

# BELGIUM

Early Childhood Education and Care  
**ECEC Workforce Profile**

*Country report authors*

**Florence Pirard**

University of Liège

**Brecht Peleman, Nima Sharmahd, Katrien Van Laere**

Ghent University, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy and  
Centre for Innovation in the Early Years (VBJK)

**Catherine Reinertz, Jana Backes**

Ministry of the German-speaking Community, Eupen

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## Glossary

### **EQF – European Qualifications Framework**

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

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

### **ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System**

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

[https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en)

### **ISCED – International Standard Classification of Education**

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

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

## About the authors

**Florence Pirard**, PhD in Psychology, was appointed professor at the Department of Education and Training at the University of Liège (Wallonia-Brussels Federation, Belgium) in 2010. She has worked in the early childhood education field for over 25 years, first as a researcher and then as an educational advisor in a public agency (*Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance*). Her publications focus on the initial training and professional development of practitioners in early childhood education and care. A further specialisation lies in supporting the implementation of curricula.

**Brecht Peleman**, PhD in Educational Sciences, is a researcher at VBJK (Centre for Innovation in the Early Years) and the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy (Ghent University, Belgium). He currently works on (inter)national research and professionalisation projects about linguistic diversity in ECEC, quality of teacher-child interactions and out-of-school care.

**Nima Sharmahd**, PhD, is a senior researcher at VBJK (Centre for Innovation in the Early Years) in Ghent (Belgium). She works in international research projects on ECEC, with a focus on professional development, access to ECEC, and family participation. She also collaborates with the Department of Education and Psychology at the University of Florence (Italy), where she obtained her doctoral degree. She worked for several years in Italy at the University of Florence as a researcher and coach for different ECEC centres in Tuscany.

**Katrien Van Laere**, PhD in Social Work from Ghent University, is a senior researcher at VBJK (Centre for Innovation in the Early Years) in Ghent (Belgium). Her doctoral degree focused on “Conceptualisations of care and education in ECEC” in relation to the accessibility of preschool education. In recent years, she has worked mainly in (inter)national action research and professionalisation projects on the topic of inclusive transitions from home or childcare to preschool education. She has published several articles and essays on the importance of educare and smooth transitions on ECEC.

**Catherine Reinertz** is head of the Education and Training unit at the Ministry of the German-speaking Community (Belgium). She is jointly responsible for the financing of educational institutions in the Community - including kindergartens - as well as for the legal-organisational framework, e.g. with regard to the weekly and daily school timetables

**Jana Backes** is head of the Family Unit in the Department of Family and Social Affairs of the Ministry of the German-speaking Community (Belgium). The unit is responsible for the recognition, subsidisation and monitoring of persons and service providers active in childcare in accordance with the relevant legal framework and also for the administration of projects to fund childcare in eastern Belgium.



## Introduction

Belgium is a federal, multilingual state comprising three autonomous Regions (Flemish Region, Walloon Region, Brussels-Capital Region), three language Communities (Flemish, French, German-speaking), and four language areas (Dutch, French, German and in the Brussels-Capital Region bilingual, French/Dutch). Of a total population of 11.5 million in 2021, 6.65 million were Dutch-speaking and lived in the Flemish Region and 3.56 million were French-speaking, living in the Walloon Region. In the bilingual Brussels Region (1.2 million inhabitants) a large majority is French-speaking. The German-speaking Community accounts for 0.7 percent of the total population (78,497 inhabitants in 2021).

Wherever possible, separate accounts are given in this report for the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community. Otherwise, unless specifically stated, the data presented refer to the whole country. It should be noted that the Workforce challenges (see Section 10) represent a common country expert assessment drafted together by all the authors of this report.

## 1. ECEC governance in Belgium

Early childhood education and care in the three language Communities is organised as a multi-sectoral system. Belgium is historically characterised by an ECEC split system since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This implies that childcare services for children up to 3 years of age (*kinderopvang*) are under the auspices of the Minister for Welfare, whereas pre-primary institutions (preschools – *kleuterschool*) for children from 2½ to compulsory school age (6 years) are under the auspices of the Minister for Education (OECD 2006). The two types of institutions have distinct curricula, professional profiles and staff to child ratios. The day-to-day running of childcare centres is the responsibility of the childcare service providers (local authorities, non-profit organisations, and also private for-profit providers). In March 2019, the Belgian Federal Parliament passed a law to lower the starting age of compulsory education from 6 to 5 years, thus including the last year of ECEC. The law came into force on 1st September 2020.

In the **Flemish Community**, preschools (pre-primary education, *kleuterscholen*) for children from 2½ years up to school entry come under the general auspices of the Ministry for Education and Training (*Vlaams ministerie van onderwijs en vorming*). Schools enjoy a high degree of autonomy, which is part of the Belgian Constitution. There is ‘Freedom of education’ and ‘Freedom of organisation’, which gives the right to any natural or legal person to start a school. Moreover, this degree of autonomy also allows each school to develop its own educational policies, including its own pedagogical plan, teaching methods, curriculum and timetables, as well as to appoint its own staff. Although schools receiving public funding are required to operate within a regulatory framework, they still enjoy ‘considerable autonomy’. School boards are distributed over three ‘educational networks’ (GO! education of the Flemish Community; municipal schools; publicly funded and privately run schools, mostly Catholic) and may belong to an ‘umbrella organisation’, that is, a representative association of school boards that acts as a partner for schools in policy discussions with the Flemish government. In the case of childcare provision for younger children (*groepsopvang & gezinsopvang voor baby’s en peuters*) and out-of-school provision for school children (*buitenschoolse opvang*), the Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family (*Department Welzijn Volksgezondheid en Gezin*) delegates supervisory duties to a governmental

agency called The Upbringing Agency (*Agentschap Opgroeien*, formerly *Kind en Gezin, Child & Family*). The Upbringing Agency is responsible for regulations, allocation of places, funding, quality standards and quality management. The day-to-day running of childcare centres is the responsibility of the service providers (local authorities, non-profit organisations, and also private for-profit providers). All childcare services must be registered with the Upbringing Agency.

In the **French Community** (Wallonia-Brussels Federation - WBF), the *écoles maternelles* (pre-primary education) for 2½–6 year-olds come under the general auspices of the Minister for Education (*Ministre de l'Éducation*) and, more specifically, under three provider umbrellas: the State, local authorities or subsidised organisations. In the case of provision for younger children and out-of-school provision for school children, the Minister for Childhood, Health, Culture, Media and Women's Rights (*Ministre de l'Enfance, de la Santé, la Culture, des Médias et des Droits des Femmes*) delegates responsibility to a government agency called ONE (*Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance - Birth and Childhood Office*). ONE is responsible for regulations, allocation of places, funding, accompaniment and monitoring of both childcare services, and the continuing professional development system in WBF.

In the **German-speaking Community**, the Minister for Education and Scientific Research (*Minister für Bildung, Forschung und Erziehung*) is responsible for both ECEC for children under the age of 3 and pre-primary education for children aged 3–6. Pre-primary education is currently accessible for children from the age of 3 but will be accessible for 2½ year-olds from 1st September 2024.

## 2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

### 2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

The administrative split in services for 0–6 year-olds between 'childcare' for the under-threes and 'education' for children aged 2½ years up to school entry is also reflected in the qualifications required for work in these two different sectors. In 2022, core pedagogues in pre-primary education follow their professional Bachelor's education/training alongside teachers in the school system. Practitioners working with children in services for the under-threes are mostly Infant Care Workers (vocational secondary level).

#### **Flemish Community**

##### *Childcare sector*

In the Flemish Community of Belgium, childcare (*kinderopvang*) for children from 0–3 is organised in two settings: *groepsopvang* ('group-based childcare') and *gezinsopvang* ('home-based care'). For the purpose of this report, we will only focus on group-based childcare, unless otherwise stated. The core practitioners working in group-based childcare are called *kinderbegeleider groepsopvang* ('childcare worker group-based childcare') or just '*kinderbegeleider*' ('childcare worker'). There are no 'assistants' but some childcare services work with volunteers for supportive tasks.

The adult to child ratio is set at 1 adult per 8 children, but there are no regulations regarding group size or age range of the children in a group. All childcare services are free to choose how they arrange the groups. When there are two *kinderbegeleiders* in a group, the maximum group size is 18 children (so in this case, the adult to child ratio is even less favourable at 1:9.)



In the 2014 Decree on childcare for the 0 to 3 year-olds (*Decreet houdende de organisatie van kinderopvang van baby's en peuters*) it was stipulated that every childcare worker should have a qualification by 2024. There is a list of possible certificates of qualification from different fields of study eligible to do the job. The minimum qualification requirement is the same for *kinderbegeleiders groepsopvang* as for *kinderbegeleiders gezinsopvang* and is set at level 4 of the European Qualifications Framework (also ISCED 4).

### *Pre-primary education*

In pre-primary education in the Flemish Community of Belgium, the core pedagogues are called *kleuterleerkracht* ('Toddler Teacher') or *kleuterleider* ('Toddler Leader'). They work in a *kleuterklas* ('toddler class') within a *kleuterschool* ('toddler school' = pre-primary) that is mostly situated at the same site as the school for children from 6 to 12 years old (*lagere school* or 'lower school' = primary) with one Principal for both the pre-primary and the primary school.

All Pre-primary School Teachers hold a Bachelor's degree in pre-primary education (EQF level 6; ISCED 6, 180 ECTS credits). They often have additional support from a Childcare Worker (*kinderverzorgster*, 'child carer') for a few hours per week, depending on the number and socio-economic situation of the toddlers. Schools with less than 35 toddlers receive funding for four hours 'childcare' in the week. The Childcare Workers usually have a secondary vocational degree in childcare (*kinderzorg*) (ISCED 4). The deployment of these assisting practitioners is mostly framed as a support for the core teachers or as a means to unburden the core teacher. Childcare Workers in pre-primary schools in the Flemish Community of Belgium are typically responsible for caring tasks for the youngest children (e.g. potty training and toilet moments, guidance during meals and snack time, supervising midday naps) while the Teachers are responsible for the learning activities.

Many pre-primary schools collaborate with after-school care services either within or outside of the school building. After-school care workers organise the leisure time of children after school and may also supervise the children in between educational activities and during the lunch break. Many hold a secondary vocational degree in childcare (ISCED 4). In addition, many staff members without any specific pedagogical or educational qualification can be responsible for the supervision of playtime outside and lunchtime.

## **French Community (WBF)**

### *Childcare sector*

In both the childcare and pre-primary education sectors the initial professional study requirements are currently undergoing a series of reforms. A new law on childcare for the 0 to 3 year-olds has come into force (*Arrêté 2-05-2019, MB 09-10-2019*), requiring every Childcare Worker to graduate at least at upper secondary level and giving the possibility of acquiring higher qualifications. The main staff working directly with children are currently '*puériculteurs/puéricultrices*' (Childcare Workers), but people with other qualifications can also be employed (e.g. *auxiliaires de l'enfance*).

However, since September 2020, official working groups set up by the SFMQ (*Service Francophone des Métiers et Qualifications*, French-speaking service of profession and qualifications) have elaborated a new job profile (*accueillant/accueillante d'enfants*) which should become the official common profiles for the multiple former initial training programmes (see *Chapter 4.2*). Another working group in the ARES (*Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement supérieur*, Academy of Research and Higher Education) made up of the heads of all the university colleges and adult education institutes in WBF, has studied the opportunity of creating together a higher level initial training as recommended by research reports commissioned by the ONE (César et al.

2012; Pirard et al. 2015), which were the product of a broad consultation process with stakeholders in the childcare sector. In 2022, the creation of a new Bachelor's degree in childcare and education in September 2023 is decided and a new job profile (*référentiel métier et de compétences, Bachelier en accueil et en éducation du jeune enfant*) has been set up.

### *Pre-primary education*

At the same time other reforms are ongoing in education as a consequence of the *Pacte pour un enseignement d'excellence* (Pact for a teaching of excellence) which invests in preschool as the first step of the whole system. A new law defines a new common job profile for all the teachers (from preschool – “section 1” to secondary school) (*Décret D. 07-02-2019, MB 05-03-2019; 02-12-2021, MB 02-02-2022*). This law comes into force in 2023. A Master's degree (EQF: level 7, 60 ECTS) for all Teachers (including Pre-primary Teachers who will be registered to work in pre-primary and primary settings with 2½/3 to 8 year-olds) is to be set up by university colleges and universities. More Childcare Workers (*puériculteurs/puéricultrices*) considered as qualified auxiliary staff, are to be registered to work in pre-primary settings, mostly with 2 and 3 year-olds.

### **German-speaking Community**

Early childhood education and care in the German-speaking Community is divided into two domains: childcare for children under 3 years and pre-primary education for children over 3 years.

#### *Childcare sector*

In March 2014, a new decree on childcare for the 0 to 3 year-olds was implemented (*Dekret über die Kinderbetreuung*). In addition, in May 2014 two edicts came into effect: Government Decree Services and Other Forms of Childcare (*Erlass der Regierung über die Dienste und andere Formen der Kinderbetreuung*) and Government Decree on Self-employed Childminders (*Erlass der Regierung über die selbstständigen Tagesmütter/-väter*). Amongst other things, they contain and regulate the conditions for the accreditation and subsidisation of childcare institutions and home-based ECEC services.

Childcare is organised for children from birth until they enter pre-primary education. Childcare in the German-speaking Community also comprises after-school care and out-of-school care during holidays for children in primary education. The Regional Centre for the care of small children (“Regionalzentrum für Kleinkindbetreuung”, RZKB) is the focal point for the establishment, organisation, and attendance of childcare facilities. It has the legal status of a non-profit organisation and works in cooperation with the local public institutions.

There are different forms of childcare in the German-speaking Community.

- **Up to the age of 3**, children often attend regulated home-based care, which is provided by childminders (*Tagesmütter/-väter*). Childminders either work independently (*selbstständige Tagesmütter/-väter*), thus determining the contractual details of the care themselves, or they are affiliated to the RZKB in the so-called childminder service (*Tagesmütter/-väterdienst, konventionierte Tagesmütter/-väter*). In both cases, home-based childcare providers care for the children in their own home or in external premises working together as *Co-Tagesmütter/-väter* (two or three childminders).
- There are also organisations in which several childminders work together under one roof. They are called “childminder houses” (*Tagesmütter/-väterhäuser*). The childminders themselves determine the contractual details of the care. They do this in the form of a company or association.
- There is also a centre-based setting known as *Kinderkrippe*. Two *Kinderkrippen* have a capacity of 24 places and one has a capacity for 36 places for children from 0–3 years.



- *Kinderhorte* offers the possibility for occasional childcare.

Currently, the childcare sector is undergoing a reform with the goal of transforming the RZKB into an institution of public interest. As part of the process, legal frameworks, including qualification and education requirements, are being reconsidered. At the moment, there are no minimum qualification requirements for all types of childminders, whereas for working in a *Kinderkrippe* a certificate as Childcare Worker (“Kinderbetreuer:in”) is a prerequisite.

### Pre-primary education

**From the age of 3**, children are entitled to free early childhood education in a **kindergarten**. Early childhood education together with primary education constitutes ‘elementary education’. Primary education starts at the age of 6.

Childcare and pre-primary education for children under the age of 5 is not obligatory in the German-speaking Community. Compulsory education starts at age 5, when children are required to attend pre-primary education full-time.

Table 1 shows ECEC staff working in direct contact with children in centre-based settings and also categorises the core professionals (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 at end of this section).

Table 1

#### Belgium: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
<b>Childcare sector (0–2<sup>1</sup> years)</b>				
<i>Flemish Community</i>				
<b>Childcare Worker</b> <i>Kinderbegeleid(st)er</i>  <i>Profile:</i> Social Care/Health Care Professional	<i>Kinderdagverblijf</i> <b>Childcare Centre / Nursery</b>  <i>Groepsopvang</i> <b>Group-based Childcare</b>	Core practitioner with group responsibility	0–6 years	3 years at upper secondary level plus 1 year specialisation <i>Award:</i> Vocational Certificate in Childcare <b>or</b> Certificate as Childcare Worker (through Adult Education) – Babies and Toddlers  ECTS credits: n/a <sup>2</sup> EQF: level 4 ISCED 2011: 4

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

<sup>2</sup> n/a= not applicable





Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
<b>French Community</b>				
<b>Childcare Worker</b> <i>Puériculteur/ puéricultrice</i> <i>Auxiliaire de l'enfance</i>  <i>Profile:</i> Social Care/Health Care Professional	<i>Crèche</i> <b>Childcare Centre</b>	Core practitioner with group responsibility	0–6 years	3 years at upper secondary level plus 1 year specialisation <i>Award:</i> Childcare Certificate <b>or</b> through Adult Education – only for the <i>Auxiliaires de l'enfance</i>  ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 4
<b>German-speaking Community</b>				
<b>Childcare Worker</b> <i>Kinderbetreuer/in</i>  <i>Profile:</i> Social Care /Health Care Professional	<i>Kinderkrippe</i> <i>Mini-Krippe</i> <i>Kinderhort</i> <b>Childcare Centres</b>	Core practitioner with group responsibility	0–6 years	3 years at upper secondary level plus 1 year specialisation <i>Award:</i> Diploma 'Kinderbetreuer:in /Childcare Worker' or equivalent  ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 4
<b>Pre-primary education (2½–5 years)</b>				
<b>Flemish Community</b>				
<b>Pre-primary Teacher</b> <i>Kleuterleid(st)er, or Kleuteronderwijzer, or Kleuterleerkracht, or Leraar Kleuteronderwijs</i>  <i>Profile:</i> Pre-primary Education Professional	<i>Kleuterschool</i> <b>Pre-primary school</b>	Core practitioner with group responsibility	2½–6 years	3 years at University College <i>Award:</i> Bachelor's Degree in Pre-primary Education  ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
<b>Auxiliary Worker</b> <i>Kinderbegeleid(st)er, or Kinderverzorg(st)er</i>	<i>Kleuterschool</i> <b>Pre-primary school</b>	Qualified Auxiliary Worker in pre-primary settings, mostly with 2 and 3 year-olds		3 years at upper secondary level plus 1 year specialisation <i>Award:</i> Vocational Certificate in Childcare  ECTS credits: n/a

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 4
<b>French Community</b>				
<b>Pre-primary Teacher</b> <i>Instituteur/ Institutrice Maternelle</i>  <i>Profile:</i> Pre-primary Education Professional	<i>École maternelle</i> <b>Pre-primary school</b>	Core pedagogue with group responsibility	2½–6 years From 2023: 2½–7 years	3 years at University College <i>Award:</i> Bachelor's Degree in Preschool Education (from 2023: Master's degree)  ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 (7 from 2023) ISCED 2011: 6
<b>Auxiliary Worker</b> <i>Puériculteur/ puéricultrice</i>	<i>École maternelle</i> <b>Pre-primary school</b>	Qualified auxiliary worker in pre-primary settings, mostly with 2 and 3 year-olds		3 years at upper secondary level plus 1 year specialisation <i>Award:</i> Vocational certificate  ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 4
<b>German-speaking Community</b>				
<b>Pre-Primary Teacher</b> <i>Kindergärtner:in</i>  <i>Profile:</i> Pre-primary Education Professional	<i>Kindergarten</i> <b>Pre-primary school</b>	Core practitioner with group responsibility	3–6 years	3 years University College <i>Award:</i> Bachelor Degree in Preschool Education. ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
<b>Auxiliary Worker</b> <i>Kindergarten-assistent:in</i>	<i>Kindergarten</i> <b>Pre-primary school</b>	Assistant to the core practitioner without group responsibility	3-6 years	3 years at upper secondary level plus 1 year specialisation <i>Award:</i> Vocational certificate in Childcare <b>or</b> Certificate as Childcare Worker (through Adult Education)  ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 for both ISCED 2011: 4

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

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

## 2.2 Centre leader

Nowadays a Director or a Centre Leader is a required position both in childcare services and in the pre-primary schools in the three language Communities of Belgium. In Belgium, there is one director, or principal, often responsible for both pre-primary and primary school together. Legislation defines their general profile, but the more accurate job characteristics and the understanding of leadership depend on the context.

