



Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: Slovak Republic 2012

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FOREWORD

This publication is intended to be a quick reference guide for anyone with a role to play in encouraging quality in the Slovak Republic's early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce.

There is a growing body of evidence that children starting strong in their learning and well-being will have better outcomes when they grow older. Such evidence has driven policy makers to design an early intervention and re-think their education spending patterns to gain "value for money". At the same time, research emphasises that the benefits from early interventions are conditional on the level of "quality" of ECEC children experience.

What does "quality" mean? *Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care* has identified five policy levers that can encourage quality in ECEC, bringing positive effects on early child development and learning.

- Policy Lever 1: Setting out quality goals and regulations
- Policy Lever 2: Designing and implementing curriculum and standards
- Policy Lever 3: Improving qualifications, training and working conditions
- Policy Lever 4: Engaging families and communities
- Policy Lever 5: Advancing data collection, research and monitoring

Of the five policy levers, the Slovak Republic has selected **Policy Lever 3: Improving Qualifications, Training and Working Conditions** for its current policy focus.

This policy profile for the Slovak Republic would not have been possible without the support of the national authority and the stakeholders involved. The OECD Secretariat would like to thank the national co-ordinators, Viera Hadjukova and Marcela Hanusova, for their work in providing information. We would also like to thank all those who gave their time to respond to our many questions, provide comments on preliminary drafts and validate the information for accuracy. We would also like to thank consultants Janice Heejin Kim and Matias Egeland who worked on sections of the preliminary drafts as part of the OECD team on Early Childhood Education and Care.

The online version of the quality toolbox can be found at: **www.oecd.org/edu/earlychildhood/toolbox**. The online toolbox has additional information, such as a country materials page where actual documents from OECD countries are presented, including curricula, regulatory frameworks and data systems information. All information related to the OECD Network on ECEC is available at: **www.oecd.org/edu/earlychildhood**.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The level of the ECEC workforce is one of the determining factors that has positive effects on child development.

ECEC is a topic of increased policy interest in the Slovak Republic where improving quality in the ECEC sector is a subject of growing importance. The OECD has identified five effective policy levers to encourage quality in the sector: 1) quality goals and regulations; 2) curriculum and guidelines; 3) workforce; 4) family and community engagement; and 5) data, research and monitoring. Of the five aspects, the Slovak Republic considers improving quality in the workforce as a priority; it considers well-educated, well-trained professionals the key factor in providing high-quality ECEC with the most favourable cognitive and social outcomes for children.

However, it is not the qualification per se that has an impact on child outcomes but the staff competencies matter.

It is, however, not the qualification *per se* that has an impact on child outcomes but the *ability* of the staff to create a high-quality pedagogical environment that makes the difference. Research suggests that pedagogical quality includes: good understanding of child development; the ability to develop children's perspectives, praise, comfort, question, be responsive and elicit children's ideas; skills for leadership, problem solving and development of lessons plans; and good vocabulary.

Well-educated/trained staff is better able to create more effective work environments and increase the efficiency of other ECEC staff members; while ongoing professional training maintains the benefits from initial education and allows staff to stay updated on professional developments and best practices, contributing to improved pedagogical and professional quality, and stimulating early child development. Additionally, the ability of staff to provide high-quality care and education is influenced by their working conditions, such as salary and non-financial benefits.

The Slovak Republic could share its good initiatives to raise workforce quality with their peer countries, such as ensuring pay parity between kindergarten and primary school staff, providing mandatory but flexible and varied professional development opportunities, and co-financing such training programmes.

The Slovak Republic's ECEC workforce has several strengths. There is pay parity for kindergarten staff and primary school staff. Initial teacher education programmes are offered by both public and private providers. Professional development is mandatory and provided by a range of different providers, with different modes, on a broad range of topics. The costs of the training are shared between the individuals, government and employers.

International comparative data suggests areas of reflection for the Slovak Republic, such as reviewing qualification requirements, diversifying incentives for professional development and updating the contents of such opportunities, reviewing the quality standards, and advancing gender balance in the workforce.

Capitalising upon its strengths, the Slovak Republic could further enhance quality in its ECEC workforce. Other country practices would suggest such options as: 1) reviewing the qualification requirements; 2) providing more incentives for staff to take up professional development; 3) providing more professional development opportunities to better respond to societal changes, such as providing training on leadership skills for staff and how to introduce the use of ICT in ECEC; 4) reviewing the staff-child ratios in nursery and child care; and 5) improving gender and age balance in the ECEC sector.

The Slovak Republic has undertaken measures to tackle challenges in enhancing workforce quality, focusing on retaining the workforce. More efforts can be made, drawing on other countries' experiences. Options would include reforming qualifications; attracting and retaining more varied staff by advancing the use of recognition of prior learning and offering effective induction programmes; and monitoring staff needs and offering needs-based training.

Common challenges countries face in enhancing quality in ECEC workforce include: 1) improving staff qualifications; 2) securing a high-quality workforce supply; 3) retaining the workforce; 4) workforce and leadership development; and 5) managing the quality of the workforce in private ECEC provision. The Slovak Republic has made several efforts in tackling these challenges, mostly focusing on retaining the workforce, by, for example, giving pay parity to kindergarten teachers with teachers in compulsory education and developing handbooks for staff that provide implementation support.

To further their efforts, the Slovak Republic could consider alternative strategies implemented by Finland and Sweden, such as aligning qualifications between pre-primary and primary teachers; validating existing competencies to allow easier entry into the profession; implementing an induction process for new staff; funding institutions to set up needs-based training programmes; and assessing the education and development needs of ECEC staff.

INTRODUCTION

Aim of the policy profile

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has become a growing policy priority in many countries. A growing body of research recognises that it makes a wide range of benefits, including social and economic benefits, better child well-being and learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning, more equitable outcomes and reduction of poverty, and increased intergenerational social mobility. But these positive benefits are directly related to the “quality” of ECEC.

Definitions of quality differ across countries and across different stakeholder groups depending on beliefs, values, a country’s (or region’s) socio-economic context, and the needs of the community of users. While definitions should be interpreted with caution and sensitivity when comparing cross-country practices, the OECD has taken a two-tier approach to define “quality” to proceed policy discussions. Therefore, this policy profile considers quality, as in “structural quality”¹ and “process quality”², and sets out “child development or “child outcome” as quality targets.

Based on international literature reviews findings, the OECD has identified five levers as key policies to encourage quality in ECEC:

- 1) Quality goals and minimum standards
- 2) Curriculum and pedagogy
- 3) Workforce qualifications, education and training, and working conditions
- 4) Family and community engagement
- 5) Research, monitoring, and evaluation

Of the five levers, the Slovak Republic has selected “workforce qualifications, education and training, and working conditions” to be the theme of this policy profile. As reference countries in focus for international comparison, the Slovak Republic has selected Finland and Sweden.

Structure of the report

This report consists of three chapters:

Chapter 1: What does research say?

This chapter aims to help you to brief political leaders, stakeholders and the media about the latest research and explain why workforce quality and working conditions matter for better child development. It includes an overview of research findings on why qualifications and training and development matter, what the effects of workforce-related aspects are on child development and quality of ECEC provision, which aspects matter in workforce development

and working conditions, policy implications from research, and knowledge gaps in current research.

Chapter 2: Where does the Slovak Republic compared to other countries?

Chapter two provides an international comparative overview of where your country stands with regard to education and training of staff, as well as working conditions. It identifies the strengths and areas for reflection for the Slovak Republic in comparison with the selected reference countries. The section can provide an insight into which aspects of workforce development the Slovak Republic might consider taking policy action, and can raise awareness about policy issues.

Chapter 3: What are the challenges and strategies?

Chapter three presents the challenges countries have faced in improving workforce development and working conditions and gives alternative approaches to overcome these challenges. This section provides a quick overview of what Finland and Sweden have done in tackling challenges in improving the quality of the workforce.

NOTES

- 1 Structural quality consists of “inputs to process-characteristics which create the framework for the processes that children experience”. These characteristics are not only part of the ECEC location in which children participate, but they are part of the environment that surrounds the ECEC setting, *e.g.*, the community. They are often aspects of ECEC that can be regulated, though they may contain variables which cannot be regulated (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).
- 2 Process quality consists of what children actually experience in their programmes – that which happens within a setting. These experiences are thought to have an influence on children’s well-being and development (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

CHAPTER 1

WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY?

Staff qualifications, initial education and professional development contribute to enhancing pedagogical quality, which is – ultimately – highly associated with better child outcomes. It is not the qualification per se that has an impact on child outcomes but the ability of better qualified staff members to create a high-quality pedagogic environment. Key elements of high staff quality are the ways in which staff involve children, stimulate interaction with and between children, and use diverse scaffolding strategies.

Research has shown that working conditions can also improve the quality of ECEC services: better conditions will improve staff job satisfaction and retention. This will influence staff behaviour, encouraging more stable, sensitive and stimulating interactions with children, and thus, lead to better child development. Research has pointed to certain conditions that can impact the quality of ECEC services: i) high staff-child ratio and low group size; ii) competitive wages and other benefits; iii) reasonable schedule/workload; iv) low staff turnover; v) a good physical environment; and vi) a competent and supportive centre manager.

This chapter contains two research briefs:

- Workforce qualifications, education and training
- Working conditions

WHY DO WORKFORCE QUALIFICATIONS, EDUCATION AND TRAINING MATTER FOR BETTER CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

What are “qualifications, education and professional development” in ECEC?

ECEC qualifications indicate the recognised level and types of knowledge, skills and competencies that ECEC staff have received.¹ Formal education in ECEC refers to the level and type of education that ECEC staff pursue to acquire such knowledge, skills and competencies to work in the sector. Professional development provides opportunities for staff who are already working in the sector to update or enhance their practices; it is often referred to as “in-service training”, “continuous education” or “professional training”.

What is at stake?

Recent social changes have challenged traditional views of childhood and child rearing: 1) the changing socio-economic role of women, 2) growing ethnic diversity of developed countries, and 3) changing views on (early) education and the purpose of (early) education. The last two changes have important consequences for what is expected of those who work with young children.

As pointed out by the OECD teachers’ review (OECD, 2005), education systems need to invest in intensive teacher education and training if teachers are to deliver high-quality outcomes. This also refers to the ECEC sector (OECD, 2006). Specific knowledge, skills and competencies are expected of ECEC practitioners. There is a general consensus supported by research that well-educated, well-trained professionals are the key factor in providing high-quality ECEC with the most favourable cognitive and social outcomes for children. Research shows that the behaviour of those who work in ECEC matters and that this is related to their education and training. The qualifications, education and training of ECEC staff are, therefore, an important policy issue (OECD, 2006).

In spite of the consensus on the importance of well-trained staff, governments often fear the funding consequences of raising staff qualifications. Higher qualifications can be followed by increased wage demands which, in turn, contribute significantly to the costs of services. Although the evidence is strong that improved training and qualification levels raise the quality of interaction and pedagogy in ECEC services – and similar evidence exists in favour of staff qualifications – governments often choose not to invest in raising qualifications or funding staff training (OECD, 2006). This might seriously affect ECEC quality and, with this, child development outcomes, since staff are not being optimally trained or educated to stimulate early learning and development.

Although research emphasises the high relevance of adequate staff initial education and continuous professional development opportunities, large differences occur between countries in terms of which qualifications are being asked of ECEC practitioners.

Opportunities to participate in professional development and in-service training also vary greatly across countries and between education and child care in split systems. The qualification requirements vary from no formal education at all to a specialised bachelor's or even master's degree, and professional development and training ranges from being compulsory to being based on voluntary will in combination with no additional funding for training (OECD, 2006).

Often there is a difference between the qualifications required to work with very young children (up to three or four years of age) and the qualifications needed to be a teacher for children age four to primary school age. This is especially the case in countries with a so-called split system: children ages zero to three or four attend different ECEC institutions (often day care services) than those ages three or four to primary schooling age, who more regularly attend pre-primary services. In countries with an integrated system where all young children (age zero to primary school age) attend the same centres, all practitioners usually have to meet the same requirements in terms of education and training (Eurydice, 2009; OECD, 2006). The latter encourages continuous child development throughout the ECEC years and ensures greater professionalism of staff working with both younger and older children (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000).

Why do qualifications, education and professional development matter?

Staff qualifications/education/professional development → pedagogical quality → child outcomes

The main importance of staff lies in their effect on the process and content quality of ECEC² (Sheridan, 2009; Pramling and Pramling Samuelsson, in press 2011). The training and education of ECEC staff affects the quality of services and outcomes primarily through the knowledge, skills and competencies that are transmitted and encouraged by practitioners. It is also considered important that staff believe in their ability to organise and execute the courses of action necessary to bring about desired results (Fives, 2003). Qualifications can matter in terms of which skill sets and what knowledge are recognised as important for working with young children. The skills and staff traits that research identifies as important in facilitating high-quality services and outcomes are:

- Good understanding of child development and learning;
- Ability to develop children's perspectives;
- Ability to praise, comfort, question and be responsive to children;
- Leadership skills, problem solving and development of targeted lesson plans; and
- Good vocabulary and ability to elicit children's ideas.

However, it is not the qualification *per se* that has an impact on child outcomes but the ability of better qualified staff members to create a high-quality pedagogic environment that makes the difference (Elliott, 2006; Sheridan *et al.*, 2009). There is strong evidence that enriched stimulating environments and high-quality pedagogy are fostered by better qualified staff; and better quality pedagogy leads to better learning outcomes (Litjens and Taguma, 2010). Key elements of high staff quality are the way staff involve children and stimulate interaction with and between children as well as staff's scaffolding strategies, such as guiding, modelling and questioning.

More specialised staff education and training on ECEC are strongly associated with stable, sensitive and stimulating interactions (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000). Other elements of high staff quality include staff's content (curriculum) knowledge and their ability to create a multi-disciplinary learning environment (Pramling and Pramling Samuelsson, in press 2011).

What matters most?

