

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

POLICY DEPARTMENT
STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES **B**



Agriculture and Rural Development

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**QUALITY IN EARLY
CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION AND CARE**

ANNEX REPORT COUNTRY & CASE STUDIES





DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT B: STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES

CULTURE AND EDUCATION

QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

ANNEX REPORT COUNTRY & CASE STUDIES

Case studies:

- Finland
- Germany
- The Netherlands
- Romania
- Spain
- Ireland

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1. FINLAND

1.1. Country study Finland

1.1.1. Structure of national ECEC services

In Finland, several types of ECEC institutions exist alongside each other, sometimes offered by the same institutions. Before compulsory education starts at the age of 7, parents can choose to enrol their children in private day-care institutions, municipal day-care institutions, or to take care of the children themselves. For all types, financial assistance (depending on the family income) is guaranteed, even when parents decide to take care of the children themselves. Since 1996, Finnish children under age 7 have had, by law, a “right to child care,” regardless of family income or parental employment¹. In Finland, ECEC services are generally offered to 0-6 year old children through one of the various types that may be chosen by the parents. For 6 year olds a separate specific pre-primary education programme is offered free of charge, by schools and / or day-care institutions.

Parents may choose to take care of their child at home and will receive child home care allowance by the municipal authority if the youngest child in the family is under the age of 3. The right to receive child home care allowance begins after the parental allowance period ends. Child home care allowance consists of a statutory basic allowance, a municipal supplement and a possible earnings-related care supplement. Parents may also choose to hire a child care provider for their children at home. If they do, parents are eligible for private day care allowance, which also consists of a basic allowance, a municipal supplement and an earning related supplement².

Another possibility for parents is to send their children to municipal day-care centres. Day care costs depend on the size of a family and the respective level of income. Costs are maximised at 18-233 Euros a month for one child, and increase degressively if you have more children. Despite regular debates about it, day-care institutions are free for low income families. Recall that given the integral approach to children’s development of Finland, meals and healthcare are considered integral part of the day-care services, and are included in the mentioned price for parents.

Next to these options, private day care exists, and does so in several forms. First, family day-care is offered in a child minder’s home; a childminder is an independent employee that has completed a specific qualification in ECEC, but is paid by the municipality. The childminder works from his/her own house, which must have been approved by the municipality as a family day care place. The childminder is bound to the regional ECEC plan, and in cooperation with parents draws up individual development plans for children. A child minder is supervised by the day care supervisor or the director of a day care centre. The supervisor instructs, supports and supervises the care and education provided by the child minder.

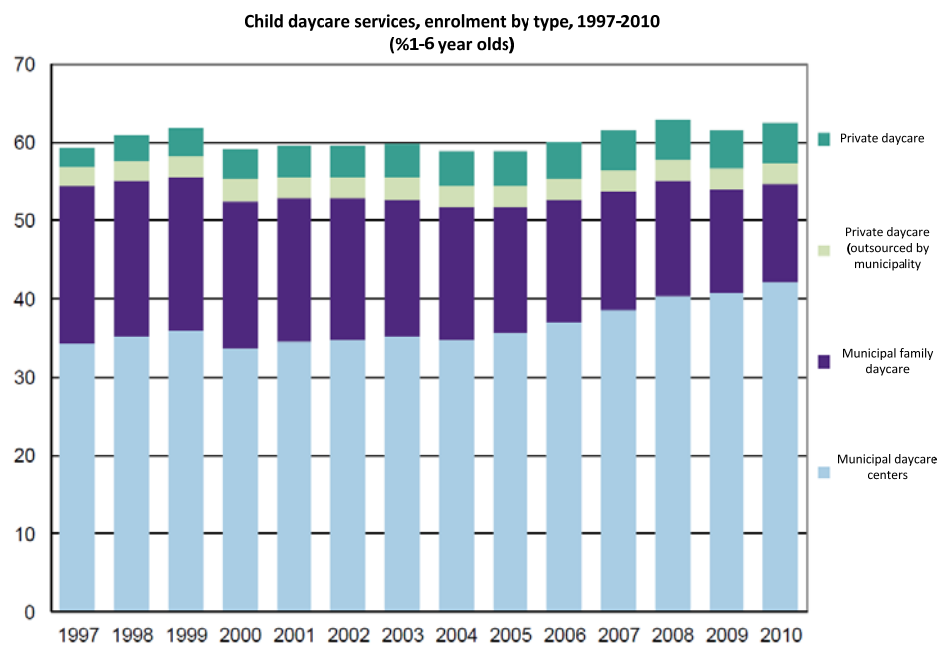
Municipalities also sometimes ‘buy’ places in larger private day-care centres in some regions. By arranging childcare this way, the municipality can better control the content and costs of private providers, while ensuring sufficient places for all children.

¹ Act on the Child Home Care Allowance and the Private Care Allowance 1128/1996.

² Act on the Child Home Care Allowance and the Private Care Allowance 1128/1996.

Only a small percentage of the day-care institutions are fully private, as the graph shows below. Still, these 'fully private' day-care services receive grants for setting up, and parents are still entitled to receive financial support. In Helsinki, for instance, the municipal authority is encouraging private providers to set up new services at this moment, because the current demand of day-care services is higher than the actual provision. Even though this private sector is relatively small, it is expected to grow significantly in the next few years, especially in the larger residential areas.

The figure below shows the average distribution of children aged 0-6 among private, municipal or family day-care. Recall that the government compensates parents for all three types. More than 60 percent of Finnish children aged 0-6 attend municipal day-care programs (family day-care and day centres combined), about 40 percent are at home with their parents, while the remainder attend a publicly subsidised private day-care centres, as displayed by the figure below. It is however important to take into consideration that these numbers understate the degree to which Finnish children participate in early education programs during at least some period in their early childhood. Finnish children are more likely to stay at home during their first three years of life—when stay-at-home parents can collect a "home care allowance" of almost 300 Euros per month—than they are after they turn three years old.



Source: National Institute for health and welfare (2010), *Lasten päivähoido 2010*

Pre-primary education

For 6-year-olds specific pre-primary education programmes exist, and offer free, half-day preschool programs, which place a slightly greater emphasis on academic preparation and language development than typical child care. Though sometimes offered in separate settings and organised by school, a majority of these programmes are offered in day-care centres to provide a full day of care that meets families' child care needs. The table below for instance shows that only about 22% of 6 year-olds attends pre-primary education in a school setting. Some schools combine classes for pre-primary education and the first levels of primary education; this is not regulated and may be decided by individual providers. However, there are national guidelines about the curriculum of pre-primary education; in terms of content there is no difference be-

tween pre-primary education in schools or in day-care institutions. Over 99 percent of Finnish 6-year-olds now attend these programs, as the table below shows¹.

Table:

	2005	2009
Pre-primary education in cooperation with schools, compared to all 6 year olds	21,16%	21,94%
Pre-primary education in cooperation with day-care, compared to all 6 year olds	74,04%	77,46%
Total participation of 6 year olds	95,20%	99,40%

Source: Finnish Board of Education (see footnote)

Despite what these high participation rates suggest, pre-primary education is voluntarily. It is offered free-of-charge, regardless of income or family size, and includes meals, healthcare and travel costs. In 2004, additional measures were taken to take care of the practical issue of transportation of children in the more remote places of Finland. By law, every municipality is obliged to offer such pre-school education, consisting of at least 700 hours a year for these six-year-olds spread out over a maximum of four days a week and no more than 4 hours a day. Although the take-up rates are practically universal, Finland tried to map the population that is not using pre-primary education. The focus of this evaluation was to see whether a higher population of children with disadvantaged background was present in this group, and how these can be reached. Finland is for instance considering making pre-primary education compulsory, but awaits the results of this evaluation before making a decision².

In general, we conclude that ECEC is considered a central feature of a child's development in Finland. Most families make use of the publicly supported types of care before their children reach school age. Often, parents go through the entire cycle of provisions, starting with caring at home with the homecare allowance for a while, after which children go to municipal day-care centres or family day-care, for which parents pay a small fee. Other possibility is that the family arranges day-care with the aid of the private childcare allowance. When the child reaches the age is 6, practically all children are then sent to pre-primary education programmes, which are offered free of charge, and are often offered by the day-care institutions that allow the possibility of day-care in combination with the 4 hour pre-primary education programme. It also eases the transition for young children to the next educational step.

Authorities

Although Finland already had a relatively unitary system, with 1 ministry responsible for the entire age group 0-6, a recent reform, starting January 1st 2013, put all political responsibility for ECEC under the ministry of Education. Before, ECEC for children aged 0-6 were the responsibility of the Ministry of Social and Health Affairs. Pre-primary institutions for 6 year-olds prepare children for education. This was already governed by the Ministry for Education and Culture³. Therefore, before this recent reform, the system was not unitary in the strict sense of the word. Although the ministerial responsibility was moved towards the Education department, ECEC is still by two national boards; the National institute for Health and Welfare (that previously resided

¹ Wera information services, Finnish National Education board http://www.oph.fi/english/education/pre-primary_education.

² Plan for Education and Research 2011-2016, page 22.

³ Plan for Education and Research 2011-2016, page 21.

under the Ministry of social and health affairs), and the National board of education. The former is responsible for the national curriculum guidelines for day-care institutions and the latter was and is responsible for pre-primary education.

Despite the influence of these 2 'boards' on national guidelines, ECEC policy in Finland is to a large extent decentralised. The ministries / central government are supposed to 'steer by information', while the 320 municipalities (in 2013) on paper have autonomy to design ECEC how they want. Municipalities have to remain inside the boundaries set by national policy, such as the universal right to access, the level of the fees, the staff-child ratios, the national curriculum guidelines, the minimal requirements for staff and the requirement of parental involvement in the programme. In pre-schools, where no fee is required, no staff-child ratios are set, but a class-size of 20 is recommended by the ministry.

It is left to local governments to choose to set up day-care centres themselves or in cooperation with (pre-) primary education centres. It is also possible that municipalities use the funds allocated to this particular goal to purchase the services of private day-care / pre-primary education providers. The national government however clearly defined the municipal authorities to be responsible for ensuring that the ECEC provision is in compliance with the laws and regulations that are centrally set.

More on funding / Costs

Day care costs depend on the size of a family and the respective level of income. Costs are maximised at 264 Euros a month for one child, and increase degressively for families with more children. Despite regular debates, day-care institutions are free for low income families. Recall that given the integral approach to children's development of Finland, meals and healthcare are considered integral part of the day-care services, and are included in the mentioned price for parents. The parental contributions for day-care cover only about 15% of the total costs. The remainder of the costs, which is the largest burden of costs for providing ECEC lies with (local) governments; in 2007 the entire system cost 1,655 million euro, of which municipalities covered 1 billion, the central government 400 million, and parent fees could cover the remaining 250 million euro.

Relevant policy reforms

An important policy reform outside ECEC affects the quality of ECEC provision in Finland. Municipalities, the primary providers of day-care services will be required to reorganise themselves to offer their services to at least 20.000 citizen areas. This has a considerable effect on the (universal) provision of ECEC, and is an issue that will be monitored by the central government; it is for instance possible that ECEC services are also more centralised thus impeding the availability of ECEC in remote areas.

Throughout 2013, the Ministry of Education is also working on a new law for ECEC that is to replace the old law on 1973. Although the old law was amended several times, it was decided that a new law should replace the existing one. Most importantly, this law will move the focus from a labour market tool for parents to one of children's rights to ECEC. The law is now being drafted, and it is therefore not yet clear what issues will be addressed. However it is likely that the law will also include additional requirements for staff requirements and potentially prescribe not only staff-child ratios but also maximum group sizes.

1.1.2. The general perception and policy relevance of ECEC

The Finnish education system is designed to support the development of learner's thinking skills, work, and interaction skills, crafts and expressive skills, participation and skills to influence, as well as self-knowledge and responsibility¹. These goals have been set for the entire education system, but early childhood education and care is specifically earmarked to be the first step towards acquiring these citizenship skills.

A guiding principle in Finnish early childhood education and care is 'educare'; the combination of care and education; also the new law will uphold this integrated approach. The national guidelines for ECEC define ECEC services as:

"ECEC is a whole comprising the intertwining dimensions of care, education and teaching. These dimensions receive a different emphasis according to the age of the child and the situation. The younger the child, the greater the extent to which interactions between the child and educators take place in care situations. These situations also involve education, teaching and guidance, being important for both the child's general well being and learning."²

As such, Finland has formulated specific goals for its system of ECEC provision, which are interlinked:

- Social policy (early prevention, equal opportunities for all);
- Employment policy (allow parents to work fulltime);
- Educational policy (contribute to education results).
- Family (support for families and equality between male/female)
- Equality (equal opportunities)

All policy goals are central in ECEC policy, though the emphasis has not always been the same. Based on the Education and Research plan 2011-2016 (page 22), it seems at this moment the emphasis lies on the first pillar, even though the system is approached from this 'educare' perspective. With the introduction of the new ECEC law, foreseen in 2014, more formal emphasis will lie on the educational and social aspects, and less on the employment and family goals³. The child will be put at the centre of attention. This does however not mean that ECEC cannot serve as a tool that also promotes the active participation of women in the labour market⁴.

Despite the combined focus on 'educare' and the existence of national guidelines on both day-care and pre-primary education, Finland does not define educational goals for young children; the guidelines serve mainly to guide providers, but no 'output' / results targets are set for young children.

Links with other policy areas

The transfer of ECEC policies from the ministry of social affairs and health to education, which was completed in 2013, is indicative of a shift in attention in ECEC provision towards more education-oriented goals.

¹ Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE)(2011), *Learning and Competence 2020, Strategy of the FNBE*.

² National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES), National Curriculum guidelines, page 15.

³ Plan for Education and Research 2011-2016, page 22.

⁴ Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2006), *Finland's family policy*.

1.1.3. Educational requirements for staff

In Finland the teacher profession is highly valued in comparison to other countries. The profession of teacher is an attractive career path for students, due to this high status and good working conditions, and Finland is able to select a very restricted number of highly trained university-level young and ambitious teachers (a large number of applicants is in fact rejected).

Finnish day-care centres are by definition multidisciplinary, since they are open to children from the age of 0-6 and thus have to facilitate different needs of children. Therefore, the staff is also multidisciplinary, and different minimal qualifications are required. Staff indeed has different responsibilities, and different educational levels accordingly. At the minimum, national law prescribes that staff working for a day-care institution should have at least secondary-level education, and one-third of the staff must have a post-secondary, higher education level degree (bachelor of education, master of education, bachelor of social sciences). Since 1995, childcare teacher's education is also offered as higher education¹.

Specialised training is required for childminders offering family day care, in addition to the requirements of a completed vocational degree. 1/3 of the staff in municipal day-care centres should have a higher education level degree. Additional requirements may be set by municipalities who hire the ECEC staff. Central feature in the training curriculum of ECEC staff is the focus on a child's development.

Teachers in pre-primary school settings, which offer education for 6 year olds in preparation for primary school, are required to have at least a bachelor's degree. With childcare teachers as a higher education programme, more attention is paid to the role of education in addition to the care tasks². It provided for instance possibilities to link training for childcare better to primary school teacher to further smoothen integration between the two types. Also note that the integrated nature of Finland's provision for 0-6 year-olds also results in integrated and similar education requirements for teachers/ ECEC working in these settings. In many other countries different education requirements are set for working with different age groups.

Karila et al. (2005) have analysed the curriculum for ECEC staff qualifications and identify several developments. The table below shows these developments of the status, importance, and integration of the education programme for educators, as it is now compared to the older system.

¹ OECD (2012), *Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education Care: Finland 2012*, OECD Publishing, p. 67.

² Karila et al (2008), 'A Finnish viewpoint on professionalism in early childhood education', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 16 (2): 210-223.

Early Childhood education as subject ¹	Two- and three-year (vocational) training (from the late 1970s to the early 1990s)	University-level training (the late 1990s and the early 21st century)
Status	Independent professional subject	Education, particularly early childhood education as a main subject. The seed of early childhood education as an independent science was sown
Importance and role	Differentiated and created its own substance and core. One subject among others, aiming to clarify its relation and boundaries with other subjects.	Division into scientific and professional studies. Acted as a bridge between various pedagogical views and the different branches of science. The glue/paste between the components in the curriculum.
Connection to nearby branches and sciences	Loose content integration. Mainly linked to practical training. Psychology, health-care, the content areas of education	Strong both content and structural integration. Connection to preschool training and early school education into a central theme. Education, psychology, the content areas of education

1.1.4. Competence development for staff

Employees in ECEC services are obliged by the law (Social Welfare Act 50/2005), to spend between 3 and 10 days (depending on the basic education, and the particular job) on continuous training. As such, ECEC staff should develop and renew the professional skills to maintain and enhance quality ECEC². Indeed, the national curriculum guidelines specify professional knowledge and development as the foundation for staff competences and require “a strong professional awareness” of individual educators³. These ‘training days’ are generally provided by municipalities (who are also the primary employer of ECEC staff), but also open for staff from the private providers. Some interesting partnerships exist when it comes to the professional development of ECEC; the Finnish American Kindergarten in Helsinki for instance instructed its staff to prepare courses for students that are enrolled in an ECEC education programme. This allowed a very fruitful exchange of ideas between theory and practice. Interestingly

¹ See Karila, K., J. Kinon, P. Niiranen, and J. Virtanen. 2005. Curricula of Finnish kindergarten teacher education: Interpretations of early childhood education, professional competencies and educational theory. *European Early Childhood Research Journal* 13, no. 2.

² OECD (2012), *Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education Care: Finland 2012*, OECD Publishing, p. 68-69.

³ National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES), National Curriculum guidelines, page 12.

enough, the law prescribes such in-service training for ECEC staff, but not for staff involved with pre-primary education. Even though the new upcoming law may change this situation at this moment only the staff working in institutions that fall under the competence of the Social Welfare Act (which is on day-care institutions) have the legal requirement on additional training. In effect this does not harm the provision of quality ECEC since the large majority of pre-primary education programmes are in fact offered by day-care facilities.

1.1.5. Quality of staff

In many countries, ECEC professionals need to renew their licensing – required to work in the sector – with regular intervals. However, in Finland no such licensing for professionals is required to work in ECEC. After they obtain the required qualifications they can continue working in the sector, without additional registration. Municipalities may set additional requirements for staff, but that is not very common.

The Finish Evaluation Organisation for Higher Education is planning to evaluate the existing degrees and qualifications for ECEC staff. It is for instance possible that in the future the two systems of care and education are further integrated, also on the level of the educational programme; similar requirements for staff may then be formulated. Currently, a legal requirement for ECEC institutions is to have at least 1 out of 3 staff members with a completed higher education degree in ECEC. Also for this, municipalities, the primary employer of ECEC staff, may set additional requirements. Staff members with a vocational background are required to have a specialised degree in social-pedagogy. However, the quality of staff is thus determined by the learning outcomes of the degree, and not by additional (national) requirements. In the CoRe report on ECEC staff requirements, it is mentioned that not every institution has staff with a Bachelor degree specialised in early childhood education and care¹.

1.1.6. Perception of staff

In Finland the teacher profession is highly valued in comparison to other countries. The profession of teacher is an attractive career path for students, due to this high status and good working conditions, and Finland is able to select a very restricted number of highly trained university-level young teachers (only 10% of the applicants is admitted). (These pedagogues are complemented with support staff that is comparatively to other EU member states relatively well qualified.

1.1.7. Gender balance in ECEC staff

The OECD reports a high level (98,6%) of female staff of ECEC staff². In comparative perspective however, this ratio is however not bad.

1.1.8. Requirements for staff working with children at risk

The vocational qualification that is required for day-care institutions offers specific requirements for dealing with children from disadvantaged groups. It is detailed that "He/She knows how to support the development of a child's healthy self-esteem and a positive self-image. He/She is able to approach families who are in a challenging life situa-

¹ Urban, M. et al. (2011), *Competence Requirements of Staff in Early Childhood Education and Care in the European Union*, European Commission - DG EAC.

² OECD (2012), *Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education Care: Finland 2012*, OECD Publishing, p. 61.

tion and work with them. He/She participates in the operations of multi-professional teams and is able to work as a member of a team"¹.

Similarly, specific optional courses can be taken by students to prepare them in their future ECEC position to function in a multicultural working environment. In this context it is relevant that the Finnish law prescribes that day-care centres should offer education at least in the 3 official languages (Finnish, Swedish and Sami), and thus also be open to children with a minority language in Finland.

Extra attention is also paid to Romani children, who speak Roma (not an officially recognised language). Often, these children speak a mix of Finnish and Romani language at home, and thereby risk ending up with a severe limitation of their Finnish vocabulary. To prevent social exclusion at a later age, national curriculum standards pay special attention to language development (both of Finnish and of Romany separately). Additional attention for Romany culture (by songs, stories) can be given to bolster Romani children's sense of identity². Additional training and education for ECEC staff can help them better grasp the specifics of Romani culture. Evidence exists that including Romani members of staff in child day-care institutions increases an atmosphere of tolerance, and allow Romani children to feel more at home.

1.1.9. Curriculum goals

In terms of curriculum it is important to distinguish between the national guidelines for day-care and the guidelines for pre-primary education. The former is formulated by the national institute for health and welfare (which resided under the ministry for social affairs and healthcare before the shift in 2013). Pre-primary education is different, as it only exists since the 2000 reform that introduced this particular type; its guidelines are formulated by the national board for education. The goal is that the shift of these two agencies on ECEC to the ministry of education will further smooth out differences between the two types. Despite this split before 2013, differences must not be overstated, given that 70% of the pre-primary education is provided by the day-care services. As such, these institutions were already used to combine the two types of guidelines on the practical level.

The National curriculum for pre-primary education stipulates the role of pre-school education to promote children's growth into individual human beings and ethically responsible members of society. Through this pre-primary education, these children are guided towards responsible action and compliance with generally accepted rules and towards appreciation of other people. The core role of pre-school education is to promote children's growth, development and learning opportunities and support and monitor physical, psychological, social, cognitive and emotional development and prevent any difficulties that may arise. The explicit goal of these programs is to be an integrated system for day-care, pre-primary education and primary education, with a focus on the child's full development.

On a national level some core curriculum guidelines are defined, as discussed below. However, on the local level these guidelines are further operationalised in a more specific outline of ECEC standards. These local guidelines allow fitting local practices in

¹ Finnish National board of Education (2012), *Vocational qualification in child care and education and family welfare, children's instructor*, page 9.

² Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2004), *Finland's Romani People*.

line with the broader nationally set guidelines. The combination of national and local guidelines can serve as the basis for evaluating ECEC by local governments.

Educational goals in ECEC principles and curriculum are:

- 1 Promote personal well being
- 2 Reinforcement of considerate behaviour and action towards others
- 3 Gradual development of autonomy

The Finnish curriculum guidelines do not focus on performance requirements of children, but are limited to the learning process. Peculiar to the Finnish system is the lack of an inspectorate agency that checks whether certain standards are upheld. Parents have the possibility to approach the regional administrative agency if they feel the institutions are not upholding the legal prescriptions. These can then take action, but this is not a common practice.

Some observers see how municipal authorities can interpret national regulations differently, when it comes to staff requirements, but also the nationally pre-scribed staff-child ratios may not always be adhered to in practice¹. In practice therefore, different municipal contexts may vary.

Pre-primary education

The core-curriculum for pre-primary education defines the core role of pre-school education to be the promotion of "children's growth into humane individuals and ethically responsible membership of society by guiding them towards responsible action and compliance with generally accepted rules and towards appreciation for other people"². This core curriculum was amended in 2010, but upholds the major framework as outlined in this 2000 version.

Amendments to the National Core Curricula for pre-primary and basic education (2010) include a new systematic way of organising support for children that need extra attention. The focus is on earliest possible support in order to prevent the emergence and growth of problems. Support for growth, learning and school attendance is shaped into three categories: general support, intensified support and special support. Everyone is entitled to general support. It is a natural part of everyday teaching and the learning process. Intensified and special supports are based on careful assessment and long-span planning in multi-professional teams and on individual learning plans for pupils.

Interaction between the teacher and the child and between children is considered an essential factor of a learning environment. This should stimulate children's curiosity and promote "children's linguistic development and their potential to learn new things".

In addition to the national core-curriculum, every municipality also defines its own core-curriculum based on the principles laid down by the ministry, with additional guidelines for the institutions. Recall that in Finland ECEC is a competence for local municipalities.

¹ Karila, K. (2008): 'A Finnish viewpoint on professionalism in early childhood education', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 16:2, 210-223.

² Finnish National Board of Education (2000), *Core Curriculum for pre-school education 2000*, page 7.

1.1.10. Stakeholder involvement in curriculum

The national core-curricula for different groups and types of educational programmes are determined by the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE). In 2000, the FNBE determined the core curriculum for pre-school education, after a long and broad consultation process. In the preparation of this framework the FNBE worked in close cooperation with all relevant partners in this process; numerous education experts and interest groups, education providers, and teachers. As such the core-curriculum was in cooperation with the ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Ministry of Education, National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health, the Association of Finnish local and Regional activities, trade unions involved with education, as well as local authorities and their day-care centres and schools. In addition to this national curriculum, municipalities, who further elaborate the curriculum guidelines, are also encouraged to include stakeholders like professionals and parents in the process. Finally, at the micro-level of individual ECEC providers who also draw up a pedagogical plan in the form curriculum, parents are generally also involved through regular parents meetings; this is however left to the individual providers.

1.1.11. Curriculum Content

The Core curriculum focuses on the 'active role of the child', and calls for child participation, by learning through playing. Pre-primary education for 6 year olds is limited to 4 hours a day, but is often combined with day-care arrangements. The focus lies on 'educare', a combination of care and education, where education is mostly done through more informal ways and playing. Pre-primary education therefore consists of activities that facilitate a child's learning, growth and development. Children talk, play games, exercise, study, experiment, acquire knowledge and solve problems. Pre-primary education has the purpose to strengthen the child's self-esteem and to provide positive learning experiences as well as opportunities to interact with peers in diverse ways¹.

The core curriculum for pre-primary education specifically outlines the importance of an integrated system of education. The objectives of such 'integrative' education are to be negotiated jointly by the local governments, day-care / pre-primary schools and the parents and be acknowledged by the communities in which children live. The core curriculum for pre-primary education identifies several 'subject areas', which are to give some guidance to teachers. It is however emphasised that teachers view the programme as an integrated curriculum, and do not treat each subject individually.

- **Language and interaction**

Goal is to "create a foundation for learning to read and write" by "inspiring and increasing children's interest in observing and exploring spoken and written language" (Core curriculum p 11-12). This is supported through "playing with language, talking nonsense and rhyming as well as through exploring the written forms of language diversely".

- **Mathematics**

"Natural ways to expand children's understanding of mathematics include inducement mainly by means of play, stories, songs, physical exercise, small tasks, discussions and games and ample use of illustrative examples.

¹ Finnish National Board of Education (2000), *Core Curriculum for pre-school education 2000*.

- **Ethics and philosophy**

“Depending on the choice of the parents or other guardians, children shall participate in either religious education or secular ethical education.” “Ethical education shall be integrated into different situations in pre-school education and it shall be dealt with in discussions with children or by means of role-play, thus developing children’s ethical thinking.” Religious education serves to familiarise children with the core contents of their religion, whereas secular ethics serves to develop abilities to deal with human relationships, cultural identity, nature and the community.

- **Environmental and natural studies**

The objective of education in this field is to learn to understand and appreciate natural and man-made environments and to recognise the effects of their own actions on their immediate environment.

- **Health**

In natural everyday situations, children’s capabilities to understand and take responsibility for their own health and safety should be promoted by staff.

- **Physical and motorial development**

Through everyday activities, children’s fine motor functions, manual skills, and hand-eye coordination will be developed.

- **Art and culture**

Through making pictures, music and objects by hand, drama rehearsals, dance and movement, children’s creativity, imagination and self-expression will be developed.

Pre-primary education can be given in one of the three official languages in Finland (Finnish, Swedish and Sami). The centres that teach in Sami have the specific goal to educate children into multilingualism and multiculturalism and to teach them to respect the languages and cultures of their area. The importance of this practice is emphasised by the core-curriculum, because Sami-speaking people live across national borders.

1.1.12. Quality of curriculum content

The content of curriculum is determined by the combination of local guidelines for ECEC service, and the national guidelines. Since ECEC is generally a public service, it is left to the municipalities to determine how to provide ECEC and how to assure the quality. No national ‘learning outcomes’ are set, or developmental goals are prescribed. Moreover, the national government does not check whether ECEC providers indeed follow the guidelines for curriculum; in reality it therefore remains an issue for the local government.¹

The level of detail of municipal curriculum guidelines varies across municipalities but on their turn generally leave most up to the individual providers. This may be different for municipalities that only organise ECEC in a few municipal day-care centres, but especially the bigger cities, with a larger variety of ECEC provision allow a lot of freedom. To give an example, in Helsinki there are no guidelines on the language of instruction in ECEC centres, so indeed some English, French, Spanish, or Swedish speaking day-care centres exist, but also Russian, Arabic and German. Also a wide variety of types of day-care services can be found, ranging from a focus on sport, or on

¹ Powerpoint presentation Finnish Board of Education
http://www.englishliteracyconference.com.au/files/documents/hobart/conferencePapers/plenary/To%20quality%20through%20equiity%20in%20a%20Finnish%20way%20-%20lecture%20Hobart%2011_7_2009.ppt#322,20, “Soft” evaluation.

Music or art. Despite this variety, in order to be able to offer day-care services all services have to submit a far more detailed curriculum plan, complete with proposed goals to the municipal authority. These plans are also used as the evaluation framework for municipal inspection, which occurs once a year.

1.1.13. Health and Safety provisions

The core curriculum for pre-primary education calls for a healthy learning environment that “diversely supports children’s safety and security”, while also being “aesthetically pleasing”¹. It is left to individual ECEC providers that generally reside under the municipality where these standards are further elaborated. Private day-care (and for instance family day-care) providers that offer ECEC also need to meet these demands; generally municipalities organise checks and inspections to check compliance. Again, no national mechanisms to assure quality exist.