### *Flemish Community*

#### *Childcare sector*

In the childcare sector in the Flemish Community of Belgium, the Centre Leader is called a *verantwoordelijke* ('responsible person'). 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 also the main contact persons for parents, for the inspectorate and for the government agency responsible for childcare (*Agentschap Opgroeien*). They mainly have administrative tasks, but sometimes Centre Leaders are also in charge of pedagogical support for their teams. In smaller childcare services, it often happens that Centre Leaders also work directly with children on a regular basis.

As far as qualification requirements go, a distinction is made between services up to 18 full-time child places and services with at least 19 full-time child places. Centre Leaders of childcare services up to 18 children are required to have at least the same level of qualification as the core pedagogues. There is a list of possible certificates of qualification from different fields of study eligible to perform the job. The minimum qualification requirement is set at level 4 of the European Qualifications Framework (also ISCED 4). Centre Leaders of childcare services with at least 19 full-time child places are required to have at least a Bachelor's degree (EQF level 6, ISCED 6). There is a list of possible certificates of qualification from different fields of study eligible to perform the job.

#### *Pre-primary education*

In the education sector, Directors of pre-primary and primary school education are in charge of the pre-primary and primary schools. They need to have a Bachelor's degree initial qualification. In order to be tenured and thus receive a higher salary, they need to have a 'pedagogical certificate of competence'. Directors of pre-primary and primary school education do not have to take additional training, although most school boards expect them to. Umbrella organisations have their own training programmes for directors which can last between one and three years. Each school board provides a job description and makes agreements with respect to the assessment

of staff members (in a promotion position) in accordance with the provisions laid down by the Flemish decree on how to evaluate school staff members.

## **French Community (WBF)**

### *Childcare sector*

In the French Community, a new law on childcare for 0 to under 3 year-olds (*Arrêté* 2-05-2019, MB 09-10-2019) recognises the position of Director for the first time, as recommended in research studies (César et al. 2012; Pirard et al. 2015). Six main functions are defined: (1) administrative and organisational management; (2) team management and human resources (recruitment, integration, evaluation, training plan, organisation of the teamwork/schedules); (3) change support in teams (orientation of practices...); (4) ensuring, participating and coordinating the implementation of the educational project, its evaluation and its evolution, including its social and health dimensions; (5) establishing a relational approach with parents and children which promotes the accessibility for all of them and the support for parenthood; (6) playing an interface role with families, partners, local stakeholders and developing actions with the local community. Currently the Director, who does not work directly with children, is often a medical, social or, more recently, a pedagogical worker. Depending on the size of the childcare service (at least 14 children according to the new law) and the management options of the institution, he or she can work alone or in a multidisciplinary team where some tasks can be shared or delegated. He or she has at least a Bachelor's level degree, but rarely an orientation related to childcare when first employed. According to the new law, a relevant experience is required, or an additional qualification recognised by *ONE* (list to be established) has to be taken within the first two years in office. This additional qualification has been set up as a modular multidisciplinary certificate (25 ECTS) with five parts especially focused on childcare: (1) psycho-educational approach, (2) communicational and relational attitudes and strategies, (3) institutional management /leadership (4) team support, (5) health promotion. This programme has been adapted to the candidate's profile and is made accessible (through a shifted schedule, relocation...). A 10% salary increase has been planned. Two challenges for the near future can be underlined. Firstly, a pedagogical view has been increasingly expected according to the pedagogical curriculum implemented since 2002 in WBF, even if the initial training programmes and the qualification requirements of the staff (Director included) do not yet sufficiently reflect this new approach. Secondly, too many administrative tasks make pedagogical leadership difficult.

### *Pre-primary education*

In the education sector, the missions of all school Directors have been officially defined since 2007 (*Décret* 2-02-2007, MB 15-05-2007) and were reviewed in 2019 (*Décret* 14-03-2019, MB 16-04-2019, Erratum MB 20-05-2019) according to the general reform of schools (*Pacte pour un enseignement d'excellence*, Pact for a Teaching of Excellence). The Directors are promoted teachers (possibly Pre-primary Teachers) with a relevant experience (at least three years) and an additional qualification. They are in charge of both the management and the organisation of their establishment. They are considered as pedagogical and educational leaders in charge of the action plan (*plan de pilotage*) of their establishment. An official typical profile identifies seven areas of responsibility (*Circulaire* n° 8198, 19-07-2021): (1) production of meaning according to values; (2) overall strategic and operational management of the school, which includes the responsibility of the pedagogical and educational projects; (3) leading educational actions and projects where a shared pedagogical leadership is expected; (4) management resources and human relations to develop a collective dynamic with the educational staff and supporting col-



laborative work; (5) internal and external communication; (6) administrative, financial and material management of the establishment; (7) planning and active management of their own professional development. The profile is common for the whole educational system (not specific to preschool). According to the law (*Arrêtés* 22-05-2019, MB 1-10-2019 and MB 8-10-2019) an additional qualification is required to develop relational, pedagogical, administrative, material, financial and organisational general competences (not specific to pre-primary school Directors). This initial training programme is free and combines two parts: (1) a first common part for all candidates dedicated to administrative (12 hours) and steering (*pilotage*) (78 hours) tasks; (2) a second part organised by each of the educational umbrella organisations with their own specific modules on administrative, material and financial topics (30 hours), educative and pedagogical issues (60 hours). This initial training programme also includes an internship and a support to reflexive competences development (30 hours) during the period of integration. In WBF the profile and the initial training programme for the Directors are included in the global reform of the whole education system. They do not take into account specific ECEC issues. In 2020–2021, only 12.89% (251/1,947) of Directors in schools were designated pre-primary Directors (without also being in charge of a primary school) and in June 2021, only 16.25% (331/2,037) had an initial qualification as Pre-primary Teacher (Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles 2020). So the directors are often Primary Teachers with an additional general qualification without specific skills, knowledge or views about pre-primary issues. They are responsible for both a primary and pre-primary school which may be implemented in different places. The Directors often work in an office (usually in the primary school) and do not work directly with children on a regular basis, although they maintain contacts through visits to classes.

## **German-speaking Community**

### *Childcare sector*

Within the Regional Centre for Early Childcare (RZKB), there are different leadership functions. The Director is not directly involved in childcare but rather concerned with administrative and financial tasks. His/her role includes e.g. responsibility for the whole service, ensuring compliance with the management contract, the strategic orientation of the RZKB in cooperation with the administrative board and the government and the execution of the decisions of the administrative board.

Second, there is the Head of Service for Childcare (*Dienstleitung Kleinkindbetreuung*) and the Head of Service for Out-of-school Care for children up to the age of 12 (*Dienstleitung Außerschulische Betreuung*). The tasks of the Head of Service for Childcare consist of quality development, strategic decisions, staff management, compliance with regulations, work rules, and so on (FASNK 2022), as well as promoting the development of the service and of the mission statement. The tasks of the Head of Service for Out-of-school Care consist of recruiting staff and staff management, including supervision, management of trainings and education programmes, and the preparation and organisation of projects taking place during the school holidays.

Third, there are the social-pedagogical specialist staff (*Sozialpädagogisches Fachpersonal*), responsible for the management of the crèches /*Kinderkrippen*. Their tasks include the recruitment of childcare workers and team leading, ensuring compliance with the rules and regulations, observing pedagogical processes and the children's development, deployment in case of shortage of childcare workers, contact with parents (allocation of places, contracts, etc.), calculation of fees, management of buildings and material and on-site supervision of trainee childcare workers.

Each childminder house appoints a main person in charge. He/she is available every day and is also active in childcare. His/her tasks consist in particular of the implementation of the pedagogical concept with the team, the supervision and guidance of the childminders, the day-to-day management and the contact to legal guardians and authorities.

### *Pre-primary education*

Pre-primary schools can only be created in attachment to a primary school. In consequence, the leader of the pre-primary school is also the leader of the primary school. The Directors are usually promoted Primary or Pre-primary Teachers, but a qualification in teacher education or relevant experience are not required by law. Any higher education degree is acceptable, along with the proof of a thorough knowledge of the German and French languages (see Royal decree of 22 April 1969; decree of 31 August 1998 and decree of 19 April 2004). Directors must undergo a special training for school leaders within five years of taking up their post. Should they fail to do so, then the designation as Director would be terminated ex officio after five years.

Depending on the number of pupils, the Director is fully or partially relieved of teaching duties. In schools with 50 to 99 pupils, the Headteacher teaches a three-quarter timetable, in schools with 100 to 149 pupils a half timetable, and in schools with 150 to 179 a quarter timetable. In schools with 180 pupils or more as well as in school centres which have at least 125 pupils and are composed of at least three school sites, the Director is exempted from teaching altogether. The official tasks of the school leaders in the German-speaking Community are the following (article 96 of the decree of 26<sup>th</sup> April 1999): (1) the pedagogical and organisational management of the school on behalf of the school authority; (2) the implementation of social, educational and school-related objectives; (3) the management and supervision of the school staff; (4) representing the school externally; (5) ensuring that lessons are taught; (6) chairing class councils and other school conferences; (7) the distribution of lessons; (8) drawing up the weekly and annual timetables; (9) admitting and dismissing pupils on behalf of the school authority; (10) organising supervision and substitutes; (11) monitoring compliance with statutory and regulatory provisions and the school rules; (12) cooperation with the staff members, the pedagogical council and the other representative bodies of the school; (13) cooperation with the psycho-medical-social centres; (14) the counselling of pupils and their guardians; (15) cooperation with the school authorities; (16) the organisation of in-service and further training events; (17) personal continuing education and training; (18) tasks contributing to the implementation of the school project and the school's internal curriculum; (19) the coordination of special needs education; (20) The tasks that contribute to driving school development in line with the mission statement and school development goals for continuous quality improvement; (21) the assignment of middle managers in relation to operational tasks of management in the school organisation and in relation to strategic tasks in school and teaching development.

## **2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility**

The view on the posts of responsibility allocated within the centre for pedagogical tasks across the centre depends on the Community (French, Flemish or German-speaking Community), on the sector (childcare services/pre-primary school) and on local projects. In the **French Community**, Pre-primary Teachers can also become mentors and are granted remuneration for this role. Pre-primary and Primary Teachers can also become specialised in supporting the French Language learning (FLA) of migrant children or the integration of children with special needs. But in these cases they can also be considered as specialist staff (see *Chapter 2.5*) even if some reforms aim at giving them more responsibility within the centre in the immediate future.

Generally speaking, however, it is not common practice in Belgium to assign one of the regular centre team to a designated and remunerated post of responsibility regarding a specific pedagogical task.

Some local authorities (in cities like Gent, Aalst, Oostende, Sint-Niklaas, ...) deploy in pre-primary schools staff members (*brugfiguren*) who act as a 'bridge' between the school and parents, with a focus on socially disadvantaged families. Although some of these 'bridging persons' may have a teaching background, this is not a requirement, as their selection is based on social, communication, and organisational skills as well as their experience within the local communities.

## 2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

In Belgium, Pedagogical Coordinators and supervisory staff are employed in a few cities such as Gand, Liege, Seraing, Arlon..., but their role is not generalised as in some other countries such as France or Italy, where for many years coordinators have combined professional support and guidance, administrative and coordinating functions aimed at improving children's educational experiences in early childhood services. Pedagogical coordination can also be exercised by pedagogical advisers employed by private associations or public administrations over a large area. This is an emerging function.

### *Flemish Community*

#### *Childcare sector*

Since the implementation of the 2014 Decree on childcare for 0 to 3 year-olds, every provider of childcare has to guarantee pedagogical support for all employed Childcare Workers. The government has provided financial resources to realise this right to pedagogical support and allocates them according to the scale of childcare services:

- Income related childcare services (where parents pay a fee according to their income) with more than 18 full-time child places receive a subsidy with which they can choose how they want to organise the pedagogical support. They can either employ or hire a Pedagogical Coach themselves, or make use of the existing training offer provided by different pedagogical support centres and training centres.
- Income-related childcare services with less than 18 full-time child places and childcare services that are not income related can access a support network called *Mentes*. This support network is made up of about 20 support organisations that are active in the entire Flemish Community. Childcare services get support from *Mentes* through a Regional Counsellor (*regionale ondersteuner*) or through a Pedagogical Coach (*pedagogisch coach*). The Regional Counsellor is the first point of contact for a childcare service and works on the policy-making capacity (*beleidsvoerend vermogen*) of the childcare service. One FTE (full-time equivalent) Regional Counsellor supports about 45 childcare services and sees them in an annual cycle. They mainly coach the service provider or the Centre Leader. The Pedagogical Coach offers support on the ground, cooperates in the childcare service and from that position looks for solutions to pedagogic issues that are present. One FTE Pedagogical Coach supports about 33 childcare services in total and sees about 17 of them per year. They mainly coach Childcare Workers.

With the Flemish Intersectoral Agreement (VIA6) that was reached in 2021 (Vlaamse Regering 2021b), financial resources were made available to recruit 264 FTE Pedagogical Coaches for the whole childcare sector in the Flemish Community of Belgium.

There is no qualification list that enumerates the possible diplomas a Pedagogical Coach must have. However, a Pedagogical Coach must: (1) have at least a Bachelor's degree (EQF 6, ISCED

6); and (2) have demonstrable competences or sufficient relevant experience in the pedagogical field of childcare. The support must be based on (1) the legally defined competences for the profession of a childcare worker (*15 Beroepscompetenties Kinderopvang*); (2) the Pedagogical Framework MeMoQ (Kind en Gezin 2016). It is expected that the Coach knows and applies these well.

### *Pre-primary education*

Every pre-primary and primary school has a Care Coordinator (*zorgcoördinator*) and sometimes care teacher (*zorgleerkracht*) who is responsible to develop a ‘care’ policy with the aim of increasing the educational opportunities of all children. Care Coordinators can work on different themes such as parental involvement, etc. Most of them do pupil guidance (embedded in a care concept of remedial teaching a sort of learning delay). This group consists of teachers, Speech Therapists, Special Needs Educators or other persons with a social or educational bachelor degree. Here there is thus an overlap here with the specialist support staff (*Chapter 2.5*).

In the pre-primary education sector, each umbrella organisation has its own Pedagogical Advisory Service (PBD, *Pedagogische begeleidingsdienst*), which ensures professional internal support to schools and pupil guidance centres. The School Advisers (*pedagogische begeleiders/onderwijsondersteuners*) offer support to different schools within their network, including professional development, support for self-evaluation and quality assurance (including student assessment and teacher appraisal). They are mostly former teachers, directors and care coordinators. The Pedagogical Advisory Services (PBD) also play a role in external school evaluation. In the case that inspectors give a school a negative evaluation, the inspectors may determine whether or not that school has sufficient policy-making capacity to implement a successful improvement plan. If the inspectors judge that this is not the case, the school will be obliged to accept support from the PBD.

## ***French Community (WBF)***

### *Childcare sector*

While most municipalities have created a coordination position for the out-of-school provision for children from 3–11 years of age (*coordinateurs, coordinatrices* ATL, social, pedagogical and psychological workers with a Bachelor’s degree acquired through three years at university college), few municipalities envisage such support for the childcare services or pre-primary schools. Indeed, coordination is only legally provided for in these specific (out-of-school) services and includes a great deal of administrative work (to make inventories and monitor the provision, to improve accessibility) alongside the pedagogical support (to sustain and develop the quality of services, to accompany the elaboration of educational projects). In some municipalities (very often cities, no official data), some coordinators for childcare services may be employed, but without official guidelines.

However, pedagogical coordination and supervision have been developed since 2001 by the governmental administration ONE, which has employed 62.8 FTE Care Coordinators (*coordinateurs, coordinatrices accueil* – social or medical workers with a Bachelor’s degree following three years at university college) and 10 FTE Pedagogical Advisers (*conseiller/conseillères pédagogiques* – pedagogical and psychological workers with a Master’s degree after five years at university) to support and accompany childcare services beyond its traditional controlling/monitoring role (Pirard, Camus, and Barbier 2018). While these ONE coordinators have combined controlling, evaluating and supporting roles with an extended multidisciplinary approach since 2001, Pedagogical Advisers only have a support and guidance role focused on their disciplinary



specialism. Nowadays Coordinators and Pedagogical Advisers must collaborate to support the educational function of the childcare services.

### *Pre-primary education*

In the education sector, some actors can also be considered to be Pedagogical Counsellors. They are employed by the educational umbrella organisations (*conseillers pédagogiques des réseaux ou d'organes de représentation et de coordination*, pedagogical advisers of networks or representative and coordinating bodies, *Décret 28-03-2019*, MB 09-10-2019). According to the reform pact, their role is to change. They not only have to work on the action plan of schools with the DCO (*Délégués aux Contrats d'Objectifs*, Delegates to Contracts of Objectives) to assure a diagnostic mission with the general service of inspection (*SIG, Service Général d'Inspection*) or to support some innovation such as the development of an integrated digital approach, but also to support Directors to create collaborative working among staff, to accompany staff in carrying out their plan according to educational project of their network. They sustain innovation and work to improve the quality of the children's education. These overarching missions concern the whole educational system and are not focused on pre-primary school issues.

## **German-speaking Community**

### *Childcare sector*

Every childminder affiliated to the RZKB is licensed by the RZKB. Social-pedagogical specialists of the RZKB accompany them. These Social Assistants carry out the same tasks as the pedagogical staff working at a *crèche* (see *Chapter 2.2*). Additionally, they are the immediate contact person for all childminders and assess the suitability of potential new childminders before recognition. Moreover, they organise pedagogical consultations.

Every self-employed childminder must be recognised by the German-speaking Community. They are accompanied by socio-educational specialists from Kaleido Ostbelgien (2022). Consultants from the Ministry's "Service for Children and Families" supervise them and control compliance with current regulations.

## **2.5 Specialist support staff**

### **Flemish Community**

#### *Childcare sector*

In the childcare sector, there are no specialist staff who work with individual children within the centre. However, childcare services that provide childcare for children with specific support needs / disabilities can turn to a 'Centre for Inclusive Childcare' (*Centrum voor Inclusieve Kinderopvang*, or, '*CIK*') for free support. A Centre for Inclusive Childcare either takes care of children itself or puts parents in contact with other childcare services that offer inclusive childcare. Childcare services may receive support and subsidies from the Inclusive Childcare Centre. Depending on its needs, a childcare service receives long-term support or support through a network of professionals. The Centre for Inclusive Childcare provides customised support: thinking about organising care for a specific child, reflecting on the accessibility of care, training on inclusive policy and the pedagogical role of the service, coaching on communication with parents. The goal of the support provided by a Centre for Inclusive Childcare is to increase accessibility for families and children with specific support needs and to develop qualitative childcare. In the Flemish Community of Belgium there are 16 of these Centres for Inclusive Childcare.

