



European Education Area Strategic Framework

Working group on early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Leadership in ECEC: competences and training



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**Leadership in early childhood
education and care (ECEC):
competences and training**

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Executive summary

Leadership has been recognised as a crucial condition for ensuring the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) provision since the adoption of the Council Recommendation on high-quality early childhood education and care systems (2019)¹. In this Recommendation, supporting the professionalisation of ECEC staff and leaders is seen as a crucial strategy to improve ECEC quality as:

- it contributes to developing a shared sense of purpose orienting the ECEC practice at the team level,
- it enhances professional activities such as collective reflection, planning, engaging with parents and collaborating with colleagues, thus helping to make pedagogical practices more responsive to the diverse needs of children, families and communities within which such services are placed.

In this sense, ECEC leadership has been recognised as an important element in shaping organisational conditions and operational strategies that are supportive of the continuing professional development of the workforce, with potential benefits for staff motivation and retention.

Although there is a growing policy interest in gaining a better understanding of what ECEC leadership looks like across diverse settings and contexts – and how it can positively impact quality – research on ECEC leadership tends to be rather limited compared with other levels of education. In addition, peer learning across Europe on existing and inspiring initiatives is needed. For this reason, the European Education Area working group on ECEC² started exploring the topic of ECEC leadership over the work cycle 2024-2025. The working group adopted the following definitions to guide its work on ECEC leadership:

Leader (head of centre-based ECEC setting): the person who is ultimately responsible for the administrative, managerial and pedagogical leadership of the ECEC centre. As part of the leadership role, centre heads may be responsible for:

- the monitoring of children's well-being, learning and development
- the guidance and supervision of other staff, as well as their involvement in decision-making processes
- contact with parents and guardians
- the planning, preparation and/or carrying-out of pedagogical work in the centre.

Centre leaders may also spend part of their time working with children. In some situations, the leadership role is distributed between a number of staff who may have job titles such as assistant head, senior teacher, deputy leader, etc.

Professional leadership: in an ECEC context, this requires skills, behaviours and competences related to supporting children's care and education, pedagogy, engagement with parents, the local community, staff management and organisation. As with other leadership roles in the education sector, ECEC leaders need to establish a culture and purpose which ensures that high-quality provision is available to all children, and that staff and parents are involved and supported.

This report is the second output of the working group, whose work is summarised in three separate but interrelated thematic reports and one additional output:

1. ['Leadership in ECEC: an overview of models and practices across Europe'](#), exploring how ECEC leadership is understood in research and enacted in practice,

¹ [EUR-Lex - 32019H0605\(01\) - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

² <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EAC/ECEC>

with specific reference to the functions and tasks associated to centre leadership and to the existing structures of leadership in place;

2. The present report: *'Leadership in ECEC: competences and training'*, delving into competence requirements associated to leadership profiles of centre leaders, as well as in existing training programmes and career pathways supporting their professionalisation;
3. *'Leadership for Educational Equity: a Whole-System Approach to Early Childhood Development'* (title tbc) focusing on how to develop a leadership culture whereby ECEC centre leaders are embedded in a well-coordinated governance infrastructure at local/regional level, supporting a systematic inter-agency cooperation across the education, social and health sectors;
4. *A reflection tool to organise leadership in ECEC.*

This second report describes the **reality of ECEC centre leaders** in Europe, who form a very heterogeneous group. Their roles vary widely: from self-employed childminders and heads of small centres to leaders managing multiple settings, or even leaders of primary schools. Also, the leadership structures differ: some settings have a single leader who also works as a childcare worker, while others distribute leadership responsibilities among a number of staff.

Although the structures differ significantly, **many ECEC centre leaders face similar challenges**, such as rather low salaries, administrative burdens, resource constraints (e.g. staff shortages), unclear roles, etc. ECEC leadership is clearly a very demanding job, and not all leaders feel either prepared or supported. This might make the profession seem unattractive and lead to a shortage of ECEC centre leaders in many European countries.

To overcome the challenges related to ECEC centre leadership, the working group proposes a competence profile for ECEC centre leaders. The aim of this competence profile is to serve as a flexible guide for regional, local and national levels, based on the following definition:

A competence profile for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) leaders outlines the key competences (including skills, practices, values, knowledge, and attitudes) required for effective leadership in high-quality, inclusive early childhood settings.

Depending on specific contexts, some competencies may be emphasised more than others, and the competencies required may be shared between several persons (in line with the concept of distributed leadership presented in the working group's first report).

Defining a competence profile for ECEC leaders can serve multiple purposes:

- **quality and inclusion:** set clear expectations for leadership that supports equity and child well-being
- **leadership development:** support recruitment, training and professional development
- **public trust:** enhance confidence in leadership roles
- **policy alignment:** ensure consistency with quality standards
- **operational efficiency:** guide hiring, performance evaluation and career development of ECEC centre leaders.

Designing a competence profile was, however, not without its **challenges**. These relate primarily to the complexity of the different systems between European countries, but also within the different countries, the contextual diversity, the diverse roles of ECEC centre leaders, and the difficulty of evaluating soft skills.

It is therefore important to stress the following **key principles** when designing a competence profile. Such a profile should be:

- **context-specific** and adaptable to local or national structures and realities
- **aligned with the EU quality framework** and grounded in values of inclusion, equity, and holistic child development
- **systemic in scope**, covering both competences and training/qualification needs
- **flexible and avoid overly prescriptive detail**
- **based on a collaborative, bottom-up approach** involving all stakeholders (i.e. governing bodies, ECEC practitioners and centre leaders, researchers, trainers, professional associations and unions, families and communities, and international bodies).

The ECEC working group agreed that a competence profile for ECEC leaders would be useful and discussed the set of competences to be included in such a profile. The working group **proposes a competence profile of ECEC leaders**, structured around seven key areas, including leadership in pedagogy, staff management, inclusion, collaboration, and organisational development. It is intended as a **guiding framework**, adaptable to different definitions of leadership, setting sizes, and local or national priorities.

<i>TOPIC</i>	<i>DEFINITION OF COMPETENCE</i>
1. Leadership and management	
<i>Visionary leadership</i>	Ability to develop and communicate a clear vision for high-quality ECEC and build an organisational culture in line with this vision
<i>Strategic thinking</i>	Proficient in planning, setting goals and organising resources to achieve objectives aligned with the vision
<i>Decision-making</i>	Confident and ethical in making informed, timely decisions under pressure
<i>Change management</i>	Ability to lead staff and families through changes and follow through on decisions
<i>Quality assurance and development</i>	Proficient in leading quality development processes and anchoring them in systematic processes, including through internal and external evaluation
<i>Resource management</i>	Skilled in managing budgets, facilities and staffing to ensure a sustainable and efficient provision of high-quality ECEC
<i>Regulatory compliance</i>	Knowledge of and ability to apply (local / regional / national / international) ECEC policies, standards and legal requirements, including child protection, health, safety and safeguarding protocols
2. Pedagogy	
<i>Early childhood development</i>	Knowledge of child development theories, children's rights and best practices of working with 0-6 year olds

<i>Curriculum design and implementation</i>	Knowledge of ECEC regional or national curricula; competence in planning, designing, evaluating and adapting pedagogic activities to meet diverse needs and listening to children's voices; ability to lead the team to implement the curriculum
<i>Assessment and evaluation</i>	Knowledge of planning, implementing and analysing the assessment of children's development, in the best interest of the child
3. Interpersonal communication	
<i>Relationship building</i>	Ability to build and maintain positive relationships with diverse children, staff, families and community stakeholders
<i>Effective communication</i>	Oral, written and digital communication skills, with the ability to mediate conflicts and provide constructive feedback
<i>Empathy and emotional intelligence</i>	Ability to understand and respond to the emotional and social needs of children, families and staff
4. Team management	
<i>Staff supervision and development</i>	Skilled in recruiting, mentoring, coaching, enabling needs assessment and professional development for staff; listening and supporting initiatives from the team; empowering staff and supporting distributed leadership
<i>Team collaboration</i>	Ability to foster trust and a collaborative culture and to encourage teamwork among staff, as well as a culture of feedback and reflection
<i>Conflict resolution</i>	Proficient in resolving workplace conflicts to maintain a positive and productive environment
5. Diversity and inclusion	
<i>Cultural competence</i>	Sensitive to the diverse cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds of children, families and staff
<i>Equity focus</i>	Committed to fostering an inclusive environment that promotes equity and respect for all; knowledgeable about providing resources and adaptations for children and staff with special, needs, additional needs or disabilities
6. Professionalism and ethics	
<i>Ethical leadership</i>	Adherence to ethical standards, professional codes of conduct and children's rights
<i>Reflective practice</i>	Commitment to ongoing self-reflection and improvement
<i>Commitment to lifelong learning</i>	Commitment to continuous professional development and keeping up to date with trends in ECEC

7. Community engagement	
<i>Family partnerships</i>	Actively involve families, respecting their role as primary educators, and securing their rights of participation
<i>Community collaboration</i>	Build strong partnerships to work in an integrated way with other educational institutions (e.g. between 0-3 and 3-6 ECEC settings, or with primary schools), community organisations and services to support children and families, and ease transitions throughout the entire ECEC phase
<i>Public relations</i>	Skilled in representing the ECEC setting and promoting its values and mission effectively

Subsequently, the report describes several **examples** of national or local competence profiles of ECEC leaders from Estonia, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Ukraine and Belgium.

After stressing the importance of clear competence descriptions, the report focuses on the **qualification requirements** for ECEC centre leaders. Although there are some variations among European countries, in general, ECEC centre leaders are highly qualified, and there are some additional requirements in place (e.g. previous professional requirements and specific training on leadership).

Next to the initial requirements, **training programmes and continuing professional development (CPD)** are required for ECEC centre leaders to enhance their complex role and professional motivation and lead to less retention, helping to address the leadership shortage. **Core points of effective CPD** are practice-based training, tailored to their actual role, individual coaching, mentoring, job shadowing and supervision, along with peer support in professional learning communities, overcoming the barriers of limited time, a lack of staff and the high costs.

Ideally, a systemic approach should be in place to support ECEC centre leaders with:

- a clear competence profile
- clear qualification requirements
- strong initial training
- effective CPD pathways with ongoing mentoring and coaching (both individual as well as peer support), leading towards collaborative leadership cultures
- policy alignment across all levels of ECEC.

1. Background

1.1. Purpose and structure of the report

At the European level, leadership has been recognised as a crucial condition for ensuring quality of ECEC provision since the adoption of the [Council Recommendation on high-quality early childhood education and care systems \(2019\)](#). In this Recommendation³, *supporting the professionalisation of ECEC staff and leaders is seen as a successful strategy to improve ECEC quality as:*

- it contributes to developing a shared sense of purpose orienting the education and care practice at the team level,
- it enhances professional activities such as collective reflection, planning, engaging with parents and collaborating with colleagues, thus contributing to making pedagogical practices more responsive to the diverse needs of children, families and communities within which such services are placed.

In this sense, ECEC leadership has been acknowledged as an important element in *shaping organisational conditions and operational strategies that are supportive of the continuing professional development of the workforce with potential benefits on staff motivation and retention*. In particular, statement 4 of the **European quality framework for ECEC** includes professional leadership among those supportive working conditions which can contribute to reducing the detrimental staff turnover in ECEC⁴. The report entitled '**Monitoring the quality of early childhood education and care – Complementing the 2014 ECEC quality framework proposal with indicators**' stresses the importance of *investing in ECEC leaders' training and qualification to increase their capacity in sustaining quality development processes in ECEC settings*. Better trained leaders are more able to manage ECEC services effectively and lead teams to develop high-quality educational practices with a focus on children and families. Such training should therefore entail a solid pedagogical leadership component, rather than being limited to administrative and organisational components⁵.

Although there is a growing policy interest in gaining a better understanding of what ECEC leadership looks like across diverse settings and contexts – and how it can positively impact quality – research on ECEC leadership tends to be rather limited compared with other levels of education, and more exchange on existing initiatives is needed.

For this reason, in January 2024, the European Education Area working group on ECEC⁶ started to look into the topic of ECEC leadership, with a focus on supporting the exchange of inspiring practices and policy initiatives among EU countries. The group's discussions between January 2024 and the summer of 2025 focused on the following questions.

³ For a more detailed account refer to Annex 8.1.

⁴ For a more detailed account refer to Annex 8.1.

⁵ For a more detailed account refer to Annex 8.1.

⁶ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EAC/ECEC>

1. Leadership in ECEC: models and practices across Europe

- What are the main **functions and tasks** associated to centre leaderships?
- What are the main **structures of leadership** in place (*i.e. hierarchical/distributed, support structure, role of providers, local authorities,...*)?

2. How to train, recruit and motivate leaders in ECEC?

- What are the **competence requirements/professional profiles** for ECEC centre leaders?
- What are **initial and in-service training** programmes provided?
- Which **career pathways** are currently available (*i.e. from being a practitioner to become a leader*)?

3. From centre leaders to ECEC system leadership

- How can **network leadership** support **integrated work across sectors** (*horizontally*)?
- as well as **across different levels of education** (*vertically*), *i.e. 0-3/3-6 in split systems, ECEC/primary schools in integrated systems*?

The working group discussions were summarised in three separate but interrelated thematic reports:

- ‘*Leadership in ECEC: an overview of models and practices across Europe*’, which looks at how ECEC leadership is understood in research and enacted in practice, with specific reference to the functions and tasks associated with centre leadership and to the existing structures of leadership in place;
- ‘*Leadership in ECEC: competences and training*’, which delves into competence requirements for the leadership profiles of centre leaders, as well as in existing training programmes and career pathways supporting their professionalisation;
- ‘ECEC leadership for inclusion’, which focuses on how to develop a leadership culture whereby ECEC centre leaders are embedded in a well-coordinated governance infrastructure at local or regional levels, supporting a systematic inter-agency cooperation across the education, social and health sectors.

