

GERMANY

Early Childhood Education and Care
ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report authors

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Glossary

EQF – European Qualifications Framework

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

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

ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

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

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

ISCED – International Standard Classification of Education

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

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

About the authors

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Sigrid Ebert, state-certified educator, qualified psychologist, organisational and personnel developer. As Chair of the Pestalozzi-Froebel Association, she was a member of the "Initial and continuing professional education" committee of the national Youth Welfare Working Group (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Jugendhilfe*) and of the Federal Youth Council (*Bundesjugendkuratorium*). Expert commission member in the Robert Bosch Foundation funding programme for the initial education and professionalisation of ECEC staff.

1. (E)CEC¹ governance in Germany

In the Federal Republic of Germany, early childhood education and care settings for children up to compulsory schooling at age 6 are part of the child and youth welfare system. The decision to exclude kindergartens from the public education system was made some 100 years ago, when the Imperial Youth Welfare Act 1922 (*Reichsjugendwohlfahrtsgesetz*) assigned them to the welfare sector (Franke-Meyer 2024). With the exception of the 40-year post-war era, when kindergartens in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) were part of the public education system, this decision has been maintained up to the present day.

Federalism and subsidiarity are core political and organisational concepts underpinning the structures, legislation, regulation and funding of early childhood education and care in Germany. The subsidiarity principle evolved over time from the traditional provider structures in the social welfare sector. According to this principle, public authorities are only obliged to provide social services if non-governmental agencies are unable to do so, and this is still the case today for roughly two-thirds of ECEC provision. Childhood care and education services (*Kindertagesbetreuung*) in Germany comprises not only centre-based *early childhood* settings (nurseries, kindergartens, mixed-age centres) and home-based ECEC provision, but also out-of-school education and care services for school-age children. Collectively, centre-based services are called *Kindertageseinrichtungen*².

In the context of federal and decentralised administrative structures, responsibilities for the ECEC system are shared between the federal government (*Bund*), the regional parliaments of the 16 federal states (*Länder*) and local government bodies – in partnership with voluntary, non-governmental child and youth welfare provider organisations (*Freie Träger der Jugendhilfe*), which receive state subsidies in order to carry out their function independently.

At the **federal level** the main responsibility lies with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (*Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend*), which by law has a ‘stimulatory competence’. At the **regional level**, youth authorities (*Landesjugendbehörden*) in the 16 federal states (*Länder*), which are usually located within the respective Ministry of Social Affairs or Ministry of Education, implement federal legislative requirements and regulate issues not included in the federal law. At the **local level** the municipalities (districts, towns, boroughs) are responsible for the organisation, provision and funding of ECEC services in cooperation with various provider agencies, mainly with welfare associations and church affiliated organisations. This multi-level policy-making often results in considerable regional differences.

¹ Throughout this report, we will refer to “ECEC” in most cases as (E)CEC. The brackets signalise that the early childhood sector in Germany is integrated into the broader field of child and youth welfare, which also includes childhood care and education services for children up to the age of 14.

² Literally translated, *Kindertageseinrichtungen* are ‘children’s day centres’. *Kita* (pronounced ‘keeta’) is an abbreviated and commonly used form in Germany.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in (E)CEC provision

The (E)CEC workforce in Germany consists of two main occupational groups: (Early Childhood) Educators and (E)CEC Co-workers/Assistants. Childhood Pedagogues are a third, much smaller but nevertheless forward-looking professional group. Staff with a professional qualification from a vocational technical college³ specialising in social pedagogy (Educators) represent the largest group overall.

(Early Childhood) Educators (*Erzieher:innen*)

As in previous years, state-certified Educators were the largest group of staff (63.1%, not including administrative staff⁴) in childhood care and education facilities in 2023. In the eastern federal states and Berlin the proportion was higher (75.2%) than in the western federal states (60.1%) (Destatis/Genesis 2023, own calculations)⁵.

Educators are core professionals in the system of early childhood education and care and are employed mainly as group leaders, but also as centre leaders/managers. Entry requirements for their initial professional education (IPE) at a vocational technical college specialising in social pedagogy are an intermediate secondary school leaving certificate, or an educational qualification recognised as equivalent, or a completed relevant vocational qualification. In most cases the course of studies lasts three years in full-time form. Although *Fachschulen* (in Bavaria: *Fachakademien*) are located in the tertiary education sector (if the duration of training is more than 2,400 hours), they are not part of the higher education system.

Childhood Pedagogues (*Kindheitspädagoginnen, Kindheitspädagogen*)

Childhood Pedagogy study programmes leading to a degree at Bachelor level are a comparatively recent development in Germany, as is the ongoing construction of a professional self-image as academics in the (E)CEC field (Schneider 2016). Since 2003-2004, study programmes have been offered by higher education institutions across the country, mostly by universities of applied sciences (*Hochschulen für angewandte Wissenschaften* or *Fachhochschulen*). However, around 20 years later, in 2023, among the 5.7% staff in (E)CEC settings with a higher education degree only 1.5% were Childhood Pedagogues (Destatis/Genesis 2023).

ECEC Co-workers/ Assistants (*Sozialpädagogische Assistenzkräfte*)

Three types of qualified co-workers are employed as supplementary staff in ECEC settings: Child-carers (*Kinderpfleger:innen*), Social Assistants (*Sozialassistentinnen/Sozialassistenten*), and Socio-pedagogical Assistants (*Sozialpädagogische Assistentinnen/Assistenten*). Together with other staff in social services (3.3%), they make up 13.5% of the total workforce (FKB 2023, 178f, own calculations).

³ Strictly speaking, the term in German is “school”. However, in the international context this can be misleading and we have therefore chosen the term “vocational technical college” for *Fachschulen/Fachakademien*, also in order to distinguish them from “vocational schools” (*Berufsfachschulen*).

⁴ In this report, administrative, housekeeping and technical staff are not included in the data from Destatis/Genesis 2023.

⁵ The cut-off date for all Federal Statistical Office figures (Destatis/Genesis 2023) is 01.03.2023. However, at the time of reporting, some of the more detailed data were only available in the 2022 edition (Destatis 2023), with a cut-off date of 01.03.2022.

As a rule, the entry requirement for initial professional education programmes is a lower secondary school leaving certificate, with courses lasting between two and three years on a full-time basis - depending on federal state regulations (see FKB 2023; WIFF 2018).

Other personnel

In addition to the two largest occupational groups (Educators and ECEC Co-workers/ Assistants) and the numerically marginal group of Childhood Pedagogues, a number of other types of personnel with varying professional qualifications also work in (E)CEC settings. These are, for example, persons with a university degree in social pedagogy/social work or educational science; or persons with a vocational technical college qualification (e.g. in curative education) (see also *Chapter 3, Table 2*). Depending on the size and the respective provider of the (E)CEC setting, administrative staff, technical staff or staff responsible for preparing meals may also be employed.

Table 1 provides an overview of the main occupational groups in (E)CEC centres and categorises the **core professionals**, i.e. those with group or centre responsibility, according to one of five professional profiles (see *Box 1* at the end of this chapter).

Table 1

Germany: (E)CEC staff in centre-based settings

| Job title | Main (E)CEC 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 |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| <p>(Early Childhood) Educator <i>Erzieherin, Erzieher</i></p> <p><i>Profile:</i> Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional</p> | <p>Nursery 0–2⁶ years</p> <p>Kindergarten 2/3–5 years</p> <p>Age-integrated centres 0–5 or 3–9 or 0–12/14 years</p> <p>Out-of-school education and care services 6–14 years</p> | <p>Core professional</p> <p>Group leader</p> <p>Centre leader</p> | <p>0–12/14 years up to 27 years</p> | <p>Route 1 Usually 3 years full-time at a tertiary-level vocational technical college (<i>Fachschule/ Fachakademie</i>) specialising in social pedagogy – specific length varies between federal states</p> <p>Route 2 (since 2012) <i>Dualised model:</i> 3-4 years divided between a specialist vocational technical college and a paid work placement in a socio-pedagogical institution (see <i>Chapter 4.3</i>)</p> |

⁶ **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: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years, as in Germany.



| Job title | Main (E)CEC 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 |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| | | | | ECTS credits: n/a ⁷ EQF/DQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 655 |
| Childhood Pedagogue <i>Kindheitspädagogin, Kindheitspädagog</i> <i>Profile:</i> Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional | Nursery 0–2 years Kindergarten 2/3–5 years Age-integrated centres 0–5 or 3–9 or 0–12/14 years Out-of-school education and care services 6–14 years | Core professional Group leader Centre leader | 0–12 years | 3 to 3½ years at a higher education institution (usually university of applied sciences, sometimes university) <i>Award:</i> Bachelor ECTS credits: 180 or 210 EQF/GQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6 |
| Childcarer <i>Kinderpflegerin, Kinderpfleger</i> Social Assistant <i>Sozialassistentin, Sozialassistent</i> Socio-pedagogical Assistant <i>Sozialpädagogische Assistentin, Sozialpädagogischer Assistent</i> | Nursery 0–2 years Kindergarten 2/3–5 years Age-integrated centres 0–5 or 3–9 or 0–12/14 years Out-of-school education and care services 6–14 years | Qualified assistant / co-worker | 0–10 years (<i>Childcare Assistants</i>) and beyond (<i>Social/Socio-pedagogical Assistants</i>) | Route 1 2 or 3 years at vocational school (<i>Berufsfachschule</i>), length may vary between federal states and according to previous education Route 2 (recent) Also possible as dualised model in some <i>Länder</i> , alternating between vocational school and socio-pedagogical institution ECTS credits: n/a EQF/GQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 354 |

Box 1

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 (E)CEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)

⁷ n/a not applicable



- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre Leader

A qualification beyond the regular initial professional education (IPE) is not generally required for the responsible position as head of an (E)CEC setting in Germany. Professional requirements on the part of the federal state or the service provider are not only different, but also often not very specific. In some federal states, for example, the position of Centre Leader is to be filled by a "suitable person", although the criteria for this are not precisely described and the decision is left to the respective provider (Strehmel und Ulber 2012; Strehmel 2017).⁸

At the same time, the range of responsibilities of a Centre Leader is very demanding and involves both pedagogically-oriented and administrative tasks. These include the implementation of the respective federal state curricular framework, quality development, operational and organisational management and development, staff management and cooperating with the service provider, the legal guardians and with all other partners in the neighbourhood and region. Despite this, the role of *Kita* management is neither defined uniformly nor in detail (Anders et al. 2021). Moreover, the division of tasks between the provider and the Centre Leader is rarely clarified in a binding manner. However, the representative AQUA study showed that Centre Leaders are more satisfied with their work and feel less burdened if this is clearly regulated (Schreyer et al. 2014).

