



European
Commission

What is Eurydice

The Eurydice Network's task is to understand and explain how Europe's different education systems are organised and how they work. The network provides descriptions of national education systems, comparative studies devoted to specific topics, indicators and statistics. All Eurydice publications are available free of charge on the Eurydice website or in print upon request. Through its work, Eurydice aims to promote understanding, cooperation, trust and mobility at European and international levels. The network consists of national units located in European countries and is co-ordinated by the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. For more information about Eurydice, see <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice>

Eurydice Highlights

Children face differing conditions in early childhood education and care programmes in Europe



At a time of unprecedented challenges, the importance of giving all our children a solid start by providing quality early childhood education is central. The extensive benefits of early childhood education and care have been increasingly acknowledged, ranging from economic advantages for society as a whole to better performance in schools. International skill survey results (PISA 2012 (OECD) and PIRLS 2011 (IEA)) document that children and teenagers perform better in reading and mathematics if they have attended ECEC. Providing high quality ECEC may help reduce future public spending on welfare, health and even justice. By laying strong foundations for successful lifelong learning, high quality ECEC brings personal benefits to children, particularly to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. ECEC is a cornerstone for building better and more equitable education systems.

In support of evidence-based policy making, Eurydice publishes *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2014 Edition* in cooperation with Eurostat. The report provides insights into what constitutes high quality early childhood education and care through internationally comparable indicators. It combines statistical data and system-level information to describe the structure, organisation and funding of early childhood education and care in Europe. It covers a number of specific issues important to policy-makers such as access to ECEC, governance, quality assurance, affordability, professionalisation of staff, leadership and measures to support disadvantaged children. This brochure summarises the report's key findings.

This report covers the 32 European countries (37 education systems), involved in the Eurydice Network under the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013), except the Netherlands.

The full study

Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2014 Edition

can be found in English on the Eurydice website

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/key_data_en.php

Printed copies of the report

are available upon request at:
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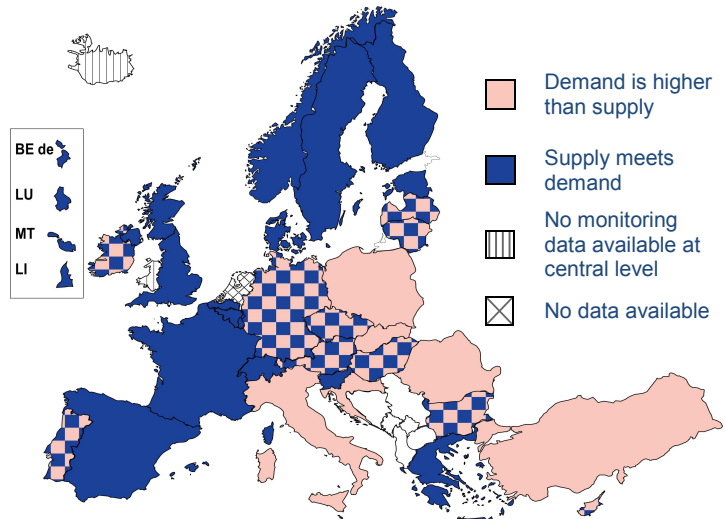
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A shortage of ECEC places for children under three years old is likely to persist in most European countries despite a fall in population numbers

Currently 32 million children are in the age range to use ECEC services in Europe. Population projections suggest that by 2030, there will be 2.5 million fewer children in the European Union compared with 2012. Despite this decline, demand for ECEC places – especially those for younger children – is expected to continue to exceed supply. In fact, ECEC attendance among children under 3 is very low. At present, supply of ECEC places matches demand in only four European countries, namely Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway. Conversely, participation is high during the year or two before starting primary education.

Demand exceeds supply for children of all ages in Croatia, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Turkey. However, demand and supply may vary within countries. For example, in Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Portugal and Slovenia, it is easier to find an ECEC place in rural areas than in big cities.

Demand and supply of places in publicly subsidised centre-based ECEC settings for children 3 years and older, 2012/13



Source: Eurydice.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have lower ECEC participation rates

One in four children under the age of 6 in Europe is at risk of poverty or social exclusion and may need specific measures to support their educational needs. Nevertheless, disadvantaged children have lower ECEC participation rates. Increasing the participation in ECEC of children from disadvantaged backgrounds is one of the main priorities of European ECEC policy. Therefore, most countries offer means-tested financial support to parents. Concerning staff, most European countries integrate specific training on working with children with additional needs into initial education

programmes. While in some countries, specific training is compulsory for all ECEC staff (Belgium – French Community, Denmark, Spain, France, Austria, Slovenia and Turkey), in others, it is only compulsory for staff preparing to work with older children (Romania, Slovakia and Switzerland). In most countries, ECEC teams receive support from educational psychologists and speech/language therapists; however, support from professionals specialised in teaching reading or mathematics is rare.

Language support is the most common form of centralised support for disadvantaged children.