This report entitled ‘**Leadership in ECEC: competences and training**’ is structured in five parts:

- the first section considers the **purpose and structure of the report** and outlines existing definitions of leadership in ECEC, with a focus on centre leaders;
- the second section describes the **main characteristics of ECEC leaders’ workforce and working conditions in European countries**; it also looks at the challenges currently experienced by ECEC centre leaders, which may contribute to potential shortages in the sector;
- the third section highlights the need for **competence profiles of ECEC leaders**; a proposal for ECEC leaders’ competence profile is presented as a reference tool to guide Member States in designing national competence profiles; examples of existing ECEC leaders’ competence profiles designed at national and local level are also presented;
- **initial qualification, work experience and other professional requirements** associated with ECEC leaders’ role in European countries are analysed in the fourth section, along with existing career pathways;
- the fifth section explores **initial and in-service training pathways for ECEC leaders**, by drawing on existing programmes available for ECEC leaders in European countries.

The report presents the results of discussions held during the second period of the 2024-2025 work cycle (September 2024 – March 2025) of the working group and draws on the following sources:

- research literature and policy reports that fed into the discussions in the working group meetings;
- working group discussions on challenges and good practices highlighting current issues within and across European countries;
- presentations by experts to deepen the understanding of current issues related to leadership development in the ECEC field;
- examples of practice shared by working group members in relation to existing structures and support available for ECEC leaders across Europe.

1.2. Definitions of leadership in ECEC

Although the issue of ECEC leadership has gained increased visibility in international research and policy debates over recent years, a clear definition of what ECEC leadership is and what it entails is not readily available.

The definition of leadership adopted by the working group in a previous report [“How to recruit, train and motivate well qualified ECEC staff”](#) (2021) investigating the professionalisation in the ECEC sector draws on the definition of centre-based ECEC leaders drawn up by [Eurydice \(2019\)](#) and complements it with a more comprehensive focus on professional leadership.

This definition was revised further by the working group in 2024, as follows:

Leader (head of centre-based ECEC setting): the person who is ultimately responsible for the administrative, managerial and pedagogical leadership at the ECEC centre. As part of the leadership role, centre heads may be responsible for:

- monitoring children's well-being, learning and development
- guiding and supervising other staff, as well as their involvement in decision-making processes
- contacting parents and guardians
- planning, preparing and/or carrying out the centre's pedagogical work.

Centre leaders may also spend part of their time working with children. In some situations, the leadership role is **distributed** between a number of staff who may have job titles, such as assistant head, senior teacher, deputy leader, etc.

Professional leadership: in an ECEC context this requires skills, behaviours and competences related to supporting children's care and education, pedagogy, engagement with parents, the local community, staff management and organisation. As with other leadership roles in the education sector, ECEC leaders need to establish a culture and purpose which ensures that high-quality provision is available to all children and that staff and parents are involved and supported.

2. ECEC leaders' characteristics

2.1. Who are ECEC leaders?

ECEC centre leaders are a **diversified workforce across Europe**: there are many differences between European countries, but also within individual countries. Some ECEC leaders are the only staff member in their ECEC service (e.g. in the case of childminders), some are leaders of a small ECEC centre, whereas others have several services to manage. In some countries, the leader of the primary school also leads pre-primary services. Some ECEC leaders only have a 'leading role', while others also work directly with children in addition to their leading role⁷. In some countries there is a single ECEC centre leader, but in many countries the roles are distributed among different staff members. Oberhuemer (2024) mentions a few examples:

- head of a one-group kindergarten 3-5 (e.g. Slovakia);
- pedagogical leader of different sized mixed-age 0-5 settings (e.g. Norway);
- head of an ECEC centre 0-5 with several units in different locations and up to 500 children (e.g. Croatia);
- head of a primary school with pre-primary provision (e.g. Belgium 3-6, France, Greece, Malta, Netherlands, Switzerland);
- principal/director of more than one ECEC setting (e.g. Denmark, Sweden);
- lead professional for a number of 0-3 settings where there is no specified centre leader (e.g. Bulgaria, Italy).

Research has shown that most ECEC leaders are **women** (Douglass, 2019; OECD, 2019; Palaiologou & Male, 2019; Hazegh, 2019). The TALIS data (OECD, 2019) reveal that most ECEC leaders have **extensive experience** (i.e. 10 years or more) and are therefore in an 'older age range' (i.e. **over 50 years old**). For example:

- in Flanders (Belgium, 0-3), the female predominance is also the case for ECEC leaders; the MeMoQ research⁸ revealed that 96.5% of ECEC leaders are female, and the mean age is 42.59 years⁹;
- in Finland, most ECEC leaders are between 51 and 60 years old and have either between 2-5 years of work experience or more than 20 years.

2.2. Leaders' working conditions

2.2.1. Salaries of ECEC leaders

The 2025 Key Data report on ECEC (Eurydice, 2025) provides insights in the minimum statutory starting salaries for ECEC leaders (see Figure 1). This is on average PPS 25 800 for ECEC leaders in ISCED 02, and PPS 33 200 for ISCED 1. The latter is higher than for pre-primary teachers. In several ECEC systems, ECEC leaders earn less than leaders of primary schools (e.g. in Czechia, Slovakia, Finland and Serbia where there are also lower

⁷ According to the TALIS Starting Strong survey, approximately 28% of leaders also worked directly with children (OECD, 2019).

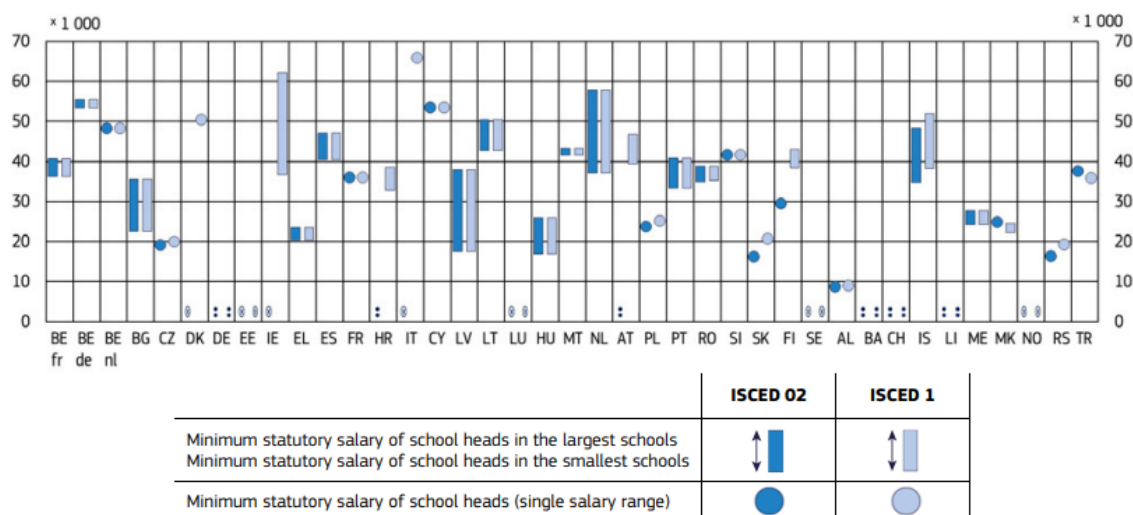
⁸ <https://www.opgroeien.be/sites/default/files/tool-documents/deelrapport-5-context.pdf>

⁹ The average age of leaders in home-based setting is higher at almost 47 years. The average age of leaders in centre-based setting is 35.71 years.

qualification requirements for ECEC leaders than for primary school leaders; but this is also the case in ECEC systems where they have the same qualification requirements, such as Albania and Poland, as well as in Romania and Iceland, but this is only for the smallest services).

Figure 1

Annual gross statutory minimum salaries (in thousands of PPS)¹⁰ of school heads in public institutions, 2022/2023 (Eurydice, 2025)



Source: Eurydice.

Annual gross statutory minimum salaries (in PPS) of school heads in public institutions

	Type of institution	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL
ISCED 02	All or smallest size	36 226	53 408	48 282	22 552	19 094	-	:	-	-	20 426
	Largest size	40 725	55 436	-	35 550	-	-	:	-	-	23 617
ISCED 1	All or smallest size	36 226	53 408	48 282	22 552	19 880	50 345	:	-	36 706	20 426
	Largest size	40 725	55 436	-	35 550	-	-	:	-	62 213	23 617
	Type of institution	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
ISCED 02	All or smallest size	40 467	35 949	:	-	53 453	17 504	42 744	-	16 881	41 644
	Largest size	47 145	-	:	-	-	37 962	50 393	-	25 984	43 291
ISCED 1	All or smallest size	40 467	35 949	32 739	65 847	53 453	17 504	42 744	-	16 881	41 644
	Largest size	47 145	-	38 508	-	-	37 962	50 393	-	25 984	43 291
	Type of institution	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	
ISCED 02	All or smallest size	37 046	:	23 668	33 364	34 953	41 594	16 180	29 465	-	
	Largest size	57 862	:	-	40 875	38 906	-	-	-	-	
ISCED 1	All or smallest size	37 046	39 382	25 154	33 364	35 290	41 594	20 604	38 417	-	
	Largest size	57 862	46 837	-	40 875	38 906	-	-	43 012	-	
	Type of institution	AL	BA	CH	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
ISCED 02	All or smallest size	8 750	:	:	34 857	:	24 233	24 918	-	16 406	37 482
	Largest size	-	:	:	48 393	:	27 720	-	-	-	-
ISCED 1	All or smallest size	8 944	:	:	38 206	:	24 233	22 287	-	19 190	35 853
	Largest size	-	:	:	52 039	:	27 720	24 606	-	-	-

2.2.2. A challenging job

Based on the OECD TALIS Starting Strong survey (2019), Douglass (2019) states that there are **high levels of overall job satisfaction** among ECEC leaders. However, there are some challenges related to working conditions that may lead to a shortage of ECEC leaders.

¹⁰ PPS = Purchasing Power Standard.

ECEC leaders reported **too much administrative work** (e.g. filling out forms). Key sources of work-related stress identified include: the **broad scope and/or lack of a clearly defined role, competing demands on their time**, the **low status, changing regulations** and changing requirements from authorities, and a **lack of staff and resources** (e.g. financial support and material resources). This has also been documented through research:

- Rouse and Spradbury (2016; in Douglass, 2019) found that pedagogical leaders described their **role as being unclear** and that they often felt **unprepared** and **unsupported**. Because the role was often not a dedicated position, ECEC leaders were expected to perform other duties which limited their time to perform their leadership role.
- Similarly, a study of ECEC leaders in Finland, Japan and Singapore found that leaders across these three countries complain about the **time** available to adequately engage in their leadership tasks, in the face of multiple other demands (Hujala et al., 2016; in Douglass, 2019).
- Sims, Waniganayake and Hadley (2017; in Douglass, 2019) found that ECEC leaders may experience challenges in juggling relational tasks with their role ensuring **compliance with policy and regulatory standards**. Centre leaders in their study reported spending about one-third of their time on monitoring and compliance tasks.
- Other studies stressed the **limited resources**. For example, a Swedish study (Lunnenblad & Garvis, 2017; in Douglass, 2019) stated that leaders sometimes feel constrained in their budget, which had a negative impact on their efforts to ensure programme quality; as a result they had to increase group size and hire less-qualified staff than they felt to be appropriate.

Hence, according to these studies, managing, balancing and prioritising time are challenges faced by many ECEC leaders.

Another study looked at those who were intending to leave the ECEC sector (Bull et al., 2024). It found that the ECEC leaders who intended to leave their position reported **emotional exhaustion**¹¹, lower satisfaction with **pay and benefits**, less **professional respect**, less positive teamwork and supervisor relations, a more negative organisational climate, limited autonomy and a lack of quality staffing. ECEC leaders who intend to leave their job also had higher personal accomplishments and were generally older in age.

Among the ECEC leaders who reported an intention to quit, 71% indicated work responsibilities and 56% indicated work hours as reasons for leaving. They also mentioned the **overwhelming administrative and regulatory workloads**, which were becoming increasingly complex but not supported with **additional resources**. The fact that ECEC leaders are not always satisfied with their **salaries** was also mentioned in the TALIS research (OECD, 2020)¹².

Other challenges mentioned by ECEC leaders in the study of Bull et al. (2024) included dealing with the increasingly **complex needs** of children and families, struggling to get

¹¹ I.e. feeling overextended and exhausted by work; feeling emotionally drained, burnt out and frustrated by their job.

¹² The TALIS study (OECD, 2020) revealed that opportunities for leaders to progress in the salary scale are very limited (for example in Finland, Poland and Turkey). This is not the case in the United Kingdom where the maximum salaries differ significantly from the minimum salaries, which may help to attract and retain ECEC leaders. Also in a number of countries (e.g. France and Greece) the remuneration between ECEC leaders and ECEC practitioners does not differ considerably, potentially making leadership positions less attractive. See also Annex 7.2.

However, this is not always the case. Becoming an ECEC leader in Spain, for example, leads to a significant increase in salary (EC, 2021).

timely support from allied professionals, and dealing with family trauma and the increasing mental health concerns of staff.

Similar challenges were also mentioned in Finland by Vlasov (2024):

- leaders' duties were often seen as **fragmented** and difficult to predict;
- 56% of centre leaders felt that they did not have enough **time** to do their (core) work;
- the majority of working time was spent on day-to-day management, administrative tasks and shift planning, and on finding (or trying to find) substitutes;
- some centre leaders did not have the time to lead the long-term development of the pedagogy nor to implement national reforms. This situation led to a conflict between expectations and the ability to influence the work.

In addition, Oberhuemer (2024) found similar challenges in the SEEPRO-data, for example in Greece (4-5) where core practitioners are not motivated to apply for leadership positions because of the excessive **bureaucracy** required over and above classroom work and a **lack of overtime compensation**. The allowance granted to ECEC leaders in Greece does not compensate for the wide range of duties required. Oberhuemer (2024) also mentions Belgium (French-speaking community, 3-5) and Czechia (3-5) where **excessive administrative** tasks detract from pedagogical leadership and discourage potential candidates from applying for ECEC leadership functions.

2.3. Shortage of ECEC leaders

The above-mentioned challenges might lead to a **shortage of ECEC leaders**. According to Hazegh (2019) this is currently a key challenge. Some numbers include¹³:

- Austria: 860 missing leaders
- Flanders (BE 0-3): 104 open vacancies for leaders, 864 jobs needed¹⁴
- France (0-3): 10% of the ECEC services (0-3) declare that they are missing ECEC leaders or face difficulties finding candidates for the job; 1 623 ECEC leaders are currently missing
- Spain: between 500 or 1 200 missing leaders.

