

# Early Childhood Education and Care

National organisation of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) provision varies greatly from country to country. Therefore the structure of articles for this topic reflects this and takes into account for example aspects such as structures for very young children, the possibility to have parallel provision depending on parents' choice or on the contrary the existence of a unitary setting for all ages until 6/7 years old. General policies and objectives are outlined in the introduction.

## Organisation

This section includes information about the geographical accessibility, the admission requirements and choice of ECEC institution, the age levels and grouping of children as well as the organisation of time (on a yearly, weekly and daily basis).

## Teaching and Learning

First, an overview of which kind of steering documents exist to guide institutions offering ECEC is provided. Some countries adopt a more decentralised approach in which local authorities are conferred responsibilities for curriculum and educational planning. All applicable situations are explained.

Second, teaching methods and materials available are presented, especially if staff/teachers are free to choose the teaching methodology best suited to their particular circumstances, or have to follow certain guidelines. Information are provided on the implementation of major methodological guidelines for the organisation of activities (e.g. play, peer-play, discovery activities, etc.); the use of pedagogical approaches (developmental, social-emotional, didactic, academic, etc.); the use of particular teaching methods (such as Freinet, Montessori, Steiner, etc.). In addition, the existence of teaching materials (handbooks, audio-visual and painting materials, objects as well as natural materials such as cloth, wood, clay, etc.) available for children and teachers in this kind of ECEC institution is described in this section.

## Assessment

This article explains whether or not there is a formal evaluation system in place with regard to ECEC and how the progress of children is measured. If a formal system exists, the main purposes of evaluation and the main elements assessed are explained. Children's assessment linked to access to primary education is also presented where it is organised.

## **Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures**

In case of less common or unusual variations in public-sector ECEC provision (for example, in rural areas, experimental ECEC institutions, etc.), details are provided in this section which presents the general objectives of these alternative structures, their admission criteria, programme of activities and methodological emphasis, etc.

**Per ciascun Paese consultare la pagina:**

[https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Early\\_Childhood\\_Education\\_and\\_Care](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Early_Childhood_Education_and_Care)

**Italy**

Early childhood education and care has two different stages based on child age groups.

Provision for children aged 0-3 years, offered by nursery schools, is not part of the education system and, thus, is outside of the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR). The educational function of public nursery schools, as opposed to the merely utilitarian aspect of the service they provide for families, was established through central regulations in 1971 (law n. 1044/1971). ECEC services are run directly by the municipalities, in accordance with general criteria defined at regional level.

Provision for children over 3 years of age is called *scuola dell'infanzia*. It is part of the education system and falls under the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, although institutions providing pre-primary education are also run at local level, not only by the State, but by the municipalities and the private sector. This level of education is not compulsory and lasts up to three years (from 3 to 6 years of age).

Pre-primary education contributes to the affective, psychomotor, cognitive, moral, religious and social development of children and promotes their potential to establish relationships, for autonomy, creativity, learning and to secure equal educational opportunities: in accordance with parent responsibility for education, it contributes to the full education of children; through its autonomy and didactical and pedagogical unity, it implements the educational project and educational continuity together with all childhood services and the primary school' (Legislative Decree 59/2004, art. 1).

## **Organisation of Programmes for Children under 2-3 years**

CEC services, included nursery schools for children aged less than 3 years, are mainly organized at local level and by Communes and private subjects, according to specific regulations issued at regional level. In some Communes nursery schools managed by private subjects may be awarded accreditation, if they meet the requirements of organisation and inclusion of all children, as foreseen by the specific regulations issued by each Commune for ECEC services.

## **Geographical Accessibility**

In the last years, the request of services for ECEC has considerably increased. Nursery schools for children aged less than three years have high running costs and, as a consequence, also high costs for families, as this service is not offered free of charge. Their distribution throughout the country is not homogenous. In fact, their presence in the territory depends on local policies, on the initiatives of private subjects or associations, and also on enterprises which sometimes organize services to meet the needs of their employees.

## **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institution**

In general, families submit a request of admittance to ECEC services at the relevant local office, responsible for the organisation of ECEC services. In case more than one nursery

school is available in the Commune, families have freedom of choice and they may also indicate more than one option.

In general, taking into account requests and admittance requirements established at local level, Communes make priority lists in order to regulate admissions in case posts available are less than the requests.

### **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Each Commune is responsible for the organisation of the educational services for early childhood, in compliance with regional regulations. Therefore, the offer varies throughout the country.

In general, nursery schools admit children aged from 3 to 36 months. Communes may also offer services for children aged than 3 months, usually at the presence of parents.

Special classes called 'spring sections' started, on an experimental basis, in 2007. They are addressed to children aged from 24 to 36 months. This new service has been introduced to meet the needs of families where both parents are employed. These sections are established at pre-primary schools, both state and paritarie, as a specific section with its own pedagogic plan, its own facilities and staff. Activities connected to the experimentation of this new service will be maintained through agreements signed by the Regions and the necessary coordination of this service with the early enrolments.

Children can be grouped according to their age or in mixed-age groups.

The children/educators ratio as well as minimum and maximum group size, are established at regional level.

### **Organisation of Time**

Nursery schools are managed at local level and, therefore, it is not possible to provide detailed information on the organisation of time. In general, the organisation of annual, weekly and daily timetables guarantee a service which is the most suitable to meet the needs of families.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activity**

In general, each Commune draws up a general educative project, that is applied by each nursery school through its own educational plan. The school plan details on the activities carried out. Usually, activities follow a 'routine' consisting of play, rest, meals, and children's health care and cleaning. In addition, plans may foresee outdoor activities and the involvement of families (e.g. grandparents reading stories) or other subjects (e.g. association for the pet-therapy).

### **Teaching Methods and Materials**

Nursery schools have the double purpose of facilitating families with both working parents and to provide an educational service complementary to the child's family.

In this perspective, activities are aimed at helping socialization and allowing children's learning development through playing, both individual and in small groups.

### ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

Children in nursery schools are not assessed. Educators observe children's development, always involving parents.

### ***Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care***

As for the offer for children aged less than 3 years, beside public nursery schools directly run by communes and accredited private nursery school, there are several merely private institutes.

Recently, due the lack of available posts in public nursery schools, in-house nursery schools are getting more and more common. Moreover, families often organise parents nursery schools, where one parent, often the mother, takes care of more children at home.

The pre-primary level of the education system is exclusively organised at pre-primary schools (scuola dell'infanzia), run by both public and private subjects.

**France**

In France, no single structure exists suited to all pre-elementary-age children. France has a juxtaposed model providing two kinds of institution, each coming under different competent authorities, depending on children's age-group. Children from birth to age three years can be received in other care structures or services that are not part of the national educational system. On the one hand, those are so-called collective or parental crèches, set up and managed, in most cases, by local authorities or by non-profit associations; on the other hand, they are [individual care services](#) (nursery assistants) or home childminding.

Pre-primary (or pre-elementary) education is dispensed at [nursery schools](#) ("*écoles maternelles*"), which take children from 3 up to 6 years of age. 2-years-old can be admitted if places are available.

Almost all children attend nursery school from the age of 3 for the last 20 years, even though it is optional (RERS 2014) . Such schools therefore form an integral part of the French educational system and are under the aegis of the [Department of National Education](#), which draws up educational programmes and is responsible for training and recruitment of teachers.

Nursery schooling is secular and free of charge when it is State-run. From a legal point of view, nursery schools are not autonomous public establishments. They have no operating budget as secondary schools ([collèges](#) and [lycées](#)) do. [Municipalities](#) are responsible for buildings and for financing of material expenditure.

The latest regulatory provisions on school hours and programmes are set out in the [special Official Bulletin no.3 of 19 June 2008](#): "The main objective of pre-primary education is acquisition of rich, organised spoken language that can be understood by others. At nursery school, a child establishes relationships with other children and with adults. It practises its motor, sensory, affective, interpersonal and intellectual skills, progressively becoming a student. It discovers the world of the written word" (extract from the [Official Bulletin special edition no.3 of 19 June 2008](#)). The law on restructuring the Republic's school system has entrusted nursery schools with a new mission, with consultation on a new draft programme for nursery schools held in autumn 2014. The programme, which should be finalised by the end of 2014, has two key aims. First of all, it prepares children for the education they will be receiving at primary school, while respecting each child's pace of learning; secondly, it contributes to reducing inequalities from the earliest possible age, in particular with regard to language.

A child's right to receive pre-primary education and the nursery school's educational responsibilities are asserted in the two fundamental guidance laws for schools:

- the [Guidance law no 89-486 of 10 July 1989 on Education](#) (*Loi d'orientation sur l'éducation*) (Article 2, codified in Article L113-1 of the French Code of Education);
- the [Guidance and Planning Law no 2005-380 of 23 April 2005 for the Future of Schools](#) (*Loi d'orientation et de programme pour l'avenir de l'école*) (Article 24, codified in Article L321-2 of the French Code of Education).

The most recent regulatory provisions on timetables and programmes are detailed in the [Official Bulletin special edition no.3 of 19 June 2008](#).



## **Reforms and policies**

Due to a change in education policy more favourable to the schooling of two-year-olds, the gross enrolment ratio for this age-group is up for the first time in 10 years, standing at 11.9% in 2013 (public + under-contract private sectors) ([RERS, 2014](#) page 80). The objective is to reduce inequalities between pupils in terms of school success.

The 400 teaching jobs created for the start of the 2013/2014 school year to develop the schooling of children under three years old are assigned, as a priority, to priority education sectors, isolated rural sectors and [overseas regions](#). For more information about current reforms on pre-primary and primary education please refer to [section 14.2.1](#).

In 2013, in line with the European Union's two quantified objectives following the 2002 Barcelona Summit (providing intake facilities for at least 33% of children under 3 years old and pre-elementary education for at least 95% of children between the age of 4 and compulsory school age), France provided intake facilities for 40% of children under 3 years old and pre-elementary education for all children between the age of 4 and compulsory school age.

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

The reception of children under the age of three years comes only very partially under the responsibility of the Department for National Education. In fact, only children aged two years can be registered in pre-elementary teaching structures ([nursery schools](#)) that come under the Ministry, but only to the extent that there are places available (pre-elementary schooling normally covers children aged between three and six years).

The number of places available is defined by each commune, which is responsible for the functioning of nursery schools. At the start of the 2011 school year, 11.6% of children aged two years were receiving nursery-school education ([RERS, 2012. p. 83](#)). The current government aims at significantly increasing that rate of schooling, above all in areas with particular school-related difficulties, in order to reduce school-related inequalities linked to children's differing cultural and socio-economic contexts. Part of the recruitment of 1 000 additional school teachers at the start of the 2012 school year aimed at attaining that objective.

Moreover, **children from birth to age three years** can be received in other structures or care services that are not part of the national educational system.

On the one hand, those are so-called **collective care centres** (*crèches*, day nurseries, etc. [see below](#)) set up and managed, in most cases, by [local authorities](#) or by non-profit associations; on the other hand, they are [individual care services](#) (nursery assistants). Unlike [nursery schools](#), access to those types of care is at a cost to families, and is generally based on parents' income (collective care mode) or negotiated with the nursery assistant (individual care mode).

To carry out their activity, early childhood reception structures and services must all meet two basic conditions:

- obtain accreditation from the [département](#) of residence, which awards accreditation based on criteria set by the General Council of the [département](#) (for example: the

structures' safety conditions, knowledge of a child's psychomotor needs, the activities proposed, etc.) The *département* also has a surveillance and verification role in relation to those reception services, in particular through the *Protection Maternelle et Infantile* (PMI - Mother and Child Protection) department;

- comply with the provisions of [decree no. 2010-613 of 7 June 2010 relating to reception establishments and services for children aged under 6 years](#), in regard to standards of child health and safety (Public Health Code, articles R.2324-16 et seq.) Above all, the mission of those structures and services is to provide childcare in conditions of safety, although their role as “educational” bodies is increasingly developed and acknowledged.

According to a survey conducted by *DREES*, in 2007, 18% of children aged under three years were cared for by [nursery assistants](#), as opposed to 10% of children from the same age band for whom provision was made by [collective-care structures](#). Finally, in 2007, most children aged under three (62%) were cared for mainly by their parents (*DREES, Études et Résultats no. 678, February 2009*).

However, France intends to favour freedom of parental choice between stopping work temporarily, full-time work, and part-time work. To that end, it offers them care benefits and tax deductions for care costs, as well as reception structures for children aged under the age of three and financed by public funds. However, the significant increase since 2009 in the number of places available in collective structures must be correlated with the fall in schooling of children aged two years, which fell from 20.9% in 2007 to 15.2% in 2009 and 11.6% in 2011.

### **Collective-care centres**

Those are reception structures that are set up mainly at the initiative of communes (66% in 2010) and non-profit associations (27%). Other bodies like [Family Allowance Funds](#), private profit-making bodies, and works committees can also set up those structures (7%) (*DREES, Études et Résultats no. 803, 2012*). In all cases, setting up structures is subject to authorisation from the Chairperson of the General Council of the *département* for structures constituted under private law, and to the Chairperson's opinion for public bodies.

Provision for children is made by a **multidisciplinary team**, made up in particular of early-childhood educators and of childcare assistants, and led by a physician, a nursery nurse, or an early-childhood educator. Those members of staff are remunerated by the [local authorities](#) or the private body that employs them.

The **financial contribution** from parents is set by each structure. It is usually calculated on the basis of the family's resources and composition. A large part of collective care centres receives assistance from the Caisse d'Allocations Familiales (CAF – [Family Allowance Fund](#)) intended to cover part of the structure's operating costs. As a counterpart to that financing, the administrator undertakes to calculate the financial contribution made by families based on a scale drawn up by the CAF, that scale being the same across the whole of mainland France. For example, a family that declares €2 000 of net monthly income and that has only one dependent child will have to spend about €190 per month for 160 hours of childcare (eight hours a day, five days a week) in a *crèche* (see below) that applies the scale drawn up by the CAF (for more information, please refer to the [CAF web site](#)).

The following are deemed to be collective care structures:

**a. Collective *crèches*** (routine reception of children aged under three years)

A distinction is made between:

- **traditional neighbourhood *crèches***, set up near the child's home and with a maximum reception capacity of 60 places per unit;
- **mini *crèches***, that receive children under the same regulatory conditions as traditional neighbourhood *crèches*, but which operate out of private houses or social premises;
- **works *crèches***, set up at parents' workplaces and with hours tailored to those of the company or administrative body. Their reception capacity is also a maximum of sixty places per unit;
- **parental *crèches***, which are managed by parents themselves: parents come together to form a non-profit association and to take it in turns to care for children aged under three years. The structure has a maximum reception capacity of twenty places, which can, in exceptional cases, be increased to twenty-five places by a decision by the Chairperson of the General Council based on the families' needs.

**b. Day-care centres** (occasional reception of children aged under six years).

Day care centres receive children aged under six years on a one-off basis. In particular, they enable children aged under three years to have periods of group interaction and play with other children, gradually preparing them for admission to nursery school. As is the case for collective *crèches*, a distinction is made between traditional neighbourhood day care centres, which can offer a maximum of sixty places per unit, and parent-managed day care centres, which are limited to twenty places (or up to twenty-five by derogation).

**c. Kindergartens** (routine reception of children aged from two to six years).

Kindergartens routinely receive children aged from two to six years, either non-schooled or with part-time schooling. Conceived as a possible alternative to [nursery schools](#), qualified staff (early-childhood educators, childcare assistants, etc.) offer activities that encourage early learning in children (physical and psychomotor development, early learning, and socialisation). Their reception capacity can reach eighty places per unit.

**d. Multireception establishments** (routine and occasional reception of children aged under six years).

Multireception establishments offer various ways of receiving children aged under six years within a single structure. They often offer a combination of several modes of collective reception: routine reception places (of the *crèche* or kindergarten type), occasional reception places (of the day care centre type), or multifunctional reception places (used, according to need, sometimes for routine and sometimes for occasional reception). Those structures can be managed in a traditional manner or they can come under parental management; their reception capacity stands, in the first case, at sixty places, and in the second case, at twenty places (twenty-five by derogation). Some of those establishments also offer collective and "family reception service" at the same time (see below): in that case, their overall reception capacity is limited to one hundred places.

#### e. Family reception services or family *crèches*

Family reception services bring together *nursery assistants* accredited by the General Council of the [département](#) of residence, who care for children in their homes for part of the day and who go at regular intervals to a collective-reception structure for various activities. Those assistants follow a training course that is organised by the *Protection Maternelle et Infantile* (PMI - Mother and Child Protection) department, a service provided by the [département](#). The PMI is headed by a physician, and includes, in particular, members of staff who are qualified in the medical, paramedical, social, and psychological fields. That type of structure is supervised and managed like collective *crèches*. Their reception capacity cannot exceed one hundred and fifty places.

#### Individual care services: nursery assistants

Apart from collective reception arrangements and family reception services, children can be cared for by **nursery assistants** who are accredited by the [département](#) and who are paid directly by the parents. Each nursery assistant must abide by the number of children specified in her / his accreditation, which is renewed every five years.

[Law no. 2005-706 of 27 June 2005 relating to nursery assistants and family assistants](#) provides that “accreditation is granted (...) if reception arrangements guarantee the safety, the health, and the development of the minors (...) who are cared for, taking account of the educational aptitudes of the person,” stipulating that the General Council of the [département](#) can “adapt accreditation criteria to respond specific needs.” The implementing decree sets out those criteria, stressing the candidate’s availability, her / his aptitude for communication and dialogue, her / his ability to take account of the particular needs of each child, the candidate’s knowledge of the role, and her / his accommodation environment.

According to a DREES survey, the number of nursery assistants employed by private individuals is estimated at 300 000 in the second quarter of 2010 (DREES, [Études et Résultats no. 803, 2012](#)).

For home-based childcare, rates are negotiated between the parents and the person employed, there being one minimum condition: the basic gross hourly wage cannot be less than 0.281 times the minimum salary (SMIC – *Salaire Minimum Interprofessionnel de Croissance* – Minimum Interprofessional Growth Salary) per child, i.e. €2.65 per hour in 2013 (national collective-bargaining agreement of 1 July 2004 for nursery assistants employed by private individuals).

The [Family Allowance Fund](#) can also make provision for part of the nursery assistant’s remuneration and social-security contributions.

#### Geographical Accessibility

The type and level of the offer in relation to reception arrangements for children under the age of three years are not determined by a regulatory requirement made by the French State. [Local authorities](#), *départements* and municipalities in particular, are the bodies that, under the heading of social action, develop optional public child-care services. As a general rule, families approach the town hall to locate the structures that are present in their area of residence.

The offer relating to reception arrangements for children aged under three years is spread in a fairly homogenous fashion across mainland France, even though there are significant disparities relating to the type of service offered: in the Paris area and in the south of France – the south-east in particular – the offer is mostly provided by [collective-care centres](#) (*crèches*, day-care centres, family reception services, etc.), whereas in the rest of France, individual care services ([nursery assistants](#) employed by private individuals) are more developed. Furthermore, no *département* appears amongst the best equipped in terms of those two types of care provision; conversely, no *département* registers low reception rates in respect of the various types of care. For example, Paris is the *département* with the lowest rate of reception by nursery assistants (of the order of 6 children under the age of three years per 100), but it registers the highest collective-reception rate in France, with 37 children under the age of three years per 100 (*DREES, Études et Résultats no. 803, 2012*).

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institution**

In the case of [collective-care centres](#), the criteria for allocating places are set out by each reception structure. Those criteria are relatively close in all municipal structures: urban area, rural area, large city, small town, etc. With just a few variations in terms of priority, they are all based on: the child's age; the place of residence, the date of registration (with priority being given to the oldest applications), the characteristics of the application (days, times), the parents' professional activity, any siblings who are already accommodated in the structure, multiple births, disability, and single-parent status. The level of income is taken into account for calculating the financial contribution that is requested of parents.

In all cases, for a child to be registered, she / he must be up to date with compulsory vaccinations (except if contra-indication attested to by the presentation of a medical certificate).

French and foreign children, if they have reached the age of two years on the first day of the school year, can also be admitted to a state or private nursery (pre-elementary) school, subject to places being available, on condition that they are physically and psychologically ready to attend the school. For registration in a state school, parents must approach the town hall of their commune to determine the school in their geographical sector that is likely to admit their child at the start of the school year, then they must make the necessary administrative arrangements.

If the parents wish to register their child at a school other than the one for their sector, they must apply to the mayor of the commune for derogation.

### **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

The **minimum age for initial reception** of children is not set by national regulations. In general, it is in line with the end of maternity leave, i.e. in the two / three months following the birth of the child. In [collective-care centres](#), the threshold reception age is determined by the establishment: it is three years in *crèches*; it goes up to six years in day-care centres, kindergartens, and multireception establishments. However, it is important to note that all children aged three (the schooling rate at that age being 100% since 1994) are registered with the [nursery schools](#), i.e. in pre-elementary educational structures that come

under the Department for National Education.

The **mode of grouping** children in [collective-care centres](#) depends on the type and size of the institution. Here, the child's age is not always a significant criterion for grouping, the more significant criterion being the psychomotor development of the child.

There are no standards relating to the number of children per early-childhood educator in collective-care centres. Those centres are required to comply with the provisions of the Public Health Code (articles R.2324-16 et seq.) There is no regular data available on the management practices followed by those centres. However, individual elements are available in the files of the [Family Allowance Fund](#). For example, the standards mentioned in relation to *crèches* are as follows: "Making provision for children is done by a multidisciplinary team that includes: a director (nursery nurse, physician, early-childhood educator) and a number of professionals (in particular childcare assistants and early-childhood educators) at a ratio of one person for five children who cannot yet walk, and one person for eight children who can walk. Other professionals (psychologists, psychomotor therapists, cultural speakers) can play a role in the team for short periods of time." (Source: [CNAF](#)).

As regards [individual care services](#), each nursery assistant must abide by the number of children who can be cared for at one time, as specified in her / his accreditation, the maximum number of children being set at four in law ([law no. 2008-1330 of 17 December 2008 on social-security financing for 2009](#)). In 2009, 55% of accreditations issued were for the care of three or more children at one time, according to data quoted by DREES ([Études et Résultats, no. 719, February 2010](#)).

## Organisation of Time

The periods during which [collective-care centres](#) are open depend on the reception structure: they are defined by the administrator and the director, in dialogue with the other partners (municipalities, staff members, parents, etc.) They must appear in the rules of operation. A summary of that type of information at national level is not available; however, it can be stated that, as a general rule, the periods of opening are in line with the school year (September – July).

## Organisation of the Day and Week

In [collective-care centres](#), opening times are set by each structure: they are defined by the administrator and the director, in dialogue with the other partners (municipalities, staff members, parents, etc.) They must appear in the rules of operation. A summary of that local information is not available. However, it can be stated that the normal opening times of collective-care centres run from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. They are closed at night, on Sundays, and on public holidays. Works *crèches* tailor their hours to those of the company.

As regards the organisation of the company – and solely by way of example – activities generally run as follows:

- morning reception of children (between 8:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m.);
- educational activities (9:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m.);

- meal (from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. or 1:00 p.m.);
- nap (from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.);
- educational activities (from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.);
- tea (4:00 p.m.);
- reception of parents, followed by departure (5:30 p.m.).

The so-called educational activity is mainly carried out in the morning, before the meal. In the afternoon, the time is mainly used for free games, for story-telling, and for reading.

In the case of [nursery schools](#), since 2008, primary-school pupils (pre-elementary and elementary levels) attend 24 hours of classes spread over a 4-day week (8 half days). However, a reform of the school day has just been decided upon by the government: decree no. 2013-77 of 24 January 2013 envisages, from the start of the school year in 2013 or 2014 (the choice lies with the communes), the retention of 24 hours of classes, but a return to the 4.5-day week (9 half days), under the following conditions:

- the teaching day shall last for no more than 5 hours 30 minutes
- the teaching half day shall last for no more than 3 hours and 30 minutes
- the midday break shall not last for less than 1 hour and 30 minutes.

### ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

Beyond operating as care centres, the educational mission of [ECEC Institutions](#) and [services](#) for receiving young children is increasingly recognised, and is developed by professionals working in the field. The latter are generally professional educators: childcare assistants; holders of an “early childhood” [CAP](#), psychologists, and early-childhood educators. They are sometimes assisted by health staff.

At this level of education, it is not a matter of providing school or even [pre-school instruction](#), as is the case with [nursery schools](#), but of supporting children in situations that can contribute to their early learning and to development of the psychomotor independence.

### **Steering documents and types of activities**

Setting aside what concerns children aged two admitted to [nursery schools](#) - which come under the Department for National Education – the educational activities of other reception structures for children aged under three years are drawn up by the heads of each structure or service. Those activities are set out in detail in accreditation requests made to the General Council of the [département](#) (that latter condition being necessary for the structure to open).

[Article R. 2324-29 of the Public Health Code](#) contains recommendations on accreditation requests; in particular, the article indicates that reception establishments and services must, with a view to obtaining accreditation, draw up an “implementation plan” or “service plan” that includes an “educational project” and a “social project”.

## Educational plan

That is a document containing, on the one hand, the educational objectives set by the [ECEC Institution](#) (e.g. enabling children to feel safe; progress towards independence; awaken children's intelligence; develop their personality and creativity; establish relationships with others, adults and children, etc.), and on the other hand, the concrete manner in which the structure is organised to attain that objective on a daily basis. To that end, the following is established: fitting out and using areas; organising groups of children; organising activities, as well as the manner of intervening with children on a daily basis, based on activities, needs, and the children's ages; work and method objectives, the bases of which are common to all members of staff; the means and terms put in place for respecting the position of parents in the educational process; etc.

## Social project

The social project contains an explanation of how the [ECEC Institution](#) takes account of the geographical, social, economic, and demographic environment of the location where it will operate. For that purpose, the following are taken into consideration:

- geographical characteristics (sensitive urban areas; rural areas with a low population density, etc.);
- the characteristics of the population (high rate of unemployment, proportion of immigrants with difficulties relating to language or to social insertion, etc.);
- the needs and requests of families in respect of opening times and days;
- neighbourhood resources: a plan to build social housing, a forthcoming business set-up, a large-scale urban renewal project, the arrival of a new bus route, etc.

Those two documents are required, in particular, of collective-care structures, so drawing up an educational plan is also part of conditions for accreditation of [nursery assistants](#).

## Teaching Methods and Materials

Each [ECEC Institution](#) and [service](#) draws up an "educational plan" (see above), and chooses the educational methods and materials to implement that plan, in compliance with health standards set out at national level (Public Health Code, articles R.2324-16 et seq.) There are no national recommendations on the educational approach to be used in most cases, it is a matter of traditional approaches (i.e. distinct from specific approaches like those of Célestin Freinet, Maria Montessori, etc.) that aim at encouraging children's well-being and early learning: develop their independence, creativity, socialisation, capacity for communication, and psychophysical capacity. Games situations are put in place, either with educators or with other children. Some [ECEC Institution](#) also organise art-related activities: listening to music and song, drawing, modelling, etc.

In general, [ECEC Institution](#) provide the materials used by the children. Parents contribute indirectly to purchasing those materials by paying registration fees. In other cases, e.g. *parental crèches*, parents share the direct costs of purchasing toys and other materials.



## ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

There are no standards relating to assessing children aged under three years, with the exception of children aged two years who are admitted to pre-elementary educational structures ([nursery schools](#)), which come under the Department for National Education.

Assessments of reception centres for early childhood, apart from nursery schools, cover accommodation conditions, compliance with health and safety standards, the number of children involved, the size of the reception structure, the management, and the qualifications of staff members. Verification is carried out by the *Protection Maternelle et Infantile* (PMI - Mother and Child Protection) department, a [département](#) service that comes under the authority of the Chairperson of the General Council and that is not competent in educational matters.

**Germany**

Traditionally in Germany children under the age of three years are looked after in *Kinderkrippen* (crèches) and children from the age of three up to starting school in *Kindergarten*. In past years the profile of day-care centres has changed considerably. The number of facilities, which offer day care exclusively for children from the age of three up to starting school has decreased while more and more facilities offer day care for different age groups. One reason for this change in the supply structure is the expansion of day care for children agreed by the Federation, Länder and local authorities for children under three years of age, which is expected to create a needs-oriented supply of day-care places for children nationally and thus establish the basis for fulfilling the legal right to early childhood education and care in a day-care centre or child-minding service which has entered into force on 1 August 2013. This complements the legal entitlement introduced back in 1996 to day care in a day-care centre for children from the age of three up to starting school. The heightened efforts to expand day care for children aged below three have since the introduction of official statistics in 2006 led to a steady rise in day-care uptake.

## **General objectives**

Under the [Social Security Code VIII](#) (*Achtes Buch Sozialgesetzbuch – Kinder- und Jugendhilfe*) day-care centres for children and child-minding services are called upon to encourage the child's development into a responsible and autonomous member of the community. Furthermore, day care is designed to support and supplement the child's upbringing in the family and to assist the parents in better reconciling employment and child rearing. This duty includes instructing, educating and caring for the child and relates to the child's social, emotional, physical and mental development. It includes the communication of guiding values and rules. The provision of education and care is to be adjusted to the individual child's age and developmental stage, linguistic and other capabilities, life situation and interests, and take account of the child's ethnic origin. In terms of pedagogy and organisation, the range of services offered should be based on the needs of the children and their families.

Under the joint framework of the Länder for early education in day-care centres for children (*Gemeinsamer Rahmen der Länder für die frühe Bildung in Kindertageseinrichtungen*), educational objectives in early childhood education focus on communicating basic skills and developing and strengthening personal resources, which motivate children and

prepare them to take up and cope with future challenges in learning and life, to play a responsible part in society and be open to lifelong learning.

### **Specific legislative framework**

Under the [Basic Law](#) (*Grundgesetz*), as part of its responsibility for public welfare, the Federation has concurrent legislative competence for child and youth welfare. This also applies to the promotion of children in day care (*Kinderkrippen, Kindergärten, Horte* or *Kindertagespflege*). The Federation exercised its legislative authority in this field by passing the [Social Security Code VIII](#) in June 1990. The legal framework of the Federation for child and youth welfare is completed, supplemented and extended by the Länder in their own laws.

The Social Security Code VIII was amended in July 1992 and expanded to include the legal right, introduced on 1 January 1996 and in force without restriction since 1 January 1999, to a *Kindergarten* place for all children from the age of three years until they start school. The Social Security Code VIII was last amended in December 2008 by the [Children Promotion Act](#) (*Kinderförderungsgesetz – KiföG*). The Child Promotion Act laid down a gradual expansion of supervision and care offers for children under the age of three. In a first stage the maintaining bodies of public youth welfare had been obliged to increase the number of places available to children under the age of three in day-care centres or child-minding services and to provide a place if required for child development purposes or because the parents are in employment, seeking work or in training. This is an objective obligation, however, not a legal right to a place. On 1 August 2013 the second phase of the expansion of supervision and care offers was achieved: since this point there has been a legal entitlement to a place in day care for children who have reached the age of one. The implementation and financing of child and youth welfare legislation lies, under the Basic Law, in the sphere of competence of the Länder and, as a matter for local self-government, is the responsibility of the *Kommunen* (local authorities).

Under Federal Law the legal framework for day care for children provided under the youth welfare office is regulated by the Child and Youth Welfare Act (*Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz*) and covers the placement, briefing, training and payment of suitable day-care staff by the youth welfare office. The Länder and local authorities are responsible for implementation, and have as a rule adopted their own legal provisions substantiating the framework conditions.

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

Needs-oriented day-care services are to be established for children under three years of age in day-care centres and child-minding services.

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC institution**

Since 1 August 2013 there has been a legal entitlement to support in a day care centre for children or in a child-minding service for children who have reached the age of one. The scope of daily support is oriented to individual needs.

### **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Children under the age of three may be looked after in *Kinderkrippen* (crèches), in groups of children under the age of three in day-care centres or, in mixed-age groups, in day-care centres together with children between three up to 14 years of age or in child-minding services. At present, day care for children under three years of age is undergoing [expansion](#). Day-care for children under the age of three was initially expanded due to the legal entitlement introduced in 2013. This expansion is currently being continued as there are still day-care requirements which need to be covered.

### **Organisation of Time**

For the organisation of time in day care for children under three years of age, the information on the [organisation of time in programmes for children over 2–3 years](#) applies.

### **Organisation of the Day and Week**

For the organisation of the day and week in day care for children under three years of age, the information on the [organisation of the day and week in programmes for children over 2–3 years](#) applies.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activity**

According to the specialist recommendations of the national working group of the Land youth welfare services (*Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Landesjugendämter*) of November 2009 on the quality of the education, upbringing and care of children under three in day-care centres for children and child-minding services, early childcare must respond in particular to the basic needs of small children. The specific needs of children under three include:

- loving attention;
- sensitive care based on stable relationships;
- sympathetic support appropriate to development stage;
- empathy and support in stressful situations;
- unconditional acceptance;
- safety and security.

Educational support at this stage in life is primarily understood as shaping relationships with the child and as holistic support complementing development. It is accompanied by educational partnership with parents. The educational processes take place through social interaction and communication, and above all through play. Special development themes of early childhood promotion include supporting communication, language and motor development.

### **Teaching Methods and Materials**

The promotion of communication and language is a core educational task. Language development is promoted in an emotionally approachable atmosphere. Children acquire language skills not in isolation, but in daily interaction with adults and other children. Educational staff are expected to support workflows and care processes with language, and to structure them as language-stimulating situations. Language development is also supported by the language model provided by educational staff, through customs including songs, finger play and verse, teaching work with picture books, and much more besides.

Another development aspect is the promotion of motor development. Extensive opportunities for motor activities are designed to support secure movement and the

development of body awareness, self-acceptance and the attentiveness of the child. This includes inter alia a wealth of physical activities, open spaces, programmes such as rhythmic early education, and song and movement games. Children should also have enough time to make motor advances by themselves.

### ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

There is no assessment of performance in day-care centres for children, as there are no lessons in the traditional sense. Regular observation and documenting of development and the abilities and needs of the children allows educational staff to support individual development tasks competently. Staff incorporate these observations into dialogue with the child and conversations with the parents.

**Spain**



The 2006 Education Act and the 2013 Act on the Improvement of the Quality of Education, modifying it, are the basic rules currently governing the educational provision of the Spanish education system.

The Act on the Improvement of the Quality of Education, that has already begun to be implemented this academic year 2014/15, has not introduced any change in pre-primary education.

The 2006 Act on Education establishes Pre-Primary Education, an educational stage in its own right which is non-compulsory, as the first stage of the education system. It is organised into two cycles of three years each: the first one, up to 3 years of age, and the second one, from 3 to 6 years of age.

The Autonomous Communities regulate the objectives, contents, evaluation, organisation, as well as the requirements schools have to meet in the first cycle of the stage. In the second cycle, however, all these aspects are regulated by the State and the Autonomous Communities complete them for their respective regions.

### **Aim and general objectives**

The **aim** of Pre-Primary Education is to contribute to the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of children in close cooperation with families. The two cycles of the stage should progressively pay attention to emotional development, body movement and control, communication and verbal expression, basic guidelines of coexistence and social relations, as well as discovery of the physical and social characteristics of the environment. The development of a positive and balanced image of themselves and the acquisition of personal autonomy should also be encouraged.

In accordance with the Act on Education and the Royal Decree establishing the core curricula for the second cycle of Pre-Primary Education, the **general objectives** of this stage are the following:

- Know their own and others' bodies, its capacities, and learn to respect differences.
- Observe and explore their family, natural and social environment.
- Acquire progressive autonomy in their regular activities.
- Develop their emotional abilities.

- Socialise with others and progressively acquire the basic guidelines of coexistence and social relations, as well as practise the peaceful resolution of conflicts.
- Develop communicative skills in different languages and types of expression.
- Begin developing logical-mathematical abilities, reading and writing, as well as movement, gesture and rhythm.

The Autonomous Communities, in the exercise of their educational powers, complete the general objectives of the stage.

### **Schools providing Pre-Primary Education**

Pre-Primary Education is offered in public or private schools, which may provide the first cycle of the stage, the second or both. Public schools offering Pre-Primary Education are called **Pre-Primary schools** and those also providing primary education are known as **Pre-Primary and Primary schools**.

Almost every institution which provides pre-primary education falls within the competence of the education authorities. In some Autonomous Communities, there are schools for children aged 0 to 3 years which depend upon the social area, such as areas that are related to family or welfare.

In 2012/13, 8 341 schools offered exclusively the first cycle of pre-primary education throughout the State. Of these schools, 4 137 were public, 1 309 were [publicly-funded private schools](#) and 2 895 were private. The number of schools varies significantly from one Autonomous Community to another.

### **Educational policy**

The priorities of Spain's educational policy regarding Pre-Primary Education focus on the improvement of quality and access to education during the first years of life.

The Education Act already envisaged a free second cycle of Pre-Primary Education, and urged the Education Authorities to progressively provide enough school places for the first cycle through agreements with the local corporations, other authorities or non-profit private institutions. The main lines of action were:

- Continue increasing the number of public school places for children under 3 years of age.
- Offer enough school places in public schools and establish a system of subsidy arrangements in order to ensure a free second cycle.
- Adapt the schools offering this stage to the minimum requirements established by the Education Authorities, such as facilities or pupil/teacher ratio.

In 2013, with the adoption of the [2013-2016 2nd National Strategic Plan for Childhood and Adolescence](#), two objectives related to pre-primary education, in line with the previous ones, were formulated:

- Optimise the provision of quality services in pre-primary schools for children aged 0-3 during parents' working hours, bringing both parameters closer to the guidelines of the European Union, supporting compliance with some minimum requirements regarding quality, training of staff and facilities, and promoting the exchange of experiences on reconciliation and the development of educational and recreational activities.
- Ensure the free nature of the second cycle of pre-primary education from the age of 3, as well as the early care of children with disabilities so that they can develop their full potential.

In addition, the [2013-2016 National Action Plan for Social Inclusion](#) proposed to include an assessment on the risk of social exclusion in the scale for admission into pre-primary schools offering the first cycle of the stage.

Finally, the Act on the Improvement of the Quality of Education stipulates that, from the 2014/15 school year, the Government is responsible for establishing, for the second cycle of pre-primary education:

- The objectives, skills and evaluation criteria of the core curriculum, which will represent 55% of the school timetable in the Autonomous Communities with a co-official language and 65% in the rest.
- The foundations for multilingual education.

## **Legislative references**

Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación (BOE 4-5-2006).

Real Decreto 1630/2006, de 29 de diciembre, por el que se establecen las enseñanzas mínimas del segundo ciclo de Educación infantil (BOE 4-5-2007).

Orden EDU/1965/2010, de 14 de julio, por la que se regulan los requisitos que han de cumplir los centros que impartan el primer ciclo de la educación infantil y diferentes aspectos relacionados con la admisión de alumnos, la participación, la organización y el funcionamiento de dichos centros en las ciudades de Ceuta y Melilla.

Ley Orgánica 8/2013, de 9 de diciembre, para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa (BOE 10-12-2013).

## ***Organisation of Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Geographical accessibility**

In order to guarantee the principle of equality as regards the right to Education recognised by the 1978 Spanish Constitution, the 2006 Act on Education stipulates the necessity for developing preventive and compensatory actions in underprivileged regions.

The Education Authorities are responsible for implementing these actions, avoiding inequalities on geographical, social and economic or other grounds and ensuring the best conditions for Pre-Primary schooling. These actions are aimed at specific educational institutions or geographical areas and, more particularly, rural schools.

The measures adopted are the following:

- Provision of financial and material resources to guarantee pupils' cost-free education either in their own municipality or area of schooling, or in neighbouring areas. For detailed information on schooling in rural areas, see article [Organisational variations and alternative structures in early childhood education and care](#).
- Annual regulation of financial assistance aimed at covering enrolment and tuition fees in a [publicly-funded private school](#) or private school. For detailed

information on assistance of this type, see article [Early childhood and school education funding](#).

- Authorisation for the creation or closure of Pre-Primary education units.

The factors that have to be considered when planning educational provision in a specific geographical area are:

- In urban areas: the birth rate, the increase in the number of foreign pupils and the increasing population in emerging areas.
- In rural areas: difficulty in accessing certain geographical areas, birth and death rates, the aging of the population and the number of seasonal workers.

### **Admission requirements and choice of ECEC institution**

The Spanish education system has begun to implement the reforms established by the new 2013 Act on the Improvement of the Quality of Education, which modifies the 2006 Education Act, this academic year 2014/15. However, admission requirements and choice of school will not be affected by the educational reform.

The Act on Education establishes that the Education Authorities have to regulate pupils' admission to public schools, so that the right to education, equal access and freedom of choice of school are guaranteed. The objective is to achieve a fair distribution of pupils, with no discrimination on racial, gender, religious or opinion grounds or due to conditions of birth any other personal or social condition or circumstance.

Parents or guardians may apply to any school, public or private, for a place for their children. The only admission requirement is the year of birth, although private schools have autonomy to establish their own admission procedures.

If there are not enough places in publicly-funded schools providing the **first cycle** of pre-primary education, the education authorities set a scale on the basis of the priority criteria established, for the whole State, by the Education Act: prior enrolment of other siblings in the school or parents or legal guardians working in the school, proximity of parents' home or workplace, annual family income and legal status of large family, and either the pupil or any of the parents or siblings having any type of disability. In some Autonomous Communities, there are some other criteria, such as parents' labour situation or social and family circumstances. The local authorities may also set additional criteria for their own schools.

As for the **second cycle**, in the case of public schools and publicly-funded private schools, if there are not enough places, pupil admission is subject to the priority admission criteria established by the Act on Education previously mentioned. The Autonomous Communities and schools themselves may also set some additional criteria.

In public schools, pupil admission is the responsibility of the School Council; in publicly-funded private schools, the owner of the school is also responsible. In addition, the Education Authorities may set up schooling or assessment bodies or commissions in order to decide on the allocation of places. They also establish the corresponding ways for families to appeal against the decisions taken in such processes.

**Pupils with special educational needs** attend mainstream schools. They have to meet the general admission requirements as well as the specific conditions the Autonomous Communities may impose. Schooling in specific special education institutions takes place if any of the following situations arise: special educational needs due to a disability that cannot be met in a mainstream school, highly significant adaptation needs, impossibility of integrating into a mainstream school and schooling report from the specialised guidance services authorising schooling. For detailed information on the admission of these pupils, see article [Separate special education needs provision in early childhood and school education](#).

### **Age levels and grouping of children**

The first cycle of Pre-Primary Education caters for children from birth to age 3. On a general basis, the minimum age for access is 3-4 months of age, depending on the Autonomous Community in question. The second cycle caters for children from 3 to 6 years of age. Class groups are normally created according to the year of birth in both cycles.

Each group has a class teacher assigned, who, as far as possible, keeps the same group of pupils throughout the whole cycle.

Professionals who hold a [School Teacher](#) degree, and who are specialised in pre-primary education, or the equivalent Bachelor degree, are responsible for drawing up and monitoring the pedagogical plan. In the first cycle of the stage, professionals holding the Pre-Primary Education Advanced [Technician](#) certificate may teach or support school teachers, as determined by the education authorities. In the second cycle, classes are

taught by school teachers who can be also supported by school teachers in other specialities if necessary. For detailed information on the qualifications of professionals of Pre-Primary Education, see article [Initial education for teachers working in early childhood and school education](#).

In the first cycle, the teacher/pupil ratio per unit is regulated by each Autonomous Community. For children under 1 year of age, most of the Autonomous Communities establish a maximum of 8 children per unit; for children between 1 and 2 years of age, the number of pupils ranges between 12 and 14; and for children between 2 and 3 years of age, ratios vary between 16 and 20 children per unit. In the second cycle, however, the teacher/pupil ratio per unit is regulated by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport as well as the Education Authorities for their respective regions. In any case, a maximum of 25 pupils per unit is established.

### **Organisation of time**

The Education Authorities are responsible for annually establishing the school year within their jurisdiction, taking into account certain minimum criteria which are set for the whole State. Thus, they fix the number of school days of public schools and publicly-funded private schools, specifying the time devoted to organisation tasks and the care of children.

The **beginning and end of the school year** tend to be regulated separately for each cycle. In general, the second cycle is regulated like the rest of non-university educational stages. In any case, the school year starts at the beginning of September and school holidays are allocated as follows: approximately 12 weeks correspond to summer holidays; around 15 days for Christmas; between 8 and 11 days at the end of March or beginning of April (Holy Week); and around 7 bank holidays established by the central Government or regional or local authorities. During summer holidays, schools can remain open until the end of July. This is also the case with the days that are not a bank holiday during Christmas and Easter.

In the case of private schools, particularly those providing the first cycle of the stage, the number of school days may vary depending on the needs of families, the possibilities for organisation and more flexible working time arrangements of the educational staff, the stable functioning of groups and compliance with the ratio established in the regulations. In

this sense, the duration of the school year ranges between ten and eleven months in most Autonomous Communities.

### **Organisation of the day and week**

In general, a **weekly timetable** of 25 hours operates in pre-primary education. However, the education authorities are responsible for establishing the school day, which may vary depending on the ownership of the school. Thus, the timetable of public schools providing the whole stage is usually 35 hours per week, which translates into 7 hours per day, Monday to Friday. This includes lunch breaks, rest or nap periods and recreation. Private schools have the autonomy to adapt their timetable to family demands. Nevertheless, in accordance with the regulations on the requirements for schools offering the first cycle, children are not allowed to remain on the school premises for more than eight hours in some Autonomous Communities.

In many pre-primary schools extended timetable and breakfast and lunch services are provided, so schools can be opened from 7:30 in the morning. Parents' associations, schools themselves or external institutions can organise extracurricular activities, which are non-compulsory for pupils.

In schools exclusively providing Pre-Primary Education, either the first or both cycles, the arrival and ending time may be delayed half an hour to facilitate the communication with the families and children's adaptation to the school day.

In addition, pupils normally go through a **period of adaptation** during the month of September, especially those who are attending school for the first time. The time children remain on the school premises is gradually increased until they have the number of schools hours generally established.

Due to the global nature of the methodology used at this educational stage, no specific number of hours has been set for the different curricular areas. The organisation of time combines stability with flexibility and is adapted to pupils' needs and rhythm of activity, play and rest.



## ***Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Steering documents and types of activities**

The 2006 Education Act and the 2013 Act on the Improvement of the Quality of Education, modifying it, are the basic rules currently governing the educational provision of the Spanish education system. The Act on the Improvement of the Quality of Education defines curriculum as the regulation of the elements influencing the teaching and learning processes for each type of provision.

The curriculum of Pre-Primary Education is organised into different levels of definition, progressively adapting to the special characteristics of the context, the school and its pupils. For detailed information on the levels of curricular definition, see article [Administration and governance at central and/or regional level](#).

The 2006 Act on Education establishes the educational nature of the two cycles of pre-primary education. The **curriculum** of the first cycle is not established at central level but determined by the Autonomous Communities for their respective regions. In the case of the second cycle, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport is responsible for setting the core curricula and defines the objectives, contents and evaluation criteria for the whole State, subsequently completed by the education authorities. Regulation at regional level started in 2007 in both cycles.

At this stage, **educational contents** are organised around three curricular areas relating to children's experience and development. These curricular areas are considered from a global and integrated perspective and developed by carrying out meaningful experiences for pupils:

- Self-knowledge and personal autonomy: It promotes the gradual building of self-identity, emotional maturity, the establishment of emotional relationships with others and personal autonomy.
- Knowledge of the environment: It helps discovering the contexts of the child's environment, favouring its integration in a reflective and participative way.
- Languages, communication and representation: It aims at achieving knowledge of the different forms of communication and representation of reality, as well as the expression of feelings, thoughts, experiences and interactions with others.

The Act on Education entrusts the Education Authorities with introducing a foreign language, especially in the last year of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle (5-6 years of age), as well as reading and writing, basic numeracy, information and communication technologies, and visual and musical expression during the second cycle. As regards Religion, all schools have to offer it in the second cycle, although pupils are free to choose it, guaranteeing parents' or guardians' right to a religious education for their children. The curriculum is established by the relevant religious authorities and schools have to organise an alternative subject for those pupils who do not take it.

There are differences between the Autonomous Communities when it comes to establishing the contents of the first cycle and completing contents on the basis of the core curricula for the second cycle. Some establish the same contents for both cycles; others formulate specific contents for each cycle; and, finally, some others only specify the contents of the second cycle, based on the actual contents of the core curricula.

Schools also play an active role in the development of the curriculum. In order to adapt it to the needs of their pupils and their environment, they draw up a series of documents where they formulate their pedagogical and curricular organisation: the [school development plan](#), which includes the curricular definition of the Education Authority, and the [yearly general programme](#), which covers all aspects concerning the organisation and running of the school for the school year, including the projects, the curriculum and all action plans as agreed and approved. A final report which includes and evaluates the activities and running of the school is also prepared annually.

The educational community participates in the drawing up of these documents through the relevant governing and educational coordination bodies of the school. Both the school development plan and the yearly general programme are prepared by the management team, in accordance with the criteria and proposals of the mixed-membership governing bodies of the school. The curricular project is normally drawn up by those responsible for pedagogical coordination, who submit their proposal to the Teachers' Assembly.

For detailed information on the administration and governance of non-university educational institutions, see article [Administration and governance at local and/or institutional level](#).

## Teaching methods and materials

The **methodology** used in Pre-Primary Education is based on experiences and playing activities, in the context of an atmosphere of trust and affection which promotes children's self-esteem and social integration.

In order to support schools in the drawing up of their pedagogical plan, the education authorities establish a series of **methodological principles**:

- Global perspective of learning.
- Children's physical and mental activity, and importance of play.
- Priority is given to emotional and relationship aspects.
- Peer to peer interaction.
- Coordination with families.
- Preventive and compensatory nature.

Attention to diversity is also one of the methodological principles guiding educational provision, which adapts to children's specific characteristics, interests, cognitive styles and maturing processes.

Schools, in the exercise of their teaching autonomy, define the teaching methods used in the classroom, in accordance with the methodological principles described. They also decide on curricular materials and didactic resources. In addition, each **school teacher** is free to choose the methodology, which must comply with what has been agreed at institutional level and established by the relevant Education Authorities.

The **curricular materials and didactic resources** which can be used include: activity books, printed material, self-produced materials, reference books from the school or classroom library, press, tales, Internet and online or digital resources and audiovisual aids. Didactic guides are also used as didactic basis of the curricular material employed and guidelines for content sequencing and adaptation. The use of resources related to plastic and musical expression is also particularly important at this stage.

The Education Act generally establishes that the publication and adoption of textbooks and teaching materials do not require prior authorisation from the Education Authority. In any case, they must have the appropriate level of scientific rigor, be adapted to the age of pupils and the curriculum approved by each Autonomous Community and reflect and encourage respect for the constitutional principles, values, liberties, rights and duties, as well as for the principles and values included in both the Act on Education and the 2004

Act on Comprehensive Protection Measures Against Gender Violence, to which all educational activity must adapt. Although it does not directly affect this stage, the principles and values of the 2013 Act on the Improvement of the Quality of Education explicitly refer to the need for measures for the prevention of gender-based violence and for the promotion of gender equality.

The supervision of textbooks and other curricular materials is part of the regular process of inspection carried out by the Education Authority of all the elements included in the teaching/learning process.

The textbook selection process follows some guidelines in all educational institutions: 1) The Pedagogical Coordination Commission prepares a report on the textbooks that are considered most appropriate; 2) The report is supervised by the School Council and the Teachers' Assembly; 3) Teachers are responsible for the final decision. If the School Council does not agree with this decision, suggestions can be made for the Teachers' Assembly to consider them.

Although **grants for the purchase of textbooks and school materials** are awarded at the compulsory stages (Primary Education and Lower Compulsory Secondary Education), there are also local and/or regional grants for the acquisition of school materials in the second cycle of Pre-Primary Education. For detailed information on assistance of this type, see article [Early childhood and school education funding](#).

## ***Assessment in Early Childhood Education and Care***

The evaluation of Pre-Primary Education has a global, continuous and educational nature. Evaluation at this stage helps to identify and assess pupils' development processes and their learning, always according to their personal characteristics. To that end, the **evaluation criteria** for each curricular area of the second cycle, established at central level and completed by the Autonomous Communities for their respective regions, are used as reference points.

Similarly, the Education Authorities define **pupils' evaluation process** for their respective regions, although some Autonomous Communities do it for the two cycles and some

others only regulate evaluation in the second cycle. In any case, the Autonomous Communities consider the evaluation process as a means to assess, review and improve teaching processes, so that they are better adapted to pupils' needs.

The evaluation process has an **initial individual evaluation**, which starts during the adaptation period of each child to the school and is defined by each school in its [school development plan](#). In addition, the **continuous evaluation** implies monitoring each child on a daily basis according to the objectives and evaluation criteria set. Lastly, the **final evaluation** specifies to what degree abilities and basic skills have been acquired by the end of the school year.

The Education Authorities establish at least three formal **evaluation sessions** per school year. Results are expressed in qualitative terms, including the progress made by pupils and, where appropriate, the remedial and adaptation measures introduced. At the end of each evaluation session, families receive a written report. These reports, together with the different evaluation documents, help to improve coordination between the two cycles of the stage. Lastly, in order to ensure a smooth transition from pre-primary to primary education, schools providing pre-primary education also establish mechanisms to coordinate with the new schools.

Due to the nature of evaluation in Pre-Primary Education, its purpose is not the grading of pupils or their progression from one year to next and into primary education, which is automatic.

Assessment is a class teacher's competence, supported by professionals who work with pupils as a group or individually. The main data collection **technique** used in the evaluation process is direct and systematic observation, generally complemented with the analysis of children's output and interviews with families.

Exceptionally, staying another year at the stage can be authorised by the Education Authorities in the case of pupils with special educational needs. As for highly gifted pupils, the duration of the second cycle can also be reduced by authorising the early commencement of schooling in Primary Education. For detailed information on support measures, see article [Special education needs provision within mainstream education](#).

## ***Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Rural schools**

The Education Authorities, within their jurisdiction, are responsible for guaranteeing equal opportunities in rural areas, by providing the necessary organisational means and systems to meet their specific needs.

[Gathered rural schools](#) constitute an organisational structure which is specific to rural areas. There is one single management team and all peripatetic maestros teaching in these schools are members of the Teachers' Assembly. This way, pupils living in geographical areas with small centres of population can attend school without having to travel to other towns. The [school development plan](#) and the [yearly general programme](#) are the same for all the schools grouped together in the area.

**Rural centres for educational innovation** were established in order to carry out activities developing and complementing the educational action of schools located in rural areas, as well as to promote coexistence among pupils of the different rural schools. They also collaborate in the development of educational innovation and teacher training and promote coordination among schools and the involvement of the school community. With regard to Pre-Primary Education, their action is mainly aimed at incomplete schools and gathered rural schools.

Finally, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, in collaboration with the Education Authorities, has promoted the carrying out of studies to identify valid ways to teach children aged 0-3 who live in rural areas with a very dispersed population. This has been implemented through the [Educa3 Plan](#), developed between 2008 and 2012.