### *Pre-primary education*

Every accredited school in Flanders works together with a centre for pupil guidance (CLB *Centrum voor Leerlingenbegeleiding*). A CLB can help with questions about: (1) Learning and studying: problems with reading, writing, arithmetic, learning ... (2) The educational career: questions about study choice, courses of study, certificates and diplomas ... (3) Psychological and social functioning: depressive feelings, stress, fear of failure, bullying problems, transgressive behaviour, a difficult home situation ... (4) Preventive health care: health problems, vaccinations, growth disorders, drug use, obesity. Parents, students, teachers and administrators can contact a team of doctors, nurses, psychologists, educators and social workers free of charge. The M-decree on measures for pupils with specific educational needs (M-Decreet, 2014) states that inclusive education is the first option for children and parents. The aim is to allow more pupils to attend school in mainstream education and thus to refer fewer pupils to schools for special education. A school builds a continuum of care and, together with the teacher or teachers, the parents and the centre for pupil guidance (CLB), considers what reasonable adjustments or measures a pupil with special educational needs may need in order to attend classes.

The Flemish Government will replace the M-decree for pupils with specific educational needs by the learning support decree. In the learning support decree, a new model for supporting pupils with specific educational needs in ordinary education will be elaborated: the learning support model. The decree on learning support and the learning support model will be phased in from 1 September 2023 (Vlaamse Regering 2021a). Learning support staff will have their own status, in line with that of a care coordinator and with retention of seniority. In consultation with the educational field, a competence profile will also be developed, including the expertise that a 'learning support worker' must have. To develop this expertise, cross-network consultation between the learning support centres is envisaged.

### *French Community (WBF)*

#### *Childcare sector*

According to the law, the childcare services must guarantee the preventive medical and health surveillance of each child and draw up a contract with a general practitioner (sometimes a paediatrician) who also supports the staff (collective health promotion) and/or collaborate with a children's consultation bureau of the *ONE*.

A pedagogically qualified candidate can be employed complementarity to the Social and Health workers (*Arrêté 2-05-2019, MB 09-10-2019*) to support the staff and the pedagogical programme, which can include working with children and families (e.g. a *Pédagogue*, a Psychologist, a Psychomotor Specialist). So a pedagogical role can be integrated, but without specific additional public funds. Indeed, hiring a pedagogical worker in the staff instead of exclusively Social and Health Workers is an innovative choice, not a requirement. Step by step networks supported by the Pedagogical Counsellors of the *ONE* have been set up to share pedagogical views and experience.

Other specialists such as physical therapists can also work within the centre when they are required. But in the field, few specialists regularly work with individual children within the centre. As explained in *Chapter 2.3*, the inclusive approach favours a collective support and the reinforcement of the staff in the childcare services rather than the multiplication of specialists. That's the point of the inclusion support provided by the teams of the *mobile inclusion support device (dispositif mobile de soutien à l'inclusion* see 2.2), made up by multidisciplinary experts and childcare workers who reinforce the in-service staff without replacing them or focusing their work on the only child(ren) with special needs. These specialised teams are also supported by



the *ONE* which has set up a team aiming at developing a transverse inclusive approach. In all these supports, also working with families, not only with the child is required according to their rights, but also to the parenthood support framework (*ONE* 2012).

Finally, an inclusive approach is required from all the practitioners in all the childcare services, but no specific post of responsibility is dedicated to this development. However, nine external specialist teams (eight in Wallonia, funded by the Agency for a Quality of Life - AVIQ, *Agence pour une qualité de vie* and one in Brussels funded by the service PHARE) can support the staff when one or several children with special needs is/are included in the childcare service. These teams (*dispositif mobile de soutien à l'inclusion, mobile inclusion support device*) made up by multidisciplinary experts (psychologists included) support the in-service staff reflexion about the needs of the child(ren) and their own. Some of these support teams include childcare workers who reinforce the in-service staff without focusing their work on the child(ren) with special needs. These specialised teams and services collaborate with the *ONE*.

### *Pre-primary education*

In the education sector several specialists work on site to support the integration of children with special needs. Until now integration agents who are teachers (often Primary Teachers) attached to a specialised school or a Speech Therapist enrolled by a psycho-medico social centre (PMS), depending on the diagnostic and the agreement with the staff, are granted around four periods of time per child with special needs (number of periods of time decreasing each year down to two). Their guidance is more focused on the primary than the pre-primary level. According to a new law (*Décret* 17-06-2021, MB 06-08-2021) these agents should progressively be replaced by a pool of resource people allocated to each territorial area (*pole territorial*) and distributed according to the number of children at school in the area, no longer depending on the number of children with special needs. Even if some children with special needs still need support, their function is extended to support teachers (Pre-primary Teachers included) and help them to define reasonable arrangements. In 2019, the Minister of Education decided to employ 170 additional Speech Therapy Assistants especially allocated to pre-primary settings and integrated in the PMS teams. They are expected to support and advise staff or Pre-primary Teachers (reasonable arrangements, learning strategies, and so on) rather than work with individual children, but they can observe them and therefore interact with them. Moreover, from 2019, additional periods of time for teachers are dedicated to a new support called *FLA* (*Français Langue d'apprentissage*; French as an additional language) focused on newcomers (at least 4 years old) who have not yet mastered the language of instruction (French) to successfully adapt to the activities of their age group (*Décret* D. 07-02-2019, MB 18-03-2019). When a school has at least eight newly arrived or already settled children with a migration background, an educational service called a *DASPA* (*Dispositif d'Accueil et de Scolarisation des élèves Primo-Arrivants et Assimilés*; Reception and Schooling System for Newcomers and Already Settled Pupils) can be set up and granted. A *DASPA* is aimed at welcoming, schooling and integrating newcomers and other immigrant children into regular education from the third year of pre-primary education to secondary school. In 2021 (15<sup>th</sup> January), only 0.07% of the children in the *DAPSA* were young children registered in a pre-primary. In 2019, the granting of these additional periods under the new system *FLA* generated an increase of 2% working in preschool education, despite a 1.5% drop in the school population (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles 2020). Complementary in-service training sessions for teachers working or wishing to work in the *DASPA* or the devices *FLA* support are organised and have become compulsory (see section 6), but not specialised in pre-primary issues.



### **German-speaking Community**

The Centre for the Healthy Development of Children and Adolescents, *Kaleido Ostbelgien*, is responsible for all children and adolescents from 0–20 years of age and has the following general objectives: to promote optimal physical and mental health of children and adolescents, including pregnancy counselling; to support the optimal development of the educational potential and inclusion in education and training of children and young people; promoting a safe environment for children and young people to protect them from accidents and deliberate harm; promoting economic security and a decent standard of living for children and young people as a basis for healthy development; to promote children and young people as part of a developmentally supportive network of family, friends, neighbours and community; promoting the inclusion of children and young people in the community; promoting the ability of children and young people to make a positive contribution to society.

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

### **Flemish Community**

#### *Childcare sector*

In the childcare sector, a large proportion of the core practitioners are still not qualified, despite the Decree requirement to do so by 2024. 8.8% of Childcare Workers in group-based childcare and 31.8% in home-based ECEC provision affiliated with a larger childcare provider do not have the required qualification (Agentschap Opgroeien n.d.). In group-based childcare, 71.7% of staff have a post-secondary vocational degree (EQF 4), compared to 21.6% of staff in home-based childcare services.

On 01.01.2022, a total of 357 men (2.4%) were working in childcare, of whom 164 (1.1%) were core practitioners, 98 (0.7%) had a supportive function and 95 (0.6%) were centre leaders.

#### *Pre-primary education*

In the Flemish Community, over 90% of staff working in pre-primary settings during the official teaching hours (*lestijden*) with 2½ to 6 year-olds have a Bachelor level qualification; around 10% of the workforce in the *Kleuterscholen* are Assistants qualified at upper secondary vocational level. In the school year of 2020/2021, a total of 21,437 ‘hours of childcare’ (*uren kindzorg*) were allocated to 2,268 *Kleuterscholen* (AGODI 2021). In the school year 2020/2021, 23,850 teachers were employed in pre-primary education, of which 630 (2.6%) were male (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming 2021b). Staff members or volunteers without a specific educational qualification can be responsible for the supervision of numerous groups of children during the lunch break as well as before and after school. No specific data are available on their number. There are however exceptions as in the city of Ghent where qualified out-of-school care staff support the children during these extracurricular times. The out-of-school care staff have a minimum of three months of training and many hold a secondary vocational degree in childcare (ISCED 4).

Table 2:

**Belgium - Flemish Community: Structural composition of ECEC workforce**

Staff categories	Year / Proportion of workforce in %	
Staff with a specialist three-year (or longer) higher education degree	<i>Pre-primary education, 01.10.2022:</i> Bachelor's degree (EQF 6): 19,854 Master's degree (EQF 7): 123 <b>98.0</b> <b>0.6</b>	
	<i>Group-based childcare, 01.01.2022:</i> Bachelor's degree (EQF 6): 551 Master's degree (EQF 7): 21 <b>5.3</b> <b>0.2</b>	
	<i>Pre-primary education, 01.10.2022:</i> - Post-Secondary vocational degree (EQF 4) <sup>1</sup> : 2,325 - Higher vocational qualification (EQF 5): 278 <b>11.7</b> <b>1.4</b>	
	<i>Group-based childcare, 01.01.2022:</i> - Post-Secondary vocational degree (EQF 4): 7,451 - Higher vocational qualification (EQF 5): 157 <b>71.7</b> <b>1.5</b>	
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary, post-secondary)	<i>Pre-primary education, 2019/2020:</i> - Among tenured teachers - Among temporary staff (Data only available on pre-primary and primary school staff combined.) <b>0.01</b> <b>7.7</b>	
	<i>Group-based childcare, 01.01.2022:</i> - Secondary vocational degree (EQF 3): 582 - General secondary degree (EQF 4): 212 - Technical secondary degree (EQF 4): 1,166 - Arts secondary degree (EQF 4): 19 - Bachelor's degree (EQF 6): 135 - Master's degree (EQF 7): 23 <b>5.6</b> <b>2.0</b> <b>11.2</b> <b>0.2</b> <b>1.3</b> <b>0.2</b>	
	Trainee staff (not counted in staff to child ratios)	No data available
	Unqualified staff	<i>Pre-primary education:</i> No unqualified staff
		<i>Group-based childcare, 01.01.2022:</i> - No required qualification: 900 (701.27 FTE <sup>2</sup> ) - Currently qualifying: 994 (853.12 FTE <sup>2</sup> ) <b>8.83</b> <b>9.25</b>
	Male practitioners (disaggregated according to: centre leaders, core pedagogues, auxiliary staff/assistants)	<i>Pre-primary education, 2020/21:</i> 630 out of 23,850 (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming, 2021b) <b>2.6</b>
		<i>Childcare sector, 01.01.2022</i> 357 men total out of 14,967 - 164 core practitioners - 98 support staff - 95 centre leaders <b>2.4</b> <b>1.1</b> <b>0.7</b> <b>0.6</b>
Staff with a minority ethnic background or a 'background of migration'		<i>Pre-primary education, 2019</i> Proportion of teachers of foreign origin (Departement Onderwijs en Vorming 2021a) <b>5.4</b>

Staff categories	Year / Proportion of workforce in %
<i>(definitions will vary from country to country)</i>	Childcare sector No systematically compiled data

Note: The data for the childcare sector in the Flemish Community was provided by *Agentschap Op-groei* (non-public database, 2022) and is based on a sample of 93% of all childcare services. The data for pre-primary education was provided by *Agentschap Voor Onderwijsdiensten AGODI* (non-public database, 2022).

<sup>1</sup>: In pre-primary education, staff with a post-secondary vocational degree (EQF 4) are childcare workers, working as assistants of the teacher. They are not counted as teaching staff.

<sup>2</sup>: Full-time equivalent

## French Community (WBF)

### Childcare sector

In the childcare sector, data collections on qualifications have only taken place since 2020 and only in subsidised childcare facilities (*crèches*), but not in non-subsidised settings, revealing a lack of reliable data across settings. The data is therefore partial but underlines some trends which need to be confirmed: 97% of staff working with children in subsidised childcare facilities (*crèches*) have an upper secondary vocational level (92% *puériculteurs-puéricultrices*; 8% *auxiliaires de l'enfance*); 3% have a Bachelor level qualification (*instituteurs-institutrices maternelles, éducateurs/éducatrices en accompagnement spécialisés, assistant-e-s sociales, infirmiers-infirmières*). 97% of the staff who carry out psycho-medico-social supervision have a higher education degree (48% *infirmiers-infirmières*, 37% *assistant-e-s sociales*, 1% *éducateurs/éducatrices en accompagnement spécialisés*, 0,5% *instituteurs-institutrices maternelles*, 13,5% unspecified). There are only a small number of male workers in the childcare centres for under-threes and no reliable data. Research results emphasise that the current professional education/training needs to focus more on gender-neutral competences (Pirard, Schoenmaeckers, and Camus 2015). No data is collected on staff characteristics relating to minority ethnic background or a 'background of migration'.

### Pre-primary education

In 2020, over 89% of staff working in **pre-primary settings** with 2½–5 year-olds had at least a Bachelor level qualification; around 11% of the workforce were Assistants who graduated from upper secondary vocational level to support teachers in the first year of the *école maternelle (classe d'accueil)* with 2 and 3 year-olds. Nearly 100% of Pre-primary Teachers (*instituteurs-institutrices maternelles*) were qualified: 95.3% with a specialised Bachelor's degree in pre-primary education (*bachelier instituteurs/institutrices maternelles*), 2.4% with a Bachelor's degree in primary education (*bachelier instituteurs/institutrices primaires*), 0.8% with a general Bachelor's degree and an additional specialisation (AESI, *Agrégation de l'Enseignement Secondaire Inférieur*), 1.2% with a Master's degree in Educational Sciences complementary to their Bachelor's degree in pre-primary education (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles 2020). In October 2020, in addition to these Pre-primary Teachers (10,355 full-time equivalent - FTE), 79.1% of the staff), there were 1,469.74 FTE *puériculteurs/puéricultrices* (11.2%) employed as auxiliary workers in *écoles maternelles* financed by the WBF, others were employed and paid directly by the School Heads (no data available). Assistants without any formal qualification may also be part of the staff (no data), although it should be noted that not every *école maternelle* employs an Assistant or an auxiliary worker. The fairly low number of specialist support staff tend to be mostly *maîtres/maîtresses de psychomotricité* (812.04 FTE, 6.2% of the staff) and more recently teachers

for French as a foreign Language (*FLA, Français Langue d'apprentissage*, 449.58 FTE, 3.4% of the staff). No data are available about the integration agents working in pre-primary schools (see *Chapter 2.5*). 97% of Pre-primary Teachers (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles 2020), 98.24% of auxiliary workers, 76.51% of *maîtres/maîtresses de psychomotricité* and 98% of FLA are female. 96.4% of the specifically Pre-primary directors (compared to 66.6% of the total number of Pre-primary and Primary directors) are female.

Table 3

**Belgium - French Community: Structural composition of ECEC workforce - Pre-primary education**

Staff categories	2020 / Proportion of workforce, in %
Staff with specialist higher education degree	(corresponds to 10,355 FTE <i>instituteurs / institutrices maternelles</i> of 13,085 total <b>79.1</b> 79.1% composed by: Bachelor's degree (pre-primary) <b>95.3</b> Bachelor's degree (primary) <b>2.4</b> Bachelor's degree (general + specialisation) <b>0.8</b> Master's degree <b>1.2</b>
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	n/a
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	<i>puériculteurs/puéricultrices</i> as auxiliary workers – 1,469 FTE of 13,085 total at least <b>11.2</b>
Staff with non-specialist qualification	n/a
Staff without formal IPS	Assistant (no current data available)
Specialist support staff	<i>Maîtres/maîtresses de psychomotricité</i> 812 FTE of 13,085 total <b>6.2</b> <i>Français Langue d'apprentissage</i> 449,58 FTE of 13,085 total <b>3.4</b>
Male staff	– Share of total staff <b>3.0</b> – Share of pre-primary directors <b>3.6</b>
Staff with a background of migration	No data available

Source: Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles 2020 and Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles – *Administration générale de l'Enseignement* (unpublished)

### German-speaking Community

No statistical data are compiled in the German-speaking Community about the workforce composition in *Kinderkrippen* or in the pre-primary section of primary schools.

## 4. Initial professional education (IPE)

### 4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

For a long time, the administrative split in services into 'childcare' for the under-threes and 'education' for the 2½ to under 6 year-olds has been reflected in the qualifications required to work in these two different sectors. On the one hand, core practitioners in childcare settings have either a vocational qualification or no formal IPE at all. This upper-secondary vocational qualification route takes place in secondary schools or adult education courses. On the other hand, core pedagogues in pre-primary education predominantly have at least a Bachelor's degree. In 2021, the IPE at Bachelor level takes place at higher education institutions – university colleges – specialising in teacher education or pedagogy of the young child (*Hogeschool, Department Onderwijs – Institut Supérieur de Pédagogie – Autonome Hochschule*).

In pre-primary education a growing number of Childcare Workers now work as an Auxiliary Worker (Teacher's Assistant).

#### **Flemish Community**

##### *Childcare sector*

To obtain a qualification as Childcare Worker, courses are offered in secondary vocational education, adult education, higher education or in a specialised training centre.

##### **Route 1:** *Secondary vocational education: '7<sup>th</sup> year childcare'*

The vocational track 'Childcare' is a specialisation year in the third grade of vocational secondary education. It is therefore called a 'seventh year'. In a linear, full-time track, the training takes one school year, at the rate of 32 to 36 hours per week. The programme can also be followed in modular form.

To start this training, a certificate of the basic training 'Care' is required (third degree of vocational secondary education). It is also possible to enter from other training courses, but then permission is needed from a class council. The class council is the only body within the school that is responsible for the admission, formation, evaluation and deliberation of pupils. It is composed of the principal of the school or her/his delegate and all teaching staff providing education to the pupil. The principal chairs the class council and may invite additional members if necessary.

After completing the specialisation year in Childcare, students are awarded the diploma of secondary education and a 'Certificate of Childcare' if they have passed the modules. This qualification is classified at level 4 of the EQF. After the specialisation year, students can work as a Childcare Worker in group-based childcare, home-based ECEC provision, after-school care or in pre-primary education. It is also possible to choose to continue studying.

There is no enrolment fee in post-secondary education, but schools may charge extra.

##### **Route 2:** *Adult education: 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers'*

Various Centres for Adult Education in the Flemish Community of Belgium offer the course 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers'. In a linear, full-time track, the training takes two semesters, at the rate of two teaching days or evenings per week. The training consists of 720 50-minute lessons, so 600 hours in total. Those who already work in childcare can also follow the training on Saturdays.





After the training, students obtain either a certificate of 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers' (for those who have not yet obtained a diploma of secondary education) or a diploma of 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers' (for those who have already obtained a diploma of secondary education). Both the certificate and the diploma count as a recognised professional qualification for Childcare Workers and Centre Leader in group-based childcare settings for up to 18 children. This qualification is classified at level 4 of the EQF.

The government has fixed the standard registration fee at €1.50 per lesson hour. Without any additional costs, participants therefore pay €1,080 for this course. However, since the profession of a Childcare Worker has been officially recognised as a 'bottleneck profession' (*knel-puntberoep*), one can follow the training completely free of charge.