These numbers show a significant challenge for the ECEC sector. Nevertheless, not all EU countries face a shortage of ECEC leaders. For example, this is not the case in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary or Slovenia.

To conclude, leadership in ECEC is a challenging job. As leaders in ECEC often have an unclear understanding of their role, clear job profiles and competence requirements are needed. Similarly, ECEC leaders felt ill-prepared and needed support to develop the necessary skills to fulfil the many demands of their role.

¹³ Based on input from working group members, August 2024.

¹⁴ Source: <https://www.vdab.be/trends-en-cijfers/beroeopen>.

3. What competences should ECEC leaders have?

The ECEC working group reflected on the wide range of tasks and responsibilities attached to ECEC leadership. This resulted in:

- a mapping of tasks and responsibilities attached to ECEC leadership (included in the working group's first report entitled 'Leadership in ECEC: an overview of models and practices in Europe')¹⁵
- a reflection tool for decision-makers to organise ECEC leadership¹⁶.

As a next step, the working group reflected on the competences required from ECEC leaders, including:

- the purpose and possible use of such a profile
- the challenges and basic principles of designing a competence profile for ECEC, as well as considering who are the relevant stakeholders
- a proposal for a competence profile to be adapted, as appropriate, according to national, regional and local contexts and users' needs
- several examples of national competence profiles of ECEC leaders.

The following chapters look at these topics and considers the training programmes offered to ECEC leaders.



¹⁵ [ECEC Documents - EACGroups - EC Public Wiki](#).

¹⁶ The entire mapping of tasks and responsibilities is available in the ["Leadership in ECEC: an overview of models and practices in Europe"](#).

3.1. Definition and purpose of a competence profile for ECEC leaders

Definition

The working group agreed that it is useful to design (national) competence profiles for ECEC leaders, and explored the topic based on the following definition:

A competence profile for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) leaders outlines the key competences (including skills, practices, values, knowledge and attitudes) required for effective leadership in high-quality, inclusive early childhood settings.

Depending on specific contexts, some competencies may be emphasised more than others, and the competencies required may be shared between several persons (in line with the concept of distributed leadership presented in the working group's first report).

Purpose of ECEC leaders' competence profiles

Defining and implementing a competence profile for ECEC leaders can have multiple benefits and the profile can be used in a variety of ways.

Ensuring high-quality, inclusive ECEC

A competence profile establishes clear expectations for ECEC leaders, ensuring that they possess the skills and knowledge needed to deliver high-quality education and care to young children. By incorporating competences related to diversity and inclusion, a competence profile ensures that ECEC leaders are prepared to create and maintain an equitable and supportive environment for all children, families and staff members.

Ensuring effective leadership and strengthening leadership capacity

A competence profile provides a clear framework of the essential competences, skills, attitudes and values required for ECEC leaders, ensuring that those in leadership positions are equipped to guide their organisations towards achieving high-quality ECEC. A competence profile provides a foundation for building leadership capacity, fostering confident and capable leaders who can inspire and guide their teams. A competence profile helps to streamline the training and preparation of leaders, including their recruitment and selection, and might also help to make the profession appear more attractive.

Enhancing confidence

Demonstrating that leadership roles are filled based on a robust competence profile builds trust and confidence among staff, families and the broader community. It also highlights a commitment to quality and professionalism.

Promoting consistency

A competence profile helps to align leadership practices with national and international quality standards. It ensures that leaders across different settings adhere to the same set of goals and practices, and it helps to promote consistency in leadership approaches and decision-making processes.

Streamlining recruitment and selection

Having a defined competence profile helps to identify and attract candidates who have the necessary qualifications and competencies, thereby leading to better informed and effective hiring decisions.

Facilitating initial training and professional development

A competence profile can help orienting training programmes and preparation of leaders; it can serve as a benchmark for ongoing training and professional development, enabling leaders (and their employers) to identify areas for improvement. A well-defined competence profile can provide objective criteria when assessing the performance and needs of ECEC leaders, ensuring evaluations are fair, comprehensive and aligned with strategic objectives, and supporting career pathways.

3.2. What are the challenges of designing and using a national competence profile for ECEC leaders?

Given the multifaceted nature of ECEC leaders' roles and the diverse contexts in which they operate, defining a national competence profile for ECEC leaders can pose several challenges. The key challenges include:

Diversity of roles and responsibilities

Broad scope: ECEC leaders often juggle administrative, pedagogical and relational responsibilities. Capturing this complexity in a single competence profile is challenging.

Context-specific duties: leaders' responsibilities can vary significantly depending on the region or institution, including differences in regulatory frameworks and cultural expectations. In the ECEC working group's first report entitled '*Leadership in ECEC: an overview of models and practices in Europe*'¹⁷, the importance of distributed leadership was highlighted. This concept must also be considered when designing a competence profile, as responsibilities for leadership can be shared between several individuals.

Pedagogical focus vs operational management: leaders may be expected to oversee curriculum and/or work with children while also managing budgets, staff and compliance with standards and regulations. Identifying a balanced set of competences required to implement all the leaders' tasks and responsibilities can be challenging.

Interdisciplinary skills: ECEC leaders must integrate a range of skills from education, psychology, business management and more, which makes it more difficult to define essential competences.

A complex and evolving environment

Increasing accountability: current ECEC leadership demands greater accountability for child well-being, educational outcomes and inclusivity.

Dynamic policy changes: policies and expectations for ECEC are frequently revised, requiring leaders to keep adapting and upskilling.

Focus on inclusion and diversity: addressing the needs of increasingly diverse child and family populations calls for leadership competences that are culturally responsive.

¹⁷ [Working group report "Leadership in ECEC: an overview of models and practices in Europe"](#)

Different expectations in leading settings for 0-3 or 3-6-year-olds: in countries with a split system, it may be difficult to design a single competence profile for all ECEC leaders.

Diversity of provision: defining a single set of competences for leaders may be challenging in a sector which includes very small and very large ECEC settings, which may be governed by public or private (for-profit or not-for-profit) regulations and different resources.

Practical challenges of implementation

Subjectivity of competence: when the competence profile is used to support the evaluation of competences, evaluating 'soft skills' such as empathy, leadership, communication skills and problem-solving skills in a standardised manner is inherently challenging; building strong partnerships with families and local communities is also essential but difficult to quantify in a competence profile.

Staff collaboration and team building: ECEC leaders must excel in relational skills to foster collaboration and professional development among staff; the competences required for this are heavily affected by the regulatory framework and working conditions.

Ethical leadership: upholding ethical standards while managing conflicts and pressures is complex and dependent on context.

Training and professional development alignment: ensuring professional development programmes align with the defined competencies can be challenging, especially in environments where resources are constrained.

3.3. Key points for designing a national competence profile of ECEC leaders

Basic principles

Recognising the set of challenges mentioned in the previous section, the working group noted that the following points should be considered when developing a national competence profile for ECEC leaders.

Competence profiles in the field of ECEC leadership need to be context-specific, recognising the specificities of ECEC and of the ECEC system in each country and region. It is advisable to create adaptable profiles that allow for customisation based on local needs and evolving roles. The possible uses of competence profiles in different contexts should also be reflected (see section above on the purpose of competences profiles).

Competence profiles should have the following characteristics:

- **be grounded in principles that prioritise children's holistic development, well-being, and learning, inclusion, equity, and family and community engagement**
- **recognise and value the role of leadership in promoting effective pedagogies, diversity, cultural competence and equal access to ECEC**
- **align with established frameworks,** such as the EU quality framework for ECEC¹⁸, to ensure high-quality ECEC
- **include a broad definition of competences and have a systemic vision which include competences, qualifications and training requirements;** while it is important to define the main components of competence profiles for ECEC

¹⁸ EU Quality Framework for ECEC: [EUR-Lex - 32019H0605\(01\) - EN - EUR-Lex](#).

leadership, going into the details of the competences that leaders should have must be avoided, as this is context-related.

Which stakeholders and sources should be considered when designing a national competence profile of ECEC leaders?

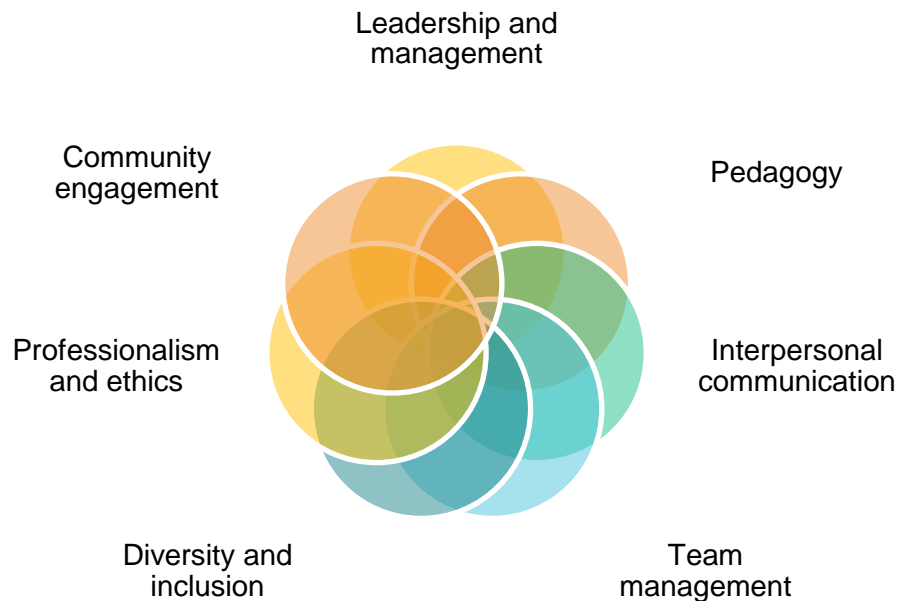
A national competence profile of leaders in **ECEC** should ideally be defined collaboratively, using a bottom-up, evidence-based approach. It should also be consolidated at the national (i.e. highest) level to ensure consistency across the whole system. Below is a suggestion of **who should be considered and why** when defining a national competence profile:

STAKEHOLDER	REASON	FOCUS
Governmental authorities (e.g. ministries of education, social affairs, etc.)	These bodies establish regulatory frameworks, funding structures and national educational goals	Aligning leadership competencies with national educational priorities, quality standards, compliance requirements and specific contexts (e.g. in split systems)
ECEC professional organisations and trade unions	Professional bodies and trade unions have insight into the daily challenges, best practices, and evolving trends in ECEC	Emphasising practical leadership skills, such as pedagogy, staff management and family engagement
Researchers and academics	Academics provide evidence-based recommendations and insights into effective leadership practices	Integrating research on child development, educational equity and organisational leadership into the profile
ECEC practitioners and leaders	Practitioners understand the real-world context and challenges of ECEC settings	Including practical and situational aspects of leadership, such as conflict resolution, team-building and resource management
Children, parents and community stakeholders	ECEC leaders play a critical role in creating a safe and enjoyable environment for children, fostering partnerships with families and the broader community	Ensuring leadership profiles address the needs and expectations of children, families and communities
International organisations (European Commission, OECD, UNICEF, etc.)	These organisations provide benchmarks, guidelines and global perspectives on high-quality ECEC leadership	Incorporating international best practices and standards into the competence profile

3.4. Competence profile of ECEC leaders: a proposal

The ECEC working group agreed that a competence profile for ECEC leaders would be useful and discussed the set of competences to be included in such a profile.

These competences are clustered around seven areas, which are then broken down into several topics, providing the description of the competence required to lead a high-quality, inclusive ECEC setting:



REMARK: this profile is proposed by the European working group as a basis to be adapted by users, depending on their own national, regional or local context (e.g. national definition of ECEC leaders, size of the setting, etc.).

- For instance: ‘Competent in planning, designing, evaluating and adapting pedagogic activities’ could be adapted into ‘Competent in leading the process to plan, design, evaluate and adapt pedagogic activities’.
- The user may also want to add the level of expertise required to fit their needs and expectations (e.g. ‘basic knowledge’ or ‘in-depth knowledge’).

Proposal for a competence profile of leaders in ECEC

TOPIC	DEFINITION OF COMPETENCE
1. Leadership and management	
<i>Visionary leadership</i>	Ability to develop and communicate a clear vision for high-quality in the ECEC setting and build the organisational culture in line with this vision
<i>Strategic thinking</i>	Proficient in planning, setting goals and organising resources to achieve objectives aligned with the vision
<i>Decision-making</i>	Confident and ethical in making informed, timely decisions under pressure
<i>Change management</i>	Ability to lead staff and families through changes and follow through on decisions
<i>Quality assurance and development</i>	Proficient in leading quality development processes and anchoring them in systematic processes, including through internal and external evaluation
<i>Resource management</i>	Skilled in managing budgets, facilities and staffing to ensure a sustainable and efficient provision of high-quality ECEC
<i>Regulatory compliance</i>	Knowledge of, and ability to apply (at local, regional, national and international levels), ECEC policies, standards and legal requirements, including child protection, health, safety and safeguarding protocols
2. Pedagogy	
<i>Early childhood development</i>	Knowledge of child development theories, children rights and best practices to work with 0-6 year olds
<i>Curriculum design and Implementation</i>	Knowledge of ECEC regional and national curricula; competent in planning, designing, evaluating and adapting pedagogic activities to meet diverse needs and listening to children's voices, and leading the team to implement the curriculum
<i>Assessment and evaluation</i>	Knowledgeable in planning, implementing and analysing the assessment of children's development, in the best interest of the child
3. Interpersonal communication	
<i>Relationship-building</i>	Ability to build and maintain positive relationships with diverse children, staff, families and community stakeholders
<i>Effective communication</i>	Oral, written, digital communication skills, with the ability to mediate conflicts and provide constructive feedback

<i>Empathy and emotional intelligence</i>	Ability to understand and respond to the emotional and social needs of children, families and staff
4. Team management	
<i>Staff supervision and development</i>	Skilled in recruiting, mentoring, coaching, enabling needs assessment and professional development for staff; listening and supporting initiatives from the team; empowering staff and supporting distributed leadership
<i>Team collaboration</i>	Ability to foster trust and a collaborative culture and encourage teamwork among staff, as well as a culture of feedback and reflection
<i>Conflict resolution</i>	Proficient in resolving workplace conflicts to maintain a positive and productive environment
5. Diversity and inclusion	
<i>Cultural competence</i>	Sensitive to the diverse cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds of children, families and staff
<i>Equity focus</i>	Committed to fostering an inclusive environment that promotes equity and respect for all; knowledgeable in providing resources and adaptations for children and staff with special and additional needs or disabilities
6. Professionalism and ethics	
<i>Ethical leadership</i>	Adherence to ethical standards, professional codes of conduct and children's rights
<i>Reflective practice</i>	Commitment to ongoing self-reflection and improvement
<i>Commitment to lifelong learning</i>	Commitment to continuous professional development and staying informed about trends in ECEC
7. Community engagement	
<i>Family partnerships</i>	Actively involve families, respecting their role as primary educators, and securing their rights of participation
<i>Community collaboration</i>	Builds strong partnerships to work in an integrated way with other educational institutions (e.g. between 0-3 and 3-6 ECEC settings, or with primary schools), community organisations and services to support children and families, and ease transitions throughout the entire ECEC phase
<i>Public relations</i>	Skilled in representing the ECEC setting and promoting its values and mission effectively

3.5. Competence profile of ECEC leaders: national and local examples

This section presents information gathered from the invaluable research published within the SeePro project¹⁹, as well as inputs from working group members and experts. It reflects the diversity of ECEC leaders' profiles and qualifications across Europe and of approaches taken to define ECEC leaders' competences.