### **Bilingual sections**

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport and the British Council signed an agreement in 1996 by which some public Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary schools have implemented an integrated Spanish-British curriculum. Lessons are held both by teachers specifically engaged for the project and by English specialist teachers of the schools. The aim is to provide pupils with an education which enables them to hold both certificates at

the end of Lower Compulsory Secondary Education, so that they can continue their studies in any of the two countries. Due to the good results obtained in an external and independent evaluation carried out in 2011, the agreement was renewed in 2013.

In addition, the Ministry supports a cultural agreement between Spain and Portugal since 1970. Its main aim is that the children of Portuguese workers and immigrants may retain their linguistic and cultural references, although it also encourages Spanish pupils' interest and respect for the Portuguese culture. The programme is developed in Pre-Primary and Primary Education, and, to a lesser extent, in Secondary Education.

**Portogallo**



The Comprehensive Law on the Education System ([Law no. 5/97, of February 10](#)) defines pre-primary education as the first step of the Portuguese Education System in a lifelong learning process, and as a complement of parent's role in their children's education, with whom the school should establish a close relationship, favoring child development, in order to assure their full integration in society as an autonomous, free and supportive human being.

Pre-primary education is an optional cycle for children from 3 to 5 year-olds. In 2009, the Government established the universality of pre-primary education for children over 5 years old ([Law no. 85/2009, August 27](#)).

In Portugal, the pre-school education covers children from 3 years up to the age of entry to compulsory schooling. There is a public and a private network of pre-primary education institutions, which are complementary. The Public network is composed of education institutions under the [Ministry of Education and Science](#) (MEC) and the [Ministry of Solidarity, Employment and Social Security](#) (MSESS). The private network is composed of for-profit and non-profit education institutions. Those are private and cooperative education institutions, in the first case, and private institutions for social solidarity (IPSS), in the second case.

Pedagogical tutelage is the responsibility of the [Ministry of Education and Science](#). Thus, the [Ministry of Education and Science](#) is responsible for ensuring the pedagogical quality of teaching in pre-primary education institutions network.

The main pedagogical objectives of pre-primary education are: to promote children's personal and social development; to foster children's integration into diverse social groups; to contribute to equal opportunities; to stimulate children's global development; to promote expression and communication development; to enhance curiosity and critical thinking; to provide children with situations of well-being and security; to identify maladjustments, disabilities or giftedness and to encourage families to participate in the educative process.

Pre-primary education is guaranteed nationally and must be administered in recognised pre-primary educational establishments ([Law n°5/97, 10 February](#)) or in other words, nursery schools.

Educational provision geared towards children under three is made up of child-minders and family crèches (a group of between 12 and 20 child-minders that live in same geographical area and are regulated, technically and financially, by Social Security, Lisbon's [Santa Casa da Misericórdia](#) or private charities). Crèches offer the greatest level

of provision, which is centre based and socio-educational in nature, caring for children under 3 years of age for a period of time in which parents or guardians are unable to.

In Portugal there are school clusters that integrate: pre-primary; first, second and third cycle schools; as well as secondary schools. The constitution of school clusters aims to optimize human and material resources and the equipment existing in schools of basic and secondary education. Children are allowed to use, for instance, the school library, gym, playing fields, sciences lab, and schools canteen of the school headquarters - in these school clusters a common curricular plan is designed for all education levels.

### ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 3 years***

Educational provision for children up to the age of 3 is not part of the educational system and therefore not the responsibility of the [Ministry of Education and Science](#) (Ministério da Educação e Ciência - MEC) but that of the [Ministry of Solidarity, Employment and Social Security](#) (Ministério da Solidariedade, Emprego e Segurança Social - MSESS). Child-minders, crèches and family crèches make up the provision available for children in this age group.

Crèches are a socio-educational provision for children up to the age of 3 during the day when parents or guardians are unable to care for them, thus supporting children and families. This service is provided mostly by private, not-for-profit bodies (Private Social Solidarity Institutions - Instituições Particulares de Solidariedade Social - IPSS), which have agreements with the [Ministry of Solidarity, Employment and Social Security](#), and by for-profit private bodies with an operating licence approved by the [MSESS](#).

The services of child-minders and family crèches (a group of between 12 and 20 child carers) are provided by suitable people who, in return for payment, care for children who are not related to them, for a period of time in which the parents are unable to or have to work. Child-minders are regulated, technically and financially, by Social Security, Lisbon's [Santa Casa da Misericórdia](#) or private charities.

## **Geographical Accessibility**

In recent years, provision for children up to the age of 3 has increased considerably, particularly in terms of crèches, with coverage in 2013 reaching 46.2% on the mainland, demonstrating significant growth in comparison to 2000 (18.6 %).

This provision, however, is not yet homogenous throughout the country, with the majority of provision concentrated in the northern and central coastal areas and in major towns and cities.

## **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC institution**

Families enrol their child at the institution of their choice, normally near their place of residence. The child's admission to the crèche, whether with private not-for-profit or for-profit bodies, is undertaken by the institution itself. In the case of crèches run by private not-for-profit bodies (with cooperation agreements with the [MSESS](#)), every year a public contribution paid to the institution for each child is established, which is supplemented by an amount paid by the family itself.

## **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Generally speaking, crèches admit children between the ages of 3 and 36 months, being divided into autonomous groups of children, based on the specific characteristics of different age groups. The maximum number per group is 10 pre-toddler children; 14 toddling children up to 24 months; and 18 children between 24 and 36 months. In situations where the number of children makes it impossible to form groups, it is possible to create heterogeneous groups of toddlers with a maximum of 16 children.

In relation to nannies, there is a legally-defined maximum of four children per nanny (between the ages of three months and three years old).

With regard to crèches, the maximum number of children per nursery teacher is age-dependent. For children younger than one, the maximum is ten children for every two child development professionals or qualified assistants. For children between the ages of one and two, the maximum is 14 children per qualified nursery teacher with a qualified

assistant. For children aged two, the maximum is 18 per qualified nursery teacher with a qualified assistant.

### **Organization of Time**

It is not possible to provide detailed information on how time is organised in crèches, as this is the responsibility of the respective institutions. As a rule, annual, weekly and daily organisation of time is adjusted to meet the needs of families. However, it is worth noting, according to 2013<sup>1</sup> data, the majority of crèches (84%) open from between 7.00 and 8.00 and close between 18.00 and 20.00 (94.5%). Also, the number of crèches open for 12 hours (in the same year represented 85.8% of the total. In approximately 46% of crèches, the average time a child stays is 8 hours a day.

<sup>1</sup>[MSESS-GEP - Carta Social – Rede de Serviços e Equipamentos, Relatório 2013](#)

### **Organisation of the Day and Week**

It is not possible to provide detailed information on how time is organised in crèches, as this is the responsibility of the respective institutions. As a rule, annual, weekly and daily organisation of time is adjusted to meet the needs of families.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 3 years***

### **Steering documents and types of activities**

According to the legislation in effect, each crèche sets out a pedagogical project, which functions as a tool for planning and the monitoring of activities, in accordance with the profile of the children. The pedagogical project includes the socio-pedagogical activity plan, which includes educational activities that help children's overall development, including motor, cognitive, personal, emotional and social skills, and the information plan that includes awareness-raising activities for families in the area of parenting.

Crèche activities include the provision of care that meets the child's needs; appropriate nutrition and food, qualitatively and quantitatively suitable for the age of the child, subject to special diets in the case of medical prescription; personal hygiene; individualised care, in accordance with children's abilities and skills; educational, recreational and motor skills activities, in accordance with the children's age and needs.

Usually, activities follow a 'routine' consisting of play, rest, meals, and children's health care and cleaning. In addition, outdoor activities and activities with the families are foreseen.

### **Teaching Methods and Materials**

Crèches' main objectives are the following: the reconciliation of the household's family and professional life; to help families by sharing care and responsibilities throughout the child's development; to provide individual and personalised service according to children's specific needs; to prevent and detect any lack of adaptation, deficiency or risk, ensuring the most appropriate course of action; to provide the right conditions for the proper development of children, in an environment that is physical and emotionally safe; to encourage collaboration with other community services.

These settings have the double purpose of supporting families, in particular those where both parents are working and to provide an complementary educational service.

In this perspective, activities are organized to promote socialization and children's learning development through playing, both in individual and in small groups.

### ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 3 years***

These children are not assessed. Educators observe children's development, with the involvement of parents.

When the pedagogical project is drafted by the technical team for each group of children, family participation may be requested. Some crèches wish to encourage the participation of families in the planning and assessment of activities, promoting educational continuity.

# **Belgio**

## **comunità francese**

The education and care of young children are organised in two distinct types of structures: pre-primary or nursery education , from the age of 2,5, and childcare facilities : education and care for young children who can be cared for in day care centres or by childminders as soon as the maternity leave of their mother is over (which generally means after 4 months).

In the French-speaking part of Belgium there is a variety of childcare facilities adapted to the needs of children and their family. Globally, the coverage rate for 0 to 3 years-old is 43,8%, which is above the Barcelona target, taking into account the children attending nursery school from the age of 2,5. This coverage rate is 28,2% for children under the age of 2,5, even if there is still an imbalance between supply and demand.

The ECEC sector is strongly regulated. It's forbidden by law to take care of a child under 6 outside school hours without the [ONE](#)'s authorisation. However, no authorisation is required if the childminder is a family member or if the child is taken care of at his parents' home. Specific training is compulsory for all the staff of the childcare facilities, and also for self-employed childminders.

The [ONE](#) (Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance- Office of Birth and Childhood) plays an important role in the organisation and regulation of the ECEC sector. The [ONE](#) is an independent public organism, and its two main missions are :

- To support the child's development within his family and his social environment. The role of the [ONE](#) is to advise and support pregnant women, parents and families through medical and social action, in order to ensure the global wellbeing of children. Most of the services offered by the [ONE](#) are free.
- To organise (that means to control and sometimes to finance) day care centres for children outside family background. The role of the [ONE](#) is to ensure that these structures operate correctly and provide quality care for children.

The [ONE](#) also has cross-cutting missions, such as parenting support for example.

There are two main categories of child care facilities for children under the age of three : day care centres, and childminders.

Subsidised by the ONE

Not subsidised by the ONE

Group day care centres

Crèche, day care centre, nursery school, kindergarten

Independent day care centres

Family day care centres

Contractually regulated childminders

Self-employed childminders

A [quality framework](#) (17 december 2003) considers both the quality of life of the children in the centres and the service provided to parents and to society. It defines general quality objectives which are directly inspired by the Children Rights Convention and by the European Commission's Recommendations on ECEC. The legislator considers that ECEC needs exceed the sole necessity of supervision of the child when his parents are not available , and that those needs are particularly related to his physical, psychological, cognitive, affective and social development.

More recently, two innovative sectors are being developed:

- flexible day care centres ("haltes-accueil"), which address specific, occasional, urgent needs on reduced hours;
- after school activities, support to homework, holiday activities and camps.

Pre-primary education organised or grant-aided by the French Community is commonly known as nursery education. Nursery education is defined as education given to children whose age on 30 September is at least two years and six months and who are not yet in primary education . While constituting a level of education in its own right, nursery education is grouped with the three cycles of primary education under the umbrella term of pre-secondary education. Pre-primary education pursues all the general goals laid down in the [Decree on the Missions of School](#) (24 July 1997). Its specific aims are:

- to develop children's awareness of their individual potential and encourage self-expression through creative activities;
- to develop socialisation;
- to develop the learning of cognitive, social, affective and psychomotor skills;



- to identify children's difficulties and handicaps and address these through remediation.

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

The 1991 Charter of Infancy recognises that access to a childcare facility is one of children's rights, independently of the parents' professional situation. The global coverage rate for childcare under 2,5 years old is 28,2%. The variety among childcare settings (group day care centres or family day care centres) ensures geographical accessibility, even in rural areas.

The French Community has 40 000 childcare places, while the population of children aged 0 to 2,5 years-old is 140 000. Group day care centres constitutes 65% of the childcare provision, while family day care centres constitutes 35%. Subsidised day care (both group and family centres) constitutes 70% of the provision, the remaining 30% being non-subsidised.

In subsidised day care centres, financial accessibility is good as parents pay a day fee based on their income. In non subsidised centres, the fee are determined by an agreement between the centre and the parents.

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institution**

There are various forms of childcare: collective or at home, subsidised or non-subsidised. Parents have a free choice regarding the childcare facility attended by their child. Nevertheless, provision is not always sufficient to meet demand.

Wallonia and Brussels have an extensive network of quality day care centres (nurseries, kindergartens and childminders), for babies and children aged 3 months to 3 years. All childcare facilities are subject to strict regulations enacted and controlled by the [ONE](#). Nobody is allowed to welcome children without approval of the [ONE](#).

The [ONE](#) ensures that those structures operate correctly and provide quality care for children. Some of them are financed by the [ONE](#). The "[quality code](#)" is for all the structures a compulsory reference. The day care centres have to respect different qualitative conditions: employees' training, building's quality, security of the accommodation, social and psychological attention to each child, etc.

There are two kinds of facilities:

- Collective facilities (i.e. "crèches", nurseries, kindergartens): the child is welcomed into a group of children supervised by one or several nursery nurses depending on the number of children. At least one adult is required for every 6 or 7 children.
- Childminders in familial surroundings: your child is welcomed into the home of a childminder in a small group of children (maximum 4 children for one childminder). A childminder is allowed to work with another one, so maximum 8 children can be welcomed.

Some day care centres, accredited by the [ONE](#), are fully financed by the [ONE](#). Consequently the daily rate is based on the parents' income (under specific conditions). Other day care centres are accredited by the [ONE](#) but don't receive any subsidies. The rate is then determined by the day care centre.

The [ONE](#) also supervises:

- flexible day care centres, called "haltes accueil", a special formula conceived for parents who just need to leave their child in secure professional care during a few hours.
- meeting points for parents and children (Dolto model)

## **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Most non-school facilities admit children from birth. Only [prégardiennats](#) are reserved for a specific age range (18 months to 3 years).

### **Childcare facility**

#### **Accepted ages**

Crèches

0 to 3 years

Prégardiennats

18 months to 3 years

Municipal childcare centres

0 to 6 years

Contractually regulated childminders

0 to 6 years

Children's homes

0 to 6 years

Self-employed childminders

0 to 3 years

Parental crèches

0 to 3 years

Childminders may take care of one to four equivalent full-time children, including the childminder's own children under three years old, unless the Office of Birth and Childhood (ONE) grants authorisation for one or two additional children. In the absence of any such dispensation, five is the maximum number of children looked after simultaneously.

Traditionally, children are grouped by age in crèches and préguardiennats.

Up to two independent childminders may carry out their activity together, in the same facility. In this case, the total number of registered children cannot exceed 14 and the number of children looked after simultaneously cannot exceed 10; as soon as five children are present simultaneously, the presence of both childminders is required. Play and rest areas must be set up, and the two childminders are bound by a collaboration agreement.

## **Organisation of Time**

Women's work is a reality in Belgium. Childcare facilities are therefore generally open all year long, five days a week, during more than 11 hours (for example from 7 a.m. to 6.30 p.m.).

## **Organisation of the Day and Week**

Each facility must draw up its internal rules, defining the rights and obligations of parents, staff and the controlling authority, which in particular defines the timetables. The educational plan usually specifies the conditions of organisation of the day and week.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activity**

The Childcare Quality Code ([17 December 2003](#)) provides a coherent framework which is given concrete expression, depending on each particular context, through freely organised activities. Four principles of educational psychology must be respected:

- nurturing and fostering the child's desire to discover,
- watching over the quality of the relationship between childminder and child,
- allowing the child to express him/herself personally and spontaneously, fostering the development of self-confidence and autonomy,
- contributing to the development of the child's socialisation, in a perspective of solidarity and cooperation.

Children must be grouped so that conditions are optimal for carrying out activities, building a quality relationship with the childminder, and taking into account the needs and expectations of children. The childcare facility must also provide a healthy living environment for children.

An educational reference work, *Accueillir les tout-petits – Oser la qualité* ('Minding very young children – Go for quality') was elaborated to support the Childcare Quality Code.

### **Teaching Methods and Materials**

As stipulated by the Childcare Quality Code, every childcare facility must, through a process of consultation, elaborate a 'childcare plan', which lists its objectives and the methodological options chosen to achieve them. This plan is subject to periodic evaluation. The Quality Code provides some indications on the means to be deployed: organising living spaces that are adapted to the needs of children, fostering the development of living in groups, organising groups in a way that optimises the carrying out of activities and building of a quality relationship with the childminder, making room for children's initiative and preserving the notion of free time, and ensuring a healthy living environment for children.

More information about the implementation of the Quality Code is available here (in French) :

[http://www.one.be/uploads/txtproducts/datasheet/A\\_la\\_rencontre\\_des\\_enfants\\_one.pdf](http://www.one.be/uploads/txtproducts/datasheet/A_la_rencontre_des_enfants_one.pdf)

[http://www.one.be/uploads/txtproducts/datasheet/A\\_la\\_rencontre\\_des\\_familles\\_one.pdf](http://www.one.be/uploads/txtproducts/datasheet/A_la_rencontre_des_familles_one.pdf)

[http://www.one.be/uploads/txtproducts/datasheet/brochure\\_professionnelle\\_one.pdf](http://www.one.be/uploads/txtproducts/datasheet/brochure_professionnelle_one.pdf)

### ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

All childcare facilities must have their childcare plan. Their implementation is self-assessed, and also assessed by ONE's Inspectorate.

In addition, the subsidised childcare facilities need a quality certificate (valid for 3 years). This means that, in addition to the childcare plan required for all childcare facilities, they need to develop a quality improvement plan including objectives and means to reach them. The certificate is issued/renewed only if the objectives are relevant and the means adequate (in the Inspectorate's opinion).

It is therefore an assessment both of process and quality.

As children can attend childcare from a very young age (before one year old), partnership with parents, professionalism, respect of the rhythms, wellbeing and adapted activities are encouraged, and there's not focus on evaluation of the child's outcomes. Nevertheless, the children are under preventive medical supervision, that includes weight and growth monitoring as well as assessment of language and psychomotor development. The doctors who do the consultations are provided with a guide to preventive health care which is often used as a reference by doctors working in childcare.

# **Belgio**

## **comunità fiamminga**

**Formal care** is ordinary care, organised on a regulated basis, for children under 12 by non-family-members, up to and including the fourth stage. There is registered care, recognised care and care with a supervision certificate.

- Anyone who regularly looks after children under the age of 12 who are not family members, whether in return for payment or not, must declare this activity to Child and Family. For care that is merely registered, there are no legal conditions. However, Child and Family can send the Care Inspection agency to visit if there is any concern about the safety or health of the children.
- Recognised care and care with a supervision certificate satisfies legal conditions. Care of this kind is also regularly inspected by the Care Inspection agency.

**Informal care** by parents and relatives up to and including the fourth stage and care that is organised in the child's home setting (such as by a babysitter or au pair) are exempt from this declaration requirement.

**Formal pre-primary care** is for children who do not yet go to school. This approximately corresponds to the age of 0 to 2.5 or 3 years.

**Formal out-of-school care** is for children up to the age of 12 attending elementary school. Formal pre-primary or out-of-school care for children can be provided in either family day care or group day care.

Various types of care facility can be distinguished within formal care:

#### **Recognised (and subsidised) care**

##### **Independent care with a supervision certificate**

##### **Family day care**

- childminding service (mainly pre-primary care)
- self-employed childminder (mainly pre-primary care)

##### **Group day care**

- recognised childcare centre (mainly pre-primary care)
- initiative for out-of-school care (exclusively out-of-school care)
- local service for community-oriented pre-primary and out-of-school care

- independent childcare centre (mainly pre-primary care)
- independent out-of-school care facility (exclusively out-of-school care)

**Both recognised and independent pre-primary and out-of-school care facilities can also offer flexible or occasional care.**

- Flexible care is care of school-going or non-school-going children in formal care, outside the opening hours of the facility's core service.
- Occasional care is childcare for a period of up to six months, regardless of the intensity of use, for one of the following reasons: the parent is not working and starts a training programme; the parent is not working and suddenly finds work; the parent attends a job interview; there is an acute crisis situation in the family; the family needs temporary relief from its burden of stress; or care and support outside the family during the day is desirable for the child for social and/or pedagogical reasons.

## **Child and Family**

Kind en Gezin (Child and Family) is an internal autonomous agency, with legal personality (an IVA, see 1.2.2.). Child and Family's mission is to create, together with its partners and for every child, no matter where and how it is born and raised, as many opportunities as possible (<http://www.kindengezin.be>).

In order to achieve this, Child and Family provides a wide range of services. To parents with young children Child and Family offers advice, clinical preventive guidance, vaccinations, and parenting support via its parenting-support clinics. This is done through home visits, visits to the health centres and via the Child-and-Family helpline. Besides the basic services, Child and Family also offers specific services for families who are going through a difficult time. Child and Family also subsidises centres for childcare and family support, family-supportive foster-care services and the confidential child-protection centres.

The control of [childcare](#) is one of the important roles of Child and Family. Child and Family does not organise any childcare itself, but is responsible for the recognition and award of supervision certificates to care facilities, and for the subsidisation of and promotion of quality in formal childcare. Among other publications see its annual report [http://](#)



[www.kindengezin.be/brochures-en-rapporten/rapporten/over-kind-en-gezin/](http://www.kindengezin.be/brochures-en-rapporten/rapporten/over-kind-en-gezin/) and management agreement 2011-2015 <http://www.kindengezin.be/over-kind-en-gezin/juridisch/>

The agency falls within the Welfare, Public Health and Family policy area.

The relevant legislation can be found on [Juriwel](#), the Flemish welfare, health and family regulations.

On 20 April 2012, a new framework decree on the organisation of childcare for babies and toddlers was approved. The implementing decrees are expected by 2013, and the provisions are scheduled to enter into force in 2014. There will also be transitional measures. [See 14.2-3.2].

### **Geographical Accessibility**

At the end of 2011, there were 378 recognised childcare centres (38 of which also offered out-of-school care in separate rooms), 189 childminder services, 254 initiatives for out-of-school care, 34 local community-oriented childcare services and 70 mandated facilities. There were also 1,536 independent childcare centres (595 of which were working with the income-related system), 995 independent childminders (19 of whom were working with the income-related system) and 94 independent out-of-school childcare facilities with a supervision certificate from Child and Family. (Child and Family annual report 2011).

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC institution**

Childcare recognised and subsidised by Child and Family

Before childcare facilities can be recognised by and receive subsidies from Child and Family, they must meet certain quality conditions in terms of education, care, parent participation, staff, safety... In addition, the facility must also have a quality-assurance system in place. Via this quality-assurance system, childcare facilities chart how they go about guaranteeing a certain level of quality. In practice, this means that the facility formulates its mission, vision and values and that it will think about how it is going to achieve them and by which means. The childcare facility must also evaluate its operations and think about possible improvements. A satisfaction survey among parents forms part of

this process. Recognition also entails that the facility is inspected on a regular basis by the Agency for Care Inspection.

- [Quality policy](#) in **recognised childcare facilities** is governed by the decree of 17 October 2003 and the Flemish government decree of 6 May 2011. The recognised childcare facility should have a quality manual that sets out at least the quality policy, the quality management system and the self-evaluation system (including the training policy). A satisfaction survey of the families is part of this self-evaluation process. The childcare facility should evaluate and if necessary adjust its functioning and the quality manual in a five-year cycle. Child and Family oversees compliance with this requirement. In situ supervision is practised by the personnel members of the internally autonomous Care Inspection agency.
- The qualifications of employees and coordinators of recognised childcare facilities are governed by the ministerial decree of 3 March 2010.

The Flemish government decree of 23 February 2001 sets the conditions for recognition and subsidisation.

### Erkende kinderdagverblijven (Recognised childcare centres)

- This is group day care.
- Here, we distinguish between crèches, which cater for children who are too young to go to school and children who attend nursery school on a part-time basis, on the one hand, and a limited number of playgroups children from the age of 18 months can attend until they are ready to go to nursery school.
- Some childcare centres additionally provide out-of-school care, either in the same premises (infants), or in separate premises (primary-school children).
- Crèches cater for a minimum of 23 children, playgroups for a minimum of 20. Childcare centres can also run an additional facility, which must be able to accommodate a minimum of 14 children.

### Diensten voor onthaalouders (Childminding Services)

- This is family day care.
- Childminders who are affiliated to a childminding service mainly look after children who are too young to go to school or after children who go to nursery school on a

part-time basis only. They can also provide out-of-school care for primary-school children.

- A childminding service groups a number of childminders and has a minimum capacity of 50 places.
- On average, childminders can only look after a maximum of 4 children on a full-time basis (this figure includes their own children who are not attending nursery school yet).
- Childminders are not allowed to mind more than 8 children at any one time (including their own children up and until the time they start primary school).
- Childminders have to meet a number of minimum requirements before they can affiliate to a service. They do not sign an employment contract with the service they are affiliated to. Childminders do have their own social status however, which is tailored to their own specific work regime. The service selects and support the childminders and puts them in contact with parents.

## IBO, Initiatieven voor Buitenschoolse Opvang (Initiatives for Out-of-School Care)

- This is group day care.
- The initiatives are specifically and exclusively aimed at out-of-school care for children from elementary school. They can offer childcare before and after school, on Wednesday afternoons, on free days and during school holidays.
- They cater for a minimum of 21 children and are free to operate from various locations. Each facility can cater for at least 8 children. In view of the tremendous demand, the rules were relaxed in 2008. Childcare facilities that can accommodate up to 21 children are henceforth entitled to look after an extra 30% of children during the school year and the holidays from one hour before school starts and up to one hour after school ends. This 30% rule also applies during the holiday periods.

## Lokale diensten voor buurtgerichte kinderopvang (Local community-oriented childcare services)

- These services may be organised by recognised childcare centres, an initiative for out-of-school care (IBO) or by a community and neighbourhood service (BND)

project. (In 2004, the community and neighbourhood services (BND) experiment was started. In 2008, the BND projects were converted by the Flemish government decree of 8 May into local community-oriented childcare services and structurally integrated into childcare provision).

- They provide accessible and low-threshold childcare for vulnerable families and put great store by diversity. Moreover, they operate on the basis of neighbourhood-oriented embeddedness and participation of their target group. These local services also employ target-group staff who assist with childcare. These are people who have difficulties finding their niche in the regular labour market. The local services offer these unskilled childcare workers equal opportunities within the organisation and also provide them with training.
- There are two types of local services and each type must offer a minimum of ten childcare places:
  - **a local pre-school childcare service**, which caters for children who do not go to school yet and for children in the transition period between childcare and school; these local services may also provide out-of-school care for children attending nursery education;
  - **a local out-of-school childcare service**, which caters for school-going children.

## Independent childcare accredited with a Child and Family supervision certificate

Legally, independent childcare centres, independent out-of-school childcare services and self-employed childminders only have the duty to report their childminding activities to Child and Family, but most of them choose to apply for **een attest van toezicht van Kind en Gezin (a Child and Family supervision certificate)**. This means that they have to meet a number of conditions in relation to dealing with children and parents, health and safety and the layout of their premises. The supervision certificate also entails that the facility is regularly inspected by the Welfare, Public Health and Family Inspectorate Agency.

## Zelfstandige kinderdagverblijven (Independent childcare centres)

- This is group day care.
- These facilities provide childcare for non-school-going children and out-of-school care for children attending Elementary education.
- Each facility can cater for at least 8 children.

## Zelfstandige onthaalouders (Self-employed childminders)

- This is family day care.
- These childminders provide childcare for non-school-going children and out-of-school care for children following elementary education.
- A self-employed childminder can look after up to 7 children at any one time.

## Independent out-of-school care facilities

- This is group day care.
- These services are exclusively for the care of school-going children from elementary school.
- They have a capacity of at least eight places.

## Prioritisation rules

Childcare facilities are obliged to make the services they provide open to all children, but on 5 December 2008 the Flemish government approved a number of modifications to the Flemish government decree of 23 February 2001 setting out the conditions for recognition and subsidisation of childcare centres and childminding services. Among other things, this modifying decree introduced the new prioritisation system for recognised childcare centres and childminding services. These prioritisation rules apply to at least 20% of the childcare capacity. Priority is given to children:

- of single parents who are unable to look after their children during the day themselves due to work circumstances or attendance of training;
- whose parents have a working income that is lower than an income threshold calculated by the Flemish government on 1 July every year and are unable to look after their children during the day themselves due to work circumstances or attendance of training;
- whose parents have a working income that is lower than an income threshold calculated by the Flemish government on 1 July every year, where childcare is an important factor in their economic and social participation;
- for whom it is desirable that they should receive care and support outside the family for social and/or pedagogical reasons.

This prioritisation system also applies to the independent care facilities that have entered the income-related system since 2009.

## **Organisation of time**

**Recognised childcare centres and childminding services** provide childcare for a minimum of 220 workdays a year, 11 consecutive hours a day between 6.30 a.m. and 6.30 p.m. However, they are free to extend this service provision by opening before 6.30 a.m. and staying open after 6.30 p.m., or by providing childcare during weekends, at night, occasional childcare and by looking after children with special needs.

**Recognised initiatives for out-of-school care** organise before and after-school care, provide childcare on Wednesday afternoons, on free days and during school holidays for children of school age. Initiatives open at 7 a.m., at the latest, and do not close until 6 p.m., at the earliest, for at least 230 working days per year, including 50 full days. On Wednesday afternoons initiatives reopen at the end of school time. However, they may also provide a broader childcare service, for example before 7 a.m., after 6 p.m., at the weekend, at night, occasional care and the care of children with specific care needs. For out-of-school care initiatives there is no minimum number of opening days per year.

**Self-employed childminders, independent out-of-school care facilities and independent childcare centres** determine their opening hours and periods themselves. The regulations do not impose any requirements in this respect.

**Self-employed childminders and independent childcare centres** operate autonomously and set their own opening hours.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Childcare***

### *Policy documents and different activities*

The regulations on the conditions for the recognition and subsidisation of childcare centres and childminding services state that the facilities must operate a pedagogical policy that ensures that the care provided takes account of individual children's capacities and offers each child optimal development opportunities.

### **Educational methods and didactical materials**

Not applicable.

## **Assessment in Childcare**

In the context of quality assurance, the regulations indicate that recognised care facilities must evaluate their functioning and consider possibilities for introducing improvements. A family satisfaction survey forms part of this process. In addition, in order to improve the quality of the recognised care facilities from the child's viewpoint, Child and Family has an agreement with ECEGO, the Expertise Centre for Experiential Education run by Professor Laevers and associated with K.U.Leuven. ECEGO has developed ZiKo and ZiKo-Vo, the self-evaluation tool for the well-being and involvement of children in care. ZiKo makes self-evaluation of the facility's approach possible at the level of a group of children, while ZiKo-Vo looks at the individual child's level. The use of these tools is not imposed by regulation, so not every recognised care facility works with them.

# **Belgio**

## **comunità tedesca**



## **ECEC for Children Under 3 Years**

The Ministry of the German-speaking Community is not directly responsible for the organisation of institutions for the Early Childhood Education Care system (ECEC) for children under 3 years of age. This is taken care of by private companies and non-profit associations. This offer primarily concerns childcare to facilitate an easier return to the working world for parents. The GC Ministry for Family, Social Services and Health does, however, have the following authority and responsibilities: It reviews everything done in the childcare department; it establishes the conditions of approval for institutions, subsidisation and quality assurance. The GC plays an informative and advisory role and monitors and evaluates institutions. The Ministry of the GC established the 'Service for Children and Families' (SCF) to ensure that these functions are fulfilled. Its mission is to promote the establishment of childcare institutions, to review their organisation, and to monitor and evaluate their quality. The legal conditions were formulated on 18 January 2007 in a government writ on childcare. The general principles are as follows:

**Art. 2.** *The people or effective associations authorized in the current writ guarantee the best possible prospects and chances for development for every child in childcare regardless of race, citizenship, gender or world view. They consider the child's individual rhythm, and encourage the child's mental and motor development, creativity and relationship skills. They also provide sufficient structure and freedom of action for every child.*

**Art. 3.** *Notwithstanding contrary compulsory legal conditions, people participating in implementing the current writ are obligated to keep the information confided to them while performing their assignment confidential.*

**Art. 4.** *Every person authorized as part of the current writ, jurist or not, and every effective association that offers childcare guarantees quality of care in accordance with the applicable conditions of the current writ.*

Childcare offered in the GC comprises the following current institutions:

## **Regional Centre for the Care of Small Children (RCCSC)**

The RCCSC is the focal point for the establishment, organisation and attendance of childcare facilities in the GC. It has the legal constitution of a non-profit organisation and works in cooperation with the local public institutions.

- Child-minder service (CS): The organisation offers care centres in all nine of the GC's municipalities and currently employs 85 child-minders. The child-minder service must guarantee care from Monday to Friday, 10 hours a day and 220 working days per calendar year. Childcare never takes place at the residence of the child to be minded. The service guarantees continuous psycho-social attendance to the child's development, education and health. A child-minder can take care of a maximum of four small children and a total maximum of six children at the same time.
- Preschool: The GC currently has one preschool located in Eupen and administered by the RCCSC. It is open Monday to Friday from 7:47 a.m. until 5:45 p.m. (4 weeks annual holiday). It has a capacity of 24 places for children from 0 to 3 years old whose parents are pursuing a career.

## **Self-employed Child-minders**

Child-minders are not hired by the RCCSC, but the Ministry of the GC ensures the quality of care by approving self-employed child-minders. In addition, SCF consultants supervise and advise child-minders and administer further training. Self-employed child-minder's work consists of caring for the children of working parents in their own home.

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

The ECEC institutions are available for all parents in the GC, but there is no guarantee that each will get a place for their child, and it is even less likely that each will get a place

in their chosen municipality. The preschool is located in Eupen and primarily accepts children from that area. The child-minders are located in all nine of the GC's municipalities.

Every effort is made to offer parents a care centre close to their place of residence or work.

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC institution**

Parents must have some sort of ties to the German-speaking Community (either they work or live in the GC) in order to be able to enrol their child at a facility.

Parents can select any facility, so long as a place is offered. Unlike schools, there is no guarantee that parents will get a spot at the facility of their choice, because there are fewer places available than there are children. There is a waiting list of at least one year for the preschool.

It usually works out that the first to enrol are the first to get a place. However, there are exceptions:

- a child with a sibling at the facility takes priority;
- a child that wants to switch to the facility takes priority;
- a child in danger takes priority.

### **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

- The preschool accepts 24 children between 0 and 3 years of age. They are divided into three groups based on stage of development rather than age.
- Every child-minder cares for a maximum of 5 children between 0 and 12 years old and there is no specific grouping.

### **Organisation of Time**

The preschool must be open 220 days of the year, from Monday to Friday between 7:15 a.m. and 5:45 p.m. It is closed for three weeks during the summer (from 21 July to 15 August), as well as Christmas and New Year's Day and other holidays. The following days are holidays (or school-free days) in the German-speaking Community: Easter Monday, 1 May, Ascension Day, Pentecost Monday, 1 November, 11 November, 15 November (the official holiday of the German-speaking Community).

## **Organisation of Day and Week**

The child-minders must guarantee the care of small children from Monday to Friday, 10 hours a day and 220 working days per calendar year. They are allowed to schedule their timetable themselves. They are entitled to 4 weeks of holidays whenever they would like. In exceptional situations and emergencies, care can be guaranteed during the night or on weekends or holidays.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Steering documents and types of activities**

Every institution is free to determine its educational programme and job offers. The Ministry of the GC does not specify any specific regulations. However, the government writ on childcare dated 18 January 2007 provides the following in article 5, §1: *“Every person, jurist or not, and every effective association that offers childcare services must be accredited within the scope of the current writ in pursuance of the decree.”* In order to be accredited, every facility has to make an enquiry at the SCF (Service for Children and Families) and submit miscellaneous documents, *“that contain the service's detailed policy, specifies objectives, the care policy, a description of the infrastructure, job descriptions of personnel, a transcription of the cooperation with legal guardians and other institutions, and the health policy”* (articles 12, §1, 7° et 30, 7°). The ‘service policy’ is then evaluated and reviewed by the SCF.

### **Teaching Methods and Materials**

Since the service is only a matter of caring for children from 0-3 years of age and not teaching them, no teaching methods or materials have been prescribed.

## ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

No performance evaluations are conducted while caring for children between 0 and 3 years of age.

**Austria**

## ***Historical overview of Austrian child care policy***

Austria is a federal state in which, alongside the federal state, the nine federal provinces also have **legislative and executive authority in the area of family policy**. This means that

- **fiscal measures** within the framework of family policy such as granting child support are the **responsibility of the Federal Government** while
- **legislation and implementation** in the area of child care outside the family before the beginning of compulsory schooling are exclusively within the **authority of the federal provinces (*Bundesländer*)**.

Child care policy in Austria must be understood as being **family-oriented** and pre-school care establishments are not allocated to the field of education policy. Family policy measures have a long tradition:

- At the end of the 19th century, the entitlements of pregnant women according to labour law and insurance law were stipulated for the first time. From **1888**, female workers and employees were prohibited to work for up to four weeks after the birth and were provided with financial compensation during this period.
- In **1920** this period in which they were prohibited to work was extended to eight weeks after the birth and four weeks before the birth.
- From **1957**, mothers were entitled to unpaid leave for six months after their period of paid maternity leave without being able to be dismissed from their job, and from **1960** this was extended until the child's first birthday.
- From **1961**, an allowance was introduced so that the woman was also able to stop working for a year in low-income families. The amount of the allowance was connected with the household income and the size of the family but represented only small compensation for the loss of income. If their household income was above a certain amount, people were not entitled to this allowance. In 1961 a so-called **mothers' allowance** was introduced for women with three or more children to make it easier to cope with a lack of employment, and one year later this was also paid to mothers with two children, although the amount paid was reduced in this case.

- At the **end of the 1960s** this allowance was subsumed under the family allowance, which was staggered based on the number of children, as part of the new [Austrian Family Support Act \(\*Familienlastenausgleichsgesetz\*\)](#).
- In the **1970s and 1980s** paid maternity leave was extended. For farmers, self-employed women, the entitlement to funding for additional operating personnel was introduced in 1982. There is still no prohibition to work for these mothers.
- From **1974**, the entitlement to a maternity allowance was extended for mothers working before the birth and was split into a standard rate and a 50% increase in the payment for unmarried women and married women whose husband had a low income. Unmarried women were entitled to emergency aid until their child's third birthday as long as they were not working and were dedicated to child care.
- After critical remarks about the connection between limiting the financial payment with the increase in illegitimate children and with improving the financial situation of unmarried people who were nevertheless living together, from **1984** both the increased maternity pay and also the emergency aid were only paid to actual single mothers and not just unmarried mothers.

**Source:** [Österreichisches Institut für Familienforschung: Europäische Kinderbetreuungskulturen im Vergleich. Working Paper No. 82, 2014.](#)

### **Structure of the Austrian administration in the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC)**

The **structure of the Austrian administration in the field of ECEC** consists of three levels:

- the **Federal Government**,
- the administrations of the nine **federal provinces (*Bundesländer*)**,
- the administrations of more than 2,300 Austrian **municipalities**.

At **federal level** two ministries are responsible for designing ECEC policies:

- The [Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs](#) is responsible for the training of kindergarten pedagogues. It promotes the educational character of early childhood education. Increasing equality of opportunities and improving early language development are educational objectives in order to better prepare all children for the demands of school. These objectives have been affirmed by the introduction of a compulsory kindergarten year free of charge for all children before they reach statutory school age.
- The [Austrian Federal Ministry for Family and Youth](#) is responsible for youth welfare laws, policies for child-minders, family allowances and child care benefits. In line with the Barcelona objective of the European Union, the Federal Government and the federal provinces agreed to promote the **availability** of child care facilities.

Provincial governments have full responsibility for the organisation, regulation and funding of ECEC services. Centre-based services are **crèches** for children under 3 years, **kindergartens** for children aged 3-6 years, **mixed-age groups** - mostly situated at kindergartens for children from 1 to 6 years. Non-centre-based services are parent-toddler groups (*elternverwaltete Kindergruppen*) run by parent associations and family day care (*Tageseltern*).

The legal basis for day care facility providers is provided by the [Youth Welfare Act - as amended](#) and the individual [Kindergarten Acts of the federal provinces - as amended](#) with the respective implementation regulations.

### **Provider organisation and funding**

The **legislation** and **implementation** in the area of child care outside the family for pre-school care are exclusively within the authority of the federal provinces. Child care is also **funded** by the federal provinces and municipalities by means of tax money which they are granted as part of the redistribution of income. In 2011 the federal provinces and municipalities spent a total of around € 1.9 billion for institutional child care (Statistics Austria 2013:107). The Federal Government grants funds in order to intervene for corrective action in the structure and quantity of available child care.

The **providers** of child care establishments in Austria are the municipalities, associations, religiously-affiliated providers and – to a small extent – companies. Throughout Austria, a



little more than 40% of crèches are run by associations and municipalities, with almost 10% run by churches.

There is a big **difference between the federal provinces (*Bundesländer*)**, however. In Burgenland, for example, almost 90% of the crèches are run by municipalities, while in Tyrol and Carinthia approximately 70% are run by associations. There is a different provider structure with kindergartens: for more than 70% of the establishments, municipalities are the providers; around 13% are provided by churches and 12% by associations. In all federal provinces, municipalities dominate the share of provider organisations; only in Vienna are just about half of the kindergartens in the hands of municipalities, 37% are run by associations and around 14% by religiously-affiliated providers. In Carinthia and Upper Austria there is also roughly the same proportion of public providers to private ones (Statistics Austria 2013: 63).

### **Extension initiative**

To reach the EU Benchmark (IP/11/488) of having at least a 95% **participation rate** of children between age four and the start of compulsory education, the Federal Government has initiated extension programmes with financial support for the provinces and the municipalities. These initiatives have led to an increase in places, as well as to lengthened opening hours in the afternoons and during holidays.

From 2008 to 2010 € 45 million was **invested** for the extension of child care services. In 2011 the coalition partners agreed on the further extension of an additional 5,000 places with an investment of € 15 million per year until 2014 with a specific focus on places for under 3 year olds. Since Austria has already exceeded the Barcelona target for 3-6 year olds, the provinces can only use 25% of the money for that age group to close regional gaps, but 100% for under 3 year olds.

Since 2013/14 services are subsidised if they are **open for at least 47 weeks** per kindergarten year. As in many cases this leads to an increase in costs for personnel, the provinces can use a certain amount of the targeted federal money for those costs: max. 20% in 2012, 10% in 2013 and 5% in 2014.

Further funding priority is given to the sector of **day care parents/child minders**. To support additional care places the provinces get € 750 for each "new" day care parent. Providers of specific training courses for this target group get € 750 per participant as well.

If their courses fulfil the requirements of the federal curriculum they receive € 1000 per person.

### **Obligatory and free kindergarten for 5 year olds**

In **September 2010 obligatory kindergarten attendance** for 16 to 20 hours (half day) over a minimum of at least 4 days per week was introduced for 5 year olds (i.e. children one year before school entry) according to an agreement pursuant to Art. 15a of the Federal Constitutional Law. To ensure the attendance at kindergarten for all 5 year old children as well as to reduce the financial burden for parents, the Federal Government concluded a legal agreement with the provinces (Federal Law Gazette II no. 478/2008) in 2008. As a result, parents have not had to pay fees for half-day ECEC (20 hours per week) since September 2009. This initiative is financially supported by the Federal Government with € 70 million per year to reimburse the increase in costs for the provinces and the municipalities.

Some provinces additionally offer additional free child care for the following age groups:

- **Burgenland:** reimbursement of parents' fees up to € 45.00 per month (kindergartens) or up to € 90.00 (crèches)
- **Lower Austria:** part-time day care free of charge for children between 2.5 and 6
- **Upper Austria:** full-time day care free of charge for children between 2.5 and 6
- **Tyrol:** part-time day care free of charge for children between 4 and 6
- **Vienna:** full-time day care free of charge for all children up to 6.

### **Sources:**

- [Statistics Austria, Kindergartens and After-School Child Care](#)
- [Administration in Austria: Basics](#)
- [Charlotte Bühler Institut](#)
- [Child care texts](#)
- [Language Support in ECEC](#)

## Legislation References:

- [Federal Constitutional Law - as amended](#)
- [Youth Welfare Act - as amended](#)
- [Provincial Kindergarten Education Acts \(of the 9 provinces\) - as amended](#)

### ***Organisation of Programmes for Children over 2-3 years***

#### **Geographical Accessibility**

Day care services are well established throughout Austria. Still, there are clear differences between **rural** and **urban areas**. According to Statistics Austria, there is less provision of services for 0-3 and 3-6-year-old children in rural areas due to low population density. Nevertheless the number of children in day care aged 0 to 3 years has increased significantly in all federal provinces.

Clear differences can be seen in the shares of children **aged between one and two** and **between two and three**. The shares of children being looked after are much higher in densely populated areas than in areas with a low population density. While in 2011 in cities with a high density almost a third of children aged between one and two were already looked after in an institution, in sparsely populated regions this figure is only around 5%. The particularly high increases among children aged between two and three can be explained not only by the establishment of new groups and institutions but also, in part, by the fact that existing facilities opened up for children aged below three.

However, for all children aged below three there are **clear increases everywhere** in the shares of children being looked after (an increase of 6.5 percent with a low population density, 7.6 percent with a medium density and 9.0 percent with a high population density). In areas with a medium or low population density, the share of children being looked after in 2011 is still less than the share in densely populated areas in 2007, however (Statistics Austria – Special evaluations of day care facility statistics in 2007/08 and 2011/12; in-house calculations).

The differences in the figures for children **aged between three and six** are much smaller. The generally wider distribution and acceptance of kindergartens plays a key role here. On account of the better starting situation, the increases are also much smaller than among those aged below three. In contrast to the care of small children (children aged below three), the share of children looked after from the age of four in densely populated areas is a little lower than in regions with a medium or low population density. The reason for this is mainly the relatively low share of children of this age being looked after in Vienna (Statistics Austria – Special evaluations of day care facility statistics in 2007/08 and 2011/12; in-house calculations).

#### **Sources:**

- [\*Österreichisches Institut für Familienforschung: Europäische Kinderbetreuungskulturen im Vergleich. Working Paper No. 82, 2014.\*](#)
- [Child Care Statistics](#)

#### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institution**

Admission requirements are laid down in the [provincial legislation for day care services](#) and relate primarily to the age of the children (i.e. crèches 0-3, kindergartens 3-6, mixed age groups 2-6 and up).

There are no central but local regulations by providers, most often related to employment and family status: children of **working and/or single parents** are given preference in the allocation process.

Since September 2009, the provinces have been required to ensure that children aged 5 to 6 attend services for 20 hours per week in the year before they start school, and by September 2010 kindergarten attendance for a minimum of 16 to 20 hours over a minimum of 4 days per week was made **obligatory** (pursuant to [Art. 15 a](#) of the Federal Constitutional Law).

At local level **providers** have to identify their **demand** and **report** to the regional/provincial government. Provincial governments usually check the request according to population, birth rates and the availability of places nearby.

## **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

In most services children are organised in co-educational, so-called "**family groups**", which are mixed age groups of 3 to 6-year-old children in kindergartens and of 0 to 3-year-olds in crèches. The **staff/child ratio** is regulated by the provincial laws and shows only minor differences between the provinces. In kindergartens one professionally trained pedagogue and usually one assistant take care of 23 to 25 children. Group sizes in crèches vary from 10 to 15 children under the responsibility of one professionally trained pedagogue and one assistant.

All groups/classes in crèches, kindergartens and services for older children are led by at least one professionally trained pedagogue ([ISCED 5](#)). In most cases the second person is an assistant, occasionally also a trained pedagogue.

## **Organisation of Time**

Regulations on daily and weekly hours and on open weeks per year are determined by the **provider**. About 90% of all services are open at least 6 hours per day, 5 days a week. On average services are closed for 30 days per year, mainly in summer.

The **opening hours** are similar in all federal provinces: around 90% of all kindergartens open before 7:30 a.m. and by 8:00 a.m. practically all of them are open. On the other hand there are big differences in **closing times**, with an east-west divide apparent here: in Vienna the establishments are open the longest, with 97% open until 5:00 p.m. or longer; in Tyrol, Vorarlberg and Styria more than half close before 3:00 p.m. In addition, a fifth of the kindergartens in Vorarlberg are closed during lunchtime (Statistics Austria 2013: 67; in-house calculations).

## **Organisation of Day and Week**

In general there is **no strict daily or weekly schedule** governing ECEC. Routines are determined by the Austrian social pedagogical approach with the focus on learning through play. An enriched play environment invites unstructured and self-determined play. Usually a day begins with a phase of free play, followed by some guided group or small group educational activities, snack time, free play combined with individual educational work, lunch break and again free play parallel to guided group or small group educational activities in the afternoon.

**Long-term educational planning** respects the four seasons, the main seasonal festivities as well as educational domains as set out in the Austrian Framework Curriculum for ECEC.

**Olanda**

In section 1, subsection 1 of the Childcare and Quality Standards for Playgroups Act, childcare is defined as: the provision of care and learning opportunities for children commercially or otherwise, but not for free, until the first day of the month in which they start secondary school.

BoinK, the Dutch association for parents using childcare, defines childcare as: the provision of care, supervision and learning opportunities for children aged up to 16, in a clear organisational structure, by those other than their parents or primary carers, in a way that is appropriate for the duration of the childcare per day, a child's age and the needs of their parents or primary carers.

## ***Organisation of Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Geographical accessibility**

The geographic distribution of childcare facilities reflects supply and demand, in line with the [Childcare and Quality Standards for Playgroups Act](#).

### **Childcare admission requirements**

Playgroups providing early childhood education are in principle open to all children between 2-2½ and 4 years of age. However, early childhood education is intended primarily for children with sociomedical problems and children suffering from or at risk of developmental delay. Individual municipalities may give these children priority at playgroups where demand is high. Potential developmental delays are often identified by baby and toddler clinics. These municipal clinics are part of the child health service and are responsible for basic medical care and prevention for children up to the age of four. Parents may tell the municipality what playgroup they would prefer their child to attend. Such requests are usually met.



## Age levels and grouping of children

To ensure the quality of childcare and early childhood education programmes, playgroups and day nurseries are subject to a number of restrictions regarding the size of each group and the minimum ratio of staff to children. The agreement between providers and parents on the quality of childcare and the Policy Rules on the Quality of Childcare lay down maximum group sizes. At day nurseries, children have their own regular group which has its own 'base', or room. The size and design of the rooms are in keeping with the group size and children's ages. The maximum number of children in a group at the same time is:

- for children under 12 months: no more than 12 children per group;
- for children up to 4 years: no more than 16 children per group, of whom no more than 8 may be under 12 months.

In day nurseries or out-of-school care at a childcare centre, the maximum permitted number of children per qualified staff member is as follows:

- four children under 12 months; or
- five children aged 1 to 2; or
- six children aged 2 to 3; or
- eight children aged 3 to 4.

The age requirements for admission to childcare are as follows:

- 0-4 years for day nurseries and half-day nurseries;
- 4-12 years for out-of-school and after-school care.

At small childcare centres with only one qualified staff member present, there must always be at least one other adult to provide assistance. Many municipalities also lay down quality standards for playgroups.

There are various early childhood education programmes. Most aim to tackle language disadvantage. Some programmes also address children's socioemotional development. Municipalities choose the programme to be implemented. The most popular programmes are Piramide and Kaleidoscoop. The Netherlands Youth Institute (NJI) website provides an [overview](#) (in Dutch) of the most commonly used early childhood education programmes.

## **Organisation of time**

There are no regulations on the annual timetable in childcare. With regard to early childhood education, however, municipalities are required by law to provide an adequate range of programmes. Outside of school holidays, children participating in a preschool programme must attend at least four half-days, of 2½ hours each, a week, or ten hours of activities aimed at stimulating their development. There are no regulations on the daily or weekly organisation of childcare. As each nursery or playgroup follows its own timetable, it is impossible to give a general description here.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Steering documents and types of activities**

There is no prescribed national curriculum as such in childcare provision, but providers are obliged to draw up policy on child development and learning opportunities, in consultation with parents' committees. The policy must include a vision on interacting with and caring for children. The various initiatives in the Netherlands concerned with child development policy frameworks aim primarily to supervise the implementation of child development policy plans. These plans set out policy as regards:

- the methods used, the maximum size and age distribution in groups;
- how children's emotional security is ensured, what opportunities are provided for personal and social development, and how children are taught rules and social values;
- the opportunities for activity and play outside the group room;
- the type of assistance given to professional child carers by other adults.

Children participating in a preschool education programme must attend at least four half-days a week. From the age of four, children can go on to primary schools, where attainment targets apply. In the Netherlands, the compulsory school-starting age is five. Dutch is the language of communication in both day nurseries and out-of-school care in childcare centres. In places where Frisian or another regional language is widely spoken, this language may be spoken alongside Dutch. Children from a non-Dutch background may likewise be spoken to for part of the time in their own language to aid comprehension.

Early childhood education aims to enhance children's development through play. Preschool programmes are provided by day nurseries and playgroups. In order to ensure continuity of learning, children who have participated in a preschool programme should ideally, at the age of four, transfer to a primary school with a special early childhood education programme. Continuity of learning also depends on municipal authorities, playgroups, day nurseries and schools making agreements on early childhood education.

### **Teaching methods and materials**

There are different programmes for early childhood education in the Netherlands. Some are used throughout the country, others – such as Taalrijk, Speeltaal and Kinderklanken – only locally. Programmes are usually carried out at day nurseries, playgroups or primary schools (years 1 and 2). These are called centre-based programmes. By contrast, home-based programmes are provided in the child's home environment, usually by volunteers, and often include parenting support as well as activities to boost the child's development. Opstapje is an example of a Dutch home-based programme for preschool children.

Some early childhood education programmes focus on only one developmental domain, usually language (narrow programmes). Broad programmes address multiple developmental domains and require parents' active participation.

Two organisations in the Netherlands are authorised to recognise early childhood education programmes: Erkenningscommissie Interventies (the NJI committee for the recognition of child intervention programmes) and Panel Welzijn en Ontwikkelingsstimulering (the panel on welfare and developmental stimulation). Programmes must satisfy strict conditions in order to attain national recognition. So far, only five programmes are nationally recognised: Piramide, Kaleidoscoop, Startblokken/Basisontwikkeling, KO Totaal, and the Reggio Emilia approach Sporen.

For more information, go to <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/passend-onderwijs/extra-aandacht-op-de-basisschool>.

## ***Assessment in Early Childhood Education and Care***

The aim of early childhood education is to provide continuity of learning and support over an extended period of time, i.e. to deliver what professionals call a continuous developmental trajectory. This can be achieved by ensuring continuity in, for instance, the method used at playgroup and at primary school (same programme), parental involvement (playgroup and primary school inform and involve parents in more or less the same way) or learning climate (same rules of conduct at playgroup and primary school; playworkers and teachers respond similarly in certain play and learning situations). Playgroups and primary schools can also use the same instruments for observation and diagnostics (continuity of observation and diagnostics). Municipalities and primary schools have joint financial responsibility for the methods and monitoring systems used.

