

Provision of quality early childcare services (Czech Republic, 10-11 November 2015)

Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland – current situation and recent trends¹

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Description of the Finnish ECEC system

Introduction

In Finland, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is seen as an entity that comprises the intertwining dimensions of education, teaching and care (educare). ECEC, pre-primary education for 6-year-old children as part of it and basic education form an integrated entity progressing consistently in terms of children's development. The Finnish ECEC system is divided into two parts: ECEC (mainly 0-5 years) and pre-primary education for 6-year-old children. The following explanation focuses on ECEC. Pre-primary education is also discussed to some extent.

Brief history of ECEC in Finland

- Kindergartens already from 1860s; early education at focus
- Also crèches from 1860; care at focus; for low-income families/single mothers who had to work
- EDUCARE ideology; Fröbel's methods of upbringing from 1880's
- At the system level the Day Care Act from 1973 integrated the different forms of kindergarten and crèches as day care
- The Day Care Act obligated the municipalities to provide day care in accordance with local needs.
- Early education and care for all in need
- Women's participation in the labour market as main force.

Focal points in the development of ECEC

- 1973 the Day Care Act
- From 1990 parents of children under 3 years had the right to choose either municipal day care or home care allowance
- 1996 the right for day care for all children under school age
 - universal services
- 2000 Pre-Primary Education Reform
 - pre-primary education free of charge for 6-year-old children
 - from 2001 August every municipality had to offer pre-primary education for 6-year-old children, 700 hours/year
- 2004 Morning and afternoon activities for school children
 - targeted to children at 1-2 grades and all children with special needs
- 2002/2005 National Curriculum for ECEC

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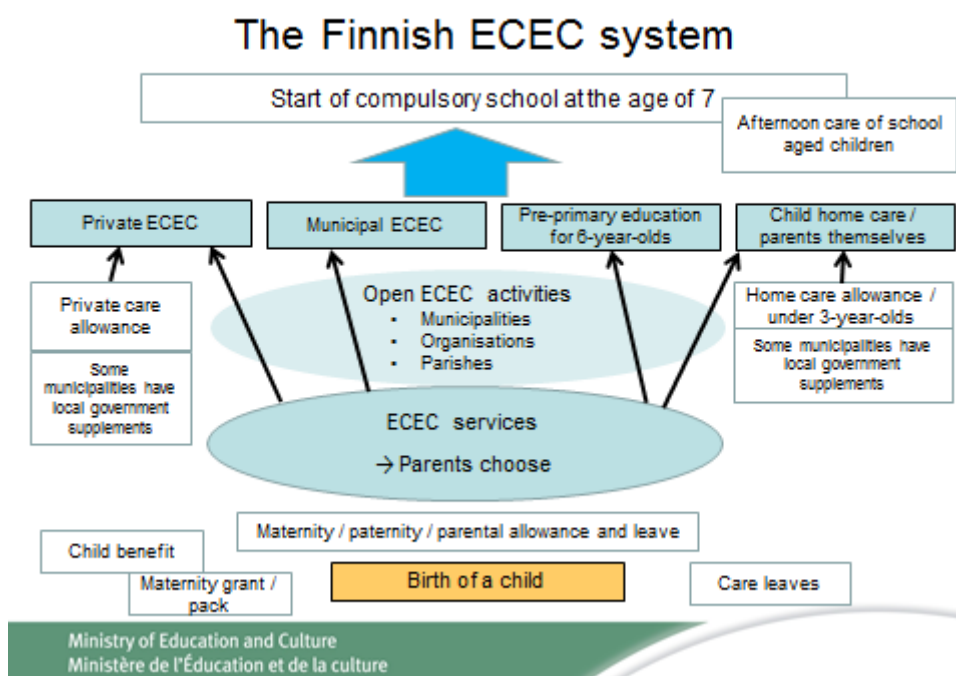


- 2003 Change of ministries, from Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to Ministry of Education and Culture
- 2015 Act on ECEC

Children and families with children in Finland, statistics 2014

- Children (0-17 year-olds) in Finland
- 1,075,492 children
- 19.7 % of the population (5,471,753)
- 573,566 families with children
- Single-parent families 20.9 %
- Total fertility rate 1.71
- First birth at the age of 28.6
- Employment rate of women 15-64 years 67.9 %.