3.5.1. Estonia

According to the ECEC Act the qualification required for the position of Director is a master's degree or equivalent²⁰. The master's degree gives a scientific education and deepens the competences of ECEC teachers competences, complements scientific knowledge in early childhood education, provides additional knowledge about the management of children's institutions and gives guidance on how to support a child's smooth transition from kindergarten to school.

A goal of the Estonian 2021-2030 strategy for lifelong learning is promoting the professionalism of ECEC leaders through research projects and CPD so that they can create a culture of learning and an environment that supports learning and well-being and skilfully manages and implements change. In 2023, a Competency and career model for educational leaders was issued. It describes what high-performing educational leaders need to do and know. The tool can also be used by centre leaders themselves in planning their development and career, as well as in the recruitment, development and future planning for centre directors in ECEC institutions. The tool is being further developed by the Ministry of Education to support the design of advanced training courses for ECEC leaders.

The pedagogical, managerial and leadership competence requirements of a centre director are described in the professional standard for teachers (Estonian qualification authority 2020). Management and leadership competences are defined in the following areas: organisational development; design of the learning environment; human resources management; general resource management; management of the learning process; and self-management. The competency and career model of educational leaders prepared in 2023 (Good Deed Foundation et al. 2023)²¹ describes what high-performing educational leaders need to do and know, and how the development of leaders in the field of education should take place.

3.5.2. Germany

The ECEC system in Germany is highly decentralised and comprises several different types of settings. The provision of ECEC is within the remit and overall responsibility of the municipalities. At the national level, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth is responsible for framework legislation. At the state (Land) level, it can

¹⁹ [Seepro 3 English](#)

²⁰ Veisson, M., and T. Peterson. 2024. 'Estonia – ECEC Workforce Profile.' In Early childhood workforce profiles across Europe. 33 country reports with key contextual data, edited by P. Oberhuemer and I. Schreyer. Munich: State Institute for Early Childhood Research and Media Literacy. www.seeapro.eu/English/Country-Reports.htm

²¹ Good Deed Foundation, Ministry of Education and Research, Fontes, Estonian Principals' Association. 2023. Haridusjuhi kompetentsimudel [Competency model of educational head]. <https://www.hm.ee/uldharidus-ja-noored/opetaja-koolijuht-ja-koolipidaja/haridusasutuse-juhi-kompetentsimude>.

be either the ministry responsible for family affairs or the ministry for education that has the regulatory and supervisory role and provides supplementary funding²² as well as curricula for ECEC in both home-based and centre-based provision.

The federal states have diverse legal regulations or requirements for the qualification of ECEC centre leaders. The requirements range from unspecified requirements (i.e. 'must be sufficiently qualified'), to requirements for a certain number of years of professional experience and activity, to participation in (more or less specified) CPD courses for leadership, to the requirement that the centre leader holds a university degree. In an attempt to provide a uniform and generally accepted framework for leadership competences, the 'Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte (WiFF)²³, an initiative of the Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), Robert Bosch Foundation and German Youth Institute (DJI), has developed a competence profile for centre leaders in a process of cooperation between researchers, professionals and their organisations, ECEC providers and politics, which can be used as a basis for designing high-quality CPD for leadership.

The WiFF competence profile for leadership as a framework for competence-oriented continuing professional development

The WiFF competence profiles are addressed to those responsible for, and involved in, the continuing professional development of early childhood educators and are intended as a basis for designing and ensuring high-quality CPD opportunities. They are, however, non-binding and serve only as a framework for orientation. The frameworks are based on the concept of competences, as defined in the German qualifications framework as 'the ability and willingness of individuals to use knowledge and skills, as well as personal, social and methodological abilities, and to act in a well-thought-out and socially responsible manner'²⁴. The competence-orientation has been chosen because 'Competence orientation can help to align CPD with specific, everyday action requirements and in this way support and expand the capacity of skilled workers to act. First and foremost, professional skills need to be strengthened, i.e. skilled workers need to be empowered to reflect on their routines and everyday pedagogical life against the background of scientific knowledge.'²⁵

The competences required are categorised into professional knowledge, which consists of knowledge, skills and human competences, including interpersonal skills and responsibility. Skills are more related to actions, i.e. what professionals should do. According to the German qualifications framework, interpersonal skills include team/leadership, co-creation and collaborative skills.

The aim of WiFF's competence profiles is to facilitate the targeted planning of CPD programmes by providing an overview of the broad range of key competences for a particular qualification area. They provide participants with learning opportunities that target the different sub-components (i.e. knowledge, skills, social and self-skills) and thus support the further development of their competency. Thereby the goal of WiFF is to determine

²² European Education and Culture Executive Agency: Eurydice, *Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe 2025 – Eurydice report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/66224>.

²³ The overall purpose of the WiFF is to promote the professionalisation of ECEC practitioners by enhancing the quality of CPD activities. For this purpose WiFF provides (among other tasks) competence-oriented frameworks for CPD related to different areas of ECEC practice, e.g. health promotion, STEM education, child participation, etc. To do so, WiFF cooperates with stakeholders from science, practice and politics. Beyond this, WiFF also observes and analyses the ongoing professionalisation process by publishing a biannual report 'Fachkräftebarometer Frühe Bildung'. (<https://www.weiterbildungsinitiative.de/ueber-wiff>).

²⁴ Arbeitskreis Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen (AK DQR): Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen für lebenslanges Lernen, verabschiedet am 22. März 2011, p. 4.

²⁵ Deutsches Jugendinstitut/Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte (Hrsg.) (2014): *Leitung von Kindertageseinrichtungen. Grundlagen für die kompetenzorientierte Weiterbildung*, Band 10. München, p. 116.

competences as far as possible in relation to specific situations. The formulation of skills profiles is based on the level of education of the educators.

Competence profiles provide a basis for the modularisation of training opportunities that build on each other to contribute to the development of overarching curricula. Modular training building blocks promote lifelong learning and can contribute to long-term professional development. The competency orientation of further training is a first step towards a staged training system. In such a system with modular building blocks of training, there is also an opportunity to make development pathways transparent and integrate crediting opportunities (the latter, however, has not been implemented in Germany).

When a level for further training has been established and possibly credit points have been acquired, lifelong learning can be a building block for career upgrading and progression.

The competence profile 'Kita-Leitung' (= ECEC centre management)

ECEC centre leaders play a key role in the development of quality in the early childhood education and care system. Together with the provider of the ECEC centre who is the legal representative and responsible for funding and running the centre, they are responsible for the leadership and management of the centre, combining pedagogical, administrative and strategic leadership tasks.

Competences are differentiated according to four categories: knowledge, skills, social competency and self-competence. The competence formulations are learning objectives for further training, which can be built upon and designed in a didactic way.

ECEC centre leaders manage small and medium-sized enterprises, some of which have a large number of employees. They also have a high and comprehensive responsibility for the organisation's operational and pedagogical day-to-day management. Each ECEC centre is embedded in a system of providers that vary widely in how they exercise responsibility and control of their centres. As a result, the management tasks of an ECEC centre are divided very differently between the providers and the centre leaders.

It is therefore important for the provider of the ECEC centre to ensure transparency by recording in writing the tasks of centre leaders, for example in the form of a job description.

The competency profile is focused and articulated on the Kita management function and its tasks in the diverse social contexts. The competency profile addresses the value of diversity and heterogeneity, as well as bias-conscious pedagogical work.

The leadership competence profile is based on the structure by Ruth Simsa and Michael Patak²⁶(2008) and the five fields of action are structured as follows, describing what the ECEC centre management does^{27,28}.

A. fulfil tasks and objectives

Education, socialisation and care responsibilities

1. ensures the implementation of the pedagogical concept of the institution and its continuous updating
2. plans and is responsible for spatial concepts and timetables for pedagogical work
3. ensures the implementation of the applicable education plan

²⁶ Simsa, Ruth/Patak, Michael (2008): Leadership in Non-Profit-Organisationen. Die Kunst der Führung ohne Profitdenken. Wien.

²⁷ Deutsches Jugendinstitut/Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte (Hrsg.) (2014): Leitung von Kindertageseinrichtungen. Grundlagen für die kompetenzorientierte Weiterbildung, Band 10. München, p. 128f.

²⁸ The tasks are defined very broadly and are, in practice, to varying degrees shared between the centre leaders and the centre provider.

4. ensures protection against child endangerment
5. is responsible for and organises the quality management of the institution

Operation of services

6. ensures compliance with all legal requirements
7. is responsible for the use of financial, material and spatial resources
8. plans and organises procedures and processes
9. will ensure that the places in the facility are filled
10. designs the health management of the institution
11. uses strategic communication channels for outreach

B. self-management: lead yourself

12. continuously develops its own expertise
13. continuously develops its own leadership profile
14. clarifies its own task profile with the centre provider
15. deals constructively with demands and stresses (i.e. stress and crisis management)
16. plan their individual career

C. lead staff

17. ensures adequate staffing
18. plans the deployment of staff
19. is responsible for team development and individual staff development
20. leads staff
21. designs the training process of trainees
22. carries out personnel control

D. shaping cooperation

23. leads the team
24. initiates and accompanies cooperation with parents
25. cooperates with the provider
26. networks the institution in the social environment

E. develop organisation

27. develops visions for the institution
28. promotes the (further) development of the institution's identity and culture
29. initiates and moderates change processes in the institution.

3.5.3. Iceland

In Iceland, the 2020 Act on education, competency and recruitment of teachers and school leaders in preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools lays down the requirements for teachers and leaders. To be employed as a school leader at a preschool, primary school or secondary school, the applicant must:

- have a licence to teach
- possess qualifications as an administrator

- have additional education in management or experience that provides the applicant with specialised qualifications.

The Act is the basis for the competence framework for teachers and school leaders and includes criteria that are intended to provide guidance on the content of teacher education, define the conditions under which teaching licences may be issued and serve as the basis of evaluations of the quality of education. The competence framework also provides guidance on professional development and continuing education and guidance in relation to the recruitment of teachers and school leaders.

According to the competence framework, school leaders at preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools must have, in addition to their general competences, specific competencies relevant to school development, leadership, financial management and public administration. School leaders must have specialised competency in:

- professional leadership regarding the development of learning and teaching and the prosperity of students
- communication and cooperation within and outside the school
- human resources and welfare
- finance and management.

School leaders' competences are laid down in eight topics:

- 1) knowledge of the acts, regulations and other legal provisions that concern the work of schools and the competency to lead that work in accordance with the aims and provisions of the law
- 2) competency to perform daily leadership of a reform-oriented school, including in respect of finances, management and human resources
- 3) knowledge and competency to lead and support the learning community within a school, both formally and informally
- 4) knowledge and competency to provide professional leadership in relation to student assessment and quality assurance
- 5) competency to communicate with different stakeholders within and outside the school, and to promote collaboration and cooperation between people both within and outside the school community
- 6) knowledge of developments, trends and tendencies in educational sciences and schooling
- 7) knowledge of the potential and limitations of using digital technologies in schooling, from the perspectives of both management and school development
- 8) knowledge and competency to safeguard and promote the well-being of children and young people in the context of schooling.

3.5.4. Ireland

In Ireland, the report entitled '*Nurturing Skills. The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare (2022 – 2028)*²⁹ sets out role profiles for each of three grades of responsibility:

- early years educators (i.e. assistants)

²⁹ [Nurturing Skills: The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care \(ELC\) and School-Age Childcare \(SAC\), 2022-2028](#) (Appendix 3, p. 132).

- lead educators who lead practice with a group of children (i.e. teachers)
- managers who have day-to-day charge of the setting (i.e. heads of centre).

The Workforce Plan outlines a vision of a skilled and sustainable professional workforce and five pillars for developing the profession:

- establishing a career framework
- raising qualification levels
- developing a national CPD system
- supporting recruitment
- retention and diversity and regulating the profession.

Furthermore, the Workforce Plan lays down three enablers to safeguard the implementation of the pillars:

- improvements in pay and conditions of employment
- coordination of quality support infrastructure
- ongoing engagement with the profession.

The qualification requirements for managers will be introduced for the first time and adopted by 2028. The Workforce Plan provides a detailed list of managers' key tasks and responsibilities, together with a list of skills and knowledge expected to fulfil their tasks, centred around the following areas:

- child development
- play and learning
- social environment
- safety, health and well-being
- personal professional development
- leadership, management, communication and administration.

The Workforce Plan also stresses the development of distributed leadership responsibilities. The roles of other middle management are mentioned, such as an inclusion coordinator, pedagogical lead, family and community partnership coordinator, student placement and induction lead. These different 'roles' may be distributed across different individuals in different configurations, depending on the size and structure of the setting. However, in a small setting for example, all these leadership roles may lie with one individual.

3.5.5. Lithuania

In Lithuania, regulations on the performance appraisal of heads, deputy heads of education and heads of departments organising education of state and municipal educational institutions (except higher education institution) are developed. A self-assessment instrument has been developed, aimed at turning ECEC settings into learning organisations. The self-evaluation tool uses four indicators:

- school activity management
- continuous professional development
- leadership for learning
- school self-governance.