Level of education and/or pedagogical practices

Studies that have addressed the question of whether higher staff qualifications lead to better pedagogical practice have yielded mixed results. There are various studies showing that, generally, a higher level of education is associated with higher pedagogic quality in ECEC settings. One study found that preschool teachers with bachelor's degrees were the most effective practitioners. Their effectiveness was measured within the classroom and based on stimulation, responsiveness and engagement of the children in learning activities (Howes *et al.*, 2003). The results of the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study from England (United Kingdom) have also shown that key explanatory factors for high-quality ECEC were related to "staff with higher qualifications, staff with leadership skills and long-serving staff; trained staff working alongside and supporting less qualified staff; staff with a good understanding of child development and learning" (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). Higher proportions of staff with low-level qualifications were related with less favourable child outcomes in the socio-emotional domain (social relationships with their peers and co-operation).

However, the general conclusion that higher education of ECEC staff leads to higher pedagogical quality and, therefore, to better child outcomes is not supported by all studies. Early *et al.* (2007) emphasise that teacher quality is a very complex issue. There is no simple relationship between the level of education of staff and classroom quality or learning outcomes. They studied the relationship between child outcomes and staff qualifications and found no, or contradictory, associations between the two. They argue that increasing staff education will not suffice for improving classroom quality or maximising children's academic gains. Instead, raising the effectiveness of early childhood education will likely require a broad range of professional development activities and support for staff's interactions with children. An area that can improve pedagogical practices of ECEC staff includes supporting staff's competence to communicate and interact with children in a shared and sustainable manner (Sheridan *et al.*, 2009).

Research also points out that it is not necessary that all staff have high general levels of education. Highly qualified staff can have a positive influence on those who work with them and who do not have the same high qualifications. The EPPE study finds that the observed behaviour of lower-qualified staff turned out to be positively influenced by working alongside highly trained staff (Sammons, 2010).

Specialised education and training

Not only the level of education but also the content of the staff's educational or training curriculum is important for the level of quality in ECEC. Specialised education is associated with better child outcomes and improved staff competences to provide suitable pedagogical learning opportunities. Specialisation can refer to "any education or training focusing on early childhood education, child development or similar, above and beyond general educational attainments" (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

Initial education and training in areas, such as early child development and early education, increase the likelihood that practitioners are effective in promoting the educational, socio-emotional and healthy development of children.

The practitioners' ability to create rich, stimulating environments in ECEC is jeopardised when staff have inadequate, insufficient or incorrect content and pedagogical knowledge. When trained on matters related to early development and care, staff can better develop a child's perspective (Sommer *et al.*, 2010); are better able to integrate playing and learning into practice (Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson, 2008; Johansson and Pramling Samuelsson, 2009); have increased ability to solve problems and develop targeted lesson plans; and have an improved vocabulary, which stimulates early literacy development (NIEER, 2004). Additionally, staff with higher education *and* specialised training engage in more positive teacher-child interactions including praising, comforting, questioning and being responsive to children (Howes *et al.*, 2003).

However, specialised education and training does not *guarantee* greater effectiveness (Hyson *et al.*, 2009). The quality of the education or training programme may be a more critical factor in staff's ability to stimulate children's development and learning. There is a strong need for good initial staff preparation; and there is a call for greater consistency across initial professional preparation programmes to enhance quality (Elliot, 2006).

Ongoing education and training are also important. Research shows that in order for staff to maintain their professional quality, they need to engage in ongoing professional development³. A well-trained practitioner does not only have a good initial level of education but makes sure that the effects of initial education do not fade out (Fukkink and Lont, 2007; Mitchell and Cubey, 2003). Ongoing professional development has the potential to fill in the knowledge and skills that staff may be lacking or require updating due to changes in particular knowledge fields. This is especially crucial in ECEC where new programmes are being developed continuously. The body of research on what works is growing, the discussions on quality in ECEC are ongoing, and the focus has changed to a developmental perspective.

In-service (ongoing) education and training can be conducted "on the job" or can be provided by an external source, such as training institutes or colleges. It can be provided through for instance staff meetings, workshops, conferences, subject training, field-based consultation training, supervised practices and mentoring. The key to effective professional development is identifying the right training strategies to help ECEC practitioners stay updated on scientifically based methods and curriculum subject knowledge so as to be able to apply this knowledge in their work (Litjens and Taguma, 2010). It also pointed out that it should continue over a longer period of time: staff should have long-term or regular opportunities for training (Sheridan, 2001). Only when learning experiences are targeted to the needs of staff and are true learning experiences with development opportunities can professional development have favourable outcomes (Mitchell and Cubey, 2003).

An effective way of improving knowledge and skills is found to be subject training. Field-based consultation can also be very effective, as it provides ECEC staff with the possibility to receive feedback on their practices. Furthermore, practitioners who do not have a degree, but who attend ECEC-relevant professional workshops are found to provide higher quality care than colleagues who do not attend (Burchinal *et al.*, 2002). However, in general, there is little clarity about what forms of professional development are *most* effective. One of the reasons is that staff have different needs: practitioners have very different backgrounds, and effective training methods should suit these differences (Elliott, 2006).

Leadership of managerial staff

Managers play an important role in supporting professional development. Managers matter for the extent to which the centre supports, stimulates and subsidises professional development (Ackerman, 2006). Staff quality is maintained by leadership that motivates and encourages working as a team, information sharing and professional staff development (OECD, 2006). The quality of leaders and managers of ECEC services is also strongly related to their level of education and professional development, as found in the EPPE study (Sylva *et al.*, 2010).

Differences between education and training for educating different age groups

The United States National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) points out that although staff education and training has an impact on infants and toddlers, staff's formal education is a stronger predictor for children of preschool age than for younger children (NICHD, 2000). For younger children (toddlers and infants), specialised and practical training seems to be more strongly associated with pedagogic quality and cognitive and social outcomes.

Social equality and professional development

ECEC is often seen as a vehicle to give children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds a “head start” when commencing compulsory education. Early childhood educators come across increasingly complex social environments and encounter a multiplicity of family backgrounds and experiences. These factors create imperatives to adopt new pedagogies and organisational practices to accommodate this pluralism (Elliott, 2006). In various countries, this has led to knowledge and skills requirements for staff.

In line with the issues of integration and prevention of social inequality highlighted by politicians and professionals, current and emerging content for continuing professional development include: intercultural approaches, approaches to second languages, working with children with special needs, working with children at risk and special focus on language acquisition (Eurydice, 2009). However, little is known yet about the effectiveness of these approaches.

What are the policy implications?

Raising qualifications of ECEC practitioners

Highly qualified practitioners often provide better quality ECEC. This can yield better child outcomes, both socially and academically, not only in the short term but also in the long term. It is not necessary that all staff working in ECEC have high levels of education, which may also be impossible to realise and not desirable. However, those with lower levels of general education should work alongside those who are highly qualified.

Providing ongoing professional development to ECEC staff

Ongoing professional development can lead to higher quality ECEC services and outcomes. Attending a workshop may be an easy way to realise means of professional development; however, high-quality subject training, field-based consultation training or supervised practices may be more effective. Ongoing professional development should not only be available, but it should be a requirement to stay and grow in the profession. Furthermore, professional development should be tailored to staff's needs.

Providing specialised training courses for those working with young children

In-service training that provides possibilities for ECEC specialisation is considered beneficial: educating young children requires specialised skills and content knowledge, including a variety of subject and development areas.

What is still unknown?

Concept of quality in ECEC

Researchers are still debating the concept of “quality” in ECEC. Judgement of quality involves values. The effect of the education and training of teachers on the quality of ECEC depends on the definition of quality and the instrument that is used to measure this quality. Children’s developmental outcomes are often used as the most important dependent variable in assessing high-quality ECEC, but this leaves the debate open on *which* developmental outcomes should be studied.

Content of training and education of ECEC staff

The debate around the concept of “quality” in ECEC also means that the content of the training and education of ECEC staff remains a point of discussion. Some early childhood specialists voice concerns about the suitability for young children of the emphasis on 1) standards and testing (performance rather than meaning making), 2) the teaching of predefined knowledge rather than play, discovery, personal choice and the responsibility of the child – the traditional tools of early childhood learning, and 3) the neglect in ECEC curricula of developmental readiness.

Effectiveness of the level of education and different in-service training strategies

Even though correlations have been found between the level of education and pedagogical quality, the exact relationship between the two is still unclear. Also, little is known about the effectiveness of different training strategies to help ECEC practitioners stay updated. More research is needed on how to engage staff in learning about and implementing evidence-based practices (Diamond and Powell, 2011).

Knowledge, leadership and competences of managerial staff

Focus has been on the individual qualifications of staff. Knowledge, leadership and competences of the manager have also been found to be important. Research is needed that shows how important this is and why; what kind of qualifications and training would be most relevant for managers; what would be the most effective delivery of such training; etc.

Ethnic diversity in training and education

The effectiveness of teacher training (both initial and in-service) in which special attention is devoted to social and ethnic diversity has hardly been evaluated. This is a growing issue of importance because of the greater ethnic diversity of the population many countries are facing.

WHY DO WORKING CONDITIONS MATTER FOR BETTER CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

What are “working conditions”?

Working conditions in ECEC settings are often referred to as structural quality indicators (e.g., wages, staff-child ratio, maximum group size, working hours, etc.) and other characteristics (e.g., non-financial benefits, team-work, manager’s leadership, workload, etc.) that can influence the ability of professionals to do their work well and their satisfaction with the workplace, work tasks and nature of the job.

What is at stake?

Attracting, training and retaining suitably qualified ECEC staff is a challenge. Good working conditions are strong incentives for qualified staff to enter the profession. Structural quality indicators have received ample attention because they can usually be regulated or guided at the national level. For staff quality, it is also crucial that practitioners are motivated and supported in applying what they have learned.

The European Commission’s Early Matters symposium (European Commission, 2009) concluded that many research findings indicate that, in addition to training and education of staff, staff working conditions are important in providing safe, healthy and good learning environments for children. In spite of these findings, the ECEC sector is usually associated with relatively poor working conditions and poor compensation leading to high turnover rates. ECEC centres often experience turnover rates exceeding 40% annually, undermining the quality of care (Moon and Burbank, 2004).

Why do working conditions in ECEC matter?

Research points out that the ability of staff to attend to the needs of children is influenced not only by their level of education and training but also by external factors, such as their work environment, salary and work benefits (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000). Working conditions can have an impact on staff job satisfaction and their ability to carry out their tasks as well as their possibilities to positively interact with children, give them enough attention and stimulate their development.

Strongly associated with stable, sensitive and stimulating interactions with children are the context and conditions in which staff member works. One study found that low wages: i) effect the ways in which staff interact with children, and ii) are related to high turnover rates (Huntsman, 2008). High turnover rates can have a negative effect on ECEC quality since staff provision is less stable which, in turn, can impact child development. When staff members regularly change within a group of children, staff and children are less able to develop stable relationships; and nurturing, stimulating interactions take place less often (CCI, 2006).

The body of research on the effects of working conditions on child development is not very extensive, and findings do not always point in the same direction. This is mainly because there is a complex inter-relationship between staff-child ratios, staff qualifications, quality and type of provision that makes it difficult to single out the effect of a particular characteristic of working conditions (Sammons, 2010).

What matters most?

First, it is important to point out that more research is needed in this area. Available research findings focus on the effects on staff satisfaction rather than on child development. Many aspects of working conditions are found to be related to the quality of ECEC services, while a few aspects have been found to be related to child development. Table 1.1 presents an overview of research findings, pointing to characteristics of working conditions that matter.

Table 1.1. Which staff working conditions improve ECEC?

Optimal staff working conditions	Areas of improvement	
	<i>ECEC services</i>	<i>Child outcomes</i>
1. High staff-child ratio and low group size	X	X
2. Competitive wages and benefits	X	unclear
3. Reasonable schedule/workload	X	unclear
4. Low staff turnover	X	X
5. Stimulating and playful physical environment	X	unclear
6. Competent and supportive centre manager	X	unclear

Note: Areas of improvement that remain “unclear” present important opportunities for future ECEC research.

Source: Ackerman, 2006; Burchinal *et al.*, 2002; De Schipper *et al.*, 2004; De Schipper *et al.*, 2006; De Schipper *et al.*, 2007; Diamond and Powell, 2011; Huntsman, 2008; Litjens and Taguma, 2010; Loeb *et al.*, 2004; Moon and Burbank, 2004; Sheridan and Shuster, 2001; Sheridan *et al.*, 2009; Torquati *et al.*, 2007.

Staff-child ratio

Higher staff-child ratios, referring to a smaller number of children per staff, are usually found to enhance ECEC quality and facilitate better developmental outcomes for children (Burchinal *et al.*, 2002, De Schipper *et al.*, 2006; Huntsman, 2008; Torquati *et al.*, 2007). While there have been some older studies with contradictory results, the weight of evidence favours the conclusion that staff-child ratio in an ECEC setting is significantly associated with quality (Huntsman, 2008). Findings on “quality” can be summarised as follows.

Better staff-child interactions and less stress for staff

Larger staff-child ratios are associated with better working conditions and less stress. Staff are found to be more supportive when they are responsible for a smaller group of children (De Schipper *et al.*, 2006). A higher staff-child ratio improves working conditions within ECEC settings, as staff can give sufficient attention to different developmental domains and create more caring and meaningful interactions with children. As the number of children per staff member increases, staff spend more time in restrictive and routine communication with children and less in positive verbal interactions (Litjens and Taguma, 2010; Rao *et al.*, 2003).

Better child development

Children become more co-operative in activities and interactions with larger staff-child ratios. They also tend to perform better in cognitive and linguistic assessments when staff-child ratios are higher. Furthermore, academic development seems to be enhanced by higher staff-child ratios, although there are not many (recent) studies that have investigated this topic (Huntsman, 2008; Sylva *et al.*, 2004). A limitation of the research mentioned above is that most findings are almost exclusively correlational and there have been very few experimental studies (Huntsman, 2008). An experimental study carried out by Chetty *et al.* (2011) found that even though smaller staff-child ratios of three-to-four-year-olds improved

outcomes, there were no long-lasting effects on adult earnings. However, the *overall* quality of the ECEC setting did have an effect on adult earnings.