The younger the children the lower the minimum qualification requirements for staff

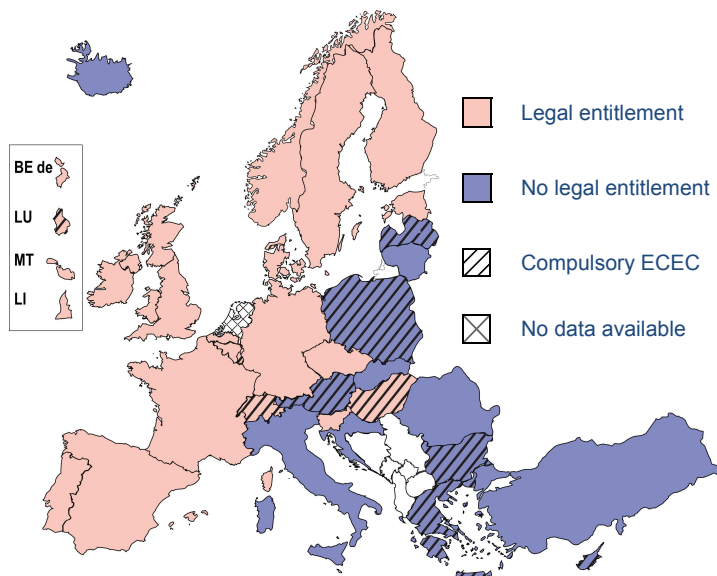
Required qualification levels for ECEC staff vary between countries. The minimum level for staff working with children 3 years of age and over is usually a Bachelor degree. The exceptions are France, Italy, Portugal and Iceland, where a Master degree is the minimum qualification. As a general rule, the younger the children, the lower the minimum qualification requirements for staff. For example, education and care staff working with

children 3 years of age and under are not required to hold a Bachelor degree in more than two thirds of countries.

In countries that provide for regulated home-based ECEC services, a minimum formal qualification or specific training is usually stipulated and may be a requirement for accreditation. Half of the countries with regulated home-based ECEC provision have mandatory training courses to prepare prospective childminders for work in home-based settings, but do not require a formal qualification.

Most European countries guarantee every child a place in ECEC, but few from an early age

Legal entitlement and/or compulsory ECEC, 2012/13

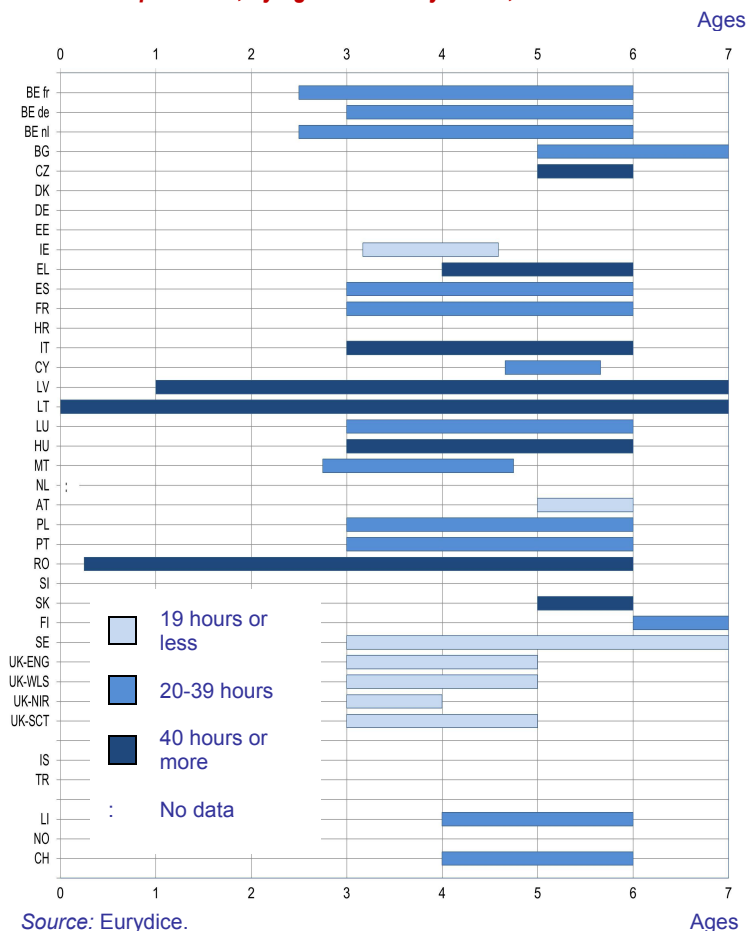


Source: Eurydice.

Most European countries guarantee a place in ECEC, either by providing a legal entitlement (a right to a place) or by making attendance compulsory for at least one or two years before primary education starts. However, there are significant differences regarding the age from which children are guaranteed to have a place in ECEC. Only Denmark, Germany (from August 2013), Estonia, Malta (from April 2014), Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and Norway guarantee a legal right to ECEC to each child soon after their birth, often immediately after the end of childcare leave(s). About one third of European countries guarantee a place from age 3.

