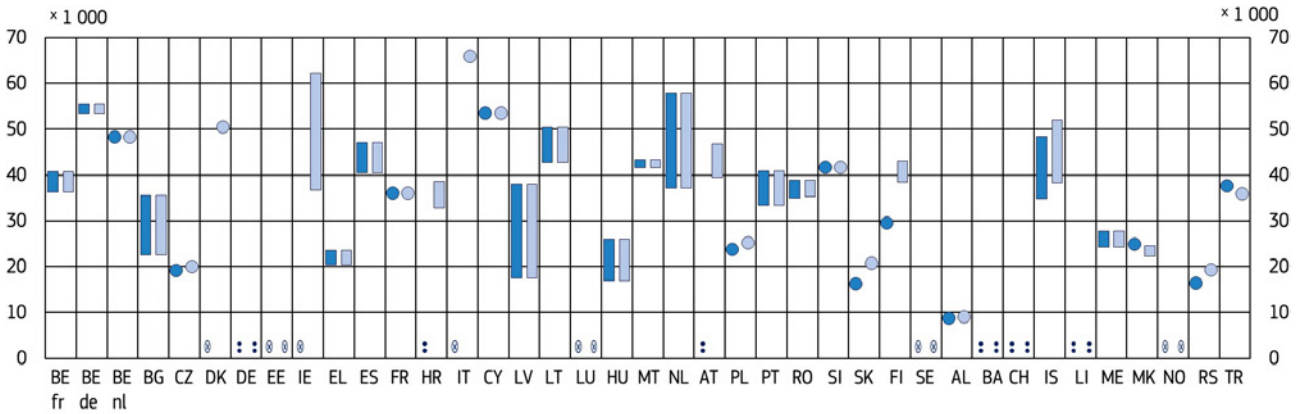
Heads of ECEC settings, pre-primary or primary schools – referred to as 'school heads' in this section – have a crucial role to play in ensuring high-quality ECEC and primary education. As leaders, they need to combine professional commitment with sound managerial, pedagogical and communication skills. This requires a strategic vision for creating an effective and attractive environment that is conducive to the balanced cognitive, physical, emotional and social development and overall well-being of the child.

School heads' responsibilities also depend on the level of autonomy institutions have in different areas: managing human and financial resources, executing organisational and administrative tasks, coordinating the service's daily tasks, teaching content and processes. Higher levels of institutional autonomy imply wider responsibilities and more tasks to be managed by the school head. Increasingly, school leaders need to liaise between different levels of education and the local community.

Figure C12 displays the minimum statutory starting salaries for school heads in pre-primary education. As a comparison, the minimum statutory salary for school heads in primary education is also shown. In some countries, pre-primary education is or may be organised within schools, and the same school head is therefore in charge of both the education levels (e.g. in Belgium, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Austria).

School heads' salary progression may depend on several criteria, such as experience, performance and the nature and number of responsibilities. The school characteristics may also have an impact on the salary of school heads. The most common criterion is the size of the institution (e.g. number of children or groups/classes). Other characteristics that may be taken into account include the location and the number of children with SEN. The starting salaries of school heads in the smallest and the largest schools are depicted as a range for education systems where there are several pay ranges based on school size.

Figure C12: Annual gross statutory minimum salaries (in thousands of PPS) of school heads in public institutions, 2022/2023



	ISCED 02	ISCED 1
Minimum statutory salary of school heads in the largest schools Minimum statutory salary of school heads in the smallest schools	↕	↕
Minimum statutory salary of school heads (single salary range)	●	●

Source: Eurydice.

Annual gross statutory minimum salaries (in PPS) of school heads in public institutions

	Type of institution	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL
ISCED 02	All or smallest size	36 226	53 408	48 282	22 552	19 094	-	:	-	-	20 426
	Largest size	40 725	55 436	-	35 550	-	-	:	-	-	23 617
ISCED 1	All or smallest size	36 226	53 408	48 282	22 552	19 880	50 345	:	-	36 706	20 426
	Largest size	40 725	55 436	-	35 550	-	-	:	-	62 213	23 617

	Type of institution	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
ISCED 02	All or smallest size	40 467	35 949	:	-	53 453	17 504	42 744	-	16 881	41 644
	Largest size	47 145	-	:	-	-	37 962	50 393	-	25 984	43 291
ISCED 1	All or smallest size	40 467	35 949	32 739	65 847	53 453	17 504	42 744	-	16 881	41 644
	Largest size	47 145	-	38 508	-	-	37 962	50 393	-	25 984	43 291

	Type of institution	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE
ISCED 02	All or smallest size	37 046	:	23 668	33 364	34 953	41 594	16 180	29 465	-
	Largest size	57 862	:	-	40 875	38 906	-	-	-	-
ISCED 1	All or smallest size	37 046	39 382	25 154	33 364	35 290	41 594	20 604	38 417	-
	Largest size	57 862	46 837	-	40 875	38 906	-	-	43 012	-

	Type of institution	AL	BA	CH	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
ISCED 02	All or smallest size	8 750	:	:	34 857	:	24 233	24 918	-	16 406	37 482
	Largest size	-	:	:	48 393	:	27 720	-	-	-	-
ISCED 1	All or smallest size	8 944	:	:	38 206	:	24 233	22 287	-	19 190	35 853
	Largest size	-	:	:	52 039	:	27 720	24 606	-	-	-

Explanatory notes

School head means any person whose primary or major function is heading an ECEC setting with children aged 3 years and over (ISCED 02), a school or a group of schools, alone or within an administrative body such as a board or council. The school head is the primary leader responsible for the leadership, management and administration of the school. Depending on circumstances, school heads may exercise educational responsibilities (which may include teaching tasks, but also responsibility for the general functioning of the institution, covering, for example, the timetable, implementation of the curriculum, and decisions about what is to be taught and the materials and methods to be used). They may also have, to varying degrees, other administrative, staff management and financial responsibilities. The term 'school heads' may therefore correspond, in the context of this report, to either 'school heads' or 'heads of ECEC settings'.

Statutory salaries for school heads are the range of pay received by school heads (working full-time) with the minimum qualification required to manage a school. Salary scales are statutorily defined in either regulations or agreements between stakeholders. Salary progression may depend on various criteria, such as experience, performance, the nature and number of responsibilities, and school characteristics. The reported salaries of school heads may consist of the statutory teacher salary plus a management allowance, or there may be a distinct statutory salary range for school heads. In education systems where the salary range changes with the type of school (e.g. based on the number of children or groups/classes, geographical location or offer of special programmes), the data refers to the scales with the lowest and highest minimum salaries.

To facilitate international comparison, salaries have been converted from national currencies into PPS. The PPS values are obtained by dividing the national currency unit by the purchasing power parity. Eurostat data on purchasing power parities (EU-27 = 1) for 2023 for actual individual consumptions (prc_ppp_ind) were used (last updated 19 June 2024).

This information is collected yearly within a specific data collection on teachers' and school heads' salaries and allowances, managed jointly by EACEA/Eurydice and OECD/NESLI. This data collection covers pre-primary, primary and general secondary education. More information, with visualisations and downloadable data, is available through a dedicated web-based tool available here: https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/data-and-visuals/teachers-salaries. More methodological and country-specific notes are available with the tool.

Country-specific notes

Czechia: School heads receive an additional allowance for leadership (usually 15–60 % of a teacher's salary at the highest pay grade according to the pay range), which is not taken into account here.
Denmark: For ISCED 02, there is no minimum salary defined, only a maximum salary (PPS 58 519). The management allowance is not included in the reported statutory salaries since the amount is decided at the local level.
Estonia: There are no statutory salaries for school heads. Their salaries are a matter of local autonomy.
Ireland: ISCED 02 provision is organised by the private sector and salaries are set by the owners of the ECEC settings.
Spain: The statutory salaries shown are weighted averages of salaries at the regional (autonomous community) level.
Italy: The statutory salaries for school heads is composed of a fixed part, common to all school heads, plus a variable part that depends on the regions. This variable part is calculated as a weighted average. Pre-primary education is integrated into primary or lower secondary schools in the public sector.
Luxembourg: In pre-primary and primary education, there is no school head. The president of the school committee is responsible for its management and the relationship with parents and the municipality. The work of school teachers is organised by the relevant regional directorate.
Austria: ISCED 02 is mainly organised in kindergartens at the provincial level. There are no federal-level statistics for this type of provision.
Sweden: There are no statutory salaries. School heads' salaries are set individually and based on collective agreements. The reported salaries refer to actual salaries, including bonuses and allowances. Minimum salaries correspond to the median values of the actual salaries of school heads with 1 and 2 years of experience in 2022.
Norway: There are no statutory salaries for school heads. Their salaries are a matter of local autonomy.

In the EU, the average minimum statutory salary for pre-primary school heads is PPS 33 200. This surpasses the average starting salary for pre-primary teachers, which is PPS 25 800 (see Figure C10a).

The size of the preschool – which may or not include other education levels – has an impact on the minimum statutory salary of a pre-primary school head in half of the education systems for which information is available. In Latvia, the minimum salary for heads in charge of the largest pre-primary institutions is more than double that of those working in the smallest institutions. Conversely, the difference does not exceed 15 % in five education systems (in Belgium (French and German-speaking Communities), Malta, Romania and Montenegro).

The minimum salary for pre-primary school heads is below PPS 20 000 in Czechia, Slovakia, Albania and Serbia. This is also the case in Latvia and Hungary, but only for leaders working in the smallest institutions. In contrast, the minimum remuneration for pre-primary school heads exceeds PPS 50 000 in Belgium (German-speaking Community) and Cyprus. This also applies to leaders working in the largest institutions in Lithuania and the Netherlands.

In six countries, heads of all pre-primary institutions have a lower minimum statutory salary than those in all primary schools (in Czechia, Poland, Slovakia, Finland, Albania and Serbia). This is also the case in Romania and Iceland, but only for school heads working in the smallest institutions. In four of these countries, a higher qualification level is required to work in primary schools (in Czechia and Slovakia, ISCED 3 for pre-primary education and ISCED 7 for primary education; in Finland and Serbia, ISCED 6 for pre-primary education and ISCED 7 for primary education). However, in Poland, Romania, Albania and Iceland, the minimum qualification level required is the same for both education levels.

North Macedonia and Türkiye are the only countries with higher salaries for pre-primary school heads than primary school heads. In North Macedonia, preschools are governed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, which awards a higher amount for allowances common to all preschool heads – and by definition included in the base salary – than the Ministry of Education and Science does for school heads. In Türkiye, this difference is due to the collective agreement, which awards a higher number of extra class hours to pre-primary school heads than to primary school heads.

Chapter D: Educational guidelines

Section I – General framework

Enhancing the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in parallel with efforts to increase access and participation (presented in Chapter B 'Access') is crucial, as emphasised in the Council recommendation on high-quality early childhood education and care systems ([1]). Educational guidelines issued by education authorities can help ensure consistent quality across various domains.

The first section of this chapter examines which education systems have issued top-level guidelines that set out the educational component of ECEC in centre-based and home-based settings. It also offers a thematic focus on three aspects European countries have highlighted as important to foster during ECEC: sustainability education ([2]), digital education ([3]) and language development in several languages ([4]). The section explores how the three areas are embedded in the top-level educational guidelines for ECEC and offers insights into the recommended teaching approaches and educational activities. Furthermore, it analyses the inclusion of sustainability and digital competences in line with the EU-level competence frameworks for these two areas ([5]). Regarding digital education, the section highlights the limitations set by several countries during ECEC. Lastly, regarding language development in several languages, the section distinguishes two main objectives: early foreign language teaching and awakening to linguistic diversity.

The second section focuses on measures to facilitate transitions. When children transition between different types of ECEC settings, particularly around the age of 3, a coordinated approach can reduce anxiety and help them adjust to new environments. The same applies when moving from ECEC to primary school, where measures promoting collaboration between ECEC professionals and teachers, and familiarity with school settings, can ease the adjustment period (OECD, 2021b).

The second section thus starts with an analysis of the top-level measures recommended to ease children's transitions between different types of centre-based ECEC settings around the age of 3. It then moves on to describe the criteria education authorities use to determine whether children should be admitted to the first year of primary education. Finally, it describes the measures recommended to ease children's transitions into primary education.

The third section of this chapter examines two types of targeted support measures in ECEC. It looks first at measures to develop children's language competences, both in the language of instruction and in their home language. It then sheds some light on parental involvement in ECEC, which is essential for reinforcing

([1]) Council recommendation of 22 May 2019 on high-quality early childhood education and care systems (OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4), 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.

([2]) Council recommendation of 16 June 2022 on learning for the green transition and sustainable development, 2022/C 243/01 (OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 5), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=oj:JOC_2022_243_R_0001.

([3]) Council recommendation of 23 November 2023 on improving the provision of digital skills and competences in education and training (OJ C, C/2024/1030, 23.1.2024), ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/1030/oj.

([4]) Council recommendation of 22 May 2019 on high-quality early childhood education and care systems (OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4), 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.

([5]) European Commission's GreenComp framework (European Commission: Joint Research Centre et al., 2022) and DigComp 2.1 Framework (European Commission: Joint Research Centre et al., 2017).

learning at home and providing a collaborative educational experience (Hanssen et al., 2023). The analysis presents the measures recommended to support parental involvement and participation in ECEC.

A quarter of education systems do not provide educational guidelines for those under 3

The importance of ECEC as the foundation of children's learning and development is widely acknowledged ([6]). All education systems have set educational guidelines for this crucial stage. However, despite recent progress, educational guidelines continue to be more widespread for settings for children aged 3 and over than for younger children, and they are less common for home-based provision than centre-based settings.

Educational guidelines are official documents intended to help settings deliver high-quality children's care and learning and ensure that high standards are maintained across all ECEC services. The content of these guidelines varies, but they generally include developmental or learning goals and pedagogical principles, sometimes in the form of a standard curriculum.

Educational guidelines 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. In some countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Spain, Latvia and Poland), the entire set of educational guidelines are incorporated into legislation. Depending on how they are structured, educational guidelines allow varying degrees of flexibility in the way they are applied in ECEC settings. These documents may be issued by the same or several top-level authorities. The complete list of documents that form ECEC educational guidelines in European countries is provided in Annex D.

In Europe, approximately three quarters of education systems have developed comprehensive educational guidelines that span the entire ECEC phase (see Figure D1a). These guidelines emphasise the importance of fostering learning and development for children from the earliest age at which they can enter ECEC programmes until the point they transition to primary school. In the others, the guidelines are only directed at settings for older children.

The governance model, whether integrated or split, largely shapes the structuring of educational guidelines (see Figure A4a). In nearly all countries where a single authority oversees the entire ECEC phase, educational objectives or content are set for the whole age range (all Nordic countries and Baltic states, most central European countries (Germany, Croatia and Austria), a majority of Balkan countries, Ireland, Spain, Italy and Malta). The only exception is Luxembourg, where the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth has issued different steering documents according to age range. In two countries, integrated guidelines exist alongside separate guidelines addressing specific aspects for younger and older children.

In **Italy**, the educational guidelines for the integrated system provide a general framework of founding values and pedagogical principles for ECEC from birth to 6 years of age. Moreover, there are distinct sets of educational guidelines that outline the specificities of ECEC provision for younger children and for older children.

In **Malta**, there are four distinct steering documents that guide educational aspects of ECEC. Distinct sets of educational guidelines apply to centre-based settings for younger (national standards) and older children (the national curriculum). In addition, the educators' guide outlines learning outcomes, pedagogy and assessment strategies for the entire ECEC period. Last, the national policy framework identifies major goals for the development of various ECEC areas, including the curriculum.

The situation is more varied in the split ECEC systems, where only the settings for older children are under the responsibility of an educational authority, while those for younger children are under a different authority (see Figure A4a and Annex B). Just under half of these education systems have established a top-level educational framework for the whole age range (Belgium (French and Flemish Communities), France, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Liechtenstein and Türkiye). In these systems, the framework is set out in separate documents for younger and older children and is issued by different authorities.

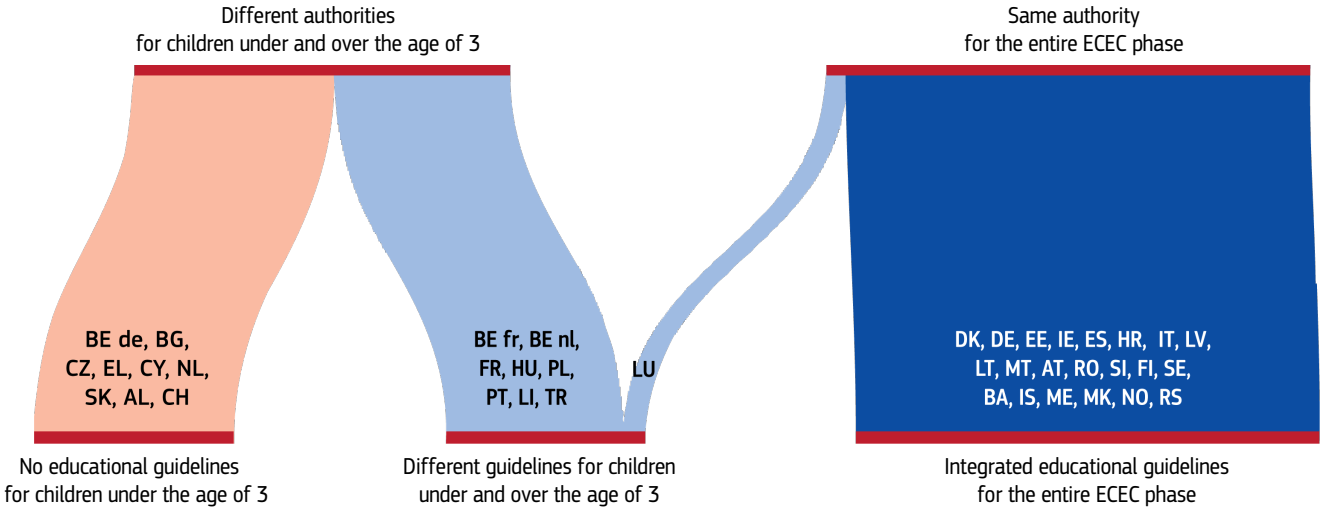
([6]) Council recommendation of 22 May 2019 on high-quality early childhood education and care systems (OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2019.189.01.0004.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2019:189:TOC.

In **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, it is recommended that ECEC settings for younger children follow a pedagogical framework for babies and toddlers issued by *Kind en Gezin* ([7]), while pre-primary schools have to implement the developmental aims defined by the Flemish government.

In **Poland**, centre-based settings for children under 3 years old must comply with the standards of care established by the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy, while preschool education is regulated by core curricula issued by the Minister of National Education.

Top-level educational guidelines for younger children have become more widespread over recent years. Since 2013, top-level authorities in Belgium (Flemish Community), France, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Liechtenstein have issued specific guidelines with an educational component for younger children for the first time.

Figure D1a: Top-level educational guidelines for centre-based ECEC provision, by governance, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

For a definition of educational guidelines, see the glossary.
See Annex D for the specific documents referred to as top-level educational guidelines in each country.
See the national system information sheets for explanations of what 'under the age of 3' and 'over the age of 3' correspond to in the context of each country.
For more information on the authority responsible for governing centre-based provision in each country, see Figures A4a and Annex B.

Country-specific notes

Belgium (French Community) and **France**: For children aged 3 and over, the top-level educational guidelines apply to public and government-dependent private centre-based ECEC institutions, but not to government-independent private ones.
Italy: For children aged 3 years and over, the top-level educational guidelines only apply to state ECEC settings and to public and private ECEC settings that have been given parity status with state settings (*scuole dell'infanzia paritarie*).
Netherlands: There is no national curriculum for ECEC for children under the age of 4 years. However, in order to be able to offer *voorschoolse educatie* (subsidised early childhood education provision targeting disadvantaged children) for that age range (2.5–4 years), centre-based settings must apply an education programme that meets legal requirements ([8]).
Portugal: The pedagogical guidelines for children under 3 were introduced in March 2024.
Switzerland: There are no educational guidelines for childcare issued by federal or cantonal authorities. In 2012, the Swiss United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Commission and the now dissolved Swiss childcare network launched an orientation framework for early childhood education (Orientierungsrahmen für frühkindliche Bildung, Betreuung und Erziehung ([9])), which is currently being updated.
North Macedonia: The top-level educational guidelines are only binding for public ECEC settings.

([7]) Kind en Gezin is the body formerly in charge of ECEC provision for younger children. It was replaced in 2018 by the agency Growing Up (Opgroeien).

([8]) https://www.nji.nl/voor-en-vroegschoolse-educatie-vve/welke-afspraken-kunnen-gemeenten-maken-over-voorschoolse-educatie.

([9]) https://www.netzwerk-kinderbetreuung.ch/de/publikationen/20/.

In nine of the education systems where a top-level education authority is responsible only for centre-based settings for children aged 3 and over, the top-level educational guidelines are exclusively issued for ECEC provision for older children (Belgium (German-speaking Community), Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Albania and Switzerland). Existing top-level guidelines for ECEC for younger children primarily address norms related to health, safety and staffing, rather than focusing on educational aspects.

The status of the top-level educational guidelines for ECEC settings varies between countries and, occasionally, within countries according to age range or type of funding.

In the education systems with integrated educational guidelines for younger and older children, these guidelines are usually binding (compulsory) across the whole ECEC phase. 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. In Ireland, the curriculum framework (Aistear) is compulsory for the centre-based settings under the contractual agreement with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, which is the case for 98 % of ECEC services ([10]).

In countries where the guidelines differ according to age range, these are also usually binding throughout the entire ECEC period, except in Belgium (Flemish Community) and Türkiye, where they are only binding for settings for children aged 3 and over. Finally, in the countries where top-level educational guidelines exist solely for older children, they are binding in all cases.

Whether binding or only recommended, the educational guidelines usually apply to all types of public and private centre-based settings (for more information on the different types of public and private ECEC settings, see Figure A8). However, in four countries, the rules are different for private settings. In Belgium (French Community) and France, government-independent private institutions for older children do not have to follow the educational guidelines set for public and government-dependent private institutions. In Italy, regarding ECEC for children aged 3 years and over, the top-level educational guidelines only apply to state ECEC settings and to public and private ECEC settings that have been given parity status with state settings (*scuole dell'infanzia paritarie*). They do not apply to public and private settings that have not requested and obtained parity status. Finally, in North Macedonia, the top-level educational guidelines apply throughout the whole ECEC phase to only public settings, not private ones.

In some countries, home-based ECEC or childminding services is a significant component of ECEC provision, particularly for younger children (see Figure A3). Figure D1b provides information on the existence of educational guidelines for this type of provision for children under 3. It shows that several countries with regulated home-based provision have no top-level educational guidelines for this sector. The top-level educational guidelines for centre-based settings do not necessarily apply to home-based provision. Looking at the governance of these two kinds of provision – that is, whether they fall under the same authority or under different authorities (see Figure A4b) – sheds some light on the topic.

In most countries where the authority in charge of both sectors is the same, whether it is an education authority or an authority in charge of topics such as social affairs or labour, the educational guidelines apply uniformly across the two types of provision. However, there are four exceptions. In Austria, there are specific guidelines that apply only to home-based settings. In Portugal and Slovenia, childminders do not have to follow the educational guidelines that apply to centre-based settings. In Sweden, while the curriculum is mandatory for preschools, it is only recommended for home-based ECEC. In addition, in Ireland, where the compulsory character of the Aistear framework depends on entering into an agreement with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, currently there are a small number of registered childminders ([11]).

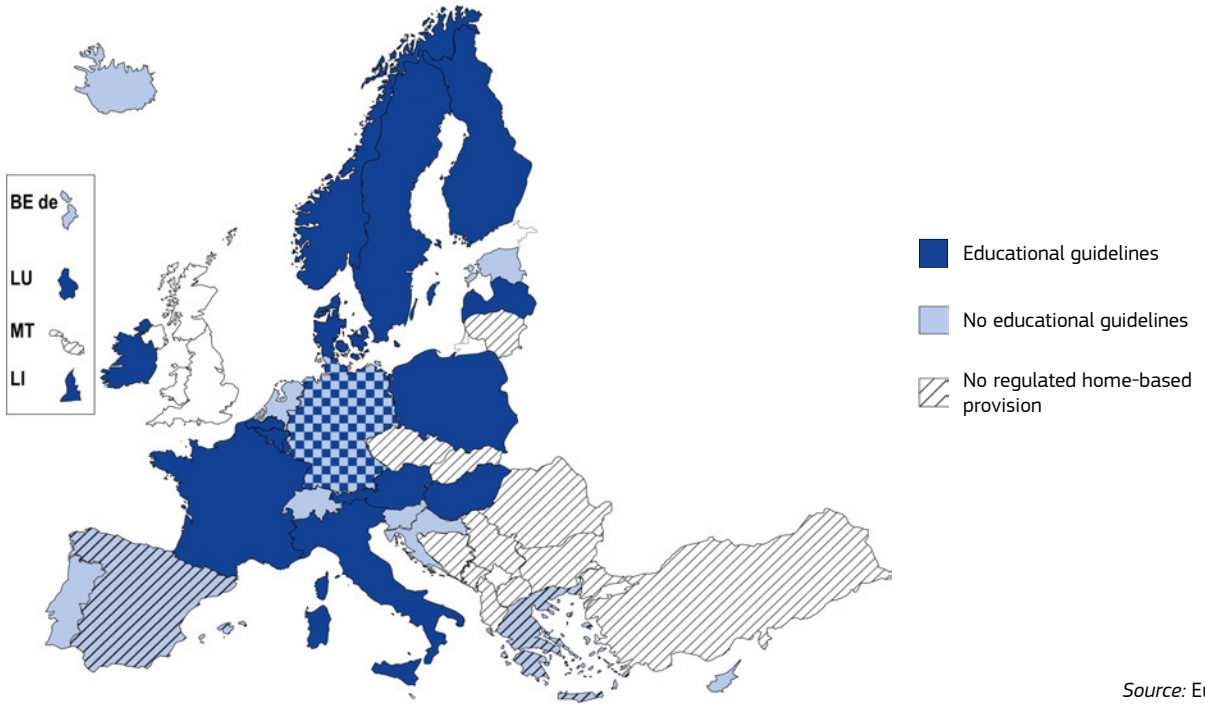
When different authorities are responsible for centre-based and home-based ECEC, the framework for

([10]) Calculation made by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth using administrative data.

([11]) According to 2022 census data (https://data.cso.ie/), 22 644 children aged 0–4 (7.7 % of children in this age group) were cared for by a childminder (in the childminder's home), but very few childminders (fewer than 80) were registered with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

educational guidelines diverges in all instances. In Estonia, Spain, Croatia and Iceland, the educational guidelines set for centre-based settings do not apply to home-based provision. In Italy, while the guidelines are binding for centre-based settings, they are only recommendations for home-based settings. In all these countries, an education authority is responsible for centre-based settings, while home-based provision is overseen by authorities in charge of social topics or, in Italy and Spain, by the regions or local authorities.

Figure D1b: Top-level educational guidelines for home-based ECEC provision for children under the age of 3, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

See the explanatory notes of Figure D1a.

Country-specific notes

Germany: Whether the educational guidelines for ECEC apply to childminders depends on the regulations of each *Land*.
Greece: Home-based ECEC operates on a pilot basis in 61 out of the 332 municipalities.
Spain: Regulated home-based provision exists in 3 out of 17 autonomous communities: Madrid, Navarre and Galicia.

Moreover, five education systems where there is regulated home-based provision have no education guidelines for children under 3 years for any type of ECEC provision: Belgium (German-speaking Community), Greece, Cyprus, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

This examination of educational guidelines demonstrates that integrated governance facilitates coordination and a comprehensive educational approach across diverse ECEC settings and forms. In instances where a single education authority oversees the entire ECEC sector, educational guidance is typically provided for both younger and older children, encompassing both centre-based nurseries/preschools and home-based childminding services. Furthermore, it is encouraging to note that several ECEC systems with split governance structures have begun to develop educational guidelines tailored specifically for children under the age of 3. Although these guidelines may originate from different authorities and therefore somewhat lack alignment and continuation, this emerging trend indicates a growing emphasis on education within this sector.

Learning for sustainability is embedded in ECEC with varied levels of emphasis

Sustainability is a crucial challenge for modern societies. It can be defined as 'prioritising the needs of all life forms and of the planet by ensuring that human activity does not exceed planetary boundaries … It involves transformation of values and attitudes for a more sustainable future' (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice 2024, p. 93). While the key role of educational institutions in equipping learners with knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding sustainability is increasingly acknowledged at the European level, a contribution from ECEC to this overall goal is clearly expected. The Council recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development ([12]), adopted in 2022, calls for Member States to integrate sustainability competences into curricula, underlining the need to provide 'time and space for learners to develop sustainability competences from an early age'. The case for an early start in the development of sustainability competences is supported by research findings. According to a comparative report by the European Commission (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture et al., 2021, p. 10), 'evidence suggests that promoting sustainability competences and behaviour should start from a child's very early years'.

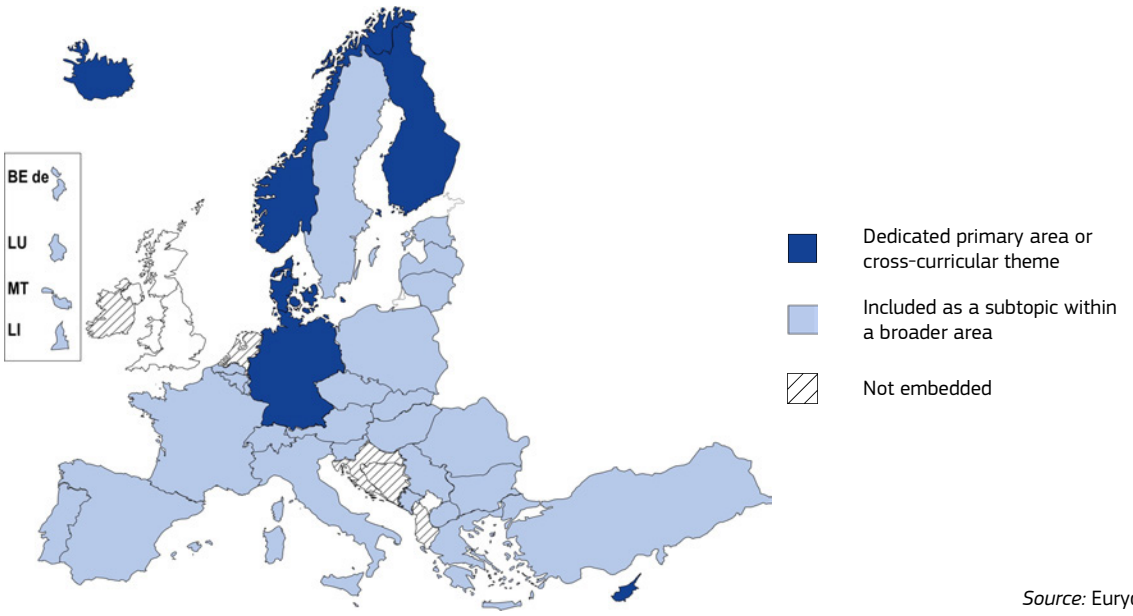
This section examines whether and how sustainability is embedded in the top-level educational guidelines for ECEC. For the purposes of this comparison, only the educational guidelines that are binding (compulsory) for ECEC settings are considered. The analysis reveals that most countries include references to sustainability in their guidelines for ECEC settings, with varied levels of emphasis (see Figure D2). Nevertheless, in Croatia, the Netherlands and Albania, sustainability is not addressed at all in the top-level educational guidelines. Moreover, in Ireland, the elements relating to sustainability included in the curriculum framework are formulated as suggested learning opportunities and are not mandatory for settings to follow.

In the top-level educational guidelines for ECEC, the most common way to embed sustainability is to include references to it within a broader area of learning or development. Across countries, the topics or competences related to sustainability are usually included as subtopics in the thematic fields that deal with natural sciences, knowledge of the world and knowledge of the environment. In addition, references to sustainability may be found in non-thematic areas of educational guidelines, which focus on pedagogical principles, activities or the learning environment.

When sustainability is integrated as a subtopic within broader areas of ECEC curricula, the depth of the references varies significantly, from concise mentions to detailed learning outcomes and activities. For instance, in Belgium (Flemish Community), references to learning for sustainability in the developmental aims for older children are exceptionally succinct. The educational guidelines outline a single aim under the science area: 'the preschoolers show an attitude of care and respect for nature'. Similarly, in Italy, the didactic principles in the guidelines applying to the entire period of ECEC refer broadly to learning for sustainability with one sentence: 'an ecological vision of human development is lifelong and contributes to well-being of the person, as well as of society'. However, other countries include more substantial references to sustainability within their curricula. For instance, in the Czech pre-primary educational programme, the area 'the child and the world' sets out several learning outcomes on sustainability for children, such as 'awareness of his/her belonging to the world, the living and non-living nature, society, Planet Earth'. It also specifies the types of experiences and activities staff should provide to children to deliver learning for sustainability, including 'getting to know ecosystems (forest, meadow, pond, etc.), activities directed at the care for the school environment, garden and the surroundings'.

([12]) Council recommendation of 16 June 2022 on learning for the green transition and sustainable development, 2022/C 243/01 (OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 5), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=oj:JOC_2022_243_R_0001.

Figure D2: Embedding sustainability in the top-level educational guidelines for ECEC, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

For a definition of educational guidelines, see the glossary. Only binding top-level educational guidelines are considered.
For a list of the top-level educational guidelines referenced in each country, along with their status (whether they are binding or non-binding), see Annex D.
When Figure D2 shows that sustainability is embedded in the top-level educational guidelines, the age range covered varies depending on the country. It may encompass the entire ECEC phase, apply solely to provision for younger children or concern provision for older children exclusively. For more information on the age range for which sustainability is embedded in the top-level educational guidelines in each country, see Figure D3.
The categories 'dedicated primary area or cross-curricular theme' and 'included as a subtopic within a broader area' are derived from the primary sections outlined in the table of contents of the steering documents (e.g. core curricula).

Country-specific notes

Ireland: The Aistear framework curriculum includes elements relating to sustainability. For example, there is an emphasis on nature and a commitment to sustainability. However, these elements are formulated as suggested learning opportunities and are not prescriptive.
Bosnia and Herzegovina: The guidelines for the implementation of common core curricula are non-binding across the whole ECEC phase.

In some countries, sustainability education features more strongly in the educational guidelines for ECEC as one of the primary areas of learning or a cross-curricular theme (see Figure D2). In Denmark, 'nature, outdoor life and phenomena' is one of the six curriculum themes that should be supported by the pedagogical learning environment. The theme aims to 'enable all children to experience human connectedness with nature and provide them with an early-stage understanding of the importance of sustainable development'. In Germany, 'environmental education and education for sustainable development', which is one of the seven areas of learning in the common framework for ECEC, should be meaningfully integrated into the everyday life of childcare centres. In Cyprus, in the curriculum for preschools, the environmental education / education for sustainable development programme assigns teachers the task of developing a holistic approach to sustainable development within the school. In Finland, sustainability is a cross-cutting theme in the national core curriculum for ECEC; it is included in the underlying values, operational culture, learning environments and transversal competences and in the learning area 'exploring and interacting with my environment'. In Iceland, sustainability is one of the six fundamental pillars of education that should be evident in all educational activities. Finally, in Norway, according to the framework plan for ECEC, 'sustainable development' is one of the seven core values that kindergartens should promote. Moreover, 'nature, environment and technology' is one of the learning areas for children.

This analysis of whether sustainability competences are embedded in the binding top-level educational guidelines reveals some variation according to the children's age range (for more information on the age range for which sustainability competences are cover-

ed, see Figure D3). These variations mostly stem from the organisation of ECEC guidelines – whether they are integrated or separate, as shown in Figure D1a – rather than from the topic of learning for sustainability.

The countries that issue integrated educational guidelines for the entire period of ECEC usually establish content regarding learning for sustainability throughout the entire phase. The only exception is North Macedonia, where the goals and learning outcomes for sustainability within the integrated curriculum are not specified for younger children, but only start from around the age of 4–5 years.

In contrast, among the education systems with separate guidelines for younger and older children, variations in sustainability competences based on age are more frequently observed. This may stem from the fact that different authorities draft these documents. Moreover, the documents may be adopted at different times, with newer curricula mentioning sustainability more frequently and in greater detail. For example, in Belgium (French Community), Poland and Liechtenstein, sustainability is exclusively addressed in the guidelines for older children. Conversely, in Luxembourg, learning for sustainability is included in the curriculum framework for younger children (issued in 2021), but it is not mentioned in the framework plan for preschool education for 3-year-olds (adopted in 2018) or the ECEC part of the study plan for fundamental education (issued in 2011). These discrepancies reveal a need for closer alignment of the steering documents for younger and older children.

Valuing sustainability is the most common competence

Fostering environmental awareness and sustainable behaviour among young learners may be addressed in various ways in ECEC curricula. In order to structure the analysis and comparison of the ECEC curriculum documents, this section focuses on three competences:

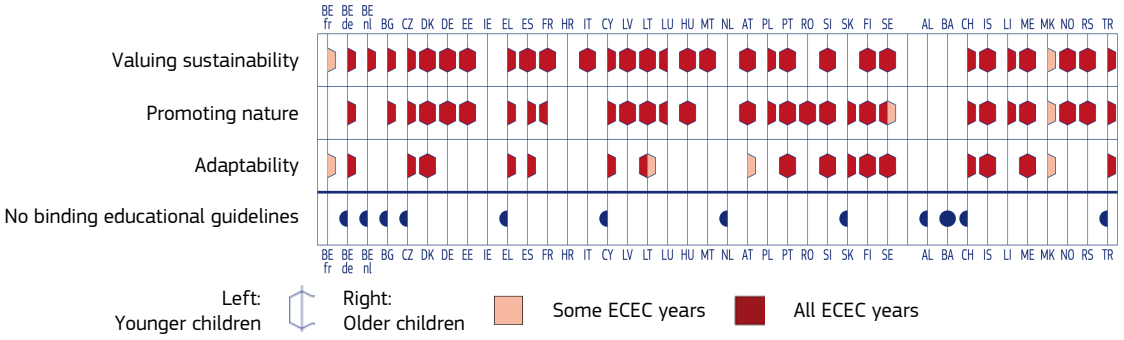
- valuing sustainability,
- promoting nature,
- adaptability.

These were selected from the European Commission's GreenComp framework (European Commission: Joint Research Centre et al., 2022) as the most relevant when addressing young children. In the analysis that follows, readers should be aware that the competences shown in the figure for each country may conceal significant variation in depth and level of detail. For instance, the competences of valuing sustainability and promoting nature are both shown as being referred to in the French charter for ECEC for younger children and the Finnish core curriculum for the whole ECEC phase. In France, the two competences arise from the same short phrase in the sixth pedagogical principle of the charter, which states that 'being in contact with nature allows children to know, respect and love it'. In contrast, in the Finnish core curriculum, valuing sustainability is discussed as part of the two underlying values 'growth as a human being' and 'healthy and sustainable way of living'. Moreover, promoting nature is addressed within the transversal competences 'taking care of oneself and managing daily life' and the learning area 'exploring and interacting with my environment'.

'Valuing sustainability' is defined as a competence that allows children to develop care for the environment, respect for life, justice for current and future generations, shared responsibility, etc. Some elements of this competence are included in almost all the education systems that address sustainability in their top-level educational guidelines. Only in Romania and Slovakia do the educational guidelines not include references to valuing sustainability.

Across countries, valuing sustainability is commonly addressed by setting the objective to develop attitudes of care and respect for life and the environment. Furthermore, in some cases, particular attention is given to engaging children in the process of constructing these values. For instance, in Hungary, the national programme for kindergarten sets a goal to 'develop the child's independent opinion and decision-making abilities in shaping the environment'. Meanwhile, the Finnish core curriculum for the last year of ECEC establishes that 'the task of pre-primary education is to guide children in making choices in line with a sustainable way of life'.

Figure D3: Sustainability competences in the top-level educational guidelines for ECEC, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

For a definition of educational guidelines, see the glossary. Only binding top-level educational guidelines are considered. For a list of the top-level educational guidelines referenced in each country, along with their status (whether they are binding or non-binding), see Annex D. For information on the age ranges in each country, see the national system information sheets at the end of the report.

Country-specific notes

Belgium (French Community): The competences of valuing sustainability and adaptability are only addressed in the last year of pre-primary education, which is the first year of compulsory education.
Ireland: The Aistear framework curriculum includes elements relating to sustainability. However, these elements are formulated as suggested learning opportunities and are not prescriptive.
Lithuania: The competence of adaptability is not addressed in the curriculum for the last year of ECEC (pre-primary classes).
Austria: The competence of adaptability is only addressed in the curriculum for the last year of ECEC.
Portugal: The pedagogical guidelines for children under 3 that include the three sustainability competences shown in Figure D3 were introduced in March 2024.
Sweden: The competence of promoting nature is not addressed in the curriculum for the last year of ECEC (pre-primary classes), but is included in commentary materials on the curriculum ([13]).
North Macedonia: The three sustainability competences only apply to children from the age of 4–5 years.

The sense of responsibility and justice towards future generations is another notable element of the competence related to valuing sustainability. This focus is included in the educational guidelines of Germany, Portugal (older children), Iceland and Norway. For instance, the Norwegian framework plan states that 'Kindergartens shall help make the children understand that their actions today have consequences for the future'.

The analysis of ECEC curricula also investigated the prevalence of promoting nature. Promoting nature is defined as a competence that allows children to:

- establish connections with their own natural environment;
- understand the interdependence between people, plants, animals and the land;
- get acquainted with how human action – including their own action – can affect nature;
- identify practices that avoid or reduce the use of natural resources and/or those that contribute to the protection of nature.

The promoting nature competence is very common in ECEC curricula. The most commonly recurring aspect of promoting nature is the need to offer interactions with nature so that children develop an emotional relationship (joy, love, wonder) with it and feel the desire to protect it. For instance, in Austria, in the guidelines for the last year of ECEC, the 'nature and technology' area argues that 'experimentation and observation of the animate and inanimate nature … is of great importance for the development of children [as it supports] the development of a caring and mindful attitude towards their environment'.

To create connections with nature, children need experiences in natural surroundings, such as observing animals, going on nature walks or engaging in gardening activities. In many countries, the educational guidelines mention activities in nature within their steering documents for ECEC. Usually, these references are brief mentions integrated into the general parts concerning the learning environment or the type of activities to be carried out. In addition, some countries provide specific examples of nature-based activities for

([13]) https://www.skolverket.se/getFile?file=12049.

the development of sustainability competences (i.e. in Belgium (German-speaking Community), Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Hungary, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Norway). For instance, in Belgium (German-speaking Community) the following activities are suggested within the 'world orientation' area of the plan for pre-primary education: 'sponsoring for a tree; establishing and maintaining a school garden; planting a flower meadow for insect food; taking care of a bird feeder in winter'. In Denmark, the curriculum theme 'nature, outdoor life and phenomena' specifies that 'children should be exposed to natural habitats such as forests, beaches, bogs and watercourses as well as living organisms such as animals, micro-organisms and plants'.

Besides the need to develop relationships with nature, the other three elements – interdependence, impact on nature and practices to protect nature – of the promoting nature competence listed above are addressed in the educational guidelines for ECEC, albeit to a lesser extent. Depending on the country, these three elements of the promoting nature competence are mentioned with or without a reference to the connection with nature. In Estonia, Latvia, Romania and Sweden, and in Slovakia and Switzerland for older children, the emotional element of the competence, the feeling of connectedness with nature, is not included. For instance, in the Slovak programme for pre-primary education, the objectives related to the promoting nature competence focus on the impact of human action on nature: 'the [teacher] and children discuss the importance of water for people, plants, and animals. The discussion also includes the issue of water pollution caused by different substances, which are possible as well as impossible to detect in the water using one's senses.'