High staff-child ratios are considered particularly important for younger children; there is evidence indicating that infants and toddlers especially benefit from high staff-child ratios (De Schipper, 2006). In many countries staff-child ratios have been regulated with higher staff-child ratios for the very young and lower ratios for older children (NICHD, 2002). Research is lacking, however, on exactly which ratio is most favourable to enhance teacher job satisfaction, ECEC quality and child outcomes. Nevertheless, many early childhood educators believe that anything less than a 1:3 or 1:4 ratio for children up to two years old is insufficient to allow staff to interact effectively with each child (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

Group size

Increased process quality, although the direct effect remains unclear

Group sizes are often regulated, prescribing the number of children to be arranged and supervised as a group. Not all studies find effects of group size on the quality of ECEC: effect sizes are usually small, and the “size” factor is often difficult to single out when staff-child ratios are included in the same analyses. Another research limitation on group size is that it rarely takes into account the age mixing of children, which may be an important factor (with homogeneous age groups being easier to handle). The overall research conclusion, however, is that group size has an effect on process quality (e.g., staff-child relationship, staff-parent communication). If staff experience their working conditions as more pleasant, this will result in more caring and stimulating behaviour (Huntsman, 2008; Burchinal *et al.*, 2002; Clarke-Stewart *et al.*, 2002).

Classroom quality and staff job satisfaction

Research suggests that it is not only the staff-child ratio but also the number of adults in a classroom that impacts quality and job satisfaction. The quality of the classroom environment is found to improve with every additional adult in the room. When practitioners work together in a classroom, this provides opportunities for supervision, consultation and discussing work challenges (Goelman *et al.*, 2006). Clear roles and expectations must be defined to optimise teamwork in ECEC settings. Under current practice, the hiring of assistants has generally failed to compensate for larger groups and less contact with teachers (Chartier and Geneix, 2006; Finn and Pannozzo, 2004).

Remunerations: wages and other benefits

Higher wages and better working conditions affect people’s job satisfaction, work motivation and, indirectly, the quality of their teaching, caring and interactions with children (Huntsman, 2008; Moon and Burbank, 2004).

Low wages leading to less process quality for child development

Research has indicated that where there are very low wages in ECEC, it “impacts quality primarily by preventing qualified and committed individuals from considering working in child care or early education in the first place” (Manlove and Guzell, 1997). Low wages are, as mentioned above, related to high staff turnover rates (Moon and Burbank, 2004), which influence children’s language and socio-emotional development as well as the relationships they form with practitioners (Whitebook 2002; Torquati 2007). Low wages are also correlated with the perception that working in the ECEC sector is not a high-status profession (Ackerman, 2006).

Although pay in ECEC-related professions in most OECD countries is not very high (OECD, 2006), this is not the case in all OECD countries. In Scandinavian countries, for instance, where a bachelor's degree is needed to work as an ECEC teacher, staff receive better pay, and their job has a higher status than in countries with lower pay. Countries with split systems often have lower education requirements and lower wages for practitioners working with very young children (up to three or four years of age) and higher educational requirements and better pay (and better status) for those working with children ages three or four to primary school age.

Non-financial incentives leading to better job satisfaction and better process quality

The number of vacation days and the compensation that ECEC practitioners receive for additional work hours are also found to have a positive effect on job satisfaction. This, in turn, is related to the quality of teacher-child interactions (Doherty *et al.*, 2000).

Social status and professional identity

Even when preschool teachers experience higher status within the sector, they do not necessarily experience improved recognition from the outside world, something seen in Denmark and Sweden (Berntsson, 2006). In order to raise the value attributed to the profession and counter gender stereotypes, it is suggested that the “professional identity” of the ECEC workforce must change (OECD, 2006).

Turnover rate

Stability in care has been found to be strongly and consistently positively related to child outcomes (Loeb *et al.*, 2004). High staff turnover is pronounced across studies of child care in various countries, somewhere between 30% and 50% annually (Huntsman, 2008; Moon and Burbank, 2004).

High staff turnover is associated with lower quality service and poorer child outcomes. Centres with low staff turnover rates have staff that engage in more appropriate and attentive interactions with children. High turnover rates disrupt the continuity of care. Moon and Burbank (2004) argue that when turnover rates are high, children spend less time being engaged in meaningful activities.

Workload

Heavy workloads are associated with stressed staff. Workload refers to the number of working hours, indicating the extent to which staff's schedules are compatible with family life and the physical demands of the job. Large group sizes, low staff-child ratios and a heavy workload are potential stressors for ECEC practitioners. In general, stressed staff perform less well. Some research findings show the effects of workload on ECEC quality, indicating that practitioners with a heavy workload perform less well than colleagues with lighter schedules (De Schipper *et al.*, 2007).

Physical aspects of the setting

A rich playing and learning environment is found to be of importance. More space is considered beneficial for child development, although the full impact or effects of physical aspects remain unclear. The United States National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD, 2002) found a significant link between positive care giving behaviour and the physical characteristics of their environment, *e.g.*, the space requirements in more general terms and the instruments and materials available within the setting. Children were

found to be less easily distracted in settings where they had more space available to them. Also, in these circumstances, staff provided more age-appropriate practices and behaviour.

Cross-cultural studies of ECEC quality highlight the fact that differences in physical space and staff-child ratio create different opportunities for staff. With more space, staff are better able to organise children into smaller groups, which, in turn, creates better learning conditions and opportunities for children to play, relax and learn in a variety of ways (Sheridan and Shuster, 2001; Sheridan *et al.*, 2009). Research appears to provide little or no guidance regarding the appropriateness of space requirement regulations (Huntsman, 2008), and further research on the importance of space for child development is needed.

Role of the manager in supporting professional development

Managers are important in facilitating conducive working conditions and supporting professional development. Although part of working conditions is subject to regulation, another part is centre-specific. ECEC providers who provide better working conditions are observed to provide better care and education (Litjens and Taguma, 2010; Diamond and Powell, 2011). The role of managers of ECEC centres is important in this, as they are the key factor in providing favourable working conditions for their staff.

Evidence shows that ECEC practitioners who experience little professional support from the centre's management have lower job satisfaction and perform their teaching and care-giving tasks less well than those that are professionally supported (Ackerman, 2006). Professional support usually means that the centre supports, stimulates and subsidises professional development, there are regular staff meetings with the management of the centre, and there is encouragement and consultation by colleagues (Ackerman, 2006). The importance of ongoing professional development in making sure that practitioners stay up-to-date with evidence-based practices (staff meetings, conferences and workshops, supervised practices, etc.) has been found in various studies (Litjens and Taguma, 2010).

What are the policy implications?

Investing in ECEC to improve working conditions

Research findings indicate that staff who are happy in their job provide better care and are better practitioners. Group size and staff-child ratio are important quality factors in facilitating good working conditions as well as staff having enough time and attention to spend on the children under their supervision. Smaller groups and higher staff-child ratios can facilitate this. Time for staff to plan, document, analyse and reflect – individually and collectively – on their work with children is seen to improve quality. However, increasing staff-child ratios and reducing group size is expensive. For example, reducing the average class size from 15 to 10 requires a 50% increase in the number of teachers and, thus, total teacher salaries paid. Plus there is little clarity on exactly which group sizes or staff-child ratios are most favourable or optimal (Chetty *et al.*, 2011).

In order to enhance the status and quality of early childhood work, governments may wish to consider introducing equal working conditions (salaries, benefits and professional development opportunities) for equivalent qualifications across the early childhood and primary education fields. Care should be taken that in-service training is linked to career progression and to obtaining further qualification (OECD, 2006).

Giving financial and non-financial incentives to keep well-trained staff

Compensation is one important factor in facilitating good working conditions. Increased salaries will most likely reduce staff turnover rates and attract better qualified staff. Additionally, it increases job satisfaction. Providing non-financial support and incentives for practitioners is also likely to improve staff well-being and encourage ongoing professional development.

Turnover should only be welcomed if the lowest-quality ECEC staff are leaving the profession; this practice opens the door to more high-quality staff. New research suggests that the “forcing out” of low-quality ECEC staff may dramatically improve student outcomes (Hanushek, 2010).

Raising awareness of ECEC centre managers

Going beyond the regulations, centre managers can be seen to play an important role in providing good working conditions for their staff, facilitating professional development and further training of staff. Raising awareness among managers on the importance of ensuring favourable working conditions and how they can actually facilitate these are important in raising ECEC quality (OECD, 2006).

What is still unknown?

Relationship between working conditions and child development

The research evidence for the impact of working conditions on child outcomes is not yet very strong. Working conditions have not often been at the heart of studies. Researchers have linked certain workplace characteristics (staff-child ratios and staff compensation) to differences in programme quality and/or to staff turnover and less often to measures of child development (Whitebook, 2009). Research on how working conditions affect ECEC quality and child outcomes could shed new light on the importance of working conditions.

More research on which aspects of working conditions matter most for which children

Staff-child ratios are found to be important for all young children, but there is evidence that infants and toddlers especially benefit from high staff-child ratios (De Schipper, 2006). The exact role of space in facilitating better working environments and enhancing child development also remains largely unknown, and the role of multiple adults in ECEC settings is not sufficiently defined to maximise the impact on child outcomes. Additionally, no studies have specifically investigated whether working conditions (and which aspects of working conditions) have different effects on different groups of children, e.g., migrant children or children at risk.

NOTES

- 1 In the literature, “staff” is the term that is usually used to refer to those who work directly with children in the ECEC field. They are also referred to as “professionals”, “teachers”, “caregivers” or “practitioners”.
- 2 “Process quality” refers to what children actually experience in their programmes: that which happens within a setting. “Content quality” specifically refers to the substance of what is being learned (e.g., curriculum).
- 3 “Ongoing professional development” refers to in-service education and training. Litjens and Taguma (2010) give a clear definition of in-service education. This “includes all planned programmes of learning opportunities for staff members of ECEC providers for the purpose of improving the performance of individuals in already assigned positions”.

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CHAPTER 2

WHERE DOES THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC STAND COMPARED TO OTHER COUNTRIES?¹

The Slovak Republic's ECEC workforce has several strengths. There is pay parity for kindergarten staff and primary school staff. Initial teacher education programmes are offered by both public and private providers. Professional development is mandatory and provided by a range of different providers, with different modes, on a broad range of topics. Training costs are shared between individuals, the government and employers.

Capitalising upon the strengths, the Slovak Republic could further enhance quality in its ECEC workforce. Other country practices would suggest such options as: 1) reviewing the qualification requirements; 2) providing more incentives for staff to take up professional development; 3) providing more professional development opportunities to better respond to societal changes, such as providing training on leadership skills for staff and how to introduce the use of ICT in ECEC; 4) reviewing the staff-child ratios in nursery and child care; and 5) improving gender and age balance in the ECEC sector.

In the Slovak Republic, ECEC is separated into nursery schools covering children from birth to age three and kindergartens that care for children from the age of three up until compulsory primary school age. In the Slovak Republic, compulsory school commences at age six, whereas it starts at age seven in Finland and Sweden. Finland separates the year before formal schooling (for six-year-olds) from ECEC for younger children: these children attend a preparatory preschool year which forms part of ECEC.

Slovakian kindergartens are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, while the child care sector is primarily the responsibility of local service providers. On the contrary, both Finland and Sweden have an integrated system of ECEC where the responsibilities for care and education across the entire age range are under one lead ministry. The latter results in educational requirements for ECEC staff depending on function, but being similar for staff working with children in the whole age range.

Overall, the Slovak Republic has a good practice regarding the provision and encouragement of professional development in particular. Some potential areas for reflection are mainly related to staff training and development and retaining workforce.

As child care is mostly regulated at the local level in the Slovak Republic, data for this sector has often not been provided in the “Survey for the Quality Toolbox and Portal”, and data is therefore lacking on certain aspects of child care in this section. Subsequently, some of the strengths and areas for reflection regarding workforce and working conditions in the Slovak Republic are based on the practice and regulation for kindergartens. In some cases, the practice of the reference countries in the child care sector will be addressed to show how there are different situations and practices across different countries and to provide input for reflection for the Slovak Republic on child care in addition to kindergarten.

Strengths

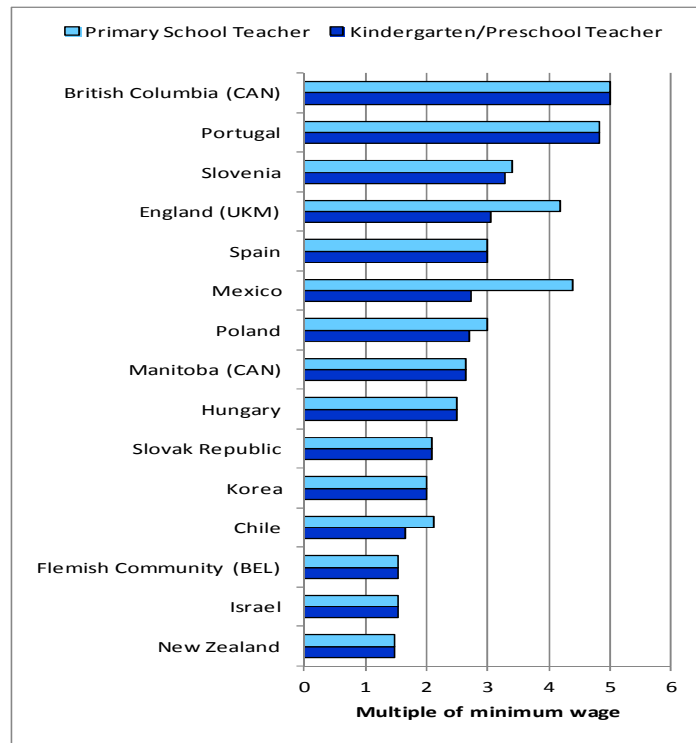
Pay parity between kindergarten and primary school staff

All ECEC staff earn above the minimum wage set for their countries. But there is a significant wage range across countries. Oftentimes, kindergarten or preschool staff receive higher salaries than other ECEC staff (Figure 2.1).

In the Slovak Republic, kindergarten teachers (staff in teaching positions) are paid 2.1 times the minimum wage. Furthermore, kindergarten teachers receive the same remuneration as their primary school colleagues. Many other OECD countries are following the Slovak Republic in this initiative.

