

AUSTRIA

Early Childhood Education and Care
ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report author

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf>

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

<http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>

About the author

Marisa Krenn-Wache, Director of the Federal College for Early Childhood Pedagogy in Klagenfurt until September 2022. During her professional career she was involved in various national and international activities. These included being a national delegate in the OECD ECEC network and the European Commission ECEC working group and being a consultant for Eurydice. She also worked as a lecturer at the University of Applied Sciences “FH Campus Wien”.

1. ECEC governance in Austria

Austria is a federal republic. According to the Federal Constitutional Law, the legislation and regulatory frameworks for early childhood and out-of-school education and care fall within the competence of the nine federal states or provinces (*Länder*). These are responsible for specifying the general conditions for ECEC institutions. In each federal state, independent structures have been established, some with different names.

Further responsibilities are held by the municipalities, which in many cases also act as legal entities of public institutions, and by private legal entities. This distribution of competences leads to different salary and service regulations as well as to non-uniform structural conditions (e.g. group size, staff to child ratios, non-contact time) for the pedagogical work in the *Länder*.

The federal states and municipalities bear the main burden of funding. In all federal states, there are both age-integrated (up to under 6 years) and age-differentiated settings (separate for under 3 year-olds and 3 to 5 year-olds). These facilities include crèches (also known as toddler centres or toddler groups) for 0 to 2 year-olds, kindergartens for 3 to 5 year-olds¹ and extended-age facilities, which are usually open for children aged from 18 months to 10 or 15 years. In official sources, ECEC settings in Austria are also referred to as "children's day homes" (*Kindertagesheime*). It is only for kindergartens that the employment requirements for core professionals are standardised by a federal basic law (BGBl I No. 185/2021).

According to Statistics Austria (2023a, 5), there were a total of 9,717 institutional ECEC facilities in the reporting year 2022/23, of which 4,602 were kindergartens, 2,650 crèches and toddler care facilities, 898 out-of-school care centres and 1,567 mixed-age care facilities (whereby a five-year comparison shows that the number of crèches and toddler care facilities has increased significantly by 24.9%, while the number of kindergartens has remained stable since 2017).

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Personnel with direct everyday contact to children can be categorised as follows: Core pedagogues, assistant staff, support staff and special educational needs/inclusive support staff. All of these professionals and assistants can work in all types of ECEC centres.

¹ **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6 (as in Austria): **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds.



Table 1

Austria: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
<p>Early Childhood Pedagogue / Kindergarten Pedagogue <i>Elementarpädagoge/-pädagogin Kindergartenpädagogin/-pädagogin</i></p> <p><i>Profile:</i> Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional</p>	All forms of ECEC settings 1–5 years	Core professional with group responsibility	1–5 years	<p>5 years at a vocational college specialising in early childhood education (<i>Bildungsanstalt für Elementarpädagogik - BAfEP</i>) = short cycle tertiary education</p> <p><i>Awards:</i> University entrance requirement and professional diploma in early childhood education</p> <p>or</p> <p>School leaving certificate (university entrance requirement) plus a 2-year post-secondary collegiate course in early childhood education</p> <p><i>Award:</i> Professional diploma in early childhood education</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a² EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5</p> <p>or</p> <p>NEW since 2020/21: 2-semester higher education study programme “Early Childhood Education” at a University of Teacher Education for persons with a relevant Bachelor’s degree (Primary School Education or a teaching qualification for Special Education or a Bachelor in Education</p>

² n/a = not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
				<p>NEW since 2023 (summer semester) 4-semester higher education study programme for persons with a non-specialist Bachelor's degree (lateral entry) <i>Award:</i> University degree certificate combined with a professional qualification for the occupational field of early childhood education</p> <p>ECTS credits: 60 <i>in relation to the previous training, but not to the university course certificate:</i> EQF level: 6 or 7* ISCED 2011: 6 or 7*</p>
<p>Out-of-school Pedagogue <i>Kindergarten- und Hortpädagogin/-pädagoge/-pädagogin</i></p> <p><i>Profile:</i> Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional</p>	<p>All kinds of out-of-school settings (<i>Horte</i>) for school-age children 6–14 years</p>	<p>Core professional with group responsibility</p>	<p>6–14 years</p>	<p>5 years at vocational college specialising in early childhood education with supplementary qualifying course for work in out-of-school settings or 5 years at vocational college specialising in social pedagogy</p> <p><i>Award:</i> General university entrance qualification and professional diploma in early childhood and out-of-school pedagogy or 2-year post-secondary collegiate course specialising in early childhood and out-of-school pedagogy or in social pedagogy <i>Award:</i> Professional</p>

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
				<p>diploma in early childhood and out-of-school pedagogy or professional diploma in social pedagogy</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5</p>
<p>Inclusive Early Childhood Pedagogue Special Needs Kindergarten Pedagogue Early Intervention Specialist</p> <p><i>Inklusive Elementarpädagoge/-pädagogin/ Sonderkindergarten-pädagoge/-pädagogin Frühförderungsfachkraft</i></p> <p><i>Profile:</i> Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional with specialisation in special needs</p>	<p>All kinds of ECEC settings 1–5 years</p> <p>Spezifische Förder- einrichtungen 1–5 Jahre</p>	<p>Core profes- sional with group responsi- bility</p> <p>Individuelle Ar- beit mit einzel- nen Kindern</p>	<p>1–5 years</p>	<p>Up to 2022/23: 4-semester post-sec- ondary collegiate course in Inclusive Early Childhood Edu- cation at a vocational college specialising in early childhood edu- cation <i>Award:</i> Professional Diploma in inclusive early childhood edu- cation</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5</p> <p>This qualification route has been dis- continued.</p> <p>Since 2022/23: 4-semester higher ed- ucation study pro- gramme in Inclusive Early Childhood Edu- cation at a University of Teacher Education</p> <p><i>Target group:</i> Persons with a completed vo- cational college quali- fication as Early Child- hood Pedagogue or with a completed higher education course in early child- hood education <i>Award:</i></p>



Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ETCS credits EQF level ISCED level
				University degree combined with a professional qualification for the early childhood field ECTS credits: 90 EQF level: n/a* ISCED 2011: n/a*
Pedagogical Assistant <i>Pädagogischer Assistent/ pädagogische Assistentin</i>	All kinds of ECEC settings 1–5 years	Qualified co-worker	1–5 years	Since 2019/20: 3 years at vocational secondary school ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 3 ISCED 2011: 3

* The formal classification of both higher education courses in early childhood education has not yet taken place.

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhüemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Due to the federal structure of the ECEC system in Austria, the legal regulations regarding the professional conditions of employment and the administrative requirements for Centre Leaders differ from state to state. To summarise, it can be stated that all nine federal states have specific employment requirements and job descriptions for ECEC Centre Leaders and that corresponding training courses are offered in different formats. In all federal states, however, several years of relevant professional experience are required. For example, the Viennese Kindergarten Act (LGBl 35/2019) requires management training comprising 110 teaching units of theory, at least 12 hours of peer group meetings and 60 units of self-study to ensure the organisational and pedagogical quality of an ECEC facility. The content of this training covers topics such as quality management, personnel management, team development and team leadership, personality skills, conflict management and complaints management, communication, the legal and business

management framework for running an ECEC centre, cooperation with parents and public relations. Similar training programmes for Centre Leaders are held in all federal states.