1.1.14. Curriculum for children at risk

The core-curriculum on pre-primary education also includes provisions on children that need special support. A distinction is made for children that have physical limitations and children whose development involves risk factors related to learning potential. Each child in need of special support is to have an individualised ‘special support plan’ which is focused to enable children to participate in group activities as fully as possible. Children with special needs may for instance start 1 year earlier with pre-school programmes; the key objective of such pre-primary programmes is to smooth out individual differences in children’s readiness to start school.

Roman children receive explicit mention in the core-curriculum, which emphasises the need to provide instruction in Romany language as far as possible, and encourage the use of this language in interaction with each other. The use of this language in schools as language for instruction is made possible through the Constitutional amendment of 1995². In fact, in 1999 legislation on Education was further reformed, and increases state funding to allow two hours a week of mother tongue instruction to be provided if there are at least four children in the group³. At the same time however, the curriculum stresses the particular need to instruct children in Finnish/ Swedish language skills. Finnish spoken in Romani homes is often a mix of Finnish and Romani language, which often results in a relatively limited vocabulary of Roma children in Finnish. To prevent social exclusion at a later age, national curriculum standards pay special attention to language development (both of Finnish and of Romany separately). Additional attention for Romany culture (by songs, stories) can be given to bolster Romani children’s sense of identity⁴.

The crucial task for educators in ECEC institutions is to bridge the gap between the day-care / pre-school and the home situation. A positive interaction between the classroom and the home is required, and needs children to do well at school.⁵ For immigrants also specific provisions exist, based on the same principles as for Roma; the emphasis lies on supporting the development of the Finnish / Swedish language, and where possible that of children’s own native language. The core subject fields of pre-

¹ Finnish National Board of Education (2000), *Core Curriculum for pre-school education 2000*, page 9.

² Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2004), *Finland’s Romani People*. P21.

³ Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2004), *Finland’s Romani People*.p 22.

⁴ Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2004), *Finland’s Romani People*. P11.

⁵ Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2004), *Finland’s Romani People*. P11.

school education are designed to provide practice in the different functions of language use, integrate them into Finnish culture and compare Finnish culture with other cultures¹.

1.1.15. Background Parental involvement

Parents are considered very important stakeholders. Finland leaves it up to the parents to decide whether to use day care services, and if so where and what type of services. The assigned discretion of parents to choose is shown best by the possibility *not* to use day care services, but raise children themselves; if parents were eligible for financial support for the day care, they still receive financial support for home-care.

In addition to this 'fiscal freedom' to choose, national guidelines on ECEC curriculum stress the importance of partnerships with parents. Such partnerships allow combining the knowledge and experience of parents and of ECEC staff and can therefore adequately contribute to the development of the child. The national curriculum guidelines for instance prescribe that ECEC teachers write down individual development plans in close collaboration with parents for their children. This way, parents are involved not only in the education programme, but can also turn to the 'pedagogues' (the teachers) for question and particular issues. Furthermore, this also allows the ECEC staff to spot potential areas that require additional attention.

1.1.16. National policies to stimulate parental involvement

The core-curriculum for pre-primary education, set by the national government, includes specific provisions on cooperation between school staff and parents / other guardians. In the initial phase of pre-school education, the teacher is encouraged to draw up a specific education plan in cooperation with the parents, and possibly with the child, so as to explore the best opportunities to grow and learn. In this plan, factors essential for individual development are set, and may it may be drawn up separately for each child, and/or jointly for the group². By the core curriculum parents are specifically mentioned as the primary educational responsible for their children; it is therefore vital to create 'a trusting relationship between pre-school staff and parents'.

1.1.17. Concrete initiatives to stimulate parental involvement

In pre-primary education, teachers are obliged to give regular feedback to parents about the progress of their child. There are no specific central assessments; these are carried continuously, based on the achievement of the general objectives, and the objectives set in the personal development plan.

To be more specific, in the Helsinki Core curriculum (recall that every municipality draws up their own curriculum standards for the day-care services they provide) additional attention is paid to how parents' involvement should take place. Here the drawing up of the personal ECEC plan for the child is a two-way process. In practice, development of this personal plan is envisaged consist of the following steps. First, the parents of the child have a chance to visit the day care place and meet its personnel. This also allows exchanging knowledge about the habits, customs and personality of the child that can be of valuable importance for providing quality and individualised

¹ Finnish National Board of Education (2000), *Core Curriculum for pre-school education 2000*, page 21.

² Finnish National Board of Education (2000), *Core Curriculum for pre-school education 2000*, page 16.

day-care. In the first two months, the ECEC staff members have the task to actually get to know the child. Based on this orientation, ECEC staff may formulate core concerns or specific areas of attention. These are discussed with the parents and formalised in an individual development plan. After this ECEC development plan is formalised, the ECEC is responsible to continuously (re)assess the means and effectiveness of the ECEC support.

Still, considerable variation exists in the extent to which institutions further involve parents in curricular activities. One particular good example is the 'open-door policy' of a private day-care provider. Here, parents are invited to visit the centre whenever they like, so without specific 'visiting hours'. Parents can then choose to observe the activities of the staff and their children from the 'parents' corner', where facilities are offered to drink coffee, or even work. Next to this *passive* 'open door policy', parents are also invited to actively participate, when they enter the playground. These options are highly valued by parents, especially when they start bringing their children to the day-care.

1.1.18. Parental involvement for children at risk

Parental involvement is crucial for improving the chances for children at risk. It is for instance necessary to strengthen the trust of Romani parents in schools and teachers in order to improve attendance rates by Romani children. Attendance of Romani children has improved over the years, but remains a problem. Plans are developed to reach out to Romani parents. In early 2013, for instance, the Finnish government was in the process of evaluating its (free) pre-school system, which was reformed in 2010. In this evaluation particular emphasis was put on the remaining 5% of children that does not participate in pre-school. It is investigated whether this group of children have factors in common that may impede their progress at school. Also, this mapping may allow a better targeting of this group to fully reach universal participation. This evaluation must therefore also be seen as input to deciding whether or not to make the pre-school phase mandatory.

The participation of Romani parents in school activities can create a sense of cohesion and diminishes the chances of pupils feeling that there is a conflict between home and school. More efforts are required.

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1.1.20. Respondents interviewed

Name	Organisation	Country
Tarja Kahiluoto	Government Advisor - Ministry of Education and Culture	Finland
Heli Jauhola	Member EU thematic working Group ECEC Policy Advisor Ministry of Education and Culture	Finland
Angie Hämäläinen	Head teacher Finnish American Kindergarten, Helsinki	Finland

1.2. Case study Finland

Parental involvement – Helsinki city guidelines

In Finland, next to the national core-curriculum set by the education and health boards local municipalities have the freedom and deliberate authority to set additional guidelines about ECEC provision in their territory. Consider for instance additional services such as transportation of children in remote areas, which may not be as elaborate in bigger cities. Regarding parental involvement, the Helsinki Core curriculum concentrates specifically on how parents' involvement should take place.

In addition, to the national requirement of developing a personal plan, it is specified that this personal plan should be a two-way process. In practice, development of this personal plan is envisaged by local authorities to consist of the following steps. First, the parents of the child have a chance to visit the day-care place and meet its personnel. This also allows exchanging knowledge about the habits, customs and personality of the child that can be important in providing quality and individualised day-care. In the first two months, the ECEC staff has the task to actually get to know the child. Based on these initial observations, the ECEC pedagogue may formulate core concerns or specific areas of attention. These are discussed with the parents and formalised in an individual development plan. After this ECEC development plan is formalised, the ECEC is responsible to continuously (re)assess the means and effectiveness of the ECEC support.

Regardless of such local guidelines, there is still considerable variation in the extent to which institutions further involve parents in daily curricular activities. One particular good example is the 'open-door policy' of a private day-care provider that was interviewed in the context of this study. Here, parents are invited to visit the centre at any time they like. This is different from most other municipal day-care centres where the staff set visiting hours, so that they are not 'disturbed' when working with the children. As parents come in, they have the opportunity to observe the activities of the staff and their children from the 'parents' corner', where facilities are offered to drink coffee, or even work. Next to this passive 'open door policy', parents are also invited to actively participate, when they enter the playground. In fact, when parents enter the playground, staff actually expects the parent to participate in the games and other ongoing activities. These options are highly valued by parents, especially when they first start bringing their children to the day-care and still need to build up a trusting relation with the ECEC practitioners.

2. GERMANY

2.1. Country study Germany

Country: Germany – North Rhine Westphalia

2.1.1. Structure of national ECEC services

In Germany, the federal government has no competence over education issues; this is all delegated to the level of the individual states. For healthcare and social issues the federal government does have a role, and therefore the federal government is not entirely absent on the issue of ECEC. However, its role is primarily to facilitate cooperation between the states, and providing additional financial support. However, the financing and actual provision is a responsibility of the States and municipalities. The federal government recently set the political goal of increasing the supply of ECEC places for children below the age of three (which is more care than educational) to 35 per cent by 2013, and backed up this commitment with substantial financial means.

Across the different states in Germany large differences in quality of ECEC services can be observed. Also, the attendance levels across individual states vary significantly. However, for older children the participation numbers are more uniform. For younger children (under 3 year-olds), especially the difference between former East-German states and West German states is enormous; in East Germany many institutions and provisions existed to allow mothers to work, whereas in West-Germany it was far more common for mothers to have part-time or no jobs. In Germany, every child has legal right to day-care in childcare facilities from the age of three up to the compulsory school age¹.

Primarily, the Bundesländer (states) have the competence to set guidelines, rules and spending levels on education issues and ECEC, while the municipalities have an important role in executing the policy, and enabling the provision of actual day-care services. We start by outlining different types of day-care services, after which we look more closely at the ministerial competences at the level of the individual states.

For children aged 0-3 *Kinderkrippen* exist, while children from the age of three up to compulsory school age go to *Kindergarten*. These types of day-care services are generally not integrated and are split in different groups, even though it is quite common that the two forms of day-care are offered in the same institutions. In the remainder of this report, we refer to both types when talking about 'day-care'. Both public and private Krippen / Gärten exist. Next to the publicly provided kindergartens, different types of private day-care services exist. A large portion is offered by idealistic organisations such as different religious institutions, the Red Cross, or labour emancipatory movements. There are also 'for-profit' private institutions. In addition to these institutions, individual or family childminders are also increasingly popular for children under 3, especially for working parents that have problems with the opening hours of the *Kinderkrippen* that can be limited. In 2011, the share of publicly-funded childminders was 15 percent, and the explicit goal of the federal government is to increase this to 30%.

¹ § 24 Sozialgesetzbuch – VIII - Kinder- und Jugendhilfe.

Next to the system of Kinderkrippen and Kindergärten, in some Länder a special track of pre-school exist for children that need extra attention before they can enrol in primary school. A decreasing number of these institutions however exist; often these are being integrated into the 'regular' day-care. These pre-school (vorschule / Schulkindergarten) institutions are, in contrary to the 'regular' kindergarten governed by the Ministries of Education, and generally focus on children from disadvantaged groups. The explicit goal of the Kinderförderungsgesetz (Kifög – Child support law, entered into force in December 2008) is to first of all to offer ECEC services to children who will benefit in their development from ECEC services. As such, not just the children with working parents are targeted, but also children of parents that may want to work, but want to secure their childcare first¹.

With the exception of preschools (which do not exist in NRW, but in some Länder), ECEC services are the competence of the Ministries of Family Affairs in the different Länder. Since pre-schools are not a central element in the German system, and it is possible to go from KiTa directly to primary school, Germany can also considered a unitary system. Because of the federal structure of the country, and the relatively decentralised policymaking of this issue, for practical reasons this study will focus on Nordrhein Westfalen (NRW), as an example of the policies and structure of ECEC in Germany. This does not mean that we consider NRW to be an average or a particular example for other German states. The primary reason to pick NRW is its particularly high attention to childcare issues over the recent years, and its large urban population; NRW is the most populous state of German.

As we will show below, the federal government is not entirely absent when it comes to ECEC; especially in the last few years, ECEC has become a national priority (Action plan "Frühe Chancen", which started in 2011). The federal government mainly made extra funds available, and tries to encourage the Länder to stimulate the provision of quality ECEC. Nordrhein Westfalen is an interesting case, given its remarkably low coverage rate of ECEC services compared to other German states in 2012.

The character of day-care has changed significantly over the past few years; generally the number of facilities that offer services solely for older children have reduced in number, while an increasing number of day-care services offer day care to the youngest children, or a wider number of age groups. This recent change can be explained by an increase in attention for day-care availability for younger children by the federal government, state governments and municipalities. From August 1 2013 for instance a law will enter into force that legally entitles the right to childcare services to children from the age of one.

Finances

Day-care centres in Germany are regulated by the local municipal authorities (Jugendamt – Youth Offices), in cooperation (and supported by) the state. In principle the individual states (Länder) have the competence of creating early childhood education and care policies, while in practice the Family ministers for often come together in the institutionalised interstate Ministers' conference, where joint goals and plans are discussed.

¹ www.fruehe-chancen.de (visited March 5).

Both public and private day-care providers exist. As a result of historical heritage, in NRW day-care is generally provided by private organisations that do not focus on profit. These are termed 'independent providers' (Freie Träger), and are religious institutions, labour associations or other ideal organisations. Approximately 50% of all day-care services are provided by religious institutions, another 25% by other associations (such as parental groups, labour associations, or for instance the Red Cross), and the last 25% as municipal services. The state governments support all these types of independent institutions, generally in addition to individual parental contributions. Support for the providers is generally directed through the municipality. In 2008, about 40% of the public costs for ECEC were covered by the Länder, while approximately 60% of the costs were covered by the municipalities. However, since the municipalities effectively control the entire funding stream for childcare in their region (through their Youth offices – Jugendamt) large differences exist between municipalities. In some municipalities, the parental contributions can be non-existent, whereas in another municipality this may be up to 500 Euros per year.

Next to these subsidised provisions, private for-profit day-care services also exist; these do not receive financial support from the state. Increasingly, companies are also offering day-care services. These do not qualify for governmental support. Therefore, there is a trend where these cooperate with some 'independent providers' to ensure governmental funding.

In 2008, the funding provisions by the state NRW were reformed; day-care services used to receive their funding based on the number of staff they had on the payroll. Now the system was reformed towards an allocated 'funding package' per child. This new system has the goal to create incentives for day-care services to work more efficiently. There is a danger in this system that it also provides incentives for providers to put pressure on the staff-child ratios and the staff qualifications, since these cost extra money.

The Federal government also contributes to ECEC services, by supporting the state government's budget; from 2005 onwards, the federal state launched an action plan to increase the number of quality day-care services (following the approval of the TAG - Tagesbetreuungsausbaugesetz (Day-care development act). This programme was prolonged in December 2008 by the Kifög (Child support Act) for additional five years to support founding additional day-care services, and received a third of the required money from the Federal government.¹ Significant amounts of additional federal funds were made available to support the operational costs of these new day-care services from 2014 onwards. All these efforts must be seen in the light of a provision in the Kifög that entitles every child from the age of 1 the legal right to childcare starting in August 2013.

Quality Assurance

In NRW, quality is mainly assured through criteria that set lower limits. Each new provider has to show evidence to the municipal youth centre that it meets strict demands on issues like architecture, staff qualifications, pedagogical issues, hygiene, safety and health, fire regulations. Next to this check-up at the opening of the centre, the local youth offices may also inspect the provider at any given time, to see whether the provider still meets the criteria. Then, the Youth office at the state level (in NRW it is ac-

¹ <http://www.bmfsfj.de/BMFSFJ/gesetze,did=133282.html> (visited on March 5).

tually at the sub-state level, because there are 2; one for Rhineland, and one for Westphalia) are also involved, but focus primarily on provisions for child well-being, and for instance the staff – child ratio. There are some complaints that this state-level youth office does not have the means to effectively inspect reality on the ground. No additional licensing or quality labels exist for ‘regular’ kindergartens. The independent providers, which are generally national (or at least state-wide) organisations, however have their own means of quality assurance, on top of the provisions by the youth office.

In recent years, however, the concept of Family Centres has become a common factor across NRW, following the British example of Early Excellence Centres. They offer low-threshold services of support to children and parents. A family centre is regarded as a hub in the wider network of child support. It offers assistance in the individual development of children and comprehensive guidance and support for families. Examples for the range of services offered by a family centre are early language training programs, cross-cultural exchange, support for families with a non-German (non-German speaking) background in their social integration, parental education programs, counselling in cases of familial problems as well as help with reintegration into the working world. Services are rendered in cooperation with programs and support offered by the family and youth welfare services.

In Nordrhein Westfalen specifically, these Family centres are governed by a quality assurance label. The label ‘familienzentrum NRW’, is recently developed, after it started with a pilot in 2006, it is now awarded to institutions that meet the criteria of an integrated approach to education. Approximately 3000 child day-care services are now recognised as family centres throughout NRW. This label is to increase ECEC institutions to work together with other educational institutions and provide an integrated curriculum to children. Family centres also specifically serve to bring together child-minders from family day-care. By coming together, the state also tries to improve the quality and professionalisation of these more informal ways of childcare.

The local youth offices are charged with making sure that the Family centres are sufficiently spread out across the region, and therefore have to approve a daycare’s application to become a family centre. The goals of the quality label are to promote daycare services to invest in supporting children in their development, while putting the family (so also the needs of the parents) central. As such, these family centres should take over responsibilities of care, while also supporting children in the development of language, and support for the parents. In this goal, day-care centres become supporting part of a network involving the child and its parents, and should be available to give advice and support to parents. In short, family centres serve 3 goals:

- To be an accessible point for support, advise and learning
- To allow better combination of work and family
- To be the earliest way of supporting a child’s development¹.

Every year a comparison is made across different Länder for the participation rates in ECEC services, to see whether the targets for the 2013-2014 school year will be met. For the children under 3, Nordrhein Westfalen scored consistently lowest in Germany, with a considerable difference with other (mostly East-) German Länder (see table 1). In 2007 however, the federal government, in cooperation with the Länder and the

¹ Ministerium für Familie, Kinder, Jugend, Kultur und Sport des Landes NRW, *Gütesiegel Nordrhein-Westfalen*.

municipalities set the goal to reach an average coverage rate of 35% of all children under 3 years old. In the table below, it is clear that Nordrhein Westfalen is lagging behind in this figure. A new impulse to meet the targets in 2013, led to the creation of the U3-taskforce in NRW in 2011, which serves as catalyst for building capacity for under-3 years day-care services (see case-study for more detailed description). The NRW-government supports these efforts financially. In November 2012, an additional law was passed by the Landtag, which further secured Land-support for municipal ECEC provision. In January 2013, the federal parliament also allocated additional funds to the states for increasing the number of under 3 childcare places.

Ranking German states % participation in under 3 - ECEC		
1	Sachsen-Anhalt	56,1
2	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	51,7
3	Brandenburg	51,6
4	Thüringen	46,9
5	Sachsen	44,1
6	Berlin	41,9
7	Hamburg	32,4
8	Rheinland-Pfalz	24,7
9	Schleswig-Holstein	21,6
10	Hessen	21,5
11	Baden-Württemberg	20,8
12	Bayern	20,6
13	Saarland	20,2
14	Bremen	19,6
15	Niedersachsen	18,6
16	Nordrhein-Westfalen	15,9

Source¹:

These additional efforts must be seen in the context of the new federal law, that will enter into force in 2013, and that guarantees every child above one a place at a day-care. From 2010 onwards, NRW has already created over 30.000 new places for children under 3, and is currently reaching its goal of 144.000 places for children under 3 in 2013/2014². However, on the federal level, there is considerable doubt that municipalities throughout the country will be able to meet the legal requirement; throughout Germany estimates circulate that between 150.000 and 250.000 places of under 3 childcare places cannot be guaranteed by August 2013. Because of this 'self-imposed' deadline, in 2013, the focus in Germany seems to be primarily on access rates, instead of quality. In NRW, a taskforce was founded to assist municipalities, youth offices, kindergartens and investors, as described in more detail in the case study.

¹ <http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/soziales/0,1518,854510,00.html> (visited on March 5).

² See for instance <http://www.mfkjks.nrw.de/kinder-und-jugend/betreuung-fuer-unter-dreijaehrige/> (visited on March 7).

In the most recent update on participation rates (March 2013), NRW reports to have achieved its coverage target for 32% participation for the under-3-year-olds. Given the enormous number of places that were required, this was quite an achievement for policymakers. Some organisations point out however, that a state-wide coverage of 32% may mask differences between different municipalities. Even though every child over the age of 1 is entitled to a place, in some municipalities the demand for child-care places is still higher than the actual capacity. Indeed, there will be a difference in coverage ranging from places for 57% of all children under-3 in one community to 19% in another¹.

2.1.2. The general perception and policy relevance of ECEC

The main role for ECEC in general is generally a social one. In most Länder the ministry of Youth and Family affairs is responsible for ECEC policies, which is a good indication for this particular societal focus, rather than a focus on preparation for primary school. Even though education is considered part of the responsibility of ECEC services, the main general idea is that children learn through playing and interacting with other children. As such, no strict curriculum guidelines did exist for ECEC services in NRW either.

At the same time however, the NRW government has underlined the importance of ECEC for doing well in education at later stages of life. A pilot project has been launched in which an integrated education approach is offered to children between the age of 0-10². In this project, Kindergartens are brought together with elementary schools, to integrate the same educational concepts throughout a child's development, under the supervision of education experts associated with the Wilhelms-Universität in Münster. Goal of this pilot is to explore how such closer cooperation between different educational institutions works in practice. Practically, spread over the different parts of NRW, one elementary school allied itself with 2-3 day-care facilities and sat down to discuss and develop common priorities in their pedagogical programme. No central guidance was given to project, instead it was stimulated that schools and day-care facilities found each other on their own initiative.

It has already been described that different types of day-care services exist. Some day-care services offer the possibility for working parents to drop children off very early, while also staying open until 20h. Other day-care services however have more conventional opening hours during the day.

Relevant policy goals / targets

In a May 2008 position paper, the (federal) Conference of Ministers of Youth and Family Affairs (*Jugend- und Familienministerkonferenz* – JFMK) designated six areas of day care for children as priorities for future development³:

- safeguarding, developing and reviewing the quality of educational work in day-care centres for children, in particular developing the quality of education offers for children under three years of age;

¹ <http://www.nrw.de/landesregierung/etappenziel-beim-u3-ausbau-mit-hohen-qualitaetsstandards-erreicht-14189/> (visited April 2).

² http://www.bildungsgrundsaeetze.nrw.de/fileadmin/dateien/PDF/Erprobung-der-Grundsaeetze-zur-Bildungsfoerderung_Erfahrungen-aus-der-Praxis.pdf.

³ <http://www.kindergartenpaedagogik.de/1879.html> (visited on March 6, 2013).

- developing education plans which take the experiences of the Länder into account as regards their binding character, content and structure;
- observing the further development of family day-care for children, particularly in relation to institutional day care;
- optimising the transition from day-care centre to primary school, with a particular emphasis on ensuring equal educational opportunities and promoting integration;
- expanding cooperation and developing interlocking concepts of content for all places of learning involved in the education of children;
- the requirements of degree courses for early-childhood education at Fachhochschule and university level with a view to enabling students to work in accordance with Land-specific education plans.

Within the scope of the qualification initiative for Germany "Getting ahead through education" (*Aufstieg durch Bildung*) of the Federation and the Länder, cooperation between day-care facilities for children and primary schools may be made compulsory, in so far as this is not already the case. In this regard the Länder also plan to develop coordinated learning objectives for child day-care facilities and primary schools. In 2004 already, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (*Kultusministerkonferenz – KMK*) and the Conference of Ministers of Youth (*Jugendministerkonferenz*) together adopted a framework for early education in the early childhood sector (*Gemeinsamer Rahmen der Länder für die frühe Bildung in Kindertageseinrichtungen*), as well as a recommendation to strengthen and further develop the overall relationship between education, upbringing and supervision (*Empfehlung zur Stärkung und Weiterentwicklung des Gesamtzusammenhangs von Bildung, Erziehung und Betreuung*). On the basis of this decision the Länder have now drawn up education plans to intensify educational efforts in day-care centres for children and ensure closer collaboration with primary education. The focus is on the acquisition of basic skills and on developing and reinforcing personal resources. Linguistic education is of particular importance. To support these efforts, offers to promote the active involvement of parents in day care are being extended and concepts developed to intensify the collaboration between school, parents and youth welfare services. A further goal is to improve the training of *Erzieherinnen* and *Erzieher* (state-recognised youth or child-care workers).

The early childhood education sector in Germany is currently being expanded. Amongst other developments, the introduction of curricular guidelines for the early childhood education system has led to a change and broadening of the tasks and job profile of early childhood education personnel. This also resulted in a heightened attention to the professional qualification of early childhood education personnel. It sparked debates about necessary competencies of the staff, professional training and education profiles as well as the academisation of this profession.

Provisions for children with special needs

A special curriculum for children with special needs is currently being developed by a group of academics. Most attention is paid to improving linguistic competence in the early childhood sector, by exploring the range of methodical instruments to early diagnose lacking linguistic development. These instruments are targeted primarily to children with a migrant background, but also serve to compensate for social disadvantages. Since 2010, all Länder are obliged to have these systems into place; facilities

that accommodate these children with a migrant background receive additional funding for the effective promotion of language skills¹.

Other

In policy-terms, the (west) German Länder are now working very hard to meet the targets and reach the required coverage rates by August 2013. Potentially these efforts can be seen different from the developments on the European level, where generally the focus moves from attention to access to day-care to quality provision.

2.1.3. Educational requirements for staff

In 2005, the Tagesbetreuungsausbaugesetz (Childcare Development Act - TAG) was passed which introduced minimal qualification standards for the childminders at day-care institutions. The goal of this act was to make childminding services equally in terms of quality to the supervision in day-care institutions².

Like in many other EU countries, different educational requirements exist for the different types of ECEC staff. On the whole however, the minimal level of educational requirements is the competence of the individual Länder. The NRW Kinderbildungsgesetz (Child Education Act – Kibiz) of 2008 further provides a legal framework in NRW about the required staff competences and stipulates that staff working in day-care facilities should have at least a completed vocational training (Fachschulabschluss). This requirement was prepared in collaboration with the concerned stakeholders. The use of support staff in day-care is limited by law to consist at most of half of the staff. Support staff does not require the specialised knowledge and/or qualifications that the pedagogues/teachers require. It does however allow individuals in such a support staff position to develop one's competences through continuing professional development programme and later obtain the required qualification based on prior experiences. Generally however, these legal guidelines only serve as guidelines for the municipalities that directly govern the day-care facilities.

The KiBiz law does also include provisions on the management of day-care facilities; these should have the standard required educational level in addition to sufficient working experience. The table below presents the educational level of ECEC staff throughout Germany. NRW scores relatively average compared to the other Bundesländer.

Nationally, no competence profiles exist for ECEC staff; it is primarily left to the local Youth offices or the private provider to set more specific profiles for day-care staff. As a result, there is some variation exists between municipalities throughout NRW. Municipalities control the HR policies of the municipal day-care facilities, and these decide about the staffing of day-care facilities within the legal limits as set out above.

No staff requirements are set for the more informal type of childminding, of family day-care. The only requirement is that the childminders enrol in courses of approximately 160 hours, before they start running their 'family day-care'. No additional tests or requirements exist, and it is therefore hard to assure the quality of these institu-

¹ Eurypedia: "Separate Special Education Needs Provision in Early Childhood and School Education" (visited on March 6 2013).

² Eurypedia: Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care.

tions. The recently introduced concept of Family Centres may contribute to the overall quality of family day-care by supporting the exchange of practice by these childminders, but generally the responsibility for quality ECEC here lies solely with the individual childminder. In the light of the U3-ausbau programme, particular emphasis was put on this type of provision.

Table: ECEC Staff qualifications in Germany, by state

	HE	Vocational Degree	Lower vocational degree	Other	Currently pursuing degree	No degree
In % of total staff population						
BW	2,9	74,7	10,4	4,5	5	2,6
BY	2,9	52,2	37,3	1,4	4,7	1,5
BE	4,5	84,2	1,5	4,9	2,5	2,4
BB	2,3	90,9	0,9	3,7	1,1	1,1
HB	10,2	60,7	8,3	5,1	9,5	6,3
HH	8	62,4	19	6,2	2,1	2,3
HE	8,1	70,6	6	6,6	5,9	2,8
MV	1,8	93,5	1,5	1,5	0,5	1,2
NI	4,1	72,8	14,9	4,4	0,9	2,9
NW	3,4	72,5	11,9	5,4	4,4	2,4
RP	2,7	76,9	10,8	3,5	3	3,1
SL	1,1	69,2	19,8	3,5	3,9	2,5
SN	6,8	85,9	1,1	3,5	1,3	1,5
ST	2,4	92,3	1,7	1,9	0,9	0,9
SH	5,4	63,9	22,3	5	0,9	2,5
TH	4,1	89,7	1	1,6	2,2	1,4
Ost	4,1	89,6	1,2	2,7	1,2	1,2
West	4,1	68,4	16,7	4,4	4,1	2,5
D	4,1	72,9	13,2	4,1	3,5	2,2

Source: Ländermonitor 2011¹

Increasingly, higher education institutions start offering degrees in ECEC, which also attract an increasing number of students over the years. It will take however very long before this significantly contributes to raising the general level of ECEC staff qualifications. The rising trend is however evaluated positively by policymakers, providers, and parents. It will remain an issue however to use the higher qualified staff also for the tasks that should be done by higher educated pedagogues. It would simply not add to the quality of the higher educated graduates are put to work on the same tasks as supporting staff; instead these should be encouraged to develop new pedagogical plans that may raise the quality of individual services. Even though this seems a very straightforward remark, it still happens and is a waste of the available resources.