Figure 2.1. Remuneration of ECEC staff

Given as multiple of minimum wage



Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Both public and private provision of initial education

Initial education is more commonly provided by public institutions than private institutions; this is especially the case for kindergarten or preschool staff (Table 2.1). Private institutions might offer initial education programmes for a higher price, whereas public institutions often charge lower fees. However, this is not always the case: private institutions can receive public funding.

In the Slovak Republic there is both public and private provision of initial education for kindergarten staff. Finland offers public and private education for all ECEC staff, including staff in caring positions and family day care staff. In Sweden there is no private provision of initial education for ECEC staff: all education programmes for ECEC staff are offered by public institutions.

Table 2.1. Public and private provision of initial education

	Kindergarten or preschool staff	Child care staff	Family day care staff
Public	Australia, Austria, British Columbia (CAN), Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Flemish Community (BEL), French Community (BEL), Georgia (USA), Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Manitoba (CAN), Massachusetts (USA), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Carolina (USA), Norway, Oklahoma (USA), Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey	Australia, British Columbia (CAN), Denmark, Finland, Flemish Community (BEL), French Community (BEL), Germany, Hungary, Japan, Italy, Korea, Manitoba (CAN), Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Spain, Sweden	Australia, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Manitoba (CAN), Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN)
Private	Austria, British Columbia (CAN), Estonia, Finland, Flemish Community (BEL), Georgia (USA), Germany, Italy, Korea, Massachusetts (USA), New Zealand*, North Carolina (USA), Norway, Oklahoma (USA), Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Slovak Republic, Spain	Australia, British Columbia (CAN), Finland, French Community (BEL), Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, New Zealand*, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Spain	Australia, Austria, Finland, Germany, Italy, Manitoba (CAN), Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN)

* For New Zealand, regarding kindergarten/preschool – private provision, data refers only to initial education provision for *kaiako* (teacher for indigenous/pacific children) and not for kindergarten teachers. Regarding child care – private provision, data refers only to the initial education provision for playgroup leaders.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Mandatory professional development

Mandatory professional development can ensure that staff remain up-to-date on knowledge of ECEC and child development, and can ensure a stable level of quality. Professional development is more frequently mandatory for kindergarten/teaching staff than for care centre staff or staff in child caring positions (Figure 2.2, Panels A and B). In the Slovak Republic, uptake of professional development is mandatory for kindergarten staff. It is also mandatory in Finland for all types of ECEC staff. Finland is among the countries to report that it is mandatory for family day care staff to complete in-service training (Figure 2.2, Panel C). In Sweden, staff are not obliged to take up training when working in ECEC.

Sharing of costs of professional development

Sharing of costs of professional development makes participation less expensive for the individual and might also increase uptake. The costs of in-service training in the Slovak Republic, Finland and Sweden are shared between the government, the employer and the employee (Figure 2.2). The government and employer bear all the training costs for family day care staff in Finland.

Figure 2.2. Funding of professional development

Panel A. For preschool/kindergarten staff				Panel B. For child care staff			
	Government	Employer	Individual		Government	Employer	Individual
Australia	X	X	X	Australia	X	X	X
Austria*	X	X	X	Austria*	X	X	X
Belgium (Flemish and French)	X			Belgium (Flemish and French)	X		
Czech Republic**	X	X	X	British Columbia* (CAN)	X	X	X
England (UKM)	X			Czech Republic		X	
Estonia*	X	X	X	England (UKM)	X		
Finland*	X	X	X	Finland*	X	X	X
Georgia* (USA)	X	X		Hungary*	X		
Hungary*	X		X	Ireland			X
Ireland	X			Israel			X
Israel			X	Italy		X	X
Italy	X	X	X	Japan	X	X	X
Japan*	X	X	X	Korea*	X	X	X
Korea	X	X	X	Manitoba (CAN)	X	X	X
Manitoba (CAN)*	X	X	X	Mexico*	X		
Massachusetts (USA)	X	X		Netherlands	X	X	X
Mexico*	X			New Zealand	X	X	
Netherlands	X	X	X	Norway**	X	X	
New Zealand	X	X		Poland	X	X	X
North Carolina* (USA)	X	X	X	Prince Edward Island (CAN)*	X	X	X
Norway	X	X		Scotland (UKM)	X	X	X
Oklahoma* (USA)	X			Spain*	X	X	X
Poland	X	X	X	Sweden**	X	X	X
Portugal	X	X	X				
Prince Edward Island (CAN)*	X	X	X				
Slovak Republic*	X	X	X				
Slovenia*	X	X	X				
Spain*	X	X	X				
Sweden	X	X	X				
Turkey	X		X				

Panel C. For domestic day care staff			
	Government	Employer	Individual
Finland*	X	X	a
Flemish Community (BEL)*	X	a	a
French Community (BEL)	X	a	a
Italy	a	X	X

* Staff uptake of professional education is compulsory at the individual level. In countries without *, uptake of professional development by staff is voluntary.

** For Czech Republic, training is only mandatory for directors of preschools/kindergartens. For Norway, data regarding child care refers to child/youth workers. For Sweden, data regarding child care refers to childminders.

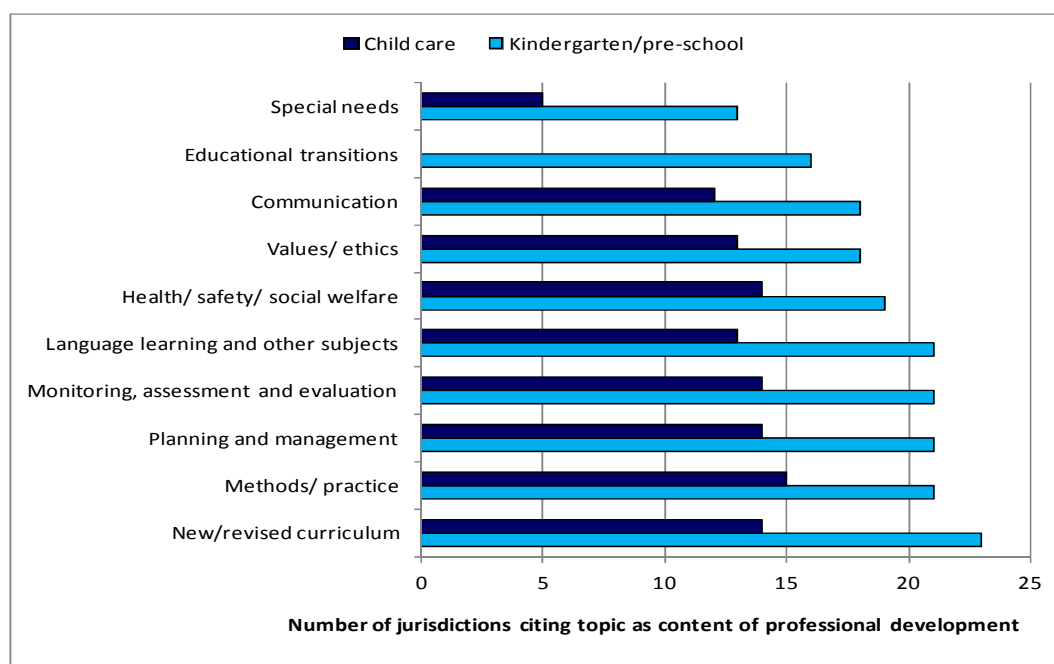
Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Professional development covering a broad range of topics

Professional development can be offered on different subjects or topics (Figure 2.3). The focus or content of professional development is on "new or revised curriculum" in early education, while it is on "methods and practice" in child caring related jobs. Planning and management is a popular subject in training as well as monitoring, assessment and evaluation. Development in management, planning and leadership are important for the quality of ECEC. The absence of a cohesive leadership strategy or good management can be a significant risk to improving quality in ECEC.

Special needs are the least frequently cited topic of professional development. Training on educational transitions is offered to staff that work with older children who are closer to the primary schooling age, mostly teaching staff/kindergarten teachers. Training in this ensures a smooth transition from ECEC to primary schooling.

Professional development for kindergarten or preschool staff in the Slovak Republic provides training in all the subjects listed in Figure 2.3, except for special needs. Sweden focuses largely on curriculum and curriculum subjects in professional development but also on monitoring and assessment strategies. Finland includes all the listed subjects in Figure 2.3 for both kindergarten and child caring staff, except for the subject of educational transitions in which only early education teaching staff are being trained.

Figure 2.3. Content of professional development²

Note 1: Countries were given a range of topics to select from, including the possibility to list topics not mentioned in the selection. Answers indicating "other" without specifying which topic was referred to with "other" is not included in this figure.

Note 2: Countries with an integrated ECEC system who indicated that the subjects of professional development were similar for the whole ECEC sector/ECEC age range: responses have been included in both "child care" and "kindergarten/preschool" since the content of professional development refers to the whole ECEC age range, including ECEC workers with younger children (herein referred to as "child care").

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Broad professional development provision

Choice of providers can allow staff, centres and kindergartens, as well as authorities, to choose between different provisions dependent on cost effectiveness and purpose.

Many countries have a wide range of providers of professional development, including government, employers, university/colleges and non-governmental institutions. For kindergarten/teaching staff, professional development is most often provided by universities or colleges; while, for child care staff or staff in child caring positions, professional development is mostly offered by non-government-related providers (Figure 2.4).

In the Slovak Republic, professional development opportunities are offered by a variety of providers, including the government, employers, universities or colleges and non-government providers. Having integrated ECEC systems, the providers of professional development do not differ between teaching staff and staff in child caring positions in Finland and Sweden. In both countries, professional development is offered in universities or colleges and non-governmental providers. In addition, in Finland the government and employer also provide professional training, and the employer does so in Sweden.

Figure 2.4. Providers of professional development

Panel A. For kindergarten or preschool staff					Panel B. For child care staff				
	Government	Employer	University / college	Non-government		Government	Employer	University / college	Non-government
Australia	a	X	a	X	Australia	a	X	a	X
Austria	X	X	X	X	Austria	X	X	X	X
British Columbia (CAN)	X	X	X	X	British Columbia (CAN)	X	X	X	X
Czech Republic	X	X	X	X	Czech Republic	a	X	a	a
Denmark	a	a	X	a	Denmark	X	a	a	a
England (UKM)	X	a	X	X	England (UKM)	X	a	X	X
Estonia	X	X	X	X	Finland	X	X	X	X
Finland	X	X	X	X	Flemish Community (BEL)	a	a	X	X
Flemish Community (BEL)	a	X	X	X	French Community (BEL)	a	X	a	a
French Community (BEL)	a	X	a	a	Georgia (USA)	X	X	a	a
Georgia (USA)	X	X	a	a	Hungary	X	a	X	a
Hungary	X	a	X	a	Ireland	X	a	a	a
Ireland	X	a	a	a	Israel	X	a	X	a
Israel	X	a	X	a	Italy	X	X	X	X
Italy	X	X	X	X	Japan	X	a	X	X
Japan	X	X	X	X	Korea	X	X	X	X
Korea	X	X	X	X	Manitoba (CAN)	X	X	X	X
Manitoba (CAN)	X	X	X	X	Massachusetts (USA)	a	X	X	X
Massachusetts (USA)	X	X	X	X	Mexico	X	X	X	X
Mexico	X	a	a	a	Netherlands	X	X	a	X
Netherlands	a	X	X	X	New Zealand	a	X	X	X
New Zealand	a	a	X	X	North Carolina (USA)	X	X	a	a
North Carolina (USA)	X	X	a	a	Norway	X	X	X	X
Norway	X	X	X	X	Oklahoma (USA)	X	X	a	a
Norway*	X	X	X	X	Poland	X	X	X	X
Oklahoma (USA)	X	X	a	a	Portugal	X	X	X	X
Poland	X	X	X	X	Prince Edward Island (CAN)	X	X	X	X
Portugal	X	X	X	X	Scotland (UKM)	a	X	X	X
Prince Edward Island (CAN)	X	X	X	X	Slovak Republic	X	X	X	X
Scotland (UKM)	a	X	X	X	Slovenia	X	X	X	X
Slovak Republic	X	X	X	X	Spain	X	X	X	X
Slovenia	X	X	X	X	Sweden	a	X	X	X
Spain	X	X	X	X	Turkey	X	a	X	X
Sweden	a	X	X	X					
Turkey	X	a	X	X					

* For Norway, data regarding child care refers to child/youth workers. For Sweden, data regarding child care refers to childminders.

Note: "Non-government" refers to professional training institutions, churches, community organisations, etc.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Provision of professional development in different formats

By providing different formats of professional development opportunities, more staff might be able to participate or take up training. Online training might attract, for example, more participants since staff can participate in this from home, as well as seminars and workshops, since they require short-term input.

Different formats can have different purposes, and depending on what the training is about and on the needs of staff, one format might be more suitable than another and/or more effective. On-site mentoring can be costly but highly effective since it is based on one-on-one learning. The different formats are not mutually exclusive but can complement each other. Most countries use a face-to-face approach: seminars and workshops, as well as formal training courses, are popular in the ECEC sector. Online training is less frequently offered.

The Slovak Republic offers seminars, workshops, onsite mentoring possibilities and has, as one of few countries, online training possibilities. Finland offers professional development through seminar or workshops, on-site mentoring and formal training courses, while Sweden indicated it only offers formal training courses (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2. Forms and structures of professional development opportunities

		Staff type	
		Kindergarten or preschool staff	Child care staff
Training programme form and structure	Seminar or Workshop	Australia, Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Flemish Community (BEL), French Community (BEL), Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Massachusetts (USA), Manitoba (CAN), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Carolina (USA), Norway, Oklahoma (USA), Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey	Australia, Austria, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, Finland, Flemish Community (BEL), French Community (BEL), Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Manitoba (CAN), Massachusetts (USA), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway*, Oklahoma (USA), Poland, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM) and Spain
	Onsite Mentoring	Australia, Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Flemish Community (BEL), Georgia (USA), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Manitoba (CAN), Massachusetts (USA), Netherlands, New Zealand, North Carolina (USA), Norway, Oklahoma (USA), Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Spain	Australia, Austria, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Flemish Community (BEL), Georgia (USA), Israel, Italy, Japan, Manitoba (CAN), Massachusetts (USA), Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway*, Oklahoma (USA), Poland, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM) and Spain
	Online Training	Australia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia (USA), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Manitoba (CAN), Massachusetts (USA), Netherlands, New Zealand, North Carolina (USA), Norway, Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Slovak Republic and Spain	Australia, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, Georgia (USA), Israel, Italy, Korea, Manitoba (CAN), Massachusetts (USA), Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway*, Oklahoma (USA), Poland, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM) and Spain
	Formal Training Course	Australia, Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, England (UKM), Estonia, Finland, Flemish Community (BEL), French Community (BEL), Georgia (USA), Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Manitoba (CAN), Massachusetts (USA), Mexico, Netherlands, North Carolina (USA), Norway, Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Slovenia and Sweden	Australia, Austria, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, England (UKM), Finland, Flemish Community (BEL), Georgia (USA), Israel, Italy, Manitoba (CAN), Massachusetts (USA), Mexico, Netherlands, Norway*, Oklahoma (USA), Poland, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM) and Sweden*

* For Norway, data regarding child care refers to child/youth workers. For Sweden, data regarding child care refers to childminders.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Potential areas for reflection

The following potential areas for reflection are identified as a result of desk-based international comparison without stakeholder's views, such as through a country visit, due to the constraints of the working methods involved.