### **Route 3: Specialised training centre (Syntra): 'Childcare Worker'**

Syntra is a network of training centres that offer profession-oriented training courses. They also have a course that focuses on the childcare sector: 'Childcare Worker'. In a linear, full-time track, the training takes one year, at the rate of three teaching days per week. The course lasts 610 hours in total. It is also possible to take the course in evening classes at the rate of two evenings per week. In that case, the training lasts two years.

To be eligible for this programme, students must be at least 18 years old. In addition, they must have either a secondary school diploma, a vocational secondary school certificate or demonstrable experience. They must also have a certificate of good behaviour and morals and a certificate of medical fitness.

After the training, students obtain a diploma of 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers', which is recognised as the professional qualification for Childcare Workers and Centre Leader in group-based childcare settings for up to 18 children. This qualification is classified at level 4 of the EQF. The full-time, one-year course costs €999.

### **Route 4: Higher Education: 'Bachelor – Pedagogy of the Young Child'**

Although a Bachelor's degree is not expected from the core practitioners in childcare, we consider the programme 'Pedagogy of the Young Child' as one of the initial qualifying routes. This Bachelor's programme has been offered at three University Colleges (*hogeschole*) in Flanders (Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent) since 2011. The first students graduated in 2014. These graduates take up a post as Pedagogical Coach or Adviser, designing the pedagogical policy of the childcare centre with the core practitioners and the centre leaders. They are also trained to work with children and their parents. Some of these Bachelor graduates also work as part of the management staff in childcare centres, and it is envisaged that they will gradually replace the Nurses and Social Care Workers currently working in childcare centres.

In a linear, full-time track, the training takes three years (20 teaching hours per week). The total programme amounts to 180 ECTS credits.

A diploma of secondary education is required to start this Professional Bachelor programme. After the training, students obtain a Bachelor's degree in 'Pedagogy of the Young Child'. This qualification is classified at level 6 of the EQF.

The price for a full-time programme of 60 credits is €979.60. For the full programme (180 credits), students therefore pay €2,938.80 without any additional costs.

### **Pre-primary education**

A Bachelor's Degree is required to work as a Pre-primary Teacher (*kleuterleerkracht*). The full name of the programme is 'Bachelor in Education: Pre-primary Education' (also 'Bachelor in Pre-

school Education’) (*Bachelor in het Onderwijs: Kleuteronderwijs, also Educatieve Bachelor Kleuteronderwijs*). In a linear, full-time track, the training takes three years (about 20 teaching hours per week). The total programme amounts to 180 ECTS credits.

A diploma of secondary education is required to start this Professional Bachelor programme. From the academic year 2017/2018, there is also an entry test. All prospective students are required to take this test, but the result is not binding. Hence, although the test is mandatory, candidates who fail can still start the course. The aim is to give students an indication of their skills in certain starting competences for the programme. The test consists of a Dutch language test and a test on motivation and study skills. This entry test is the same for all University Colleges in the Flemish Community of Belgium that offer teacher training programmes (*lerarenopleiding*).

The price for a full-time programme of 60 credits is €979.60. For the full programme (180 credits, students therefore pay €2,938.80€ without any additional costs.

### **French Community (WBF)**

#### *Childcare sector*

Some similar qualifying routes to Flanders are organised in WBF: secondary vocational education with a 'seventh year' (the main core workforce), possibly Adult education in the childcare services and Professional Bachelor programme after a diploma of secondary education in pre-primary education. As explained above, in both the childcare and pre-primary education sectors the initial professional education requirements are currently undergoing a series of reforms.

### **German-speaking Community**

#### *Childcare sector*

To obtain a qualification as Childcare Worker, courses are offered in secondary vocational education or in adult education.

#### *Pre-primary education*

Pre-primary Teachers complete a Bachelor-level degree at the Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien, the only higher education institution in the German-speaking Community. Initial professional studies combine professional basic knowledge, scientific approaches, generic and subject-specific as well as didactic training, and links between theory and practice. The total course comprises 180 ECTS points (60 credits per year), with one credit representing a work load of 25 to 30 hours.

*Tables 4 and 5* give an overview of the core practitioners (Childcare Workers and Pre-primary Teachers) in all three language Communities.



Table 4

**Belgium: Childcare Worker**

<p><b>Job title in Flemish Community:</b> <i>Begeleid(st)er Kinderopvang/ Kinderzorg</i>  <b>Job title in French Community:</b> <i>Puéricultrice/puériculteur</i>  <b>Job title in German-speaking Community:</b> <i>Kinderbetreuer:in</i>  <b>Profile:</b> Social Care/Health Care Professional</p>
<p><b>Entry requirements:</b> 9 years of schooling  <b>Professional studies:</b> 3 years upper secondary level (vocational branch) plus 1 year specialisation  <b>Award: (1)</b> Diploma (vocational secondary education)  <i>Flemish Community:</i> <i>Kinderzorg</i>  <i>French Community:</i> <i>Puéricultrice/teur</i>  <i>German-speaking Community:</i> <i>Kinderbetreuer:in</i>  <b>ECTS credits:</b> n/a  <b>EQF level:</b> 4  <b>ISCED 2011:</b> 4</p> <p><b>Award (2):</b> Certificate (adult education)  <i>Flemish Community:</i> <i>Begeleid(st)er in de kinderopvang</i>  <i>French Community:</i> <i>Auxiliaire de l'enfance</i>  <i>German-speaking Community:</i> <i>Kinderbetreuer:in</i>  <b>ECTS credits:</b> n/a  <b>EQF level:</b> 4  <b>ISCED 2011:</b> 4</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplaces:</b> Childcare centres (0–2 years), extra-curricular activities in childcare and out-of-school centres (3–11 years). A few also work in pre-primary education and youth activity centres. In both the Flemish and French Communities also as Auxiliary Worker in pre-primary education (<i>Kleuterschool, École maternelle</i>), mostly with 2 and 3 year-olds.</p>

Table 5

**Belgium: Pre-primary Teacher**

<p><b>Job title in Flemish Community:</b> <i>Kleuterleid(st)er, Kleuteronderwijzer, Leraar Kleuteronderwijs</i>  <b>Job title in French Community:</b> <i>Instituteur/institutrice maternelle</i>  <b>Job title in German-speaking Community:</b> <i>Kindergärtner:in</i>  <b>Profile:</b> Pre-primary Education Professional</p>
<p><b>Entry requirements:</b> 12 years of schooling (general or vocational), upper secondary education school-leaving certificate. Applicants with vocational certificate: 1 extra year or equivalent qualification.  <b>Professional studies:</b>  <i>Flemish Community:</i> 3 years at higher education institution affiliated to a University College (<i>Hogeschool</i>)  <i>French Community:</i> 3 years at higher education institution affiliated to a University College (<i>Institut Supérieur d'Enseignement Pédagogique</i> or <i>Haute école</i>). From 2023, 4 years co-organised by higher education institution affiliated to a University College and a University.  <i>German-speaking Community:</i> 3 years at higher education institution (<i>Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien</i>)  <b>Award:</b>  <i>Flemish Community:</i> <i>Bachelor in het onderwijs: kleuteronderwijs</i>  <i>French Community:</i> <i>Bachelier instituteur/ institutrice maternelle</i> (from 2023, <i>Master en enseignement de section</i>, EQF level 7)  <i>German-speaking Community:</i> <i>Bachelor Kindergärtner:in</i>  <b>ECTS credits:</b> 180  <b>EQF level:</b> 6  <b>ISCED 2011:</b> 6</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> Pre-primary settings <i>Kleuterschool, École maternelle, Kindergarten</i> (2½–5 years, in DG: 3–5 years). A few also work in childcare centres (0–2 years) or in primary education (6–11 years)</p>

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

### *Flemish Community*

#### *Childcare Worker (Begeleid(st)er Kinderopvang/ Kinderzorg)*

**Competences:** In 2018, 15 competences for the profession of a Childcare Worker (*15 Beroepscompetenties Kinderopvang*) were legally defined as the professional qualification for a childcare worker (*Beroepskwalificatie Kinderbegeleider Baby's en Peuters*) (Vlaams ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2019).

A Childcare Worker ...

- Interacts in a positive, constructive manner with all babies and toddlers, parents, colleagues and others.
- Observes the behaviour of the baby/toddler, individually and in groups, reflects on it and adapts his/her actions accordingly
- Stimulates each baby/toddler in their development, uses the child's talents and entrepreneurial spirit
- Supports the baby/toddler in all their activities
- Encourages positive contacts between babies and toddlers and sets boundaries
- Recognises and responds to the social-emotional needs of the baby/toddler
- Provides a stimulating, safe, hygienic and healthy play environment for babies and toddlers
- Works with parents and recognises them as primary educators
- Cooperates with others in the care of the baby/toddler
- Cooperates, gives feedback and makes agreements
- Reflects on the organisation and contributes to the improvement of childcare
- Accompanies babies and toddlers at their arrival and pick-up time
- Prepares baby and toddler meals, organises and supervises mealtimes
- Organises sessions of rest and exercise
- Cares for the baby/toddler according to their needs.

**Curriculum:** This vocational qualification forms the basis of the curriculum within both the Centres for Adult Education and the Syntra Specialised Training Centres.

#### *Route 1: Secondary vocational education: '7th year Childcare'*

In contrast to the initial training courses within the Syntra Centres and the Centres for Adult Education centres, the curriculum of the initial training course 'Childcare' within secondary vocational education is not based on the legally defined professional qualification 'Childcare Worker'. There is no legally defined educational qualification either. As a result, teaching content and timetables differ from school to school. Schools have great freedom in organising the curriculum.

Globally, students go through two modules: 'Guidance for young children' and 'Guidance for school-age children'. They have to pass both modules. The theoretical part of these modules consists of 'General Education' and 'Vocational Training':

- 'General Education' is mainly offered at school. It consists of the general subjects such as French or English, Physical Education, Cross-curricular Secondary Education Attainment Targets and Ideology classes....

- In 'Vocational Training' students learn what they need to be able to do as a beginner Childcare Worker. Vocational training is partly covered during the internships and partly at school.

*Route 2: Adult education: 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers'*

**Curriculum:** The training focuses on pedagogical skills needed to guide and stimulate babies and toddlers in childcare. A very large part of the training is spent at a workplace. In terms of content, the MeMoQ pedagogical framework guides the curriculum. Most Centres for Adult Education use the same structure for the training of 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers'. The full programme consists of 18 modules:

Table 6

**Belgium, Flemish Community: Curriculum areas and number of teaching hours in Adult Education**

Curricular areas	Number of teaching hours
Childcare and me	20
First aid and life-saving treatment	20
Basic principles of pedagogical work	40
Communication skills in childcare	20
Dealing with diversity in childcare	60
Working with families and their contexts	60
Teamwork and interdisciplinary work	30
Basic care/nurturing	30
Quality work in childcare	60
Babies' and toddlers' play	80
Care for babies and toddlers	60
Feeding babies and toddlers	40
Pedagogical work with babies and toddlers	60
Time and space planning for babies and toddlers	30
Supervised intervision 1	10
Supervised intervision 2	10
Supervised intervision 3	10
Internship	80

*Route 3: Specialised training centre (Syntra): 'Childcare Worker'*

Just like the Centres for Adult Education, most Syntra centres also follow the same structure for the 'Childcare Worker' course. This structure is very similar to that of the training 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers' within Adult Education. The programme consists of **16 content areas**:

Table 7

**Belgium, Flemish Community: Curriculum areas and number of teaching hours in specialised training centres**

Curriculum areas	Number of teaching hours
Orientation in childcare	32
First aid and life-saving treatment	20
General communication	20



Curriculum areas	Number of teaching hours
Working with families and their context	28
Working with the team and working interdisciplinary	20
Quality work in childcare	20
Pedagogical work with babies and toddlers	56
Diversity and inclusion in childcare	24
Pedagogic observation of babies and toddlers	20
Feeding babies and toddlers	20
Caring for babies and toddlers	52
Time and space planning	20
Babies' and toddlers' play	40
Internship	150
Organisational management of a childcare facility	44 + 1 (final test)
Manager of a childcare facility up to 18 places	44

#### Route 4: Higher Education: 'Bachelor Pedagogy of the Young Child'

For the Bachelor 'Pedagogy of the Young Child' there is a legally defined educational qualification (*onderwijskwalificatie*). This means that the Flemish Government (Department of Education and Training) officially acknowledges the domain-specific learning outcomes of the Bachelor programme. For the Bachelor 'Pedagogy of the Young Child' there are 10 distinct learning outcomes divided according to different fields of responsibility. The program consists of four competence areas:

Table 8

#### Belgium, Flemish Community: Competence areas in Higher Education

1. <b>Responsibility for the children in the service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Creating a positive, safe, healthy, hygienic and structured living environment of care for every baby and every child in the group; creating basic trust with each child by being sensitive and focused on fulfilling basic needs.</li> <li>– Supporting the whole personality development of every baby and every child by means of stimulating interaction in a rich environment and by guiding an offer based on observation of their living environment and developmental needs.</li> </ul>
2. <b>Responsibility towards families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Maximising continuity between the home and the care environment by designing vision-based childcare together with the team and in such a way that parents recognise themselves in it</li> <li>– Building a relationship of trust with the parents in the best interests of the child, and links his/her own professional expertise to the experiential expertise of the parent.</li> </ul>
3. <b>Responsibility towards one's own team and the facility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Stimulating and motivating diversely educated staff to professional development in the areas of 'educating children', 'supporting children's development' and 'being a partner to the children's families', by fulfilling a model role, by giving and receiving feedback in an open manner and by creating a favourable professional development context for the staff</li> <li>– Taking responsibility, together with a team of diversely educated colleagues for the common socio-pedagogical project of the facility and actively creating the preconditions for this.</li> </ul>

<p><b>4. Responsibility towards the childcare sector and towards society at large</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Working proactively in the local social context and taking the initiative to cooperate with external partners to this end</li> <li>– Actively following relevant developments in society, government policy, the field of study/expertise, and the international context to interpret the social relevance of his/her professional activity.</li> </ul>
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Two learning outcomes transcend these four competence areas and are important for each one:

- Building up new pedagogical knowledge and integrating this into the policy of the facility. Together with the team, she/he collects, analyses and interprets relevant complex situations in professional practice, uses the results of research, and takes the initiative and responsibility to innovate the existing pedagogical practice.
- Acting from an awareness of her/his own frame of reference with respect for identity of others (children, parents, team, external partners) and supporting the identity development of children and their families.

The three University Colleges that offer this Bachelor programme each have their own emphases and accents with regard to the curriculum, but there is regular consultation and exchange between the different institutions. It is noticeable that the role of Pedagogical Coach is getting more and more emphasis in the curricula of the different University Colleges that offer the Bachelor 'Pedagogy of the Young Child'.

#### **Pre-Primary Teacher** (*Leraar Kleuteronderwijs*)

The integrated teacher training programmes combine subject-specific, didactical and pedagogical/teaching components throughout the entire three-year study route for Pre-primary Teachers. They also focus on building capacity and experience in practice through extensive internships in authentic learning environments. The pre-primary route leads to a professional Bachelor's degree in Education (*Bachelor in het onderwijs: kleuteronderwijs*). The total course comprises 180 ECTS credits (60 credits per year), with one credit representing a work load of 25 to 30 hours. The practical component accounts for at least 45 credits.

**Competences:** In 1998, and again in 2007, the first official professional profiles for Pre-primary Teachers and basic competences for new teachers were established which assigned the profession ten specific roles, including an instructional role (*lerende*) and an educational role (*opvoedende*). The basic competencies for teachers set out the requirements that education and society place on newly qualified teachers. They are both a frame of reference for the curriculum development of teacher education programmes, which have autonomy in this area, and an individual assessment framework for each student in teacher education. The government sets the minimum quality criteria so that parents and outsiders know what to expect from teachers. By specifically defining the basic competences, the government makes it clear that a newly graduated teacher cannot be expected to perform at the same level of professional practice as a teacher with some experience. This indicates that 'being a teacher' is a process of lifelong learning

These basic competences for a beginning teacher start from the following premises: 'In the future, more than ever, a teacher will become a team player. Cooperation with other teachers and other actors in a school team is essential to ensure quality education. To participate fully in this, each individual teacher must possess certain competencies. They must be able to use both individually and together with colleagues.'

Table 9

**Belgium, Flemish Community: Functional roles for a beginning teacher**

Functional roles	
<b><i>As a facilitator of learning and development processes</i></b>	<p>The teacher can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identify the initial situation of the learner and the group</li> <li>– Adapt his/her didactic approach to the objectives on the one hand and the environment, motivation, initial situation and needs of the learner(s) on the other hand, taking into account the diversity of the group</li> <li>– Choose and formulate objectives for the level of education in question, taking into account the starting situation of the learners and the validated objectives framework, curriculum...</li> <li>– Select, structure and translate learning and development opportunities, learning experiences or learning content into a coherent educational offer, shaping and monitoring the horizontal and vertical coherence between learning content and learning areas.</li> <li>– Determine and use appropriate forms of work and grouping</li> <li>– Select, use and adapt developmental materials and teaching aids</li> <li>– Create a powerful learning environment with attention to group heterogeneity</li> <li>– Can prepare and carry out observation and evaluation with a view to adjustment and remediation as part of the learning process of a learner(s) and can use those observation and evaluation data to question his/her own didactic actions and adjust them where necessary</li> <li>– Contribute to the organisation of inclusive education for each learner within the framework of the care and equal educational opportunities policy of the educational institution</li> <li>– Contribute to the learner(s) being sensitive to language and open to other languages</li> <li>– Set up learning and development processes, both from the content of the learning areas or subject areas of his/her expertise, and from a learning area or cross-curricular perspective.</li> </ul>
<b><i>As an educator</i></b>	<p>The teacher can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Create a positive climate for the learner(s) in the group and in the educational institution</li> <li>– Promote the empowerment of the learner(s) by encouraging them to become empowered, independent, self-initiative, responsible and participative</li> <li>– Support the learner(s) in their individual development and social participation by paying attention to their attitude formation, social-emotional formation and value development of the learner(s)</li> <li>– Monitor current social events and trends and translate them into an educational context</li> <li>– Adequately deal with learner(s) with specific educational and pedagogical needs.</li> <li>– Pay attention to the physical and mental health of the learner(s)</li> <li>– Communicate with learner(s) from diverse language backgrounds in a variety of linguistic situations.</li> </ul>
<b><i>As a content expert</i></b>	<p>The teacher ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Masters the knowledge and skills related to the learning areas or subject areas of his/her expertise, which are relevant to his teaching level. He can update, broaden and deepen these</li> <li>– Is able to use the knowledge and skills acquired in relation to the learning areas or subject areas. In primary education this is done in an integrated way, in the other levels this is done in an integrated way where relevant</li> <li>– Masters the knowledge and skills related to the (subject) didactics of his/her teaching assignment. He/she can update, broaden and deepen these</li> <li>– Can situate his/her own offer in the whole of the educational provision with a view to educational career guidance</li> <li>– Can use appropriate and correct teaching language.</li> </ul>



<b>As an organiser</b>	<p>The teacher can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Promote a structured play, living, working or learning environment</li> <li>– Create a smooth and efficient teaching and daily routine that fits into short- and long-term planning</li> <li>– Plan his/her own work in view of his/her teaching assignment and can perform relevant administrative tasks</li> <li>– Create a stimulating, workable and safe living, working or learning space.</li> </ul>
<b>As an innovator and researcher</b>	<p>The teacher can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Further develop the quality of his/her teaching. The teacher can question and adjust (improve) his/her own teaching practice and his/her own functioning</li> <li>– Share and discuss new insights and experiences with colleagues</li> <li>– Identify his/her professionalisation needs and turn them into actions.</li> </ul>
<b>As a partner of parents or carers</b>	<p>The teacher can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Inform himself/herself about and exercise discretion with data about the learner(s) and their context</li> <li>– Communicate with parents or carers about the learner(s) in the educational setting, based on consultation with colleagues or external parties as appropriate</li> <li>– Inform and involve parents or carers in teaching, taking into account diversity</li> <li>– Engage with parents or carers on issues relating to parenting and education</li> <li>– Communicate with parents and carers from diverse language backgrounds in a variety of linguistic situations, and can develop strategies for doing so.</li> </ul>
<b>As a member of an educational team</b>	<p>The teacher can</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Collaborate and consult within the educational team on issues such as curricula and educational vision</li> <li>– Discuss his/her own pedagogical and didactic task in the team, reflect on it in the team and take feedback into account in his/her own actions</li> <li>– Reflect on the joint functioning of the educational team in consultation with colleagues.</li> </ul>
<b>As a partner of external parties</b>	<p>The teacher can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Establish and maintain contacts, communicate and cooperate with external bodies or actors. These include, for example, internship or employment sites, the broad socio-cultural sector, teacher training programs, higher education, the labour market, and childcare facilities.</li> </ul>
<b>As a member of the educational community</b>	<p>The teacher ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Is aware of their social role and his potential influence on the wider society</li> <li>– Can take a reasoned position on educational issues</li> <li>– Can engage in conversation about their profession and their place in society</li> <li>– Can document their own legal status and that of learners.</li> </ul>
<b>As a cultural participant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The teacher, from their professional position, can recognise and critically approach current social issues and developments in the socio-political domain, the socio-economic domain, the ideological domain, the cultural-aesthetic domain and the cultural-scientific domain.</li> </ul>

The following dispositions and attitudes apply to all functional roles:

- *Decision-making ability*: daring to take a position or to proceed to an action, and also to take responsibility for it
- *Relational orientation*: showing characteristics of authenticity, acceptance, empathy and respect in contacts with others
- *Critical attitude*: be prepared to question oneself and one's environment, to verify the value of an assertion or a fact and the desirability and feasibility of a proposed goal, before taking a stand
- *Eagerness to learn*: actively seeking situations to broaden and deepen one's competence

- *Organisational ability*: aiming to plan, coordinate and delegate tasks in such a way that the intended goal can be achieved in an efficient way
- *Sense of cooperation*: being willing to work collectively on the same task
- *Sense of responsibility*: feeling responsible for the school as a whole and making the commitment to promote positive development of the learner(s)
- *Flexibility*: being prepared to adapt to changing circumstances, such as resources, goals, people and procedures.