ECEC Centre Leaders are responsible for the entire staff, the support staff and the housekeeping and cleaning staff. Depending on the state law, time is available for management activities, depending on the number of groups of children. In Upper Austria (Merkblatt 2021, Educational Directorate Upper Austria 2021), for example, for the management of a three-group facility with an employment level of 40 hours, it is stipulated under employment law that seven hours are to be worked as non-group work time (preparation time), six hours as management time and 27 hours as group work time. The tasks of the management are divided into pedagogical and administrative tasks such as the organisation and steering of quality assurance and quality development measures, team development, personnel development, team coordination, monitoring compliance with general official duties, cooperation with the service provider, cooperation with parents and external partners, coordination of work shadowing and the support of students from vocational colleges who are on field practice. Centre Leaders who do not lead a children's group have to deputise for pedagogical staff in the event of absence due to continuing professional development, illness, etc.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Apart from the position of Centre Leader and deputy Centre Leader, other positions for pedagogical tasks are not common. In multi-group centres, subject specialists (see under *Chapter 2.5*) such as pedagogues for inclusive education are responsible for specific activities, depending on the federal state. Their areas of responsibility include, for example, the planning, implementation and documentation of support measures for children with disabilities, supporting the socialisation of children with disabilities in the children's group, the planning and implementation of language assessments and language support programmes in cooperation with the group leader, as well as participation in planning and implementation with regard to cooperation with parents. In the case of appropriate additional qualifications, this activity is remunerated with a salary supplement.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

The positions of specialist advisory and supervisory staff is also regulated at federal state level. Depending on the federal state, the supervisory function takes centre stage more than the advisory function. In general, responsibilities include advising on pedagogical, organisational, personnel, financial and legal issues, the further development of staff professionalism, individual counselling of professionals and teams, the support of young professionals and communication and conflict management in the ECEC settings. There is no standardised, specific training for this role. The requirement profile usually includes a completed training as an Early Childhood Pedagogue, several years of relevant professional experience and additional specialist training.

2.5 Specialist support staff

The most frequently encountered support staff in ECEC centres are Special Needs Kindergarten Pedagogues or Inclusive Early Childhood Pedagogues. Depending on the size of the centre, these specialists work across different groups or with several groups at different locations. The lack of a legal entitlement to inclusion, the partial lack of places for children with disabilities and the often inadequate structural framework conditions are among the criticisms levelled at the Austrian system.

Since the 2019/20 kindergarten year, a standardised nationwide instrument for assessing language skills in German has been mandatory throughout Austria (FMESC 2022). The language

assessments must be carried out by specialists who have completed a six ECTS course in "Early language support" at a university college of teacher education (see, for example University College of Teacher Education Upper Austria 2022a; University College of Teacher Education Styria 2022a). In most cases, speech therapy sessions must be organised externally by the parents.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

In the 2022/23 kindergarten year, a total of 67,319 people were employed in ECEC centres (Statistics Austria 2023a, 97). The annual survey does not show whether the professionals have completed a five-year secondary vocational training programme at a vocational college for early childhood education, a two-year post-secondary *Kolleg* for early childhood education or a university degree programme. The high percentage of staff with other, non-relevant or low qualifications (42.4%) is striking.

Table 2

Austria: Structural composition of the workforce in ECEC centres, 2022/23

Staff	Total	Percentage of workforce overall
All staff in ECEC settings*	67,319	
<i>Of these:</i> Male staff (without differentiation by qualification)	2,014	3.0
Staff with a relevant higher education degree BA/MA	-	No data available
Staff with relevant vocational (short cycle tertiary) qualification	33,308	49.5
Staff with an additional qualification in inclusive/special needs education, support staff	947	1.4
Staff with a non-specialised qualification	4,503	6.7
Staff with no or low-level qualification – varies according to federal state	28,561	42.4
Staff with a migration background	-	No data available

Source: Statistics Austria 2023a, 101, 104 and own calculations

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

Vocational College for Early Childhood Pedagogue Professions

The initial professional education of core specialists (Early Childhood Pedagogues) continues to take place for the most part at the vocational colleges specialising in early childhood pedagogy (*Bildungsanstalten für Elementarpädagogik – BAfEP*). This type of school comes under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and belongs to the group of "vocational secondary schools" (BHS). Attendance starts after completing the 8th grade and concludes with a school-leaving examination and diploma.



Persons who already have a school-leaving certificate or an equivalent qualification such as a general or subject-related university entrance qualification can attend this programme at a *Kolleg* for early childhood education and complete it with a diploma examination. The programme lasts four semesters and can be extended to five to six semesters in part-time form. *Kolleg* courses can be set up at *BAfEP* institutions.

In 2016, a new curriculum came into force (BGBl II No. 204/2016) and the school name was changed from Vocational College for Kindergarten Pedagogues to Vocational College for Early Childhood Pedagogy. The term “early childhood pedagogy” emphasises the focus on children aged 1 to under 6 years. Whereas the previous official curriculum (BGBl II No. 327/2004) focussed on kindergarten children aged 3 to under 6 years, early childhood education for under 3 year-olds is now included in the standard professional training for all.

In accordance with European Directive 2005/36/EC, Article 11c (European Parliament 2005) and Directive 2013/55/EU (European Parliament 2013), the school-leaving certificate and diploma from a vocational secondary school also open up access to the respective regulated professions in those Member States for which a higher education or university degree of (up to) four years is required in the respective country.

Since 2020, a “Vocational School for Pedagogical Assistant Occupations” can be integrated into the *BAfEP* structures and run 3-year courses for prospective Pedagogical Assistants.

In the 2021/22 school year, there were a total of 33 “Vocational Colleges for Early Childhood Pedagogy Professions” in the nine federal states, of which 17 were run by the federal government, two by municipalities, 12 by the Catholic church and two by other legal entities. Nine locations offered “Vocational Schools for Pedagogical Assistant Professions” and 28 locations offered collegiate courses for early childhood education and care (Statistics Austria 2023b, 84, 86).

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

The following outlines the initial professional education options for core pedagogical staff, assistant pedagogical staff and the qualifying routes for out-of-school pedagogues and inclusion specialists.

Table 3

Austria: Early Childhood Pedagogue / Kindergarten Pedagogue

Job title in German: Elementarpädagogin/-pädagogin, Kindergartenpädagogin/-pädagogin Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
<i>Route 1 (regular qualifying route):</i> Entry requirements: Successful completion of the 8th school grade plus aptitude test at the <i>BAfEP</i> in the field of contact and communication skills (from January 2024) Professional studies: 5 years at a vocational college specialising in early childhood education (<i>BAfEP</i>) Award: School-leaving certificate (general university entrance requirement) and diploma in early childhood education /professional license ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5 Main fields of work: All ECEC settings for 1 to 5 year olds
<i>Route 2 (collegiate course - Kolleg):</i> Entry requirements: General or subject-related university entrance requirement plus aptitude test at the <i>BAfEP</i> in the field of contact and communication skills (from January 2024) Professional studies: 2-year post-secondary collegiate course (<i>Kolleg für Elementarpädagogik</i>)



Job title in German: Elementarpädagogin/-pädagog, Kindergartenpädagogin/-pädagog Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
<p>Award: Diploma in early childhood education/professional license ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5 Main fields of work: All ECEC settings for 1 to 5 year-olds</p> <p><i>Route 3 (postgraduate studies for Bachelor graduates with relevant specialism):</i> Entry requirements: Bachelor’s degree in primary school teaching (240 ECTS credits) or in special needs education (180 ECTS) or in pedagogy/educational science; completion of a self-evaluation assessment at the relevant university/university of teacher education; language skills at reference level C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Professional studies: 2-semester higher education study programme (continuing education) Award: Higher education degree and professional license authorisation for the occupational field of early childhood education ECTS credits: 60 EQF level: 6 or 7* ISCED 2011: 6 or 7* Main fields of work: All ECEC settings for 1 to 5 year-olds</p> <p><i>Route 4 (lateral entry for Bachelor graduates with non-relevant degree):</i> Entry requirements: A Bachelor’s degree (at least 180 ECTS credits); assessment by the relevant higher education institution; language skills at reference level C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Professional studies: 4-semester higher education study programme “lateral entry early childhood education” Award: Higher education degree with professional license authorisation for the occupational field of early childhood education ECTS credits: 120 EQF level: 6 or 7* ISCED 2011: 6 or 7* Main fields of work: All ECEC settings for 1 to 5 year-olds</p>

* The formal classification of both higher education courses in early childhood education has not yet taken place.