Reflection on qualifications for staff in ECEC

Policymakers can ensure the quality of teacher education by setting minimum qualification requirement or raising accreditation requirements for teacher education programmes. Accreditation is a means to ensure that diverse teacher education programmes meet the standards set by the teaching field at large and includes the preparation for key skills, such as teaching methodologies, classroom management and student evaluation.

Five job types are commonly used for staff working in the ECEC sector across OECD countries (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3. Job types for ECEC workers

Child care workers	The qualifications of child care workers differ greatly from country to country and from service to service. In most countries, child care workers have a vocational-level diploma, generally at a children's nurse level (upper secondary, vocational level); although many countries will also have specialist staff trained to secondary-level graduation, plus a one-to-two-year tertiary-level vocational diploma.
Pre-primary teacher (or kindergarten/preschool teachers)	Pre-primary teachers are generally trained at the same level and in the same training institutions as primary school teachers. This profile is found in Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. In some of these countries, e.g., the Netherlands, the pre-primary teacher is trained both for the preschool and primary sectors. In federal countries, variation exists across different states or provinces, but the predominant type of training is in primary school-oriented pedagogy (readiness-for-school is a primary aim of early education).
Family and domestic care workers	Family and domestic care workers are caregivers working in a family day care provision or home-based care setting. These are traditionally provided in a home setting. This can be at the childminder's home or at the child's own home where a qualified or registered childminder looks after the child. This type of care is most common for children prior to preschool, <i>i.e.</i> , those up to three years old.
Pedagogues	In Nordic and central European countries, many pedagogues have been trained (upper-secondary or tertiary education) with a focus on early childhood services rather than primary teaching. Pedagogues may also have received training in other settings, e.g., youth work or elderly care. In some countries, pedagogues are the main staff members responsible for the care and education of children.
Auxiliary staff	There are many types of auxiliary staff working in centres that have been trained at different levels. On one end of the scale is auxiliary staff that does not need a formal qualification in the area, while auxiliaries in the preschool service sector in Nordic countries have often gone through a couple years of upper secondary vocational training.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011; OECD Family Database, 2010.

Across OECD countries, a wide range of qualifications are given to staff working in ECEC (by ISCED levels)³ (Figure 2.5). In "split" system countries, the majority of countries indicated that staff in teaching positions require an ISCED level 5 qualification, while a minimum of ISCED level 3 is required for staff in caring positions.

The Slovak Republic differentiates between child carers in nursery schools responsible for children up until the age of three and kindergarten teachers/staff in teaching positions responsible for children between three and five years of age. In Sweden and Finland, staff in caring positions work alongside staff in teaching positions. Both workers, though with different responsibilities, work with children in the same age group in the same settings.

Staff working in caring positions in the Slovak Republic, as well as in Finland and Sweden, require at least a qualification equal to ISCED level 3. The same level of ICSED requirement is set for staff in teaching positions in ECEC in the Slovak Republic, whereas kindergarten teachers in Finland and Sweden need to finish a university level education. In Finland, the share of higher versus lower qualified staff is set so that at least one third of the staff requires a tertiary degree (bachelor at university level, or ISCED level 5B); and they are assigned teaching roles, while the remaining staff will only have caring responsibilities and need an ISCED level 3 qualification.

Figure 2.5. Required ISCED levels for different types of ECEC staff

Staff titles with minimum required ISCED level in brackets

Country	Age						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Staff working for the care sector						
	Teaching staff working for the education sector or in an integrated system for care and education						
	Compulsory schooling						
Australia	Child care Worker (4) / Child care Manager (5) Preschool/Kindergarten Teacher (5A)						
Austria	Kindergarten Pedagogue (4A)						
Belgium (Flemish Community)	Child care Worker in the care sector (3) 2.5y Child care Worker in the education sector (3) 2.5y Kindergarten teacher / Pedagogue (5B)						
Belgium (French Community)	Child care Worker (3) 2.5y Pre-Primary Teacher (5)						
Canada (British Columbia)	Early childhood educator (3) Kindergarten teacher (5A)						
Canada (Manitoba)	Early Childhood Educator (5B) Kindergarten teacher (5)						
Canada (Prince Edward Island)	Family Day Carer (3) / Child carer in centre-based care (4) Kindergarten teacher (4)						
Czech Republic	Child care Worker (3) Pedagogue (3)						
Denmark	Pedagogue (5)						
Estonia	1.5y Preschool pedagogue (5)						
Finland	Child care worker in kindergarten (2/3 of staff should have at least level 3) Kindergarten Teacher (5B) Pre-primary Teacher (5B)						
Germany	Child care worker (3) Pedagogue (4A) Pedagogue for childhood or social pedagogue (5)						
Hungary	Child care Worker (3) Pedagogue (5)						
Ireland	Pre-primary Teacher (5)						
Israel	Child care Teacher (5) Pre-Primary Teacher (5)						
Italy	Educator (child care centres) (5B) Pre-primary teacher (6)						
Japan	Nursery Teacher (5B) Kindergarten Teacher (5B)						
Korea	Child care Worker (3) Pre-Primary Teacher (5)						
Luxembourg	Pre-Primary Teacher (Instituteur) / Educator (5B)						
Mexico	Indigenous ECEC Teacher (3) ECEC/Preschool Teacher (5) Indigenous preschool Teacher (3)						
Netherlands	Child carer (centred child care) / Official Childminder (3) Playgroup Leader (3) Kindergarten/ primary school teacher (4) until 12 y						
New Zealand	Playcentre Leader (3) Qualified Education and Care Teacher / Kindergarten Teacher (5B) Teacher for pacific/indigenous children (Kaiako) (5B)						
Norway	Child/Youth Worker (3) Pedagogical Leader (Kindergarten & Family Kindergarten) / Head Teacher (5A)						
Poland	Child care Worker (3) Kindergarten teacher (5)						
Portugal	Preschool Teacher (5A)						
Slovak Republic	Nursery School Worker (3B) Kindergarten Teacher (3)						
Slovenia	Family Day Carer (3) Preschool teacher (5B)						
Spain	Early education teacher (5B) Preschool teacher (5A)						
Sweden	Child minder (3) Preschool teacher (5A)						
Turkey	Pre-Primary Teacher (5A)						
United Kingdom (Scotland)	Child care practitioners (5) Preschool Teacher (5)						
United States (Georgia, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Oklahoma)	Preschool Teacher (5)						

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Reflection on incentives for uptake of professional development

Staff participation in professional development is affected by the incentives for undertaking these activities, such as support on cost coverage, financial support in covering loss of partial salary when up-taking training, the possibility to obtain a higher qualification, support in the form of time off for participation in training, or receiving an increase in salary or other form of promotion after participation.

The most commonly used incentives to encourage the uptake of professional development in ECEC include financial support to cover training costs, followed by pathways to obtain a higher qualification and granting study leave to workers participating in professional development. More incentives are in place for teaching/kindergarten staff than for child care or family day care staff (Table 2.4).

Financial support to cover partial salary, path to higher qualification and promotion or higher salaries are incentives for kindergarten staff in the Slovak Republic to take up professional development. In Finland and Sweden, financial support to cover training costs, to cover partial loss of salary, for the attainment of higher qualifications, and for study leave are employed as incentives for all ECEC staff (both staff in caring and teaching positions) to take up professional development. Thus Finland and Sweden have a greater number of incentives for the uptake of professional development in place. To ensure a larger uptake of professional training among ECEC professionals, especially for staff in caring position, the Slovak Republic might find it useful to reflect on further incentives for staff to uptake professional development.

Table 2.4. Incentives for ECEC workers to take up professional development

By type of provision

	Financial support for training costs		Financial support to cover partial salary		Path to higher qualification ¹		Study leave ²		Higher salary/promotion	
	Child care	Pre-school	Child care	Pre-school	Child care	Pre-school	Child care	Pre-school	Child care	Pre-school
Australia	X	X								
Austria	X	X					X	X		
British Columbia (CAN)*	X	X	X				X	X	X	X
Czech Republic	X	X				X		X		
Denmark						X		X		X
England (UKM)	X	X			X	X				
Estonia		X						X		X
Finland	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Flemish Community (BEL)		X				X		X		
French Community (BEL)	X	X		X	X			X		
Georgia (USA)		X			X					
Germany							X	X	X	X
Hungary	X	X								
Italy							X	X		
Japan	X	X		X		X		X		
Korea	X	X								X
Manitoba (CAN)	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
Massachusetts (USA)		X					X			
Mexico	X	X								X
Netherlands	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
New Zealand	X	X			X	X				
North Carolina (USA)		X								
Norway*	X	X			X	X				
Oklahoma (USA)										
Poland	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
Portugal		X		X		X		X		X
Prince Edward Island (CAN)*		X				X				X
Scotland (UKM)					X					
Slovak Republic				X		X				X
Slovenia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Spain	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
Sweden*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Turkey						X				X

* For British Columbia (CAN), incentives for take-up of professional development can differ per employer. For Norway, data regarding child care refers to child/youth workers. For Prince Edward Island (CAN), data refers to entry-level ECEC staff. For Sweden, data regarding child care refers to childminders.

Note: "Path to higher qualification" refers to the availability of higher qualification through professional development. In some countries, higher qualifications are not available for the ECEC workforce; whereas in other countries, higher qualification is available and may be obtained through professional development. "Study leave" includes permitted time off from work to pursue professional development and replacement of an employee with a substitute.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Reflection on development areas in response to changing needs or societal changes

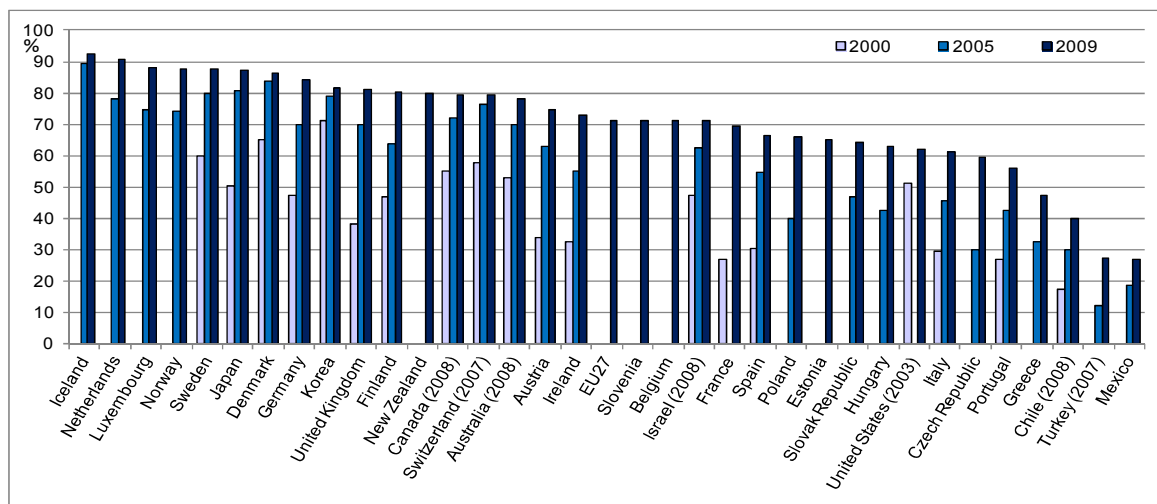
ICT

Information and communication technology (ICT) has developed rapidly over the past 40 years. ICT has now become part of our everyday lives. Access to computers at home grew rapidly in OECD countries between 2000 and 2009 although discrepancies can be observed across different countries. In the Slovak Republic, the share of households having access to a computer increased from 45% in 2005 to about 65% in 2009, indicating a rapid increase of computer use at home. In Finland and Sweden, over 80% of households had access to a computer in 2009 (Figure 2.6).

ICT can foster many benefits, including helping children visualising abstract issues or learn how to read. Besides, it fosters children's technological skills. Since computers are increasingly being used in households and schools, and are becoming a more important part of people's everyday lives and children are expected to have a minimum of ICT skills when entering the labour market, staff in ECEC and education are increasingly expected to integrate the use of ICT into their professional practice and to keep up to date with ICT developments and applications. ICT might therefore become an emerging subject for professional development for ECEC staff, since children learn about ICT from a very young age onwards and this can benefit children's development.

Figure 2.6. The use of ICT in the home environment (including PC, portable and handhelds)

Households with access to computer at home as percentage of all households



Note: Generally, data from the EU Community Survey on household use of ICT, which covers EU countries plus Iceland, Norway and Turkey, relate to the first quarter of the reference year. For the Czech Republic, data relate to the fourth quarter of the reference year. Statlink: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932321530>

Source: OECD, ICT database and Eurostat, Community Survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals, July 2010.

Leadership

Although there is an increasing need for the development of leadership skills in many OECD countries, leadership has received only intermittent attention by early childhood theorists and researchers. Besides this, there might be a lack of awareness among ECEC staff and managers of the importance of leadership skills. However, leadership is of great relevance in ensuring quality ECEC provision, and a high-quality workforce since leadership strengthens staff performance and can stimulate staff to participate in ongoing professional development. Leadership might be of particular relevance in the Slovak Republic where responsibility for child care programmes is largely that of the individual provider.