The Finnish ECEC system



ECEC services

Early Childhood education and care is regulated with a number of acts and degrees stipulating, for example, that ECEC is a universal right for the child and including regulations on educational goals, staff-child ratio, staff qualifications and client fees in ECEC.

The framework for the implementation of ECEC is provided by

- Act and Degree on Children's Day Care (1973). Act changed to Act on ECEC from 1.8. 2015;
- Government Resolution Concerning the National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care (2002);
- National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (2003, revised 2005). Renewing of curriculum is going on and it is coming into force by the municipalities and organisers at latest in autumn 2017.



The 1973 Act on ECEC obligates the municipalities to provide ECEC in accordance with local needs. As of 1996, the parents of all children under school age have enjoyed the right to a place in ECEC for their child provided by their local authority.

In addition to the Act and Decree on Children's Day Care (1973), the planning and implementation of ECEC activities are regulated by the Government resolution introducing national strategies for ECEC and the National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC.

Regulations on ECEC are not limited to the Act on ECEC in Finland. For example, many acts from Social services still steer ECEC. That is why ECEC has been earlier under administration of Ministry of Social Services and Health. From the start of the year 2013 took place the change of ministries to Ministry of Education and Culture. This is a major change in thinking of ECEC as educational service instead of being part of social services.

Policy goals of ECEC

ECEC services have many policy goals (see as follows), which are present together and all times. The emphasis on these goals has been changing over history, though. Before, employment, social and family policy was emphasised while being under social services. Now the strong emphasis is on educational and equality policies of ECEC:

- Educational policy: early education for all children;
- Social policy: early prevention;
- Family policy: support for families;
- Equality policy: equal opportunities for women and men, equality between children;
- Employment policy: reconciliation of work and family, gives parents possibility to work and study.

Educational goals

The Act on ECEC defines the educational goals for ECEC as follows:

- Promote every child's growth, development, health and wellbeing in a holistic way;
- Support the child's learning opportunities and promote lifelong learning and educational equality;
- Execute multifaceted pedagogical activities based on play, physical exercise, arts and cultural heritage and positive learning experiences;
- Ensure environment which is developing, healthy and safe and promotes learning;
- Ensure procedures that respect children and to offer constant relationships between children and staff;
- Give all children equal opportunities to have early childhood education and care, advance gender equality and to give skills to understand and respect general cultural heritage and different kind of linguistic, cultural, religious and ethical background;
- Identify the child's need for individual support and arrange appropriate support, also in multi-sectoral cooperation when needed;
- Develop the child's skills to cooperate and to be in interaction with others and to steer children to act ethically, responsibly and sustainably and to be an active member in society, also respect other human beings;
- Ensure the child's possibility to participate and to be able to impact things that concern the child him/herself; work together with children and parents to ensure



the child's balanced development and holistic wellbeing and to support parents in upbringing the child.

Types of ECEC services

Municipal ECEC is provided at ECEC centres and as family day care, also play activities. ECEC is mainly reserved for children under the age of 7 when school starts. If necessary, ECEC is organised also in the evening and at nights and weekends.

Strengths of ECEC

- ECEC is steered by a number of acts and decrees
 - regulations on access, educational goals, staff-child ratio, staff qualifications and client fees in day care
- Access to ECEC is an universal right
- Freedom of choice for parents
 - ECEC, home care allowance or private care allowance
- An integrated system
 - education + care = educare
- Well-educated staff
- Affordable
- Inclusion
 - integration of children with special needs
- National Curriculum Guidelines
 - sets the objectives and principles for ECEC

Client fees in ECEC

Client fees in ECEC are regulated by law and are based on the size and income of the family. The maximum fee is 283 EUR per child per month. The fee is lower for the second child (maximum 255 EUR/month) and for each additional child (56.60 EUR). ECEC is free of charge for low-income families, with 26 EUR as the lowest fee collected.

Client fees cover about 14 % of day care costs. Fees are index bound.

