

Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe 2023

Early childhood education and care

Eurydice report



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INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

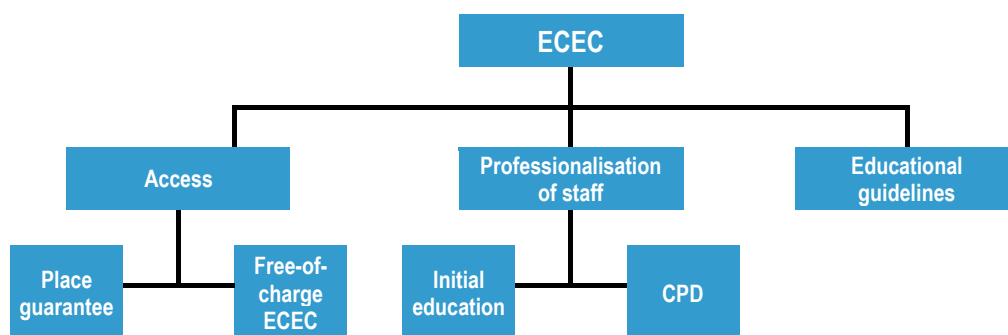
The report contains information for the 2022/2023 school year. Participating countries include the EU Member States, along with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Türkiye ⁽¹⁾.

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

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

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

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



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

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

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

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

1. Access

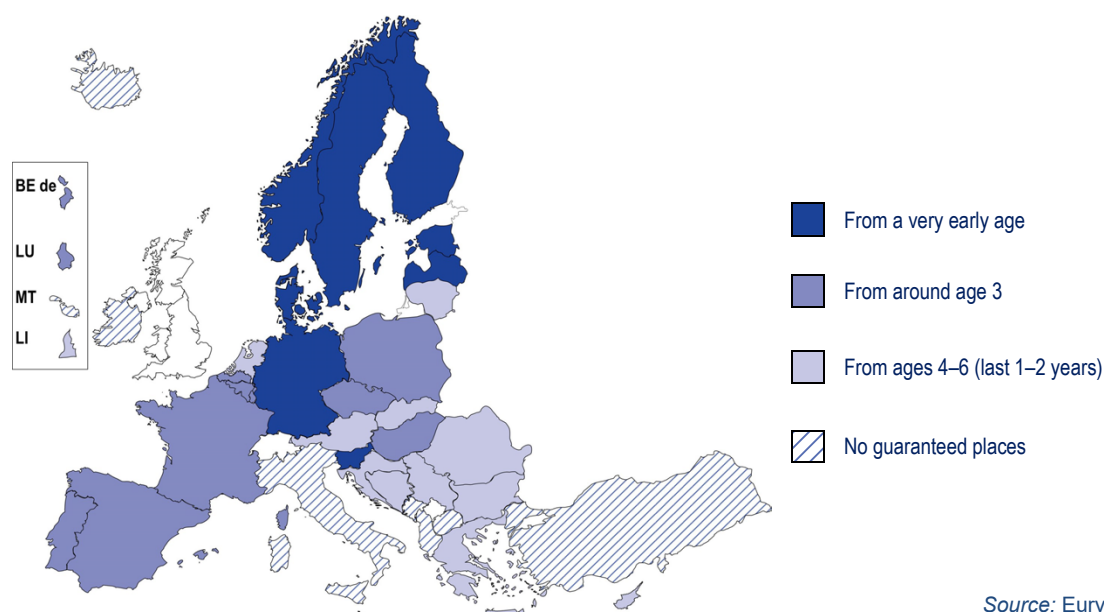
Ensuring access to ECEC is a primary concern of national and European Union decision-makers when developing policies for young children and their parents. The European Pillar of Social Rights ⁽³⁾ established the right to affordable ECEC of good quality for all children. However, this right is not yet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

Place guarantee: two ways of ensuring the right to ECEC

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

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

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



Source: Eurydice.