Children in early childhood education programmes are monitored using observation lists and assessments of development. The various developmental domains are usually assessed three times a year, or more often for children whose development is abnormal. The monitoring system provides an overall picture of a child's development: is he lagging behind, or is he ahead of the other children? Monitoring information has many uses. It is:

- shared with other playworkers at handover;
- discussed at team meetings;
- used in managing a child's specific problems;
- used in planning children's activities;
- a tool in providing optimum support to children;
- discussed with parents;
- summarised in a handover form given to the primary school when the child reaches the age of four.

For more information, go to <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/passend-onderwijs/extra-aandacht-op-de-basisschool>.

## ***Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care***

Registered childminders are an attractive option for parents who work irregular hours, live in rural areas or prefer their child to be cared for in a domestic setting. Under the Childcare Act a registered childminder provides flexible childcare in a family setting. This is arranged through childminder agencies, which act as brokers between parents and childminders.

Registered childminders usually work in the childminder's own home. They may have up to six children in their charge, including their own children under the age of ten. Innovative childminders may, under certain conditions, including a guaranteed quality of care, have up to six children in their charge, other than their own. Children's ages may vary from 6 weeks to 12 years. A number of early childhood education methods have been specially adapted for use by registered childminders.

**Inghilterra**

Early years education and care makes an important contribution to the Government's aims of:

- improving children's outcomes and putting them on the path to success in later life
- enabling parents to work
- getting children into early years provision at an early age to provide an opportunity to identify and intervene earlier in potential problems.

(Source: [Ofsted Early Years Annual Report 2012/13](#))

The Government's policy for early years education and care – [improving the quality and range of education and childcare from birth to five years](#) – sets out what the Government is seeking to achieve, why and how. Policy actions relate to:

- extending early education to those who need it most (such as the expansion of free places for eligible two-year-olds) and to give parents a greater choice of childcare
- helping parents with the costs of childcare (such as introducing a new tax-free childcare scheme to support working families from autumn 2015)
- improving the quality of early education and childcare (such as through improving the qualifications of the early years workforce – see the article on '[Initial Education for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education](#)').

In England the phase of education and care spanning the period from birth to age five is known as the early years foundation stage (EYFS). It covers education and care with different types of provider in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sectors as well as the publicly funded schools sector (maintained nursery schools, primary schools and academies). The [Early Years Foundation Stage Framework](#) is the common regulatory framework which sets out the standards which all early years providers in public and PVI settings must meet. Common registration and inspection arrangements also apply (see the article on '[Quality Assurance in Early Childhood and School Education](#)').

Although the EYFS framework covers the age range 0 to 5 as a seamless phase it is easier to understand the system by considering provision for babies and children aged up to 2/3 years and provision for children aged 2/3 years and over, at which point the entitlement to publicly funded early years provision begins.

### **Applies from birth (childcare for babies and children up to age 2/3)**

There is no general entitlement to pre-school education for children under the age of three (or two for eligible disadvantaged children). Parents can choose to pay for childcare using privately run day nurseries, voluntary pre-schools, childminders or nannies.

Local authorities have a statutory duty under the Childcare Act 2006 to secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably practicable for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment for children aged 0 to 14 years (or up to 18 for disabled children). Further information is available in [Early Education and Childcare: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities](#).

Under the Government's 'Sure Start Programme', a network of children's centres has been developed, offering integrated early years education, childcare and a range of related support services in England. Amongst others, these include family support, child and family health services, childminding and antenatal services. These centres are intended to be available to all but should benefit the families in the greatest need of support. Local authorities have statutory duties in respect of children's centres – [detailed guidance](#) is available from the Department for Education.

### **Applies from age 2/3 years**

Local authorities have statutory duties under the Childcare Act 2006 to secure free early years provision for eligible children under compulsory school age.

Since 1998 all four year olds have been entitled to a funded part-time early years place. This entitlement was extended to all three-year-olds in 2004. These places are provided in a mixture of public and private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings.

More recently, provision has been extended to targeted two-year-olds. Since 2009, funded part-time early education places have been available for the most disadvantaged two-year-olds. This was formalised in September 2013 through a statutory duty on local authorities to provide free early education to disadvantaged two-year-olds who meet the economic eligibility criteria also used for free schools meals, as well as children in the care of the local authority. From September 2014 eligibility is further extended to include adopted children and those with special educational needs and disabilities ([specific details](#) of the entitlement to free early education are available from the Department for Education). As an indication of the expansion of the programme, the Government estimated in April 2012 that 20 per cent of the cohort would be eligible from September 2013 and 40 per cent of the cohort. In January 2014 13 per cent of all two-year-olds benefitted from some funded early education. Nearly all publicly funded provision for two-year-olds is in private and voluntary



settings (96 per cent in January 2014); however the Government has indicated that it wants primary schools to admit more two year olds in nursery schools/classes.

Providers in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sectors receive government funding for provision for children aged three and over (and increasingly for disadvantaged two-year-olds, see the '**Introduction**' to this topic) under the entitlement to 15 hours of early years education. Parents whose children attend private and voluntary provision can choose to pay for additional provision on top of the free part-time services they receive or for care for children not yet eligible for publicly funded provision. In addition the law now allows publicly funded schools to open a nursery for 2, 3 and 4-year-olds which operates a full working day from 8am to 6pm.

Pupil participation in the early years foundation stage is voluntary; however nearly all children attend some form of pre-school or nursery education, either full- or part-time. All children are entitled to be admitted to the reception class of a primary school (ISCED 0) in the September following their fourth birthday and most do. Very few children remain at home until the start of compulsory education (the term following their fifth birthday).

In January 2014 99 per cent of the 4-year-old population and 94 per cent of the 3-year-old population benefitted from publicly funded early education. The main providers of publicly funded part time – typically 15 hours a week over a 38 week year – early education for children aged three and four are:

Provider

% of 3-year-olds

% of 4-year-olds

Private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings (which may be known as nursery schools, pre-schools or day nurseries)

60

18

Publicly funded nursery schools

4

2

Nursery classes in primary schools

32

14

Infant (reception classes) in publicly funded primary schools

0

63

Independent (private) schools

2

2

Source: [Provision for Children Under 5 Years of Age in England January 2014](#) (Statistical First Release, page 5)

Further information on legislation referenced in Eurypedia is available [here](#).

**Scozia**

The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 gives local authorities a duty to provide a free, part-time early learning and childcare place for all 3- and 4-year olds whose parents wish it. This legislation came into effect in April 2002.

The Children and Young People Act 2014 increases the flexibility and amount of free early learning and childcare from 475 to 600 hours per year for all 3 and 4 year olds and extends the entitlement to 2 year olds who are looked after or under a kinship care order.

### **Aims of early learning and childcare**

The Curriculum Framework for Three to Five Year Olds has now been replaced by A Curriculum for Excellence as the main guidance for providers about the delivery of early learning and childcare. This promotes a coherent and inclusive curriculum from 3 to 18, wherever learning is taking place, whether in pre-school centres, schools, colleges or other settings. The early level of Curriculum for Excellence encompasses both pre-school and Primary 1.

[Building the Curriculum 2](#), published in 2007, provides guidance on how to ensure that all children in pre-school and primary school settings experience stimulating, effective learning in ways that are appropriate to their needs to enable them to develop their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

It treats both pre-school education and the early part of primary school as "early education" and seeks to promote similar kinds of learning in both settings. It argues that active learning is crucial as the means by which children develop vital skills and knowledge and a positive attitude to learning. Active learning engages and challenges children's thinking using real-life and imaginary situations. It takes full advantage of the opportunities for learning presented by:

- spontaneous play
- planned, purposeful play
- investigating and exploring
- events and life experiences

- focused learning and teaching, supported when necessary through sensitive intervention to support or extend learning.

### **Care in the pre-school setting**

There is a growing appreciation that education and care in the pre-school setting are interlinked. As a result, services that have traditionally been thought of as providers of care are now recognised as also playing a role in educating young children. The Children and Young People Act 2014 introduces a new concept of 'early learning and childcare': the term seeks to remove an artificial divide between pre-school for 3 and 4 year olds; and, childcare for 0 – 3 year olds; or, pre-school and wrap around care for 3 and 4 year olds; whereby pre-school is the educational element delivered in short blocks tied to a certain number of hours in a day; topped up by childcare or wrap around care which can be seen as less important to learning.

### **Local authority provision**

Local authorities provide early learning and childcare through their education departments in a range of settings such as:

- Nursery classes within primary schools
- Nursery schools
- Children's centres.

Pre-school education provision in a primary school will usually have places for up to 20 children at one time. It is possible for a large primary school to have more than one pre-school education class. Most pre-school education centres outwith primary schools have places for 40-60 children at any one time, although in some parts of Scotland there are larger units.

The number of children provided for is increased by having children attend for only part of a day. Practice varies from authority to authority but it is common for most children to attend either in the morning or the afternoon. Children with priority needs, however, may well attend for the whole day.

Occasionally, in special cases, children may attend local authority pre-school classes beyond the statutory school starting age. Whether younger children or those deferring

entry to primary school are accepted into a pre-school establishment may depend on a number of factors, such as family circumstances, the aims of the establishment and the availability of a place. Priority may be given to children who are referred by the social work department, the psychological service or the health services.

The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 requires local authorities to promote social welfare and enables them to provide, through their social work departments, accommodation, material resources and finance (grants or loans) for work with the under-5s. By this Act, the local authority social work departments are empowered to set up day nurseries. These cater for children across the whole pre-school age group but provide pre-school education for the older children. Priority for admission may be given to the children of single parents, especially if the parent is required to go to work, children who have been neglected or abused and children from families whose difficulties may be eased by the day nursery placement. This is often an all-day provision.

### **Voluntary and private sector provision**

Through the development of Childcare Partnerships, local authorities commission private and voluntary pre-school centres in providing early learning and childcare. The Scottish Government encourages such partnerships wherever this helps meet parents' and children's needs and offers value for money. All local authorities are now contracting with partners in addition to their own provision.

Many local authorities also encourage pre-school playgroups and provide support for them, often in conjunction with the [Scottish Pre-school Play Association](#) (SPPA) or the [Care and Learning Alliance](#) (CALA). These playgroups are run by parents, who in many cases pay a trained play leader to take charge of the group. Sometimes groups are run by volunteers from the community. Playgroups belonging to the SPPA have an agreed code of practice and the organisation provides training for those working with pre-school children who wish to have it.

The private sector also offers all-day care and education, often to the children of working parents. There are also a number of pre-school education centres attached to independent (private) schools. Some industrial and commercial firms, as well as major national and local government offices, offer day-care facilities for the children of employees.

## Staffing of early learning and childcare

Since the repeal of the Schools Code in 2002, local authorities are no longer required by statute to have a trained teacher in their nursery schools or classes. However, the Scottish Government made a commitment in 2007, within its Concordat with local government, to ensure that every pre-school child has access to a teacher registered with the [General Teaching Council for Scotland](#) (GTCS). The Scottish Government published guidance in May 2009 for pre-school providers on the implementation of this commitment, which made clear that, where it was not possible to employ a teacher in a pre-school centre on a full-time basis, other methods of deployment such as part-time or peripatetic models should be considered. The Scottish Government has also provided funding to the Universities of Stirling and Aberdeen to develop the early years content of initial teacher education.

Many groups of social service workers are required to register with the [Scottish Social Services Council](#) if they are not already registered with another regulatory body. This includes residential childcare service workers and day care of children service workers.

Leadership in this sector is also being supported through new awards in Childhood Practice for lead practitioners and managers. The Scottish benchmark statement for development of these awards by universities and other providers, the Standard for Childhood Practice, was published in October 2007. This specifies that the awards will be work-based and at level 9 on the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (see National Qualifications Framework). Programmes to deliver them are now available in the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow, Strathclyde, the University of the Highlands and Islands, the University of the West of Scotland and the Open University.

## Legislative references

[Children and Young People Act 2014](#) (Act of the Scottish Parliament) : 2014, asp8.

[Social Work \(Scotland\) Act 1968](#) (Act of Parliament) : 1968, c.49.

[Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000](#) (Act of the Scottish Parliament) : 2000, asp6.

**Galles**



This topic outlines the organisation, structure and the main policy and general objectives for early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Wales. It also provides information on teaching and learning in ECEC.

In Wales, early childhood education and care is known by a variety of terms – early years, nursery, pre-school or pre-primary education. It is offered in what is known as the foundation phase for three- to seven-year-olds.

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 defines nursery education as full- or part-time education suitable for children who have not attained compulsory school age (the term after a child's fifth birthday), whether provided at schools or elsewhere. The Act placed a statutory duty on local authorities (LAs) to ensure the provision of pre-primary education in their area. The Childcare Act 2006 also placed a statutory duty on LAs in Wales to secure sufficient childcare within their areas and to ensure that parents have access to adequate information on childcare and other children's services; this includes assessing the sufficiency of Welsh-medium provision.

Participation in pre-school education is voluntary. Over recent years, the Welsh Government has set targets to expand and develop government-funded pre-school education and childcare and all three- and four-year-olds are now entitled to free part-time pre-school places. LAs have a statutory duty to offer these places. Free part-time places are also available for some two-year-olds in deprived areas as part of the 'Flying Start' programme.

Maintained primary schools and nursery schools (fully government-funded) are major providers of pre-school education places. These places can either be provided in stand-alone nursery schools, or in nursery classes (children aged three to four) and reception classes (children aged four to five) in primary schools. Early childhood education is also provided in integrated children's centres, which offer early years education, childcare, open access play and community education and training. As a result of the recent expansion free early years education and childcare is now also provided in the private and voluntary sectors, who are supported by government funding to provide free places for children aged three and over (subject to meeting certain requirements). For children aged three and over, parents can choose to pay for additional provision on top of the free part-time provision they receive.

There is no general entitlement to free early years education and care for children under the age of three, although parents can choose to pay for early childhood education and care using privately-run or voluntary sector day nurseries, childminders or nannies.

The foundation phase covers the age range three to seven years. Education in the foundation phase becomes compulsory in the term after a child reaches the age of five. The goals for early childhood education established in the late 1990s, which emphasised early literacy, numeracy and the development of personal and social skills, remain the focus of the foundation phase, which is also based on the principle that children learn better through first-hand practical experiences, play and active involvement (see the subheading on '[Curriculum/Steering Documents and Types of Activities](#)' in the article on the '[Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children over 2–3 years](#)').

Early childhood provision for children under the age of three is founded on the 'Flying Start' programme for the birth to three age group. Additional strategies, such as the Parenting Action Plan and the Childcare Strategy *Nurturing Children, Supporting Families* (WAG, 2011) – aim to ensure a comprehensive suite of programmes targeting the needs of very young children and parents and helping to improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged. This provision is based on the Welsh Government's belief that the support and stimulation children receive in their early years fundamentally affect their abilities and potential throughout life.

All LAs in Wales are required to produce a comprehensive and overarching Children and Young People's Plan which must include provision for early childhood education and care.

# **Irlanda del Nord**

This topic outlines the organisation, structure and the main policy and general objectives for early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Northern Ireland. It also provides information on teaching and learning in ECEC.

Early childhood education and learning in Northern Ireland caters for children from the age of two to four years (the age at which compulsory education starts).

The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 defines pre-school education as:

'education provided for a child (whether at a school or any other premises) at any time after he/she has attained the age of two and before he/she has reached compulsory school age' (four years), 'other than in the reception class of a primary school'.

The provision of – and participation in - pre-school education in Northern Ireland is not a statutory requirement. However, in 1998, through the 'Pre-school Education Expansion Programme', the Government set a target to provide one year of pre-school education for every child whose parents wanted it. The programme initially targeted children from socially disadvantaged circumstances and the oldest children in the pre-school cohort. It is now completed as the target for the expansion of provision has been met. All children in their immediate pre-school year (aged three to four) whose parents want it, receive free part-time provision for 38 weeks during the period September to June, five days each week (Monday to Friday), and for at least two-and-a-half hours each day.

Publicly-funded pre-primary places for three- to four-year-olds are available in a range of settings including nursery schools; nursery classes and units in primary schools; and voluntary and privately-run playgroups. Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have overall responsibility for pre-primary provision at local level. They are expected to submit a Pre-school Education Development Plan to the Department of Education (Northern Ireland) (DE) detailing how they provide pre-school education for children resident in the local area. In addition, ELBs are expected to develop partnerships with pre-primary education providers in all sectors (statutory, voluntary, private, integrated and Irish-medium), in order to collaborate on pre-school provision and promotion of good practice.

[\*Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning\*](#), published in December 2012, sets out the strategy for early years education in Northern Ireland in line with overall education priorities.

**Irlanda**

Since 2000, significant progress has been made towards the establishment of high quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) provision in Ireland. Unlike other European countries, Ireland does not have a long tradition of young children attending pre-school services. The compulsory school age in Ireland is 6 and all forms of pre-primary education are optional. However, children from the age of 4 can be enrolled in infant classes in primary schools. Approximately 40% of 4-year-olds and virtually all 5-year-olds attend primary school, where early education is provided by trained teachers in infant classes. In addition to the provision for children in the infant classes in primary schools, the Department of Education and Skills funds some specific pre-primary services. These include:

- Early Start Programme: a pre-primary initiative in designated areas of urban disadvantage, for children who are most at risk of not succeeding in education. The total number of spaces provided by the existing 40 Early Start centres is over 1,650.
- Rutland Street Project: a programme in a Dublin inner city community. Although not part of Early Start, it was used to pilot many of the approaches later incorporated in the Early Start project.

With the exception of the above, early childhood education and care services in Ireland are delivered outside the formal education system, by a diverse range of private, community and voluntary interests and are described variously as crèches, nurseries, pre-schools, naíonraí (Irish language pre-schools), playgroups and daycare services. Government investment in such provision is primarily implemented by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The 'free' Pre-School Year scheme was introduced in January 2010 and is administered by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Under the terms of this initiative, all children are entitled to a free of charge pre-school year of appropriate programme-based activities in the year prior to starting primary school. While participation is voluntary, there has been a very positive response to the scheme. Approximately 68,000 or 94% of eligible children are currently enrolled in pre-school services in the 2012/2013 school year.

The regulatory environment is split between the Department of Education and Skills whose Inspectorate has responsibility for all activities in primary schools and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs whose Pre-School Inspectorate monitor the implementation of the [2006 Child Care \(Pre-School Services\) \(No 2\) Regulations](#).

## ***Organisation of Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

Early Start facilities are provided in primary schools in designated areas of urban disadvantage. Primary schools are generally available within a reasonable distance of children's homes. There is a State organised school bus transport system in operation for pupils outside a defined catchment area from the school.

Services participating in the free Pre-School Year scheme are located in all geographical areas of the country.

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institution**

Ireland has a tradition of supporting parents and families to make informed, but independent choices regarding the care and education of their young children.

Many children start primary school in the September following their fourth birthday and consequently approximately 40% of 4-year-olds and virtually all 5-year-olds are enrolled in infant classes in primary schools. Children normally attend the local school in their area. The Education Act, 1998, acknowledges the right of parents/guardians to send their children to the school of their choice with due regard for the obligation of denominational schools to maintain their religious ethos. It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. Where a school refuses to enrol a pupil, parents have a right to appeal refusal of admission and an independent board is constituted to this end under Section 29 of the Education Act.

For pre-school programmes which are funded by the Department of Education and Skills, the criteria for enrolling pupils are:

- Age: Children must be over 3 years and 2 months and under 4 years and 7 months of age on the 1st day of September of the year in which they are enrolled.

- Disadvantage: Early Start is designed to cater for the needs of children, including those with disabilities, who are most at risk of not reaching their potential in the education system and therefore priority is given to the children who are most at risk.

Children are eligible to participate in the free Pre-School Year scheme when they are aged between 3 years 2 months and 4 years 7 months in September of the relevant year. Parents can enrol their children in the participating service of their choice, subject to availability of places. Enrolment in individual services is the responsibility of the managerial authority of those services.

### **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

For the Early Start programme, children must be over 3 years and 2 months and under 4 years and 7 months on the 1st day of September of the year in which they are enrolled.

Each Early Start pre-school class caters for a total of 30 children - 15 in the morning and 15 in the afternoon. 15 of the Early Start centres cater for 60 children by providing two pre-school classes. Each pre-school class has a qualified teacher and a child care worker. The Programme can cater for 1,650 children.

Under the terms and conditions of the free pre-school year scheme, participating services are expected to have a minimum enrolment of 8 children in their pre-school year.

The minimum number of pre-school leaders and assistants in the free Pre-School Year service are as follows:

Up to 11 children:	1 pre-school leader
12 - 22 children:	1 pre-school leader and 1 pre-school assistant
23 - 33 children:	2 pre-school leaders and 1 pre-school assistant
34 - 44 children:	2 pre-school leaders and 2 pre-school assistants

and so on.



## **Organisation of Time**

Children attending Early Start settings attend five days a week (Monday to Friday) for approximately 2.5 to 3 hours daily and for a similar period to the standard school year (183 days). The Free Pre-school Year Scheme is delivered on the basis of 3 hours per week, 5 days per week for 38 weeks per year.

## **Organisation of the Day and Week**

The curricular guidelines for the Early Start programme include structured play activities, with specific objectives, aimed at enhancing the children's language, cognition and social/ personal development.

Services participating in the free Pre-School Year scheme are required to provide an appropriate programme of activities in early childhood care and education, which adheres to the principles of Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Steering documents and types of activities**

The Department of Education and Skills has funded two practice frameworks (Síolta and Aistear) to support the development of quality provision in pre-school services.

**Síolta**, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, was developed by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills. It was published in 2006, following an extensive three-year research and consultation process with a wide range of stakeholders.

Síolta is designed to support practitioners to develop high quality services for children aged birth to six years and is relevant to all settings where children spend time out of their home environment. Síolta is process-focused rather than product-focused and sets out quality benchmarks based upon the twelve principles of: the value of early childhood, children first, parents, relationships, equality, diversity, enriching environments, welfare, role of the adult, teamwork, pedagogy and play. Sixteen quality standards translate the vision of quality contained in the principles into areas of practice to be addressed. Quality indicators assist practitioners in implementing the Framework. Further information about Síolta is available at [www.siolta.ie](http://www.siolta.ie).

**Aistear**, the Framework for Early Learning, is a curriculum framework for all children from birth to six years of age in Ireland. The Framework describes the types of learning that are important for children during this period in their lives, and as such sets out broad learning goals for all children. Aistear does this using four broad and interconnected themes: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, Exploring and Thinking. Each theme identifies important dispositions, skills, attitudes and values, and knowledge and understanding. It can be used in different types of settings including children's homes.

The publication of Aistear in October 2009 followed eight years of collaborative work between the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), children, parents, practitioners, training and education institutions, early childhood agencies/organisations and relevant government departments, as well as with the international early childhood community. Further information about Aistear is available at [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie).

### **Teaching Methods and Materials**

As an early childhood curriculum framework developed at national level, Aistear does not subscribe to a particular pedagogical approach such as Montessori, Steiner, High-Scope and so on. Instead, the framework is firmly rooted in research about how children learn and develop. Aistear aims to help bring greater continuity and progression in children's learning and development as they move from home to various out-of-home settings and on to primary school. Instead of looking at individual developmental domains such as physical, social etc, Aistear is based on the belief that all learning is connected and that

different aspects of children's learning and development often take place at the same time. The Framework includes guidelines on using play to support learning and development.

Early childhood settings are not required to use Aistear – it is optional. The NCCA has developed free online resources - the Aistear Toolkit - to help the early childhood sector to become familiar with Aistear and to use it to support children's early learning and development. These resources include tip-sheets, information leaflets, podcasts, presentations and activities. Aistear tutors are working through local education centres to support teachers to use Aistear.

### ***Assessment in Early Childhood Education and Care***

There is no formal evaluation system in place at this level. However, Aistear includes guidelines on assessing children's progress and planning for the next steps in their learning and development.

Outside the education sector, the Health Service Executive (HSE) in Ireland provides a health screening service for pre-school children that is free of charge. This service provides both general health and specific developmental advice to parents and monitor the development of the child. A developmental examination is also offered to every child at approximately 9 months. This examination covers all aspects of the child's development, including hearing, sight, language development, physical development, etc, and is offered to infants irrespective of the family's income.

### ***Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care***

In the absence of national pre-schooling provision in Ireland, the majority of services could be considered as alternative structures. Notable exceptions to this are the infant classes in primary schools and the Early Start Programme. The State is becoming increasingly involved in early childhood care and education, with the introduction in January 2010 of the free Pre-School Year scheme which entitles all children to a free pre-school place in the year prior to starting primary school. Two important national quality initiatives, Síolta and Aistear, have been completed which together provide clear guidance on the scope and nature of professional practice in the care and education of children from birth to six years of age.

**Danimarca**

A day-care facility is the term used for various types of facilities for children below school age. Day-care facilities cover nurseries, kindergartens, private organistaions, family day-care and age-integrated institutions.

Facilities for school-age children fall under the term after-school centres. Older children and young people are offered after-school facilities in the form of club facilities and other socio-pedagogic after-school facilities.

The rules on day-care facilities, after-school centres and club facilities and other socio-pedagogic after-school facilities for older children and young people can be found in the [Day-Care Facilities Act](#).

## ***Organisation of Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

All children in Denmark must be given the opportunity to attend a day-care facility. This therefore obligates the local council of the individual local authority to ensure the necessary number of places for the children in the local authority, referred to as guaranteed day-care availability. Day-care facilities can be set up in various ways – either as local-authority childminding, local-authority day-care centres, independent day-care centres, private childminding or an approved private day-care centre.

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institutions**

The individual local authority determines the guidelines for and makes decisions on admission to day-care facilities. The local council may decide that the individual independent day-care centre or pool scheme make its own decision on admission to the day-care centre.

The local authority must lay down the guidelines for admission to day-care facilities based on local needs in the local authority. When determining the guidelines, the individual local authority may, within the framework of the guaranteed day-care availability, consider factors such as siblings, composition of the group of children, geographical location of the day-care facility and children with special needs.

Parents may state their wishes for admission to specific day-care facilities. When allocating a specific place, the local authority must to the extent possible consider the parents' wishes. Parents are also entitled to state their wishes for admission to specific day-care facilities if they want a place in another local authority. Admission and registration follows the guidelines of the relevant local authority. When allocating a specific place, the local council may specifically assess the child's and the family's time needs and offer the child a part-time/half-time place accordingly.

The local council of the individual local authority must provide guaranteed day-care availability. Guaranteed day-care availability means that the local council of the individual local authority must offer a place in an age-appropriate day-care facility to all children aged 26 weeks to school age.

The local council of the individual local authority must state application deadlines for parents wanting a place immediately after their child reaches the age of 26 weeks. This deadline must be observed in order for parents to earn a right to a place at that time.

If the parents want a place immediately after their child reaches 26 weeks and have applied for a place in a day-care facility within the deadline for applications, the local council must, in order to observe the guaranteed day-care availability, be able to offer a place to the child at least four weeks after the child has reached the age of 26 weeks, regardless of whether this follows immediately after the parent's parental leave.

Generally, the local authority will ask the parents to state when they need a place. In these situations, the local authority may set the date when the parents must be given a place as the date when the parents need a place. The guaranteed day-care availability is observed as long as the deadline for a place is prolonged at the request of the parents.

A local authority is in breach of the guaranteed day-care availability if it fails to offer a place at least four weeks after the child has reached the age of 26 weeks. If the guaranteed day-care availability is breached, the local authority must offer to cover either the parents' expenses for a private care scheme or the expenses for a place in another local authority.

For some families it may be easier to reconcile family life and working life if their children are admitted to a day-care facility in another local authority. Under the Day-Care Facility Act, children may thus be admitted to a day-care facility in a local authority other than their local authority of residence.

The individual local authority may decide to close the waiting list for day-care, after-school and club facilities, etc., to children from other local authorities for capacity reasons or special considerations regarding children from the local authority.

The local council may decide to close the waiting list for three months at a time. If one of the conditions for closing the waiting list is still met after this period, a new decision can be made to keep the waiting list closed for new admissions.

If a local authority has not closed its waiting lists for children from other local authorities, these children will be entered on the waiting list on the same terms as children from the local authority. There may not be any available places where parents would prefer their children to be admitted; however, requests will be considered based on the same rules that apply to parents living in the local authority.

If parents are offered a place in a day-care facility for their child in another local authority, their own local authority must grant a subsidy for the place. The size of the subsidy is determined on the basis of the level of expenditure and service of their local authority of residence. Consequently, when calculating subsidies for a place in another local authority, one applies the gross operating costs that the parents' own local authority uses to calculate subsidies and own payment for a place in a day-care facility in the local authority for its residents.

If day-care facilities in another local authority are more expensive than day-care facilities in the local authority of residence, parents must pay the difference between the subsidy from their own local authority and operating costs per place in the day-care facility used in the other local authority. In cases where the other local authority has a higher service level than the local authority of residence, parent payment for a day-care facility in the other local authority may be more expensive than payment for a place in a day-care facility in the local authority of residence.

Parents are always entitled to keep a place for their child in a facility if they move to another local authority. This right is maintained even if the waiting list is closed for children from other local authorities in the local authority in which the child has been admitted to a day-care facility, and even if the local authority of residence does not have after-school or club facilities for the age group of the child. A child who keeps its place or is given a place in a day-care facility in a local authority other than the local authority of residence has no direct right to progression to other day-care facilities in the other local authority unless it is an age-integrated institution where children automatically progress from nursery to kindergarten and where children are meant to progress within the specific facility.

The admission requirement to the institutions is age-based, which means that children can attend certain institutions when they are a certain age, e.g:

- Nurseries: 26 weeks
- Kindergartens: 3 years
- Integrated institutions: 26 weeks
- Child-minder: 26 weeks

### **Local-authority child-minding**

Local-authority childminding is an offer where childminders take care of children in private homes. The local authority refers children to the individual childminders. One childminder may take up to five children. If two or more persons are carrying out childminding together, the local authority may allow the childminders to receive up to ten children.

### **Local-authority day-care centres**

Local-authority day-care centres are local-authority owned institutions such as nurseries, kindergartens and age-integrated institutions. In the day-care facility area, centres basically receive children aged 0 to school age.

### **Independent day-care centres**

Independent day-care centres are institutions which are owned by private individuals and have made an operating agreement with the local authority to operate a day-care facility. Independent day-care centres are subject to local-authority supervision and receive subsidies from the local authority to cover their costs.

### **Private child-minding**

Private childminding involves private childminders whose work is based on an operating agreement between the scheme and the local authority. The local authority grants a subsidy per child admitted to the scheme and supervises the scheme.



## **Approved private day-care centres**

Approved private day-care centres are owned and operated by private individuals. The local authority must approve private day-care centres. The centres decide which children are admitted to the day-care centre and the local authority does not refer children to the day-care centre. The local authority grants a subsidy per child admitted to the private day-care centre.

For more information: [Ministry of Children, Gender Equality, Integration and Social Affairs](#)

## **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Children attending daycare institutions are divided into three levels according to age:

- Nurseries for 6 months to 3-year-olds
- Kindergartens for 3 to 5/6-year olds or integrated institutions for 1 to 5/6-year-olds

Usually, daycare institutions divide the children into groups of 11-12 children. Normally, 3-4 pedagogues/daycare assistants are assigned to each group.

## **Organisation of Time**

The daycare institutions are open Monday to Friday all year round except on religious holidays and other closing days.

## **Organisation of the Day and Week**

Normally, daycare institutions open around 6.30 - 7.00 and close at 17.00. On Friday, most institutions close at 16. Some special daycare institutions are open all day and night. These types of institutions are for children whose parents have shifting working hours.

Normally, the day in a daycare institution consists of both organised play or project work and time for free play.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activities**

The legal provisions regarding day-care facilities are laid down in the [Day-Care Facilities Act](#) from 2013:

- The municipality lays down the targets and framework of the work of the day-care suppliers for children as an integrated part both of the municipality's offer for children and of the preventive and supportive effort in relation to children, including children with reduced physical or mental functional abilities or with other needs of support.
- The day-care suppliers are in cooperation with the parents supposed to provide care to children and support the individual child's acquisition and development of social and general skills with a view to strengthening the individual child's all-round development and self-esteem and contribute to giving children a good and secure childhood and adolescence.
- The day-care offers are to provide opportunities of experiences and activities which contribute to stimulating the imagination, creativity and linguistic development of the child as well as to giving the child room to play and learn and room for physical development, interaction and possibility of exploring the surroundings.
- The day-care offers are to provide children with a possibility of participation in decision-making and joint responsibility and thus contribute to developing children's independence and skills to participate in engaging communities.
- The day-care offers are to give children an understanding of cultural values and of the interaction with nature.

Since 1 August 2004, all day-care facilities have had to prepare an educational curriculum. Educational curricula is to document the learning and development of 0-6-year-olds. It is up to the individual day-care facility to decide how to approach this work, however, the curriculum must relate to six main themes:

- The comprehensive personal development of the child
- Social competencies
- Language
- Body and motion

- Nature and natural phenomena
- Cultural expressions and values

### **Teaching Methods and Materials**

Teaching in daycare institutions is provided by play and developing activities in general. The children are trained to be seated, concentrate, remember, retell, and make drawings of what they have experienced. They are furthermore trained in social processes. They learn to listen to each other and tell stories, they are stimulated by movements and rhythmic, and they are prepared for learning through play.

### ***Assessment in Early Childhood Education and Care***

Since 1 August 2007, according to §11 in the [Act on Day-Care facilities](#), all local councils must offer all 3-year olds a language assessment and follow-up, as required, if there are linguistic, behavioral or other conditions that lead to the presumption that the child may be in need of language stimulation. The language assessments are to serve as an extra support tool in the pedagogic work with children's linguistic development.

Language assessment is an offer for all parents of 3-year olds – meaning that the parents decide whether their child should undergo a language assessment. The language assessment process typically goes as follows:

- A teacher whom the child knows well will offer the parents a language assessment.
- If the parents accept the offer, they will be given a formular to be used in making the first part of the language assessment with the child.
- The parents return the formular to the teacher, who will enter the answers in a registration form for the child.
- The teacher will then perform the pedagogical part of the language assessment.
- The parents are given the final score, meaning the overall result of the two assessments. If a special effort is called for, an agreement is made between the teacher and the parents.

For more information (in Danish): Language [assessment and stimulation](#)

## **Child environment impact assessments**

Under the rules of educational curricula in the Day-Care Facility Act, all day-care facilities must prepare a written child environment impact assessment, which must be revised at least every three years and when changes are implemented that may affect the child's environment. The child environment impact assessment is a tool used to describe, assess and develop the child's environment. The child environment must be assessed from a child's perspective and, to the extent possible, children's experience of the child environment must be included in the assessment. This means that the adults must try to put themselves in the children's place and retrieve knowledge directly from the children.

It is up to the individual day-care facility to decide how to make the child environment impact assessment, which gives a range of options for creating a working process that fits into the educational practice, interest and logics of the day-care facility.

The assessment must consider three mandatory areas of the day-care facility:

- The physical child environment
- The aesthetical child environment
- The mental child environment

A comprehensive description of these areas in the child environment impact assessment must help focus attention on a good and healthy environment for children in day-care facilities throughout Denmark.

The management of the day-care facility is responsible for preparing a written child environment impact assessment. Staff and parents must be included in discussions about the child environment impact assessment to reflect their observations.

Similarly, management is responsible for ensuring that the child environment impact assessment is publicly available to parents and other interested parties at all times. The assessment must be displayed in a central location in the day-care facility and be published on the website of the day-care facility and/or local authority.

## ***Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care***

Since 1990 it has been possible for associations, parents or businesses to set up institutions subsidised by the municipalities as an alternative to the municipal day care offer. These institutions usually take in children between 3 and 10 years of age. A board of parents is responsible for the administration of the institution and takes decisions regarding the use of the public subsidy and the appointment of the leader and staff.

[The Day Care Facilities Act](#) includes the private day care offers, but they are not obliged to create pedagogical educational curricula such as the public institutions offer. There are no rules on the cost of the offers, however, the municipalities have the responsibility to overlook the private offers.

The number of children per one care taker must not exceed five children.

**Norvegia**

In Norway Early Childhood and Care is for children under school age, less than six years old. Participation is voluntary. Municipalities are responsible for the development and supervision of both private and municipal institutions and for ensuring that institutions are run according to goals set by the national Government. Pre-primary institutions are generally referred to as kindergartens. In Norwegian they are called *barnehage*, which is a direct translation of the German word Kindergarten.

### **Specific Legislative Framework**

Until the end of 2005, pre-primary institutions were the responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. They are now the responsibility of the [Ministry of Education and Research](#).

Pre-primary institutions are defined as pedagogical undertakings for children under school age, e.g. for children less than six years. [The Kindergarten Act No 64 of 17 June 2005](#), in force from 1 January 2006, regulates the authorisation, operation and supervision of the institutions. The institutions must be approved by local authorities.

A new objects clause in section 1 in [the Kindergarten Act](#) and ensuing amendments in the Act relating to kindergartens entered into force 1st of August 2010. The new objects clause regulates core values in the kindergarten and how this institution can contribute to develop the child, the family and the society.

The Ministry has established regulations in accordance with the Act, among these is the Framework Plan (national curriculum) for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens. The new Framework Plan was laid down 1 March 2006. All approved institutions, both municipal and privately owned, are obliged to follow the Act and the Framework Plan.

Municipalities have since 1984 had a legal obligation to provide a sufficient amount of places in kindergarten institutions. An amendment concerning an individual, legal right to a place in kindergarten institution was introduced and put into effect in 2009. The municipalities are obliged to provide a kindergarten place for children that have applied for a place and who are one year by the end of August in the year of admittance.

The municipalities are the local authorities for kindergarten institutions. At present, almost half of the kindergartens are provided by private organisations under municipal supervision.

The municipalities cover a great part of the annual costs, 75 - 80 %, of all approved institutions, private or public. In addition parents pay a monthly fee. There are regulations concerning maximum parents' fees. The Government gives the municipalities special grants to improve the language skills of and integrate minority language children.

## **General Objectives**

Pre-primary institutions serve a dual function: they contribute to the education of children of pre-primary age, and they provide care during parents' working hours. Norwegian kindergartens are founded on a holistic approach to care and learning and respect for the value of childhood in itself.

Kindergartens shall be pedagogical undertakings that give children below school age good opportunities for development and activities. Kindergartens shall give children a safe and stimulating community, as well as individual support and care.

Good, moderately priced and accessible places in kindergarten institutions are important in order to give all children equal opportunities. Language enhancement for all children is an essential objective in kindergartens, especially for improving knowledge of the Norwegian language for children with minority language parents (immigrants). It may contribute to helping children in families with different types of problems. Early intervention is one of the governments main efforts to achieve the goal of equal possibilities for learning and to equalize social differences.

The national curriculum, the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens, states the general aims of pre-primary education. The plan must be used by all kindergartens and is based on the Nordic tradition of combining education and care.

After a period with high increase in the number of kindergarten places, introduction of maximum parental fees and a legal entitlement to a place in kindergarten, the government now concentrates more on quality in and the content of kindergartens.

The Norwegian Government has three goals for quality work in ECEC:

- Ensure equity and high quality in all kindergartens
- Strengthen the kindergarten as an arena for learning and development
- Make sure that all children have the opportunity to participate actively in a safe and inclusive kindergarten environment. . White Paper No 41 2008-2009 [Quality in ECEC](#) and



White Paper No 24 2012-2013 "The future kindergarten" lays the foundation for the government's policy in the ECEC area.

## ***Organisation of Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

An amendment concerning an individual, legal right to a place in kindergarten institution was introduced and put into effect in 2009 and municipalities have a legal obligation to provide a sufficient amount of places in kindergarten institutions. Kindergartens are mainly financed by municipalities, mostly through block grant from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, and parents. From January 2011 the earmarked kindergarten state grants were replaced with block grants to the municipalities. Municipal kindergartens in towns often cater for children in the neighbourhood, often the same area as for primary school. Private non-profit organisations, commercial providers and groups of parents have also established institutions. At present, almost half of the kindergarten places nationally are privately provided.

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of Institution/Centre**

The municipality shall facilitate a coordinated admission process, in which account is taken of the diversity and distinctive character of the kindergartens. Great importance shall be attached to the wishes and needs of users in connection with the actual admission.

Attendance is not compulsory and there are no formal entrance requirements. [The Kindergarten Act](#) gives disabled children under school age admission priority, provided that it is deemed by an expert assessment that the child has a disability. Children who are the object of an administrative decision pursuant to the Child Welfare Act shall also be entitled to priority for admission to kindergarten.

## **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Ordinary kindergartens are usually divided into groups consisting of children either in the age group 0-2 years or 3-5 years. There may also be mixed age groups of children 0-5 years. This is up to the kindergarten owners or the kindergartens themselves to decide.

As paid parental leave of absence from work constitute almost one year, few parents apply for a place before the child is one year old.

There are no regulations concerning group sizes. Regulations to [the Kindergarten Act](#) states a norm for staff qualifications. The norm is one qualified pre-school teacher per 14-18 children over the age of three, and one qualified pre-school teacher per 7-9 children under the age of three. Head teachers and the rest of the teaching staff should be qualified pre-primary teachers. The pre-primary teacher education is a bachelor's degree at a (state or private) university college. In addition, there are assistants without the same level of qualifications. They may have some formal education on upper secondary level as children and youth workers or care workers. There are generally one or two assistants in each group of children.

## **Organisation of Time**

The kindergartens themselves decide the organization of time, in cooperation with the joint committee and the parents. Please refer to the subdivisions for more details. As for organisation of the year, the formal kindergarten year starts in August like the primary school year. In cooperation with the joint committee and the parents, the kindergartens themselves decide whether they will be closed or not during shorter and longer vacations like Christmas, Easter and summer holidays.

## **Organisation of the day and week**

There are no national regulations concerning weekly and daily timetable.

Most ordinary kindergarten institutions are open at least 41 hours a week (Monday – Friday) and some of them even longer. Children may attend part-time or full time, from 8 hours a week to about 47 hours a week. Full time attendance is 41 hours or more a week.

Normally the kindergarten institutions open at 7.00 or 8.00 in the morning and close at 17.00 or 18.00 in the afternoon. Parents in white-collar jobs usually have working hours from 8.00 to 15.30 or 16.00, while working hours in shops usually are eight hours between 10.00 and 20.00.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Steering documents and the types of activities**

[The Kindergarten Act](#) instructs the Ministry to lay down a framework for the operation of institutions. The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens states the fundamental principles, goals, contents and activities for all kindergartens, both public and private. Included in the Framework Plan are also the political and social functions of the institutions and the importance of early childhood as a life phase of intrinsic value.

Kindergartens shall take a holistic view of care, upbringing, learning and social and linguistic skills. Kindergartens shall be cultural arenas in which children help to create their own culture. The Framework Plan recommends seven basic themes or learning areas that all children shall be acquainted with:

- Communication, language and text
- Body, movement and health
- Art, culture and creativity
- Nature, environment and technology
- Ethics, religion and philosophy
- Local community and society
- Numbers, spaces and shapes

Within each learning area there are national process aims.

According to [the Kindergarten Act](#), the children themselves have a legal right to participate in all questions concerning their daily lives in kindergartens.

The daily programme consists of free time to play, out-door activities, playing in groups, supervised activities, meals and reading/show-and-tell time. The hours spent on the different activities vary, according to local needs and the children's attendance time.

Cooperation with local schools is common, for instance by using swimming pools and gymnasiums. Kindergartens also make use of theatres, cinemas, museums, parks and other local facilities in order to let the children familiarize themselves with their local environment.

Within the frames of the kindergarten's opening hours, children may attend part-time (6 – 40 hours a week) or full-time (41 hours a week or more). In 2012, 90 % of the children attended full-time.

### **Teaching Methods and Materials**

The Framework Plan recommends play and social activities as important methods for learning and development for pre-primary children. The staff are free to choose methods within the frames of the national plan. Play is considered both a working method and an important way for children to acquire life skills.

Each kindergarten must establish an annual plan for the educational activity based on the national curriculum. A concrete evaluation programme must be part of this plan.

Most kindergartens base their activities on the principle that the children should develop all their skills and their personal and interpersonal relations. Most groups consist of children of different ages and at different stages in their development, and the staff often balance between organised activities and free playing activities.

## ***Assessment in Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Evaluation and progression of children**

There is no formal evaluation of children at pre-primary level.

The teachers give informal evaluations to parents about their children's progress in different fields once or twice a year. This information is normally given in person during meetings between the teacher and the parents of one child at a time. If the teacher finds that a child does not develop well or have any kind of problems, he or she is responsible for discussing her/his observation of this problem with the

parents. The teacher is responsible for giving them advice on how to cope with this in the institution and at home, and how to get in touch with a specialist in the field. Staff in kindergartens have a duty of disclosure to the social services and to the child welfare service if needed.

### ***Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care***

Family kindergarten provides another type of pre-primary education, usually for children under the age of three. This type is organised in private homes, with a smaller group of children and an assistant under the supervision of a pre-school teacher, who normally has responsibility for several homes.

Open kindergarten provides a third type of pre-primary education. Here parents may bring and accompany their children whenever they want within the opening hours of the kindergarten. These institutions can be regarded as places where pre-primary teachers, parents and children can meet. Open kindergartens are popular, especially among immigrant families in the major cities and among parents on parental leave.

**Svezia**

The Swedish Parliament and the Government set out the goals and guidelines for the preschool and school through the Education Act and the Curricula. The preschool, the preschool class and the leisure centre are regulated in [the Education Act](#) (*Skollagen SFS 2010:800*), but have two different curricula, see the sections below for each type of ECEC. The National Agency for Education is the central administrative authority for the publicly organised preschools and school age childcare. The mission of the Agency is to actively work for the attainment of the goals. The municipalities and the independent schools are the principal organisers in the school system, they allocate resources and organise activities so that pupils attain the national goals. The Agency supervises, supports, follows up and evaluates the school in order to improve quality and outcomes. For more statistics on ECEC see chapter [2.8 Statistics on Organisation and Governance](#).

## **The preschool**

Municipalities are required by the Education Act to provide preschool activities and childcare for children aged 1–12 years to the extent necessary for their parents to be able to work or study or for the child's own needs. This requirement includes preschool for children whose parents are unemployed or on parental leave with another sibling. These children should be offered a place in preschool for at least three hours per day or 15 hours per week. All children are entitled to free preschool for at least 525 hours per year from the autumn term when they turn three years old.

A total of 83 percent of all children aged 1–5 years old attend preschool. The distribution between boys and girls is generally equal. The proportion of enrolled children has increased to some extent in all age groups. 47 percent of 1 year olds attended pre-school, 87 and 92 percent respectively of 2 and 3 year olds and 94 percent of all 4 and 5 year olds.

Sweden's maximum fee policy makes childcare affordable. Fees are calculated according to income with low-income families paying nothing while the cost is capped at SEK 1,260 (about €140) per month for all families.

The preschool has had its own curriculum since 1998 (revised in 2010). [The preschool curriculum](#) (*Läroplan för förskolan Lpfö 98. Reviderad 2010*) sets out fundamental values and tasks, national goals and guidelines. The educational principles of the preschool curriculum are based on the assumption that care and education go hand in hand. A good caring environment is essential for development and learning, while care in itself provides

educational content. The curriculum also emphasises the importance of play in the child's learning and development, and the child's own active participation. Preschool is meant to be fun, secure and educational for all children.

The preschool curriculum was revised in 2010 and now contains clearer objectives for children's development in language and mathematics, and in natural sciences and technology. The guidelines for staff responsibilities have been clarified, both at individual teacher level and at team level. New sections on monitoring, evaluation and development, and on the responsibilities of preschool heads, have been added.

*Open preschool* is for stay at home parents and their children. The parents together with the staff have the opportunity to develop educational group activities for the children. The children are not enrolled.

### **The preschool class**

The preschool class is incorporated in the school system. The compulsory school and the preschool class, as well as the leisure-time centre, share a common curriculum, [the Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the leisure-time centre](#) (*Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet 2011*).

The preschool class is a voluntary type of school within the public school system. The activities in preschool classes should be considered as teaching in the same sense as in other types of school. The education in preschool class will encourage each child's learning and development at the same time as providing a foundation for continued schooling. It is mandatory for municipalities to provide preschool classes and for all six year olds to be offered a place for a minimum of 525 hours. Participation is voluntary for the children.

In the school year 2010/11 preschool class was available in all of the country's municipalities. The proportion of six year olds enrolled in preschool class 2010/11 was 95.8 percent.

Over 9 percent of the pupils attended a preschool class organised by independent management. The proportion of pupils attending independent facilities varied between municipalities and was highest in major cities and suburban municipalities. In one of ten



municipalities, more than 13 percent of the pupils were enrolled in a independent school's preschool class, while almost 100 municipalities had no pupils in such facilities.

### **The leisure-time centre**

Leisure time centres are educational group facilities, operating during the times of the day and year when schools are closed for enrolled children whose parents are working or studying or for children who have their own needs of the facilities. Generally leisure time centres are integrated within schools. Leisure-time centres are aimed at children up to 12 years-old who attend school.

*Open leisure-time centres* are an alternative to leisure-time centres and educational activities for all children in the age group 10–12 years. The children are not enrolled.

### **Providers**

Alongside the municipal preschools and schools there are grant aided independent preschools and schools. They have a different principal organiser/owner than the municipality or county council. For more information about grant-aided independent preschools and schools see [chapter 2.4 - Organisation of private education](#). Independently organised and grant aided childcare is most common in the bigger cities and their suburbs. Of 290 Swedish municipalities 250 had grant aided independent childcare in 2010. The table below shows the different kinds of institutions in early childhood education and care. It also shows how many of them that are independently organised (figures from 2010).

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Pre-Primary Education***

### **Geographical accessibility**

Irrespective of where they live, all children must have equal access to the public education system, including preschool. Each type of school must offer equivalent education irrespective of where it is provided. The municipality is responsible for offering a place in a preschool as close to the child's home as possible. Reasonable regard shall also be paid

to guardian's wishes. The municipalities are not legally obligated to provide transportation to the preschool.

There is a "principle of proximity" (*närhetsprincip*), which means that the child should be offered a place at a preschool as close to the home as possible. If a child lives closer to a preschool in another municipality it is possible for the child to access that preschool, especially if the child's particular needs would be better fulfilled in that preschool. Such needs could be access to a preschool in the child's native language if it is an official Swedish minority language, if the child has special educational needs that cannot be met at the preschool in the municipality of residence or if the child's parents live in different municipalities. Municipalities in rural areas often make arrangements so that children can attend the nearest preschool, regardless of municipality. In those cases the municipality of residence compensates the municipality where the child attends preschool.

### **Admission requirements and Choice of ECEC institution**

Under the Education Act the municipalities are required to provide preschool activities and childcare for children aged 1–12 years to the extent necessary for their parents to be able to work or study or for the child's own needs. This requirement also includes preschool for children whose parents are unemployed or on parental leave with another sibling. These children should be offered a place in preschool or pedagogical care for at least three hours per day or 15 hours per week. All children are entitled to free preschool for at least 525 hours per year from the autumn term when they turn three years old. The municipality shall take reasonable account of the wishes of the parent or guardian as regards provision of childcare, both concerning the type of care and the choice of organiser.

A total of 83 percent of all children aged 1–5 years old attend preschool. The distribution between boys and girls is generally equal. The proportion of enrolled children has increased to some extent in all age groups. 47 percent of 1 year olds attended preschool, 87 and 92 percent respectively of 2 and 3 year olds and 94 percent of all 4 and 5 year olds.

School-age childcare cater for children from the year they start the preschool class or compulsory school up to and including the age of 12.

Parents have the right to appeal against decisions taken by the municipality in regards to childcare and the municipality is obliged to inform the parents of how to do so. The case would go to one of Sweden's 12 administrative courts.

It is possible for preschools to exclude children when the parents have failed to pay the fee. However, fees are calculated according to income with low-income families paying nothing while the costs is capped at SEK 1,260 (about €140) per month for all families.

### **Age levels and grouping of children**

A preschool normally consists of two to five groups according to the age of the children. The number of children per group varies. Mixed age groups are most common; there are groups for children up to the age of three and groups for three- to five-year-olds. Some preschools have so called 'sibling groups' for one- to five-year-olds. In some preschools there are also groups for children of the same age.

Leisure time centres (*fritidshem*) provide activities outside school hours for pupils of different ages, from the preschool class up to the age of 12. Open leisure time centres often provide activities for pupils between the ages of 10 to 12.

There is no national regulation determining the number of children per employee or the number of children in a group. However, the Swedish National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*) has drawn up general guidelines regarding quality in preschools and leisure time centres, which includes the appropriate composition and size of groups of children. The guiding principle used in grouping children is the child's need for continuity and consistency in their daily activities. The aim is to satisfy the child's needs to be together with others, to play and work with their peers as well as with older and younger friends, regardless what form of grouping is used. In order to develop a sense of group identity, great emphasis is placed on establishing continuity in both the children's groups and amongst the staff.

In the autumn 2010, the average number of children per group in preschools was 17. 56 percent of the groups had 17 or fewer children. In 18 percent of the groups there were 21 or more children. Almost one third of the groups in the preschools were so called toddler groups, i.e. only accepting children aged 0–3 years. In 2010 just under half (45 percent) of the toddler groups had 14–16 children. 15 percent of the toddler groups had 17 or more

children. In the autumn 2010 there were 5.4 children per full-time employee in preschool. There were very large variations between the municipalities.

### **Organisation of the year**

Preschools and childcare for school-age children are open throughout the year subject to need. School-age childcare caters for children during the part of the day when they are not in school and during holidays. Preschools have the opening hours determined by the municipality, both regarding the year and the day. A municipality might for example state that the preschools should be open all weekdays except bank holidays between 6.30 in the morning and 6.30 p.m.

### **Organisation of the day and week**

There is no syllabus for preschool, and neither is there any regulation as to how time should be allocated to various activities. The distribution of the daily workload is decided in each preschool.

An agreement is made between parents and the municipality that the municipality shall be responsible for the care of children during a given part of the day. The municipality documents this agreement. Preschools are usually open between 6.30 a.m. and 6.30 p.m. Monday to Friday.

School-age childcare skolbarnsomsorg caters for children during the part of the day when they are not at school and during holidays. Usually leisure-time centres are open 7.30 – 17.30 Monday to Friday. During school hours the leisure time centre staff often work in the classroom.

### **Steering documents and types of activities**

Since autumn 1998, the preschool has had its own [curriculum](#), laid down in an ordinance. The curriculum is set by the Swedish Parliament and the Government. This emphasises the importance of preschool as the first step in lifelong learning. Within the set frameworks, individual municipalities are free to decide how to conduct their preschool services. The

curriculum sets out fundamental values and tasks, national goals and guidelines for the preschool, etc. The educational principles of the preschool curriculum are based on the assumption that care and education go hand in hand. A good caring environment is essential for development and learning, while care in itself provides educational content. The curriculum also emphasises the importance of play in the child's learning and development, and the child's own active participation. The preschool is meant to be fun, secure and educational for all children.