Children with special needs

The Act on ECEC provides that for the purpose of integrated rehabilitation of children in need of special care and education, an individual ECEC plan for the child must be drawn up for the child in cooperation with the child's parents and, as necessary, in cooperation with the municipal division for other social welfare, health care and education.

Facilities and environment

There is no standard for ECEC facilities or environment. However, in the Act on ECEC it is stipulated that the learning environment of ECEC must be safe, healthy and developing and take into account age and level of development of the children.

Also, several building regulations and the Health Protection Act apply to the planning of ECEC facilities. Moreover, there is a set of guidelines for the planning of ECEC facilities.

Curriculum

The content and quality of ECEC is guided by the National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC (adopted in 2003 and reviewed in 2005, new curriculum is launched 2016)



and the Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (adopted in 2000 and reviewed in 2010 and 2014).

- Link: National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC in Finland 2003

The National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC provide the basis for municipal and unit-based curricula and individual plans for each child. An individual plan for every child is now legally binding.

According to the National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC, the principal target of ECEC is to promote the child's overall well-being so as to ensure the best possible conditions for growth, learning and development.

Central issues in curriculum and in pedagogy of ECEC:

- Well-being of the child
- Pedagogy
 - education, teaching and care integrated as a whole
- What is meaningful and characteristic for children
 - playing, physical exercise, exploration and doing and experiencing art
- Process aims:
 - goals for the work of educators and the learning environment, NOT for the child
- The team of educators
 - multi-professional communities
- Educational partnership
 - participation and empowerment of families
- Inclusive perspective to special needs
- Appreciation of different language and culture backgrounds
- Continuity between ECEC and school
- Content orientations
 - no performance requirements for children
- The view of children as competent active subjects.

Staff qualifications

Well-educated and multi-disciplinary staff is one of the strengths of the Finnish system. The Act and Decree on Qualification Requirements for Social Welfare Professionals include the staff qualifications for child day care.

Staff qualifications in ECEC centres: A vocational qualification of at least a secondary-level degree in the field of social welfare and health care is required (ISCED 3 for nurses). One in three of the staff must have a higher education level degree (ISCED 5 (Bachelor of Education, Master of Education or Bachelor of Social Services) for kindergarten teachers).

Staff qualification in family day care (child minders): The family child minder is required to have a suitable education (Qualification for Family Child Minders of 2000). This competence-based vocational qualification is recommended. Exception: in group family day care with 3 child minders, one minder must have a suitable vocational qualification.

Moreover, according to the Social Welfare Act, the municipality must see to it that its social welfare staff, depending on the length of their basic education, work demands and job description, take sufficiently part in the continuing professional education organised for them. The same applies to also ECEC staff.



Adult-child ratios

Ratios are regulated by degree.

ECEC centres: The adult-child ratio in day care centres is one to seven (1:7) for children 3-6 years (full-time), one to thirteen (1:13) for children 3-6 years (part-time), one to four (1:4) for children under 3 years (full/part time).

Family day care (child minders): The adult-child ratio in family day care is one to four (1:4), including the child minder's own under school-aged child. Additionally, the child minder can provide part-time care for one pre-primary education or school-aged child.

The status and rights of clients

The Act on the Status and Rights of Social Welfare Clients provides that in ECEC:

- The legal principles regarding the participation, treatment and legal safety of the client (the child in ECEC and his or her custodians) apply;
- The individual ECEC plan must be done every year with the cooperation of the children's parents;
- Confidentiality of personal information is guaranteed (obligation to observe secrecy and supplying confidential information). As a rule, the supplying of partners with ECEC information regarding the child (or, vice versa, receiving such information from partners) is subject to parental consent.

In the new Act of ECEC there are regulations on children's and parents' participation and impacting the ECEC.