Only a small number of the education systems that embed sustainability in their binding top-level educational guidelines do not include elements related to promoting nature: Belgium (French and Flemish Communities) (for older children), Italy and Malta. However, in Belgium (French Community), an ongoing campaign by the authority responsible for ECEC for children under 3 (Office of Birth and Childhood (Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance)) promotes outdoors activities, including contact with nature, as part of ECEC provision for younger children ([14]).

The third type of sustainability competence examined within the realm of ECEC – adaptability – pertains to recognising and promoting environmentally conscious behaviours. Adaptability is defined as a competence that:

- promotes actions among children that support and sustain the environment, such as saving energy, recycling, controlling water use and encouraging others at home and in their ECEC settings to do the same things;
- allows children to identify aspects of modern life that have a greater impact on the environment and need to be adapted (e.g. disposable plastic packaging, meat consumption patterns, fast fashion and consumerism).

References to adaptability are significantly less widespread than references to valuing sustainability or promoting nature. It is addressed in the top-level educational guidelines of just under half of the education systems (19 out of 39). The most common elements of adaptability in educational guidelines for ECEC relate to promoting actions that support and sustain the environment, such as saving energy, recycling packaging, controlling water use and sorting waste. Adaptability can also be addressed from a more theoretical point of view. For instance, in Spain, the pedagogical principles of the curriculum mention expectations to 'initiate reflection on the responsible consumption of goods and resources', while in Iceland the curriculum highlights that discussions on food waste and why we sort waste are important.

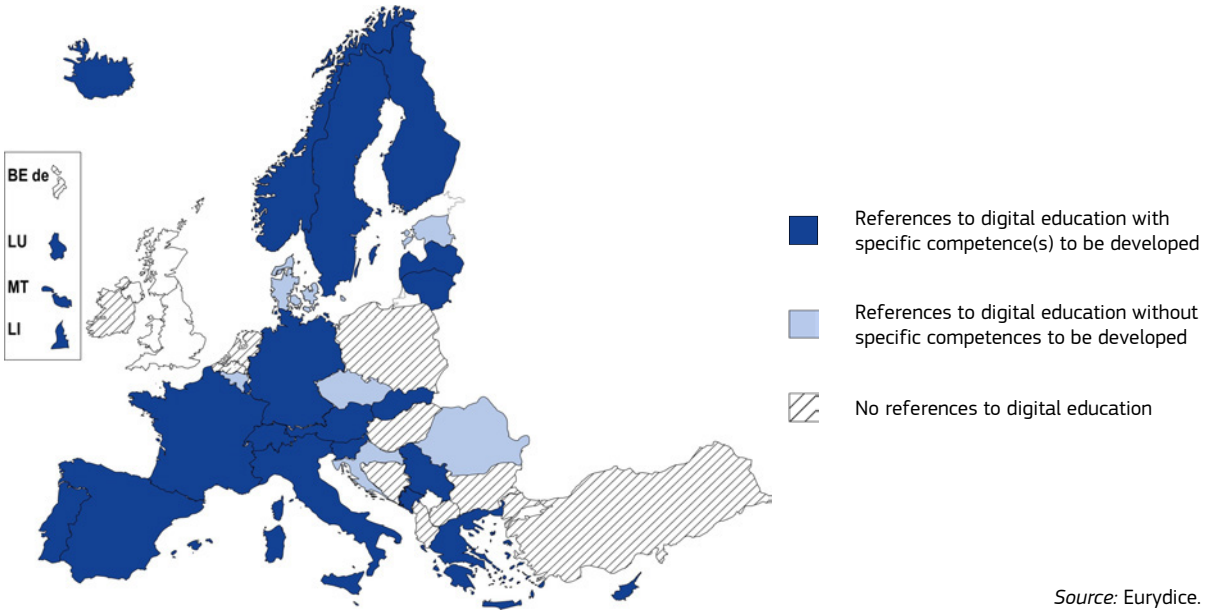
([14]) www.one.be/public/cest-quoi-lone/nos-campagnes/cest-dehors-que-ca-se-passe/.

A majority of countries include digital competences in ECEC

Digital education is currently a widely agreed priority in Europe and concerns all levels of education ([15]). European policies advocate for the age-appropriate and consistent integration of digital skills and competences into learning from early childhood and care to adulthood. In particular, a recent Council recommendation stresses the importance of ensuring children's safety online and ensuring that they better understand the opportunities that come with digitalisation in a more equal and inclusive manner ([16]). Moreover, the same recommendation suggests using developmentally appropriate methods, such as unplugged activities and play-based learning, to build digital competences while taking into consideration children's socioemotional and cognitive development.

This section examines whether and how digital education is embedded in the top-level educational guidelines for ECEC. It investigates if curricula include references to specific digital competences that children should start developing in ECEC. As contact with digital technologies is acknowledged as being potentially detrimental to young children, this section also looks at the restrictions outlined in the top-level educational guidelines regarding their use. For the purpose of international comparison, only binding (compulsory) top-level educational guidelines are considered.

Figure D4: Embedding digital education in the top-level educational guidelines for ECEC, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

For a definition of educational guidelines, see the glossary. Only binding top-level educational guidelines are considered. For a list of the top-level educational guidelines referenced in each country, along with their status (whether they are binding or non-binding), see Annex D.

When Figure D4 shows that digital education is embedded in the top-level educational guidelines, the age range covered varies depending on the country. It may encompass the entire ECEC phase, apply solely to provision for younger children or concern provision for older children exclusively. For more information on the age range of the children concerned, see Annex A, data complementing Figure D4.

To establish whether the top-level educational guidelines refer to the development of children's digital competences, their content was analysed for relation to the most basic elements of the five competence areas set out in the DigComp 2.1 framework (European Commission: Joint Research Centre et al., 2017): information literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety and problem-solving. For more information on the competences covered in each country by age range, see Annex A.

Country-specific notes

Ireland: The Aistear framework curriculum includes elements relating to digital education. However, these elements are formulated as suggested learning opportunities and are not prescriptive.

([15]) Commission communication – Digital education action plan 2021–2027: Resetting education and training for the digital age (COM(2020) 624 final), https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en.

([16]) Council recommendation of 23 November 2023 on improving the provision of digital skills and competences in education and training (OJ C, C/2024/1030, 23.1.2024), ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/1030/oj.

As Figure D4 shows, nearly three quarters of education systems address digital education in their top-level educational guidelines for ECEC. The majority of these education systems outline specific digital competences to be developed. However, for older children in Belgium (French Community) and Czechia, and for children in the whole phase in Denmark, Croatia and Romania, the emphasis in the educational guidelines is on facilitating children's engagement in digital activities without explicit mention of developing specific digital competences. Moreover, in Estonia, references to digital education focus on the role of digital technologies in children's daily lives and in the modern world, and on using digital devices to enrich educational activities. It should be noted that in Estonia the new curriculum, which is to be enforced together with the Act on Early Childhood Education in 2025, details the development of digital competences. In 11 other education systems, digital education is not addressed in the top-level educational guidelines. However, in Ireland, the publication of a national policy statement on the use of digital technologies and digital learning in ECEC by 2025 is a stated output in *First 5 – Implementation plan 2023–2025* ([17]). Moreover, a recently launched national strategy for 2024–2033 addresses digital literacy for learners from birth to young adulthood ([18]).

In several education systems, the top-level educational guidelines or other steering documents set various kinds of limits on staff regarding the use of digital technologies in ECEC:

- there is a maximum time per day for children to spend in front of a computer (Latvia ([19]));
- a limited, cautious, moderate use of digital technologies is required (Belgium (French Community) and Czechia for older children, and Croatia, Lithuania and Norway for the entire ECEC period);
- staff must always be involved with the children when they are using digital technologies (Norway);
- children are provided with content that is appropriate for their age and developmental level (Finland ([20]));
- the use of digital technologies must always be in support of the learning process (France and Cyprus for older children, and Norway for the entire ECEC period);
- children's digital competences should also be developed through experiential exploration of real objects and phenomena, and through social interactions (Croatia and Lithuania).

Moreover, in two countries, additional frameworks that limit the use of screens and digital tools in ECEC have recently been established or are being developed. In Denmark, following amendments in July 2024, the Act on Daycare Facilities ([21]) entails new principles differentiated according to age range. For children under 3 years, digital tools should only be used in pedagogical work in certain situations, such as in the case of children with disabilities. Meanwhile, for children aged 3 years and over, digital tools can be used if their support of the pedagogical work is substantiated by pedagogical staff. In Sweden, the government intends to remove the current requirement that preschool teachers are responsible for ensuring that every child is given the opportunity to use digital tools. To achieve this, the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) has published proposals to review the preschool curriculum ([22]) in order that education be made mainly screen-free for the children.

As seen above, in the majority of countries (22 out of 37), the top-level educational guidelines include references to some digital competences that children should start developing during ECEC (see also the data complementing Figure D4 in Annex A). These references can take the form of general aims, learning objectives or learning activities. The two competences

([17]) https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/36359-implementation-plan-20192021/.

([18]) https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/3f341-towards-a-new-literacy-numeracy-and-digital-literacy/.

([19]) Republic of Latvia Cabinet Regulation No 890 – Hygiene requirements for the providers of child supervision service and educational institutions implementing a pre-school education programme, https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/260057-hygiene-requirements-for-the-providers-of-child-supervision-service-and-educational-institutions-implementing-a-pre-school-education-programme.

([20]) https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/en/digiosaaminen/8706410/tekstikappale/8709071.

([21]) https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2024/479.

([22]) https://www.skolverket.se/getFile?file=12968.

most commonly referred to are information literacy and digital content creation (17 countries each), followed by communication and collaboration (14 countries), safety (12 countries) and problem-solving (8 countries). The range of digital competences included in the top-level educational guidelines varies across countries. The most comprehensive guidelines regarding the variety of digital competences addressed are those of Germany, Greece, Spain, Lithuania, Finland and Sweden. They include references to all five of the competences addressed here. At the other end of the scale, in Latvia, Slovenia, Montenegro and Serbia, the top-level educational guidelines refer to only one of the five digital competences. However, in Slovenia, since 2022, the kindergarten curriculum has been undergoing revision to strengthen various aspects, including digital competences. The implementation of the revised curriculum is expected to take place for the 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 school years ([23]).

This analysis also reveals some variations in the digital competences covered according to the children's age range. In four countries where there are separate guidelines for younger and older children (i.e. France, Luxembourg, Portugal and Liechtenstein), the digital competences covered are only introduced in the second phase of ECEC. In contrast, in most of the countries that have integrated guidelines for the entire period of ECEC (see Figure D1a), the digital competences referred to are the same throughout the whole phase. However, in Spain, Italy, Austria and Sweden, the range of digital competences to be addressed increases as children get older. In all four countries, the information literacy competence is not included from the start of ECEC.

As highlighted in European policies, acquiring the safety competence is crucial for children. This competence is commonly addressed by referring to the risks associated with digital media for children and the need to promote safe and responsible use of digital technologies. For instance, in Greece, the curriculum for preschool education emphasises as learning content related to information and communication technologies the need to 'record the benefits and disadvantages of ICT use / propose rules for beneficial and safe use of internet'. More specific risks for children when using digital technologies are highlighted, for instance, in the Spanish curriculum for ECEC, which promotes a 'healthy use of digital tools' in the definition of the digital key competence, or in the Finnish core curriculum for pre-primary education, which refers to teaching children to adopt 'an ergonomic ICT use'. The risks associated with communication though digital technologies are highlighted, for example, in the German framework for ECEC, which stresses that 'children learn to reflect on the importance of media, its opportunities and risks as well as safety issues (e.g. the right to one's own image)'. Likewise, the Swedish curriculum mentions 'safe and responsible communication, also in digital contexts', while the Norwegian framework plan requires staff to safeguard children's privacy when using digital support for learning.

Another emphasis of the European recommendations regarding digital competences in ECEC lies in the use of developmentally appropriate methods, such as screen-free activities. Regarding the problem-solving competence in particular, several countries underline the importance of integrating educational activities that promote the development of children's skills without using digital devices. For instance, the Greek curriculum for preschool education suggests creating contexts for problem-solving programming both inside and outside the classroom, such as configuring spaces with obstacles. In Spain, the royal decree on teaching in ECEC outlines the importance of progressively developing the computational thinking skills of children from the age of 3 years through the observation and manipulation of objects. In Lithuania, the guidelines for the preschool education programme covering the whole ECEC phase propose sequences of actions and problem-solving scenarios suitable for different age groups.

In addition to this analysis of the top-level educational guidelines, it should be mentioned that a few countries complement their guidelines with other kinds of support documents for staff or programmes focusing specifically on digital education. This is the case, for instance, in Belgium (German-speaking Community) with the framework-orientated guidelines for the

([23]) https://www.zrss.si/digitalna_bralnica/izhodisca-za-prenovo-kurikuluma-za-vrtce/.

development of information and media literacy ([24]), and in Latvia with the methodological guidelines on new and digital technologies in preschool ([25]). In Luxembourg, the *Media Compass* (*Medienkompass*) ([26]) addresses coding in preschool education. In Austria, a guide to digital media training in ECEC for all settings has been made available by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research ([27]). The National Education Institute of Slovenia published updated guidelines on the use of digital technologies in kindergarten ([28]). The Finnish National Agency for Education and the National Audiovisual Institute published the framework for digital competence in June 2022 ([29]), which provides recommendations regarding the implementation of national core curricula at all levels of education, including ECEC. Finally, in Estonia, preschools receive support to integrate robotics into their daily learning and educational activities through the national programme Progetiiger ([30]).

Early language activities in ECEC often focus on awakening children to linguistic diversity

As emphasised in the Council recommendation on high-quality early childhood education and care systems ([31]), ECEC curricula may lay the foundations for language development in more than one language.

This indicator looks into early language-learning activities in languages other than the language of the service provided in centre-based ECEC settings. Only approaches that apply to all children in all types of public and government-dependent private settings are considered. Therefore, ECEC settings with a specific emphasis on particular languages, such as those providing bilingual or content- and language-integrated learning education for some children, are excluded. In addition, optional foreign language programmes offered in regular settings are not covered.

Two main objectives of early language activities are distinguished:

- awakening all children to a variety of languages;
- introducing all children to a particular foreign language.

In six European education systems, all children are introduced to a particular foreign language at some point during ECEC: Belgium (German-speaking Community), Greece, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta and Poland. This also applies to 17 autonomous communities in Spain. In the countries with several state languages – namely, Belgium, Luxembourg and Malta – the foreign language introduced alongside the language of the ECEC service is one of their state languages: French in Belgium (German-speaking Community) and Luxembourg, and either English or Maltese in Malta, depending on the mother tongue of the children. In Greece, Spain and Cyprus, English is the foreign language provided to all children in pre-primary schools. In Poland, foreign language activities are compulsory in all pre-primary schools, allowing each ECEC institution the freedom to choose the foreign language they teach. According to the educational information system ([32]), English was the most commonly selected language in 2023/2024, followed by German, Spanish, French and Italian.

The approaches to introducing children to a specific foreign language in ECEC vary across countries.

In **Belgium (German-speaking Community)**, for children aged 3–6 years attending pre-primary education, the foreign language activities in French take place on a daily basis and last for a minimum of 50 and a maximum of 200 minutes per week.

([24]) https://ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-3969/7117_read-41353/.

([25]) https://skola2030.lv/lv/jaunumi/blogs/jaunas-un-digitalas-tehnologijas-pirmsskola.

([26]) https://edumedia.lu/uebersicht/.

([27]) https://www.charlotte-buehler-institut.at/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ep_digitale_medienbildung.pdf.

([28]) https://www.zrss.si/pdf/DTsmernice_vrtci.pdf.

([29]) https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/en/digiosaaminen/8706410/tekstikappale/8709071.

([30]) https://progetiiger.ee/tool/105/kogumik-oppetegevused-robotikaszädetega-alusharidusele?fbclid=IwAR35zUgK4_tdngDsi-Tr0FaHU5HUtDnWM4ci4qKzt4jVbOhaJGgsWIEHlvg.

([31]) Council recommendation of 22 May 2019 on high-quality early childhood education and care systems (OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4), 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.

([32]) https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/220,nauka-jezykow-obcych/resource/57398/table?page=1&per_page=20&q=&sort=.

Language acquisition is embedded in experiential and action-oriented situations in which the children are encouraged to actively engage and to express themselves linguistically through songs, poems and rhymes. A few learning outcomes related to the learning of French are established (e.g. 'the child develops interest and curiosity for the foreign language', 'the child develops a feeling for the sound of the foreign language').

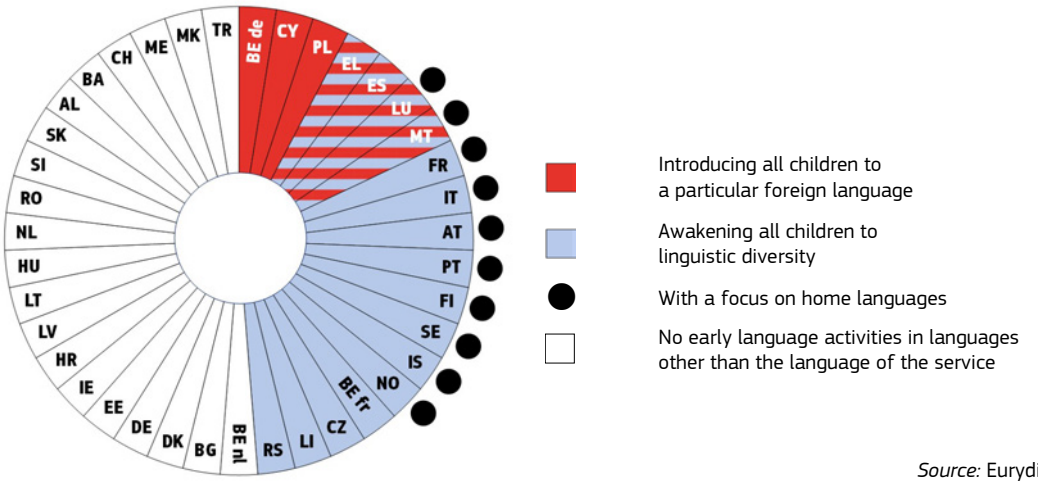
In **Greece**, in pre-primary schools, English is introduced through creative activities for 2 teaching hours a week, led jointly by the kindergarten teacher and an English language teacher.

In **Cyprus**, the Content and Language Integrated Learning Coordinating Centre ([33]) recommends that foreign language learning in pre-primary education occur through intermittent exposure to the foreign language, which can be integrated into various parts of the school day (e.g. during structured creative or motor activities, or in specific subjects, such as music education or mathematics). These language sessions may initially be brief, lasting just 5 minutes, but they can gradually increase in duration and reach up to 30 minutes.

In **Luxembourg**, both the national reference framework on non-formal education for children under age 4 and the framework plan for the first year of pre-primary education promote a non-formal approach in which the child is exposed to French through an easy, natural and relaxed access to the language. No learning outcomes are defined.

In **Poland**, one of the tasks of preschool is to create educational situations developing the child's interest in a foreign modern language. Several learning outcomes are set for the end of pre-primary education, including that children can 'understand and respond to very simple commands in a modern foreign language; repeat simple rhymes and sing songs in a group; and understand the general meaning of short stories (told or read) when supported by, for example, pictures, props, movement, mimicry or gestures'.

Figure D5: Objectives of early language activities in centre-based ECEC settings, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

Figure D5 deals with early language-learning activities in languages other than the language of the service provided in centre-based ECEC settings. Only approaches that apply to all children in all types of public and government-dependent private settings are considered. Therefore, ECEC settings with a specific emphasis on particular languages, such as those providing bilingual or content- and language-integrated learning education, are excluded. In addition, optional foreign language programmes offered in regular settings are not covered.
'With a focus on home languages' refers to ensuring that the early language activities value the mother tongues of all children attending the ECEC setting.
Information is based on top-level educational guidelines for centre-based ECEC settings. For a definition of educational guidelines, see the glossary. Only binding top-level educational guidelines are considered. For a list of the top-level educational guidelines referenced in each country, along with their status (whether they are binding or non-binding), see Annex D.
When Figure D5 shows that there are early language activities in ECEC, the age range concerned varies depending on the country. It may encompass the entire ECEC phase, apply solely to provision for younger children or concern provision for older children exclusively.

Country-specific notes

Ireland: The Aistear framework curriculum includes elements relating to early language activities. However, these elements are formulated as suggested learning opportunities and are not prescriptive.
Spain: The autonomous communities and cities decide whether starting foreign language learning in ECEC is compulsory for all children or the decision is up to individual schools. Figure D5 represents the most common situation: 17 out of 19 of them include a foreign language (English) as a compulsory area of educational activity for all children in the second cycle of early childhood education.

Most commonly, when ECEC programmes mandate early language activities in ECEC, there is no singular emphasis on a specific compulsory foreign language. This approach is geared to instil a broad appreciation for linguistic diversity, thereby ensuring that children

([33]) https://clil.schools.ac.cy/index.php/el/clip-in-cyprus/implementation-models.

are being prepared for effective communication in a multilingual and multicultural society.

The top-level educational guidelines for ECEC in 16 education systems refer to awakening children to linguistic diversity (see Figure D5). For instance, in Spain, the royal decree that establishes the organisation and minimum teaching requirements for ECEC sets as a specific competence of the communicating and representing reality area that children be able 'to value the linguistic diversity present in their environment, as well as other cultural manifestations, in order to enrich their communication strategies and cultural background'. In Sweden, preschool must lay the foundation for the children's understanding of different languages and cultures. In Liechtenstein, the national curriculum for pre-primary education refers to children's sensitisation to linguistic and cultural diversity. In Serbia, the programme for preschool education includes 'raising awareness and knowledge about different cultures and languages' as a component of the communication competence.

Some education systems suggest specific activities or approaches to create openness to and positive attitudes towards linguistic diversity.

In **Greece**, the curriculum for pre-primary education proposes, in relation to the multilingual communication learning area, that 'children record key words for the topic of their investigation in the children's languages or other languages of interest, enriching the dictionary of the classroom or making word games (e.g. memory games), and identify which ones sound the same or similar'.

In **France**, the curriculum for pre-primary education suggests, as part of the section on awakening children to linguistic diversity, exposing children to meaningful playful situations (games, songs, watching videos on well-known stories) and making some trials of word/sentence repetitions.

In **Italy**, the educational guidelines for younger children underline that 'incorporating other sounds and prosodies into everyday educational life is a way to enable children to become familiar with other languages, be curious about them and approach them in the optimal period for their development'. The educational guidelines for the integrated system (0–6 years old) suggest 'drawing attention to languages, creating contexts in which more than one language can be used makes it possible to recognise the cultural heritage of each child, to develop diversified communication skills to stimulate curiosity and exploration of different languages'.

In **Austria**, the guidelines on the development of values in ECEC suggest offering multilingual games, songs and books and using greetings in all children's languages, aiming to foster tolerance of and respect for others. The module for the last year of ECEC recommends that staff 'respect and honour the (own) family language; accept and promote the multilingualism of children and suggest that they provide opportunities to experience different languages, such as singing songs in several languages and to utilise the linguistic diversity of children, parents and the team as a resource for educational processes'.

The **Finnish** core curriculum mentions that 'children are assisted in perceiving the cultural and linguistic richness and variety of the world around them'; for example 'songs in different languages, games and signs may be used in the instruction'.

Awakening children to linguistic diversity can also support the development of the metalinguistic competences of children, which will facilitate future foreign language learning, as emphasised in the steering documents of Belgium (French Community) and Italy.

In **Belgium (French Community)**, the activities proposed for the weekly teaching period dedicated to the 'language awakening' topic in pre-primary education consist of discovering, exploring and comparing a variety of languages to make children aware of the specificities of different languages, relying on what they know in a particular language to better understand another language and benefiting from synergies between the learning of different languages.

In **Italy**, the educational guidelines for the integrated system targeting children aged 0–6 underscore the importance of exposing them to a variety of languages during the crucial period of language development. This exposure facilitates the ability to compare languages and promotes cognitive transfer. In addition, it triggers metalinguistic processes that serve as a foundation for cultivating a positive attitude towards language learning, thereby fostering openness to future learning opportunities.

In multilingual societies, early language activities in languages other than the language of the service offer the opportunity to use the languages of children who speak different languages at home as a pedagogical resource for all children. Respecting and valuing the home languages of all children in an ECEC setting is a feature of high-quality ECEC systems, as underlined in the Council recommendation on high-quality early childhood education and care systems ([34]). Moreover, a few countries focus on enhancing children's skills in

([34]) Council recommendation of 22 May 2019 on high-quality early childhood education and care systems (OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4), 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.

their home languages, but this is discussed in Figure D10. Ten of the countries conducting early language activities emphasise the importance of valuing and respecting the mother tongues of all children attending the ECEC setting within daily activities (see Figure D5).

In **France**, the pre-primary curriculum mentions that 'It is important in the context of the awake to linguistic diversity [area] to value the language of origin of multilingual children or children not speaking French. Their presence in class allows awakening all children to linguistic diversity and create[s] openness towards it.'

In **Italy**, according to the educational guidelines covering the entire period of ECEC, 'drawing attention to languages, creating contexts in which more than one language can be used makes it possible to recognise the cultural heritage of each child'.

In **Luxembourg**, the curriculum framework for younger children establishes that 'staff should put particular emphasis on the recognition and promotion of the language(s) spoken at home, as these factors have a considerable influence on children's self-esteem and identity development'. The study plan for the final 2 years of ECEC advocates for the implementation of language activities in a familiar and engaging environment, which respects and values the mother tongues of the children in the class.

In **Malta**, both the standards for ECEC services for younger children and the policy framework for the whole ECEC period underline that 'staff should foster a language-rich environment that promotes positive attitudes towards all children's home languages other than Maltese and English'.

The **Norwegian** framework plan for ECEC states that 'Kindergartens shall acknowledge and value the children's different forms of communication and language, including sign language. Staff shall help ensure that linguistic diversity becomes an enrichment for the entire group of children and encourage multilingual children to use their mother tongue.'

Section II – Transitions

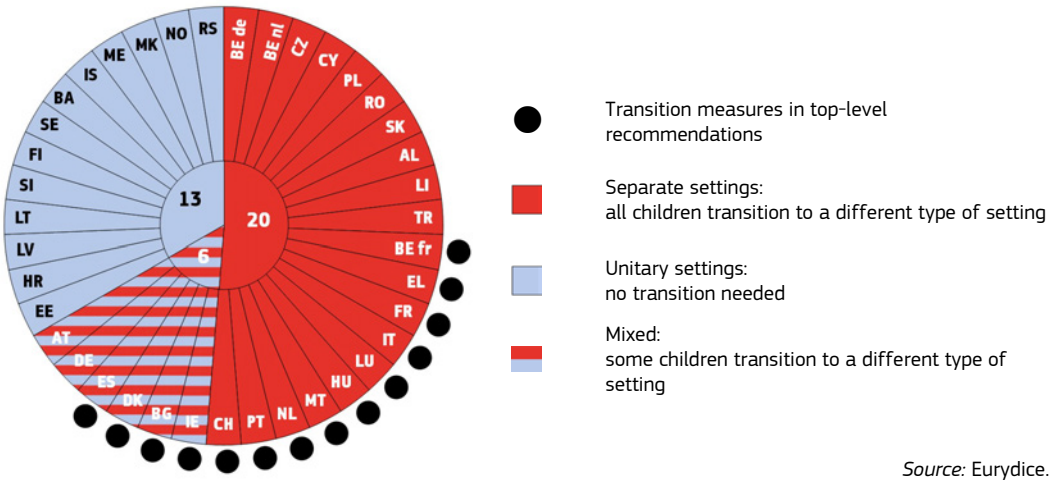
Measures to ease the transition between ECEC settings are recommended in one third of education systems

For a young child, any change – from home or home-based provision to centre-based provision, from one setting to another, or from an ECEC setting to a school – is an important step for which they need to be carefully prepared to ensure a smooth transition. Top-level education authorities may recommend certain measures to facilitate this change.

Depending on the structural organisation of ECEC provision, children who are in centre-based ECEC settings may not have to change setting at all (see Figure A2b). By definition, no transition takes place in countries organising centre-based ECEC provision solely in unitary settings. This is the case in over one third of European countries. In the remaining countries, at least some children may need to move from a childcare-type setting to an education-type setting.

Figure D6 focuses on the key structural transition point (usually around age 3) that occurs in two thirds of the education systems. In 20 systems, all children move to a different type of setting around this time. In a further six systems, where centre-based ECEC provision is mixed (i.e. there are both unitary and age-dependent settings), only some children face a transition at this point. Top-level recommendations on how this change should be addressed are made in 14 of the education systems where a structural transition occurs.

Figure D6: Top-level measures recommended to facilitate children's transition between different types of centre-based ECEC settings around the age of 3, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure concerns children who start ECEC at an early age (below the age of 3). Only structural transitions between childcare- and education-type settings are considered; transitions between the same type of setting due to family decisions are not taken into account. ECEC groups organised within primary schools in less populated areas are also not taken into account.

The transition between two types of setting usually takes place at the age of 3, but it may happen at an earlier or later age: at 2-and-a-half in Belgium (French and Flemish Communities) or at the age of 4 in Greece, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

In most systems, official documents (e.g. decrees, laws or ordinances) related to ECEC set out the recommended measures intended to ease transitions and help children adapt to a new environment. These may include introducing the new environment to children before the official starting date by setting up, for example, a visit to the new setting and a meeting with the new staff ahead of the change. Parents are also often involved in the transition. Some of the recommendations are intended to raise parents' awareness of the importance of this step for their child and encourage them to plan for the transition by, for example, organising meetings with the staff who will be responsible for their child after the transition. Some measures specifically relate to the changeover period (e.g. gradually increasing the time spent in the new setting, increasing the number of staff during the reception phase, welcoming the children into their new pre-primary school 1 or 2 days before the older children start the school year or encouraging parents to spend some time with their children in the setting during the first few days).

In **Bulgaria**, Ordinance No 26 of 18 November 2008 ([35]) on the structure and activities of nurseries and children's kitchen and health requirements for them specifies that an individual adaptation plan is implemented for each child upon admission to the nursery. Furthermore, Ordinance No 5 of 3 June 2016 ([36]) on preschool education stipulates that the kindergarten develops and implements a model for working with families and children during the period of adaptation when moving from the family environment to the kindergarten, which is an integral part of the regulations for the activities of the kindergarten. The model necessarily includes the short-term presence of parents in the kindergarten. The duration of parents' presence, and the activities in which they can participate, are determined in advance in individual meetings between teachers and parents.

In **Spain**, Royal Decree 95/2022 ([37]), which establishes the organisation and minimum teaching requirements for ECEC in Spain, states that, in terms of the curriculum, both ECEC cycles (for children under 3 and those aged 3 years and over) must address the same three areas (growing in harmony, discovering and exploring the environment, and communicating and representing reality) and that these three areas must cover the same specific competences in both cycles so as to ensure continuity between cycles and stages. Education administrations also need to ensure coordination between the teaching teams of different cycles. On the basis of the royal decree, some concrete measures have been developed by the autonomous communities. For example, in Aragon, at the end of

([35]) https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135608240.

([36]) https://www.mon.bg/regulation/naredba-%e2%84%96-5-ot-03-06-2016-g-za-preduchilisthnoto-obrazovanie/.

([37]) https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1654.

each cycle, the pedagogical staff assess the overall progress of each child and facilitate the transition from one cycle to the next with a guarantee of continuity and coherence in the educational process (Article 17 of Order ECD/853/2022).

In **Malta**, the national standards for ECEC services (for those aged 0–3) ([38]) require the following: the centre must promote and cultivate the continuity of learning and development, ensuring smooth transitions for each child; the centre must welcome parents to establish a smooth transition from the family home to the centre; the centre must support parents from the point of enrolment of their child and during transition phases; and the centre must support parents in the educational journey of their child and during all transition phases.

In some of the countries with transition measures, top-level authorities do not recommend any specific measures, but require that measures be taken at the local or setting level.

In **Denmark**, according to the Act on Daycare Facilities ([39]), ECEC centres must ensure, in cooperation with parents, a smooth transition for the children from the family home to ECEC centres, as well as between ECEC centres for children under and over the age of 3 years, by developing and supporting the children's basic competences and desire to learn. The local parental boards must be involved in this work to ensure smooth transitions for the children.

In **Ireland**, the ECEC regulations require every ECEC service to have a settling-in policy, which is defined in the regulations as 'the procedures in place in the service to facilitate the integration in the service of a pre-school child when he or she first attends the service, his or her progression within the service and his or her transition to primary school'. The regulations require not only that every service have such a policy, but also that all staff of the service be 'appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training' in relation to it.

In systems with broad recommendations on facilitating children's transitions, the move from home-based to centre-based ECEC provision is also considered. In total, 7 of the 28 education systems with regulated home-based provision (see Figure A3) recommend some measures to ease this transition (Belgium (French Community), Denmark, France, Luxembourg, Portugal, Finland and Switzerland).

In **France**, partnership work is recommended to facilitate transitions between home-based and centre-based ECEC. This includes creating opportunities for families to interact with the staff of the services in order to adapt the service offer to the needs of children and to facilitate transfers. It also involves collaboration between national and local authorities and other ECEC services at the local and *département* levels.

In Finland and Sweden, there are no transitions at the age of 3; nevertheless, there are some top-level recommendations on how to support children during other key moments (e.g. their transition from the family home to ECEC, or from early childhood to pre-primary education).

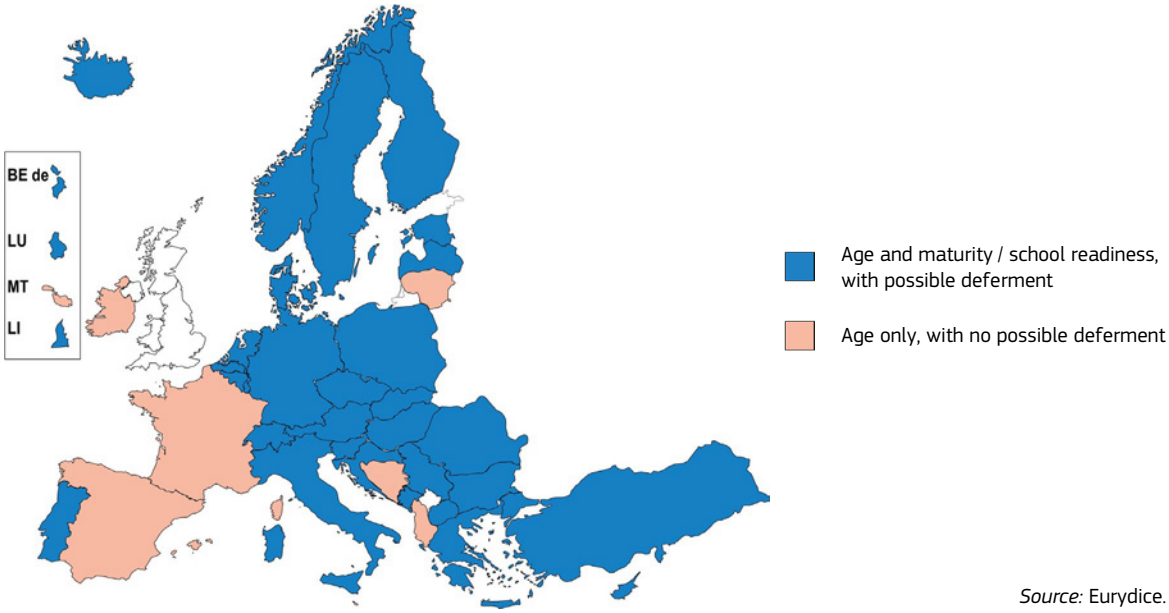
Both age and school readiness are important criteria for admission to primary education

Regulations defining entry to primary school have a direct impact on a child's educational journey. The official starting age for compulsory primary education is usually set at 6 years in Europe (see Figure B3). There are only a few exceptions. Malta requires children to start primary education at age 5, while eight countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland and Sweden) have set the starting age at 7. The entry age is typically determined by the calendar year. With school years generally commencing at the end of summer, children born between September and December may start school before reaching the official starting age. Consequently, for instance, an entry age of 6 encompasses children ranging from 5 years and 8 months to 6 years and 8 months in age. There are, again, a few exceptions. In Croatia, children born in January–March start primary school in the calendar year in which they turn 6, while the rest start in the calendar year they turn 7. In Cyprus, Hungary and Slovakia, children start primary education after reaching age 6.

([38]) https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/en/2021/national-standards-early-childhood-education-and-care-services-0-3-years-7433.

([39]) https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2024/988.

Figure D7: Criteria for admission to the first year of primary education, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

The figure does not take into consideration deferment of entry to primary education for children with health-related reasons for deferment, for children with special educational needs or for those children who have recently arrived in the country.

Country-specific note

Finland: Deferment is legally possible; however, in practice, it is exceptional.

Figure D7 shows the criteria for admission to the first year of primary education, detailing whether admission is based solely on age or on age and other criteria, such as maturity or school readiness, which may imply the possibility of deferment. In seven education systems (Ireland, Spain, France, Lithuania, Malta, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina), reaching the official age is the only condition for admission to primary school, and deferment is not possible. In Lithuania, while postponement is not allowed, children may start primary education earlier (at age 6 instead of 7) if they have completed 1 year of compulsory pre-primary education.

In some systems, criteria other than age may also be applied for admission to primary education and, if a child does not meet the necessary conditions, entry may be deferred. In most education systems, primary school admission can be postponed. It should be noted that this analysis reflects only the mainstream situation. Deferment for health reasons and any alternative provisions made for children with special educational needs are not considered here.

Deferment is possible in 31 education systems, and it is usually based on an assessment of the child's level of maturity or school readiness. The latter is a criterion that is based on the concept that a child must have attained a certain level of development and be deemed ready for school. It means that a child possesses the motivation and the cognitive and socioemotional abilities that are required to learn and succeed in school. Children's school readiness is generally checked before they enrol in primary education. If they are found to be unprepared (i.e. not ready), they usually continue pre-primary education.

To understand the process leading to deferment decisions, it is also important to look at all those who are involved. Deferment is usually requested by the parents, although sometimes this request must be accompanied by an expert opinion. For example, in Belgium (French Community), Estonia, Italy, Poland, North Macedonia and Norway, deferment is possible at the request of the parents if based on a pedagogical-psychological assessment made by a paediatrician, psychologist or other expert.

Another important aspect concerns the authorities in charge of making deferment decisions. The final decision on deferment is usually taken by parents, ECEC setting, primary school or educational authorities,

or a combination of these. In almost all the education systems where children normally start primary school when they reach the official age, but deferment is possible, parents play an important role in the decision-making process. This is also the case in eight systems where school readiness is an additional condition for entry (Belgium (German-speaking Community), Germany, Estonia, Cyprus, Hungary, Slovakia, Montenegro and North Macedonia).

In Slovenia, parents and/or a physician or psychologist may request deferment; however, the final decision lies with the head of the school (the Slovenian country example is discussed further later in this section). In Portugal, parents request a deferment, which is reviewed by the Multidisciplinary Inclusive Education Support Team; the final decision is delegated by the Secretary of State for Educational Administration and Innovation to the Deputy Director-General for Schools. In Sweden, it is the municipality that examines the request of the parents and takes the final decision. In Belgium (German-speaking Community), Czechia, Greece, Hungary, Slovakia and Switzerland, the parents need to either consent to or take the final decision on deferment.

In some education systems where school readiness is an admission criterion, the ECEC setting or the primary school has the greatest influence on the decision over a child's admission to the first year of primary education. In Estonia and Liechtenstein, for example, the ECEC setting plays the most important role.

In **Estonia**, the ECEC setting has to assess the school readiness of each child and issue a readiness-for-school card describing the child's level of development. The card has an informative function to ensure a smooth transition from ECEC to primary school and, if necessary, to provide support services at school. Deferment can be requested by the parents and is decided by an out-of-school counselling team.

In **Liechtenstein**, school readiness is assessed by kindergarten teachers. If required, and in cases of disagreement between teachers and parents, other specialists, such as psychologists, may be involved. The relevant factors are age, stage of development and family circumstances. Children who are deemed not ready for school in certain respects can attend special classes to receive targeted help to prepare them for school. The decision-making process involves teachers, parents and, if necessary, an educational psychologist.

In several countries, primary schools play a key role in determining a child's school readiness. In Cyprus, for example, schools can suggest postponing admission to primary education if there are doubts concerning maturity or school readiness. In the Netherlands and Slovenia, schools are in charge of deferment decisions.

In **the Netherlands**, the decision to defer a child's entry to primary school is made by the individual school, and the school is free to establish its own rules on deferment. These rules form part of a school's educational policy, which schools are required to publish in their school plans.

In **Slovenia**, the criterion for deferment is the child's readiness for school. The final decision is taken by the school head on the basis of the opinion of the committee (appointed by the school head) that assesses school readiness.

Two countries – Austria and Montenegro – have national tests of school readiness, which are used, with the consent or at the request of the parents and/or based on the opinion of a school doctor or psychologist, to inform decisions about children's school readiness.

In **Austria**, a child is considered ready for school when there is reason to assume that they will be able to follow instructions in the first year without being mentally or physically overwhelmed. With the school entrance screening (*Schuleingangsscreening*), primary schools have an easy-to-use, flexible, and scientifically based support diagnostic procedure at their disposal.

In **Montenegro**, the assessment of a child's readiness is organised by educational authorities at the school level. The results of a national standardised test of school readiness determine whether a child may start primary school.

A variety of measures are recommended to ensure a smooth transition from ECEC to primary education

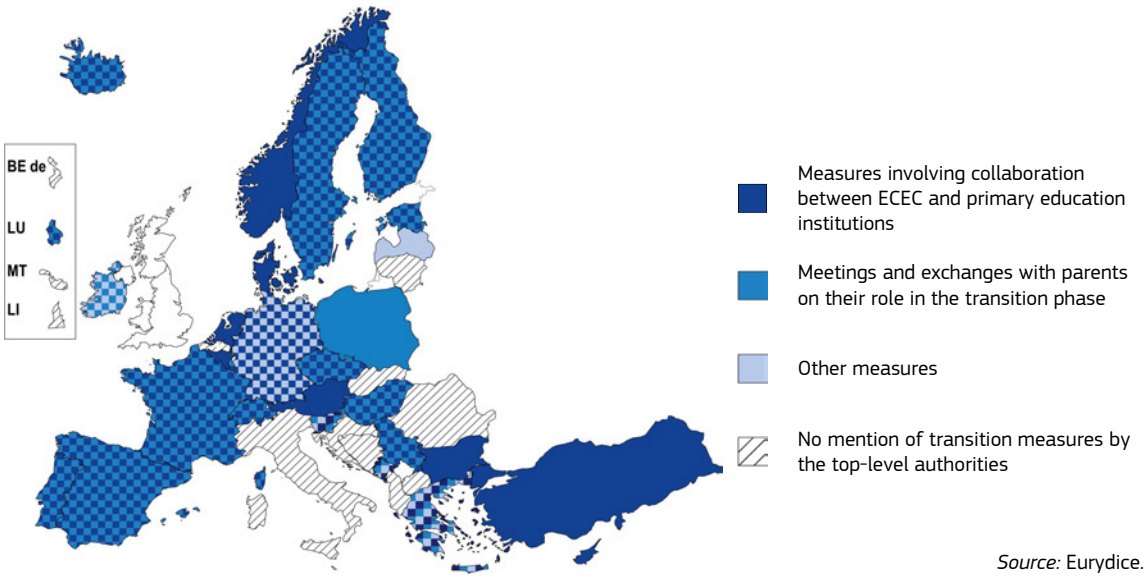
Another important milestone in children's educational journeys is the transition from ECEC to primary education. The two settings can be very different physically and pedagogically (e.g. in terms of group size, teaching practices or the curriculum), which can be challenging for some children (OECD, 2017). This transition may therefore be facilitated by following recommendations from education authorities.