Not all Centre Leaders are able to devote themselves fully to management tasks: in 2022, just over half (55.7%) were partially released from pedagogical work, 44.3% were fully released (FKB 2023, 202).

"Strong leadership" is one of the seven core fields of action prescribed in the new *Act on the Enhancement of Quality and Participation in (E)CEC - KiQuTG (2023)*⁹ – known as the *KiTa Quality Act* – which the federal states can select for improvement measures with additional funding from the federal government. This field of action was selected as a priority by half of the 16 federal states under the *Good Childcare Act* (BMFSFJ 2020a). With further funding from the federal government (around 530 million euros for the "Strong leadership" field of action), the work previously started will be continued in 2023 and 2024 (BMFSFJ 2023a).

Although there is no universally agreed framework for the position of Centre Leader in German (E)CEC settings, the concept of distributed leadership is seen in professional circles as fitting the governance structure and tradition of early childhood education and care in Germany. Distributed leadership does not necessarily mean the functional distribution of tasks (see *Chapter 2.3*), but an ongoing process of dialogue and of developing a common vision in the team (Anders et al. 2021, 76).

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

The establishment of designated posts of responsibility in (E)CEC settings has not been common practice in Germany so far. At most, the position of deputy leader is fairly common in larger facilities. However, due to the expanding field of work and the associated need not only for well-

⁸ In Bavaria, since July 2023, a change in the law means that it is no longer necessary to be trained as an Educator to work as an ECEC Centre Leader. While the Ministry of Social Affairs sees this as a flexible option for providers, professional associations such as the Verband Kita-Fachkräfte Bayern e.V. (2023) fear a downgrading of established quality standards.

⁹ Amendments to the *Good Childcare Act* (KiQuTG 2019)

qualified but also highly motivated professionals, the idea is gaining in importance. There is widespread agreement nationally and internationally that ECEC occupations need to be made more attractive (BMFSFJ 2018; OECD 2019). This attractiveness includes promotion grades, career advancement opportunities and corresponding remuneration mechanisms. In addition to the management of (E)CEC settings, a dossier by the German Youth Institute (Deutsches Jugendinstitut) based on results of the *Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte, WiFF* (see *Chapter 8* for more details) elaborates the following fields of activity as potential designated posts (Kalicki et al 2019, 1): language education; inclusion of children with disabilities; intercultural education and multilingualism; children in poverty; and cooperation with families. The German Association for Public and Private Welfare also recommends not only horizontal, theme-oriented designated posts of responsibility with higher remuneration, but also possibilities for increased vertical differentiation, e.g. positions as deputy leader, pedagogical quality officer, practical guidance for trainees or child protection officers. All these posts should require a "certified qualification" (Deutscher Verein 2022).

The implementation of these ideas requires close cooperation between the responsible decision-makers (relevant authorities, employers, collective bargaining partners) as well as the qualifying support systems (initial and continuing professional education and training institutions and organisations).

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

ECEC counsellors have a supporting, coordinating and, to some extent, controlling role in the German (E)CEC system. However, specialist counselling is currently structured very differently across the federal states and ECEC service providers in terms of mandate and licence (Kaiser und Fuchs-Rechlin 2020, 12).

As a rule, ECEC counsellors are employed by and act on behalf of the providers of (E)CEC settings, occasionally they are also employed by the Youth Welfare Office. Although their contributions to the field in terms of professional pedagogical support, advising centre leaders and service providers, staff development and quality enhancement as well as in a steering capacity are undisputed in professional circles (cf. Deutscher Verein 2012; Preissing et al. 2017), a specified job description at the level of professional policy is rather rare and the legal frameworks in the federal states vary greatly.

According to a survey commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth of 367 ECEC counsellors, the five most common professional tasks are: Quality assurance and development (84%); pedagogical and professional advice (82%); organisation of continuing professional development (57%); giving advice to the provider (57%); knowledge transfer between research and professional practice (51%). From their own perspective, ECEC counsellors currently need support measures themselves, such as: the opportunity for more collegial dialogue, a reduction in the number of ECEC centres to be supervised, as well as more time and opportunities for their own professional development (BMFSFJ 2017).

For years, a controversial issue and repeated demand has concerned the need for a clear division of tasks between advisory and supervisory roles. In some federal states and in some larger municipal (E)CEC centres, both are in the hands of the same person. Moreover, the advisory role of the federal state Youth Welfare Office with regard to management and operating licences is also referred to as "specialist counselling", although this is clearly a supervisory task.

The system of ECEC counselling can successfully support both providers and settings in their development of quality, personnel and organisation. However, the great heterogeneity of the specialist counselling system also harbours obstacles: For example, only two federal states (Thuringia and Saxony) have regulations regarding the qualification of specialist counsellors. There is



also great variation in terms of the qualifications themselves - these range from further training courses lasting several days to a university education as a prerequisite; the scope of the specialist counselling services offered is also rarely specified (cf. Kaiser und Fuchs-Rechlin 2020; Kaiser, Lipowski und Fuchs-Rechlin 2022).

2.5 Specialist support staff

Cooperation with specialist support services is an integral part of an inclusive concept of (E)CEC. Such services include psychological, child psychiatric, medical and speech therapy diagnostics (Heimlich und Ueffing 2018). Depending on the need, specialised support staff can come to the (E)CEC setting according to a plan agreed with setting and parents. Specialists from early intervention centres for children with disabilities or children at risk of becoming disabled are key cooperation partners who either visit the (E)CEC setting or offer therapy sessions to the children concerned on their own premises. Specialists from the migration social services and general social services can also be important contacts. As a rule, cooperation takes place on an off-site basis.

3. Structural composition of (E)CEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

In general, the rapid expansion in the childcare and education field, particularly in ECEC, has been accompanied by a steady growth in the workforce. In 2022, 587,536 persons (full-time equivalent) were employed in (E)CEC centres. Since 2018, an additional 83,710 staff have joined the workforce (FKB 2023, 165). Despite the increase and the shortage of qualified staff (see *Chapter 8.5*), there has been no increase in the employment of unqualified, non-specialist staff (i.e. people with no professional qualifications or with qualifications from non-related fields).

Persons with an award from a tertiary-level specialist vocational technical college comprise almost two thirds of staff working in (E)CEC settings and are thus by far the largest group of professionals. Staff with a higher education degree account for only a small part of the workforce at roughly 5.7%, whereas the share of staff with an upper secondary vocational award is more than double that at 13.3%, as indicated in *Table 2* (FKB 2023, 178f).

Academics with a relevant qualification worked in 40.3% of *Kitas* in 2022, while Educators were employed in 99% of (E)CEC centres (FKB 2023, 58, 201). However, the distribution varies considerably across the federal states. 19.3% of Centre Leaders had a higher education degree in 2022 (31.8% in the eastern *Bundesländer*; 16.0% in the western federal states (FKB 2023, 204).

The proportion of male staff in the workforce remains relatively low at 7.9%; a higher proportion (approximately 20%) work in out-of-school settings than in early childhood settings. The proportion of male staff in leadership positions is slightly lower at 7.3% than the overall share among ECEC staff (FKB 2023, 172, 227).

Data on the proportion of persons with a background of migration are not systematically compiled. According to the Early Education Staffing Barometer (see *Chapter 8*), around 17.7% of the early childhood workforce were persons with a migration background compared with 24% of all persons in the employment market (FKB 2023, 102, 228). According to data from the Federal Statistical Office, there are 21.2 million people in Germany who meet the definition of "persons with a migration background" (Destatis 2021), including 11.4 million who have a non-German nationality. This corresponds to around a quarter of the total population (Friederich und Gisdakis 2021).

Table 2

Germany: Structural composition of the workforce in (E)CEC settings, 2022, 2023

| Staff categories | Overall distribution in workforce, in % |
|--|--|
| 2023: Staff with a relevant higher education degree | |
| – Childhood Pedagogues (no disaggregated data on the proportion of Bachelor/Master degrees) | 1.5 |
| – Social Pedagogues/Social Workers (University of Applied Sciences degree) | 2.6 |
| – Social Pedagogues; Pedagogues (University degree) | 1.2 |
| – Remedial/Special Needs Pedagogues (University of Applied Sciences degree) | 0.4 |
| <i>Total</i> | 5.7 |
| 2023: Staff with a relevant post-secondary qualification (specialist vocational technical college) | |
| – Educators | 63.1 |
| – Other post-secondary award (e.g Curative/Remedial Educators) | 3.0 |
| <i>Total</i> | 66.1 |
| 2023: Staff with a relevant upper secondary qualification (vocational school) | |
| – Childcarers | 10.2 |
| – Social/Socio-pedagogical Assistants | 3.3 |
| <i>Total</i> | 13.5 |
| 2023: Staff with other, non-specialist qualification (including short qualification routes in the social and health care services) | 5.4 |
| 2023: Trainees | 5.4 |
| 2023: Staff with no formal IPE | 2.4 |
| Specialist support staff (e.g. Language Therapist or Special Needs Educators) | Mostly off-site, no systematically compiled data available |
| 2023: Proportion of male staff in (E)CEC centres | 7.9* |
| 2022: in <i>Kitas</i> without school children | 7.0* |
| 2022: in <i>Kitas</i> with school children and other children | 9.2* |
| 2022: in <i>Kitas</i> with only school children (<i>Horte</i>) | 20.5* |
| 2022: Proportion of male staff as Centre Leaders | 7.3* |
| 2022: Proportion of male staff among persons with a higher education degree | 9.3* |
| 2022: Proportion of male staff among persons with a tertiary-level vocational qualification as Educator | 6.7* |
| 2022: Proportion of male staff among persons with an upper secondary vocational qualification | |
| 2022: Childcarers | 4.1* |
| 2022: Social/Socio-pedagogical Assistants | 11.2* |
| (E)CEC staff with a migration background | 17.7** (2019) |

Sources: FKB 2023, 172, 178f, 205, 227f; *Destatis/Genesis 2023, **Destatis 2021, own calculations. Federal Statistical Office definition: "A person has a background of migration if he/she or at least one parent does not possess German nationality at birth".

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

(Early Childhood) Educator (*Erzieherin, Erzieher*)

The initial professional education pathway to become a state-certified **Educator** is not a field-specific, specialised training for the age group 0 to 6 years, but a generalist route for work in settings in the entire child and youth welfare sector. This covers the age group 0 to 27 years and includes children's homes, residential youth groups, facilities for persons with special educational needs, youth work facilities and complementary childcare services in all-day schools. This vocational programme is classified in Germany as "further vocational training", which leads to a federal state certified post-secondary vocational qualification. Key documents issued by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs are the framework agreement on *Fachschulen* (KMK 2002/2021), the Competence-oriented Qualification Profile (KMK 2011/2017) and the Curriculum for *Fachschulen* for Social Pedagogy (KMK 2020a).