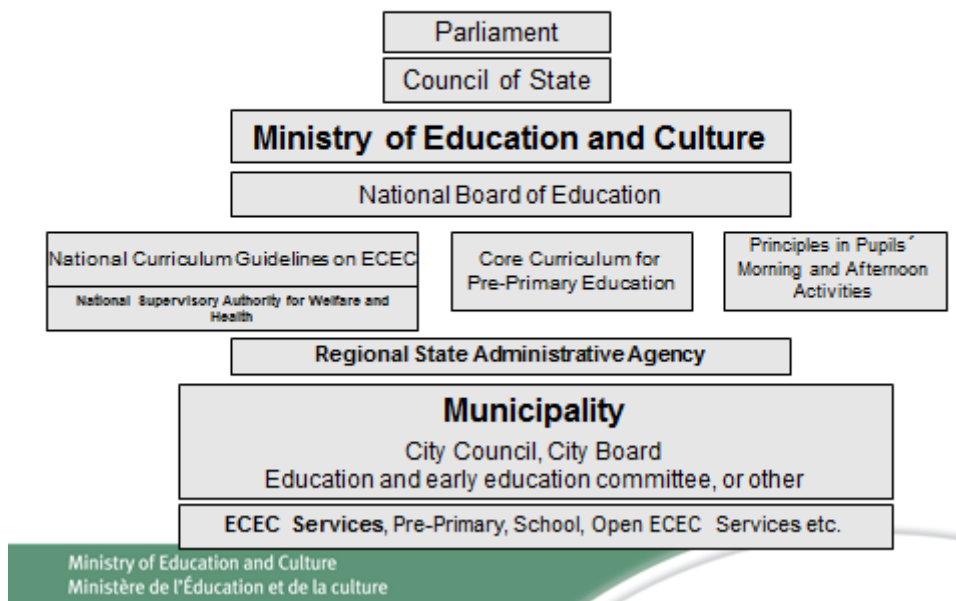
Supervision, administration and steering

The general planning, supervision and control of ECEC supervision belong to the domain of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Regional State Administrative Agencies answer for ECEC supervision in their respective areas. The primary actor supervising ECEC is the municipality.

The Social Welfare Act and the Act of Private Social Services include the key supervision provisions applying to ECEC.



ECEC Administration and Steering, from 1.8.2015



Appeal

The Act on ECEC includes a regulation on the appeal of a decision on a place in day care.

Safety of children in ECEC

Regulations

- According to the Consumer Protection Act, public and private providers of consumer services are obligated to ensure the safety of the services they provide. These provisions apply to services provided by both private ECEC units and municipal ECEC units.
- According to the Health Care Act, the ECEC provider must submit a written notification of using the premises to the health care authorities. The authority will then inspect the indoor and outdoor premises on the basis of the notification.
- According to the rescue legislation, each ECEC facility with over 25 children must draw up a rescue plan. Also, a safety analysis report, including an escape plan, must be drawn up.
- Moreover, the ECEC unit must also draw up a day care security plan, which is more comprehensive than the rescue plan and aims at improving and maintaining the overall safety of day care. The security plan must include an assessment of risks both within and from outside the service.
- According to the Child Welfare Act, the ECEC staff is obligated to make a child welfare notification, if necessary.
- According to the Act on checking the criminal background of persons working with children (504/2002), an employer must ask a person to produce an extract from the criminal record when the person is employed or appointed for the first time to a position which involves to a material degree and in the guardian's absence, raising, teaching or caring for or looking after a minor or other work performed in personal contact with a minor.



Recommendations

- The ECEC staff has the obligation to ensure that the person fetching the child from ECEC has the right to do so.
- In principle, the child should not be allowed to go to or from ECEC without the custodian or another safe accompanying person.
- Guidelines have been issued on the safe medication at ECEC. Medicines are administered primarily by a person with the appropriate training.
- The unit must draw up a plan for supervising children when they are outside in the yard (yard rules). The yard must be checked every day before children are allowed outside.
- To ensure safe day trips it is recommended that a written day-trip-specific plan is drawn up.
- Necessary security training is arranged for new employees, and regular maintaining of information and skills is ensured. The ECEC unit must have a training plan for the personnel dealing with security issues. The plan is reviewed at regular intervals and it includes, among other safety issues, a security plan induction, an induction in child welfare issues, first aid training, training in first-aid fire extinguishing and survival training.

Private ECEC

The same obligations apply for both private ECEC and municipal ECEC. In addition to the above-mentioned regulations, also the Act and Decree on Supervision of Private Social Services apply to private ECEC. The Act includes regulations on, for example, provision and operating conditions of private social services, quality of services, authorisation, supervision and a national register of private service providers.