There are guidelines for strengthening leadership and management in educational institutions. These guidelines outline the activities and measures that will lead to a sustainable system of educational leadership and social justice, focusing on the training of educational leaders, the development and assessment of their competences, the provision of professional support, the expansion of post-career opportunities and the transfer of successful leadership experiences.

Lithuania is also involved in a structural reforms support programme on educational leadership with experts from Ireland and the Netherlands. The following focus points for strengthening leadership and leadership in education have been set:

- training of leaders of educational institutions
- development of selection processes (i.e. reserve strengthening)
- assistance and consulting
- ensuring opportunities for career continuity
- publicity.

3.5.6. Norway

It is a national policy priority in Norway that, by 2030, all children must be able to participate in a kindergarten provision of equitable high quality. Among other things, the government stresses that quality should be assured by strengthening competence for staff, good leadership and staffing. In Norway the tasks of ECEC leaders (head teacher = centre leader) are described as follows:

- The head teacher is given day-to-day responsibility for pedagogical practices, staff and administration.
- The head teacher ensures that pedagogical practices comply with the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan, and that staff have a common understanding of their duties as described in these documents.
- The head teacher must enable staff to put their expertise into practice.
- Good pedagogical and administrative management requires good cooperation with the kindergarten owner, the pedagogical leaders and other kindergarten staff.
- The head teacher should lead and follow up on the planning, documentation, evaluation and development of kindergarten content and working methods and ensure that the entire staff are involved.
- The head teacher must ensure that the kindergarten adopts procedures for cooperating with relevant institutions such as schools, health centres, the educational psychology service and the child protection service.
- The pedagogical leader is tasked with implementing and overseeing the kindergarten's pedagogical practices using sound professional judgement.
- The pedagogical leader offers guidance and ensures that the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan are observed in the kindergarten's pedagogical practices.
- The pedagogical leader oversees the process of planning, implementing, documenting, assessing and developing the work taking place amongst the group of children or in the areas they are tasked with supervising.

3.5.7. Portugal

ECEC (3-6) leadership in Portugal is organised as part of a larger ecosystem which covers all teachers/educators in the public sector and which is based on the school clusters model

for public provision, where public ECEC centres are organised into school clusters nationwide. Clusters are groups of school centres ranging from kindergartens (between age 3-5 years), through primary schools and lower secondary schools, to upper secondary schools. There is therefore no ECEC leadership as such, only cluster leadership. ECEC educators and teachers within the clusters have the same qualifications, salary, etc. as other teachers. All centres are linked to one centre leader – a head teacher – who oversees all the schools and kindergartens in the cluster.

All teachers must work within the framework of a general and broad profile. To be a kindergarten teacher, one must have a first degree in education and a master's degree either in ECEC education or one that certifies the teacher to work in ECEC schools and primary education. These degrees, which are offered by public universities and both public and private schools of education, must incorporate the following training components: teaching, educational sciences, subject didactics, introduction to professional practice, and supervised practice and teaching.

Any fully qualified teacher can apply to become the head teacher provided that they meet certain minimum criteria related to the number of years of experience and that have attended a training programme that qualifies them for the position. The programmes available are:

- either a master's in school administration and management;
- or specialised training programmes in school administration, which most leaders follow, including programmes that qualify them for the pedagogical and administrative management of public school clusters.

The key areas at the core of headteachers' training are management and administration (including school operational management, together with financial and human resources management), and legal and policy knowledge in educational law and policy implementation. Additional areas that are also favoured by more wide-ranging training programmes include curriculum development, teaching and learning practices, assessment and evaluation, strategic thinking and planning, change management and inspirational leadership.

3.5.8. Ukraine

According to the Law of Ukraine 'On Preschool Education' (Ministry of Education and Science 2015), the management of early childhood institutions/kindergartens is provided by the centre leader/director. A director should have Ukrainian citizenship, be fluent in the Ukrainian language, have a master's degree and have a minimum of three years of practical experience. The director should also possess organisational skills and have the physical and psychological prerequisites to fulfil this professional function.

The SEEPRO project reported that, in September 2021, professional standards for the directors of early childhood institutions were issued and approved by the Ministry of Economics of Ukraine (2021); they are structured according to the same goals as those for the early childhood teacher and include the following professional tasks, functions and competences:

A. organising a healthy, safe and inclusive learning environment

- health protection (an ability to provide a physically and psychologically safe learning environment and an ability to organise the work of psychological and social-pedagogical services in the kindergarten)
- planning (an ability to plan and analyse the effectiveness of the educational process)

B. managing an early childhood institution or kindergarten

- operational management (an ability to secure the financing of the kindergarten, organisation and control of nutrition and medical services in the kindergarten, management of human resources)
- organisational-methodological management (an ability to organise the educational programme, the work of the psychological-pedagogical support team, the methodological support of the pedagogical staff)
- communication (an ability to communicate effectively with all participants involved in the educational process and other stakeholders)

C. ongoing personal and professional development

- lifelong learning (an ability to reflect, self-assess and then plan professional development)
- informational-communicational aspects (an ability to use ICT and e-resources effectively in the educational process, to be aware of and use safety rules in the digital environment).

D. leadership and partnership

- leadership (an ability to present the early childhood institution or kindergarten, show resilience and flexibility, and support conflict resolution and the prevention of professional burn-out)
- emotional-ethical aspects (an ability to self-regulate, display tolerance, conduct constructive and sustainable interactions with the participants of the educational process)

E. strategic development

- strategic governance and strategic development (an ability to conduct strategic planning, to develop a strategy for the kindergarten, and to develop a system of quality control)
- strategic communication (an ability to present the kindergarten to different stakeholders)
- normative-legal aspects (an ability to use legal documents in professional activities).

3.5.9. Belgium (Flanders and the city of Ghent)

In the childcare sector in Flanders (Belgium), according to the 2014 Decree on childcare for the 0- to 3-year-olds, a centre leader is 'the person appointed by the service provider to take care of the quality of the daily operation of the childcare centre'. Centre leaders are responsible for taking care of contacts with parents, the authorities for inspections and with the government agency responsible for childcare (Agentschap Opgroeien). The tasks of centre leaders are mainly administrative but, in some cases, centre leaders are also responsible for providing pedagogical support to their teams. In smaller childcare services, centre leaders can also work directly with children in child groups.

The qualification requirements of centre leaders vary depending on the group size. Centre leaders of childcare services with up to 18 full-time child places are required to have at least the same level of qualifications as the core pedagogues, namely ISCED 3. Centre leaders of childcare services with 19 or more full-time child places are required to have at least a bachelor's degree (EQF level 6 or ISCED 6). There is a list of eligible qualifications in different fields of study for those wishing to work as centre leaders in the above groups.

In Flanders, 15 basic competences are defined for ECEC staff working with children under the age of three, but there are no specific competencies defined for ECEC leaders. As the organising authorities for childcare in Ghent, the city has established a clear task list for ECEC leaders and the required competences:

Tasks domains	Competences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• general leadership• children• families• community• team• health and safety• food• finances	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• working efficiently• client-oriented working• result-focused working• coaching• delegating• motivating• leading a team• reporting• collaborating• being flexible

Each competency is described clearly and further defined with indicators.

4. Qualifications and career pathways

The job of ECEC leaders is demanding. To meet all the challenges, it is crucial that they are highly qualified and undertake specific training before (or during) they enter the job.

4.1 Initial qualification requirements

The Key Data report on ECEC (Eurydice, 2025) show that ECEC leaders must be qualified at the **bachelor's level (ISCED 6)** or higher in most European countries (see Figure 2). In more than half of the ECEC systems in settings for younger children (below 3), and in over three-quarters of ECEC systems in settings for older children (above 3). In nine education systems, the minimum qualification level for ECEC leaders is even higher in at least one setting, being set **at master's level (ISCED 7)**. This applies to ECEC leaders in:

- Lithuania, Portugal and Iceland in all ECEC services
- France, Italy, Malta and Poland only in ECEC settings for older children
- Bulgaria, only for ECEC leaders of kindergartens (for children from 10 months to 7 years) need an ISCED 7 qualification; whereas ECEC leaders of nurseries for children from 3 months to 3 years need an ISCED 6 qualification
- Slovakia but only for ECEC leaders in settings for younger children; whereas ECEC leaders of pre-primary schools for older children only need an upper-secondary-level qualification (ISCED 3).

In eight ECEC systems, the minimum requirement needed for an ECEC leader in settings for older children is a qualification at bachelor's level or higher, with lower requirements in settings for younger children (Eurydice, 2025). For example;

- Greece and Malta: short-cycle, tertiary qualification (ISCED 5)
- Luxembourg: post-secondary, non-tertiary education qualification (ISCED 4)
- Poland: upper-secondary-level qualification.

In line with the Key Data report on ECEC (Eurydice, 2025), Oberhuemer (2024) stressed that ECEC leaders in unitary systems need higher minimum qualification requirements than in split systems (respectively ranging from ISCED 6 to 7 versus ISCED 3 or 4 to 7).

In some countries this is a decentralised regulation. For example, in Italy, the requirements for ECEC leaders in settings for younger children are a matter of regional autonomy (Eurydice, 2025). In Germany, Saxony, Saarland and Thuringia are the federal states that require a university degree for the management of an ECEC centre (if it reaches a certain size)³⁰.

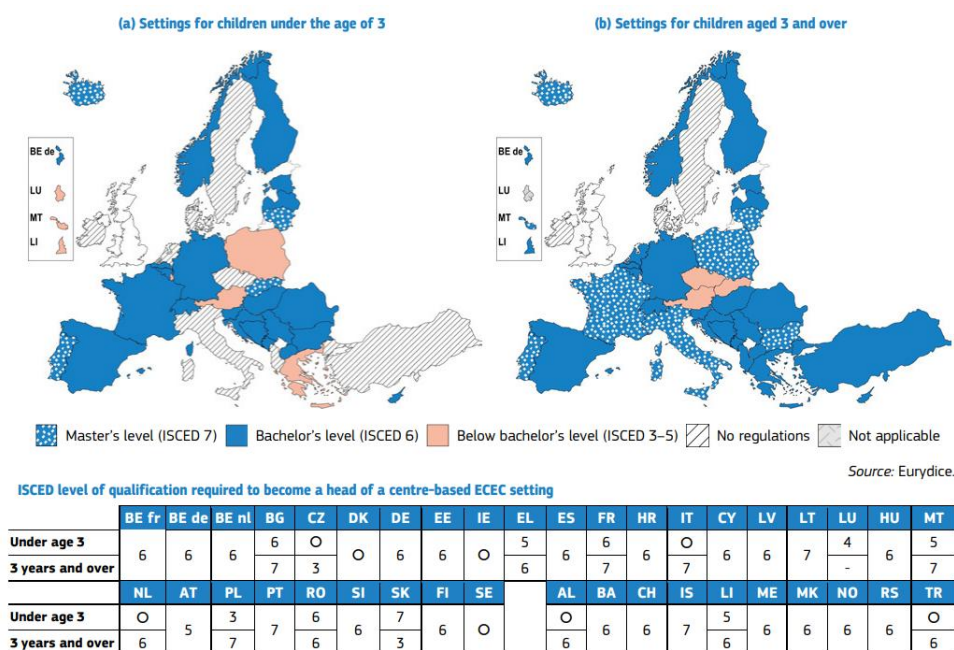
In other countries there are no top-level regulations on the minimum qualification requirements for ECEC leaders. For example, in Czechia, the Netherlands and Albania, there are no minimum qualification requirements to lead the settings for younger children. In Denmark, Ireland³¹ and Sweden there are no top-level regulations on minimum qualification requirements in any centre-based ECEC setting.

³⁰ https://www.weiterbildungsinitiative.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Publikationen/WiFF_FKB_2023_Web.pdf

³¹ This will change with the new workforce plan 'Nurturing Skills' (2022-2028).

Figure 2:

Minimum qualifications required to become an ECEC leader of a centre-based ECEC setting, 2024-2025 (Eurydice, Key Data report on ECEC, 2025)



4.2 Extra requirements for ECEC leaders

Beyond the minimum qualification requirements, other requirements are often needed to become an ECEC leader. This might be previous professional experience or other requirements, like specific training.

4.2.1. Previous work experience

Both the SEEPRO data (Oberhuemer, 2024) and the Key Data report on ECEC (Eurydice, 2025, Figure 3) revealed that most EU countries require previous **work experience** (within or outside ECEC) for ECEC leaders.

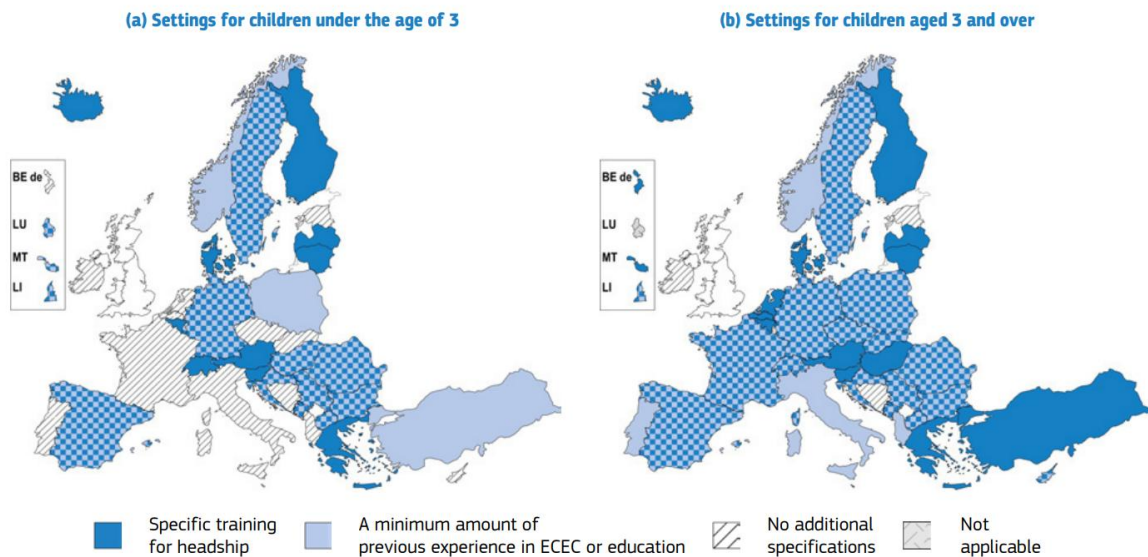
This is the case in more than half of all European ECEC systems. Again (and similar to the minimum qualification requirements) there are often more requirements specified for ECEC leaders of settings for older children than for ECEC leaders of settings for younger children. Key examples include the following:

- In Bulgaria, Germany, Spain, Croatia, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway and Serbia, all ECEC leaders (in all settings, regardless of the childrens' ages) must have previous experience.
- In Luxembourg, Hungary and Malta, experience is required for ECEC leaders of settings for younger children.
- In Czechia, France, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, Slovakia, Albania and Switzerland, experience is required for ECEC leaders of settings for older children.