Reflection on nursery and care working conditions: staff-child ratios

Working conditions can impact staff's ability to do their job well. Furthermore, favourable working conditions can make the sector more attractive and encourage skilled and qualified personnel not only to work in the ECEC sector, but also encourage them to stay in the sector. Staff-child ratio (the number of children per professional) plays an important role in determining an optimal working environment for ECEC staff.

Countries set different minimum standards for staff-child ratios for staff working with younger children and staff working with older children. When the number of children per staff member is low, more intensive care and active interaction between young children and ECEC staff is possible.

Children in kindergarten and preschool (or children in the older age bracket⁴) tend to have less staff per child than those in care centres (or children in the age category zero to three⁵) (Figure 2.7). This goes well with the research finding that closer supervision and care matter more for younger children than older ones. Across 19 OECD countries⁶, it is regulated that, on average, a kindergarten or preschool staff member can have, at most, 18 children. A professional with caring responsibilities can, on average, have only seven children at his/her responsibility.

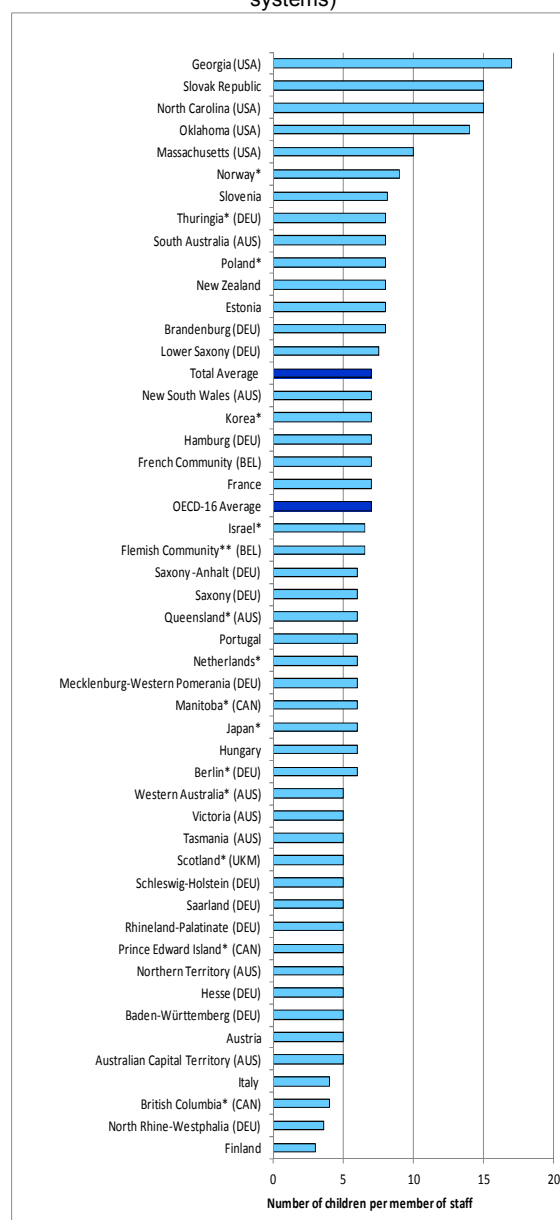
The Slovak Republic has a regulated staff-child ratio of 1:12 in kindergartens (three-to-six-year-old children) and 1:15 in the care sector (zero-to-three-year-old children). While the staff-child ratio is better than average in Slovakian kindergartens, the number of children in care per professional is larger than in most other OECD countries: Finland has the most favourable staff-child ratios among responding countries with four children per member of staff working with the youngest children, a ratio of 1:7 in pre-primary education (staff working with older children). Sweden is one of the few countries where there is no regulated staff-child ratio in place, although the actual staff-child ratio remains low in Sweden.

Figure 2.7. Regulated maximum number of children per staff member in ECEC

Panel A: In kindergarten or preschool (three years to compulsory schooling age for integrated systems)



Panel B: In child care (zero-to-three-year-olds for integrated systems)



* Jurisdictions with separate regulations for staff-child ratio for different age groups, the data given is based on: 3-6-year-olds attending for 5-7 hours per day regarding Berlin; and 4-year-olds regarding Korea.

** The figure for Norway applies only to qualified kindergarten teachers, whereas regulation stipulates that if other staff will also be present in the kindergarten setting, the number of children per member of staff is effectively lower. The figure for Norway is based on regulation for 3-6-year-olds.

* Jurisdictions with separate regulations for different age groups, the data given is based on: Berlin (DEU), 2-3-year-olds (attending 5-7 hours per day); British Columbia (CAN), 0-3-year-olds; Israel, 2-3-year-olds; Japan, 1-2-year-olds (while the country has different ratios in place for different ages: the ratio for age 0 is 1:3; age 1-2, 1:6; age 3, 1:20; and age 4, 1:30 – only data regarding 1-2-year-olds is included in the figure); Korea, 2-year-olds; Manitoba (CAN), 2-3-year-olds; Netherlands, 2-3-year-olds; Norway, 0-3-year-olds; Prince Edward Island (CAN), 2-3-year-olds; Queensland (AUS) 2-3-year-olds; Scotland (UKM), 2-3-year-olds; Thuringia (DEU), 2-3-year-olds; Western Australia (AUS), 2-3-year-olds. For Poland, when there is a disabled child in the playroom, the ratio is set at 1:5.

**Subsidised facilities only

Note: Countries who reported averages for staff-child ratio instead of a minimum requirement in the Survey have not been included in the graphs, as averages do not constitute a regulated minimum requirement. When regulated ratios were indicated as maximum number per multiple staff members (e.g., 2:15), the number included in the figure has been calculated based on the maximum number of children for one member of staff (e.g., 2:15 has been re-calculated into 1:7.5).

Note on Panel A: OECD-19 Average is only based on data reported for OECD countries, excluding regions and territories, and is calculated based on data from: Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey.

Note on Panel B: OECD-16 Average is only based on data reported for OECD countries, excluding regions and territories, and is calculated based on data from: Austria, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic and Slovenia.

The Total Average is based on data for all countries and jurisdictions included in the respective figures.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

Ageing workforce population

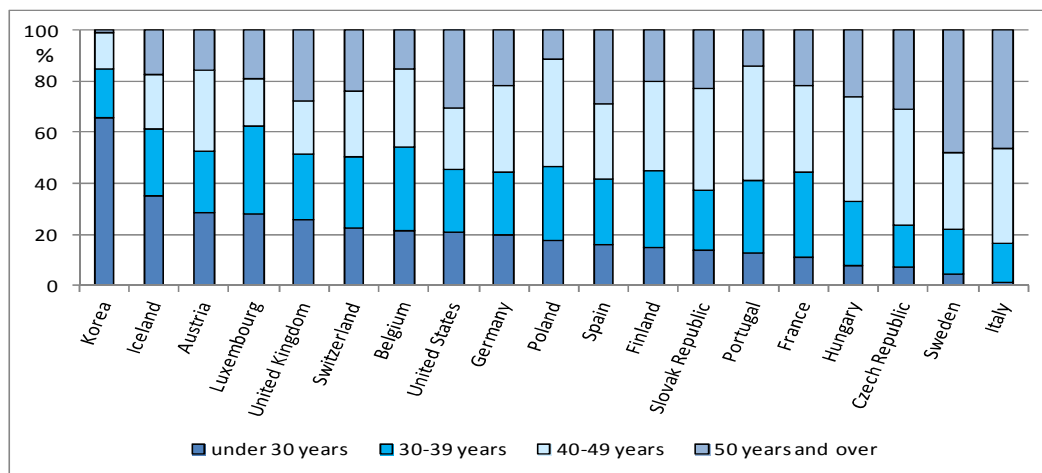
The age distribution of pre-primary education teachers varies among OECD countries, especially for under 30-year-olds, and for 50-year-olds and over (Figure 2.8).

In the Slovak Republic and Finland, about 15% of pre-primary staff is below the age of 30. However, more than 60% is above 40 in the Slovak Republic, compared to 50% in Finland. This is still lower than in Sweden where 78% of staff is above 40. In the Slovak Republic, the average age of kindergarten staff is 47.5 years (Figure 2.10).

An ageing ECEC workforce might be related to the unattractiveness of working in the sector, where pay is often low and development opportunities are not always available. It might also indicate there is high staff turnover rate, where young people work for a short period of time in the ECEC sector and quickly move on to work elsewhere.

Figure 2.8. Age distribution of pre-primary education teachers

2008



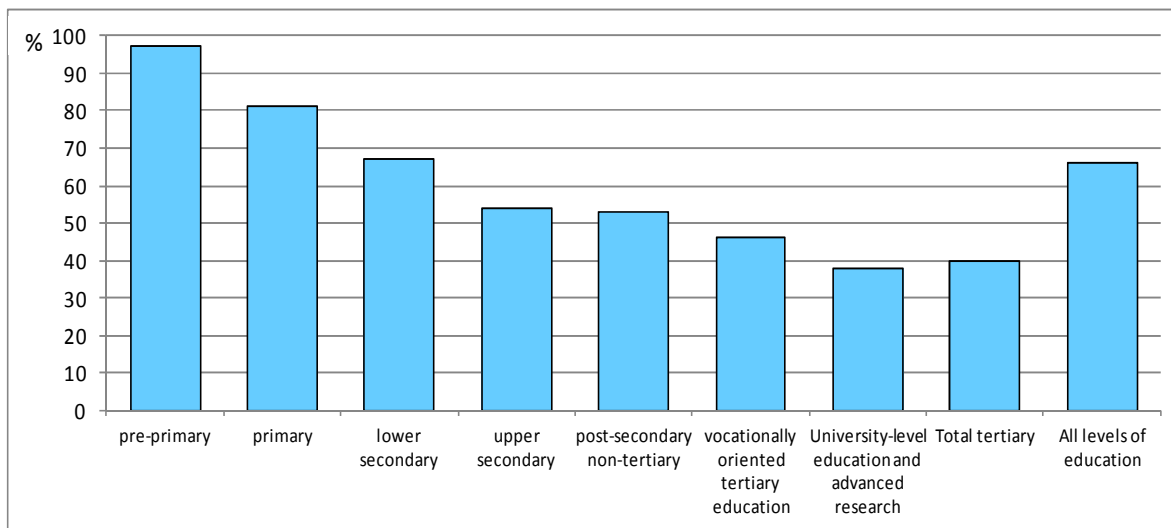
Source: OECD Education Database, June 2011.

Highly gender-characterised sector

Many countries are concerned that the proportion of males in teaching is significantly low. Looking at all levels of education, women represent an average of over 66% of teachers in OECD countries, but the percentage of female staff tends to differ significantly between sectors. The younger the children educational staff are working with, the higher the proportion of female staff: women account for almost 97% of teachers at the pre-primary level; over 80% at the primary level; slightly more than 53% at the upper secondary level; and only 40% in tertiary education (Figure 2.9).

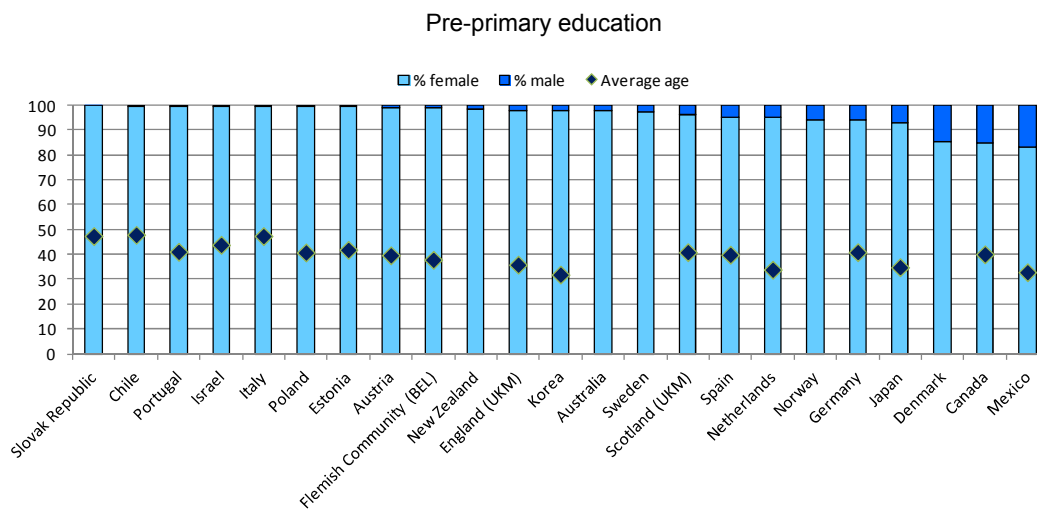
In most countries, the median proportion for female pre-primary and pedagogical staff is 95% or higher. The Slovak Republic, Finland and Sweden have a very high proportion of female staff in kindergartens: 99.9%, 98.6% and 97% respectively (Figure 2.10).

Figure 2.9. Percentage of female teaching staff by level of education



Source: OECD (2010), Education at a Glance 2010.

Figure 2.10. Teacher (or pedagogue) staff profiles



Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal", June 2011.

NOTES

- 1 The findings presented in section 2 are based on data from the OECD Network on ECEC's "Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal" (2011), and on the OECD's desk-based research. For each graph and table, the countries or regions for which data is used are listed (if not presented in the graph).
- 2 For kindergarten/preschool, based on data from: Australia, Austria, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, England (UKM), Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Manitoba (CAN), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Turkey. For child care, based on data from: Australia, Austria, British Columbia (CAN), Czech Republic, Finland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Manitoba (CAN), Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Prince Edward Island (CAN), Scotland (UKM), Spain and Sweden.
- 3 The international ISCED classification system is often used to facilitate international comparisons, four of which are relevant to the OECD survey responses: Level 2: Lower secondary school – normally considered the end of basic education; Level 3: Upper secondary school – normally the end of compulsory education; Level 4: Post-secondary non-tertiary education (e.g., short vocational programs; pre-university courses); Level 5: First stage tertiary education (e.g., first university degree); Level 6: Second stage of tertiary education (leading to an advanced research qualification).
- 4 When referring to kindergarten or preschool in countries with an integrated ECEC system, data refers to the children in the older age bracket of ECEC, *i.e.*, children from the age of three to the age that primary schooling starts (unless indicated otherwise).
- 5 When referring to child care in countries with an integrated ECEC system, data refers to the children in the youngest age group of ECEC, usually zero-to-three-year-olds (unless indicated otherwise).
- 6 OECD averages are only based on data reported for OECD countries in the respective figures, excluding regions and territories. Data from jurisdictions and regions, as well as countries, are included in the Total Average.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES?