State-certified Educators represent by far the largest occupational group in the (E)CEC workfield, accounting for almost 63.1% of the staff in (E)CEC settings. About half (46%) of the Educators work as group leaders, 6.3% have a position as Centre Leader (Destatis/Genesis 2023, own calculations).

The IPE institutions providing courses for this profession – *Fachschulen für Sozialpädagogik*, in Bavaria *Fachakademien* – officially belong to the **tertiary** education system, but not to the **higher** education system. In the school year 2021/2022, there were 693 *Fachschulen/ Fachakademien* specialising in social pedagogy in Germany, of which just under half (47.5%) were public and 52.5% private institutions (FKB 2023, 239).

Due to the sovereignty of the *Länder* in educational affairs, the IPE admission criteria vary considerably between federal states. However, the basic requirement for attending a *Fachschule* is always an intermediate school leaving certificate or a completed relevant vocational training, from which the required duration of the IPE course is calculated. Thus, a **full-time IPE course** for persons with an intermediate school leaving certificate usually lasts three years (including one year of work experience).

In 2011, the traditional post-secondary VET qualification was classified in the German Qualifications Framework (DQR) at the same level as the Bachelor's degree from higher education institutions - at level 6. Among field experts in Germany, this was seen as a backward step with regard to the professionalisation of the early childhood education field (see e.g. Stieve und Kägi 2012). It was also argued that academic studies should be seen as a necessary requirement for systematic and critical thinking, which is also important for the profession of early childhood educators (Rauschenbach 2013).

Since 2012, an additional pathway into the profession of state-certified Educator has been introduced: a **dualised work-integrated and remunerated** model called 'practice-integrated training' (PIA), during which students are paid for the time spent in an (E)CEC work placement (see also *Chapter 4.3*).

Since the end of 2020, according to a resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (2020a), the *Länder* can "provide for" the term "Bachelor Professional in Social Services" to be used in addition to the occupational title "State-certified Educator". The application procedure is regulated by the federal states.



Table 3

Germany: (Early Childhood) Educator

| |
|--|
| <p>Title in German: <i>Staatlich anerkannte Erzieherin, staatlich anerkannter Erzieher</i> (Bachelor Professional in Social Services) Profile: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional</p> |
| <p>Entry requirements: Intermediate school-leaving certificate or a completed and relevant vocational training (considerable differences between the <i>Länder</i>)</p> <p>Initial professional education: The IPE course at a post-secondary specialist vocational technical college for social pedagogy comprises at least 2,400 hours of teaching and at least 1,200 hours of college-supported practical experience. It usually lasts three years in the full-time form and correspondingly longer in the part-time form. The practical training takes place in various socio-pedagogical fields of work (KMK as amended in 2021, 26).</p> <p>Award: State-certified Educator; in some cases: Bachelor Professional in Social Services (at the discretion of the federal state). Usually regarded as a general university entrance certificate or specialist university entrance certificate.</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a EQF/DQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 655</p> <p>Main (E)CEC workplaces: Nursery (0–2 years), kindergarten (2/3–5 years), age-integrated centre (0–5, 3–10, 10–12/14 years), out-of-school care and education setting (<i>Hort</i>, 6–14 years)</p> <p>Recent dualised practice-integrated and remunerated qualification routes: Introduced in Baden-Württemberg in 2012; by 2020 in varying formats at least as a pilot project in all federal states except Mecklenburg-Pomerania (Weltzien et al. 2021, 7).</p> <p>Entry requirements: As a rule, intermediate school leaving certificate</p> <p>Initial professional education: 3 to 4 years (depending on <i>Land</i> and previous experience) at a <i>Fachschule/Fachakademie</i> for Social Pedagogy and simultaneously in an early childhood setting in an employment relationship subject to social security contributions</p> <p>Award: State-certified Educator (<i>staatlich anerkannte Erzieherin/staatlich anerkannter Erzieher</i>)</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a EQF/DQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 655</p> <p>Main (E)CEC workplaces: see above</p> |

Childhood Pedagogue (*Kindheitspädagogin/ Kindheitspädagoge*)

Two major triggers leading to a demand for more (E)CEC personnel with an academic degree were on the one hand Germany's mediocre rankings in international comparisons of educational achievement (e.g. the OECD PISA studies) and on the other hand the fact that the required initial professional education in the majority of European countries, at least for staff working in pre-primary education (3–5/6 years) and increasingly for those working with under 3 year-olds (Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010) was a Bachelor's degree. With the reform of higher education in Europe through the Bologna process, BA and MA structures were also introduced in Germany. Beginning in 2003/2004, Bachelor programmes in childhood pedagogy and early childhood education were established at German higher education institutions, followed in a number of cases by Master's degree programmes (see Hechler et al. 2021).

In 2021, there were a total of 76 Childhood Pedagogy Bachelor's and 14 Master's degree programmes at 61 locations (FKB 2023, 122, 125, 247). 57.9% of the study programmes were offered at public universities of applied sciences, 21.1% at private higher education institutions. Half (51%) of all Bachelor's degree programmes in childhood pedagogy were designed as full-time programmes in 2021, while the other half were offered in dualised or part-time form.

Nearly all (95%) focus on early childhood or childhood pedagogy, 55% focus in particular on management and leadership (FKB 2023, 122, 125, 247).

Full-time studies usually take 3 to 3½ years (6 or 7 semesters).

Admission requirements, specialisations and the duration of studies vary depending on the federal state and the higher education institution. Most HEI's require a general higher education entrance qualification for the Bachelor's programme, although this can also be achieved by completing lower secondary education with four to five years of professional experience in a similar subject or by passing an aptitude test.

A Bachelor's and/or Master's degree in (Early) Childhood Pedagogy opens up broad fields of work. Childhood Pedagogues are often employed in areas of child and youth welfare such as: family counselling, integration initiatives, immigration authority, adult education, research. In 2023, among the 5.7% of staff in (E)CEC settings with a higher education degree, only 1.5% were Childhood Pedagogues (Destatis/Genesis 2023; own calculations).

Table 4

Germany: Childhood Pedagogue

| |
|---|
| <p>Title in German: <i>Staatliche anerkannte Kindheitspädagogin / staatlich anerkannter Kindheitspädagoge</i> Profile: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional</p> |
| <p>Entry requirements: General or vocational university access eligibility, in some cases also a successfully completed Educator IPE programme</p> <p>Professional education: 3 to 3½ years at a University of Applied Sciences, University of Teacher Education¹⁰, Professional Academy (Dual HEI)¹¹, or in some case at a University</p> <p>Award: State-certified Childhood Pedagogue (Bachelor, title varies according to federal state and higher education institution) – a subsequent 2-year Master's study programme can be followed.</p> <p>ECTS credits: 180 or 210 (120 ECTS credits for a Master's degree)</p> <p>EQF/DQF level: 6 (or 7 - Master)</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 6 (or 7 - Master)</p> <p>Main (E)CEC workplaces: Nursery (0–2), kindergarten (2/3–5 year), age-integrated centre (0–5, 3–10, 10–12/14 years), out-of-school care and education setting (<i>Hort</i>, 6–14 years)</p> <p><i>Additional fields of work:</i> Child and youth welfare, family counselling, integration initiatives, immigration authority, adult education, research</p> |

(E)CEC Co-workers/ Assistants (*Childcarer, Social Assistant, Socio-pedagogical Assistant*)

Childcarers, Socio-pedagogical Assistants and Social Assistants together accounted for 13.5% of the total staff in (E)CEC in 2023 (Destatis/Genesis 2023). The training programmes completed at vocational schools are regulated by state law. In the 2021/2022 school year, there were 234 vocational schools for childcare and 467 vocational schools for social assistance in Germany. IPE courses for prospective Childcarers were offered in eight federal states in 2022, while vocational routes for future Social Assistant staff were offered in 13 federal states (FKB 2023, 234).

The usual entry qualification for the mostly two- or three-year training is a basic secondary school leaving certificate (*Hauptschulabschluss*). In some *Länder* the courses are designed in such a way that, after completion, the student can immediately enrol for a qualifying course to become an Educator. In some cases, an intermediate or higher school leaving certificate is awarded on completion.

¹⁰ Only in Baden-Württemberg

¹¹ Only in Baden-Württemberg, Hesse and Saxony



Table 5

Germany: Childcarer, Social Assistant, Socio-pedagogical Assistant

| Titles in German: |
|---|
| <i>Staatlich geprüfte¹² Kinderpflegerin, staatlich geprüfter Kinderpfleger</i> <i>Staatlich geprüfte Sozialassistentin, staatlich geprüfter Sozialassistent</i> <i>Staatlich geprüfte Sozialpädagogische Assistentin,</i> <i>staatlich geprüfter Sozialpädagogischer Assistent</i> |
| Entry requirements: 9 years compulsory schooling with basic secondary school leaving certificate or intermediate school certificate; some <i>Länder</i> also require an interview and/or a written entry examination. |
| Initial professional education: 1–3 years upper secondary vocational school (depending on federal state regulations and previous experience) |
| Award: State-certified (or state-recognised) Childcarer or Social Assistant or Socio-pedagogical Assistant. |
| In some <i>Länder</i> it is possible to complete the course with an intermediate school certificate (Childcarer) or secondary school certificate (Social Assistant). |
| ECTS credits: n/a |
| EQF/DQF level: 4 |
| ISCED 2011: 354 |
| Main (E)CEC workplaces: Nursery (0–2), kindergarten (2/3–5), age-integrated centre (0–5, 3–10, 10–12/14), outside-school-hours care and education setting (<i>Hort</i> , 6–14). Social Assistants also work in social care institutions with persons of all ages, e.g. in hospitals or in mobile care services. |

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

(Early Childhood) Educator (*Erzieherin/Erzieher*)

Since 2011, IPE courses leading to the award of state-certified Educator at tertiary-level colleges specialising in social pedagogy have been based on a “Competence-oriented Qualification Profile” (KMK 2011/2017). The profile defines professional standards, knowledge and includes the competence categories (social competence, independence, knowledge, skills) of the German Qualifications Framework (DQR 2014).