The majority of education systems recommend that settings establish continuity and cooperation between ECEC and primary education. Usually, these recommendations can be found in the top-level ECEC educational guidelines (see Annex D); however, sometimes the recommendations are expressed in curricula for primary education or in other official education-related documents (e.g. decrees, laws or ordinances). In 12 education systems, top-level authorities do not make any explicit recommendations on measures related to the transition from ECEC to primary education (see Figure D8).

The need for collaboration between ECEC settings and primary schools during the transition to primary education is emphasised in the top-level educational guidelines of 24 education systems. Some of these systems recommend concrete cooperation measures, such as staff meetings (e.g. in Estonia and Hungary), the sharing of reports on children's development and needs (e.g. in Bulgaria and Spain) and other forms of exchange of knowledge, experiences and information (e.g. in Austria and Finland), joint training programmes for ECEC staff and primary school teachers (e.g. in Germany, France and Luxembourg), or joint projects (e.g. in Portugal and Serbia). Allowing ECEC children to visit primary schools is also often recommended.

Seventeen education systems explicitly recommend that ECEC settings organise meetings and/or otherwise ensure exchanges that allow parents to familiarise themselves with the learning environment of the primary school. In addition to visits to primary school, other concrete measures promoting parents' involvement in the transition phase include the provision of guidelines for partnerships between parents and ECEC practitioners (e.g. in Ireland), training activities for parents (e.g. in some autonomous communities of Spain, such as the Basque Country), or information given to parents about their child's development and readiness for primary school (e.g. in Poland and Iceland).

Figure D8: Measures to facilitate children's transition to primary education to be implemented at the setting level, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

This figure reflects the content of top-level educational guidelines, curricula for primary education and/or other official education-related documents. See Annex D for the top-level educational guidelines for ECEC provision.

Some other measures that are recommended by top-level education authorities to facilitate children's transition between ECEC and primary education can be found across Europe. In Germany, the recommendations include flexible models for starting school, which enable all children to receive individual support while largely avoiding deferrals. In Ireland, education authorities provide a transition template called My Story (*Mo Scéal*) ([40]), which is a resource that early years educators may use to document information about a child, which can support the child's transition to primary school. In Slovenia and Montenegro, authorities recommend that education institutions themselves develop a plan for the transition of children. Similarly, in Greece, in the framework of internal evaluations and the development of action plans, kindergartens are encouraged to design and implement plans for a smooth transition to primary school. In Latvia, the Ministry of Education and Science commissioned a study in 2020 on the preconditions for a successful transition from pre-primary to primary education, including the implementation of the principle of inclusive education ([41]). The published document presents proposals for a successful transition from pre-primary to the first phase of primary education and a conceptual model for the transition.

Section III – Support measures

Support to improve skills in the language of the service for children with a different home language is rare

The ability to communicate effectively is essential if children are to complete their education successfully. The European quality framework for ECEC recommends supporting the language development of all children, including children whose first language differs from the language of the service ([42]).

Figure D9 looks into support offered to children who speak another language at home and need to improve their skills in the language of the ECEC service. Overall, 11 European education systems provide support in the form of structured measures intended to improve individual children's language development. In Belgium (French Community), Bulgaria, Czechia, Austria, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, these measures usually concern older children. In Denmark, Germany, Estonia (as of September 2024), Latvia and Norway, they may be provided to younger children as well.

The children targeted by these measures vary across countries. In Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany and Austria, the measures to support acquisition of the language of instruction may concern all children with other mother tongues. Contrastingly, some countries target structured language-learning measures at particular groups of children who speak a different language at home: newly arrived migrant children in Belgium (French Community) and Luxembourg, foreign pupils in Czechia, and Ukrainian refugees in Latvia.

In Belgium (French Community), children from migrant backgrounds or those who have recently returned from living abroad may also qualify for support measures, depending on their results in a French language competence test.

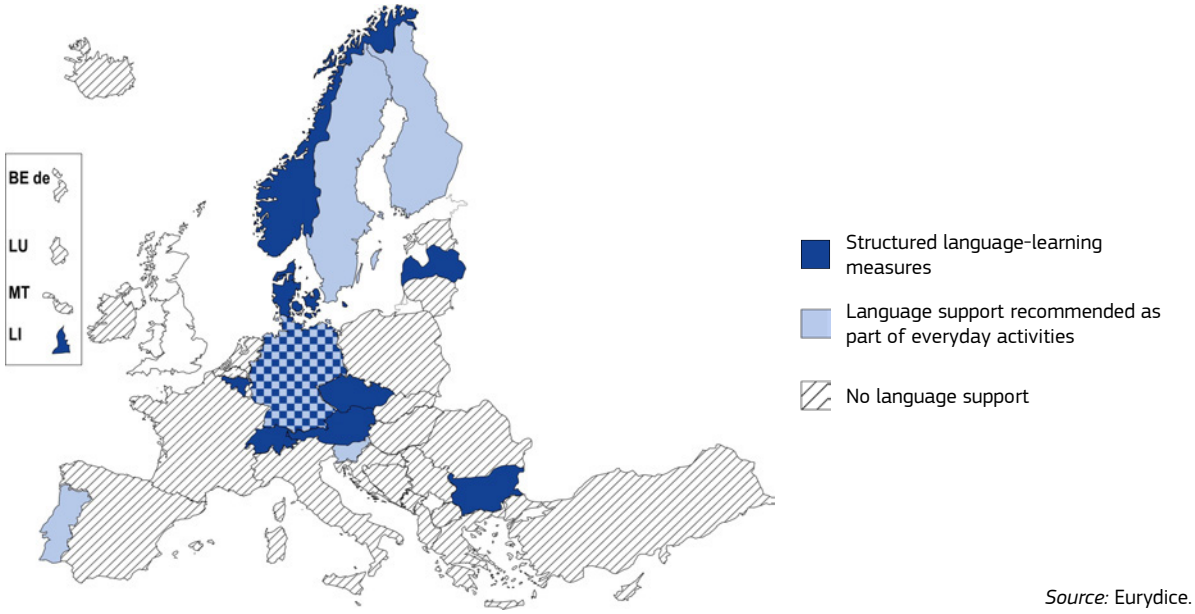
In Estonia and Latvia, as the regional minority language settings are being phased out, ECEC settings now only provide services in the state language. Consequently, both countries are implementing or planning to introduce language-learning support measures for children from linguistic minorities who are attending ECEC settings.

([40]) https://ncca.ie/en/early-childhood/mo-sceal/mo-sceal-reporting-templates/.

([41]) https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/media/11465/download.

([42]) Council recommendation of 22 May 2019 on high-quality early childhood education and care systems (OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4), 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.

Figure D9: Support in centre-based ECEC settings to improve skills in the language of the service for children who speak another language at home, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

Data relates to regular settings from the point of view of the language of instruction. Settings with another language of instruction than the national language and content- and language-integrated learning groups are not considered.

The category 'structured language-learning measures' covers measures specified by top-level authorities in their educational guidelines or other regulations or recommendations, measures that are part of a national programme or measures financially supported by top-level authorities.

In **Estonia**, as of September 2024, kindergartens providing ECEC in Estonian will have to support children with other home languages in learning Estonian through integrated learning and educational activities and, if necessary, specific language-learning activities. ECEC centres are supported financially during the transition, while teachers are provided with methodological training, Estonian language training and other support.

In **Latvia**, in 2023/2024, preschool education institutions received additional funding from the state budget to provide language support measures in Latvian to 6-year-old children who completed minority education programmes in the preceding school year. These temporary support measures are integral components of the transitional strategy geared towards providing ECEC exclusively in Latvian.

The regulations and recommendations governing structured measures to support children in acquiring the language of the ECEC service vary significantly in scope and precision. In Belgium (French Community), Bulgaria ([43]), Czechia, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein, the language support measures provided are defined by education authorities. For instance, in all these education systems, additional classes in the language of the service may be provided for up to a few hours per week in the ECEC setting. In Switzerland, the measures provided (e.g. classes in German, French and Italian as second languages) are established by education authorities but vary by canton.

In Denmark, Latvia, Austria and Norway, it is the responsibility of the ECEC setting (or the local authority, in Denmark and Norway) to decide which specific language support measures are appropriate. In Denmark and Austria, the chosen measures depend on children's results in a diagnostic test.

In **Denmark**, all children aged 3 years (or aged 2 years if the local authority has decided this) who attend ECEC must pass a test to assess their language skills if there is a linguistic, behavioural or other factor that gives rise to a presumption that the child may need language stimulation. Children with mother tongues other than Danish for whom the test reveals a need for language stimulation must be offered language stimulation in an ECEC facility for 30 hours a week. The specific activities or approaches to language stimulation are decided locally but must be handled by people who have specific qualifications for the task.

In **Latvia**, Ukrainian children enrolled in ECEC settings have individualised learning plans tailored to their needs. These plans include necessary support measures for learning Latvian.

([43]) https://www.mon.bg/regulation/naredba-%E2%84%96-6-ot-11-avgust-2016-g-za-usvoyavaneto-na-balgarskiya-knizhoven-ezik/.

In **Austria**, all children aged 3–5 years old who have a mother tongue other than German undergo an assessment of their German language skills. This evaluation helps determine whether they require specific language support and in what areas. Depending on the results of the test, this support is either provided by the kindergarten teacher and integrated into daily activities or provided by external language teachers as additional language support.

In **Norway**, the Directorate for Education and Training has a grant scheme for municipalities to implement measures to strengthen language development among children in kindergarten who have a home language other than Norwegian, Sami, Swedish, Danish or English. The measures are to support the child in using their home language and to support and develop the child's Norwegian language competence.

Several countries include general guidelines and recommendations for supporting children who speak another language at home in learning the language of the ECEC services. The guidelines usually emphasise the importance of language learning as an integral part of daily ECEC activities. They tend to advocate paying attention to development in both the dominant language and the child's mother tongue (for more information on what can be done to support the child's home language, see Figure D10).

In **Portugal**, the guide on the integration of refugee children in pre-primary education ([44]) underlines that these children's language comprehension and production skills should be progressively extended through interactions with the teacher, other children and adults, regardless of the level at which these children can speak Portuguese when starting preschool education.

In **Slovenia**, the kindergarten curriculum recommends that special attention be paid to children whose native language is not Slovenian. They should be given the opportunity to make up for the gap in their knowledge of Slovenian. Moreover, the guidelines on the integration of immigrant children in kindergartens invite these settings to support the children in using their home language and at the same time actively encourage the children to develop communication skills in Slovenian.

In **Finland**, the national curricula for the whole ECEC phase underscores that versatile interactive situations and learning environments are to be used to provide children with opportunities to use and learn Finnish/Swedish as a second language while also supporting their own linguistic background. Concrete everyday language and its pool of expressions are the starting point for learning the Finnish/Swedish language.

In **Sweden**, the curriculum for preschool emphasises that children with a mother tongue other than Swedish must be given the opportunity to develop their understanding of both Swedish and their mother tongue. The preschool must place great emphasis on stimulating the children's language development in Swedish. Moreover, the National Agency for Education provides examples ([45]) of how to work with language development in groups with multilingual children.

Finally, in Germany, linguistic support for children with a mother tongue other than German is incorporated into comprehensive programmes for language support.

In **Germany**, all *Länder* run programmes to improve children's language skills in the language of instruction in ECEC settings. For instance, 11 *Länder* are continuing the former federal programme Sprach-Kitas, which ended in June 2023 and gave ECEC settings access to an additional specialist coordinator, who helped the ECEC team provide language support as part of everyday activities. Other *Länder* have decided to combine elements of Sprach-Kitas with their own state programmes or to anchor substructures in their state daycare laws. Moreover, some *Länder* provide additional structured support programmes for children who need language support.

A small number of countries provide home language teaching in ECEC for children from migrant backgrounds

Based on its principles of cultural preservation, educational effectiveness and inclusivity, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has been advocating home language (or mother tongue) teaching in pre-primary and primary education since 1953 ([46]). Welcoming and valuing all children's home languages forms part of the recommendations to Member States made in the Council recommendation on high-quality early childhood education and care systems ([47]). However, in only a minority of education systems do top-level education authorities recommend home language teaching in ECEC.

([44]) https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Projetos/Criancas_jovens_refugiados/integracao_de_criancas_refugiadas_na_educacao_pre-escolar.pdf.

([45]) https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/inspiration-och-stod-i-arbetet/stod-i-arbetet/flersprakighet-i-forskolan.

([46]) https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000212270.

([47]) Council recommendation of 22 May 2019 on high-quality early childhood education and care systems (OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4), 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.

'Home language teaching' refers to measures to improve children's skills in their home language where it is not the main language used in the ECEC and school context. Two main types of language support are offered: (1) support for regional or minority languages and (2) support for languages spoken by children from migrant backgrounds (see Figure D10).

In the first type, home language teaching is provided in the regional or minority languages in the country through dedicated classes in regular ECEC settings, bilingual programmes or settings with a regional or minority language as the language of the service. The objective is to promote the cultural identity of these ethnic or national minorities. This type of support can be found in a dozen central and eastern European and Balkan countries (Czechia, Estonia (until June 2024), Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Montenegro and Serbia), and in Spain, France, Italy and three Nordic countries.

In **Czechia**, classes in the language of a national minority can be set up if a minimum of eight children belonging to a particular national minority attend the nursery school. Meanwhile, 12 pupils are necessary to open a nursery school where the language of the national minority is a language of instruction. Currently, it is only the Polish national minority, located mostly in Silesia, that exercises the right to set up such a school/class. In the 2023/2024 school year, Czechia had 24 nursery schools, with a total enrolment of 854 children, where Polish was the language of service (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2024) ([48]).

In **France**, since 2021, classes for regional language learning have been proposed in pre-primary schools (e.g. for Basque, Breton and Catalan).

In **Italy**, there are some bilingual settings involving Italian and French, German, Ladin or Slovenian.

In **Latvia**, since September 2023, an educational programme that ensures the acquisition and development of minority language skills has been implemented for up to 3 hours per week, with the minimum number of children aged 3 and over required to run the programme determined by the local authority ([49]).

In **Lithuania**, children belonging to national minorities can receive teaching of their home language or teaching of other subjects in their home language in ECEC settings.

In **Hungary,** there are kindergartens offering ECEC in 12 minority languages.

In **Poland**, if it is requested by parents, school heads in public settings for children aged 3 and over are obliged to organise additional learning hours covering national or ethnic minority language learning (e.g. Belarusian, German, Kashubian, Lithuanian and Ukrainian).

Slovenia provides bilingual settings in the areas inhabited by Italian and Hungarian minorities. In the area where the Italian minority lives, ECEC is provided in settings where either the language of instruction is Slovenian and children learn Italian as a second language, or vice versa. In the areas inhabited by the Hungarian minority, teaching is provided in both Slovenian and Hungarian. The educational authorities have issued a supplement to the curriculum for working in ethnically mixed areas. Bilingual settings are entitled to receive extra funds for specific continuing professional development (CPD). Moreover, these settings may benefit from such advantages as smaller group sizes, extra staff or a higher level of education among staff. The costs are subsidised by the state from the national budget.

In **Slovakia**, bilingual pre-primary schools provide education in the following minority languages: German, Hungarian and Ukrainian.

Montenegro provides preschool activities in Albanian in certain areas.

The second type of home language provision focuses on the languages of children from migrant backgrounds. This analysis only considers regulations and recommendations that explicitly encourage ECEC staff to support these children in developing their home language skills. Recommendations or regulations to enhance home language development for migrant children can be found in Italy, Luxembourg and Austria and in four Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway).

In addition to general recommendations, the top-level educational guidelines in Austria and Finland refer to concrete measures to enhance home language development in ECEC. In Norway, the Directorate for Education and Training has a grant scheme for municipalities to implement measures to strengthen the language development of children from migrant backgrounds, including in their home language.

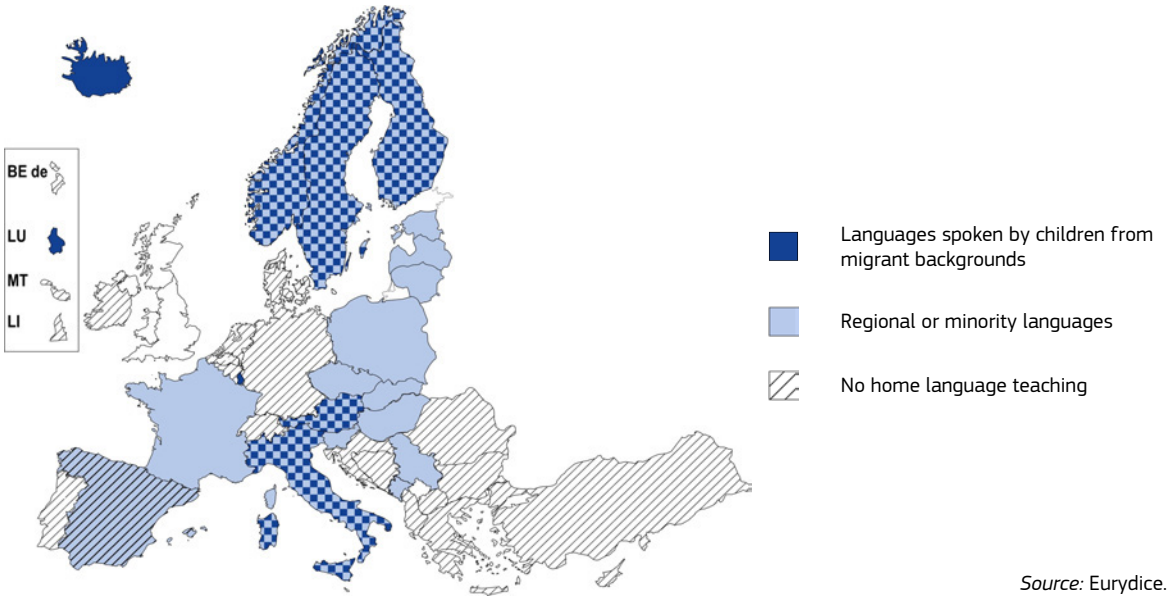
([48]) https://msmt.gov.cz/vzdelavani/skolstvi-v-cr/statistika-skolstvi/statisticka-rocenka-skolstvi-vykonove-ukazatele-2017-18.

([49]) https://likumi.lv/ta/id/345047-noteikumi-par-mazakumtautibu-valodas-un-kulturvestures-interesu-izglitibas-programmas-paraugu-un-tas-istenosanas-vadlinijam.

In **Austria**, the module for the last year of early childhood services suggests fostering language skills in children's first language, if it is not German, through activities such as sharing personal experiences, retelling stories or exploring word meanings.

The **Finnish** core curriculum for pre-primary education explicitly mentions the possibility of providing separate instruction in the home language of children from migrant backgrounds alongside teaching in the language of instruction during the final year of ECEC.

Figure D10: Support for home language teaching in ECEC, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure reflects the content of binding top-level educational guidelines and other top-level regulations and recommendations. For a definition of regional or minority language and home language, see the glossary. The teaching of regional or minority languages applies only to the settings for older children (around age 3 and over), except in Lithuania, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Serbia, where it applies to the whole ECEC phase. Home language teaching for children from migrant backgrounds applies to the whole ECEC phase in Luxembourg, Sweden, Iceland and Norway, to ECEC settings for children under 3 in Italy, and to the last year of ECEC in Austria and Finland.

Country-specific notes

Estonia: In 2022/2023, 81 % of Estonian ECEC groups had Estonian as a language of instruction, 13 % taught in Russian, and nearly 6 % of children attended language immersion groups. On 1 September 2024, all preschools transferred to using Estonian as a language of instruction.

Spain: The top-level educational guidance documents of the autonomous communities refer to the inclusion of children's mother tongues that are co-official languages of their territories in ECEC settings under various modalities.

Aragon – Law 3/2013, of 9 May, on the use, protection and promotion of the languages and linguistic modalities of Aragon ([50]).
The Balearic Islands – Statute of Autonomy; Law on Linguistic Normalisation ([51]).
The Basque Country – Decree 75/2023, of 30 May, on the establishment of the infant education curriculum and its implementation in the autonomous community of the Basque Country ([52]).
Catalonia – Law 8/2022, of 9 June, on the use and learning of official languages in non-university education ([53]).
Galicia – Decree 79/2010, of 20 May, for multilingualism in non-university education in Galicia ([54]).
Navarre – Foral Law 18/1986, of 15 December of the Basque language ([55]).
Valencia – Law 4/2018, of 21 February, which regulates and promotes multilingualism in the Valencian educational system ([56]).

Austria: Home language teaching in minority languages applies to Burgenland and Carinthia.

([50]) https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2013-6103.
([51]) https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-1986-19091.
([52]) https://www.legegunea.euskadi.eus/eli/es-pv/d/2023/05/30/75/dof/spa/html/webleg00-contfich/es/.
([53]) https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2022-10234&p=20230505&tn=6.
([54]) https://www.xunta.gal/dog/Publicados/2010/20100525/Anuncio17BE6_es.html.
([55]) https://www.lexnavarra.navarra.es/detalle.asp?r=1822 .
([56]) https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2018/BOE-A-2018-3441-consolidado.pdf.

In some cases, both approaches to home language teaching are supported – that is, there is a support framework for the languages of children from migrant backgrounds as well as provision of additional funding for specific minority languages.

In **Sweden**, the Education Act (Svensk författningssamling 2010:800) stipulates that 'Pre-schools shall contribute to giving children with a home language other than Swedish the opportunity to develop both the Swedish language and their home language' ([57]). In addition, special minority rights protection is given to Finnish, Meänkieli and Sami in administrative areas (*förvaltningsområden*). This gives individuals the right to use Finnish, Meänkieli and Sami in their dealings with the authorities and also the right to attend preschool partly or completely in the minority language. The municipalities within the *förvaltningsområden* are allocated government funding for the additional costs.

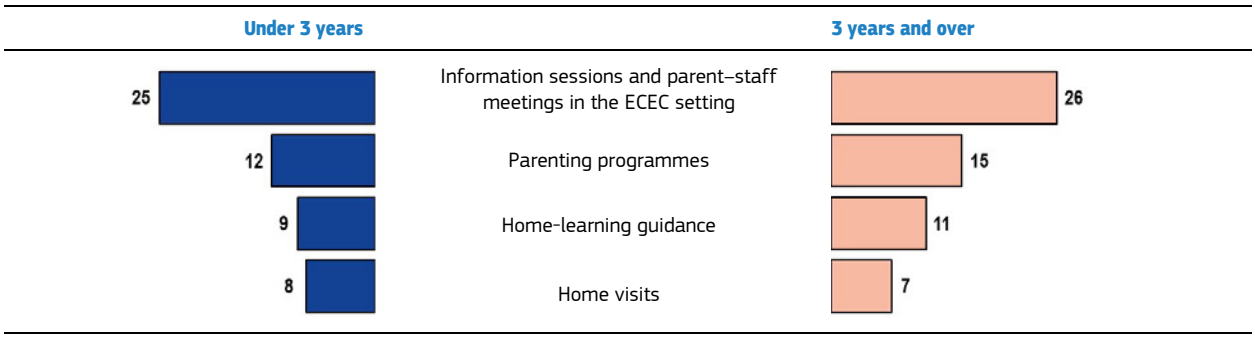
Parents with children in ECEC are mainly supported through information sessions and meetings with the staff

Parental involvement and participation is an essential factor in high-quality ECEC provision. Parents are key people in the education process, who are able to provide ECEC settings with unique insights into their children's needs, interests and potential. The Council recommendation on high-quality early childhood education and care systems ([58]) therefore underlines the importance of involving parents as partners in ECEC provision that is adapted to the needs of families.

Most European education systems emphasise the importance of collaborating with parents and encourage ECEC settings to provide specific measures aimed at parents. Figure D11 shows the number of systems specifying the following types of support measures for parents in ECEC:

- information sessions and parent–staff meetings held in the ECEC settings;
- parenting programmes that offer formal classes to help families create a home environment that supports children as learners; classes cover a variety of topics relating to children's education and development (e.g. encouraging speech/language development, maintaining discipline, building self-esteem and understanding challenging behaviour);
- home-learning guidance, which helps parents encourage their children's learning at home by providing information and ideas on how to help their children with curriculum-related activities and other learning situations at home (e.g. by involving children in daily routines, such as preparing meals and getting dressed) and enriching these routines with stimulating discussions;
- home visits.

Figure D11: Support measures for parents with children in ECEC, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure includes any support specified by top-level authorities in their educational guidelines or other regulations or recommendations. For each age range, the number on the bar indicates the number of European education systems (39 in total) promoting each support measure. Information by country is available in Annex A.

([57]) http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skollag-2010800_sfs-2010-800#K8.

([58]) Council recommendation of 22 May 2019 on high-quality early childhood education and care systems (OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4), 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.

A range of measures may be required to respond to the different needs of families. Some education systems therefore take a comprehensive approach to supporting parents, which incorporates several of the abovementioned measures.

In **Hungary**, the national core programme of nursery education and care ([59]) recommends that parent group discussions be organised at least three times per year about current educational topics of concern for the parents of young children attending the nursery. The group discussions are led by the early childhood educators, and they provide a space for sharing problems and listening to each other, which aims to promote parental competence. Several other forms of interaction with parents are recommended. For example, staff are encouraged to engage in daily contact conversations with parents to exchange information concerning the emotional state of the child, daily events and any changes affecting the child. In addition, meetings between parents, early childhood educators and/or management can take place, and other specialists may be consulted. Written information, notice boards, websites, flyers and social networking sites also provide opportunities for communicating information. Finally, home visits aim to connect educators with the family, getting to know the young child and their parents within the home environment.

In **Slovenia**, fostering parental involvement is a key aspect of the kindergarten curriculum ([60]) and yearly plans. Staff provide guidance to parents during information sessions, and parenting programmes are tailored at the local level. Counsellors support staff in building strong parent partnerships, aiding with children's transitions, offering educational sessions and facilitating individual support. Parenting programmes, often with outside experts, promote dialogue on child development. For Roma children, home and kindergarten visits, as well as Roma assistants, enhance parent collaboration. Finally, the supplement to the kindergarten curriculum for Roma children also stresses the importance of cooperation with parents – for example, through visits of Roma parents to the kindergarten, and home visits of preschool staff. The introduction of Roma assistants is also recognised as an important factor, as they can represent a link between the kindergarten and the Roma community.

Considering the individual support measures, the most widely promoted initiatives are **information sessions and parent–staff meetings** for parents with children in ECEC settings, which should form the basis of a regular dialogue between families and ECEC practitioners. Parents should receive information on their child's progress and development, and they may be given advice on how to support their child's development. Although most countries' educational guidelines mention that meetings with parents should be organised at the discretion of the ECEC setting – that is, the setting decides the format and frequency deemed necessary – some education systems provide recommendations regarding the meeting frequency and/or format.

In **Belgium (German-speaking Community)**, according to official guidelines concerning ECEC settings for children under 3 years ([61]), there should be regular or daily exchange on children's development and well-being between parents and ECEC staff. According to guidelines concerning ECEC settings for children over 3 years ([62]), organising contact with parents and parent–teacher conferences is an integral part of pre-primary schools' mission. However, the frequency of these meetings is determined at the school level.

In **Spain**, the frequency of parent–staff meetings is not established in the steering documents at the national level; meetings should be held according to the needs of those involved. Some autonomous communities' decrees provide further guidance on the cooperative relationship with families; for example, in Cantabria (Order EDU/3/2023, Article 11 'Information to families'): 'The group tutor will establish a cooperative relationship with the families of their students, which will include regular communication by means of written reports, individual interviews and collective meetings. Without prejudice to holding as many meetings as necessary, at least one individual interview will be guaranteed at the beginning of each school year and at least two collective meetings during the course, one of them in the first term, in which the families will be informed of the corresponding course programme.'

In **Malta**, the national standards for ECEC services ([63]) state that childcare educators must regularly share and discuss with parents the progress their child has made in learning and holistic development, in a spirit of mutual respect. Formal one-to-one meetings are to be held at least twice a year.

In **Portugal**, for children under 3 years, both the legislation that regulates crèches (Ordinance 262/2011) and the pedagogical guidelines for crèches ([64]), introduced in March 2024, mention the importance of dialogue/interactions between daycare professionals and families, but no frequency is specified. It is usual to hold at least one meeting with parents per school year. For children aged 3 years

([59]) https://issuu.com/magyarbolcsodekegyesulete/docs/bolcsodei_orszagos_alapprogram_2023_issuu?fr=sNjY5ZTM3MjUzMjY.

([60]) https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MIZS/Dokumenti/Sektor-za-predsolsko-vzgojo/AN/Kindergarten_Curriculum_pop.docx.

([61]) https://ostbelgienlive.be/addons/SharepointDokumentsuche/desktop/SharepointDokDetails.aspx?Extern=1&DokID=7267c697-e1fe-4652-b0e4-ea7f3c89368e.

([62]) https://ostbelgienlive.be/addons/SharepointDokumentsuche/desktop/SharepointDokDetails.aspx?Extern=1&DokID=7528bdbc-2bd1-4ad9-aa52-478a0cdd712f.

([63]) https://educationservices.gov.mt/en/dqse/Documents/publications/MFED%20National%20Standards%20ECEC%20ENG%20Oct21.pdf.

([64]) https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/opc_marco2024.pdf.

and over, a meeting with the parents whose children are about to enter kindergarten is recommended. It allows parents to ask questions and clarify their doubts and concerns. Apart from these meetings, parents can also attend meetings concerning their child's individual progress and information sessions on specific subjects related to the organisation of the setting or the educational project.

In **Serbia**, the fundamentals of the preschool education programme ([65]) define different ways of involving parents. Parents are members of the parents' councils; they can be volunteers and they can also participate directly in activities with the children. Parents are invited to participate in social activities (e.g. trips, cultural events), which provide opportunities to develop relationships among parents and between parents and ECEC staff. Parents can also meet with the core practitioners and talk about their child and the ECEC programme activities at different times of the day or week.

In countries that have no specific recommendations on the forms of support that should be provided to parents, informal meetings between staff and parents are also common practice.

Parenting programmes cover a variety of topics related to children's education and development, and have similar objectives to those set for guidance on home learning. However, whereas parenting programmes usually involve parents attending formal programmes, home-learning guidance can be provided in a written format (e.g. in brochures) or online. Top-level authorities support or organise parenting programmes in around one third of education systems.

In **Belgium (French Community)**, the Office of Birth and Childhood (*Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance*) develops and provides a series of health education programmes for families. They cover aspects linked both to preventive health (vaccination, sudden death, prevention of myopia, pregnancy and consumption, brushing teeth, etc.) and to the well-being and good development of the child (fragility of the newborn, safety, language, potty training, television, etc.). The programmes are provided to parents from the prenatal stage up to the child's sixth birthday, during preventive medical consultation sessions and during home visits or collective activities organised in the framework of consultations.

In **France**, for children aged 0–3 years, the law provides that family services include, in addition to childcare arrangements for young children, parenting support services (e.g. information websites ([66])) and specific family support structures, such as the early childhood relay (*relais petite enfance*) ([67]) and the networks for listening to and supporting parents (*Réseaux d'écoute, d'appui et d'accompagnement des parents*) ([68]), to which professionals can direct parents. For children aged 3–6 years, official guidelines recommend going beyond institutional meetings and proposes systems such as the parents' briefcase (*mallette des parents*) ([69]), which is an online resource offering materials for teachers and parents on various topics, such as the health of young children and the importance of sleep and diet.

In **Latvia**, the General Education Law ([70]) states that preschool education advisory centres are to provide advisory and methodological support to parents and educational institutions for the education of children of preschool age and for the preparation of children from 5 years of age for school. The preschool education advisory centre may be founded as a unit of a preschool education institution or as an independent education support institution.

Compared with parenting programmes, **home-learning guidance** is provided by top-level authorities or promoted through their educational guidelines slightly less often. This measure aims to inspire parents to offer their children all kinds of learning experiences, both implicit and explicit, at home – for example, by involving children in routine activities (making grocery lists, shopping, preparing meals, getting dressed, making phone calls, etc.) – and to stimulate children further by talking about these activities. Often, top-level authorities set up websites or provide printed information for parents that can help guide the education of their children.

The **Irish** curriculum framework for ECEC (Aistear) ([71]) contains information not only for ECEC practitioners but also for parents. The information is intended to help parents 'plan for and provide enjoyable and challenging learning experiences so that all children can grow and develop as competent and confident learners'. The Aistear Siolta good practice guidelines ([72]), which include concrete tools to help identify priorities and plan actions for learning and development, are available online.

([65]) https://prosveta.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/OSNOVE-PROGRAMA-.pdf.

([66]) https://monenfant.fr/.

([67]) https://www.caf.fr/allocataires/vies-de-famille/articles/relais-petite-enfance-accueillir-informer-et-accompagner-familles-et-professionnels.

([68]) https://caf.fr/partenaires/caf-de-l-ain/partenaires-locaux/parentalite/les-reseaux-d-ecoute-d-appui-et-d-accompagnement-des-parents-reaap.

([69]) https://mallettedesparents.education.gouv.fr/.

([70]) https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/20243-general-education-law.

([71]) https://curriculumonline.ie/early-childhood/.

([72]) https://www.aistearsiolta.ie/en/introduction/.

In **Greece**, official guidelines ([73]) recommend that ECEC educators propose ideas and activities in order for parents to provide a continuation of the learning experience through learning activities at home, such as (1) parents collecting examples of their child's progress outside school, in order to have a well-rounded assessment of the child and their continued learning experience; (2) within the context of learning about their body, good physical states and health, children drafting their own, personal diet plans and organising, with the parents' help, the family's breakfast at home; (3) children, in cooperation with their parents, finding images or objects within their family environment that are related to the subjects they are learning about in school; and (4) children participating in lending libraries, small explorations/investigations of nature, shopping at the supermarket, the creation of diet rules for the home and educational games at home.

Home visits involving ECEC staff (teachers or specialists) are recommended in relatively few European education systems. These visits sometimes target families from disadvantaged backgrounds, or they are intended for parents of children with language or learning difficulties. The purpose of such visits is twofold: (1) providing advice to parents and (2) learning more about a child's family environment to better understand their needs.

In **Denmark**, local authorities are responsible for performing a language assessment of all 3-year-olds not attending ECEC. Children in need of support must be offered language stimulation, which parents may undertake themselves. Local authorities are obliged to monitor the language stimulation that parents undertake themselves through home visits, and they may impose penalties for non-compliance ([74]).

In **Switzerland**, various programmes, such as the *schritt:weise* programme ([75]) in the canton of Berne, actively support families as they educate and care for their children. Parents learn to encourage their child's healthy development through games and play in order to ensure a good start in preschool and in school later on. A home visitor comes to see the family, initially each week and then every second week. Home visits are sometimes supplemented by group meetings. The programmes last around 1.5 years.

In **Türkiye**, home visits are strongly encouraged, especially at the beginning of the school year. Parents are required to fill out the family education needs form and the family engagement preference form ([76]). These forms are then used by teachers to evaluate the needs of the children in the group and establish monthly work plans.

Where no central recommendations exist, local authorities and/or ECEC services are free to choose their own ways of cooperating with and assisting families.

In **the Netherlands**, for children aged 4 years and over, municipalities are responsible for providing information to parents and for parental involvement.

In **Austria**, there are no binding guidelines from the federal government with regard to cooperation with parents, as this is the constitutional responsibility of the *Bundesländer*. Guidance is often provided by institutions.

([73]) https://search.et.gr/el/fek/?fekId=587975.
([74]) https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2024/988.
([75]) https://primano.ch/hausbesuchsprogramm/.
([76]) https://tegm.meb.gov.tr/dosya/okuloncesi/0-36ebaderegitimcikitap.pdf.

Chapter E: Evaluation and monitoring

The positive impact of early childhood education depends to a large extent on its quality. The Council recommendation on high-quality early childhood education and care systems ([1]) identifies evaluation and monitoring as one of the five crucial dimensions for ensuring high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC). Evaluation and monitoring systems offer the opportunity to achieve, maintain or develop high-quality provision in ECEC by identifying strengths and weaknesses, which can then be built upon or remedied. The recent publications released by the EU Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care provide concrete guidance on evaluation and monitoring of ECEC across Europe and share good practices in this area ([2]).

Evaluation and monitoring systems in Europe are very diverse in the sense that those involved, their mission and the freedom they have to fulfil their tasks vary substantially between countries. This chapter aims to shed light on the processes and procedures used in ECEC monitoring and evaluation systems across Europe while, at the same time, taking into consideration related aspects of governance.

The chapter maps the approaches used in external evaluation of ECEC settings by looking at their scope and the types of body responsible. It then offers a typology of the ways in which internal evaluation of centre-based settings, where it exists, is regulated by public authorities. The involvement of parents in evaluation and monitoring processes is also explored. Finally, the chapter examines whether the results of the evaluations of ECEC settings or of other analyses are used to help provide a picture of the quality of the ECEC system as a whole, thus leading to further improvements.

Supporting children's learning is often a focus of external evaluation of settings for older children

One of the means used to ensure and develop high quality levels in ECEC is the evaluation of individual settings. This section focuses on the external evaluation process. External evaluation of settings is a quality control process carried out by individuals or teams who report to a local, regional or top-level education authority and who are not directly involved in the activities of the setting being evaluated. External evaluation of settings seeks to:

- evaluate or monitor the performance of the setting;
- report on the quality of the provision;
- suggest ways to improve practice.

Two main dimensions of quality are often emphasised in the ECEC context: structural quality and process quality (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2014; Slot et al., 2015; von Suchodoletz et al., 2023). Both structural quality and process quality are needed to generate high-quality provision and build effective ECEC systems (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2014).

Structural quality, which refers to the framework conditions supporting the day-to-day practice within settings, is evaluated through checking compliance at the setting level with ECEC system regulations or guidelines on a range of factors, such as:

- health and safety;
- staff qualifications;
- group sizes or child–staff ratios.

([1]) Council recommendation of 22 May 2019 on high-quality early childhood education and care systems (OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4), 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.

([2]) https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EAC/ECEC+Documents.

In some cases, the setting's pedagogical plan and the design of the curriculum are also checked to ensure that they meet the standards set out in top-level educational guidelines. This type of curriculum review is focused on formal adherence to standards, not the quality of the interactions that take place in the setting.

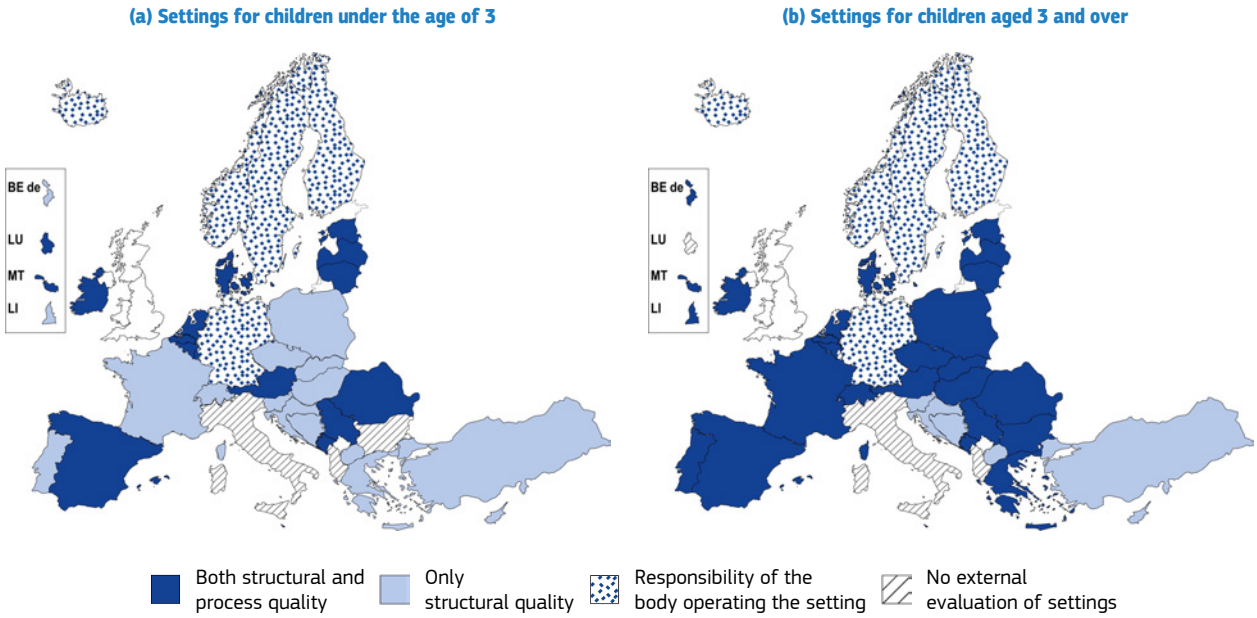
Process quality refers to how well the setting supports children's holistic development, well-being and learning. This focus on children's experiences is reflected by several key dimensions, including:

- the quality of interactions and relationships between staff and children;
- how well children interact with each other;
- the quality and variety of pedagogical activities;
- the emotional and instructional support provided by educators.

While relationships with families might be acknowledged as components of process quality, they are not considered a determining factor in this analysis. In other words, when relationships with families are the only element of process quality covered by external evaluation of ECEC settings, the focus is regarded as being on structural quality rather than process quality.

Through the analysis of top-level guidelines, Figure E1 determines whether the scope of external evaluations of centre-based ECEC settings mainly concentrates on structural quality or extends to process quality. It shows that in about half of the education systems concerned, external evaluations of ECEC settings for younger children focus solely on structural quality, while those for older children's settings tend to include process quality more often.

Figure E1: Main focus of external evaluation of centre-based ECEC settings, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure reflects the content of top-level educational guidelines and other top-level regulations and recommendations. External evaluation of settings is a quality control process carried out by individuals or teams who report to a local, regional or top-level education authority and who are not directly involved in the activities of the setting being evaluated. It seeks to evaluate or monitor the performance of the setting, report on the quality of the provision and suggest ways to improve practice. Structural quality refers to the framework conditions supporting the day-to-day practice within settings and is evaluated through checking compliance with ECEC system regulations and standards at the setting level. Process quality refers to how well the setting supports children's holistic development, well-being and learning.

Responsibility of the body operating the setting covers countries where the top-level regulations focus not so much on settings but rather on the duty of providers (i.e. local authorities (e.g. municipalities), non-governmental organisations or other private bodies) to evaluate the quality of their provision. These providers have a great deal of freedom to set up the processes and procedures for evaluating their own ECEC provision, and aggregated information is limited.

Country-specific notes

Czechia: The main focus of external evaluation of centre-based ECEC settings for children under 3 years is on structural quality. However, legislation ([3]) provides some standards on evaluating the quality of the relationship with parents.
Germany: Figure E1 represents the situation of the whole country except the *Land* of Berlin. In Berlin, every centre-based ECEC setting must undergo an external evaluation of their pedagogical work every 5 years according to the educational plan of the state of Berlin.
Italy: There is no external evaluation. Local authorities and regional school offices, respectively, check that ECEC settings for younger children and of some ECEC settings for older children comply with regulations. They do that during accreditation renewal, which takes place every 3 years.
Latvia: External evaluation of ECEC settings, which covers a broad range of tasks, is performed by the state quality services and by local authorities through the assessment of the activities of the heads of settings.
Lithuania: The information in Figure E1 is applicable from autumn 2024, when the National Agency for Education initiated a new external evaluation process for centre-based ECEC settings, covering both structural and process quality, based on a set of standard indicators defined in a regulation framework ([4]). Prior to this, the responsibility for evaluating the quality of ECEC lay with each education provider (e.g. the municipalities).
Austria: The focus of external evaluation of centre-based ECEC settings, carried out by provincial inspectors within the framework of each individual *Bundesland*'s laws, varies. According to a renewed agreement between the federal government and the *Bundesländer* (2022–2027) ([5]), the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research carries out external evaluation of ECEC settings for children aged 3 and over, focusing on the fulfilment of their obligation with respect to language support for children ([6]).