As with the Bachelor Pedagogy of the Young Child (see above), the same applies for the Bachelor in Pre-primary Education: there is an official educational qualification with a framework of domain-specific learning outcomes. There are 10 distinct learning outcomes related to the following **competence areas**:

- Supporting toddlers in their learning and development in complex school and classroom contexts. Taking into account the starting situation of the class group and the perception of the individual child, he/she provides appropriate guidance, formulates general and concrete goals, selects appropriate learning content and learning experiences, adapted development materials, forms of work and grouping. He/she functions autonomously and uses Standard Dutch.
- Creating a pleasant and challenging playing, learning and living climate in the classroom and at school, with an eye for the social-emotional development and the physical wellbeing of the class group and the individual child. He/she uses a care wide approach and responds positively to the social, cultural and linguistic diversity within the class group. She/he promotes emancipation, individual development and social participation.
- Having a thorough insight into the broad development of the pre-school child and masters the basic knowledge – including at least the developmental objectives – regarding contents and skills from the learning areas Dutch, mathematical initiation, world orientation, music education and physical education, and cross-curricular themes. She/he uses an integrated and media-minded approach and follows recent developments critically.
- Creating a safe, workable and stimulating playing, learning and living environment. She/he provides goal-oriented and child-oriented planning. She/he handles administrative tasks correctly.
- Adjusting and renewing her/his professional role on the basis of a systematic, critical reflection on her/his own professional practice from relevant theoretical frameworks and insights from educational research
- Communicating discreetly and in Standard Dutch or if necessary in another appropriate register with parents/carers about the child, the school, upbringing and education. She/he involves parents/carers in class and school events.
- Working in a team-oriented way and taking responsibility in the school team for the implementation of school policy
- Establishing contacts and cooperating with providers of educational initiatives and other external partners
- Taking part in the social debate on educational themes and on the profession of the teacher and his/her place in society, also in an international perspective
- Thinking critically and with an open mind about developments in the socio-political, socio-economic, philosophical, cultural-aesthetic and cultural-scientific fields.

16 institutions throughout the Flemish Community of Belgium offer the Bachelor programme.



## French Community (WBF)

### Childcare Worker (*puériculteur/puéricultrice*)

**Competences:** The new law related to the childcare services in the French Community defines competence specifications for all Childcare Workers (*Arrêté 2-05-2019, MB 09-10-2019*):

- Taking care of children according to their daily needs and providing them rich conditions for their development at the physical, psychological, cognitive, emotional and social levels
- Ensuring the hygiene in the childcare service
- Contributing to the preparation of appropriate meals and to the practical organisation of the childcare service
- Putting into action the educational project and contributing to its evaluation and development
- Welcoming families and children, ensuring daily relations with parents in a spirit of partnership
- Providing support for trainees.

The main initial training for *puériculteurs/puéricultrices* consists in a three-year upper secondary course, followed by a year of specialisation in working with infants and toddlers. They are then expected to display the following competences: Guaranteeing care, hygiene and health

- Organising meals
- Organising sleeping
- Guaranteeing the children's safety and taking the right measures in cases of child abuse
- Planning and organising activities according to the individuality of each child
- Organising appropriate interventions towards children and parents
- Supporting children in toilet-training
- Developing a warm relationship with the child
- Planning and documenting professional practice for parents or colleagues
- Working in teams
- Communicating and building a professional relationship with parents
- Respecting ethical values.

In 2021, a new profile for Childcare Workers for children from (*accueillant, accueillante d'enfants*) was approved and the following **competence specifications** should become official in the near future.

- Welcoming and establishing a relationship of reciprocal trust adapted to the child
- Ensuring a socio-educational role in the childcare service promoting the physical and psychological well-being of each and all children
- Taking care of a group of children taking into account the diversity of their needs and interests
- Proposing arrangements for space and time and activities in order to promote the psychomotor, sensory, cognitive and socio-emotional development of the child and of all children
- Communicating with the child and his/her family using verbal, non-verbal, para-verbal communication techniques and the most appropriate supports to dialogue
- Putting into action the educational project of the childcare service and participating in its development through open and proactive collaboration with families and other professionals
- Establishing and developing a partnership with the family, the child's environment, the multidisciplinary team and external services for the socio-educational well-being of the child
- Taking care of the logistical tasks related to the organisation of the childcare service

- Applying and monitoring changes in regulations and recommendations relating to the childcare services.

The initial training of the Childcare Workers who work as an Auxiliary Worker (Teacher’s Assistant) in pre-primary settings is the same as that for the Childcare Worker in childcare services. In 2022, a new profile for Bachelor-level Childcare Workers for children from 0–6 years (*Bachelier en accueil et éducation du jeune enfant*) was approved and is to become official in 2023.

### **Pre-primary Teacher** (*Instituteur/institutrice maternelle*)

The IPE of Pre-Primary Teachers in the French Community combines academic subjects, professional studies and social context studies. There is a common competence profile for pre-primary, primary and secondary teachers. The total course comprises 180 ECTS credits (60 credits per year), with one credit representing a workload of 25 to 30 hours. Ongoing reforms should generate some changes (see **2.1**).

**Competence specifications** for all teachers in the education system are defined in a 2019 Decree of 2019 (*Décret* 07-02-2019, MB 05-03-2019) and include **15 competence areas**:

- The ability to act as an educational, social and cultural actor within school and society, including in their transformation, to integrate the diversity and develop civic practices for greater social cohesion
- The willingness to position oneself in the face of ethical issues and to respect the ethical and regulatory frameworks of the profession in a democratic and accountability perspective
- The ability to invest in the collaborative work of an educational team, in order to increase its professionalism and expertise through the rallying/mobilisation of collective intelligence, particularly during consultations
- The ability to analyse the organisational environment and institutionalisation of the education system and to act within it, in particular by interacting with colleagues, parents and other stakeholders in order to: (1) be part of the establishment's quality approach and participate in steps to improve the French Community's educational system; (2) make the classroom and the school a place where students learn, grow and are trained in a positive climate, not a place of selection
- The ability to draw on various subjects in the human sciences to analyse and act in a professional setting
- French language proficiency to teach and communicate optimally in the various contexts and the different disciplines related to the profession
- Mastery of disciplinary content, including the concepts to be taught, their epistemological foundations, their didactics and the methodology of their teaching, as well as the development of a critical and autonomous relation with scientific knowledge
- The ability to critically read scientific research results in education and didactics and to be inspired by them for teaching action
- The ability to act as a pedagogue within the classroom and, in a collective perspective, within the school, particularly: (1) through the design and implementation of a teaching approach including varied and differentiated practices, in particular digital practices, and ensuring motivation and promotion of students’ self-confidence, creativity and a spirit of initiative and cooperation in the concern for the general interest; (2) through the design, choice and use of teaching aids, tools and manuals; (3) through the construction and use of observation supports and specifically diagnostic and formative assessment promoting empowerment and students’ participation in their learning

- The ability to lead, individually and with peers, an observation as well a critical and rigorous analysis of their own practices and of their impact on students in order to regulate their teaching and make the strategies and conditions of implementation evolve in a perspective of efficiency and equity. This analysis integrates the gender dimension.
- Development of relational capacity with pupils and students, including their own family circle, and with regard to colleagues; group management in educational and pedagogical setting
- The ability to identify individual training needs and participate in the identification of the training needs of the educational team
- The ability to develop personal skills related to professional requirements, including requirements related to the management of the class
- The ability to integrate into the education system respecting the codes and its functioning, in particular hierarchical functioning
- The control of their administrative situation and the follow-up.

A more recent Decree redefines four main roles for all teachers (*master de l'enseignement section 1*), including Pre-primary Teachers:

Teachers as

- Institutional, social and cultural actors
- Actors of a learning organisation in a collective dynamic
- Organisers and coaches of learning in an evolving dynamic and as
- Reflective practitioners (Décret 02-12-2021, MB 02-02-2022).

### **German-speaking Community**

According to Article 6 of the Decree on childcare (Dekret 31-03-2014), any service provider concerned by the Decree and offering childcare for children aged 0–3 years must be recognised before commencing activities.

In order to be recognised, the providers of childcare have to comply with the conditions of recognition of the Decree and the Edicts. Each recognised provider of childcare is obliged to guarantee the quality of care in accordance with the relevant provisions.

### **Childcare Worker (*Kinderbetreuer:in*)**

**Curriculum:** The one-year qualifying adult education course for Childcare Workers of the KPVDB (2022) includes theoretical and practical content as well as internships in the different fields of work. The students attend classes in the following modules:

- Domestic economy: cooking, infant and child nutrition dietetics
- Psychology and pedagogy: health education, psychology, developmental psychology, professional handling of problems in families, care of children with impairments, psycho-pedagogy, didactics, Pikler pedagogy, child-friendly play, conversational skills
- Care: Caring for healthy and sick children, back-friendly lifting, general hygiene, first aid
- Vocational skills: deontology, ethics, social organisations, social and labour legislation
- Methodological guidance: Learning techniques, supervision, organisation, seminars on current topics.

In addition, the education includes 480 hours of internships in different childcare structures/settings.

### Pre-primary Teacher (*Kindergärtner:in*)

Pre-primary Teachers complete a Bachelor-level degree at the Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien, the only higher education institution in the German-speaking Community. Initial professional studies combine professional basic knowledge, scientific approaches, generic and subject-specific as well as didactic training, and links between theory and practice. The total course comprises 180 ECTS points (60 credits per year), with one credit representing a work load of 25 to 30 hours.

The initial professional education as a Pre-primary Teacher is organised in such a way as to enable the student to develop the following 10 specific competences.

#### **Competence specifications:**

Pre-primary Teachers should be able to...

- Communicate clearly and correctly in the language of instruction, both orally and in writing
- Include both cultural/intellectual heritage as well as a critical examination and interpretation of facts and cultural assets in their professional approach and foster openness for cultural and linguistic diversity
- Listen to and observe the children and accept them as a person by consciously discerning their holistic educational needs as well as their socio-cultural needs in order to foster their search for identity, their independence and their sense of responsibility
- Consistently extend and deepen fundamental knowledge acquired within the subject areas, including the historical, scientific and health-promoting aspects
- Design the educational process as an active learning experience of discovery, while at the same time making clear decisions in relation to aims, fields of knowledge, learning and teaching methods, evaluation and certification within the framework of legal requirements
- Pursue one's own activities in close cooperation with the families, school authorities, education and cultural institutions as well as the community's interest groups within the framework of legal requirements
- While respecting the individuality of the children, complete tasks related to the achievement and evaluation of developmental goals and competencies, both individually and together as a team
- Use information and communication technologies and integrate them into the preparation and managing of teaching and learning activities in the classroom as well as in their own professional development
- Develop a professional identity, handle complexity, uncertainty, conflicts, and setbacks professionally as well as understanding group dynamics and the functioning of organisations
- Reflect both individually and as a team on professional development needs both in terms of individual advancement and institutional innovation and assessing the ethical challenges related to the profession.

## 4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

### **Flemish Community**

#### *Childcare sector*

According to the Decree of 2014, everyone working in childcare in the Flemish Community should be qualified by 2024. In 2022, however, a large part of the sector still had no qualification and there are still a considerable number of Childcare Workers who enter the job unqualified. For these unqualified staff, most training institutions provide the possibility of combining work



and training. For example, the Syntra training centres and the Centres for Adult Education (see above) offer training programmes in which students can follow the training in the evenings or during weekend days. This usually implies that it takes students twice as long to complete the entire training programme.

Unqualified Childcare Workers who consider that they have sufficient competences to be equal to qualified Childcare Workers can participate in an assessment organised by a recognised test centre or by a Centre for Adult Education. In the assessment, the assessors use the legally defined professional qualification of a Childcare Worker as a framework to test previously acquired competences (*Eerder Verworven Competenties*) in an attempt to validate non-formal and informal learning experiences of the applicant. The results of the test procedure should make clear which of the 15 competences the Childcare Worker already has and which still need to be learned. For the missing competences, a customised programme is then designed consisting of the different modules that the Childcare Worker can follow at the Centre for Adult Education.

Additionally, there is a special training programme called 'Childcare Worker – Dual work-integrated route' (*Kinderbegeleider Duaal*). This programme is organised as a specialisation year in the third year of the third cycle of secondary vocational education, so it follows the same curriculum as the '7<sup>th</sup> Year Childcare' (see above). However, this dual learning programme combines a school component with a work component. This means that students are properly employed in a childcare service and that they spend at least 20 hours a week at their workplace during the training. The training programme lasts for one year and can be followed by young adults (between 16–25 years old) who have fulfilled their full-time compulsory education. After completing this training, students are awarded the diploma of secondary education and a 'Certificate of Childcare' if they have passed the modules. This qualification is classified at level 4 of the EQF.

Careers within Flemish Childcare are flat, i.e. there is no system permeability in this sector. There is no offer of different job profiles to which people can move on, nor is there a 'learning ladder' to enable Childcare Workers to grow in their job. For the job of Pedagogical Coach and of Centre Leader of a facility with more than 18 places, a Bachelor's degree is required. However, it appears that the transition from post-secondary vocational level (EQF 4) to Bachelor (EQF 6) is very difficult. Many students do not succeed or have a great deal of difficulty in succeeding in the higher education programme.

### *Pre-primary education*

Flemish policy makers have major concerns in finding sufficient teaching staff to work in pre- and primary school education. Enabling alternative qualifying trajectories for assisting staff to become Pre-primary Teachers could be a future pathway for the ECEC and broader primary school sector. Two newly developed alternative pathways are:

- The Baobab Project: this is a small-scale project in Brussels, initiated by the NGO EVA (EVA bxl 2022) and supported by the Flemish Community Commission (VGC). Motivated Brussels inhabitants (with diverse migration backgrounds) are working as assisting practitioners with experienced Pre-primary Teachers while following a qualifying trajectory to become a Pre-primary Teacher themselves (in the Erasmus University College). For four years they receive intense support in order to find a job as a Pre-primary Teacher in the city of Brussels.
- In order to counter the growing teacher shortage, the University Colleges have special training programmes for students in pre-primary education who combine work and study. Especially assisting staff in pre-primary education make use of the opportunity of getting an official qualification whilst continuing their job.

## **French Community (WBF)**

The system is characterised by little permeability and there are only a few alternative entry and qualification routes at the vocational qualification (upper secondary) level. The candidate's previously acquired competences are not taken into account when studying to become a *puériculteur/puéricultrice*. A VAE (*Valorisation des Acquis de l'Expérience*) pilot project to promote access to the adult education programme for childminders (*Auxiliaire de l'enfance*) is currently being tested. In terms of the higher education study programmes, some measures have been developed to relax the entry requirements of IPE (for example to become a Pre-primary Teacher). Staff at the IPE institutions can examine the former experiences of the student and in some cases give extra credits so that the student can follow a shorter track. This system of previously acquired competences (VAE) was implemented in universities at the end of 2009.

## **German-speaking Community**

The German-speaking Nursing Care Union in Belgium (*Deutschsprachige Krankenpflegevereinigung Belgiens, KPVDB 2022*) offers one-year qualifying adult education courses for Childcare Workers. There are no formal entry requirements. Participants are selected on the basis of an interview.

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

## **Flemish Community**

### **Childcare Worker (*Begeleid(st)er Kinderopvang/ Kinderzorg*)**

Practica or workplace-based learning (*stage*) play an important role in the four IPE programmes of core practitioners in childcare in the Flemish Community. The Government Agency *Opgroeien* does not allow trainees to count towards the required adult-child ratio. All trainees need a certificate of medical aptitude and an excerpt from the criminal records to prove good behaviour and morals.

The internships in each of the four qualifying routes are organised as follows:

#### ***Route 1: Secondary vocational education: '7th year Childcare'***

As the schools offering a 7<sup>th</sup> year Childcare have great freedom in organising the curriculum, the lesson content and timetables differ from school to school. In most schools, the work placement takes up about one third of a school year. This means that students in this programme have an internship of about 10 to 12 weeks in total. The internship is usually offered in blocks and takes place in group-based childcare, after-school care and in pre-primary education.

#### ***Route 2: Adult education: 'Childcare Worker – Babies and Toddlers'***

Half of this IPE programme is spent at a workplace. In this guided workplace learning, students are coached by a mentor from the workplace and by a coach from the study programme. The experience gained in the workplace is actively integrated into the lessons and vice versa. In other words, there is a strong interaction between theory and practice. The internships take place in home-based provision, group-based childcare and out-of-school care settings. Although workplace learning is integrated in all modules within the entire programme, four modules are explicitly aimed at the internship: 'Internship childcare worker babies and toddlers 1' (80 teaching





hours), 'Supervised intervention babies and toddlers 1' (10 teaching hours), 'Supervised intervention babies and toddlers 2' (10 teaching hours) and 'Supervised intervention babies and toddlers 3' (10 teaching hours).