¹ http://www.laendermonitor.de/uebersicht-grafiken/indikator-11a1-qualifikation-niveaus/indikator/9/indcat/11/indsubcat/5/index.nc.html?no_cache=1&period=131&dimension=0

2.1.4. Competence development for staff

Lifelong learning has been recognised as a central feature to ensure pedagogical quality of ECEC staff, also after the required qualifications have been obtained¹. Pedagogical insights, concepts, and teaching methods change over time, and to maintain quality it is recognised by the NRW guidelines that staff should further develop their knowledge and competences. ECEC staff is required by the NRW guidelines to remain aware of relevant developments, and are expected to enrol in in-service trainings and to be aware of developments in professional literature. As such, the NRW guidelines only see the combination of continued professional development and properly qualified ECEC staff as an essential component of quality ECEC. Even though these guidelines are clearly defined, NRW places responsibility to act on these requirements with the providers². NRW does not further define how staff is subsequently quality assured through such continued training programme; several additional training possibilities do exist however. The nationally operating 'independent providers' for instance generally offer additional training to their staff.

2.1.5. Quality of staff

NRW does not have a licensing system; this is not further controlled on the level of the state.

2.1.6. Perception of staff

Due to the significantly increasing capacity of day-care facilities in the last (and upcoming) years, NRW faces a shortage of childcare workers. At the same time, NRW also aims to increase the staff-child ratios, and increase the possibilities for day-care services to be longer open. NRW claims however that finding sufficient staff is not a major issue in the state. Several initiatives exist to promote the profession, mostly sponsored by the federal government. The Federal government for instance actively promotes continuing training for childminders in its initiative to promote qualifications "Aufstieg durch Bildung".

At the same time, the federal government funds a programme "Profis für die Kita", in which it is attempted to attract highly qualified staff, while also trying to raise the societal evaluation of the profession of childminder³. Through this programme it is emphasised how ECEC teachers can contribute to a stable development of children, regardless of their home situation. Also, the project emphasises the profession of childminders as a good and secure job, especially in the light of the increased number of places that are planned by the Länder to meet the ambitious provisions by the Federal government to ensure a place for every child over the age of 1.

¹ Ministerium für Familie, Kinder, Jugend, Kultur und Sport des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (2012), *Grundsätze zur Bildungsförderung für Kinder von 0 bis 10 Jahren in Kindertageseinrichtungen und Schulen im Primarbereich in Nordrhein-Westfalen*, p. 74.

² Ministerium für Familie, Kinder, Jugend, Kultur und Sport des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (2012), *Grundsätze zur Bildungsförderung für Kinder von 0 bis 10 Jahren in Kindertageseinrichtungen und Schulen im Primarbereich in Nordrhein-Westfalen*, p. 74.

³ <http://www.runder-tisch.eu/> (visited on March 6).

2.1.7. Gender balance in ECEC staff

Currently, a programme is running called the "Modellprogramm Mehr Männer in Kitas"¹, funded by ESF money. In 2012 approximately 3% of the childminders across Germany is male. Through national campaigns across secondary schools, workshops and adult learning centres, this initiative aims to reach more men to pursue a career as childminder. As such, it must be seen as a clear policy aim to encourage more men to pursue a career in ECEC. In 13 Länder, a similar programme is currently running that promotes the inclusion of men as ECEC staff. These 'local' programmes organise promo events, workshops and conferences targeted at men to raise awareness and enthusiasm to become day-care teacher. It is equally relevant and included in this programme to reach out to also receive parents' support for male ECEC teachers. First of all these efforts must be seen as an effort to raise children from a broad perspective, allowing interaction with both men and women. At the same time however, Germany is currently lacking a significant number of ECEC staff, due to the drastic increases in places over the last years. As such, the efforts to motivate men for an ECEC-career are also motivated by a simple labour market demand.

2.1.8. Requirements for staff working with children at risk

There is no particular attention for this, even though students that are engaged in pedagogical studies can often choose such courses voluntarily.

2.1.9. Curriculum goals

No particular guidelines exist for the youngest children (0-3) in Germany / NRW. It is left to the individual providers to determine the pedagogical programme for these children. On the federal level, the different state ministers of education have agreed on a common framework for curriculum guidelines². These guidelines are defined relatively broad, and are left for more detailed and specific curriculum guidelines at the state-level.

On the level of NRW curriculum guidelines exist; these specify on several areas how the day-care facilities can contribute to the development of children. The primary goal of curricula as offered by day-care services, as agreed by all education ministers of the states is to strengthen the individual competences and ability to learn, while supporting the children's curiosity and further development. In NRW these curriculum guidelines have been further developed into the 2003 guidelines (Vereinbarung zu den Grundsätzen über die Bildungsarbeit in Tageseinrichtungen für Kinder). These have been revised in 2011, in which particular emphasis is put on the development of children from 0-10, thus integrating the first part of primary education with ECEC, to ease the transition between the two types of education. In this document, the basic competences have been defined, in addition to the development towards a child-centred approach. With the child as point of departure, the curriculum guidelines underline the importance of a smooth transition to primary education, mainly obtained through early education.

¹ <http://www.mehrmännerinkitas-mv.de/> / <http://www.koordination-maennerinkitas.de/>.

² Jugendministerkonferenz (2004), Gemeinsamer Rahmen der Länder für die frühe Bildung in Kindertageseinrichtungen, <http://www.bildungsserver.de/Jugend-und-Familienministerkonferenz-2039.html> (visited on March 19, 2013).

At the same time the curriculum gives priority to the family as the first place to start learning. For this reason it is identified that children with a disadvantaged background deserve additional attention, to prevent problems at a later stage in life. For language development the NRW curriculum therefore requires children to participate in language assessments two years before compulsory education starts¹. Due to that fact that this can only be forced *after* compulsory education, the curriculum places responsibility for this with the teachers in day-care services; however because approximately 90% of the children over 4 years old are enrolled in such services, it is very common. The Family centres that have been developed throughout NRW offer a suitable infrastructure to further facilitate implementation of these demands that often go beyond the mere responsibility of the day-care institutions and require an integrated approach to children's development, in close collaboration with the parents. Children that are not reached through these 'conventional' channels may be reached through mandatory health check-ups during the early years, in which also attention is paid to language development.

2.1.10. Stakeholder involvement in curriculum

In setting the NRW curriculum guidelines, the ministry has included a wide range of stakeholders, mainly reflecting the diversity of day-care providers. The nationally operating 'independent providers' for instance were also consulted on the curriculum. Even though curriculum guidelines have been identified, it is emphasised that these are merely to guide, and not to bind or restrict day-care providers. This consultation process lasted for a year and a half.

2.1.11. Curriculum Content

The NRW curriculum is defined very broadly, and should perhaps better be termed simply guidelines. It sets some framework as to what issues should get attention, but the guidelines leave it up to the individual providers to determine what exactly is to be done². It definitely does not set specific activities for children of certain age-groups, but offers some ideas. What is central in the guidelines document is that it puts children at the centre of their own development; the guidelines serve to enable children to discover new things while following their interest.

Secondly, the 'guidelines' also recognise the central role of parents; in their families young children learn their competences and basic dispositions. Therefore also for full day-care services, it is emphasised that the role of the parents should be put central.

Thirdly, the guidelines also concentrate on the importance of continuing professional development of staff, in order to know the most recent (academic) pedagogical developments and apply these in practice.

Lastly, an important element of the guidelines concerns the role of regional networks that focus on cooperation between different types of institutions. Through such regional networks, services that work with the youngest children are encouraged to

¹ Ministerium für Familie, Kinder, Jugend, Kultur und Sport des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (2012), *Grundsätze zur Bildungsförderung für Kinder von 0 bis 10 Jahren in Kindertageseinrichtungen und Schulen im Primarbereich in Nordrhein-Westfalen*.

² Ministerium für Familie, Kinder, Jugend, Kultur und Sport des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (2012), *Grundsätze zur Bildungsförderung für Kinder von 0 bis 10 Jahren in Kindertageseinrichtungen und Schulen im Primarbereich in Nordrhein-Westfalen*, <http://www.bildungsgrundsaeetze.nrw.de/>.

work together with primary schools in the region to facilitate an easier transition for the children. This deserves particular attention since the curricular guidelines are not just for one age group, but are formulated for all children 0-10.

2.1.12. Quality of curriculum content

The State level Youth office (Landesjugesamt) is charged with the more substantive issues of quality in the provision of ECEC. It is however generally considered to be an issue of individual providers (and hence to a large part of internal quality control of the nationally operating 'independent providers') when it concerns the youngest children. Stakeholders report that the lack of oversight when it concerns the content of ECEC provision is not necessarily bad, since too strict national (or state) control would remove all creativity. It is however problematic to be able to assure the level of quality. This is now done by the lowest level, often in cooperation with parents, and thus leads to very diverse programmes across different institutions.

2.1.13. Health and Safety provisions

Health and safety provisions are set by the local youth offices that are generally organised on the level of the municipalities. Even though these adhere to a basic level, there are quite some differences across municipalities.

2.1.14. Curriculum for children at risk

No specific curriculum guidelines are formulated for children at risk in NRW. These are targeted as part of the universal approach of the curriculum guidelines, while Family centres are supposed to target children that would otherwise not be reached.

2.1.15. Background Parental involvement

It is provided by law that parents have a say in the activities of the day-care services and are engaged in new initiatives. In reality however, the influence of parents on the provision of day-care services can vary enormously across different municipalities and specific day-care services. Most importantly, in order to be able to offer parents sufficient involvement in the day-to-day activities in the day-care service, it is crucial to have sufficient staff. Stakeholders consider this is a major problem, since there is simply not enough staff to be able to effectively engage the parents and follow-up on activities with their children as well. Ideally, and this happens in some services, the staff draws up individualised developmental plans with the parents, and consequently staff member should be in sufficient numbers to also monitor the development of the children. The reality is generally however that the staff-child ratios, which are defined relatively broadly, are under pressure. Especially with the recent U3 Ausbau additional pressure has been applied on the system and the existing services. Also the value of staff-child ratios must be considered in perspective; in reality, when there is a lot of pressure on the ECEC staff, there may be numerous situations with staff members on sick leave (potentially even due to the pressure), while remaining on the list in order to maintain a more favourable staff-child ratio than is actually the case.

2.1.16. National policies to stimulate parental involvement

In the most recent curriculum guidelines NRW assigns the parents as crucial actors in raising and teaching children¹. The experiences and developments of children with their parents are the fundamental foundation of their later learning life. NRW therefore aims to include parents not only in the day-care phase, but it is considered equally important during primary education. The curriculum has the following demands on day-care services with young children²:

- The pedagogical content is shared transparently with parents
- The parents are recognised as experts in raising their children; experiences of children in their home environment are used in the pedagogical approach
- The ECEC staff conducts regular meetings with the parents to get the best insights of what goes on in the child's life
- The pedagogical efforts of parents are adhered to and complemented as much as possible
- The day-care service is arranged to function as a meeting place for ECEC staff, parents and children.
- The cooperation with parents and day-care provision focuses and takes into account the experiences and situations in line with the family.

The municipal youth offices are expected to build their service provision in line with these guidelines. These focal points clearly show a child-centred approach of parental involvement; parents are not merely involved to assist the teachers or give their opinion. Instead, the development of the child receives all attention.

2.1.17. Concrete initiatives to stimulate parental involvement

In NRW, a state-wide parental organisation exists that advocates the interests of parents with children in ECEC services. It is composed of representatives of the parent councils of individual day-care services, who elect the parent council of the local Youth Office. These regional bodies then elect the state-level representatives for the organisation.

Family centres are very active in involving parents with the programme of their children. These have the particular position of engaging entire families, rather than simply a parent; a programme for engaging the entire family should be developed in order to obtain the quality label. It is also the task of the family centres to be aware of the situation of the family, and act on it. Through this wider focus, family centres can offer more and better services that can contribute to better child development that are focused on what is needed in particular neighbourhoods and specific families.

A family centre should offer specialised programmes to children, while also providing support and counselling for parents. Parents can drop by with questions they have regarding the raising of their child. Also, specific to the requirements of the local communities regular courses should be developed for the parents by the family centre. The idea is that these parental services are offered with a low threshold, where parents will come to drop their children anyway. The quality label that is awarded, does

¹ Ministerium für Familie, Kinder, Jugend, Kultur und Sport des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (2012), *Grundsätze zur Bildungsförderung für Kinder von 0 bis 10 Jahren in Kindertageseinrichtungen und Schulen im Primarbereich in Nordrhein-Westfalen*, p. 71.

² Ministerium für Familie, Kinder, Jugend, Kultur und Sport des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (2012), *Grundsätze zur Bildungsförderung für Kinder von 0 bis 10 Jahren in Kindertageseinrichtungen und Schulen im Primarbereich in Nordrhein-Westfalen*, p72.

not specifically guarantee the overall quality of day-care, but instead focuses specifically on the requirements of ECEC institutions that go beyond the basics of day-care and are required to transform into family centres. This means that, next to the basic criteria that apply to all day-care centres, family centres are judged based on criteria that are vital for realising the goal of family centres. The provision of a nutritious lunch is for instance often organised by day-care services, but is absolutely essential for family centres which serve to combine working parents and family responsibilities. Family centres with the label receive additional financial support from the state to conduct their additional activities (such as parental courses).

The added value of these Family centres can be seen at some more specific centres; consider one particular family centre in an area with a lot of Roma women. Here, this particular centre hired a midwife, to assist pregnant (Roma) women on practical and healthcare issues. Otherwise it would have been much harder to reach these women. By playing a more active role in the local community, the centres are able to significantly lower the threshold and provide tailor-made services to the local demands. The quality label "Familienzentrum" takes such specific measures into account; it is obtained by scoring a certain number of points from a large list. One particular service may be provided in one area, but not in another, whereas both centres are eligible for the quality label. Another family centre for instance, offers provisions for older kids to do their homework there; the clear goal of these centres is to be more than just child-care for the young children.

2.1.18. Parental involvement for children at risk

Through the particular focus of Family centres on the local community, these centres take their task of reaching children at risk very seriously. Through the networks of parents that are visiting the centre, parents that would otherwise not be engaged are reached, for day-care services, but equally so for the additional services that these centres have to offer. The flexible design of the quality label allows for tailor-made services to the local community, while also providing a minimum level of services.

2.1.19. Literature used

- Jugendministerkonferenz (2004), Gemeinsamer Rahmen der Länder für die frühe Bildung in Kindertageseinrichtungen, <http://www.bildungsserver.de/Jugend-und-Familienministerkonferenz-2039.html> (visited on March 19, 2013)
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- § 24 Sozialgesetzbuch – VIII - Kinder- und Jugendhilfe

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- <http://www.bmfsfj.de/BMFSFJ/gesetze,did=133282.html> (visited on March 5)
- http://www.laendermonitor.de/uebersicht-grafiken/indikator-11a1-qualifikationsniveaus/indikator/9/indcat/11/indsubcat/5/index.nc.html?no_cache=1&period=131&dimension=0 (visited on March 5)
- <http://www.mehrmannerinkitas-mv.de/> / <http://www.koordination-maennerinkitas.de/> (visited on March 6)
- <http://www.runder-tisch.eu/> (visited on March 6)
- <http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/soziales/0,1518,854510,00.html> (visited on March 5)

2.1.20. Respondents interviewed

Name	Organisation	Country
Nina Schadt	Taskforce U3-ausbau - NRW	Germany – Nordrhein Westfalen
Dagmar Friedrich	Ministry of Family, Children, Youth, Culture and Sports of NRW	Germany – Nordrhein Westfalen
Markus Quetting	Landeselternbeirat NRW – Parent Organisation NRW	Germany – Nordrhein Westfalen
Sonja Boos	Landeselternbeirat NRW – Parent Organisation NRW	Germany – Nordrhein Westfalen

2.2. Case study Germany

Title of the practice: U3 Ausbau project - NRW

Name expert: Gert-Jan Lindeboom

2.2.1. Problem definition

In response to wide variety of participation rates for under 3 year olds throughout Germany, the Federal government in close collaboration with the competent authorities has formulated an ambitious action plan to build the capacity of day-care services throughout Germany. The goal is to reach a participation rate of the target group of on average 35% across the different states. In addition to this target, a new federal law (the 'Kinderförderungsgesetz' -- Child support act – adopted in 2008) entitles every child over the age of 1 access to an affordable day-care service, starting August 2013. In addition, qualitative demands were also formulated regarding the provision of day-care places for children under three. However, it is especially this legal entitlement behind the policy that caused considerable traction with the individual states. Particularly the Western-German states had to formulate an ambitious agenda to reach this target, because compared to the Eastern states they were far behind in terms of participation in day-care services of this youngest group of children. In this case study we look more specifically at the policies taken (and their consequences) in NRW to be able to meet this legal entitlement to every child older than 1 by August 2013.

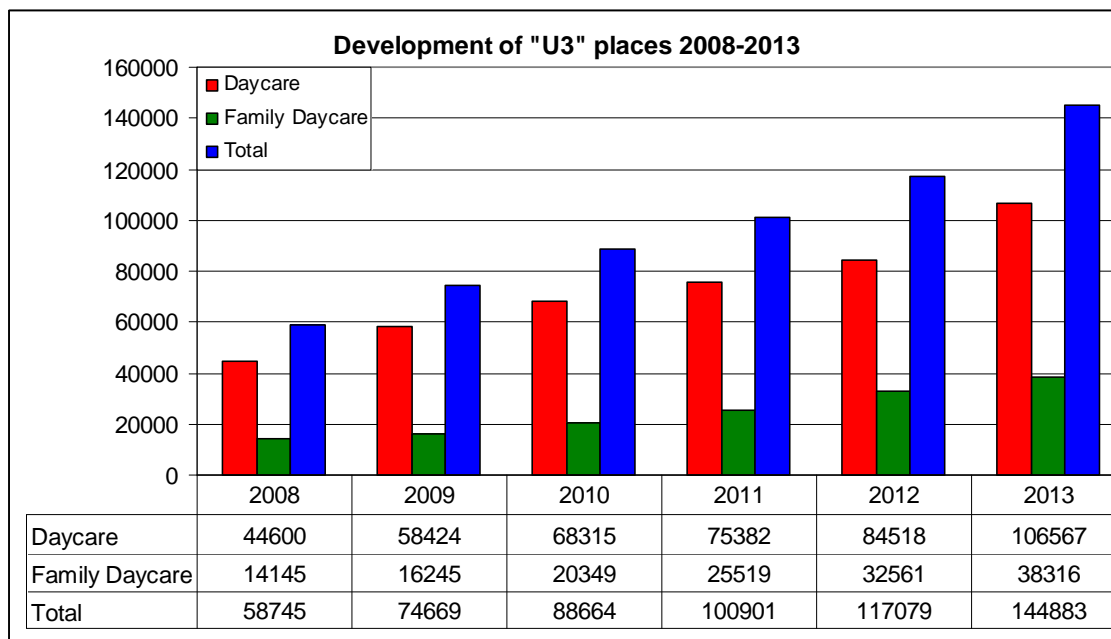
2.2.2. Approach

This case-study will consider the developments associated with this new legal entitlement throughout Germany, by looking at the policy developments in Nordrhein Westfalen. Even though the federal government approved this act, and also made available some funds, most has to be done by the individual Länder. Preparing for the new legal entitlement to day-care in August 2013 is a considerable task; from 2010 onwards approximately 30.000 new day-care places have been developed in NRW. The NRW government set itself the target that 144.000 day-care places by August 2013 would be sufficient to cover the increased demand associated with the new legal entitlement. If these 144.000 day-care places have been realised, NRW will have achieved a capacity of 32 % of all children under three. This 32% as target has been set in collaboration with other states, and must be seen as the contribution towards reaching a German average of 35% coverage.

Specific responsibility for the development of quality day-care was allocated by the federal government to the local 'youth-offices' (Jugendamt). Next to further developing formal day-care services, the law explicitly promotes the development of more informal types of day-care, like family day-care (Kindertagespflege). In this type a childminder takes care of children in her own house. Such informal types are more flexible to react upon changing demand of services, which is part of the reasons that it is supported by the federal level and the local authorities. Another advantage when enlarging provision is that the law only requires these ECEC workers to follow a relatively short (160 hours) training. As the figure below shows however, this type remains less popular than the more institutionalised forms of day-care facilities.

To ensure quality of all types of day-care, the law calls for further regulations of the experience and qualifications of providers. Moreover, to ensure the quality of staff, the

federal bill requires that in the contributions for day-care sufficient attention is paid to additional expenses for the family day-care (such as risk insurance, or staff pensions). Even though the federal government does not have the competence to set minimum cost levels, it hereby implicitly does so by setting forth what elements should be included in the price. The federal government also encourages private family day-care providers to work together with the public institutions for day-care, to ensure the level of quality in return for financial support. In short, the government (both federal as the state) has an ambitious target to raise day-care coverage, while at least aiming to maintain the quality of the care delivered.



Source: Ministerium für Familie, Kinder, Jugend, Kultur und Sport des Landes NRW

The NRW government directly support the local youth offices to expand the provision of day-care services. These local offices have to report the progress made every year to the ministry, which results in the figure above. In order to meet the targets, the NRW government spends in total more than a billion Euros; of this money, local communities and the state support new day-care services financially for about 2/3, while complemented by the federal government that contributes approximately 1/3 of the required funds to expand day-care services for children under 3¹. Furthermore, to be able to meet the target in August 2013 and support local efforts in more practical issues, the NRW government has founded a 'U3-Taskforce' in December 2011.

This Taskforce has the aim to support local communities and municipalities in the practical problems that may arise in expanding the day-care coverage. Consider here for instance issues with local bureaucracies, or zoning plans that may come in the way of developing new day-care services. It offers a very practical approach to potential bottlenecks in the development of new day-care places for Young children. The idea behind the taskforce was to have a specific agency, close to the ministry (it resided at the ministry) to be able to coordinate quickly and effectively between local stakeholders and policymakers at the state level.

¹ MFKJKS: <http://www.mfkjks.nrw.de/kinder-und-jugend/betreuung-fuer-unter-dreijaehrige/> (18 March 2013).

It was founded in February 2012, and is therefore a very recent policy initiative to support local stakeholders. It opened up a Telephone hotline and received questions by e-mail, especially after the taskforce presented itself at a stakeholder conference. It handled various requests by various institutions. Most questions were coming from day-care services and municipal youth offices. Childminders that offer family day-care were also a considerable Group of persons that approached the taskforce, followed by companies that had questions regarding the provision of day-care for their employees. Finally, questions also came from parents with questions regarding provision of ECEC for their Young children and potential investors that were interested in providing assistance to the setting up new services.

Most of the issues that the Taskforce dealt with concern the financing of projects, mostly coming from the youth offices that were practically involved in assisting new services, but required help in the scale of this project. Often, not only new facilities were being built, but existing day-care services were often renovating to offer a higher capacity to younger children. Another important issue for which the taskforce was often approached concerned practical problems with regard to planning and development policies, or for instance building permits that are related to fire safety, architectural demands.

As already mentioned, the role of the taskforce was primarily the assisting of institutions with practical issues that arose from increasing “under 3” capacity. Often the Taskforce took on a role of mediator between different services, sometimes even between administrations of the same municipality. It happened for instance that a local planning office of the municipality would deny plans to further expand a particular day-care institution. Due to these administrative hurdles, projects often slow down, but with the help of the taskforce both municipal offices can be brought together, without losing too much time. In fact, after the intervention of the taskforce in one large city, the Youth office decided to organise regular meeting with the office for building permit, with the goal to coordinate together future plans. It is mainly in these practical issues, that the taskforce played an important role. Similarly, it could also serve as a relevant helpdesk for individual day-care institutions that did not have the expertise (yet) with handling building permits, or even with the demands of the youth office.

As a preparation towards August 2013, when the Legal entitlement to a place is implemented, the taskforce also launched a state-wide website for parents, where they can find day-care services in their neighbourhood. This initiative also answered a lot of questions of worried parents that could not find a suitable day-care service near their homes. As such, the Taskforce U3 must be seen as a tool of the ministry to facilitate better cooperation between the stakeholders in the project of raising the capacity of day-care services for children under 3.

2.2.3. Contextual factors that influence the quality measure

The work of the U3 taskforce must be considered in the light of the broader attempt to raise capacity for under-3-year-olds. To support the day-care facilities and local communities in running the increased number of services, the NRW government in November 2012 also approved additional favourable fiscal policies for municipal ‘youth

offices' to ensure a secure financial position for public facilities¹. With these tax cuts, the NRW government encourages local communities to invest in building, renovating, expanding and improving the physical day-care facilities.

The NRW Minister for Youth affairs identified two main goals of all these efforts: First she calls for the need that young families are able to combine raising their family with their professional obligations, while a second clear goal is to ensure equal opportunities for all children. The local youth offices (organised per community) are thus encouraged to raise the number of places on day-care facilities. The recently published report by the federal government gives some insights in the strategies that are employed by the youth offices.

At the end of 2012, the federal government raised its prognoses for demand for day-care services after August 2013. As a result, it further increased its contribution to Länder for this issue to be able to meet the targets, and make sure that every child above 1 can have a place, if their parents would require this². In total the federal government is supporting the states with 5,4 billion Euros to achieve the coverage goals set by the Lander and the increased demand that may follow the introduction of a legal entitlement in August 2013.

With so much effort on raising the number of day-care facilities, it is crucial to keep the quality level of day-care facilities in mind. On the policy level, the federal government proposes an annual report on the progress towards the coverage goals, while choosing a particular type of quality. In its most recent report, for instance, the federal government maps the development of staff levels. For obvious reasons the increasing number of day-care services require a similar increase in qualified staff. In earlier versions the reports focused on children well-being, staff qualifications, the interaction with parents, and language development. Note that the Federal government only reports on these issues; the policies to improve on such issues have to be enacted by the individual states.

2.2.4. Outcomes and results

As shown by the figure above, NRW reports to have achieved its target of coverage for 32% participation for the under-3-year-olds. Given the enormous number of places that were required, this was quite an achievement for policymakers. Some organisations point out however, that a state-wide participation of 32% may mask differences between different municipalities. Even though *every* child over the age of 1 is entitled to a place, in some municipalities the demand for childcare places is still higher than the actual capacity.

It is important to realise that the taskforce itself did not create new capacity, but that it merely facilitated local providers and municipalities in the process, to work as much together as possible in achieving the common goal of ECEC. Given the many questions of stakeholders directed at the taskforce, we may conclude that the taskforce filled a void and thereby was able to assist practically in reaching the target. By improving

¹ Belastungsausgleichsgesetz Jugendhilfe, http://www.mfkjks.nrw.de/web/media_get.php?mediaid=26283&fileid=84830&sprachid=1 (18 March).

² Dritter Zwischenbericht zur Evaluation des Kinderförderungsgesetzes, http://www.bmfsfj.de/RedaktionBMFSFJ/Broschuerenstelle/Pdf-Anlagen/Kif_C3_B6g-Dritter-Zwischenbericht-zur-Evaluation-des-Kinderf_C3_B6rderungsgesetzes.property=pdf,bereich=bmfsfj,sprache=de,rwb=true.pdfv.

the means of communication between institutions, which can often be long and cumbersome, especially when permits are at stake, it was made possible to expand the capacity within such a short time span.

Because the Taskforce took up such a central position it was able to oversee the entire project of capacity growth, from the level of parents, to the provider, the local youth offices and finally the institutionalised decision makers at the ministry. It notes that on the whole the quality of ECEC was assured; new institutions still had to meet the same quality criteria. Contrary to what would be expected given the increasing demand for ECEC staff, it also reports that finding sufficiently qualified staff wasn't a major bottleneck. The primary issue that did have some negative impact on the quality of ECEC institutions was the housing of the institutions. Because of the increased high demand for new buildings, and ongoing renovations of existing services, the increased capacity went together with temporary solutions for housing. As such, some services had to continue their day-care provision from temporary building that would otherwise not suffice.

3. THE NETHERLANDS

3.1. Country study The Netherlands

3.1.1. Structure of national ECEC services

Compulsory education in the Netherlands starts at the age of 5, though most children enter primary school at the age of 4. In the Netherlands, early childhood education and care for children of 0 to 4 years old is characterised by a dual system of general childcare and childcare focused on children at risk.

Kinderopvang, or general child care, consists of *kinderdagverblijven* (childcare centres) and family care hosts (*gastouders*) for children from a few months to 4 years old. Additionally, the *kinderopvang* sector includes the out-of-school-hours care for children aged 4 to 12 (*buitenschoolse opvang*). This sector however, is not included in this country report.

Childcare focused on children at risk, comprising both preschool playgroups (*peuterspeelzalen*) and *voor- en vroegschoolse educatie (VVE)*, preschool and early school educational programmes.

Table 1: Use of childcare, number of 0 to 4 year olds by type of ECEC (2010)

	<i>N</i>	%
Kinderdagopvang – child care centres	376.000	51%
Gastouderopvang – family care hosts	75.000	10%
Peuterspeelzalen – playgroups	150.000	20%
Total number of 0 to 4 years old	737.359	100%

Source: Panteia, based on ministry of Social Affairs and Work (2012), *Brancheorganisatie Kinderopvang (2012)* and Central Bureau for Statistics (2012)

General child care

In the Netherlands there are about 5.000 childcare centres (*kinderopvanglocaties*) for children up to 4 years¹. These are generally open five days a week for 10 to 11 hours (for instance from 7h30 to 18h15). Some childcare centres also offer flexible childcare around the clock.

The providers of child care are located in the private sector, but the central government regulates the sector through laws and other regulations on quality, health, safety and registration. Local government (the municipality) is responsible for maintaining quality requirements, the inspection of which is delegated to the municipal health authorities, the GGD.

The funding of child care is a joined responsibility of (central) government, employers and parents. Parents pay childcare providers an hourly rate, but are eligible for *kinderopvangtoeslag*, or childcare subsidy, which is paid by the central government to the parents and is income based. A compulsory contribution for employers has been in

¹ In 2011 there were 5.205 childcare locations, source: Brancheorganisatie Kinderopvang (2012) *Fact-sheet Kinderopvang 2012*, September 2012.

place since 1997. The capacity for child care centres has increased substantially during the past decade in response to growing demand. This demand in turn, has been stimulated by increased state subsidies for parents using childcare.

Next to the child care centres, there are family care hosts (*gastouderopvang*). Host parents (*gastouders*) host children from other parents in exchange for an hourly fee. Host parents also have to meet national standards and regulations to become registered. Registration is required for all types of childcare providers. Otherwise parents are not eligible for government subsidies on childcare.