The preschool curriculum was revised in 2010 and now contains clearer objectives for children's development in language and mathematics, and in natural sciences and technology. The guidelines for staff responsibilities have been clarified, both at individual teacher level and at team level. New sections on monitoring, evaluation and development, and on the responsibilities of preschool heads, have been added.

Besides the curriculum, a preschool may have policy documents or working plans of its own, which may broaden, focus or specify its orientation or working methods provided there is no conflict with the curriculum. These documents may be seen as supplementing the national curriculum in individual preschools.

In many countries, there is a tendency towards setting goals and assessing the progress of preschool children but the Swedish system focuses more on basic values such as playing together, tolerance and consideration for others. The Swedish preschool curriculum does not include goals for individual children and their learning progress at particular stages, but to stimulate and support each child's learning the preschool needs knowledge about each child's development. The child specific knowledge should not be used to categorise or compare the children, but to contribute to the planning of the entire preschool and its activities.

### ***Teaching methods and materials in the preschool***

Staff in preschools determine how the goals of the curriculum are to be achieved. The curriculum is based on the notion that children of preschool age learn mainly through their own activities in contexts that are natural and meaningful to them. By using a topic based method, children are given the opportunity to explore, investigate and experiment and through music, drama, art and craft, playing, conversing, singing etc., they can digest their

experiences, step by step gaining new insights and building knowledge. Children can also learn more about a particular area through books and listening to stories.

Day-to-day teaching should include the whole group of children, as well as take place in the form of organised and/or spontaneously formed smaller groups for various activities. The development and learning of the individual child should be supported in close cooperation between the preschool and the home.

A few preschools use alternative pedagogical methods, e.g. Montessori, Waldorf etc., some specialise in areas such as sport, science, arts and craft, computers, nature and ecology and some spend most hours outdoors in so called 'Rain and Shine pre-schools' ('*Ur och skur*') where such activities as artistic and pedagogical work as well as meals etc. take place outdoors, either in the vicinity of the pre-school or in nature.

### **Evaluation and progression of children in pre-school**

In the pre-school (*förskola*) the outcome of the individual child is not evaluated. Grades and assessments are not used. The pre-school provides pedagogical activities in which children can start participating at different ages and over varying periods of time. Children participate on basis of their individual conditions. All who work in the pre-school should pay particular attention to and help those children who for different reasons need support in their development. The pre-school should ensure a regular dialogue between the child's home and the pre-school on the well-being, development and learning of the child. In addition to daily contact between staff and parents it is common to hold a dialogue held twice a year between staff and parents to discuss the child's development and progress at the pre-school. Parents may also take the initiative for such dialogues at other times.

Teachers regularly monitor pupil's progress, but there are no formal regulations on how this is done. In addition to daily contact between staff and parents, it is common that a special dialogue is held twice a year between staff and parents to discuss the child's development and progress. Parents may also take the initiative for such dialogues. It is decided at school level whether children participate in these dialogues or not.

## ***Organisation of the Pre-Primary Class***

### **Geographical accessibility**

Irrespective of where they live, all children must have equal access to the public education system. Each type of school must offer equivalent education irrespective of where it is provided. There are pre-school classes (*förskoleklasser*) in all municipalities. The municipality is responsible for offering a place in pre-school class (*förskoleklass*) as close to the child's home or school as possible. Reasonable regard shall also be paid to guardian's wishes. The municipalities are not legally obligated to provide transportation to pre-school or pre-school class. However, some municipalities provide transportation free of charge for children in pre-school class.

### **Admission requirements and choice of institution/centre in the pre-school class**

The municipalities are obliged to offer all children six years of age 525 hours per year in the pre-school class (*förskoleklass*), however, children are not obliged to attend. The pre-school class is one year and takes place the year before a child starts compulsory school, however, a child may be admitted to pre-school class before the autumn term of the year when the child is six years old. Parents choose which pre-school class the child shall attend in the same way as they choose compulsory school (*grundskola*). If a place in a chosen school is not available and the municipality places the pupil elsewhere that decision cannot be appealed.

### **Age levels and grouping of children in the pre-school class**

There are no national regulations as regards size of classes etc. Almost all pupils in the pre-school class (*förskoleklass*) are enrolled from the autumn term the calendar year they turn six. They are enrolled for one school year 0,9 per cent of the pupils that started pre-school class in 2010/11 were five-year-olds, and 1,0 per cent started in the year they turned seven.

## Organisation of the year

Pre-school class (*förskoleklass*) follows the same structure of the school year as the compulsory school (*grundskolan*). For more information on the organisation of the year for compulsory school see [5.1 - Organisation of the School Year](#).

## Organisation of the day and week

There is no syllabus for pre-school class (*förskoleklass*), and neither is there any regulation as to how time should be allocated to various activities. The distribution of the daily workload is decided locally in each pre-school class.

An agreement is made between parents and the municipality that the municipality shall be responsible for the care of children during a given part of the day. The municipality documents this agreement. Pre-schools (*förskolor*), are usually open between 6.30 a.m. and 18.30 p.m. Monday to Friday. There is no timetable for pre-school or pre-school class (*förskoleklass*); the daily workload distribution is decided at each school or institution.

School-age childcare (*skolbarnsomsorg*) caters for children during the part of the day when they are not at school and during holidays. Usually leisure-time centres (*fritidshem*) are open 7.30 – 17.30 Monday to Friday. During school hours the leisure-time centre staff often works in the class room.

## Curriculum, Types of Activity, Number of Hours in the Pre-school Class

A new curriculum (*Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet 2011*) was adopted in 2010 and is common for compulsory school (*grundskola*), pre-school class (*förskoleklass*) and leisure-time centres (*fritidshem*). It sets out general principles and goals of two kinds: a) goals to aim for and b) goals to be attained. The goals to aim for state the direction of the school's work and thus the desired quality development. The goals to be attained are an expression of the minimum pupil attainment required when leaving school. It is the responsibility of the school and the school organisers to ensure that pupils are given the necessary opportunities to attain these goals. There is no syllabus or timetable for the pre-school class.



## **Steering documents and types of activities**

The pre-school class (*förskoleklass*) combines the pedagogical methods of the pre-school (*förskolan*) with those of compulsory school (*grundskolan*). An important objective is that the pre-school class, compulsory school and leisure-time centre (*fritidshem*) are to be more closely linked. The activities are to be stimulated by the meeting of different pedagogical traditions.

## **Teaching methods and materials**

Creative activities and play are essential components of active learning. By providing a wealth of opportunities for discussion, reading and writing, all pupils should be able to develop their ability to communicate and thus enhance confidence in their own language abilities. Pupils should have the opportunity of experiencing the expression of their knowledge in different ways. Drama, movement, dance, music and creativity in art, writing and design should all form part of the school's activity. A sense of exploration, curiosity and desire to learn should provide a foundation for education.

The municipalities distribute resources and organise education and goals and guidelines for pre-school class are set out in the steering documents, On these basis the schoolhead and the teachers in individual pre-schools and leisure-time centres can then choose work methods suited to their activities and local conditions. Teachers should endeavour to balance and integrate knowledge in its various forms. The school head has overall responsibility for drawing up a local work plan as well as following up and evaluating the results achieved by the school in relation to the national goals, the goals set out in the school plan as well as the local work plan. A few pre-school classes follow alternative pedagogical methods, e.g. Montessori, Waldorf etc.

Pupils have access to teaching material such as books free of charge. Books are not free of charge for pre-schools. All pre-schools do not use the same teaching material, and there is no central organ that prepares books for all pre-schools. Schools or institutions have their own budget that regulates the costs of teaching materials. School heads and teachers choose which teaching materials to use. Not all pre-schools use books,

## ***Assessment in the Pre-Primary Class***

## **Evaluation and progression of children in the preschool class**

Teachers regularly monitor pupil's progress, but there are no formal regulations on how this is done. In addition to daily contact between staff and parents, it is common that a special dialogue is held twice a year between staff and parents to discuss the child's development and progress. Parents may also take the initiative for such meetings. It is decided at school level whether children participate in these dialogues or not.

Education in the preschool class (*förskoleklass*) is one year and ends in the summer the year the child turns seven. In the autumn term the same year most children start compulsory schooling, without assessment procedures.

## ***Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Family day care homes**

Pedagogical care (*pedagogisk omsorg*) in family day care homes (*familjedaghem*) are run by registered child minders in their own homes, looking after children aged one to twelve while their parents work or study. Pedagogical care is governed by Chapter 2 of the [Education Act \(Skollagen - SFS 2010:800\)](#). Family day care homes are under the same regulatory control and evaluation as the preschool (*förskola*), the curriculum for the preschool does not apply, but it can nevertheless be used as a guidance document for preschool children in pedagogical care.

General guidelines for family day care home activities are issued by the Swedish National Agency for Education. In many municipalities, family day-care homes cooperate closely with preschools and the open pre-school (where parents or child minders take part in preschool activities together with the children). Family day-care homes are most common in the countryside.

### **The open preschool**

The open preschool (*öppna förskolan*) is basically intended for children who do not participate in other forms of preschool (*förskola*). Parents and child minders come along to

the open preschool with their children whenever they wish. Children are given the opportunity to participate in pedagogical group activities, often under the supervision of a preschool teacher. The focus of open preschool varies and sometimes its activities are part of social support for the children and/or their families.

### **Mother tongue tuition for children**

The number of immigrant and refugee children in preschool has increased. Many municipalities are able to help children whose first language is not Swedish in learning their mother tongue. The aim is to develop active bilingualism and support the creation of the child's dual cultural identity.

Around one third of the municipalities offer mother tongue tuition to children who speak a language other than Swedish at home. In 2010/11 there were 19 385 preschool children with another mother language than Swedish , and 8 489 of these children opted to have mother tongue tuition (*modersmålsundervisning*) in the preschool class.

**Svizzera**

Childcare supports families, helps balance family and working life, serves the integration and socialisation of children and promotes their development. These are voluntary services which parents use at their discretion and pay a share of the costs.

The Swiss Civil Code (Article 316) and the Federal Ordinance on the Placement of Children in Foster Care and for Adoption (FCAO) lay down the legal framework conditions governing childcare. The FCAO mainly regulates the approval requirements for childcare and the [supervision](#) of such services. The cantons are responsible for the specific application of these provisions. They can perform these tasks themselves or delegate them to the communes or third parties. Childcare for children under four years falls within the sphere of family and social policy. In this context the [Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Social Affairs](#) (SODK) assumes a coordinating role for the cantons. The SODK has adopted [recommendations](#) on early childhood childcare.

For day-care centres in the sphere of compulsory education including pre-school please see the comments on [primary education](#). The SODK has adopted, together with the [Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education](#) (EDK), which undertakes key coordination tasks in education for the cantons, a [joint declaration](#) on day-care centres for children. Most cantons mention the promotion of childcare in their constitution or in cantonal laws. Only in one canton do parents have the right to have their children offered a public or private place in childcare within a reasonable time.

## **Pre-school**

Pre-school promotes individual development and social learning and prepares children for starting school. It falls within the sphere of education and is covered by education policy. Attendance of state-run pre-school is free. The cantons regulate pre-school in the cantonal education acts. Important tasks which require intercantonal coordination are undertaken by the EDK. The communes (and less frequently the private sector) operate pre-school establishments.

Depending on the canton pre-school attendance may be compulsory ([compulsory attendance](#)) or the cantons may require the communes to provide pre-school (compulsory provision).

Almost 100% of children attend pre-school for at least one year, and around 86% for two years. Depending on the canton children start pre-school once they have reached the age

of four or five, or the age of three in the canton of Ticino. At the request of parents children may start pre-school at a later or earlier stage.

Under the Intercantonal Agreement on Harmonisation of Compulsory Education ([HarmoS Agreement](#)), two years of pre-school will become compulsory in those cantons which have signed the HarmoS Agreement but do not yet offer a compulsory two-year pre-school; children will start once they have reached the age of four (this will be implemented from the start of the 2015/16 school year at the latest). In most cantons which have not signed the HarmoS Agreement, or have not yet started the ratification process, pre-school attendance of at least one year is compulsory. Many of these cantons also offer two years of pre-school.

## **Legislative References**

[Schweizerisches Zivilgesetzbuch](#) [Swiss Civil Code]

[Verordnung über die Aufnahme von Kindern zur Pflege und zur Adoption \(PAVO\)](#)  
[Ordinance on the Placement of Children in Foster Care and for Adoption (FCAO)]

[Interkantonale Vereinbarung über die Harmonisierung der obligatorischen Schule \(HarmoS-Konkordat\)](#) [Intercantonal Agreement on Harmonisation of Compulsory Education (HarmoS Agreement)]

[Kantonale Schulgesetzgebung](#) [Cantonal education acts]

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 4 years***

There are various childcare facilities and services. These are voluntary services which parents use at their discretion. Only in one canton do parents have the right to have their children offered a public or private place in childcare within a reasonable time.

- **Child day-care facilities**

Child day-care facilities are establishments which care for small children from the age of three months on a full-day or half-day basis until they enter pre-school or school.

They offer professional care and meals. There are both state-run and private child day-care facilities. Employers can operate child day-care facilities for their employees' children. Child day-care facilities have to be approved and are subject to [supervision](#). Their [regulation](#) and responsibility for them differ depending on the canton or commune. Child day-care facilities are the most heavily regulated of all the childcare services.

- **Day-care families**

Day-care families care for one or more children at home. The care is very flexible and may be on an hourly, half-day or full-day basis. Day-care families care for both children under school age and children of school age.

Day-care families are subject to registration and [supervision](#). In some cantons day-care families have to be approved. The responsibilities and [regulations](#) differ depending on the canton and commune. The terms of care are agreed directly between two families or through an agency (e.g. day-care family organisations).

The Swiss Childcare Association [kibesuisse](#), which emerged from the Swiss Association of Child-Day-Care Centres (KiTaS) and the Swiss Association of day-care family organisations (SVT) in 2013, is the nationwide industry association covering the organisation of childcare outside the family and before and after school. Kibesuisse promotes the buildup of childcare in a quantitative and qualitative manner and supports its members in their task fulfilment. Kibesuisse defines quality standards and lobbies for their implementation.

- **Informal care services**

Alongside the formal childcare services mentioned above there are [informal care services](#) such as care by private individuals, playgroups or care facilities which do

not operate on a regular basis or operate for short periods only (e.g. babysitting services).

The *Scuola dell'infanzia* in the canton of Ticino differs from the [pre-school establishments](#) (*Kindergarten, Ecole enfantine*) of the other two language regions in that it takes children from the age of three. In the rest of Switzerland children of this age are cared for by childcare facilities and services.

For before and after school childcare facilities and services in compulsory education including pre-school (day-care centres, supervised midday meals, periods before and after lessons, day nurseries, etc.) please see the comments on [primary education](#).

### **Geographical Accessibility**

The number of childcare places has increased considerably in recent years. The cantons and communes have taken appropriate measures. Most cantons mention the [promotion of childcare](#) in their constitution or in cantonal laws. The Confederation's temporary [incentive programme](#), designed to promote the creation of additional places in day-care for children, supported the creation of around 30,500 new childcare places between 2003 and 2011. The incentive programme for childcare has been extended for four years to 2015.

Demand for childcare places remains high and is forecast to continue to exceed supply. In 2001 three in ten households in which the youngest child was aged under 15 used a childcare service, while in 2009 this had risen to four in ten. This increase is reflected mainly in increased use of formal services such as child day-care facilities ([Swiss Federal Statistical Office Data 2010](#)). Most often, care is provided by private carers (60%) – predominantly by relatives (52%). These are followed by child day-care facilities and day nurseries (26%), with day-care families in third place (15%). Cantons or communes can carry out their own [surveys](#) of supply and demand in their residential areas.

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institution**

The [admission requirements](#) depend on the establishment or type of service. Only a few cantons have rules which lay down which children have priority when there are not enough free places. State-run, subsidised child day-care facilities can restrict admission to children who are domiciled/have their place of residence in the same place as the establishment, or give preference to these children. Other potential criteria are whether both parents work,



the family status (in particular single parents), or the social situation of the parents. As the use of these services is voluntary, the choice of establishment rests with the parents or legal guardians.

### **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

The age at which children are accepted (generally from three months at the earliest) depends on the establishment or service offered. Children may be cared for in mixed age-groups or in groups of children of similar ages (e.g. babies).

Within the framework of the national legislation (FCAO) the cantons or communes regulate or specify the prerequisites for the [approval](#) of child day-care facilities. These usually include rules on childcare conditions (group size, number of children per carer, ratio of qualified to non-qualified childcare staff, special staff ratios for babies etc.). In day-care families children are taken into a family and cared for together with that family's own children at home. The cantons or communes can lay down a [maximum number](#) of children looked after in each day-care family.

### **Organisation of Time**

For child day-care facilities the cantons or communes can lay down rules on minimum [opening hours](#) each day and/or rules on a minimum number of days open per year (generally only for subsidised establishments).

There are no regulations on times for day-care families. The care provided is very flexible. It can cater better for different situations and the individual needs of parents and children.

### **Organisation of the Day and Week**

For details of the organisation of the day and week see the information on Organisation of Time

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 4 years***

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activities**

The cantonal or communal regulations on child day-care facilities can require the establishment to draw up a [pedagogical concept](#) as a basic prerequisite for approval.

These pedagogical concepts make statements about the establishment's pedagogical work (e.g. socio-pedagogical objectives, education and support of the children, range of activities, details of cooperation with parents, details of the regular daily routine, group composition and group sizes, etc.).

As children start [pre-school](#) with different backgrounds, childcare establishments are increasingly being called upon to offer a stronger educational orientation. In urban centres in particular there are projects specifically promoting disadvantaged children or children with a migrant background.

The [Swiss UNESCO Commission](#) and the Swiss childcare network [Netzwerk Kinderbetreuung Schweiz](#) have launched an [orientation framework](#) for early childhood education. This orientation framework offers a comprehensive educational basis for childcare from 0 to 4 years. It describes in general terms how small children develop and proposes guidelines for work with children. It records the elements covered by educational action in childcare institutions. It is not binding but is a reference document. Feasibility is to be tested in a trial phase.

As a rule the cantonal or communal [regulations on child day-care facilities](#) lay down which qualifications are required for skilled [childcare workers](#) and how high the proportion of skilled childcare workers must be. The Swiss Childcare Association [kibesuisse](#) recommends at least two childcare workers to be present for each group of children, one of whom with appropriate training.

Cantonal and communal [regulations on day-care families](#) can stipulate that childminders have to complete a course and continuing education and training. These courses are generally provided by day-care family organisations. In its quality framework the Swiss Childcare Association [kibesuisse](#) requires childminders to have basic and continuing education.

## **Teaching Methods and Materials**

Childcare establishments and services have a duty of care and also perform teaching and educational tasks. Self-development and mixing with other children are important principles of their work. They are required to provide places in which the children can live, learn and play, and offer appropriate games, thereby encouraging the children's emotional, social and cognitive development.

Some childcare services offer specific support (e.g. motor development, language development, development of social skills), especially to support the development of children growing up under difficult conditions.

## ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 4 years***

Children under four are not assessed. However, monitoring the children's development is very important. Childcare workers can make parents aware of any developmental difficulties experienced by their children, so that appropriate support measures (e.g. remedial [education in early childhood](#)) can be taken.

**Finlandia**

The Finnish model of early childhood education and care (ECEC) is described as “educare” because the basic elements of it are care, education and teaching. Early childhood education and care, pre-primary education and primary education form from the point of view of child’s development a logically progressing entirety. The parents of all children under school-age have a subjective right to a place in day care for their child provided by their local authority. Day care is the concept used by the current Finnish legislation (Day Care Act and Decree 1973) which is why it is used also in this text along with the concept of early childhood education and care.

ECEC in Finland has two main goals. One is to respond to the day care needs of children under school age and the other is to provide early childhood education. A guiding principle in the Finnish child and family policy has been to offer alternatives for families. After the maternity and parental leave periods, parents have several different forms of publicly supported child care to choose from:

- Municipal day care either in a day care centre or in family day care.
- Private day care either in a day care centre or in family day care with the private child care allowance.
- One parent staying at home on care leave and child home care allowance until the youngest child turns three.

Early childhood education and care in Finland is intended for children from the end of parental leave period, that is when a child is usually 9 or 10 months, to start of basic education at the age of 7. Families pay fees that in full-day provision vary between 0 – 283 € (2014) depending on the size and income of the family. In private ECEC fees are usually higher. Pre-primary education is provided free of charge for children in the year preceding the start of their compulsory education. Pre-primary education is organised both in day care centres and in schools in connection with basic education. The majority (ca 80 per cent in 2013) of the pre-primary provision takes place in conjunction with day care. The core curriculum governing pre-primary education is the same regardless of the setting.

At present attending pre-primary education is voluntary, but already ca 98 % percent of all 6-year-old children participate. The majority of children in pre-primary education are also

enrolled in other early childhood education and care because in Finland most parents work full-time and the scope of pre-primary education is approximately 4 hours a day.

Moreover, some municipalities, local parishes and non-governmental organisations provide so-called open day care services or supervised playground activities for young children and their families.

The framework for the implementation of early childhood education and care is provided by legislation and national core curricula. The most important regulations are laid down in the Act and Decree on Children's Day Care (1973) and, as far as pre-primary education is concerned, in the Basic Education Act and Decree (1998). The legislation governing ECEC is currently being reformed.

The objectives and principles for ECEC are laid down in the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (2003, rev. 2005) issued by the former National Research and Development Institute for Welfare and Health (as from 2009 National Institute for Health and Welfare). The document is a recommendation for the education/service providers and it aims to promote the provision of ECEC on equal terms throughout the country. Pre-primary education is guided by the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education approved by the Finnish National Board of Education (2000 rev. 2010). The core curriculum for pre-primary education is currently under revision in the context of a wider curricular reform in general education. The new core curriculum will be completed by the end of 2014 and the new curricula based on it will be implemented as from August 2016.

The ECEC staff responsible for children is required to have appropriate training. One in three must have a higher education degree. Kindergarten teachers have a Bachelor or Master degree in Education or Bachelor or Master degree in Social Science (ISCED 5). Other staff in day care centres is expected to have at least a vocational upper-secondary qualification in the field of social welfare and health care (ISCED 3). Also family child minders are expected to have suitable education and the competence based Qualification for Family Child Minders is recommended. Pre-primary education is given either by a kindergarten teacher (Bachelor or Master of Education) or a class teacher (Master of Education). The adult:child ratio in ECEC is regulated by law.

The Government defined in its Programme in June 2011 that the administrative responsibility for ECEC should be transferred from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture. As from 1 January 2013, the Ministry of Education and Culture has had the overall responsibility for the ECEC sector. Pre-primary education for 6-year-olds was under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture already prior to the administrative reform.

The legislation governing early childhood education and care (Day Care Act and Decree) was originally enacted in the early 1970s. A comprehensive legislative reform is under way. In December 2012, the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a working group to prepare a proposal for a new law on early childhood education and care. The working group proposal was sent for consultation in spring 2014. The Government Proposal for a new Act on Early Childhood Education and Care was submitted to the Parliament in December 2014.

The Government Programme issued in June 2011 mentioned that the possibility of making pre-primary education compulsory will be explored. The Ministry of Education and Culture appointed reviewers to look into the matter and their report submitted in June 2012 supported the motion. Following a Government Proposal and related legislative amendments, participation in pre-primary education or corresponding activities will be mandatory as from August 2015.

[Day Care Act \(36/1973\)](#)

[Day Care Decree \(239/1973\)](#)

[Basic Education Act \(628/1998\)](#)

[Basic Education Decree \(852/1998\)](#)

[Government Resolution Concerning the National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care \(2002\)](#)

[National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland \(2003, rev. 2005\)](#)

[National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education 2010](#)

## ***Organisation of early childhood education and care other than pre-primary education***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

All children under school-age have a right to publicly subsidised early childhood education and care should their parents so decide. Municipalities are responsible for providing ECEC for children residing in their area in the official languages of Finland: Finnish, Swedish and Sami. The local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that the provision is sufficient to meet the demand. Municipalities can organize ECEC themselves or purchase the service. Families can also opt for private service providers.

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC institution**

All parents have a right to place their children under school age in municipal early childhood education and care either in a day care centre or in family day care. Municipalities must ensure that all children who are in need of ECEC are assigned a place within 4 months of applying. In urgent cases where the need for care could not be foreseen in advance the child shall be assigned a place in ECEC within two weeks of applying. Due to capacity constraints, the child is not always admitted to the ECEC setting that the parents applied for but the place is assigned in another setting.

The parents can also apply for a place in a private ECEC setting. In this case, the selection and admittance procedures are at the discretion of the service provider. Parents are entitled to private child care allowance.

### **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

All parents of children under school age have a right to place their children in municipal early childhood education and care when the parental leave period ends. The youngest children entering ECEC are 9 or 10 months old. In practice, most children start at a later



age because parents are entitled to a child home care leave and allowance until the youngest child turns three. The majority of six-year-old children in pre-primary education are also enrolled in early childhood education and care because in Finland most parents work full-time and the scope of pre-primary education is ca 4 hours a day.

Activities in day care centers are usually organised by age group. A typical way of grouping children is groups of children under 3 years, and children between 3 and 6, but other models exist as well. In the so-called sibling groups the age distribution is wider. The Finnish ECEC model combines care, education and teaching. The pedagogy varies with the age and needs of the children, and the elements of care, education and teaching have different emphases in different situations. Children with special needs are mostly integrated to settings near their home.

The adult:child ratio in ECEC is regulated by law. In day care centres the ratio is 1:4 for children under three years, and 1:7 for children aged three or more. In family day care child minders are allowed to care for up to 4 children including their own children under school-age on a full-day basis as well as for one pre-primary or school-age child on a part-day basis. In group family day care there are 2–3 adults and 8–12 children in a group.

### **Organisation of Time**

All children have a subjective right to a place in ECEC if their parents so wish. The municipalities have a statutory duty to ensure that their provision is sufficient to meet the demand. The annual calendar and daily opening hours of day care centres must be organized according to the local need. The daily length of the provision for an individual child should not usually exceed 10 hours. Local authorities also provide evening, overnight and weekend care for children whose parents work shifts.

The Finnish model of early childhood education and care (ECEC) is described as “EduCare” because it integrates care, education and teaching in a holistic manner. The curriculum guidelines for ECEC define core content areas but these are not subjects to be studied but rather orientations that provide the educators with a framework that indicates

what kind of experiences, situations and learning environments they should look for in order to ensure children's balanced growth and development.

[Day Care Act \(36/1973\)](#)

[National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland \(2003, rev. 2005\)](#)

## **Organisation of the Day and Week**

The annual calendar and daily opening hours of day care centres must be organized according to the local need. Local authorities also provide evening, over-night and weekend care for children whose parents work shifts. The daily length of the provision for an individual child should not usually exceed 10 hours.

In early childhood education and care and in pre-primary education healthy meals are provided at regular intervals. Mealtimes are considered an essential part of children's well-being, upbringing and education.

## ***Teaching and Learning in early childhood education and care other than pre-primary education***

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activities**

The principal steering documents are:

- The Act and Decree on Children's Day Care (1973, a legislative reform is under preparation)
- The Government Resolution Concerning the National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care (2002)
- The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (2003, revised 2005)

The central principles and overall objectives of early childhood education and care are outlined in the legislation and in the Government Resolution (2002). One of the key principles in the National Policy Definition is that early childhood education is part of lifelong learning. The policy also emphasises the educational partnership between parents and staff as well as cooperation between different administrative bodies in the organisation of ECEC services for children and families. Care, education and teaching should form a whole, which flexibly supports the individual development of each child. The National Policy Definition laid down the foundations for the new steering instrument: the National Curriculum Guidelines.

The National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC is a recommendation on the basis of which the education providers are expected to draw up local and unit-specific curricula and plans, as well as individual ECEC plans for each child. The National Curriculum Guidelines aim to promote the provision of ECEC on equal terms throughout the country, to guide the development of the content of activities, and to contribute to developing the quality of activities by introducing uniform principles for organising such activities.

The National Curriculum Guidelines was originally issued in 2003 by the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health, STAKES (as from 1.1 January 2009 National Institute for Health and Welfare, THL). The stakeholders involved in the preparation process represented widely the views of administration, world of research, labour market partners and other ECEC experts. The document was first of its kind which is why the publishing was followed by a broad consultation. The revised document was issued in 2005 based on the feedback received. At the local level, ECEC and administrative staff have the main responsibility for drafting the curricula, but also parents', children's and different cooperation partners' voice should be heard in the development and evaluation of curricula.

In line with the Finnish EduCare model, the curriculum guidelines stress the importance of care, upbringing and education as an integrated whole. The focus is on the overall well-being of the child.

The curriculum guidelines emphasise language development and joy of learning. There is

also a strong emphasis on playing, physical activities, artistic experiences and self-expression as well as exploration which are seen as ways of acting peculiar to children. These should be taken into account in planning and implementing activities and used as guiding principles in interactions with children. The curriculum guidelines also underline the importance of cooperation and partnership between the staff and parents for the well-being of the child.

The curriculum guidelines define six core content areas:

- mathematical orientation
- natural sciences orientation
- historical-societal orientation
- aesthetic orientation
- ethical
- religious-philosophical orientation.

The idea of orientations is to provide educators with a framework to organise their work and the learning environment. Children are not expected to study these as subjects, neither are there any performance requirements for children. Children's own interests and needs, as well as local circumstances should guide the content of education.

The aim is that the local curricula for ECEC, pre-primary education and basic education should form an integrated whole where different levels of education form a logical continuum from the children's point of view.

[National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland \(2003, rev. 2005\)](#)

### **Teaching methods and materials**

In early childhood education and care, the care, education and teaching form an integrated whole where the focus is on the overall well-being of the child. These dimensions are emphasised differently according to the child's age and the situation. Teaching and guidance is embedded in different situations and activities during the child's day in ECEC.

The curriculum guidelines use the term “ECEC environment” instead of “learning environment” to reflect the specificities of early childhood education and care. It is connected not only to learning situations but to care, play, and the nature and the environment at large. It also highlights the importance of various interaction relationships in ECEC. The ECEC environment is a whole comprising physical, psychological and social elements. It encompasses built indoor and outdoor facilities, the immediate neighbourhood, psychological and social settings as well as various materials and equipment. The aim is that children can participate in planning their own ECEC environment. The ECEC environment should enable and promote diverse ways of working, including activities in small groups.

Teachers may freely choose the teaching methods and materials as long as they are in line with the goals defined in steering documents and support learning and well-being of children. The staff in day care centres forms a multi-professional educator community, with staff carrying out different professional tasks and roles.

### ***Assessment in early childhood education and care other than pre-primary education***

In ECEC, there are no performance requirements for the child but the focus is on the overall well-being of the child. This is reflected also in the assessment. An individual ECEC plan is drawn up for each child in collaboration with the staff and parents. The plan takes into account the child’s experiences, interests and strengths, as well as needs for support and guidance. The ECEC staff is expected to systematically and consciously observe and document the child’s development and take account of their observations in planning the activities. The implementation of the plan is monitored and assessed regularly both among the staff and with the parents. The individual ECEC plan is a central instrument in the dialogue with parents and it must be done for each child attending day care according to legislation.

**Islanda**

Pre-primary education is the first level of the Icelandic educational system. Pre-primary schools in Iceland all operate in accordance with the [Pre-primary School Act](#) and they all follow an educational programme, the [National Curriculum Guide](#), issued by the [Ministry of Education, Science and Culture](#). Pre-primary education is not compulsory.

Day care in private homes is also an option for young children but is not considered to be part of the educational system. Supervision of day care in private homes is controlled by the local authorities.

The pre-primary school level is governed by the [Pre-primary School Act](#) of 2008. The Act's first article defines pre-primary schools as the first level of the educational system and under the Act, pre-primary schools are to provide education and care for children below the age at which compulsory education begins i.e. usually the year in which the child turns six years old. Children's interests and welfare shall be the primary mission of all pre-primary school activities and learning through play shall be encouraged in a creative environment.

According to the [Pre-primary School Act](#), the local municipalities are responsible for the operation of pre-primary schools. They are to establish and operate good pre-primary schools for children and manage the schools in accordance with the law. Furthermore their obligation is to organise specialist services for pre-primary schools i.e. to include support for pre-primary school children and their families, as well as support for the pre-primary school and its personnel. The municipalities can operate one specialist service for both pre-primary schools and compulsory schools.

Municipalities are also required to recruit pre-primary school education specialist to provide counselling and support to pre-primary schools regarding innovation and development in pre-primary school activities. They are to take care of monitoring pre-primary school operations and encourage cooperation between pre-primary schools as well as between pre-primary schools and other school levels.

The [Ministry of Education, Science and Culture](#) supports experiments and development projects and formulates a [National Curriculum Guide](#) for pre-primary schools. The National Curriculum Guide sets out the aims that pre-primary schools are to follow and describes the basic means and attitudes that apply in the education of young children.

The [Pre-primary School Act](#) defines its main aim as follows:

- to monitor and encourage children's general development in close cooperation with parents
- to provide systematic linguistic stimulation and contribute to common skills in the Icelandic language
- to provide children with mental, intellectual and physical care according to the needs of each individual, so that they may enjoy their childhood
- to encourage children's broad-mindedness and strengthen their moral values
- to lay the foundation necessary for children to become independent, autonomous, active and responsible participants in a democratic society which is undergoing rapid and continuous development
- to cultivate children's expressive and creative abilities with the aim of strengthening their self-esteem, health awareness, confidence and communication skills



**Bulgaria**

The main goal of pre-primary education is to ensure the child's development by using educational interaction. The ultimate aim of the kindergarten is to offer the necessary conditions for the development of each child's abilities and to make them ready for school.

ECEC is organized in two stages and appropriate programs. The system of pre-primary education includes children from the age of 3 to the age of 6/7. Besides the state-funded sector, which is prevalent, the private sector is also developing (see [Statistics on Organisation and Governance](#)).

Kindergarten attendance is optional from the age of 3 to the age of 5.

In 2003 with the amendment of the Public Educational Act (1999) was implemented compulsory preparatory group for the children in age 6 to 7 years. In 2010 with new amendment in the Act the age for compulsory attendance of the preparatory group was extended for the children from 5 to 7 y.o.

## ***Organisation of Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

Most kindergartens are separate institutions run by the municipalities. They have a day-care regime and are located in purpose-built premises. If there are only a few children, groups are formed within schools where pre-school groups are also organized. They work on a part-time basis and in shifts. Children in kindergartens are divided into groups according to age – from 3 to 4 years; 4 to 5 years, 5 to 6 years and 6 to 7 years. The preparatory group for the school includes 5 to 7 year old children. The age division is not absolutely obligatory and can in some circumstances vary. The children may be placed into mixed-age groups. There are 12 to 22 children per group. State kindergartens are opened where at least four but no more than eight groups are formed. In the creche institutions are formed groups for children in age from 3 months to 3 years. In kindergartens as institution could be formed and creche groups for the children in age from 10 months to 3 years. The kindergarten which unit chreches and kindergarten groups are Obedineni detski zavedenia (ODZ). The children have the right to leave the creche group on 1<sup>st</sup> of September in the year when they are up 3 y.o. (i.e. pre-primary age) or could leave earlier by the wish of the parents.

## **Admission Requirements**

The admission of children in kindergartens is managed by special Rules approved by the local authority. The Rules comprise the criteria, conditions and the special procedures governing the acceptance of children in the united full-day-care kindergarten and crèche day-care kindergarten. Parents who want to apply for their children's admittance in a local municipality kindergarten can do it by using the Internet-Based Registration System (IBRS). Registration can be done by Internet or locally in the kindergarten. Parents choose the kindergartens they want and then place them in an order of preference. Local authorities organize the classification of the parents' choices according to different sets of criteria – common and social. Pedagogical councils may also accept special additional criteria.

## **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

At kindergartens, children are distributed in 4 groups by age. The first group includes children aged from 3 to 4 years of age, the second group – from 4 or 5 years of age, the third group – from 5 or 6 years of age and the fourth group – from 6 to 7 years of age. As of 2010 the preparatory group begins with children from 5 to 7 years of age. Depending on the age group, an appropriate educational content is acquired, in compliance with the state educational requirements, and relevant methods of instruction are applied. Most of the kindergartens are independent institutions, which are established by the municipalities.

In a group in a kindergarten on full-day regime work 2 teachers on 2 shifts. They began to work in 1st group (3-4 y.o. children) and stay with them during the whole period to 4th group including when the children finish preparatory group on 7 y.o.

## **Organization of Time**

The educational interaction at half-day, full-day and weekly kindergartens, is carried out as a continuous process throughout the whole year. The parents can interrupt at their own discretion their children's attending the kindergarten for a certain period of time. The school year starts during the second half of September. During the rest of the time the pedagogical interaction continues as a permanent process of upbringing, including in the summer.

## **Organization of the Day and Week**

The time for organized activities for children is about 15-20 minutes for the early childhood from 2 to 3 years of age, 1st and 2nd group (4-5 years old) to 25-30 minutes for the preparatory group from 5 to 6/7 year old children (3rd and 4th group). For the rest of the day, children are involved in games, dances, foreign language learning, swimming, walks and sleep. The forms of organization of the pedagogical process are specific and differ from these at school. They correspond to the age peculiarities and abilities of children. The weekly intensity of the process varies according to age groups.

The programme for the compulsory preparatory group contents materials as sample for the compulsory forms of organisation in a half-day and full-day preparatory groups. They are distributed in 3 parts – pedagogical situations to the children with Bulgarian as family language, but non-attended kindergarten, the second module is for the children with Bulgarian as family language and attended kindergarten and the third model is for the children to who Bulgarian is not family language and they have not attended kindergarten. The educational fields Bulgarian language is adopted and for bilingual children who need of developing of the communicative and speaking skills.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activities**

The main issues concerning pre-primary education are regulated by the [Public Education Act \(1991\)](#) and the acts for its amendment, The Regulations on the Implementation of the PEA. [The Public Education Act](#) from 1991 provides for creation of both preparatory groups and classes, for the purpose of better preparation of children for their education at school. A step forward in the direction of granting equal start at school for all children has been made in the *Act of Amendment and Supplementation of the Public Education Act of 2002*. By virtue of this amendment of the 2003/2004 school year, all children over 6 years of age must attend the preparatory group. After subsequent amendment of the Act of 2010 the age was increased and currently includes preparatory group from 5 years old to 6/7 years old children in III and IV groups in kindergartens. This means that the preparatory group began two years before children entering the first grade in primary school.

The latter act entitles parents of children with special educational needs to choose which institution should educate their child amongst the mainstream kindergartens or the special kindergartens. The state educational requirement (*Regulation N 4/2000* for the pre-primary education and preparation and amendment from 2005) defines the study content of pre-primary education, presented by the attainable knowledge, skills and relations, which are assessed as a result of the education and training of children at kindergartens according to educational fields.

For the transition from pre-school education to primary education and enrollment to the 1<sup>st</sup> grade the children receive a special document – Certificate for completion of the preparatory group in the kindergarten with text “Finished preparatory group in ..... year”, signed and stamped by the principal of the kindergarten. In this certificate are described the dynamics of development, as well as his/her readiness or his/her uncompleted preparation for the school and recommendations in which fields the child should be directed as additional forms and activities. The text is “After finishing of the preparatory group in the kindergarten the child is with completely readiness or incompletely readiness for the 1<sup>st</sup> grade in school”.

This certificate is registered officially in the documents of the kindergarten and is necessary to be present by the entrance in 1<sup>st</sup> grade in the primary school.

### **Teaching Methods and Materials**

The education of children at kindergartens aims to develop vital concepts and practical skills and habits, which are very important for further studying. The successful acquisition of these concepts, skills and habits is guaranteed by a variety of interactive methods and contemporary pedagogical technologies within the expertise of pre-primary teachers.

A basic form of organizing pedagogical interaction is the pedagogical situation. In the preparatory groups the pedagogical situations are fixed in time – in terms of duration and week day, or non-fixed in time (but still compulsory) in terms of duration and week day.

Another well suited method useful for children's development is playing. By playing, children express different forms of behavior activities – intellectual, motorics and artistic and in the same time they begin to accumulate social experience. The teacher in the preparatory group stimulate the creative potential of the children in accordance with their individual abilities and interests and so that to ensure on this way self-expressing of the

children in a playing situation. Through the game the children re-create their environment and personal relationship in stimulated situation.

A basic form of organizing pedagogical interaction is **the pedagogical situation**. In the preparatory groups the pedagogical situations are instructive and are either fixed in time – in terms of duration and week day, or non-fixed in time (but still compulsory) in terms of duration and week day.

Another well suited method useful for children's development is **playing**. By playing, children become familiar with the world around them, and simulate that world in their games. This, in turn, enhances their knowledge and allows them to express themselves in various ways.

Kindergartens use teaching materials and learning aids approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as various audiovisual materials.

Everywhere, "the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science" is replaced by "Ministry of Education and Science."

The State ensures completely financing the set of educational aids for every child in the preparatory groups – from 5 to 6/7 years old (for the 3rd and 4th group) in all kindergartens in the country. There is huge variety of appliances, which are structured concerning the requirements of the state educational standards and programs, they are approved by the Ministry of Education and Science for each educational field - Bulgarian language, Mathematics, Social world, Natural world, Game culture, Artistic information and literature for children, Music, Arts, Construction-technical and every-day activities and Physical culture.

The teachers are completely free to choose the most appropriate for the group. The parents can buy only some additional appliances or some other materials and only in case that it is necessary.

The compulsory pre-primary preparation for school follows and approved program for educational fields Bulgarian language, developed on a module principle - pedagogical situations to the children with Bulgarian as family language, but non-attended kindergarten, the second module is for the children with Bulgarian as family language and attended kindergarten and the third model is for the children to who Bulgarian is not family language and they have not attended kindergarten.

The educational fields Bulgarian language is adopted and for bilingual children who need of developing of the communicative and speaking skills.

The children can learn foreign languages in kindergartens by wish of their parents and if there are possibilities to have a foreign language teacher as a part of the educational staff in the kindergarten.

## **Parental engagement**

According to the [Public Education Act](#) (1999)

Trusteeships shall be independent voluntary associations to support the development of and provision of facilities to schools, kindergartens

Trusteeships shall be established as not-for-profit legal entities acting for public benefit.

With a view to attaining their objectives, trusteeships shall:

- discuss and make proposals to the respective authorities for the development or resolving of current problems of kindergartens;
- assist the raising of additional financial and material resources for the - support the establishment and support of the facilities of kindergartens;
- participate in the selection of textbooks by the Teachers' Council to be used in the education of the children in kindergartens and provide, if possible, for their purchase;
- assist the organisation of the supply of food to pupils, the provision of transportation and the resolving of other social problems of children, pupils and teachers kindergartens;
- assist the development and implementation of educational programmes geared to the problems of children and pupils;
- assist the implementation of extracurricular forms, organised recreation, tourism and sports events with children and pupils;
- assist the involvement of parents in the organisation of leisure time of children and pupils;
- propose measures for the improvement of the activities of kindergartens;
- organise the general public to assist kindergartens;
- report violations in the public education system to the competent authorities;

- organise and support the training of parents on issues related to the upbringing and development of their children;
- assist socially disadvantaged children and pupils;
- assist commissions for combating anti-social behaviour of minors.

## Support for children with special educational needs and their parents

One of the main goals is - the children with special educational needs to be integrated in kindergartens and schools so that they can be completely socialized in a real educational environment.

Resource centers are created to support integrated education of children with special educational needs, state units - extracurricular educational institutions in the education system. The Resource centers function in all 28 regions in the country.

The Resource Center carries out activities in accordance with the state policy in the field of integrated education by supporting the successful integration and socialization of children and pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in the educational environment.

Specialists Resource Center support full integration of children and pupils with special educational needs in the educational and social environment by implementing corrective therapeutic activities with them, consulting with parents and teachers in consultation with teaching teams, implementation of activities to support the full inclusion of these children and students in public life.

Resource centers are funded by:

1. the state budget;
2. own incomes.

## Inclusive education

The project is funded by the Operational Programme "Human Resources Development", co-financed by the European Social Fund of the European Union, Beneficiary - The Ministry of Education and Science

### **Common goal**

To provide a supportive environment for equal access to education and open education system with the aim of inclusive education.

### Specific aims



- Early identification of children at risk of learning difficulties, and their successful inclusion in pre-primary and school education, successful socialization and integration.
- Provide a supportive environment of psychologists, resource teachers, speech therapists and/or other specialists for students and children deprived of parental care and using services from residential tip involved in the process of deinstitutionalization.

### **Activity 1**

Early assessment and prevention of learning difficulties in children of pre-primary age

Training of psychologists and speech therapists in the implementation of a screening test for children from 3 years of age, who have a risk of learning difficulties, in children, for which there are indications for the presence of learning disabilities .

Carry out the test by trained professionals - speech therapists and psychologists in all kindergartens with children 3 years of age and determination of the 25 pilot kindergartens in the country, which result from the application of the test groups were formed for children who are at risk of learning difficulties or are indications of the occurrence of learning difficulties.

Development of tests to determine the language development of children of 4 -, 5 - and 6-years old.

Training of 25 speech pilot kindergartens for the implementation of tests to determine the language development of children of 4 -, 5 - and 6- years old.

Approbation of the test at 25 pilot kindergartens.

Forming a team of speech therapists and psychologists, appointment and training of team members to work with groups of children who are at risk of learning difficulties or are indications of risk of learning disabilities in the developed sample programs.

### ***Assessment in Early Childhood Education and Care***

Children's achievements are evaluated through teacher observation, the products of children's creativity, and through games. Teachers inform parents about what their children have learned and about the products of their activities on a weekly basis. Two or three times a year in open lessons or in other form parents are directly shown the achievements of their children. In accordance with the educational aims and expected results the degree of acquisition of the learning content is envisaged to be assessed on two levels – entry level and exit level. The results are then entered in the group's register. In this register teachers record any changes in the physical, psychic and mental growth of children, as

well as children's achievements in the course of acquiring the compulsory educational content.

At the preparatory group or the preparatory class, the children are evaluated through conversation or respective tests on their level of command of Bulgarian (for those children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian) and for their general preparation for school. The teachers maintain direct contact with the parents and give recommendations, if there are gaps in the development and preparation of the children. At the end of the preparatory group for school every child's achievements are assessed and the problems and difficulties the child has are pointed out.

#### Methodology of children evaluation in a kindergarten preparatory group

After evaluating children's development, a conclusion is made about their abilities, achievements, skills and relation to all kinds of activities and potential abilities, etc. The summarized information allows for analyzing the logic behind the way the child changes. The evaluation should be concerned with children's reflective behavior and partially with their ability for self-evaluation.

The evaluation should be stimulating and showing the child's positive sides. It should also be well argued, to make note of both the difficulties and the achievements, to use encouragement which directs the child towards self-evaluation and to stimulate the need for development, learning and proactiveness. Evaluation should always foster a child's all known natural talents.

Goals: Attention to intellectual activity; independent orientation in the environment

Methods and ways for achievement of these goals are:

- Through play and verbal communication;
- Self-evaluation is not completely stable and in this case the evaluation of the teachers is very important to the children;
- Complex evaluation for the readiness of the children for school (in the end of the year);
- Psychological aspect of readiness - stage of command of the necessary working and learning habits.

Pedagogical aspect of readiness:

- Motivation;
- Physical condition;
- Intellectual abilities;
- Emotional maturity;
- Health condition.

Children receive a special document – **Certificate for completion** of the preparatory group in the kindergarten which states “Finished preparatory group in ..... year”, signed and stamped by the principal of the kindergarten. The certificate described the dynamics of the child, development of the child dynamics, as well as his/her readiness or uncompleted preparation for the school and recommendations in which fields the child should be directed, as well as additional forms and activities. The text says “After finishing of the preparatory group in the kindergarten the child is prepared or not yet prepared for the 1st grade in school”. This certificate is registered officially in the documents of the kindergarten and is necessary to be present for entrance in 1st grade in the primary school.

### ***Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care***

Sticking to the framework of the compulsory requirements for pre-primary education and training, innovative approaches in education are applied and work on international projects is being carried out in a number of kindergartens. This leads to enhancing the quality of education and enriching the technical facilities and conditions, to collaborating actively with scientific and research organizations and doing experimental work.

Additional pedagogical services can also be provided at kindergartens for additional payment and at the wish of parents. Intensive foreign language teaching and computer courses, music, dancing and different kinds of sports can also be provided. Greater innovativeness of teaching methods, better technical facilities and conditions, a variety of activities and a smaller number of children in a group are characteristic of the majority of private kindergartens.

Some kindergartens structured educational - learning process of alternative way f.e.

First educational level includes compulsory education according to the Ministry of Education and Science requirements.

Second level of education – includes upgraded information on each educational fields and educational initiatives for enriching horizons of children in all areas of human knowledge.

Third level includes development talents of children: work in the studios of fine arts and applied arts, studios and individual classes, dancing schools, theater schools, sports activities, summer and winter camps, green schools.

Organizing extracurricular events - children visit museums, exhibitions, theater performances, concerts, and thus have the opportunity to touch the relevant science and related arts.

Children are encouraged to learn about and express their inner world through the language of different arts - painting, sculpture, theater, music, dance, to develop their social skills and to be supported their adaptation and self-expression in the group;

Creating of choos for parents where the specialists and psychologists advise parents on the psychological development of children and their readiness for life and school.

Other forms associated the learning process through stimulation of the senses

- vision - through variety of illustrations and multimedia;
- ears - by listening to songs, rhymes and language;
- motor skills - through game approaches, dancing, drawing and writing etc.

For a better socialization of the child is recommended to visit sites and places for learning and educational purposes – zoo, museums, walking in the mountains, theatre.

There are created different structures for diagnosis, rehabilitation and correction of all types of communication disorders in children in pre-primary age. These structures work on programs including counseling, training and active involvement of parents in therapy and the process of integration of children with special educational needs. A variety of specific training therapy is used, based on the technique of psycho-motor perception therapy, puppet therapy, fairy-tale therapy, carried out by speech therapists, psychologists, special educators, and music teacher.

**Croazia**

Early Childhood Education and Care in the Republic of Croatia is an integral part of the system of character development, education and child care, and includes the programmes of character development, education, healthcare, nutrition and social care for children from the age of 6 months to school age implemented in kindergartens and, exceptionally, in other institutions and organizations.

Early Childhood Education and Care constitutes the first level of the educational system and, with the exception of pre-school program, is not compulsory for preschool children. It is divided into three educational cycles, based on the age of children: (1) from 6 months to one year of age, (2) from 1 to 3 years, (3) from 3 years of age to the start of primary education.

Early Childhood Education and Care is provided by kindergartens and other legal entities that have established educational programs for children aged from 6 months to primary school age in accordance with the provisions of the Preschool Education Act. A kindergarten is a preschool institution (with or without branches) providing organized forms of out-of-family education and care for preschool children.

Early Childhood Education and Care is provided in accordance with the developmental characteristics and needs of children, as well as with the social, cultural, religious and other needs of the family.

Educational activities at kindergartens are performed in Croatian language and Latin script, whereas early childhood education and care for children belonging to national minorities is provided in accordance with the Act and regulations governing the rights of national minorities.

A kindergarten can be established by the authorities of the Republic of Croatia, local and regional units of self-government, religious communities, and other legal and natural persons.

## **Focus of educational activities**

The focus of educational activities during the early childhood education and care is on encouraging full and healthy growth and development of children, and the development of all areas of the child's personality: physical, emotional, social, intellectual, moral and spiritual, in accordance with the child's developmental abilities. The education of preschool children is based on humanistic-developmental concept consisting of the following:

1. the idea of humanism (a child is a value in him/herself);
2. knowledge of the specific characteristics and principles of development of preschool children, and knowledge of human development as a whole;
3. knowledge of the characteristics of the out-of-family education of preschool children.

## **Principles of early childhood education and care**

The principles of early childhood education and care are as follows:

- to meet the child's basic physical needs is a basic prerequisite for the development as a whole;
- socio-emotional needs are equivalent to physical development, and all areas of development are in interaction;
- to ensure optimal conditions for development: flexible organization;
- a period of adjustment of the child to the kindergarten and re-adjustment (after absence);
- preparing children for school;
- preventing negative impacts on child + active protection;
- spontaneity as a working principle (always allow the child spontaneity);
- constant interaction child-adult;
- individual approach to child;
- to carefully design the space and material environment where the child resides;
- to flexibly organize the educational process, directed towards the child, not for the child;
- to respect the principles of development (age abilities + integrity of development opportunities);
- evaluation of the results of educational activities and conditions.

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 3 years***

Increasing number of children are entrusted by parents to nursery care at the age from 1 to 3 years, i.e. at the time when the intensity of growth and development is very distinct, and the child has already mastered some basic skills important for later life and the activity in the human community . Nurseries are an “extended arm” of mother and father. Children in nurseries have the opportunities and possibilities to find everything they need in order to grow psychologically and physically, and to form themselves in the social and human terms. This means that, in addition to the usual personal care, nurseries assume the obligation to provide the children with the following: incentives for the development of children's potentials; that every child therein is confirmed as a human being in a favourable atmosphere of safety and emotional connection with an adult; to satisfy their need for action, exploring, early methods of research in the company of other children that every individual will find stimulating.

The basis of the process of care and education of children in nurseries is the modification of the educational practices of educators (choice of activities, organization of space and planning). However, education and care of children in nurseries cannot be observed without the education and care of children at home. The cooperation between the family and the institution is required to achieve optimal results. The process of gathering information about the child includes involvement of parents, educators and other experts participating in the educational process, and they all have to cooperate, be flexible and open to the needs of the child. The whole process of care and education takes place in indoor and outdoor nursery areas. This environment should be safe, clean and inviting to children who are at the centre of the holistic approach. In such an environment, children are free to move around and explore, practice their abilities and skills; carry out freely their activities, whether they are initiated by children or educators. The holistic approach to care and education of children in nurseries involves connecting of all components. The fact is that a child is the most important in the educational process, that every child is different, but equally valuable. If adults who participate in the educational process respect this fact, the nurseries will be filled with creative children, children who learn quickly and look forward to independent attempts.



## **Geographical Accessibility**

Early childhood education and care is an important stage in the entire educational system. In this regard, in the Republic of Croatia, since 2004, important steps have been made in that part of the educational system and the development goals set out in the Educational Sector Development Plan 2005 - 2010 have been achieved, including the following: an increase in admission rates in pre-primary educational programs and an increase in the participation of children in preschool education programs in the year before they start primary school, as well as co-financing of preschool children included in the programs of public needs (children with disabilities, gifted children, children belonging to national minorities and children in pre-primary educational programs). The year 2013 saw the passing of the Act on Amendments to the Preschool Education Act, whereby, as of the 2014/2015 pedagogical year, pre-primary educational programs become mandatory for all children in the year prior to starting primary school, thereby contributing to a greater number of children attending the pre-primary educational programs.

## **Croatian National Educational Standard for Preschool Education and Care**

In addition, in early 2004, the work began on developing the Croatian National Educational Standard for Preschool Education and Care, which was adopted in 2008 with the aim of improving the education standards in preschool institutions. The document laid a solid foundation for further development and educational activities in preschool institutions. By ensuring a level playing field by the application of the provisions of the national educational standard, which regulates the minimum infrastructure, financial, material and human resources for the implementation and development of activities and the same conditions for a balanced development of the system, the same quality of education and care for all children in preschool institutions in the Republic of Croatia has been provided.