#### *Route 3: Specialised training centre (Syntra): 'Childcare Worker'*

In the Syntra IPE programme, 150 of the 610 hours are allocated to the internship of the students. This internship is spread over several internship periods throughout the year, when fewer lessons are scheduled.

#### *Route 4: Higher Education: 'Bachelor – Pedagogy of the Young Child'*

Although the three University Colleges that offer this Bachelor programme have their own emphases and accents with regard to the curriculum, internship is integrated in each of the three years in each of the three programmes and follows more or less the same structure. In the first year, the internship is explicitly focused on getting to know the childcare sector. Across the three University Colleges, the number of ECTS in this first year varies from 5 to 11. In the second year, students are stimulated to discover neighbouring sectors in which they can experiment with their role as coach. Here, the number of ECTS varies from 11 to 14. In the final year, the internship comprises almost half of the programme with ECTS ranging from 20 to 24. In this final year, students are free to choose an internship in childcare or in another sector. The students are expected to adopt a reflective attitude and to monitor their own learning process by means of a portfolio. In addition, a mentor or supervisor from the University College is always appointed, as well as a mentor or coach at the work placement site.

#### **Pre-primary Teacher (*Leraar Kleuteronderwijs*)**

According to guidelines of the Flemish Department of Education, the field-based component in the IPE of prospective Pre-primary Teachers consists of at least 45 ECTS credits. These 45 credits (usually more) are spread across the curriculum, and are progressive in volume and complexity. The work experience can be structured as a ribbon placement throughout the semesters (one day weekly) or in blocks of one, two or five weeks. University Colleges are free to implement their own system. These placements are mentored and evaluated by an experienced teacher in the pre-primary setting and by tutors at the university college. This mentoring role is taken on by motivated Pre-primary Teachers who coach students voluntarily, i.e. without additional payment.

#### **French Community (WBF)**

##### **Childcare Worker (*Puéricultrice/Puériculteur*)**

According to the relevant legislation (*Arrêté* 6-09-2001, MB 22-11-2001), 1,000 periods of 50 minutes (approx. 833 hours) must be dedicated to practical training in the field and focused on working with young children (up to 6 years). A further 1,000 periods should be dedicated to general teaching and 1,700 periods (approx. 1,416 hours) to technical and professional practice training at school – organised within three years. The law specifies different workplaces: childcare services, pre-primary schools, also maternity hospitals. At least 500 periods (approx. 416 hours) must be spent in a childcare service. Forthcoming reforms could generate some organisational changes.

According to an official guideline (*Circulaire* n°6718 du 28-06-2018), three types of internship must be organised: (1) discovery and initiation, (2) supported practice, (3) responsible practice. The head of the IPE institution appoints a tutor (*maître de stage*) for each student. This tutor is responsible for the preparation, pedagogical coaching and assessment of the practical training in the field. The tutor cooperates with a mentor (specified practitioner) in the ECEC setting

where the student is doing internship. External evaluation is conducted both by the tutor and the supervising practitioner; and there is a self-evaluation of the student. A contract must be signed by the IPE institution, the ECEC service and the student; this specifies the competences and skills to be acquired. The student is required to maintain a regular written journal/portfolio (*carnet de stage*) with information and observations collected in the field (for example, observations about the learning environment, activities with children, children's behaviour).

Mentoring has been gradually getting organised. According to the law, a mentor (specified practitioner) who can be a Childcare Worker or another staff member (Director included) in the services where a student is doing internship must be appointed. However, no additional funds are granted, time periods are not specified and there are no measures-for providing substitute staff. The mentoring practitioner is not trained specifically to accompany students. Since 2014, more and more projects (four in 2014, 47 in 2021) have been financed by firstly the APEF association (*Association Paritaire pour l'Emploi et la Formation, Joint association for employment and training*) and then also by the ONE and the Minister of Education, to provide a framework which sustains cooperation between initial training institutes and childcare services in WBF, with a view to improving tutoring and mentoring practices (François and Noël 2015; Pirard, François, and Noël 2019).

In these projects both tutors and mentors have been accompanied by researchers (University of Liège) to evaluate their own tutoring and mentoring practices, to conduct specific projects which can improve these and to analyse their effects on the student's learning, the pedagogical coaching of the mentor and the tutor, and on the collaboration between IPE institutions and ECEC services. This analysis can draw on the student's or mentor's written observation and sometimes on video documentation to support the reflective competences of students in the field. However, this documented process analysis is not easy for childcare practitioners and can only be used to give normative advice (Alonso Vilches and Pirard 2016; Alonso Vilches and Pirard 2018). Several focus groups and study day conferences are organised each year, where tutors and mentors have the opportunity to present and share their experience and analysis. Attention has also been paid to contextualised practice and meaning making rather than the concept of 'best practice' (Pirard, François, and Noël 2019). An open website with all the resources has been set up. In 2022, a new improved framework for sustained cooperation between IPE institutions and childcare services (services admitting children from 0–12 years) in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation has been introduced following the analysis of these professional experiences, with a view to also improve tutoring and mentoring practices (Pirard, François, and Noel 2022). This framework was written in collaboration with tutors and mentors who have taken part in these pilot projects aiming at broadening the mentoring/tutoring learning network. It is supported by the APEF association, the ONE and the Minister of Education.

Mentoring time is granted in these projects and free training seminars, focus groups, study workshops have been organised every year. Despite a positive evaluation of all the stakeholders (students, mentors, childcare directors, teachers, school directors, ONE), the financial means are currently lacking to generalise the experience and ensure its sustainability.

### **Pre-primary Teacher (*Instituteur/Institutrice maternelle*)**

A third of the ECTS credits in the IPE of Pre-primary Teachers are dedicated to field-based studies and analyses of practice. At least 26 ECTS credits throughout the IPE are dedicated to placements in pre-primary settings: two weeks in the first year (2 ECTS credits each), four weeks in the second year (3 ECTS credits each) and ten weeks in the final year (10 ECTS credits). Students must be accompanied by tutors employed by the University College: at least one visit per week during placement periods from the second year onwards. They also have a mentoring teacher (*maître*



*de stage*) who signs an agreement with the IPE institution that sets out a variety of partnerships in a range of professional settings.

The University Colleges also organise professional workshops (10 ECTS credits) to strengthen the link between practice and theory. These workshops are guided not only by University College tutors, but also by tutors who spend at least half of their working time in a pre-primary setting. Each University College can organise the field-based component of IPE according to specified guidelines (Decree focused on IPE of teachers, 12-12-2000, MB 19-01-2001). Forthcoming reforms could generate some organisational changes for the new *master enseignement section 1* in 2023.

### **German-speaking Community**

In the German-speaking Community, the field-based component in the IPE of prospective Pre-primary Teachers consists of at least 43 ECTS credits. These 43 credits are spread across the curriculum, and are progressive in volume and complexity. The work experience is structured in blocks. These placements are mentored and evaluated by an experienced teacher in the ECE setting and by tutors at the University College. This mentoring role is taken on by motivated Pre-primary Teachers who coach students voluntarily, i.e. without additional payment.

The field-based component of prospective Child Workers of the adult education course of the KPVDB consists of 480 hours. It includes six weeks spent in a crèche/*Kinderkrippe* and two weeks in each of the following institutions: out-of-school-care during the holidays, out-of-school-care (AUBE), special school (*Förderschule*), home-based provision and kindergarten.

The vocational education programme offered by secondary schools also includes the completion of practical training in a childcare institution.

## **6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff**

In Belgium there is an established tradition of pedagogical coaching to raise the level of professionalism in low qualified Childcare Workers. Such experimental approaches started in the 1980s and were supported by grants from the Bernard van Leer Foundation (BVLf). In Flanders, the first coaching projects were set up in the 1990s in Ghent (Peeters 1993). These pedagogical counselling projects focus on practitioners as active actors in their own professionalisation process, which has a motivating effect on the learners (Peeters and Vandebroek 2011). In the French Community, several action research projects sustained by BVLf or the *ONE* were also carried out in Liège, Mons, and other towns. One of them aimed at setting up a publicly funded CPD which could support counselling projects elaborated by childcare services from the analysis of their local needs (bottom-up process). A law was voted in 1983 but never came into force. It was not until sixteen years later that a subsidised system of continuing professional development was put in place by the Childhood Minister. Since 1999, the funds dedicated to CPD and the number of training providers have continued to increase. In 2001, a new Pedagogical Adviser position was introduced in the *ONE* to sustain local projects according to a logic of both innovation and reform (Pirard 2011).

In the education sector, no specific reform focusing on CPD for Pre-primary Teachers has been implemented, but global reforms for all teachers in schools. Across the country, Childcare Workers, Pre-primary Teachers, Centre Leaders and members of the educational teams have many

opportunities to participate in CPD activities. Specialised training centres offer a broad range of courses. The regional governments view the provision of professional development activities as part of their quality policy.

## **Flemish Community**

### *Childcare sector*

Since the Decree of 2014, organisers of childcare are obliged to provide Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for their staff. However, they are free to choose how they wish to organise this in terms of content, delivery mode (training courses, coaching, learning networks...), quantity and duration. Before the introduction of the Decree, there was a requirement that Childcare Workers had to follow 12 hours of training per year, but this expectation has been abandoned, without providing another. Consequently, there is no fixed amount of days per year granted for CPD activities during working hours, nor is there a system of childfree hours to be used for CPD activities. Moreover, there is no monitoring of CPD across Flanders. This means that there is no reliable data that would allow an indication of what is common for CPD of Flemish Childcare in terms of main forms, access, and key content.

The government has allocated financial resources to provide CPD and allocates them according to the scale of childcare services:

- Income related childcare services (where parents pay a fee according to their income) with more than 18 full-time child places receive a subsidy with which they can choose how they want to organise CPD. They can either employ or hire a pedagogical coach themselves, or make use of the existing training offer provided by different pedagogical support centres and training centres.
- The funds for income related childcare services with less than 18 full-time child places and childcare services that are not income related go to a support network, which is called *Mentes*. This support network is made up of about 20 support organisations that are active in the entire Flemish Community. Childcare services get support from *Mentes* through a Regional Counsellor (*regionale ondersteuner*) or through a Pedagogical Coach (*pedagogisch coach*). Because *Mentes* receives subsidies from the government, the government also has a say in the priority topics to be addressed in the CPD. For example, 'enforcement' and 'policy-making capacity' are currently high on the agenda as a result of malpractices that have recently come to light in Flemish childcare.

With the Flemish Intersectoral Agreement VIA 6 (Vlaamse Regering 2021b) that was reached in 2021, financial resources were made available to recruit 264 FTE Pedagogical Coaches for the whole childcare sector in the Flemish Community of Belgium.

Besides the funds that are made available by the Flemish Government, childcare services are of course free to use their own resources for extra CPD offered by pedagogical support centres and training centres. There is, however, no data available on whether or not childcare services do this and under what circumstances.

### *Pre-primary education*

In the Flemish Community, continuing professional development courses for Pre-primary Teachers (*Kleuteronderwijzers*) are provided mostly by the state recognised and subsidised educational guidance services (PBD – *Pedagogische begeleidingsdienst*). Each of the three educational umbrella organisations (private Catholic education, Flemish state-maintained education (Go!) and municipal education) has its own educational guidance service, which ensures professional

on-site support to schools and centres. Schools can call on them for educational and methodological advisory services (innovation projects, self-evaluation projects, support initiatives in the classroom). Beyond this, private organisations can provide specialised courses in pedagogy, didactics, arts education, and so on. CPD and support for the core pedagogues (i.e. the Pre-primary Teachers) is structurally provided since schools receive funds for this. Each pre-primary and primary school has to develop a training plan for the teachers. Assisting Childcare Workers are hardly included in these plans. Schools need to follow-up on this plan, otherwise they may lose their CPD budget. Notwithstanding, schools decide autonomously how to organise the plan. Consequently, no minimum number of CPD hours are specified for the Pre-primary Teachers or Childcare Workers. Only one collective pedagogical training day per year for all the teachers is obligatory.

### **French Community (WBF)**

Since 2003, two public offices have been responsible for the regulating and funding of CPD provision: one focused especially on the continuing professional development for staff in the childcare services (*ONE – Office de la Naissance et de l’Enfance*) and the other on the education sector (*IFPC Institut Inter-réseaux de Formation Professionnelle Continue, ‘Inter-network Professional Training Institute’, formerly IFC, Institut de Formation en cours de Carrière Inter-réseaux, ‘Inter-network career training institute’*). *ONE* and *IFPC* work separately, even if they have a collaboration contract for some specific common activities. None of them can refer to large-scale research projects on the CPD of ECEC personal funding over the past five years.

#### *Childcare sector*

In the childcare sector, the governmental organisation *ONE* provides an annual continuing development plan for all childcare practitioners according to a new official five-year programme from 2021 to 2026 approved by the government (*Arrêté 11-02-2021, MB 2-03-2021*). Public funds are used for different kinds of financially accessible in-service training, based on an offer from official training providers according to the governmental programme: specified sessions (often one or two days focused on a predefined topic); nomadic sessions (often one or two days focused on a topic and organised in a space negotiated with the participants); and pedagogical coaching in teams (one to five days in childcare services or a network of services where both the topic and the organisation can be negotiated with the training centre).

Fourteen focus areas classified by their funding rates are defined in the early childhood CPD public programme that takes into account both the priorities defined by childcare staff in their quality plans, the opinions of the trainers, Pedagogical Advisers and other *ONE* staff:

- Child development (20.8% of allocated funding)
- Family partners (9.2%)
- Health global approach (8.3%)
- Artistic and cultural activities and projects (8.3%)
- Attitudes, roles and tasks (7.7%)
- Environment (6.3%)
- Active role (5.7%)
- Diversity approach (4.4%)
- Group dynamics (3.6%)
- Activities practice (3.5%)
- Observation: practice and children (3.2%)



- Educational project (2.7%)
- Children’s rights (2.4%) and
- Institution management (2%).

Four of these focus areas directly concern centre leaders: (1) attitudes, roles and functions; (2) group dynamics; (3) educational project; (4) institution management. The remaining 11% of funds are dedicated to pedagogical coaching without any predefined topic. Complementary to these offers supported by specialised training centres, a team of ten Pedagogical Advisers (*conseillers pédagogiques*) enrolled by *ONE* organises some pedagogical support frameworks for childcare practitioners and their leaders grounded on an analysis of local needs in WFB: educational continuity, caregiving, outdoor, artistic and cultural awakening or speech development. Some of these topics can be integrated in the official two-year *ONE* campaign such as the outdoor investment planned in 2022. One of the Pedagogical Advisers coordinates a group of staff dedicated to the development of an inclusive approach which recognises diversity as a resource and the rule (not the exception) (Camus 2019). Pedagogical advisers and trainers can collaborate or work on common issues such as coaching new teams in creating a childcare service. From 2022 onwards, a process of twenty-hour training sessions could also be proposed two times directly by Centre Leaders every five years. This measure aims at improving the accessibility of the offer and responding to local needs of childcare services. It could provide a framework for experimenting in new forms of CPD such as blended learning or professional trips (Pirard, Rayna, and Brougère 2021).

Thus a large part of the training process is viewed as a specialised space, where new knowledge, skills and abilities can be acquired in a limited period of time, in order to be applied or transferred to childcare services. Nevertheless, the emergence of another culture of education is confirmed: a culture of professionalisation that views competence as the central theme in educational work, based on the hypothesis that action and actors can be jointly and simultaneously transformed (Pirard and Barbier 2012; Pirard, Camus, and Barbier 2018). Since 2019, CPD has become compulsory for all Childcare Workers (two days per year, *Arrêté* 2-05-2019, MB 09-10-2019), but there are no measures in place for providing substitute staff while a colleague pursues CPD. Moreover, participation in specific forms of CPD is not formally recognised in terms of promotion and career advancement.

### *Pre-primary education*

In the education sector, the IFPC (*Institut Inter-réseaux de Formation Professionnelle Continue* according to the Decree on Book 6 of the Code of Primary and Secondary Education entered into force on August 29, 2022), formerly the IFC (*Décret* 11-07-2002, MB 31-08-2002), offers an annual general programme with specified sessions for all teachers, including Pre-primary Teachers and Centre Leaders from a global analysis of the needs in the field. The IFPC collaborates with University Colleges, Universities and specialised training centres, but has also registered trainers (mostly teachers, directors, staff from schools). All of them must meet the standards required by the IFPC.

Alongside the IFPC, each of the three educational umbrella organisations (service provider organisations) also has its own educational guidance service for providing on-site CPD activities. For the past five years sessions for twenty participants from different institutions have taken place out of school (sometimes in a museum). The topics have been rarely focused on the specific pre-primary staff needs, which have not been accurately analysed. They often concern general learning issues with a disciplinary approach for not only Pre-primary Teachers, but also primary school staff. Some topics relevant to preschool include: oral and written communication; pleasure in reading; learning to learn; observation of children; ‘better verbal communication’;



children's literature; memorisation tools for pre-primary classes; music education; identifying and analysing learning difficulties from the start of kindergarten; a social skills development programme; stimulating the prerequisites for learning; transition to pre-primary school, and so on. Supporting language and communication and supporting children with special needs are topics often chosen by pre-primary staff. There is no specific focus on pre-primary leadership or mentoring.

Some sessions are also organised for Speech Therapists who have recently been enrolled by the psycho-medico-social centres to collaborate with Pre-primary Teachers, but there are no specific CPD offers dedicated to the Teachers' Assistants.

In 2020–2021, a new specific CPD course with experienced pre-primary trainers was set up to support the implementation of the new pre-primary curriculum (*référentiel des compétences initiales*). All Pre-primary Teachers had to take part in two-day sessions and an additional funded six-hour session organised out of school. Another specific parallel session was organised for the leaders and for the first time, especially for the pre-primary Teachers' Assistants (*puériculteurs/puéricultrices*). This last session was focused on sustaining the child's independence, language teaching, the communication with parents, emotional and physiological needs, verbalisation, observing play, the child's rhythm and development, creating a positive and benevolent climate, the child statute, the scholar culture. This session was not compulsory and not funded for the Assistants, but 639 '*puériculteurs/puéricultrices*' (34% of the auxiliary workers hired by the WBF and 62 other *puériculteurs/puéricultrices*) took part in this first session that can be considered as a success and underlines their motivation to learn. This training process highlights the necessary complementarity of their work and that of Pre-primary Teachers in the interests of children's development. Moreover, the IFC (IFPC) is taking part in a partnership project between the FRB (*Fondation Roi Baudouin*, King Baudouin Foundation) and the WFB to provide pre-primary trainers with quality training tools focused on the special needs of children and families living in poverty and for all stakeholders in pre-primary education.

Nowadays, continuing professional development is free and mandatory (six half days per year) for all teachers, including Pre-primary Teachers (additional periods possible on a voluntary basis) but for their Assistants (Childcare Workers) who do not have any period of time dedicated to CPD nor any substitute staff, it remains voluntary. The participation in some forms of CPD is not formally recognised in terms of promotion and career advancement. From September 1, 2022 all teachers (Pre-primary Teachers included) enrolled in the French Language Learning coaching (FLA or DASPA) will have to take part in some specific course on French as an additional language and on intercultural mediation, but without promotion or career advancement.