Preschool playgroups and preschool and early school educational programmes

Playgroups are in principle open to all children between 2-2½ and 4 years of age. Children typically play here two mornings or afternoons a week for in total 5 to 6 hours. The preschool playgroups belong to the public sector and are subsidised by the municipal authorities. Most playgroups offer preschool and early school educational programmes, (*VVE-programma's*) (see below). Children that participate in VVE go to the playgroup at least four mornings or afternoons a week. The number of places in playgroups had decreased sharply from 230.000 in 2007 to 150.000 in 2010¹.

VVE policies have been in place since 2000, and originated in local programmes and preschools targeting educational deficits of children at risk from disadvantaged backgrounds, mostly migrant groups in specific areas in the larger cities. The goal is to decrease the educational deficits of children at risk between the age of 2 and 6. Though all forms of ECEC contain some form of educational or pedagogical approach, VVE policies are specifically aimed at improving the individual positions of children with language deficiencies. These deficiencies are being combated by specific (language) stimulation programmes, the so-called *VVE-programmes*².

Municipalities are responsible for the preschool period (2,5 and 3 year olds) in VVE and the playgroup³. Since 2006 school boards have been (financially) responsible for the early school part of VVE programmes for children aged 4 and 5. The most widely used VVE-programmes are designed for children from 2 to 6 years and are used in the preschool playgroups and during the first two years of the primary schools.

Municipalities are responsible for organising sufficient supply of VVE "places" and in defining, identifying and reaching children at risk (so-called 'target groups') so that they come to the VVE playgroups. In practice, potential developmental delays are often identified by baby and toddler clinics. These municipal clinics are part of the child health service, responsible for basic medical care and prevention for children up to the age of four⁴. Municipalities may give children in the 'target groups' priority at playgroups when demand is high. Municipal authorities are also responsible for the collaboration between playgroups and schools, such as choosing the same *VVE-programme* and in sharing information on children.

¹ Ministerie van SZW (2012) beleidsdoorlichting kinderopvang.

² Eurydice (2009) Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities, country Descriptions, The Netherlands.

³ Inspectie van het Onderwijs (2011) VVE-bestandsopname, tussenrapportage.

⁴ Eurydice (2009) Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities, country Descriptions, The Netherlands.

3.1.2. The general perception and policy relevance of ECEC

General childcare was strongly linked to national policies on increasing (female) labour market participation. Playgroups are rooted in local and educational policies aimed at “groups at risk”, which are defined as having a migrant background, language deficits, or are children of parents with lower educational qualifications. However, since a few years, efforts have been made to integrate these two systems and approaches, in terms of regulation, quality inspection and financing.

In 2010, a new law [“Ontwikkelingskansen door Kwaliteit en Educatie”](#) (roughly translated as better chances through quality and education) formalised a partial integration between the two sub-sectors. Overall, the goal is to improve the developmental chances of all young children, especially those at risk of early (language) deficits (*ontwikkelingsachterstanden*).

To do so, the law synchronised quality frameworks for child care and playgroups and the oversight on this framework by local municipalities. Second, the national Inspectorate of Education was given oversight on the quality of pre-school education in both sectors. Last, municipalities became responsible for sufficient local supply of pre-school programmes for all young children with deficits. At the same time, the goals of childcare were broadened to include more explicit educational goals and broadening supply of VVE to the childcare sector.

The current government aims to further integrate different ECEC systems and improve the overall quality and chances for all children, irrespective of the type of ECEC provider they visit. During early 2013 the ministry of Social Affairs and Work sent a draft bill to parliament, to increase both safety and quality in child care, through a variety of proposals:

- Continuous screening of staff on criminal records
- The implementation of a central registry of all ECEC staff, including interns, volunteers and temp workers.
- The introduction of a legal obligation to report any (suspicion of) cases of assault or abuse
- The obligation for child care providers to inform parents through their website on quality of ECEC: pedagogical quality, prices, opening hours, quality, food policy.
- Developing a more dynamic approach to quality inspection, aimed at quality improvement and stronger focus on pedagogical quality.

Quality

Since 2010 the national standard for all forms of early childhood education is the national law *kinderopvang en kwaliteitseisen peuterspeelzalen*. The goals of ECEC are formulated in terms of emotional safety, social competences, personal competences and the transfer of norms and values. This law (and its subsequent regulations) contains several aspects of quality:

- Safety and health regulation
- Staff educational requirements
- Requirements on staff-child ratios
- Maximum group sizes (16 toddlers or 9 babies).
- Pedagogical approach: every provider has developed a *pedagogical plan*.
- Criteria on quality of housing, sleeping areas and minimal (communal) area requirements (3,5m² per child).

In the Netherlands, strict national regulations on staff-child ratios are in place for general child-care and playgroups in the pre-school period. The ratio ranges from 1:4 for 0 year olds to 1:8 for 3 to 4 year olds. Maximum group sizes ranges from 12 to 16 children per group. In primary school, there are no staff-child ratios; an average class size is currently 22 to 23 in primary education¹.

Local governments are responsible for playgroups and are responsible for overseeing compliance by providers of both playgroups and childcare, using local health officers/inspectors (GGD). However, since 2010 playgroups are also regulated by the aforementioned national quality rules. An exemption is made for staff educational requirements. Where in *kinderopvang* all staff has to be professional, in playgroups only one of the two workers per group needs formal qualifications of at least secondary vocational education level (EQF3 or higher).

Indications of quality

Based on the international literature, it is assumed that VVE-programmes are beneficial for the children that participate. As of yet, national empirical research findings in the Netherlands show that VVE-programmes bring little to no result, and little is known on the long-term impact on educational outcomes. During the last few years the government has funded comparative and longitudinal cohort studies to assess this long-term impact of preschool and early school educational investments on school results at the age of 12. The results of these studies will become available over a few years².

Research on the process quality of general childcare in the Netherlands shows a steady decline of quality between 1995 and 2008³. The researchers comment that staff is generally stronger on care than on education. For example, the quality of the *interactions* between staff and children has decreased between 2005 and 2008, which the researchers claimed was especially worrisome, since these interactions constitute the core of pedagogical quality.

Financing

In the Netherlands, general child care is a demand-side funded system, with joint responsibility of the central government, employers and parents. Parents pay the private childcare providers an hourly rate, but are eligible for childcare subsidy (*kinderopvangtoeslag*). The Tax Office pays this subsidy to parents, dependent on family income and number of children, as in Finland. In 2011, the state budget for *kinderopvangtoeslag* was 2,5 billion euro. A compulsory contribution for employers has been in place since 1997, and amounted in 2011 to 709 million euro. Parents contributed 27% of the financing of the childcare sector⁴.

Playgroups belong to the public sector and are subsidised by the municipal authorities. Municipal authorities derive this funding from different sources. They receive structural funding from the ministry of the Interior for general playgroups, namely 193 million euro per year through their General Fund (*gemeentefonds*). Also, municipalities receive funding from the ministry of Education, through a specific subsidy for the VVE-

¹ Dutch Minister of Education (2012) Letter to parliament, November 15, 2012, nr 44785.

² <http://www.pre-cool.nl/> for more information on this study.

³ NCKO (2009) Pedagogische kwaliteit van de opvang voor 0- tot 4-jarigen in Nederlandse kinderdagverblijven in 2008.

⁴ Brancheorganisatie Kinderopvang (2012) Factsheet Kinderopvang 2012, these financial data also include the out-of school *buitenschoolse opvang for children aged 4 to 12*.

programmes aimed at disadvantaged groups, estimated at 187 million euro per year. Additionally, since 2010, municipalities receive 35 million euro per year from the ministry of Social Affairs and Work, to improve the quality of playgroups.

3.1.3. Educational requirements for staff

Playgroup workers and workers in child care centres need a degree in secondary vocational educational (EQF level 3 or higher). Students are first trained in a broad field of social work, including care for children, people with disabilities, and elderly people. Child care is a specialisation within this field, during which the students become a *pedagogical worker*.

In primary schools, VVE-programmes are integrated in the curriculum and the work of teachers working with the youngest groups. Primary school teachers need a degree in higher vocational education (universities of applied science - *hogeschole*), though they can be supported by teaching assistants, a degree at level EQF 4 (*MBO4*). Up until the 1980s there was a specialised curriculum for teachers working the youngest children (toddlers age 4 to 6), but this specialisation was abolished after the integration of *kleuterschool* (toddler school) and *lagere school* (6 to 12) into the *basisschool* (primary education) in 1985.

Both within secondary and higher vocational education, there are no special initial curricula or degrees for working with babies, young children, disadvantaged groups, or with at-risk children. Playgroup workers and teachers that work with preschool and early school educational programmes (VVE) usually receive training for the programme their playgroup is using. Whether this training is mandatory and how much time is to be spent on the training is determined by the municipal authorities and school boards.

3.1.4. Quality of staff

The requirements on staff initial training are monitored by the municipal authorities, the providers of child care and school boards. The local GGD inspections check staff quality in childcare. These inspections are guided by a quality framework, aimed to establish minimal quality requirements, such as qualifications and basic pedagogical quality. These visits are limited to a half day, in which the inspector has to check the necessary documents and visit all groups. This does not leave much room for a thorough assessment of the pedagogical quality and therefore discussions continue on how to improve the oversight on pedagogical quality.

Some childcare providers work with systems for internal quality Assurance (INK, HKZ) or use validated instruments to monitor and improve the pedagogical quality of their staff. One of these instruments has been developed by the academic research team that monitors quality of childcare at the national level for the Ministry of Social Affairs¹. There is no comparative data on the extent to which providers use these (internal) quality assurance instruments.

¹ <http://www.kinderopvangonderzoek.nl/> (last accessed on april 12, 2013).

3.1.5. Perception of staff

Over the years there has been critique on the limited qualification requirements for pedagogical workers in the sector. They are perceived as having insufficient knowledge on developmental psychology and the inadequate skills to stimulate individual children in their development¹. A comparative study on the quality of childcare indicates that staff is generally stronger on care than on education. The quality of the *interactions* between staff and children has decreased between 2005 and 2008.² The researchers comment that this is especially worrisome, since interactions constitute the core of pedagogical quality.

3.1.6. Competence development for staff

The last few years different policies have been initiated to increase the quality of staff working in ECEC. As a response to the 2008 research findings that showed falling pedagogical quality in childcare, in 2009 employers, trade unions and parent organisation founded *Bureau Kwaliteit Kinderopvang* (Bureau Quality in Childcare) to improve pedagogical quality in the sector. In this *bureau*, parties have worked together on developing pedagogical frameworks for the sector, support further competence development and training of staff, and improve cooperation between vocational educational schools and employers. The ministry of Social Affairs has allocated 40 million euro between 2009 and 2012 via the bureau to support further training of staff. According to the evaluation of BKK³ and several experts, this initiative has led to increased attention for quality in the sector, amongst others through the following results:

- development of a pedagogical framework, that is known by over 80% of workers and management in the sector,
- The framework is used in more than 60% of locations.
- The framework has been translated into the curricula for pedagogical workers in of 75% of VET-institutions.
- The majority of providers has a plan for further competence development
- 60% of workers has followed training subsidised by the organisation
- Almost all workers and managers that have been trained, report to use their training in everyday work
- The bureau has supported regional cooperation between providers and VET-institutions on initial curriculum, practical training and further staff development.

To improve quality of staff working on VVE-programmes, the ministry of Education financed a national project *VVersterk* ("strengthening VVE) has since 2006, aimed at further training and support. The project will continue until 2014 and elements of this project are⁴:

- Basic and advanced training for pedagogical workers in playgroups and childcare centres, teachers and school staff.
- Further training for managers in child care, playgroups and schools
- National and regional meetings for municipal policymakers on VVE
- Support for special attention for VVE in VET and higher vocational teacher training.

¹ Verslag expertmeeting ECO3/Sardes (2009), [Professionalisering uitvoerend personeel VVE](#).

² NCKO (2009) Pedagogische kwaliteit van de opvang voor 0- tot 4-jarigen in Nederlandse kinderdagverblijven in 2008.

³ Bureau Bartels (2012) *Monitoring en evaluatie stichting bureau kwaliteit kinderopvang, Eindmeting*,

⁴ www.vversterk.nl.

In 2012 the Ministry of Education invested 100 million euro to improve quality in VVE. Of these funds, 95% were targeted at the 37 largest cities. In return, these cities made promises to increase quality and to reach the results of their VVE-programmes. One of the goals was to increase the number of pedagogical workers in the playgroups (and childcare) with a higher education degree.

3.1.7. Gender balance in ECEC staff

Employers estimate that male workers in general childcare constitute about 1% of total workforce. It was reported that the amount of men working with 0 to 4 year olds has further decreased in the wake of a major case of abuse in a childcare centre in 2010 in Amsterdam¹, mainly due to pressure from parents. Consequently, the uneven gender balance of staff in ECEC is at the moment not a prominent issue for debate or for specific interventions in the Netherlands.

3.1.8. Requirements for staff working with children at risk

There is no specialised initial curriculum for working with disadvantaged groups. There are training requirements for working with the targeted VVE-programmes and there is a trend to increase staff educational requirements for working in subsidised VVE, though demands vary per municipality. In VVE, no special qualifications are required for working with at-risk children in ECEC. However, playgroup workers and teachers that work with preschool and² early school educational programmes (VVE) usually receive training for the programme their playgroup is using. Whether this training is mandatory and how much time is to be spent in training, is determined by the municipal authorities and school boards. The training is developed by the programme developer.

3.1.9. Curriculum goals

Curriculum goals for ECEC in the Netherlands are strongly process oriented. There are no specific goals on the desired or expected outcomes or results. There is no central or state-defined curriculum, as is the case for primary and secondary education in the Netherlands. Freedom for schools to develop their own curriculum is enshrined in the constitution, and strongly linked to the strong position of non-public education in the Netherlands (*bijzonder onderwijs*).

However, since a few years, policymakers have shifted focus in ECEC from widening access to improving quality, and this has increased demands for clarity on results and outcomes. This shift has been fuelled by signs that pedagogical quality in the childcare sector has deteriorated between 1995 and 2008. At the same time however, studies, (both international and national), have showed the importance of high pedagogical quality in the development and wellbeing of children in day care.

In VVE, providers are required to use a systematic and recognised programme to be eligible for funding. At the moment there are seven or eight recognised centre-oriented VVE-programs and several supplementary programs focusing on specific aspects, such as reading or stimulating parents³.

¹ See <http://nos.nl/artikel/336339-minder-mannen-in-kinderopvang.html>.

² NCKO (2009) Pedagogische kwaliteit van de opvang voor 0- tot 4-jarigen in Nederlandse kinderdagverblijven in 2008.

³ <http://nji.nl/eCache/DEF/1/28/823.html> en VVErsterk (2011) *Publieksverslag VVErsterk 2006-2010*

3.1.10. Curriculum for children at risk

VVE-programs aim to stimulate language development, early numeracy, motor skills and social-emotional development. These programmes are characterised by:

- A clear methodology
- Major focus on language development
- Flexibility to adjust the program for specific groups of situations in the playgroups
- Structural activities targeting parents to support active child developmental behaviour
- Training and support for workers and teachers

Quality in VVE is still strongly defined by the process (training and certified programmes, number of children at risk, staff –child ratio, hours per week). A result-oriented approach is propagated at the national level, though until recently there were only few municipalities that make explicit demands for providers on the expected outputs, such as diminished deficits or increased capacities of individual children entering primary education¹.

3.1.11. Background Parental involvement

The childcare law (*wet kinderopvang*) of 2005 introduced the obligation for all childcare centres to contain an advisory committee of parents (*oudercommissie*). This committee has the right to discuss all matters relevant to parents with the (private) provider. Providers are obliged to ask the committees advice on several key policies, such as the pedagogical plan, educational activities, safety, health, prices and opening hours². The provider has to respond to any recommendations given, and if it does not follow the advice, the provider must substantiate its policies. When a dispute arises between an *oudercommissie* and a provider, the former can go to a national chamber of complaints (*klachtenkamer oudercommissies kinderopvang*). This chamber of complaints does not however, have the formal authority to pass legal judgement.

Several experts point out that the role of parents as guardians of quality, being positioned as the 'customer' of private childcare providers, has not quite worked out. Individual parents as well as those in *oudercommissies* do not have sufficient knowledge of daily pedagogical practice in the centres. Some observers also see parents focusing on price, rather than quality. This is stimulated by the maximum price per hour that is subsidised through the childcare tax benefit (*kinderopvangtoeslag*). Moreover, this means that there is hardly any room for providers to let better quality be reflected in higher prices. The legal position of *oudercommissies* is not very strong, compared for example to parents-teachers committees in primary schools. Only a few *oudercommissies* a year make it to the *klachtenkamer*. If they do, the dispute is almost always about the price³.

In the general childcare sector, parental involvement is mainly centre-oriented. There is no strong tradition in child-focused parental involvement or supporting parenting at home. Contacts between pedagogical workers and parents are informal and mostly limited to 'dropdown and pickup' moments. Some providers work with written daily re-

¹ Inspectie van het Onderwijs (2011) VVE-Bestandsopname.

² Wet kinderopvang en kwaliteitseisen peuterspeelzalen, article 58 to 60.

³ See www.skkjaarverslagen.nl, (last accessed on 08/04/2013) for an overview of complaints by parents and parent committees.

ports, or keep info on the child on whiteboards. Most centers organise a few additional contact moments between parents and pedagogical workers to discuss the development of the child. Most centers have yearly 10-minute talks and one or two evenings for all parents to discuss or present a pedagogic topic¹. Typical topics are health issues, first aid, reading at home or a 'day in the life' in the centre.

In playgroups, and especially those that work with VVE-programmes, there is a stronger tradition to involve parents in a child-focused way. Traditionally, the playgroups were founded by parents and parents were in the boards, though nowadays, playgroups are almost all run by either private companies or semi-public foundations. Most VVE-playgroups combine the centre-oriented program with one or more elements to introduce individual parents in the centre's program and to improve parenting at home. Some playgroups and centers try to involve parents more in their work, stimulate positive parenting or try to stimulate contact among parents themselves. Some groups organise for example monthly meetings with parents, in which they can play with their children on the group and staff members discuss with parents the theme and materials the group will be working on the upcoming period. Others supply parents regularly with a number of games and tasks to use at home with their child, to increase effective learning time also at home. Other groups have weekly coffee mornings for parents to freely discuss any issues that might arise. Other means are cooperation with local social organisations, for example support local women group meetings by taking care of the children.²

In the Netherlands, there are a few (about ten) cooperative childcentres or *ouderparticipatiecreches*, child centers in which parents themselves run the child care in turns.

Relation of national policymaking and European OMC

The interviewed stakeholders all agreed that the influence of the European open method of coordination on national policymaking was recognisable, but limited. They were aware of the special position that the Netherlands has on several key-indicators, but point out that each MS has a different ECEC sector.

In the Netherlands, there is on the one hand a systematic approach in which policymakers try to improve quality and incorporate lessons from other MS, mainly the Nordic countries and Germany. On the other hand, public debate and policymaking is shaped to a large extent by incidents, such as a severe case of abuse in an Amsterdam childcare centre and contextual factors, such as government budget cuts in financial support for childcare, due to general austerity measures.

Policymakers point out that the main function of international and EU-level coordination for them is the easy access to information on how other countries or member states deal with similar concerns. All Member States face the same issues (access, financing, safety and quality of ECEC), though national contexts vary to a great extent. One interviewee wondered how the work by the EC and the Thematic Working Group is doubling the work done on ECEC by the OECD.

¹ Netherlands Youth Institute: <http://nji.nl/eCache/DEF/1/25/227.html> (last accessed on 08/04/2013).

² Panteai/Research voor beleid (2009) *Viva la Village, The role of schools and ECEC-providers in supporting parenting*.

Between 2006 and 2009 through the Dutch ESF the childcare sector has used ESF funding to subsidise innovative projects on increasing access and quality in childcare and on the cooperation between childcare centres and playgroups.

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- www.vversterk.nl
- https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Netherlands:Early_Childhood_Education_and_Care

3.1.13. Respondents interviewed

Name	Organisation	Country
Willeke van der Werf	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment	The Netherlands
Wytske Boomsma	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science	The Netherlands
Gjalt Jellesma	BOINK, National organisation for parents in ECEC.	The Netherlands
Ruben Fukkink	Professor in childcare, University of Amsterdam	The Netherlands

3.2. Case study The Netherlands

In 2010, a new law “Ontwikkelingskansen door Kwaliteit en Educatie” (roughly translated as better chances through quality and education) formalised a partial integration between the two sub-sectors. Overall, the goal is to improve the developmental chances of all young children, especially those with cognitive and linguistic deficits. To do so, the law aimed to improve quality of early childhood education in both playgroups and childcare centres through national quality standards for playgroups, a stronger responsibility for local authorities in all forms of early childhood education, and oversight (inspections) on the quality of early childhood education by the national Inspectorate of Education. At the same time, the goals of childcare were broadened to include more explicit educational goals and broadening supply of VVE to the childcare sector.

Before, municipalities would usually subsidise a limited number of institutions that offer playgroups working with pre-school programmes for children that need additional attention. Other child care services are paid for by parents, though subsidised by the national government.

Amersfoort, a middle-large city in the centre of the Netherlands, realised that through their traditional approach, it was not able reach all children at risk, whereas at the same time many children used the pre-school programmes that were not in the target group. In fact, more and more target group children did attend regular child care and did not receive the additional educational support needed.

Therefore, based on individual assessment of all children at 18 months, Amersfoort focused at those children that actually needed additional attention. Instead of subsidising entire playgroups, it has worked out a different system, in which it funds personalised place for children at need, which can be situated in both type of providers.

In the pre-school institutions (playgroups), there are also additional non-subsidised places for non-target group children, whereas regular day care may also receive funding for pre-school programmes for children that need it. As of 2013, there are no more traditional municipality-funded playgroups in Amersfoort.

Other municipalities are experimenting with the coordination of pre-school programmes and groups by primary education (startgroepen)

4. ROMANIA

4.1. Country study Romania

In recent years, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) received an elevated attention from the Romanian Government. In 2011, a comprehensive legislation¹ gave the system a new shape, introducing measures that aim to promote and revitalise the national educational mechanism. As part of these efforts, the early childhood education (in Romanian: *educația timpurie*) gained an elevated attention.

The present report aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the ECEC mechanism in Romania, focusing on the following separate but interconnected sectors: the general structure and perception of the ECEC; the educational staff and the curriculum; as well as the parental involvement in ECEC services.

4.1.1. Structure of national ECEC services

Before delving into the detailed exploration of the framework, it is necessary to understand the basic structure and mechanism of the ECEC services in Romania. The early education of children not reaching the compulsory school age (that is, 6/7 years-old) is structured in a two-tier manner²: the period between 0-3 years is known as the ante-preschool level (in Romanian: *nivelul antepreșcolar*); while the period between 3-6 years is the pre-school phase (in Romanian: *învățământul preșcolar*).

The ante-preschool level focuses on the care of children from birth to the age of 3 years. Generally, new-born children are taken care of by their parents during the maternal leave (on average, 63 business days³). After the termination of this period children are taken care of in crèches. Ante-preschool care is governed by Law 236 of 19 July 2007⁴ which defines crèches as units that offer specialised social services for the growth, care and early education of children until the age of 3.

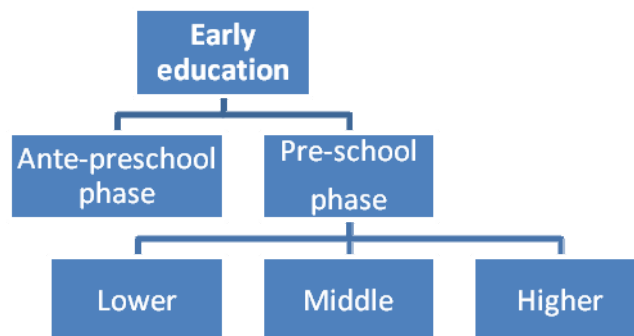
The pre-school phase is further divided into three levels, depending on the age of the children: lower group (3-4 years), middle group (4-5 years), and higher group (5-6 years). Each group comprises of an average of 15 children.

¹ Law 1 of 2011 on National Education, Official Gazette Nr. 18 (10 January 2011).

² Article 23(1)(a) of Law 1 of 2011 on National Education, Official Gazette Nr. 18 (10 January 2011).

³ In accordance with the Government Ordinance 158/2005 on holidays and allowance for social health care insurances. The law allows a total of 126 days of maternal leave, which comprises of two phases: a pre- and a post-birth period (63 days each). The law imposes that the minimum post-birth leave must be at least 42 days. It is also possible to ask for a care-period of two years which is available to either of the two parents.

⁴ Art. 1(1) of Law 236 of 19 July 2007 on the establishment, organisation and functioning of crèches (Published in the Official Gazette nr. 507 of 30 July 2007), available at: http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htm_act_text?id=82187 (last accessed 28 March 2013).



Item 1: The structure of early education in Romania

ECEC Institutions

The Romanian ECEC system envisages three institutions that engage in the provision of early education: crèches, kindergarten (in Romanian: *grădiniță*), as well as daycare centres. The ante-preschool phase can be carried out in all three institutions, while the pre-school phase is organised in kindergartens.

Crèches are units of care for children between birth and 3 years-old. In practice, children are brought to crèches only at the age of 3-months since that is the end of the average maternal leave for their parents. The main role of crèches is to take care of the children by means of providing adequate food, medical and hygienic care, taking into consideration potential unique condition of each child. Education is not the focal role of crèches *per se*. This is evidenced also by the care-takers in crèches, who usually are medical and child-care professionals, and seldom educators.

The kindergartens can operate with three different types of programmes: normal (on average: 4 hours/day), prolonged (on average: 11 hours/day), and weekly. Kindergartens are established by the county school inspectorates. Institutions providing ante-preschool and pre-school services must be established in accordance with the standards set out by the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports. Requests for establishment should be filed locally at the local administrative bodies. The official operating language in the pre-school institutions is Romanian, but other minority languages may also be used.

The children attending the ECEC facilities are supervised by educators or child carers. Each children group in kindergartens has at least one educator, but in case of prolonged or weekly programmes, multiple (usually two) educators engage with the children on a shifting basis.

The 2011 Law on National Education also introduced the so-called 'preparatory class' (in Romanian: *clasa pregătitoare*) which is a transitional year between kindergartens and primary school. The preparatory class is meant to serve as a hybrid programme that is built on elements of kindergartens (e.g., games and tales) while familiarising the child with the structure and working procedure of schools (schedules, structure, etc.).

Relevant Authorities

The Ministry of National Education (in Romanian: *Ministerul Educației Naționale*)¹ is the key authority in the structuring and functioning of the ECEC services. Along with the Ministry, the local administrative authorities and inspectorates (organised locally) also play an important role, as they are responsible for assuring the conditions necessary for the provision of ECEC services. The local authorities and inspectorates are responsible also for the hiring of educational staff in the various ECEC institutions. Payment of salaries is done also by the local authorities from a State budget allocated by the Government. Furthermore, the Ministry is also engaged with the coordination and monitoring of the national education system (including all forms of early childhood education and care) as well as setting the objectives of the separate levels of educational phases.

The local or municipal school inspectorates (in Romanian: *Inspectoratul Școlar Județean/Municipal*)² operate with the function to oversee and supervise the operation of the educational institutions (both public and private) and their activities. The local school inspectorates are headed by an inspector general, and comprise of a managing board and an advisory council. The advisory council incorporates various actors, such as directors of educational units, prominent teaching staff and representatives of parents, and religious communities.

The local county administrations also play a crucial role in education. The local city hall is responsible, in cooperation with the local school inspectorates, for the establishment of ante-preschool and pre-school facilities. Its responsibility lies in the financial support and infrastructural coordination needed for these facilities.

Quality Assurances

For ante-preschool education, the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports is responsible for enactment of laws that guarantee a high quality education content as well as describes the methodology to be implemented in the institutions.³

Quality assurances are done through a wide variety of mechanisms. On a national level, the national finalisation in education exam works as a minimum competence-setting system for the educators. This exam ensures that educators will be able to offer a set of competences. The exam also enables a harmonised, minimum level quality assurance throughout the country.

On the county level, the local school inspectorates are responsible for the monitoring of quality in educational institutes. This is done through inspections, which encompasses visits by officials from the inspectorates to the educational institutions. During the visits, the inspectors can attend the programme; examine the facility and other education-related aspect of the institution.

There are also internal quality assurances, which are conducted on an intra-institution basis. The educators are given a yearly evaluation of their work, which will be included in their personal portfolio.⁴

¹ For the Ministry's website, see: www.edu.ro (last accessed 28 March 2013).

² For the website of the Municipal Inspectorate of Bucharest, see: <http://www.ismb.edu.ro/> (last accessed 28 March 2013).

³ Article 27 of Law 1 of 2011 on National Education, Official Gazette Nr. 18 (10 January 2011).

⁴ For more on this aspect, see below the text for Question 5 on *Monitoring Quality of Staff*.

Funding

Funding is made a State obligation under Article 104(1)-(2) of the Law on National Education of 2011. This provision provides that the basic financing relating to a number of expenses (e.g., salaries, educational materials, and maintenance) must be allocated from the State budget. The local administrative body (generally, the city hall of the municipality) will be responsible for the distributing of the State budget accorded for the educational institutions.

On a yearly basis, a Government degree outlines the methodology and the structure in which the financing is conducted, as well as the budget accorded to the local administrative bodies. The accordance of budget is made on the basis of a standard cost per pre-school pupil. This standard cost is a result of a complex calculation involving numerous factors, such as the capacity of the pre-school institute, whether it is situated in a rural or an urban environment, as well as anticipated costs. Government Decree 72 of 27 February 2013¹ sets out the current standard cost, which for the academic year of 2013 is set to 2,420 RON per child (around € 548/child).

Based on a similar structure, the ante-preschool education is financed through a State budget, as well as other income sources, such as parental contributions, donations or through sponsors.²

One of the main developments introduced by the 2011 Law on National Education was the approval of a so called 'social coupon'.³ The purpose of this social coupon is to provide governmental support for early childhood education, and is accorded on the basis of family income.

Main Stakeholders

As outlined in the above section on the relevant authorities, the key policy and enforcement players are: the Ministry of National Education, the local school inspectorates and the county administrations. The relevant ECEC institutions are the crèches, kindergartens and day-care centres.