Funding of ECEC (2013)

- State subsidies for ECEC services, about 30.96 % of costs
- Local tax revenues
- Client fees cover about 14 % of ECEC costs
- Expenditure of ECEC 2.5 billion
- Amount of client fees for ECEC: 334 million EUR
- One ECEC place/child/year = about 11,400 EUR
- Pre-primary education/child/year about 6,100 EUR
- State subsidy for pre-primary education 30.96 % of costs
- Total expenditure for ECEC for 0-6-year-old children, care allowances and pre-primary education for 6-year-old children was about 1.6 % of GDP in 2013

Pre-primary education for 6-year-old children

The framework for the implementation of pre-primary education is provided by:

- the Basic Education Act (adopted in 1998) and the
- Core Curriculum for Pre-School Education (adopted 2000, revised 2010/2014).

Also pre-primary education is regulated. Access to pre-primary education for 6-year-old children is a right and also obligation; regulations on staff qualification; recommendation on maximum group size; core curriculum.

Pre-primary education became a statutory obligation for the municipalities in 2001. Pre-primary education as part of ECEC is the systematic education and instruction provided in the year preceding the commencement of compulsory education. Pre-primary education is provided in every municipality for 700 hours annually during

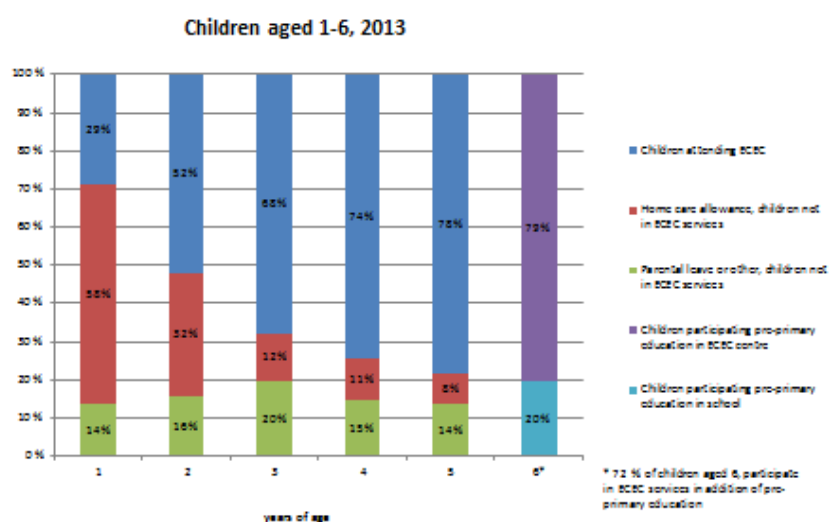


the academic year. For families it is free of charge. At the national level, pre-primary education is administered by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

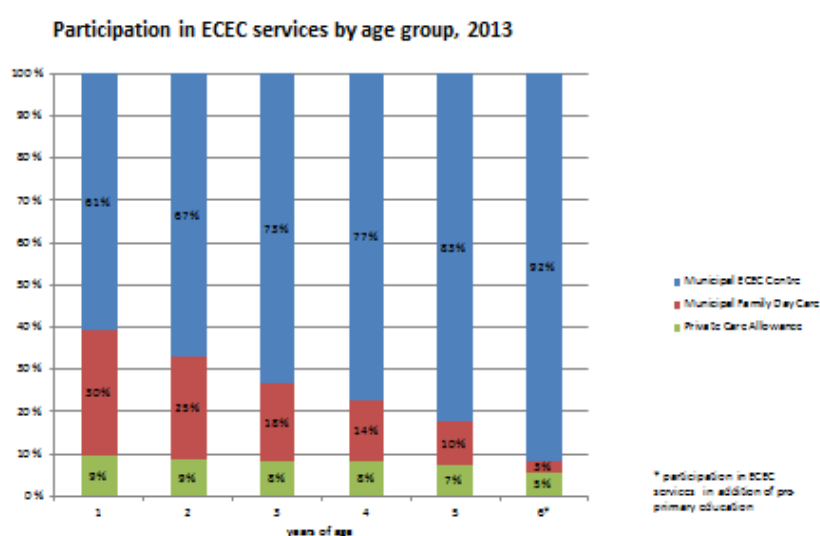
Staff qualifications in pre-primary education: Pre-primary education kindergarten teachers should have university qualifications (lower university degrees, Bachelor of Education (ISCED 5) or Master of Education (about 5 years). Primary school teachers need a higher university degree (about 5 years). Assistants need at least an upper secondary level training (ISCED 3).