Table 4

Austria: Out-of-school Pedagogue

Job title in German: Hortpädagogin/-pädagog Profile: Social and Childhod Pedagogy Professional
<p><i>Route 1:</i> Entry requirements: Successful completion of the 8th school grade plus aptitude test Professional studies: 5 years at a vocational college specialising in early childhood education (<i>BAfEP</i>) with a supplementary course in out-of-school education Award: General university entrance requirement and occupational diploma in early childhood education and out-of-school pedagogy ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5 Main fields of work: All out-of-school childcare settings for 6 to 14 year-olds</p>



Job title in German: Hortpädagogin/-pädagoge Profile: Social and Childhod Pedagogy Professional
<p><i>Route 2:</i></p> <p>Entry requirements: Successful completion of the 8th school grade plus aptitude test</p> <p>Professional studies: 5 years at a vocational college specialising in social pedagogy</p> <p>Award: General university entrance requirement and diploma in out-of-school pedagogy/professional license</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a</p> <p>EQF level: 5</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 5</p> <p>Main fields of work: All out-of-school childcare settings for 6 to 14 year-olds</p>
<p><i>Route 3:</i></p> <p>Entry requirements: General or subject-related university entrance requirement plus aptitude test at the <i>BAfEP</i> in the field of contact and communication skills (from January 2024)</p> <p>Professional studies: 2-year post-secondary collegiate course (<i>Kolleg für Elementarpädagogik und Horterziehung</i>)</p> <p>Award: Diploma with professional license authorisation</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a</p> <p>EQF level: 5</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 5</p> <p>Main fields of work: All out-of-school childcare settings for 6 to 14 year-olds</p>
<p><i>Route 4:</i></p> <p>Entry requirements: General or subject-related university entrance requirement plus aptitude test</p> <p>Professional studies: 2-year post-secondary collegiate course, vocational college for social pedagogy (<i>Kolleg für Sozialpädagogik</i>)</p> <p>Award: Diploma with professional license authorisation</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a</p> <p>EQF level: 5</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 5</p> <p>Main fields of work: All out-of-school childcare settings for 6 to 14 year-olds</p>

Table 5

Austria: Inclusive Early Childhood Pedagogue

Job title in German: Inklusive Elementarpädagogin/-pädagoge Profile: Early childhood pedagogy professional with specialisation in special needs
<p>Entry requirements: Completed initial professional education as Early Childhood Pedagogue at a vocational college for early childhood pedagogy (<i>BAfEP</i>) or a completed higher education study programme in early childhood education (60 ECTS credits)</p> <p>Professional studies: 4-semester higher education study programme</p> <p>Award: Higher education degree with professional license authorisation as Inclusive Early Childhood Pedagogue</p> <p>ECTS credits: 90</p> <p>EQF level: n/a</p> <p>ISCED 2011: n/a</p> <p>Main fields of work: All ECEC settings for 1 to 5 year-olds</p>

Table 6

Austria: Pedagogical Assistant

Job title in German: Pädagogische Assistentkraft
<p>Entry requirements: Successful completion of the 8th school grade <i>plus</i> aptitude test in the field of contact and communication skills (from January 2024)</p> <p>Professional studies: 3 years at a vocational secondary school for early childhood pedagogical assistants</p> <p>Award: School-leaving examination with occupational license</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a</p> <p>EQF level: 3</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 3</p> <p>Main fields of work: All ECEC settings for 1 to 5 year-olds</p>

Vocational school for pedagogical assistant occupations

The 2017 Education Reform Act (BGBl I No. 138/2017) enabled the opening of three-year "vocational schools for pedagogical assistant occupations" as a new type of school, opening for the first time in the 2019/20 school year. From an educational policy perspective, one of the aims of this is to specify the job profile of "Pedagogical Assistant", as there have been very different structures for the qualification of assistant personnel in the federal states.

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Early Childhood Pedagogue

Route 1: Vocational College for Early Childhood Education (BAfEP)

With the amendment to the School Education Act (BGBl I No. 117/2008), "educational standards" (i.e. specifically formulated learning outcomes that relate to the content of the curriculum of the respective type of school) were enshrined in Austrian school laws. For the vocational education system, the focus is on application-based, action-orientated learning, whereby knowledge, cognitive abilities and skills are to be related to the real world of life and work. In Austria, educational standards are formulated as regulatory standards (medium requirement level) and differentiate between general and subject-related competences (FIERID 2017).

With the Federal Law Gazette II No. 204/2016 of 27 July 2016, the updated curriculum for the IPE institutions for early childhood education from September 2016 basically enables two competence profiles: (1) the qualification as an Early Childhood/Kindergarten Pedagogue (children from 1–5 years) and (2) additionally, from the 3rd grade of the BAfEP, the qualification as an Out-of-school Pedagogue (children from 6–14 years, which is not discussed further in this chapter). The optional opportunity to specialise in working with children aged 1 to under 3 in the 2004 curriculum has been replaced by additional compulsory lessons and practical hours for all students with a focus on qualification for work in the field of early education for under 3 year-olds.

Competences

According to the current curriculum, vocational institutions for early childhood education "have the task of providing students with the professional attitude and the professional knowledge and skills required to fulfil the educational tasks in kindergartens as early childhood educational



institutions for children from the age of one until they start school and to lead them to university entrance".

The curriculum has a comprehensive catalogue of skills; accordingly, the initial professional education must impart general, job-specific, social and personal skills.

Box 2

Austria: Competence specifications – Vocational College for Early Childhood Pedagogy (BAfEP)

Diploma holders are in a position to:

- Address the question of the meaning of life and deal with ethical and social values as well as with the religious dimension
- Be sensitive and open towards philosophical, existential and religious questions, particularly those of the children (and young people) in their care
- Act in a socially responsible, respectful and appreciative manner
- Handle culturally, gender and diversity relevant aspects of upbringing and education sensitively
- Be open for innovations, flexibility and mobility
- Apply a broad spectrum of communication forms (verbal and non-verbal)
- Guide and supervise working and learning contexts in which non-predictable situations occur
- Examine and further develop both their own abilities and those of other persons, particularly of the children (and young people) in their care
- Communicate correctly in speaking and writing both in the language of instruction and in everyday life and, according to the requirements of the situation, also in a foreign language
- Participate in creating culture and in cultural life
- Analyse everyday and professional issues with the help of mathematical procedures, retrieve data and present them in a systematic way; acquire, interpret and present findings with the use of contemporary computer-based information technology
- Address in a critical manner current and relevant societal issues on the basis of a thorough knowledge in the areas of science, technology and entrepreneurship education, as well as knowledge in the arts and social science disciplines
- Review political processes at the national, European and international levels and be sensitive for democratic processes and peaceful cohabitation under consideration of interculturality and diversity, the environment and ecological sustainability
- Use their comprehensive and networked (pedagogical) knowledge in a reflective way in the context of practical experiences in their work and in their personal life situation
- Make full use of their knowledge of occupation-related legislation, particularly in the areas of safety, liability, hygiene, equipment, first aid, traffic education and (sexual) violence, in a manner appropriate to the situation
- Deal with conflicts in a problem-solving and self-controlled way and avoid violence
- Act in a self-critical and cooperative way in teamwork
- View lifelong learning as an intrinsic component of their own life course and career planning and promote appropriate attitudes and competencies in the children and young people under their guidance
- Handle physical and health-related aspects of education and upbringing in a sensitive way
- Handle the area of tension between normative standards and the individual development of learners
- Base their actions on the foundations of ‘scientific evidence’ and ‘reflective tacit knowledge’
- Plan educational processes appropriately on the basis of an inclusive attitude towards children’s individual developmental needs