Next to these, the House of the Teaching Body (*In Romanian: Casa Corpului Didactic*)⁴ is a separate institute under the coordination of the local school inspectorates and the Ministry with the main role of promoting innovation and reformation in education, to assure the development of the teaching staff implementing qualitative controls and monitoring competence standards. The Houses of Teaching Body are structured on a municipality basis, along with the local school inspectorates.

¹ Government Decree 72 of 27 February 2013 on the determination of the standard cost per student/pre-school attendees and determination of the financing of the public pre-university educational units (Published in Official Gazette I, nr. 133 of 13 March 2013), available at: <http://lege5.ro/en/Gratuit/qm2doojuqq/hotararea-72-2013-hotarare-privind-aprobarea-normelor-metodologice-pentru-determinarea-costului-standard-per-elev-prescolar-si-stabilirea-finantarii-de-baza-a-unitatilor-de-invataman-preuniversitar-d?pid=77340682> (last accessed 28 March 2013).

² Article 69 of Government Decree 1252/2012 on the approval of the methodology of the organisation and functioning of crèches and other ante-preschool early childhood education units (published in Official Gazette I, nr. 8 of 7 January 2013), available at: http://www.dreptonline.ro/legislatie/hq_1252_2013_metodologie_functionare_crese_unitati_educatie_timpurie_anteprescolara.php (last accessed 28 March 2013).

³ Article 27(6) of Law 1 of 2011 on National Education, Official Gazette Nr. 18 (10 January 2011).

⁴ For the House of Teaching Body for Bucharest see: www.ccd-bucuresti.org (last accessed 28 March 2013).

Furthermore, the National Federation of the Associations of Parents in Pre-University Education (in Romanian: *Federația Națională a Asociațiilor de Părinți – Învățământ Preuniversitar*)¹ is the entity which aims to develop and integrate the interests of parents in the national educational framework.

Among the various stakeholders, the Romanian Educators' Association (in Romanian: *Asociația Educatoarelor din România*)² was established in 2008 as an agency that provides with a unified community for all Romanian educators engaged in ante-preschool and pre-school educations. The Association envisages to promotion of the education of the pre-school staff through specialised courses, manuals and other activities.

Decision-making on ECEC Issues

Decision-making on a wide set of aspects rests with the Ministry of Education. Some of these aspects relate to the allocation of budget, the setting of the standards costs per pre-school pupil, as well as providing with guidelines on the curriculum and methodology, among many other areas.

The local administrative authority is responsible for decision-making associated with the establishment of ECEC facilities, the distribution of the State budget as well as other administrative matters. Decisions relating to the substantive and organisational aspects are made by the local school inspectorates.

Policy Reforms and Developments in Light of the EU Attention on ECEC Issues

Romania set up its recent educational reforms in cooperation and in accordance with the guidelines and aims of the various institutions of the European Union. A specialised unit, the National Agency for Community Programmes in the Field of Education and Professional Development (in Romanian: *Agencia Națională pentru Programe Comunitare în Domeniul Educației și Formării Profesionale*),³ was given the responsibility of managing, on the Romanian level, of various European projects. The Agency aims to adopt and promote the European values and to integrate Romanian values into the European context. This is conducted through the strong cooperation with the institutions of the Union, as well as through the support of local institutes and organisations. Among others, the Agency is the driving entity for the integration of the Comenius programme⁴.

4.1.2. The general perception and policy relevance of ECEC

The ECEC occupies a central role in the Romanian educational system. This is particularly reflected in the 2011 Law on National Education, which accords an elevated emphasis to this phase of the educational framework. The previous law on education included a considerable number of amendments, and one of the driving reasons for the enactment of the new law was the provision of one comprehensive legal instrument governing the Romanian education system.

¹ For the website of the Federation, see: <http://www.fnapi.ro/> (last accessed 28 March 2013).

² Asociația Educatoarelor din România, official website available at: <http://www.educatoarea.ro> (last accessed 28 March 2013).

³ For the Agency's website, see: <http://www.anpcdefp.ro/anpcdefp.php?id=1&link=15> (last accessed 28 March 2013).

⁴ See <http://www.anpcdefp.ro/programe/llp/comenius/> (last accessed 28 March 2013); and <http://www.llp-ro.ro/?d=41> (last accessed 28 March 2013).

The broader role of the ECEC is encapsulated in Article 4 of the 2011 Law on National Education, providing that the scope of education of children and youth is the development of competences, multifunctional and transferable skills which will contribute to various aspects of a child's life, including, among others, the aspirations towards life-long learning, social integration, employment, and cultivation of sensitivity towards ethnic-civic values, social and natural environment.

From a somewhat more narrow approach, the aims of the ECEC in the pre-school phase (3-6) is more concentrated on the balanced development of the child's personality while taking into consideration not only the personal needs of the child but also factors such as creative training, promoting social interaction among the children, encouraging exploration and experimentations as well as playing a key factor in the discovery of the child's own self-image, abilities and skills.

Links to Other Policy Areas

The Romanian ECEC policy is inter-connected with other policy areas on multiple levels. First and foremost, there is a direct connection to the labour sector. Article 4 of the Law on National Education of 2011 expressly states that the improvement of the education of children is a prerequisite for enhancing employment and the functioning of a sustainable economy. This relationship between the early childhood education and the development of the Romanian labour market forms part of the *National Development Plan 2007-2013 (in Romanian: Planul Național de Dezvoltare 2007-2013)*¹ which was drafted in 2005 with the aim to bring a more dynamic and modern labour market into existence. The National Development Plan acknowledges that a sustainable labour market requires the promotion of educational and training systems on various framework levels, including formal and informal learning frameworks.

Early education is further correlated to developing of humanistic and scientific values, which aim to increase the participation of children in the knowledge society of Romania. To this extent, the *Education and Research for the Knowledge Society Strategy 2009-2015*² provides with a mechanism for the improvement, through education and research, of a knowledge society in Romania. In order to reach its goals, the Strategy puts emphasis on the promotion of a new set of values that will contribute to the achievement of the purposes of the Strategy, that is, the creation of a knowledge society. This goal is in consistency with the 2011 Law on National Education, which mirrors the need for the adoption of a set of guiding principles or values in order to attain a better education framework.

Along the connections to the labour market and the building of a knowledge society, Article 4 of the Law on National Education envisages that the educational system, including the ECEC, will contribute to the fostering of respect for fundamental human rights, ethnic-, cultural-, and social-values.

Policy Goals for ECEC Services and Efforts to Achieve these Goals

The central policy goals in the development of the Romanian ECEC services relate to the improvement of the education of children, the enhancement of competences and

¹ Government of Romania, *National Development Plan 2007-2013* (December 2005), available at (in English): [http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/res/filepicker_users/cd25a597fd-62/Doc_prog/PND_2007_2013/3_NDP2007_2013\(eng.\).pdf](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/res/filepicker_users/cd25a597fd-62/Doc_prog/PND_2007_2013/3_NDP2007_2013(eng.).pdf) (last accessed 18 March 2013).

² *Education and Research for the Knowledge Society Strategy 2009-2015*, available at: http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/COMISIA_EDUCATIE/EDUCATION_AND_RESEARCH_FOR_A_KNOWLEDGE_SOCIETY.pdf (last accessed 18 March 2013).

skills from the early stages as well as the promotion of a harmonious development of personality. These aims are enlisted also in Articles 2 to 4 of the 2011 Law on Education, which further enriches the spectrum of aims by according priority to educational integration and ensuring equal, non-discriminatory access to educational facilities (Article 2). The underlying principles for an improved educational system are provided for in Article 3, and include, among others, equity, quality, the preservation of national identity, the recognition of minority rights (including the right to preserve and express their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identities), learner-centred education, and parental participation. Article 3 is a comprehensive and ambitious effort to set a firm foundation for the educational system. This ambitious effort is carried further on in Article 4 which takes a more specific approach than the principle-based Article 3.

Challenges to Policy Developments

One of the core challenges to any development in the field of early childhood education represents the inequalities between the rural and the urban zones. This inequality manifests through a number of differences. First, the number of qualified educators is substantially lower in the rural zones. This creates a fluctuating and inconsistent level of education throughout the country. Second, the social statuses of the rural families are lower than those who live in cities. This affects not only the education of the child, but also the socialisation and access to education processes. Third, other barriers may exist, such as inappropriate educational infrastructure or cultural services.

While the number of children attending pre-school facilities (kindergartens) is increasing, this proves to be more problematic for ante-preschool education (crèches). The pivotal reason for this is the decrease in the number of parents addressing these institutions, particularly in the rural areas. Financial shortcomings in families, increasing fees for care services as well as the increase of the number of family members who spend their time at home (for reasons of lack of employment, medical leave, or presence of grandparents) are factors that contribute to the decrease of usage of care services for children between 0 and 3 years-old. Interestingly, this phenomenon characterises mostly the rural zones, and in the urban areas the reverse phenomenon exists. Parents in the major cities are keener to allow their children to attend crèches. This situation presents at least two major challenges to the policy makers: first, the improvement of ante-preschool education and care in the rural areas; and second, the harmonisation of the education between rural and urban areas.

4.1.3. Educational requirements for staff

The quality of early childhood education receives a particular focus in Romania. The education requirement for ECEC staff is regulated by Article 9(2) of the Ordinance 5560 of 7 October 2011 on the Framework Methodology on the Pre-University Education Staff for the Academic Year 2012-2013.¹ This provision stipulates that educational positions in the pre-school phase can be fulfilled only by individuals who possess certain qualifications. The range of qualifications is rather broad, ranging from graduates of pedagogical high schools (with specialisations in early childhood education) to individuals possessing university degrees in pedagogical studies and specialisations in primary or preschool education. The common feature of this wide net of qualifications

¹ Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, *Ordinance 5560 of 7 October 2011 on the Framework Methodology on the Pre-University Education Staff for the Academic Year 2012-2013* (published 27 October 2011), available at: http://www.cmbrae.ro/upload/OMECTS_5560_metod_misc_%20pers_did_2012_2013.pdf (last accessed 28 March 2013).

is the specialisation of the candidates in early childhood education, particularly pre-school education.

Competences of ECEC Staff

The educational staff may participate in the so-called national finalisation in education exam, which acknowledges the minimum competences of the educators and guarantees the readiness and preparedness of the educator as well as the possibility to build a professional career in this field.¹ The examination encompasses a written exam and an on-sight inspection of the capacities of the educator in educating the children. The exam accords an increased importance to the capacities and competences of the educator and follows a well-structured checklist which must be followed during the on-sight inspections.

The educators are encouraged to follow certain education strategies which include three approaches: a. *active participation*, through which children must be encouraged to explore and develop independent interest, abilities and capacities; b. *play*: educators requested to use games as educational tools, in the ambit of which they can observe the behaviour of the child and later on, customise other activities in a manner consistent with the needs and abilities of the child; c. *evaluation*: is seen as the role of the educators to monitor the children's progress on all levels, and discuss the development (and needs) of the child with the parents on a regular basis.

4.1.4. Competence development for staff

The 2011 Law on National Education puts an elevated emphasis on the promotion of the teaching career of the educators.² To promote the competence development of the ECEC staff, the educational system provides with the possibility to obtain a national finalisation exam, which guarantees not only the basic competences of the educator but also provides with a starting point for a career in education. After passing this exam, educators will be accorded the possibility to gain higher level statuses (so called 'grades') which require an extended set of competences and experience in the field. These grades serve as a certification of an increasing level of competence of the educators and afford an ascending challenge to the educators. The system is set up in the following way: the starting point is the possession of the finalisation exam. Grade II requires an experience at least 4 years as well a set of examination (written, oral and on-sight inspections). Grade I may be obtained after the accumulation of an additional 4 years of experience (since the obtaining of Grade II) as well a more complex set of examinations. The completion of a level entitles the educator to a higher title and salary, which act as a stimulus for the furtherance of competence development.

Along with this mechanism, the House of the Teaching Body is responsible for the organisation of competence promoting events for educators. The so-called 'pedagogical circle for educators' (in Romanian: *Cerc Pedagogic al Educatoarelor*) is a regularly organised event that gathers the educators for meetings where experiences and good practices are shared.

¹ See particularly Chapter V of the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, *Ordinance 5560 of 7 October 2011 on the Framework Methodology on the Pre-University Education Staff for the Academic Year 2012-2013* (published 27 October 2011), available at: http://www.cmbrae.ro/upload/OMECTS_5560_metod_misc_%20pers_did_2012_2013.pdf (last accessed 28 March 2013).

² Article 242 *et seq.* of the 2011 Law 1 on National Education. Official Gazette Nr. 18 (10 January 2011).

4.1.5. Quality of staff

The previously described national finalisation in education exam serves also as a mechanism for the monitoring of quality of the ECEC staff. It imposes clearly defined standards and requirements, while imposing on-sight inspections of the educational methodology. This allows the imposing of minimum national requirements that will be possessed by educators throughout the country.

Along with the national finalisation exam, there are also internal and county level quality-monitoring mechanisms which aim to supervise and support the correct work of the educators. As regards the county level monitoring, the local school inspectorates can attend the programmes of ECEC institutions and evaluate not only the competence of the educator but also the educational environment and the working mechanism of the whole institute.

As concerns the internal level checks, the educational institutions organise their intra-institution monitoring of the educators. This encompasses the election by the educators of one person (generally, the most senior educator) which will attend an ordinary programme and observe the work of a fellow educator. The results of the session are recorded on an evaluation form which will be included in the portfolio of the educator. At the end of the session, the observer will discuss his/her observation with the educator, often accompanied by advices and shares of good practices.

4.1.6. Perception of staff

In terms of payment, the educational positions of public ECEC facilities are not perceived as high income positions. The average income of an educator ranges between 1,000-1,500 RON (€ 226 – 339). The educator wishing to raise his/her income faces the challenge of being limited to two options: either through competence development in accordance with the grade-system or through employment in a private ECEC service provider.

The working conditions vary among the institutions and are subject to numerous factors such the allocated budget, the infrastructure, or the geographical location. Because of these wide variations, it is difficult to accurately assess the perception of the ECEC staff on the basis of their working conditions.

4.1.7. Gender balance in ECEC staff

There is no explicit gender discrimination in any of the process relating to the access, qualification and employment of ECEC staff. However, in practice, ante-preschool and pre-school educators and care-takers are almost entirely female. Furthermore, there are no initiatives for the promotion of gender balance in this field.

4.1.8. Requirements for staff working with children at risk

The special staff requirement for working with 'children at risk' encompasses the presence of psychologists or medical personnel in ECEC institutions. The presence of specialist personnel accords the 'child at risk' an elevated attention and personalised care. In most cases, the specialists have a separate session with the relevant children on a weekly basis.

Furthermore, the ECEC institutions adopt an integrative approach towards children with disabilities or special needs. This means that educators are instructed to involve these children into the ordinary activities of the programme, and if needed, accord them special attention. As learned from the interviewed experts, this special attention can mean that one disabled child is recorded as two children in terms of time required for his/her education and care.

4.1.9. Curriculum goals

From a broader perspective, the aim of setting a clear framework for curriculum was based on the need to promote education in order to enable the formulation and development of human personality. This is seen as a necessity in order to allow the formation of an individual and also for the society as a whole. To reach this broad target, education is perceived as an organised, systematic and institutionalised means. Through a structured early education, children are given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with a wide spectrum of knowledge, develop social-behavioural skills and develop individual capacities. Furthermore, the use of a well-designed curriculum could lead to the reduction of social inequalities. In addition, the scope for the introduction of a structured curriculum is connected to the reduction of the ratio of children abandoning school education at a later phase in their life. Intervening at a very early stage of the child's development through a schematic and structured system is seen as a solution and direct influential factor in preventing pupils, and later students, from abandoning education.

Perceived from a more narrow perspective, the curriculum is designated to address every age-group separately, providing them suitable and appropriate challenges. The work of the separate age-groups is governed by separate principles. While in the early stage (3-5 years), emphasis is given to the familiarisation of the child with basic socio-cultural aspects, at the later stage (5 to 6/7 years) the emphasis falls on the preparation of the children for their next educational step: school.

4.1.10. Stakeholder involvement in curriculum

The Ministry of Education, Research and Youth is the key actor in setting the goals as well as the content of the curriculum. The Ministry, as part of a specialised project, provided a comprehensive document in 2008 in which it outlined the precise scope and content that should be addressed in kindergartens for children aged between 3 and 7. Along the Ministry, the public may be involved to a certain extent, since draft documents are made publicly available for observations and comments (see, for instance, Q12 below). The role of the parents is one of a partner, and as such remains in constant communication with the educators on every aspect relating to the education of the child, including the curriculum. Other *ad hoc* stakeholders may also be involved in the setting of principles and content. In 2007, a consultation process was conducted with the representation of UNICEF in Romania in order to align the domestic framework with international standards on child rights and child protection. Part of this consultation, the specialist elaborated on the promotion of various domains of early childhood education. This demonstrated that third parties may be involved in the setting of curriculum, whose expertise and knowledge are transformed into practical policy changes.

4.1.11. Curriculum Content

The curriculum is based on several guiding principles, such as extensiveness (the aim to incorporate a wide range of domains); equilibrium (to ensure that each domain fits well into the curriculum as a whole); relevance (the integration of domains and topics that promote the development of an intellectually firm individual who will be equipped with the skills and tools to meet the challenges of life); differentiation (the aim to allow the individual development of each child's own characteristics); progress and continuity (acts as the final step, which permits the smooth transition from one educational step to the other).

For the ante-preschool phase, the Ministry of Education provides with a detailed guideline for the stimulation of the development of children aged between 0 and 3 years.¹ This Guideline builds on a wide spectrum of international legislation, which is the basis for the structuring of the principles to be adopted in the ante-preschool education in Romania. Furthermore, the Guideline sets out not only the objectives and the reasons for a structured early childhood education but also outlines the structure that needs to be followed. The structural outlines contain also guidelines on the curriculum. The curriculum is divided into specific 'domains' which relate to physical development, health and personal hygiene; socio-emotional development; language and communication development; cognitive development; and improvement of the learning capacity. Each of these domains is further divided into an age-specific guideline, outlining the targeted goals for each age-group throughout the domains. For instance, in the domain of physical development, health and personal hygiene, the aimed target goals for the age-group of 0-18 months are, among others, the child's capacity to control his/her head and limb movements as well as ability to stand on his/her legs while being supported.² The Guideline provides a second set of target goals for the age-group of 19-36 months-old as well. This systematic approach ensures a harmonised approach throughout all ante-preschool institutes in Romania, allowing the allocation of a co-ordinated and transparent curriculum that needs to be followed.

In 2000, a new vision over education brought a structured and clearly defined curriculum for the pre-school education. A special framework curriculum was drawn up that defines a set of activities that must be implemented in the educational programme of the pre-school institutions. The categories of activities are separated between the age groups of 3 to 5 years-old on the one hand, and 5 to 6/7 years-old on the other. The number of activities for each group is set on a 'per week' basis:

¹ Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, *Guidelines for the Stimulation of Development for Children Aged between Birth and 3 years* (2008), available at: <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/articles/11489> (last accessed 28 March 2013).

² See in detail p. 12 *et seq.* of the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, *Guidelines for the Stimulation of Development for Children Aged between Birth and 3 years* (2008), available at: <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/articles/11489> (last accessed 28 March 2013).

Category	3-5 years-old	5-6 / 7
<i>Normal programme activities</i>		
<i>Common activities</i>	7	10
Language education	1	2
Mathematics activities	1	2
Knowledge of the environment	1	1
Social education	1	1
Practical and home activities		1
Aesthetic education	2	2
Physical education	1	1
Chosen activities, playing and other activities	17	14
Extensions	0-1	1-2
Optional activities	0-1	1-2
Minimum no. of activities	24	26
Maximum no. of activities	25	28
<i>Supplementary activities for prolonged and</i>		
Recreational activities	10	5
Development and exercising individual apti-	15	15
Remedial teaching		5
Minimum no. of activities	49	51
Maximum no. of activities	51	53

Item 2: Pre-school framework curriculum

© UNESCO, World Data on Education (Romania, 2011)

In 2008, the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth embarked on a project to refresh the curriculum for pre-school education. The cordial emphasis was put on the restructuring and modernising of the curriculum followed especially by kindergartens. The Ministry provided a number of domains (also labelled as experience domains) along the lines of which the curriculum is structured. These include, the aesthetic and creative domain; the man and society domain; language and communication; science; and psycho-motoric domains. Along these domains, the promotion of cognitive abilities is accorded high importance. The curriculum is meant to enable the child to understand the relations between various objects, phenomenon and people, through logical thinking and problem-solving attitude.

Age (months)	Categories of educative activities	Number of activity/week		Number of hours/shift from the educational framework dedicated for the activity
		Normal programme	Pro-longed/Weekly programme	
37-60 months (3,1 – 5 years)	Activities relating to experience domains	7	+7	2 hrs x 5 days = 10 hrs
	Games and optional educative activities	10	+5	1,5 h x 5 = 7,5 hrs
	Activities relating to personal development	5	+10	1,5 h x 5 = 7,5 hrs
	TOTAL	22	+22	25 hrs
61-84 months (5,1 – 7 years)	Activities relating to experience domains	10	+10	3 hrs x 5 days = 15 hrs
	Games and optional educative activities	10	+5	1 h x 5 days = 5 hrs
	Activities relating to personal development	6	+11	1 h x 5 days = 5 hrs
	TOTAL	26	+26	25 hrs

Item 3: Educational Plan (2008)

4.1.12. Quality of curriculum content

The quality of the curriculum is assured through multiple mechanisms. One of these mechanisms relates to the availability of public comments during the drafting phase of the curriculum. Once a draft is made, it is published and the public may submit observations and proposals.¹

Through Ordinance 3851 of May 2010, the Government adopted a document on the fundamental guidelines in learning and early development for children from birth to age of 7. This law was the result of a consultation process between the representation of UNICEF in Romania and the national authorities in order to set the basis for a domestic policy that is in conformity with international norms and brings into the spotlight the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, particularly their right to education between the period of birth to the age of 7. In accordance with the scope and vision of this document, the 2008 reform in curriculum imposed elevated attention on the implementation of a qualitative curriculum that not only respects international

¹ Observations and comments can be submitted via email to curriculum@cnceip.ro.

norms but also contributes to the fulfilment of its scope. Accordingly, several curriculum domains gained attention and were included in the framework. These include, among others, the domains of development of a healthy and hygienic body, socio-emotional development, cognitive developments as well as capacity to learn.

4.1.13. Health and Safety provisions

The ECEC service providers (both public and private) are subject to stringent safety and hygiene requirements imposed by law. Ordinance 1955 of 18 October 1995 provides a detailed overview of the minimum standards for educational facilities engaging in the care and education of children and youth.¹ Furthermore, health and safety provisions form an integral part of the internal rules of each ECEC facility.

4.1.14. Curriculum for children at risk

The Romanian ECEC framework builds on the integration of children at risk into the natural environment of the ECEC institutions. This integration entails that children with disabilities also participate in the community and activity of an ante-preschool or pre-school institution.

The ECEC framework recognises the special needs of children at risk, and, while promoting integration, a special curriculum is set up for children with disabilities.² The curriculum also sets out the methodology to be applied with respect to this group of children, which takes into consideration the needs and capabilities of these children. The curriculum and the methodology require the involvement of specialised personnel on a regular basis.

As concerns the treatment of Roma children, special attention is accorded to their integration on various levels. With respect to the curriculum, kindergartens in areas where the population comprise mostly of Roma people, the activities of the kindergartens are conducted both in Romanian and in Romani language. There are also examples of projects that aim to reach out and integrate Roma children into early childhood education in order to confer equal opportunities for these children.³ The Roma Education Fund (established in 2009),⁴ was created with the purpose of reducing the educational barriers for Roma children. In June 2012, it was this NGO (in cooperation with other organisations) that launched the project entitled "A Good Start". Through this initiative, kindergartens in areas with high Romani population were completely renovated, equipped, and made ready for the Roma Children. Moreover, the project entitled "Roma Children are Preparing for Kindergarten" was a project financed by the European Union, and implemented by Save the Children Romania and the Ministry of

¹ Government Ordinance 1955 of 18 October 1995 on the Approval of Hygiene Norms for Facilities Engaging in the Care, Education, and Teaching of Children and Youth (Published Official Gazette I, nr. 86bis), available at: <http://www.legex.ro/Ordin-1955-1995-8285.aspx> (last accessed 29 March 2013).

² Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, *Curriculum for Groups/Kindergartens for Children with Deficiencies* (2008), available at: http://www.cnae.ro/documents/curriculum_pedagogie_curativa_prescolar.pdf (last accessed 28 March 2013).

³ By way of an example, see *Educational Project for the Integration of Roma Children in Kindergarten*, Kindergarten no. 18 in the city of Alba Iulia (January 2006), available at: http://staticlb.didactic.ro/uploads/assets/82/49/0//proiect_educational.doc (last accessed 8 April 2013).

⁴ For the website of the Roma Education Fund, see www.romaeducationfund.ro.

Education between 2009 and 2011. The aim of the project was to improve the early childhood education of Roma children in Romania.

4.1.15. Background Parental involvement

The involvement of parents is a crucial part of the Romanian ECEC. In 2008, in restructuring the curriculum on pre-school education, the Government expressed a vision for a change in the parental involvement in the early childhood education. In this context, parents are perceived as key partners in the education of the child, while the relationship between family-institution-community is decisive for the attainment of the set ECEC goals. The role of partners relates to the commonly shared goal of educating children, a goal that is attained not only through educational institutions but also through the active participation of parents. Participation is meant to extend to financial contributions, decision making relating to education, the assurance of their presence at the educational institutions. Parents are encouraged to have an active participation in the life of kindergartens, its activities and events.

4.1.16. Concrete initiatives to stimulate parental involvement

Parents are involved in various aspects of the child's early education. First and foremost, parents are provided with a personalised overview of the child's progress, his/her needs and other education-related information. Parents also gather for meetings with the educator, which serve the purpose of discussing issues that are relevant for the class as a whole. Parents often participate in, and help with the organisation of field trips and cultural events.

4.1.17. Parental involvement for children at risk

Children at risk receive an elevated attention from the educational staff. This elevated attention manifests also in the involvement of parents. Parents have a greater involvement in the education of the child, outlining the needs of the child to the educator and maintaining constant communication with the educational staff. The ECEC facilities are open to discuss the special treatment of the child and the extent of the involvement of specialised personnel such as psychologists, speech therapist or medical assistants.

4.1.18. General conclusions

The early childhood education and care (ECEC) system in Romania proves to be a well-working yet a rather complex mechanism. This is mainly due to the fact that education is a national priority on the legislative and policy-making levels. The system is based on a set of laws and rules that outline both the underlying principles as well as the detailed methodology. The laws also empower various institutions, the most relevant of which is the Ministry of Education, which acts as a central policy-maker.

A recent development in the Romanian early childhood education was achieved through the enactment of Law 1 of 2011 on National Education. This law repealed an earlier legal instrument and adduced a number of changes into the educational mechanism.

The policy developments introduced by the 2011 Law, as well as the previous framework on other aspects of early childhood education (e.g., on the educational staff or curriculum), form an integral part of the Romanian ECEC framework. As concerns the

priority areas identified by the EU, the Romanian framework puts forward a considerable development in the areas of child-centred curriculum, promoting higher access to facilities as well the preparation of an adequate and competent staff.

Nevertheless, a number of challenges remain to be addressed. First, the discrepancies and inequalities in education between the rural and urban areas represent a major challenge. Second, the introduction of the preparatory class in the education of children is a novel initiative which requires, however, further impetus from the government. Its novelty rests on good initiatives, but the enforcement of the programme proves to be problematic on infrastructural and methodological levels. Furthermore, its effects and (positive or negative) influences on the child's education are yet unknown since the compulsory introduction was made only in September 2012.

Despite these minor issues, the idea behind the preparatory class is laudable. That is because the true focus of this project is on the easing of the child's transition from a considerably free environment of kindergartens into the more rigid framework of school. Because of these factors, the newly introduced 'preparatory class' programme will form part of the case study, accompanying the present report.

In conclusion, the Romanian early childhood education and care is a dynamically developing area, which continues to enjoy priority among the law-makers in the spirit of providing children with an adequate first step for their career as well as stimulating them into a lifelong learning that is based on firm foundations.

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4.1.20. Respondents interviewed

Name	Organisation	Country
Pető Csilla	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National MP; • Former county inspector for ante-preschool and preschool education; • Participant in drafting of the 2011 Law on National Education • University lecturer. 	Romania
Koncsek-Vadnai Zita	General Director of the Oradea Social Community Administration	Romania
Dénes Ida	Chief educator (Public Kindergarten of the village of Borş, Bihor county).	Romania
Földes Adalbert	Council Member for the municipality of Oradea;	Romania
Biró Erzsébet	Preparatory Class educator – Public Kindergarten Borş, Bihor	Romania

4.2. Case study Romania

4.2.1. Introduction

The concept of the 'preparatory class' (in Romanian: *clasa pregătitoare*) is a novel addition to the Romanian educational framework through the newly adopted Law 1 of 2011 on National Education. The preparatory class is a one year programme which aims to bridge the gaps between kindergarten and school by offering the child a transitional year in which he/she will gradually be accustomed to the rules and principles of the primary education.

The introduction of the preparatory class was officially launched in September 2012. This was also the starting date for the first preparatory class with 13 pupils in the kindergarten of the village of Borș, situated in the county of Bihor, north-western Romania.

The scope of the present case study is to present the preparatory class from a policy perspective, while reflecting these to the practical reality in the context of the kindergarten in Borș. This kindergarten serves as an excellent object of analysis for two reasons: first, it was among the first institutes to implement the preparatory class which brought a number of changes in the infrastructural, organisational, and working levels; and second, the kindergarten is attended by children belonging to a national minority group (Hungarian).

4.2.2. The rationale behind the preparatory class

The preparatory class was established with the purpose of providing children with a smooth transition from the 'freedom' of the kindergarten to the rule-oriented world of the school. Prior to the preparatory class, children entering the first school year were faced with an abrupt change of the educational environment, the educator, and the social community. The aim of the programme is to ameliorate this transition.