ECEC is free of charge from age three in half of all European countries

Free ECEC provision, by age and weekly hours, 2012/13



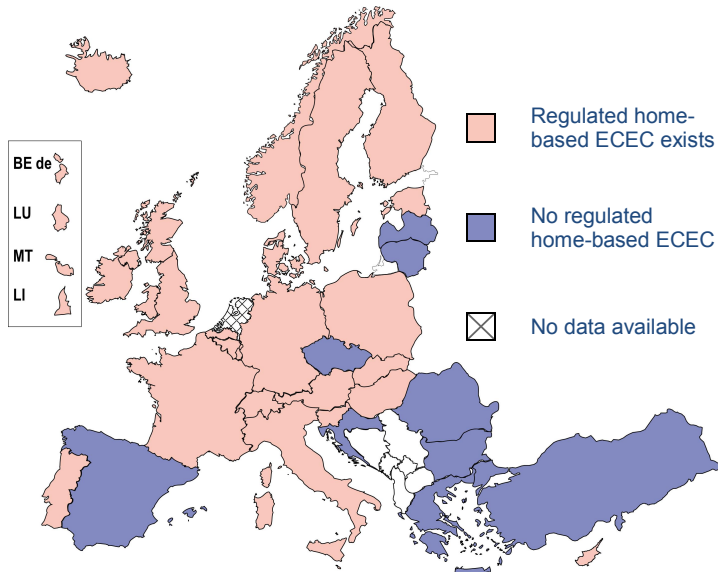
Source: Eurydice.

Affordability is a very important factor in ensuring that all children have access to ECEC, especially those in most need. Most European countries, therefore, offer at least one year of free pre-primary education, while in approximately half of European education systems, ECEC is provided free of charge from age 3. However, the entire phase of ECEC requires parent contributions in Denmark, most *Länder* in Germany, Estonia, Croatia, Slovenia, Iceland, Turkey and Norway. ECEC fees are the lowest in Eastern European and Nordic countries.

In Latvia, Lithuania and Romania only, publicly subsidised ECEC is free from the earliest possible age of participation. Availability, however, is just as important. In these three countries, there is no legal entitlement to a place during most years of ECEC. There is therefore no guarantee for a place for every child and many children still cannot access ECEC.

Most European countries offer regulated home-based ECEC provision in addition to centre-based care

Existence of regulated home-based ECEC, 2012/13



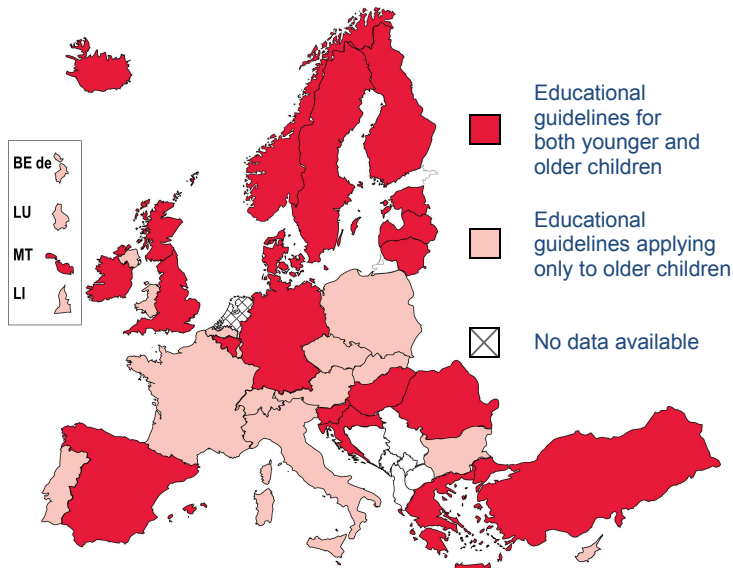
Source: Eurydice.

All European countries have a system of formal centre-based early childhood education and care for children below primary school age. However, the organisation of these services varies across Europe. Two structures are the most common: a unitary system to which all children below primary school age may attend or a split system, where services are delivered in separate settings for younger and older children. Unitary systems prevail in most Nordic countries, Baltic countries, Croatia and Slovenia.

In addition, most countries have also set up regulated home-based provision. This means that services can be offered in a qualified provider's own home.

Only half of European countries provide educational ECEC guidelines for children under 3

Provision of central educational guidelines for centre-based ECEC, 2012/13



The effectiveness of the teaching and learning process largely determines the quality of ECEC. Therefore, all European countries issue official educational guidelines to help settings improve their provision. However, such guidelines in around half of countries are restricted to settings for over three year old children. For younger children, the emphasis tends to be more on the care element of provision. Central ECEC guidelines for children under 3 are more common in countries with unitary systems, where education authorities are in charge for the entire ECEC phase.

The full study *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2014 Edition* can be found in English on the Eurydice website: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/key_data_en.php

For additional information, see: Eurypedia: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia_en.php