- Implement a diverse repertoire of situation-appropriate didactic approaches which include various ways of working, communication and presentation
- Initiate situation-appropriate educational partnerships in their professional work and use them in a responsible way
- Assess and select centre-based childcare settings, taking into account ecological and economical aspects, the use of modern technology and methods of quality management (quality development and quality assurance).

Source: Syllabus – Vocational College for Early Childhood Pedagogy (BGBl II Nr. 204/2016)

Curricular areas and pedagogic-didactic approaches

The curricular areas ‘pedagogy’, ‘didactics’ and ‘practice’ are the main subjects for transmitting the core competences needed for independent and autonomous professional work. The curriculum is conceptualised as a spiral model of learning, during which core content is handled and repeated in increasing detail and growing complexity during the five years of initial professional education.

A particular characteristic of the Austrian approach to IPE for work in ECEC settings is the emphasis placed on the creative arts and on movement education. Subject teaching in ‘visual arts education’, ‘handicraft education’, ‘textile design’, ‘music education’, ‘voice training and elocution’ and ‘playing the guitar’ (or piano), ‘rhythm and music education’ and ‘movement education’ takes place throughout the five years and includes both general and occupation-related content and competences.

Beyond these profession-specific areas, general subjects required for completion of the school-leaving examination (university entrance qualification) are also included, such as ‘German’, ‘English’, ‘history, social and political studies’, ‘geography and economics’, ‘applied mathematics’, ‘physics’, ‘chemistry’, ‘biology and ecology’.

Didactic principles specified in the curriculum include learning outcome orientation, systematic and networked competence building, cooperation and coordination between all tutors in any one year in terms of planning, implementation and evaluation of the teaching process; this is considered essential for interdisciplinary thinking and understanding, maintaining an optimal transfer between theory and practice and connecting the content with the real-life situations of the learners.

It is difficult to weight the various curricular areas since, for example, creative arts and movement education include both general education and profession-specific content. Also, subjects such as German (e.g. including children’s literature), English (e.g. including specialist terminology) and mathematics (e.g. with examples related to the occupational field) contribute to the professional goals of the IPE programme.

Table 7

Austria: IPE curriculum Vocational College for Early Childhood Pedagogy (Bildungsanstalt für Elementarpädagogik) – curricular areas and distribution

Main curricular components 5-year initial education programme (excluding supplementary course for out-of-school pedagogy)	Estimated share of total hours
General education studies (excluding religion) German (including elocution, children’s literature) English History, social studies, political education Geography and economics Applied mathematics	40%



Main curricular components 5-year initial education programme (excluding supplementary course for out-of-school pedagogy)	Estimated share of total hours
Physics Chemistry Biology and ecology (including physiological foundations, health, nutrition) Applied sciences Nutrition with hands-on practice Basics of computer science	
Theoretical and field-based studies Pedagogy (including psychology and philosophy) Inclusive education Didactics Practice (15%) Organisation, management and legislation (including scientific work) Communication practice and group dynamics	33%
Creative arts and sport Visual arts education Handicraft education Textile design Music education, voice training, elocution Instrumental studies Music and movement Movement education and sport	27%

Source: Adapted from curricular framework for vocational colleges specialising in early childhood education (BAfEP) (BGBl II Nr. 204/2016)

Route 2: Collegiate course (*Kolleg*) – Vocational College for Early Childhood Pedagogy

Collegiate courses have been offered at all vocational colleges since 1994/95 and the demand for them is increasing. In the 2021/22 school year, collegiate courses in early childhood education were offered at 28 of the relevant vocational colleges throughout Austria (Statistics Austria 2023b, 86). The curriculum was updated in 2017 and the course was renamed "Collegiate course in early childhood education", corresponding to the changed names for the vocational colleges. This post-secondary qualifying route lasts four semesters: it can also be offered as a part-time option and then lasts for five or a maximum of six semesters. The course leads to the same professional qualifications as the vocational college course through a so-called "diploma examination".

Competences

In a course lasting four semesters and according to the general educational goals of the collegiate curriculum (BGBl II Nr. 239/2017), the collegiate course in early childhood education aims to transmit the following general and occupation-specific social and personal competences:

Box 3

Austria: Competence specifications – collegiate courses (*Kolleg*)

Diploma holders are in a position to:

- Address the question of the meaning of life and to deal with ethical and social values as well as with the religious dimension
- Be sensitive and open towards philosophical, existential and religious questions, particularly those of the children (and young people) in their care
- Act in a socially responsible, respectful and appreciative manner

- Handle culturally, gender and diversity relevant aspects of upbringing and education sensitively
 - Be open for innovations, flexibility and mobility
 - Apply a broad spectrum of communication forms (verbal and non-verbal)
 - Guide and supervise working and learning contexts in which non-predictable situations occur
 - Systematically observe and support developmental processes
 - Communicate correctly in speaking and writing both in the language of instruction and in everyday life and, according to the requirements of the situation, also in a foreign language
 - Participate in creating culture and in cultural life
 - Keep informed about political processes at the national, European and international levels and be sensitive for democratic processes and peaceful cohabitation under consideration of interculturality and diversity, the environment and ecological sustainability
 - Use their comprehensive and networked (pedagogical) knowledge in a reflective way in the context of practical experiences in their work and in their personal life situation
 - Make use of their knowledge of occupation-related legislation, particularly in the areas of safety, liability, hygiene, equipment, first aid, traffic education and (sexual) violence, in a manner appropriate to the situation
 - Deal with conflicts in a problem-solving and self-controlled way and avoid violence
 - Act in a self-critical and cooperative way in teamwork
 - View lifelong learning as an intrinsic component of their own life course and career planning and promote appropriate attitudes and competencies in the children and young people under their guidance
 - Deal sensitively with physical and health-related aspects of education and upbringing
 - Review and further develop their own performance and that of the persons they support
 - Organise educational processes on the basis of an inclusive attitude according to each child's individual developmental situation
 - Use a diverse and situation-appropriate repertoire of methods, including different didactic and communicative approaches
 - Initiate situation-appropriate educational partnerships in their professional work and conduct them responsibly
 - Assess and select centre-based childcare facilities, taking into account ecological and economic aspects, the use of modern technology and methods of quality management (quality development and quality assurance).
- In addition, the course should lead to a responsible attitude in dealing with people, with one's own and other cultures and with multicultural societies, as well as to gender and diversity competence.