Common challenges countries face in enhancing quality in ECEC workforce include: 1) improving staff qualifications; 2) securing a high-quality workforce supply; 3) retaining the workforce; 4) workforce and leadership development; and 5) managing the quality of the workforce in private ECEC provision.

The Slovak Republic has made several efforts in tackling these challenges, mostly focusing on retaining the workforce by, for example, giving pay parity to kindergarten teachers with teachers in compulsory education, and developing handbooks for staff that provide implementation support. To further their efforts, the Slovak Republic could consider alternative strategies implemented by Finland and Sweden, such as aligning qualifications between pre-primary and primary teachers; validating existing competencies to allow easier entry into the profession; implementing an induction process for new staff; funding institutions to set up needs-based training programmes; and assessing the education and development needs of ECEC staff.

This chapter aims to identify alternatives the Slovak Republic could consider when facing challenges in improving workforce quality. It first describes common challenges countries are facing. It then presents the different approaches the Slovak Republic has been using to tackle the challenges. Lastly, it identifies strategies Finland and Sweden have undertaken.

Common challenges

The OECD international survey on quality has identified five common challenges that countries often face in improving workforce quality: 1) improving staff qualifications; 2) securing a high-quality workforce supply; 3) retaining the workforce; 4) workforce development; 5) managing quality of workforce in private ECEC provision.

Improving staff qualifications

Qualifications for ECEC staff often overlap and are not transparent among child care workers and early education teachers. Different qualifications leading to different job titles/profiles do not always clearly communicate to staff or parents about what knowledge, skills and competencies staff have. Improving qualifications evenly across a country can also be a challenge due to local control over the contents of the education programmes.

Securing a high-quality workforce supply

Securing a high-quality workforce supply is a major challenge in many OECD countries. Chronic shortages of ECEC staff are observed, especially in remote and disadvantaged areas. Furthermore, lower qualification levels of the workforce, especially among child care workers, often raise concerns among parents and policy makers about the quality of services. Additionally, there are often insufficient incentives for people to work in the sector. The main reasons for the shortages are often cited as: low wages, low social status, heavy workload and lack of career progression paths, which make the profession unattractive and can cause or contribute to the challenge of recruiting staff.

Additionally, the ECEC workforce is most often homogeneous, composed of mostly female workers and from the majority ethnic group.

Retaining the workforce

Many countries experience difficulties with retaining the workforce, with particularly high staff turnover rates in the child care sector. The factors that keep people from working in the ECEC sector are often the same factors that discourage people from pursuing a career in the sector: low wages, low social status, heavy workload and lack of career progression paths.

Workforce and leadership development

Many countries offer some form of professional development opportunities for ECEC staff. However, the take-up rates are often found to be low. First and foremost, information about training opportunities may not be well known, or the benefits of participating may not be clearly articulated, especially among low-qualified ECEC workers. Second, continuous training and professional development might be disconnected from what they wish to learn, and, therefore, they may not be motivated to take training. Third, there is an increasing need for staff and managers to be trained in leadership, whether it be in the playroom or leading an ECEC centre. However, this poses a challenge for many countries.

Even when staff are informed of such opportunities and are motivated to take up training, their manager may be reluctant to send them to professional development courses. It is often argued that when the training leads to the possibility of a higher level of qualification, staff may subsequently wish for a pay raise or leave for a higher paying job elsewhere.

Managing quality of workforce in different ECEC provisions

A challenge in many countries is managing the quality of the workforce to ensure quality remains high, or at least stable. This provides insights to where a country stands in terms of workforce; whether there are any issues regarding workforce; and the changes in the workforce. In countries where provision is largely public, workforce quality can be initiated through direct government action; whereas when the private market delivers a significant proportion of ECEC services, action may need to be taken through regulation or incentives.

The Slovak Republic's efforts

The Slovak Republic has made several efforts to tackle the challenges.

To improve staff qualifications

Considering revision of minimum initial education requirement

In the **Slovak Republic**, ECEC teachers currently enter the profession with varying levels of training. Although the government is considering making it mandatory that teachers pursue higher initial education at ISCED levels 5A or 5B.

To secure a high-quality workforce supply

Raising the status of ECEC professionals

In the **Slovak Republic**, kindergartens have not been always been a part of the school system, as children's attendance in kindergarten is not mandatory. The government took a systematic step to improve the status of kindergarten programmes and teachers by making kindergartens a part of the school system. As a result, kindergarten teachers are now able to pursue bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees at the university level, whereas they once only had the opportunity to obtain an education at the secondary vocational level.

To retain workforce

Giving pay parity to kindergarten teachers with teachers at other levels of education

In the **Slovak Republic**, kindergarten teachers have been given pay parity with primary and secondary school teachers. New Zealand has a funding system for ECEC services in place that provides incentives for services to employ more qualified, registered teachers. This resulted in more services being able to afford paying better salaries and significantly increased the number of registered teachers in the ECEC workforce.

Developing handbooks for implementation support

The **Slovak Republic** developed handbooks for ECEC staff that provide implementation support. The Slovak Republic has the *Manual for the Design of School Educational Programmes*, while Turkey developed the *Preschool Education Curriculum Guidebook*. The Slovak Republic also developed the *Methodology for Pre-Primary Education*, which includes methodological advice and recommendations for kindergarten teachers on how to develop key competences of children. Additionally, training videos were distributed to ECEC staff, informing them about curriculum changes and training them in how to implement the changes.

To manage the quality of workforce in different ECEC provisions

Carrying out inspections in kindergartens

The **Slovak Republic** has carried out inspections for kindergartens regarding education, as well as institutional management, by the State School Inspectorate. The comprehensive inspection activities focus on the quality of education and related child outcomes; the quality of ECEC provision and its management; co-operation with parents and other sectors (e.g., primary school, special pedagogues, psychologists, doctors and seniors); working conditions of ECEC staff; and supplementary activities of kindergarten. Based upon the inspection results, kindergarten services take advantage of the following: 1) sharing updated goals and information; 2) establishing proper decision-making standards for kindergarten directors; 3) collaborating with advisory bodies to address professional issues; and 4) co-operating with various educational institutions.

Possible alternative strategies: lessons from other countries, including Finland and Sweden

Where available, strategies to overcome challenges in improving workforce from Finland and Sweden have been included. Based on the challenges the Slovak Republic is facing, and the possible areas for reflection outlined in section two, alternative strategies from other countries than the chosen reference countries are highlighted to provide some further “food for thought” in overcoming challenges.

To improve staff qualifications

Revising initial education programmes and merging different education programmes

In **Finland**, the education for practical nurses started in the 1990s. At that time, there was a call from the labour market for more flexible movement from one task to another. Formerly, there were several different examinations (childminder, day care nurse, rehabilitation nurse, nurse for the disabled, etc.), which are now merged into one broader examination with different sub lines to choose from.

In **Sweden**, in 2010, the government proposed that current degrees in education be replaced by four new professional degrees: preschool education, primary school education, subject education and vocational education. The new degrees will lead to greater clarity regarding the components of teacher education; and the preschool education programme will have a more specific direction to secure the supply of well-educated teachers. The government introduced in 2011 a new initial training programme to increase the supply of well-educated preschool teachers. The following decisions have been made:

- Regulate preschool teachers as other teachers are regulated;
- Clarify teacher qualifications;
- Create a teacher certification process; and
- Design a state authorisation system (senior subject teachers) to strengthen incentives for preschool teachers to advance the quality of activities and to pursue continuous education.

Aligning qualifications between pre-primary and primary teachers

Finland raised the level of education for kindergarten teachers and connected it more closely to the level for primary school teachers. In 1995, kindergarten teacher education was moved to the university level, as classroom teacher training and other teacher training had

already been established in universities. This change created greater synergy and interaction between training for ECEC professionals and training for primary school teachers to better support children's development and learning and foster co-operation between teachers during children's transition from kindergarten to primary school. One of the main lessons learned is that when kindergarten and primary teachers are trained in connection to one another, they can better support children's development and learning by knowing how to co-operate during children's transition from pre-primary to primary school.

Adopting same training requirements for whole ECEC phase

Both managers and staff who work directly with children in **Sweden** are drawn from the education sector. Known as teachers or pedagogues, these staff have taken higher education courses (university or non-university level) usually lasting three-and-a-half years (seven semesters) and covering general education (sociology, arts and sciences), professional studies, including educational psychology and child development, and practical training with work placements in different types of settings.

Revising the curriculum for initial education

In **Finland**, the national curriculum for practical nurse training has been reformed. In this reform, the view points of ECEC have been taken into consideration more profoundly than in the former curriculum. Also, the national curriculum for family childminders has been reformed.

Evaluating initial education programmes

Norway established the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (*NOKUT*) in 2002. In 2008, *NOKUT* was tasked to evaluate the education of preschool teachers. The purpose was to develop knowledge and information on the current status of the quality of pre-primary teacher education in relation to the framework and regulations on higher education. The report was delivered in 2010 and concluded that: the preschool education programme has low status within the universities and the society; the sector does not recruit the best students, and its students do not put enough time/effort into the study; the focus is too much on children over three years of age and does not meet the needs of those under three years; and the programme needs to strengthen the staff competences of multiculturalism. Additionally, the evaluation pointed to the fact that today's preschool teacher training does not offer sufficient possibilities of in-depth studies of pedagogy for children with special needs. A new regulation for preschool teacher education is now being prepared. The government has appointed a commission to deliver a framework plan that will modernise preschool teacher education, which is relevant and of high quality.

To secure a high-quality workforce supply

Setting minimum qualification standards for ECEC staff and management

Staff working in ECEC centres in **Finland** have different educational backgrounds. The number of workers with either a higher or lower qualification is laid down in legislations: at least one third of the staff must have a tertiary level degree (ISCED level 5), and the remaining staff must have at least an upper secondary education (ISCED level 3).

There are also minimum qualification standards set for principals and directors. They need to have a Master's degree, and/or are also qualified teachers with experience of teaching and a diploma in educational administration or the equivalent. Depending on the job description, directors of day care centres are expected to have either kindergarten teacher qualifications and adequate management skills or an appropriate Master's degree, knowledge of early childhood education and adequate management skills.

Funding students and professionals

In **New Zealand**, student grants and scholarships are provided for hard-to-staff professions, including ECEC, to help students and services meet the costs of pursuing an ECE qualification. A number of scholarships are available to students undertaking a programme of study to prepare them for teaching in Pasifika or Māori immersion services. Additionally, the government funded expert assistance for initial teacher education providers who started developing programmes for preparing teachers to work in Pasifika and Māori immersion services: the assistance went to developing and implementing these programmes.

Funding education and training programmes

In **Norway**, the state budget was increased by NOK 25 million in 2011, amounting to NOK 130 million to:

- recruit and educate enough preschool teachers to meet the demand;
- provide education at the secondary level as well as further education for childminders; and
- provide further education for preschool teachers (both pedagogical and head teachers).

This was a response to a need to provide a sufficient and quality workforce to accommodate a large increase in the number of kindergarten places over a short period of time. Norway has also provided university colleges/universities with means to develop practices that support the follow-through and completion of teacher training for bilingual students. The implemented measures include providing help during the application process, providing support in Norwegian language, incorporating multicultural aspects into the curriculum and providing individual support to students throughout the duration of preschool teacher education in co-operation with ten university colleges/universities.

Diversifying the workforce by having staff with different high quality educational backgrounds

In **Finland**, ECEC centres have multi-professional staff with different educational backgrounds. Members of staff with different educational backgrounds work with the entire age range (children aged zero to six or seven years), as Finland has an integrated system of early childhood education and care. ECEC staff have degrees from universities, polytechnics, to upper secondary education and competence-based vocational training. Early child development is taken into consideration in all the various initial staff qualifications. A diversification of staff can have positive spill-over effects, since higher qualified staff can train or educate lower qualified staff about the (additional) knowledge they have, and lower qualified staff can learn from their higher qualified colleagues. However, a challenge that remains for Finnish ECEC staff is that the roles and responsibilities of different occupations (staff with different qualifications) are not clearly defined, which often results in a working environment where “everyone does everything”.

Validating existing competencies to allow easier entry into the profession

New Zealand recognises prior learning (RPL), and people can convert prior learning experiences into credits towards a recognised ECE qualification. The government has funded the use of RPL to help increase the supply of qualified and registered teachers.

Recognising foreign diplomas for ECEC staff

New Zealand assesses foreign qualifications and offers a diploma in ECEC if it is comparable to New Zealand’s benchmark qualification, the Diploma of Education, required for early childhood teachers. New Zealand also offers relocation grants and return to

teaching allowances to assist qualified staff to move to areas where there is a shortage of staff, such as remote areas.

To retain workforce

Offering status of family day care equal to other forms of ECEC

Finland issued the Day Care Act in 1973, regulating family day care and legitimising this form of service as equal to other forms of ECEC services. Family childminders became employees of the local authority, as was the case with centre-based ECEC staff, and now had their own working contract as part of the general working contract for employees at the municipality. Prior to the act, family childminders worked privately. The act established them as part of the municipal ECEC services and permitted them participate in service training and common events. Family childminders also follow the National Curriculum Guidelines for ECEC.

Providing practical support and guidance for staff and management to guide them in their job

The National Agency for Education in **Sweden** publishes support material and General Guidelines with comments for guidance and supervision for municipality management, heads of preschools and staff in preschools.

The Swedish Curriculum includes guidelines for preschool staff, specifying the responsibilities of teachers to ensure that work is carried out in accordance with the general goals in the curriculum and specifying the responsibilities that each and everyone in the work team has in the preschool. This contributes to a better understanding of the expected tasks of different staff members towards child development.

Norway implemented a preschool teacher recruitment strategy for 2007-11, which includes establishing guidance for educated preschool teachers in their first year of work. The government has also increased the capacity of preschool teacher education and established work-place-based preschool teacher education for assistants in kindergartens in co-operation with Oslo University College and the University of Stavanger.