Furthermore, around 80% is the current percentage of the children attending pre-school education, while 20% of the children between 3 and 6 years have never attended kindergartens. The European objective for 2020 is to reach 95%. Romania pledges to attain this through, among others, the introduction of the preparatory class.¹

4.2.3. Structure, staff, curriculum and parental involvement

Formally, the preparatory class is the first step of the primary education.² Structurally however, the class acts as a hybrid programme that encompasses elements from both kindergarten and school. Games and tales remain the epicentre of education, which are now structured in accordance with a school-like schedule.

¹ Ministry of Education and Research, *The Preparatory Class – Presentation*, available at: <http://administrare.site.edu.ro/index.php/articles/16626> (last accessed 30 March 2013).

² Article 29 of Law 1 of 2011 on National Education, Official Gazette I, nr. 18 (10 January 2011), available at: http://www.dreptonline.ro/legislatie/legea_educatiei_nationale_lege_1_2011.php (last accessed 30 March 2013).

Attending the preparatory class is made compulsory for all children who turn 6 before 31 August 2013.

The educators in the preparatory class received a specialised training in order to prepare them for this task. Furthermore, the educator coaching the preparatory class will remain the educator also for the following four years of primary education. This gives the educators the possibility to learn more about each child, their needs and capacities, and build on these throughout the coming years.



Item 1: An average day at the Borş kindergarten

	HÉTFŐ	KEDD	SZERDA	CSÜTÖRTÖK	PÉNTEK
8-9	Reggel edzés	Történelem	Matematika	Matematika	Regények
9-10	Regények	Matematika	Regények	Matematika	Matematika
10-11	Matematika	Matematika	Matematika	Regények	Matematika
11-12	Regények	Matematika	Matematika	Regények	Matematika
12-13	Regények	Matematika	Matematika	Regények	Matematika
13-14	Regények	Matematika	Matematika	Regények	Matematika
14-15	Regények	Matematika	Matematika	Regények	Matematika
15-16	Regények	Matematika	Matematika	Regények	Matematika

The curriculum is more structured than in kindergartens.¹ It outlines the targeted aims which must be achieved, but the educator is left with a considerable discretion with respect to the path through which the targeted aims will be reached. In order to assist the educator, the Government outlined a methodology that can be implemented.² At the Borş kindergarten, various subject matters are thought, among others, Romanian language, minority language (Hungarian), mathematics, visual arts and

music. Each day on average of 4 subjects are taught (see the attached schedule). The length of one class is 35 minutes with a 15 minutes break. The educator emphasised that this division is rather flexible and, depending on the interests of the children, the length of the class can be extended.

The involvement of parents is crucial in the formulation of the contours of the preparatory class.³ The perception of parents about the class is also interesting to mention. At Borş, parents were highly satisfied with the initiative of the preparatory class. The general perception was that children are given an opportunity to integrate into the atmosphere of a school, while lessening also the burden of parents in the integration process.

¹ Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, *Ordinance 3654 of 29 March 2012 relating to the Approval of the Educational Framework Plan for the Preparatory Class* (29 March 2012), available at: <http://administrasite.edu.ro/index.php/articles/16945> (last accessed 30 March 2013). See also,

Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, *Ordinance 3656 of 29 March 2012 relating to the Approval of Programmes for the Preparatory Class* (29 March 2012), available at: <http://administrasite.edu.ro/index.php/articles/16947> (last accessed 30 March 2013).

² Ordinance 3064 of 19 January 2012 on Approving the Methodology for Children in the Preparatory Class and Class I for the Academic Year 2012-2013, available at: <http://administrasite.edu.ro/index.php/articles/16428> (last accessed 30 March 2013).

³ By way of example, see Ministry of National Education, *Agreement on a Common Position between the Ministry of National Education, Teaching Unions, and the National Union for the Association of Parents in Pre-University Education with respect to the Organisation of the Preparatory Class for the Academic Year 2013/2014* (30 January 2013), available at: <http://administrasite.edu.ro/index.php/articles/18696> (last accessed 30 March 2013).

4.2.4. Challenges

A major challenge faced by the local county administrations was the organisation and provision of sufficient facilities for the preparatory classes. This implied considerable infrastructural changes in order to accommodate the additional groups. Furthermore, the local administrations, in cooperation with the ECEC institutions and the representatives of parents are responsible to decide on whether the preparatory class will remain in the ambit of the kindergarten or be transferred in the school building. At the kindergarten in Borş, the room now used for the preparatory class, was used as a lunch room up until September 2012.



Figure 2: The preparatory classroom at Borş

There are other minor challenges as well. For instance, there can be a considerable inconsistency with respect to equipment among the institutions. The government provided each institute with a certain amount of equipment; however these are less than the equipment envisioned in the curriculum guidelines. This challenge is currently being addressed through an agreement between the Ministry of National Education, and teaching bodies and the representatives of parents. According to the agreement, efforts will be made to continue investments in finding solutions for problems relating to the equipment of facilities before 1 September 2013.¹

4.2.5. Conclusion

The introduction of the preparatory class proves to be a positive improvement to the Romanian educational system. As the educator at the Borş kindergarten stated, the preparatory class is a 'gift year' that affords sufficient time for the preparation of children for their next educational step. The combination of elements from both kindergarten and school confer a smooth transition for the child, while preparing him for the greater challenges of primary education.

¹ Ministry of National Education, *Agreement on a Common Position between the Ministry of National Education, Teaching Unions, and the National Union for the Association of Parents in Pre-University Education with respect to the Organisation of the Preparatory Class for the Academic Year 2013/2014* (30 January 2013), available at: <http://administrasite.edu.ro/index.php/articles/18696> (last accessed 30 March 2013).

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5. SPAIN

5.1. Country study Spain

5.1.1. Structure of national ECEC services

Spain is a country with a highly decentralised political structure. The devolved territories are autonomous communities (*comunidades autonomas*) and these have their own regional governments and ministries or departments. Spain boasts seventeen autonomous communities and there is great variation in their geographical area and population numbers. The policy area of education is one which falls under the competencies of the Autonomous Communities though the main direction of education policy is established at the national level. In Spain's case, an overarching national law on education was passed in 2006, the *Lei Organica de Educacion, 2006*. This law repealed and amended a number of existing pieces of legislation, which will be elaborated on at a later stage. In any case, this law set the objectives, standards and evaluation procedures for all levels of education, including that of early childhood education as well. Besides this organic law, a number of Royal decrees were also implemented, providing more specific regulations for the national level.

Early childhood education, or *educacion infantil*, is aimed at children aged 0 – 6 years old (zero years old in this case refers to the period after maternity leave expires). The early childhood education stage occurs in two cycles; the first cycle is for children from 0 -3, and the second cycle is for children ages 3 – 6. At the age of 6, compulsory education commences in Spain. Early childhood education, also known as pre-primary education is enshrined in the Organic Law on Education of 2006, as are the main objectives of such educational programmes. Given that education also falls under the competency of the autonomous communities, they are at liberty to define the more precise requirements of curricula at the pre-primary education stage. The providers of early childhood education and care services are allowed in turn to develop specific curricula which must adhere to the state requirements.

In Spain, early childhood education and care is provided by three different types of centres: private, which are privately funded and managed; public, which are publicly funded and follow regional management styles; and "Conservado" centres, which are private centres which receive some public funding. The providers are care and education orientated though the centres all fall under the competency of the education ministries at the national and regional levels. In Spain therefore, people tend to speak of "educacion infantil" to encompass the whole category of care and educational facilities for children below primary school age. The names vary, kindergartens, nurseries or pre-primary school centres all allude to the same concept, namely that of early childhood education and care.

Table: Educational institutions according to ownership and type of institution. 2009/2010 academic year.

	Public Education Institutions	Publicly funded private institutions	Private educational institutions	Total according to education stages
Pre-primary schools	3,547	1,192	3,516	8,255

Source: Eurypedia

All types of providers are able to provide early childhood education, provided they adhere to the requirements for early childhood education and care facilities, set out by the national government and developed further by the Autonomous communities in their respective legislations. Centres can also provide pre-primary education in a unitary manner, that is providing education and care to both cycles, or they can do so in a segregated manner, dividing the children by age. As each implementation of the policy differs per education provider, the consequent means of evaluation and quality control vary as well.

Under the Organic Law on Education, article 116, private schools which provide free education and which satisfy the Legal schooling requirements, can become publically funded under the legally established terms. Agreements regarding funding are made with the educational authority of the autonomous community in question. Schools serving economically disadvantaged areas of the population, or conducting research of pedagogic interest, enjoy preferential funding, as stated in the OLE, article 116.2. It is the responsibility of the educational authority to make sure that these publicly funded private institutions, or "conservado" centres, adhere to the requirements for ECEC centres.

The specific requirements for the setting up and operation of centres are also laid down in regional legislation. In the case of the autonomous community of Madrid, Decree 18/2008 stipulates the minimum requirements for centres providing first cycle pre-primary education. Both public and private centres must register themselves at the national level body, the Special Register of Educational Centres. Besides this requirement, the Decree's Article 7 contains specific points regarding requirements, such as the space required per unit, the specifications of the equipment in the centre such as the levels of table tops, the availability of a kitchen to prepare food, bathroom specifications, an area for the management staff, etc. If schools do not adhere to these requirements, their authorisation as ECEC providers is taken away by the regional education authority. Each autonomous community is expected to have some form of educational inspection body to verify the compliance with education regulations¹. In the case of the Madrid region, this is the Inspectorate of the Community of Madrid.

In Spain, progress regarding the implementation of the early childhood policies is rather skewed. Early childhood and education has been acknowledged as an important educational stage with its own specific identity and goals, namely to make very young children aware of themselves, those around them, and to imbue them with morals, so-

¹ Organic Law on Education, 2006, Title VI Evaluation of the Education System.

cial tools, and literacy and numeracy; these ideas are laid down in the Organic Law on Education of 2006. However, given that the precise teaching programmes are under the autonomy of the individual childhood education and care provider, the pursuit of these national and regional objectives varies. The second cycle, for children ages 3 – 6 has been far more widely institutionalised, evidenced by the fact that the participation rate for children of that age is at least 95% in Spain in 2009. This places Spain amongst some of the best performing countries in Europe on this particular front. Additionally, the government and autonomous communities fund the childhood care providers quite heavily so that second cycle care is free to very large extent; only additional items such as meals require extra payment from parents, but this again depends on the specific type of pre-primary care provider in question.

The first cycle however, has a much lower participation rate. In this case the funding is not completely covered by the authorities and hence parents must pay more for this type of care. The requirements for staff in this cycle is also lower than those required of educators and employees involved in the second cycle (though it should be noted the staff requirements are generally quite high). The participation rate in 2010 was sufficient to attain the EU Barcelona Targets of 33% participation for the first cycle, but when compared to the second cycle rate this is still rather low. This lower rate of participation in first cycle education appears to be due to the age of the children during the first cycle and the fact that this stage is not entirely free. The national and regional governments subsidise the first cycle of early childhood education with the expectation that parents contribute financially as well. Additionally, a new policy programme was launched to further institutionalise the first cycle childhood education, “Educa 3” and the effects were still taking hold at the time of measurement.

On the national level the Ministry of Education and Science (Ministerio de Educacion y Ciencia, MEC) has the competency over educational matters and has under its jurisdiction the powers to safeguard the homogeneity and unity of the education system. Its main roles in this area are: establishing the general organisation of the education system, determining the minimum requirements of the education, the general education program and fixing common lessons. The autonomous communities have legislative competency over the area of Education. In the case of early childhood education they are obliged to guarantee sufficient numbers of spaces for ECEC. This can also be done through care centres for children under 6 years old; nursery schools for instance. Not all autonomous communities have full competency however. Autonomous communities have their own executive governments and regional parliaments¹. Local municipalities within a region are also involved in supporting ECEC providers at the more local level; they help with costs such as water and energy. Participation in ECEC services varies across autonomous communities².

Quality Assurance in ECEC providers

Assuring quality in early childhood education and care is difficult in Spain. There is no definition of quality regarding education in the national or regional legislation³. As the national law on education and the autonomous community legislations provide the basic objectives and requirements for curricula, the care providers are free to develop and implement curricula which achieve these objectives. As such there is a vast diversity in the types of curricula in early childhood education and care. The Spanish na-

¹ Karlsruhe ‘Situation in Spain’ – find exact source.

² Objectives European and Spain 2010- 2011.

³ Rivas, Sobrino & Peralta (2008).

tional law states that the curricula must be evaluated, and autonomous community legislation tends to provide more specific requirements as to how such evaluation should be carried out. There is still a significant degree of freedom in this however as the evaluation of a given programme relies on how well certain practical objectives have been achieved; these practical objectives, such as a given level of literacy for instance or progress in communication, differ across centres and their individual teaching programmes. Hence, a uniform evaluation of the ECEC sector in Spain is difficult. Some feel that this should be remedied as this approach allows for diversity in educational programmes which is not always helpful; the quality of teaching programmes can fluctuate. The World Association of Early Childhood Educators for instance, (AMEI-WAECEC, 2007) carried out a study to explore schoolteachers', educators' and parents' opinion on education for 0-6 year-olds in Spain. Some of the most relevant opinions were emphasised: the need for education to acquire a "state policy" level, the existing inequality between different autonomous regions and the high pupil/teacher ratio¹.

Aside from the issue of evaluating in a uniform manner, there is the issue that one cannot fully judge how successful a curriculum is when a child leaves pre-primary education. The main goals of pre-primary education include the development of social interaction skills, affective and cognitive development, and basic numeracy, literacy and language skills. Such developments have been proven to help a child's learning at primary school level. Hence judging the success of the ECEC programmes will involve investigating how well a child does at primary education level.

On a practical level however, evaluation does take place; it can be undertaken internally by teachers and staff of a given centre, be undertaken by external agencies, or involve the regional government through investigative teams which visit the providers.

Funding

In Spain education has been free of charge for all children of the second cycle since 2005. This is not the case for the first cycle however. Instead, the national Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture and the Autonomous communities offer grants to help families meet the costs of first-cycle childhood education, which are based on the family income. This is largely to do with the fact that there are not enough places in the first-cycle organisations to meet the demand for them. By providing more financial support more teachers and better facilities can be organised so that more places can be provided. The national government assigns part of its childhood education budget to the autonomous communities for education, which then distribute it to centres².

Since 1984 most of the autonomous regions have set up supervisory bodies for their respective parliaments to monitor the public sector. At this moment eleven of the seventeen autonomous communities, (Andalucía, Asturias, Islas Baleares, Canarias, Castilla-La Mancha, Castilla-León, Cataluña, Comunidad de Madrid, Comunidad Valenciana, Galicia, Navarra y País Vasco), have such a supervisory organ to monitor the fiscal situation in the region's public sector.

The schools themselves acquire and manage the goods and services necessary their operation, except for fixed costs such as water consumption, energy costs, etc., which are borne by the respective municipality. Other investments, depending on the amount are funded by the Autonomous Community, the State (those with the highest amount) or the educational institution itself (for the smaller investments). Spanish

¹ AMEI-WAECEC, 2007.

² WFI report, 2010.

schools are entitled to earn additional income through leasing of school facilities, the provision of certain services, the sale of certain products, the organisation of events, interest income, in-kind donations and financial aid by legacies and donations. Textbooks are purchased by parents of students. For students from families with an income and assets not exceeding a legal limit are awarded study grants and other subsidies.

Regarding the amounts of funding for the early childhood education and care sector, the second cycle receives more financial support. In its National Reform Programme of 2008, the Spanish government allocated 428 million Euros of its budget to the second cycle of pre-primary education. In order to enhance the availability of first cycle education places, the government introduced the policy "Educa 3", which amongst other things, was to include a total investment of 1,087 million Euros between 2008 and 2012; funding was to be split 50/50 amongst the national government and the autonomous communities.

This does however raise some points of concern. When one considers that the early childhood education and care system in Spain is almost entirely reliant on public funding, the sustainability of the related policies comes into question. Especially given the current economic climate, the long term potential of such a system may not be guaranteed. In the autonomous community of Madrid for instance, 26 million euro was cut from the grants going towards pre-primary education in 2012. The effects of this are being felt on the provider level as the resources accessible to centres decline; less teachers, facilities and activities can be utilised in the centres. Prices of the centres increase and parents face larger obstacles in sending their children to ECEC providers.

Policies on Early Childhood Education and Care

Since the Organic Law on Education of 2006, not many new national reforms for early childhood education have taken place. This Law has quite a broad scope and repealed a number of existing pieces of legislation dating back to the 1990s. The OLE and associated Royal Decrees such as the RD 1630/2006, laid down the aims and objectives of ECEC services as well as basic curriculum and evaluative requirements. In 2008 the Educa3 programme was initiated to stimulate more participation in the first cycle of pre-primary education by adding some 49,000 extra places in nurseries across Spain. Recently, more political attention is given to the quality of the education in Spain. It has become apparent that the quality of Spanish education compared to the average levels in the EU can be improved. Therefore there a new law has been drafted, the Organic Law for Improving the Quality of Education, the "Ley Orgánica Para la Mejora de la Calidad de la Educación". The exact details of the law are not clear yet, but the main direction of the law has been met with differing response. Regarding the stage of early childhood education and care specifically, the aim is to make the pre-primary level more supportive and assistive in nature and thus less educationally oriented. Additionally, a main tenant of the new law is to try and raise the position of teachers. The exact details are not clear, but more emphasis is to be put on the expertise and authority of teachers across all levels of education. This development might suggest that at the political and policy making level, quality in education is being recognised as closely related to the quality of the teachers.

The EU 2020 targets state that by 2020 at least 95% between the age of 4 and the start of primary education, should be in early childhood education. The EU proposes to its member states that they should: 1) analyse and evaluate the current childhood education services and care at local, regional and national level in terms of its avail-

ability, affordability and quality. 2) Make sure there is equitable access to quality early childhood education and care in place. 3) Effectively invest in early childhood education and care as a measure for long term growth. Spain has achieved this 95% target and has also been successful regarding the Barcelona Targets for the first cycle of pre-primary education.

5.1.2. The general perception and policy relevance of ECEC

The main aim of early childhood care and education described in the national Organic Law on Education of 2006 is to: "Infant education is of a voluntary nature and its purpose is to contribute to children's physical, affective, social and intellectual development". The Law goes on to outline the main objectives of this stage of education in Article 13:

"Article 13: Objectives:

Infant education will contribute to developing the capacities which enable children to:

- *Get to know their own body and that of others, to understand its capabilities and to learn to respect differences.*
- *Observe and explore the family, natural and social environments.*
- *Gradually acquire autonomy in their daily activities.*
- *Develop their affective capacities.*
- *Relate to others and gradually acquire basic social skills and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.*
- *Develop communication skills in different languages and ways of expression.*
- *Begin developing logical and mathematical skills, reading and writing skills, movement, gesture and rhythm."*

The autonomous community of Madrid states the goals of pre-primary education as aiming to contribute to the physical, sensory, intellectual, emotional and social development of children. Both levels will be focused to the development of movement and body control habits, different forms of communication, language, the guidelines for coexistence and social relations, and the discovery of the physical and social environment. It also encourages children to develop a positive self-image and balanced and acquire personal autonomy¹.

Early childhood education and care also has broader, longer term goals which also affect other policy areas. In a 2011 report on the EU2020 objectives and Spain's progress therein, the EU Council of Ministers state that: "Complementing the central role of the family, early childhood education and care to childhood lays the essential foundations for language acquisition, learning success permanent social integration, personal development and employability."

The Spanish National Reform Programme 2008 Progress report states that with regard to the first stage of nursery school, for children under 3 years of age, measures have been implemented to increase the rate of schooling and facilitate the access of women to the labour market. The long term aims of early childhood education and care are to benefit society; childhood education reduces the loss of talents and skills as parents can work more. This in turn reduces public spending on areas such as welfare.

¹ Madrid.org
http://www.madrid.org/cs/Satellite?c=CM_Actuaciones_FA&cid=1142329766621&idConsejeria=1109266187254&idListConsj=1109265444710&idOrganismo=1142359974952&language=es&pagename=ComunidadMadrid%2FEstructura&sm=1109266100977.

Policy Goals & Objectives

In Spain the specific policy goals are based on those set by the EU, such as the EU 2020 goals and the Barcelona Targets. These targets have been attained. On a national level, the policy goals are less concretely defined; given that the national Ministry of Education and Science aims to promote an educational system that is accessible to all children in Spain, the actual rate of success is difficult to quantify. The broad aim is to provide quality education to all children in Spain and thus autonomous communities are obliged to provide the necessary number of spaces, though this only applies to the second cycle of pre-primary education.

There are a number of obstacles to achieving the Spanish aim of quality pre-primary education for all children. The first cycle is not free for instance and the costs are in practice higher than parents can afford. Even in the second cycle, prices can be high as not all parents opt for the public providers, choosing instead for private or semi-private centres. These financial strains have been exacerbated by the effects of the economic crisis. Furthermore there is the fact that the age of the children in the first cycle makes parents hesitant to be parted from them. There are also socio-cultural obstacles to further participation in ECEC services as some parents do not see the value or need of early childhood education and care, especially for the first cycle. From the provider perspective, quality education services are closely related to the management and teaching in a given centre. Teachers in pre-primary education are required to be relatively high-educated, having at least university bachelors for the second cycle or advanced vocational training for the first. Their salaries, however, tend to be relatively low and thus motivation tends to decrease as time wears on. This can have an impact on the quality of early childhood education centres and the attractiveness of this kind of work generally. These factors all taken together can prove to be significant obstacles to achieving the aim of quality education for all pre-primary children.

In 2007, for example, the World Association of Early Childhood Educators (AMEI-WAECEC, 2007) carried out a study to explore schoolteachers', educators' and parents' opinion on education for 0-6 year-olds in Spain. Some of the most relevant opinions were emphasised: the need for education to acquire a "State policy" level, the existing inequality between different autonomous regions and the high pupil/teacher ratio

5.1.3. Educational requirement for staff

For early childhood care and education the specific qualifications required of teachers are set out in the national Organic Law on Education of 2006, under Article 92 which refers to infant education. The provisions read as follows:

"Art.92.1. Direct educational care and attention to children in the first cycle of infant education will be the responsibility of qualified primary school teachers specialised in infant education or with an equivalent level qualification and, where appropriate, of other staff with due qualifications for working with children of this age. In all cases, the drawing up and monitoring of the pedagogic plan referred to in item 2 of Article 14, will be the responsibility of a qualified primary school teacher, specialised in infant education or with an equivalent level qualification.

Art. 92.2. The second cycle of infant education will be taught by qualified primary school teachers specialised in infant education or with an equivalent level qualification. They may be supported by teachers of other specialities when the teaching programme so requires."

These provisions translate into the necessity of a university degree in Pre-Primary Education to be able to teach both the first and the second cycles, where the degree tends to last for years or be equivalent to 240 ECTS. To be eligible to teach the first cycle slightly lower qualifications are required; through advanced vocational training in Advanced Teaching of Pre-Primary education one can teach the first cycle, though not the second. This had been laid down according to the national decree ESD/4066/2008. These vocational trainings tend to take two years. It is up to the trained professionals to design, implement and monitor the educational curricula for pre-primary education. Auxiliary staff can be hired to help in the more care-based activities though the exact qualifications for such individuals are not clear. In fact in most countries the exact competencies required for assistants to pre-primary education professionals are missing¹. In any case, the assistants (*Técnico/técnica o Asistente en educación infantil*) help the other staff to look after pre-primary education pupils, especially in relation to their hygiene and diet, their well-being and personal attention to children.

5.1.4. Competence development for staff

The constant developments in education and society require that the teaching provided evolves as well. This poses new demands on teachers who are expected to follow trainings so that their professional skills keep up with the changing educational context. The requirement to follow trainings is stated in the Organic Law on Education and applies to teachers of all levels of education. The training of teachers, can take the shape of courses, seminars, workshops, training projects and conference centres.

The regulation and validation of trainings are set at the national level. The most recent decree on the issue is the Educational Order 2886/2011 which regulates the call, recognition, certification and registration of training of trainers. The exact evaluation of the quality of teachers specifically is not made clear, though the Spanish system of educational evaluation takes a rather broad approach; when investigating schools all aspects, including the teachers are examined. The ramifications of not completing such trainings are not quite clear either.

For teachers who have obtained their qualifications through advanced vocational training, upholding their skills through training is obliged. The Spanish national Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport operates through the National Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CNIIE) and the National Institute for Education Technologies and Teachers Training (INTEF) which sets the most recent criteria which teachers of non-university qualifications must adhere to². The Ministry, working through the INTEF, sets new criteria and these are taken up in the plans of the Teachers Continuing Professional Development programmes. The INTEF offers State Continuing Professional Development programmes and it establishes the appropriate agreements with other institutions.

Teachers who have obtained their qualifications at university are obliged by the government to take trainings amounting to 30hours a year. The subject of these trainings may be chosen by the teachers themselves however.

¹ University of East London & University of Ghent, (2011), 'Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care' issued by the European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture.

² INTEF, (no date), Regulations: Teacher training, <http://formacionprofesorado.educacion.es/index.php/es/servicioformacion/normativa/306-formacion-del-profesorado>.

Additionally, regarding staff trainings provided by schools, recent studies have come to light which indicate that teachers often feel the trainings do not help them so much with the demands of working life. As a result schools are focusing attention on forming more specialised trainings which will benefit early childhood educators in practice.

5.1.5. Quality of staff

At the national level, there are no specific requirements regarding the evaluation of teaching staff in early childhood education and care centres. Experts on the subject indicate that evaluation of staff can happen internally and be performed by other teachers at the centre, or that external agencies can be called in to evaluate staff instead¹. The exact criteria of teacher evaluations are once again difficult to establish; different centres have different educational programmes and consequently, different teaching methods to achieve the programme aims. The teachers are then evaluated on criteria which are deemed relevant to their performance within the educational programme of the provider in question. This last point is stated, for instance in the Community of Madrid legislation, in Decree 680/2008, demonstrating that the evaluation of staff is quite specific to individual care centres.

One could consider the trainings which teachers are obliged to follow as an indirect method of quality assurance. Recall that teachers with advanced vocational training must follow courses each year based on the latest criteria considered necessary by the National Institute for Education Technologies and Teachers Training (*INTEF*). Teachers with university degrees are also obliged to follow trainings of at least 30 hours per year to maintain their professional skill set.

5.1.6. Perception of staff

In general terms, the perception of the ECEC staff is not very positive. There is a lack of appreciation towards the value of early childhood teaching. There are changes in legislation every few years, with increasingly high ratios of teachers to students in classrooms, a lack of continuity between the two cycles of pre-primary education, and insufficient human and material resources. Such factors contribute to the generally low status of the function of the teacher and to the early childhood education itself². A study by the World Association of Early Childhood Educators conducted in 2011, indicated that 69% of teachers strongly criticise the lack of appreciation and recognition to both the social figure of child education teacher as to the work carried out.

In Spain the pre-school staff and child care workers are equally paid³. Care workers and kindergarten/pre-school workers in ECEC are paid the same wage, namely 3 times the minimum wage in Spain. Additionally, primary school and pre-school teachers are paid the same rate. In general, on an international level turn-over rates are reportedly high in both child care and preschool institutions. On average, globally speaking the turn-over rate in 2011, for pre-school institutions was 17.7%, while it was slightly lower in child care with 15.4%. *(These statistics suggest that the early childhood education and care sector is generally subject to relatively high levels of changes in employment and may suggest something about the nature of the work in that sector.)*

¹ Gonzalez, B. F., (2011), ASSESSMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, Journal of Education and Development, Vol 3, No. 29 (July 2011).

² www.waece.org/AMEIestudio_opinion2011.pdf.

³ OECD Encouraging equality in ECEC (2011).

Studies have been carried out investigating the job satisfaction of Spanish early childhood education and care teachers. In an academic study of teachers it has been demonstrated that the job satisfaction of educators has an affect on the quality of the teaching they provide; as such upholding job satisfaction amongst ECEC teachers is crucial in upholding the quality of the education. One such article by Nieto and Suarez Riveiro involved conducting a study amongst teachers in Spain, including those working in the ECEC sector¹. The authors formed a number of conclusions concerning what sort of factors could influence job satisfaction. For instance primary and pre-school teachers are happier on average. Across all stages of education younger teachers tended to have more job satisfaction across all groups compared to older teachers, and on average women enjoyed teaching more than men. There is however, the issue that as time goes on, teachers lose job satisfaction. Knowing where potential stumbling blocks lie to satisfied teachers provides extra insight as to how to overcome such obstacles and consequently, help uphold the quality of education.

5.1.7. Gender balance in ECEC staff

On a legislative level, it is worth mentioning that the Spanish state has strongly promoted gender equality issues. More specifically, Article 23 of the Equality Law, passed in March 2007, sets down various education initiatives to promote gender equality and the introduction of gender mainstreaming in education. One section of this article refers to the incorporation of the study and application of the principle of equality in initial and continuous teacher training courses and programmes. It is still to be seen how the aspects of this law will be put into practice in the teacher training centres. Regarding education specifically, the Organic Law on Education of 2006 also stipulates that the School Council of any non-university institution must "propose measures and initiative" which help foster, amongst other things, gender equality. Specifically at the early childhood care and education level there are no further provisions to promote gender equality however.

However, at the regional level, some of these policies exist. In the autonomous community of Andalusia, for example, it is compulsory to have a head of coeducation in each centre and to include the gender perspective on the centre's development plan. However, other Autonomous Communities are not doing anything in this respect or they have voluntary coeducation programmes for the centres with a very limited budget.

5.1.8. Requirements for staff working with children at risk

The provisions for teachers teaching students at risk are quite broad. Teachers are expected to have or acquire the training and qualifications which enable them to support children with specific needs. The principle of universal access and inclusive teaching is stated in the Organic Law on Education, though the precise regulation for attaining appropriate qualifications is not clear².

¹ Nieto & Suarez Riveiro, *REOP. Vol. 21, Nº 2, 2º Cuatrimestre, 2010* – Article on Evaluation job satisfaction spanish ECEC teachers.