Country-specific note

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

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

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

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

Gap between childcare leave and place guarantee in ECEC

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

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

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

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

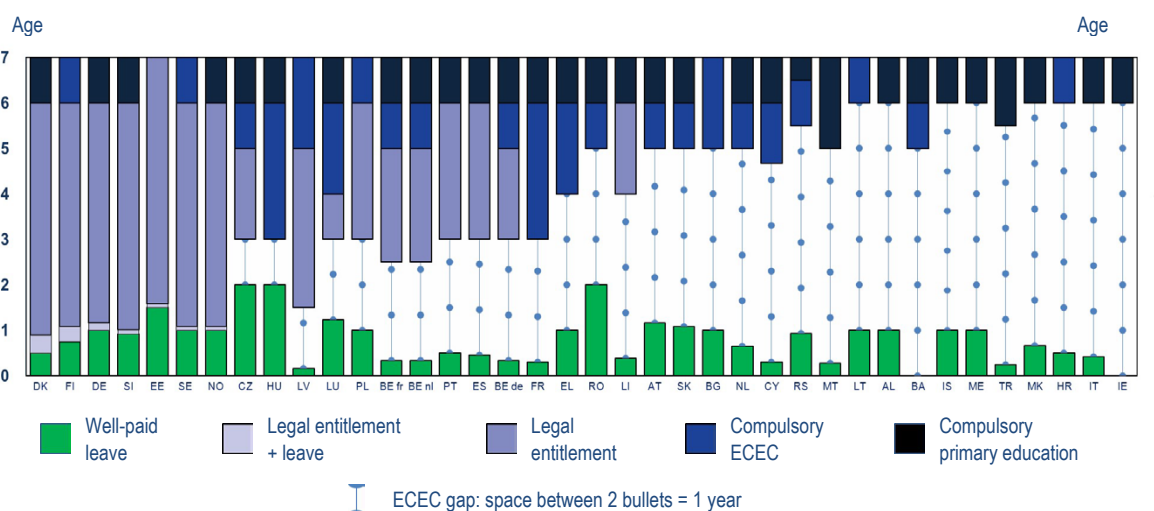
When there is an ECEC gap, it lasts for a minimum of 1 and maximum of 6 years. The difference between the well-paid childcare leave and the start of the legal entitlement is between 1 and 2 years in Czechia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Hungary and Poland. Most of these countries grant long, well-paid childcare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

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

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

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

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



Source: Eurydice.

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

Explanatory note

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

Country-specific notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Many countries have been extending the universal place guarantee in ECEC

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. ECEC staff

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Qualification requirements for ECEC staff

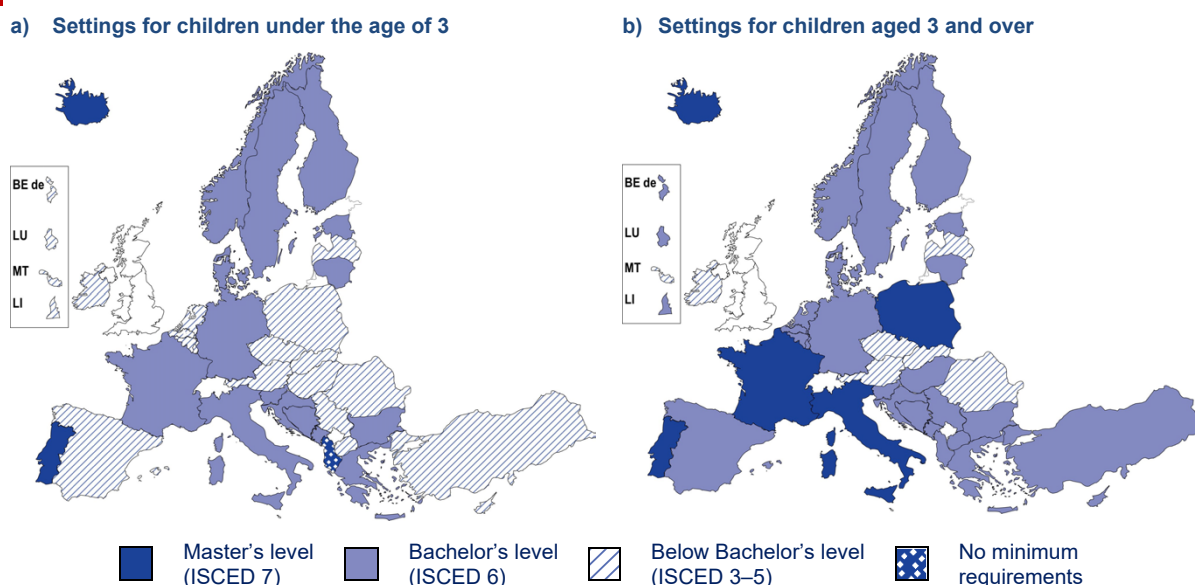
Analysis of the minimum qualification levels for core practitioners reveals large differences between regulations for work with younger and older children (see Figure 4). Less than half of European education systems require that at least one of the team members caring for a group of children, regardless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