Implementing an induction process for new staff

In **New Zealand**, following verification of the qualification of graduated ECEC students and a police vetting, beginning staff gain provisional teacher registration and then embark on a two-year teacher induction process with a mentor teacher to oversee their programme. They must demonstrate to their mentor teacher through evidence of their teaching that they are able to meet the Satisfactory Teacher Dimensions. At the end of the two years, the mentor may recommend the teacher to the professional leader of the early childhood service as meeting the Satisfactory Teacher Dimensions. The professional leader then recommends the teacher to the New Zealand Teacher Council for full registration. There is Ministry of Education funding support for the first two years of the induction and mentoring programme. Once a teacher is fully registered, the registration needs to be renewed every three years.

Targeting experienced workers or returning staff

New Zealand offers relocation grants and return to teaching allowances to assist qualified staff to get back into the profession and to move to areas where there is a high shortage of ECEC staff.

Assisting in bargaining or negotiating for working conditions in the ECEC sector

In **New Zealand**, working conditions are negotiated between the teachers and their employers, except for kindergarten teachers where the Ministry of Education negotiates their terms and conditions on behalf of kindergarten associations.

Improving classroom conditions to improve working conditions

In 2004, **Sweden** granted an increase of SEK 2 million of state funding to local authorities for the employment of 6 000 additional preschool teachers and child assistants. The grant was intended to reduce class sizes and improve staff-child ratios to 1:5 on average for zero to six years to improve the quality of ECEC and make working conditions for staff more favourable.

*To develop the workforce and leadership skills**Making continuous training a job requirement*

In **Finland**, the annual amount of in-service training for employees in social welfare (including day care staff) should be three to ten days depending on the employee's basic education, the qualifications required for the job and the job description. This is laid down in the Act on amending the Social Welfare Act (50/2005). This Act also obligates local authorities to ensure and offer an adequate level of continuous training to ECEC staff. The goal of the obligation to continuous training is to maintain and renew the professional skills of the staff.

Financing training costs

Finland provides state-funded in-service training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers and other education personnel. Since 2010, the Ministry of Education and Culture has nearly doubled its funding for the CPD and in-service training of teachers and education personnel, including ECEC staff. Currently, a total of EUR 21 million is spent annually for this purpose. Additionally, the in-service training for employees in social welfare (including day care staff) receives about 33% of its funding from the state. This training amounts to three to ten days per year depending on the employee's basic education, the qualifications required for the job and the job description. The state funding helps ensure that local authorities offer an adequate level of continuous training that maintains and renews the professional skills of ECEC staff.

In certain regions or cities in Finland, local municipalities cover for the costs of continuous development training. As an example, at the University of Tampere in the city of Tampere (Finland) needs-based continuous training is carried out in co-operation with the city of Tampere and kindergarten staff (especially the leaders of kindergartens and day care centres). Staff and leaders of ECEC centres indicate their needs for development, and based on these needs, training is developed. The trainings are usually programmes which last for six months up to one year. It is financed by the employer (the city/municipality).

Every year, **Slovenia** offers "Study help for school fees for further education of pedagogical workers". The grant helps employed teachers and other pedagogical staff to reach a higher level of education or qualification. Candidates can apply if they meet the certain criteria (*e.g.*, they must be employed; they must enrol in programmes for further education with which they will meet the level of education required by law).

Funding institutions to set up needs-based training programmes

In **New Zealand**, the Ministry of Education developed a new programme for centrally funded professional development. The change was in response to a reduction in available funding, which provided an impetus for targeting professional development to ECEC services

catering to children from the government's priority groups: Māori, Pasifika and low-socio-economic communities. Centrally-funded professional development contracts are for a three-year period. Providers are required to go into targeted communities, carry out a needs analysis and plan a programme that best meets the needs of particular communities. This new approach to central funding for providers intends to decrease the competitive environment for providers and give way to a more collaborative approach to providing professional development.

Implementing a government-funded programme focusing on improving staff competences

To strengthen staff competence, **Sweden** has allocated SEK 600 million on continuing education for preschool teachers and childminders for a three-year period running from 2009-11 under the programme "The boost for preschool". The training is primarily directed at advancing pedagogical competence for preschool staff. The programme gives some thousands of preschool teachers and childminders the chance to take further education courses – at the university level (for preschool teachers) and at the upper secondary/high school level (for childminders). Teachers and childminders keep 80% of their salary during the study period, co-funded by the government and the preschool principal organisers. The courses focus on children's linguistic and mathematical development and evaluation of preschool activities. There is also an opportunity for preschool teachers to take research studies to have a licentiate degree. The purpose is to increase the number of post-graduated preschool teachers in preschool.

Emphasising the importance of continuous training among staff and managers

Finland explicitly points out the importance of staff and management continuous learning, training, and development. The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care recognises that professional and vocational knowledge and experience are the foundation for staff competences. The Guidelines denote that staff should document, evaluate, and make efforts to continuously develop their work. Staff should be aware of the changing needs of ECEC and the new challenges created by technological advancement and participate in training on areas needed in relation to these changes and challenges.

The policy goals for staff education and the educational system are set by the government every four years in the Development Plan for Education and Research. The latest plan is from 2007, and the availability of competent and skilful staff is marked as a large priority in this plan.

Developing a national professional development strategy

In **Norway**, continuous training is not mandatory. Employers are responsible for continuous training. As the government considers competent staff the most important factor concerning quality, a strategic plan was designed for a competence development initiative spanning 2007-10. The strategy prescribed NOK 60 million per year and prioritised pedagogical leadership, children's participation, language/ language stimulation and transition from kindergarten to school. The strategy led to increased activity among municipalities, encompassing all kindergartens public and private.

Focusing on professional development for quality enhancement

As of 1 August 2005, the Act on amending the Social Welfare Act (50/2005) in **Finland** has obligated local authorities to ensure an adequate level of continuous training in social welfare for different job positions, including ECEC staff. The annual amount of training is supposed to be three to ten days depending on the educator's basic education, the qualifications required for the job, and the job description. The goal of the obligation to organise continuous training in social welfare is to develop and renew the professional skills

of staff to enhance quality provision. The Act prescribes that continuous training should be methodical and it should support the professional skills and respond to both short- and long-term needs for training. Municipalities are obligated to assess and analyse the skills and training needs of the personnel. The mode of organising the continuous training is up to each municipality. The training can be individual and/or workplace-specific, or it can be specified according to occupational groups.

Focusing training on areas in which there is a large need for development

Based on what staff needs, **Sweden** focuses training mostly on language development, mathematics, experimental sciences and child assessment of learning and well-being. For this, the National Agency for Education in Sweden has, in co-operation with Swedish Television, made short films to give inspiration on how to implement and stimulate different curriculum subjects, such as mathematics and natural science, in preschool.

In **Finland**, municipalities are responsible for determining the content of social welfare training; however, municipalities do not always maintain diversified know-how about the needs of the social welfare sector. Therefore, the government created centres of excellence on social welfare in 2002 to convey expertise to municipalities on this topic and ensure that training content is consistent and relevant. These centres of excellence work in close connection with universities and other education institutions.

Offering training for curriculum implementation

In **Finland**, regarding continuous training and development, municipalities (the providers of training) focus on the centre's child-specific ECEC plans, which are based on the national ECEC plan. They focus especially on the processes of drawing up the ECEC plans and the contents of the ECEC plans, such as parental engagement, interaction between the child and the adult, the environment, the child's ways of acting (how the child moves, plays, experiences art, explores, etc.), leadership and special needs of children.

New Zealand focuses on the implementation of *Te Whāriki*, the Early Childhood Curriculum, and provides training to improve learning outcomes for all young children, especially those at risk. Teachers are expected to strengthen their teaching practices. The government also provides training to support the implementations of *Kei Tua o Te Pae*, Assessment for Learning. Teachers are expected to develop effective assessment practices that meet the aspirations of the curriculum.

Recognising the need for diversity training

Finland recognised a need to develop inclusive education and multicultural working methods for ECEC staff. From 2007-11, they have participated in the European Commission's project INCLUD-ED, which analyses educational strategies that contribute to overcoming inequalities and promoting social cohesion as well as educational strategies that generate social exclusion, particularly focusing on vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Establishing partnerships between staff and parents

Finland has a profound approach to ensure that staff are up-to-date about children's development: staff are ought to establish partnerships with parents. This involves participation that goes further than co-operation. According to Finland's National Curriculum Guidelines, educators have a key role in sharing day-to-day education and care of the young child with the parents. It follows that the nature of the relationship between parents and educators is an essential part of the child's well-being. This requires mutual, continuous and committed interaction between staff and parents in all matters concerning the child. Through this partnership, staff find out more about how the child develops and behaves outside of the

ECEC environment; and this helps staff in developing better skills and competences, which can result in staff being better able to adapt the curriculum and pedagogical practices to children's needs.

Developing a self-evaluation tool for staff

In **Sweden**, self-evaluation kits have been developed so that ECEC professionals can evaluate their knowledge of the curriculum framework, child development and their pedagogical practices. This tool can be used for staff to self-reflect on their competences and skills and help them in their personal development. Pedagogical advisors work comprehensively at the local level to improve the quality of pedagogy in all services by providing up-to-date information on new forms of pedagogy and supporting the organisation on internal quality improvement processes, such as team-evaluation and documentation.

To manage quality of workforce in different ECEC provisions

Regulating private and public provision similarly

Legislation in **Finland**, though decentralised, sets out strong and clear requirements for staff qualification and staff-child ratios, which apply to both public and private service providers. By regulating the minimum ISCED level for certain job functions, Finland assures that the level of workforce is equal across all ECEC provisions, whether they are public or private. Additionally, there is a minimum level of quality and working conditions assured prescribing staff-child ratios for example.

Assessing the education and development needs of ECEC staff

The city of Helsinki in **Finland** participated in the Multicultural Children and Adults in Day Care Project. The project gathered data on the opinions of day care staff working with multicultural children regarding their working conditions and identified staff needs for development. The study found that staff working with multicultural children need more time for planning and implementation of educational activities for these children, such as additional linguistic instruction and other support for non-Finnish speakers. They also experience difficulties in communicating with parents and need additional knowledge on religions and cultures influencing the development of these children.

Finland plans to undertake an assessment of the education of kindergarten teachers. Afterwards, it plans to assess the education of other ECEC staff.

Systematically evaluating quality

In **Sweden**, the quality of the preschool is regularly and systematically documented, followed up, evaluated and developed. The aim of evaluation is to obtain knowledge of how the quality of the preschool, *i.e.*, its organisation, content and actions, can be developed so that each child receives the best possible conditions for learning and development. Ultimately, this involves developing better work processes, being able to determine whether the work takes place in accordance with the goals, as well as investigating what measures need to be taken in order to improve the conditions for children to learn, develop, feel secure and have fun in the preschool, such as developing or training staff or supplying more staff. To assure that the quality and performance of staff is being evaluated, management and heads of preschools are in charge of this and should implement on a regular basis.

ANNEX

DEFINITIONS AND METHODOLOGIES

Professional development refers to knowledge, skills and competencies attained for professional advancement. **Professional development opportunities** are aimed at improving the performance of ECEC staff in already assigned positions. Professional development opportunities are often referred to as “in-service training” and “continuous education/training”. The contents indicate which subject areas and topics these training programmes seek to address and improve upon. Countries could choose from the following:

- *Language learning and other subjects*: includes language learning, languages, arts, math, sciences, information and communication technologies, etc.
- *New curriculum*: includes new and updated curriculum, reform in curriculum, etc.
- *Methods/practice*: includes teaching methodologies, teaching strategies and practices, such as Reggio Emilia or inclusive education.
- *Values/ethics*: includes ethics, anti-discrimination, equal opportunity, citizenship, etc.
- *Planning and management*: includes planning of activities and the curriculum, programming, management, leadership, etc.
- *Communication*: includes communication with parents, communication with other staff for team teaching/caring, use of information and communication technologies, etc.
- *Monitoring, assessment and evaluation*: includes monitoring, assessment (*i.e.*, of targets/goals/etc.) of child outcomes, evaluation of development, programme quality and staff performance, etc.
- *Health, safety and social welfare*: includes health, safety, well-being, social welfare, etc.
- *Special needs and educational transitions*: these two subjects were not included in the list to choose from as separate topics, but countries could indicate in a box named “other” whether they were addressing these subjects in professional development.

Recognition of prior learning refers to a process used by governments, accreditation organisations, employers or universities or colleges to evaluate learning acquired outside the

classroom and often formally recognised as academic credits, certificates, salary increase, etc.

Working conditions in ECEC refer to the characteristics of work and the workplace that can influence the ability and motivation of professionals to do their work well. They also relate to ECEC staff satisfaction with the workplace, work tasks and the nature of the job. Indicators to describe working conditions often include salaries and staff turn-over rate but also non-financial benefits, such as the possibility to participate in training and staff-child ratio.

Staff turn-over rate is based on the number of workers that had to be replaced over a given period of time, calculated as the number of employee departures divided by staff members and multiplied by a hundred (Capko, 2001).

Comparisons are made among staff working in different settings:

- **Centre-based day care:** encompasses all child care that is provided outside the home in licensed centres. The services provided can be full- or part-time and are most commonly referred to as nurseries, day care centres, *crèches*, playschools and parent-run groups.
- **Preschool early education programmes (Kindergartens):** includes centre- or school-based programmes designed to meet the needs of children preparing to enter primary education. In most countries, these programmes include at least 50% educational content and are supervised by qualified staff. Among respondents, it is common to enrol an older age bracket from circa age three in kindergartens or preschools.

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Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) can bring a wide range of benefits – for children, parents and society at large. However, these benefits are conditional on “quality”. Expanding access to services without attention to quality will not deliver good outcomes for children or long-term productivity benefits for society.

This series of country reports focuses on quality issues. Each report tackles a specific theme that was selected by the country reviewed. These reports suggest strengths and point to areas for further reflection on current policy initiatives.

Contents

Chapter 1. What does research say?

Chapter 2. Where does the Slovak Republic stand compared to other countries?

Chapter 3. What are the challenges and strategies?

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