Source: Adapted from the collegiate curricular framework (BGBl II Nr. 239/2017)

Table 8

Austria: IPE curricular framework of collegiate course (*Kolleg*), vocational college for early childhood pedagogy

Main curricular components 4 semesters, excluding the supplementary course in out-of-school pedagogy	Estimated share of total hours
Religion/Ethics Early childhood education (from under 1 to under 6 years of age) – Theory and practical application Pedagogy (including psychology and sociology) Inclusive education Didactics Field practice (ca. 19%) German (including children's literature)	63%



Main curricular components 4 semesters, excluding the supplementary course in out-of-school pedagogy	Estimated share of total hours
German as an additional language Organisation, management und legislation, academic work Health and nutrition, physiological foundations Media education Communication practices and group dynamics Subject-specific seminar	
Expression, design and movement - artistic-creative domains Art education Arts and crafts education Textile design Music education and voice training Instrumental lessons Rhythmic-musical education Physical education and sport	33%
School-specific areas of free choice English conversation Nature and technology Supervisory support Specialisation in media education Intercultural education Specialisation in early education Gender and diversity Theatre education Voice training Psychomotor skills: specialisation in expression, design	4%

Source: Adapted from the collegiate course curricular framework (BGBl II Nr. 239/2017), own estimations

According to the curriculum, the *Fachschule für Pädagogische Assistenzberufe* (BGBl II 127/2019) has the task of providing students with the professional attitudes, knowledge and skills required to support pedagogical work in kindergartens as early childhood educational institutions for children from the age of 1 until they start school. The curriculum sets out the following general, occupation-specific, social and personal competences:

Box 4

Austria: Pedagogical Assistant Occupations – Competence specifications

<p>Certificate holders are in a position to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Address questions of the meaning of life, ethical and social values and religious dimensions – Act in a socially responsible, respectful and appreciative way – Deal sensitively with cultural, gender-related and diversity-relevant aspects of upbringing and education – Apply a broad spectrum of verbal and non-verbal forms of communication – Guide working and learning contexts – Utilise their own potential and support that of the children (and young people) in their care – Communicate correctly in speaking and writing in everyday and work-related life and communicate in a situation-appropriate way – Participate in creating culture and cultural life – Reflect on political processes and be sensitive for democratic practices, for peaceful cohabitation in a context of interculturality and diversity as well as for environmental and ecological sustainability – Use acquired (pedagogical) knowledge combined with practical work experiences in a situation-appropriate way

- Act in a resource-conscious and responsible manner, taking into account social, economic and ecological aspects
- Apply knowledge of professional legal principles, especially in the areas of safety, liability, hygiene, equipment, first aid, road safety education and (sexual) violence, as appropriate to the situation
- Deal with conflicts in a solution-orientated and self-controlled manner and avoid violence
- Recognise the need for development and further training as well as on-the-job learning to continue learning independently
- Act in a self-critical and co-operative way in teamwork
- Deal sensitively with movement and health-related aspects of education and upbringing
- Approach the tension between normative standards and the individual development of learners in a sensitive way
- Have the basic ability to reflect and assess their own performance and act accordingly
- Utilise a diverse and situation-appropriate repertoire of methods, including various forms of work, social and presentation skills
- Support educational partnerships in a responsible way appropriate to the situation.

Source: Adapted from the Vocational School for Pedagogical Assistant Occupations curriculum (BGBl I Nr. 138/2017)

Table 9

Austria: IPE curriculum Vocational school for pedagogical assistant occupations – curricular areas and distribution

Main curricular components	Estimated share of total hours
General subjects (excluding religion) German (including speech training, children’s literature) English Geography and economics, history and social affairs, political education, profession-related legal aspects Mathematics and mathematical foundations Information technology and media basics Applied natural sciences	33%
Early childhood education – theory and practice Pedagogy (including psychology and inclusive education) Didactics Practice and care of toddlers Household and safety management Out-of-school care Language acquisition and early language education Communication and group dynamics Intercultural project School subject of choice	45%
Musical-creative areas and sport Creative activities Musical education, voice training and speech techniques Learning an instrument Rhythmic-musical education Physical education, movement and sport	22%

Source: Adapted from curricular framework for Vocational Schools for Pedagogical Assistant Occupations (BGBl I Nr. 138/2017), own calculations

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Higher education study programme in early childhood education

Since the 2020/21 academic year, an alternative route has been provided for acquiring a professional qualification as a core specialist for the early childhood sector. With the "University course in early childhood education", which can be offered by the university colleges of teacher education, a lateral entry option into the professional field of ECEC has been opened up for groups of people with relevant prior training. This makes it possible for the first time to qualify as a "group-leading Early Childhood Pedagogue" in accordance with the Federal Act on the "Professional Employment Requirements for Kindergarten Teachers" (BGBl I No. 185/2021) for specialists employed in the public sector beyond institutions for early childhood education. Access to the university degree programme is possible via a completed Bachelor's degree in primary education, a teaching degree for special schools or a Bachelor's degree (180 ECTS credits) in pedagogy or educational science. This degree programme is classified as continuing education at universities of teacher education.

The university course is divided into 12 modules with a duration of two semesters, providing theoretical-didactic foundations and practical pedagogical studies. The course comprises a workload of 60 ECTS.

The framework curriculum is specified by the Ministry of Education and can be adapted by the individual universities. The qualifications and entitlements achieved by completing the programme are formulated in the following way:

"The university course builds on a relevant Bachelor's degree and offers a professional, scientific and practice-oriented qualification as an Early Childhood Pedagogue. The aim is to enable graduates to support and guide children from the age of 1 to 7 in their learning and development processes in early childhood settings in a competent way, to shape educational cooperation in a professional way and to make high-quality contributions to organisational development in the respective setting (University College of Teacher Education Styria/Church University College of Teacher Education Graz/Carinthia University College of Teacher Education 2021).

Higher education study programme "Lateral entry – early childhood education"

Since the summer semester of 2023, a further university course has been available. This is designed as a lateral entry opportunity into the occupational field of early childhood education for all graduates of non-subject-related studies. The university course comprises 120 ECTS credits and, building on a completed degree programme of at least 180 ECTS credits, offers a "professional, academic and practice oriented qualification for Kindergarten Teachers, leading to a professional qualification" (BMBWK 2023a).

Career advancement possibilities

The structure of the professional field in early childhood education offers only limited opportunities for advancement. In principle, a field specialist can take over the management of an ECEC centre without any further formal qualifications. However, a variety of further training programmes are offered in all federal states as formal prerequisites for taking on a management role. In some cases, working in one of the "*Praxiskindergärten*" affiliated to all vocational schools for early childhood education is seen as a step up. These kindergartens are a legal part of the IPE institutions and are subject to the school timetable. They serve primarily as a practical training centre for prospective Early Childhood Pedagogues.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Field practice is integrated into the initial professional education programmes. It is part of the studies in all five years of the vocational school courses and in all four semesters of the vocational college courses (*Kolleg*). The practical training is organised in kindergartens, children's groups, crèches and the like (in the case of supplementary training in out-of-school care) as day-long practice or as block practice. Duration and content are laid down in the respective national curricular frameworks and comprise between 15 and 17% of the overall IPE course. The practical sessions can take place weekly or be offered in block form.

The tasks for the practical training are set within the teaching subject 'didactics'. They vary in scope and requirements depending on the year group, and must be prepared and followed up in writing by the students. The group leaders responsible for the trainees in the centres are informed about the requirements and tasks set by the school and assume responsibility for carrying out the practical training in their group of children. An assigned teacher at the vocational school/college is responsible for supervising the trainees.

The curricular frameworks of the vocational school/college define areas of competence for each subject area, which, with increasing requirements in terms of specific practical activities, aim to lead to the acquisition of competences that enable independent work as an Early Childhood Pedagogue. For the subject area 'Field practice', these are: "Orientation towards values and norms, self-management and professional socialisation, communication and language, organisation of development and educational processes".