² INTEF, (no date), Regulations: Teacher training, <http://formacionprofesorado.educacion.es/index.php/es/servicioformacion/normativa/306-formacion-del-profesorado>.

5.1.9. Curriculum goals

The main curriculum goals of Spanish ECEC services have been set out in national and autonomous community legislation. Though there are a number of national level objectives, these still leave significant room for interpretation and ultimately, at the provider level there is a large variety in teaching programmes.

The curriculum requirements for the second cycle of pre-primary education are established at the national level, in the Organic Law on Education and the Royal Decree 1630/2006. These objectives are then enshrined in regional, autonomous community law as well. Regarding the first cycle however, there are no specific curricula requirements beyond the broad aims stipulated in the general OLE of 2006. The Royal Decree 1630/2006, states in article 5.1 that the teaching programmes for the first cycle are to be determined and enforced at the autonomous community level by the region's education authority.

Organic Law on Education, 2006: Article 13: Objectives:

"Infant education will contribute to developing the capacities which enable children to:

- Get to know their own body and that of others, to understand its capabilities and to learn to respect differences.
- Observe and explore the family, natural and social environments.
- Gradually acquire autonomy in their daily activities.
- Develop their affective capacities.
- Relate to others and gradually acquire basic social skills and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.
- Develop communication skills in different languages and ways of expression.
- Begin developing logical and mathematical skills, reading and writing skills, movement, gesture and rhythm."

According to national and autonomous community legislation, the qualified teachers develop the teaching programme at a given ECEC provider. As they decide upon the teaching programme and the goals which the programme works towards, it is the providers who then also decide how to evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes. As such, according to the scholars Rivas and Sobrina, educators "play a critical role in determining specific content and how minimum objectives are to be adapted to the socioeconomic and cultural context, establishing general methodological criteria and adopting pertinent decisions regarding the assessment process"¹. Given the diversity in teaching curricula and the consequent ways of evaluating these programmes, there continues to be much debate on how quality is established and upheld in ECEC providers in Spain.

5.1.10. Stakeholder involvement in curriculum

The qualified teachers are the only stakeholders with formal influence on the nature of the curriculum. Only those teachers with the appropriate qualifications, namely those holding bachelor degrees or advanced vocational training in Pre-Primary education can develop the curricula for early childhood education. As has been stated earlier, teachers with advanced vocational training can only teach up to the first cycle of pre-primary education. However indirect cues can be taken from parents as the developments of children at home are used in the evaluation of how a child is developing.

¹ Rivas & Sobrino, 2011.

Therefore if enough parents report similar developmental observations, this will naturally play a part when the curriculum is evaluated.

5.1.11. Curriculum Content

The exact balance of cognitive and non-cognitive skills within a curriculum depends on the specific educational centre in question. Some centres for instance place a higher value on language development and dedicate time to interacting in a secondary language to develop children's linguistic skills. Other providers on the other hand, focus on music and devote more time to musically based activities. The basic principles which should be upheld in any curriculum are laid down in the national Organic Law on Education of 2006. Article 14 concerns the planning and pedagogic principles which must be adhered to; article 14.5 indicates that in the later phases of pre-primary education, namely the last year of the second cycle, there should be a stronger emphasis on reading, writing, numeracy and ICT skills amongst others. Article 14.6 also highlights the importance of social integration and emotional development through play and other activities. The main principles can be seen below:

OLE 2006: Article 14 Planning and Pedagogic Principles:

- 1. Infant education is organised into two cycles. The first cycle is from birth to three and the second from three to six.*
- 2. The educational nature of each cycle will be described by the infant school in a pedagogic proposal.*
- 3. Both cycles of infant education will cover the affective development, mobility, body control habits, communication and language, basic social skills and the discovery of the physical and social nature of the environment in which they live. They will also encourage children to develop a positive, balanced self-image and acquire personal autonomy.*
- 4. The educational contents of infant education will be organised into areas corresponding to the areas of experience and infant development and will be carried out through global activities which are meaningful and interesting for the children.*
- 5. It is the responsibility of the Education Administrations to provide initial contact with a foreign language in the second cycle of infant education, especially in the last year. They will also provide initial contact with reading and writing skills, introduce basic numerical skills, information and communication technology (ICT) and visual and musical expression.*
- 6. Teaching methods in both cycles will be based on experiences, activities and play and will be carried out in an environment of affection and trust which will promote self-esteem and social integration.*
- 7. The Education Administrations will determine the educational content of the first cycle of education, according to the conditions laid down in this chapter. They will also regulate the requirements that infant schools offering this cycle of infant education must fulfil in terms of teacher-pupil ratios, installations and number of school places.*

5.1.12. Quality of curriculum content

At the level of the decentralised autonomous communities there can be requirements regarding the procedure of evaluation in this stage of education. In the case of the autonomous community of Madrid for instance, the Decree 680/2009 regulates evaluation of early childhood education. The decree details the evaluative style for

both cycles and lays down guidelines for the timing, manner and criteria for evaluation (*ORDEN 680/2009 para la Comunidad de Madrid*).

For the first cycle, the requirements are less extensive; evaluation is an ongoing process at this stage and is based on observation of the child's development in the various "areas of experience" defined in the centre's educational programme (*Article 2, ORDEN 680/2009 para la Comunidad de Madrid*). At the end of the year the teachers provide an overview report of the child's progress to the parent or legal guardian of the student. Additionally, the Decree 680/2009 states that a "fluid" communication must be maintained between the teachers of a centre and the parents of a child regarding the progress and development being made at the centre.

In the case of the second cycle however the regulations are more elaborate. The decree states that evaluation of this stage is to be continuous, global and formative. In doing so, the full development of the child across numerous areas can be monitored through direct, systematic observation. The observation is based on a number of evaluation criteria which are based on the educational programme of the education and care provider in question. The nature of the teaching programme also influences the instruments and techniques of evaluation to be used. The guidelines of evaluation are set by the centre director as this is the individual responsible for the forming of the teaching curriculum. Within a class, evaluation is the responsibility of the teacher, though observations from other teachers can also be combined and collated in the monitoring of a student's development. There are to be at least three evaluative sessions throughout the year, with the final assessment collating the results from the continuous evaluation which has taken place throughout the year.

As has been mentioned before in this country report, measuring quality in early childhood education is problematic in Spain as there is no clearly defined definition of quality. In any case, regardless of the understanding of quality which one takes, recommends a universal evaluation of how the group of children is progressing as a group; this is to evaluate the style of the curriculum. Besides this, individual evaluations of each child's progress should be made.

5.1.13. Curriculum for children at risk

One of the educational principles set out in the Organic Law on Education is that it be available to everyone. As such it is the responsibility of the autonomous communities to make sure that there is extra educational support for those that need it, be they intellectually gifted, learning difficulties or other personal circumstances. Educational authorities in the autonomous communities are expected to improve the physical and technological conditions of schools so that the educational resources and curricula are available to all students, including disabled students.

The Spanish education system employs "Los Equipos de Orientación Educativa y Psicopedagógica", EOEP, which are teams of educational psychologists, to intervene in the pre-primary and primary education stages where they detect signs of learning difficulties. They have regular presences in schools and co-ordinate with other health care organisations to provide appropriate support to students and their families. The Royal Decree 696/1995 manages the education of special needs students, and the resolution of July 28, 2005 in the autonomous community of Madrid established the teams of educational psychologists.

5.1.14. Background Parental involvement

In Spain, one of the first mentions of formal parental involvement in the education of their children was made in 1970, in the General Organic Law on Education and the Financing of the Reform in Education, also known as the LGE. This law effectively meant that parents were periodically informed of their children's progress and stimulated parents to form parent associations so as to be more involved in the schooling of their children at all educational levels (Ley Orgánica General de Educación y Financiamiento de la Reforma Educativa, 1970). Legislation on education throughout the 1980s furthered the emphasis on parental involvement. The 1980 Organic Law on the Statutes of School Centres meant that amongst other things, parents had formal freedom of assembly and could form parental associations which could in turn participate in collegiate organs of the centres (Art. 5, 8 and 18.1, Ley Orgánica del Estatuto de Centros Escolares, 1980). The Organic Law Regulating the Right to Education added to the formal participation of parents, stating that besides forming parental associations, parents could also contribute to the promotion and management of the centre (Art. 5.2, Ley Orgánica Reguladora del Derecho a la Educación, 1985).

Several laws were put in place throughout the 1990s which with respect to parental involvement, further enshrined the value of parental participation in education. These were repealed however under the 2006 Organic Law on Education. Regarding the involvement of parents this law stated that the education administrations of Spain's seventeen autonomous communities were responsible for adopting necessary measure to promote and encourage collaboration between the family and school. Additionally, the law states that schools will set up educational commitments between families or Legal guardians, and schools, taking the form of activities through which parents, teachers and students collaborate and to enhance the academic performance of students (Art 118.4 and 121.5, Ley Orgánica de Educación, 2006).

The organic laws tend to refer to education though references are made to the pre-primary school levels of education; certain Royal Decrees however focus specifically on early childhood education and also mention the issue of parental involvement. The Royal Decree 1630/2006 is such a decree, stating that education providers should cooperate closely with parents or guardians and establish mechanisms to facilitate participation in the education of the children. In this decree parents and guardians are recognised as having a fundamental responsibility in the early childhood education phase and this must be respected.

Specific means at the provider level facilitating such parental participation tends to vary per education provider. The autonomous communities tend to have legislative power to further dictate how such parental involvement should be implemented. This country report has focused on the autonomous community of Madrid, but no further specifications regarding parental participation in early childhood education and care exist. What is clear, however, is that the notion of parental involvement in education has been part of the Spanish education since the 1970s and it therefore seems to have a relatively rich tradition in Spain.

5.1.15. National policies to stimulate parental involvement

Parental involvement in the ECEC services is enshrined at in national level legislation, though these are relatively broad terms. They allow room for interpretation and different applications of parental application in practice as a result. Across Spain's seven-

teen autonomous communities the exact mechanisms for facilitating parental involvement is likely to differ. However, looking beyond the legislative aspect, it becomes clear that during early childhood education and care, and especially the first cycle, parents are generally very willing to be involved and do not appear to need much persuasion. This has to do with the age of the children during this phase of education; parents tend to worry more and be more curious and involved as to how their child is progressing. This is especially the case during the first cycle, where children can legally attend such centres from the age of 3 months onwards. It is therefore common for parents to discuss with teachers on a daily basis how their child has been doing that day, whether they have eaten, slept and interacted with others well for instance.

During pre-primary education the aim is for children to develop socially, morally and culturally as well as cognitively. The teachers, carers and parents all share this as their main goal and the importance of parents in this process is a well established idea in Spain. Co-operation and communication between teachers and parents is thus very important, though in practice not always optimal.

5.1.16. Concrete initiatives to stimulate parental involvement

Parental involvement in early childhood education and care in Spain can happen through numerous channels. In a more organisational sense, most institutions have parental associations through which parents can collaborate with the provider and with fellow parents. Additionally, parents can attend parent-teacher conferences, attend meetings by school-sponsored Parent Education Centre, attend school events and organise extra curricular activities, which can be done both at home and at school. This last option however is somewhat rare in early childhood care and education.

From a more educational perspective, parents can also participate in their child's learning and development by encouraging the learning of children at home. In a less organisational capacity, parents can also become very involved in their child's developmental progress by remaining continuously informed about the child's time at the centre. This relies on frequent and open communication with teachers. One mechanism to achieve this is the use of personal diaries for the children. The teacher writes in such a diary daily and covers aspects such as what food a child has eaten and how much, whether a nap was taken, and hygiene (that is, whether the child had regular bowel movements and such). Parents on the other hand, can record their own observations regarding their child for the teacher. Details covered include whether the child had a good night's rest, if they took any necessary medication, what they ate and so forth. There is thus a regular communication between parent and teacher regarding the development of the child. Even if such diaries are not a feature of the provider in question, it is quite a normal occurrence for parents and teachers to briefly discuss how a child has been that day and whether there were any incidents, be they positive or negative in nature. Such informal communication can also be facilitated using ICT applications. Some providers for instance have forums where parents log in and can chat with teachers and other parents, see documents of interest posted by the provider and generally remain involved with the centre.

Some schools organised trainings or courses for the parents of their young students. The responsible parents course for instance, or "padres y madres encargados del curso" (MECS) is designed to encourage parental involvement in the classes of the provider. Also, educational talks are arranged. Finally, in order to contribute to par-

ents' identification with the school and their child's development, trainings and field trips are organised.

Given that there is no universal definition of quality regarding education in Spain, if one wishes to evaluate quality one must deduce this from other aspects. One parent for instance said that one could "consider the relationship successful when parents see that the centre meets the daily problems they might encounter with your children, if children and parents are well behaved, if the children are happy at school". Facilities and the programmes adopted by the school matter as well, but this goes to show that judging the quality of early childhood care and education from a parental perspective relies on more day-to-day and short term observations.

5.1.17. Conclusions

In Spain participation in ECEC services is generally quite high when compared to the rest of the international community. For the second cycle, more than 95% of Spanish children are involved in some kind of ECEC centre. For the first cycle, the participation rate is much lower, though it was above the Barcelona Target of 33% by 2010. Measures are implemented to improve this, such as the Educa3 initiative, which aims to increase the number of spaces by 49,000 in centres across Spain. The much lower rate of participation at this stage is due in part to the age of the children during the first cycle; parents are less inclined to be separated from them. Additionally, the fact that these centres are not free is an important issue. The financial crisis is exacerbating these financial strains.

The Spanish public authorities fund the majority Spanish education, including the pre-primary stage. However this extreme reliance on funding and subsidies leaves the system vulnerable. Given the situation of Spain in the current economic climate, public spending is being cut. The ECEC sector has also felt the effects of this; parents have more trouble finding good quality and affordable early childcare.

Another observation is that due to that the highly decentralised structure of the Spanish political system and the high degree of autonomy which ECEC providers hold, a uniform definition of quality does not exist. At the national level there are descriptions laid down in legislation regarding the objectives and aims to be pursued through early childhood education and care, but no definition of quality. The different manifestations of curricula based on the broadly defined national legal objectives lead to varying teaching programmes which vary in quality across Spain.

Regarding the notion of quality: Professor Rivas indicates that even on a national scale, the aims of ECEC services are to prepare a child for primary education by laying the cognitive and affective foundations. Therefore, to know how successful the ECEC programme in question was, one can only get to know this when the child in question attends primary school; this is when potential observations on quality of ECEC services will come to light. From this perspective there is thus quite a delay if one wishes to monitor quality in the long term.

A point which has started to receive more credence is that although there is no definition of quality in Spanish law, teachers are seen as crucial in establishing and maintaining quality ECEC services. Qualified teachers are the ones who have the autonomy to develop teaching programmes and teach these to children. Thus when for instance the motivation of teachers diminishes, so does the quality of the education. Plans are in motion, such as the Organic Law to Improve the Quality of Education, 2012 to im-

prove this situation, though the exact details of the legislation and how it intends to achieve this goal have not been made public yet.

Closely related to this lack of a definition of quality in early childhood education, is that an evaluation of ECEC services becomes problematic. At the provider level, most providers have a different teaching programme, bar perhaps the publicly funded providers which are more uniform in their operations. As a result the evaluative instruments and criteria vary widely across providers as well. The result is that the overall success of ECEC services in Spain are difficult to deduce and that comparison between providers are also difficult to establish.

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5.1.19. Respondents interviewed

Name	Organisation	Country
Sonia Rivas	University of Navarra, Department of Education	Spain
Judit Diez	Isadora Duncan Foundation	Spain
Adella Ustarroz Perez	Childcarer: "Madres de Día Pamplona" (Casas Amigas)	Spain
Renata Sarmento	Early Intervention Centre "Apadis"	Spain

5.2. Case study Spain

5.2.1. Introduction

This case study examines the practice of ECEC provision taking place at the homes of carers, for children aged 0 – 3, in groups of no more than five children at a time. The aim of these centres is to provide more personalised, higher quality early childhood education and care, with more flexible schedules and close communication with parents. The ultimate goal of providing such services is to get parents, especially mothers, to feel comfortable enough to enter the labour market, knowing that their young children are in good hands. The programme has been implemented in the Spanish autonomous community of Navarra, under the competency of its Department for Social Welfare, Sports and Youth.

5.2.2. Problem definition

ECEC services in Spain have several main objectives. They aim to lay the foundations for sound social, intellectual and emotional development for children; ECEC has had proven effects on the performance of a child in later stages of school and these services are therefore assumed to have positive long term effects such as promoting employability amongst future job seekers. Additionally, ECEC services help current job-seekers as they have a caring function as well; this allows parents, especially mothers, to join the labour market as well. The impetus for the Casas Amigas initiative was to provide quality day care so that mothers can more easily join the labour market.

There are a number of obstacles to participating in ECEC services in Spain. Especially during the first cycle the services are not free as is the case for the second cycle. As a result some families can not afford it. Additionally, the quality ECEC centres can fluctuate across Spain, with different resources, teaching styles and opening times. These characteristics can impact how desirable it is for a parent to put their child in an ECEC centre. Another important obstacle is related to the age of the children at this stage; parents are reluctant to be separated from their children at this stage. The Casas Amigas initiative seeks to remedy the issue of restrictive opening hours so that mothers can more easily return to work, and does so by providing stable, more intimate care which makes parents feel their young children are receiving the personal care they require; in doing so another main obstacle is overcome.

5.2.3. Approach

The Casas Amigas measure is an initiative to facilitate the balance between work and home life for parents with young children. The indirect way of achieving this balance is by providing quality flexible early education and care for children between the ages of 0 and 3. This is done by caring and educating children at the homes of Early-Childhood professionals in groups of no more than five children¹. This measure has been implemented in the autonomous community of Navarra in Spain, and falls under the broader category of “services for children under three years old at the homes of carers” (servicio de atención a menores de tres años en el domicilio de las cuidadoras).

¹ Entrechiquitines, *Casas Amigas*, 2011: <http://www.entrechiquitines.com/casas-amigas-una-alternativa-a-las-guarderías/>.

This approach started in May 2003 with a single centre. The pilot project was developed by the Gaztelan Foundation in the autonomous community of Navarra as part of the EU's Equal Community Initiative. By December there were three more centres and by 2004 eleven centres were in operation. The Regional Law 27/2006 came into force in 2006 and regulated the provision of ECEC services at carers' homes. In January, 2008, Xylem, an organisation dedicated to family intervention took over the management of such services, calling them "Casas Amigas"

The government of Navarra instituted a law to regulate the provision of care of this nature; Regional Law 27/2006, of February 7th, drawn up by the Department of Social Welfare, Sports and Youth. The law outlines in detail the target beneficiaries of such centres, the staff requirements and composition, the number of children allowed per carer's home, and a detailed list of the necessary requirements in the home of the carer.

Casas Amigas staff includes a co-ordinator of the Casas Amigas services, a voluntary education professional, and 16 carers for each of the houses. There is also a technician, which performs psychological development and supervisory tasks¹.

According to the Regional Law 27/2006, the co-ordinator for these types of services must have a degree in a branch early childhood education, be that in Education, Psychology, Pedagogy, Social Work or Sociology. The educator must have advanced qualifications or training in the care of children under three years of age and proven experience in the development and management of young children. The exact qualifications necessary for the carers are not defined in this law however. The ratio of children to staff is generally four children to every educator, but in certain conditions, (though these are not defined in the law), the ratio can be five children to one educator².

In the case of Casas Amigas, the objectives are to: develop a child care service of quality, with guarantees, security and professionalism to facilitate the reconciliation of family life and work; to encourage the incorporation of women into the labour market, by reconciling work and family life; promote a learning space in a welcoming, warm, supportive relationship. create and promote bonding processes through emotional attention; meeting basic needs of each child: food, hygiene, rhythms of dreams, etc.; encourage and display all the potential of every child through play and stimulation; to encourage a close and smooth with parents, enabling the continuity and unity in relation to their children; and prevent problems for the child through early detection, providing individual interventions tailored to the needs of each child³.

Thus ultimately, within Casas Amigas there is a strong emphasis on personalised, quality childhood education and care, allowing parents, but especially mothers to enter the labour market. The scheduling flexibility of the Casas Amigas and the emphasis

¹ Echeverría & del Río, (2011) CASAS AMIGAS: UNA EXPERIENCIA DE PROXIMIDAD Y CONTINUIDAD EN CUIDADO PARA NIÑOS/AS MENORES DE 3 AÑOS: http://www.unavarra.es/digitalAssets/158/158831_6_p-OteizaMartin_CasasAmigas.pdf.

² ORDEN FORAL 27/2006, de 7 de febrero, del Consejero de Bienestar Social, Deporte y Juventud: "servicio de atención a menores de tres años en el domicilio de las cuidadoras" http://www.solidaridadintergeneracional.es/public/web/pdfs/normativa/NA2010/NA2010_OF0027.pdf.

³ Echeverría & del Río, (2011) CASAS AMIGAS: UNA EXPERIENCIA DE PROXIMIDAD Y CONTINUIDAD EN CUIDADO PARA NIÑOS/AS MENORES DE 3 AÑOS.

on close relationships with the parents overcomes some of the major obstacles which deter women from entering the labour market.

When it comes to monitoring and evaluating the quality of the Casas Amigas system, the same problems arise as when evaluating other stages of early childhood education and care. These issues rest on the fact that there is no uniform definition of quality in ECEC in Spanish legislation. As such it is difficult to monitor

5.2.4. Contextual factors that influence the quality measure

The situation of ECEC provision in Spain has influenced the formation of this particular measure. The legal regulations regarding ECEC services provide basic requirements and objectives for centres to adhere to. However the centres themselves have a large degree of freedom in implementing these requirements and objectives; each centre is at liberty to form its own teaching programme and thus the nature of the curricula vary across the centres in Spain. To evaluate these programmes requires different evaluative criteria and instruments and one result is that there are fluctuating levels of quality in ECEC services in Spain. In this context parents are often unsure about leaving their young children in ECEC centres, which helps to explain why the participation rate in the first cycle of pre-primary education is much lower than in the second. The emphasis in the Casas Amigas is on creating a warm, welcoming environment where children receive more emotional attention. Given the personalised manner of interaction and teaching of the children, early detection of problems is also made easier. There is also a strong emphasis on close and smooth communication with parents. Hence in a context of fluctuating quality of ECEC providers, Casas Amigas provides parents with more assurance that their children are receiving enough attention.

A secondary circumstantial factor is the policy aim of the Spanish political sphere to stimulate the labour market and to get more women to work. Especially in the early stages of a child's life women tend to stay home more. With the strong emphasis on scheduling flexibility for parents, the transition to work is made much easier for parents, especially mothers.

The government of the autonomous community of Navarra supports the Casas Amigas measure financially and technically through its Department of Social Affairs, Family, Youth and Sports. Besides the governmental support the Casas Amigas is supported by the organisation which orchestrated the development of the measure, namely the Xilema Association. This support helps the initiative implement the necessary resources, both human and material, to deliver the aims of the measure.

Some of the main advantages of the Casas Amigas style of ECEC provision include, a familiar, personalised attention, small groups (maximum 4 children / as, 5 as an exception), schedule flexibility, stability and continuity, availability, decreased disease transmission, educational activities, quality and guarantees."

A factor which appears to inhibit the success of this measure is that it is bound to limited groups of children. This is a source of its success in many ways as it is this set-up which allows for the highly personalised teaching and caring approach. It does mean however, that increasing the number of centres is problematic, especially since each centre requires a Technical Team of staff.

Another obstacle to this measure being more widely implemented is that this style of ECEC provision is not free. While the autonomous community of Navarra subsidises a number of the costs of the Casas Amigas, parents must still pay fees. Though this option is appealing to parents wanting more personalised treatment or benefiting from the flexible scheduling, it may not be very accessible in practice.

5.2.5. Outcomes and results

As there is no uniform definition of quality in ECEC services in Spain, nor any uniform means to evaluate such services, other indicators are taken to estimate quality. As parents decide where to send their children, this report examines parental satisfaction as an indicator for success¹. From this perspective the Casas Amigas programme is quite successful. On a scale of 1 – 9, with 9 being most satisfied, 90% of parents participating in such centres in the region of Navarra gave the system a 9. The remaining parents gave a score of 8.

Between 2008 and 2011 the number of centres has increased, as has the number of participants.

Figure 1 illustrates the development in the numbers of Casas Amigas and Figure 2 illustrates the development in the numbers of children participating. As is evident from the tables the number of centres has steadily increased, as has the number of children in centres. Based on these results one can deduce that the initiatives are successful; they appear to achieve the criteria which at the very least satisfy parents to keep bringing their children to these types of centres. An interesting point is the decrease in number of children on waiting lists in 2011 while only one extra centre was set up in that year.

Figure 1: Number of Houses (Casas Amigas), second siblings and children on waiting lists, 2008 - 2011

Year	Number of Houses	Second siblings in centres	Children on waiting lists
2008	13	-	-
2009	15	15	50
2010	15	16	67
2011	16	17	53

Source: Asociación Casas Amigas, 2011

Figure 2: Number of children in Houses (Casas Amigas), 2008 – 2010

Year	2008	2009	2010
Number of Children	48	77	87

Source: Asociación Casas Amigas, 2011

¹ Rivas, S. & Sobrino, A., Determining quality of early childhood education programmes in Spain: a case study, *Revista de Educación*, 2011. Vol. 355, issue: may-august, pp. 257-283.

5.2.6. Reflection on success and fail factors

Relevance: The measure appears to satisfy the various objectives it sets out to achieve; personalised, quality care; flexible scheduling; good and smooth communication with parents, etc. These successful working to these goals is supported by the evidence of the growing popularity of these centres. It would be interesting to investigate whether mother are in fact employed as a result of the Casas Amigas centres.

Effectiveness: The extent to which expected results have been achieved is difficult to ascertain as they are not enumerated in any precise manner; only general, (though by no means less important), objectives are set out for Casas Amigas. However, taking parental satisfaction as indicators suggests this measure is quite effective.

Efficiency: The extent to which this measure is implemented efficiently remains a point of discussion; while the quality of this style of ECEC provision seems high, the ratio of 5 children to one educator does not seem very efficient. On the other hand, it is this ratio that makes the system so appealing to parents and thus makes it effective.

This measure requires support from the public authorities and an educational professional willing to volunteer. It succeeds it seems due to the tradition of public funding for the education sector and the willingness of educators and carers to open up their homes to parents and their children. The success thus also rests on the motivations of such professionals. To transfer this concept would therefore require the willingness of politicians and educators, and a commitment to the idea. Thus in nations where the culture of subsidising education or employment schemes is not as strong, this idea may find limited support. Additionally, though the Casas Amigas do not rely on public funding entirely, they do to a significant extent and this makes them vulnerable. Given the current economic climate for instance, such programmes may be in jeopardy.

5.2.7. Conclusions

Unlike in the stages of education after pre-primary education, the emphasis is not only on learning, but to a large degree on very basic affective, social and intellectual development. Hence the monitoring and evaluation of such development is different to other stages of education where the emphasis tends to be more on tests to ascertain the amount of learning a student has undergone.

6. IRELAND

6.1. Country study Ireland

6.1.1. Structure of national ECEC services

Ireland does not have a tradition of its youngest children attending day-care services. Currently however, the Department of Children and Youth affairs (DCYA) subsidises ECEC places for these youngest children through a Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) scheme which is restricted to community/not-for-profit childcare services whereby services are grant-aided on the basis of evidence of their parental profile by reference to 3 tiered income bands. Given the Irish tradition of raising children at home this is not often used, also because the rules of obtaining subvention are relatively strict.

The compulsory school age is 6, and any participation in education before that age is voluntary. However, formal education may start at the age of 4 with children enrolling in primary school which is funded by the Department of Education and Skills. 45.5% of 4 year olds and 99% of 5 year olds are enrolled in primary schools.

In January 2010, Ireland introduced a pre-school year for children aged between 3 years and two months and 4 years and 7 months. These pre-school programmes are funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), and offered by the day-care providers that can apply for funding for each child that they accept. The Irish childcare system is largely private (+/- 70%), with only smaller parts that are community day-care services (about 30%). The programme offered consists of a programme of 3 hours a day, 5 days per week. The objective of the scheme is to make early learning in a formal setting available to all children in the key developmental year before they commence primary school. It aims to provide age-appropriate activities, and this is the reason for setting the relatively strict age window.

Services participating in the free pre-school scheme are paid a capitation fee for each eligible child enrolled, based on the qualifications of the pre-school leader. The ordinary capitation rate per participating child is equivalent to €62.50 per week for 38 weeks. A higher capitation rate equivalent to €73 per week for 38 weeks is paid where pre-school leaders are qualified to degree level. Expenditure by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on the scheme was €163m in 2011. This free pre-school year has proven a success with 94 % of all qualifying-age pre-school children now participating. As mentioned, the services that offer pre-school have to offer their services free-of-charge, in return for a capitation fee per child, provided by the government. They have the discretionary space to offer additional services to parents and charge money for these. Recall that the day-care sector in Ireland is largely private, and through this funding the government can exert influence on the quality of these providers. In order to be eligible for funding for instance services have to show they comply with the minimum staff requirements and the staff-child ration (1:11 in 2012).

Individual childminders can also provide care to children under the compulsory schooling age. If the person is minding more than 3 children, they are required to notify the Health Service Executive. As part of this notification process the childminder is re-

quired to hand over some documents, and he/ she will be subject to inspection. The Childcare Regulation forbids looking after more than 5 pre-school children¹. Several government grants exist for childminders; they are eligible if the childminder follow additional training courses. Such grants exist to allow covering the cost of equipment or Household adaptation².

Providers of pre-school programmes complain about the lack of inspections by the HSE. Another issue with inspection is the lack of transparency of the inspection reports; "Early Childhood Ireland", the organisation of pre-school / day-care institutions has argued to have at least annual inspections and more consistency and transparency for the public how inspections are carried out. Also, the sector tries to move away from the current system of notification to a registration system, where a day-care simply cannot open unless it meets the criteria and is inspected.