Regarding settings for younger children, 16 educations systems assess compliance with standards, while 15 other systems evaluate both structural aspects and the quality of processes. In contrast, the evaluation of settings for older children generally addresses learning processes and children's experiences, together with an emphasis on structural conditions, focusing on both structural and process quality in 25 education systems. For instance, in Estonia, the Ministry of Education and Research carries out both an external review focused on structural quality and a thematic supervision focused on specific aspects of process quality (e.g. the effectiveness of the teaching of Estonian as a second language). New approaches to external evaluation of ECEC settings for older children addressing both process and structural quality have recently been introduced in several European countries.

Bulgaria, since the 2020/2021 academic year, has initiated a 5-year cycle of external evaluations for kindergartens conducted by the National Inspectorate of Education. The framework ([7]) focuses on criteria and indicators grouped in three areas: educational process, management and institutional environment.

In **Greece**, a 2021 ministerial decision ([8]) introduced new procedures for external evaluation of pre-primary schools. Under this new framework, external educational advisors are required to produce an annual evaluation report for each pre-primary school, which covers nine aspects of the school's educational work and the results of the action plan for improvement. These reports are based on the school's internal evaluation report and the advisors' own documented observations and assessments informed by their cooperation with the school throughout the year.

France, since the 2020/2021 school year, has implemented a systematic evaluation of pre-primary schools. The evaluation, carried out every 5 years, coincides with the renewal of the school project. It entails a comprehensive review of the school's policies and practices, drawing from the school's internal evaluation report and an on-site visit by a team of external evaluators appointed by regional educational authorities, in collaboration with the Council for School Evaluation.

Only in Cyprus and five Balkan countries (Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Türkiye) do the regulations on evaluation address structural quality without considering the quality of educational processes or interactions throughout the whole ECEC phase.

It is worth noting that not all European countries fit into this classification, as the development and extent of external evaluation vary between countries. In a few countries, there are no regulations on external evaluation of ECEC settings: Italy and Albania for the entire period, Bulgaria for ECEC settings for younger children and Luxembourg for pre-primary schools. Furthermore, in several countries with unitary settings and integrated governance (see Figures A2b and A4a), the top-level educational guidelines and other regulations and recommendations focus not so much on settings but rather on the duty of providers to evaluate their own provision's quality. In these countries, covered by the category 'responsibility of the body

([3]) https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2021-350.
([4]) https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/4a3525c0e27911ec8d9390588bf2de65.
([5]) https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/eli/bgbl/I/2022/148/20220920.
([6]) https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/ep/v_15a.html.
([7]) https://www.mon.bg/regulation/naredba-%E2%84%96-18-ot-9-septemvri-2021-g-za-inspektiraneto-na-detskite-gradini-i-uchilisthata/.
([8]) https://search.et.gr/el/fek/?fekId=607785.

operating the setting' in Figure E1, local authorities (e.g. municipalities), non-governmental organisations or other private bodies have considerable freedom to establish the processes and procedures for evaluating their own ECEC provision. This decentralised approach aims to foster trust and engagement, facilitating continuous quality improvement. Nonetheless, aggregated information on external evaluations is more limited in these countries.

In **Germany**, the responsibility for monitoring and evaluating quality lies with the local authorities or other bodies operating ECEC settings. To obtain their operating licence, ECEC providers have to explain in their service plans how they will evaluate and develop quality provision in the ECEC settings (Sozialgesetzbuch VIII, Article 45, paragraph 3).

In **Finland**, the municipalities have a statutory duty to evaluate their own provision, with the aims of supporting educational development and enhancing learning conditions. The curriculum documents produced by the municipality must explain how the national core curriculum for ECEC in the different ECEC services should be implemented in settings, and how settings will be monitored, evaluated and improved. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre carries out sample-based national evaluations and supports local authorities to fulfil their self-evaluation duty. The centre maintains a digital quality evaluation system (Valssi) and self-evaluation tools, which are based on structural and process-related indicators and criteria ([9]). Although the use of the system for self-evaluation is voluntary for municipalities, participation in the national evaluation (through Valssi) is mandatory. The system aims to aggregate self-evaluation data for national-level use.

In **Sweden**, one of the tasks of the municipalities is to continuously evaluate and monitor preschools. The principal organiser of a preschool – the municipality or provider of an independent preschool (private companies, foundations and associations) – is responsible for its quality and results ([10]).

In **Iceland**, according to Regulation No 893/2009, educational committees in municipalities are responsible for evaluating and monitoring ECEC in their jurisdiction.

In **Norway**, the Kindergarten Act assigns municipalities the responsibility for ensuring that ECEC settings are run according to the framework plan and the Kindergarten Act. To fulfil this obligation, municipalities may conduct supervision visits in ECEC settings. The top-level authorities support and promote internal evaluation at the local and setting levels – for example, by providing them with the outcomes of an annual national survey conducted among parents (see Figure E4).

In these countries, although the primary responsibility for ensuring the quality of ECEC is high lies at the local level, there might nevertheless be some situations where top-level authorities are involved in the evaluation of settings. Top-level agencies dealing with evaluations of the quality of ECEC may undertake visits to some ECEC settings to evaluate a specific aspect of provision with a view to making a judgement about the quality of this provision across the entire ECEC system. The performance of the individual setting is not the primary concern. There might also be mechanisms to ensure that local authorities are performing their quality assurance duties. For instance, in Germany, the local youth welfare offices have a legal obligation to check that ECEC providers have evaluation instruments and measures in place. In Sweden, the Schools Inspectorate is responsible for reviewing how the municipalities assume their responsibility for the supervision of independent preschools' compliance with regulations. Some of these countries also have risk assessment arrangements to ensure that, when serious issues are detected in a particular setting, a national/regional agency intervenes to help ensure that the problems are addressed. For instance, in Germany, when complaints are made, the local youth welfare offices intervene. In Sweden, if grievances in a particular setting are reported to the Schools Inspectorate, the inspectorate may choose to initiate an investigation into these matters and, if necessary, can decide what the setting must do to improve. In Finland, regional state administrative agencies are responsible for monitoring and supervising ECEC services and their compliance with the law, and for handling complaints.

The focus of external evaluation is often related to governance

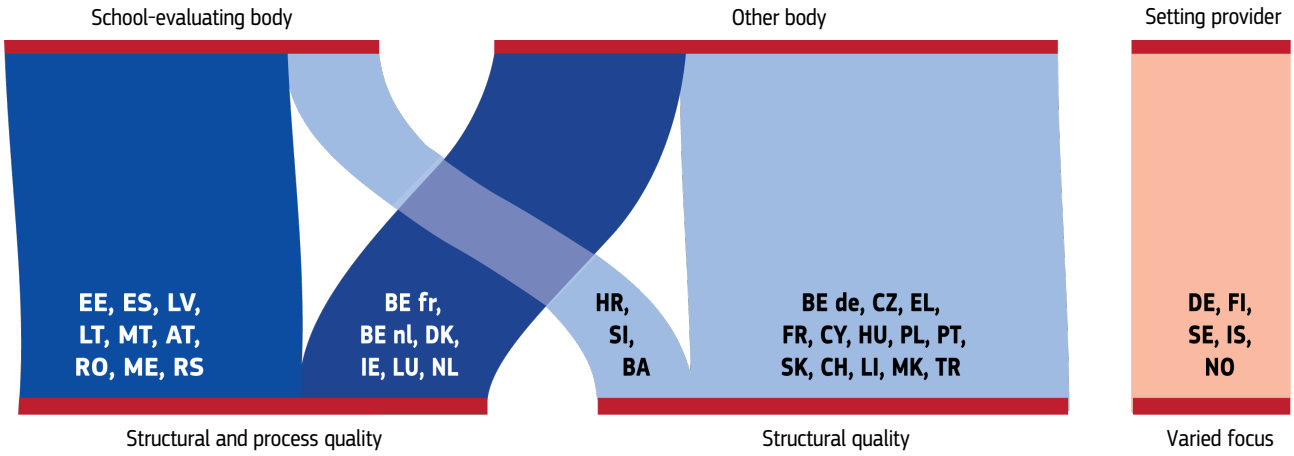
The scope of external evaluation in ECEC settings is often influenced by the nature of the organisation responsible for conducting the assessment. This is especially clear for ECEC for children under age 3 (see Figure E2). When an educational inspectorate or a ministerial department responsible for evaluating higher levels of education (typically primary education) carries out external evaluations of ECEC settings, the focus usually includes how well the setting supports

([9]) https://www.karvi.fi/en/publications/guidelines-and-recommendations-evaluating-quality-early-childhood-education-and-care.

([10]) Education Act, Chapter 4, Arts 3–8, https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skollag-2010800_sfs-2010-800/#K17.

the learning process (process quality). However, when public bodies responsible for family, social affairs or young people – entities not involved in evaluating schools at higher levels of education – are responsible for evaluations, the emphasis is more often on compliance with norms and standards (structural quality).

Figure E2: External evaluation of centre-based ECEC settings for children under the age of 3: types of evaluation body and main focus, 2023/2024



No external evaluation: BG, IT, AL.

Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

See explanatory notes to Figure E1. Countries in the 'setting provider' category are those where the top-level regulations do not focus so much on settings but rather on the duty of providers (i.e. local authorities (e.g. municipalities), non-governmental organisations or other private bodies) to evaluate the quality of their provision. For more information on these countries, see the country examples earlier in the text.

Country-specific notes

Czechia, **Germany**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania** and **Austria**: See country-specific notes to Figure E1.
Netherlands: The municipal health services have primary responsibility for carrying out external evaluation of centre-based settings for younger children. However, when they report shortcomings concerning the targeted programmes within centre-based settings for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, the Inspectorate of Education must perform a follow-up inspection.

In 19 education systems, external evaluation of settings for younger children is carried out by bodies that are not involved in evaluation of primary schools or higher levels of education. In 13 of those, the focus is mostly on structural quality (see Figure E2). The bodies responsible for evaluation can be the ministry or other top-level body responsible for family, childhood or social affairs (Czechia, Cyprus, Portugal, Slovakia, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia and Türkiye), childcare inspection services (Belgium (German-speaking Community)), regional social advisors (Greece), county government offices (Hungary), local authorities (Poland), cantonal and local authorities (Switzerland) or local child protection services (France).

Interestingly, in five education systems, although external evaluation of the settings for younger children is carried out by the inspectorate or body in charge of social affairs or youth (not education), it does focus on how well the setting supports the learning process. Moreover, in Denmark, where local authorities are not responsible for evaluating further levels of education, top-level regulations establish that they must evaluate the pedagogical content of individual ECEC settings. In Belgium (French Community), this focus on process quality is the result of recent reforms.

In **Belgium (French Community)**, since January 2022, the responsibilities of daycare setting coordinators from the Office of Birth and Childhood (Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance) have included analysing and evaluating the quality improvement projects set up by childcare settings for a 5-year period, which are underpinned by an internal evaluation process. These quality improvement projects focus on three main areas, including the implementation of the education and care plan of the childcare setting ([11]). The evaluation by the coordinators includes data gathering and observation through on-site visits.

In **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, care inspectors evaluate the pedagogical quality of ECEC settings based on a monitoring

([11]) https://pro.one.be/news/?p=1594.

instrument ([12]) promoted by the agency Growing Up (Opgroeien), the body responsible for ECEC for younger children. Inspections take place every 3–5 years. In special circumstances, such as when complaints are made, more frequent inspections are possible.

In **Denmark**, according to the Act on Daycare Facilities ([13]), the municipalities must ensure an external monitoring of ECEC settings against a pedagogical foundation of nine main elements and must publish a monitoring report for each ECEC setting every 2 years.

In **Ireland**, the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) uses a set of 13 pedagogical principles addressing both structural and process quality in terms of care, play and the interactions of staff with children when inspecting ECEC settings ([14]). Moreover, in 2023, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education began conducting education-focused inspections in some settings for children under 3.

In **Luxembourg**, the regional agents of the National Youth Service ([15]) visit the centre-based settings for younger children (*service d'éducation et d'accueil*) twice a year on average to advise on whether the pedagogical practices and plans fulfil the fundamental pedagogical objectives for young children established by the curriculum framework on non-formal education for children and youth ([16]).

In **the Netherlands**, the municipal health services inspect centre-based settings for younger children every year using an assessment instrument for the observation of pedagogical practice in the field ([17]) co-designed with the Netherlands Youth Institute.

As stated above, when bodies in charge of evaluating primary school education also carry out evaluation of ECEC settings, they usually focus on both structural and process quality. Hence, in Romania, the national agency responsible for quality assurance of pre-university education expanded its mandate in September 2023 to include settings for younger children. It now conducts external evaluations of these settings according to a framework covering both process and structural quality ([18]).

However, in Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the bodies responsible for evaluating educational institutions solely concentrate on the structural quality of ECEC settings. In Croatia, an inspection team is sent to an ECEC setting when there is a suspicion that the institution is not operating in accordance with the law. In Slovenia, inspections are conducted every 5 years to examine if educational institutions are pursuing their activities according to the law. They check compliance with legal and organisational requirements, including the design of the educational activities as outlined in relevant laws, staffing levels, and parental involvement and communication. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the bodies responsible for educational evaluation check compliance with requirements/standards within ECEC settings twice a year.

The frequency of external evaluations of settings for younger children is sometimes defined at the top level and, when it is defined, it is usually carried out cyclically. In Belgium (German-speaking Community), Czechia, France, Poland, Slovakia and Türkiye, top-level authorities do not set the frequency of external evaluations for settings for younger children. It is either left to the body responsible for evaluation to decide, or it happens only under specific circumstances, such as when complaints are received. For instance, in Slovakia, external evaluation of ECEC settings for children under 3 years is carried out on the basis of an annual evaluation plan prepared by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, and in special circumstances, such as when complaints are received. In Greece, Spain, Cyprus, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, the settings for younger children are evaluated at fixed intervals, ranging from every 6 months to every 6 years. In Switzerland, each canton sets the frequency of the inspection of childcare settings: for instance, in Berne they are evaluated every 3 years and in Zurich they are evaluated every 5 years.

For older children, external evaluation of ECEC settings is often the responsibility of the bodies that evaluate higher levels of education. This evaluation generally covers process quality. The regularity and level of standardisation of these evaluations vary across countries. They usually operate at a set frequency and on the basis of an evaluation framework. In Belgium (French Community), an external evaluation of pre-

([12]) https://www.opgroeien.be/sites/default/files/tool-documents/evaluatie-memoq-monitoring-instrument.pdf.
([13]) https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2024/988.
([14]) https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/EYI-GDE12.5_EYI_Underpinning_Pedagogical_Principles_FINAL_.pdf.
([15]) https://www.snj.public.lu/a-propos/#qualite.
([16]) https://www.enfancejeunesse.lu/fr/documents/cadre-de-reference-national-sur-leducation-non-formelle-des-enfants-et-des-jeunes/.
([17]) https://www.nji.nl/nl/Producten-en-diensten/Publicaties/Publicaties-Veldinstrument-observatie-pedagogische-praktijk.
([18]) https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/235162.

primary schools by the inspectorate only takes place in the case of underperformance regarding the school steering plan or the school contractual agreement of objectives, which must relate to a list of educational priorities set by the top-level authority. Meanwhile, in Poland, the criteria by which the ECEC settings are to be evaluated and selected for evaluation are determined annually by the inspectorate and the minister responsible for education, respectively.

There are fewer regulations on internal evaluation of ECEC settings for younger children

Alongside evaluation by external bodies, internal evaluation performed by staff members of the setting is another cornerstone of quality assurance and improvement. The internal evaluation of settings is a quality control process that seeks to evaluate or monitor the performance of the setting, report on overall quality and suggest ways to improve practice or provision. Evaluation outputs may include, for example, a self-evaluation report, an annual activity report, a development plan or a revised pedagogical plan.

Not all European countries have regulations or recommendations on internal evaluation of ECEC settings (see Figure E3). There are no top-level recommendations or requirements for settings to conduct any internal evaluation during the whole ECEC phase in Italy, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Türkiye. This exception is limited to the settings for younger children in Belgium (German-speaking Community), Bulgaria, Greece, France, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Slovakia and Liechtenstein. Moreover, in Austria, arrangements for the internal evaluation of settings are up to each *Bundesland*.

Figure E3 classifies the European countries that have top-level regulations on internal evaluation according to the rigour of the regulations. The three categories distinguished here (loose, moderate and strong) are based on the degree of obligation, the frequency specified and the requirements on the use of evaluation results. The settings' responsibility to develop their own strategies for internal evaluation is also taken into account. No definite correlation between these categories is inferred with respect to improvements in the quality of the setting. The aim is to display the range of regulations and provide a basis for reflecting on how public authorities frame this process.

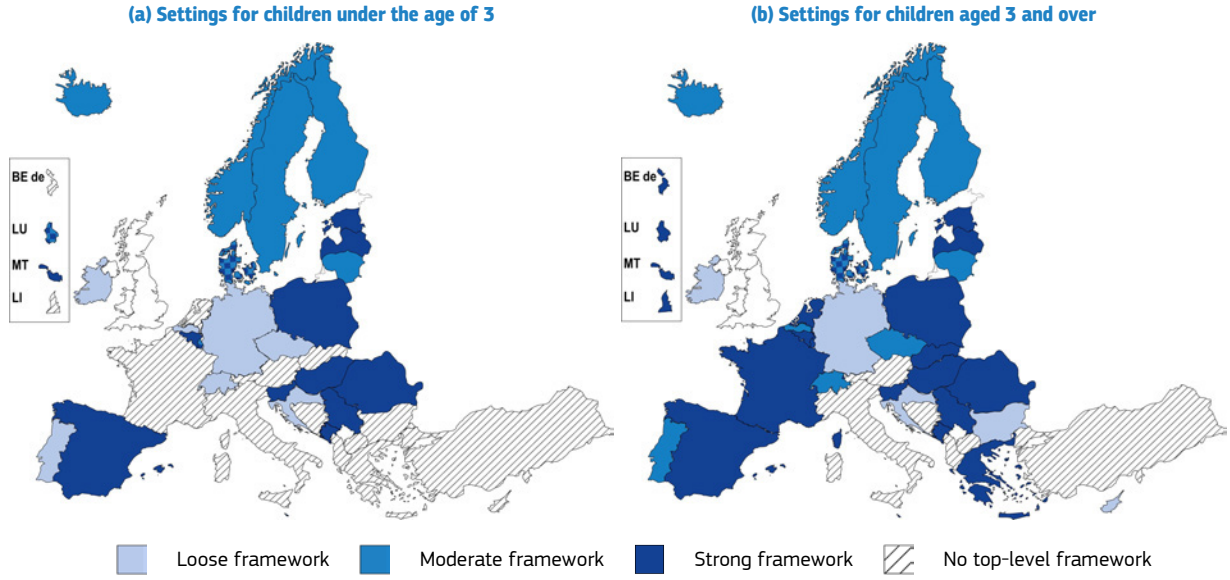
When a top-level framework for internal evaluation exists, it can be considered strong in the majority of education systems. This usually applies to ECEC settings across the entire age range. Most commonly, internal evaluation is compulsory and has to be carried out at regular intervals, ranging from annually to every 5 years. At the end of these intervals, ECEC settings must produce a self-evaluation report, an annual activity report, a development plan or a revised pedagogical plan based on the main outcomes of the process. Internal evaluation frameworks are strong across the whole ECEC phase in Belgium (French Community), Estonia, Spain, Latvia, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Montenegro and Serbia. ECEC falls under the same authority for the whole age range in most of these countries (see Figure A4a).

In **Estonia**, an internal evaluation report and a development plan informed by its results must be prepared by each preschool institution at least every 3 years.

In **Romania**, the evaluation committee of each ECEC setting should produce an internal evaluation report annually.

Three European education systems where different authorities are responsible for provision for children under 3 and for those aged 3 and over have strong evaluation framework in both phases: Belgium (French Community), Hungary and Poland. However, the regulations for internal evaluation may differ, as they are regulated by distinct authorities.

Figure E3: Top-level framework for the internal evaluation of ECEC settings, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Loose framework	Moderate framework	Strong framework
– Recommended (compulsory in exceptional cases) – No defined frequency – No regulation on use of results – No requirement to develop own strategy	– Compulsory – Must be regular or continuous – No report based on results to be produced within fixed intervals – Requirement for settings to develop own strategy	– Compulsory – Report based on results to be produced within fixed intervals – No requirement to develop own strategy

Explanatory notes

The internal evaluation of settings is a quality control process that seeks to evaluate or monitor the performance of the setting, report on overall quality and suggest ways to improve practice or provision. It is performed primarily by the setting's own staff. Depending on the country, the framework for the internal evaluation of ECEC settings may refer to top-level educational guidelines, or other regulations and recommendations.

Country-specific notes

Belgium (German-speaking Community): Internal evaluation of pre-primary schools should take place every 3 years. However, there is no obligation to produce an evaluation report.
Italy: By the 2025/2026 school year, it will be compulsory for all pre-primary schools for children aged 3 and over to complete a standard self-evaluation report every 3 years. The template for this report is currently being developed by the Ministry of Education and Merit ([19]).
Austria: Arrangements for the internal evaluation of settings are up to each Bundesland.
Portugal: For ECEC settings for children aged 3 and over, continuous internal evaluation is mandatory. However, there are no requirements for those settings to devise their own internal evaluation strategies.
Switzerland: For ECEC settings for older children, regular internal evaluation is compulsory in all cantons. Some cantons have additional requirements, such as drafting an evaluation report with measures for improvement.

In **Belgium (French Community)**, ECEC settings for younger children are required to perform an internal evaluation every 5 years to assess and review their quality improvement project. In contrast, pre-primary schools must evaluate their progress towards contractual objectives annually and adjust as needed. These objectives should align with priorities set by top-level authorities, such as improving inclusion for children with special needs or enhancing well-being and the school climate.

In **Poland**, ECEC settings for younger children must assess their adherence to top-level standards and adjust their pedagogical plans every 2 years. Nursery schools for children aged 3 and over are required to conduct annual internal pedagogical supervision of their educational processes, aligning with the yearly priorities set by the Minister of National Education. The results of these evaluations should be incorporated into the following year's pedagogical supervision plan.

In several countries with separate settings for younger and older children (see Figure A2b), strong top-level frameworks for internal evaluation apply only to ECEC settings for older children. There is no top-level evaluation framework for settings for younger children.

In **Greece**, the teaching board of a pre-primary school must evaluate its educational work and its implementation of action plans at the end of every year and must draft proposals for improvement in the next school year.

In **France**, pre-primary school staff must evaluate their school project every 5 years and revise it accordingly.

([19]) https://snv.pubblica.istruzione.it/snv-portale-web/public/scuole/rav.

In **the Netherlands**, pre-primary schools are required to produce an annual report that includes the results of an internal evaluation of the quality of their educational provision.

A small group of countries fall into the moderate category, where internal evaluation is compulsory but top-level regulations do not specify the frequency. Instead, the emphasis is placed on conducting regular or continuous evaluations. Where settings are required to publish the main results of internal evaluation or produce an evaluation report, the frequency is up to them. In addition, ECEC settings in this group of countries are responsible for developing their own internal evaluation strategies, allowing them to tailor their approach to their specific needs and resources.

In **Czechia**, the nursery schools are required to evaluate their work systematically, comprehensively and regularly, in accordance with a pre-prepared plan. The evaluation tools, methods and techniques are chosen by each nursery school, but must be described in the school's curriculum documents.

In **Lithuania**, according to a new order of the minister on internal evaluation of preschools ([20]), the self-assessment process must become an integral part of the school's activities. The preschool sets its own strategic planning cycle, which drives the frequency of internal evaluation. An ad hoc group of staff established to carry out internal evaluation must develop a self-assessment plan. Following holistic or thematic internal evaluation, this ad hoc group issues recommendations for improvement in a self-evaluation report.

In **Finland**, regular evaluation at the local level is a statutory duty for providers of ECEC. The national core curriculum further elaborates on the duty to evaluate at the provider (municipality or private service providers) and unit levels. The local curriculum must outline how the core curriculum will be implemented and detail the methods for monitoring and evaluating it within ECEC settings. Key evaluation results must be published online.

In **Sweden**, according to the curriculum for the preschool, the head must systematically and continually plan, monitor, evaluate and improve preschool educational provision.

In **Iceland**, preschools must outline their internal evaluation procedures in their own curriculum. They are required to issue a report along with an improvement plan; both have to be made public.

In **Norway**, all kindergartens must evaluate, on a regular basis, their pedagogical practices in the light of their own plans, the Kindergarten Act and the framework plan. In its annual plan, each kindergarten must explain how it will evaluate its own pedagogical practices.

In two countries, internal evaluation of ECEC settings presents features that span across the moderate and strong categories. The requirement for each setting to develop its own strategy for internal evaluation applies alongside the obligation to carry out internal evaluation at given intervals.

In **Denmark**, according to the Act on Daycare Facilities, the heads of ECEC settings are responsible for establishing a culture of evaluation in their institutions with the purpose of developing and improving the pedagogical learning environment. They are required to evaluate their pedagogical curriculum at least every second year. The evaluation must be published online.

In **Luxembourg**, the pedagogical plans created by settings for younger children must describe how they evaluate their educational processes. The revision of the pedagogical plan every 3 years entails an internal evaluation process.

In nine education systems, the framework for internal evaluation of ECEC settings is rather loose (Germany, Ireland and Croatia for the entire phase; Belgium (Flemish Community), Czechia, Portugal and Switzerland for the settings for younger children; Bulgaria and Cyprus for the settings for older children). In these education systems, ECEC settings have a great deal of autonomy in carrying out this task, as the evaluation framework does not prescribe the procedures, frequency or use of results. In systems with a loose framework, internal evaluation is recommended or, in the case of Bulgaria, compulsory. For example, the Bulgarian Pre-school and School Education Act requires kindergartens to carry out an internal assessment of education, granting them full autonomy in the process. In Germany, the common framework of the *Länder* for centre-based ECEC simply recommends regular internal and/or external evaluation as a fundamental basis for driving quality improvement. In Croatia, the national pedagogical standards for preschool education and care ([21]) only mention ECEC settings conducting self-assessments. In Czechia, the situation differs slightly, as the responsible authorities offer guidance on internal evaluation to ECEC settings for younger children ([22]), without making evaluation compulsory.

([20]) https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/b73dca50a0dd11eda06e9a4a8dd92fc1.

([21]) https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2008_06_63_2128.html.

([22]) https://www.mpsv.cz/web/cz/metodicke-materialy.

Parents' views are often considered in setting evaluation

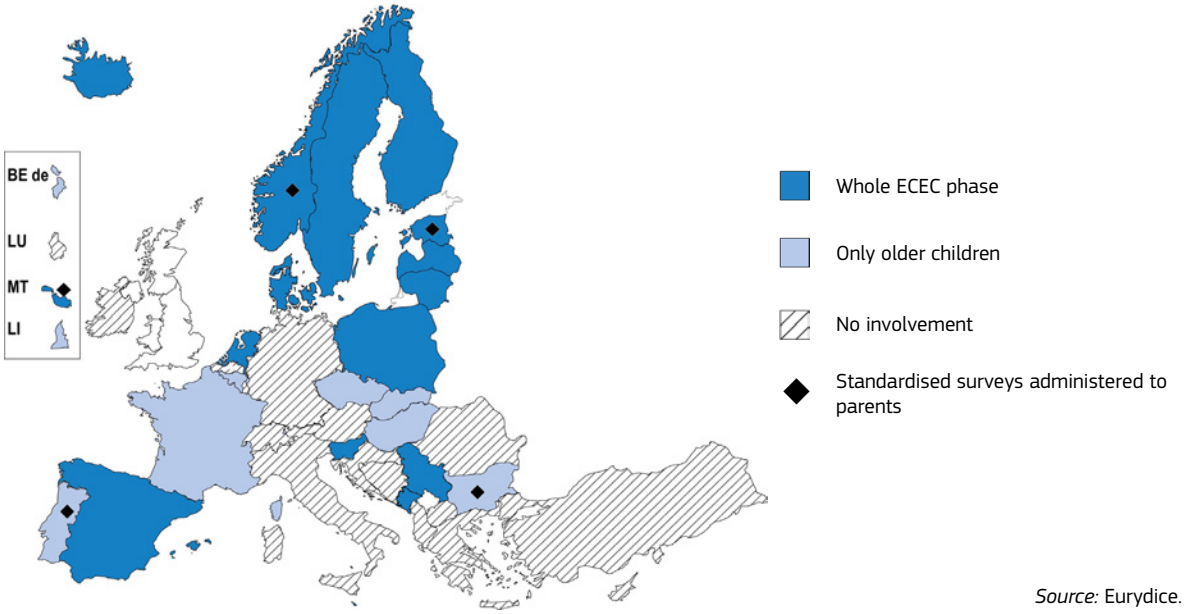
Both external and internal evaluation of settings offer opportunities for involving parents. Taking into account the views of parents on how to improve quality is seen as highly beneficial to ECEC provision. This contributes to considering diverse perspectives on the quality of ECEC and promotes a participatory approach to internal evaluation (European Commission: Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2023a).

This indicator focuses on evaluation procedures in which parents' views on the setting attended by their child are used to improve the quality of the setting. Consequently, national surveys sent to parents, which provide an overview of the ECEC system without providing specific feedback to individual settings, are not within the scope of this indicator. Moreover, this indicator deals with the content of top-level regulations and does not consider standard practices among external evaluators or within settings.

Figure E4 shows that 24 education systems have guidelines for involving parents in evaluation of ECEC settings. In countries with split settings (see Figure A2b), it is more common to involve parents in ECEC settings for older children. Parents participate in evaluation of settings for the entire age range in 15 education systems, while in 9 systems their involvement is limited to evaluation of settings for older children.

In a number of countries, the views of parents are expressed through their representatives in a formal body at the setting level that has the right to participate in the internal evaluation process. This applies to the whole ECEC age range in Denmark, the three Baltic states, Spain, Poland, Slovenia and Montenegro. This is also the case in settings for older children in four education systems: Belgium (French Community), Hungary, Malta and Slovakia. Moreover, in Denmark, the Netherlands and Slovenia, parents participate in a formal body at the setting or local level that is involved in external evaluation of ECEC settings.

Figure E4: Involvement of parents in the evaluation of centre-based ECEC settings, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure reflects the top-level educational guidelines and other top-level regulations and recommendations concerning the involvement of parents and children in internal and/or external evaluation of settings.
The standardised surveys administered either by external evaluators of ECEC settings or by top-level authorities with a view to supporting the evaluation of individual ECEC settings are also considered.

Country-specific note

Germany: In the state of Berlin, considering the view of parents in external evaluation of ECEC settings is mandatory.

The ways in which parents participate in the evaluation process as members of a formal body vary between countries, ranging from discussing and approving the evaluation report to contributing to the development of the internal evaluation process.

In **Denmark**, the parental boards in ECEC settings must be included in the development, evaluation and follow-up of the pedagogical curriculum. Moreover, if there are serious concerns about the quality of a specific ECEC facility, the municipal council must give the parental council the opportunity to provide comments on the action plan for improving the quality of the given ECEC institution.

In **Spain**, the school board, which includes parents, evaluates the overall running of the school, and school achievements in relation to the school development plan and annual general programme.

In **the Netherlands**, inspections of settings for younger children are carried out by the municipal health service. Parents are involved through a consultation with the parents' committee.

In **Slovenia**, parents, as members of the kindergarten council, discuss and adopt its internal evaluation report. They may also address matters raised by inspections during external evaluation.

Beyond the involvement of parents' representatives through their participation in formal bodies, some countries recommend or require evaluation methods that are likely to broaden the scope of the feedback received, such as interviews, surveys or focus groups. In Malta, parental surveys are recommended as an approach to internal evaluation of ECEC settings for younger children ([23]). Similar methods are advised in Montenegro for the whole ECEC phase ([24]). In Poland, ECEC settings for younger children are obliged to administer satisfaction surveys to parents as part of their internal evaluation. In Hungary, this requirement applies to kindergartens for children aged 3 and over.

In five countries, top-level authorities have implemented surveys designed to support the involvement of parents in the evaluation of ECEC settings. In Estonia ([25]) and Norway ([26]), top-level authorities regularly organise surveys to parents and also provide feedback to ECEC settings on their individual results in order to support the internal quality assurance process. In Bulgaria, Malta and Portugal, questionnaires are administered to parents as part of external evaluation of ECEC settings for older children.

By means of standardised questionnaires, parents are consulted in a consistent way on a variety of topics. The primary questions concern children's happiness in the ECEC setting (Estonia and Norway), cooperation and communication with parents (Estonia, Portugal and Norway) and satisfaction with premises (Estonia and Norway). Other areas addressed include the quality of educational provision (Portugal) and outdoor play environments (Norway).

In Belgium (German-speaking Community), Czechia, France, the Netherlands and Liechtenstein, top-level guidelines require or recommend parental involvement in the internal evaluation of settings for older children, without specifying the methods through which this is to be achieved. In Czechia, the framework programme for pre-primary education emphasises that parents should have the opportunity to participate in the development of the school's programme and its evaluation. In France, the evaluation framework that applies to pre-primary schools ([27]) advocates a participatory approach to internal evaluation, in which methods for collecting parents' views should enable gathering a wide range of parental perspectives. In Liechtenstein, the guidelines for quality assurance in the education system ([28]) recommend that schools include feedback from parents in their methods for internal evaluation, as it can significantly increase the informative basis from which the evaluation findings will be derived.

Finally, in four Nordic countries, the regulations state that parents must have the opportunity to evaluate their child's ECEC setting during the entire period, leaving it to the local authorities or the settings to decide how this should be done.

In **Finland**, the national core curriculum makes several references to parent participation in evaluation: they should be involved in the development and evaluation of, for instance, the municipality's curriculum, the operational culture and the activities of the ECEC setting.

([23]) https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/en/2021/national-standards-early-childhood-education-and-care-services-0-3-years-7433.
([24]) https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/410dfbd3-c202-48a6-90e4-ced271ee8482.
([25]) https://harno.ee/riiklikud-rahulolukusitlused.
([26]) https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/brukerundersokelser/foreldreundersokelsen-i-barnehage/.
([27]) https://www.education.gouv.fr/media/112373/download.
([28]) https://archiv.llv.li/files/sa/pdf-llv-sa-qse.pdf.

In **Sweden**, according to the curriculum for the preschool, the head of the preschool is responsible for providing the child's guardian with opportunities to participate in the work on quality.

In **Iceland**, the national curriculum guide for preschools emphasises that parents' views should be heard and their influence encouraged – for example, through the parent council and participation in internal evaluation.

In **Norway**, the framework plan for ECEC states that parents are entitled to participate in the evaluations of kindergartens.

Few countries undertake national evaluations of the quality of ECEC

While quality can be evaluated and improved at the level of an individual setting (see Figures E1 and E3), producing an overall picture can help reveal strengths and weaknesses at the system level. This broader perspective can guide national policy developments aiming to improve quality, such as by adjusting the national curriculum or supporting staff's continuing professional development (CPD) (European Commission: Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2022). These changes will, in turn, affect practices at the setting level.

Figure E5 looks at whether countries have implemented national-level evaluations of ECEC quality within the past 5 years. This analysis aims to highlight the importance of primary sources, such as visits to settings and field observations, in assessing ECEC quality at the national level. It distinguishes between (1) reports by top-level inspectorates or evaluators and (2) reports by other top-level bodies. The first category is based on aggregated findings from external evaluations of individual settings, while the second category consists of system-wide analyses targeting the national level rather than specific settings. In order to be considered, these system-wide analyses must rely on primary sources but, unlike in the first category, the data do not come from external evaluations of individual settings.

As shown in Figure E5, one third of European education systems compile national evaluation reports on ECEC quality, aggregating data from external evaluations of individual settings. In addition, system-wide analyses of ECEC by bodies other than those responsible for external evaluation of settings are conducted in seven education systems.

The scope and frequency of the reports aggregating the results from individual ECEC setting evaluations for system-wide evaluation vary. In seven countries, these reports, prepared by evaluation bodies responsible for the evaluation of higher levels of education, offer a general overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the education system, including ECEC. In Czechia, Estonia, the Netherlands ([29]) and Montenegro, these reports are published annually, while in Bulgaria, Portugal and Romania they occur less frequently.

In **Bulgaria**, after the introduction of external evaluation of ECEC settings, the inspectorate published a report in 2021 focusing on the quality of education at the pre-primary, primary and secondary education levels ([30]). The report examines various educational aspects, including teachers' skills in maintaining positive discipline during the lessons, professional attitudes, individualised approaches to children, the development of children's learning abilities and the early assessment of personal development and learning difficulties.

In **Czechia**, the annual report of the Czech School Inspectorate provides a comprehensive assessment of the state of the education system and the quality and effectiveness of education, including pre-primary education. It formulates conclusions and recommendations on further development and support of education ([31]).

In **Estonia**, the Ministry of Education and Research produces the External Evaluation Yearbook ([32]), which provides an overview, by level of education, of the results of state evaluation conducted to ensure the legal compliance of the activities in educational institutions (including group sizes, qualification of teachers and availability of support services). The yearbook also includes some thematic emphasis. In 2023, the evaluation focused on the effectiveness of teaching Estonian as a second language.

In **Portugal**, the Inspectorate-General of Education and Science published a report in 2024 focusing on the quality of education at the preschool, primary and secondary education levels, based on external evaluations of schools carried out in 2021–2022. The report

([29]) https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2024/04/17/rapport-de-staat-van-het-onderwijs-2024.

([30]) https://nio.government.bg/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Analysis-of-the-quality-of-education-provided-by-schools-and-kindergartens-inspected-during-the-2020_2021-academic-year.pdf.

([31]) https://www.csicr.cz/cz/cz/DOKUMENTY/Vyrocni-zpravy.

([32]) https://www.hm.ee/ministeerium-uudised-ja-kontakt/ministeerium/valishindamine?view_instance=0&current_page=1#valishindamise-uleva.

examines four domains – namely, self-evaluation, leadership and management, educational provision and outcomes ([33]).

In **Romania**, the latest report on the quality of education in pre-university institutions, including kindergartens, was published in 2018 ([34]).

In **Montenegro**, annual reports on the quality of educational institutions at the ECEC, primary and secondary levels are produced ([35]). They address a few educational aspects such as child-oriented activities and working with children who have SEN.

In six countries, the bodies responsible for external evaluation of centre-based settings produce aggregated reports exclusively dedicated to ECEC. In Luxembourg and Malta, these reports are specific to ECEC settings for younger children. In Ireland, Sweden and Iceland, they encompass the entire ECEC period, whereas in Slovakia they target ECEC provision for older children. Usually, such reports are prepared regularly (except in Sweden and Iceland).

In **Ireland**, two kinds of aggregated reports on ECEC are produced. The Child and Family Agency (Tusla) releases reports ([36]) summarising the findings of external inspections, focusing on ECEC settings' compliance with regulations regarding safety, quality of care and developmental support for children aged 0–6 years old. In addition, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education produces summaries of its evaluation on the nature, range and appropriateness of the educational experiences of children from birth to age 6, which are published within broader inspection reports ([37]).

In **Luxembourg**, the latest monitoring report, dated 2022, is based on annual reports from regional officers evaluating ECEC settings for younger children ([38]). This report focuses on various dimensions of quality: management, layout and equipment, interactions between staff and children, interactions with parents and internal evaluation.

In **Malta**, the latest aggregated report on ECEC for children under age 3 was published by the Director for Quality and Standards in Education in 2020 ([39]) and covers leadership style, pedagogical approach, inclusive education, child–staff ratios, compliance certificates and health and safety, among other topics.

In **Slovakia**, the Chief School Inspector submits an annual report on educational quality, which addresses pedagogical management, educational conditions, material and technical support and the educational process in kindergartens ([40]).

In **Sweden**, from 2015 to 2017, the Schools Inspectorate was given a 3-year task by the government to monitor and evaluate the pedagogical quality of preschools through a special audit. The final report was published in 2018 ([41]).

In **Iceland**, the Directorate of Education published a summary of the 2015–2021 external evaluation of preschool centres. This summary focused on management, education activities, human resources and internal evaluation ([42]).

([33]) https://www.igec.mec.pt/upload/Relatorios/AEE_2021-2022.pdf.

([34]) https://www.aracip.eu/storage/app/media/Documente/Resurse/Starea%20calitatii%20educatiei/Raportul%20activi.%20de%20evaluare%20extern%C4%83%20periodic%C4%83%20a%20calit%C4%83%C8%9Bii%20%C3%AEn%20238%20de%20unit%C4%83%C8%9Bi%20de%20%C3%AEnv%C4%83%C8%9B%C4%83m%C3%A2nt%20preuniversitar%20de%20stat.pdf.pdf.

([35]) https://www.gov.me/zzs/nadzor/izvjestaji-o-kvalitetu-rada-obrazovno-vaspitnih-ustanova.

([36]) https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Early_Years_Inspection_Reports_2018_-_2019,_Analysis_and_Trends.pdf.

([37]) 232560_fac408b3-689b-44cb-a8f1-3cb090018a05 (4).pdf.

([38]) https://www.snj.public.lu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2309036_SNJ_brochure_DQ_Suivi-Enfance_web.pdf.

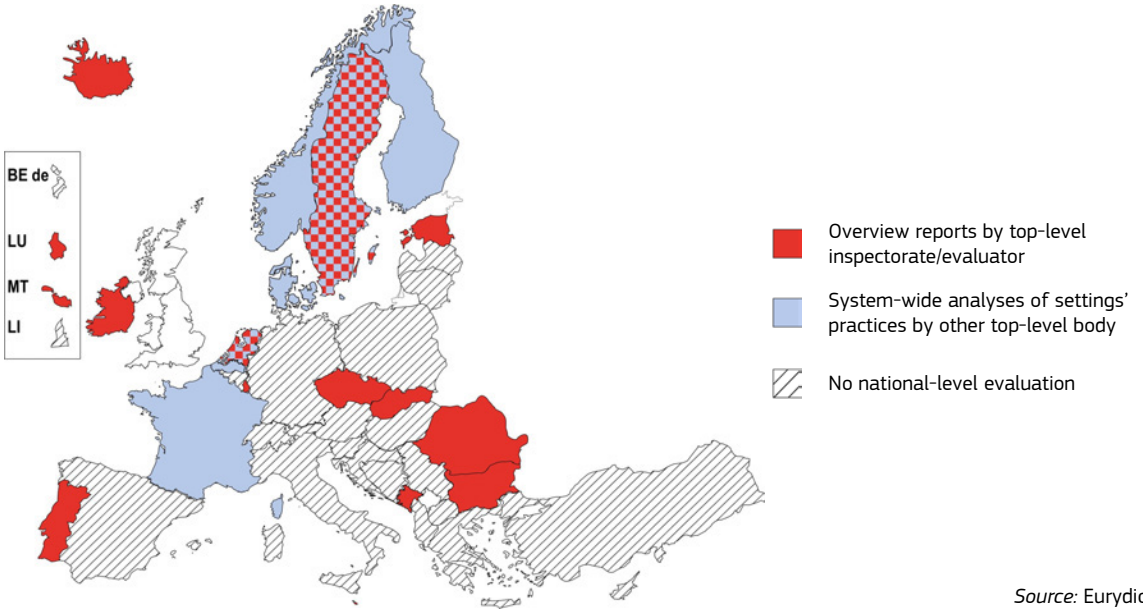
([39]) https://educationservices.gov.mt/en/dqse/Documents/publications/DQSE%20-%20ECEC%20Visits%20Report%20(2018-2019).pdf.