The National Educational Standard for Preschool Education and Care established the following:

1. programmes with respect to the duration and purpose;
2. early childhood education and care of children in general, and children with special needs (children with disabilities and gifted children);
3. early childhood education and care of children of Croatian citizens abroad;
4. early childhood education and care of children belonging to national minorities;

5. organization of the pre-primary classes;
6. the criteria for the number of children in educational groups;
7. the criteria for the number of educators, professional associates and other employees in the kindergarten;
8. measures for healthcare and nutrition of children in kindergarten;
9. the criteria for funding the kindergarten programmes;
10. material and financial working conditions;
11. kindergarten premises;
12. sanitary and technical requirements for the kindergarten premises;
13. the criteria for kindergarten equipment;
14. the criteria for didactic aids.

Fulfilling the criteria set up by the National Educational Standard for Preschool Education and Care is monitored systematically, in accordance with the feasibility coefficients, and each year an annual Implementation Report is drawn up and submitted to the Parliament.

### **Programmatic Orientation of Education and Care of Preschool Children**

The entire work in kindergartens in the Republic of Croatia is based on the two documents on educational activities - the "Programmatic Orientation of Education and Care of Preschool Children", i.e. on the "Concept of Development of the Early Childhood Education and Care", in which the basic starting points to work with preschool children are pointed out. In addition, the Act on Amendments to the Preschool Education Act (2013) stipulates the adoption of the National Curriculum for Early Childhood and Pre-Primary Education and Care. The public debate on the document in question was held in June 2014 and the adoption of the National Curriculum for Early Childhood and Pre-Primary Education and Care is currently underway.

The Programme Orientation of Education and Care of Preschool Children, and the Concept of Development of Early Childhood Education and Care, represent the professional basis for the implementation of various programmes of education of preschool children in organized out-of-family conditions. The Concept of Development of Early Childhood Education and Care, and the Programme Orientation of Education and Care of Preschool Children offer the possibility to create and implement different pedagogical concepts, as well as the openness and freedom in the application of new ideas in

pedagogical practice with respect to specificity, culture, customs, conditions and other elements that are important for the achievement of the educational process.

The Programme Orientation of Education and Care of Preschool Children is based on the compliance with the following principles:

- pluralism and freedom in applying the pedagogical ideas and concepts;
- differences with respect to the types and forms of programme implementation;
- society democratization towards the entities that are lawfully and legally defined as the programme implementers.

A broad humanistic approach, and the recognition of the priority status to the rules and modern scientific knowledge about child development promote the freedom of the programme implementers with respect to planning, programming and carrying out of the direct educational activities with preschool children.

In outlining the Programme Orientation, the scientific knowledge about the nature and efficiency of the programmes for preschool children has been respected, as well as the joint evaluation of the document promoters and practitioners on the level of the achieved pedagogical practices and the real prospects for its acceptance, which has been proposed in the form of guidelines for educational activities. At the same time, the Programme Orientation is expected to provide usability to all the factors that take care of the changes and the development of early childhood education and care, and especially to the creators and trainers that provide and exercise staff training programmes in preschool institutions.

Also, this document corresponds with the possibility of establishing a system of public accountability by monitoring and evaluating the contributions of individuals, institutions and activities as a whole. The application of the document requires systematic monitoring and evaluation of the achievements and changes in the educational practice, the application of organizational and other standards, legislation, development of various professional instructions for immediate pedagogical practices, and publication of information about innovations in the world.

### **Programs of Public Needs**

Pursuant to the Preschool Education Act, early childhood education and care is an integral part of the system of education and care, and is financed mainly by the budget of local and regional self-government units and the participation of parents in the cost of preschool

programmes in which their children are involved. Certain programmes of public needs (pre-primary educational programmes, special programmes for children with disabilities, and for children belonging to national minorities and for gifted children) are co-financed by the state budget.

Consequently, local and regional self-government units make programmes of public needs in preschool activities for their areas, and establish the criteria for programme funding by their budget, as well as the criteria for the participation of parents in the cost of the programmes. The ministry responsible for education establishes the criteria for funding of certain programmes by the state budget (programmes for children with disabilities, pre-primary educational programmes, programmes for children belonging to national minorities, programmes for gifted children).

Pursuant to Article 49 of the Preschool Education Act, each representative body of the county, i.e. of the City of Zagreb sets up the criteria for ensuring the funds to satisfy the public needs (programmes of public needs) in the area of early childhood education and care on the territory of a local and regional self-government unit, under which the establisher has the right and obligation to decide upon the needs and interests of the citizens in their area for organizing and implementing programmes of early childhood education and care for preschool children, and to meet those needs by establishing kindergartens.

The programmes of public needs in the area of early childhood education and care define the form, the scope, the quality and the method of meeting the public needs in early childhood education and care of preschool children.

The programmes of public needs, for which the funds are provided by the state budget, include the following:

1. regular programmes of care, education, training, healthcare, nutrition and social care of children of preschool age (hereinafter referred to as: regular programmes) and special programmes - all-day, half-day and shorter programmes;
2. pre-primary educational programmes;
3. other programmes important for the development of early childhood education and care.

The specified educational policy and the previously mentioned activities result in the achievement of the effect of the balanced development that provides the appropriate conditions for the growth and development of each child in the Republic of Croatia,

regardless of the part of the state where they live. After attending kindergarten or mandatory pre-primary educational programs every child should be prepared for inclusion in the school environment and the classroom obligations.

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institution**

Every year, the representative body of a local and regional self-government unit and the City of Zagreb publishes an annual call for admission of children to the early childhood educational programmes for every school year. The call for admission is, in general, announced on all kindergarten premises and on the website of the representative body. Alongside the call for admission, the admission application form is also made.

Accordingly, each kindergarten is obliged to prepare the implementing regulations governing the procedure for admission to kindergarten, the manner of organizing and implementing the early childhood educational programmes, the education and social care of preschool children, and the rights and duties of parents, i.e. guardians of children - beneficiaries of services in kindergarten.

In kindergarten, in general, the following programmes for preschool children are carried out:

1. regular programmes of care, education, training, healthcare, nutrition and social care of preschool children (hereinafter referred to as: regular programmes) in compliance with the working hours of parents and the needs of children;
2. pre-primary educational programme for children in the year before they start primary school, and for children with disabilities two years before they start primary school;
3. special programmes for children with disabilities and for children belonging to national minorities, alternative programmes, programmes of early learning of foreign languages, programmes of healthcare, sports, dance, music, art, drama and stage, IT, environmental, religious and others, designed to meet the special interests and needs of children.

Kindergarten can organize special all-day, half-day and shorter programmes, and other early childhood educational programmes in accordance with the interests and needs of children and the demands of parents, and the existence of favourable conditions in kindergarten, with the consent of the establisher.

In kindergartens the following educational programmes are carried out: regular programmes of care, education, training, healthcare, nutrition and social care of preschool children, which are adapted to the developmental needs of children and their abilities and skills; programmes for preschool children with disabilities; programmes for gifted preschool children; programmes for children belonging to national minorities; pre-primary educational programmes; programmes of early foreign language learning and other programmes of artistic, cultural, religious and sports content that are approved by the ministry responsible for education.

In the process of implementing the educational programmes, the kindergarten is bound to create favourable conditions for the growth and development of every child, and to supplement family education and use its openness to establish active cooperation with parents and immediate children's environment.

In kindergartens, the educational programmes for preschool children with disabilities are organized under special conditions, and in accordance with the programme issued by the Minister responsible for education. The type and degree of disability of the child, and the need for the creation of the appropriate conditions for care, education and protection of children with disabilities, at the proposal of the primary care physicians, are determined by an expert committee that is established under the legal act governing relations in the field of social care.

The educational activities in kindergartens are organized and carried out with children divided into groups with full-day, half-day, several-day attendance or a shortened day-attendance. The organization and implementation of educational activities in kindergartens are carried out pursuant to the National Educational Standard for Preschool Education and Care.

Pursuant to the Preschool Education Act, the priority admission to kindergartens, which are owned by the local and regional self-government units or by the state, is given to children of victims and disabled veterans of the Homeland War, children from families with three or more children, children of working parents, children with disabilities, children of single parents and children in foster care, children in the year before they start primary school and children of parents receiving children's allowance. The way of gaining priority admission of children to kindergarten is laid down in the decision of the kindergarten establisher.

## **Admission of Children to Kindergarten Educational Programmes**

The admission of children to kindergarten educational programmes is carried out in accordance with the annual admission plan adopted for each pedagogic year by the Governing Council of kindergarten, with the consent of the establisher. The right to admission to kindergarten educational programmes have the children of parents who reside in a particular area, and if there are vacant seats, children of parents who reside in another area can be admitted to particular programmes.

Kindergarten is bound, in accordance with its capacity, to primarily organize regular early childhood educational programmes for children residing on its territory and to ensure the priority admission to regular programmes as stipulated by the Preschool Education Act, the decision of the establisher and the previously mentioned implementing regulation. The priority admission within the planned number of seats available per age group is given to a child with a higher aggregate score. If more children achieve the same number of points, the priority admission is determined by the Kindergarten Admission Committee based on the assessment of the expert team on the mental and physical status and the needs of the child for the educational programmes in question as well as the conditions that kindergarten can offer. If the expert team, based on documentation of specific developmental and/or medical needs of the child and the initial conversation with the parents, i.e. the guardians of the child, in the presence of the child, finds that these needs cannot be met within the regular programme, the Admission Committee will reject the child's application for admission to the regular programme and suggest another appropriate programme that kindergarten can offer.

A parent, i.e. a guardian of the child is required to submit to kindergarten evidence of the facts essential to gain priority admission to kindergarten. Children with disabilities are not subject to the scoring procedure. The kindergarten admission of children with disabilities is decided upon by the Admission Committee based on the documentation and assessment of an expert team on the mental and physical condition and the needs of the child for the educational programmes and the conditions that kindergarten can offer. A parent is required to submit to kindergarten the evaluation and opinion of the body of expert witnesses or the decision of the Social Welfare Centre indicating the existence of disabilities in the development of the child, and assume the obligation to respond to the invitation of the kindergarten to hear the opinion of the expert team of the existence of the conditions for the integration of the child in regular programmes, inclusion in a special educational group with a special programme for children with disabilities or inclusion in

another appropriate programme that kindergarten can offer. Children living in extremely difficult social and health conditions are not subject to the scoring procedure. The admission of a child living in extremely difficult social and health conditions is decided upon by the kindergarten Admission Committee based on the recommendations of the Social Welfare Centre and the assessment of the expert team on the mental and physical condition and the needs of the child for educational programmes and the conditions that kindergarten can offer.

## **Admission Procedure**

In accordance with the admission plan, every year, the kindergarten publishes annual notice of admission of children to early childhood educational programmes. Every year, the establisher, in general, determines the time and the conditions for the admission to kindergarten by publishing a joint notice of admission of children to kindergarten and announcing it on notice boards of all kindergarten premises and on the website of the establisher. Along with the notice of admission, the kindergarten announces detailed information on all programmes offered by the kindergarten in accordance with the admission plan.

A parent, i.e. a guardian of a child, in the time period defined by the establisher, applies for the admission of the child to a particular educational programme in the preschool institution, in general, nearest to their place of residence, i.e. if there exists interest for the educational programmes offered by that kindergarten.

Along with the application for admission, a parent, i.e. a guardian also encloses the following certificates:

1. birth certificate, or excerpt from the Birth Register, or certificate containing the data on the birth of a child, or written consent of parents allowing kindergarten to check the data on the birth of the child in the Birth Register;
2. certificate of residency of the child and a copy of the identity cards of parents;
3. evidence of the facts essential to gain priority admission to kindergarten.

The procedure for admission of children to kindergarten is carried out by the Admission Committee appointed by the kindergarten Governing Council. The Governing Council appoints the chairman and two members of the Committee from among the kindergarten educators and professional associates of the kindergarten for the period of two years. The



Committee decides on the applications for admission of children to educational programmes based on the results of a comprehensive insight into the development and the needs of each child, analyses of the submitted documentation, and the results of the initial interview with parents, i.e. guardians, in the presence of children, conducted by the members of the expert and development team, with a possibility to consult external experts in order to provide opinions and data relevant in the process of decision making.

Within a period set by the establisher (in general, a month after the deadline for submission of admission applications), the Committee is bound to announce on the notice boards of all kindergarten premises the admission results showing information on the accepted admission applications, rejected admission applications and the remaining available seats in kindergarten after obtaining the admission results. Thereafter, the kindergarten director is bound to submit to the establisher the information on the following data: the number of applications received; the admission applications accepted; the admission applications rejected - including the grounds for rejection; and the remaining available seats in kindergarten after obtaining the admission results. On the basis of the consent given by the establisher, the Committee notifies parents, i.e. guardians of children of the possibilities of subsequent admission to kindergarten under certain conditions. The kindergarten submits a report on the carried admission procedure to the establisher.

A parent, i.e. a guardian of the child is bound to conclude a contract on the implementation of the programme with the kindergarten within one month as of the date of the announcement of the admission results, and exceptionally by 1 September of the current year.

Children admitted to kindergarten following the notice of admission start attending the educational programme as of 1 September of the current year, unless otherwise determined. Before the child starts attending the programme, a parent, i.e. a guardian is bound to submit to kindergarten a certificate of pre-kindergarten systematic medical examination of the child conducted by a competent physician.

Children who, following the notice of admission, are not admitted to kindergarten, are placed on the priority waiting list, and are admitted to kindergarten during the year, in case vacant seats occur in the appropriate educational groups or in case of expanding the capacities of the kindergarten (by opening new kindergarten facilities, establishing new educational groups).

If there are no children on the priority waiting list or if a parent, i.e. guardian of a child does not respond to kindergarten notice of a vacant seat in kindergarten, the kindergarten may also admit the children whose parents, i.e. guardians did not participate in the admission procedure following the notice of admission.

### **Rights and Obligations of Kindergarten Service Users**

A parent, i.e. a guardian of a child has the following rights:

- to be acquainted with the programme for the child and the conditions under which it is carried out, and in that respect with the rights and obligations of service users, before the implementation of the programme;
- to be regularly informed of developments and progress of the child through individual and parent meetings, and to be involved in various forms of cooperation between parents and kindergarten;
- to submit applications for the exercise and protection of the individual rights and needs of the child to the competent kindergarten authorities;
- to participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of educational programmes for children;
- to participate in the management of kindergarten in the manner provided by law and the kindergarten statute, to elect and be elected parent representative of service users in the Governing Council of kindergarten.

A parent, i.e. a guardian of a child has the following obligations:

- to submit a certificate of pre-kindergarten systematic medical examination of the child conducted by a competent physician before the beginning of the implementation of the programme, as well as additional health certificate in the case of health changes that occurred after conducting the regular pre-kindergarten medical examination;
- to submit full documentation and information on the characteristics and needs of the child that are important to select an appropriate programme for the child as well as to provide for the child's safety and health during the programme implementation;
- to promptly report to the kindergarten on the changes in the development status of the child and cooperate with kindergarten in case of introducing changes to the programme;

- in case of significant changes in the health condition or development status of the child that is noticed by the kindergarten expert team during the programme implementation, a parent, i.e. guardian is obliged to have the child undergo the necessary tests and obtain the opinion of the competent services, and to participate in the programme of pedagogical observation of the child and the establishment of a new custom individualized programme, if it is in the interest of development needs and safety of the child, i.e. safety and the implementation of educational programme for other children;
- to personally bring and take their child from the educational group, or submit a written notification to the kindergarten educator of an adult person authorized to do this;
- to inform the child's kindergarten educator of the reasons for the absence of the child within the period of 24 hours;
- not to bring a sick child to kindergarten, and after completion of the medical treatment to submit a certificate of the performed health examination from the competent physician, which indicates that the child is able to attend the kindergarten;
- after child's absence from kindergarten for other reasons for more than 60 days, to submit a certificate of the performed health examination from the competent physician, which indicates that the child is able to attend kindergarten;
- to respond to invitations to attend parent meetings and other forms of cooperation of parents with kindergarten in order to monitor the development and progress of the child;
- to pay determined amount of parental participation in the cost of the programme;
- to submit to kindergarten a written notice of child's withdrawal from kindergarten at least 15 days before withdrawal, and prove the settlement of all costs incurred to the date of withdrawal;
- to perform other duties of service users specified in the internal regulations of kindergarten.

Kindergarten has the following obligations:

- to set up work with children in nursery and kindergarten educational groups in accordance with the prescribed programme and the standard of early childhood education;
- to cooperate with the child's family in order to monitor the development and progress of the child;

- to provide regular updates to the service users and ensure their participation in the management of kindergarten in accordance with law and the kindergarten statute;
- to enable the protection of individual rights of service users by filing complaints or requests to the Governing Council.

### **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Children who reach one year of age by 31 August of the current year (and under certain conditions, children who reach 6 to 11 months by 31 August of the current year) to the age they start attending primary school, are eligible to enter the regular educational programmes in the five-day working week.

Children in the year before they start primary school (and children with disabilities two years before they start primary school), who do not participate in the regular programmes, are eligible to enter the preschool programme (250 hours per a year).

Children with particular disabilities, children belonging to national minorities, and children with special interests and needs are eligible to enter the following special programmes: alternative programmes – Montessori programme, Waldorf programme, and other special 10-hour and half-day programmes of early foreign language learning, healthcare, sports, dance, music, art, drama and stage, IT, environment, religion, etc.

Kindergartens offering verified programmes, also offer special shorter programmes of early foreign language learning, healthcare, sports, dance, music, art, drama and stage, IT, environment, religion and other developmentally and socially oriented programmes.

### **Criteria for the Number of Children in Educational Groups**

The size of the kindergarten depending on the number of educational groups, the number of children in educational groups, the age of children in particular educational groups, the size of living room premises, the equipment norms and the norms of immediate activities for educators in the group are regulated by the Minister for Education, in accordance with the National Educational Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care.

Educational group is a basic unit in which various programmes for preschool children are implemented. Educational groups are organized with respect to the age of children, type and duration of the programme, abilities, needs and interests of children and parents.

Kindergarten of optimal size has 17-20 educational groups in regular programmes or 340-400 children in total. Kindergarten with branches of optimal size has 30 educational groups or 600 children. Kindergarten may have at least one educational group with a maximum of 25 children.

The number of children in an educational group in the regular programme is established depending on the age of children and the number of children with disabilities included in the educational group. Educational group of children in the regular programme at the age from 6 to 12 months may include up to 5 children maximum. Educational group of children in the regular programme at the age from 13 to 18 months may include a maximum of 8 children, whereas educational group of children at the age from 19 to 24 months may include up to 12 children. In the third year of age, the group may include up to 14 children, in the fourth year up to 18 children, in the fifth year up to 20 children, in the sixth year up to 23 children, and in the seventh year to primary school age up to 25 children.

Based on the opinion of the kindergarten professional associates, only one child with mild disabilities may be included in the educational group. In such case, the number of children in the group is reduced by two children.

An educational group may include only one child with greater or combined disabilities, if there is an insufficient number of children to organize an educational group with a special programme. In such case, the number of children in the group is reduced by four children.

A mixed educational group of children in the regular programme at the age from 1 to 2 years may include up to 10 children, at the age from 1 to 3 years up to 12 children, at the age from 3 years to school age up to 20 children, and at the age from 4 years until the start of primary school up to 22 children.

The number of children with disabilities in educational groups with special programmes in kindergartens and in special institutions is established depending on the age of children and the type of disabilities. An educational group of children with the same disability may include the following number of children: at the age from 1 to 2 years up to 3 children, at the age from 2 to 4 years up to 5 children, at the age from 3 to 7 years up to 5 children, and at the age from 4 to 7 up to 7 children maximum.

An educational group of children with autism, children of different age, and children with different types of disability may include the following number of children: at the age from 1 to 2 years up to 2 children, at the age from 2 to 5 years up to 3 children, at the age from 3 to 7 years up to 3 children, at the age from 6 to 7 years up to 4 children.

In exceptional cases, depending on the operating conditions, the needs of children and parents, the introduction of experimental programmes etc., kindergarten may include, with the consent of the establisher, a smaller number of children in an educational group than the number of children in educational groups stipulated by the National Educational Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care.

### **Kindergarten - Spatial and Technical Requirements**

Kindergarten buildings are built and equipped in accordance with the National Educational Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care, standards for the construction and furnishing of kindergartens, and laws, by-laws and technical regulations in construction and other areas of importance to work and stay in the premises of the kindergarten.

Kindergarten building has an optimum capacity of 200 children. Maximum capacity of kindergarten with branches is 600 children.

Kindergarten building capacity is derived from the number of preschool children in the projected catchment area, i.e. from the planned kindergarten coverage of children. Kindergarten distance from the place of residence in general is up to 1,000m maximum.

Kindergarten building should provide pedagogical and aesthetic environment stimulating for the education and care of preschool children at the age from 6 months to the school age (nursery and kindergarten age), and meet all sanitary and technical requirements, and the fundamental ecological and aesthetic criteria.

The size of the land necessary for the construction of kindergarten building and the formation of access roads, playgrounds, open areas, the court yard and parking lots should be at least 30 m<sup>2</sup> per child, and if the kindergarten is located near the existing available green areas, at least 15 m<sup>2</sup> per child.

## Organization of Time

### Education and Care Programs

With regard to duration, the programmes of education and care may be as follows:

- full-day programmes, lasting 7 to 10 hours per day;
- half-day programmes, lasting 4 to 6 hours per day;
- several-day programmes, lasting from 1 to 10 days (excursion programmes, summer programmes and winter programmes);
- programmes lasting up to 3 hours.

Programmes of education and care for preschool children are regular, special and alternative educational programmes.

**Regular programs** are comprehensive developmental programmes of care and education for children at the age from 6 months to the school age, which are of various duration and are designed to meet the children's needs and the needs of their parents.

**Special programs** include the following: programmes of early foreign language learning, music programmes, art programmes, drama and theatre programmes, IT programmes, sports programmes and programmes of rhythm and dance, environmental programmes and educational programmes for sustainable development, religious programmes, health educational programmes, programmes for children with special healthcare needs (children with acute illnesses and needs, children with chronic illnesses, children affected by body weight disorder, endocrine and other disorders), programmes of work with parents, prevention programmes, safety programmes, and intervention, compensation and rehabilitation programmes.

**Alternative educational programmes** are programmes based on the concepts of e.g. Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, Agazzi sisters, Jurgen Zimmer, Reggio concept, etc.

### Public Needs Programs

Programmes of public needs are organized and implemented for children with disabilities, gifted children, children of Croatian citizens abroad, children belonging to national minorities, and children in the year before they start primary school, who have not been covered by the regular programme of preschool education (pre-primary educational programme).

Every kindergarten develops its own educational programme according to its specificities (culture, tradition, geographical specificities, etc.).

Kindergarten performs activities based on the annual curriculum adopted for a school year lasting from 1 September of the current year until 31 August of the following year. The annual curriculum for the school year is adopted by the Governing Council of a kindergarten by 30 September. The annual curriculum includes programmes of educational activities, programmes of child healthcare, hygiene and nutrition, social welfare programmes, and other programmes that kindergarten implements in consultation with parents.

Work with preschool children is organized in nursery and kindergarten educational groups. Early childhood educational programmes can be implemented in primary schools, as playrooms in libraries and in healthcare institutions, social institutions, cultural institutions, sports institutions and associations.

Early childhood educational programme and activities of an organizational unit within a legal entity are managed by an educator in accordance with law, the founding act and the Statute of the legal person. Special conditions and criteria for the programme implementation are regulated by the Minister responsible for education. Meeting the conditions for the commencement of work and the implementation of programmes is established by a county office in its decision, i.e. by the office of the City of Zagreb competent for educational activities.

Working hours of preschool institutions are from 7 am till 17 pm, but, in general, they are adjusted to the identified needs of parents.

Work on Saturdays, in general, is organized on the basis of prior notification of at least five children at locations with the minimum expenses for children, following the joint agreement of preschool institutions in each city area. According to the needs of the family, the programmes can be organized as afternoon programmes, several-day programmes and weekend programmes. In accordance with the educational standards, during the summer and on other occasions when the number of present children is reduced, preschool institutions organize work on a smaller number of locations.



## **Organization of the Day and Week**

Working hours of preschool institutions are from 7 am till 17 pm, but, in general, they are adjusted to the identified needs of parents.

Early childhood education is divided into three educational cycles, based on the age of children: (1) from 6 months to one year of age, (2) from 1 to 3 years, (3) from 3 years of age to the start of primary education.

The following table shows an example of work of a kindergarten during a working week.

Daily kindergarten work schedule

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 3 years***

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activities**

The expert basis for the implementation of various programmes of education of preschool children is represented by the following documents: “Programme Orientation of Education and Care of Preschool Children”, “ Concept of Development of Early Childhood Education and Care” and the National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education and General Compulsory and Secondary Education.

The education of preschool children is based on a humanistic and developmental concept, consisting of the following:

- the idea of humanism;
- knowledge of the specific characteristics and principles of development of preschool children, and knowledge of human development as a whole;
- knowledge of the characteristics of out-of-family education of preschool children.

The starting points of the humanistic and developmental concept of education of preschool children are the following notions and commitments:

- the child is a value by himself/herself, that should be accepted in all its uniqueness, and also as the member of the family with its characteristics and the system of values;
- the child has special rights expressed in the Declaration on the Rights of the Child, i.e. the right to live in a healthy environment; the right, without exception or

discrimination, to have the society provide them with the best possible conditions for growth, development and learning, in order to develop harmoniously in physical, reasonable, moral and social terms, in conditions of freedom, dignity, acceptance, love and understanding, and as much as possible under the umbrella of parental love, care and responsibility; and the right to have all children with disabilities get educated in accordance with their particular needs;

- to respect the child's dignity in the process of care and education, and constantly develop their positive identity (self-esteem).

The humanistic and developmental concept requires the application of democratic principles in the education and care of preschool children, since it starts from the idea of the value of democratic relations among the people with whom the child is encountered in their environment.

The application of such principles is supported by the notions of the active and creative nature of the child, and the fact that their development is decisively influenced by the quality of relations with the educators. A child in a non-authoritarian democratic environment and relationships has better conditions and incentives for their own activities and the overall development, especially for the development of creative attributes and capabilities. Democratic relations between the educators and children and other adults in the child's environment allow early perceiving of the value of such relationships and early learning of the appropriate behaviour.

The humanistic and developmental concept opens up possibilities of improving the quality of a child's life as a whole, including the expression, realization and maximum development of individual capacities of the child.

In the education of a preschool child it is essential to know that the child is a qualitatively different being from an adult, and that preschool age is a fundamental stage of human development in which the basic characteristics and the physical and mental capabilities are manifested and developed in a specific way. At that age, the development determines the range of overall development in adulthood, and given that it depends much on the environmental conditions and influences, and the activities of the child, it emphasizes the importance of the specific tasks of early childhood education and care, when compared to education at a later age.

Among the prevailing characteristics of preschoolers, one can single out the following important human, and especially creative, potentials of the child:

- curious, active creative attitude towards the environment;
- comprehensive (complex) forms of perception (through all sensory modalities) and imagination (fancying, inventing, imagination);
- development of speech, basic forms of human communication;
- development of sociability, compassion (empathy), and self-control, which, among other effects and characteristics of the child, enables the child to adopt behaviours in accordance with some of the basic requirements of life in the community (socialization);
- sensibility for music, poetic words, different forms of expression, etc.

The main role of the early childhood education is to contribute to the favourable overall development of the child's personality and the quality of their life. Early childhood education guidance contributes to the favourable overall development of the child, it requires, among other things, stronger connections of family and out-of-family education of the child, a certain similarity between out-of-family and good family education as well as greater cooperation, broadly defined, general, open and flexible out-of-family programme of child's education providing, in general, every child, already after the first year of life, with the following favourable conditions for the development:

1. meeting the basic physical needs and protecting the child's life and health;
2. satisfying the need for safety, tenderness and love of parents and other persons with whom the child meets;
3. meeting the needs for diverse stimulation provided by the changing environment and the environment rich in experiences and objects;
4. meeting the needs for communication reciprocity (provided by sensitivity and active adult attitude towards the child).

Out-of-family education of preschool children should have as many characteristics of good family education as possible, generate and develop rapport, positive emotional climate, free communication, durable bonds with adults and other children, active participation of children in a variety of important life activities with adults, etc.

Therefore, it is important that a child in kindergarten and other forms of out-of-family life has possibilities to successfully establish and expand emotional and social bonds, high-quality relationships with adults and children in the immediate stimulating environment. In this interaction the child can develop different kinds of activities.

In this regard, there is a number of educational programmes for preschool children in kindergartens made with respect to the type and duration. Programmes are made by kindergartens and approved by the ministry responsible for education.

### **Teaching Methods and Materials**

Modern, high-quality educator is successful in direct educational work with children, in the professional pedagogical work and is committed to continuing professional development.

The basic starting points for working with preschool children, as outlined in the Programme Orientation of Education, are, in the first place, appreciation and respect for the child's needs and developmental abilities, their satisfaction, encouragement and development in the spirit of humanistic values. Apart from knowing the child and his needs, other factors important for work with children are the motivation of educators, their knowledge and meeting of personal needs in mutual interactions.

Another important backbone of the Programme Orientation is the establishment of conditions to improve the quality of life and meeting of the child's needs.

In this context, we refer to the organization of space, the creation of complex stimulating environment, flexible organization of time, and activities. The characteristics of a contemporary educator in the immediate educational work are as follows: he is methodically creative; applies modern working forms and methods, uses contemporary sources of knowledge to stimulate the child's overall mental and physical development; achieves results in the educational work with children; promotes human rights, especially the rights of the child and takes care of the healthy environment; cooperates with educators, i.e. professional associates, parents and representatives of the kindergarten social environment. During all activities the conditions are provided for children's active establishment of interaction with the material and social environment, whose result is the acquiring of immediate experiences.

There are spontaneous and planned activities. In both the educator manages the current needs of the child, his development opportunities, in order to achieve integrative effects on the overall development. These settings require from educators particular knowledge of the child development and the needs of preschool children, individual differences and characteristics of each individual child, ways of observing the child's behaviour, such as: skills to recognize a favourable moment for the establishment of trust and friendship with a

child, creating a sense of safety, recognizing the time of child's readiness to adopt something new, helping the child in creating a positive image of themselves. The educator affects the children with his personality: warmth, acceptance of others, caring for others. The aim is primarily to satisfy the child's physical needs for food, rest, movement, as a prerequisite to satisfy the socio-emotional, cognitive, and other needs. The educator must have professional education, the access to training, resource materials, literature, seminars, etc.

In carrying out the educational duties, the teamwork, in which educators share information, strategies and support, is of great help. In this sense, the partnership of educators and professional associates in kindergarten (psychologists, pedagogues, speech therapists, director) is very important. The modern educator is an animator (knows how to draw child's attention), a commentator, i.e. explains ambiguities, a therapist, an evaluator, a teacher, an observer, a good organizer and also needs to have a good knowledge of psychological and physical characteristics and capacities of children of this age. He is also a reflective practitioner, observing children, has insight into their work, constantly trying out and finding out new possibilities for educational activities, identifies and creates new educational situations. A successful educator is aware of the differences in thinking of children, carefully listens to what children say or do not say, responds to it. He enables children to acquire knowledge at their own personal pace without imposing his personal style of learning. He raises questions that motivate children, questions are open to the children's opinions, encourages them to talk, expressing ideas and raising new questions. He creates an environment that offers numerous opportunities for experimenting with objects, ideas and active construction of their knowledge. The educator is reasonable, well-mannered with decorum, optimistic, with a positive attitude toward the world, seeing other people as remarkable, friendly and worth the effort. He needs a broad ethical, educational and moral maturity, strong character to govern his actions, to have developed a sense of responsibility and dignity, and to respect the personality of the young people.

Aids for working with children, i.e. for programme implementation, among others, may include the following: audio-visual aids: cd-radio, television and DVD, display panels etc., means of artistic expression, and speech and theatrical expression: picture books, spelling books, occasional prose texts and lyrics, encyclopedias, books with reproductions of the masters of fine art, Croatian and important world historical and cultural monuments, images of living communities, means of musical expression and creation: some musical instruments, rattles, percussion, drum, triangles, audio recordings of songs, musical

fragments, means of research: disposed and waste materials, microscopes, magnifiers, scales, meter, thermometer, barometer, magnets, etc., and various other materials.

### **References:**

- Preschool Education Act (Official Gazette, Nos. 10/97 and 107/07)
- Croatian National Educational Standard for Preschool Education (Official Gazette, Nos. 63/08. and 90/10.)
- Programme Orientation of Education and Care of Preschool Children (Official Gazette of the Ministry of Culture, No. 7-8/91)
- National Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education and General Compulsory and Secondary Education (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2011)

### ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 3 years***

Recognising the need for functional connectivity of all employees of the educational system in a single unit, a need occurred for a clearer definition of the early childhood education and care, and the approach to the planning, monitoring and evaluation of the educational process as a specific integration part in the educational system.

The educational process should provide each child with the most appropriate programme that is firmly connected with the parents and the child's environment as a whole. Contemporary designed educational system is based on the developmental and integration approach, planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation of the educational process in kindergarten, and has to proceed from the general education settings of individuality, whose scope includes the development of an individual in accordance with the individual's needs, abilities, opportunities, and enabling the individual for a certain degree of their own development as a whole, taking into account the child's age, the specificities of the child's development prospects and the child's individual needs. In this way, the early childhood education develops as an integral part of a unified educational system, and in the implementation of planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation of the educational process by providing autonomy, independence and freedom, i.e. stimulation of freedom of the programme implementers in the process of planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation of direct educational work with preschool children.

The activity that promotes one dimension of development affects other dimensions, because the child is a whole person, and no matter how certain characteristics are developed (by the age standards), one should always encourage the further development of the characteristics. The basic organizational form of the programme implementation is kindergarten, whereas the strategies of planning and evaluation of the educational process in kindergarten are as follows:

- **long-term planning** - a team of educators makes plans throughout the whole year (common essential tasks, projects, etc.), the concretization in the orientation (three-month) plan - parts of the activities (themes), and developmental tasks (by areas: motor skills, social and emotional development, cognition , communication);
- **short-term planning** – weekly planning is the characteristic of activities (what) according to the sets of activities from the orientation plan, whereas the way of of activity implementation (where, what, how) is defined in relation to the set tasks;
- **daily plan** - only complements the weekly plan, by providing incentives for a particular activity or the set of activities, the planned incentives are given in advance, whereas spontaneous incentives are added for the spontaneously created activities of children. In fact, the daily plan serves to evaluate the effects of the activity on children (how many children participated in the activity, specificities of children's behaviour, specific contributions of each child). The evaluation of curriculum implementation (three-month curriculum); the comments are made on the number of children in groups, the effects of changes on financial, organizational and other conditions are stated, the implemented activities and contents for children that were especially valuable and attractive are paid special attention to, the results of collaboration with parents are stated, the achievements of children are assessed.

It is important to have a comprehensive understanding of the child's developmental characteristics in order to ensure the optimal conditions for the development of the child. The meaning of integration is to provide every child with the most suitable programme of education firmly connected to parents and the child's environment. The ultimate goal of this approach to the planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation of the educational process is to train the child, help him/her to independently build and acquire knowledge.

Accordingly, preschool institutions and institutions providing early childhood education are required to monitor the quality of work through the process of evaluation and self-evaluation. The external evaluation of work is performed by the competent Ministry and the establisher, whereas the self-evaluation is performed by the preschool institutions. A public institution in the Republic of Croatia that performs external evaluation of the educational

system at the national level is the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education, whose role, along with the external evaluation of education, is to provide support to educational institutions in the projects of quality assurance, i.e. projects of self-evaluation. With the help of the National Centre, the self-evaluation has been a part of grammar school and vocational school programmes since 2006, and as of 2008 it has been a part of the primary school programmes. Along with the methodological framework, the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education provides the educational institutions with advisory assistance in improving the quality of education.

Based on the implementation practice of self-evaluation projects, i.e. the quality improvement on the primary and secondary school level, the need occurred for the introduction of self-evaluation on the level of early childhood education. In this regard, in 2010 the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education established the Committee for the development of the methodology and instruments for monitoring the quality of work of early childhood and pre-primary educational institutions, consisting of various experts, ranging from university professors to practitioners who have proven themselves through their work in the field of early childhood education.

One of the first tasks of the Committee was to define the quality of early childhood and pre-primary educational institutions, the quality areas of work and the associated indicators. A quality institution of early childhood and pre-primary education is defined as one that promotes the growth and development of each child, parents, staff and the community in which it operates. The quality areas of work of the institution refer to the strategy of early educational institution, i.e. to the mission, vision and values of the institution, its organizational management, culture, spatial and material, and technical working conditions, health and hygienic working conditions and safety, human resources, cooperation with the narrow and the wider social environment, and the process of monitoring and evaluation. For each quality area of work, guidelines of key quality indicators, which are in line with the current knowledge in the field of early childhood education, have been developed. After defining the key quality areas of work, the key players in the process of monitoring and assurance of the quality of work of the early childhood and pre-primary educational institution have been defined: director, Governing Council, educators, professional associates, administrative, technical and support staff, and parents.



After defining the key elements of the quality assurance process, the Committee has elaborated instruments and methodology for monitoring the quality of work of early childhood and pre-primary educational institutions.

The holder of the process of self-evaluation at the level of institution is the Quality Team, which brings together the director of the institution and the representatives of the Governing Council, educators, professional associates, administrative, technical and support staff, parents and the local community. The role of the Quality Team is to inform the key players of the quality assurance process, the implementation of the process of self-evaluation of the National Centre for External Evaluation and monitoring of the implementation of the development plan, i.e. improving the quality of the institution.

The proposed model of self-evaluation of early childhood and pre-primary educational institutions was tested through a pilot project in 14 institutions of early childhood and pre-primary education. The aim of the pilot project was to test the prepared methodology, instruments and supporting materials in real conditions of the early childhood and pre-primary educational institutions. Pilot project of the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education resulted in a total of 14 development plans for early childhood and pre-primary educational institutions. The experiences of the institutions that participated in the pilot project were very positive and encouraging for further work on improving the quality of the institutions of early childhood and pre-primary education.

The need for a systematic introduction of the self-evaluation process at the national level is justified by the following:

- the need for a systematic approach to quality improvement at all educational levels,
- the legal framework that includes self-evaluation of the institutions for early childhood education,
- the protective function of the quality assurance for the child, whereby every child has the right to quality care and quality start,
- raising awareness of quality standards of all key players of early childhood education,
- continued work on quality at all levels,
- improving the quality of the educational system,
- setting guidelines for the improvement of educational policy.

**References:**

- Preschool Education Act (Official Gazette, Nos. 10/97 and 107/07)

- Act on the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education (Official Gazette, No. 151/4)
- School Inspection Act (Official Gazette, Nos. 50/95 and 73/97)
- Croatian National Educational Standard for Preschool Education (Official Gazette, Nos. 63/08 and 90/10)
- Programme Orientation of Education and Care of Preschool Children (Official Gazette of the Ministry of Culture, No. 7-8/91)
- Ordinance on the Methods of Disposal of the State Budget Funds and the Criteria for the Co-financing of Preschool Educational Programmes (Official Gazette, No. 134/97)
- Ordinance on the Forms and Content of Pedagogical Documentation and the Records of Children in Kindergarten (Official Gazette, No. 83/01)

**Cipro**

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is organised in two discrete systems based on the children's age, namely the pre-school and the pre-primary system. The pre-school system involves day nurseries, childminders and after school day centres, all of them operating under the remit of the [Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance](#). The pre-primary system involves kindergartens operating under the remit of the [Ministry of Education and Culture](#). All the types of institutions are co-educational.

### **The pre-school system**

Day nurseries (παιδο/βρεφοκομικοί σταθμοί) are open to children under the age of three. There are public, community and private day nurseries. Public day nurseries are established by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance in cooperation with the parents' association and the local authority for the area where the institution is located. Community day nurseries are established and run by local authorities on a non-for-profit basis. Private day nurseries are established and supported by individuals, usually on a for-profit basis. After school day centres provide protection and social activities to school age children after the end of each school day and during the school holidays. They are normally attached to schools or kindergartens. Childminders are persons entitled to look after a number of young children at home. Day nurseries, after school day centres and childminders are subject to inspection by the [Social Welfare Services](#) of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance.

### **The pre-primary system**

Kindergartens (νηπιαγωγεία) are open to children in the age range of 3 – 5 8/12 years. As of September 2004 attendance for children 4 8/12 – 5 8/12 years old is free and obligatory. There are public, community and private kindergartens. Public kindergartens are established by the Ministry of Education and Culture in cooperation with the parents' association and the local authority for the area where the institution is located. Public kindergartens may operate with one teacher (μονοδιδάσκαλα), with two teachers (διδιδάσκαλα) or with three or more teachers (πολυδιδάσκαλα). Community kindergartens are established either by a parents' association, a local authority, a municipality, a welfare community council, a trade union or a charitable organisation, following an approval by the Ministry of Education and Culture. They operate on a non-for-

profit basis, usually in areas where the number of public kindergartens is insufficient to meet the needs of the community. In many cases, they are co-located with public kindergartens and they serve children in the age range of 3 – 4 8/12 years. Community kindergartens are subsidised by government with an annual grant of €6,834 - €11,960.

Private kindergartens are established and operated by private individuals with the approval of the Ministry of Education and Culture and they run on a for-profit basis. There are three types of private kindergartens, as follows:

Same type: They follow, without any exception, the curricula and the timetables of the public kindergartens;

Similar type: At least two-thirds of their curricula and timetables are those of the public kindergartens;

Other type: They are neither of the same, nor of the similar type. They follow their own curricula and timetables provided that they have been approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

All of the different types of kindergartens are registered with the Ministry of Education and Culture and they are subject to inspection by the Department of Primary Education of the Ministry.

Note: A day nursery may be integrated with a kindergarten. As such, it is open to children up to the age of 5 8/12. Integrated day nurseries are registered both with the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance and the Ministry of Education and Culture, each Ministry being responsible for the respective age group of children.

The primary role of kindergarten education in Cyprus is to satisfy the basic needs of the child. Pre-primary education is considered fundamental to the development of human nature, contributing to the child's cognitive, emotional, social, moral, aesthetic and psychomotor development; the acquisition of useful life skills; and, the development of right attitudes and values. The general objectives for kindergartens include the following:

Development of creative expression and thinking;

Pupils' preparation for the primary school, including for maximizing their potential for school success; and,

Development of personality attributes, such as self-confidence, initiative taking, optimism and persistence.

## **Legislation**

The day nurseries are regulated by [The Children Law, Chap. 352](#) (Περί Παιδίων Νόμος, Κεφ. 352) and its amendments, and the Children Regulations of 2011 (Περί Παιδίων - Παιδοκομικοί Σταθμοί – Διάταγμα του 2011, [Κ.Δ.Π. 262/2011](#)).

The after school day centres are regulated by the After School Day Centres Law of 1996 ([Περί Κέντρων Προστασίας και Απασχόλησης Παιδίων Νόμος του 1996, Ν. 2\(Ι\)/96](#)) and the Regulations of 1997 (Περί Κέντρων Προστασίας και Απασχόλησης Παιδίων Τροποποιητικοί Κανονισμοί του 1997, [Κ.Δ.Π. 157/97](#)).

The public kindergartens are regulated by Regulations [Κ.Δ.Π. 225/2008 - Κ.Δ.Π. 253/2012](#), based on the Elementary Education Law, which provides for the operation of public primary education.

The community and the private kindergartens are regulated by the Laws on Private Schools and Institutes ([Laws 5/1971 – 18\(Ι\)/2012](#)).

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

Day nurseries operate in all towns and villages where more than ten children live. In the case of communities with fewer than ten children, regional day nurseries are established and transport is provided free of charge by the Government. In cases where the remoteness of the location does not allow for the establishment of a regional institution, there are a small number of day nurseries operating with fewer than ten children enrolled.

Places in public day nurseries are limited, as their number is very small compared to the number in the community and the private sector.

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institution**

There is no legal minimum limit for a child to be enrolled in a day nursery, whether public, community or private. Parents are free to choose the day care nursery of their own

preference. There are no admission requirements, except for the case of public day nurseries, where parents have to apply to the nearest Social Welfare Services for admission, due to the limited number of places. Decisions for admission depend on a number of criteria, such as whether both parents are working; the family is large or on a low income; there are problems in the family, e.g. divorced parents; or the family receives welfare benefits.

### **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Decisions on the grouping of the children by age are made by the director of the day nursery according to the age composition and the number of children enrolled. There are no specific regulations on the grouping of children. There are, however, regulations [[The Children \(Day Nurseries\) Decree of 2011 - Κ.Δ.Π. 262/2011](#)] that lay down the following guidelines for the maximum number of children per teacher according to their age:

- From four years old upwards, there must be a maximum of twenty-eight children per teacher;
- From three years old upwards, there must be a maximum of twenty-four children per teacher;
- From two years old upwards, there must be a maximum of sixteen children per teacher;
- For infants under two years old, there must be one teacher per six children.

### **Organisation of Time**

Day nurseries operate from 1 September to 30 July and are closed for the month of August. There are also 12 public - national or religious - holidays.

The Director of the day nursery is responsible for the organisation of time in his/her particular institution, in the framework of the objectives set out in circulars issued by the Department of Social Welfare Services and the existing legislation.

## **Organisation of the day and week**

A typical day at a day nursery in Cyprus begins at about 7.00 a.m. and ends at 5.00 p.m. The day nurseries do not follow any specific daily plan laid down by the Social Welfare Services. Daily activities depend on the age and number of the children. The final decision as to the daily plan rests with the director of the day nursery and a timetable must be approved by the District Welfare Officer.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Steering documents and types of activity**

There is no curriculum for day nurseries. Directors of day nurseries are expected to plan activities which are differentiated according to age and fulfil the obligations imposed by the objectives for day nurseries. The number of hours spent on such activities is the decision of the Director of the day nursery according to the needs of the group of children in the nursery. The main priority is to ensure the safety of the children and to occupy them in an age-appropriate way.

### **Teaching methods and materials**

No particular methodology is determined by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. The staff is expected to choose the best methods and activities according to the needs of the children.

Some books and teaching materials are provided free of charge to day nurseries by the Department of Social Welfare Services. In addition to the material provided by the State, supplementary materials may be provided either by the owners of the school or the parents' association.



## ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Evaluation and progression of children**

Evaluation in day nurseries in Cyprus is carried out by keeping a personal file on each child. In the personal file, in addition to his/her birth and health certificates, the staff of the day nursery are expected to include a report on the progress of the child. This begins with an initial report completed fifteen days after the admittance of the child to the nursery and is then updated with a progress report a minimum of once every three months. If there is any need for support, especially with regard to the meeting of special educational needs, the appropriate steps are taken.

# **Repubblica ceca**

Institutional care for young children in the Czech Republic has a long tradition and is provided on a very broad basis for children older than 3 years of age although it is not compulsory. In terms of operating and staff costs, it is on a high level and its educational component has always been substantial.

Until 2013, children under the age of 3 were taken care of in **crèches** (*jesle*) – special health facilities. The number of children attending these facilities was very low in recent years (0.5% in relation to the age group of 0-3 year olds), one of the reasons was the low number of crèches (45 in the whole territory of the Czech Republic in 2011, including the private ones). The operation of crèches under the Act on Public Health Care was discontinued from the end of 2013.

Since 2000, the regulated **trade (profession) Daily care for children under 3 years of age** has co-existed besides crèches. It is primarily intended for private natural persons or legal entities; however, some crèches have it registered as well. It enables care in the household of a child (possibly the care person) as well as care in a facility. 645 entities had care in a facility registered in 2012.

A **child group** (*dětská skupina*) is a newly suggested form for children from one year of age until the commencement of compulsory schooling. The Parliament approved the new Act on providing these services in September 2014, but President vetoed the Act. Child groups will be established by employers (private, public and state organisations) for their employees and by various non-profit entities (municipalities, regions, church organisations, benevolent corporations). They will only provide supervision, not education (unlike nursery schools). For more information see the [section on child group](#).

**Pre-primary education** is mainly carried out in **nursery schools** (*mateřské školy*) designated for children **from 3 to 6 years of age**. They may be attended by children over 6 years of age as well (with postponement of the compulsory school attendance) and exceptionally by children under 3 years of age. Education in the pre-primary year is provided free of charge (for one year), and children are eligible for it. However, in other years it is paid, but the amount of payment is adjusted by the decree of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.

Under the Education Act, nursery schools fall into the category of schools under the purview of the Ministry of Education. They are mostly founded by a municipality or a group of municipalities. Private and denominational founders represent just a small percentage (4.65% of institutions, 2.42% of children in the school year of 2012/13). Nursery schools

for children with disabilities which provide specially adjusted education programs are established by a regional authority or the Ministry of Education.

**Preparatory classes** (*přípravné třídy*) for socially disadvantaged children in the year prior to compulsory schooling can be set up in basic schools (*základní školy*, ISCED 1+2) corresponding to the pre-primary level of education (more on this issue in Special Education Needs Provision within Mainstream Education).

## General Objectives

Under the Education Act, **pre-primary education in a nursery school** (*mateřská škola*) supports the development of a pre-school child's personality, contributes to his or her healthy emotional, intellectual and physical development and to acquiring basic rules of behaviour, basic life values and to forming interpersonal relationships. It creates basic pre-requisites for continuing learning and helps to reduce inequalities in child's development before they enter compulsory schooling, it also provides special educational care to children with special educational needs. More detailed goals can be found in the basic educational document – the Framework Education Programme for Pre-primary Education which also applies to pupils with special educational needs. This document forms a basis on which school education programmes are developed.

## Legislative Framework

**Crèches** (*jesle*) were governed by the Act on Public Health and by other regulations of the Ministry of Health. The operation of crèches was discontinued by the Act on Health Services. Crèches could have been, according to former regulations, in operation until the end of 2013.

The regulated **trade Daily care of children under three years of age** is governed by the Trade Act that stipulates conditions for the trader's (or a responsible person in authority) and care person's qualification. If the trade is carried out in a facility, some demands of the Act on Public Health Protection and in particular the Regulation on hygienic requirements in premises aimed at education relate to it.

A separate Act on a **child group** (*dětská skupina*) was approved by the Parliament in September 2014, but President vetoed the Act.

The Education Act stipulates the goals and organisation of **pre-primary education**, defines **nursery schools'** (*mateřské školy*) position in the education system, regulates their establishment and administrative matters. Details are regulated by the Decree on pre-primary education which lays down conditions regarding the operation and organisation of a nursery school, the maximum and minimum numbers of children in a classroom and provides for their safety. It determines the level of the tuition fee for pre-primary education.

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

The attendance of facilities taking care of children up to 3 years of age is influenced by several factors:

Since 1970, maternity allowances have been introduced to which mothers were entitled up to 2 years of the child's age. From the end of the 1980s it gradually increased to up to 4 years of the child's age. In the first half of the 1990's, it was also extended to fathers and it is now called **parental allowance**. Since 2007, the allowance has been significantly raised. In successive years, rules for its drawing up were adjusted. Parents are entitled to receive the allowance after termination of the maternity leave (from 5 months of a child's age) during which they withdrew financial help in maternity. At present, they decide on the monthly amount of the allowance, up to the amount of possible withdrawn financial help in maternity (a maximum of 11,500 CZK). They can draw 220,000 CZK altogether, at the maximum up to 4 years of a child's age. Also parents who have not withdrawn the financial help in maternity are entitled to receive the allowance, that is to say up to 9 months of a child's age in the amount of 7,600 CZK and successively up to 4 years of a child's age in the amount of 3,800 CZK. While withdrawing the parental allowance, parents can be gainfully employed. The amount of the earnings is not limited. Parents who take care of their child during the whole day are entitled to receive the allowance (possibly provide care by another person of age). Up to 2 years of age, the child can attend *acrèche*, a nursery school or a similar facility, however, for a maximum of 46 hours per month (when the

amount is exceeded, the allowance cannot be disbursed). Attendance of children over 2 years is not observed in the above mentioned facilities.

The number of **crèches** (*jesle*) that were established in 1950's was significantly reduced in connection with the demographic decrease in 1990's. The establishment and maintenance of crèches was fully in regions' purview and in recent years, their overall capacity has been minimalised with over 1400 places in 45 facilities (including a private one, subsidised by a municipality) in connection to the overall number of children under 3 years of age (the number has recently slightly increased). In 2012, the operation of crèches was, according to existing acts, revoked. They could have operated until the end of 2013.

Since 2000, the Trade Act enabled the establishment of a **facility taking care of children under 3 years of age in a daily regime** on the basis of a particular regulated **trade**. Neither the number of facilities nor the degree of participation are monitored in these facilities. It is assumed that most former crèches will operate in this form.

Children up to 3 years of age can be exceptionally accepted to a **nursery school** (*mateřská škola*). However, the number of such children is quite high in fact. In 2012/13, about 26.7% of children under 3 years of age attended nursery schools, as measured from the age cohort of the two-year olds. Such a solution even deepens the capacity problems of nursery schools, causes operational difficulties, as a daily regime for two-year olds differs from that of the older ones. The possibility of re-joining crèches with nursery schools is no longer taken into consideration.

Other means of support of mothers' (parents') employment of children under 3 years of age are being discussed. The Parliament approved the Act on **child group** (*dětská skupina*), but President vetoed the Act. Such a form of care, aimed at children from 1 year till the start of the compulsory school attendance, should (in case of a lower number of children) decrease demands on hygienic conditions etc., which should facilitate their establishment by employers. For more information see [section on child group](#).

The situation is further complicated by the insufficient offer of part-time jobs (only 9.5% of women were working part-time in 2012, in European Union countries it was 32.5%). Part-time enrolment of small children to facilities taking care of children is not only more affordable than full-time enrolment for a certain number of parents, but probably corresponds better to their expectations on the division of care between a family and a facility. Parents (mothers) usually return to their jobs after three years of a child's age, when it is more common for them to attend more accessible nursery schools during the

whole day and thus, parents can start working full-time. Even so, the percentage of women employed with the youngest child under 6 years of age is still quite low in the Czech Republic (in 2011 only 37.4% with one child and 42.5% with two children).

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institution**

Children accepted to facilities taking care of children under 3 years of age must be properly vaccinated. Other criteria are set by the organising body or by the head of the facility. The choice of the facility can be influenced by the monthly payment for the provided service.

### **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Crèches (*jesle*) usually accept children from 12 or 18 months, sometimes from 6 months of their age. Attendance usually terminates in the school year when a child reaches 3 years of age. There is no detailed data on facilities taking care of children under 3 years of age that operate on the basis of a trade. However, sometimes, they accept even the smallest infants. In both types of facilities, the groups are homogenous as well as heterogenous.

### **Organisation of Time**

Crèches (*jesle*) provide care on a whole-day basis, although some of them, according to their capacity, also provide short-term babysitting. Private facilities taking care of children under 3 years of age offer various time settings, including the whole-week operation and babysitting in a household.