The trainees are prepared for the requirements of the respective work placements in the various practical subjects. The content requirements are formulated in class as specific work assignments, which the trainees must prepare and follow up in writing. The ECEC centres are informed of these requirements and are expected to support the trainees in achieving the competences to be acquired.

Teachers of the subject "Field practice" visit and advise the trainees on site. They are therefore in direct contact and exchange information with the responsible staff in the ECEC settings and are responsible for the assessment of the trainees. The selection and use of assessment and evaluation tools is the responsibility of the individual school. Individual assessment forms are created in line with the respective requirements of the curriculum. These are completed on site by the specialist staff responsible for the trainees and form the basis for the assessment of the trainees alongside the personal records of the pedagogue accompanying the traineeship.

In most cases, field practice teachers at the vocational school are qualified core pedagogues who come from the occupational field, have often completed a relevant degree programme and also work as teachers of didactics at the vocational schools/colleges. Since the 2019/20 academic year, a Bachelor's degree in a relevant subject is the requirement for teaching didactics and field practice. Depending on the region, these teachers may also have an additional qualification as a mentor.



6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Regulations on the requirements and recognition of participation in CPD activities also vary at the federal state level and provider level. They range from 20 hours to two or three days of mandatory training during working hours up to a maximum of five days during holidays. Requirements for assistant staff are regulated by the individual organisations. In most federal states, further training is provided within working hours. The recognition of further training, e.g. when taking over a position, is regulated differently depending on the federal state. There are no standardised regulations for taking over costs. However, many courses are offered free of charge or for a small fee by the relevant CPD organisations in the federal states. These main providers are, for example, the further and continuing education centres of the federal states of Carinthia, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Styria and Tyrol. These centres have drawn up a joint working paper on quality aspects in close cooperation and provide a considerable amount of information online (FWB-Stellen 2013).

The federal state of Upper Austria offers a wide range of over 400 seminars and courses for the kindergarten year 2022/23 as well as in-house CPD courses. Seminar registrations can be made online by Centre Leaders for employees via a dedicated portal.

KIWI (Children in Vienna 2022a), a large private provider in Vienna, organises a very good CPD programme for its professionals. The "KIWI Academy" (Children in Vienna 2022b) offers extensive programmes for managers, educational professionals and assistants in kindergartens and out-of-school care centres. Centre Leaders employed by KIWI are supported over six years through various management courses. Contents include the following areas of expertise: Quality management; personnel management; team development and personal skills; communication, conflict and complaints; legal and business frameworks; work with parent; public relations.

The Styrian state government is offering a university course for "Management and Leadership in Early Childhood Education" (13 ECTS) in the 2022/23 CPD programme (University College of Teacher Education Styria 2022b). The course provides professionally oriented further education for managers and their deputies. In addition to deepening knowledge and expertise in the areas of quality development, quality management, administration and legal principles, the programme also reflects on one's own understanding of leadership and leadership behaviour and develops suitable methods for the respective location by expanding knowledge about focused personnel and team development. All training programmes offered by the Styrian Government are free of charge.

In general, participation in continuing education programmes is voluntary and is not financially supported. However, under certain conditions, students have the opportunity to apply for scholarships from the "*Studienbeihilfenbehörde*", a federal authority under the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (Stipendium.at 2022).

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

The minimum wage rate for employees in private ECEC centres with a regular working week of 40 hours is €2,473 gross for an **Early Childhood Pedagogue** in the 1st and 2nd year of employment, €2,695 gross in the 10th year of employment, €2,989 gross in the 20th year of employment and €3,418 gross in the 40th year of employment.

Certified **Special Needs Kindergarten Teachers** in special educational institutions or groups receive a monthly hardship allowance of €218.30. Kindergarten managers receive a monthly management allowance of €114.00 gross for one group. For each additional group, the allowance increases by €48.80 (BGBl II No. 546/2021).

In comparison, the income of **Primary School Teachers** is significantly higher. The following shows the salary of teachers who are subject to the new service law (BGBl I No. 211/2013, Pedagogical Service). This has been in force since the 2019/20 school year and is the first standardised employment law for teachers at all schools. This employment law is also associated with a changed salary scheme comprising seven levels and higher starting salaries with lower increases up to career grade. In 2023, the starting salary at level 1 was €3,116.10 with a retention period of 3.5 years; at level 2, €3,546.00 with a retention period of 5 years; at level 4, the salary is €4,408.20 with a retention period of 6 years and at level 7, the salary is €5,537.10 (Public Service Trade Union 2023).

The employment requirement under the new employment law requires a teaching qualification from a Bachelor's degree programme (240 ECTS) and a Master's degree programme of 60 ECTS building on this Bachelor's degree. Teachers who have completed a Bachelor's degree programme can be employed if they undertake to complete the Master's degree programme within five years while working, otherwise this is a ground for dismissal. From 2029, completion of the Master's degree programme before taking up employment will be mandatory.

One major difference to the early childhood profession is the extent of the weekly teaching commitment. This amounts to 24 hours per week for school teachers under the new employment law, of which 22 hours are for direct teaching and 2 hours per week for school-specific activities (e.g. as head of class, quality management, counselling, and so on). Compared to this, the average working time of a core pedagogical specialist of 35 hours per week in direct contact with children is very high.

The holiday regulations in most federal states are also clearly to the disadvantage of early childhood education employees, who are entitled to five weeks' paid leave per year, and six weeks from the 26th year of service (Labour Market Directive 2022). However, according to the Civil Service Act (BGBl No. 362/1991), teachers have the opportunity to "leave the place of their teaching activity" during the main summer holidays and during other holidays. This results in an average of at least 13 weeks off teaching per school year: nine weeks in summer, two weeks at Christmas, one week after the winter term, one week at Easter. Since 2019/20, there has been a slight restriction for teachers under the new employment law: for them, the summer holidays end one week before the start of the next school year. This means that teachers under the new employment law still have around 12 weeks of teaching-free time per year in contrast to the five weeks of holiday entitlement for Early Childhood Pedagogues. One exception is the employment law in Lower Austria, in which the kindergarten holidays correspond to the main school holidays. Kindergarten Teachers are subject to state law and are entitled to six weeks' holiday leave during the "kindergarten holidays" in summer, as well as during the closing days in accordance with the



Lower Austrian Kindergarten Act during the Christmas, Easter and Whitsun holidays (LGBl No. 5060-0/2006).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

The legally regulated working time for full-time employment is 40 hours per week. In the 2022/23 kindergarten year, 39.9% of staff in ECEC centres were in full-time employment. According to statistics, core pedagogues work an average of 30.5 hours per week (Statistics Austria 2023a, 103).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

There are no generally regulated measures to support staff and for quality assurance. These are regulated individually at provider level or in the individual facilities. However, there are offers for quality improvement in this area, such as the university course for "Management and Leadership in Early Childhood Education" (13 ECTS) run by the University College of Teacher Education and the Styrian government (University College of Teacher Education Styria 2022b). The federal state of Upper Austria is offering support for 60 career starters in the form of mentoring by experienced educators in the 2022/2023 working year (Educational Directorate Upper Austria 2022).