In pre-primary education maximum group size is 20 children according to a recommendation given by the National Board of Education.

Participation in ECEC

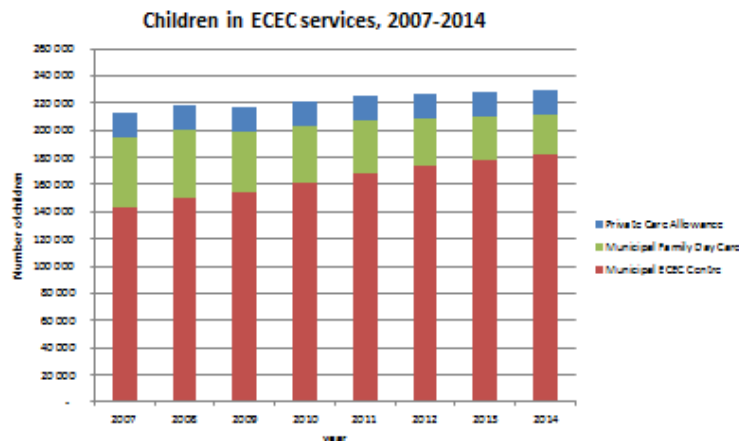


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Current trends

Change of ministry and focus on service

Administration of ECEC was transferred from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture as of 2013. After this, ECEC is no longer part of social services, instead it is part of educational services. In Finland we had a very large change of for culture, also change of concepts, determinations and ideology of the service. The change is still going on.

Law reform of Day Care Act (1973) => Act on ECEC 1.8.2015

New regulations came into force in August this year. The new regulation includes many very important changes in ECEC, also in the ideology of ECEC:

- The Finnish model of early childhood education and care is described as "educare" because the basic elements of it are education, teaching and care, which combine together. For the first time the **concept of early childhood education and care is legally defined. The concept of "day care" has been replaced by the concept of ECEC in the Finnish legislation.**
- Early Childhood Education and Care: planned and goal-oriented entity of education, upbringing and care, where pedagogy is emphasised.
- The reformed act emphasises the benefit of child in organising early childhood education and also that early childhood education and care is the right of the child (before it was the right of the parents).
- The objectives and principles for ECEC will be laid down in the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland and it will be issued by the Finnish National Board of Education. It aims to promote the provision of ECEC on equal terms throughout the country with a strong emphasis on pedagogy.
- Mandatory local curricula and the child's individual plan for ECEC both based on the National Curriculum will be implemented as from August 2017.



- Participation in pre-primary education (4h per day) is compulsory for all six-years-olds. The new core curriculum for pre-primary education was completed by the end of 2014.

Other new regulations:

- Maximum group size (to support achieving the goals of ECEC) is maximum 3 staff member in group of children;
- Regulation on assessment;
- The best interest of the child emphasised as a main principle when organising ECEC.

Renewing the Act of ECEC is still further needed, because it is necessary to cut the links to the remaining acts of social services and built new legislation inside or side to the Act of ECEC.

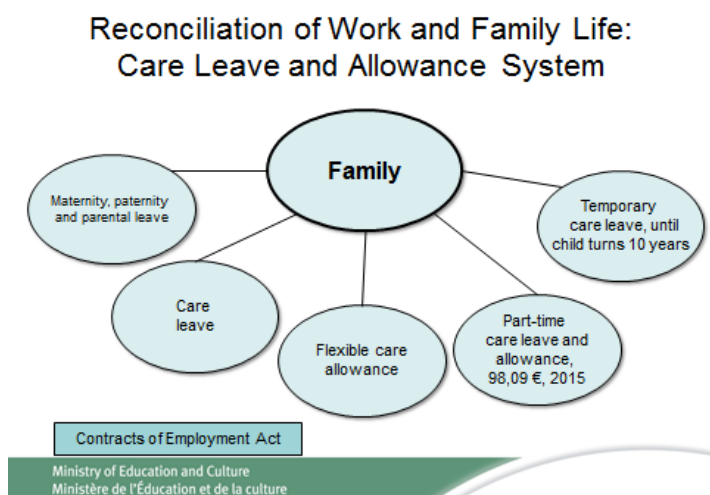
The legislation governing ECEC is **currently being reformed by the new government**. In order to have economical cutbacks in public services, some changes are planned to make in the year 2016:

- All children under school-age have a subjective right to a place in Early Childhood Education provided by their local authority for at least 20 hours per week. It is available on a full-time basis for children whose parents are working or studying full time. It is also available on a full-time basis for children, who are considered to benefit from it for pedagogical or social reasons.

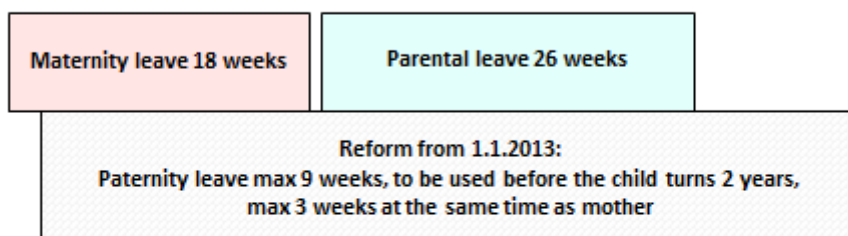
Now the right is for the full-time of ECEC.

- The adult-child ratio in ECEC regulated by law is subject to change. The new ratio for children over 3-years-old will be eight children per one adult instead of seven. The ECEC staff responsible for children is required to have appropriate training. One in three must have a higher education degree. Kindergarten teachers have a Bachelor or Master degree in Education or Bachelor or Master degree in Social Science (ISCED 5). Other staff in ECEC centres is expected to have at least a vocational upper-secondary qualification in the field of social welfare and health care (ISCED 3).
- The fees for municipal ECEC will get higher.

Reconciliation of Work and Family Life: Care Leave and Allowance System



Parental Leave and allowance



- **Parental allowance**
 - Level of allowance determined according to income earned, being nearly 70 % of employee's salary
 - Minimum allowance 24,02 €/day for 6 days per week, about 600 €/month (year 2015)
 - Financed mainly by employers and employees and the minimum allowance by state subsidies

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Child home care allowance (level 2015)

- Gradual entry into force from 1985, has covered all children under 3 years of age since 1990
- Conditions for entitlement :
 - a family with a child under 3 years
 - the child is not in municipal day care
- The allowance is composed of:
 - basic care allowance
 - a supplement
- The basic care allowance for
 - one child under 3: 342.53 EUR/month
 - each additional child under 3: 102.55 EUR/month
 - each other child under school age: 65.89 EUR/month
- Supplement
 - depending on the size and income level of the family
 - maximum 183.31 EUR/month
 - paid only for one child
- Taxable income
- Municipal supplements also possible

Private care allowance

- Since August 1997
- Every child under school age
- The allowance is composed of:
 - basic care allowance, 174.38 EUR/month /child (year 2015)
 - supplement
 - maximum 146.64 EUR/month/child
 - depending on the size and income level of the family
- Taxable income for the service provider



Flexible care allowance for parents of children under 3

- flexible care allowance has been created to facilitate parents' part-time working
- it can be paid to
 - the father, mother or other provider of a child under 3 years of age
 - both parents at the same time if they make work arrangements that allow them to look after the child at different times
 - a parent who does not live in the same household as the child
 - only for one child at a time
 - if parent works no more than 30 hours per week on average or no more than 80 % of normal full-time hours
- The amount of the flexible care allowance 2015:
 - 244.18 EUR per month if the recipient works no more than 22.5 hours per week or no more than 60 % of normal full-time hours
 - 167.78 EUR per month if the recipient works more than 22.5 hours or more than 60 % but no more than 80 % of normal full-time hours.