([40]) https://www.ssi.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/SS_SR_MS_final.pdf.

([41]) https://www.skolinspektionen.se/globalassets/02-beslut-rapporter-stat/granskningsrapporter/regeringsrapporter/redovisning-av-regeringsuppdrag/2018/forskolans-kvalitet-och-maluppfyllelse-slutrapport-feb-2018.pdf.

([42]) https://mms.is/sites/mms.is/files/ytra_mat_leiksk_samantekt.pdf.

Figure E5: National-level evaluation of ECEC quality, 2018–2023



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

Figure E5 considers the evaluation reports and system-wide analyses that address the quality of the education and care provided within ECEC settings and rely on primary sources, such as visits to settings and field observations. 'Overview reports by top-level inspectorate/evaluator' refers to reports aggregating the findings from external evaluation of individual ECEC settings. System-wide analyses target the national level rather than specific settings. Reports that focus on the activities of the evaluation body are not within scope. Only aggregated reports and other system-wide analyses published in 2018–2023 are considered.

The scope of the overview reports or system-wide analysis shown in Figure E5 vary. They may cover settings that ensure provision for the entire ECEC phase or focus on settings working exclusively with younger or older children. For more information on the age range covered, see Annex A, data complementing Figure E5. Since the absence of overview reports aggregating findings from external evaluation of ECEC settings can indicate different situations, Annex A distinguishes between countries where findings are not aggregated and those without external evaluation of ECEC settings. For more information on external evaluation of ECEC settings, see Figure E1.

Country-specific notes

Lithuania: The National Agency for Education, which started implementing a new external evaluation process for ECEC settings in autumn 2024, is responsible for aggregating the findings of these evaluations in reports and publishing them in the future.
Belgium (Flemish community) and **Portugal**: The national-level evaluations referenced in Figure E5 were published outside the time frame of the figure (i.e. in 2024).

There may be several reasons why only a limited number of countries aggregate findings from external evaluation of ECEC settings into comprehensive reports on overall system quality. As discussed earlier, some countries have no top-level regulations on external evaluation. Moreover, in several countries, local authorities have a lot of autonomy over their evaluation systems, leading to limited information at the central level. In other countries, external evaluations of ECEC settings focus on regulatory compliance rather than teaching and learning quality (see Figure E1). Finally, not all countries that evaluate both compliance and pedagogical quality consolidate their findings into comprehensive reports.

National-level reports on ECEC quality may be produced by top-level authorities other than those responsible for external evaluation of ECEC settings. Five countries have established national bodies specialising in evaluating the quality of the entire education system, including the ECEC sector. However, these organisations do not implement external evaluations of individual ECEC settings. These bodies are instead tasked with processing a great deal of data that originates from various levels of authority – both local and central – and are responsible for disseminating data and analyses to inform policy-making and decision-making.

In **Denmark**, the Evaluation Institute studies and evaluates a variety of phenomena related to ECEC service provision, either on its own initiative or at the request of ministries, local authorities and others. For instance, in May 2023, the Evaluation Institute and the National Research and Analysis Centre for Welfare published a comprehensive national quality study of ECEC settings for 0- to 2-year-olds ([43]).

In **France**, the General Inspectorate of Education, Sport and Research is in charge of monitoring the implementation of educational policy and the quality of teaching and learning at the system level. It carries out thematic studies that involve sample-based visits and field observations of educational institutions. It published a thematic report on the development of writing skills in pre-primary schools ([44]) in 2023 and another report on the pedagogical management of schools (including pre-primary schools) by school heads ([45]) in 2024.

The **Finnish** Education Evaluation Centre is responsible for the national evaluation of education. Its tasks include conducting national external evaluations of ECEC based on the national education evaluation plan approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The centre's latest evaluation studies deal with a variety of topics, such as the pedagogical contents of activities, ECEC leadership, curriculum implementation, education in the ECEC sector and the impacts of a national experiment on services for families with children ([46]).

In **Sweden**, the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) is responsible for national monitoring and evaluation of the school system, including ECEC. Skolverket produces thematic reports on ECEC – for example, a report on the implementation of the new curriculum in preschools ([47]).

In **Norway**, the Directorate for Education and Training is responsible for promoting quality improvement in the ECEC system. The directorate collects and publishes information, data and statistics to be used in quality improvement. It commissions thematic evaluations, such as the recent evaluation of kindergartens' implementation of the new framework plan for kindergartens ([48]).

Finally, in three education systems, top-level authorities or agencies in charge of social affairs have commissioned system-level analysis of the quality of ECEC settings specifically for younger children.

In **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, researchers from universities of Ghent and Leuven conducted a sample-based assessment of centre-based and home-based childcare centres in 2023, following a similar exercise in 2016. This assessment, knows as the MeMoQ (Measuring and Monitoring Pedagogical Quality), was commissioned by the agency responsible for ECEC for younger children (Growing Up (Opgroeien)), and funded by the Flemish government. The MeMoQ assessment involved field visits and observations of children and staff, focusing on various aspects of pedagogical quality within centre-based and home-based childcare centres, including emotional and educational support from staff, children's well-being and involvement, daily activities, organisation of the space and the availability and use of materials. The results ([49]) were published in 2024.

In **France**, the General Inspectorate of Social Affairs commissioned a one-off report on the quality of care and the prevention of mistreatment in nurseries ([50]). The report covered both structural aspects (child–staff ratios, premises, staff qualifications, funding) and content aspects (child–staff relationships, fulfilment of children's needs).

In **the Netherlands**, a university-based centre ([51]) monitors the quality of ECEC settings for younger children on behalf of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. This ongoing evaluation project involves yearly evaluations of a sample of childcare settings, primarily focusing on pedagogical aspects. The latest report spans from 2017 to 2023 ([52]).

([43]) https://www.uvm.dk/dagtilbud/viden-og-udvikling/aktuelle-puljer-og-projekter/kvalitetsundersoegelse-paa-dagtilbudsomraadet.
([44]) https://www.education.gouv.fr/l-enseignement-de-la-production-d-ecrits-etat-des-lieux-et-besoins-379446.
([45]) https://www.education.gouv.fr/le-pilotage-pedagogique-des-ecoles-par-les-directeurs-livret-1-etat-des-lieux-et-perspectives-414713.
([46]) https://www.karvi.fi/en/evaluations/early-childhood-education-and-care/thematic-and-system-evaluations.
([47]) https://www.skolverket.se/publikationsserier/rapporter/2023/forskolan-och-laroplanen---om-forandringar-i-sparen-av-lpfo-18.
([48]) https://www.udir.no/tall-og-forskning/evaluering-av-rammeplanen-for-barnehagen/.
([49]) https://www.opgroeien.be/kennis/toolbox/onderzoeksrapport-memoq-eenmeting-pedagogische-kwaliteit-vlaamse-kinderopvang.
([50]) https://www.igas.gouv.fr/Qualite-de-l-accueil-et-prevention-de-la-maltraitance-institutionnelle-dans-les.
([51]) https://www.monitorlkk.nl/.
([52]) https://www.monitorlkk.nl/pathtoimg.php?id=4518&image=kwaliteit_van_de_nederlandse_kinderopvang_de_kinderdagopvang__peuteropvang__buitenschoolse_opvang_en_gastouderopvang_in_beeld_gecombineerde_metingen_2017-2023__1.pdf.

It is worth noting that there are some other common methods of evaluating and monitoring the ECEC system, but these fall outside the scope of this indicator. Many countries regularly compile statistical reports that analyse various structural aspects of ECEC provision, such as staff qualifications and the sociodemographic characteristics of children. National summaries of surveys sent to parents regarding their use of ECEC services and satisfaction with them are also common ways of evaluating the quality of the ECEC system in Europe.

In **Germany**, the Federal Statistical Office releases results from a nationwide survey covering structural aspects among ECEC settings annually ([53]). The German Youth Institute regularly publishes analysis on the fulfilment of parents' needs for accessing ECEC services based on nationwide parental surveys ([54]). Since 2019, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth has issued regular reports ([55]) monitoring the implementation of the priorities for quality and participation set out in the Children's Daycare Quality and Improvement of Participation Act ([56]). This monitoring is based on official child and youth welfare statistics and nationwide surveys of ECEC centre staff and leaders, daycare providers, family daycarers, local youth welfare offices and parents, conducted every 2 years. In addition, a survey on children's perspectives on daycare centres was conducted in 2022 ([57]).

This analysis revealed that national evaluation reports on ECEC quality were compiled in only a minority of European education systems over the last 5 years. To maintain and improve the quality of ECEC systems, there should be more emphasis on standardising national evaluation practices, increasing support for comprehensive reporting and promoting transparency and best practices across all education systems.

([53]) https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Soziales/Kindertagesbetreuung/_inhalt.html#_xnykja6pe.

([54]) https://www.dji.de/en/aboIn ut-us/projects/projekte/dji-childcare-study-kibs/projekt-publikationen.html.

([55]) https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/service/publikationen/monitoringbericht-zum-kiqutg-2023-235364.

([56]) https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/service/gesetze/zweites-gesetz-zur-weiterentwicklung-der-qualitaet-und-zur-teilhabe-in-der-kindertagesbetreuung-kita-qualitaetsgesetz--201142.

([57]) https://www.dji.de/ueber-uns/projekte/projekte/entwicklung-von-rahmenbedingungen-in-der-kindertagesbetreuung-erik/erik-kinderbefragung.html.

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Glossary

Accreditation of early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings: a process of assessing whether settings intending to provide ECEC comply with the regulations in force (i.e. a certain set of rules and minimum standards).

Assistant: an individual who supports the core practitioner(s) with a group of children or class on a daily basis. Assistants usually have to meet lower qualification requirements than core practitioners, which may range from no formal requirements to, for instance, vocational education and training.

Centre-based ECEC (also known as nursery, crèche, kindergarten, daycare centre, pre-primary school or preschool): publicly regulated ECEC provision that is delivered in dedicated facilities primarily intended for the care and education of young children. These facilities may be stand-alone buildings or part of larger institutions, such as schools or community centres. Centre-based ECEC typically operates in a group setting, with trained staff members supervising and guiding children's activities.

Content- and language-integrated learning: a general term to designate different types of bilingual or immersion education.

Child–staff ratio: the number of children per full-time member of staff. This can be a maximum (regulated) number, which indicates the maximum number of children that one full-time member of staff is allowed to be responsible for, or it can be an average (the average number of children a full-time staff member can be responsible for).

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion: includes children from families with low income, low levels of parental education or low parental employment status, children whose parents have physical/mental disabilities, those in single parent families, children in foster care, children of women in shelters (fleeing violence at home), homeless children, and children who have lost a parent in military service, a terror attack or similar circumstances.

Children from migrant backgrounds: newly arrived / first-generation, second-generation and returning migrant children. They may have varying legal status (asylum seeker, refugee, unaccompanied minor, irregular migrant, etc.), varying length of stay in the host country (short- or long-term) and different reasons for having migrated (e.g. seeking protection, for economic reasons).

Children with special educational needs (SEN) / disabilities: a term used to describe the needs of a child who is not able to benefit from the education structures made generally available for children of the same age without additional support or adaptations. Therefore, SEN can cover a variety of needs, including physical or mental disabilities and cognitive or educational impairments. The concept is a construct that countries usually define further within their legislation.

Compulsory ECEC: the obligation for children to attend ECEC.

Continuing professional development (CPD): the formal in-service training undertaken throughout a career that allows ECEC staff members to broaden, develop and update their knowledge, skills and attitudes. It includes both subject-based and pedagogical training. Different formats are offered, such as courses, seminars, peer observation and support from practitioners' networks. In certain cases, CPD activities may lead to supplementary qualifications.

Core hours: the hours during which the ECEC setting is fully staffed and equipped to offer its main services/activities. The times for dropping off and picking up children usually fall outside the core hours.

Core practitioner: 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 teachers, kindergarten teachers, early childhood teachers, pedagogues, educators, childcare practitioners, pedagogical staff, etc. In small settings, core practitioners may also be the head of the setting while still working with children.

Diagnostic test: '[a] test whose purpose is to evaluate a learner's strengths and areas for development … [It is] a means of discovering what level of support or challenge the learner will need. A diagnostic test is often a first step in developing an individual learning plan. It is usually carried out when the learner enters their course of study, and its results are sometimes referred to as the learner's "entry behaviour", or starting point' (Wallace, 2015). Diagnostic tests can be national/standardised or can be defined by the settings and staff themselves.

Digital education: for the purpose of this report, digital education is understood as covering two different but complementary perspectives: the development of children's early digital competences on the one hand, and the use of digital technologies to support, enhance and transform the learning process on the other.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC): encompasses educational or developmental programmes as well as childcare services for children from birth to the start of compulsory primary education.

Educational guidelines: official documents issued to steer or guide ECEC providers that may include main principles, values, developmental and learning goals or learning areas, competences, educational/pedagogical approaches, suggested activities and assessment methods. Such documents may be national curriculum frameworks or criteria for developing local curricula; they might be expressed as practical guidelines for ECEC practitioners, be incorporated into legislation, or be published as a reference framework of educational/care standards, care and education plans, etc. Depending on how formal or binding they are, steering documents allow varying degrees of flexibility in the way they are applied in ECEC settings. There may be more than one document applicable to ECEC within a country, but they all contribute to establishing the fundamental framework in which ECEC staff are required (or advised, where mandatory requirements do not exist) to develop their own practice to meet children's developmental needs.

Evaluation and monitoring of the ECEC system: a process involving the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data in order to check ECEC system performance in relation to goals and standards and to identify any improvements needed. Monitoring may focus on structural data (e.g. tracking children's participation rates or child–staff ratios), or information concerning service development and delivery (e.g. children's progress, curriculum implementation or staffing issues). Monitoring can be applied at various levels of the ECEC system: at the local, regional or system level.

External evaluation of settings: a quality control process carried out by individuals or teams who report to a local, regional or top-level education authority and who are not directly involved in the activities of the setting being evaluated. It seeks to evaluate or monitor the performance of the setting, report on the quality of the provision and suggest ways to improve practice.

Focus group: interviews in which a group of staff members or stakeholders from ECEC settings are asked about their perspectives on ECEC quality.

Foreign language: a language described as such in the educational guidelines set out by top-level authorities. Foreign languages may also be referred to as 'modern languages', or the 'second or third language' as opposed to the 'first language', which may be used to describe the language of the service in countries with more than one state language. The description used is based on an education-related definition, unrelated to the political status of a language. Thus, certain languages regarded as regional or minority languages from a political perspective may be included in the curriculum as foreign language(s).

Free of charge ECEC: implies no payment for typical educational and care activities. There might still be a fee payable for meals taken during the session, transport to the setting, additional hours of provision and/or extra activities (e.g. English, swimming).

Head of centre-based ECEC setting: the person with the most responsibility for the administrative, managerial and/or pedagogical leadership at the ECEC centre. As part of the leadership role, centre heads may be responsible for the monitoring of children, the supervision of other staff, contact with parents and guardians and/or the planning, preparation and carrying out of the pedagogical work in the centre. Centre heads may also spend part of their time working with the children.

Home language: the language often spoken at home by children where it differs from the language of the service. In many cases, the children's home language is their mother tongue.

Home-learning guidance: guidance helping parents to encourage their children's learning at home by providing information and ideas to families on how to help their children with curriculum-related activities. ECEC services can inspire parents to offer their children all kinds of learning situations at home, both implicit and explicit – for example, by involving children in daily routines (making meals, phone calls or grocery lists, getting dressed, etc.) and enriching these routines with stimulating discussions. Top-level authorities may also provide home-learning guidance in a written format (e.g. digital).

Home-based ECEC (childminding service or family daycare): publicly regulated ECEC provision that is delivered in a provider's home or another home-like place. Home-based ECEC is usually provided to a small group by one childminder. Sometimes, two or three childminders deliver their services together. Home-based ECEC excludes individual care that occurs in the child's own home (e.g. live-in and live-out nannies and babysitters, care by relatives).

Initial education: any formal initial education or training that prepares ECEC staff for working with children. It usually includes general education and professional training.

Internal evaluation of settings: a quality control process that seeks to evaluate or monitor the performance of the setting, report on overall quality and suggest ways to improve practice or provision. In contrast to external evaluation, it is performed primarily by staff members of the setting.

Language of the service: the language that is used to deliver the content of the educational guidelines and, more broadly, for official communication inside and outside the setting, with stakeholders such as parents and education authorities.

Legal entitlement to ECEC: a statutory duty of ECEC providers to secure publicly subsidised ECEC provision for all children living in a catchment area whose parents, regardless of their employment, socioeconomic or family status, require a place for their child. A legal entitlement to ECEC exists when every child has the enforceable right to benefit from ECEC provision.

- **Targeted legal entitlement** is a statutory duty for ECEC providers to secure (publicly subsidised) ECEC provision for children living in a catchment area who fall into certain categories. These categories can be based on various aspects, including the employment, socioeconomic or family status of their parents.

Maternity leave: a period of paid absence from work to which a woman is legally entitled immediately before and after childbirth. The part of the leave used up before the birth is called prenatal leave and the part thereafter is termed postnatal leave.

Medical staff (e.g. paediatricians, nurses): those responsible for monitoring children's health, administering medications, managing minor injuries, conducting health assessments and providing guidance on health-related matters.

National tests: standardised tests/examinations set by top-level public authorities and carried out under their responsibility. Standardised tests/examinations are any form of test that (1) requires all test takers to answer the same questions (or questions selected from a common bank of questions) and (2) is scored in a standard or consistent way. National tests are to be distinguished from standardised guidelines and other tools designed to assist teachers in undertaking forms of pupil assessment other than national testing.

Nutritionists/dietitians: those who may develop and oversee meal plans and nutrition education in ECEC centres to ensure children receive balanced and healthy meals.

Occupational/psychomotor therapists work with children who have physical or developmental challenges, helping them develop fine motor skills, sensory processing, coordination and daily living skills.

Official language: a language used for legal and public administration purposes within a specified area of any given state. The official status can be limited to part of the state or extend over its entire territory. All state languages are official languages but not all languages with official language status are state languages (e.g. Danish, which has official language status in Germany, is a regional or minority language and not a state language).

Parent liaisons (family engagement coordinators): those who facilitate communication and engagement between parents and the ECEC centre, ensuring parents are involved in their children's education and well-being.

Parental leave: paid time off work to care for the child, keeping workers' social security rights intact.

Parenting programmes: formal classes to help families create a home environment that supports children as learners. The classes cover a variety of topics related to children's education and development (e.g. encouraging speech/language development, maintaining discipline, building self-esteem and understanding challenging behaviour).

Paternity leave: an entitlement to absence from work that may be taken by the biological father or mother's partner immediately after the child's birth or during the first year(s) of a child's life.

Pre-primary classes: organised in the last 1–2 year(s) of ECEC, they aim to prepare children for primary education with a specific programme, compulsory for all children, to smooth the transition to school education. Pre-primary classes may be organised within centre-based ECEC settings or in primary schools.

Private ECEC settings: settings that may be owned and operated by businesses, which are profit-oriented, or by the voluntary (non-profit) sector, which includes charitable organisations (churches, trade unions, businesses and others). Private settings may be government dependent or independent. The terms 'government dependent' and 'independent' refer only to the degree of a private institution's dependence on core funding from public sources; they do not refer to the degree of government direction or regulation. 'Core funding' refers to the funds that support the basic services of the institutions. It does not include funds received for ancillary services, such as lodging and meals.

- A government-dependent private institution is one that receives more than 50 % of its core funding from public sources (government agencies, regions, municipalities).
- An independent private institution is one that receives less than 50 % of its core funding from public sources (government agencies, regions, municipalities).

Process quality: refers to how well the setting supports the learning process. The main areas evaluated are how the curriculum is implemented (the quality and variety of activities), the quality of interactions and relationships between staff and children (how practitioners encourage children's development and provide them with emotional support) and how well children interact with each other.

Professional duty: a task described as such in working regulations, contracts, legislation or other regulations on the teaching profession.

Psychologists/counsellors: those who assess and support the psychological well-being of young children. Their role includes conducting developmental assessments, providing counselling and collaborating with educators and families to address developmental and behavioural issues.

Public ECEC settings: settings owned and operated by public authorities at the top, regional or local level. They are not profit-driven, but aim to provide a public service.

Purchasing power standard (PPS): an artificial currency unit. Theoretically, one PPS can buy the same amount of goods and services in each country. However, price differences across borders mean that different amounts of national currency units are needed for the same goods and services depending on the country. PPS values are derived by dividing any economic aggregate of a country in the national currency unit by the purchasing power parity.

Regional or minority language: a language that is 'traditionally used within a given territory of a state by nationals of that state who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the state's population'; it is different from the state language(s) of that state (Council of Europe, 1992). As a general rule, these are languages of populations that have their ethnic roots in the areas concerned or have been settled in the regions concerned for generations. Minority/regional languages can have the status of an official language, but by definition this status will be limited to the areas in which they are spoken.

School readiness: the definition of school readiness varies, as there is still much debate on what it means to be 'ready' for school. Here, it implies that a child possesses the motivation and cognitive and socioemotional abilities required to learn and succeed in school.

Social pedagogues focus on the educational and holistic development of children within the ECEC setting, emphasising social, emotional and cognitive growth. They aim to create a nurturing learning environment and develop children's social skills.

Social workers work with families to address challenges beyond education, including social, economic and mental health issues, while also providing counselling and crisis intervention services. They also assist with resource allocation to connect families with essential community services.

Special education assistants work with children who have SEN/disabilities, providing individualised support and accommodations to help them participate in ECEC activities. They may also assist with planning of the day, small group activities and the overall learning/playing environment for all children in the group.

Specific training for headship: depending on the circumstances, the specific training may be provided either prior to the application or recruitment procedures for headship, or during the 1–2 years immediately after taking up the post. Its aim is to equip future ECEC heads with the skills required to carry out their new duties. It is not to be confused with initial education of ECEC staff or CPD.

Speech therapists help children with speech and language difficulties or disorders, facilitating communication and language development.

State language: any language with official status throughout an entire country. Any state language is an official language.

Steering documents: different kinds of official documents containing regulations, guidelines and/or recommendations for education institutions.

Structural quality: refers to the framework conditions supporting the day-to-day practice within settings. It is evaluated through checking compliance at the setting level with ECEC system regulations or guidelines on health and safety, staff qualifications, group sizes or child–staff ratios. In some cases, the pedagogical plan is also checked to ensure it meets the standards set out in top-level educational guidelines.

Survey: data-gathering method relying on a standardised questionnaire administered to a target group.

Sustainability education: education that aims to instil in children, staff and settings the values and motivations to act for sustainability now and in the future – in one's own life, in their communities and as global citizens – and aims to develop children's early knowledge and understanding of sustainability concepts and problems.

Top-level authority: the highest level of authority with responsibility for education in a given country, usually located at the national (state) level. However, in Belgium, Germany, Spain and Switzerland, the administrations of the communities, *Länder*, autonomous communities and cantons, respectively, either are wholly responsible or share responsibilities with the national level for all or most areas relating to education. Therefore, these administrations are considered the top-level authorities for the areas where they hold the responsibility, while for the areas for which they share responsibility with the national level both are considered to be top-level authorities.

Top-level regulations/recommendations: regulations/recommendations issued by the top-level authority.

Well-paid leave: includes post-natal maternity, paternity and parental leave. 'Well-paid' means earnings-related payment of 66 % of earnings or more.

Annexes

Annex A: Additional data for figures

Degree of ECEC system integration, by dimension, 2023/2024 (data complementing Figure 5)

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
Governance	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1
Access	2	2	2	1	2	3	3	3	0	1	2	2	1	0	1	3	1	2	2	0
Staff	1	1	1	2	0	2	2	2	0	2	1	2	2	2	1	0	2	1	1	0
Curriculum	1	0	1	0	0	2	2	2	2	0	2	1	2	2	0	2	2	1	1	2
Total	4	3	4	3	2	8	8	8	3	3	6	5	6	5	2	6	6	5	4	3
	NL	**AT**	**PL**	**PT**	**RO**	**SI**	**SK**	**FI**	**SE**		**AL**	**BA**	**CH**	**IS**	**LI**	**ME**	**MK**	**NO**	**RS**	**TR**
Governance	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1		0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0
Access	1	1	2	2	1	3	1	3	3		0	1	1	0	1	0	0	3	1	0
Staff	1	0	1	2	0	2	0	2	2		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1
Curriculum	0	2	1	1	2	2	0	2	2		0	2	0	2	1	2	2	2	2	1
Total	2	4	4	5	4	8	1	8	8		1	6	2	5	3	5	4	8	5	2

Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

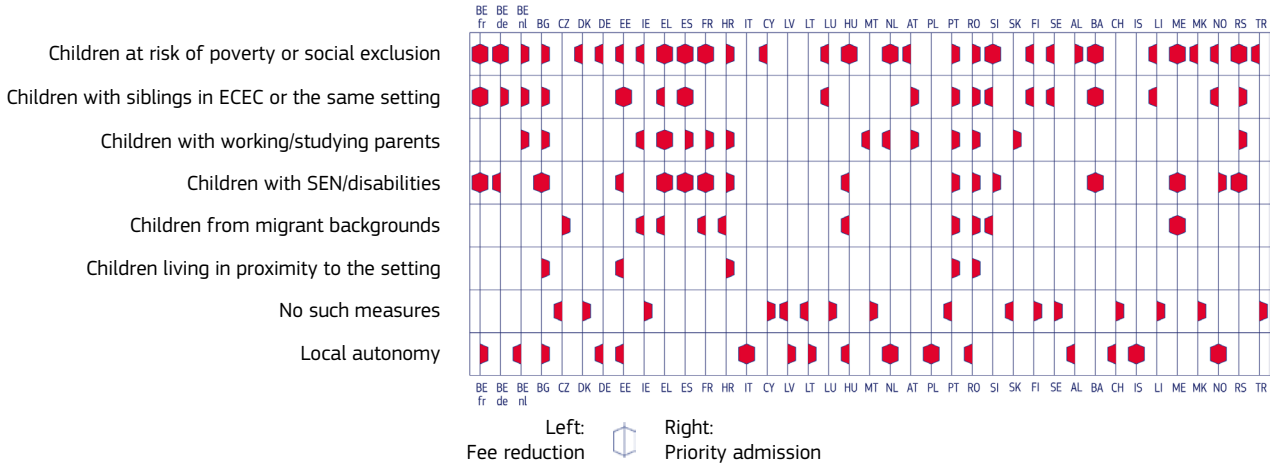
Governance:
1: Same ministry or top-level authority responsible for the entire ECEC
0: Different ministries responsible

Access: place guarantee
3: From an early age (6–18 months)
2: from 3 years of age
1: For the last 1–2 years of ECEC
0: No place guarantee

Staff:
2: Staff for the entire ECEC phase qualified at the bachelor's level
1: Staff working with children over age 3 qualified at the bachelor's level
0: Qualification lower than bachelor's is required

Curriculum:
2: integrated framework for the entire ECEC phase
1: Different guidelines for settings working with younger and older children
0: no educational guidelines for the first phase of ECEC

Target groups for fee reductions or priority admission in centre-based ECEC settings for children under age 3, 2023/2024 (data complementing Figure B8)



Source: Eurydice.

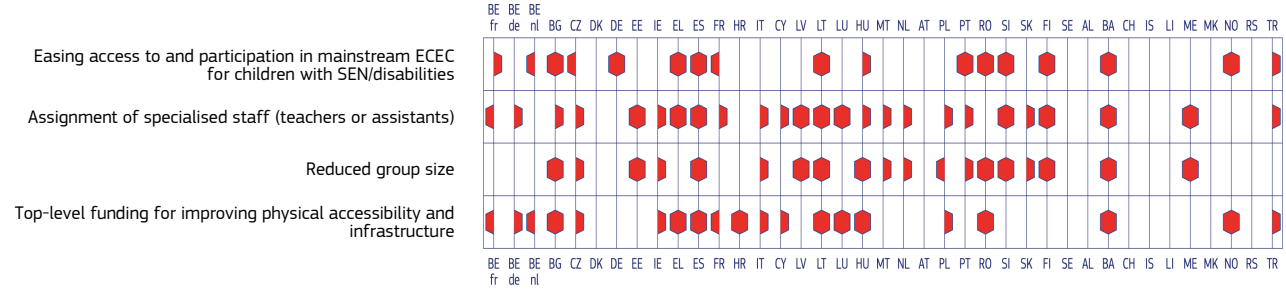
Country-specific notes

Belgium (French Community): According to legislation, ECEC settings may select additional target groups for priority admission.
Bulgaria: Private kindergartens included in the system of state financing must provide the opportunity for no fewer than 20 % of the children enrolled, including children with SEN or gifted children, to be educated for free. Municipalities can award priority admission to other target groups.
Hungary: In the case of nursery institutions, the amount of the fee may be reduced, or it may be waived.

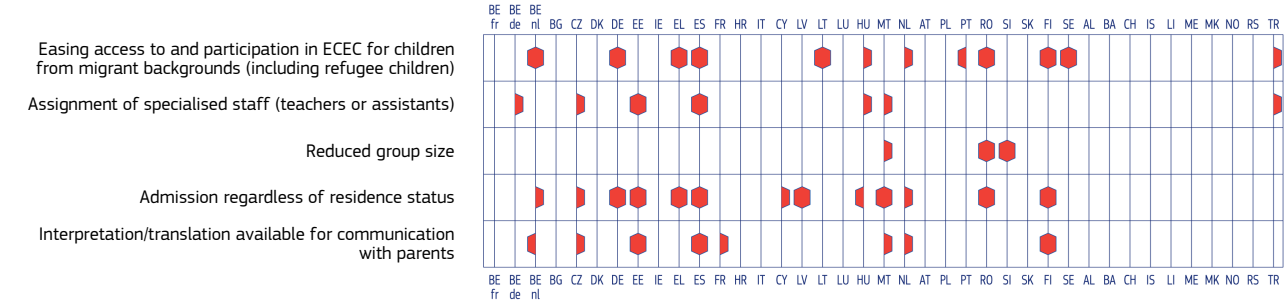
Germany: The specific criteria to be applied and the amount of the fee reductions are generally decided by the *Länder* and providers.
Estonia: The level of fee reduction depends on the municipality. Similarly, the definition of low income differs between municipalities, but it is most often related to minimum wage.
Luxembourg: Target groups can benefit from reductions in the sector of non-formal education.
Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania: Free public ECEC is provided for all children from the earliest years.
Netherlands: Childcare benefits are income-based, with low-income, dual-working-parent households receiving up to 96% of costs. Municipalities provide subsidised care for children aged 2.5 to 4 whose parents do not qualify, setting fees or offering free care, with a spot guaranteed for each child.
Romania: Local authorities may partly or fully cover the costs of food for vulnerable children in ECEC.
Norway: Some regions have free kindergarten / kindergarten fee reductions for all children.

Targeted top-level policies and measures promoting access to mainstream ECEC for children facing barriers, 2023/2024 (data complementing Figure B9)

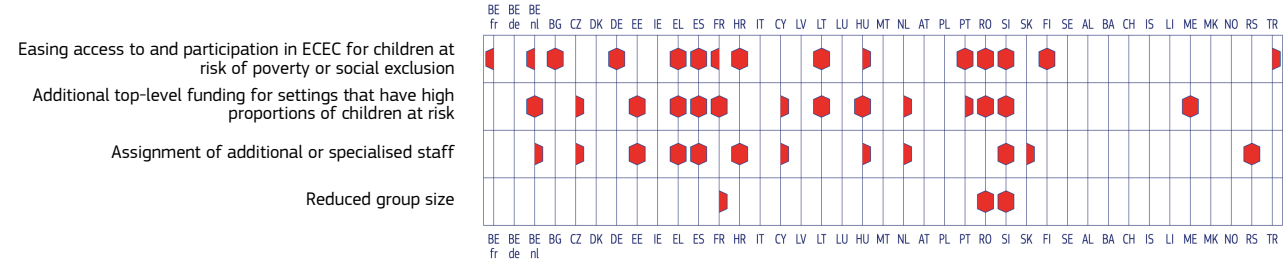
Easing access to and participation in mainstream ECEC for children with SEN/disabilities



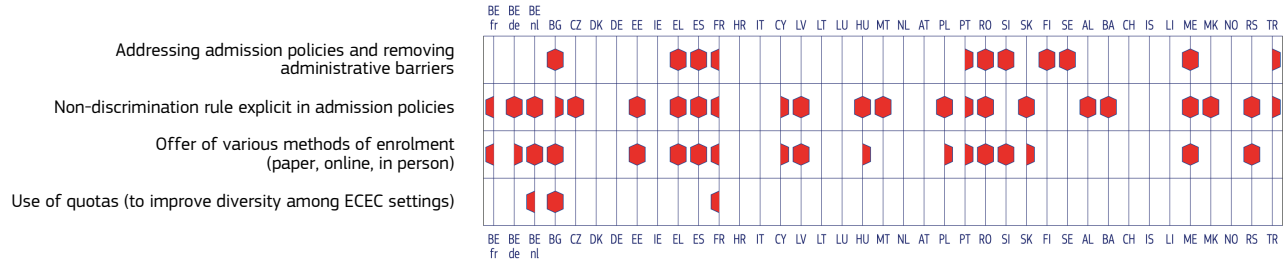
Easing access to and participation in ECEC for children from migrant backgrounds (including refugee children)



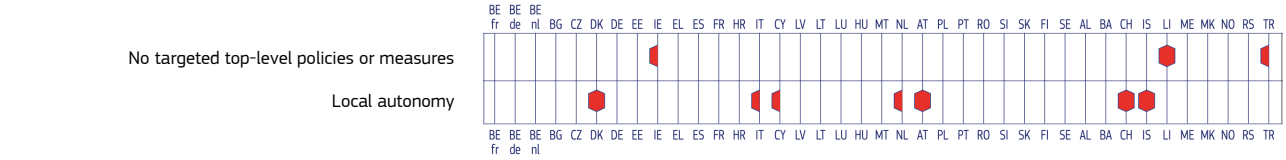
Easing access to and participation in ECEC for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion



Addressing admission policies and removing administrative barriers for all children facing barriers



Other

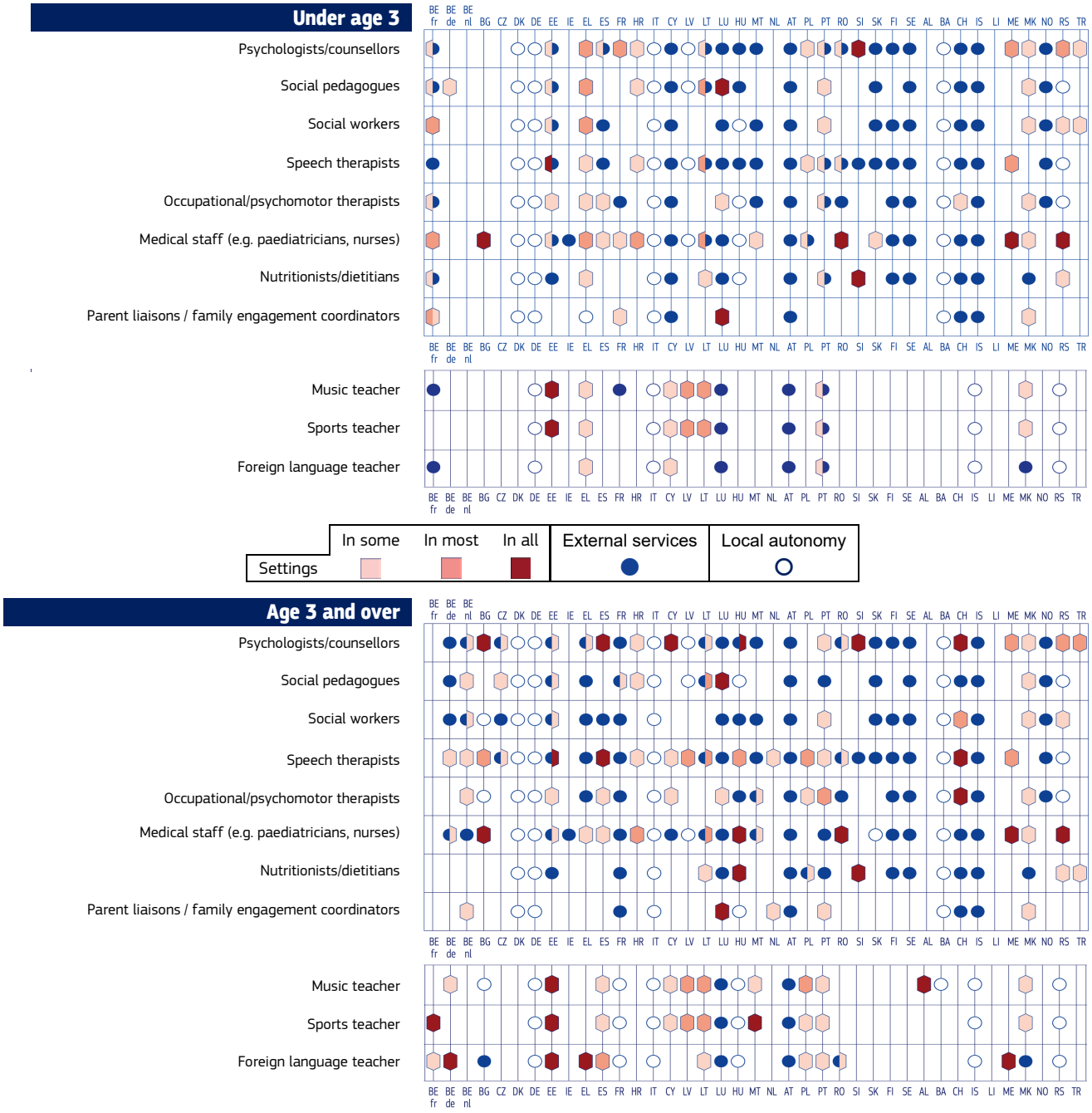


Source: Eurydice.

Left: under 3 years

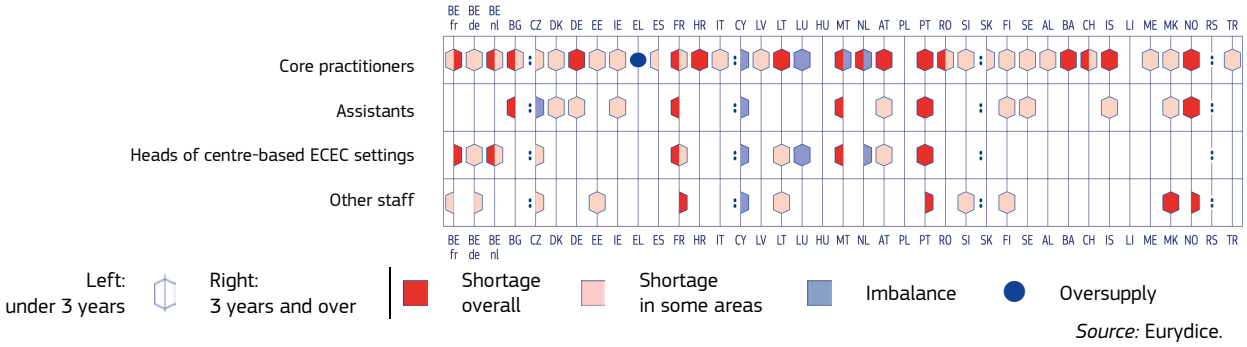
Right: 3 years and over

Specialist and educational support staff in ECEC, 2024/2025 (data complementing Figure C6a)



Source: Eurydice.

Shortages of staff in ECEC settings, 2023/2024 (data complementing Figure C7)



Source: Eurydice.

Maximum number of children allowed per staff member, per core practitioner and per group in centre-based ECEC provision, 2023/2024 (data complementing Figure C8)

Age		BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
0	sm	x	x	x	3	x	3	●	○	3	4	x	5	x	●	x	○	x	6	4	3
	cp	7	6	9	4	4	●	●	○	3	6	6–8	●	5	●	6	○	6	12	6	3
	gp	14	●	18	8	4	●	●	○	●	12	6–8	●	5	●	6	○	6	12	12	●
1	sm	x	x	x	7	x	3	●	8	5	4	x	8	x	●	x	●	x	6	4	5
	cp	7	6	9	20	8	●	●	16	5	6	10–14	●	8	●	6	●	10	12	6	5
	gp	14	●	18	20	24	●	●	16	●	12	10–14	●	8	●	6	●	10	12	12	●
2	sm	x	x	x	7	x	3	●	8	6	4	x	8	x	●	x	●	x	8	4	6
	cp	7	6	9	20	8	●	●	16	6	6	16–20	●	14	●	16	●	15	16	6	6
	gp	14	●	18	20	24	●	●	16	●	12	16–20	●	14	●	16	●	15	16	12	●
3	sm	●	●	●	14	x	6	●	12	11	13	x	●	x	x	17	●	x	10	10	x
	cp	19	19	●	23	12	●	●	24	22	25	25	●	18	26	25	●	20	20	25	12
	gp	●	●	●	28	24	●	●	24	22	25	25	●	18	26	25	●	20	20	25	14
4	sm	●	●	●	14	x	6	●	12	11	x	x	●	x	x	17	●	x	x	10	x
	cp	19	19	●	23	12	●	●	24	22	25	25	●	20	26	25	●	20	24	25	14
	gp	●	●	●	28	24	●	●	24	22	25	25	●	20	26	25	●	20	24	25	19
5	sm	●	●	●	14	x	6	●	12	11	x	x	12	x	x	17	●	x	x	10	○
	cp	19	19	●	23	12	●	●	24	22	25	25	24	23	26	25	●	20	24	25	○
	gp	●	●	●	28	24	●	●	24	22	25	25	24	23	26	25	●	20	24	25	○

Age		NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	CH	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
0	sm	x	4–5	x	5	x	6	x	4	○	x	x	4	●	3	4	x	3	x	x
	cp	3	8–10	5	10	9	●	5	●	○	●	3	4	●	5	8	4	7	7	10
	gp	16	8–10	●	10	9	12	12	12	○	●	6	●	●	8	8	8	●	7	10
1	sm	x	4–8	x	8	x	6	x	4	●	x	x	4	●	4	6	x	3	x	x
	cp	5	8–15	8	16	15	●	5	●	●	●	5	4	●	5	12	6	7	12	10
	gp	16	8–15	●	16	15	12	15	12	6–12	●	10	●	●	10	12	12	●	12	10
2	sm	x	4–8	x	10	x	6	x	4	●	x	x	4	●	5	7	x	3	x	x
	cp	8	8–15	8	20	20	●	5	●	●	●	8	6	●	12	14	8	7	16	10
	gp	16	8–15	●	20	20	12	15	12	6–12	●	15	●	●	12	14	15	●	16	10
3	sm	x	10–13	x	13	x	9	x	7	●	x	x	4	●	5	10	9	6	x	10
	cp	8	20–25	25	25	20	●	20	●	●	25	11	6	●	12	20	18	14	20	20
	gp	16	20–25	25	25	20	17	20	21	6–12	25	23	●	●	12	20	18	●	20	20
4	sm	x	10–13	x	13	x	11	x	7	●	x	x	11	●	x	12	10	6	x	10
	cp	●	20–25	25	25	20	●	21	●	●	25	12	23	●	20	24	20	14	24	20
	gp	●	20–25	25	25	20	22	21	21	9–15	25	25	23	●	20	24	20	●	24	20
5	sm	x	10–13	x	13	x	11	x	7	●	x	x	11	●	x	13	13	6	x	10
	cp	●	20–25	25	25	20	●	22	●	●	25	14	23	●	20	25	25	14	26	20
	gp	●	20–25	25	25	20	22	22	21	9–15	25	28	23	●	20	25	25	●	26	20

x No assistants ● No top-level regulations ○ No provision for this age group

NB: cp, core practitioner; gp, group; sm, staff member.

Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The table refers to the maximum number of children per staff member, per core practitioner and per group present at the same time during the core hours of a working day, as defined in regulations/recommendations. It does not take into account the regulations for age-heterogeneous groups or reductions when children with special needs are included in the group. Assistants recruited to support children with special education needs are not considered.

Depending on the education system, regulations may specify the maximum number of children per staff member (if assistants are regularly present), per core practitioner or per group.

In education systems where the maximum group size is indicated, but either the maximum number of children per staff member or per core practitioner is not specified, the information has been calculated according to the following methodology.

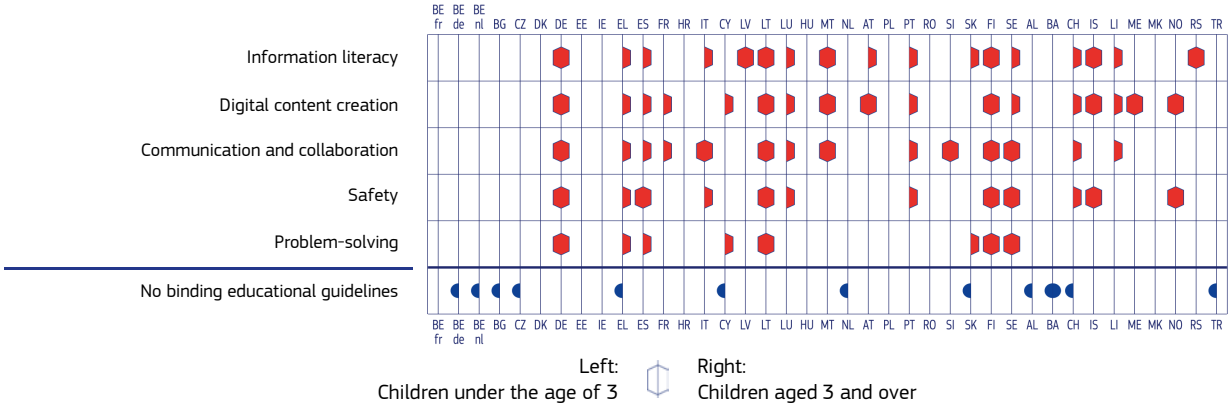
- When an assistant is required in each group of children:
  - the maximum number of children per staff member corresponds to the maximum number of children per group divided by two (one core practitioner plus one assistant) – it is divided by more than two when the regulations state that more than one core practitioner or assistant should be present at the same time with each group of children;

- the maximum number of children per core practitioner corresponds to the maximum number of children per group – it is divided by two or more when the regulations state that two or more core practitioners should be present at the same time with each group of children.
- When there is no requirement to have an assistant in each setting for older children, the maximum number of children per staff is not indicated.

Country-specific notes

Belgium (Flemish Community): in June 2024, child–staff ratios were introduced for the youngest children, with a grace period until the end of 2026 for providers to adapt. Maximum 5 children under age 1 per staff member and maximum 8 children aged 1–2 per staff member.
Czechia: For age 2, the table shows the situation in *dětské skupiny*. For those already in *mateřské školy*, the situation is the same as for 3-year-olds. For ages 3–5, the table shows the situation in *mateřské školy*. For children in the same age range still in *dětské skupiny*, the situation is the same as for 2-year-olds.
Ireland: The table shows the maximum ratio for sessional (up to 3.5 hours per day) ECEC provided under the free early childhood care and education scheme for 3- to 5-year-olds. The ratio is 1:8 for all other ECEC services.
Greece: Data covers the public sector only. For 2-year-olds, the table shows the situation for children aged under 30 months. Over this age, the situation is the same as for 3-year-olds.
France: For children aged 3–4, the maximum group size is regulated at the local (*département*) level.
Croatia: For children in the 'age 1' category, the table shows the situation for children aged between 12 and 18 months. Between 18 and 24 months, the maximum number of children is 12.
Italy: For children under age 3, this is a matter of regional autonomy.
Cyprus: In groups for children aged 3–6, one assistant is responsible for up to two groups of children.
Hungary: For children under age 3, there are two early childhood educators (*kisgyermeknevelő*) per group and one assistant (*bölcsődei dajka*) per two groups. For children aged 3–5, there is one core practitioner (*óvodapedagógus*) in the morning and another in the afternoon, with 2 hours' overlap. There is one assistant (*dajka*) per group and one pedagogical assistant (*pedagógiai asszisztens*) per three groups.
Malta: If classes of 3-year-olds ('Kinder 1') include more than 12 children, or classes of 4-year-olds ('Kinder 2') include more than 14 children, a learning support educator is assigned. These professionals are not considered assistants, but typically support pupils with special needs.
Austria: The table shows the variations in the regulations across *Bundesländer*.
Slovenia: Municipalities can increase the maximum number of children per group by two, based on local community needs. In practice, the number of children per group is raised in about half of the groups.
Sweden: There are no regulations; the table indicates suggested benchmarks.

Digital competences in the top-level educational guidelines for ECEC, 2023/2024 (data complementing Figure D4)



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

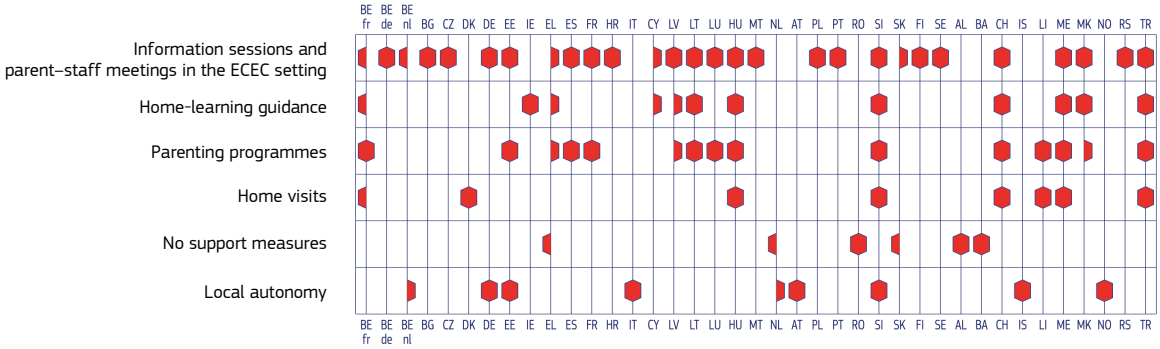
For a definition of educational guidelines, see the glossary. Only binding top-level educational guidelines are considered. See Annex D for the specific documents referred to as top-level educational guidelines in each country, as well as their status (whether they are binding or non-binding). See the national system information sheets for explanations of what 'under the age of 3' and 'aged 3 and over' correspond to in the context of each country.
To establish whether the top-level educational guidelines refer to the development of children's digital competences (those shown in the figure), their content was analysed for relatedness to the most basic elements of the five competence areas set out in the DigComp 2.1 framework (European Commission: Joint Research Centre et al., 2017), that is:

- for **information literacy**, grasp basic concepts such as finding, collecting, assessing, categorising and displaying digital information;
- for **digital content creation**, encourage creative digital expression, such as through digital art, storytelling and multimedia projects, to foster digital creativity;
- for **communication and collaboration**, use digital tools to facilitate collaborative learning experiences where children communicate or work with other children and share ideas through digital means;
- for **safety**, educate children about online safety, including risks to physical and psychological health when using digital technologies, the risks of sharing personal information and the importance of safe online practices; and discuss ethical and moral dilemmas related to technology, such as issues of privacy, data security and digital addiction, in an age-appropriate manner;
- for **problem-solving**, engage in digital activities, such as playing interactive mathematics games or solving puzzles on age-appropriate apps, and develop the ability to think critically, make decisions and solve problems in both digital and real-world contexts.

Country-specific notes

Ireland: The Aistear framework curriculum includes elements relating to digital education. However, these elements are formulated as suggested learning opportunities and are not prescriptive.
Luxembourg: The digital competences shown in the figure are only addressed in the last 2 years of ECEC.
Austria: The information literacy competence is only addressed in the last year of ECEC.
Portugal: Binding pedagogical guidelines for children under 3 were introduced in March 2024.
Sweden: The competences of information literacy and digital content creation are only addressed in the last year of ECEC.

Support measures for parents with children in ECEC, 2023/2024 (data complementing Figure D11)



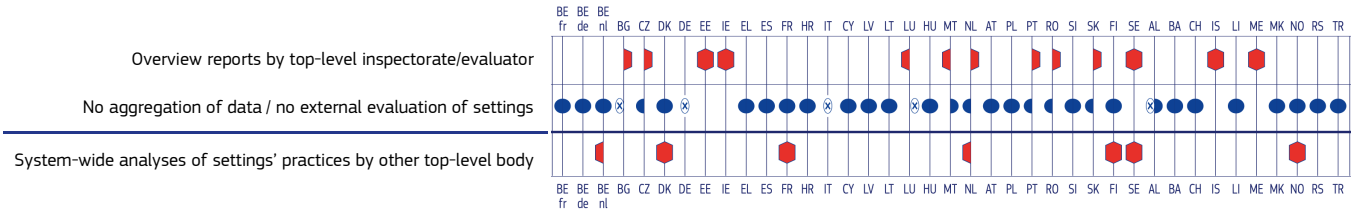
Left: under 3 years
Right: 3 years and over

Source: Eurydice.

Country-specific notes

Germany: Federal programmes promote an "educational partnership" between ECEC staff and parents, with regular progress meetings and, for vulnerable families, additional support like parent cafés.
Estonia: In addition to parent–staff meetings, cooperation with parents includes the use of the education information system ELIIS (used by around 500–630 ECEC centres) for the presentation of weekly activity plans, exchange of information, guidance materials, etc.
Slovenia: Kindergartens (and schools) are autonomous in deciding which of the measures to implement.
Finland: In addition to support measures through ECEC, child health clinics monitor the well-being of families and support parenting.
Türkiye: The frequency of the meetings is determined by the ECEC centre.

National-level evaluation of ECEC quality, 2018–2023 (data complementing Figure E5)



Left: Provision for children under the age of 3
Right: Provision for children aged 3 and over
No aggregation of data
No external evaluation of settings

Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The evaluation reports and system-wide analyses considered address the quality of the education and care provided within ECEC settings and rely on primary sources, such as visits to settings and field observation. 'Overview reports prepared by top-level inspectorate/evaluator' refers to reports aggregating the findings from external evaluation of individual ECEC settings. System-wide analyses target the national level rather than specific settings. Reports that focus on the activities of the evaluation body are not within scope. Only aggregated reports and other system-wide analyses published in 2018–2023 are considered.

Country-specific note

See country-specific notes to Figure E5.

Annex B: Authorities responsible for governing ECEC

Country	Responsible authority	Home-based ECEC	Centre-based ECEC		Website
			children < 3 years	children ≥ 3 years	
● Responsible for this type of ECEC provision × No home-based ECEC					
BE fr	Ministry of Childhood; Office of Birth and Childhood (Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance)	●	●		https://gouvernement.cfwb.be/home/competences/list-competences/enfance.html; https://www.one.be
	Ministry of Education			●	http://www.enseignement.be/
BE de	Department for Family and Social Affairs, Ministry of the German-speaking Community	●	●		https://www.ostbelgienfamilie.be
	Department for Education, Ministry of the German-speaking Community			●	https://www.ostbelgienbildung.be
BE nl	Ministry of Welfare, and Poverty Reduction, Culture and Equal Opportunities; Agency Growing Up (*Opgroeien*)	●	●		https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaamse-regering/caroline-gennez; https://www.opgroeien.be
	Flemish Ministry of Education and Training			●	https://www.onderwijs.vlaanderen.be
BG	Ministry of Health	×	●		https://www.mh.government.bg
	Ministry of Education and Science	×	●	●	https://www.mon.bg/
CZ	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	×	●		https://www.mpsv.cz
	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports	×		●	https://www.msmt.cz
DK	Ministry for Children and Education	●			https://www.uvm.dk
DE	Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth	●			https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj
EE	Ministry of Education and Research		●	●	https://www.hm.ee
	Ministry of Social Affairs	●			https://www.sm.ee
IE	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	●	●	●	https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-children-equality-disability-integration-and-youth/
	Department of Education		●	●	https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-education/
EL	Ministry of the Interior		●		https://www.ypes.gr
	Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family	●	●		https://www.minscfa.gov.gr
	Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports			●	https://www.minedu.gov.gr
ES	Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports		●	●	https://www.educacionfpydeportes.gob.es/portada.html
	Educational administrations of the autonomous communities		●	●	https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/contenidos/in/comunidades-autonomas.html
	Social policy administrations in three autonomous communities	●			https://www.comunidad.madrid/servicios/asuntos-sociales; https://www.navarra.es/es/tramites/on/~/line/Atencion-a-menores-de-tres-anos-en-domicilios-particulares-de-cuidadores; https://politicasocial.xunta.gal/es/areas/familia-e-infancia/escuelas-infantiles/casas-nido
FR	Ministry of Solidarity	●	●		https://www.solidarites.gouv.fr
	Ministry of National Education			●	https://www.education.gouv.fr
HR	Ministry of Science, Education and Youth		●	●	https://mzom.gov.hr
	Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy	●			https://mrosp.gov.hr

Country	Responsible authority	Home-based ECEC	Centre-based ECEC		Website
			children < 3 years	children ≥ 3 years	
● Responsible for this type of ECEC provision × No home-based ECEC					
IT	Ministry of Education and Merit		●	●	https://www.miur.gov.it
	Regional administrations	●	●		https://www.regioni.it/regioni-online
CY	Social Welfare Services, Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare	●	●		http://www.dmsw.gov.cy/sws
	Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth			●	https://www.moec.gov.cy
LV	Ministry of Education and Science		●		https://www.izm.gov.lv
LT	Ministry of Education, Science and Sport	×	●	●	https://smsm.lrv.lt
LU	Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth		●		http://www.men.public.lu/en/systeme-educatif/enfance.html
HU	Ministry of Culture and Innovation	●	●		https://www.kormany.hu/kulturalis-es-innovacios-miniszterium
	Ministry of Interior			●	https://www.kormany.hu/belugyminiszterium
MT	Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation	×	●	●	https://education.gov.mt/
NL	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment	●	●		https://www.government.nl/ministries/ministry-of-social-affairs-and-employment
	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science			●	https://www.government.nl/ministries/ministry-of-education-culture-and-science
AT	Federal Chancellery: Federal Minister for Women, Family, Integration and Media	●	●	●	https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at
	Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research		●	●	https://www.bmbwf.gv.at
PL	Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy	●	●		http://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina
	Ministry of National Education			●	http://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja
PT	Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security	●	●		https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc24/area-de-governo/trabalho-solidariedade-e-seguranca-social
	Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation			●	https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc24/area-de-governo/educacao-ciencia-e-inovacao
RO	Ministry of Education	×	●	●	https://www.edu.ro
SI	Ministry of Education		●		http://www.mvi.gov.si/
SK	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family	×	●		https://www.employment.gov.sk
	Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth	×		●	https://www.minedu.sk
FI	Ministry of Education and Culture		●		https://www.okm.fi
SE	Ministry of Education and Research		●		https://www.government.se/government-of-sweden/ministry-of-education-and-research/
AL	Ministry of Health and Social Protection	×	●		https://www.shendetesia.gov.al
	Ministry of Education and Sports	×		●	https://www.arsimi.gov.al
BA	Ministries of Education in cantons	×	●	●	http://www.fmon.gov.ba/Link/Index
	Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Srpska	×	●	●	https://vladars.rs/eng/vlada/ministries/MEC/Pages/default.aspx
	Department for Education, Brčko District	×	●	●	http://www.vlada.bdcentral.net/

Country	Responsible authority	Home-based ECEC	Centre-based ECEC		Website
			children < 3 years	children ≥ 3 years	
● Responsible for this type of ECEC provision ✕ No home-based ECEC					
CH	Mainly cantonal ministries of social affairs (can also be those of education); Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Social Affairs	●	●		https://www.sodk.ch
	Cantonal ministries of education; Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education			●	https://www.edk.ch
IS	Ministry of Education and Children		●	●	https://www.government.is/ministries/ministry-of-education-and-children/
	Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour	●			https://www.government.is/ministries/ministry-of-social-affairs-and-labour/
LI	Office of Social Services	●	●		https://www.llv.li/de/landesverwaltung/amt-fuer-soziale-dienste
	Office of Education			●	https://www.llv.li/de/landesverwaltung/schulamt
ME	Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation	✕	●	●	https://www.gov.me/mps
MK	Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (jointly)	✕	●	●	https://www.mon.gov.mk/ and https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/
NO	Ministry of Education and Research	●			https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/kd/
RS	Ministry of Education	✕	●	●	https://www.prosveta.gov.rs
TR	Ministry of Family and Social Services	✕	●		https://www.aile.gov.tr
	Ministry of National Education	✕		●	https://www.meb.gov.tr

Source: Eurydice.

Country-specific notes

Germany: The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth is responsible for the framework legislation for the integrated system of ECEC for children aged 0–6, but the federal states are responsible for the actual regulation of the system, including funding regulations, structural requirements and educational guidelines.
Greece: Home-based ECEC operates on a pilot basis in 61 out of 332 municipalities. For more information, see https://ntantades.gov.gr.
Spain: Regulated home-based provision exists in 3 out of 17 autonomous communities: Madrid, Navarre and Galicia.
Italy: The Ministry of Education and Merit finances the development of the integrated system for those aged 0–6 and issues the educational guidelines for the entire phase. In other aspects, the regions are responsible for centre-based ECEC provision for children under the age of 3 and for regulated home-based provision.

Annex C: Staff profiles in centre-based settings

	ECEC core practitioner			
	Working with children under age 3		Working with children aged 3 and over	
	Name in national language	Minimum qualification level	Name in national language	Minimum qualification level
BE fr	*Accueillant/accueillante d'enfants* (five types of education)	ISCED 3 or ISCED 4	*Instituteur maternel / institutrice maternelle*	ISCED 6
BE de	*Kinderbetreuer/Kinderbetreuerin*	ISCED 3	*Kindergärtner/Kindergärtnerin*	ISCED 6
BE nl	*Kinderbegeleider*	ISCED 4	*Kleuteronderwijzer*	ISCED 6
BG	*Meditsinska sestra / akusherka / pedagog*	ISCED 6	*Detski uchitel*	ISCED 6
CZ	*Pečující osoba*	ISCED 3	*Učitel mateřské školy*	ISCED 3
DK	*Pædagog*	ISCED 6	*Pædagog*	ISCED 6
DE	*Pädagogische Fachkräfte: Erzieherinnen; Kindheitspädagoginnen/Kindheitspädagogen; Sozialpädagoginnen/Sozialpädagogen*	ISCED 6	*Pädagogische Fachkräfte: Erzieherinnen; Kindheitspädagoginnen/Kindheitspädagogen; Sozialpädagoginnen/Sozialpädagogen*	ISCED 6
EE	*Koolieelse lasteasutuse õpetaja*	ISCED 6	*Koolieelse lasteasutuse õpetaja*	ISCED 6
IE	Lead educator / *Príomhoideoir*	ISCED 4	Lead educator / *Príomhoideoir*	ISCED 4
EL	*Vrefonipiokomos*	ISCED 6	*Nipiagogos*	ISCED 6
ES	1. *Técnico Superior de Educación Infantil* 2. *Maestro de Educación Infantil*	1. ISCED 5 2. ISCED 6	*Maestro/Maestra de Educación Infantil*	ISCED 6
FR	*Educateur de jeunes enfants*	ISCED 6	*Professeur des écoles*	ISCED 7
HR	*Odgojitelj djece rane i predškolske dobi*	ISCED 6	*Odgojitelj djece rane i predškolske dobi*	ISCED 6
IT	*Educatore – servizi educativi per l'infanzia*	ISCED 6	*Insegnante scuola dell'infanzia*	ISCED 7
CY	*Παιδοκόμος*	ISCED 5	*Νηπιαγωγός*	ISCED 6
LV	*Pirmsskolas izglītības skolotājs*	ISCED 5	*Pirmsskolas izglītības skolotājs*	ISCED 5
LT	*Ikimokyklinio / priešmokyklinio ugdymo mokytojas*	ISCED 6	*Ikimokyklinio / priešmokyklinio ugdymo mokytojas*	ISCED 6
LU	*Educateur*	ISCED 4	*Enseignant au cycle 1*	ISCED 6
HU	*Kisgyermeknevelő*	ISCED 4	*Óvodapedagógus*	ISCED 6
MT	Childcare educator	ISCED 4	Kindergarten educator	ISCED 4
NL	*Pedagogisch medewerker kinderopvang*	ISCED 3	*Leerkracht basisschool onderwijs*	ISCED 6
AT	*Elementarpädagogin/Elementarpädagoge*	ISCED 5	*Elementarpädagogin/Elementarpädagoge*	ISCED 5
PL	*opiekun (żłobek, klub dzieciecy)*	ISCED 3	*Nauczyciel wychowania przedszkolnego*	ISCED 7
PT	*Educador de infância*	ISCED 7	*Educador de infância*	ISCED 7
RO	*Educatoare*	ISCED 3	*Educatoare*	ISCED 3
SI	*Vzgojitelj*	ISCED 6	*Vzgojitelj*	ISCED 6
SK	*Opatrovateľ detí*	ISCED 3	*Učiteľ materskej školy*	ISCED 3
FI	*1. Varhaiskasvatuksen opettaja* *2. Varhaiskasvatuksen sosionomi*	1. ISCED 6 2. ISCED 6	*1. Varhaiskasvatuksen opettaja* *2. Varhaiskasvatuksen sosionomi*	1. ISCED 6 2. ISCED 6
SE	*Förskollärare*	ISCED 6	*Förskollärare*	ISCED 6
AL	*Edukatore*	No minimum	*Mesues parashkollor*	ISCED 6
BA	*Odgajatelj u predškolskom obrazovanju*	ISCED 6	*Odgajatelj u predškolskom obrazovanju*	ISCED 6
CH	1. *Fachmann/Fachfrau Betreuung (Kinder) / Assistant(e) socio-éducatif (enfants) Kindheitspädagoge/Kindheitspädagogin* 2. *Educateur/educatrice de l'enfance*	1. ISCED 3 2. ISCED 6	*Lehrer/Lehrerin für die Vorschulstufe / Enseignant(e) préscolaire; Lehrer/Lehrerin für die Primarstufe / Enseignant(e) primaire*	ISCED 6
IS	*Leikskólakennari*	ISCED 7	*Leikskólakennari*	ISCED 7
LI	*Fachfrau Betreeung*	ISCED 3	*Kindergärtner*	ISCED 6
ME	*Vaspitač*	ISCED 6	*Vaspitač*	ISCED 6
MK	*Neguvateli*	ISCED 3	*Vospituvači*	ISCED 6
NO	*Barnehagelærer*	ISCED 6	*Barnehagelærer*	ISCED 6
RS	*Medicinska sestra-vaspitač*	ISCED 3	*Vaspitač*	ISCED 6
TR	*Grup Sorumlusu*	ISCED 3	*Okul Öncesi Öğretmeni*	ISCED 6

Source: Eurydice.

	ECEC assistant			
	Working with children under age 3		Working with children aged 3 and over	
	Name in national language	Minimum qualification level	Name in national language	Minimum qualification level
BE fr	x	x	*Puériculteur/puéricultrice*	ISCED 4
BE de	x	x	*Kindergartenassistent*	ISCED 3 or short training course
BE nl	x	x	*Kinderbegeleider*	ISCED 4
BG	*Detegledachka*	ISCED 3	*Pomoshtnik vazpitatel*	ISCED 3
CZ	x	x	x	x
DK	1. *Pædagogmedhjælper* 2. *Pædagogisk assistant*	1. No minimum 2. ISCED 3	1. *Pædagogmedhjælper* 2. *Pædagogisk assistant*	1. No minimum 2. ISCED 3
DE	*Sozialassistentinnen/Sozialassistenten; Sozialpädagogische Assistentinnen / Sozialpädagogische Assistenten; Kinderpfleger(innen)*	ISCED 3	*Sozialassistentinnen/Sozialassistenten; Sozialpädagogische Assistentinnen / Sozialpädagogische Assistenten; Kinderpfleger(innen)*	ISCED 3
EE	*Õpetaja abi*	No minimum	*Õpetaja abi*	No minimum
IE	Early years educator / *Oideoir Luathbhlianta*	ISCED 4	Early years educator / *Oideoir Luathbhlianta*	ISCED 4
EL	*Voithos vrefonipiokomou*	ISCED 4	x	x
ES	x	x	x	x
FR	*Accompagnant éducatif petite enfance*	ISCED 3	*Agent territorial spécialisé des écoles maternelles*	ISCED 3
HR	x	x	x	x
IT	x	x	x	x
CY	*Sxoliki voithos*	ISCED 3	*Βοηθός Νηπιαγωγού*	ISCED 3
LV	*Skolotāja palīgs*	No minimum	*Skolotāja palīgs*	No minimum
LT	x	x	x	x
LU	*Agent socio-pédagogique; assistant d'accompagnement au quotidien*	No minimum	x	x
HU	*Bölcsődei dajka*	ISCED 2	*Pedagógiai asszisztens*	ISCED 3
MT	Assistant to the childcare educator	ISCED 3	x	x
NL	x	x	x	x
AT	*Pädagogische Assistentin / Pädagogischer Assistent*	ISCED 3	*Pädagogische Assistentin / Pädagogischer Assistent*	ISCED 3
PL	x	x	x	x
PT	*Assistentes operacionais*	ISCED 3	*Assistentes operacionais*	ISCED 3
RO	x	x	x	x
SI	*Vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok – pomočnik vzgojitelja*	ISCED 3	*Vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok – pomočnik vzgojitelja*	ISCED 3
SK	x	x	x	x
FI	*Varhaiskasvatuksen lastenhoitaja*	ISCED 3	*Varhaiskasvatuksen lastenhoitaja*	ISCED 3
SE	*Barnskötare*	ISCED 3	*Barnskötare*	ISCED 3
AL	x	x	x	x
BA	x	x	x	x
CH	*Stagiaire*	No minimum	*Assistenzlehrpersonen / assistants de classe*	No minimum
IS	*Ófaglærðir við uppeldi og menntun*	No minimum	*Ófaglærðir við uppeldi og menntun*	No minimum
LI	*Stagiaire*	No minimum	x	x
ME	*Trijažna sestra*	ISCED 4	*Trijažna sestra*	4
MK	x	x	*Neguvateli*	ISCED 3
NO	1. *Barne- og ungdomsarbeider* 2. *Assistent*	1. ISCED 3 2. No minimum	1. *Barne- og ungdomsarbeider* 2. *Assistent*	1. ISCED 3 2. No minimum
RS	x	x	x	x
TR	x	x	*Çocuk Bakıcısı*	ISCED 3

X = No assistants

Source: Eurydice.

Annex D: Top-level educational guidelines for ECEC

Country	Top-level educational guidelines	Children < 3 years	Children ≥ 3 years	Pre-primary classes	Home-based ECEC
	● Binding ○ Non-binding ✕ Provision not available				
BE fr	Quality Code for ECEC Centres (Code de Qualité de l'Accueil)	●		✕	●
	Minding Very Young Children – Go for quality: A psycho-pedagogical guide for quality childcare (*Accueillir les tout petits: Oser la qualité – Un référentiel psycho-pédagogique pour des milieux d'accueil de qualité*)	○		✕	○
	Guidelines for quality practices in ECEC (*Meeting the Families, Meeting the Children, Supporting Professionals, Meeting the Settings*) (*Repères pour des pratiques d'accueil de qualité* (*À la rencontre des familles*, *À la rencontre des enfants*, *Soutien à l'activité des professionnel.le.s*, *À la rencontre des milieux d'accueil*))	○		✕	○
	Initial Skills Reference Guide (*Référentiel des compétences initiales*)		●	✕	
BE de	*Activity Plan for Pre-primary Education* (Aktivitätenplan für den Kindergarten)		●	✕	
	26 April 1999 – Decree 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 No 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)	●		✕	●
	Act on Daycare Facilities (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 childcare centres* (*Gemeinsamer Rahmen der Länder für die frühe Bildung in Kindertageseinrichtungen*)	●		✕	
EE	National Curriculum for Pre-school Child Care Institutions (*Koolieelse lasteasutuse riiklik õppekava*)	●		✕	
IE	*Aistear: The early childhood curriculum framework* (*Aistear: Creatchuraclam na Luath-Óige*)	●		✕	○
EL	*Curriculum for Pre-school Education* (*Προγραμμα σπουδών για την Προσχολική Εκπαίδευση*)		●	✕	✕
	Curriculum for Pre-school Education – Extended version (*Προγραμμα σπουδών για την Προσχολική Εκπαίδευση-Διευρυμενη Εκδοχη*)		●	✕	✕
	Pre-school Education Teachers' Guide (*Οδηγός Νηπιαγωγού*)		●	✕	✕
	Skills labs (Εργαστήρια Δεξιοτήτων)		●	✕	✕
ES	Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education (Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación)	●		✕	
	Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December, modifying 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)	●		✕	

Country	Top-level educational guidelines	Children < 3 years	Children ≥ 3 years	Pre-primary classes	Home-based ECEC
	● Binding ○ Non-binding × Provision not available				
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*)	●		●	
IT	*National Guidelines for Early Childhood Education Services* (*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	*Guidelines for the Preschool Education Programme* (*Dėl Ikimokyklinio ugdymo programos gairių patvirtinimo*)	●			×
	Outline of Criteria for Preschool Education Curricula (*Ikimokyklinio 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 (*Ikimokyklinio amžiaus vaikų pasiekimų aprašas*)	○		○	×
	General Curriculum for Pre-primary Education (*Priešmokyklinio ugdymo bendroji programa*)			●	×
LU	*National curriculum framework for non-formal education for children and youth* (*Cadre de référence national sur l'éducation non formelle des enfants et des jeunes*)	●			●
	Framework Plan for Pre-school Education in Luxembourg (*Plan-cadre pour l'éducation précoce au Luxembourg*) (cycle 1 – first year)		●		
	Study Plan – Fundamental education (*Plan d'études – l'école fondamentale*) (cycles 1 (second and third years) to 4)			●	
HU	*National Core Programme for Nursery Education and Care* (*A bölcsődei nevelés-gondozás országos alapprogramja*)	●		×	●
	National Core Programme of Kindergarten Education (*Az óvodai nevelés országos alapprogramja*)		●	×	
MT	*National standards for early childhood education and care services (0–3 years)*	●		×	×
	A National Curriculum Framework for All – 2012		●	×	×
	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 2006* (*Kerndoelen primair onderwijs 2006*)		●	×	
AT	*Children's Last Year Before School. Guidelines for Home Care and Daycare Parents* (*Kinder im Jahr vor dem Schuleintritt – Leitfaden für die häusliche Betreuung sowie die Betreuung durch Tageseltern*)				●
	Statewide framework curriculum for elementary educational 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*)			●	

Country	Top-level educational guidelines	Children < 3 years	Children ≥ 3 years	Pre-primary classes	Home-based ECEC
	● Binding ○ Non-binding × Provision not available				
PL	Regulation of the Minister of Family and Social Policy of 19 September 2023 on the standards of care provided to children under 3 years of age (Rozporządzenie Ministra Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej z dnia 19 września 2023 r w sprawie standardów opieki sprawowanej nad dziećmi w wieku do lat 3)	●		×	●
	Regulation of 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	*Pedagogical Guidelines for Creches* (*Orientações Pedagógicas para Creche*)	●		×	
	Curricular Guidelines for Preschool Education (*Orientações Curriculares para a Educação Pré-Escolar*)		●	×	
RO	*Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2019* (*Curriculum pentru educația timpurie 2019*) (for children from birth to age 6 years)	●		×	×
SI	*Kindergarten Curriculum* (*Kurikulum za vrtce*)	●		×	
	Supplement to the Kindergarten Curriculum for Roma Children (*Dodatek h Kurikulu za vrtce za otroke Romov*)	●		×	
	Supplement to the curriculum for working in the bilingual areas (*Dodatek h Kurikulu za vrtce na narodno Mešanih območjih*)	●		×	
	Instructions regarding the kindergarten curriculum with adapted implementation and additional professional support for children with special needs (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 vzdelávací 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	Act 2010:800 (Education Act) (Skollag 2010:800)	●		●	○
	Curriculum for the Preschool (*Läroplan för förskolan*)	●			○
	Curriculum for the elementary school, pre-school class and after-school centres (*Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet*)			●	
AL	*Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education* (*Korniza Kurrikulare e Arsimit Parashkollor*)		●	×	×
BA	*Guidelines for the implementation of common core curricula and defined learning outcomes* (*Smjernice za implementaciju zajedničke jezgre nastaznih planova i programa za kroskurikularno i međupredmetno područje definirano na ishodima učenja*)	○		○	×
CH	German-speaking cantons: *Curriculum 21* (*Lehrplan 21*) French-speaking cantons: *Curriculum Romand* (*Plan d'études Romand*) Italian-speaking canton: *Curriculum for Compulsory Education in Ticino* (*Piani di studio della scuola dell'obbligo ticinese*)		●	×	

Country	Top-level educational guidelines	Children < 3 years	Children ≥ 3 years	Pre-primary classes	Home-based ECEC
● Binding ○ Non-binding ✕ Provision not available					
IS	Notice No 897/2023 amending the national curriculum guide for preschools (Auglýsing No 897/2023 um breytingu á aðalnámskrá leikskóla)	●		✕	
	The Icelandic national curriculum guide for preschools (*Aðalnámskrá leikskóla*)	●		✕	
LI	*Guidelines of the Ministry of Social Affairs for approval and quality assurance of extrafamilial childcare services* (*Richtlinien des Amtes für Soziale Dienste für die Bewilligung und Aufsicht in der ausserhäuslichen Betreuung von Kindern*)	●		✕	●
	National Curriculum (*Liechtensteiner Lehrplan*)		●	✕	
ME	Law on Preschool Upbringing and Education (Zakon o predškolskom vaspitanju i obrazovanju)	●		✕	✕
	Programme for Preschool Upbringing and Education (*Program za predškolsko vaspitanje i obrazovanje*)	●		✕	✕
MK	*Early learning and development standards for children from 0–6 years* (*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 barnehagen*)	●		✕	●
RS	*Fundamentals of the Preschool Education Programme* (*Osnove programa predškolskog vaspitanja i obrazovanja*)	●		●	✕
TR	*Education programme for children aged 0–36 months old* (*0–36 Aylik Çocuklar Için Eğitim Programı*)	○		✕	✕
	Preschool Education Programme (*Okul Öncesi Eğitim Programı*)		●	✕	✕

Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The information on home-based provision only refers to provision for children under the age of 3.
'Pre-primary classes' refers to a specific educational programme provided in the last 1–2 year(s) of ECEC that is distinct from the main pre-primary education programme and aims to prepare children for primary education. This programme is compulsory.

Country-specific notes

Germany: Whether the common framework for ECEC of the *Länder* applies to childminders depends on the regulations of each *Land*.
Ireland: The curriculum framework designed for the whole ECEC phase (Aistear) is not legally mandated but is binding for all centre-based settings under the contractual agreement for receipt of public funding from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.
Greece: Home-based ECEC operates on a pilot basis in 61 out of the 332 municipalities.
Spain: Regulated home-based provision exists in 3 out of 17 autonomous communities: Madrid, Navarre and Galicia.
Netherlands: There is no national curriculum for ECEC for children under the age of 4 years. However, in order to be able to offer *voorschoolse educatie* (subsidised provision targeting disadvantaged children) for that age range (2-and-a-half to 4 years), centre-based settings must apply an education programme that meets legal requirements ([1]).
Portugal: The top-level pedagogical guidelines for settings for children under the age of 3 years were introduced in March 2024.
Finland: The early education centres that are participating in the trial (2021–2024) to extend the duration of the pre-primary education programme to 2 years use a separate pilot curriculum ([2]).
Iceland: Preschools centres should have fully implemented the changes in Notice No 897/2023 by 1 August 2024.
Switzerland: There are no educational guidelines for childcare issued by federal or cantonal authorities. However, in 2012, the Swiss United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Commission and the now dissolved Swiss childcare network launched an orientation framework for early childhood education (Orientierungsrahmen für frühkindliche Bildung, Betreuung und Erziehung ([3])), which is currently being updated.

([1]) https://www.nji.nl/voor-en-vroegschoolse-educatie-vve/welke-afspraken-kunnen-gemeenten-maken-over-voorschoolse-educatie.
([2]) https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163006/OKM-twoyear_preprimary_booklet_webFX.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
([3]) https://www.netzwerk-kinderbetreuung.ch/de/publikationen/20/.

National system information sheets

Diagram

The diagrams represent the structure of mainstream early childhood education and care (ECEC) provision in each country. Separate provision outside mainstream ECEC for children with special educational needs is not included.

Only the main structures in which a child spends the main part of the day are depicted. Out-of-school-hours care or supplementary ECEC provision to cover the full day are not presented in the diagrams. For example, when a child has to follow a compulsory ECEC programme in a centre-based setting for a half-day, but may attend home-based ECEC in the afternoon, only the centre-based provision is shown in the diagram.

The diagrams are structured around a scale showing the age of children. These ages are notional and give an indication of the official ages at which children might begin different types of ECEC.

The thin first bar indicates the theoretical length of well-paid leave (where 'well-paid' means earnings-related payment of 66 % of earnings or more). The data on leave comes from the International Network on Leave Policies and Research and refers to April 2024 (Dobrotić et al., 2024). It includes post-natal maternity, paternity and parental leave.

The subsequent bars show the range of official ages at which children are eligible for admission to different settings or types of ECEC provision. For most countries, the national term for the ECEC setting is shown on the diagram. However, in some countries, the programme is considered to be more appropriate, and so these terms are given instead. All terms are provided in the official national language(s) of the country. Centre-based settings are indicated in blue, while home-based ECEC is in pink. Involvement of the education authorities (e.g. the Ministry of Education) is marked by a lower intensity of the respective colours.

When applicable, underlining indicates the level of education as defined in the 2011 International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED): dashes for ISCED 01 and dots for ISCED 02 ([1]). Special symbols indicate the starting age of any legal entitlement to ECEC provision and the availability of free-of-charge provision for at least some hours per week. The beginning of compulsory education is also indicated.

When appropriate, the thin vertical lines within the setting represent the division between different programmes, cycles or key stages. The lines may also indicate the start of a distinct programme (e.g. pre-primary classes).

After each diagram, a shaded paragraph aims to help the reader identify which centre-based settings are being referred to in the report when describing provision as either for children 'under 3 years' or for those aged '3 years and over'. In some education systems, settings may cater largely for one of these age groups but may still admit children who are slightly younger or older. The terms 'settings for younger children' and 'settings for older children' are used as substitutes in some cases.

Organisation

A short description of the main types of ECEC is provided in the 'Organisation' section. It also specifies which authorities are responsible for which types of settings. Additional information on non-mainstream provision is provided as appropriate.

Participation rates

In order to enable international comparisons, participation rates in ISCED 0 and ISCED 1 by age are shown using combined United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Eurostat (UOE) data. When the same age group is enrolled in ISCED 01 and ISCED 02, the tables display this distinction.

When available, national data on participation rates for children under 3 or national data showing participation by type of provision and/or setting is also included, specifying the reference year and source. Differences between rates provided by different sources might be due to disparities in the methodologies used.

Current reforms

The main ongoing reforms related to the central themes of this report are briefly outlined.

([1]) international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf.

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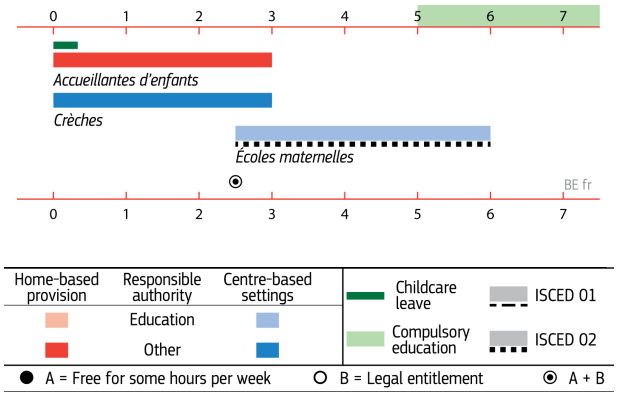
Belgium – French Community

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Belgium (French Community), the category 'under 3 years' refers to children in *crèches*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *écoles maternelles*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2021/2022	Less than 1 year	1-year-olds	2-year-olds
Accueillantes d'enfants	4.7	9.7	7.1
Crèches	14.1	28.7	22.5

Note: only subsidised services; no data on independent childminders or *crèches* without subsidies, which constitute approximately 25 % of the ECEC offered.

Source: ONE, 2022.

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0 (*)	-	52.8	98.0	98.5	97.2	3.8	0.1
ISCED 1 (*)	-	-	-	-	1.5	94.8	98.4

(*) Data for Belgium (except the German-speaking Community).

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

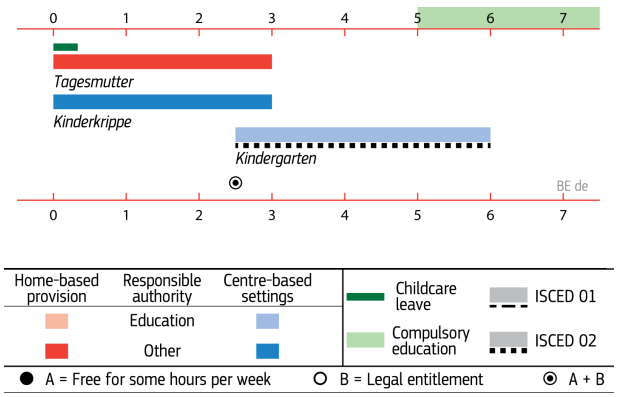
From birth to 3 years, children may attend centre-based settings (*crèches*). There is also a system of regulated home-based care, which is delivered by childminders (*accueillant(e)s d'enfants*) who either work independently (*accueillant(e)s d'enfants indépendant(e)s*) or are affiliated with specific childminding organisations (*accueillant(e)s d'enfants conventionné(e)s ou salarié(e)s*). Home-based and centre-based care for younger children falls under the responsibility of the Office of Birth and Childhood (Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance), which is under the authority of the Minister of Childhood. From age 2-and-a-half, children are legally entitled to early childhood education free of charge in *écoles maternelles*. This area falls under the responsibility of the Minister of Education.

The last year of ECEC (which is for 5-year-olds) is compulsory. Primary education starts at age 6.

Belgium – German-speaking Community

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Belgium (German-speaking Community), the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *Kinderkrippe*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *Kindergarten*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Under 3
Total coverage of childcare (excluding those who turn 3 years old before 31 December of the current year and already attend kindergarten)	46.6
Tagesmütter	36
Kinderkrippen	7

Sources: Das Statistikportal der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens; distribution in home-based and centre-based ECEC: Eurydice calculations based on the numbers of children in ECEC and the numbers of children (2).

Reference year 2023/2024	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds
Kindergarten	99	99	100

Note: proportion over 100 truncated.

Source: Calculations based on the population figures of 1 January 2023 and the pupil numbers for 2023/2024 (3).

No Eurostat data available.

Organisation

Up to the age of 3, children mostly attend regulated home-based care, which is provided by childminders (*Tagesmütter*), who either work independently (*Selbstständige Tagesmütter*) or are affiliated with a specific childminding organisation (*Tagesmütterdienst/ Tagesväterdienst*). There are also centre-based settings known as nurseries (*Kinderkrippen*). ECEC for younger children falls under the responsibility of the Department for Family and Social Affairs.

From age 2-and-a-half, children are legally entitled to pre-primary education, free of charge, in kindergartens. This area falls under the responsibility of the Department for Education.

The last year of ECEC (which is for 5-year-olds) is compulsory. Primary education starts at age 6.