According to a new law (*Décret 17-06-2021*, MB 30-07-2021), professional development activities should be planned in a six-year programme to promote longer and long-term training, alternating with work in the field and more appropriation of learning outcomes in context, according to the action plan of each school. These action plans will include the training plans for their staff next to the research recommendations and the institutional reforms or priorities. Mixed groups gathering Pre-primary Teachers and other stakeholders could be organised around common topics (e.g. partnership with libraries, artistic and cultural education). Some of them could integrate Childcare Workers such as those dedicated to smooth transitions at the start of pre-primary school, one of the priorities of the Government (*Déclaration de Politique Communautaire de la FWB*, Community Policy Statement, 2019–2024) and the topic of a three-year research project funded by the Minister of Education (Housen and Royen 2019; Housen, Royen, and Pi-rard 2020; Housen et al. 2022). Bridges between staff in pre-primary schools, leisure centres and childcare centres have been recommended. A quality chart is being elaborated by stakeholders



from pre-primary schools and a *ONE* Pedagogical Adviser drawing on research results and should be implemented in the near future.

In conclusion, reforms of CPD are underway in both the childcare and the education sectors. They can be focused on childcare challenges or more generally linked to goals for school. They aim at better meeting local needs according to quality plans of childcare services on the one hand, in school (pre-primary school included) on the other hand. In this context, how can a holistic approach towards children as recommended in the ECEC services be developed? How could a CPD programme dedicated to pre-primary school be better grounded on resources produced in the childcare services and not only directed toward turning children into pupils and making them ready for school (schoolification trends)? The quality charta about the first transition when starting pre-primary school can be considered as an important step in the emergence of an *ed-ucare* approach.

### **German-speaking Community**

In the German-speaking Community, it is stipulated by law that regular participation in continuing professional learning is part of a teacher's job. During the career entry period, Pre-primary Teachers can take part in meetings with staff of the Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien, experienced Pre-primary Teachers, and other young professionals. The topics discussed in these meetings are chosen by the newly-qualified professionals. In the context of peer-group mentoring, they can bring forward specific cases they struggle with or ask more general questions on teaching and education.

In ECEC, recognised and subsidised childcare services are legally bound to offer at least 10 hours per year of complementary further training to their staff (Erlass der Regierung vom 22. Mai 2014 über die Dienste und andere Formen der Kinderbetreuung). The RZKB and Kaleido Ostbelgien provide trainings and coaching projects on diverse topics ranging from first aid over nutrition to pedagogical contents. Those trainings are not compulsory. However, home-based childcare providers are granted a subsidy for participation.

## **7. Working conditions and current workforce issues**

The following information applies to all three Communities unless otherwise stated.

### **7.1 Remuneration**

Pre-primary Teachers in Belgium receive salaries equivalent to those of primary and lower secondary teachers (OECD 2012; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2022). The salaries are comparable to other jobs that require a Bachelor's degree and are sufficient for living as a single parent in a major city. In WBF, teachers with a mentoring position are granted a higher salary whereas teachers designated for FLA or integration (integration agent) are paid like other teachers. Centre Leaders are paid more than teachers when they are promoted.

The salaries of Childcare Workers in the childcare services or those who work as an auxiliary in pre-primary settings are lower but still decent enough for living on as a single parent. In WBF, the salary of staff in childcare centres with a Bachelor-level qualification is comparable to that of a Pre-primary Teacher if they are in charge of a social, health or pedagogical specific role, but not if they work directly with the children. Mentoring is not funded. According to legislation





passed in 2019, the salaries of the Centre Leader were to be increased by 10% (*Arrêté* 2-05-2019, MB 09-10-2019).

In the Flemish Community, a tenured and non-tenured Pre-primary Teacher can earn a gross monthly salary between €2,754 (beginner) and €4,944 (36 years of experience). A tenured and non-tenured Childcare Worker can earn a gross monthly salary between €2,270 (beginner) and €4,213 (36 years of experience). A tenured and non-tenured School Director can earn a gross monthly salary between €4,108 (0 years of experience) and €6,329 (36 years of experience) (Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming 2022). The average gross monthly salary in Belgium is €3,758 and the minimum wage is €1,626.

It should be noted that during the COVID-19 health crisis, Pre-primary Teachers continued to be paid by the Flemish Department of Education, whereas many Childcare Workers faced being technically unemployed. When the financial compensation measures for public and private childcare were installed by the Flemish Minister of Welfare, this meant for the staff that their salaries continued to be paid (Van Laere et al. 2021).

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

In Flanders and in WBF (not in the German-speaking Community), a full-time job in pre-primary settings comprises 26 hours per week of teaching, including six hours of non-contact time, whereas in childcare services a full-time week comprises 38 hours, with no specified non-contact time.

### ***Flemish Community***

In group based childcare, 47% of staff working with children and 68.2% of centre leaders work full time. In pre-primary education, 83.1% of teachers work full time as well as 20.9% of childcare workers working as assistants of the teachers.

### ***French Community (WBF)***

In 2020, 68.45% of teachers in pre-primary settings worked full time compared to 37% of staff working (full time) with children in subsidised childcare facilities (*crèches*) (no reliable data in non-subsidised childcare facilities).

### ***German-speaking Community***

In the German-speaking Community, a full-time job in pre-primary settings comprises 28 hours per week of teaching. The weekly working time of the Kindergarten Assistant is 36 hours at 60 minutes for full-time employment.

On 1st January 2021, 46.64% of teachers in pre-primary settings in the German-speaking Community worked full time. 16.14% worked 70–89% and 34.53% worked 50–69% of a full time equivalent. There is no data available for the Kindergarten Assistants.

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

### **Flemish Community**

#### *Childcare sector*

There is no official support procedure or requirement for newly qualified and newly appointed staff in the childcare sector. It depends on the context, the childcare service and its management.

#### *Pre-primary education*

In 2006, the Flemish government took measures to support young teachers and introduced the so-called 'mentoring hours' (*mentor-uren*). Due to these mentoring hours, schools could guide and support student teachers and novice teachers in their new job. However, in 2010 these mentor hours were abolished. Hence, supporting student and novice teachers has become an issue of the individual school policy: it depends on the school making capacity. In 2013, the Flemish inspectorate focussed on this issue, and came to the conclusion that in most schools supporting novice teachers (*aanvangsbegeleiding*) is carried out well. A recent evaluation report of the educational guidance services recommends that cross-network collaboration for beginners should be further developed in order to prevent novice teachers quitting the job. It is also up to the individual school to take care of this for the assisting childcare staff. Although there are no data, this is estimated from anecdotal data to be very low.

The Flemish government is well aware that since the outbreak of the corona crisis, school directors must, more than ever, be open to change and flexibility and, in doing so, must regularly seek new directions, including educational ones. The corona crisis thus reinforces the need for a strong school leader. At the same time, the job of school director - like that of teacher - is increasingly perceived as a bottleneck profession in education. There is a growing outflow of school directors during their career. Moreover, a lot of potential candidates for the position of school director doubt whether they would effectively take up the offer to become a principal or to apply for a vacancy. One of the possible reasons for this is that a starting school director often only really experiences what the job is all about after he or she has already taken up the position. In many cases, such a practical shock leads to a swift exit, permanently or otherwise. Many directors also indicate that if they had had more insight into the profession of school leader beforehand, they might not have started. In order to take away or at least alleviate this doubt or having cold feet, the government are making it financially possible for an organising power or school board to offer a candidate director – both an already selected candidate and a potential or interested candidate – the opportunity to shadow one or more experienced school directors for a certain period of time. Through this shadowing process, the staff member involved can watch, observe, and ask questions about the job of director. The staff member can see "in real life" what the job of school director entails and experience what the work requires and how the experienced director deals with it.

### **French Community (WBF)**

Although there is no official support procedure or requirement for newly qualified and newly appointed staff in the childcare sector, some teams decide to set up a support framework, drawing on the mentoring tools developed for the internships (i.e. those funded by APEF, ONE and the Minister of Education, see section 5). Some CPD sessions funded by ONE are dedicated to the support of staff in newly established childcare services alongside the support offered by the



Pedagogical Advisers (see section 6). Moreover, introductory events dedicated to candidates who would like to set up a new childcare service has been organised locally every month since September 2020: four compulsory meetings before the creation of the childcare service focused on legal, social pedagogical and health topics focusing on a quality perspective. They help applicants realise what is required and some of them subsequently drop or change their initial projects.

Since 2016–2017, welcoming and mentoring new teachers at school (preschool, primary and secondary) has become compulsory (*Circulaire* 5388, 28-08-2015). Different support actions are envisaged: (1) an interview with the director, (2) a visit to the premises, (3) communication of working hours, (4) provision and explanation of the school mission, of the regulations, work, standards and curricular programmes in force, to which the staff member is appointed, (5) introduction to the educational team, (6) designation of a mentor among the members of the teaching staff with an educational qualification and having at least 15 years of work experience. This mentor is considered as a key person for assisting and advising new teachers in their socio-professional integration and work tasks (only if the new teacher is employed for more than 15 weeks). Their task may be part of the collective missions of the schools which can obtain additional resources (Decree 14-03-2019, MB 27-03-2019). Some guidelines for directors and mentors (*Accueillir les enseignants débutants, guide de la Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles – Welcoming beginner teachers, WBF guidebook*) as well as some continuing training actions have been proposed but they are not specifically focused on pre-primary education. In the field, Pre-primary and Primary Teachers are less concerned than the secondary teachers by the shortage and drop outs at the start of their careers. Their working conditions (more often full time) are considered better (Goethals 2019) without being good in terms of the necessary rapid immersion of new teachers in new classes, new schools, new teams.

### **German-speaking Community**

No data available.

## **7.4 Non-contact time**

### **Flemish Community**

In the childcare sector, there is no specified non-contact time. The government established for teaching staff, through performance denominators, the basic number of hours or teaching periods that comprise a full-time assignment, by level of education and by position. For Pre-primary Teachers these are 24/26 teaching periods of 50 minutes (*lestijden*). But the number of hours or class time that appears on the teachers' pay check does not equal the number of hours they are actually required to perform. Their assignment includes other tasks such as meetings, report writing, supervision, CPD, .... These tasks are part of their full assignment. There is no systematically compiled data available that allows for an estimation of the proportion of full working time allocated to these other tasks.

### **French Community (WBF)**

In the *écoles maternelles*, a required 26 periods of 50 minutes per week are dedicated to teaching; 1,560 minutes maximum per week or 962 hours maximum per year are dedicated not only to teaching, but also to collaborative working which can include staff meetings, cooperation with parents, networking in the community and other activities according to the organisation and the



action plan (Decree 14-03-2019, MB 16-04-2019, Erratum MB 20-05-2019). There are no regulations for time allocated to preparation work: it depends on the personal organisation of the practitioner.

*Puéricultrices/teurs* who work as auxiliary staff in pre-primary settings work 36 periods of 50 minutes per week (1,800 minutes) or a 30-hour working week. These periods include (1) 1,400 minutes with teachers and children in the classroom (teaching periods), (2) 300 minutes alone with the children to help them eat or to supervise their free time and (3) at least 100 minutes or 60 periods per year dedicated to collaborative working or, without children, to taking part in meetings with parents (decree 14-03-2019, MB 16-04-2019, Erratum MB 20-05-2019). In the childcare sector, there is no specified non-contact time.

### **German-speaking Community**

In the German-speaking Community, there is no regulation of paid non-contact hours in either pre-primary education or in childcare centres.

## **7.5 Current staffing issues**

### **Flemish Community**

The COVID-19 health crisis created some debates on the position of ECEC staff in society (Van Laere et al. 2021). One of the common themes in all discussions with stakeholders in the childcare sector was that childcare workers are the invisible heroes of this corona crisis in the wider public and political debate. According to the stakeholders, this health crisis has once again made it clear that society cannot function without high-quality childcare, including the three functions (economic, social, pedagogical). The general tendency among Childcare Workers is that respect and appreciation have been sorely missed. Many stakeholders in the media and parliament have stressed the societal importance of the childcare sector and called for attention to better working conditions, better wages, better qualifications. If you consider the societal importance that has been placed on keeping the schools open even in lockdown, one could think that teachers are highly needed and appreciated in society at large. According to both testimonies of school directors in the corona commissions and teacher trade unions, the jobs of Pre-primary and Primary School Teachers are still not appreciated enough in society and should feel the confidence of their minister and their government. When schools needed to close, schools and teachers still needed to provide childcare. This raised some questions and even frustration amongst teachers. According to the teacher trade union their core task is teaching, providing lessons (*'lesgeven'*) and not providing childcare. Applied to pre-primary education, there is a difference between Pre-primary Teachers who should organise purposeful playful learning activities and childcare workers who organise free play for children. Pre-primary Teachers should be considered to be more than providers of childcare and accordingly they need to be acknowledged in their professionalism.

In the case of Childcare Workers in out-of-school care, the decision of the Minister of Education to offer the teachers an extra week of autumn holiday upset many Childcare Workers, since they had to provide childcare for the children. They stated that they had worked full time since the beginning of the crisis. This situation showed the difference in recognition and appreciation between these professional groups, present in the political and public discourse, a consequence of the split system. Because education determined the measures for childcare/emergency care on school days, it had an impact on how the cooperation worked at the local level. In the absence of a common framework in various places, this led to tensions between the staff of the two



facilities. An often-heard message is that childcare workers did not feel valued in their professional role. Childcare should be in charge of 'care' and teachers in charge of 'learning'. Respondents signalled that a different 'sense of value' was assigned to these tasks, which led to tensions (Van Laere et al. 2021).

There is a major shortage of Childcare Workers in the Flemish Community of Belgium. Many childcare centres have open vacancies, also intensified in the COVID-19 health crisis. For example, 96% of local authorities organising childcare state having problems filling vacancies for Childcare Workers. A small minority of secondary education students in childcare want to continue to work in ECEC. As the pre-primary schools received more hours of childcare (*kindertzorg*), some Childcare Workers now prefer a job in the educational sector (better salary, working conditions and longer holidays) There is now a sense of urgency at the policy level, which means that initiatives are being taken or initiated at different levels:

- The profession of Childcare Worker has been recognised as a bottleneck profession due to the large staff shortage in childcare. As a result, job-seekers can follow a training with a special contract that offers a number of financial benefits. The Flemish Public Employment Service ('VDAB') pays, amongst other things, the costs of the initial training in some Centres for Adult Education.
- Within the aforementioned intersectoral VIA6 agreements (see above), thought was also given to campaigning and branding in order to promote the profession more attractively.
- The government agency *Opgroeien* has set up an 'Action Plan Workforce' with an accompanying working group. This working group consists of all the main social partners within the sector. They mainly focus on short-term actions in the areas of inflow, advancement and retention.
- Since 2014, data relating to workforce has been monitored more closely by the Agency *Opgroeien*. For instance, it keeps track of the number of unqualified people entering the profession.

There is also a major shortage of teachers in the Flemish Community of Belgium. Many pre-primary schools have open vacancies for teachers, intensified during the COVID-19 health crisis. In pre-primary and primary schools, a quarter of beginner teachers give up their profession within five years. Initial training programmes for Pre-primary Teachers are attracting fewer and fewer people. Suggested solutions/actions in the public educational debate are: invest in higher societal appreciation of the job as teacher and as childcare worker, stimulate more lateral entrants, improve working conditions including the staff-to-child ratio, introduce more lifelong learning opportunities and job mobility... Alternative pathways on long term should be explored as well in order to raise the attractiveness of the ECEC sector: Besides the usual solutions, how can the expansion of innovative ECEC projects with staff of more diverse backgrounds attract more potential students or lateral entrants to work with young children, families and local communities? To change the image of the job, the image of the ECEC centres themselves has to change.

### ***French Community (WBF)***

Currently, there is not any official staff shortage in the French Community, neither in the pre-primary nor in the childcare sector, except in Brussels. However, observations in the field indicate a major shortage of Childcare Workers, particularly in the childcare services.

## German-speaking Community

In the German-speaking Community, minor staff shortages in both in the pre-primary and the childcare sectors may occur if staff resign in the near future. However, the after-school care services for 3–12 year-olds face major staff shortages. This has resulted in hiring unqualified staff in after school care services.

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

### Flemish Community

#### Childcare sector

In the Flemish Community of Belgium, no significant reforms have taken place over the past five years in both childcare and pre-primary schools. However, it is important for the childcare sector to refer to the aforementioned intersectional VIA6 (Vlaamse Regering 2021) agreements that were made in 2021 and that succeeded in mobilising resources to realise pedagogical support. Although they are not sufficient to support the whole sector in a qualitative way, they can be seen as an important resource for the decretal obligation of pedagogical support. Especially in combination with the *Mentes* network in which the most important organisations in the field of pedagogical and language support for babies and toddlers have joined forces since 2019.

In the field of initial professional education, several working groups have been set up to reflect on the curricula of the IPE programmes across the umbrella organisations. For example, the aim is to make the training trajectory within the Centres for Adult Education even more flexible and more in line with the legally defined professional qualification of a Childcare Worker. Today, the link between the competences from that qualification profile and the modules within the qualifying route is not straightforward. In this vein, also the assessment of previously acquired competences will be evaluated.

Furthermore, there is consensus that the ‘7th year of childcare’ qualifying route should be evaluated and adapted. For example, the curriculum is not aligned with the 15 competences from the professional qualification profile and an often-heard complaint from the sector is that students are inadequately trained and prepared for the job. From the school year 2022/2023, an educational reform will be implemented in secondary education, which will allow students from technical secondary education to work directly in childcare after graduation. They will also be qualified at EQF level 4. Pupils from vocational secondary education will still have to complete a seventh year to be allowed to work in childcare, but that extra year will be given a different name. The substantive implications of this structural reform are currently unclear.

There are also calls to set up an initial training at EQF level 5 (*HBO-5*), but there is no consensus on this within the sector.

### French Community (WBF)

In WBF, a series of reforms, more than those announced in the previous SEEPRO report (Peeters and Pirard et al. 2018) have been under way during the past five years. Pre-primary education, which has become compulsory for 5 year-olds, has been reformed, as has the whole educational system according to the Pact for a Teaching of Excellence (*Pacte pour un enseignement d'excellence*): (1) a new curriculum; (2) a new job profile for teachers (Pre-primary Teachers included);



(3) a forthcoming Master's degree in teacher education at EQF level 7 (Pre-primary Teachers included) devised by University Colleges and Universities; (4) a new job profile for Directors; (5) a new induction training programme for Directors; (6) a new specialist support staff system (employment of Speech Therapists, integration support for children with special needs and newcomers who do not master the language of instruction); (6) a reformed continuing professional development system. Few of those reforms are specifically dedicated to the pre-primary level. In the childcare sector, reforms have also been under way: (1) a new common job profile for all practitioners with a vocational secondary qualification working with children; (2) a new initial training profile is currently being defined; (3) a new professional Bachelor study programme dedicated to childhood education; (4) a new initial training certificate for Directors combined with a salary rise.

### **German-speaking Community**

Within the framework of the reform of the RZKB into an institution of public interest, a lot of consideration is currently being given to reforming Childcare Worker education. The aim is to enable permeability of education programmes and diplomas so that all professionals working in childcare have acquired the same competences and prerequisites and can work in the different childcare settings. The concept and implementation is to be developed together with the various actors of the childcare sector as well as the different training providers.