### **Organisation of the Day and Week**

A generally binding document does not exist that would stipulate conditions under which the day and the week in facilities for children under 2-3 years is organised.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activities**

Educational **care** of commended children up to 3 years of age in the daily or the whole-week regime is, **according to the Trade Act**, aimed at the development of intellectual and speech abilities, movement, work, musical, visual arts abilities and cultural and hygienic habits appropriate to the age of the child. To secure safety and health of children, their stay outside, boarding, sleeping in an appropriate hygienic environment and the personal hygiene of children, including the provision of first aid, is the main objective of the care. However, no central education programme exists.

### **Teaching Methods and Materials**

There are no methodical directives for facilities taking care of children under 3 years of age, which were established according to the Trade Act.

## ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

Crèches (*jesle*) administer children's medical documentation and records of their psychomotor development. In the framework of provided care, crèches can also collaborate with physicians, psychologists, or possibly other professionals and institutions.



**Estonia**

According to the **Education Act**, preschool education is a system of knowledge, skills, experience and behavioural norms which creates the prerequisites for succeeding in everyday life and at school. According to the **Preschool Child Care Institutions Act**, preschool child care institutions are educational institutions for preschool children offering day care as well as possibilities to acquire preschool education. A child care institution supports the family of a child and promotes the growth and development of the child and his or her individuality. It is not obligatory to attend a preschool child care institution. Local governments are obliged to provide all children aged from 1.5 to 7 years permanently residing in their catchment area with the opportunity to attend a preschool child care institution in the catchment area if the parents so wish. This obligation includes children with physical, speech, sensual or intellectual disabilities or those who need special help or special care (children with special educational needs). For children with special needs, conditions will be created for learning in integration groups together with other children. If there are no possibilities to establish an integration group in a local children's institution, the local municipality or city government creates special groups or establishes special preschools.

The basis of organisation of learning and educational activities is the **curriculum of the preschool child care institution**, which is in accordance with the **national curriculum for preschool child care institutions** approved with a decree of the Government of the Republic.

The general objectives of the ECEC are presented in the **Child Protection Act**, the **Preschool Child Care Institutions Act** and the **national curriculum for preschool child care institutions**; specific objectives and activities are laid down in the **Lifelong learning strategy 2020**.

The **Child Protection Act** of the Republic of Estonia establishes that every child has the right for education, which develops the child's mental and physical abilities and forms an integrated personality. Instruction must not involve physical violence or mental abuse, be ideologically biased or promote hate or violence. Instruction must focus on the individual, take into consideration the differences between sexes and be based on the recognition of students' achievements.

The **Preschool Child Care Institutions Act** establishes the two main functions of a preschool child care institution:

- to create possibilities and conditions for the formation of a healthy personality who is socially and mentally alert, self-confident and considerate of others and who values the environment;
- to maintain and strengthen the health of the child, and to promote his or her emotional, moral, social, mental and physical development.

At the same time, the age, sex and individual needs and characteristics of each child should be taken into consideration.

According to the **national curriculum for preschool child care institutions**, the common objective of teaching and education is versatile and consistent development of children in cooperation between home and preschool child care institutions. Based on the common objective, teaching and education fosters the physical, mental, social and emotional development of children as a result of which the children develop a comprehensive and positive self-image, understanding of the surrounding environment, ethical behaviour and initiative, basic working habits, physical activity and understanding of the importance of taking care of one's health, and play, learning, social and self-management skills develop.

Deriving from the **Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020**, flexible opportunities need to be developed for all children to participate in preschool education at least one year before starting school, so that parents could be confident of the child's readiness for school. In order to achieve this, the local governments will create an appropriate number of child care and preschool places to ensure fulfilment of the objectives of preschool curricula. At the preschool education level, each learner's individual and social development, learning skills, creativity and entrepreneurship are supported. The assessment and remuneration of teachers and directors of preschools are consistent with the qualification requirements for these jobs and the work-related performance. Modern learning resources, including digital technology, are used for teaching and learning in preschools.

The **Preschool Child Care Institutions Act** regulates issues related to the organisation of preschool education but some aspects of the latter are regulated also by the Child Protection Act of the Republic of Estonia and the Education Act of the Republic of Estonia. There are also links with the Private Schools Act.

The national curriculum for pre-school child care institutions establishes the principles of preparation of a children's institution's own curriculum, the objectives, principles and organisation of learning and educational activities, the presumed general skills of children aged 6–7, the objectives and content of learning and educational activities of different

fields, the presumed results of a child's development at the age 6–7 and the principles of evaluation of a child's development.

Proceeding from the Government Regulation “**Health protection requirements for the buildings, premises, furnishings, internal climate and maintenance of preschool child care institutions**”, a child care institution is required to have safe and secured buildings, premises, furnishings and land which are suitable for providing preschool education and care for children. Requirements for health promotion activities and daily schedules of preschool child care institutions are established by a decree of the Minister of Social Affairs “**Health protection requirements for the health promotion activities and daily schedules of preschool child care institutions**”. Requirements for catering of children in preschool child care institutions have been established by the regulation of the Minister of Social Affairs “**Health Protection Requirements for catering at preschool child care institutions and schools**”.

### ***Organisation of Programmes for Children***

Children aged up to three years attend crèche groups and preschool groups of preschool child care institutions. The growth in the number of births in the recent years has caused an increased need for preschool places for children aged 1.5-3 years. Upon parents' request, for children under 3 years of age also child care services under the Social Welfare Act can be provided. Creating every child the possibility to receive child care services and a high quality preschool education is one of the priorities of the government's action plan. In 2007-2013, the state support to local governments for creating new preschool places and renovating preschool child care institutions amounted to approximately 49 million euros, in the present ESF period 2014-2020, local governments are going to be supported at state level to the extent of 40.5 million euros.

### **Geographical Accessibility**

Local governments are obliged to provide all children aged from 1.5 to 7 years permanently residing in their catchment area with the opportunity to attend a preschool child care institution in the catchment area if the parents so wish. This obligation includes children with physical, speech, sensual or intellectual disabilities or those who need special help or special care (children with special educational needs).

For children with special needs, conditions will be created for learning in integration groups together with other children. If there are no possibilities to establish an integration group in a local child care institution, the local municipality or city government creates special groups or establishes special preschools.

Lisbon strategy sets out that by 2020, 95% of all children from 4 years old to school age (i.e. in Estonia, children aged 4 to 6) will be involved in basic education programmes. According to the Estonian Education Information System, as of 2013/2014, 95.5% of children aged 4 to 7 and 77% children aged 1.5 to 3 attended preschool child care institutions and general education schools. According to the data of the Ministry of Social Affairs as of 2013, child care service was used by 10% of children aged 1.5 to 3. Total percentage of children aged 1.5 to 3 attending preschool child care institutions was 87 (see Table 1).

According to the data of the Estonian Education Information System, as of 2013/2014, 68,684 children attended 652 preschool child care institutions, i.e. the number was higher by 6,574 children, compared to 2008. 77% of children aged 1.5-3 years and 95.5% of children aged 4-6 years attended preschool child care institutions. Compared to 2008, the participation of children aged 1.5-3 in child care institutions has decreased by 1%, the participation of children aged 4-6 has remained the same.

Due to a rapid increase in the population of cities and peri-urban areas, providing preschool places for all children aged 1.5-3 years is difficult. In the last academic year, there were waiting lists for admittance to preschools in 21 local governments (or about one tenth of the local governments). The waiting lists included approximately 5,000 children aged 1.5-3 years.

In 2007–2013, the Government of the Republic supported local governments in creating new preschool places and renovating the existing ones from European Structural Funds to the extent of approximately 49 million euros. Support for local governments for creating new preschool places is included also in the next ESF period 2014-2020 in the amount of approximately 40.5 million euros to be covered by the ESF and ERDF measures. The amendments to the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act adopted in 2014 allow local government to be flexible in providing preschool places for children aged 1.5-3 years. At the request and with the agreement of a parent, a local government can replace a preschool place for day care, whereas the parent's own contribution must not exceed 20% of the minimum wage established by a Regulation of the Government of the Republic.

## **Admission Requirements and Choice of Institution/Centre**

The procedures for admission to and dismissal of children from a preschool child care institution and determination of the catchment area of the institution are established by the municipality or city government. Parents need to submit an application for admission. Offering a place may also be regulated by a bilateral agreement. As a rule, children residing in their administrative area are given priority for admission. As preschool child care institutions work in the rhythm of an academic year, deadlines for submission of applications are generally established.

Parents are free in their choice of the child care institution for their child if there are vacant places in the child care institution they wish the child to attend. If vacant places exist in a child care institution after the admission of the children permanently residing in the catchment area, children from outside the catchment area shall be admitted to the child care institution starting with children permanently residing in the same rural municipality or city and, thereafter, children of parents who are employed in the catchment area. When admitting children residing outside the catchment area, applications which were submitted earlier shall be considered first.

Children with special educational needs are admitted to an integration or special group on the basis of a written application of a parent and a decision of the advisory committee. The procedure and principles for admission of children to and their exclusion from a special preschool or group have been established by a regulation of the Minister of Education and Research.

## **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Based on needs and possibilities, crèche and preschool groups are formed in preschool child care institutions. Preschool groups are divided as follows:

- Children between three and six years of age;
- Children between six and seven years of age and the children in whose case commencement of performance of the duty to attend school has been postponed.

Parents or guardians may submit proposals for the formation of mixed groups. Mixed groups include crèche-aged and preschool-aged children.

On the proposal of the director of a child care institution, a rural municipality or city government may, as required, form integration groups in child care institutions, where children with special needs learn together with other children, and groups for children with special needs, which include only children with special needs. The maximum size of a crèche group is 14 children, of a preschool group – 20 children and of a mixed group – 18 children.

The number of children in a group for children with special needs is smaller: up to 12 children in a group for children with physical disabilities; up to 12 children in a remedial group for children with speech disorders and specific development disorders; up to 7 children in a development group for children with intellectual disabilities; up to 10 children in a group for children with sensory disabilities, up to 4 children in a group for children with multiple disabilities and 4 children in a group for children with a pervasive disability disorder (autism).

The number of children in an integration group depends on the number of children with special needs, while one child with special needs is considered to account for three ordinary children.

With a view to ensuring children a safe environment, the organisation of work of the employees at a child care institution proceeds from the principle that during the working hours of a group, a person employed in the field of learning and teaching or an employee assisting the teacher is in a crèche group together with up to seven children, in a mixed group together with up to nine children, in a preschool group together with up to ten children, in an integration group together with up to eight children and in a group for children with special needs together with two to six children, depending on the special needs of the children.

## **Organisation of Time**

A preschool child care institution operates throughout the year or on a seasonal basis. The rural municipality or city government decides, on the proposal of the board of trustees, whether a preschool child care institution operates throughout the year or seasonally and establishes the opening hours of the preschool child care institution, taking into account the needs of the families of the respective region.

If on the territory of a local government, the temporary need for child care institution places is greater than the total number of existing places, the local government will provide all persons interested with the opportunity to obtain a part-time place at a preschool institution.

The school year begins on 1 September and lasts from the start of studies in one calendar year until the start of new studies in the next calendar year.

According to the national curriculum for preschool child care institutions, teaching and education activities at a preschool child care institution are based on the daily schedule of the group, which determines the daily routine appropriate to the age of the children where daily activities, play, free time and teaching and education activities planned by a teacher alternate. Objectives, themes, study content and activities of a period (week, month, etc.) are presented at the time of planning of the teaching and education activities of a group. Planning of the teaching and education activities of a group is flexible and allows teachers to make amendments, where needed. The national curriculum for preschool child care institutions does not establish the number of times study and other activities are carried out or specify their organisation. Teaching and education activity is an integrated process during the whole stay of a child in a preschool child care institution where lessons and activities beyond lessons are not differentiated.

The timetables of children of 6 to 7 years of age include activities aimed at smooth adaptation to school life. Emphasis is put on developing psychical processes (perception, memory, imagination and thinking) and formation of basic study skills (observation and listening skills, abilities to compare, rate, count, measure, group and model).

## ***Teaching and Learning***

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activities**

Organisation of teaching and education in a preschool child care institution is based on the curriculum of the preschool child care institution, which complies with the national curriculum for preschool child care institutions approved by the regulation of the Government of the Republic (2008). The curriculum of a preschool child care institution determines the objectives, principles and contents of teaching and education activities and



the presumed results in a child's development after completing the curriculum at each age level with regard to four general skills groups and seven fields of teaching and education. Curriculum guidebooks provide help in compiling curricula of preschool child care institutions, offering details at each age level.

The general skills to be developed comprise:

- playing skills;
- cognitive and study skills;
- social skills;
- reflexive skills.

Fields of teaching and education comprise:

- myself and the environment;
- language and speech;
- Estonian as a second language (in an institution or group with other language of instruction);
- mathematics;
- arts;
- music;
- physical movement.

Where necessary, an individual development plan is compiled for a child with special needs on the basis of the curriculum of the preschool child care institution.

The development of general skills is supported through all teaching and education activities, integrating the contents of different fields.

The study contents of fields derive from children's everyday life and their surrounding environment. Study activities include listening, speaking, reading, writing, observing, exploring, comparing, calculating and various movement, musical and artistic activities.

Cooperation between teachers and personnel and the inclusion of parents are important factors in the work of a preschool child care institution. Both contribute to the creation of a study environment which supports the development of a child. The responsibility of teachers and parents has grown with regard to assessment and support of a child's development (e.g., holding development interviews with children).

## Teaching Methods and Materials

A preschool child care institution teacher is free to choose the methodology of instruction. Planning of teaching and education is based on the methods which promote a child-oriented approach in education, and proceed from the principle that development and learning of a child are influenced by the individuality of a child, by his or her needs and interests and by his or her social relations and environment. This approach follows the principle according to which teaching and educational activities are linked together by topics related to a child's life and surrounding environment.

Preschool child care institutions implement different methodologies: “step by step”, language immersion methodology, Reggio Emilia teaching methodology, Waldorf teaching methodology, discovery learning, outdoor learning, etc.

Play is the primary activity of children in preschool age. Through teaching and education activities, teachers support the development of children’s play skills. The objective is that children:

- find joy in playing;
- concentrate on play;
- creatively apply their experiences, knowledge and impressions from surrounding world in their play;
- initiate different plays and develop the content of play;
- assume different roles in play;
- follow rules of play and are able to explain the rules of familiar plays to others;
- are able to solve problems during play and reach agreements with playmates;
- creatively use different objects in plays.

It is necessary to tie teaching and education with forming a child's physical development and hygienic habits and particularly with play and activities in open air. During the recent years, the role of audio visual and multimedia facilities has grown in teaching and educational activities.

In 2012, the Ministry of Education and Research drew up an electronic instruction on assessment and support of the development of a child and organisation of work of preschool child care institutions. In 2013, the professional standard for teachers at preschool child care institutions was developed and the principles and organisation of the support for professional development of teachers, incl. in-service training was updated proceeding from the national curriculum for preschool child care institutions. Regular

training seminars supporting the implementation of the national curriculum for preschool child care institutions are held in cooperation with Eesti Lasteaednike Liit (the Estonian Preschool Teachers' Union) and Eesti Alushariduse Juhtide Ühendus (the Estonian Association of the Heads of Preschools). Handbooks on the national curriculum for preschool child care institutions treat all fields of teaching and education activities and organisation thereof, the development of general skills in preschool age as well as the evaluation and support of children's development in a preschool child care institution. Since 2014, study materials supporting implementation of the national curriculum for preschool child care institutions have been developed in all fields of curriculum: language and speech (incl. Estonian as a second language), mathematics, me and the environment, music/motion, art. Upon creating teaching materials, the expected results of development of children specified in the national curriculum for preschool child care institutions are taken into consideration. Teaching materials facilitate the development of play and learning skills described in the national curriculum.

Estonian preschools put a strong emphasis on value education, incl. supporting well-being and safety of children and preventing bullying, facilitating tolerance, care, respect and courage in children and families.

In 2010-2014, the Ministry of Education and Research supported the project "Bully-Free Kindergarten" which was implemented in cooperation of the Danish children's protection union "Save the Children" and Estonian Union for Child Welfare. To date, two thirds of the preschools in Estonia have joined the project. All preschool child care institutions in Estonia are expected to have joined the programme by 2015. In 2010, under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Research and in cooperation with the Centre for Ethics of the University of Tartu and the Institute of Educational Sciences of Tallinn University, a practical teaching material for preschool child care institutions "Values at preschool age. Value education in preschool" was developed. Further, the quality criteria for a good preschool are under development in cooperation with the Centre for Ethics. Health behaviour and health education of children are important topics in teaching and education activities in preschools; 36% of Estonian preschools have joined the Network of Health Promoting Preschools. In the field of health education, electronic learning materials and environment assessment techniques have been developed.

In cooperation of the Ministry of Education and Research, Innove Foundation and the Integration and Migration Foundation Our People, methodological materials for studying Estonian and implementing language immersion methodologies, incl. two-way language

immersion, have been developed; counselling, regional information days and trainings have been organised for teachers in preschool child care institutions. In cooperation of the Foundation Innove and Lasteveeb OÜ, internet-based teaching materials have been developed to support learning Estonian as a second language by children at preschool age.

## ***Assessment***

The national curriculum for preschool child care institutions treats evaluation of children's development as cooperation between teachers and parents. Evaluation of a child's development is important in order to understand the child's special qualities, determine his or her special needs, support his or her positive self-esteem and development as well as to plan teaching and education activities in cooperation with parents.

Evaluation of a child's development is a part of the everyday process of education and schooling activities. Teachers carry out observations according to a precise plan and children are being followed in everyday activities, free play situations and in activities guided by teachers. The basis for evaluation of a child's development is constituted by the presumed general skills and results in fields of teaching and education activities.

At least once per academic year, the teacher carries out a development process oriented interview with the parent(s) regarding the development of the child, giving feedback on the child's development and study results and exploring the parent's views and expectations regarding the child's development. The result of the evaluation of the child's development and of the interview is documented under the conditions established in the Personal Data Protection Act. Pursuant to the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act, it is prohibited for staff to disclose any information obtained from a child concerning the family of the child.

Observation is the primary method used in the evaluation process. Indirect methods like interview or analysis of children's works are also suitable. It is also common to prepare a file or portfolio on a child's development. The methods used are introduced to the parents. Succeeding, development (progress), positive attitudes and interest are acknowledged. The development of a child is described from the standpoint of the child, valuing his or her achievements.

Pursuant to the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act, a preschool institution issues a readiness for school card to children who have completed the curriculum of the preschool

institution, the results of development of the child. A parent submits the readiness for school card to the school where the child commences his or her compulsory school attendance. The procedure for completing readiness for school cards has been set out in the regulation of the Minister of Education and Research "List of learning and education-related mandatory documents for a preschool child care institution and the procedure for completing such documents". A readiness for school card describes the child's achievements in the development of general skills and in fields of learning and educational activities, following the national curriculum for preschool child care institutions. The child's strengths as well as aspects that need development are outlined. Evaluation of readiness for school and compilation of the readiness for school card support the smooth transfer of a child from preschool to school. The readiness for school card helps the class teacher to understand the child's individuality and development and to plan cooperation with parents and support specialists. The class teacher takes account of the child's previous experiences and creates, in cooperation with the family, opportunities to support the child's individual development.

### ***Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care***

The national curriculum for preschool child care institutions allows preschool child care institutions to apply alternative pedagogy. Some of the privately owned preschool child care institutions use alternative pedagogical methods that correspond to the institution's general approach (Waldorf-preschool child care institutions, Tartu Catholic Congregation's Preschool, etc.). Alternative pedagogy is also implemented in preschool child care institutions for children with special needs. Pedagogues are responsible for the effectiveness of the methods of instruction they use.

Among private preschool child care institutions, also English language based preschool child care institutions exist (for children of the relevant community).

Most preschool child care institutions where the language of instruction is Russian are municipal preschool institutions. Traditionally, child care institutions have been divided according to the language of instruction into Estonian and Russian, or they were mixed. The need for forming groups with Russian as the language of instruction is consistently diminishing since an increasing number of parents want their children to attend groups instructed in Estonian. Estonian language training for the children whose home language

is other than Estonian and who attend immersion groups or groups with a language of instruction other than Estonian and for the children who attend Estonian-based groups and require Estonian language training as a supporting study is financed from the state budget. Support from the state budget is allocated for both organisation of learning and obtaining teaching aids.

The most widespread methodologies put into practice in preschool child care institutions are the so-called Step-by-Step Methodology, Reggio Emilia approach and Montessori approach, the environment of which allows also the application of other active teaching methodologies (discovery learning).

A growing tendency is to provide hobby classes in child care institutions for both children attending preschools and those staying at home. Hobby classes operate both for the children of preschool age and for their parents. Attending such classes may be free of charge for the parents or it may have minimum fees (financially supported by local governments).

At preschool child care institutions there are play groups and Estonian language study groups for children staying at home; such groups are generally payable but are sometimes supported by local governments.

The so-called "baby schools" for children of 2 to 8 months of age and their parents are very popular. Baby-schools operate both in the municipal preschool child care institutions and as private institutions and are, as a rule, payable for parents. In baby schools, the development of a child's creativity is supported through music, rhythm and manual activities. Primarily, the result of baby schools is that parents together with the child acquire skills to act together.

In Estonia, a child minding system was developed in the academic year 2006/2007, aiming at offering children's quality day care and home care to families. In 2013, child-minding services were used by 10% of the crèche-aged children or children of up to 3 years of age i.e., 4,543 children. A professional standard has been developed, training for child minders has been implemented and a national electronic register of child minding services is being created. Child minding is a social service and its organisation is regulated by the Social Welfare Act.

**Grecia**

Early childhood education in Greece is offered in [Pre-primary schools](#) (*Nipiagogeia*) under the competence of the [Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs](#) and in [Child](#) (*Paidikoi Stathmoi*) and [Infant/Child Centers](#) (*Vrefonipiakoi Stathmoi*) under the auspices of Municipalities as well as in respective private pre-school education centers.

Pre-school education and care offered in pre-primary schools is part of Primary Education. Pre-primary schools (*Nipiagogeia*) accept children at the age of four and five years; attendance, however, is compulsory only for children at the age of five years. An All-day Pre-primary school operates in parallel to the ordinary Pre-primary school with a broadened daily schedule. The aim is to fully prepare the child for Primary School, support working parents and reinforce the role of state care in order to eliminate any educational-social discrimination ([Law 2525/1997](#)).

Special emphasis is placed on the smooth transition of children from pre-primary school to primary school, constituting a landmark in their development having decisive effects on their personality and overall school progress. This transition does not only concern the child but also all persons and bodies related to it. In particular, pre-primary school purpose, as stipulated in the framework [Law 1566/1985](#), is to help children develop physically, emotionally, mentally and socially and in particular:

- Develop their senses and organize their actions, motor and mental ones
- Enrich and organize their experiences from the physical and social environment and acquire the skill to differentiate the relations and their interactions therein
- Develop the ability to comprehend and express themselves with symbols and particularly in the fields of language, mathematics and aesthetics
- Forge interpersonal relations boosting their gradual and harmonious social inclusion
- Develop initiatives freely and effortlessly in an organized environment and to adjust in the two-way relation between an individual and a group

[Child](#) (*Paidikoi Stathmoi*) and [Infant/Child Centers](#) (*Vrefonipiakoi Stathmoi*) constitute premises of education and safe accommodation for children at the preschool age of 2,5 up to 5 years and at the age of 6 months up to 5 years respectively, aiming at:

- Offering comprehensive preschool care, following the most up-to-date scientific developments.
- Supporting children in developing physically, mentally, emotionally and socially in a holistic manner.



- Eliminating to the extent possible any discrepancies arising from their families' cultural, economic and educational level.
- Raising parents' awareness in modern pedagogy and psychology issues.
- Helping preschool children in their smooth transition from family to school environment.
- Offering daily nutrition and care to children adhering to health and safety rules.

Pre-primary school (*Nipiagogeio*) attendance is free of charge whereas [Child](#) (*Paidikoi Stathmoi*) and [Infant/Child Centers](#) (*Vrefonipiakoi Stathmoi*) may require board fees on a monthly basis for the families of hosted children, depending on their economic capabilities. The Child and Infant Center Board of Directors establish the circumstances for a family to be exempted from this contribution or pay a lower one.

## Legislative References

The basic legislation governing pre-school education and care is summarized as follows:

### Pre-primary schools

- Framework [Law 1566/1985](#) stipulates that pre-school education is provided by Pre-primary schools while the same law sets the pre-school education purposes and the organization of pre-primary school teachers training.
- [Presidential Decree 200/1998](#) redefined Pre-primary schools operation,
- [Law 3518/2006](#) : 'Restructuring of Engineers'and Public Works Contractors' Pension Fund (TSMEDE) sectors and settlement of other issues under the competence of the Employment and Social Protection Ministry', article 73: Primary and Secondary Education Issues. This article institutes the two-year attendance at Pre-primary schools and the age of 5 as the statutory enrolment age.

### Child and Infant Centers

- [Law 2880/2001](#): 'Programme Politeia on Public Administration reform and modernization and other provisions', article 16: Child and Infant Centers. Pursuant to the said article, public child and infant centers are converted into municipal and public entities and fall under the supervision of municipalities and communities, operating in the administrative region thereof.
- [Ministerial Decision 16065/17-4-2002](#): 'Standard Operation Regulation of Municipal and Community Public Entity Child and Infant Centers'.

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 4 years***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

Municipal [Infant/Child](#) (*Vrefonipiakoi Stathmoi*) and [Child Centers](#) (*Paidikoi Stathmoi*) operate in Municipalities across the country.

According to the Standard Regulation of Operation ([Ministerial Decision 16065/17-4-2002](#)), infants and children enrolled to municipal infant and infant/child centers come primarily from the respective municipality area, not excluding the case of children living in the immediate vicinity, where enrollment is possible due to vacancies or due to acute social need of parents. These cases are justified in the decision of the Board of Directors of the Infant / Child center.

Children may be transported to the municipality centers, provided that the latter dispose their own means of transport, abiding by the rules of safety. For infants, transfer may be assigned to a special escort, or to members of the pedagogical staff, in rotation. The cost of transportation is determined by the Board of Directors of the Municipal [Infant / Child Centre](#) and may be covered by an additional contribution of parents, depending on their financial ability, irrespectively from the normal parental contribution (fee).

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institution**

Since compulsory education in Greece starts from the age of 5 years in [pre-primary school](#) (*Nipiagogeio*), the state is not legally obliged to offer Early Childhood Education and Care for younger children. The legal entitlement only refers to children aged 5 years old and above, although the state takes care to offer early childhood education and care to the majority of children aged up to 5 years old.

All children coming from a respective Municipality have the right to enrol in Child and Infant/Child Centers; children suffering from contagious diseases and for as long as they are affected, are excluded.

[Infant/Child Centers](#) accept infants from the age of 6 months, while [Child Centers](#) accept children from the age of 2.5 years.

Upon enrolment, working parents' children and/or children coming from economically weak families are selected, showing preference to children in need of care by virtue of various social causes (such as double or single orphans, children of unwed mothers, divorced or separated parents, children born to parents with a physical or mental disability, multi-member families etc.).

The selection criteria of hosted infants and children and their credit awarding may be specified by the Municipality Council of the relevant Center, following its reasoned opinion.

In case parents' application for their children's admission to municipal infant/child and child centers is rejected, they have the right of appeal against decisions on credit awarding, based on specific procedures defined at municipality level.

Discontinuation of children's attendance in Child and Infant Centers is always carried out by the Municipality Council's decision under the following circumstances:

- a) Upon parents' or guardians' request via an application.
- b) When serious problems are observed in children's behavior or health that cannot be dealt with by the Center, after previous communication with the parents and a specialized physician.
- c) When parents fail to pay their economic contribution, if foreseen, for a period of time beyond 2 months, without any serious reason for this delay.
- d) When parents repeatedly fail to comply with the Center's schedule and conditions of operation, notwithstanding written notifications.
- e) In case of repeated, continuous and unjustified absence of children from the Center beyond one month.

### **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Children from the age of 2,5 up to 5 years, as well as from the age of 6 months to 5 years are enrolled, respectively, in [Child \(Paidikoi Stathmoi\)](#) and [Infant/Child Centers \(Vrefonipiakoi Stathmoi\)](#), that is until their enrolment age to Pre-primary school.

Infant classes are structured according to age: a) from 6 months to 1,5 years and b) from 1,5 to 2,5 years. Child Centers respectively are structured in the following classes: a) from 2,5 to 3,5 years and b) from 3,5 to 4,5 years. Infant sections host 12 babies, being attended by 2 educators and one assistant. Child Sections host up to 25 children with one

educator and one assistant, and in any case with the pedagogical personnel provided thereof.

In accordance with the Standard Operation Regulation of Child and Infant/Child Centers, besides the Pedagogical Personnel and Assistant Educators, a Social Worker is foreseen in the said structures who contributes to preventing or coping with children's problems in the Center and a Psychologist, who provides counseling in child psychological support issues. Moreover, hosted children and infants are examined regularly and at least once a week by a Pediatrician who follows up their development and psychosomatic health while suggesting measures to be taken for children's hygiene and Centers' Sanitary conditions.

No special provision in legislation exists regarding the prohibition or obligation of the staff providing ECEC or contact staff, to stay with the same group or class for several years.

### **Organisation of Time**

[Child \(Paidikoi Stathmoi\)](#) and [Infant/Child Centers \(Vrefonipiakoi Stathmoi\)](#) Standard Regulation of Operation provides that ([Ministerial Decision 16065/17-4-2002](#)) the operation of Child/Infant Centers begins on September 1st and ends on July 31st of the following year (Monday to Friday). In other words, Child/Infant Centers work around 220 days per year. In areas where employment of working women reaches its peak in summer period, the Center may operate during August and discontinue its operation for a month in June-July. The Centers remain closed from December 24th until January 5th and from Holy Thursday until the first Sunday after Easter Sunday. The Centers do not operate during the official holidays of Public Services and local anniversaries. The operation of Child and Infant/Child Centers falls under Municipalities' competence.

### **Organisation of the Day and Week**

According to the Standard Regulation of Operation, Child and Infant/Child Centers operate from Monday to Friday. Even though it is flexible, the basic points in the timetable are being adhered to (arrival and leaving time, time of meals, rest and break). Centers open at 7.00 am during the winter schedule and at 6.45 am during the summer schedule and close at 16.00pm. It is possible to extend the Center's working hours by the Municipality Council's decision of each Center, provided it is served by the personnel required.

A typical schedule of children's activities is the following:

### **a) For Infants**

6.45 or 7.00 am - 9.00 am: Arrival of Infants. Catering for individual needs, rest or free activities.

9.00 am - 9.30 am: Breakfast

9.30 am - 12.00 am: Individual programmes aimed at children's development.

12.00 am -13.00 pm: Preparation-food.

13.00 pm - 14.30 pm: Rest.

14.30 pm - 15.15 pm: Infants' free activities aiming at the aforementioned objectives.

15.15 pm - 15.45 pm: Afternoon snack.

15.45 pm - 16.00 pm: Preparation - Departure.

### **b) For Children**

6.45 or 7.00 am - 8.30am: Childrens' arrival.

8.30 am - 9.00 am: Prayer. Children get ready for breakfast.

9.00 am - 9.30 am: Breakfast. Children serve and lay the table in working groups.

9.30 am - 10.00 am: The educator plans and interacts with children on daily activities.

10.00 am - 11.00 am: Parallel or individual workshops.

11.00 am - 12.00 am: 30-minute break interchangeably between classes. Preparation for lunch (personal hygiene). Free activities in 'pedagogical corners of activities' or team games in the classroom and in the yard.

12.00 am - 13.00 pm: Lunch. Children serve and lay the table in working groups. Tooth-brushing after lunch.

13.00 pm - 13.30 pm: Gradual departure of children leaving early. Quiet activities follow.

13.30 pm - 15.00 pm: Rest.

15.00 pm- 15.45 pm: Afternoon snack. Free activities. Putting the class in order. Departure.

The above schedule is adapted to the needs of each age group.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 4 years***

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activities**

Pursuant to [Law 2880/2001](#), Child (*Paidikoi Stathmoi*) and [Infant/Child Centers \(\*Vrefonipiakoi Stathmoi\*\)](#) fall under the competence of Local Government Organisations (OTA), while operating as legal entities, based on a 'Standard Regulation' ([Joint Ministerial Decision 16065/17-4-2002](#) of the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation and of the Ministry of Health and Welfare), which is in force since the date of publication in the Official Government Gazette. The provisions of the Standard Regulation of Operation constitute the minimum requirements for drawing up the Regulation Operation for each one of them. Child and Infant Centers are managed by the Board of Directors where a Representative of hosted children's parents and an Employees' representative in the respective center participate, besides Municipal and Town councilors.

According to the aforementioned regulatory text (Model Regulation) governing the operation of Day Nurseries and Baby Nurseries everywhere in the territory, the daily schedule implemented is flexible and varies in terms of the learning activities and the time devoted to each of them, based on the relevant Rules of Operation of each Nursery. Nevertheless, certain points in time included in the "Model Regulation" are steadily kept in all of them, such as the arrival and departure of children, eating times, break times and rest periods.

The daily schedule includes music-movement-rhythmic activities and space exercise, as well as simultaneous or individual workshops of painting, masking, puppetry, dramatic play, water, clay, gardening, cooking, ecological experimentation and other pedagogical activities of the same nature. Moreover, team games are also organized in the classroom and the yard, psychomotor activities are performed while pre-reading, pre-writing and pre-numbering are encouraged.

## **Teaching Methods and Materials**

In Child (*Paidikoi Stathmoi*) and Infant/Child Centers (*Vrefonipiakoi Stathmoi*), the daily Programme, drawn up in accordance with the 'Standard Regulation', includes hours dedicated to individual programmes of child development and free activities as well as hours for meals and rest.

As far as infants are concerned, individualized programmes are organized aiming at the child's social, emotional, mental and motion development and at assisting it in acquiring its autonomy.

As regards children, the educator urges and encourages children to engage in game groups or in activity groups in the symbolic 'pedagogical corners of activities' and in the corners of knowledge; children are also encouraged to get involved with building-construction or other educational material. After the departure of early leaving children, quiet activities follow, such as listening to music, narrating a fairy tale, fiction, singing, reading a book, speech-based games and games to develop children's perceptual ability, pantomime and improvisation.

The daily schedule of creative employment applicable to Day and Baby Nurseries aims to achieve the socialization and smooth interaction of children among them, strengthen their development progress and establish an environment of freedom and security ensuring the harmonious psychosomatic development of children. The teacher's goal is to give children the ability to concentrate, have self-motivation, confidence in themselves and their abilities. Children should be approached with affection, dialogue, explanation and trust. The Staff of the Nurseries is expressly prohibited from forcefully imposing views or corporal punishment; the violation of this prohibition constitutes a serious disciplinary offense.

## ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 4 years***

### **Evaluation and progression of children**

Progress assessment for children less than 4 years is not held in our country. This kind of appraisal is mainly related to the performance of pupils within the formal education system, which in Greece coincides with the beginning of primary education and is addressed to children from the age of 4 years and above.

Moreover, the main objective of early childhood education and care providers focuses on the physical, mental, emotional and social development of children and not on the acquisition of knowledge resulting from the teaching of specific subjects, as is the case in the formal education system.

In this context, teaching staff in Child (*Paidikoi Stathmoi*) and [Infant/Child Centers](#) (*Vrefonipiakoi Stathmoi*) are expected to inform parents once a month for the general and comprehensive development of the child while taking care to keep a harmonious relationship with them.



**Ungheria**

Early childhood education and care is provided in different types of institutions for the different age-groups of children aged 0-7.

Children between 20 weeks and 3 years of age are provided day care in **crèches** (day care centres, *bölcsőde*) offering professional care and nursing with some educational elements. This institution is part of the child welfare provision and is supervised by the State Secretariat responsible for health and social affairs within the Ministry of Human Resources. Crèches may be operated:

- a) as an independent crèche,
- b) as a member institute of a Nursery Directorate or merged crèches,
- c) as an independent unit of a multipurpose institute under joint control.

Depending on the duties to be performed the crèche may be

- a) a day-time crèche,
- b) a week-time (5-day) crèche

**Kindergarten** (*óvoda*) provides education and full day care for children aged 3 to 7 years. Kindergarten education and care belongs to the system of school education, within the competence of the State Secretariat for Education within the Ministry of Human Resources. Kindergarten education and care is optional from the age of 3 and is compulsory from the age of 5, when children are obliged to participate 4 hours a day in the guided kindergarten activities. The kindergarten may also admit children living in its district who will turn three within six months from the admission provided that all the requests for the admission of children over 3 years can be granted in the district concerned. It is a priority that kindergarten education should be available to each family, no matter at what age the child begins going to the institution.

**Family day care** aims to reduce the shortage of capacity in day care institutions. The non-educational care provided in the family day care of children who do not receive care in a crèche or a kindergarten, of children receiving public education outside the opening hours of school or of children not receiving school day-care in the afternoon or afternoon tutoring is considered day-time care for children. Family day care provides care, supervision, meals and activities for children living in a family appropriate to their age. Appropriate care must also be provided to children with disabilities (Act XXXI of 1997 on the Protection of Children and Guardianship Administration). Family day care is a type of child day care,

which does not undertake the functions of centre-based provision related to their professional/institutional competences.

## **Policy and objectives**

The educational policy in relation to the Europe 2020 Strategy is included in the National Reform Programme.

The educational objectives include two determining elements:

- increasing the share of the population with a higher educational qualification
- reducing the drop out rate

Hungary wishes to reduce the drop out rate to 10% until 2020 partly through measures supporting kindergarten care and early intervention and partly through targeted measures for the successful school progress of disadvantaged children and by the strengthening of vocational training providing new opportunities to vulnerable groups.

The education sector pays special attention to the early admission of multiply disadvantaged, especially Roma children to kindergartens. Complete programs have already been implemented in this respect, which are continued with some adjustments (e.g. supporting the most disadvantaged small regions).

The Hungarian introduction of the Sure Start program serves to compensate for the disadvantages and develop the skills of children living in disadvantaged families at the earliest possible age. This program is for the comprehensive support of families raising small children between 0 and 6 and living in disadvantaged regions, villages and housing estates in towns. The program aims at developing cooperation between sectors and NGOs based on local needs in the field of the health and social care of children, their day-time care, as well as in the field of caring for families and for the prevention of the reproduction of poverty.

There are 3 main objectives in the field of developing day-time care:

### 1. Improving access to services

- increasing capacity (the number of places)

– improving access for children with disadvantaged background

2. Professional innovations

3. Improving the conditions of financing and operation

The implementation of policy objectives are supported by the following legal regulations:

- Act CXC of 2011 on Public Education and Act CXXIV of 2012 amending it
- Ministerial Decree 20/2012 on the operation of educational institutions
- Government Decree 229/2012 on the implementation of the Public Education Act
- Government Decree 201/2012 on the Educational Authority

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Geographical accessibility**

Crèches are operated in 7% of 3,152 localities, only 10% of which is operated in villages while the remaining part can be found in towns. 94% of the institutions are operated and maintained by municipalities. Each municipality has to ensure the provision of day-time care to children but the establishment and operation of crèches are compulsory only in settlements with a population of over 10 thousand.

A very low percentage of the population aged between 0 and 3 attend crèches . The capacity of institutions is insufficient and availability is territorially uneven. In many of the small localities – which are often the most disadvantaged ones – there is no day-time care for children. Existing institutions are usually filled to capacity.

### **Admission requirements and the choice of institution**

Children between 20 weeks and three years may be admitted by crèches or up to five years if the child is disabled, till 31 December in the year in which the child turns three or five if he is disabled.

With the consent of the parent

- the district nurse,
- family paediatrician or family doctor,
- social worker or family worker,
- child welfare agency,
- court of guardians

may also initiate the admission of the child by the crèche.

In addition, the specialist giving help to the rehabilitation of the disabled child may also initiate the admission of the child if the crèche is able to provide early intervention for the child concerned.

Upon enrolment, parents have to provide a certificate issued by the family paediatrician or family doctor on the fact that the health condition of the child makes it possible to attend a crèche.

For rehabilitation purposes the disabled child may be admitted to a crèche offering early intervention if:

- the rehabilitation committee recommends it and
- the child is not a risk for his own and his peers' health.

Disabled children shall be admitted by the institution for a period of probation of at least 1 month. After the expiry of this period the decision on the further nursing of the child shall be made on the basis of the joint report of the group of professionals (physician, SEN pedagogue, nursery teacher) being in contact with the child.

### **Age levels and grouping of children**

The crèche primarily undertakes the daytime supervision and professional care of children under 3. The crèche may also provide early intervention for disabled children under six if it meets related material and personal conditions. Children between 20 weeks and three years may be admitted by crèches or up to five years if the child is disabled, till 31 December in the year in which the child turns three or five if he is disabled. If the child is over 3 but based on his physical or mental development he is not suitable for kindergarten education and the physician of the crèche does not recommend his enrolment to kindergarten, he may stay in crèche till 31 August following his fourth birthday.

One nursery group consists of a maximum of 12 children. However, if all the children are over 2, a maximum of 14 children may be cared for in one group. If the nursery group also includes a disabled child, maximum 10 children can attend it, while in the nursery group caring for disabled children the max. number of the children to be developed and cared for is 6.

### **Organisation of time**

The opening hours of the crèche are specified by the maintainer taking into consideration the working hours of the parents of the children. Therefore, the crèche is open for at least 10 hours a day. However, a child can only attend crèche 10-12 hours a day. The maintainer also decides on the provision of additional services.

### **Organisation of the day and week**

The daily routine in crèches is continuous and flexible in order to meet the needs of children and provide safety, reliability as well as opportunities for being active and learning to be independent. The daily schedule of crèches depends on the age, development level and needs of children in the groups but it is also influenced by the weather and the number of children in a group. A further aspect is ensuring emotional security and the consideration of the child's life in his family, if possible.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Steering documents and types of activities**

Documents governing the content of education and care are:

- National core programme of education and care in crèches
- Act XXXI of 1997 on the protection of children and guardianship administration,
- Decree 15/1998. (IV. 30.) NM on the professional duties and operational conditions of child welfare and child protection institutions providing personal care,

- Publication “Minimum requirements of education and care in crèches” (OCSGYVI, 1999), as well as methodological letters, guides, recommendations

Education in crèches is based on playing, which helps children to learn about the world around them and facilitates their physical, mental, emotional and social development.

According to the National core programme of education and care in crèches the following principles are observed:

1. The respect for the primacy of family education
2. The respect for the child's personality
3. The unity of education and care
4. The individual treatment
5. The security and stability
6. Promoting activity and self-reliance
7. Uniform educational influences.

The responsibilities of nursery education and care are:

1. to promote a healthy lifestyle
2. emotional development, socialization
3. the development of cognitive processes.

The forms of activity include:

1. care
2. play, story, poem, rhymes and singing, creative activities
3. movement

4. learning stems from the child's interest.

### **Teaching methods and materials**

The educational content of work is based on the "National core programme of education and care in crèches". Nursery teachers are free to choose the methods and materials they wish to apply.

### **Assessment in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years**

The crèche may keep documentation in the way specified in the methodological recommendations for monitoring the progress of the child.

The documentation is kept and the related data are used in order to ensure the best possible caring for the child, to facilitate his development and mitigate any drawbacks for disadvantaged children. When the methods and tools are selected for documenting progress, special attention is paid to the needs of small children (steadiness of the personal and physical environment, providing similar life situations accepted by the children, in accordance with their needs).

The consent of parents is needed for keeping such documentation, which is handed over to the parents upon request.



**Lettonia**

## **National Policy**

Early childhood education and care system in Latvia is child oriented: the focus is on the child and his/her right to develop and learn. According to the [Protection of the Rights of the Child Law](#):

*“A child has the right to such living conditions and benevolent social environment as will ensure his or her full physical and intellectual development. Every child shall receive adequate nourishment, clothing and housing. (..) The State shall ensure that all children have equal rights and opportunities to acquire education commensurate to their ability. Children have the right to free-of-charge pre-school preparation”.*

Since the adoption of the [Education Law](#) in 1999 a pre-school education become a central component of Early childhood education and care in Latvia. According to the Education Law pre-school education is:

*“an educational level in which multi-dimensional development of the child as an individual, in the strengthening of health and preparation for the acquisition of primary education takes place”.*

## **Types of Institutions**

In Latvia, children are prepared for school at pre-school education institutions [pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde \(bērnudārzs\)](#) and pre-school education groups at schools [pirmsskolas izglītības grupas pie skolām](#) registered in the [Register of Educational Institutions](#) and providing licensed pre-school education programmes. Pre-school education can be provided also by families. If the family educates the child at home, it may receive methodological support at the consultative centres of pre-school education. Pre-school education program for children with special needs is implemented in special pre-school educational establishments and groups.

Due to shortage of places in public pre-school education institutions, especially in the capital Rīga many children development and play centres were opened both by municipality and private persons, as alternative to pre-school education institutions. The purpose of these centres is to provide child minding services so that parents can access the labour market. As a rule, these centres also provide education activities for children.

In 2013, in order to tackle the existing shortage of places in kindergartens, [Ministry of Welfare](#) developed the regulations "[Requirements for child care providers and the procedure of registration of child care providers](#)" (2013) and respective [Procedure for granting and calculating State support for children from the age of one and a half till acquisition of basic education, if the child receives services from private child care service provider](#). These regulations provide that, acquiring 40 hours of training and provision of first aid, anyone who hasn't made violation of the Rights of the Child Protection Act for or criminal violations may become a child-minder, receiving EUR 142 per month compensation from the state.

## **Content and Objectives**

The **aim** of pre-school education curriculum is to promote a comprehensive and harmonious child's development, considering his or her regularity of development and needs, the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude for individual and social life, thus ensuring a child's possibility to prepare for basic education acquisition.

The **objectives of pre-school education** are to:

- promote the development of child's physical abilities and motor learning;
- promote the development of child's self-confidence, awareness of own abilities and interests, and development of feelings and will;
- promote the child's cognitive development and intellectual curiosity by ensuring the acquisition of knowledge and skills;
- develop child's communication and cooperation skills;
- promote a positive attitude towards him/herself, others, environment and the Latvian State.

The **content of pre-school educational programme** is encompassed in general pre-school education programme, pre-school education programme for ethnic minorities, special pre-school education programme and special pre-school education programme for ethnic minorities.

## Teaching Process and Assessment

**Pre-school education teaching process** is based on the principles of humanism, visuality and continuity.

The **main activity in the pre-school education** is play and the learning objectives are realized by integrated educational approach.

Knowledge, skills and attitude is being **assessed** orally, emphasizing the positive and significant in his or her activities and achievements.

After completion of pre-school education programme the parents or guardians are written informed on their child achievements (knowledge, skills and attitude regarding the planned curriculum outcomes).

## Legislative Framework

In compliance to the law [On Local Governments](#) it is a duty of every local government to ensure a possibility to acquire the pre-school education for the children residing in the territory of the municipality. The founders of pre-school education institutions are local governments (for public pre-schools) or physical or legal entities (for private pre-schools). The decision on foundation, reorganization and closing of the institution should be co-ordinated with the municipality's board of education and the [Ministry of Education and Science](#).

Pre-school education in Latvia is a part of general education. Starting from 2002, **pre-school education is compulsory for five and six year old children**.

The legal background for pre-school institutions is the [Education Law](#), the [General Education Law](#), Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers on [Guidelines for Pre-school Education](#) and [Model Programmes for Pre-school Education](#), other regulatory enactments regarding health and safety as well as the regulation of the institution approved by the founder.

## ***Organisation of Programmes for all Pre-Primary Education***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

The local government must provide the opportunity for all children in the local area to be able to attend pre-school education institution [\*pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde \(bērnudārzs\)\*](#) if the parents wish so. In reality, it is hard to ensure it due to the shortage of places in the pre-school institutions of largest municipalities. It is a particularly live issue in the capital Rīga, as also children living outside Rīga attend pre-school institutions in the capital. In 2004, the local government of Rīga developed unified terms of enrolment in pre-school institutions requiring to provide a place in municipal pre-school institutions for children from Rīga in the first place, and then for the others. Thus, now there are two registration lists, for children from Rīga and for those living outside. Only if there are free places after all children from Rīga are enrolled, the enrolment from the second list is started.

Municipalities (may) establish pre-school institutions upon the request of parents of at least 10 children or 8 children with special needs living in the administrative territory of the respective municipality. Municipalities must provide a possibility to attend the nearest educational institution implementing a pre-school programme for all 5 and 6 year olds if they not attending pre-school institutions already.

In rural areas the municipality also provides transport facilities. There are buses conveying children accompanied by an adult from home to the pre-school institution and back.

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC institution**

Pre-school institutions place children from age 1 to 7. It is possible to prolong or to reduce the acquirement of the programme depending on the state of health and psychological readiness according to parents' wish and family doctor's conclusion.

Attendance of a pre-school institution is optional for children aged 1 to 4 and mandatory for 5 and 6 year olds in order to prepare the latter for primary education, ensure early diagnostics of learning problems and give non-Latvian speaking children extra years to practice Latvian.

Children with special needs can attend special pre-school education institutions or special education pre-school groups at general education institutions, or are integrated into general pre-school groups in educational institutions which offer special pre-school education programs.

The enrolment of children into a pre-school institution is carried out in accordance with the application procedure defined by the founder of institution, usually in the order of submitted applications. However, [Ministry of Education and Science](#) has issued [recommendations](#) for local authorities referring to the priority of ECEC places for children of some groups of parents, when demand is higher than supply. These parents' groups are: professional military service; internal affairs officers and border-guards if their place of service changes. The Ministry recommends that priority for ECEC places have children whose residential address is declared in the administrative territory of respective municipality; children have reached age of compulsory pre-school preparation (5 and 6 years old children); one of child's parents is working in the respective pre-school education institutions; children from single parent families; children who are under extra-familial care; children from foster families; children with recommendations from Orphan's court; and other criteria set by local authorities.

Children are enrolled in the pre-school institution when parents submit all necessary documents and if there are accommodation capacity. Pre-school education institutions are prohibited to set up entrance tests. However, it is desirable to have basic skills on behaviour, hygiene and self-attendance, although the lack of these skills is not a reason for rejection.

Parents are free to choose pre-school institution that provides general pre-school education programme, pre-school education programme for ethnic minorities, special pre-school education programme or special pre-school education programme for ethnic minorities. However, in Rīga, a place in municipal pre-school institution first of all is provided for children from Rīga and then for the others.

All 5 and 6 year olds are admitted in compulsory pre-school education programmes on the application of parents.

## **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Children are organized in groups according to a school model (children of the same age) or family model (children of different age). There can be both or either one of the models even in a single pre-school institution. The head of a pre-school institution may organize grouping of children also by the main language of instruction (the state language or ethnic minority language). It depends on the demands of parents.

The founder may open a play group as entity or component of institution, or an integrated group attended by both sound children and those with special needs, health or development impairments.

In order to reduce bureaucratic obstacles in 2009, the regulations on minimum and maximum number of children in group were abolished and its up to schools and municipalities to determine the number of children in a group.

## **Organisation of Time**

The organization of year, week and day largely depends on the founder of a pre-school institution. However, there are common recommendations on the organization of educational part of a pre-school institution. The [Model Programme of Pre-school Education](#) states main guidelines on the organization of pre-school education defining that lesson must be organized every day, ensuring uniform (steady) study load per week.

## **Organisation of the Day and Week**

Usually pre-school institutions operate all year round with a break during the summer holidays lasting one to two months (usually in July and August). Whether or not the institution is open during summer depends on the founder of the pre-school institution. However, on the request by parents, a possibility to attend the pre-school institution should be provided also during the summer break.

Pre-schools that provide childcare full day usually are open daily from 7.00 am (or 7.30 am) till 6.00 pm (or 6.30 pm), except Saturdays and Sundays. In some pre-school institutions there are one or more twenty-four-hour groups; therefore it is possible to stay in the pre-school institution also at night.

The [Model Programme of Pre-school Education](#) issued by the [Ministry of Education and Science](#) set up the main guidelines for pre-school education contents. Every pre-school teacher is responsible for drawing the programme of activities for the particular group of children to comply with the individual development of children.

## **Teaching and Learning in Programmes for all Pre-Primary Education**

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activities**

The Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers on [State Pre-school Education Guidelines](#) (2012) defines the main aim of pre-school education and main tasks, describes the pedagogical process of pre-school education, defines the content and learning outcomes of pre-school education, and describes how the evaluation process is organized. Guidelines determine the scope of pre-school education content which is: to promote a comprehensive and harmonious child's development, considering his or her regularity of development and needs, the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude for individual and social life, thus ensuring a child's possibility to prepare for basic education acquisition.

Education plan and curriculum guidelines are described by the [Model Programme for Pre-school Education](#) (2012). The programme of pre-school education acquaints children with environment and social life, learning of the native and the state language and literature, establishment of mathematical notions. The list of subjects also includes drawing, needlework, construction, sports and music.

Reading and writing skills have to be developed during pedagogical process. Three times per week there are sport playing activities and two times – sport games inside premises or on sport ground. Other activities such as foreign language learning are optional and institutions are autonomous to decide on any other of learning through play activity provision.

Besides learning, children also spend time outside taking walks and playing freely. Children in a full time pre-school are provided with meals during the day and a possibility to take a nap.



## **Teaching Methods and Materials**

Play is the basic method in pre-school education and development of pre-school age children. By the play children learn about the world and environment, develop imagination, creativeness, face a wide range of emotional experience thus developing artistic taste and aesthetic feelings.

The other methods are: practical method, verbal method, modelling, and experiment. Teachers are free to choose from these methods, however, play is approved as the main one. Play is being kept as an integral part of childhood, giving children emotional comfort, feeling of freedom and security. Various play activities ensure children's physical, intellectual and emotional development. Therefore teachers are being encouraged to use the play as the main teaching method.

The [Ministry of Education and Science](#) has adopted the [Model Programme for Pre-school Education Programme](#). All provisions and guidelines stated in this document must be observed when pre-school institution develops its own educational programme. When preparing own content of the programme the teacher has to provide achievement of aims and tasks specified in this document. There are various textbooks, handbooks and other materials on pre-school education recommended by the Ministry of Education and Science. However, the choice to use these or any other materials depends on the pre-school institution and the particular teacher, and the pre-schools do not receive those materials free of charge.

The Ministry only distributes some free [teaching aids](#) where experience and some advice is summarized, and teachers may create new ideas on a successful implementation of pre-school education programme.

## ***Assessment in Programmes for all Pre-Primary Education***

Teacher observes the child's progress and tells him or her personally about achievements emphasizing the positive things and encouraging improvement of skills. The teacher regularly consults parents on the child's development and gives recommendations on the education of the child to be provided in the family.

From January 2011, parents or guardians of a child receives written information from a [pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde \(bērnudārzs\)](#) on achievements of the child after completion of pre-school education programme.