Stakeholders

There are voluntary childcare organisations that represent different interest groups within the sector. The most important ones are:

- Early Childhood Ireland (www.earlychildhoodireland.ie)
- Barnardos (www.barnardos.ie)
- Forbairt Naíonra Teoranta (represent Irish speaking ECEC services) <http://www.naionrai.ie/ga>
- Start Strong (www.startstrong.ie)
- Border Counties Childhood Network (www.bccn.ie)
- Childminding Ireland (www.childminding.ie)
- Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association (www.iskairland.org)
- Irish Montessori Education Board (www.imeb.ie)

Decision-making

Responsibility for decision-making rests with the relevant Minister and Government Department. However, there is a long tradition of consultation within the sector. Typically, major strategy documents are drawn up by expert advisory groups with a draft document published for consultation with stakeholders. 3-4 times a year, the D/CYA convenes a National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee meeting which is representative of the different stakeholders mentioned above.

Recent policy reforms

The most important policy reform in the ECEC sector in Ireland was the introduction of the universal pre-school provision in January 2010. This was a radical policy departure from that of targeted intervention, which existed before 2010. With the introduction of universal pre-school provision, the State also introduced a requirement for all pre-school leaders in the pre-school year to have a minimum of a Level 5 qualification (on Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications).

Before the introduction of the universal pre-school, only some small-scale targeted intervention programmes existed. Next to this, a child benefit existed for all parents. The government had the indication that this may not reach the children that need it (it is a lump sum, so can be used for all different kind of things). The advantage of

¹ Childcare Regulations (nr. 2) 2006.

² Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (2008), *National Guidelines for Childminders*, revised 2008, page 22.

spending this money in the form of a pre-school year has the advantage that it reaches the children, and actually saves money compared to the universal benefit scheme. Lastly, and not unimportantly, by this, the childcare sector was saved from drastic collapse, had there be no child benefit or free provision.

6.1.2. The general perception and policy relevance of ECEC

The basic principles underpinning ECEC are the value of early childhood education itself and the role that an ECEC sector plays in removing the barriers to labour force participation by working parents and women in particular. Childcare was traditionally small in Ireland, until the economy took off during the “Celtic Tiger” years. In these times of economic prosperity, an important focus was on broadening the capacity of ECCE, without too much regulation on quality; it clearly served the goal of reducing the pressure on the labour market.

The principles are set out in Government policy documents including the National Children’s Strategy 2000 which aims to ensure that children’s early education and developmental needs will be met through quality childcare services and family-friendly employment measures. In general the sector is referred to as Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). Care comes first; the sector does not specifically set educational goals. The sector even looks suspiciously to potential future developments where the ministry of Education may get more competence in the field of ECCE.

An ultimate fear of the ECCE sector is a full split of the system. As mentioned, at present childcare policies are the competence of the DCYA, with the Education ministry involved when it concerns the Aistear curriculum (which also extends into primary school, yet generally focuses on the well-being of children; learning through playing see below). At this moment the policy unit that is responsible for ECCE is based at the Ministry of Education, but only as an attempt to bridge the gap. According to organisations in the ECCE sector, a fully split system is undesirable, because the Education department simply lacks the expertise to offer suitable policies for pre-school; it would tilt the system too much towards ‘learning’ instead of playing, and put the entry into primary school as central.

Links to other policy areas

ECCE is related to several other policy areas, with Education as the most prominent one; even though the sector is clear in its position that the focus should not be on education, good care provisions is supposed to support educational goals in the later phase. In 2010, Ireland published a National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy which recognises the continuum of lifelong learning that begins at birth. In 2009, Ireland’s curriculum for the Early Years, Aistear was published. Its emphasis is on fostering a child’s well-being, ability to communicate, explore and think; those competences that are a pre-requisite for life-long learning.

Achieving policy goals

The introduction of universal pre-school provision in January 2010 has meant that Ireland has reached the Barcelona targets set for children between 3 years of age and the mandatory school age as the participation rate is currently at 94%. Also for quality improvement within the early years services, policy goals have been formulated. These policy goals acknowledge that quality early years services can improve the life chances of children, in particular, children at risk of educational disadvantage.

In that respect, Ireland has produced two quality frameworks, *Síolta* which is the quality framework for early years services and which looks at all aspects of quality and *Aistear* which is the curriculum framework for early years and which focuses in on the child's learning outcomes. Anyone now undertaking training in the field of childcare should have grounding in the effective use of these frameworks in practice.

Difficulties/Challenges

The requirement that pre-school leaders have a minimum of a Level 5 qualification has been a major driver in upskilling the workforce. There were no State supports offered to help with this upskilling. There isn't a tradition of State funded Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for the professionals working in ECEC services and there is insufficient support for the existing workforce to incorporate *Síolta* and *Aistear* into their practice.

6.1.3. Educational requirements for staff

The Irish regulations prescribe that all staff working in ECEC should have the required degrees and a police clearance. The Irish inspection for ECEC services checks critically for this. In the Inspection guidelines it is specified that 'at least 50% of the staff' should have a qualification appropriate to care and development. By appropriate qualification it is meant that the qualification is recognised as such by the Irish Qualifications authority.

Pre-school teachers are required to hold a national degree in childcare / education equivalent to level 4 on the EFQ, which is a specialised vocational degree. Before September 2012, it was also possible to work as pre-school practitioner without this degree level, as long as the person had a qualification in the field of ECEC. Still, no minimal requirements are set for other types of ECEC staff (support staff, but also no requirements for managers exist). The qualifications that are awarded specifically for the ECEC sector are awarded by *Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)*, and it has 8 component awards:

- * Four mandatory component awards related to the required skills and knowledge needed for practice in early childhood care and education settings, e.g. Child Development, Early Childhood Education, Working in Childcare

AND

- * Two general component awards (mandatory), one being work experience/practice-related and another drawn from a list of core skills areas, e.g. Communications, Information Technology

AND

- * Two component awards drawn from a pool of elective subjects which may relate to specific areas of practice in early childhood care and education, e.g., working with children with additional needs.

No regulations in terms of educational qualifications exist for childminders. These family day-care services must notify the local Health Service Executive if they mind four or more pre-school children (excluding their own). Even though no formal qualification requirements exist, childminders must undertake First Aid training when they notify the HSE agency.

Provisions exist to stimulate higher educated ECEC staff. Institutions are paid more for pre-school leaders with a higher qualification (at least Bachelor degree) in addition to some working experience. Generally however, the payment level of ECEC staff is rela-

tively low compared to other professions in Ireland, which accounts for the lack of higher educated staff. Even though the government has formulated a strategy to increase salaries for ECEC professionals in 2000¹, salaries are administered by the (largely private) institutions. As such, the government has no direct control over the level of payment. Currently, under the tight national budgets following the crisis years, the funds available in supporting private day-care services as support for raising payment levels, though desired by all actors is not to be expected.

6.1.4. Competence development for staff

In Ireland, no national regulations exist for continued professional development. On the policy level, there is a commitment in the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) to create incentives for the sector to engage in continuing professional development to enhance their staff's ability to address the literacy and numeracy learning needs of students from disadvantaged background. As was stated earlier, there isn't a well established mechanism for delivery and/or funding of CPD for early years practitioners.

In fact, when the Universal pre-school year was introduced, a minimum level of qualification was also required. No money was however made available to the existing day-care staff to achieve the required qualification level. Nonetheless, throughout the country, the ECEC workforce undertook CPD on its own initiative, sometimes paid for by service providers, but more often paid for by the individuals themselves, who generally took up the additional training in their own time.

The fact that there are no national guidelines for CPD does not exclude the possibility that staff still conduct CPD. Some CCCs organise training days with the (limited) funding they have available. The provision of these services across the country is however very diverse, and generally depends on the motivation of individual policymakers in the CCCs. For the successful country-wide implementation of Síolta (see below) in the upcoming years however, it is necessary to raise the qualification level of the current ECCE workforce.

6.1.5. Quality of staff

As the ECEC sector is composed of either community-for-profit or private-for-profit services, each service is a limited company, a sole trader, a partnership or a School Board of Management. In each case, the service is responsible for recruiting staff and has their own means of monitoring the performance and quality of their staff members. A state licensing or registration system does not exist.

Inspections of services are carried out by the HSE in accordance with the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations 2006. Assessment of staff competence however does not come within the Regulations. At the same time, when a service applies for funding to offer the pre-school year, it has to comply with the minimum requirements for staff qualifications set for this particular programme, which is a vocational degree in Childcare. If the service cannot provide the evidence that it has sufficient staff with proper qualifications, it simply cannot register for the capitation fees.

¹ National Childcare Strategy (2000)

In a study conducted by Early Childhood Ireland among its members, 86% of the respondents reported to have at least 1 member with the staff qualification FETAC level 5 (EQF level 4).

In September 2012, the HSE has adopted different requirements for the prescribed staff/child and space / area ratios. These requirements are set top down, and show the significant influence of the national government on these institutions. Because of budget cuts, the government proposed for 2012 a slighter looser staff-child ratio, and at the same time pay the pre-school 3% less per child¹.

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.²

6.1.6. Perception of staff

The perception is that early childcare and education practitioners are not on a par with teachers who work with children in the formal education system either in terms of professional practice or in terms of salary/remuneration. Even though it is not particularly hard for services to recruit staff, due to the current economic situation in Ireland, there is general agreement that ECCE practitioners are underpaid for the amount of work they do.

6.1.7. Gender balance in ECEC staff

While there isn't a national policy to promote gender balance, there is a Men in Child-care Network which aims to support and encourage men to work in the ECECE sector in Ireland and to highlight the many benefits that result from their inclusion in child-care.

6.1.8. Curriculum goals

The pre-school year provides opportunities to support children's early learning and development, mainly as a result of the requirement for practitioners to use Aistear in their programme. Aistear is the early childhood curriculum framework for all children from birth to six years, developed by NCCA. It is a framework built around the themes of well-being, identity and belonging, communicating and exploring and thinking. It is deliberately set up to be able to incorporate different pedagogical approaches, and therefore does not force institutions onto a particular curriculum. Montessori, Steiner, High/Scope and other curricula can work within the Aistear framework.

The policy programme for government has formulated the desire to expand early years provision of care/education. Currently, Ireland is investigating the possibilities to introduce a second free pre-school year. Other policy initiatives are currently in the process of being developed. Key document in this respect are the new 'national children's strategy 2012-2017', and 'an early years strategy'.

¹ Sure Start (2011), *Budget 2012 analysis*, www.startstrong.ie/files/start_strong_budget_2012_analysis.pdf.

² HSE (2012) CHANGES TO ECCE STAFFING AND SPACE/AREA RATIOS EFFECTIVE FROM SEPTEMBER, 2012.

6.1.9. Stakeholder involvement in curriculum

The individual ECEC setting can determine the extent of involvement of parents/partner organisations. In developing Aistear and Síolta, many different stakeholder organisations were consulted.

6.1.10. Curriculum Content

In general, Regulation 5 of the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations 2006 describes the minimum requirements for Childcare settings and states that:

A person carrying on a pre-school service shall ensure that each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the service through the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child and the child's cultural context.

Compliance with Regulation 5 is established by the pre-school inspectorate.

In addition, in an effort to move away from mere minimum quality standards, a National Quality Framework named Síolta was introduced in Ireland for the Childcare sector. Following 3 years of studies and a broad consultation process with stakeholders, Síolta may be used as a tool to support ECEC staff to develop quality services for Young children (under 6), and extends to all environments where children are outside their homes (day-care part time / full time)(infant classes) / other forms of child-minding.

6.1.11. Quality of curriculum content

Síolta started as a very ambitious policy target to raise overall quality in ECEC services across Ireland, "Síolta" (which is Irish for "seeds") was published in 2006 at the request of the Ministry of Education and Skills as the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. Strongly based in pedagogical empirical research, it consists of 12 broad principles that are the benchmark for all quality practice by ECEC services, 16 standards covering the areas of practice and based on these standards 75 individual quality indicators. Based on these principles, standards and components of quality, ECEC providers can apply for a certification, which is built around self-reflection. Through such self-reflection, staff are familiarised with a continuous process of quality improvement in his/her work with children. At this moment, it is still possible to apply for this quality label, but due to difficult financial situation of the Irish government, and individual ECEC services, its implementation has almost come to a halt in early 2013.

Despite these implementation issues, the introduction of Síolta principles has put quality in ECEC provision on the national agenda. Síolta principles and standards have for instance informed the newly introduced qualification requirements for staff working in the free pre-school programme, but also for instance put the early childhood education and care sector on the agenda for the national "literacy and numeracy strategy".

The Síolta Quality Assurance Programme (QAP), for which ECEC providers can sign up, is developed as a reflective framework for ECEC services, stimulating staff to continuously evaluate their own practices and interaction with children through self-reflection; the idea is that through higher self-awareness of one's activities, the standards of quality are raised. This self-evaluation should take place along the proposed

principles, standards and components of quality. If the ECEC provider applies for Síolta certification, it should conduct an internal baseline assessment after the necessary preparation with an individual Síolta coordinator. Based on this assessment, the provider should draw up an action plan, keep track of the developments, and have its portfolio validated by an external validator.

Even though the process of self-evaluation is laudable, the process itself should be more streamlined. At this moment it is considered very bureaucratic, slow, and time-consuming by services. One day-care service indicated that on average it would take 2,5 years of hard work for the ECEC manager to reach the certification stage. She did however see a clear added value of the Síolta QAP for overall levels of quality, as long as the implementation procedures were improved. The most important benefit of the certification process is that it makes ECEC managers and staff alike very aware of their activities.

The major drawback of Síolta is however caused by its primary asset; in order to effectively reflect on one's activities, a certain level of staff qualification would be required. Even though a minimum staff qualification exists for ECEC practitioners in the free pre-school year since 2010, no regulations (only recommendations) exist for the manager, which are the main actors involved in the process. Sector representatives report that in order to be truly reflective on one's activities at least a (short cycle) Higher Education degree would be required. In addition, to be able to reflect on activities, it is important for ECEC to have non-contact time to conduct this process. Under the current strict budgets for ECEC services, unfortunately, this cannot be paid for.

6.1.12. Health and Safety provisions

Health/Safety requirements are covered by the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations 2006, and are also inspected by the pre-school inspectorates.

6.1.13. Curriculum for children at risk

There are a number of interventions funded jointly through State and Philanthropy funding. Here, the Early Start programme is mentioned as an example of such targeted programmes. In this Case study, another programme in Tallaght-West Dublin is discussed in more detail.

Early start programme

The Early start programme is a pre-school project established in 1994 in 40 primary schools in several specific areas of urban disadvantage. The programme is a type of pre-primary education, and targets children that are at risk or may not reach their potential within the regular school system. Parental involvement is one of the core elements of the programme; the parents are actively encouraged to become involved in the child's education. It is left to individual schools to further design ways to involve the parents.

6.1.14. Background Parental involvement

Compared to other countries Ireland has is relatively late with non-parental childcare and education for the 0-6 year olds. Data from the Central Statistics survey carried

out in Q4 2007 shows the pattern of childcare used¹. This data does pre-date the introduction of universal pre-school provision but does show Ireland's tradition of parental childcare.

Types of childcare used by children aged 0-12 years by school going status, Quarter 4 2007

Type of Care	Pre-school children	Primary school children	All children aged 0-12
Parent/Guardian	64%	81%	75%
Unpaid Relative	9%	9%	9%
Paid relative	4%	3%	3%
Childminder/Au Pair/Nanny	12%	7%	9%
Crèche / Montessori / Playgroup / After-school facility	19%	3%	9%
Other	1%	1%	1%
Total children using non-parental childcare	42%	22%	30%

Percentages add to more than 100% because some children used more than one type of childcare

6.1.15. National policies to stimulate parental involvement

The National Quality Framework, *Síolta*, recognises the importance of parents as the primary educators of the child and their pre-eminent role in promoting the child's well-being, learning and development. Parents are encouraged to drop into pre-school settings. However, there isn't data available on the extent to which parents/guardians are actively involved in ECEC settings.

Within the Early Start programme, parents are encouraged to take part in the centre's activities through a rota system that involves parents taking turns to spend time each week in the centre. Annual funding for this purpose is also available.

¹ Quarterly National Household Survey Childcare Quarter 4 2007 (ref 135/2009).

6.1.16. Literature used

- Centre for Early Childhood, Development & Education (2006), *Síolta: the national quality framework for early childhood education handbook*. Available at: http://www.siolta.ie/media/pdfs/final_handbook.pdf
- Expert Working group on Childcare, *National Childcare Strategy* (2000), available at <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Childcare1.pdf/Files/Childcare1.pdf>
- Irish department of Health and children, (2006), *Childcare Regulations 2006* (nr. 2) and explanatory guide to requirements and procedures for notification and inspection. Available at: http://www.dohc.ie/legislation/statutory_instruments/pdf/si20060604.pdf?direct=1
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2009), *The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, User-guide*, available at: http://www.ncca.biz/Aistear/pdfs/UserGuide_ENG.pdf
- Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (2008), *National Guidelines for Childminders*, revised 2008.
- Quarterly National Household Survey Childcare Quarter 4 2007
- Sure Start (2011), *Budget 2012 analysis*, www.startstrong.ie/files/start_strong_budget_2012_analysis.pdf

6.1.17. Respondents interviewed

Name	Organisation	Country
Catherine Hynes	Head of Early Years Education Policy Unit – Ministry of Education and Skills	Ireland
Irene Gunning	CEO Early Childhood Ireland	Ireland
Grainne Smith	Quality Manager, Tallaght-West Childhood Development Initiative	Ireland
Aisling Breathnach	Head teacher - Naionra (day-care centre) "Chaitlin Maude", Dublin	Ireland

6.2. Case study Ireland

Engaging Parents in the “Early Years programme” Tallaght-West, Ireland

With generous funding from the Atlantic Philanthropies and the Irish government, the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI), an action group engaged in local child well-being issues in Tallaght-West, Dublin set up an initiative towards a quality “Early Years” programme. The project was developed in 2007 and put into place between 2008 and 2011 by 9 day-care centres in Tallaght-West, a neighbourhood with comparatively more children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The focus of the project lies on ‘early intervention’, and claims that when children with disadvantaged backgrounds are approached early, this will greatly enhance their chances later in life and reduce inequalities.

The funding allowed raising the overall quality in the 9 participating centres considerably; through higher staff requirements, more favourable staff-child ratios, more time to plan activities, and using a particular research-based curriculum. This example focuses on one specific element of the “Early Years” programme, which specifically provided funding for the day-care services to hire a so-called “Parent-Care Facilitator”. This professional has the sole task to be in close contact with the parents, and facilitate smooth cooperation between practitioners and the parents of the child at that institution. In the programme, specific courses were organised to train, give advice, or help parents with issues related to raising their child. The appointment of a dedicated “parent-care facilitator” allowed quality childcare provision based on the specific needs of each family. This was further ensured by the regular home visits by the ‘parent-care facilitator’, with and without the child’s ECEC practitioner. The idea of these home visits was twofold: to develop a relationship with the parents and to get to know the child from another perspective.

The ECEC practitioners in the project were particularly enthusiastic about the possibilities to engage much closer with the parents of the children. In cooperation with the parent care facilitator, practitioners were able to visit the homes of the children to discuss the child’s developments with the parents. Conducting these appointments in the home of the parents instead of at the institution, allowed the practitioners a unique insight into the home learning environment of the child. Only when the parents indicated that they would not appreciate a home visit, was the meeting conducted at the day-care service. This did not happen frequently however; most parents were very receptive to the project idea and were also enthusiastic about the home visits, where the child would for instance show their room, or the toys to the staff.

ECEC practitioners indicated that such home visits were especially valuable to get a better picture of the child’s development; one practitioner for instance indicated that the home-visit immediately gave some explanations for the slow language development of one child, on which she could respond with more targeted instruction. She also indicated that knowing the combination of a child’s behaviour at home and at the day-care, is crucial for early intervention with children with disabilities, such as autistic disorders. Often, practitioners are not able to relate to different behaviour of the child when seeing him/her a few hours and therefore will not detect the disorder; this further exacerbates the costs in later life. Even though this particular type of parent engagement may be considered too intrusive in some contexts, parents were very en-

thusiastic about the practice; it affirmed their idea that their children were in good hands. At the same time, the 'parent-care facilitators' were also open to meet at the day-care service, in case parents were indeed unwilling to receive them at home. Although sub-optimal in terms of potential benefits, it would still allow taking the necessary time for the parents, and thus be able to offer a personalised approach to day-care.

The CDI organisation also offered parent training courses, as part of the "Early Years programme", in which parents were trained to enhance children's early learning and development. Parents could join in voluntarily, but were very enthusiastic to participate. Finally, the participating services were encouraged to organise (free) 'family trips', in which not just the children, but the entire families would go on a trip, organised by the providers. These family trips were for instance visits to the zoo, a visit to a library, and for instance a picnic in a park. Such family visits served not just for providing activities for the children, but also allowed the staff to observe the children in their home environment and thus in complementing the image of the child.

The study that was conducted in the 9 participating day-care services concluded that especially the role of such parent training, in combination with a well-trained and accessible mentor (the 'parent-care facilitator'), contributes greatly to an effective home learning environment and, thus, greatly enhances the effects of quality ECEC.

7. INTERVIEWS & CHECKLISTS

Overview interviews

Name	Organisation	Country
Nina Schadt	Taskforce "U3-ausbau" - NRW	Germany – Nordrhein Westfalen
Dagmar Friedrich	Ministry of Family, Children, Youth, Culture and Sports of NRW	Germany – Nordrhein Westfalen
Markus Quetting	Landeselternbeirat NRW – Parent Organisation NRW	Germany – Nordrhein Westfalen
Sonja Boos	Landeselternbeirat NRW – Parent Organisation NRW	Germany – Nordrhein Westfalen
Pető Csilla	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member of the Romanian Parliament; • Former county inspector for ante-preschool and preschool education; • Participant in drafting of the 2011 Law on National Education • University lecturer (for students of educational studies). 	Romania
Koncsek-Vadnai Zita	General Director of the Social Community Administration for the city of Oradea	Romania
Dénes Ida	Chief educator (Public Kindergarten of the village of Borş, Bihor county).	Romania
Földes Adalbert	Council Member for the municipality of Oradea;	Romania
Biró Erzsébet	Preparatory Class educator – Public Kindergarten Bors, Bihor	Romania
Paulien Muller	Sardes, Dutch Childcare expert	the Netherlands
IJsbrand Jepma	Sardes, Dutch Childcare expert	the Netherlands
Willeke van der Werf	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment	The Netherlands
Wytske Boomsma	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science	The Netherlands
Gjalt Jellesma	BOINK, National organisation for parents in ECEC.	The Netherlands
Ruben Fukkink	Professor in childcare, University of Amsterdam	The Netherlands
Catherine Hynes	Head of Early Years Education Policy Unit – Ministry of Education and Skills	Ireland
Irene Gunning	CEO Early Childhood Ireland	Ireland
Grainne Smith	Quality Manager, Tallaght-West Childhood Development Initiative	Ireland
Aisling Breathnach	Head teacher - Naionra (daycare center) "Chaitlin Maude", Dublin	Ireland

Tarja Kahiluoto	Government Advisor - Ministry of Education and Culture	Finland
Heli Jauhola	Member EU thematic working Group ECEC Policy Advisor Ministry of Education and Culture	Finland
Angie Hämäläinen	Head teacher Finnish American Kindergarten, Helsinki	Finland
Sonia Rivas	University of Navarra, Department of Education	Spain
Judit Diez	Isadora Duncan Foundation	Spain
Adella Ustarroz Perez	Childcarer: "Madres de Dia Pamplona" (Casas Amigas)	Spain
Renata Sarmento	Early Intervention Center "Apadis"	Spain
Nora Milotay	European Commission – DG EAC	EU – stakeholder
Mafalda Leal	Eurochild	EU – stakeholder

Interview checklist

Country factsheet for study "Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care"

Part A: Aims of ECEC policies and context in which these are taking place

Instructions and questions:

Q1: Questions concerning the structure of national ECEC services in general:

- a) Describe in general the different types of ECEC institutions (in terms their focus/target group /goal/public, private)
- b) What are the relevant authorities that are stakeholder in the provisions of these services?
- c) What is /are the regime(s) of quality assurance for ECEC (consider accreditation / certification, or inspections). Are these national, regional or at the provider level?
- d) How is funding regulated for ECEC services (local/national)? Describe relevant differences for different regimes.
- e) Who are the main stakeholders/players involved (please mention national name, abbreviation, English translation, website (in footnote), and the aim of the organisation)
- f) Describe relevant structures for decisionmaking on relevant ECEC issues and the potential involvement of stakeholders.
- g) Describe recent policy reforms in national ECEC sectors. How are these related to quality?
- h) How are recent developments / reforms related to EU-attention for the ECEC issue (describe for national structure, access, staff, curriculum, parental involvement). How is Lifelong learning programme (Comenius) related to developments in the ECEC sector.
- i) Provide statistical data where available.

Q2: Questions concerning the perception of ECEC services in general:

- j) How would you describe the main role of ECEC in the country (care / education / labour market / demographic challenges / other)?
- k) Describe links to other policy areas on the national level (think for instance of lifelong learning / minorities / labour market)
- l) Describe the generally defined policy goals / targets for ECEC services? Why does the country formulate policy on ECEC?
- m) Describe how the country is working towards reaching these goals / targets. Are there recent policy developments / reforms that are relevant in the context of (achieving) these goals?
- n) Are there any difficulties/ challenges associated with these policy developments, what are the main obstacles?

Part B: National provisions on staff

Instructions and questions:

For all questions, try to map recent developments that may have been undertaken as a result of EU developments in relation to the existing practices.

Q3: What are the educational requirements for ECEC staff?

- a) Describe the educational requirements for ECEC staff. Are these education requirements set nationally by law, set locally, or left to providers?
- b) Are there specific education training programmes required? If so, describe the required competences. Also describe different regimes if applicable to the country.
- c) Are the required competences for ECEC staff clearly defined (focus on children, on parents, or on curriculum)?
- d) How long do these requirements exist; are they part of recent reforms?

Q4: What is the policy for further competence development of staff?

- e) Is it legally prescribed? Nationally, locally, by provider and what is the focus? What is the practice?

Q5: Describe national/local mechanisms to monitor quality of staff: (internal/external) Assessments / Licensing?

Q6: What is the perception of ECEC staff in the country (split by sub-system if necessary), in terms of payment, perceived working conditions? Are there relevant developments in this regard? Please also include (policy) developments with regard to staff-child ratios.

Q7: Any (national) provisions to promote gender balance? Are any efforts done at local level, by individual providers? If so, describe these policies. Are these perceived successful?

Q8: Is there any attention in staff requirements / training for working with 'children at risk'? Describe programmes in terms of targets, goals, contents and (perceived) success. Are there any prescribed actions to reach out to disadvantaged groups?

Part C: National provisions on curriculum

Q9: What curriculum goals are defined on the level of ECEC providers? (age-specific goals / learning outcomes, broad general goals)? Have these recently been defined?

Q10: How are stakeholders (parents, partner organisations) involved in setting goals and linking content of curriculum? Describe relevant differences for different types of ECEC.

Q11: How are cognitive and non-cognitive elements of the curriculum balanced? What is the basis of this balance? Is there a strategy in place in terms of intensity and duration of curriculum? Nationally / locally set, at provider level? How is this strategy aligned to the development of children?

Q12. What mechanisms are present to check quality of content at providers? How do these assure quality?

Q13. What health / safety requirements exist for ECEC providers; are these centrally described?

Q14. What programmes for children at risk exist? Are these described at the national/ local/ provider level? Describe the difference and / or emphasis of these special programmes compared to regular curriculum in detail

Part D: National provisions on parent involvement

Q15. What is the background of parental involvement with ECEC providers in the country? History, tradition, reforms, proposed policies?

Q16. How is parental involvement in ECEC services stimulated on the national level. On the local level? On the provider level? Distinguish between 'child-focused' and 'centre-focused' involvement of parents.

Q17. What does this involve, what concrete activities are conducted? Can these activities be considered successful; how is such success defined?

Q18. Are there national / local / provider initiatives to stimulate parental involvement of children at risk?

Part E: Conclusions and key findings


Instructions and questions:

Q19: Conclusions concerning ECEC provision in the country:

- a) Reflect on the relation of general aims and policy developments in relation to the priority areas identified by the EU (integrated systems, higher access, competent staff, child-centred curriculum, parent involvement / outreach)?
- b) What are the current challenges?
- c) What good practice can you identify (to be studied in the case study)

Based on the previously gathered information.

Checklist Casestudy

Data collection format: template in-depth case studies	
In-depth case study fiche: Author..... 	
Topic / chapter	Questions included:
Description of the instrument: introduction and short summary	<i>Please take into account the following items in describing the practice:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The title of the practice on which the case study will focus ▪ Level on which the practice is implemented and strategy deployed ▪ The context in which the instrument is developed ▪ Overall objectives of the practice
Problem definition	<i>Please take into account the following questions for the problem definition:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why was the practice developed (immediate cause)? ▪ What problem does the practice address?
Approach/ implementation	<i>Please take into account the following questions in describing the approach:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What approach has been used to address the problem? ▪ What are the core elements of the approach? ▪ How is this approach supposed to resolve the problem (line of reasoning)? ▪ Is this a new approach or has it been used elsewhere? ▪ What are indicators and descriptors to measure quality? ▪ Has the approach been adapted/adjusted during the implementation of the instrument? If so, in what way? ▪ What distinguishes this approach from other (similar) approaches? ▪ Where there any barriers in the implementation? ▪ Where there any changes to the original approach?
Contextual factors	<i>Please take into account the following questions</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What conditions have influenced the practice? ▪ What factors improved the success of the practice? ▪ What factors limit the success of the practice?
Outcomes and results	<i>Please take into account the following questions with regard to the outcomes and results:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the practice improve ECEC and in what area? ▪ Are there other results/effects noticeable related to the implementation of the practice?
Reflection on success and fail factors	<i>Please take into account the following questions with regard to success and fail factors:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What can others learn from this particular practice? ▪ To what extent is the practice transferable to other situations? What helps and what does not? ▪ Have there been impact assessments/other evaluations? ▪ What contribution can policy makers, programme managers and others willing to facilitate transferring this initiative to other organisations make?
Conclusions	Analysis based on the above mentioned themes and answers to the questions.
Literature list and list of interviewees	

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

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