According to Oberhuemer (2024), this previous experience may range from 1 year (e.g. Malta 0-2 and Lithuania 0-6), over 3 years (e.g. Bulgaria), 5 years (e.g. Slovenia), or 8 years (e.g. Serbia 3-5), to 12 years in Greece (4-5). In Cyprus this might even be 20 to 25 years.

Figure 3

Additional specifications to become an ECEC leader in centre-based settings, 2024-2025 (Eurydice, 2025)



4.2.2. Other requirements

As the role of an ECEC leader is demanding, the completion of extra courses or **specific training for ECEC leadership is required in many EU countries** (see Figure 3). This might vary between specific training for a couple of days or training over several years (Eurydice, 2025).

Specific training is required for all ECEC heads, irrespective of the type of setting, in over half of the education systems. It is also required in nine education systems (Belgium (German-speaking and Flemish (over 3) communities), Czechia, France, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia and Türkiye) for heads of settings for older children. The minimum duration of this specific training varies between a couple of days and several years. In some EU countries, these training programmes must be undertaken before the appointment or in the first years of employment (e.g. Slovenia and Serbia).

In other countries, ECEC leaders are not obliged to undertake specific training, although appropriate training programmes do exist. This is the case in Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria and Finland. In Luxembourg an optional training programme exists for ECEC leaders of settings for younger children; in Belgium (Flemish community), Malta and the Netherlands, such training programmes exist for ECEC leaders of settings for older children (Key Data report on ECEC, Eurydice, 2025).

Oberhuemer (2024) provided the following information:

Additional pre-post leadership qualification required?

UNITARY	PART-INTEGRATED	BI- and MULTI-SECTORAL
NO		
Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Ukraine	Austria, Germany, Italy (but may differ by region or provider) Luxembourg non-formal Romania UK private, voluntary & independent	In both sectors: Greece, Ireland, Netherlands In childcare sectors: BE-nl, Cyprus, Czechia, France, Hungary
YES		
Slovenia 0–5 Leadership course and exam before taking up post or within one year Sweden 0–5 Since 2019, a university course comprising 30 ECTS – start within 2 years of appointment, complete within 5 years	Spain 0–5 Selection process plus management course and 60 hours updates Serbia 3–5 Leadership exam UK school-based provision Wales PVI: 60 hours over 5 years	In education sectors: BE-fr: within 2 years BE-de: within 5 years Czechia: 100 hours within 3 years France: Short headship training Hungary: Leadership certificate Slovakia: 220 hours basic module, further modules within 5 years Switzerland: School leadership diploma



BUT: In most countries with this requirement, the qualifying course is for all Education specialists and not exclusively for ECEC professionals.

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Some specific examples are:

- In **Czechia**, the specific training requirement for ECEC leaders of nursery schools (for older children) is a qualification in the field of school management, which must be obtained by completing a study programme within two years of the day on which the person started acting as a school head. The study programme contains 100 lessons, ending with a final examination in front of a panel. The programme curriculum contains four basic modules: basics of law, labour law, school funding, and school management and the organisation of the pedagogical process. It also includes three days of practical training (Eurydice, 2025).
- In **Cyprus**, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute provides mandatory training to newly promoted head teachers once a week throughout the first year of their new role, with each session lasting approximately five hours, (Eurydice, 2025).
- In **Iceland**, in addition to education at ISCED 7, ECEC heads should also have completed leadership education courses, obtained at least 30 credits in school administration studies at master's level, or acquired comparable education (Eurydice, 2025).
- In **Poland**, the head of a nursery school must have, in addition to an ISCED 7 qualification, a completed master's degree or postgraduate studies in management or a qualification course in educational management (Eurydice, 2025).
- In **Romania**, the deputy head of a school institution should complete a management course in the first year of each management mandate (Eurydice, 2025).
- In **Serbia**, ECEC leaders must pass an exam within two years of being appointed. According to the law, a person who passes this exam obtains a licence to work as

a director. Details of the training programme and conditions of enrolment are defined by the by-law on the training programme and licence exam for the heads of education institutions (Eurydice, 2025).

- In **Slovenia**, the training can be completed before the appointment or within the first year after the appointment. The training lasts 144 hours and includes an introductory module about the head teacher as a manager and leader, together with modules on organisational theory and leadership, planning and decision-making, head teachers' skills, human resources and legislation (Eurydice, 2025).

4.3 Career pathways for ECEC leaders

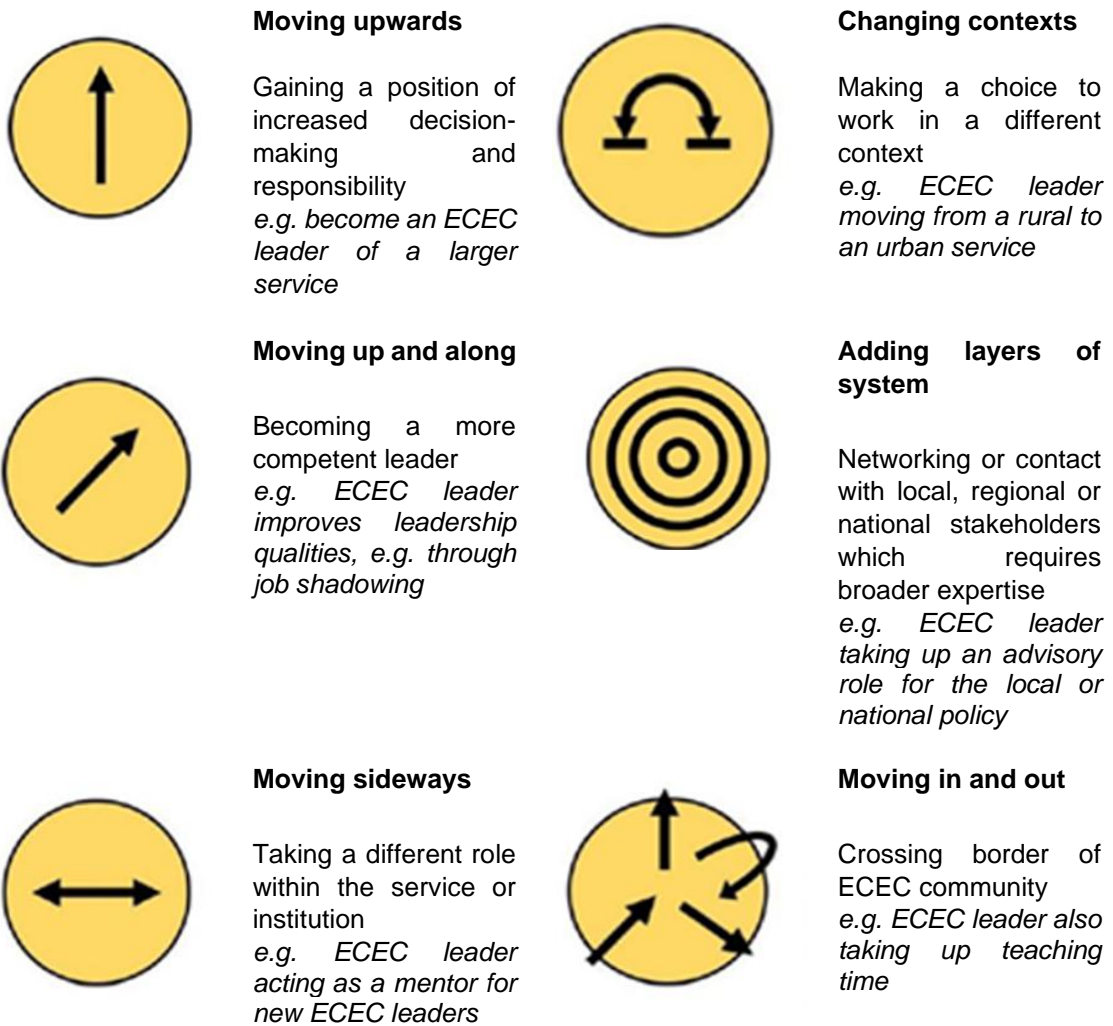
In *How to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff* (EC, 2021) inspiring examples of specific pathways to become an ECEC leader are provided. However, research reveals that ECEC leaders often become a leader '**by accident**' (Douglass, 2019). This happens when a core practitioner is moving 'upwards' and becomes an ECEC leader. This would imply that becoming an ECEC leader is the 'end' of the career path. The report on *How to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff* (EC, 2021) states that the ECEC field is under constant change (e.g. with new children and families, new staff, new curricula, new regulations to manage, etc.) and some ECEC leaders are satisfied with being employed in the same role for several years.

However, other leaders like to take on different roles and responsibilities, wishing to develop their skills and competences in other areas. Therefore, it is crucial that other **career paths** are also possible for ECEC leaders (see Figure 4). This could involve different roles within their setting (e.g. training new pedagogues, supporting apprenticeship programmes, developing second language provision, working on an Erasmus+ project, etc.) or roles in the local community (e.g. working with municipalities on safeguarding issues, children's health, children's social care, working with families at risk of becoming disadvantaged, parental liaison roles etc.).

Identifying activities and learning paths that appeal to individuals is important in motivating and retaining ECEC leaders in their setting. Sometimes these new roles involve training, but often they build on activities which the leaders have developed within their setting. These other career pathways might have a positive impact on the attractiveness of the profession and may help to address the shortages of leaders.

Figure 4

Six types of career paths for ECEC leaders. *Based on EC (2020) & referred to in EC (2021) adapted to the ECEC-context.*



The working group members suggest that these six career pathways can be a source of inspiration for ECEC leaders to identify possible ways to grow in their professional life. A specific example is, for example, the mentor-role in the Slovenian mentoring programme, which aims to support newly appointed ECEC leaders. The mentor is an experienced ECEC leader who provides structured and systematic support to new leaders to help them navigate the challenges of their roles.

Staff development in the ECEC sector is heavily context-specific, and the six career pathways suggested above may be better adapted to core professionals than to leaders. This is because it would often imply that the leader would have to leave their job or the setting or change the context.

5. Training programmes for ECEC leaders

As ECEC leadership is a demanding job, ECEC leaders should be supported in fulfilling their multiple functions and roles. Considering the sources of stress and the challenges faced by ECEC leaders (see Section 2.2.3), this support should imply, among other things, support in understanding their role, information on current ECEC policies and regulations, new developments in research and the use of data to improve quality, and support in developing the necessary skills to fulfil the various demands (OECD, 2019). This support should come from both initial training (see Section 4.1) and ongoing professional learning (CPD).

Oberhuemer (2024) mentions **five main categories for leadership support**:

- 1) designated on-site posts with managerial (vertical), pedagogic-thematic (horizontal) and special needs focus, potentially supporting distributed, collaborative and inclusive leadership
- 2) ECEC pedagogical counsellors, consultants and coordinators
- 3) centre-based steering groups
- 4) targeted CPD programmes
- 5) leadership-targeted policy initiatives.

Strehmel (2024) mentions the following **tools for providers to promote CPD and career planning for ECEC leaders**:

- 'salutogenic' leadership which places the focus on mental, social and physical health and well-being of leaders
- collaboration and participation in the circle of leaders:
 - meetings to exchange information
 - discussion of corporate management topics
 - finding solutions and making decisions together with the leaders
- team building in the circle of leaders, leading to mutual trust for peer consulting
- individual career planning and the facilitation of career pathways.
-

Although the importance of leadership support is commonly acknowledged, research reveals that, in many cases, support for leadership development in ECEC is **lacking**. This can undermine the potential for sustainable and effective leadership (Douglass, 2019). Also, Slinde (2024) mentioned a clear connection between the formal qualification of ECEC leaders and the **quality of service** delivered. ECEC leaders with additional training initiate more developmental work in their service and put more emphasis on staff development.

5.1. Examples of initial training programmes

As mentioned above (see Section 4), ECEC leaders generally tend to have a formal initial education at the level of a **bachelor's degree** or equivalent, or higher. However, it is not only the level of the minimum qualification requirements that is important, but also the **content** of the initial training that is crucial. For example, findings from the TALIS Starting Strong study showed that leaders whose initial education and training included a course on **early childhood** reported spending more time on pedagogical leadership (OECD, 2021). The Starting Strong VI (OECD, 2021) study states that ECEC leaders' initial preparation can support their engagement in pedagogical leadership and help them to build a shared understanding of effective leadership (Myran & Masterson, 2020; in OECD, 2021). It also shapes leaders' attitudes towards pedagogical leadership and their ability to reflect on such practices, leading towards more effective leadership (Fonsén & Soukainen, 2020; Myran & Masterson, 2020; in OECD, 2021).

The *Quality beyond Regulations* policy questionnaire examined the required and shared topics of ECEC leaders' initial training (OECD, 2021)). **Pedagogical leadership** is the area that is the most frequently required as part of leaders' initial training. It is either required or common practice as part of the initial training programme for centre leaders in most countries (in settings for children aged 0 to 5, and aged 3 to 5), and in just over half of the settings for younger children. Other **topics** covered in initial education programmes for leaders in more than one-quarter of settings are:

- promoting equity and diversity
- collaborating with parents
- providing effective feedback
- leadership
- research and theory
- use of data to improve the quality of ECEC.

An example, mentioned by Oberhuemer (2024) is **Cyprus (4-5)** where the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus offers a programme for newly appointed kindergarten principals. They provide weekly CPD sessions during working hours to develop leadership, managerial/administrative and organisational skills and abilities.

In general, several strategies can be used to support new teachers. Besides, of course, the initial training, other strategies can be put in place such as **shadowing**. In this method for leadership preparation, several skills can be developed such as practical knowledge, connecting theory and practice, and supporting learning (Hognestad & Boe, 2019; in Douglass, 2019). Strehmel (2014) mentions the following methods for the **onboarding** of ECEC leaders:

- induction into the circle of leaders (for providers with more than one centre)
- opportunity to get to know the support system (associations, local players and cooperations)
- coaching and supervision.