## **9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff**

### **Flemish Community**

#### **Research supporting the collaboration between ECEC core and assisting practitioners (2018-2020)**

**Sources:** Rutar et al. 2019; Hulpia et al. 2020; Jensen et al. (2020); Van der Mespel et al. (2020) VALUE 2020 (see *References* for further details)

**Aims and methods:** For the VALUE Erasmus+ project on the collaboration between ECEC core and assisting practitioners, a literature study and action research was developed. The aim of the literature review was to explore sustainable solutions in the professional development of assisting practitioners, but beyond their sole individual responsibility. More specifically, the aim was to gain a more detailed understanding of the position and the working conditions of ECEC assisting and core practitioners in the Flemish community of Belgium and three other countries (Denmark, Portugal and Slovenia.) An analysis of relevant literature and methods on how to support the collaboration between ECEC core and assisting practitioners was also made.

The aim of the action research was to examine how collaborative learning between ECEC core and assisting practitioners in pre-primary schools can be supported as part of a sustainable CPD (continuing professional development) pathway in two pilots in the context of the Flemish community of Belgium. The views of the schools on the VALUE learning path were collected from (in)formal evaluation moments during the process of the VALUE learning path, focus groups with the school teams and interviews with the school principals.

**Selected findings:** Although each pilot school had a different way of working and a tailor-made process, they both showed that it is imperative that a CPD path is simultaneously focused on an

*educare* approach; professional identity and collaboration. The learning path raised awareness of the importance of inter-professional collaboration in order to overcome the artificial divide between care and learning of young children.

Some crucial conditions for the learning path and its impact on individuals and teams could be identified:

- Leadership as a precondition for success: school leaders should provide the organisational and structural environment to strengthen collaboration between all professionals, such as child-free hours.
- The role of the facilitator (coach) and an open and safe environment are crucial to enable shared reflection and action.
- Structural conditions such as limited working hours of a Childcare Worker in one school, lack of child-free hours, high staff-to-child ratio, hinder a collaborative and *educare* approach.

**Implications:** Based on the literature review, Flemish VALUE pilots and discussions with the stakeholder group, overall recommendations for regional Flemish policy, local policy and school policies were developed aiming to answer the following question. How can a smart deployment of Childcare Workers in pre-primary education lead to effective quality improvement for children and families and sustainable jobs for all ECEC staff?

Some wider implications, which go beyond the two studies, are to:

- Create visibility for childcare workers as important educators for preschool children
- Introduce an *educare* approach in which Childcare Workers and Pre-primary Teachers collaborate on an equal footing
- Invest in sustainable professional development initiatives, close to the workplace and giving Childcare Workers and Pre-primary Teachers the opportunity to participate in shared reflection on everyday practice
- Invest in structural conditions: a lower staff to child ratio, appropriate care infrastructure and continuing deployment (more hours and full-time positions) of Childcare Workers in pre-primary schools.

### Job experience of childcare workers in infant and toddler care (2020-2022)

**Source:** Karel de Grote Hogeschool (2022) (see *References* for further details)

**Aims and Methods:** This research project aimed to gain insight 'from the inside' into the job experience of Childcare Workers and develop ways to make this experience visible at different levels. A further aim was to identify ways of taking the job experience into account in their daily work and, if possible, to influence it positively. Finally, it was hoped to contribute to the social discussion on the profession of Childcare Worker.

The design of this research was critical-participatory. First, through participatory research, insight was gained into the job perception of Childcare Workers. In a second part, the perspectives of other actors who can have a direct influence on the job experience were taken into account. The analysis and development of the research material was also participatory: Childcare Workers actively participated in the analysis process.

**Selected findings:** From the narratives we see that overall, Childcare Workers have a negative job perception and appreciation. This is a distressing finding in a sector that has an outspoken focus on child well-being and involvement. Moreover, this low well-being constitutes a risk: for the daily operation, for the retention of employees and for the willingness to deal with innovations and changes.

**Implications:** These narratives make an essential contribution to the practice of caring for infants and toddlers and to the public debate on child care in the Flemish community of Belgium. Of



course, this requires converting these narratives into appropriate measures, such as policy recommendations.

### **Pedagogical coaches in Flemish Childcare (2021-2023)**

**Source:** Devlieghere et al. 2023 (see *References* for further details)

**Aims and methods:** This study set out to explore the perspectives of childcare workers, centre leaders and pedagogical coaches on the employment of pedagogical coaches in group based childcare services. In 2019, the Flemish government agreed to allocate funds to the employment of pedagogical coaches to support childcare workers in their practices and to further professionalise the childcare sector. These pedagogical coaches have a bachelor's degree and are thus more highly qualified than the childcare workers. Considering the scientific literature, there is little to no doubt about the need and importance of highly qualified childcare staff. What remains unclear, however, are the conditions necessary to realise the use of highly qualified staff. In other words, to date, we have little insight into the conditions that can encourage or inhibit the successful deployment of highly qualified staff in childcare. To explore this, a total of nine focus groups were organised, four of which were with pedagogical coaches (n=21), three with centre leaders (n=13) and two with childcare workers (n=8).

**Selected findings:** Throughout the interviews, a number of conditions emerge to consider when deploying pedagogical coaches.

1. A first element relates to the pedagogical coach's job description: where it is less tightly defined, there is often greater ambiguity about what exactly the role of the pedagogical coach is.
2. A second element refers to the (un)conscious installation of a hierarchical expert relationship between the pedagogical coaches and other actors, in particular the child supervisors.
3. A third element refers to affinity with and experience in the workplace. All participants agree that, as a coach, it is important to have or be able to develop affinity with actual childcare practice. When this affinity is not there and there is no room to develop it, this can cause resentment and resistance among both centre leaders and childcare workers. In this case, coaches make attempts to get involved on the work floor. They do this to build trust with the child supervisors.
4. A fourth element refers to the centre leader, who is regarded as an important 'bridging figure' between childcare workers and the pedagogical coach.
5. A fifth element relates to the systemic conditions in which the pedagogical coaches are employed: the constellation in which they have to work is not ideal. Their arrival is sometimes perceived by the childcare workers as extra work. In addition, the current staff shortage in Flemish childcare and the lack of staff continuity in some facilities leads to a high deployment of the pedagogical coaches on the work floor, with no room left to exercise their role as coaches. The question arises whether in the job of childcare worker there is any time and space at all to be coached in the workplace.
6. A sixth and final element refers to the lack of advancement opportunities for childcare workers. The use of pedagogical coaches with a bachelor's degree makes this even more acute.

#### **Implications:**

1. Work needs to be done to assure child-free hours so that time can go to coaching and guided reflection.
2. At least two organisational elements need to be considered, namely (i) at what level are pedagogical coaches best aggregated organisationally: at organisation or site level; and (ii) how

are pedagogical coaches best deployed organisationally: at different sites, or assigned to a specific site.

3. There is a need for a clear guiding framework on the mandate of coaches.
4. Pedagogical coaches should be given the opportunity to develop affinity with the job content of childcare worker.
5. There is a need for career perspectives and advancement opportunities for childcare workers.

### Governing quality Early Childhood Education and Care in a global crisis: first lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic (2021)

**Source:** Van Laere et al. (2021) (see *References* for further details)

**Aims and methods:** This report explores the different ways in which European Union Member States have attempted to ensure high-quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) for children and families in the era of COVID-19. The Flemish Community of Belgium is one of the in-depth case studies of this report (together with Croatia, Germany, Italy and Sweden). Through a review of key research and policy documents, together with interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders of the ECEC sector, the researchers collected and analysed data concerning the five areas of the European Quality Framework, and drew policy recommendations related to each area: accessibility, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, governance. On all these areas, the COVID-19 situation represents an opportunity for the ECEC sector to revisit its identity and evaluate the lessons learned, both in terms of its daily practice after the emergency, and as a possible preparation for future crises.

**Selected findings:** Concerning workforce in the Flemish Community of Belgium, the report underlines that the recognition and support accorded to ECEC staff have varied, and mainly professionals of childcare and out of school care provision have felt undervalued, when compared to those working in pre-primary schools. The data underline the need to invest in recognising the value of this profession at a structural level. Valuing the profession means also investing in good working conditions, good adult-child ratio, child-free hours to reflect. The role of pedagogical coaches and (democratic) leaders has also been found crucial in supporting ECEC staff during crisis times and beyond. Within this framework, ECEC staff appreciated the ‘supportive’ elements of monitoring processes (as opposed to ‘controlling’ ones). Continuous CPD activities focused on regular reflection aimed at adapting daily practice and pedagogical vision have been found crucial.

**Implications:** The report formulates policy recommendations for each area of the EQF. Concerning the workforce, the report underlines that providing job security and adequate compensation to ensure the motivation and retention of staff is key to the sustainability of high-quality ECEC in times of crisis and beyond. Although the crisis has highlighted the importance of ECEC centres, the overall social recognition of ECEC professionals remains low, and in the Flemish Community of Belgium this is even worse in the childcare sector (0-3). Meanwhile, the pedagogical and policy-making capacity of ECEC leaders has proved crucial in supporting ECEC professionals to deal effectively with the COVID-19 crisis. Accordingly, both the working conditions of ECEC staff and the pedagogical and policy capacity of ECEC leaders should be strengthened.

More specifically the following policy recommendations are formulated: 1) Structural measures should be considered to address shortages in the ECEC workforce, in order to avoid overworking the existing staff; 2) Given the importance of maintaining contacts with children and families during prolonged periods of closure of ECEC settings, continuity of salary for ECEC staff should be guaranteed; 3) Pedagogical coaching, collegial reflectivity and planning should not be discon-



tinued during crisis periods and beyond; 4) Staff conditions and concerns should be acknowledged and taken seriously into account through the provision of pedagogical guidance and professional development opportunities. Consideration should be also given to the possibility of including them among priority groups for vaccination during a pandemic crisis; 5) ECEC leaders play a key role in providing organisational, pedagogical and emotional support to their educational teams. It is crucial that an adequate decision-making infrastructure, operating in accordance with the principles of distributed leadership, is in place at the level of each institution and that leaders have the opportunity to systematically engage in peer-learning initiatives and advocacy processes within locally established professional networks, umbrella organisations or trade unions; 6) Investments should be made towards improving ICT infrastructure, as ECEC staff have been highly appreciative of the opportunities offered by digital tools to document children's experiences, carry out meetings and conduct exchanges with parents.

### **French Community (WBF)**

#### **Improving the quality of the initial professional education of Pre-Primary Teachers**

**Source:** Degraef et al. 2019 (see *References* for further details)

**Aims and methods:** The main aim of this three-year action research study was to define core competences to be acquired by Pre-Primary Teachers (*instituteurs/intitutrices maternelles*) to improve their welcoming and support practices with children, especially those from immigration and/or precarious backgrounds. This project received financial and organisational support from the King Baudouin Foundation and from the Minister of Higher Education for the development of concrete collaborative projects by the 13 University Colleges (*Hautes Écoles*) which organise the IPE of Pre-primary Teachers in WBF with a view to reinforcing the quality of these teacher education programmes.

**Selected findings:** Seven key competences were identified:

1. Deep awareness of the social responsibility of pre-primary schools (*école maternelles*). Refusing fatalism, Pre-primary Teachers are aware of their capacity for action to prevent social inequalities from turning into educational inequalities. They have a positive image of their profession and of social diversity.
2. Ability to approach the child as a whole person. Children are considered and respected in all aspects of their personality in line with an “*educare*” perspective. Their potentialities are valued, the class is a reassuring living environment where children learn to live together. It is under these conditions that children can gradually enter the learning process and become pupils.
3. Attention given to the development of language skills of all children. Having acquired a good command of French and being aware of the specificities of the ‘language of instruction’ (*langue d’enseignement*), Pre-primary Teachers aim to stimulate the linguistic development of all children, in particular, those whose home language is not French and/or those who are more culturally distant from the language of instruction.
4. Use of learning methods that help all children learn. The meaning of learning is not always clear to all children, especially if they come from a cultural environment distant from the school culture. Pre-primary Teachers are therefore careful to explain the meaning of the proposed activities and sets up active and well-designed teaching devices, which appeal to the full range of children’s skills.
5. Development of quality relationships with parents: these are recognised and welcomed at school as full and competent educational partners. Pre-primary Teachers have analytical

tools to decode attitudes which are unfamiliar to them or which may seem disturbing to them at first glance.

6. Teamwork: Pre-primary Teachers do not have a solitary vision of their job, but collaborate with colleagues as well as other teaching professionals and local partners outside school. This dialogue makes it possible to exchange perspectives on the child and to establish a coherent and comprehensive educational approach.
7. Analytical skills, i.e. Pre-Primary Teachers are able to step back to observe themselves and take a reflective and critical look at their practices, preferably as a team, in order to adjust them.

**Implications:** The practices to be implemented at the initial professional teacher training level to promote the acquisition of these competences by students are highlighted: Firstly, a cross-cutting and concerted approach to poverty and diversity issues in University Colleges is advocated, i.e. a better coordination of teaching content between teaching teams, a strengthening of the professional training of Teacher Educators in this field. Secondly, the establishment of close collaborations with the Pre-Primary Teachers also constitute the essential basis for the development of each and all of the seven competences. Finally, recommendations are addressed to the stakeholders concerned: those responsible for the education departments of the University College and their University partners, but also all those in charge of the implementation of the reform of the initial professional training of teachers, as well as the active policy-makers on education, early childhood and the fight against poverty.

## 10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

The main workforce challenges in the three Communities of Belgium are outlined below.

### Qualifications and initial/continuing professional education

In the French community of Belgium, the qualifications of Childcare Workers and Pre-primary Teachers should improve in parallel in 2023: on the one hand, a new Master (EQF: level 7) for Pre-primary Teachers on the other hand and a new professional Bachelor training dedicated to childcare and education (EQF: level 6). The reformed vocational secondary level (EQF: level 4) for the majority of the practitioners working with children in services for the under-threes is also in progress. However, the connections between these different training reforms remain to be established. Also, in the Flemish Community of Belgium, investment is needed on the level of qualification for ECEC professionals, which is now at EQF level 4 for childcare professionals and at EQF level 6 for Pre-primary Teachers. Besides, the contents of the curricula should also be revised, with a clearer focus on an *educare* approach in the three communities of Belgium. The problem is also emphasised in the different qualification requirements between Pre-primary Teachers and the qualified auxiliary workers in pre-primary settings working mostly with 2 and 3 year-olds.

Concerning continuing professional development, the options are different for Childcare Workers, Assistants and Pre-primary Teachers. In the Flemish Community, although childcare services are obliged to provide pedagogical support for their staff since the Decree of 2014, the resources made available by the government for this purpose are not sufficient to speak of quality CPD. If the facilities want extra support, they have to finance it themselves. However, the support on

offer is very fragmented and mainly consists of short-term courses or training sessions. Long-term coaching trajectories in which, for example, a team participates intensively in a group reflection process, are rare, although we know from research that such processes are more likely to have an impact on quality. Also in pre-primary education, the pedagogical guidance services tend to offer short-term courses rather than longer-term CPD processes. The same trends can be observed in the French Community, despite the growing investment in the CPD sector. Moreover, in the two sectors, childcare and pre-primary education, the directors' qualifications reforms aim at developing a better leadership but attention needs to be paid to a holistic educational view in the ECEC services. The lack of educational competences amongst childcare practitioners and directors in the childcare services on the one hand and the generalist approach of the Pact for a Teaching of Excellence ("*Pacte pour un enseignement d'excellence*") aiming at the academic success on the other hand, could reinforce two trends: (1) a focus on care and a lack of the educational approach expected by the pedagogical curriculum dedicated to the childcare services; (2) a schoolification of pre-primary education, focused on learning, without paying enough attention to emotional and physical care.

### Working conditions

Structural conditions are needed to be able to work within an *educare* perspective. For example, the adult-child ratio should not be too high. In the Flemish Community of Belgium, the ratio of 1 adult to 8 children in childcare (1 adult to 7 children in WBF) does not allow professionals to offer good pedagogical quality to babies and toddlers. In pre-primary schools, there are no official guidelines on the staff to child ratio. Groups can comprise 27 or more children with one teacher, which affects the quality of the pedagogical practice. Besides, child-free hours are needed in order for professionals to meet and reflect together on their practice. At the moment, child-free hours are not officially foreseen in the childcare sector, and they are not sufficient in the pre-primary school sector. This means that when wanting to reflect on their practice, ECEC leaders and professionals are often obliged to look for 'creative ways' to adjust their hours, with consequences that weigh on the daily experiences of children, families and professionals. When reflecting on practice, all professionals (for example, Pre-primary Teachers and Assistants) should be involved. In the Flemish and French Communities, the fact that Pre-primary Teachers and Assistants working with the same children and families have different contracts and working conditions makes it challenging to align their pedagogical offer. The lack of child-free hours to reflect together on their practice contributes to the challenge of working towards a common vision on education and care. On top of this, the working conditions and the social image of the Childcare Workers (traditionally seen as an assisting job, socially not recognised, especially when referring to the 0–2 sector) has created a very challenging staff-shortage issue in ECEC, which has an impact on the quality of the work, because of the continuous staff turnover and (over)workload required. However, the governmental answer to this challenge seems to go in the direction of lowering the entrance qualification level to work in ECEC, which would of course impact the quality of the offer for children and families. Recently, in order to attract more professionals into the sector, the Flemish ministry proposed to create positions for Childcare Workers (*kinderbegeleiders*) in the pre-primary school classes, under the working conditions of the Education Department. This is experienced by the childcare sector as a controversial measure, because it might make the already problematic staff shortage issue in childcare even worse. Besides, this measure risks confirming the split between education and care, traditionally already characterising ECEC in Belgium: teachers in pre-primary school have mainly so-called educational-teaching tasks; childcare workers-assistants have mainly so-called caring tasks. Having Childcare Workers as Assistants in pre-primary school classes, without this being accompanied



by an *educare* vision, might just reinforce this division of tasks, hence the hierarchic traditional vision on education and care.

### Professional continuity, diverse teams and collaboration

One of the challenges faced at the workforce level in all the three Communities is the lack of diversity, especially among pre-primary school staff, considering gender, language or socio-economic and cultural background. This represents a major challenge, especially when thinking about the cities, where there is a significant socio-economic and cultural diversity among children and families. Besides, more bridges need to be established between the working groups on reforms in the ECEC field and professionals from both childcare services and pre-primary schools. The challenges are multi-level: to develop a global and coherent view; to give opportunities to improve the quality of the workforce in all the services; to be able to develop an *educare* approach grounded in children and families' participation. In WBF, some relationships between key actors in the childcare and education sectors have been set up on the topic of transitions to pre-primary school, which has become one of the priorities of the Government (*Déclaration de Politique Communautaire de la FWB*, WBF Community Policy Statement, 2019–2024). This topic can become an important issue of professionalisation which encourages professionals from different sectors to work and learn together and to develop a more shared educational culture. The same challenge characterises the ECEC system in the Flemish Community, where more collaboration between childcare and pre-primary school is needed on a structural level. As a rule, not many common reflection moments are foreseen for different professionals working with the same children and families (e.g. Assistants and Pre-primary Teachers). This makes the enactment of an *educare* approach quite challenging. The role of leaders is a crucial one in this discourse, because of their mandate in promoting and supporting shared reflection on practice. In this sense, the lack of a professional profile for ECEC leaders represents an extra challenge.

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*Dekret 26-04-1999 über das Regelgrundschulwesen* [Decree on mainstream basic education], (MB 06-10-1999)

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