7.4 Non-contact time

The time for indirect pedagogical work of professionals in ECEC centres is regulated by state law and varies from no legally prescribed time for planning, teamwork etc. to up to ten hours per week. It is up to the providers to set the child-free working hours higher than prescribed in the respective state law. For example, the "group-free working time" in the Upper Austrian Child Education and Care Act is set at seven hours for a full-time employee. At least half of this time must be spent at the centre (Educational Directorate Upper Austria 2019). The Styrian government offers the most extensive preparation time. With a weekly working time of 40 hours, specialists are entitled to ten hours per week for the necessary preparation work, of which at least five hours must be completed at the centre (LGBl No. 45/2007).

7.5 Current staffing issues

Of the total of 67,319 ECEC staff across Austria in the 2022/23 kindergarten year, 17,418 (25.9%) were over 50 years of age (Statistics Austria 2023a, 97). Staff shortages have been a recurring theme in recent years. However, the need for skilled labour varies depending on the federal state and region. For example, according to media reports, there was a shortage of 30 qualified staff in Upper Austria in September 2021. As a result, groups were run without core professionals and closed in the afternoons in some municipalities. Four large private provider organisations in Vienna (Diakonie Bildung, Kinderfreunde Wien, KIWI-Kinder in Wien, St. Nikolausstiftung) announced in a press release in July 2022 that there was already a shortage of more than 300 ECEC professionals for the start in September 2022 (APA 2022).

This contrasts with the number of students who complete their training through a collegiate course (*Kolleg*) for early childhood pedagogy. In July 2021, a total of 2,424 persons in Austria successfully completed an IPE course to become a core professional in ECEC, 721 of them at a *Kolleg* (Statistics Austria 2023b, 327f).

This rate would be labour market-friendly if all graduates were to enter the profession. Although there is no reliable data on this, experience shows that many graduates of the 5-year training



programme, which they complete at an average age of 19-20, do not opt for the profession but for further education, time abroad, etc.

The picture is different for graduates of collegiate courses. They register for the course only after completing A-levels, a degree programme or some form of vocational training. Experience shows that almost all of this group enter the labour market on completion of the course. For this reason, the Ministry of Education is very much in favour of opening new collegiate courses.

The alternative access via the "Higher Education Programme in Early Childhood Education" (see *Chapter 4.3*) also serves as a measure against the staff shortage. In addition, lateral entrants with non-specialist Bachelor's degrees can acquire the authorisation to work in ECEC settings in four semesters. These measures show that the explosive nature of the childcare shortage predicted by many experts has not been adequately recognised by those responsible for education policy.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Changes in the admission procedure for the various qualification routes

Aimed to make the qualification for the ECEC sector more attractive, the aptitude test at vocational colleges specialising in early childhood pedagogy, at *Kollegs* for early childhood pedagogy, at vocational schools for pedagogic assistant occupations and at advanced training courses for early childhood education was changed from January 2024 (Federal Law Gazette II No. 9/2024). The previous four areas (music, creativity, movement and physical resilience, communication, swimming) were replaced by a two- to four-hour examination of contact and communication skills.

New qualifying programme "Elementar+"

The "Elementar+" qualification measure, offered by the University of Graz (2023) and scheduled to start in autumn 2023, is currently undergoing the necessary approval by the Senate of the University of Graz. It aims to attract students from across Austria. 50 places are planned for the first round. Completion of the course is free of charge for participants. The Ministry of Education will cover the costs of the programme in full.

This federal initiative opens up new ways for those already working in ECEC institutions to obtain a fully-fledged qualification as a group-leading pedagogue. It is aimed in particular at those who already work in kindergartens and nurseries as assistants and maybe even lead a group.

The three-year university degree course is conceptualised as a part-time programme, carried out in regional groups. This makes it possible to combine work in an ECEC setting with participation in the qualifying programme. Participants without a *matura* take the university entrance qualification examination in the first year and can thus complete the university course as a qualified Early Childhood Pedagogue.

Language support

For several years now, the federal government has focussed on promoting German (as the language of education) in early childhood. Ideally, targeted and individualised support for children



with insufficient knowledge of German needs to begin before they start attending an ECEC setting. At the latest, it should take place during the last two years before they start compulsory schooling so that they will have mastered relevant language skills by the time they start school (FMESC 2022).

The Federal Institute for Educational Research, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System (FIERID) has developed a standardised instrument to assess language skills in German as a language of education. This has been mandatory in ECEC settings nationwide since the 2019/20 kindergarten year (FMESC 2022). This observation instrument comprises two options which can be used to determine the language competence in German (a) of children with German as their first language and (b) of children with German as an additional language.

In addition, a mandatory handover sheet from kindergarten to primary school is used which, based on the results of the language assessment, provides information on a child's strengths and areas that can be supported and offers a specific starting point for further planning of support in Year 1. It must be sent to the primary schools by the beginning of September at the latest after the end of the school holidays.

Courses on "Early language support" totalling 6 ECTS have been set up at university colleges of teacher education to qualify early childhood specialists for language assessments. The courses, which are based on findings from linguistics, developmental psychology and early childhood education research, serve to acquire the skills to carry out speech and language assessments and to implement targeted language support measures (FMESC 2022).

Further information on the university course "Early language support" can be found on the homepages of the various teacher education colleges (e.g. University College of Teacher Education Styria 2022a).

Introduction of a higher education course in Inclusive Early Childhood Education – changing the qualification route for inclusive education in the early years

Since 1985, it has been possible to attend a four-semester "Course for Special Kindergarten Education" - since 2016 "Course for Inclusive Early Childhood Education" - at vocational colleges for early childhood education. From the 2022/23 school year, this further training option for Early Childhood Pedagogues will no longer be offered at *BAfEP* institutions, but as a four-semester "University course in inclusive early childhood education" with 90 ECTS credits at university colleges of teacher education. Building on training as an ECEC Pedagogue, it represents a professionally, academically and practice-oriented qualification that leads to professional authorisation as an "Inclusive Early Childhood Pedagogue". Further information can be found on the homepages of the teacher education colleges (e.g. University College of Teacher Education Upper Austria 2022b).

Introduction of an advanced training course following the vocational school for pedagogical assistant occupations

Since the 2019/20 school year, three-year "vocational schools for pedagogical assistant occupations" can be offered at vocational colleges for early childhood pedagogy. After successfully completing this vocational school, as from the 2023/24 school year graduates will have the chance to attend a further three-year "advanced training course" (AUL) which concludes with a school-leaving certificate and diploma examination. This qualification is equivalent to the regular awards from a *BAfEP* institution (BMBWK 2023c).

Amendment to the 15a agreement on the financing of kindergartens

In accordance with Art. 15a of the Federal Constitution Act (B-VG, Republic of Austria 2022), the federal government and individual or all federal states may conclude agreements on matters within their respective spheres of activity. These so-called 15a agreements (federal-state agreements) bind both the federal government and the federal states with regard to the agreements reached.

With this amendment, an annual sum of €200 million in special-purpose grants from the federal government to the federal states is to be made for the kindergarten years 2022/23 to 2026/27. The allocation of funds to the federal states is calculated based on the proportion of under 6 year-olds per federal state in relation to the total population of the same age. The distribution of funds between the federal states and municipalities is the responsibility of the local authorities. Attendance at an ECEC centre in the year before the child enters primary school is still compulsory. As before, attendance is to be offered free of charge for 20 hours, which the federal government intends to co-finance with €80 million per kindergarten year until 2026/27 as part of the special-purpose grants. According to the proposal, the remaining €120 million is to be largely earmarked by the federal states, namely at least 51% for the expansion of ECEC facilities and at least 19% for early language support. For these two areas, the federal states are also to provide additional co-financing of €63 million per year. The remaining 30% of the federal subsidy can be used flexibly depending on the needs of the respective state. In order to expand the quality of early childhood education services, the aim is to further develop staff qualifications nationwide in a standardised manner (Republic of Austria 2022).