Current reforms

The age of legal entitlement to pre-primary education was lowered from age 3 to age 2-and-a-half on 1 September 2024 (4).

(2) https://ostbelgienstatistik.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-5876/10047_read-53994/; https://ostbelgienstatistik.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-5876/10047_read-41118/ and https://ostbelgien.inzahlen.be/jive?workspace_guid=abaeb058-57d8-4838-b80c-6c6a3d37e596.

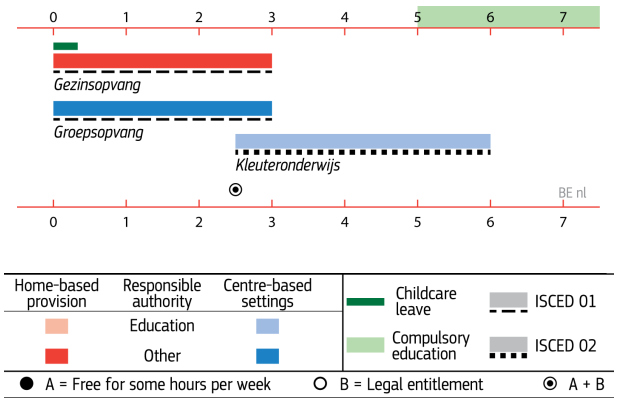
(3) https://ostbelgien.inzahlen.be/jive?workspace_guid=abaeb058-57d8-4838-b80c-6c6a3d37e596; https://ostbelgienbildung.be/DownloadCount.aspx?raid=208630&docid=91933&rn=1f5f1ed1-8ef5-4aee-aba5-e97cdc50a844.

(4) https://ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2271/4416_read-43155/.

Belgium – Flemish Community

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Belgium (Flemish Community), the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *gezinsopvang* and *groepsopvang*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *kleuteronderwijs*.

Participation rates (%)

	Age in months					
Reference year 2023 (September)	2–5	6–11	12–17	18–23	24–29	30–35
Gezinsopvang and *groepsopvang*	23.8	59.6	66.1	68.5	69.7	13.5

Source: Opgroeien, 2024.

(%) Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0 (*)	-	52.8	98.0	98.5	97.2	3.8	0.1
ISCED 1 (*)	-	-	-	-	1.5	94.8	98.4

(*) Data for Belgium (except the German-speaking Community).

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

Formal childcare for children from birth until age 3 may be provided in centre-based ECEC (*groepsopvang*) in a nursery (*kinderdagverblijf*) or as home-based ECEC (*gezinsopvang*) provided by a childminder (*onthaalouder*). These provisions fall under the responsibility of the Flemish Ministry of of Welfare, and Poverty Reduction, Culture and Equal Opportunities and the agency Growing Up (*Opgroeien*).

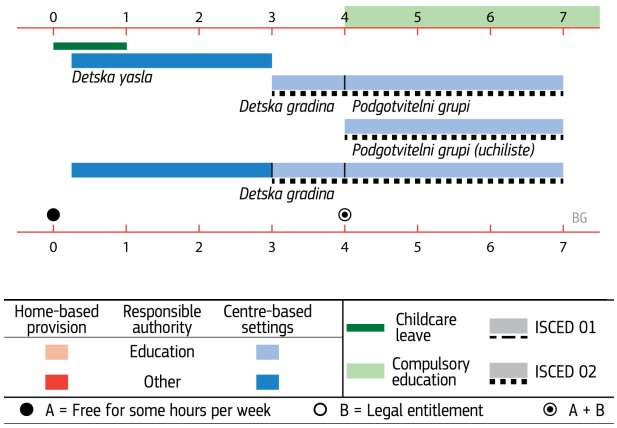
Children are legally entitled to pre-primary education (*kleuteronderwijs*) in *kleuterschool* free of charge from age 2-and-a-half. This provision falls under the responsibility of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training.

The last year of ECEC (which is for 5-year-olds) is compulsory. Primary education starts at age 6.

Bulgaria

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Bulgaria, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *detska yasla* and groups for children under 3 in *detska gradina*. The category '3 years and over' refers to children of this age in *detska gradina* and *podgotvitelni grupi*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	-	12.3	72.1	78.1	85.4	80.6	0.9
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	4.9	84.9

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

Children aged between 3 months and 3 years may attend centre-based settings *detska yasla*, falling under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. In the year in which the child turns 3, early childhood education is available in *detska gradina*, where the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the education process. From the age of 10 months, children may also attend a *detska gradina* nursery group. These groups are under the joint responsibility of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Science.

The last 3 years of pre-primary education (*predučilištno obrazovanie*), for children aged 4 to 7 years, are compulsory. Children may attend preparatory groups (*podgotvitelni grupi*), either in *detska gradina* or in a primary school (*uchiliste*).

In addition to the separate settings for younger and older children, some *detska gradina* include nursery groups. The provision in these settings is structured according to the above phases (i.e. up to 3 years, between 3 and 4 years, and between 4 and 7 years of age).

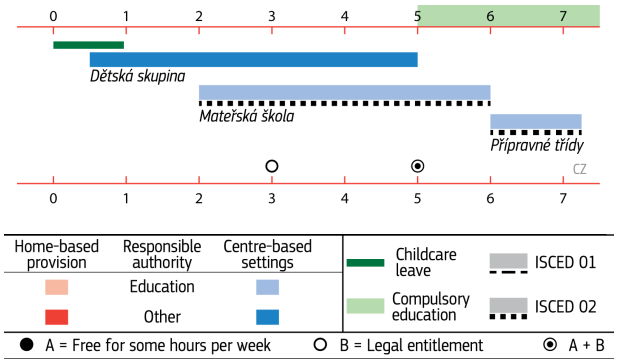
Primary education starts at age 7. A child who is ready for school may start at the age of 6 if the parents so wish.

ECEC is entirely free of charge. The collection of fees in the ECEC sector was abolished in April 2022.

Czechia

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Czechia, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *dětské skupiny*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *mateřské školy*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds
Mateřské školy	28.6	83.8	90.93	93.8	18.5

Note: the methodology for calculating national statistics differs from the methodology for calculating Eurostat indicators.

Source: Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (2023).

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	-	10.6	74.0	87.7	94.3	51.7	5.0
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	46.0	96.8

Note: ISCED 0 refers only to ISCED 02.

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

ECEC for younger children is provided in children's groups (*dětské skupiny*), which are primarily focused on care, not education. Children aged between 2 and 3 years predominate, although children from 6 months until the start of compulsory pre-primary education may attend. Children's groups are regulated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

Nursery schools (*mateřské školy*), which fall under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, provide pre-primary education (*předškolní vzdělávání*) for children aged between 2 and 6. It is the most common form of ECEC for children aged 3–6. From age 3, children are legally entitled to a place in public *mateřské školy*.

The last year of pre-primary education (from age 5) is compulsory for all children. It is free of charge in public institutions. Most children fulfil this obligation in nursery schools. Under certain conditions, homeschooling is possible.

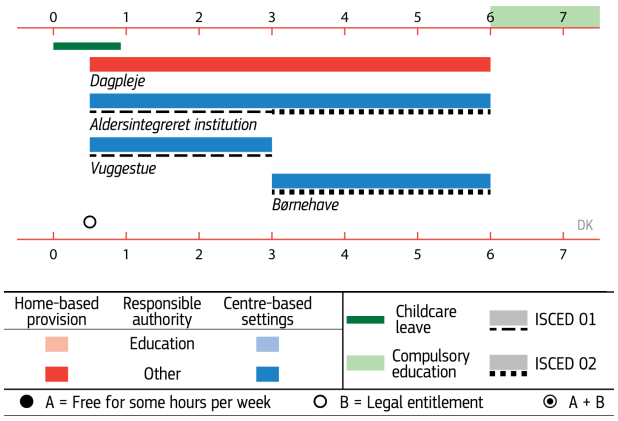
Preparatory classes (*přípravné třídy*) are established in basic schools (*základní školy*) for children in their final pre-school year. These classes are mostly for children with postponed compulsory primary education. Attending a preparatory class is also an option to fulfil the compulsory pre-primary education requirement for children aged 5.

Primary education starts at age 6.

Denmark

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Denmark, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *vuggestuer* and groups for children under 3 in *aldersintegrerede institutioner*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *børnehaver* and groups for children of this age in *aldersintegrerede institutioner*.

Participation rates (%)

	Age (years)						
Reference year 2021	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
ECEC centres run by local authorities	5.7	47.7	52.6	73.9	74.5	74.2	50.9
Self-governing ECEC centres run by independent organisations	0.8	7.5	8.8	11.7	11.5	11.7	9.1
Private ECEC centres run by independent organisations	0.7	4.8	6.0	9.6	9.7	9.6	4.6
Home-based provision regulated by local authorities	3.2	21.0	19.6	0.2	0	0	0
Total	10.4	81.0	87.0	95.4	95.7	95.5	64.6

Note: The numbers are based on children between 0 and 6 years on 1 October 2021 and children enrolled in ECEC on 1 October 2021. Children enrolled in school are excluded.

Source: Ministry for Children and Education's own calculations based on data from Statistics Denmark.

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 01	37.5	86.8	2.1	-	-	-	-
ISCED 02	-	-	93.6	97.5	96.8	5.5	0.0
ISCED 0	37.5	86.8	95.7	97.5	96.8	5.5	0.0
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	1.1	93.6	99.4

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

From 26 weeks (approximately 6 months), children are legally entitled to publicly subsidised ECEC provision.

The ECEC system consists of day care centres that can be established as age-integrated institutions for children up to age six (*aldersintegreret institution*) or separate settings for children under and over the age of three, called *nurseries (vuggestuer)* and *kindergartens (børnehaver)*. In addition to centre-based ECEC provision, there is a system of regulated home-based provision (*dagpleje*). Most of ECEC is publicly funded.

The Ministry for Children and Education sets out the framework legislation, while municipalities are locally responsible for organising and monitoring the ECEC providers.

Primary education starts at age 6.

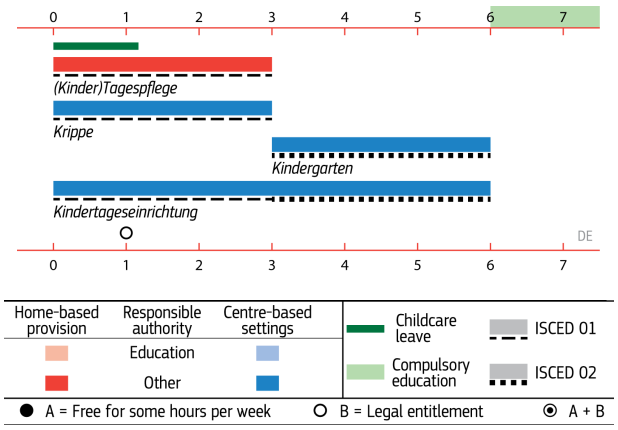
Current reforms

As of 1 January 2024, child–staff ratios apply. The legislation, passed by the Danish parliament in December 2021, requires one staff member per three children for ages 0–2 and one adult per six children for ages 3–5, averaged across all ECEC facilities within each municipality.

Germany

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Germany, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *Krippe* and groups for children under 3 in *Tageseinrichtungen*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *Kindergarten* and groups for children of this age in *Tageseinrichtungen*.

Participation rates (%)

(%) Reference year 2023	Less than 1 year	1-year-olds	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds
(Kinder)Tageseinrichtungen	1.2	30.6	57.8	85.3	91.6	93.4
(Kinder)Tagespflege	0.4	7.7	8.6	1.7	0.4	0.2
Total	1.6	38.4	66.4	87.0	92.0	93.7

Source: Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung (2024), Table C4-4web.

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	24.7	69.5	89.4	93.9	95.7	39.9	0.7
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	0.2	57.4	97.6

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Current reforms

Through the Childcare Quality Act ([5]), from 2023 to 2024, the federal government is allocating EUR 4 billion to *Länder* to help improve daycare quality and access. A joint federal and state working group presented targets for nationwide standards in March 2024. In May 2024, the Federal Minister for Family Affairs presented a strategy paper ([6]), offering recommendations and best practices to address staff shortages in educational professions.

Organisation

The ECEC system is highly decentralised and comprises several different types of setting. Childcare centres (*Tageseinrichtungen*) may provide ECEC for either younger or older children in nurseries (*Krippen; Tageseinrichtungen für Kinder unter 3*) and *Kindergartens (Tageseinrichtungen für Kinder über 3 bis 6)*, or may operate as one setting for the entire ECEC phase. In addition to centre-based ECEC provision, there is also a system of regulated and publicly subsidised home-based care (*Tagespflege*), which mainly caters for younger children (between 0 and 3), but may also deliver part-time provision for older children.

Prior to the beginning of primary education, some *Länder* provide pre-primary classes (*Vorschulklassen*). In some *Länder*, school kindergartens (*Schulkindergärten*) deliver school-based programmes for children who reach the compulsory school age (6 years) but are not yet ready to attend primary school. However, this only covers a very small proportion of children and is therefore not covered in this report.

The provision of ECEC is within the remit and overall responsibility of the municipalities. At the federal/national level, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth is responsible for framework legislation for ECEC in both home-based and centre-based provision. At the *Land* level, it can be either the ministry in charge of family affairs or that in charge of education that has the regulatory and supervisory role and provides supplementary funding.

Children are legally entitled to a publicly subsidised childcare place from age 1. In some *Länder*, some hours or certain years of ECEC are free of charge.

Primary education starts at age 6.

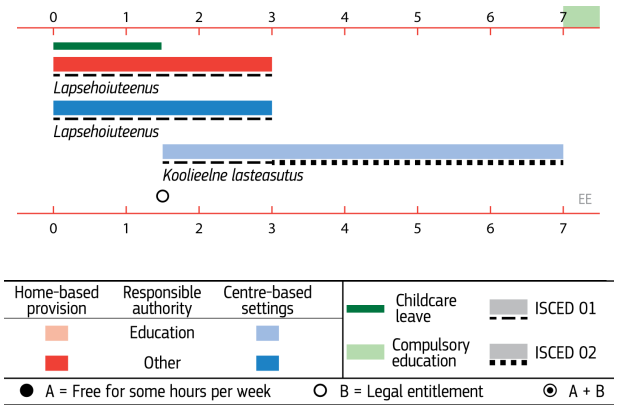
([5]) https://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBl&jumpTo=bgbl122s2791.pdf#__bgbl__%2F%2F*%5B%40attr_id%3D%27bgbl122s2791.pdf%27%5D__1729515487466

([6]) https://www.fruehe-chancen.de/themen/fachkraefte-und-qualifizierung/gesamtstrategie-fachkraefte-in-kitas-und-ganztag

Estonia

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Estonia, the category 'under 3 years' refers to all children of this age in *koolieelne lasteasutus* and *lapsehoiuteenus*. The category '3 years and over' refers to children of this age group in *koolieelne lasteasutus*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	7.1	64.0	88.0	92.3	93.6	92.5	19.5
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	1.2	77.4

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

The majority of children who participate in ECEC (*alusharidus*) attend unitary childcare institutions (*koolieelne lasteasutus*). These fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research. In addition, there is also a system of childcare services (*lapsehoiuteenus*) available for children up to primary school age, although catering mainly for younger children (under 3). These services can be either centre- or home-based; they fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

According to the Preschool Childcare Institutions Act, all children aged between 1-and-a-half and 7 years are legally entitled to an ECEC place. Parental contribution is capped at 20 % of the minimum wage, and low-income families are exempt from fees.

Primary education starts at age 7.

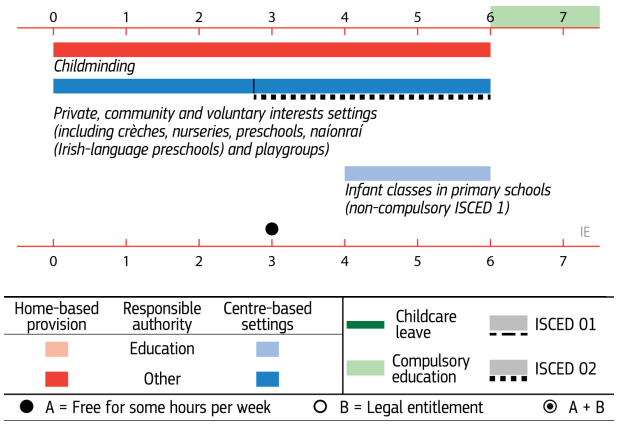
Current reforms

The new Early Childhood Education Act is currently being developed to guarantee high-quality early education and care for all children aged 1-and-a-half to 7 years. This act will incorporate childcare services, previously governed by the Social Welfare Act, into the ECEC system. In 2025, the Ministry of Education and Research will assume responsibility for the entire ECEC sector. In addition, a new curriculum for ECEC will be enforced alongside the new act.

Ireland

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Ireland, the category 'under 3 years' refers to children in a diverse range of private, community and voluntary provision. The category '3 years and over' includes those in the *early childhood care and education programme* (ISCED 0).

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 1 year	1-year-olds	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds
Early years learning and care services	4.5	23.8	42.0	90.9	78.1	9.9

Sources: Central Statistics Office (2023).

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	9.8	26.7	87.5	75.6	0.8	0.0	-
ISCED 1	-	-	0.2	17.6	97.8	100.0	100.0

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

There is centre-based and home-based ECEC available for children under the age of 6.

From the age of 2 years and 8 months, the early childhood care and education programme provides each child with 15 hours of ECEC per week free of charge for two full academic years or 76 weeks.

From age 4, children may be enrolled in infant classes in primary schools, which are formally regarded as primary education (ISCED 1) but are not compulsory. Most children start primary school at age 5.

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is the main department responsible for the statutory framework and binding rules relating to ECEC. It collaborates with the Department of Education in relation to curriculum development and oversight. The Department of Education is responsible for infant classes for 4- and 5-year-olds in primary schools.

Primary education is compulsory at age 6.

Current reforms

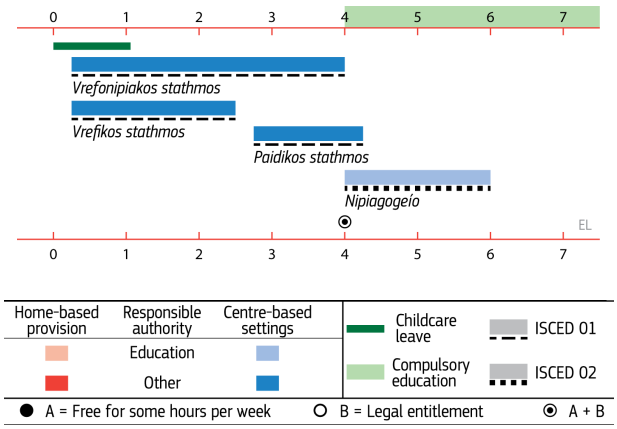
Under the national action plan for childminding (2021–2028), in September 2024 regulations commenced for what was previously a largely unregulated home-based ECEC sector ([7]). Home-based ECEC providers have a 3-year transition period (to September 2027) before registration becomes mandatory.

([7]) https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/df207-national-action-plan-for-childminding-2021-2028/

Greece

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Greece, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *vrefonipiakos stathmos, vrefonipiakos stathmos* and *paidikos stathmos*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *nipiagogeío*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	-	-	-	96.4	99.7	4.4	-
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	95.6	100.0

Note: ISCED 0 refers only to ISCED 02.

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

There are various forms of ECEC available for children under the age of 4: infant centres (*vrefonipiakos stathmos*) for children aged 2 months to 4 years, daycare centres (*vrefikos stathmos*) for children aged 2 months to 2-and-a-half, and child centres (*paidikos stathmos*) for children from 2-and-a-half to 4 years old. The Ministry of the Interior shares the authority with the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family for the provision of ECEC for children under 4.

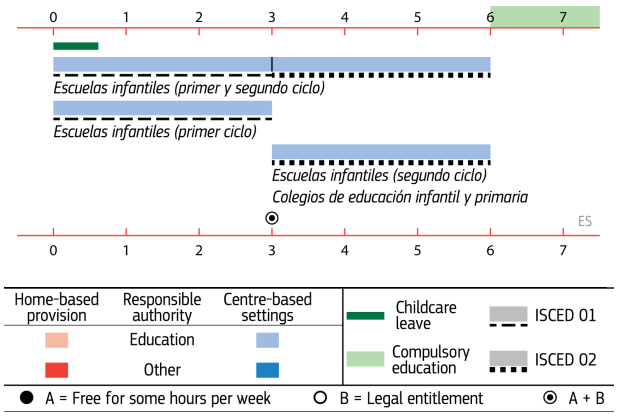
Children aged 4–5 attend compulsory pre-primary school (*nipiagogeío*), which falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports.

Primary education starts at age 6.

Spain

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Spain, the category 'under 3 years' refers to children in *escuelas infantiles (primer ciclo)*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *escuelas infantiles (segundo ciclo)* and in *colegios de educación infantil y primaria*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 01	29.7 (*)	64.2	0.1	-	-	-	-
ISCED 02	-	-	95.3	97.0	97.4	0.8	-
ISCED 0	29.7	64.2	95.4	97.0	97.4	0.8	-
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	0.1	97.1	98.1

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

(*) 12.9 % of less than 1 year old children and 46.0 % of 1-year-olds. *Sources:* Enrolment data and population data from the National Statistical Institute's Encuesta Continua de Población.

Organisation

Early childhood education (*educación infantil*) is divided into two cycles (under 3 years and 3 years and over), which can be provided either in separate settings or in combined settings for both cycles (*escuelas infantiles*).

The first cycle of early childhood education is under the responsibility of the departments in charge of education in the autonomous communities, except for Galicia, where the responsibility is shared with the Department of Social Policy.

The second cycle of early childhood education is under the responsibility of the departments of education in the autonomous communities.

The cities of Ceuta and Melilla are centrally managed: both the first and second cycles of ECEC are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports.

Home-based ECEC (*atención temprana en casa*) exists in 3 out of 17 autonomous communities: Madrid, Navarre and Galicia. In Galicia, it only applies to rural settlements with fewer than 5 000 inhabitants.

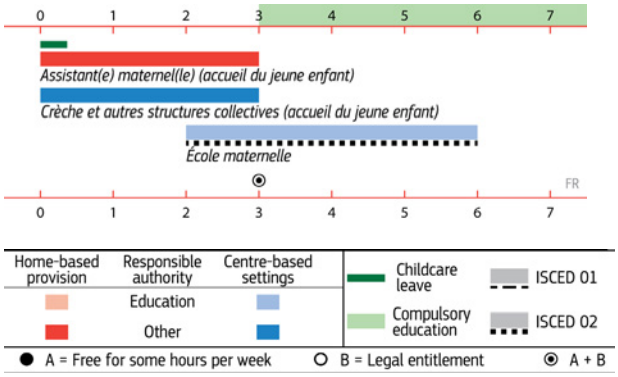
From age 3, children are legally entitled to pre-primary education free of charge.

Primary education starts at age 6.

France

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to France, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *accueil du jeune enfant*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *écoles maternelles*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2021	Under 3
Assistant(e)s maternel(le)s	27
Crèches et autres structures collectives	22
Enseignement préélémentaire	3
Total	52

Note: The table shows sample survey data and refers to primary and secondary custody arrangements.

Source: DREES (2023). https://drees.solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/2023-02/ER1257MAJ.pdf

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	-	10.3	100.0	100.0	100.0	1.7 (*)	0.2 (*)
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	0.6	100.0	100.0

(*) Only specific cases (e.g. children with SEN/disabilities).

Note: ISCED 0 refers only to ISCED 02.

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

The ECEC system includes various types of provision, especially for younger children. Childminders (*assistant(e)s maternel(le)s*) provide most of the ECEC for this group, but centre-based crèches and other group settings (e.g. *jardins d'enfant*) are also available. Infant care (*accueil du jeune enfant*) is regulated by the Ministry of Solidarity.

From age 3, it is compulsory to attend pre-primary education (*enseignement préélémentaire*) in pre-primary schools (*écoles maternelles*). Admission from the age of 2 is possible and is encouraged in schools located in disadvantaged social areas. This is coordinated by the Ministry of National Education.

Primary education starts at age 6.

Current reforms

In 2023, the government announced that a public early childhood service will be available from January 2025, with an objective of creating additional 35 000 places by 2027 ([8]). ECEC governance will be restructured. Municipalities will become the primary organizers for ECEC supply managing local listings, parent guidance, and information. The Ministry of Solidarity will set a national strategy, defining policy goals for supply growth and quality, including best practices, evaluation guidelines and strengthening of controls.

New pre-primary curriculum for *écoles maternelles* was published (BO n°41 of 31/10/2024) and will apply from 2025/2026 school year ([9]). It places stronger emphasis on teaching basic skills.

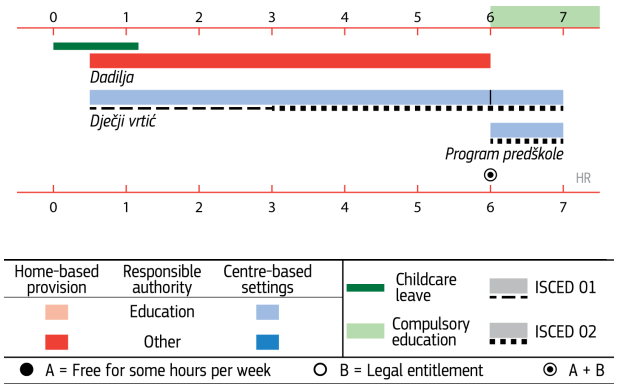
([8]) https://www.caf.fr/sites/default/files/medias/cnaf/Nous_connaitre/qui%20sommes%20nous/Textes%20de%20r%C3%A9f%C3%A9rence/COG/COG%20Etat-Cnaf%202023-2027.pdf

([9]) https://www.education.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/Bulletin_officiel_MENJS_2024_10_31_BO41-1730304113.pdf.

Croatia

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Croatia, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *jaslice* groups in *dječji vrtić*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in groups for children of this age in *dječji vrtić* and *program predškole*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	17.7	52.7	71.7	79.1	78.7	84.4	3.7
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	20.1	97.1

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Current reforms

The new national preschool curriculum is in the process of adoption. The compulsory preschool programme is expected to increase from 250 hours to 700 hours per year from 2025.

Organisation

There is a unitary system of ECEC providing education and care for children from 6 months up until their enrolment in primary education. ECEC is delivered in centre-based settings known as kindergartens (*dječji vrtić*), while the groups for younger children (up to age 3) are called nurseries (*jaslice*). Centre-based settings fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Science, Education and Youth and the founders (local self-governments and/or private individuals). Local self-governments are responsible for most of the financing and provision of services.

A few children attend home-based provision (*dadilja*), which falls under the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy.

All children are obliged to participate in a pre-primary programme (*program predškole*) for 1 year prior to starting school. In sparsely populated areas, pre-primary classes for children who did not attend kindergarten when they were younger may be organised within primary schools.

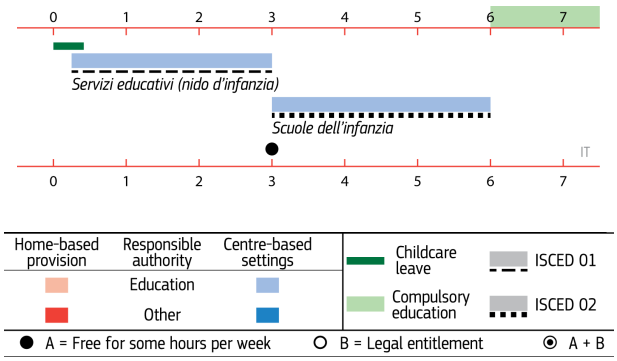
The start of primary education (ISCED 1) depends on the child's birthday. Children born in January–March start primary school in the calendar year in which they turn 6, while the rest start in the calendar year they turn 7.

In addition to the *dječji vrtić* represented in the diagram, children can participate in pre-primary and preschool programmes provided in other legally recognised institutions, such as groups in primary schools, playgroups in libraries, or groups in other health, social, cultural and sports organisations. These settings must be accredited by the Ministry of Science, Education and Youth, and their provision focuses on various short-duration programmes.

Italy

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Italy, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *nido d'infanzia*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *scuole dell'infanzia*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2020 (December)	Under 3
Nidi d'infanzia	26.0
Servizi educative integrativi	4.1
Scuole dell'infanzia (early enrolments)	4.6
Sezione primavera (reference year 2021/2022)	6.7

Source: Istituto degli Innocenti, 2023 except for *sezione primavera*, which come from the Ministry of Education, own calculations, indicative.

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	-	13.8	89.8	93.4	88.1	1.3	-
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	6.6	96.3	97.3

Note: ISCED 0 refers only to ISCED 02.

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

Educational services (*servizi educativi*) for children under the age of 3 are mostly centre based (*nido d'infanzia*). A tiny proportion of children attend home-based provision and playgroups (*servizi educativi integrativi*).

ECEC for children under 3 is managed by the municipalities or by other public and private subjects, based on the criteria defined by regional regulations. The Ministry of Education and Merit allocates financial resources to local authorities; these resources are for the development of the integrated system. The ministry defines the educational guidelines and sets minimum requirements for core staff.

Settings for children aged between 3 and 6 years (*scuole dell'infanzia*) fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Merit. They are managed by the state, municipalities or private subjects. However, the municipalities are responsible for providing and maintaining the premises. State settings provide full-time and free-of-charge ECEC.

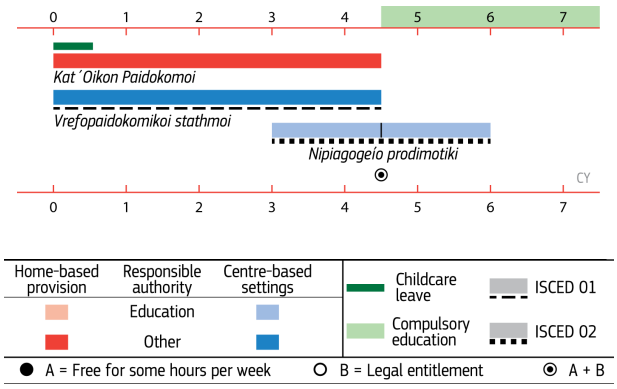
In order to meet the demand of families, some pre-primary schools (*scuole dell'infanzia*) are able to accommodate children aged 24 to 36 months in a special 'spring section' (*sezione primavera*). In addition, and under specific conditions, children who reach the age of 3 by April can be admitted to the main groups in *scuole dell'infanzia.*

Primary education starts at age 6.

Cyprus

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Cyprus, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *vrefopaidokomikoi stathmoi*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *nipiagogeío* (including *prodimotiki*).

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 01	8.9	27.1	28.9	20.4	3.5	0.4	-
ISCED 02	3.9	21.4	39.1	62.8	97.2	40.6	1.1
ISCED 0	12.8	48.4	68.0	83.2	100.0	41.0	1.1
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	0.8	65.5	100.0

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

Children under 4-and-a-half may attend day nurseries (*vrefopaidokomikoi stathmoi*) or home-based care (*kat´Oikon Paidokomoi*). The Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare is responsible for the registration and inspection of day nurseries and home-based care.

From age 3, children may also attend kindergarten (*nipiagogía*), which are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth. This means that children aged between 3 and 4-and-a-half may attend either a kindergarten or a daycare centre.

Pre-primary classes (*prodimotiki*), which take place in *nipiagogía*, are compulsory and free of charge for children from 4-and-a-half.

Primary education is compulsory for children who have reached the age of 6 years.

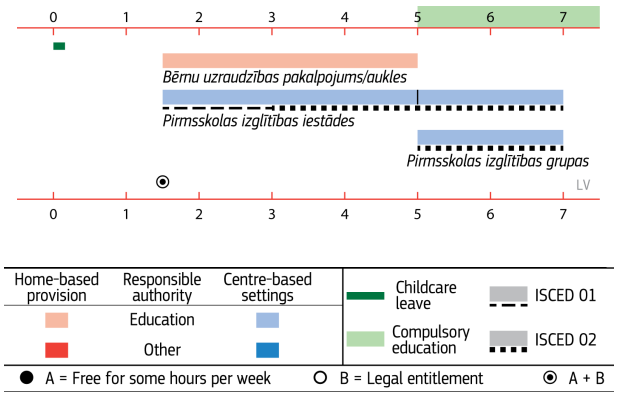
Current reforms

A reform as part of the Cyprus recovery and resilience plan includes the gradual extension of the entry age in free compulsory pre-primary education by 8 months. In September 2024, the entry age was lowered by 2 months. Compulsory education for 4-year-olds is planned to be fully implemented in 2031/2032.

Latvia

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Latvia, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in groups for children of this age in *pirmsskolas izglītības iestādes.* The category '3 years and over' refers to those in groups for children of this age in *pirmsskolas izglītības iestādes* and *pirmsskolas izglītības grupas.*

Participation rates (%)

Total ISCED 0 participation rates, 2023

Under 1	1-year-olds	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds	8-year-olds
-	20.6	77.5	86.1	87.5	87.3	91.6	9.6	0.1

Source: Calculations based on data from the Latvian national education information system and Eurostat.

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	9.7	77.1	91.2	95.2	97.4	94.3	8.2
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	3.4	89.7

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

All children are legally entitled to an ECEC place free of charge from the age of 1-and-a-half. Parental leave is paid at a rate of 44 % of the previous salary until the children reach this age.

Preschool educational institutions (*pirmsskolas izglītības iestādes*) provide pre-primary education programmes (*pirmsskolas izglītības programmas*) for children from the age of 1-and-a-half to the age of 7. In addition, preschool education groups (*pirmsskolas izglītības grupas*) are organised in schools (*skolas*). This provision falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science.

Subsidised home-based provision, referred to as child supervision services / nannies (*bērnu uzraudzības pakalpojums / aukles*) is available from the age of 1-and-a-half if the municipality does not provide a place in a preschool. The National Service for Education and Quality, a subordinate body of the Ministry of Education and Science, is responsible for the register of service providers.

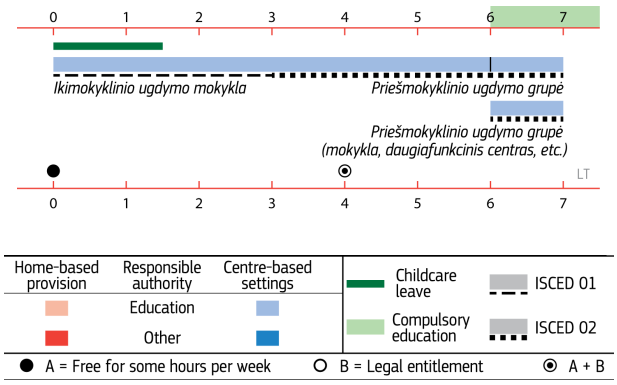
The pre-primary education programme is compulsory from age 5 and can be delivered in *pirmsskolas izglītības iestādes* and *pirmsskolas izglītības grupas.*

Primary education starts at age 7.

Lithuania

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Lithuania, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in nursery (*lopšelis*) groups in *ikimokyklinio ugdymo mokykla*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in kindergarten (*darželis*) groups in *ikimokyklinio ugdymo mokykla* and to children attending *priešmokyklinio ugdymo grupė*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 1 year	1-year-olds	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
Ikimokyklinio ugdymo mokykla	0.4	18.9	69.9	76.1	75.4	73.7	56.3	0.1
Mokykla, daugiafunkcinis centras, etc. (*)	0.01	2.4	13.1	17.7	19.6	22.2	41.3	99.9

(*) ISCED 0 and ISCED 1.

Source: National Agency for Education.

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	9.8	82.7	94.0	96.2	96.6	92.0	0.3
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	7.6	99.8

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

The majority of children who participate in ECEC attend unitary preschools (*ikimokyklinio ugdymo mokykla,* also commonly referred to as nursery-kindergarten *(lopšelis-darželis*, *vaikų darželis)* until the beginning of compulsory primary education at age 7. The groups for children under 3 are called *lopšelis* (nursery), while older children attend *darželis* (kindergarten) groups.

Pre-primary education is compulsory during the year before beginning primary education. The pre-primary groups (*priešmokyklinio ugdymo grupės*) may be held either in ECEC settings (*ikimokyklinio ugdymo mokykla*) or in schools (*mokykla*). In areas with low numbers of children, *darželis* groups for children aged 3 and over can be provided in schools, multifunctional centres (*daugiafunkcinis centras*) or other establishments.

The place guarantee was introduced for all 4-year-olds in September 2023.

ECEC falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. Local authorities co-fund and implement ECEC programmes. It is free of charge for a minimum of 20 hours per week; in some municipalities, full-time ECEC is free.

Primary education starts at age 7.

Current reforms

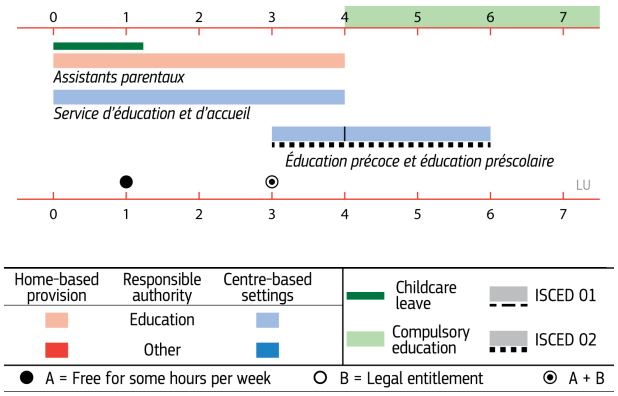
From September 2025, 2-year-olds will have an ECEC place guaranteed.

A new external evaluation process of centre-based ECEC settings by the National Agency for Education is being implemented from autumn 2024.

Luxembourg

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Luxembourg, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in the *service d'éducation et d'accueil*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *education précoce* and *éducation préscolaire*. Information on pre-primary classes refers to *éducation préscolaire*.

Participation rates (%)

Non-formal education sector

Reference year 2023	Less than 1 year	1-year-olds	2-year-olds
Childminders	1	2	2
Public crèches	7	22	26
Private (government-dependent) crèches	16	47	53
Total	24	71	81

Sources: Unpublished calculations, administrative data from the billing of *chèque-service accueil* (data from Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth) and administrative data on the population in Luxembourg (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies).

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	-	2.6	70.3	99.9	96.0	6.9	0.1
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	5.2	94.1	99.7

Note: ISCED 0 refers only to ISCED 02.

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

From an early age, children may attend centre-based provision known as *service d'éducation et d'accueil*, which is delivered in *crèches* or *foyer de jour*. These centre-based settings provide 20 hours per week free of charge for each child from the age of 1.

In addition, there is a system of regulated home-based care delivered by childminders (*assistants parentaux*).

From age 3, children are legally entitled to pre-primary education, which forms the first cycle of basic education, delivered in primary schools. The first cycle includes 1 year of *éducation précoce*, which is optional (children may also attend *service d'éducation et d'accueil* until the age of 4). The following 2 years of *éducation préscolaire* are compulsory.

In addition to the provision presented in the diagram, parents of older children (aged 3 and above) can benefit from a part-time offer of non-formal education services (*service d'éducation et d'accueil pour les enfants scolarisés*) complementing the provision to which children are entitled.

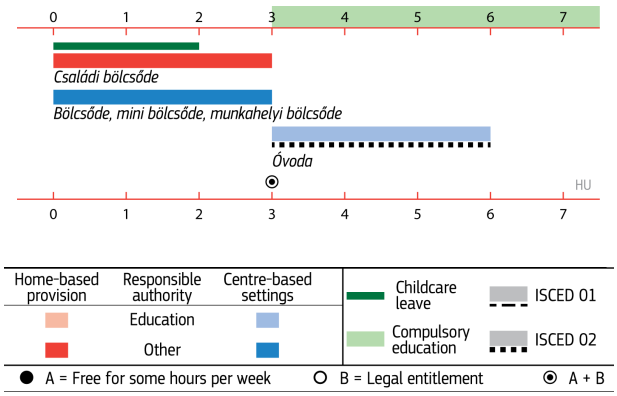
The Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth is responsible for the entire phase of ECEC.

Primary education starts at age 6.

Hungary

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Hungary, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *bölcsőde*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *óvoda*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Age (years)							
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Bölcsőde (centre- and home-based)	0.2	7.0	31.0	15.8				
Óvoda				85.9	96.7	97.2	53.8	2.8

Source: Calculations based on the 2022 national statistical survey programme of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (questionnaire 1203), population and kindergarten enrolment data.

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 01	0.8	10.8	1.3	0.6	0.2	0.1	-
ISCED 02	-	-	83.3	96.2	96.1	50.6	1.9
ISCED 0	0.8	10.8	84.6	96.8	96.3	50.7	1.9
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	45.6	94.4

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

The ECEC system comprises two stages and is bisectoral (social care and education). Children aged 20 weeks to 3 years are eligible to enrol in nurseries, which are either centre based (*bölcsőde*, *mini bölcsőde*, *munkahelyi bölcsőde*) or home based (*családi bölcsőde*).

In the year in which a child reaches the age of 3 years by 31 August, they must attend kindergarten *(óvoda)* for at least 4 hours a day from the beginning of the school year. Parents may request a 1-year exemption, providing justification. *Óvoda* are free of charge with no restrictions (usually open 10 hours per day). Children who will reach the age of 3 within the next 6 months may also be admitted to *óvoda.*

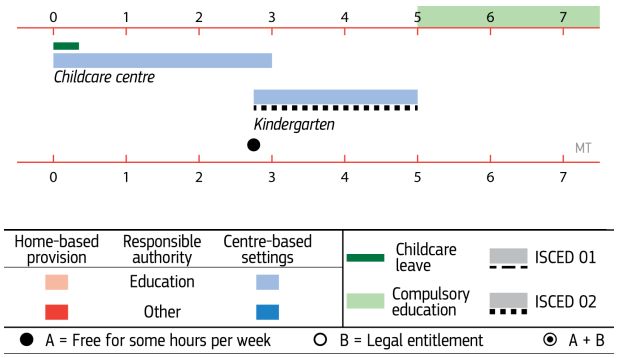
ECEC operates as a split system in Hungary. Nurseries are supervised by the Ministry of Culture and Innovation, whereas kindergartens, as part of the public education system, fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior.

Primary education typically begins on 1 September after the child reaches the age of 6. Parents may request a 1-year postponement, providing justification.

Malta

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Malta, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in childcare centres. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in kindergartens.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	-	18.2	85.6	89.2	0.9	-	-
ISCED 1	-	-	-	0.1	89.6	91.1	94.2

Note: ISCED 0 refers only to ISCED 02.

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

Children up to age 3 can attend childcare centres. The government provides care under the free childcare scheme ([10]) for children from 3 months if parents/guardians are in employment or are pursuing their education (targeted legal entitlement).

Kindergartens accept children from 2 years and 9 months ([11]) until they start compulsory primary education at age 5. Kindergartens are free of charge for all children in state and church establishments. The proportion of pre-primary children enrolled in independent private kindergartens was 18 % in 2020. State kindergartens are integrated within state primary schools. Independent and church kindergartens may be stand-alone settings and some may be integrated into childcare centres.

All types of ECEC provision fall under the responsibility of the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation.

Children are enrolled in primary education during the year they reach the age of 5.

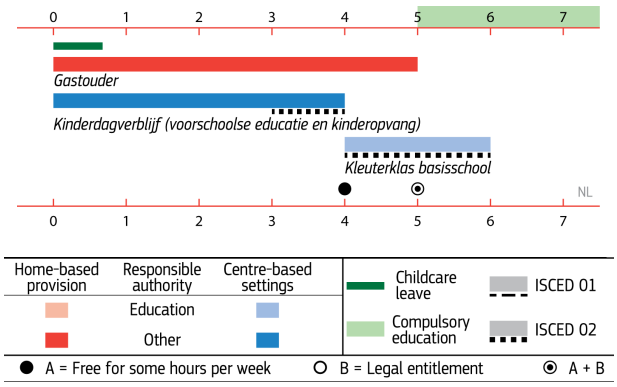
([10]) https://secure-jobsplus.gov.mt/ChildCare/childcare.html

([11]) The child must be 3 years of age by the end of April of the reference year.