Table 6

Germany: Competence-oriented Qualification Profile in IPE leading to the award of State-certified Educator (see KMK 2011/2017, 15-28, adapted)

| Knowledge areas (selection) | Competences and skills (selection) |
|--|---|
| 1. Understanding children, adolescents and young adults in their living environments and forming pedagogical relationships with them | |
| <i>Leaving certificate holders possess</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Broad and integrated knowledge about different methods of observation – In-depth specialist knowledge about the influence of socio-economic circumstances on the life worlds of children, adolescents and young adults – Thorough knowledge about the mandate of the complementary and compensatory role of settings in relation to the family. | <i>Leaving certificate holders possess skills related to</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Analysing and assessing developmental trajectories and socialisation processes in children, adolescents and young adults and – taking into consideration the key determining factors of behaviour, experiences and learning – to independently plan and organise developmental and educational stimulation – Identifying one’s own role as Educator in the developmental and educational processes of |

¹² In Baden-Württemberg and Saarland the occupational title is „State recognised Childcarer“.

| Knowledge areas (selection) | Competences and skills (selection) |
|---|---|
| | children, adolescents and young adults, reflecting on this role and drawing consequences for pedagogical procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Conceptualising, planning and organising pedagogical programmes independently which are linked to the life worlds of children, adolescents and young adults. |
| 2. Stimulating, supporting and guiding developmental and educational processes | |
| <i>Leaving certificate holders possess</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – An in-depth understanding of education and development as part of an individual, lifelong process within the framework of their social-pedagogical mandate of ‘education, upbringing and care’ – Broad and integrated knowledge which provides them with a complex understanding of developmental, learning, educational and socialisation processes – In-depth knowledge about didactic approaches for the competent guidance of children, adolescents and young adults in specific learning areas. | <i>Leaving certificate holders possess skills related to</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reflecting on and developing further their own educational experiences and competencies in different areas of education and learning – Organising the inside and outdoor spaces in socio-pedagogical settings with the aim of creating a stimulating learning environment – Using a wide range of tools and approaches from the various educational and learning areas in a targeted way and evaluating their effectiveness. |
| 3. Guiding pedagogical work in groups | |
| <i>Leaving certificate holders possess</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Broad and integrated knowledge about group psychology and about group work as a classical approach in social pedagogy – In-depth specialist knowledge in selected areas about didactic and conceptual approaches to education, upbringing and care in small groups in the classical fields of work in child and youth welfare – Thorough knowledge of the legislation frameworks relevant for socio-pedagogical work. | <i>Leaving certificate holders possess skills related to</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Systematically observing, analysing and assessing group behaviours, group processes, group relations and their own professional action – Conceptually embedding participation strategies for children, adolescents and young adults – Recognising conflicts and supporting children, adolescents and young people in solving them in an independent way. |
| 4. Building educational partnerships with parents and caregivers | |
| <i>Leaving certificate holders possess</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Broad and integrated professional knowledge about various models, approaches and forms of partnership in education and upbringing – Specialist knowledge about community support and counselling systems for families and caregivers – Relevant knowledge about forms and methods of public relations work in social services. | <i>Leaving certificate holders possess skills related to</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identifying the individually different needs and resources of families and caregivers, assessing them in a systematic way and reviewing framework structures and provision accordingly – Planning and organising needs-based parental education and counselling activities together with other field specialists – developing, carrying out and evaluating public relations strategies for social service settings. |
| 5. Developing organisations and teams | |
| <i>Leaving certificate holders possess</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Broad and integrated professional knowledge about structures and forms of team work and about other elements of organisation development | <i>Leaving certificate holders possess skills related to</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participating in needs and status analyses for the socio-pedagogical institution in order to include these in programme planning |



| Knowledge areas (selection) | Competences and skills (selection) |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Integrated specialist knowledge about relevant legislation and the funding and provider structures of settings in the field of social pedagogy as well as about current developments – Thorough knowledge about the links between employment, tariff and contract legislation in the field of social-pedagogical work. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Analysing their own team situation according to specific criteria in order to develop this further and, if necessary, to organise support – Reflecting on the sustainability of processes in team and organisation development. |
| 6. Cooperating in networks and organising transitions | |
| <i>Leaving certificate holders possess</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Broad and integrated professional knowledge about child and youth welfare institutions and other specialist services and educational institutions – Broad and integrated professional knowledge about support systems and networks – Research-based knowledge about attachment patterns and their meaning for transition procedures. | <i>Leaving certificate holders possess skills related to</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Investigating relevant resources in the community for the target group – Coordinating goals for cooperation with network partners and integrating them into their own workplace procedures – Organising transitions systematically on the basis of research evidence and conceptual frameworks. |

The following basic principles are considered to be defining for all social pedagogy occupations:

- *Participation* (including age-appropriate decision-making by children)
- *Inclusion* (as a multidimensional concept of heterogeneity and diversity and also as a basis for planning educational activities)
- *Prevention* (supporting children, adolescents and young adults to cope with different life phases)
- *Language enhancement* (ongoing support of language development), and
- *Values transmission* (guidance in the development of personal values based on the Basic Law/Constitution and the constitutions of the *Länder*).

Each federal state implements the Qualification Profile in accordance with state law. The orientation for this is a cross-state curriculum (see *Table 7*). The competences described in the curriculum of the respective federal state are mandatory for the work of the vocational technical colleges and academies in the field of social pedagogy. The curriculum is also structured into six learning fields, which are based on the competence-oriented Qualification Profile (see also *Autorengruppe Fachschulwesen 2011*).

Table 7

Germany: Curricular framework for initial professional education leading to the award of state-certified Educator (KMK 2020a, 18, 25-42)

| Fields of learning and content | Number of teaching hours |
|---|--------------------------|
| General education/non-specialist subjects | Minimum 360 |
| Occupation-related areas of learning | Minimum 1800 |
| 1. <i>Ongoing development of professional identity and professional perspectives</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Biographical work, motive for occupational choice, methods of self-assessment – Professionalisation history of the Educator profession – Fields of work and provider system in child and youth welfare – Education, upbringing and care as mandates of child and youth welfare in a changing society – Societal and legislative context of expectations and requirements regarding the professional role, cross-curricular tasks of social pedagogy work – Requirements, organisation and places of learning in IPS | Minimum 80 |

| Fields of learning and content | Number of teaching hours |
|--|--------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Learning and working strategies in self-organised learning – Self-management and health prevention in professional work – Employment and tariff framework legislation – Professional organisations and trade unions – Professional prospects, continuing professional development | |
| <p>2. <i>The pedagogy of relationships and working with groups</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Image of human being, image of the child, pedagogical values – Explanatory models for educational guidance – Attachment theory – Pedagogy of building relationships – Foundations of group pedagogy – Observation and documentation of group processes – Didactic principles and approaches of working in groups in the field of child and youth welfare, e.g. Froebel, Montessori, Reggio, contextual approach (<i>Situationsansatz</i>), Social Group Work – Chances for shaping the life worlds and everyday lives of groups in child and youth welfare fields of work – Models and approaches towards a participatory pedagogy – Communication and leading discussions – Conflicts and conflict solutions in everyday pedagogy – Legislative framework for social pedagogical group work such as supervision, child and youth protection, health protection, data protection. | Minimum 240 |
| <p>3. <i>Living environments and diversity – awareness, understanding, inclusive approaches</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Changing conditions and influences on socialisation – Diversity of life worlds and living conditions and their significance for pedagogical work – Explanatory theoretical models for human experiences and behaviours, such as behavioural and learning theories, psychoanalytical models, systemic approaches, resilience concept – Special developmental needs in children, adolescents and young adults, such as physical and intellectual impairments, giftedness – Basic ethical principles of human life – Basic issues in educational anthropology, such as educational goals, consent and emancipation, normality and abnormality – Pedagogical approaches towards promoting and managing inclusion in selected child and youth welfare settings, such as diversity pedagogy, anti-bias education – Resource-oriented support and guidance of children, adolescents and young adults who are in need of special education, support and opportunities – Observation and documentation strategies in resource-oriented processes of guidance and educational support – Legal frameworks relating to inclusion, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, German Social Code Book VIII, German Social Code Book X – Planning support according to German Social Code Book IX | Minimum 240 |
| <p>4. <i>Professional organisation of a social pedagogical approach to education in different learning areas</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explanatory models for (self-) education, development and learning – Developmental domains and developmental tasks in different life phases (childhood, adolescence, young adulthood) – Aspects of diversity in developmental and educational processes – Education mandate of the German Social Code Book VIII | Minimum 600 |



| Fields of learning and content | Number of teaching hours |
|--|--------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Curricular frameworks for childhood education and care in the <i>Länder</i> – Instruments for the observation and recording of developmental and educational processes – The role of Educators in the areas of education – Domain-specific and didactical knowledge of the areas of learning – Meaning of the areas of learning for the development of children, adolescents and young adults – Organising learning environments and identifying educational chances for different target audiences – Planning, implementation and evaluation of resilience-oriented and resources-based educational activities in different fields of work. | |
| <p>5. <i>Organising educational partnerships with parents and caregivers and supporting transitions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Social transformation of the family – Diversity in family life worlds and living conditions – Rights and duties of parents – Models, approaches and forms of educational and childrearing partnerships – Forms of work with families – Methods of leading discussions and consultations with parents and caregivers – Presentation and moderating techniques – Supporting family upbringing – Support in upbringing – Endangerment of children’s welfare and protection mandate – Support and consultancy systems in the neighbourhood – Family education provision – Concept and organisation of the family centre – Life course transitions/ transitions theory – Models and approaches towards organising transitions in the child and youth welfare field. | Minimum 80 |
| <p>6. <i>Developing institution and team, networking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provider structures, funding and legislative frameworks of social pedagogical institutions – Organisational models and development – Quality development – Programme development – Conceptual frameworks for organising everyday life in child and youth welfare settings – Teamwork and team development – Role and functions in teams/ leadership tasks – Multi-professional teams – Conflict solutions and support models for teams – Public relations work – Networking in the neighbourhood – Networks in child and youth welfare fields of work and with other educational institutions. | Minimum 80 |
| Elective modules | Minimum 120 |
| Total hours/areas of learning | Minimum 2.400 |
| Placements (practica) in child and youth welfare settings | Minimum 1.200 |



Childhood Pedagogue (*Kindheitspädagogin / Kindheitspädagoge*)

Both the target competences and the curricula in degree programmes leading to the award of Childhood Pedagogue differ between higher education institutions¹³. With a view to the competence requirements specifically for working in the early childhood field, a “typical” catalogue was developed by a research team in Freiburg on the basis of HEI curricula, research on normative guidelines, secondary analyses, and their own case studies (Fröhlich-Gildhoff et al. 2014).

In 2022, an informal core curriculum for the childhood pedagogy study programmes was developed by an expert group (*Studiengangstag Pädagogik der Kindheit*). Ten study units are outlined, each assigned with a minimum number of credits (FBTS 2022).

Despite the fact that the number of degree programmes has been expanding for around 20 years or so, (there are now also Master's programmes at 20 university locations), a detailed analysis of the study programme development, the support offered for young academics, the research topics and resources and the professional background of university professors suggests that the systematic status of childhood pedagogy within the educational sciences cannot yet be considered as complete (Hechler et al. 2021).