Although the importance of ECEC leaders' initial training is stressed, **not all leaders feel ready** for the job. For example, Oberhuemer (2024) refers to **Croatia (0-6)** where ECEC leaders reported not feeling prepared, although the Strategy for Education, Science and Technology aimed to address this issue in 2014. Similarly, in **Italy (3-6 - scuole dell'infanzia)** and **France (3-6 - école maternelle)**, school leaders rarely have specific pedagogical expertise in early childhood education. There is often a discrepancy between the expected and the desired competences of ECEC leaders and the training that is provided (EC, 2021)³². In addition, Douglass (2019) mentions that there is a gap between the training and credentials ECEC leaders have and those they would need to be effective.

5.2. Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

5.2.1. Principles and research findings

Besides initial training, leaders need to be supported and to develop their knowledge and skills through CPD, to enhance the provision of quality ECEC. For example, continuing development might bring about changes in the ideas and practices of ECEC leaders and promote a shift in leadership approaches, positively impacting leaders' abilities to facilitate and implement developmentally appropriate practices. It can also provide updated tools for

³² In general, this gap is wider for leaders working with children under the age of 3 (EC, 2021).

handling tasks in rapidly changing environments, together with concrete tools and information that help leaders to refine their practices, also contributing to their continuous reflection and improvement (OECD, 2021). Douglass (2019) also refers to research stressing further positive impacts of CPD, including that ECEC leaders can gain a greater clarity, increased confidence, and become more reflective, while CPD can also reduce isolation and increase the use of distributed leadership approaches.

Data from TALIS Starting Strong (OECD, 2021) survey show that **nearly all leaders** participated in some form of professional development in the 12 months prior to the survey. In most countries, at least three-quarters of leaders participated in a professional development course or in-person seminar.

Training in pedagogical leadership is fairly common across countries, while training in administration is least consistent (OECD, 2019). When asked about their needs for professional development, leaders indicated a need for knowledge and understanding of the current national or local ECEC policies, knowledge and understanding of new developments in leadership research, the use of data for improving quality and the design of centre goals (OECD, 2021).

In general, CPD opportunities provided to ECEC leaders should include:

- education and training with follow-up activities based on the actual job and role undertaken by the ECEC leaders;
- opportunities for reflection and learning at an individual and group level (e.g. in an environment where there are leaders from many ECEC settings in a provider organisation) to meet peers, and engage in discussion and reflection;
- opportunities to build working relations based on peer support;
- participation in managerial decisions of a provider organisation;
- access to professional consultants, coaching and supervision (EC, 2021).

Although, ECEC leaders follow CPD paths, they also experience some **barriers** towards CPD, such as time constraints (i.e. lack of staff to compensate for leaders' absence or conflicts with the leaders' work schedule) and the cost of the CPD-courses (OECD, 2021).

5.2.2. Types of CPD

Based on the SEEPRO-data, Oberhuemer (2024) provides examples of **targeted CPD-programmes**. Central here is the development of a **clear curriculum** to train the ECEC leaders. This is the case, for example, in Lower Saxony (Germany) which also introduced a specific training programme for leaders to acquire additional qualifications³³.

Another specific example is the in-service training course for pedagogical coordinators and preschool leaders developed by the University of Bologna in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy during the **In-Trans project**. This was organised around three main topics:

- 1) awareness-raising of recent ECEC policy and research developments in order to develop a shared language;
- 2) operational tools to co-design educational continuity initiatives within the interprofessional teams;
- 3) training methodology to experiment with new models of distributed leadership.

33 <https://www.revosax.sachsen.de/vorschrift/2385-Empfehlung-Fortbildung-Kindertageseinrichtung>.

Oberhuemer (2024) pointed out other examples:

- In **Austria**, centre leaders in Vienna employed by KIWI (a non-profit provider) are supported for six years with various management courses on:
 - quality management
 - personnel management
 - team development and personal skills
 - communication, conflict and complaints
 - legal and business frameworks
 - work with parents
 - public relations.
- In **Denmark**, initiatives involving the national government, municipal authorities and trade unions have funded diploma study programmes in leadership for the whole public sector. Two are particularly relevant for ECEC leaders and are offered by university colleges and private providers: two to three years part-time or one year full-time, for 60 ECTS credits.
- In **Germany**, the CPD Academy in Rheinland-Palatinate offers four linked qualification modules for providers and centre leaders of ECEC facilities on management and quality development, concluding with an optional state-recognised certification.

During the working group meetings, **job shadowing** was also mentioned as an additional training opportunity, which can be supported by Erasmus+ mobility projects, as a way of learning from and exchange with leaders of different countries and contexts.

Besides CPD, there are also other forms of support for ECEC leaders. For instance, Oberhuemer (2024) mentions examples of **pedagogical counsellors or consultants** who have advisory, coaching, supervisory and/or monitoring roles and can support ECEC leaders in management and organisational tasks. Often, they work across several ECEC services. This is the case, for example, in Belgium (Flanders 0-3), Denmark, France, Sweden, Latvia and Germany. In Italy (0-6), pedagogical coordinators play a strategic role in implementing the emerging unitary ECEC System 0-6. Networks of coordinators at the regional and district levels are responsible for research and innovation and thus for constantly revising the values underlying the overall educational programme. They have a role in:

- designing, planning, organising and coordinating educational services;
- managing, monitoring, evaluating and supervising the quality of public and private education and training systems;
- acting as supervisors, CPD trainers and consultants.

Another source of support mentioned by Oberhuemer (2024) is **mentoring**. This is the case, for example, in Finland where peer group mentoring is organised on a regional network basis (Oberhuemer, 2024).

5.2.3. Systemic approach to supporting ECEC leaders

Supporting leaders clearly calls for a systemic approach of combining initial training, onboarding ECEC leaders and CPD. This should start by defining clear qualification requirements which can lead to the development of initial training and CPD programmes.

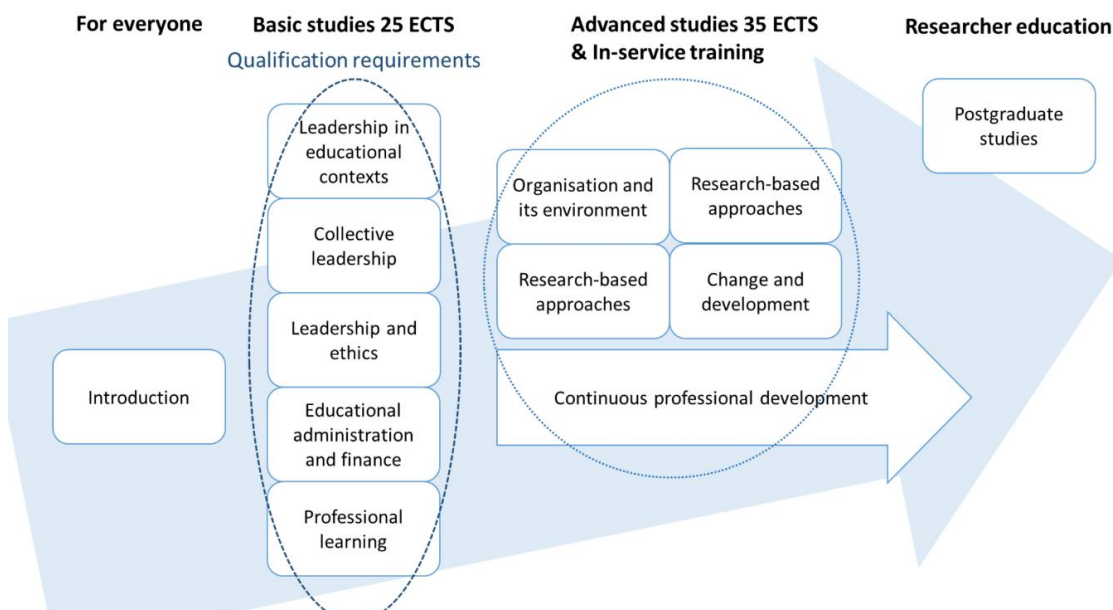
In **Finland** (Kahiluoto, 2024), the University of Helsinki carried out a research project between 2021 and 2023, commissioned by Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture. The objectives were to:

- set a vision and development plan for leadership development until 2035;
- construct a national curriculum for leadership education that can be applied and adapted in the various universities that provide teacher education;
- suggest a financing model and possible reforms needed in legislation on qualification requirements.

The key method used was to build leadership training as a research-based university-level training programme that could deliver uniform training across the country. The project analysed the content of existing education and training programmes on leadership, which led to the following four themes being defined:

- pedagogical leadership
- collective leadership
- leadership for social justice
- leadership for motivation, well-being and change.

Surveys and interviews highlighted the importance of taking various contexts (e.g. demographic situation) into account and stressed that leadership is a shared responsibility. As a conclusion, the project suggests the following training model:



Another example of a systemic approach to train ECEC leaders is the **Slovenian** National School for Leadership in Education, which provides compulsory pre-service training of one year with six modules, in-service training (e.g. mentoring programme) and other types of support. The mentoring programme for school leaders takes place on three levels:

- joint group meetings of newly appointed leaders and mentors
- individual meetings between a newly appointed leader and a mentor
- regional networks of newly appointed leaders.

The mentors need to have at least six years of experience and must complete mandatory training. This mentoring programme has led to improvements in leadership skills, a reduction in stress and feelings of isolation, and the development of professional networks.

The **Kanvas Foundation**, the largest non-profit kindergarten foundation in Norway, adopts a systemic approach to support their ECEC leaders, starting from the vision that kindergartens are learning organisations. They define three ways of learning and development:

- through experience (e.g. job shadowing, video observations, etc.)
- through others (i.e. regional meetings and networks)
- through structured courses and programmes.

They also believe in distributing tasks and assigning roles and responsibilities to all staff members in the organisation.

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7. Annexes

Annex 7.1: ECEC leadership in European policy documents

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems (2019/C 189/02)³⁴:

[...] *In accordance with national and European legislation, available resources and national circumstances, and in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders Member States are recommended to:*

“3. Support the professionalisation of early childhood education and care staff, including leaders. *Depending on the existing level of professional qualification and working conditions, successful efforts can include:*

(a) raising the status of the early childhood education and care profession by creating high professional standards, offering attractive professional status and career prospects to early childhood education and care educators, striving to reach a better gender balance and creating professionalisation pathways for staff with low or no qualification as well as specific pathways to qualify assistants;

(b) improving initial education and continuous professional development to take full account of children's wellbeing, learning and developmental needs, relevant societal developments, gender equality and a full understanding of the rights of the child;

(c) providing time for staff for the purpose of professional activities such as reflection, planning, engaging with parents and collaborating with other professionals and colleagues;

(d) aiming at equipping staff with the competences to respond to the individual needs of children from different backgrounds and with special educational needs, including disabilities, preparing staff to manage diverse groups.” [C 189/08] [...]

THE EU QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

[...] *“STAFF is the most significant factor for children's well-being, learning and developmental outcomes. Therefore staff working conditions and professional development are seen as essential components of quality.*

Quality statements:

3. Well-qualified staff with initial and continuing training that enable them to fulfil their professional role.

Effective early childhood education and care systems consider raising the professional status of staff, which is widely acknowledged as one of the key factors of quality, by raising qualification levels, offering attractive professional status and flexible career prospects and alternative pathways for assistants. This can be supported by aiming for a pedagogical staff that is composed of highly qualified professionals holding a full professional qualification specialised in early childhood education, in addition to assistant staff. State-of-the-art initial education programmes are designed together with practitioners and provide a good balance between theory and practice. It is also an asset if education programmes prepare staff for working collectively and for enhancing reflective competences. Such programmes can benefit from training staff to work with linguistically and culturally diverse groups, from

³⁴ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(01))

minority, migrant and low-income families. Staff that are equipped to follow the developmental needs, interests and potential of young children and able to detect potential development and learning problems can more actively support child development and learning. Regular, tailor-made and continued professional development opportunities benefit all staff members, including assistants and auxiliary staff. Regarding the necessary elements of child development and psychology, competences for staff should, in line with the different structures of training in the Member States, include knowledge on child protection systems, and more generally on the rights of the child.

4. Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.

Early childhood education and care systems that aim at improved working conditions, including more adequate wage levels, can make employment in early childhood education and care a more attractive option for better-qualified staff, looking for proper careers. Adult-child ratios and group sizes are most adequate if designed in an appropriate manner for the age and composition of the group of children, as younger children require more attention and care. Professional learning communities, where they exist within and across settings, have shown a positive impact through assigning time and space for staff collegial practices and joint work. Offering mentoring and supervision to newly recruited staff during their induction can help them to quickly fulfil their professional roles.” [C 189/08] [...]

European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, **Monitoring the quality of early childhood education and care – Complementing the 2014 ECEC quality framework proposal with indicators – Recommendations from ECEC experts**, Publications Office, 2018³⁵:

[...] **“Statement 3: Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role**

Recognising the professionalism of the ECEC workforce is important in improving the quality of provision. Professional development has a huge impact on the quality of staff pedagogy and children’s outcomes. Developing high quality education and training programmes for all staff working in an ECEC context (e.g. preschool teachers, assistants, educators, family day carers etc.) helps to create a shared agenda and understanding of quality.

The experts agreed that four indicators can be used to evaluate the extent to which this statement has been met.” (p.17)

“Indicator 7 - The percentage of ECEC leaders working in an ECEC setting who have completed leadership training or have a recognised, relevant leadership qualification.

This indicator is directly related to the quality of provision as better trained leaders are more able to organise and manage ECEC services. The focus is on pedagogic leadership in an ECEC setting, rather than financial or organisational leadership. The indicator contains two options which reflect different practice in Member States i.e. some countries do not require or expect ECEC leaders to complete a recognised leadership qualification.

There is a broad range of leadership training and qualifications available qualifications may be accredited or approved; training may be formal, informal or non-formal; and leadership

³⁵ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/825252b4-3ec6-11e8-b5fe-01aa75ed71a1>

training may not lead to a professional qualification. There are questions about whether the outcomes of training are assessed. Even though there is a wide range of opportunities for developing leadership skills in ECEC, the research emphasises the importance of leadership in ECEC settings as contributing to high quality³⁶.