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Calculation of costs for the expansion of ECEC

Source: Neuwirth, N. 2021 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: Current demographic scenarios for the period up to 2030 were the background to this study, as well as the need to develop access to ECEC services. The study aims to present the cost development in connection with specific recommendations for action for the ECEC sector (increase in employer costs as a result of tariff adjustments, taking over parental contributions for 4 year-olds, additional costs for tertiary-level initial professional education of core professionals).

Procedures: Varying data sources are placed in an analytical context and used as a basis for the calculations. Main data sources are the current population forecast based on three scenarios, the ECEC centre statistics, the EU-SILC Austria, the micro-censuses of the last ten years and other statistical working tables from the Austrian Institute of Family Research and Statistics Austria.

Findings and implications: Taking into account the three cost items of the draft reform (increase in employer costs as a result of tariff adjustments, taking over parental contributions for 4 year-olds, additional training costs for early childhood pedagogy professionals in the tertiary sector), costs totalling €344 million can be expected by 2030. However, around 56% of this expenditure will flow back as increased government revenue within 12 months. The additional costs of the draft reform will be largely self-financed in the first round through tax returns. Overall, it can be assumed that there will be strong positive economic effects in the long term, primarily due to the increased educational and later labour market opportunities for children.

European Quality Seal for ECEC settings

Source: Walter-Laager, C., C. Bachner, C. Geißler, L. Eichen and Quality Seal project group QUALIEPAED 2019. (see *References* for full details)

Aims: For the first time, a standardised "European Seal of Quality for ECEC settings" was to be developed in various European countries (in the Alps-Adriatic region) to record and ensure pedagogical quality in early childhood education and care settings, to which all EU countries will have free access. This can make an EU-wide contribution to the improvement, maintenance and visualisation of quality in ECEC settings.

Procedures: The development of reliable and valid criteria for determining educational quality formed the basis for the definition of quality and the development of the joint seal of approval. These quality criteria were validated by means of a quantitative survey of parents (N=1,908) and ECEC professionals (N=358). The quantitative part of the survey was supplemented by open, qualitative questions in order to be able to include any previously unconsidered but relevant quality criteria from the perspective of parents and professionals.

Findings and implications: Based on the results, a set of quality assessment tools was developed and piloted in ten audits in each country. The resulting handbook on the European Quality Label for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres summarises all the criteria developed, presents the respective measurement methods and describes the process of assessing educational quality in detail.

Policy Paper: Since political decision-making and implementation are of central importance for the sustainable establishment of the quality seal and for the general expansion and professionalisation of centre-based ECEC, a policy paper was developed that summarises the experience gained in the project and the findings of the criteria validation with specific recommendations for policy makers (Walter-Laager et al. 2019; Tietze et al. 2019)

10 steps to reflective language education integrated into everyday contexts

Source: Walter-Laager, C., E. Pözl-Stefanec, C. Bachner, K. Rettenbacher, F. Vogt, und S. Grassmann 2018 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: Based on numerous studies in the field of early language education, a wide variety of strategies can be deduced for supporting children's language acquisition. The project summarises the most important strategies for promoting language education in everyday kindergarten life and prepares them for practical use.

Findings and implications: The project "10 steps to reflective everyday integrated education" encourages ECEC professionals to reflect on strategies for language education integrated into everyday activities using short specialised texts, guided tasks to try out, checklists and video examples. In this context, the quality of interaction in groups can also be improved. Practical ideas for trialling the respective strategy in practice are also presented. A checklist is provided for regular reflections on everyday practices.

Working material for initial and continuing professional education, team meetings and parents' evenings: Various strategies for language education are presented using specialist texts, film material and opportunities for reflection. In addition to the accompanying booklet, six films are available online, in which scenes from everyday pedagogical life are shown and the various language strategies are made visible.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

The shortage of staff in early childhood education and care, which varies from region to region throughout Austria, is a challenge that has been exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis in 2020-2021. In the last three government programmes, the importance of ECEC was clearly emphasised. Currently, under the motto of "strengthening ECEC", some aspects related to quality improvement and the expansion of facilities are mentioned, but little in the way of structural improvements (staff to child ratio, more working hours for planning and reflection...) can be expected (Die neue Volkspartei/Die Grünen - Die Grüne Alternative 2020).

Qualifications

What does the ECEC system in Austria stand for? On what theoretical and sociological basis are decisions relevant to education and social policy made and measures adopted? There is little or no public discourse on these questions.

Until 2020/21, there was no fundamental opportunity for acquiring a professional qualification at tertiary level that fulfilled the legal employment requirements for core professionals in public institutions beyond the IPE provided by vocational colleges for early childhood education (*BAfeP*). This situation has changed with the introduction of the two-semester university course "Early Childhood Education" (60 ECTS) at university colleges of teacher education from September 2021 (see *Chapter 4.3*). Since September 2021, a four-semester course (120 ECTS) is also offered for graduates of all subjects at university colleges and universities (FMESC 2023).

A comparison of the curricula of the vocational colleges for early childhood education and higher education courses highlights the very different educational and professionalisation concepts which form the starting point. The change in IPE structures and the content of curricula are de facto fundamental socio-political decisions. The impending shortage of skilled labour has created a qualifications dynamic that lacks a theory-based inclusion of early childhood education and care as a fundamental, structural and curricular part of the education system.

Inclusion

With the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008 at the latest, a commitment was made to establish and implement an inclusive education system for all age groups. This process is supported by a "National Action Plan on Disability (NAP)" (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection 2022). However, the evaluation of the measures defined in the NAP 2012-2021 (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection 2019) by the "Independent Monitoring Committee for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" (Monitoring Committee 2022) shows inadequate results and an urgent need for action, as there are no suitable places available for many children with disabilities. According to BIZEPS (2022), the current 15a federal-state agreements and the National Disability Action Plan 2022-2030 also failed to fundamentally address the issue of inclusion in kindergarten. Strong criticism is voiced in the shadow report (Monitoring Committee 2020) on the occasion of the state review by the UN Committee of Experts: "In Austria, a distinction is made between children with and children without disabilities. This means that different (better) quality standards apply to children and young people without disabilities than to children with disabilities. This is contrary to equality and contradicts the goals of the UN CRPD (ibid., 7). The reorganisation of facilities into inclusive facilities, an



adjustment of the staff to child ratio, the reduction of the maximum number of children, a needs-based provision of resources for inclusive facilities, as well as an adequate number of Inclusive Early Childhood Pedagogue professionals represent major challenges. The further development of IPE for specialised core professionals is also unclear. It remains to be seen whether the introduction of the four-semester "Inclusive early childhood education" course at universities of teacher education from the 2022/23 school year will contribute to the recruitment of urgently needed specialist staff.

Federal responsibility and framework conditions

As mentioned at the beginning of this report, the entire field of early childhood education in Austria is federally regulated, which means that the legal frameworks differ from federal state to federal state. In addition to the clear demands from the professional field for better working conditions (at least 25% of working time as preparation time), a lower ratio of core professionals to children and greater support from specialised support staff, the declining entry rate of graduates from vocational colleges of early childhood education (*BAfEP*) into the profession can presumably also be attributed to these unfavourable framework conditions. For example, the NeceA association (2022) and the Educare platform (2022) are calling for, among other things, a standardised federal framework law for the ECEC sector throughout Austria under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. This would at least make it easier to implement nationwide structural changes.

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