In this chapter, four Bachelor's and two Master's programmes in (early) childhood pedagogy are presented as examples.

Table 8

Germany: Four full-time Bachelor programmes specialising in (Early) Childhood Pedagogy

| Higher Education Institution | Federal state | Provider | ECTS credits |
|--|------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| (1) University of Applied Sciences and Art, Hildesheim | Lower Saxony | Public | 180 |
| (2) Catholic University of Applied Sciences, Berlin | Berlin | Private (Catholic) | 210 |
| (3) Protestant University of Applied Sciences, Rheinland-Westfalen-Lippe, Bochum | North Rhine-Westphalia | Private (Protestant) | 180 |
| (4) University of Applied Sciences, Magdeburg-Stendal | Saxony-Anhalt | Public | 180 |

1) University of Applied Sciences and Art, Hildesheim

Bachelor programme: Childhood Pedagogy

The degree programme focuses on competences primarily for working in the fields of pedagogy, psychology and health, communication and counselling, social and childhood research as well as law and child protection. Guided field practice is integrated into the course and close links exist to local (E)CEC providers.

The course programme is organised in six study areas composing different numbers of modules:

1. General foundations
2. Pedagogy
3. Psychology and health
4. Scientific work
5. Professional orientation
6. Specialisation/in-depth focus

¹³ An overview of the study programmes in Germany can be found in the study programme database of the WiFF Professional development initiative for early childhood staff. For each degree programme there is a brief overview of the contents as well as access to the respective module handbook (WiFF 2023a).

The standard period of study of six semesters can be shortened by two semesters if the applicant is a state-certified Educator; the course can also be completed part time.

Further information: <https://www.hawk.de/de/studium/studiengaenge/ba-kindheitspaedagogik-hil-desheim>

2) Catholic University of Applied Sciences, Berlin

Bachelor programme: Childhood Pedagogy (B.A.) – curricular outline

Fields of study

Theoretical and empirical foundations of childhood pedagogy

- History, theory and understanding of the childhood pedagogy profession
- Propaedeutics and empirical research in the social sciences
- Child development, socialisation research and discourses of difference

Specific approaches in childhood pedagogy

- Practice, didactics and methods in childhood pedagogy
- Focal topics of study and practical projects (elective)
- Key skills, foreign language competence

Disciplines related to childhood pedagogy

- Educational sciences, psychology
- Sociology, social policy, law
- Anthropology, ethics

Target competences

- To professionally advocate for good and equitable living conditions for all children and their families, as well as for child- and family-friendly institutions and living spaces
- To protect the rights of children and to counteract all threats to the best interests of the child as well as all forms of discrimination and disadvantage
- To work in partnership with parents, to advise families, to develop support for families and to contribute to a better work-life balance
- To critically reflect social and political developments, to stand up for human/children's rights, social justice, the appreciation of diversity, the realisation of inclusion and principles of sustainability
- To contribute to the generation of knowledge and quality development in fields of childhood pedagogy through basic, empirical and evaluative research

Further information: <https://www.khsb-berlin.de/de/node/67044>

3) Protestant University of Applied Sciences, Rheinland-Westfalen-Lippe (Bochum)

Bachelor programme: Early Childhood Education (B.A.) – curricular outline

Brief portrait

The course content is designed to help students develop a personal pedagogical profile and a professional pedagogical attitude. The degree programme therefore provides opportunities for acquiring theoretical and practice-related knowledge on the one hand, and offers space for theory-based reflection on the other.

Course content

- Basic knowledge of early childhood education and related disciplines
- Research work
- Diversity/inclusion
- Focus on a specific educational area (visual arts and media, music, language, psycho-motor skills)

- Political, legal and administrative framework, community networking, everyday work, professional theory and personal professionalism
- Basics of centre management
- Practical research project and methods of empirical research
- Bachelor's thesis

The programme qualifies students for management positions in the early childhood sector, e.g.

- Group management/management of (E)CEC settings for children (kindergartens, family centres, etc.)
- Work in welfare associations or in local authorities and state institutions (e.g. specialist counselling, offering continuing professional development)
- Working in projects (e.g. inclusive education, intercultural work)
- Supporting and qualifying professionals providing home-based (E)CEC services

Further information: https://www.evh-bochum.de/ba_elementarpaedagogik.html

4) University of Applied Sciences, Magdeburg-Stendal

Bachelor programme: Childhood Pedagogy – Praxis, Leadership, Research (B.A.)

Aims of study programme

The study programme is geared towards the acquisition of theoretically and empirically based competence to work in fields of employment related to childhood education. Students are prepared for direct pedagogical work with children from the time they enter an (E)CEC centre until the end of out-of-school care. In addition, they are qualified for work with families, counselling and the promotion of community networking.

Leadership competences are acquired during the study programme. These enable students to take on challenging tasks in multidisciplinary teams. Students possess comprehensive skills in the field of research. These enable them to provide a scientific backing for educational practices. The specialist knowledge gained can be transferred to new practical issues and thus applied to the professional development of practice in the (E)CEC setting. In addition, students acquire the ability to reflect on their own professional self-development.

Course content

Knowledge acquisition is interdisciplinary and based on critical reflection of the theory-practice relationship as well as on a broad understanding of methods. Current research findings from all disciplines and subject areas relevant to childhood development and its support by public institutions are used. These include the educational and social sciences as well as basics of developmental psychology, exemplary in-depth knowledge of educational processes and didactics as well as systematic knowledge of key tasks of (E)CEC practices such as group dynamics, conflict resolution, methods of participation, quality development or early support.

A basic understanding of the social, political, structural, legal and institutional frameworks of education, upbringing and care in childhood is important as a basis for an academically qualified and thus innovation-open and flexible practice. The main focus of the study programme is on conceptual work and action research.

Two **field-based practica** are integrated into the degree programme. The first (15 days in full-time employment) takes place during the lecture-free period between the 1st and 2nd semesters. Within the framework of the module "Fields of work and professional identity", the content focuses on exploring a professional field relevant to childhood education. The second internship (30 days in full-time employment) takes place in the lecture-free period between the 4th and 5th semester. The module "Observation and documentation" focuses on the application and testing of instruments of observation and documentation in everyday practice.

Further information: <https://www.hs-magdeburg.de/studium/bachelor/kindheitspaedagogik-praxis-leitung-forschung.html>

Table 9

Germany: Two Master's study programmes in (Early) Childhood Education and Upbringing

| Higher education institution | Federal state | Provider | ECTS credits |
|---|-------------------|----------|--------------|
| 1) University of Education, Ludwigsburg | Baden-Württemberg | Public | 120 |
| 2) University of Leipzig | Saxony | Public | 120 |

1) University of Education, Ludwigsburg

Master's programme: Early Childhood Education and Upbringing (M.A.) – curricular outline

Course content

The Master's study programme in Early Childhood Education and Upbringing has two main focal points: leadership/management and educational research. The programme is a research-oriented, consecutive Master's degree course which builds on a completed initial relevant professional qualification.

| A. Management: Leadership, counselling and development | B. Educational research: Research, counselling and development |
|---|--|
| Educational and social science theories | Educational and social sciences |
| Management, research, counselling and development | Developing and organising educational institutions: Management Counselling, leadership and coaching |
| Educational research and development in pedagogical institutions | Foundations and methods of educational research Perspectives on educational research |
| Research-based learning: project and research workshop with study-related electives | Research workshop: Developing research questions, supervising projects |

Elective course profiles

| Course Profile A Management, Research, Counselling and Development | Course Profile B Educational Research, Leadership, Counselling and Development |
|--|---|
| <i>Modules only for students with a focus on Management Strategy and Management Procedures</i> | <i>Modules only for students with a focus on Educational Research and Development of childhood educational institutions</i> |
| Management procedures in early childhood education settings | Didactics research and development |
| Staff and organisational management | Consolidation of subject-specific knowledge and didactics in 1-2 compulsory areas (language; art, visual culture; music; natural sciences and technology; social sciences; mathematics; religion, ethics) |

Further information: <http://www.ph-ludwigsburg.de/11652.html>

2) University of Leipzig

Master's programme: Professionalising Early Childhood Education (M.A.) – curricular outline

Structure and content

The study programme includes four semesters of on-site studies in full-time or part-time format. Students possess 120 ECTS credits during the course of studies in 13 compulsory modules, one elective module and the Master's thesis. Two field-based **compulsory practica** of at least 240 hours are required.

Course content is structured into three areas:

1. Professionalisation
 - Professionalism
 - Leading a conversation and counselling
 - Management and leadership
 - Learning and teaching in the life course
2. Early childhood education
 - Teaching methods in the early years
 - Pedagogical quality
 - Interdisciplinary perspectives on health and illness in the life course
 - Interdisciplinary consolidation (elective module)
3. Theory, empiricism and practice
 - Praxeological research
 - Supporting module for the practica phases
 - Supporting module for the Master's thesis phase

Further information: https://www.uni-leipzig.de/fileadmin/studiengangsdatenbank/dokumente/Studienfuehrer_Professionalisierung_fruehkindlicher_Bildung_M.A.pdf

Childcarers, Social Assistants, Socio-pedagogical Assistants (*Sozialpädagogische Assistenzkräfte*)

Competences

A *Competence-oriented Qualification Profile for the IPE of (E)CEC staff working as Assistants* was published for the first time in 2020 (KMK 2020b). It sets out the professional standards and fields of action for the occupational groups of Childcarers, Social Assistants and Socio-pedagogical Assistants. The competences described in the qualification profile are binding for implementation in the *Länder*. The fundamental dimension of "professional attitude" is presented here, along with a selection of the knowledge and skills areas for the six fields of action of the competence profile.