### ***Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care***

In public pre-school institutions [pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde \(bērnudārzs\)](#) the language of instruction is Latvian, Russian, Polish or another ethnic minority language. In the institutions where the language of instruction is other than Latvian, part of education content is learned in Latvian, that is, the programme is implemented bilingually. It is important to develop the sense of belonging to Latvia within the children of ethnic minorities.

Other early childhood care service providers include day nurseries, playgroups and day care centres, also institutions of interest-related education provide activities for children under school age. Education programmes should be coordinated with the [Ministry of Education and Science](#).

**Lituania**

In Lithuania, early childhood education and care (ECEC) from the birth of the child until the year when a child reach 7 (except cases set by the Minister of Education and Science or on parents' request to start primary education earlier – from 6 year) is composed of **pre-school** and **pre-primary** education and attributed to the type of non-formal education. Pre-school and pre-primary is not compulsory, except in cases specified by the Minister of Education and Science and the Minister of Social Security and Labour.

[The Law on Education](#) (2011) states that the purpose of pre-school education is to help children satisfy their inherent, cultural, including ethnic, social and cognitive needs.

Pre-school education is provided in the family and, at the request of parents (foster parents or guardians), according to the pre-school education curriculum. Pre-primary education is provided to children from birth until they start their pre-primary or primary schooling.

The pre-school education curriculum that is prepared in compliance with the Outline of Criteria for Pre-School Education Curricula approved by the Minister of Education and Science is delivered in ECEC pre-school settings, general education schools, by freelance teachers or other education providers.

The purpose of pre-primary education is to help children prepare for successful schooling in accordance with the primary education curriculum.

Pre-primary education is implemented according to the one-year general pre-primary education curriculum approved by the Minister of Education and Science. Pre-primary education is offered at pre-primary classes in ECEC settings, general education schools or provided by licensed freelance teachers or other education providers in accordance with the order established by the Minister of Education and Science.

The provision of pre-school education to the child starts in the calendar year when he/she turns six years of age. In line with the [Outline of the Procedure for Assessing the Child's Maturity to Follow the Pre-Primary and Primary Education Curriculum](#) (2005), provision of pre-school education may start earlier at the request of the child's parents (foster parents or guardians), but not before the child has reached the age of five.

[The Law on Education](#) (2011) and in line with the procedure established by the Minister of Education and Science, the Minister of Social Security and Labour and the Minister of Health, pre-school and pre-primary age children and their families are entitled to a comprehensive provision of educational assistance, social support and health services.

The national education policy is aimed at ensuring the welfare to all children living in Lithuania, including creation of conditions for every child to live a happy life, be protected against all forms of violence and exploitation, be properly cared for and able to participate in public life. The focus is on ensuring the access, continuity and social equity of education and expansion of pre-school education provision, especially for disadvantaged and at-risk children through creation of an information and counseling system for parents, provision of equal start opportunities for their children's compulsory schooling and development of the universally available pre-primary education system by rendering a purposeful educational and cultural assistance for all social risk families with children.

The above-mentioned objectives and tasks are regulated by the following legal acts: the [General Concept of Education in Lithuania](#) (1992), [the National Education Strategy 2013–2022](#) (2013), [Law on Education](#) (2011), Order of the Minister of Education and Science 'Concerning Approval of the Pre-primary Education Curriculum' (2014, comes into force on 2015), Lithuanian Government Resolution '[Concerning Approval of the Model for Improvement of Living and Educational Conditions for Children from Birth to the Start of their Compulsory Schooling](#)' (2009), Ministerial Order '[Concerning Approval of the Programme for the Development of Pre-Primary and Pre-School Education for 2011–2013](#)'(2011), etc.

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Pre-Primary Education***

### **Geographical accessibility**

Organisation of early childhood education and care is a prerogative of the local government. The network of institutions depends on decisions taken by municipalities. As a result, the municipalities across the country greatly differ by geographical spread of institutions offering ECEC services.

During 2001–2010, the number of ECEC providers in the country was decreasing. However, since 2011, it has started to grow due to policies focused on the liberalisation of ECEC institutions' establishment procedure. According to the data provided by Statistics Lithuania, in 2011, there were 647 ECEC providers (521 in urban and 126 in rural areas), and, in 2013, there were 675 ECEC providers (563 in urban and 112 in rural areas) or 3.4 per cent fewer than in 2001. In 2013, participation in ECEC amounted to 66.7 per cent

of all children in the age group of 1–6 year-olds and older children across the country. That is 5.2 per cent more than in 2011 and 24.3 per cent more than in 2001.

Despite the fact that, over the recent years, private ECEC provision has been growing (19 in 2011, 45 in 2012 and 61 in 2013), the place it occupies in the country is insignificant. In comparison with 2011–2012, when participation in this sector amounted only to 0.4 per cent of all children participating in the institutional ECEC education, in 2013 the number of the children educated in the ECEC sector grew up to 2.8 per cent of all children participating in the ECEC.

Over the recent years, the number of special purpose ECEC providers and participation in them has decreased. In 2011, there were only 84 special purpose ECEC settings for children with special education needs. Only 3 of them were located in rural areas. In 2012 there were 52 special purpose ECEC (from 2012 there were none special purpose ECEC left in the rural area), and in the 2013 – 77. In 2011, those special purpose ECEC settings were attended by 2.4 thousand of children with special education needs, 1555 children – in 2012 and 1538 children - in 2013. Most of special purpose ECEC institutions (groups) are established for children recognised as having speech and multi-sensory disorders.

Comparison of the number of children participating in ECEC provision brings out a marked difference between urban and rural areas: in 2013, the participation of urban children increased up to 96.8 thousand from 87.4 thousand in 2011, whereas the number of rural children increased much slower from 10.5 thousand in 2011 to 13.3 thousand in 2013. During the past six years, the percentage of rural 1–6 year-old and older children participating in pre-school and pre-primary education is approx. three times lower than that of urban children of the same age group.

In order to expand access to ECEC provision and ensure its integrity, the Ministry of Education and Science took the initiative to create more favourable conditions for the appearance of an organisational variety in ECEC provision, including the simplification of hygiene norms for ECEC institutions, development and approval of legal documents to introduce (from 1 January 2011) partial funding (not exceeding 20 hours per week) of ECEC provision based on the principle of the pupil's basket methodology approved by a resolution of the Government (2010), promotion of the private ECEC provision sector development and liberalisation of requirements for the use of buildings and premises for newly established ECEC settings. The introduction of pre-school education basket and simplification of hygiene norms were expected to address the shortage of pre-school

institutions as well as reduce the discrepancies between pre-school education institutions in different municipalities.

In 2011, in order to increase the access and variety of ECEC provision and reduce social exclusion, particularly in rural areas the multi functional centres has been established. . That creates an opportunity for small rural schools with a constantly decreasing number of children to survive. Apart from provision of education for children, multi-functional centres may offer other kinds of activities, including non-formal adult education, educational assistance, special education, distance learning according to formal and non-formal education curricula or their modules, as well as recreational, socio-cultural and artistic activities for both adults and children and so on. The scope of the functions performed and the target groups are determined by the local authorities after evaluation of the local community needs. Ninemulti-functional centres that are also to include ECEC groups had been opened and started their operations.

Given the fact that pre-school education is closely related to the participation of the family in the labour market, pre-school education groups with flexible operational hours are being created to meet the needs of parents working a longer working day. The [National Programme for the Development of Pre-School and Pre-Primary Education for 2011–2013](#) adopted on 1 March 2011 is designed for enhancing access and quality in early childhood education and care. It provides a set of measures supposed to encourage introduction of more flexible working hours of pre-school institutions and more diverse forms of their organisation as well as develop provision of mobile educational assistance to children of pre-school age and their families, increase the targeted financial support for the staff of pre-school education institutions, etc.

In addition, the Law on Cash Social Assistance for Poor Families and Single Residents enabled families receiving social assistance or cash benefits to have their children educated in pre-school or pre-primary institutions without the loss of such social support.

In 2011, the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science prepared the Pre-School and Pre-Primary Education Development Programme for 2011–2013. The Programme was aimed at enhancing the access to pre-school and pre-primary education, improving the variety of available education forms and dealing with complex problems. As part of the Programme implementation, the project Pre-School and Pre-Primary Education Development was initiated.

The research phase of the project focused on analysing children's learning conditions in different municipalities in Lithuania. As a result, a number of important issues in the ECEC area were identified. One of the key issues was a dual problem relating to the availability of ECEC provision across the country, i.e. the excess demand for places in pre-school and pre-primary education institutions in urban areas and an extremely low children enrolment rate in ECEC education in rural areas.

One of the goals of the project was to create conditions facilitating the founders to establish new pre-school education institutions and encourage them to design and adopt new educational models.

In September - October 2012, public consultations were provided in Lithuanian municipalities. The consultations attracted more than 260 participants. During the consultations, participants had an opportunity to discuss the key issues emerging while establishing new ECEC institutions, e.g. a new kindergarten or a new group in the running pre-school institution, and analyse some case studies. Also, as part of the project, a free telephone line was provided, offering support for parties interested in establishing new pre-school institutions.

Moreover, as part of the project, the Methodical Recommendations for Non-State Pre-School and Pre-Primary Education Programme Providers were revised and updated. The Recommendations are designed for potential founders of pre-school institutions, who need more information about the key stages and steps in establishing new ECEC institutions. The main purpose of the document is to provide detailed information and necessary assistance to physical and legal entities intending to establish pre-school education institutions.

Implementation of the project has proved to be successful. By the end of 2012, 21 new non-state pre-school institutions were established in Lithuania. The availability of pre-school education in the rural areas increased by 19.6 per cent (6.2 per cent in urban areas). The number of children enrolled in pre-school or pre-primary education institutions has increased by more than 1,000.

In 2012, the amount of LTL 7.08 m was allocated from the EU SF project Pre-School and Pre-Primary Education Development to fund ECEC. In addition, thousands of pre-school baskets were financed from the state budget according to the pupil's basket methodology. The total value of the project – LTL 18.677 thousand or € 5,409 thousand.



## **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institution**

The procedure for admission of children to a state, municipal or private ECEC provider is determined by the institution implementing the rights and responsibilities of the owner.

Priority enrolment in municipal pre-school education groups is granted to children living in the catchment area assigned to the institution implementing the rights and responsibilities of the owner. At the request of parents (foster parents or guardians), children may be admitted to another pre-school primary institution only if there are vacant places in it.

Enrolment in state and municipal pre-school institutions is granted to children with major and severe special education needs. Decisions regarding the education of children with special needs in special education institutions are taken by the founder of the special education provider together with the Educational Psychology Service in the service territory of which the person concerned lives and the head of the education institution, at the request of the parents (foster parents or guardians). In cases where opinions are divided, the final decision belongs to the Educational Psychology Service.

In 2003, the Minister of Education and Science approved the Guidance for Municipalities on Centralised Admission of Children to Groups of Pre-School and Pre-Primary Education of ECEC providers. According to the Guidance, admission to a pre-primary institution may be administered not directly by the provider of the services but by the educational departments of municipal administrations. The main provisions of the Guidance include the following recommendations: admission should be granted in succession by the registration date of the application; priority should be given to children with special needs, those from single parent families, also from low-income families with three or more children attributed to socially disadvantaged families, children whose one of the parents is a pupil or full-time student studying at the day department of an education institution, families in which the child's father is doing compulsory military service and children with one of the parents recognised as having category I or II invalidity. In addition, the Guidance takes into account other significant criteria.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Law on Education (2011) attributes ECEC to non-formal education, pre-school and pre-primary education is compulsory to children from families included in the list of social risk families for a period from the children's birth to the start of their compulsory education. This provision is contained in the regulatory act of the Ministry of Education and Science ['Regarding the approval of the procedure for establishing and](#)

[providing compulsory pre-school and pre-primary education](#)' adopted by a ministerial order on 26 April 2012. The document could be seen [here](#).

## **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

The [Law on Education](#) (2011) states that pre-school education is provided to the child from the time he/she is born to the start of pre-primary or primary education provision.

ECEC groups are formed from children of the same or different age in conformity with the physiological and age characteristics related to the organisation of the child's day and his/her educational activities: groups of up to one-year-olds may comprise no more than six children, groups of 1–1.5-year-olds no more than ten children, groups of 1.5–3-year-olds no more than 15 children and groups of 3–7-year-olds no more than 20 children. Groups of different age children from birth to three years may contain no more than eight children. Group lists must be drawn up without exceeding the number of children indicated by the age groups.

When admitting children to integrated ECEC groups, one child with mental impairment (intellectual incapacity), hearing impairment (hearing loss or deafness), eyesight disorders (visual impairment or blindness), limited mobility (motor and support apparatus dysfunctions), multi-sensory disorders, behaviour and social development disorders, major speech and other communication/ interaction disorders or a child who is recognised as being disabled is equated to two children without any impairment of the same group.

Special pre-school education groups are formed in the following way: groups of children with medium, major or severe mental impairment (intellectual incapacity) may comprise no more than six children, groups of blind children no more than six children, groups of children with eyesight disorders (visual impairment) no more than ten children, groups of children with hearing impairment (hearing loss or deafness) no more than six children, groups of children with major speech and other communication/ interaction disorders no more than ten children, groups of children with limited mobility (motor and support apparatus dysfunctions) no more than eight children, groups of children with multi-sensory disorders no more than six children and groups of children with complex developmental disorders (both movement and posture) no more than three children.

One blind child in a special pre-school group for children with eyesight disorders (visual impairment) and one child with complex developmental disorders or a child who is

recognised as being disabled in a special pre-school group is equated to two children without any impairment of the same group.

At one time, a group of children from birth to one year of age must have at least two educators and a group of children from 1 to 7 years of age must have at least two employees, including at least one pedagogue (a pre-school educator or pre-primary class teacher). Every group usually has its own support staff. As children progress from one stage to a higher one, they are accompanied by the same educator/teacher.

The principles for forming groups are determined in accordance with the laws by the institution implementing the rights and responsibilities of the owner who takes into account the wishes of the family and the capacity of the educational institution.

The maximum number of children in groups of all ages is regulated by the Hygiene Norms and Rules approved by an order of the Minister of Health.

## **Organisation of Time**

Institutions of pre-school education are usually run all the year round (if the owner or institution implementing the rights and responsibilities of the owner does not establish otherwise). Pre-school education is provided in cycles starting from September 1st and finishing on September 1st the following year.

In Lithuania, the governance of ECEC provision is decentralised, so organisation of time is the prerogative of education providers offering pre-school education curricula (i. e. the owner or institution implementing the rights and responsibilities of the owner) who take into account the education needs of families with pre-primary age children.

## **Organisation of the Day and Week**

In ECEC settings, the duration of the operational hours of pre-school and pre-primary groups is established by the owner or institution implementing the rights and responsibilities of the owner who takes into account the requests of parents (foster parents or guardians).

The duration of the opening hours in ECEC settings may vary to a great extent. There are pre-school institutions operating for 3–4, 5–6, 9–10.5 or 12 hours on weekdays and also others (weekly kindergartens) working for 24 hours a day.

In order to develop more flexible operational hours, some providers offer pre-school education groups that open earlier and close later to accommodate parents' employment constraints.

In all groups where educational activities last for more than four hours per day, children are provided with facilities for having meals and rest.

## LENGTH OF "SCHOOL" DAY, EACH DAY OF THE WEEK

### **Out-of-hours provision (before activities)**

(greeting ritual, discussions, reading on a chosen topic and freely chosen other activity of the children)

### **Main activities (lessons (starting and finishing times in the morning))**

group activities (presentation of work performed by the children, games, sports, cognitive activity, etc.)

### **Lunch break**

(lunch and midday nap)

### **Activities after the lessons (starting and finishing times in the afternoon)**

(freely chosen activities of the children in special activity lots arranged by the teachers and also in activity centres)

### **Out-of-hours provision (after activities)**

(leave-taking ritual)

### **Monday**

1 h – 1 h 45 min

1 h 45 min – 2 h 10 min

1 h 30 min

2–4 h

10–15 min

**Tuesday**

1 h – 1 h 45 min

1 h 45 min – 2 h 10 min

1 h 30 min

2–4 h

10–15 min

**Wednesday**

1 h – 1 h 45 min

1 h 45 min – 2 h 10 min

1 h 30 min

2–4 h

10–15 min

**Thursday**

1 h – 1 h 45 min

1 h 45 min – 2 h 10 min

1 h 30 min

2–4 h

10–15 min

**Friday**

1 h – 1 h 45 min

1 h 45 min – 2 h 10 min

1 h 30 min

2–4 h

10–15 min

**Saturday**

1 h – 1 h 45 min

1 h 45 min – 2 h 10 min

1 h 30 min

2–4 h

10–15 min

**Lussemburgo**

The field of early childhood education in Luxembourg is currently undergoing profound transformations. In recent years, a quantitative expansion has gone along with efforts to adapt the supply structure to a modern understanding of childhood and families' needs (see Honig & Haag, 2012. *Education and Care for Children in Luxembourg*, p. 22). In 2009, formal ECEC became a part of a comprehensive elementary school (*école fondamentale*).

The process of transformation is far from over. Currently, [new draft regulations](#) on the accreditation (*agrément*) and the quality of childcare facilities are being discussed and a quality approach for non-formal education is to be introduced.

## **General objectives**

Luxembourg's current policy is based on an understanding of education which places the child and its entitlement to education in the centre of the attention. Children are understood as human beings who are naturally willing and eager to learn. National policy therefore aims at providing them with a stimulating environment and adapted learning opportunities within and outside school hours. The learning activities offered should endorse the children's natural curiosity and respect their individual development while enabling them to pursue their own interests. Non-formal education should provide space for movement, discovery, free play and rest. During the children's leisure time, tendencies towards school-like settings should be avoided.

In a recent brochure, the former Ministry of Family Affairs and Integration stated:

“Learning cannot be limited exclusively to formal processes taking place in schools and universities. Learning goes on in those institutions as well as in daily life and also comprises, besides the formal ones, non-formal and informal processes.”

(Ministry of Family Affairs and Integration, 2012. [Non-Formal Education with Children and Young People](#).)

According to this understanding, a strong link between formal and non-formal education is key. Though regulated by different ministries, formal and non-formal education are meant to complement each other. Continuity between formal and non-formal settings should be guaranteed and there is no hierarchy between formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Furthermore, national ECEC policies seek to enable parents to better combine work and family life. They also play an important role in combatting social exclusion, which is linked to the reproduction of social inequalities through educational performance.

## Structure of ECEC in Luxembourg

ECEC in Luxembourg may be characterised by

- the distinction and the thought for complementarity between formal and non-formal provisions (split system)
- various forms of State support available and
- the coexistence of various types of public and private structures.

### Split system

ECEC in Luxembourg distinguishes non-formal education, which takes place in the child's private "leisure" time, from compulsory school attendance within the formal system.

**Private time** is spent in the child's family, in day care centres (*crèches, garderies, foyers du jour, maison relais*), day care families (*assistance parentale*) or in other associations organising children's activities (e.g. music, sports, scouts). It is generally fee-based, but the State provides financial support to parents and to certain types of structures. In the context of ECEC, non-formal education is understood as "work with children and young people in day care centres, in youth facilities or in youth organisations, where it deliberately pursues learning goals" (Ministry of Family Affairs and Integration, 2012. *Non-Formal Education with Children and Young People*).

**Formal education** is delivered by elementary schools. School attendance within the formal system is free of charge. From the age of 3 years onwards, children may participate in an early childhood education programme (*enseignement précoce*), which is not compulsory, but has to be offered by each municipality. Compulsory schooling starts at the age of 4 with pre-school education (*enseignement préscolaire*). Together, the optional year of early childhood education and the two years of pre-school education form the first cycle of elementary education (*enseignement fondamental*).

The following table provides an overview of formal and non-formal ECEC provision in Luxembourg.



## **Children under 3 years**

### **Children over 3 years**

#### **Non-formal system**

(Ministry of Education, Children and Youth)

Day care centres

(*crèches, garderies*)

Day care families

(*assistance parentale*)

Day care centres

(*crèches, garderies*)

Day care families

(*assistance parentale*)

#### **Formal system**

(Ministry of Education, Children and Youth)

### **3-4 years**

optional early childhood education programme

(*enseignement précoce*)

### **4-6 years**

compulsory pre-school education

(*enseignement préscolaire*)

The main characteristics of non-formal and formal provisions are summarised below

#### **Non-formal education**

##### **Formal education**

- provided by public or private, non-profit or commercial childcare facilities, by associations or by day care families (*assistants parentaux*)
- provided by elementary schools within the formal school system

- National framework for non-formal education of children and young people  
(*Cadre national de référence "Éducation non formelle des enfants et des jeunes"*)
- Curriculum framework for elementary education  
([Règlement grand-ducal du 11 août 2011](#) fixant le plan d'études pour les quatre cycles de l'enseignement fondamental)
- process-oriented
- pursuing specific learning objectives  
(basic skills levels - *socles de compétences*)
- voluntary basis ("private" time)
- during compulsory school time
- fee-based but State-supported
- free of charge

### **Types of structures**

Non-formal ECEC is provided by different types of day care centres which may be public (run by municipalities), commercial or run by non-profit associations. In addition, there is a growing number of day care families (parental assistants –*assistants parentaux*), who provide their services on a commercial basis. Since December 2013, the responsibility for the coordination, accreditation and supervision of these provisions lies with the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth ([MENJE](#) - *ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse*). In order to bring the different fields of education and care closer together, the departments for Childhood and Youth, which formerly belonged to the Ministry of Family Affairs and Integration ([MFI](#) – *ministère de la Famille et de l'Intégration*), have been integrated into the Ministry of Education.

Formal ECEC is provided by elementary schools. Formal education is governed by the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth.

### **Coordination of the different types of education**

In 2012, Luxembourg has introduced a new legal provision aimed at coordinating formal and non-formal education and care at municipal level. Each municipality is now obliged to set up one or several Plans for Extracurricular Education (PEP – [Plan d'encadrement périscolaire](#)) which includes all local formal and non-formal activities for school-aged

children (i.e. cultural activities, sports, learning, meals). The municipality is responsible for the coordination and implementation of the plan.

The PEP should guarantee a continuous offer for education and care. . Its main objective is to offer stimulating learning activities and environments to children. It is also supposed to allow parents to better combine their work and family life.

Based on a timetable, the PEP specifies

- formal school time
- optional non-formal offers.

The following figure shows a blank template, with the yellow fields for formal school time and the green fields for non-formal offers.

## **Model for a Plan for Extracurricular Education**

*Source: MENFP & MFI, 2013. [Plan d'encadrement périscolaire - PEP. Leitfaden zur Umsetzung des PEP. MENFP, p. 14.](#)*

The framework foresees a sharing of responsibilities which goes along with an obligation for both structures to cooperate: School activities fall into the responsibility of elementary schools whereas day care centres are in charge of the non-formal activities. Municipal infrastructures may be used for both purposes; other premises should be shared if possible.

In order to strengthen their cooperation, the participating institutions should organise

- common activities for pupils
- regular exchange between school presidents and managers of day care centres
- presentations to parents and
- common trainings for staff members of both institutions.

They may also conclude agreements which can go up to offering full-day care for children in one and the same setting.

## State support

Up to the age of 4, parents bare the primary responsibility for the care and upbringing of their children. However, non-formal education and care below this age and outside school hours is supported by the State through the following instruments:

- **Co-financing of childcare facilities:** The operational costs (*frais de fonctionnement*) of municipal day care centres are 75% state-funded. The remaining 25% as well as infrastructure costs are borne by the given municipality. The provider of a municipal day care centre may be the municipality itself or a non-profit organisation which holds a tripartite agreement (*convention tripartite*) with the municipality and the competent ministry.
- **Childcare-service vouchers:** In 2009, state-funded "Childcare-service vouchers" (CSA - [\*Chèques-Service Accueil\*](#)) have been put in place in order to offer financial support to children and their families and to provide more equitable access to childcare. These vouchers offer differentiated price reductions for public and private day care centres, day care families and other non-formal activities. They are issued to parents of all children living in Luxembourg who are either younger than 13 years or who are still attending elementary education. Families benefitting from the Guaranteed Minimum Wage (RMG - *Revenu minimum garanti*) or who are identified as being at risk of poverty benefit from more favourable rates.

As part of the public school system, the optional (3- to 4 year-old pupils) and the compulsory (pupils aged 4 and over) years of elementary education are provided free of charge.

## Legislation

### Day care centres

Non-formal provisions are regulated by the laws and Grand-Ducal regulations on the accreditation of day care centres; the agreements (*conventions*) on State co-financing; and the relations between the State and structures providing social, family or therapeutical services.

### **Relations between the State and the structures providing social, family or therapeutical services**

- [Loi du 8 septembre 1998](#) réglant les relations entre l'État et les organismes œuvrant dans les domaines social, familial et thérapeutique (ASFT).
- [Règlement grand-ducal du 20 décembre 2001](#) portant exécution des articles 1er et 2 de la loi du 8 septembre 1998 réglant les relations entre l'État et les organismes œuvrant dans les domaines social, familial et thérapeutique pour ce qui concerne l'agrément gouvernemental à accorder aux gestionnaires de structures d'accueil sans hébergement pour enfants.

### **Accreditation of maisons relais**

- [Règlement grand-ducal du 20 juillet 2005](#) concernant l'agrément à accorder aux gestionnaires de maison relais pour enfants
- [Règlement grand-ducal du 13 février 2009](#) portant modification du règlement grand-ducal du 20 juillet 2005 concernant l'agrément à accorder aux gestionnaires de maison relais pour enfants.

### **Day care families**

- [Loi du 30 novembre 2007](#) portant réglementation de l'activité d'assistance parentale

### Cycle 1 of elementary education

Cycle 1 of elementary education is governed by the 2009 laws on elementary education.

### **Compulsory school attendance**

- [Loi du 6 février 2009](#) relative à l'obligation scolaire

### **Organisation of elementary education**

- [Loi modifiée du 6 février 2009](#) portant organisation de l'enseignement fondamental

### **Elementary school staff**

- [Loi du 6 février 2009](#) concernant le personnel de l'enseignement fondamental

## **Transversal instruments and other provisions**

The legislative framework of ECEC is completed by the laws on childcare-service vouchers; the PEP; private schools; and on the National Children's Office.

### **Private schools**

- [Loi modifiée du 13 juin 2003](#) concernant les relations entre l'Etat et l'enseignement privé et portant abrogation des articles 83 à 87 de la loi modifiée du 10 août 1912 concernant l'organisation de l'enseignement primaire.

### **Child and Youth Welfare / National Children's Office (ONE – *Office national de l'enfance*)**

- [Loi du 16 décembre 2008](#) relative à l'aide à l'enfance et à la famille
- [Règlement grand-ducal du 17 août 2011](#) 1. réglant l'organisation et le fonctionnement de l'Office national de l'enfance, et 2. modifiant le règlement grand-ducal modifié du 7 juin 1979 déterminant les actes, documents et fichiers autorisés à utiliser le numéro d'identité des personnes physiques et morales.

### **Childcare-service voucher**

- [Règlement grand-ducal du 13 février 2009](#) instituant le «chèque-service accueil»

### **Plan for Extracurricular Education**

- [Règlement grand-ducal du 16 mars 2012](#) portant a) exécution de l'article 16 de la loi du 6 février 2009 portant organisation de l'enseignement fondamental, relatif à l'encadrement périscolaire; b) modification du règlement grand-ducal du 17 décembre 2010 concernant l'assurance accident dans le cadre de l'enseignement précoce, préscolaire, scolaire et universitaire

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 3 years***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

#### Day care centres

Though there is no formal legislation on the geographical accessibility of early childhood education, the national funding structure provides strong incentives that have led to a countrywide provision of childcare facilities: de facto, there is at least one private or public day care centre in each municipality.

While the number of places has been increasing in recent years, the demand for ECEC in 2012 still exceeded the number of places provided. Data on the development of the offer is available in the Ministry of Family Affairs and Integration's yearly report (*ministère de la Famille et de l'Intégration*, 2013. [\*Rapport d'activité 2012\*](#)).

### **Support for children in need**

At local level, flexible and inclusive childcare facilities are to be organised with support of the State and the municipalities.

Support measures for children in need (children and young people who are threatened in their physical, mental, psychological or social development or children exposed to physical or moral dangers) are coordinated by National Children's Office (ONE – *Office national de l'enfance*). This administration of the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth (MENJE – *ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse*) takes care of the requests of children in need and their families.

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institution**

In order to be accredited by the competent ministry, day care structures must not apply any ideological, racial or philosophical criteria for admission.

As municipal day care centres are partly financed from municipal budgets, they generally give priority to the municipality's residents before admitting children from other

municipalities. They may also prioritise applications from children who attend a local school.

Since there is no legal entitlement to non-formal education for children under 3 years, there is no right of appeal for the admission to day care centres.

## **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

### Age levels

Day care centres take care of children from 0 to 12 years of age. The recent draft regulation on the accreditation of day care centres ([\*Projet de règlement grand-ducal du 7 mars 2012 concernant l'agrément à accorder aux gestionnaires de services d'éducation et d'accueil pour enfants\*](#)) distinguishes between “young children” (*jeunes enfants*) aged 0-3 years and “children attending school” (*enfants scolarisés*) aged 4-12 years. In some regards, it specifies different requirements for the supervision of children belonging to the different age groups.

### **Group size and staff/child ratio**

Currently, the maximum staff/child ratio still varies according to the different types of day care centres. In order to create equal conditions, the above-mentioned draft regulation foresees the following unified ratios for all day care centres:

- below the age of 2 years: 1:6
- between 2 to 4 years: 1:8
- over 4 years: 1:11.

The grouping of children varies according to the structures' organisation. Younger children and children attending school may be grouped together in mixed groups. The maximum group size for children under 2 is 15 children.

Day care families cater for up to 5 children per family, subject to the space available: The space per child in the eating and living room has to be at least 2, and as soon as the new [government bill on day care families](#) enters into force, 4 square metres per child, including own children.



According to the recommendations of the National framework for non-formal education for children and young people (see [article 4.2](#)), the number of reference persons per child should be limited. The PEP should guarantee a continuous offer for school children and should limit the number of reference persons. Except for day care families, pedagogical teams in non-formal ECEC consist of at least two staff members.

### **Organisation of Time**

According to article 5 of the above-mentioned draft regulation on the accreditation of day care centres, day care centres will have to be open during at least 46 weeks per year.

### **Organisation of the Day and Week**

Most day care centres in Luxembourg are open between 7 am and 7 pm. The typical structure of the daily activities is determined by each provider.

### **Legislation**

[Loi du 16 décembre 2008](#) relative à l'aide à l'enfance et à la famille

[Loi du 30 novembre 2007](#) portant réglementation de l'activité d'assistance parentale.

[Loi du 8 septembre 1998](#) réglant les relations entre l'État et les organismes œuvrant dans les domaines social, familial et thérapeutique.

[Règlement grand-ducal du 20 juillet 2005](#) concernant l'agrément à accorder aux gestionnaires de maison relais pour enfants

[Règlement grand-ducal du 20 décembre 2001](#) portant exécution des articles 1er et 2 de la loi du 8 septembre 1998 réglant les relations entre l'État et les organismes œuvrant dans les domaines social, familial et thérapeutique pour ce qui concerne l'agrément gouvernemental à accorder aux gestionnaires de structures d'accueil sans hébergement pour enfants.

[Projet de règlement grand-ducal du 7 mars 2012](#) concernant l'agrément à accorder aux gestionnaires de services d'éducation et d'accueil pour enfants.

[Projet de loi modifiant la loi du 30 novembre 2007](#) portant réglementation de l'activité d'assistance parentale.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 3 years***

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activities**

In order to provide a common basis for non-formal teaching and learning, Luxembourg has recently worked out a National framework for non-formal education for children and young people (*Cadre national de référence « Education non formelle des enfants et des jeunes »* / [Rahmenplan Non-formale Bildung im Kinder- und Jugendbereich](#)). According to the draft regulation on quality assurance in non-formal education ([Projet de règlement grand-ducal concernant l'assurance de la qualité dans les services d'éducation et d'accueil pour enfants et dans les services pour jeunes](#)), the framework is to be adopted in the aftermath of the regulation's entry into force.

The National framework for non-formal education concerns ECEC for children under 3 years as well as non-formal offers for elder children. It provides a common understanding and concept of childhood and sets out general objectives and fundamental pedagogical principles of non-formal education. It does not aim at standardising the pedagogical methodologies to be employed or at defining child outcomes, but focuses on the process of learning.

The following table summarises the framework's **main positions**.

### **Understanding of learning**

- dynamic process
- not limited to formal processes
- not limited to a specific age
- not bound to any particular venues.

## **Understanding of childhood**

- “competent child and youth” as partners of adults
- curious and desirous of learning on their own initiative
- sense of responsibility and self-determination

## **Main features of non-formal education**

- learning by doing
- process-oriented learning
- learning as partners
- openness
- learner-centricity
- participation
- voluntary nature

## **Main fields of action**

- feelings, social relations
- body-awareness, motion, health
- gender-sensitive work
- language, communication, media
- creativity, culture
- environment, technology
- value orientation, democracy, participation, interculturality.

The framework has been conceived in a cooperation of the former Ministry of Family Affairs and Integration, the Viennese Charlotte Bühler Institut, the University of Luxembourg and the National Youth Service (*Service national de la jeunesse*). It represents an important element in the new quality approach that is to be introduced by an upcoming law (see [draft regulation on quality assurance in education and care for young people](#)).

## Teaching Methods and Materials

As foreseen by the above-mentioned National framework for non-formal education of children and young people, the official documents do not indicate any mandatory teaching methods or materials for non-formal ECEC: pedagogical staff should enjoy the necessary freedom to develop and to apply adapted and innovative methods, such as Reggio Emilia, the situational approach (*Situationsansatz*) or Waldorf education, and to organise stimulating activities.

## Legislation

[Projet de règlement grand-ducal](#) concernant l'assurance de la qualité dans les services d'éducation et d'accueil pour enfants et dans les services pour jeunes

[Projet de règlement grand-ducal](#) concernant l'agrément à accorder aux gestionnaires de services d'éducation et d'accueil pour enfants

[Projet de loi modifiant la loi du 30 novembre 2007](#) portant réglementation de l'activité d'assistance parentale

## ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 3 years***

Assessment in non-formal ECEC concerns learning processes rather than the individual child's knowledge and progress.

Children up to 30 months are subject to medical monitoring, which is a precondition for receiving childbirth allowances (*allocations de naissance*). This financial aid is provided by the State and paid in three parts: before childbirth, at the moment of childbirth and 2 years after childbirth. For the third part, parents have to provide medical certificates proving that the child has undergone at least six medical exams, of which two by a children's doctor. As a result of this policy, Luxembourg has, for example, one of the highest levels of vaccination coverage in the European Union.

**Malta**

In Malta, there are two separate stages of educational provision for children who are younger than the starting age of compulsory education. These services are provided at:

- Childcare centres where attendance is for children from three months up to the age of 2 years 9 months;
- Kindergarten centres for children aged 2 years 9 months to 4 years 9 months.

Government is committed in promoting a view of early childhood as an important phase of life in its own right and not just a preparation for adult life. Early childhood education and care is of central importance to Maltese society and a key responsibility for the government. Government ensures that safe and developmentally appropriate children's services are available to promote the holistic development and well-being of children and their families.

Childcare provision blends the care and educational aspects in order to stimulate and enhance the children's emotional, social and educational development. This service also aims to facilitate work and family balance and contribute towards the promotion of social cohesion. The importance being attached to this area is further evidenced by the fact that as from April 2014 the Government has introduced free childcare provision to all parents who are either in employment or education. This measure underscores government's belief in ECEC contribution to child development and socio-economic integration.

The Ministry for Education and Employment has published a policy document titled [Early Childhood Education and Care: the Way Forward](#) listing recommendations that contribute to the provision of good quality care in the field. It covers aspects regarding:

- The philosophical re-conceptualising of early years;
- The provision of an integrated system;
- Regulations on the registration and accreditation of early years settings;
- Staff training and qualifications;
- The provision of a quality service;
- The accreditation of courses;
- Curricular programmes and activities.

Further measures implemented in recent years to improve the provision of childcare include up-skilling courses that all Kindergarten Assistants have participated in during school years 2009/10 and 2010/11 and the launching of a Bachelor's degree course in ECEC by the University of Malta while a grant was also launched by the government to improve childcare facilities.

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

Childcare Centres administered by the State are managed by the [Foundation for Educational Services](#) (FES) which falls under the remit of the Ministry for Education and Employment. The centres adhere to all standards set by the National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities (2006). To date the FES manages thirteen government-run childcare centres while another three centres are run on a public/private partnership agreement. There are other State-funded centres within large corporations and further and higher education institutions.

Childcare centres have to follow the National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities (2006) and the Occupational Standards (2012).

Activities at these centres are focused on all areas of child development, including social, emotional, physical, intellectual, communicative and creative areas. The professionals employed at the childcare centres provide a varied daily programme that includes play activities that stimulate learning in a modern, safe and fully-equipped environment such that children have fun and enjoy themselves while learning. Parents are welcome to visit the various centres to discuss and plan their child's needs with the professionals running the centres.

Every child is accepted and valued as an individual and helped to develop his/her full potential through inclusion and participation in various activities. These activities are designed to display a wide range of positive images and objects reflecting non-stereotypical roles, and the diversity of race, culture and religion. The national standards for ECEC outline for instance, the requirements for a congenial atmosphere for children, equal opportunities and parents' involvement.

Childcare Centre Coordinators are all graduates while Childcare Assistants have a recognised qualification in childcare. All childcare providers need to be in possession of valid First Aid Course certification.

Professional specialists, including speech and language specialists, educational psychologists and specialists in both reading and mathematics, provide support for state centre-based ECEC staff.

## **Geographical Accessibility**

As at November 2014 a total of 77 childcare centres are participating in the Free Childcare for All scheme. Childcare centres are spread all over the Maltese islands with a higher concentration in the North Harbour and Western regions. Following the introduction of Free Childcare for All scheme it is expected that the rate of childcare attendance of children aged three months to three years will increase to 40% of the cohort by April 2018.

The Government is also helping parents that decide to enrol their children in private childcare centres by providing them with an income tax deduction up to EUR 2,000.

## **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC institution**

Parents' choice of childcare centres is determined by several factors including vicinity to the home or workplace, admission age and the opening hours of the centre. Parents are free to choose the day-care facility of their choice to cater for their child's needs (whether state, church or independent). Following the introduction of the Free Childcare for All scheme this service is now being offered free of charge to all parents who are both in employment or in education.

## **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Childcare services are offered to children aged between three months and three years. The National Standards for Child Day-care Facilities recommends the following carer to child ratios:

- One child carer for up to three babies under the age of 12 months;
- One child carer per five children aged between 13 and 24 months;
- One child carer per six children aged between 25 and 36 months;
- It is also recommended that one carer supervises up to six children in a group of different ages.



## **Organisation of Time**

The operational hours of public centres are between 0730hrs and 1630hrs however there are varying opening and closing times in private/church-run centres. Opening times range from 0600hrs to 0900hrs with the majority opening between 0700hrs and 0730hrs. Similarly, closing times range between 1200hrs and 2000hrs though most centres close between 1600hrs and 1700hrs. Two centres offer their services 24 hours a day, but the service must be booked in advance.

## **Organisation of the Day and Week**

All childcare centres offer a service from Monday to Friday excluding national and public holidays. These centres are open during the summer period and Christmas holidays. However, a number of centres are also open during weekends and some that are open 24 hours a day.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

Providers of privately-run childcare centres have to abide by the National Standards for Child Day-care Facilities. Those centres are more flexible with regards to their opening and closing times and can provide the service according to demand. This service usually coincides with the parents' working hours (usually between 0800hrs and 1800hrs).

Adults who mind children in childcare centres are called Child Carers. At pre-primary level no formal teaching takes place. Educational activity is aimed to develop the children's social attitudes, language and communication skills in preparation for primary education.

Childcare centres provide a safe environment where children learn through play, one-to-one and group interaction. The National Standards for Child Day-care Facilities require that child carers should have a minimum [Level 4 MQF qualification](#) as defined by the [Malta Qualifications Framework](#) (MQF).

Qualified child carers talk, listen to and otherwise interact with children and the overall environment caters for their physical, social, intellectual and emotional needs. Various

activities are organised to offer learning opportunities to all children according to their individual needs. Activities are designed to encourage children's participation, provide opportunities for self-expression and promote intellectual curiosity. Children are given the opportunity to play individually and to interact with other children.

Activities for early childhood education are age-related and age-appropriate and reflect the developmental stages and needs of children at that particular age. For example, activities that encourage a baby to look, listen and make sounds are provided for those aged between four weeks and three months. For those aged between six and nine months, on the other hand, visual awareness is encouraged by providing varied experiences. Activities in pre-primary education may include "communication by word or gesture, singing, playing, painting and figure forming, exercises and rhythmic movements".

As with centre-based provision for younger children, professional specialists (including speech and language specialists, educational psychologists, specialists in both reading and mathematics and special education needs specialists) provide support at both state- and church-run kindergarten centres.

### ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

There is no formal assessment for children attending child care centres which cater for children aged from birth to 2 years 9 months.

**Polonia**

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is divided in Poland into two stages:

1. for children aged 0-3 years in creches and, as from 2011, kids clubs, or settings where care is provided by day child carers and nannies;
2. for children aged 3-6 years in nursery schools (przedszkole), pre-school classes in primary schools (szkoła podstawowa) and other pre-school settings, including pre-school units and centres.

Until 2011, creches were the only institutions or settings providing care to children aged up to 3 years. They operated within the healthcare system, and thus were regarded as institutions providing healthcare services, including prevention and care, for children aged 3 and below during their parents' or guardians' working hours. As from now, childcare institutions for children aged 3 and below are supervised by the ministry responsible for labour and social security. Care is provided in creches to children at least at the age of 20 weeks, and in kids clubs to children aged 1 year and above. Care can be provided until the end of the school year in which the child reaches the age of 3 or up to the age of 4 in cases where it is impossible or difficult for the child to participate in pre-school education. In the case of children who have reached the age of 3 and attend a creche or kids club, or are supervised by a day child carer, their parents are obliged to provide the childcare institution concerned a statement describing reasons for which their children are unable to participate in pre-school education.

In accordance with the School Education Act of 1991, pre-school education is considered the first level of school education. It is also worth mentioning that the term "pre-school education" is hardly ever used in Poland; the most popular terms are "pre-school care and upbringing" or "pre-school upbringing". Pre-school education in Poland comprises children aged 3 to 6 years. Children who reach the age of 6 in a given calendar year can either start their education in a primary school or complete one school preparatory year in a nursery school or in a pre-school class in a primary school. Most children still enter primary education at the beginning of the school year in which they turn 7. Children aged 3 and 4 attend pre-school institutions on a voluntary basis, as decided by their parents. As from 1 September 2009, 5-year olds had a statutory right to complete one school preparatory year in a nursery school, pre-school classes in a primary school or other pre-school settings (pre-school units or centres). However, as from 1 September 2011, 5-year olds are required by law to complete one school preparatory year in one of the preschool settings mentioned above.

- Pursuant to an amendment to the 1991 School Education Act which came into force on 1 September 2009, the age of entry into primary education will be gradually lowered from 7 to 6 years. During the following school years, 2009/10, 2010/11, 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14 decisions to enroll 6-year old children in the primary school are taken by parents and school heads. Six-year olds may be admitted to the primary school on condition that the school offers suitable facilities and the child has completed one year of pre-school education or that his/her school readiness has been confirmed by counseling services.
- Starting 1 September 2014, part of the population of 6-year old children, i.e. children born between 1 January and 30 June 2008, will start compulsory education in primary schools. Children born in the second half of the year will be allowed either to continue pre-primary education or start education in the first grade of the primary school.

In the school year 2015/2016, education in the primary school will be compulsory for those 7-year old children born between 1 July and 31 December 2008 who did not start formal schooling the year before, and all children born in 2009 (six-year olds).

## **Aims**

The changes introduced to the ECEC system for children aged 3 and below are designed to extend the range of services provided by introducing a wider variety of care settings and to enable parents or guardians to choose the most suitable setting. The arrangements proposed should also help parents or guardians to take up employment. The services provided by creches include the following elements based on the norms set for children of this age: meals, care and nursing, sleep and rest hygiene, indoor and outdoor educational activities, activities aimed at preventing diseases and promoting health, corrective activities, and the provision of ad-hoc medical care.

Pre-school education covers activities designed to support to the development and education of children at the age of 3 up to the beginning of primary education. The main aims of pre-school education are defined by the national core curriculum for pre-school education in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 27 August 2012 (further amended in 2014) on the core curricula for pre-school and general education in individual types of schools. Pre-school education aims to:

- support children in the development of their talents and the development of intellectual skills which are necessary in everyday life and further education;
- build a system of values which, among other things, enables children to see the difference between what is right and wrong;
- develop emotional resilience;
- develop social skills;
- create conditions for children of different levels of physical and intellectual abilities to play and learn together;
- take care of children's health and physical development;
- build children's knowledge about the world and develop skills for presenting their own reflections in a way which is understandable to others;
- introduce children into the world of aesthetic values and develop their self expression skills through music, drama and visual arts;
- develop children's sense of belonging to a community: their family, peer group and national community;
- ensure better educational opportunities for children by supporting the development of their curiosity, activity and independence and the knowledge and skills which are relevant in school education.

In 2014 the core curriculum was supplemented with provisions referring to

- the necessity of preparing children to learn a modern foreign language, especially by means of developing their linguistic awareness and cultural sensitivity, stimulating motivation necessary at further stages of education, and – in the case of children with mild and severe mental disabilities – developing awareness of linguistic and cultural differences

and

- in the nursery schools for children from national and ethnic minority groups, and those speaking regional languages, referred to in the Act of 6 January 2005 on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional languages, which aim at maintaining and developing national, ethnic and linguistic identity, children ought to be offered support in the process of learning national, ethnic or regional language, which could be achieved by means of developing their national, ethnic and linguistic awareness and arousing motivation necessary at further stages of education.

The above mentioned aims are implemented in 17 areas of pre-school education:

1. Development of social skills: communication with adults and other children. Positive functioning during play and task related situations.
2. Development of self- service skills, hygienic and cultural habits.
3. Support to the development of speech
4. Support to the development of intellectual skills related to exploration and understanding of oneself and environment.
5. Health education and development of physical agility
6. Teaching children about their own and others safety.
7. Education through art. Child as a spectator and actor.
8. Education through art. Music, dancing, singing.
9. Education through art. Various forms of fine art.
10. Support to children' s intellectual development through constructing and technical tasks.
11. Support to the understanding of weather and avoiding of danger.
12. Education towards respect for plants and animals.
13. Support to children' s intellectual development with mathematical education.
14. Development of readiness for learning how to read and write.
15. Family and civic education.
16. Preparing children to speak a modern foreign language.
17. Preparing children from national and ethnic minority groups, and those speaking regional languages, to speak a national or ethnic minority language, or a regional language,

Within each area, the core curriculum describes in detail skills which children should demonstrate at the end of pre-school education. The core curriculum is accompanied by detailed guidelines concerning the organization of pre-school activities, including the timetable for pre-school institutions.

## **Legislation**

Until 2011, pursuant to the Act on Health Care, creches were considered to be public or non-public healthcare institutions. They were established by the Minister of Health, province governors or other local government units, or medical higher education institutions. Non-public institutions could be administered by legal entities or natural persons. At present, the Act of 4 February 2011 on Care for Children up to the age of 3 is

the main legislative act concerning various forms of care for children aged 3 and below. Creches and kids clubs can be administered by natural persons, legal entities or other institutions.

The School Education Act of 7 September 1991 (amended between 1996 and 2011) and the Teachers' Charter of 1982 (amended several times in the years 1996-2014), which defines teachers' rights and duties, are the main legislative framework for pre-school education. The School Education Act has introduced the concepts of public and non-public education and laid down their operational principles. Furthermore, the 1990 Act on Local Government (as amended subsequently) has had considerable impact on the functioning of nursery schools through the delegation of responsibilities for the administration of public pre-school institutions to communes (gmina).

The administration of public pre-school institutions is one of the statutory tasks of the commune which establishes, administers, restructures and liquidates these institutions. As the managing body, the commune is responsible for providing conditions for activities of nursery schools (including repairs and investment projects, administrative and financial support, teaching resources and equipment necessary for teaching), and for the appointment and dismissal of nursery school heads (on the basis of a competition), as well as for approving annual organisational plans of nursery schools.

Pedagogical supervision over pre-school institutions is exercised by the head of the regional education authorities (REA) (kurator oświaty). Both the nursery school managing body and the head of the REA may interfere with pre-school activities only in so far as it provided for in the legislation. Thus nursery school heads and teachers are free to take decisions on various important matters such as curricula or organisational arrangements.

The Minister of National Education has adopted detailed regulations concerning various issues, including:

- the outline statutes for public nursery schools and schools (2001);
- the core curricula for pre-school education and general education in individual types of schools (from 2012, with changes introduced in 2014);
- the rules and procedures for admission to public schools (2004);
- the documentation of the teaching process to be kept by nursery schools, schools and other public educational institutions (2002, last amendment in 2010);
- the rules for counseling (psychological and educational support) in public nursery schools, schools and other public educational institutions (2013);



- the approval of pre-school education curricula, school curricula and textbooks for use in schools (2012);
- the types of pre-school settings other than nursery schools and pre-school classes in primary schools, conditions for creating such settings and their operational arrangements (2010)
- the certificates, state diplomas and other school documentation (2010)
- directing targeted funding from the state budget to co-financing of tasks in the area of pre-school education (2013).

In the school year 2013/2014 74.1% of the 3 to 5 year-olds population participated in pre-school education. The proportion of children attending pre-school institutions is still larger in cities and towns (87.6%) than in rural areas (only 55.7%). Five and six-year olds represent the overwhelming majority of children attending pre-school institutions as they are required to complete one pre-school preparatory year in a nursery school or pre-school classes in a primary school. Despite the fact that children may now enter primary education at the age of 6, as many as 79.0% of 6-year olds still attend pre-school institutions, and 3.2% attend alternative forms of pre-school education.

### ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

Creches and kids clubs can be administered by communes (gmina), natural persons, legal entities and other institutions. The commune establishes creches and kids clubs as public sector units at the commune level or can delegate the responsibility for their administration to other institutions, selected through an open competition.

The post of head in creches may be held by persons who have a higher education degree and at least 3 years of experience in the work with children or who have upper secondary qualifications and 5-year experience in the work with children. For organisational reasons, the body administering creches and kids clubs may integrate them into a cluster. The head of such a cluster is required to have prior experience in managing a creche or kids club for at least one year. A child carer in a creche or kids club may only be either a person holding the qualifications of a nurse, midwife, child carer, pre-school teacher, early school education teacher or care and upbringing specialist or a person holding an upper secondary qualification who has at least two-year experience in the work with children aged up to 3 years and has completed 280-hour training.

## **Geographical accessibility**

A low number of creches in comparison with the demand is the main obstacle in access to services. The number of places in creches is determined by local authorities as it is their task to establish and administer such institutions. Changes introduced in 2011 in care for children aged 3 and below are designed to provide conditions for the development of various forms of care and improve their quality. A dynamic growth of the number of childcare institutions has been noted recently. In 2014 there were 1321 creches in Poland, 261 kids clubs and 145 child carers. (Data of 19 May 2014 from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.) There were 62 852 places available in the above mentioned childcare institutions.

When comparing the present situation to the period of 2010-2014, the Ministry states that the percentage of children aged 0-3 enrolled in childcare institutions in 2010 amounted to 2.6%, in 2012 – 4.5%, and in 2014 it is estimated to reach 7.1%.

Communes (gmina) can receive a specifically targeted subsidy from the State budget to support the provision of care for children aged 3 and below. The level of the subsidy cannot exceed 50% of the costs incurred to provide care for children, and 70% in the case of SEN children.

## **Admission requirements and choice of ECEC institution**

The entity which has established a creche or kids club adopts its statutes which define conditions for the admission of children. Parents are obliged to cover the costs of their children's stay and meals provided in a creche, kids club or by a child carer. The amount of fees in creches and kids clubs administered by communes and fees for care provided by child carers, as well as the maximum amount to be charged for meals, is determined by the council of the commune (gmina). The council can adopt a resolution laying down conditions for full or partial fee waivers. Fees in creches and kids clubs administered by other entities are determined by the managing bodies of these institutions. The head of the relevant local government unit keeps a register of child carers with whom contracts have been concluded.

## **Age levels and grouping of children**

The maximum number of children supervised by one person in creches and kids clubs is 8. The number is reduced to 5 in cases where groups include a SEN child, a child requiring special care or a child under one year of age. Creches with more than 20 children employ at least one nurse or midwife. Creches and kids clubs may have volunteers supporting the provision of child care. Volunteers who do not have necessary qualifications are required to complete 40-hours training.

## **Organisation of time**

The internal organization of a creche or kids club is laid down in the organizational regulations adopted by the head of the institution. Heads are also responsible for ensuring compliance with the regulations. Creches and kids clubs should have at least two rooms which provide healthy conditions for meals and rest taken by children.

## **Organisation of the day and week**

Working hours in creches and kids clubs are determined in their organisational regulations, taking into account parents' preferences. Creches provide care for 10 hours per day. In particular cases, at parents' request, the duration of the stay can be extended, but an additional fee is charged. Kids clubs offer care for 5 hours a day.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

Tasks of creches and kids clubs include, in particular: providing care to children in conditions similar to those at home; providing suitable nursing and educational care through the organization of play activities with educational elements, while taking into consideration individual needs of children; organizing educational and care activities which are adjusted to the age of children and take into consideration the level of their physical and psychological development.

## **Steering documents and types of activities**

Care for children aged 3 and below is regulated by the Act of 4 February 2011 on Care for Children up to 3 years of age. The Act lays down the rules for the organization and functioning of care for children aged 3 and below, conditions for services provided, qualifications of persons providing care, rules for financing care, and arrangements for supervising the conditions and quality of the care provided. Creches and kids clubs do not implement any specific core curriculum. It is only recommended that activities should serve care and education purposes and involve play with elements of education, while taking into consideration the level of physical and psychological development of children and their age. Creche staff should cooperate with parents on an ongoing basis, providing information about children's achievements, their problems and any worrying symptoms related to their health.

## **Teaching methods and materials**

The Act on Care for Children up to the age of 3 does not recommend any working methods or teaching aids. Activities in creches are based on their organizational regulations which define the institution's tasks, including those related to the provision of care and education in healthy and safe conditions which are necessary for children's development; the provision of meals complying with nutrition standards; disease prevention and health promotion measures; and nursing care. In addition to care-related and educational activities, creches and kids clubs organise play activities which are suited to the child's individual needs and the level of his/her physical and psychological development. Teaching aids are chosen by teachers/child carers, while taking into consideration the child's age and development needs.

## ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

The head of the relevant local government unit supervises creches, kids clubs and child minders within their area with respect to the conditions and quality of provided care. Supervision is exercised on the basis of a plan adopted by the council of the commune (gmina).