Each system in each Member State will have their own understanding of 'a relevant' leadership qualification. There could be further work at a European level to gain greater clarity on this aspect of the indicator. Member States are encouraged to set their own target for this indicator – this is likely to be based on increasing (by an agreed amount each year or over a longer period) the percentage of leaders who have received training or have a relevant qualification. There is limited opportunity to consider a European target because the policies associated with ECEC leadership differ across Europe.

To support this indicator, where there is a system based on qualifications, it is worth considering:

- What is the European Qualification Framework level of the ECEC leadership qualification(s)?
- How long would it normally take to complete an ECEC leadership qualification?
- Is there one, or many, qualifications which could be taken by ECEC leaders?
- How are ECEC leaders supported (both professionally and financially) to complete a qualification?
- Are there different arrangements for staff working with children under three years of age and children aged over three?

To support this indicator, where there is a system based on training, it is worth considering:

- How is an ECEC leader supported during the training?
- What is the normal amount of time/week which is allocated to leadership training?
- Is training mainly 'on-the-job' or 'off-the-job'?
- Does the training include assessment of the leaders' skills and competences?
- Are there different arrangements for staff working with children under three years of age and children aged over three?" (pp. 19-20)

“Statement 4: Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents

Good working conditions benefit staff, contribute to their retention and reduce levels of staff turnover. Working conditions can be affected by policies which focus on the structural quality of ECEC provision. These include arrangements on the size of a group; children to adult ratios; working hours; and wage levels. These policies can help to make employment in an ECEC context a more attractive option.” (p.22) [...]

³⁶ Hujala, E. and Eskelinen M. (2016) 'Researching leadership in Early Childhood Education. Leadership Tasks in Early Childhood Education', in *Researching Leadership in Early Childhood Education*, Tampere: Tampere University Press, 213-34, http://ilrfec.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/art_12Hujala-Eskelinen.pdf.

Annex 7.2: Mapping of tasks and responsibilities of ECEC leaders

Extract from the working group's first report entitled 'ECEC leadership: Practices and models across Europe'

[...] Whereas a certain consensus exists over the five functions of ECEC leadership described in the previous section, tasks and responsibilities associated to such functions strongly differ across countries, contexts and settings. In order to shed light on the wide and extensive range of leadership tasks and responsibilities that are most commonly found in ECEC settings in Europe, **the WG agreed on a mapping exercise providing an overview of leadership tasks and responsibilities which ECEC leaders may be involved in – at different levels – when ensuring the coordination of high-quality provision.**

The goal of such mapping exercise was to draw an exhaustive list of all responsibilities and tasks which are associated to ECEC leadership, based on the holistic and multidimensional framework which has been endorsed by the Working Group. For this purpose, the five broad leadership functions outlined in the previous section are untangled by a list of more concrete responsibilities and tasks to be performed at the leadership level. This can be the leader at service level, but some responsibilities can be distributed to other members of the staff, or other persons responsible for ECEC settings at providers level or at the level of local authorities.

The WG recognises that the actual list of tasks and responsibilities varies depending on the structure/governance of the national ECEC system, the regulations in place, the type and size of the ECEC setting, the age of children being in the ECEC centre, and many other variables. Some responsibilities and tasks are repeated under the different headings, as they might serve different purposes, they might require different competences, and might be undertaken by different people depending on the purpose.

Based on the results of the mapping exercise (illustrated below), **a reflection tool** will be piloted in four countries - Slovenia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Finland – and two cities – Ghent, in the Flemish Community of Belgium, and Milan in Italy. This tool is intended to support discussions involving national, regional or local decision-makers, ECEC leaders and / or other stakeholders in reviewing policies and practices associated to ECEC leadership development in their own context. The reflection tool, along with the results derived from its piloting in a sample of EU Member States, will be published in a separate report.

PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP

Pedagogical leadership is the leadership function needed to support a high quality and inclusive educational environment, promoting children's rights and nurturing children's wellbeing, socialization, learning and development. This function includes creating trusting relationships with and among staff, supporting staff professional development, promoting participatory curriculum design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and structuring the work environment to support all aspects simultaneously with a view on ongoing improvement of practices¹.

Pedagogical leadership at service level

- Build a shared pedagogical vision with the staff for provision of ECEC, that is child-centred, value-based with specific reference to the principle of non-discrimination and non-prejudice towards children, staff and parents, strength-based and informed by research evidence
- Create an own pedagogical curriculum / educational concept, with clear links to national curriculum or guidelines, in collaboration with the staff, and lead implementation of the curriculum

- Internal and external representation of the institution; give visibility to the pedagogical work carried out in the ECEC setting, both internally (documentation of practices for families) and externally (raising awareness within local communities)
- Set short- and long-term priorities regarding the pedagogical vision and curriculum, and translate this into concrete action plans (strategic planning)
- Lead inclusive practice (pedagogy, culture) in the ECEC setting and arrange for a warm welcome of all children in the ECEC setting
- Organise the environment (including the use of space and facilities): facilitate the use of indoor or outdoor space for learning, caring, and playing, choosing materials, tools, ...
- Monitor characteristics and trends in the catchment area and care for adaptation of the service to local needs
- Lead to quality improvement: organise self-evaluation & participate in external evaluation + making changes in centre structures / practices based on internal and external monitoring & evaluation results
- Establish plans for evaluation and monitoring of children's development, well-being, and learning
- Regularly evaluate the local pedagogical curriculum / educational concept
- Ensure documentation of the connection between the learning environment and the children's well-being, learning, development, and formation
- Involve the ECEC centre in innovation / innovative practices
- Incorporate scientific findings on educational quality into pedagogical work
- Approve children for admission
- Ensure participation of parents/communication with parents
- Ensure collaboration with the community
- Ensure collaboration with local/regional/national authorities
- Ensure collaboration with other organisations working with children and families
- Ensure transparency of the organisation of the centre towards parents, stakeholders, local/national/regional authorities, ...
- (Part-time) work with children (on a regular basis, or replacing staff in leave)

Pedagogical leadership with specific reference to staff support

- Strengthen interpersonal relations, work towards a warm organisation, building trust, ... among all staff members (e.g. core practitioners, assistants, logistic staff, ...)
- Support staff professional development and self-learning
- Define a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and in-service plan for the whole team, including assistants and leaders themselves
- Mentor new staff (through an induction process)
- Support quality learning experiences for students / trainees / apprentices / interns on professional practice placements in the setting
- Observe and document staff practices and staff-child interactions
- Provide feedback to staff based on observations and performance / evaluation meetings and/or making changes based on these observations and documentation
- Create and facilitate a feedback culture among staff and a culture of evaluation / self-evaluation
- Facilitate that the staff share new knowledge, facilitate that new knowledge (e.g. from CPD) is being rooted in the everyday practice
- Organise documentation and team reflection/collaborate with staff to improve how children learn and play together
- Take actions to ensure that staff feel responsible for children's development, well-being, and learning
- Take actions to ensure that staff take responsibility for improving their skills in working with children and working with families
- Take actions to support cooperation among staff to develop new approaches to ECEC practices
- Examine the needs of staff and take actions according to those needs so that staff feel supported and have a high job involvement, job satisfaction and organisational commitment
- Establish the professional direction, which includes: 1) communication/translation on how the overall quality framework manifests itself in the specific ECEC, 2) inclusion of the staff in the

discussions of the implementation of the quality framework to create a common understanding and ownership of the ECEC practice

- Convey new knowledge/research to the ECEC staff
- Assess what projects and initiatives would help strengthen the staff's competences
- Show professional engagement
- Review staff's written work documentation
- Make sure child safeguarding policies are in place and implemented by all staff (including CSP training for increasing staff awareness)

ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP (MANAGEMENT)

Administrative leadership refers to the management of operations including human resources and finance; strategic functions connected to planning, reporting, organisational change and accountability (OECD, 2020).

Administrative leadership in relation to staff

- Define and promote job positions
- Recruit staff (interviews, salary negotiations, checking of police records, medical checks, contractual and financial arrangements)
- Assume overall responsibility to integrate new staff in the team
- Assume overall responsibility to provide mentorship
- Supervise trainees / interns / cooperate with training institutions
- Replace staff on leave (foreseen or not foreseen)
- Organise weekly/monthly/yearly planning of staff evaluation (not only from an administrative point of view but regarding performance)
- Develop / support diversity in the team
- Management of leaves (short/long term; planned/unplanned)
- Establish staff schedules
- Organise team meetings
- Organise staff training (apprentices / induction periods / CPD), from an administrative and financial point of view
- Organise support of staff according to the needs
- Conflict management
- Payment of salaries
- Performance evaluation (from an administrative point of view – e.g. respect of working schedules)
- Report data related to staff (to ministry, local authorities, ECEC owner ...)
- Prepare service certificates
- Dismiss or suspend staff

Administrative leadership in relation to children and families

- Inform families about the ECEC setting (registration rules, deadlines, current events, projects, activities, fees, staff changes, etc.)
- Manage children's registration, waiting lists, departures, approve the enrolment of children
- Record (and report) daily children's attendance
- Manage specific administrative tasks to accommodate children's specific situations (e.g. children with disabilities, undocumented or homeless children)
- Organise management of transitions (daily, e.g. from kindergarten to afterschool care, or over the years, e.g. from kindergarten to primary school)
- Organise children's groups / classes

Administrative and financial management

- Secure and manage financial resources (fees paid by parents, local, regional, national, European funds)
- Secure daily administrative and financial management (insurance, paying bills, contracts ...)
- Report on (financial) management, number of children, staff, etc.

- Manage ECEC setting's material and structure (ordering toys, keeping track of furniture, organising repairs – indoor and outdoor)
- Organise and support (ECEC/school) board (appointments, meetings, etc.), or other parents' representations
- Know all (new) national/regional/local regulations, implement them, inform/train staff to implement them; check/guarantee/report on implementation of these regulations (e.g. regulations on adult-child ratios, supervision of children, etc.)
- Cooperate with ECEC provider
- Increase centre's visibility in local community through public relations

Administrative leadership in relation to health and security

- Provide a secure and sustainable environment
- Follow development of all national/local health and security regulations, implement them, inform/train staff to implement them; check/guarantee/report on implementation of these regulations
- Organise food, provide healthy food
- Organise cleaning of the setting (staff, material, energy, etc.)
- Manage / follow medical file of each child (e.g. checking compliance with vaccination regulations, organise and follow-up medical check-ups, etc.)
- Legally responsible to ensure child protection (e.g. contact social services in case of suspicion of child abuse at home)
- Legally responsible for preventing accidents / giving first aid to children and staff or ensure that staff is trained in giving first aid to children
- Occupational health management for staff

ENGAGEMENT WITH PARENTS, LEGAL GUARDIANS AND FAMILIES

Centre leaders have an important role to play in shaping expectations for the centre's engagement with parents or guardians, so that they are involved in the learning and development of their children (OECD, 2020). The tasks connected to such function might include:

- Create a welcoming culture that values different family structures and backgrounds
- Support staff in developing 'familiarisation' activities to build trust with families (i.e. open door policy, open days, visits to the setting, facilitating the welcoming and settling in of newly enrolled children)
- Communicate with families, both formally (e.g. arranging and attending collective/individual parent's meetings) and informally (e.g. one-to-one conversations on children's development, not planned)
- Organise extra activities / discussions to understand and accommodate special needs
- Ensure that parents are informed of what is happening in the centre, by making sure that pedagogical documentation is available on display and regularly shared with families through different means (e.g. wall panels, display of children's artefacts, children's individual portfolio, etc.); organise activities with families to support their engagement and sense of belonging in the everyday life of the centre
- Facilitate the involvement of parents in decision-making processes (e.g. establishing practices that seek feedback from parents about their children's experience and involve parents in decisions related to their children and the setting), organise cooperation with the parents' council
- Organise activities for parents to understand the transition to the next step (e.g. information sessions, meetings with parents, etc.)
- Plan, implement and reflect on the partnership with parents, build a reciprocal trustful relationship
- Support parent-teacher meetings

- Examine and analyse barriers with all ECEC staff to improve the accessibility for all parents, legal guardians, and families
- Organise outreach activities to address parents whose children are not (yet) attending ECEC.

ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITIES

Establishing effective links with the community and partnerships with other child- and family-oriented services is another key function of leadership in ECEC settings, which cuts across leaders' administrative and pedagogical functions. Establishing community cross-agency collaborations and partnerships is an important - and often challenging - dimension connected to leadership role in supporting children and their families (OECD, 2020). The tasks connected to such function might include:

- Communicate and network with staff and/or leaders from other ECEC centres in the neighbourhood
- Communicate with compulsory school institutions (i.e. facilitating children's transition to primary school)
- Consult with child development / early childhood intervention specialists and services
- Cooperate with child welfare, preventive family support or social services
- Collaborate with health-related services
- Collaborate with cultural and sport organisations in the local community (e.g. libraries, cultural associations, museum, etc.)
- Cooperate with authorities
- Set up activities in the neighbourhood to improve the community-feeling
- Collaborate with child protection systems / stakeholders
- Contribute to the wide spreading of a 'culture of childhood' in the local community (e.g. advocating for children's rights, giving voice to and raise visibility of children's experiences in urban development/municipal planning processes)

CONTRIBUTION TO POLICY-MAKING

ECEC leaders can play a significant role in sustaining the development of high-quality ECEC provision for all children, therefore an important function of leadership is connected to the active engagement of leaders in policy-making processes within local/regional/national contexts. As policies influence the lives of children and families, it is important that ECEC leaders are aware of their role as "agents of change", supporting policy decision-making processes in a way that is responsive of the diverse needs – and aspirations – of children and families in local communities. The tasks connected to such function might include:

- Understand legislative/regulatory processes in the ECEC sector and the role of leaders as active agents in such processes
- Participate in action-research projects coordinated by universities, research institutions, NGOs
- Contribute to the wide spreading of a 'culture of childhood' in the local community (e.g. advocating for children's rights, giving voice to and raise visibility of children's experiences in urban development/municipal planning processes)
- Engage with local administrators/policy decision-makers to actively contribute to shaping the implementation of early childhood policy at local level
- Engage with local administrators and ECEC services to examine, analyse and make agreements on the accessibility of ECEC services
- Engage in policy consultation initiatives at local, national, European levels.

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