Table 10

Germany: Competence-oriented Qualification Profile for IPE leading to (E)CEC Assistant staff awards (KMK 2020b, extracts)

| Professional attitude |
|---|
| <p><i>Leaving certificate holders</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are open, curious, attentive and tolerant towards the world, themselves and other people – Show empathy for children, their families and their different circumstances – Take into account the importance of emotional bonds and social relationships in their educational work – Behave democratically – Communicate appropriately – Build pedagogical relationships and manage them professionally – Develop a pedagogical ethos, take responsibility for their own actions – See themselves as role models in their actions – Understand the children as subjects of their development – Respect and observe cultural backgrounds and the diversity of goals and values in the education, upbringing and care of children – Reflect critically on what they have experienced – Reflect on the biographical aspects of their own actions and are able to perceive their own and other people's needs – Inform themselves about unknown facts and find their own ways of learning – Reflect on their own professional development process and understand the development of their professionalism as a lifelong process |



| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work responsibly in a team and contribute their own ideas – Support the core professionals in planning and managing projects – Cooperate with all participants in the field of work – Take joint responsibility for the development and support of children – Deal with open work processes and uncertainties in professional action in a way appropriate to the situation. | |
|---|--|
| Knowledge areas (selection) | Competences and skills (selection) |
| 1. Perceive children in their living environments and develop pedagogical relationships to them | |
| <p><i>Award holders possess</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Basic professional knowledge from relevant disciplines – Consolidated professional knowledge about the influence of culture, religion, living conditions, social and institutional norms and rules on the behaviour and experiences of children – Consolidated professional knowledge about bonding theories and the shaping of pedagogical relationships which are supportive for their development. | <p><i>Award holders</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Regard children in their individuality and personality as subjects of pedagogical work and support their desire to learn new competences – Build up and shape relationships to children which support their development and bonding on the basis of perceptions and observations – Use verbal and non-verbal forms of communication with children in a targeted and situation-appropriate way and reflect on the influence of these on the children. |
| 2. Support developmental and educational processes | |
| <p><i>Award holders possess</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consolidated subject knowledge of educational areas (e.g. language education, music education, mathematics and science education, physical activity and health, ecological and sustainable education, media education) on the basis of the respective curricular framework – Consolidated knowledge about observation and documentation procedures relating to the developmental status and processes of children – Consolidated didactic-methodical knowledge for the planning, implementation and reflection of pedagogical activities. | <p><i>Award holders</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Take into account the variety and diversity of cultural, religious and personal educational needs in their pedagogical work – Assist in the analysis of the living and learning environments of children and in the derivation of action goals for the socio-pedagogical work – Design an environment conducive to development, taking into account the living environments and the resulting individual needs and group interests of children. |
| 3. Support groups in a pedagogical way | |
| <p><i>Award holders possess</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consolidated subject knowledge of group dynamics and consider these when shaping educational activities – Consolidated subject knowledge of inclusive and diversity-conscious and gender-sensitive pedagogy in the context of current developments in the field – Consolidated subject knowledge of didactic-methodical approaches to education, care and upbringing in small groups in the field of social pedagogy. | <p><i>Award holders</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Plan and shape activities that enable equal and equitable experiences in mixed-sex and same-sex groups – Assist in the planning of stimulating learning environments and consider the respective composition of the group – Recognise conflicts between children and support them in solving these independently, using the conflict as a chance. |
| 4. Co-operate with parents and caregivers | |
| <p><i>Award holders possess</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consolidated knowledge about family life situations in their socio-spatial contexts as well | <p><i>Award holders</i></p> |



| | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> as the influences of cultural and religious environments and ethnic affiliation – Consolidated knowledge of different models, methods and forms of cooperation with parents and caregivers – Consolidated knowledge of legal and institutional frameworks for the cooperation with parents and other caregivers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Describe areas of responsibility as a social pedagogy assistant in the context of cooperation with parents and caregivers – Participate in the identification and assessment of individually different needs and resources of families and caregivers – Reflect on their own professional and personal competences in relation to working with parents and other caregivers and derive consequences for their own further knowledge-building. |
| 5. Assist in supporting transitions | |
| <p><i>Award holders possess</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consolidated professional knowledge about designing transitions – Consolidated knowledge about legislation for early childhood settings and child and youth welfare services in Germany – Basic professional knowledge about child and youth welfare institutions and support systems. | <p><i>Award holders</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Assist the team in the development of centre-specific strategies for the design of transitions – Assist in the co-operation with other settings and services – Reflect on the implementation and quality of transition practices according to specific criteria. |
| 6. Carry out care and support measures | |
| <p><i>Award holders possess</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Basic knowledge about legislation and documentation requirements regarding assessments on the endangerment of child welfare according to Book VIII of the Social Code – Consolidated knowledge of age-appropriate and healthy nutrition for children as well as the effect of different influences on the nutritional behaviour of children – Consolidated knowledge of hygiene measures and control systems with regard to hygiene regulations (food hygiene, workplace hygiene). | <p><i>Award holders</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participate in the implementation of measures in the context of child protection, safety, health and hygiene on the basis of observation and documentation as well as legal regulations and check their compliance – Guide children towards healthy, ecological and sustainable behaviour – Carry out care measures and activities in such a way that the emotional, social, cognitive and motor development of the child is supported. |

Curricular content

The curricula for the professional training of state-certified Assistants differ depending on the federal state, the type of vocational school (*Berufsschule* or *Berufsfachschule*) and the specific course focus.

This is illustrated in the following three examples.

Bavaria

The curriculum for the *Berufsfachschule für Kinderpflege* (2010) for Childcarers is divided into six learning areas: (1) Perceiving persons and situations, observing and explaining behaviour; (2) Recognising and meeting everyday needs; (3) Planning, implementing and reflecting on educational activities; (4) Stimulating and accompanying educational processes; (5) Shaping relationships and communication; (6) Cooperating with all those involved in the educational process (StMUK 2010). The training qualifies students for pedagogical work in various socio-pedagogical fields of work, especially in the care, education and upbringing of children from infancy to early school age (StMBW and StMAS 2014).

Rheinland-Palatinate

The subject-related teaching of the curriculum for the *Höhere Berufsfachschule* specialising in Social Assistance (2019) comprises seven learning fields: (1) Finding their way and engaging in professional situations (approx. 80 teaching hours); (2) Observing, understanding and stimulating children's educational and developmental processes (200 teaching hours); (3) Perceiving, understanding and stimulating educational and developmental processes of people with disabilities (120 teaching hours); (4) Using play, movement and nature experiences for educational processes; (5) Enabling musical and creative educational processes; (6) Supporting healthy eating and conducting, guiding and supporting domestic activities; (7) Conducting, guiding and accompanying health-promoting and care activities. Part of the training is a 12 to 16-week practicum in a socio-pedagogical institution. Award holders can work in (E)CEC centres and special education institutions (Ministerium für Bildung Rheinland-Pfalz 2019).

Saxony-Anhalt

The curriculum of the *Berufsfachschule – Sozialassistenten* (2017) for trainee Social Assistants is structured according to eight learning areas: (1) Developing professional identity and perspectives (60 to 80 teaching hours); (2) Applying different learning and working techniques (40 to 60 teaching hours); (3) Understanding pedagogical and psychological processes and applying them in a professional way (240 to 280 teaching hours); (4) Helping to shape needs-oriented support for people in the areas of health and care in selected life situations (180 to 200 teaching hours); (5) Helping to design needs-oriented support for people in the areas of nutrition and food preparation (200 to 220 teaching hours); (6) Structuring, reflecting on and participating in educational, upbringing and care processes (260 to 300 teaching hours); (7) Designing musical-creative activities and using media for pedagogical purposes (160 to 200 teaching hours); (8) Assisting in quality assurance measures and conceptual tasks (40 to 60 teaching hours). Award holders can work in a variety of socio-pedagogical settings: (E)CEC centres, after-school and extended, all-day schools, residential homes for children and young people, psychiatric clinics for young people, convalescent homes, outpatient family care, care homes for the elderly and disabled and children's wards in hospitals (Ministerium für Bildung Sachsen-Anhalt 2017).

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Diversification of initial professional education formats

Due to the shortage of qualified staff for the constantly expanding field of early childhood education and care, which has been the case for more than ten years, new IPE formats have emerged which are offered alongside the traditional qualifying routes in this field. A trend can be observed in the federal states to offer as many qualification paths as possible in parallel. In general, a pluralisation of IPE formats can be observed (BMFSFJ 2021a; FKB 2023, 132).

Dualised work-integrated qualification pathways for (E)CEC trainees

Since 2012, a new qualification pathway for trainee **Educators** has been developing. The "practice-integrated and remunerated training" (PiA) was launched in Baden-Württemberg with the aim of creating more training places and at the same time attracting new target groups to train for work in (E)CEC (Ministerium für Kultus, Jugend und Sport Baden-Württemberg 2012). By 2017, the pilot project had become part of the regular programmes on offer.

By the end of 2020, this IPE format existed in all 16 federal states except Saxony-Anhalt, either as a pilot model or as a regular offer (Weltzien et al. 2021, 7). The entry requirement is usually a secondary school leaving certificate or an equivalent qualification as well as one year of prac-

tical work in a socio-pedagogical institution. Students conclude a three-year training employment contract with the service provider of the (E)CEC setting and receive a monthly remuneration – since 2019, €1,140 in the first year of training, €1,202 in the second year and €1,303 in the third year (Erzieherin-ausbildung.de 2023). In 2018, a milestone was reached, when this training format was included in the scope of the collective agreement for public service trainees (König et al. 2018, 49).

In Bavaria, a similar model has been on offer since 2016/2017, known as "Educator training with an optimised work component" (OptiPrax; Bayerische Staatsregierung 2017). The pilot project is intended to raise the attractiveness of the Educator profession. The students conclude a training contract with the (E)CEC provider agency, which also pays them. The minimum entry requirement is an intermediate school leaving certificate. In three different training variants (all with at least 2,400 hours), the title of "state-certified Educator" or "Bachelor Professional in Social Services" can be awarded within three to four years, depending on the trainee's previous education.

In Baden-Württemberg, since the school year 2020/2021, the classic **Childcarer** qualifying route will also be supplemented by a practice-integrated and remunerated training format, initially as a pilot project at two vocational schools (Ministerium für Kultus, Jugend und Sport Baden-Württemberg 2020). The job title awarded will be changed to "state-certified Social Pedagogy Assistant". The education/training lasts three years and is divided into a theoretical component at the vocational school (3 days per week) and a practical component in an (E)CEC setting (2 days per week). The students enter into a training contract with an (E)CEC centre and receive an allowance paid by the centre provider.

Part-time options for trainee Educators

Another alternative route to become a state-certified Educator is to study part time at a vocational technical college for social pedagogy. This is possible in all federal states. The number of hours remains the same and the duration is extended accordingly (KMK 2002/2021). The college-based part of the IPE then lasts between three and four years, the work placement between one and two years. The same admission requirements apply as for a full-time college-based training.

System permeability

Chapter 4.1 illustrated that existing qualification routes for work in (E)CEC settings range from vocational school pathways (Assistant Co-workers) over specialised tertiary-level college courses (Educators) to higher education degree programmes (Childhood Pedagogues). They are thus located at all levels of the vocational education and training (VET) system (Fuchs-Rechlin and Rauschenbach 2020, 5).