**Romania**

Ante-pre-school education is a part of the non-compulsory Pre-university education and is organized in crèches and, as the case may be, in kindergartens and day-care centres. According to the provisions of the Law of National Education (Law 1/2011), art.23, (a), early education (0 – 6 years), including the *ante-preschool level (0-3 years) and pre-school education (3-6 years)*, which includes *the little group, the medium group and the big group*.

Children are organised in age-level groups: lower (3-4 years old); middle (4-5 years old) and high (5-6 years). The pre-school education is organised in three types of programmes, offered in the same or different kindergartens: normal (4 periods), prolonged (11 periods) and weekly (Monday to Friday) programme.

The organization of the early ante-preschool education institutions, the educational content, quality standards and organization methodology for this type of education are decided by Government Decision initiated by the Ministry of National Education.

The public local authorities, in cooperation with school inspectorates, shall provide the teaching staff necessary for the delivery of ante-pre-school education, in compliance with the quality standards and the applicable law.

Ante-preschool education service providers shall be accredited based on a methodology developed by the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Health.

The ante-preschool education: the average group is made up of 7 children, but not less than 5 and not more than 9.

In ante-preschool education, the teaching positions is educator-child carer– one position is provided for each group of children; in institutions with extended or weekly working programme, staff's work in shifts is provided. A group works with one or two teacher, depending on the programme.

### ***Organisation of Early Childhood Education and Care***

The general legal framework for organising and functioning of Pre-academic education, including pre-primary education, is established by the education law, the Law of National Education (Law 1/2011).

## **Geographical Accessibility**

In general, the territorial distribution of kindergartens meets the population needs.

In *urban areas* each residential district has at least one kindergarten, in the neighborhood of children's homes. If parents wish to enroll their child to a different kindergarten than the one existing in the neighborhood, it is their responsibility to ensure transportation of the child.

In *the rural area* the kindergarten network is well developed, in most villages existing at least one kindergarten.

## **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC institution**

According to the provisions of the Law of National Education (Law 1/2011), art.23, (a), early education (0 – 6 years), including the ante-preschool level (0-3 years) and pre-school education (3-6 years), which includes the little group, the medium group and the big group.

Pre-primary education can be organised in public and private kindergartens, in three types of programmes, offered in the same kindergarten or in different kindergartens: *normal, prolonged and weekly programme*.

Parents or legally appointed guardians can enroll their children in the kindergarten of their choice from the age of 3. For children attending prolonged or weekly programmes, parents or legal guardians have to pay a fee which partially covers the costs of the meals and accommodation (compensation to the public subventions provided). Children have to be registered with the kindergartens before the beginning of the school year. In some cases registrations are accepted during the school year.

A large number of public kindergartens mostly in the urban areas have developed enriched programmes of study, including for example study of a modern language, sports, etc. In some of these cases kindergartens employ supplementary teachers for the subjects offered. The choice of institution in the rural areas can be limited as usually there is only one kindergarten - *grădiniță* in each village, offering at least the normal programme.

Children's admission in kindergartens is within the limits of available places, based on the criteria of age, home proximity to the kindergarten and the fact of having or not siblings attending that particular kindergarten. Parents are free to choose the service provider, considering the criteria mentioned above.

When going to enrol their children, parents must present to the kindergarten staff documents showing the child's health history, results of recent analyses, as well as special information which needs to be considered by the educational and care staff.

Children with special educational needs can be admitted in kindergartens, and those with difficulties attested by a specialist diagnosis can benefit from the support of an assistant teacher.

### **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

In pre-primary education children are organised in three age-level groups: lower (3-4 years old); middle (4-5 years old), and high (5-6 years old).

A group works with one or two teachers (educatori), depending on the programme, and comprises in average 7 children, but no less than 5 and no more than 9.

In the case of the normal programme, usually one teacher is assigned to each group and works with the same children throughout all three stages. For prolonged and weekly programme, usually there are two teachers (educatori) assigned to each group, working in 5 shifts and teaching the same children.

### **Organisation of Time**

Pre-primary education is organised in three types of programmes, offered in the same kindergarten or in different kindergartens (grădiniță):

- Normal programme (4 periods per day), providing educational activities and adequate preparation of the children for school and social life;
- Prolonged programme (11 periods per day), providing educational activities and adequate preparation of the children for school and social life as well as social protection of the children (meals, supervision and rest time);



- Weekly program (Monday to Friday), providing educational activities and adequate preparation of the children for school and social life as well as social protection of the children from socially disadvantaged areas and/or families (supervision and full accommodation during the working-days of the week). Organisation of the Day and Week

The weekly (5-day week system) and daily timetables for pre-primary education are established by the administration council of the kindergarten subsequent consultations with the teachers and the parents and based on the following criteria:

- The type of programme offered (normal, prolonged or weekly);
- The number and types of activities per week established by the National Curriculum for each age-level group and type of programme;
- The total minimum and maximum number of activities per week established by the National Curriculum for each age-level group and type of programme.

Activities organised with the children in the afternoon (prolonged and weekly programme) are supervised by the teachers and can include: recreational activities, resting, development and exercising individual aptitudes, remedial teaching, etc.

### ***Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Education and Care***

Pre-primary education ensures the free, integral and harmonious development of the child's personality, according to his/her own rhythm and needs. The education provided has to ensure differentiated stimulation of the child, aiming to his/her intellectual, social-affective and psycho-somatic development, according to age and individual particularities. Pre-primary education is equally provided for all children, including the ones with special educational needs or the ones that need recovering/rehabilitation and integration – either in special education institutions or in mainstream institutions. Attending pre-primary education gives the children equal opportunities in preparing for school.

All activities organised in pre-primary education have to respect the right of the child to play – as a form of activity, method, procedure and mean to attain educational objectives.

## Steering Documents and Types of Activities

According to the provisions of the Law of National Education (Law 1/2011), the national early education curriculum focuses on the physical, cognitive, emotional and social development of children and on the early correction of the development deficiencies.

The CJRAE (County Centre for Educational Resources and Assistance), respectively CMBRAE (Centre of Resources and Educational Assistance) set up early multidisciplinary intervention teams, meant to assess and monitor all the children and to detect and provide early assistance to those with disabilities or with risks in the development of their personal skills.

The curriculum for pre-primary education is established by the Ministry of National Education.

The curriculum establishes the following educational objectives:

- *Education of the language:* development of the oral communication, understanding and correct utilisation of the oral structures skills; education of correct phonetic, lexical and syntactic oral communication; development of creativity and expressivities in oral communication; development of the skill to understand and transmit intentions, thoughts and significances through writing;
- *Mathematics activities:* development of pre-mathematic intellectual operations; development of the capacity to understand and use numbers, digits, measurements units, using an adequate vocabulary; development of the capacity to recognise, name, construct and use geometrical forms; development of the capacity to solve simple arithmetic problems through the acquisition of adequate strategies;
- *Knowledge of the environment:* stimulation of curiosity by explaining and understanding the environment; development of the capacity to solve problems through the acquisition of adequate strategies; development of the capacity to know and understand the environment as well as stimulation of investigative curiosity ; development of the capacity to observe and establish causal, spatial and temporal connections; use of an adequate language when presenting natural phenomena; development and exercise of basic skills for the protection of the environment and education of a positive attitude towards protection of the environment;
- *Social education:* knowledge and respect of the behaviour norms in society; education of the skills to get into relations with the others; education of positive willingness and character features and building a positive attitude towards oneself

and the others; development of the skills to accept, tolerate and respect the diversity; knowledge of history, geography and religious elements defining spiritually the Romanian people;

- *Aesthetic education*: development of working skills in order to realize drawings, paintings and modellings; establishing connections between various elements of the aesthetic language, shapes and objects from the environment (nature, art and social life); stimulation of expressivities and creativity through drawing, painting and modelling;
- *Musical education*: development of the skills to intercept the sound environment and the music; development of the skills to express through music; knowledge of national and universal values of musical creation.
- *Practical and home activities*: knowledge of materials and their use; development and consolidation of practical skills; development of practical and aesthetic sense; development of home-practical skills and use of the specific vocabulary;
- *Physical education*: development of the basic motor and applicative skills; stimulation of the intellectual and emotional qualities in order to practice independently the acquired skills; knowledge of the sanitary-hygienic skills in order to maintain a healthy life.

Besides the activities established by the common core curriculum, teachers can decide on other supplementary/optional activities according to the development level of the children and within the established maximum number of activities for each group and type of programme.

Priority is given to the promotion of learning based on play, exploration, experimentation, and cooperation, giving children freedom of expression, freedom of choice and the opportunity of various learning contexts.

### **Teaching Methods and Materials**

The teacher is fully responsible for choosing the methods, taking the structure of the group into consideration and the teaching aids available in the kindergarten (grădiniță) and following the general methodological guidelines provided by the National Curriculum and the teachers' guides.

During a given activity, the management of the age-level group is the responsibility of the teacher. Teachers can decide to organise the activities with all the children (frontal

activities), in smaller groups or individually (differentiated activities) – depending on the specific objectives of the activity and the level of the children. Regarding the teaching methods, the following general remarks can be taken into consideration:

- *The oral communication methods* utilized can be classified as expository methods (story telling, description, explanation, etc.) and conversational methods (conversation, heuristic conversation, questioning on a special subject, etc.).
- Teachers also use *exploratory learning methods*: direct exploration of objects and phenomena (systematic and independent observation, small experiments, etc.) and indirect exploration (demonstration through pictures, films, etc.);
- During most of the activities, teachers use extensively *methods based on the pupils' direct voluntary action* (exercises, practical work, etc.) and simulated action (didactic games, learning through drama, etc.);
- In pre-primary education *the game is the major modality to stimulate the mental and physical capacity of the pupils* and to facilitate adaptation of the pupils to the requirements of formal education.

The teaching aids used in pre-primary education consist of:

- natural materials (plants, shells, seeds, insects, rocks, etc.),
- technical objects (measurement instruments, home appliances, etc.),
- intuitive materials (cast and clay models),
- figurative aids (pictures, photographs, atlas books, maps, albums, table games, etc.)
- printed teaching aids (children books, workbooks, etc.). Printed teaching aids can be acquired by the kindergartens (grădinița) or recommended by the teacher and acquired by the children's parents.

## **Evaluation and Progression of Children**

The syllabus for pre-primary education sets the general guidelines in evaluating children attainment levels (evaluation and assessment is not quantified in marks).

At the beginning of each school year the first two weeks are dedicated for collecting data on the children - *the initial evaluation*. Teachers observe the children during the different moments of the daily programme and talk to the children and their parents in order to build an image as accurate as possible on each child psycho-somatic development, knowledge,

understanding and skills. The same provision applies to children enrolled during the school year.

Evaluation of the children is continuous and is not determined by the structure of the school year. *Continuous evaluation* is performed by the teacher through various means, including observation, conversation, small projects, etc. and aims at establishing the progress of the children during the school year.

Corrective measures, such as differentiated activities, remedial teaching, etc. are freely applied by the teacher.

The teacher keeps parents informed on the progress of their child and works closely with the specialised local services providing support for children development (Psychopedagogical Assistance Centers –Centrul Județean de Asistență Psihopedagogică and units and inter-school logopaedic centers).

A two-week *final evaluation* is recommended – but not mandatory – in order to assess the overall progress of the each child during the school year or during all pre-primary education. The official recommendation is to use a variety of evaluation methods during this period, without limiting to assessment and/or evaluation fiches. Based on the results of this final evaluation teachers determine the educational strategy to be applied the next school year and/or make recommendations for the children ready to enroll in primary education.

According to the new curriculum, assessment is ongoing and is based on observation with the resulting data being added to the children's portfolios along with their works.

At the end of kindergarten, teachers fill in a psychopedagogical form for every child intended to characterise their development, and this form will be used when children are admitted in the 1st grade. The psychopedagogical form is different from one county to another and its role is not to recommend or not a child's admission to the 1st grade. Children with development problems are directed by teachers, through their parents, to specialised offices for therapy or counselling, or to specialised education services.

Testing children or grading their work or giving qualifying descriptors is not allowed in kindergartens. The new curriculum promotes the idea of encouraging children and helping them to develop a positive self-image, gain confidence in their own abilities and individual progress at one's own pace.

In pre-primary education children do not have to repeat the *class*, regardless of their attainment levels.

### ***Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care***

According to the provisions of the Law of National Education (Law 1/2011), Art. 59, educational activities may be initiated and organized in the pre-university education system, with the approval of the Ministry of National Education, based on regulations approved by Minister's Order. The accreditation and periodic evaluation of the educational alternatives are made in compliance with the law. Alternative pre-university educational institutions have organizational and functional autonomy, according to the specific alternative. Any Romanian citizen may enrol in all forms of alternative education in the Romanian language, worldwide spoken languages or national minority languages. The teaching staff who teaches alternative education groups or classes has the right to the recognition on the part of the ministry of education, research, youth and sports of their preparation and specializations carried out by the organizations, associations and federations who administer the development of the respective alternative at national level.

**Slovacchia**

Education and childcare of children in pre-school age has long history in the Slovak Republic. By 1993 it was provided in facilities which offered either childcare only for children from 6 months to 3 years of age – in nurseries, which were professionally and methodically controlled and regulated by the Ministry of Health, or in common facilities – nursery and kindergarten, where kindergarten was reserved for children from 3 years to the commencement of fulfilment of compulsory school attendance, i.e. 6 years of age. Kindergartens were professionally and methodically controlled and regulated by the ministry of education. The system of care and education of children was divided, controlled and regulated by two ministries.

Since 1993 until now, the childcare of children from 6 months to 3 years is provided in nurseries, mother and children centres, which however are not regulated by any ministry. Pre-primary education is provided in kindergartens which accept children from 3 to 6 years, and if the capacity of kindergarten permits, they accept children from 2 years. The childcare in kindergartens is combined with education. Kindergartens are a part of system of schools and fall under the area of competence of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

Kindergartens are not obligatory; they are free of charge for children which are one year from commencement of the compulsory school attendance. The preparedness of children in kindergartens one year before the fulfilment of the compulsory school attendance is less than 90%. The maternity leave in the Slovak Republic is 238 days, that means, 34 weeks. In case of single mother the length of the maternity leave is up to 37 weeks, that means, 259 days. In case of two or more children born the maternity leave takes 43 weeks. After maternity leave the parent may take care of his/her child up to 3 years of age, while receiving the parental allowance from the State. From this reason, the requirement to accept children to institutions providing childcare and education before two years of age of the child is not extensive.

## ***Organisation of Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Geographical accessibility**

The early care for children aged between 6 months and 3 years is carried out in nurseries, mother centres and children centres. These facilities offering personal full-day, half-day or several hours care, and providing education, suitable meals, hygiene. These facilities are



not involved in the school network in agreement with the Act No. 596/2003 of the Law Code on the state administration in education and school self-government as amended by subsequent provisions. Their founders are municipalities/cities (only in small number), mostly they are physical persons and legal entities.

The basic regulation related to duties the fulfilment of which is controlled by the appropriate Regional Office of Public Health is the Act No. 355/2007 of the Law Code on protection, support and development of public health and on the change and supplement to some acts and the Decree of the Ministry of Health of the SR No. 527/2007 of the Law Code on details of requirements for establishments designed for children and young people (hereinafter referred to as “the Decree”) was issued for its accomplishment. The Decree sets out the details on requirements concerning the premise arrangement, functional division, equipments, operation, day regime, eating regime and drinking regime, activities leading to education and care and appropriations of the operational order in these facilities.

### **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institutions**

Criteria for child’s admission to these facilities are not regulated by any legal regulation, they are determined by individual founders. The parents are entitled to choose any facility, in case of its availability in the given region, wherein they live, or, in other region too.

### **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Childcare in day nursery, or mother centres or day care centres is provided generally to the children from 6 months to 3 years of age, but when there is free capacity in the kindergartens which are included in the network of schools and school facilities, they prefer having their child accepted to a kindergarten. The size of groups of children in these facilities depends on the age of children and their maturity/development level.

### **Organisation of Time**

The schedule of activities in these facilities is not explicitly stated, individual founders decide on the schedule.

The provider must organize the day regime for children in nurseries, mother centres and children centres, under Decree of the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic No 527/2007 of the Law Code on details of requirements for facilities for children and youth, in order to provide them:

- Individual time and length of child sleeping including the possibility for morning sleeping
- Children staying outside for at least two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon depending on the length of the child's stay in the facility, in every season of the year; the time spent outside can be shortened or omitted in case of extraordinarily adverse meteorological conditions or in case of excessive air pollution,
- Physical exercises of children should be carried out at least twice a day,
- Systematic hardening of children to increase body immunity should be a part of daily activities and actions.

### **Organisation of the Day and Week**

Number of hours in which the facility should be operating is not given for these facilities. The number of hours depends on the possibilities of the founder and on the interest of children's parents. Education is not provided in these facilities, therefore in relation to these facilities we do not talk about lessons, but about hours during which they operate.

### **Legislation References**

[Act No. 596/2003 on state administration in education and school self-government and on change and supplements of some acts as amended by subsequent provisions](#) (Act of the National Council of the SR).

[Act No. 355/2007 on protection and development of public health and on the change and supplement to some acts as amended by subsequent provision](#) (Act of the National Council of the SR).

[Decree No. 527/2007 on details of requirements for facilities for children and youth](#) (Decree of the Ministry of Health of the SR).

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activities**

For this type of facilities there are no official, centrally issued documents, nor there are recommended specific types of activities. Essential childcare is provided in nurseries, mother centres and children centres and is constituted by:

- meals provision
- childcare

and further complementary services constituted by:

- education
- counselling, and
- special-interest activities.

Child care services include:

- Provision of bedding and underwear, its washing and ironing, meals preparation
- Provision of services of personal hygiene, nursing actions and other actions of self-services

Supervision and educational care of the child placed in nursery.

### **Teaching Methods and Materials**

Given that in these facilities no education is provided, it is not possible to identify any teaching methods for them. Choice of materials and toys in the facilities is fully in the competency of their founders and employees, while considering their functional, hygienic and aesthetic appropriateness of toys from the view of the child age. They see to it that all the materials and toys used by the children are irreproachable from the point of view of their safety and sound protection.

## ***Assessment in Programmes for Children under 2-3 years***

Educational programmes or other steering documents regulating the childcare of children younger than three years are not available and, consequently, there is no comprehensive system of evaluating the activities in these facilities.

**Slovenia**

In the period after World War II, kindergartens in Slovenia saw a steady development. The 70s and the 80s brought some important development changes, such as the introduction of the Educational Programme for Education and Care of Pre-School Children (1979) and the Educational Basic School Preparatory Programme for Pre-School Children (1981); higher qualification standards for pre-school teachers and carers; better quality playrooms and teaching aids; an increase in numbers of children enrolled in kindergarten, and the introduction of a mandatory one-year preparatory program for children prior to their enrolment in year one.

In the middle of the 90s, another conceptual and curricular reform of kindergartens took place (White Paper on Education, 1995; Kindergarten Act 1996; Kindergarten Curriculum 1999). Pre-school is regulated by two key acts, the [Organization and Financing of Education Act](#) (in Slovene) and the [Kindergarten Act](#) (in Slovene). They specify the terms and conditions for establishment, organisation and operation of kindergartens. All public kindergartens and kindergartens holding a concession are required to respect principles, objectives and guidelines stipulated by the [Kindergarten Curriculum](#) (in Slovene). In addition, kindergartens in Slovenia are required to observe norms regarding number of children ([Rules on the norms and personnel requirements for the performance of pre-school education activity](#); in Slovene); and relatively strict and very specific regulations on school premises and amenities as regards the health and safety of children ([Rules on norms and minimal technical conditions for premises and equipment of pre-school institutions](#); in Slovene).

Pre-school education in Slovenia is uniform for all children from the age of one to six which coincides with the start of school. Pre-school education is an integral part of the education system. Since 1993, it has been in the domain of the [ministry of education](#) which ensures a continuity from pre-school education to basic school education. The government is responsible for the national policy, the legislative framework and the general programme of preschool education. Municipalities establish kindergartens and are responsible for implementation of the preschool education programmes. They must ensure enough places for all children or make call for a concession.

Kindergartens are aimed at children [from the age one to the year when they are ready to start school](#). In addition to full care (care, nutrition), one of the key objectives of kindergartens is to provide every child with high quality and age-appropriate learning and social experiences. Pre-school education complements family care; children acquire experiences and skills that the family environment cannot provide. Considering a very high

level of employment of both parents in Slovenia, an important motivation for enrolling children in kindergartens is to have child care for the time when parents are at work. Participation of children in preschool education is not mandatory; it is up to the parents to decide.

[Participation of pre-schoolers in public and private kindergartens](#) has increased over the past few years. In 2005/2006 there were 63.6% of children who were enrolled in kindergartens. The number grew higher every year and reached 74% in 2010/2011.

**Pre-school education in kindergartens follows the following principles: -**

- Democracy; -
- Pluralism; -
- Autonomy and a professional and responsible approach by the staff; -
- Equal opportunities for children and parents by taking into account children's diversity;
- - The right to choice and diversity, and -
- A balance in various aspects of the child's physical and mental development.

The principles emanate from the [Kindergarten Act](#) (1996; in Slovene). These principles are defined in greater detail and in higher number in the [Kindergarten Curriculum](#) (1999; in Slovene).

**Pre-school education objectives in kindergartens include: -**

- Development of ability to understand and accept oneself and others;
- -Development of ability to negotiate, respect for diversity and participate in groups;
- -Development of ability to recognise emotions and providing encouragement for emotional experiences and expressions; -
- Development of curiosity, researching spirit, imagination, intuition and independent thinking;
- -Encouragement for linguistic development and effective and creative use of speech, later also reading and writing -
- Encouragement to experience artistic works and to express oneself artistically;
- -Dissemination of knowledge from different scientific fields and everyday life; -

- Encouragement for physical and locomotive development, -
- Development of independence in personal hygiene and care for one's health.

### **Kindergarten education is provided in two age groups:**

1. -First age-group: toddlers aged one to three years, and -
2. Second age-group: children aged three years to school-age.

In response to parents' and children's needs and upon agreement with the local municipality, kindergartens can offer different programmes: **full-day**, **half-day** and **shorter** programmes. These programmes are conducted by pre-school teachers and their assistants. In a special brochure, the kindergarten is required to inform parents of available programmes, their objectives, contents and methods of work. Pedagogical work is conducted in groups. The number of children in a group is laid down by law. Kindergartens or private pre-school teachers can provide early child education and care in a child-care family, or they can organise occasional child-care programmes at home.

The pre-school education curriculum was adopted by the [Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education](#). It is designed as a framework for a full-day programme but also provides support for a half-day and shorter programmes. It includes principles, objectives, developmental features of children, areas of work and suitable contents and activities in specific areas of activity. Teaching staff has the right to autonomously select from the suggested contents, objectives and methods.

## ***Organisation of Programmes for all Pre-Primary Education***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

Slovenia has a widespread and accessible network of kindergartens. By law, the kindergarten network must be organised in such a way as to provide parents and children with access and choice. Parents have the right to choose from programmes provided by public and private kindergartens. In their selection, they are not bound by kindergartens available in their local area but can rather choose any kindergarten in any municipality, if there are any available places; however, their local municipality is required to provide financial support to parents who need it.

The [Regulation on the criteria for the public kindergarten network](#) (in Slovene) stipulates that: -

- Parents have the right to choose between a full-day, a half-day or a shorter programme;
- -Institutions providing education for children with special needs are also required to provide child-care for pre-school children;
- Pre-school education must be available to children in hospitals.

When in the local area there is no kindergarten providing a public programme or there are no places available yet parents are interested in enrolling a sufficient number of children to fill at least one classroom, the municipality is required to start a procedure to ensure additional places in a public kindergarten or make a call for a concession. By encouraging and subsidising pre-primary programmes in private kindergartens, the government assists in the provision of required capacities.

Kindergartens in demographically endangered areas may conduct [short pre-school education programmes](#).

Children who have been placed in adapted pre-school programmes and sent to a specialised institution which is located more than 25 km from their place of residence have the right to free transport. Funding for transport for them and their escorting companion is provided by the government.

Pre-school Roma children join kindergartens close to their settlement or in their settlement. When the nearest kindergarten is not so close, kindergartens can organise transport and escorting companions.

As parents have different working hours, kindergarten working hours are longer than the programme provided each day. Kindergartens are normally open for 11 to 12 hours per day. The opening time is determined by the municipality upon the kindergarten's proposal; the kindergarten makes its proposal upon consultations with parents. Kindergartens adjust to the needs of parents, hence, there is normally an agreement with the municipality on after-hours duty. Some kindergartens (on duty) are open on Saturdays, or late at night.



## **Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC Institution**

Kindergartens are open for all children from the age of one to school age. The right to admission is thus universal for all pre-school children, except when there is no age group for a specific child in a specific kindergarten. As a rule, children attend kindergarten in the place of their residence; subject to place availability, children can be enrolled in other kindergartens, for example, close to a parent's work place.

The decision to enrol a child in a kindergarten is made by the child's parents. In addition to the child's age, there are no admission requirements. Parents are required to provide a paediatrician's report on the child's health. The child can be enrolled from the day when maternity leave ends, which is normally when the child is 11 months old. A child can be enrolled from this age to the age of six or to the time when the child starts school. Children with special needs and children from disadvantaged families who are given a recommendation by a centre for social work as families with medical, financial or social problems are given a priority treatment.

Parents have the right to choose the appropriate pre-school programme for their child in a public or a private kindergarten. Public kindergartens enrol children in their programmes throughout the year on the basis of applications and available places and advertise at least once a year for new enrolments for the following school year. When there are more applicants than available places, a special committee makes a selection. Priority order means classifying all the enrolled children in terms of the number of points they achieved according to predetermined criteria (e.g. municipality of permanent residence, disadvantaged families, child's age, participation in pre-school education of other siblings). Priority is given to children at social risk and children with special educational needs. Children that cannot be admitted are placed on a waiting list. Parents have the right to lodge a complaint on the placement order to the kindergarten council. Parents can appeal the kindergarten council's decision by asking for a judicial review.

Parents, whose children are enrolled in a kindergarten, sign an agreement with the kindergarten on mutual rights and responsibilities. If they do not sign the agreement, the child cannot be admitted.

By law, municipalities can implement a uniform admission procedure for kindergartens in their area. Kindergartens are required to publish place availability on their web pages. At

least once per month they are required to pass this information to the Ministry of Education which has established a [central information point on the number of enrolments and applications](#) (in Slovene) for the whole country.

## **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Education in kindergartens is provided on two age levels:

1. Level one: children aged between one (eleven months) and three years, and
2. Level two: children aged between three and six or the age when they start school.

Programmes are delivered by the pre-school teacher and the pre-school assistant. Other participants in the programme delivery include a counsellor, health and hygiene routine co-ordinator, diet co-ordinator and others. The kindergarten is led by the head teacher who acts as the pedagogical leader and the manager. In larger kindergartens, the head teacher has one or more deputies. The pre-school teacher and the teacher assistant are working together with a group of children. They prepare and plan the education process, cooperate with parents and take part in the organisation of life and work in the kindergarten. In first age groups, they must be present together for at least six hours per day and in second age groups for at least four hours per day. The child-to-teacher ratio in the first age level is six children per adult person in the period when they are both present, and in the second age level it is eleven children per adult. Preschool teachers and/or their assistants usually stay with the same group of children for several years.

By law, the number of children in a first age group shall not exceed 12 and in a second age group 22 children. In 2005, the [Kindergarten Act](#) (in Slovene) was amended so that the founding municipality can make a decision to increase the ratio but by no more than two children per group. The purpose of this amendment was to reduce the number of rejected children in locations where there are not enough available places.

Detailed standards on numbers of children are specified by the [Rules on the norms and personnel requirements for the performance of pre-school education activity](#) (in Slovene) which are issued by the minister of education. They specify as follows:

- In a first age group, there must be no less than nine and no more than twelve children if children in the group are of the same age (no more than one year difference in age);

- In a first age group there should be no less than seven and no more than ten children if children's ages vary (from one year to three years);
- In a homogenous group with three- and four-year-olds, there should be no less than twelve and no more than 17 children;
- In a homogenous group of four-to-five-year-olds or five-to-six-year old children, there should be no less than 17 and no more than 22 children;
- In a group of varied ages on the second age level (children between three and six), there should be no less than 14 and no more than 19 children;
- In a combined group including children from both age levels (from one to six), there should be no less than ten and no more than 17 children.

The number of children in a group can be lower if the group includes a child with special needs. In groups which include Roma children, the child-to-teacher ratio is more advantageous. An individual group cannot include more than two children with special needs. A developmental group where an adapted programme is provided can include at least three and no more than six children with special needs.

The minister additionally determines special norms and standards in areas with special development problems and in ethnically mixed areas.

## **Organisation of Time**

Pre-school education is provided throughout the year. Kindergartens are open a minimum of five days per week. Individual kindergartens are on duty on Saturdays and are open to all children in the municipality. Kindergartens are normally closed on Sundays and public holidays. Each kindergarten may have more than one organisational unit. Kindergartens may place children from different units (the programme is conducted in one of the kindergarten units and is visited by children from different units) during periods of reduced number of children (e.g. in the summertime, before or during workdays in holiday seasons).

Organisation and detailed contents of the life and work in a kindergarten are determined by the kindergarten itself in its Annual Work Plan (AWP); it is adopted by the council of the kindergarten and consented to by the municipality. In AWP kindergartens determine the organisation and operating time, kindergarten's programme, eventual after-hours duties, cooperation with other organisations, activities for integrating the kindergarten into the environment, enrichment activities, participation in projects (e.g. in the field of health,

sports, culture), library's office hours, celebrations, cooperation with parents etc. The parental participation plan includes meetings with parents, consultations, information exchange on a daily basis, workshops for parents and other forms of parental participation in the kindergarten programme.

### **Organisation of the Day and Week**

Kindergarten operating time is not regulated by law. Kindertartens determine it in their Annual Work Plans in consideration of the needs of the working parents (their working hours) and characteristics of the programmes they offer. Programmes are available for nine hours per day; however, kindergarten operating time is longer. Kindertartens normally open between 5.30 and 6 am and close between 4.30 and 5.30 pm or, if they operate in shifts, at 9 pm. At the beginning and at the end of operating time, children from different groups are placed together in the same playroom. A child may stay in the kindergarten for no more than 9 hours per day.

Whole-day pre-school programmes take six to nine hours per day; they are usually delivered in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon or in shifts (one week in the morning, next week in the afternoon). Half-day programmes take between four and six hours. Short programmes take 240 to 720 hours per year and are provided in demographically disadvantaged and remote areas. They can be provided throughout the year or in a condensed form, they can be provided in a kindergarten, a school or in any other suitable space.

All programmes comprise the educational component, care and nutrition for children. The duration of a programme and the order of activities are not prescribed but should rather be adapted to circumstance. Pre-school teachers spread activities over the operating period by taking account of age level groups themselves, arrivals and departures of children, feeding times, biorhythm of children and parental requirements. Programmes provide a mix of planned and spontaneous activities, ensure a holistic approach to the child's development and cover all areas/topics of education listed in the [Kindergarten Curriculum](#) (in Slovene) includes, among other things, so called enrichment activities. They include visit to plays, libraries, museums, extra-curricular activities (choir and other music, dance, fine art and sport activities), projects, visits to farms, swimming, biking and skiing courses. Kindertartens include such activities to provide a more diverse programme which is available to all children. Additional interest activities, such as learning foreign languages or

dance classes attract an additional fee. Kindergartens can offer them for interested children or parents as an after-hours programme.

A typical daily routine in a kindergarten starts with morning arrivals of children, followed by activities:

- When a child arrives in the kindergarten, he or she can choose his or her activity;
- This is followed by preparations for a breakfast which includes care, tidying up the playroom and preparing it for daily activities and similar;
- After breakfast, planned activities start in accordance with the programme, intertwined with games in the playroom or outdoors as per children's wishes;
- These activities are broken up with snack-time and exercise breaks or exercise minutes, usually with music; also there are frequent walks, trips or visits to the nearby gym;
- Lunch, followed by rest-time (sleep and quiet activities);
- Rest is followed by an afternoon snack;
- Afternoon activities are normally chosen by children, they include play in the playroom and/ or outdoors.

In kindergarten rooms, there are permanent and temporary corners which provide privacy, individuality on one side and company with peers on the other. Interaction with children from other groups is also strongly encouraged. Teaching staff plans and implements educational activities during meals and rest periods as well; for example, health education (balanced diet, diet habits, personal hygiene, tidiness), education for clean and healthy natural environment and similar.

## ***Teaching and Learning in Programmes for all Pre-Primary Education***

### **Steering Documents and Types of Activities**

Content wise, pre-school education in Slovenia is based on modern socio-cultural theories of development and learning. The [Kindergarten Curriculum](#) (1999; in Slovene) was adopted by the [Council of Experts of RS for General Education](#) (in Slovene) on the recommendation of the National Curriculum Committee for Pre-School Education. The Curriculum is based on the developmental-process approach, which includes high quality planning, implementation and evaluation of the learning process that takes into account individual traits and development of each child as a more important goal than achieving

prescribed results. It was drafted as an open and flexible national document with specified principles, outcomes and examples of activities but is not structured in detail. Kindergartens and teaching staff participated in its drafting, in co-operation with lecturers from faculties that train pre-school teachers and other academic experts for pre-school education development and substantive experts (e.g from the Faculty of Arts, Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, Faculty of Sport, library, music school). The curriculum for kindergartens and any subsequently adopted annexes and instructions are considered binding documents for public kindergartens and kindergartens with concession. The curriculum contains basic principles of preschool education (e.g. democracy and pluralism, right to choice and diversity, autonomy, a professional and responsible approach by the staff).

Its principles are based on the right to choice and to diversity. In order to allow kindergartens to implement these principles in practice, the [Council of Experts of RS for General Education](#) later adopted other [supplementary documents](#) including:

- [Guidelines to the Kindergarten Curriculum in programmes with adapted implementation and additional expert care for children with special needs](#) (2003; in Slovene);
- [Annex to the Kindergarten Curriculum in ethnically mixed areas](#) (2002; in Slovene);
- [Annex to the Kindergarten Curriculum for work with Roma children](#) (2002; in Slovene);
- [Kindergarten Curriculum and adapted programmes for pre-school children](#) (2006; in Slovene).

The Kindergarten Curriculum introduction presents principles by which teaching and counselling staff are bound and basic professionals guidelines, such as legalities on child's development and learning, democratization of everyday (routine) activities (e.g. eating, resting), positive interactions and respectful communication. The curriculum draws attention to the effects of the hidden curriculum which is mainly reflected in day-to-day routines in kindergartens. Hidden curriculum includes many elements of educational influence on the child that are not defined in the documents; it often appears in the form of indirect education and is more influential than direct educational activities defined in the curriculum. The curriculum also includes recommendations for the planning and use of rooms and for relations with parents.

In its second part, the Curriculum specifies activity areas in kindergartens. They are common for all children aged one to six. For the first and the second age group, the same

topics are specified: locomotion, language, natural environment, society, arts and mathematics.

Global goals for the field of **locomotion** are (1) enabling and encouraging movement activities for children, (2) being aware of one's own body and enjoying in movement activities, (3) enabling children to get to know their movement skills, (4) developing movement skills, (5) gaining trust in one's own body and movement skills, (6) adopting basic movement concepts, (7) gradual learning about and adopting basic elements of different sport disciplines, (8) learning about the meaning of cooperation, as well as respect and consideration of being different.

Global goals for the field of **language** are (1) language through games, (2) being aware of the existence of one's own and other languages and one's own and other cultures, (3) listening, understanding, and experiencing language, (4) experiencing and learning about basic literary works for children, (5) developing language from the viewpoint of a morally-ethical dimension, (6) encouraging creativity, (7) developing non-verbal communication skills, (8) encouraging linguistic skills (articulation, vocabulary, texts, communication etc.), (9) learning about symbols of the written language, (10) experiencing the status of the Slovenian language as the national official language.

Global goals for the field of **arts** are (1) experiencing, learning and enjoying art, (2) developing aesthetic perception and artistic conceivability, (3) learning about individual art genres, (4) developing means of expressing and communicating through art, (5) developing creativity and specific art skills.

Global goals for the field of **society** are (1) experiencing kindergarten as an environment with equal opportunities to participate in activities and everyday life regardless of the sex, physical and mental constitution, national origin, cultural background, religion etc., (2) learning about oneself and other people, (3) shaping basic living habits and learning about the differences between living habits of our own and of other cultures and between different social groups, (4) learning about the closer and wider social and cultural environment and learning about multicultural and other differences, (5) encouraging sensitivity for ethical dimension of diversity, (6) building a foundation to understand historical changes; learning that people and the environment, society and culture change with time, (7) ability to learn about new cultures and traditions, (8) learning about safe and healthy lifestyle.

Global goals for the field of **natural environment** are (1) experiencing and learning about live and not-live nature and its diversity, connectivity, constant changing and aesthetic dimensions, (2) developing a friendly, respectful and responsible attitude towards live and not-live nature, (3) learning about one's body and the cycle of life and about a healthy and safe lifestyle, (4) learning about substances, space, time, sound and light, (5) learning about technical objects and developing skills in the field of technique and technology, (6) encouraging different approaches to learning about nature.

Global goals for the field of **mathematics** are (1) learning about mathematics in everyday life, (2) developing mathematical expressions, (3) developing mathematical thinking, (4) developing mathematical skills, (5) experiencing mathematics as a pleasant experience.

Objectives and examples are provided for each activity area, as well as for the role of adults. Some objectives and recommended activities are common, others are age level specific. Suggested contents and activities are linked, upgraded and supplemented in the kindergarten's day-to-day life. Special attention is paid to social learning and development of the spoken language in both age groups throughout the day, in planned and in routine activities, in transition activities and in play. The curriculum does not determine the timeshare earmarked for each topic/field. The national curriculum is open enough to provide pre-school teachers with autonomy in selecting specific objectives, contents and methods of work. Upon adopting the [Annual Work Plan](#), the teaching staff in the kindergarten prepares educational plans which detail their activities in groups and outcomes.

## **Teaching Methods and Learning Materials**

The Kindergarten Curriculum expects teaching staff to make autonomous and responsible expert decisions within the proposed principles and guidelines in regards to the selection of appropriate methods of work and techniques for pre-school children. They are free to flexibly organise life and work in kindergartens in terms of space, time and diversity. The aforementioned is determined, to a certain degree, within the scope of the Annual Work Plan of the kindergarten, and more specifically within the scope of the operative educational plans prepared by the preschool teacher and assistant for their own department.



The Curriculum includes only general guidelines on the conduct of activities (i.e. locomotion, language, natural environment, society, arts and mathematics). It does not prescribe the structure, the timing or space management. When routine activities are planned (feeding, rest, sleeping, etc.), the teaching staff must consider differences among children (in terms of sex, social and cultural background, ideological background, special needs). They must respect children's special traits and their right to choice. The curriculum emphasises the importance of communication for social learning and a flexibly managed, safe and supportive environment.

Instruction books, didactical material and teaching aids for individual activities in kindergartens are not prescribed. Kindergartens may autonomously buy didactic or teaching materials and aids. Teaching staff can access them free of charge. For all topic-related activities there are various instruction books available: they provide a methodical and didactical analysis of all phases of educational work: planning, pedagogical work, observation and evaluation.

Teaching aids and toys suitable for children are not prescribed. General safety for toys is prescribed by the *Rules on safety of toys* issued by the minister in charge of health. In recent years it has become important that kindergartens have a declared vision by setting concrete goals and continuous improvements in quality. Pedagogical work can be conducted in pairs (pre-school teacher and her assistant), in smaller groups (for example, teaching staff of all groups on the same age level or kindergarten branch; a group of experts interested in a specific problem) or all staff.

Example of a structure and operative execution for the topic/field 'Locomotion':

*General outcomes*, for example, include: development of locomotive skills. *Specific outcomes*, for example, include: development of locomotive co-ordination and balance, refined locomotion, rhythm; learning to play games and season-specific activities. *Examples of activities* include: play and movement in the snow, with an addition of aids and without them. How such examples are implemented depends on the kindergarten's geographic location. In areas with lots of snow in winter, more activities will be organised in the snow. The Curriculum also provides guidelines on the *role of pre-school teachers*. For the locomotive activities it is recommended that they challenge children, provide support and encouragement; demonstrate activities in the snow and learn things themselves; they should pay attention to those who are talented and those who are more awkward; provide

equal encouragement to girls and boys; encourage fairplay; connect movement in the snow with other activities, such as body responses to circumstances, care for one's health, knowledge about winter sports and events, and similar.

Teaching staff has many didactic aids available which can assist them in planning and conducting locomotive activities. For example, reference books for teaching and selection of methods and means for specific sports activities (e.g. *Methods of Physical Education in Kindergartens, Skiing is a Game*).

Didactical aids for pre-school teachers are developed by experts in the field; for locomotive activities this primarily means experts from the Faculty of Sports in co-operation with experts from faculties that train pre-school teachers.

### ***Assessment in Programmes for all Pre-Primary Education***

The Kindergarten Curriculum does not specify knowledge levels and skills that children are required to acquire in individual developmental stages. Children's products are not assessed. Pre-school teachers observe, analyse and direct child's learning through play. They encourage children to learn, guide them and motivate, explain and clarify issues. They orally convey information on child's performance to parents.

Personal files are kept only for children with special needs who require counselling and assistance.

### ***Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care***

#### **Alternative kindergartens**

In Slovenia, there are few programmes available in terms of alternative pre-school education. In 2010/2011 there were 13 private kindergartens conducting programmes according to special education principles - Waldorf education programme for pre-schoolers and private kindergartens following principles of the Montessori education, and private kindergartens conducting their own programmes (the majority focuses on Christian contents, others on foreign languages and sport).

## **Experimental kindergartens**

There are no experimental kindergartens in Slovenia. However, kindergartens can participate in various projects and experimental programmes. Eco-kindergartens, for example, use a special method of delivering their programme that implements sustainable development. Most important projects or programmes combining several national kindergartens into one network include also [»healthy kindergartens«](#) (in Slovene), [network of learning kindergartens and schools](#), [Step by step](#) (in Slovene) and others.

## **Other forms of education and care for pre-school children**

Other forms of preschool education and care also include preschool education in ethnically mixed areas and preschool education carried out in hospitals or at home.

## **Early childhood education in ethnically mixed areas**

In the area where members of the Italian minority reside, preschool education is conducted in two manners: educational work is performed in the Slovenian language and the children learn about the Italian language, or the educational work is performed in the Italian language and the children learn about the Slovenian language.

Preschool education programmes are performed in bilingual kindergartens also in areas where the Hungarian minority resides. Educational work is performed both, in the Slovenian and Hungarian language.

## **Early childhood education in hospitals**

In larger towns, pre-school care is organised for children in hospitals. In 11 hospital around Slovenia there are 28 groups.

## **Early childhood education at home**

There is a provision in the Act that a kindergarten can organise pre-school education in the child's home if the child cannot attend kindergarten due to illness.

Pre-school education can also be organised in the pre-school teacher's or pre-school assistant's home if they are kindergarten employees, or in a registered pre-school

teacher's home. A registered pre-school teacher must meet the same conditions as pre-school teaching staff in public kindergartens and must be registered with the [ministry of education](#).

Child care is also provided by child minders who are not qualified to provide an educational programme. They can only provide child-minding services. However, they must be registered with the ministry of education. They can provide child-minding service in their home but for no more than a group of six children. They can also register to provide individual care in a child's home. The number of registered at-home child-minders of preschool children is higher each year also because of the problems with ensuring vacancies in public kindergartens. In January 2014, there were 239 registered at-home child-minders in Slovenia.

**Turchia**

School which offers education to 36-66 months of children is called kindergarden, while 48-66 months of children receive education in a nursery school (Regulation of Early Childhood Education and Primary School Education Institutions on 26 July 2014 and 29072 numbered in Official Journal ([http://mevzuat.meb.gov.tr/html/ilkveokuloncyon\\_1/ilkveokuloncyon\\_1.html](http://mevzuat.meb.gov.tr/html/ilkveokuloncyon_1/ilkveokuloncyon_1.html))).

The primary objective of Early Childhood Education is to provide pre-school education for those in need of special education in pre-school education institutions through mainstreaming. This education is optional. However, for those individuals special education classes can also be opened within the pre-school special education schools/institutions. Children between 36 and 72 months are provided education within the pre-school institutions for handicapped. However, based on the developmental and individual characteristics of students the pre-school period can be extended for one more year.

### ***Organization of Early Childhood Education and Care***

New enrollments take place on the third week of June every year. Enrollment is carried out on the basis of the address on the national database prepared through Law on Population Services Numbered 5490 on 25/4/2006. Enrolled through e-school system, individuals are not expected to submit any documents (Regulation of Early Childhood Education and Primary School Education Institutions, Article 11).

In these institutions, 50 minute-lessons are given and at most six lessons are provided with the students at double shifts. However, despite the fact that all children are enrolled in kindergardens, if there are not enough number of students for double shifts, one shift education can be given.

It is essential that the number of children in a group be less than 10. The second group will be created if there is more than the number of children. However, a new group can not be created before the maximum number of children of each group. In the single main class and the application class class capacity removable considering the number of children up to 25. Groups falling below the number of children 10 years of combined education and training as a priority with other groups. This is possible only if these groups will continue until the end of the academic year of education and training.

To promote and improve pre-school education, working mothers of all ages and on condition that not less than 10 to more than 20 the number of children in a group to meet

the demands of the father in the case of a contact; school in the direction of Preschool Education Program, which covers important and prior issues within the framework of programs for children can also be approved by the governor not to exceed two months of training in the summer. Training held in the summer can not benefit from pre-school and elementary school will begin to give priority to children in the future education and training. Children who have joined the summer training records do not provide the right priority for the new school year (Regulation on Early Childhood Education and Primary School Education, Article 6).

### ***Learning and Teaching in Early Childhood Education and Care***

In line with Early Childhood Education Program, Activities in Early Childhood Education, Integrated Family Participation and Educational Programme in Early Childhood Education and Counselling in Early Education are the ones prepared as student portfolios. They are are monthly arranged for all children in e-school system. Teachers hold responsibility for posting this information up on the system on time (Regulation of Early Childhood Education and Primary School Education Institutions, Article 16).

### ***Assesment in Early Childhood Education and Care***

School-Parent Collaboration is essential in the acquisition of required good behaviors in children in Early Childhood Education. To this end, at the beginning of each semester, administrators and teachers gather to discuss about the possible contributions of parents to the educational process. Teachers tend to visit children's homes once a semester. During the visits, the teacher tries to understand home climate and figure out how home routines can be implemented in school environments. The teacher can plan activities and games child and parents together play at home. Children and parents can be observed at home. The teacher can talk to parents about how to approach the child and encourage the parents to actively participate in the process (MEB-Early Childhood Education Training Program, 2013).

## ***Alternative Structures and Organisational Variations in Early Childhood Education and Care***

Children in pre-school education for the development of the desired behavior in the provision of school-family collaboration is important. Therefore, at the beginning of training institutions, administrators and teachers to come together, in what way could involve families in the program are decided. The teacher in each child's home at least once a semester to do a home visit care. During home visits; how the house can be used as learning experiences of routine work can be shown to families. Children can play games with the family or activities can be planned. Children and their families in the home environment can be observed. With family, school and what can be done is spoken at home, parents are invited to participate actively in planning and implementation (MEB-Early Childhood Education Training Program, 2013).

## ***Organisation of Early Childhood Education and Care***

### **Geographical Accessibility**

The legislative arrangements regarding pre-primary education are given below. According to Article 19 of the Basic Law of National Education (Millî Eđitim Temel Kanunu), pre-primary education is optional and takes places in formal educational institutions. The expression "children who have not reached compulsory education age are educated in pre-primary education institutions" exists in Article 13 of Primary Education Law.

With the Law numbered 652 on Regulation on Organization of Ministry of National Education, Primary Education General Dictorate and Early Childhood Education General Dictorate became united and called Basic Education General Dictorate on 14 September 2011.

### **Admission Requirements**

New enrollments take place on the third week of June every year. Enrollment is carried out on the basis of the adress on the national database prepared through Law on Population Services Numbered 5490 on 25/4/2006. Enrolled through e-school system, individuals are



not expected to submit any documents (Regulation of Early Childhood Education and Primary School Education Institutions, Article 11).

Schools report children who do not have an identity card to population unit to prepare national identity cards for them in line with the principles of 5490 numbered law on population services. Following this, new enrollments take place in the e-school system.

Children of martyries and veterans are free to enroll any school they want regardless of where they live (MEB-Regulation of Early Childhood Education and Primary School Education Institutions, Article 11).

### **Age Levels and Grouping of Children**

Enrollment into early childhood education:

Children who are between the months of 36 and 66 by the end of September each year are eligible for the enrollment of early childhood education. If there are not sufficient number of children of these ages, children of 36 and 47 months can also be enrolled into kindergardens and nurse schools.

Children of 67, 68 and 69 months who are delayed for starting the school can be primarily enrolled into the institutions on the basis of the written health reports.

Enrollment is made online through e-school system. Parents of children who are enrolled are required to submit information of people who need to be contacted in case of emergency.

Enrollment will begin in children with compulsory education in further education and priority is given to children in the registration area of the school. If there is more than the quota of the application, draw is made before parents.

According to the report prepared by the research center created by preschool educational institution in Guidance and Special Education Evaluation Committee, special education children of 36-66 months are enrolled into those institutions.

According to the Special Education Review Committee Report in line with full-time mainstreaming, children with a disability in severe who are unable to continue their training

have appropriate physical space in these institutions and special education teacher are hired to drop special education classes if necessary.

Private school enrollment in educational institutions before admission, student quotas, attendance and absenteeism, school fees, class sizes, concerning similar issues such as staff selection and appointment process is done according to the procedures specified in the legislation on private educational institutions (MEB-Regulation of Early Childhood Education and Primary School Education Institutions, Article 11).

### **Organization of Time**

Education year should not be fewer than 180 working days in schools.

The Ministry of National Education determines the official starting and ending time of school year at the beginning of each year. Based on this, working timeline is posted and used after the approval of governorship (Regulation of Early Childhood Education and Primary School Education Institutions, Article 11).

Class hours are 30 hours in primary and 35 secondary education schools a week (One class hour is 40 minute-long.) ( <http://ttkb.meb.gov.tr/www/haftalik-ders-cizelgeleri/kategori/7> )

In these institutions, 50 minute-lessons are given and at most six lessons are provided with the students at double shifts. However, despite the fact that all children are enrolled in kindergardens, if there are not enough number of students for double shifts, one shift education can be given. (MEB-Regulation of Early Childhood Education and Primary School Education Institutions, Article 5-6).

### **Organization of the Day and Week**

School administration prepares weekly programmes at the beginning of the semester. If necessary, they can make changes during the semester as well. In these programmes, one can see how many hours of classes and what classes teachers teach. School administration asks teachers to take their programmes upon the signature (Regulation of Early Childhood Education and Primary School Education Institutions, Article 5).

# ***Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Education and Care***

## **Steering Documents and Types of Activities**

In Turkey, policies, programs related with the preschool education and constitution and duties of preschool education institutions are determined by the state. Specific legal manuscripts such as Regulation on Pre-school Education Institutions (Okul Öncesi Eğitim Kurumları Yönetmeliği) are present related with the functioning of these institutions. In the preschool education, preschool curriculum prepared by ministry is applied. Curriculum applied in the private preschool education institutions is determined in the frame of procedure and base curriculum applied in the public institutions. Different curriculum approved by MEB may be applied in these institutions ((Basic law of National Education (Milli Eğitim Temel Kanunu), Law of Private Education Institutions (Özel Öğretim Kurumları Kanunu)). Criteria for selection of the textbooks and the procedures for the arrangements of the activities are determined within the frame of Regulation on Textbooks and Educational Materials (Ders Kitapları ve Eğitim Araçları Yönetmeliği), Regulation on Pre-school Education Institutions and Pre-school Education Curriculum (Okul Öncesi Eğitimi Programı). During the application of the curriculum, teachers pay attention to the principles of knowing children, planning educational activities, arranging educational environment, providing educational materials, applying educational activities, evaluating education and ensuring the parental participation to the child's education. In line with the 657 numbered Law on State Officers', early childhood education is given. Children of 36 and 72 months, as of 2013-2014 school year, can be integrated into early childhood education system through the programme of 9/9/2013 on early childhood education.

## **Teaching Methods and Materials**

It is aimed at developing children's mental and physical abilities through various activities offered through the programme. The programme concerned aims to foster the development of self-care skills and basic motor skills in children. Programme itself adopts an eclectic, cross-sectional and developmental approach which takes into account students' needs.

The education of children at kindergartens aims to develop vital concepts and practical skills and habits, which are very important for further studying. A basic form of organizing

pedagogical interaction is the pedagogical situation. In the preparatory groups the pedagogical situations are instructive and are either fixed in time – in terms of duration and week day, or non-fixed in time (but still compulsory) in terms of duration and week day. Another well suited method useful for children's development is the use of games. By playing, children become familiar with the world around them, and simulate that world in their games. This, in turn, enhances their knowledge and allows them to express themselves in various ways. Kindergartens use teaching materials and learning aids approved by the Ministry of National Education.

### ***Assessment in Early Childhood Education and Care***

In Early Childhood Education Institutions, Progress Report that is prepared based on children's progress during the semester is uploaded on e-school system. Confidential and non-pedagogical information is not posted online.

Evaluation is one of the most fundamental elements of the pre-primary education process. Evaluation is dealt with in different aspects being the evaluation of the child's development, the evaluation of the program, the self-evaluation of the teacher. In pre primary educations, an observation-development file regarding the development, health and education of every child is kept. Teacher fills in the Children Personal Information Form and Achievement Evaluation Forms (Regulation on Early Childhood Education and Primary School Education, Article 30).

### ***Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care***

Mobile Kindergarten: Mobile kindergartens can be founded for the provision of pre-primary education opportunity for children, the preparation of children for primary education, the drawing up of supportive programs aimed at the educational needs of children living in different regions, especially programs concerning linguistic development, and the arrangement of educational materials and programs for the purpose of making parents and other individuals living in the family conscious about the education of children and the sharing of the information generated with the society.

Mobile classes at the traveling buses to provide unpaid preschool educational service may be opened in the marginal and rural regions to benefit economically deprived families' children from preschool education.

Summer Schools: If demand be, education can be offered also in the summer periods. The ones who cannot utilize the pre-primary education in regular school times have the priority in summer periods. For students at schools to train government employed imams, a special programme can be offered at weekends, during breaks and summertime to support their educational progress.

A support program can be opened for students who are mentally handicapped to contribute to their educational progress during the semester. Also, a special room even can be allocated for these children (Regulation on Early Childhood Education and Primary School Education, Article 82, 83, 84).

To promote and improve pre-school education, working mothers of all ages and on condition that not less than 10 to more than 20 the number of children in a group to meet the demands of the father in the case of a contact; school in the direction of Preschool Education Program, which covers important and prior issues within the framework of programs for children can also be approved by the governor not to exceed two months of training in the summer. Training held in the summer can not benefit from pre-school and elementary school will begin to give priority to children in the future education and training. Children who have joined the summer training records do not provide the right priority for the new school year (Regulation on Early Childhood Education and Primary School Education, Article 6).