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

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

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

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



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

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

○ No minimum requirements

Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

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

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

Country-specific note

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

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

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

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

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

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

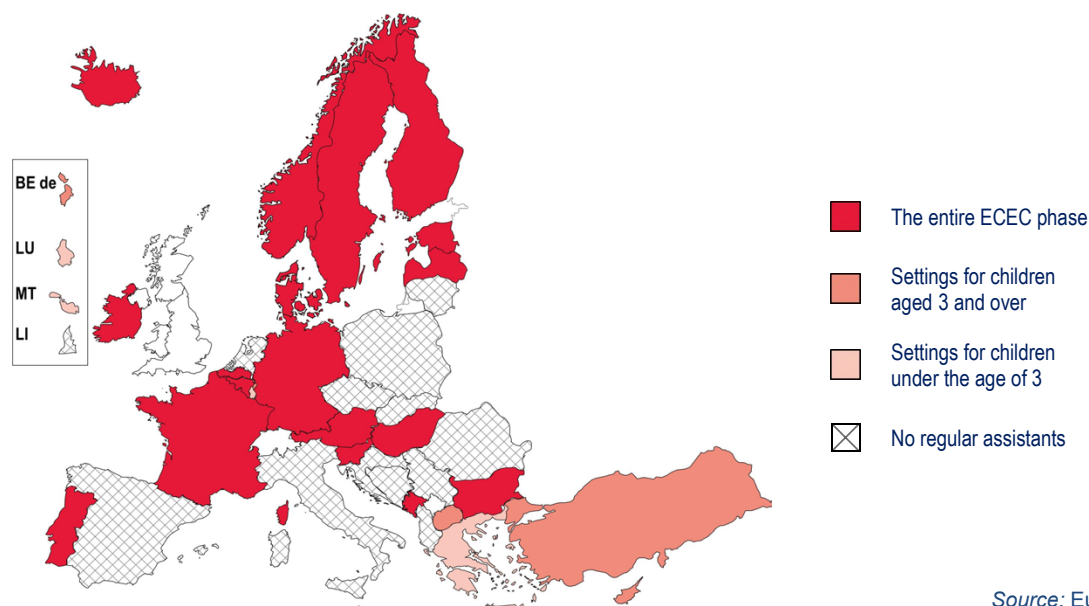
⁽⁸⁾ Call for Applications for Kindergarten Educators issued on 18/11/2022 available online at: https://recruitmentadmin.gov.mt/attachments/circulars/33f175ce-6734-4f77-b2d7-865f5dc88583_p.pdf.

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

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

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

Figure 5: Regular assistants in ECEC, 2022/2023



Source: Eurydice.

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

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

○ No minimum requirements x No assistants

Explanatory note

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Continuing professional development regulations for ECEC staff

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

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

⁽⁹⁾ Statistics Denmark BOERN1 and PBOERN1.

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

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

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