Whereas in the past, changing from one level of the system to the next was more or less impossible, this has improved in recent years. In some higher education programmes, a completed IPE as a state-certified Educator is credited as part of a higher education degree. At the University of Lüneburg, for example, 40 ECTS credits are taken into account for participation in the Social Work degree programme, shortening the study programme by two semesters. The Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences also offers 30 ECTS credits to Educators wishing to study for a Bachelor's degree in Social Work (ErzieherIn.de 2015). These examples can be viewed as a new form of system permeability which makes it possible for interested persons to obtain a formally higher qualification.



Upskilling courses for work as a “Pedagogical Specialist in (E)CEC centres”

In Bavaria an extensive development programme has been introduced – alongside the classical IPE routes – for a step-by-step qualifying pathway into work in the ECEC field (see IFP/StMAS 2024). An initial part of this programme was an upskilling module for working as a “Pedagogical Specialist in (E)CEC centres” introduced in 2017.

The target groups of this upskilling course are Childcarers, Curative/Remedial Educators, Primary School Teachers, persons seeking career changes and applicants from other countries with a relevant academic degree. Entry requirements are an award as state-certified Childcarer or support worker, a minimum age of 25 years and, depending on the previous qualification, three years of work experience (in a post at least 50% of a full-time post). Primary School Teachers who have successfully completed the First State Examination or lateral entrants with a relevant academic degree only need to have had two years of work experience; for Primary School Teachers with the Second State Examination, no teaching experience is required. The course comprises a nine-month extra-occupational module phase ending in a theoretical examination and a six-month supervised internship in an (E)CEC centre. Those who pass the Certificate are awarded the title of “Pedagogical Specialist in (E)CEC centres”, which is included in the “Professions Register for (E)CEC centres” (*Kita Berufeliste*) administered by the Bavarian State Youth Office (Zentrum Bayern Familie und Soziales 2022).

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

(E)CEC settings as a “site of learning” (*Lernort Praxis*) have not traditionally had a clear profile in the IPE of Educators, the largest group of core professionals in Germany. Even though the Conference of Ministers for Youth Affairs drew attention in the late 1990s to the significant role of the workplace component in IPE (JMK 1998) and three years later potentially strengthened the status of this learning site (JMK 2001), establishing a formal guarantee of the joint and equal responsibility of college and (E)CEC centre as sites of learning has been slow in getting off the ground, although the topic has featured in the professional literature for some time (Ebert 2002; Oberhuemer 2015; Flämig et al. 2015; Ebert et al. 2018).

The focus of this chapter is primarily on the work based component of the initial professional education of (Early Childhood) Educators. This will be followed by a brief reference to the work based phases in Childhood Pedagogy degree programmes.

(Early Childhood) Educator (*Erzieherin / Erzieher*)

The relevant framework agreement of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK 2020b) stipulates a minimum of 1,200 hours of field practice in socio-pedagogical working environments for the traditional full-time college-based training of Educators at the *Fachschule*. This corresponds to one third of the total course length.

A variety of organisational models can be observed both in full-time, part-time and practice-integrated IPE formats (König et al. 2018). Despite the different regional and institution-specific framework conditions, there are basically two basic forms of full-time college-based training for Educators (cf. also Janssen 2010). About half of the *Länder* prefer an **additive** training model, i.e. a two-year primarily theoretical component at the *Fachschule/Fachakademie* followed by a

one-year work placement in an (E)CEC centre or other socio-pedagogical field of activity. Otherwise, within the framework of an **integrated** training model, the work based component is incorporated in specific phases over a period of three years.

In the additive model, the practicum takes place in an (E)CEC setting chosen by the trainee. Here they work full time and conclude a corresponding employment contract with the service provider as the employing organisation. The host setting usually also has a contract with the relevant vocational technical college. In some federal states, the internship, which usually lasts one year, can be shortened to six months if the trainee Educator already possesses relevant practical experience. Some *Länder* waive the internship altogether if the person has already completed a relevant course of training, such as the Childcarer qualifying route.

The trainees are professionally supervised in the (E)CEC setting by a core professional (often called 'practice guidance'), and also receive support from the vocational technical college providing the IPE. In most cases, further theoretical knowledge is provided on one day per week or alternatively in compact courses.

Up to now, there has been no agreed position title¹⁴ for the professionals who take on the practical support in the (E)CEC setting. Until fairly recently, there was no qualification requirement, task profile or remuneration for these professionals (Oberhuemer 2014). In the meantime, however, all federal states require a certified professional training as a basic qualification for this activity. In 12 federal states, further requirements are also placed on the mentor in the form of professional experience (between 'two' and 'several' years) and in four federal states, proof of specific further training is required (König et al. 2018, 47f). In Rhineland-Palatinate, a framework agreement on practical guidance has applied to all service providers since 2006.

In the (E)CEC setting, the trainee Educators participate in practical projects and gather experience in guided activities. Together with the professional supporting them, they reflect on these and their own role. Teachers from the vocational technical college visit the students and observe and evaluate their practice. The grades given for the practicum help decide on admission to the final examination.

Childhood Pedagogue (*Kindheitspädagogin / Kindheitspädagoge*)

In the case of higher education degree programmes for prospective Childhood Pedagogues, the decision on the weighting of the practice component lies with the respective higher education institution. In a joint resolution of the Ministers of Education and the Ministers of Youth and Family Affairs of the *Länder* (KMK/JFMK 2010), an accompanying practical component of at least 30 ECTS credits is recommended for a study programme of 180 ECTS credits. As a rule, this minimum recommendation is a requirement for the state recognition of the professional title "*Kindheitspädagogin, Kindheitspädagoge*" (Stieve et al. 2014, 81). However, some higher education institutions give more weight to this practical component. For example, at the Emden University of Applied Sciences in Lower Saxony (Hochschule Emden-Leer 2019), a total of 45 ECTS credits are allocated to this part of the programme. It consists of two internships (9 and 12 ECTS credits respectively), a practical project (11 ECTS credits) and a six-week internship abroad with preparatory and follow-up seminars (13 ECTS credits).

¹⁴ Examples include training leader or training supervisor, practice mentor or mentor (König et al. 2018, 44).



6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

A number of European studies indicate that continuing professional development (CPD) is more effective when it is oriented towards the current competence needs of staff and when it is provided on a regular, supervised and long-term basis (CARE 2015; Eurofound 2015; Sharmahd et al. 2017; Jensen and Iannone 2018). Furthermore, a systematic review of the international literature on the effectiveness of different approaches to CPD in early childhood education has shown that training approaches which combine coaching with new knowledge and opportunities to reflect on practice are most likely to improve quality in early childhood settings (Rogers, Brown, and Poblete 2017).

Continuing professional development in Germany may be theme-oriented or competency-oriented, course-based or setting-based, provide specialist training for a specific designated role, or focus on a specific target group.

This chapter will foreground general aspects relating to the framework conditions for CPD for those working in (E)CEC centres rather than referring to specific occupational groups. In general, however, it can be stated that in comparison to (Early Childhood) Educators, the other relevant occupational groups (Childcarers, Social Assistants, Socio-pedagogical Assistants, also Childhood Pedagogues) have so far been the focus of relatively few CPD providers (see e.g. Buschle und Gruber 2018).

Legislation and regulation

In accordance with the federal structures in Germany, there is no nation-wide framework setting out specifications for the continuing professional development of staff working in early childhood settings, but there are recommendations issued by the Conference of Ministers for Family and Youth Affairs (see e.g. JFMK/KMK 2010). Continuing professional development is anchored in relevant legislation of the *Länder* as a funding-worthy instrument of quality improvement, although views regarding the scope and intensity of steering procedures vary considerably. Beyond this, the non-governmental provider organisations in the non-profit sector, which in Germany have a dual role as employer and CPD provider, have their own provider-specific requirements and conditions regarding the CPD of early childhood personnel.

Main forms

A comparative study on the continuing professional development systems in six European countries (Oberhuemer 2012) differentiates between non-formal and formal professional development.

In Germany, the main forms identified in three nationwide WiFF studies (Behr und Walter 2010; Baumeister und Grieser 2011; Buschle und Gruber 2018) are mostly **non-formal** professional development activities. These mainly aim to deepen professional and personal competences within the workplace and the field in general; they are not conceptualised as cumulative and credit-bearing qualifications with formal certification for the purpose of career advancement.

Both Behr und Walter (2010) and Baumeister und Grieser (2011) have found that the vast majority of CPD seminars for Educators are short-term events of up to three days. Other, less frequently occurring formats are: team-based or in-house seminars; seminars lasting three to five days; training series that extend over a period of around twelve days and are sometimes offered



on a modular basis; supervision offers; quality circles; distance learning courses or e- or blended learning offers; excursions and study trips; specialist conferences.

Due to the predominant participation in short-term events, a recent study (Gessler und Gruber 2022) therefore investigated the question of whether the knowledge acquired by early education managers and specialists in continuing education is sustainable in the sense of knowledge transfer (see *Chapter 9* for a project description).

Forms of **formal CPD** include courses for which a provider-specific certificate is awarded (e.g. leadership competence) which can be important for career progression within the practitioner's employer structures; in some cases, a state-recognised certificate may be awarded. In Rhineland-Palatinate, for example, in the context of the introduction of official curricular guidance in early childhood education, a cooperation initiative established by the relevant Ministry for employers/providers, municipal umbrella organisations, the state-wide parent committee and the trade unions led to a mutually agreed professional development series (of at least 15 days). For some years now, a series of linked qualification modules has also been offered for providers of (E)CEC facilities. The current offer is called: "Management and quality development of (E)CEC settings – Tandem training for (E)CEC providers and centre leaders in 4 modules - with certification option" (KitaAkademie Rheinland-Pfalz e.V. 2024).

Advanced courses of study with an early childhood specialisation which can be carried out alongside work, or Master's study programmes, are also formal categories of CPD. However, a nationwide framework system of modules for which agreed credits are awarded and which lead to career progression, or an accredited system of cross-provider modules which are recognised as an entry point to advanced studies, have not as yet been established – at least not as a visible system (Oberhuemer 2012, 77). There are as yet no binding quality standards for competence-oriented CPD (Meyer 2018).

In recent years, there have been repeated calls in the professional policy debate for further and advanced training which, in addition to increasing permeability within the ECEC system, also enable career advancement and are better remunerated. For horizontal differentiation, the German Association for Public and Private Welfare (2022) recommends the creation of positions, e.g. as "Specialist Educators", who support and advise the team and management on various topics (inclusion, language) (see also *Chapter 2.3*). Functional positions with more responsibility and also higher pay (e.g. as quality officer, practicum guidance mentor) would promote *vertical* differentiation. These positions should be linked to a "certified qualification". Although these proposals are discussed positively in the professional community, their financing and implementation still depends very much on the specific circumstances of the *Länder* and the providers (Deutscher Verein 2022).