Netherlands

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to the Netherlands, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *kinderdagverblijf*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *kleuterklas basisscholen*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2023	Less than 4 years
Home-based ECEC (*gastouderopvang*)	8.3
Kinderdagverblijf	54.2
Total	60.4

Note: Values are based on the weighted number of children per year. A child using childcare for 1 day counts as 1/365 of a child. The total is smaller than the total of the separate categories because a child can use both centre- and home-based ECEC, and these duplications have been removed from the overall total.

Sources: Childcare Figures Second Quarter 2023, 'Population on the first of the month; sex, age, migration background', Statistics Netherlands ([12]).

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	-	-	88.3	89.1	98.5	-	-
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	99.2	99.5

Note: ISCED 0 refers only to ISCED 02.

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

Up until the age of 4, children can attend centre-based private provision (*kinderdagverblijf*). Regulated home-based ECEC (*gastouderopvang*) is also available. This provision comes under the remit of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.

Children from a disadvantaged background who are aged 2-and-a-half to 4 are offered support through targeted early childhood education programmes (*voorschoolse educatie*), which reach around 45 000 children.

The last 2 years of pre-primary education (*kleuterklas*) for 4- and 5-year-olds are offered free of charge in primary schools (*basisscholen*). This provision falls under the remit of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

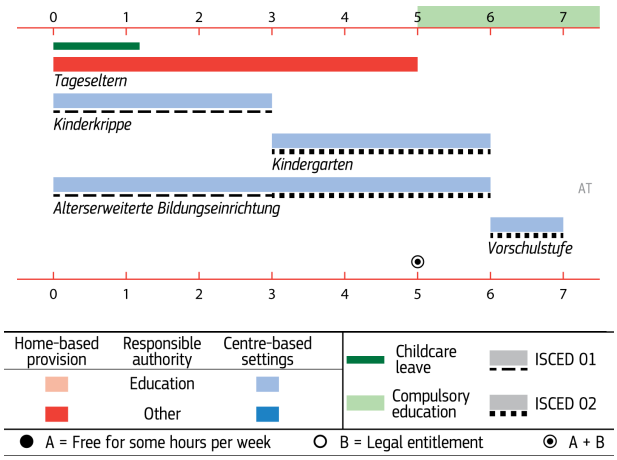
Primary education (ISCED 1) starts at age 6; education is compulsory from age 5.

([12]) https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/publicaties/2023/10/20/cijfers-kinderopvang-tweede-kwartaal-2023; https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline/#/CBS/nl/dataset/83482NED/table?dl=9C697

Austria

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Austria, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *Kinderkrippe* and groups for children under 3 in *Alterserweiterte Bildungseinrichtung*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *Kindergarten* and groups for children of this age in *Alterserweiterte Bildungseinrichtung*.

Participation rates (%)

Age at 1 September 2023	Less than 1 year	1-year-olds	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
Kinderkrippe	1.6	23.1	33.1	3.4	0.4	0.3	0.0	0.0
Kindergarten	0.0	0.2	16.6	72.7	84.3	87.3	1.2	0.2
Alterserweiterte Bildungseinrichtung	0.4	3.8	9.8	12.7	11.3	10.2	1.6	1.7
Vorschulstufe	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	10.6	0.1
Tageseltern (*)	0.1	1.7	3.5	2	0.9	0.5	0.4	0

(*) Estimated. Those attending *Tageseltern* might include children who also use other centre-based ECEC provision. *Source:* Statistics Austria, 2023.

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 01	7.7	42.2	14.3	1.0	0.3	0.1	-
ISCED 02	0.0	6.1	65.8	93.1	97.1	41.6	2.2
ISCED 0	7.8	48.3	80.1	94.1	97.4	41.7	2.2
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	57.2	95.8

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

Up to the age of 3, early childhood care is provided in centre-based settings called *Kinderkrippen*. In addition, there is a system of regulated home-based care (*Tageseltern*). From age 3 (and sometimes even slightly earlier), children may attend *Kindergarten*. In addition to these main structures, some children attend age-extended groups (*Alterserweiterte Bildungseinrichtung*) for children aged under 6 years.

One year prior to the beginning of primary education, attendance at *Kindergartens* is compulsory and free of charge.

The preschool stage (*Vorschulstufe*) is for children who have attained statutory school age but are not yet ready for school. This pre-primary education is organised in primary schools.

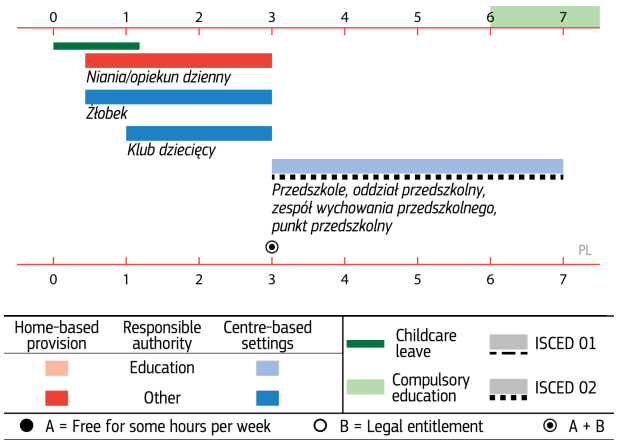
Governance of the ECEC system is highly decentralised: the main responsibility lies within the *Bundesländer*. In all *Bundesländer*, educational authorities formulate policies for centre-based ECEC provision.

Primary education starts at age 6.

Poland

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Poland, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *żłobek* and *klub dziecięcy*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *przedszkole, oddział przedszkolny, zespół wychowania przedszkolnego* and *punkt przedszkolny*.

Participation rates (%)

	Age (years)						
Reference years 2022 and 2023/2024	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Żłobki, kluby dziecięce, nianie, opiekunowie dzienni	0.7	21.2	26.5	2.8	0.1	-	-
Przedszkole	-	-	6.2	75.5	80.8	80.7	68.1
Oddział przedszkolny	-	-	0.6	7.8	10.6	14.9	29.9
Punkty przedszkolne	-	-	0.2	1.6	1.9	1.3	0.6

Sources: Information about *żłobki*, *kluby dziecięce*, *nianie* and *opiekunowie dzienni* for 2022: Statistics Poland enrolment and population data. The remaining data on is for the 2023/2024 from the *System Informacji Oświatowej* ([13]).

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	-	6.3	80.2	91.5	96.7	100.0	2.9
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	1.6	98.4

Note: ISCED 0 refers only to ISCED 02.

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

Children aged under 3 years may attend centre-based nurseries (*żłobki)* and children's clubs (*kluby dziecięce)* for 10 hours a day. *Żłobek* is available for children aged between 20 weeks and 3 years, while *klub dziecięcy* is for children aged 1 year and above. In addition, home-based childminders (*niania / opiekun dzienny*) are available, although not widespread. ECEC for children under 3 is supervised by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy.

Every child from age 3 is legally entitled to preschool education (*wychowanie przedszkolne*) of at least 25 hours a week free of charge. This provision falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education. Children aged 3–6 years may be enrolled in pre-school (*przedszkole)* or in a preschool class (*oddział przedszkolny*) in primary schools (*szkoła podstawowa)*. In order to tackle the shortage of ECEC places, provision on selected weekdays is offered in settings called *zespół wychowania przedszkolnego* and *punkt przedszkolny*. One year of pre-primary education is compulsory for 6-year-olds.

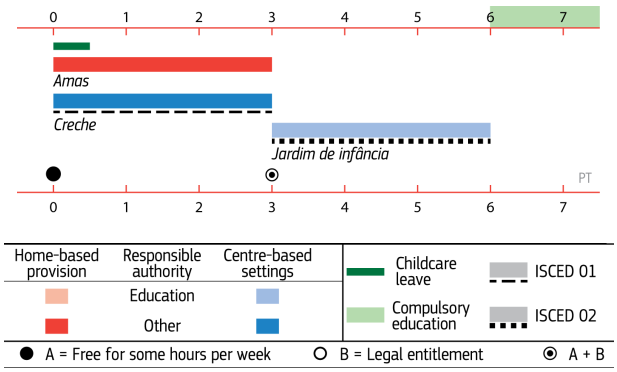
Primary education starts at age 7, although parents can choose to send their child at the age of 6, provided that the child has attended preschool education for at least 1 year or has a favourable report from appropriate counselling services.

([13]) https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/dzieci-i-rodzina/dzieci/zlobki-i-kluby-dzieciece-w-2022-roku,3,10.html; https://demografia.stat.gov.pl/BazaDemografia/Tables.aspx; https://sio.gov.pl/.

Portugal

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Portugal, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *creches*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *jardins de infância*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2021/2022	Less than 1 year	1-year-olds	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds
Amas	0.4	1.0	1.0	0.1	-	-
Creche	22.4	45.8	55.5	2.8	0.1	-
Jardim de infância	-	-	-	81.8	96.0	99.8
Total	22.8	46.8	56.5	84.7	96.1	99.8

Note: Mainland only (Madeira and the Azores are excluded).

Sources: Information for under 3-year-olds received from the Office of Strategy and Planning (Gabinete de Estratégia e Planeamento) of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social); data for 3- to 5-year-olds from Directorate-General for Education and Science Statistics (2023), Graphic 3.3.2.

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	-	-	86.3	99.0	100.0	15.4	-
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	0.2	90.3	100.0

Note: ISCED 0 refers only to ISCED 02.

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Current reforms (1)

A gradual extension of ECEC free of charge to all children under the age of 3 has been introduced under the programme Happy Childcare (*Creche Feliz*). As of 1 September 2024, creche is free of charge (see Law No 2/2022 of 3 January and Order No 158/2024/1 of 6 June) ([14]).

Organisation

Up to the age of 3, early childhood care is provided in centre-based settings known as *creches*. From 2024, all children enrolled in *creches* have the right to free-of-charge attendance, regardless of the type of provider. There is also a system of regulated home-based provision, which is ensured by childminders (*amas*) who work either independently or as a part of formal groups known as *creche familiar*. Home-based and centre-based care for younger children falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security.

From age 3, children are legally entitled to attend pre-primary education (*educação pré-escolar*) in centre-based *jardins de infância,* which are free of charge for 25 hours a week for all children in public and private non-profit sectors. Despite the extension of legal entitlement from children aged 4 to children aged 3 in 2018, demand has still not been met for 3-year-olds in some large cities. The legal entitlement is fully enforced from age 4 onwards. This area falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation.

Some private self-financed and private publicly subsidised settings may include both *creche* and *jardim de infância* in the same building.

Compulsory primary education starts at age 6.

Current reforms (2)

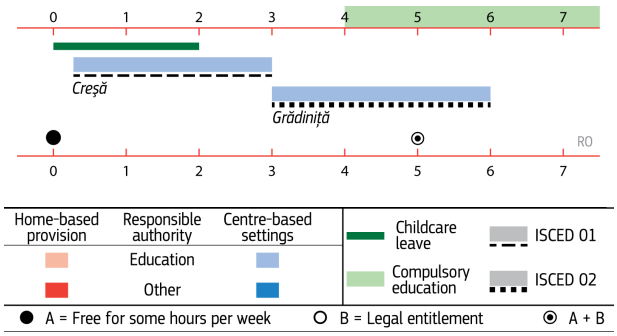
The national pedagogical guidelines for *creches* (for those aged 0–2) were approved in March 2024. They align with the curricular guidelines for preschool education (for those aged 3–6), reflecting a unified vision of quality in ECEC for children aged 0–6. They serve as a common resource to support policy decision-making on ECEC at the national, regional and local levels.

([14]) https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/lei/2-2022-176907536; https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/portaria/158-2024-868097437.

Romania

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Romania, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *creșă*. The information for children aged '3 years and over' refers to those in *grădiniță*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 01	1.4	7.1	1.2	-	-	-	-
ISCED 02	-	11.9	64.7	77.0	81.2	16.2	-
ISCED 0	1.4	18.9	65.9	77.0	81.2	16.2	-
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	72.8	81.0

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

From 3 months up to the age of 3, ECEC (*educație antepreșcolară*) is available in nurseries (*creșă*), although attendance is low. For children aged 3 years (sometimes even from age 2) up to 6 years, pre-primary education (*învățământ preșcolar*) is delivered at centre-based kindergartens (*grădiniță).* Attendance is compulsory from age 4.

In regions lacking sufficient places, such as isolated or disadvantaged areas or densely populated areas with overcrowded settings, ECEC groups may be established within pre-university education institutions, such as schools offering primary or secondary education. These services may be called *ludotheque*, playgroups or community kindergartens ([15]).

ECEC is free of charge, even full-time.

Since 2021/2022, the Ministry of Education has been responsible for the entire ECEC phase, and nurseries (*creșă*) have become school institutions.

Primary education starts at age 6.

Current reforms

In accordance with the provisions of Law No 56/2019, since September 2020, the age of compulsory ECEC has been being gradually lowered. From September 2030, the starting age of compulsory education will be age 3 ([16]).

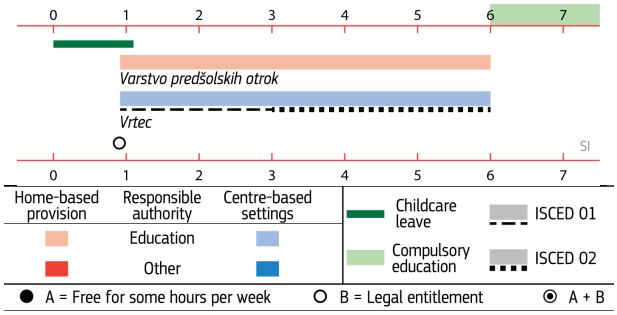
([15]) See the law establishing complementary early childhood education services: https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/263359.

([16]) The age groups concerned are described in the National Education Law, Art. 23(1)(a), see https://edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Legislatie/2020/LEN_actualizata_octombrie_2020.pdf.

Slovenia

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Slovenia, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in groups for children of this age in *vrtec*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in groups for children of this age in *vrtec*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2023/2024	Less than 1 year	1-year-olds	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds
Vrtec	0.4	58.8	85.1	91.2	93.7	95.7	10.5

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia.

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	28.0	82.4	89.7	93.1	95.0	11.1	-
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	0.1	87.3	98.8

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

There is a unitary ECEC system providing education and care (*predšolska vzgoja in varstvo*) for children from 11 months until the start of primary education. The vast majority of children attend centre-based settings known as kindergartens (*vrtec).* There is also regulated home-based childcare for preschool children (*varstvo predšolskih otrok*), but this only involves a very small proportion of children.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the entire ECEC sector.

From age 11 months, children are legally entitled to a publicly subsidised ECEC place.

Current reforms

Since 2022, the kindergarten curriculum has been undergoing revision to strengthen certain aspects, such as speech and early literacy, multilingualism and multiculturalism, digital competences, sustainable development and media education ([17]). This process is supported by the recovery and resilience plan ([18]), which aims to modernise education programmes, including that on ECEC, in the context of the green and digital transitions.

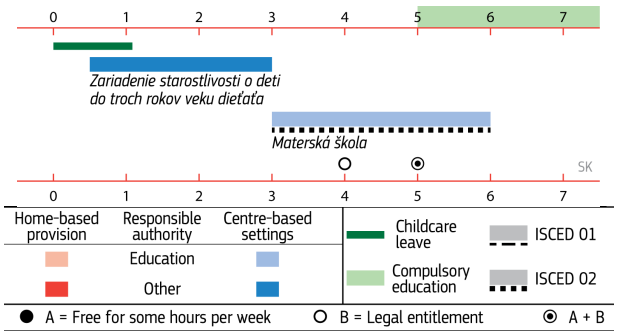
([17]) See the starting points for the reform of the kindergarten curriculum here: https://www.zrss.si/pdf/izhodisca_za_prenovo_KZV.pdf.

([18]) https://www.gov.si/en/registries/projects/the-recovery-and-resilience-plan/about-the-recovery-and-resilience-plan/smart-sustainable-and-inclusive-growth/strengthening-competences-especially-digital-and-those-required-by-new-occupations-and-the-green-transition/.

Slovakia

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Slovakia, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *zariadenia starostlivosti o deti do troch rokov veku dieťaťa.* The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *materské školy.*

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022/2023	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
Materská škola	14.1	68.5	80.1	91.0	42.2	1.3

Source: Expert calculations based on Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information (Centrum Vedecko-Technických Informácií SR) ([19]).

(%) Reference year 2022	Less than 3 years
Facilities for children up to 3 years of age	2.09
Children's groups (*)	0.02

(*) Data on children's groups is based on the capacity, not the actual number of children.

Source: Social services information system, register of social services.

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	-	12.1	66.6	78.6	90.5	46.6	3.7
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	0.1	49.6	93.9

Note: ISCED 0 refers only to ISCED 02.

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

The ECEC system for children under 3 is currently being developed. Most younger children do not attend ECEC and are instead looked after by their parents. Those who are enrolled attend nurseries (*detské jasle*), which are officially called care facilities for children up to 3 years of age (*zariadenia starostlivosti o deti do troch rokov veku dieťaťa*). In addition, a network of home-based children's groups (*detské skupiny*) for children under 4 years is being established. This provision is governed by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family.

Pre-primary education (*predprimárne vzdelávanie*) is provided by institutions called kindergartens (*materské školy*), which fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth. Typically, *materské školy* accept children aged 3–6 years. Admission of 2-year-old children is possible if there is capacity.

Pre-primary education is compulsory from age 5. Public *materské školy* provide full-time education and care for children attending compulsory pre-primary education free of charge. The fees in private *materské školy* for compulsory pre-primary education are reduced by the amount of the state contribution.

Primary education typically begins on 1 September after the child reaches the age of 6.

Current reforms

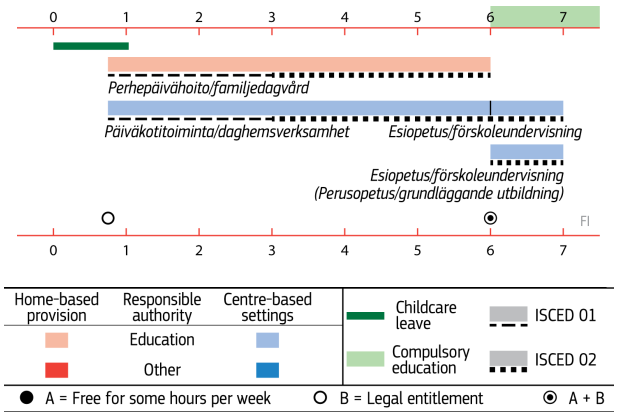
Reforms based on the plan of recovery and resilience introduced a gradual implementation of legal entitlement to a place in kindergartens. 4-year-old children will have a legal entitlement to a place in kindergarten from 2024/2025 and 3-year-old children will have this entitlement from 2025/2026.

([19]) https://www.cvtisr.sk/cvti-sr-vedecka-kniznica/informacie-o-skolstve/statistiky/statisticka-rocenka-publikacia/statisticka-rocenka-materske-skoly.html?page_id=9602.

Finland

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Finland, the category 'under 3 years' refers not to a specific institution but rather to children under 3 in *päiväkotitoiminta/daghemsverksamhet* or *perhepäivähoito/ familjedagvård*. The category '3 years and over' refers to children aged 3 and over in *päiväkotitoiminta/ daghemsverksamhet*, *perhepäivähoito/ familjedagvård* or *esiopetus/föskoleundervisning*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022/2023	Less than 1 year	1-year-olds	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ECEC								
Early education centre	0.8	37.3	67.2	80.3	85.4	88.4	79.3	2.1
Family daycare	0.2	3.7	5.2	4.3	3.3	2	0.4	0.1
Group family daycare	0	1.2	1.9	1.6	1.4	1	0.3	0.1
Pre-primary class	-	-	-	-	-	13.2	96.3	1.6

Sources: Vipunen (https://vipunen.fi/en-gb/) and StatFin database, Table 138c.

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	19.0	69.7	83.4	87.3	88.8	95.5	1.4
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	0.1	94.1

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Current reforms (1)

The 2-year pre-primary education trial, running from 2021 to 2024, evaluates the advantages of extending the current 1-year programme to include 5-year-olds, creating a 2-year compulsory pre-primary education programme ([20]).

Organisation

Children are legally entitled to a publicly subsidised ECEC place from 9 months. ECEC falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The majority of children attend centre-based early education activities (*päiväkotitoiminta/ daghemsverksamhet*). Home-based childcare (*perhepäivähoito/familjedagvård*) can be delivered by individual childminders or by two or three childminders working together.

The year that precedes the beginning of primary education (when the child is 6 years old) is compulsory. The compulsory pre-primary programme (*esiopetus/ förskoleundervisning*) may be organised either as centre-based early education activities (*päiväkoti/ daghem*) or in schools providing primary education (*perusopetus / grundläggande utbildning*). Pre-primary education is part-time, and its operational year follows the school year. Therefore, most children in pre-primary education also participate in complementary ECEC.

Primary education (ISCED 1) starts in August of the year in which the child turns 7.

Current reforms (2)

Currently, at least one third of ECEC staff in early education centres must be qualified ECEC teachers, while two thirds can be childcarers with ISCED 3 qualifications. The ECEC legislation adopted in 2018 aims to increase staff competences. As of 2030, at least two thirds of the people who work in an early education centre performing upbringing, education and care tasks must be qualified ECEC teachers or social pedagogues specialised in ECEC with ISCED 6 qualifications, and at least half of these staff members must be qualified ECEC teachers. Other staff members must at least be qualified as ECEC childcarers ([21]).

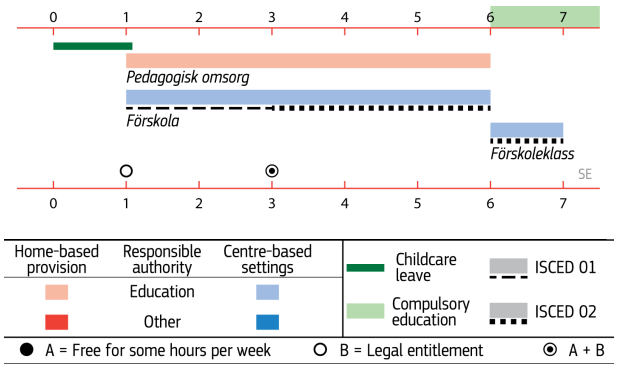
([20]) https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163006/OKM-twoyear_preprimary_booklet_webFX.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

([21]) https://okm.fi/en/legislation-ecec.

Sweden

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Sweden, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in groups for children under 3 in *förskola*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in groups for children of this age in *förskola* and *förskoleklass*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	1-year-olds	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
Förskola	51	91.3	94.5	95.6	95.5	0.6	0.2
Pedagogisk omsorg	0.7	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.1	-	-
Förskoleklass	-	-	-	-	0.4	96.7	0.5
Total	51.7	92.4	95.7	96.8	97	97.3	0.7

Source: Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2024b).

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	25.0	90.8	94.2	95.2	95.9	98.3	0.6
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	0.6	98.9

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

The ECEC system consists of unitary preschool centres (*förskola*), aimed at children aged between 1 and 6 years. Between the ages of 6 and 7, children attend a compulsory pre-primary class (*förskoleklass*). The *förskoleklass* is usually closely associated with the school the pupils will attend. In addition, there is a system known as pedagogical care (*pedagogisk omsorg*), which is run by registered childminders and can be organised in various ways (i.e. either within childminders' homes or elsewhere). As well as the provision represented in the diagram, many local authorities offer ECEC services in open preschools (*öppen förskola*), where parents (or childminders) can accompany their children whenever they wish. All the above provision falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research.

From age 1, all children are entitled to publicly subsidised ECEC provision and, from age 3, they are entitled to provision that is free of charge for at least 15 hours per week. According to Swedish law (Skollag (2010:800)), 'preschool shall be offered to the extent necessary with consideration to the parents' employment or studies, or if the child has its own need due to the family's overall situation' ([22]). Children attending the *förskoleklass* whose parents are working or studying have the right to a publicly subsidised place in an after-school recreation centre (*fritidshem*).

Primary education starts at age 7.

Current reforms

There are plans to introduce a 10-year primary school by changing the preschool class (the last year of compulsory ECEC) into the first year of primary education in 2028 ([23]).

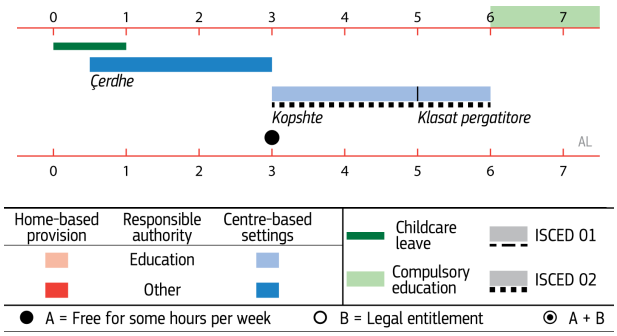
([22]) https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skollag-2010800_sfs-2010-800/#K8.

([23]) https://www.regeringen.se/artiklar/2024/09/regeringens-budgetsatsningar-pa-skolan-2025/.

Albania

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Albania, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *çerdhe*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *kopshte*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	-	-	67.7	79.5	94.2	9.8	-
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	0.6	69.7	89.0

Note: ISCED 0 refers only to ISCED 02.

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

From 6 months up to the age of 3, children may attend centre-based settings known as nurseries (*çerdhe*). From the age of 3 years up to 6 years, early childhood education (*arsimi parashkollor*) is available in kindergartens (*kopshte*) free of charge. From age 5, children can attend preparatory classes (*klasat pergatitore*), which aim to help children get ready for primary education.

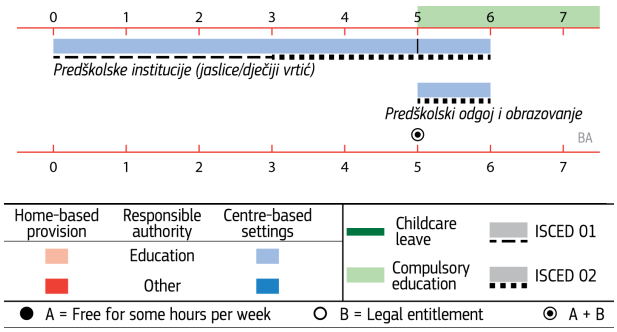
Çerdhe fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. Standards, teaching staff and curricula in *kopshte* are regulated by the Ministry of Education and Sports. The infrastructure of *çerdhe* and *kopshte* are the responsibility of local governance units.

Primary education starts at age 6.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *jaslice* groups in *predškolske institucije*. The category '3 years and over' refers to children in *dječiji vrtić* groups in *predškolske institucije* and *predskolski odgoj i obrazovanje*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022/2023	Less than 1 year	1-year-olds	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	Mixed groups (3–6 years)
Predškolske institucije	1.0	9.2	13.9	15.9	17.0	18.8	24.2

Source: Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2023).

No Eurostat data available.

Organisation

The ECEC system provides education and care for children from 6 months to 6 years. Usually, ECEC institutions (*predškolske institucije*) combine nursery (*jaslice*) groups for children under 3 and kindergarten (*dječiji vrtić*) groups for children from the age of 3 until their enrolment in primary school. However, some *predškolske institucije* have groups only for older children (3- to 5-year-olds). There are also mixed groups for children of various ages.

ECEC (*predškolsko vaspitanje i obrazovanje*) falls under the overall responsibility of 12 ministries responsible for education: one for the entity the Republic of Srpska, one for each of the 10 cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and one for the Brčko District.

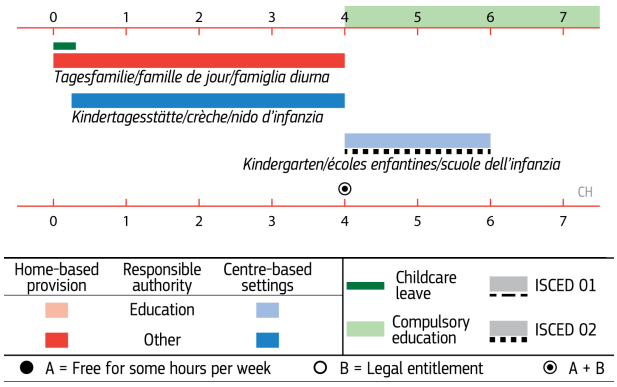
From the age of 5, ECEC is compulsory in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Brčko District for up to 5 hours per week. The compulsory ECEC programme lasts 150–190 hours, depending on the canton and entity. It may be organised in schools (*predskolski odgoj i obrazovanje*) and ECEC institutions (*predškolske institucije*). In the Republic of Srpska, ECEC is not compulsory, but most children attend a pre-primary programme for 10 hours per week during the March to June before they start primary education.

Primary education starts at age 6.

Switzerland

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Switzerland, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *Kindertagesstätte / crèche / nido d'infanzia*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *Kindergarten/ école enfantine / scuole dell'infanzia.*

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	-	-	2.2	48.8	97.6	53.0	1.4
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	0.6	46.6	98.3

Note: ISCED 0 refers only to ISCED 02.

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

Due to its federal structure, the ECEC system in Switzerland is highly decentralised and differs across the 26 cantons. There are, however, some characteristics common to the whole system.

Centre-based ECEC (*Kindertagesstätte / crèche / nido d'infanzia*) is available for children from 3-and-a-half months up to age 4 (the start of compulsory education). There is also home-based ECEC (*Tagesfamilie / famille de jour / famiglia diurna*). The majority of settings for younger children fall under the responsibility of the cantonal ministries of social affairs, while in some cantons they are under the responsibility of the cantonal ministries of education.

For children up to age 4, there is no legal entitlement to ECEC, except in the canton Basel-Stadt.

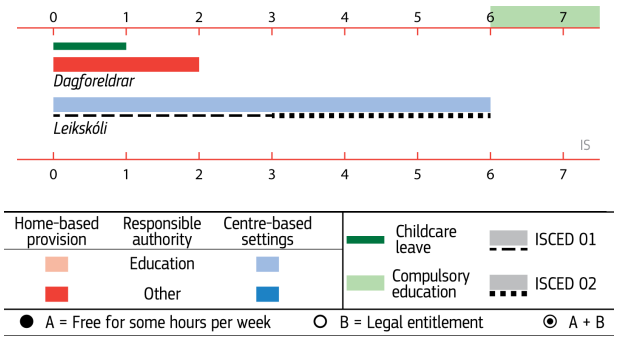
From the beginning of compulsory education, which in most cantons starts at age 4 (but in a few at age 5 or 6), children must attend pre-primary institutions (*Kindergärten / écoles enfantines / scuole dell'infanzia*), which fall under the responsibility of the cantonal ministries of education.

Primary education starts at age 6.

Iceland

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Iceland, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in groups for this age in *leikskóli.* The category '3 years and over' refers to those in groups for this age in *leikskóli.*

Participation rates (%)

	Less than 1 year	1-year-olds	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds
Dagforeldrar (reference year 2022)	2.7	17.8	0.2	-	-	-
Leikskóli (reference year 2023)	-	44	94	96	96	96

Sources: Statistics Iceland (2023; 2024).

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	27.0	95.1	95.3	96.4	96.8	0.1	-
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	0.2	97.6	97.9

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

Up to age 6, children can attend preschool centres (*leikskóli*), which fall under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Children. There is also a system of regulated and publicly subsidised home-based provision (*dagforeldrar*) aimed at younger children (from birth up to age 2), which falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. However, only a small proportion of decisions, including for the pre-primary school stage, are taken by the state, and the vast majority of decisions are taken by school leadership and municipalities.

Some children attend the last year of ECEC in primary schools, which is called 'grade 0 for 5-year-olds' (*5 ára bekkur*). As this is not common, it is not shown in the diagram.

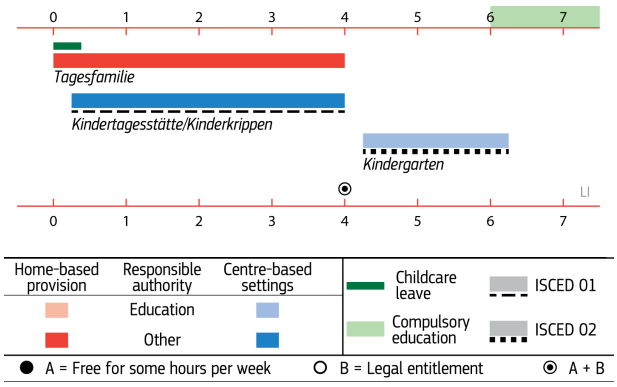
Although there is no legal entitlement to ECEC, many municipalities commit politically to providing children with a place in *leikskóli* by age 2.

Primary education starts at age 6.

Liechtenstein

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Liechtenstein, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *Kindertagesstätte/ Kinderkrippen.* The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *Kindergarten.*

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	-	-	-	51.0	99.8	55.4	1.5
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	46.7	98.7

Note: ISCED 0 refers only to ISCED 02.

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

From the age of 4 months up to 4 years, children are provided ECEC in centre-based settings known as *Kindertagesstätte/ Kinderkrippen*. There are also home-based daycare families (*Tagesfamilie*) available. From age 4, children are legally entitled to pre-primary education in kindergartens free of charge.

In addition to the main settings represented in the diagram, short-time care services (*Hütedienste*) and playgroups (*Spielgruppen*) are offered for younger children. For older children, additional childcare services are provided within daycare centres (*Tagesstrukturen*) or in *Kindergarten,* in what is known as a full-day school (*Tagesschule*). Such services generally last 2–4 hours a day and top-up the ~ 21 weekly hours offered in *Kindergartens*.

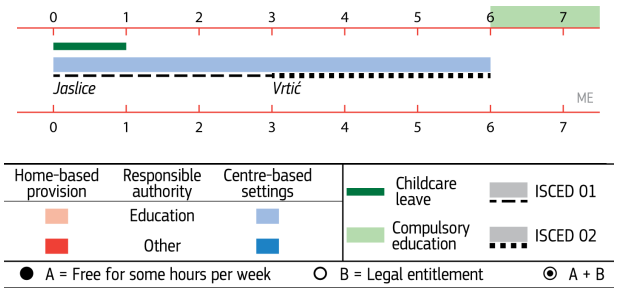
Kindergartens fall under the responsibility of the Office of Education. All other types of provision are under the responsibility of the Office of Social Services.

Primary education starts at age 6.

Montenegro

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Montenegro, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *jaslice* groups. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *vrtić* groups.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	14.1	47.5	61.4	69.0	78.3	6.2	0.1
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	1.2	92.1	99.7

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

ECEC (*predškolsko vaspitanje i obrazovanje)* is delivered in centre-based preschool settings (*jaslice i vrtić*). Groups for children under age 3 are called *jaslice*, while children aged 3–6 attend *vrtić* groups. ECEC is part of the education system and falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation. ECEC is offered in full-day, half-day or 3-hours-per-day educational programmes.

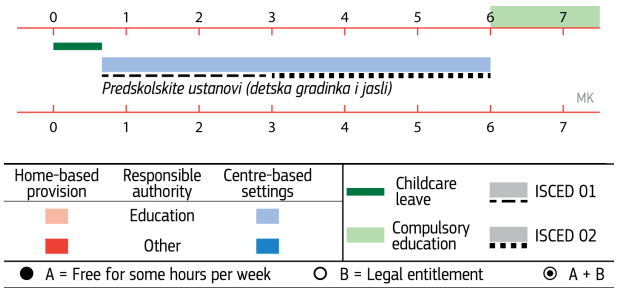
The legal basis for home-based ECEC has been established, although this type of provision is not yet in place.

Primary education starts at age 6.

North Macedonia

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to North Macedonia, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *jasli* groups in *predskolskite ustanovi*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *detska gradinka*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	8.4	26.0	37.7	39.3	45.6	7.3	-
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	4.2	93.0	96.7

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

ECEC is part of the education system; its aim is to provide care and education to children from the age of 8 months until they enter primary education. Pre-primary education (*preducilisno obrazovanie*) is available in centre-based pre-primary institutions (*predskolskite ustanovi*), which include nursery groups (*jasli*) for younger children and kindergarten groups (*detska gradinka*) for children from age 3.

The Law on Child Protection allows for the possibility of home-based caregivers (neguvateli) (fizički lica koi vršat domašno zgrižuvanje na deca od predučilišna vozrast and a service provided by agencii za davanje uslugi za chuvanje i nega na deca). However, in practice, it is almost non-existent.

In addition to the provision shown in the diagram, a small number of children aged 3–5 attend *centar za ran detski razvoj* (public and private).

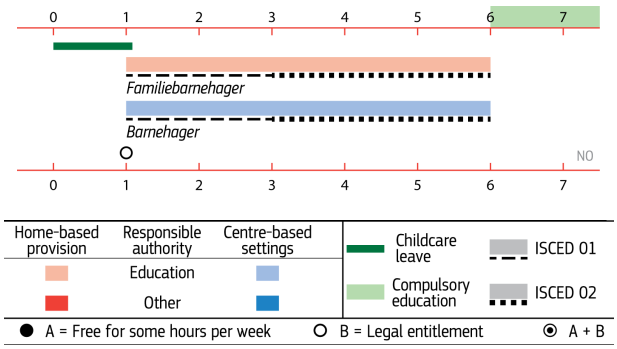
The educational part of ECEC activities falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science, whereas the care and organisational parts fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in cooperation with the municipalities. The experts from the Bureau for Development of Education are also included in the work of the commissions responsible for the creation of the educational programmes (guidelines) for preschool institutions.

Primary education starts at age 6.

Norway

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Norway, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in groups for this age in *barnehager*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in groups for this age in *barnehager*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2023	Less than 1 year	1-year-olds	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds
Barnehager	4.8	81.8	94.8	96.7	97.3	97.5	0.6

Source: Statistics Norway (2024), Table 12056.

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	40.9	94.7	96.8	97.5	97.8	0.6	-
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	99.0	98.6

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

The majority of children attend unitary centres (*barnehager*), which are under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research. Fewer than 1 % of children attend family kindergartens (*familiebarnehager*), which provide ECEC in a home-based environment. Both centre-based and home-based ECEC are regulated by the Kindergarten Act.

From age 1, children are legally entitled to publicly subsidised provision ([24]). No household pays more than 6 % of its income for a place in kindergarten. Moreover, from age 2, children from low-income families are legally entitled to 20 weekly hours of ECEC free of charge.

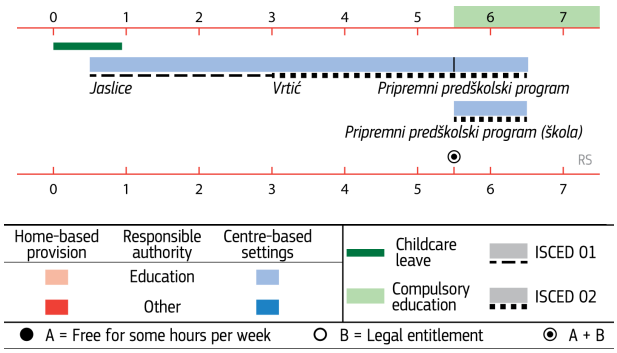
Primary education starts at age 6.

([24]) Children who turn 1 by the end of August are entitled to a place by August of the year in which their parents apply for one. Children who turn 1 in September, October or November are, upon application, entitled to a kindergarten place by the end of the month in which they have their first birthday.

Serbia

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Serbia, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *jaslice*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *vrtić* and those attending a *pripremni predškolski program* (in either *vrtić* or *škola*).

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	19.9	46.0	60.8	64.0	65.5	71.4	1.3
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	-	14.8	95.6

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

ECEC is intended for children from 6 months until 6-and-a-half years, at which point they start their primary education. ECEC has three levels based on age: nursery (*jaslice*) for children from 6 months to 3 years of age, kindergarten (*vrtić*) for children aged 3 to 5-and-a-half and a preschool preparatory programme (*pripremni predškolski program*), which lasts 9 months and takes place either in an ECEC setting (*vrtić*) or in a school (*škola*).

Nursery and kindergarten are optional and subject to parental decisions. The programme consists of general half-day or full-day educational activities and optional specialised programmes, as determined by the interests of children and their parents, ECEC institutional capacities and resources provided by local authorities.

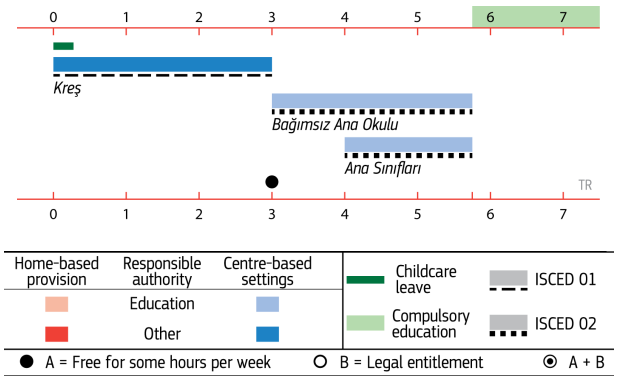
The preschool preparatory programme is mandatory for all children. It lasts at least 9 months, and runs for 4 hours per day. Children admitted to this programme must not be younger than 5-and-a-half or older than 6-and-a-half at the beginning of the school year in which they are to attend the programme.

The entire phase of ECEC falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

Türkiye

Reference year 2024/2025

Diagram



In this report, with respect to Türkiye, the category 'under 3 years' refers to those in *Kreş*. The category '3 years and over' refers to those in *Bağımsız Ana Okulu* and *Ana Sınıfları*.

Participation rates (%)

Reference year 2022	Less than 2 years	2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	7-year-olds
ISCED 0	0.0	2.1	11.3	32.9	97.5	0.0	0.0
ISCED 1	-	-	-	-	1.9	91.1	100.0

Source: Eurostat, UOE (educ_uoe_enrp07) (last updated 31 July 2024).

Organisation

Up to age 3, children can attend private crèches and daycare centres (*Kreş*), which fall under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Family and Social Services.

From age 3, children may attend pre-primary education (*Okul öncesi eğitim*) in kindergartens (*Bağımsız Ana Okulu*) and in practice classrooms (*uygulama sınıfları*) that are part of vocational high schools. From age 4, pre-primary education is also available in nursery classes (*Ana Sınıfları*) in other schools. Pre-primary education falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education. Public kindergartens are free of charge.

Primary education starts at the age of 5 years and 9 months.

Current reforms

The revision of the preschool education programme is under way for the 2024/2025 school year.

Acknowledgements

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Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe – 2025

Eurydice report

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a basic right for all children and a foundation for lifelong learning. It plays a critical role in reducing inequalities and enhancing women's participation in the workforce. This third edition of Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe aims to help build accessible, inclusive and high-quality ECEC systems by providing policymakers, researchers and parents with detailed data and examples of ECEC policies across Europe.

The first part of the report includes indicators on access, governance, funding, staffing, curricula and monitoring, showing how these areas are connected. New additions since the previous edition include insights into inclusion, funding, staff working conditions, and salaries. The curriculum section now addresses topics such as sustainability education, digital awareness and safety, and early foreign language learning, to meet the changing needs of young children.

The second part of the report delivers a national perspective, with information sheets that outline the main features of each ECEC system, including structural diagrams for easy reference.

The report covers 37 European countries: the 27 Member States of the EU, plus Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Türkiye.

The Eurydice Network's task is to understand and explain how Europe's different education systems are organised and how they work. The network provides descriptions of national education systems, comparative studies devoted to specific topics, indicators and statistics. All Eurydice publications are available free of charge on the Eurydice website or in print upon request. Through its work, Eurydice aims to promote understanding, cooperation, trust and mobility at European and international levels. The network consists of national units located in European countries and is coordinated by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

For more information about Eurydice, see:

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