CPD providers

In general, the continuing professional development market for the ECEC sector in Germany is rather confusing and is characterised by a great variety of continuing education and training (CET) providers. Alongside public providers (federal government, *Länder*, municipalities) and private commercial providers, it is primarily the non-profit providers (church organisations, political parties, trade unions, employers' associations, professional associations and welfare organisations) that offer further training for staff in ECEC settings or maintain CET institutions (Buschle und Gruber 2018). According to the nationwide survey by Beher and Walter (2010, see above), the heterogeneous group of non-profit providers is by far the largest group providing CPD for (Early Childhood) Educators in Germany.

The individual CET institutions in Germany are also diverse. They include one-person companies, welfare organisations, educational institutes/academies, adult education centres, public authorities, scientific academies/institutes, church and religious communities, vocational schools, business enterprises, universities, professional or trade associations and business-related CET providers (Beher und Walter 2010, 9). In some *Länder*, vocational technical colleges are also recognised as official CET providers.

Leave entitlement

Leave entitlement for participation in professional development activities is regulated in different ways in each *Land* – both for core practitioners and assistant staff. In most *Länder* it is possible for employees to apply for educational leave. Employees are generally entitled to five days of fully paid leave per year. According to a link posted on the German Education Portal (*Deutscher Bildungsserver*), these entitlements do not apply in Bavaria and Saxony (cf. InfoWeb-Weiterbildung 2024). In a representative survey of 1430 ECEC settings, 67% reported a specified number of days for participation in CPD (Geiger 2019, 81). However, the current staff shortages in the sector are a barrier towards making use of leave entitlement (Buschle und Gruber 2018, 62).

Obligatory or optional?

As a rule, CPD is not a compulsory requirement for ECEC staff in Germany. Only a few federal states have a regulation in this regard (e.g. in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania a training obligation of five days and in Thuringia of two days per year is enshrined in law).

In general, an employer is neither obliged to offer nor to arrange CPD activities. This excludes agreements that are set out in the employment contract (Advocard 2023).

Funding support

With regard to the coverage of costs for CPD, this usually depends on the agreements between employee and employer. The employer is not automatically obliged to bear the costs. The modalities for CPD are often stipulated in the employment contract. If the employer makes attendance mandatory, they must also bear the costs (Personalwissen 2023).

In the early childhood education and care sector, this means that the willingness of providers to cover the costs can vary greatly. A representative survey of 1,430 childcare facilities revealed that 65% of childcare facilities have a budget for further training (Geiger 2019, 81). In two thirds (66%) of the facilities surveyed, the costs of training are covered in full and in 39% in part (Geiger 2019, 82).

Access to CPD

Overall, the pedagogical staff in ECEC show a high willingness and motivation for further professional development (Buschle und Gruber 2018). Unfortunately, they are not infrequently prevented from participating by high workloads, lack of time, high costs of events and staff shortages in the institution (König und Buschle 2020). According to the estimates of the CPD providers in the nationwide WiFF survey (Beher und Walter 2010, 30), almost half (46%) were "completely" of the opinion that work pressures are a considerable barrier to participation in CPD. Between 43% and 47% of the respondents said that paid time off was far too rare and that participation fees and other costs were not met adequately by the employers of early childhood staff.



Supporting the CPD of (E)CEC Assistants is a matter for the individual employer, i.e. service provider.

CPD and career advancement

Until now, no coherent system of career advancement through continuing education and training has been established in Germany, not even for Centre Leaders in ECEC. Nevertheless, the growing complexity and ever widening fields of responsibility of Centre Leaders are recognised by those responsible for ECEC settings and an increasing number of CPD options focusing on management and leadership are being provided (see below).

Within the framework of the study "Career paths in ECEC" (Weßler-Poßberg et al. 2022), commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Family and Youth Affairs, a modular concept for different specialist careers in the ECEC professions is presented. Proposals for longer-term development opportunities that build on initial professional education and experience are based primarily on the fact that a lack of development opportunities is the most common reason for dissatisfaction among ECEC professionals. **Horizontal** career paths (in the field of language, digital or inclusive education), **diagonal** career paths (positions in student practicum guidance, quality development) and **vertical** career paths (management of childcare facilities, extracurricular all-day care) are mentioned as examples. Curricula are available for the qualifications (ten 2-day blocks, half of which are self-study), but also exemplary cost calculations. A final certificate of achievement (20-30 ECTS credits) can facilitate credit transfer to a university degree programme.

Key content focus of CPD for core professionals

In principle, the setting of topics in the CPD market is fast-moving (König und Buschle 2020). Compared to the "hot topics" identified by Baumeister und Grieser (2011) in an analysis of 96 CPD programmes of the larger providers, only a few years later a number of shifts and new priorities could be identified (Buschle und Gruber 2018). 15 topic areas appeared particularly often in the programmes: Developmental, educational and learning processes (696); reflection, attitude, self-image, role (560); communication, holding conversations, conflict management (528); cooperation with parents, families (412); music, dance, creativity, art, culture (388); children up to three years, crèches (376); leadership, management (328); methods of pedagogical work (321); inclusion, integration, participation (301); stress management, self-management, time management (288); language education, multilingualism (279); religion, philosophy, mourning (245); personnel development, team development (223); observation, documentation (221); body, movement, sport (214). It was found that compared to earlier studies, topics such as 'documentation and observation' had moved more into the background, whereas 'reflection', for example, had gained in importance. 'Cooperation with parents and families' continued to be highly ranked. The focus on pedagogical work with children under 3 years of age and current education policy topics such as inclusion have increased in importance. It was noticeable that there were comparatively few offers on the topics of 'digital education' or 'education for sustainable development'.

Research on CPD

Key findings of the aforementioned study by Buschle und Gruber (2018) included the following: The professionals perceive CPD as an important factor for high quality in ECEC. This is also reflected in the high level of participation - even if often only in terms of shorter courses. Above all, responding to constantly changing challenges cannot (only) be taught in the context of initial professional education. The motives for participation are listed as: own interest, suggestion of

the Centre Leader, obligation. In most cases, however, participants do not attend CPD primarily because they expect a career advancement or a better salary (Friederich und Buschle 2021).

Cooperation initiatives

In some federal states, regular inter-agency cooperation in the field of CPD for Educators and ECEC Assistants has been established. An example from Bavaria: The *FORUM Fortbildung* convened by the State Institute for Early Childhood Research and Media Literacy (IFP) was founded as early as 2001 as a working group including representatives of continuing education and training provision, initial professional education, and research. It can be seen as a special example of continuous and state-wide cooperation to promote the conceptual and organisational advancement of CPD opportunities for the (E)CEC field. Since 2010, all offers of the participating associations and organisations can also be viewed as a CPD database on the IFP website (www.ifp.bayern.de). This enhances the state-wide and cross-agency transparency for ECEC professionals considerably. The idea and concept of the database originated in *FORUM Fortbildung* and is financed by the Bavarian State Ministry for Family, Labour and Social Affairs (StMAS).

Current policy debates

In recent years, the CPD of early childhood education staff has been a consistent topic in professional policy discussions in Germany. This is emphasised in a number of studies dedicated to the upgrading of social professions in general and the career advancement of Early Childhood Educators in particular. For example, a study by prognos AG on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Family and Youth Affairs (Weßler-Poßberg et al. 2022) presented a modular concept for various specialist careers in the socio-pedagogical professions. In the Sinus Youth Survey (2020), young people were asked about their views on the occupational field of early childhood education and care. They considered it to be varied but not very attractive in terms of career opportunities. Also, a brochure published by the Federal Ministry of Family and Youth Affairs on the systemic relevance of the ECEC occupational field and also a project called "Mehr-Wert" (More Value) of the Fraunhofer Institute for Labour Economics and Organisation (cf. BMFSFJ 2021c). deal with the upgrading of ECEC occupations, stressing the need to strengthen their attractiveness.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

The pay of staff in (E)CEC centres varies according to the service provider they are employed by. Whereas in the private, mostly non-profit sector it is generally the providers who decide on the level of earnings, in the public sector pay is usually bound by collective bargaining agreements. Private ECEC service providers are not bound by these agreements, so the salary is a matter of negotiation. The same applies to the number of days granted for holiday leave, special payments and more (Schuhmacher 2023). However, many private providers base staff salaries on the public sector agreements (TVöD) – and the current high demand provides the pedagogical staff with a good basis for negotiation.

The public sector (TVöD) pay grades are based on job characteristics, such as “Educator with demanding tasks” (e.g. Educators who work with children with special needs), “Group Leader” or “Centre Leader in a setting with more than 100 places”). Depending on the length of service,

increments are added to the basic salary. After one year of service on the first scale point, a person advances to scale point 2; after three years, to scale point 3; after four years each, to scale points 4 and 5; and after five years, to scale point 6. This means that ECEC staff do not reach the highest seniority scale point until 17 years after starting their career (Infoportal öffentlicher Dienst 2023b). In most cases, employees also receive a Christmas bonus and staff may be paid extra for living in specific cities/locations.

After the most recent public sector collective bargaining round at the end of 2023 for the year 2024, the basic starting salary of a **Childcarer** with demanding tasks is now €3,091.81 gross per month, and that of an **Educator** with demanding tasks is €3,371.39 (compared to €2,599.20 in 2017). In the highest salary scale for each occupation the gross basic salaries increase to €3,925.36 and €4,902.44 respectively. The **Centre Leader** of a setting with more than 180 places has a starting salary of €4,458.20; in the highest salary scale the respective amount is €6,576.36 (compared with €5,446.34 in 2017) (Infoportal öffentlicher Dienst 2023a, see *Table 11*).

Table 11

Germany: Salaries of ECEC staff, 2022/23 (valid from 01.03.2024 until 31.12.2024)

| Staff categories | Salary Scale 1 / Scale 6 |
|---|--------------------------|
| Childcarer | |
| S 2/3 (regular) | € 2,719.14 / € 3,237.95 |
| S 4 (with demanding tasks) | € 3,091.81 / € 3,925.36 |
| Educator | |
| S 8a (regular) | € 3,303.85 / € 4,409.39 |
| S 8b (with demanding tasks) | € 3,371.39 / € 4,902.44 |
| Centre Leader | |
| S 13 (in settings with 40–70 places) | € 3,756.97 / € 5,169.65 |
| S 18 (in settings with over 180 places) | € 4,458.20 / € 6,576.36 |

Source: Infoportal öffentlicher Dienst 2023a

Since **Childhood Pedagogues** do not as yet have an agreed job classification, the collectively agreed classification for “other employees” who “perform corresponding activities based on equivalent skills and experience” is used for these Bachelor graduates. This means that grouping is often a matter of negotiation and is often done in the same way as for Educators with (particularly) demanding tasks. In general, a university degree does not have a great impact on the salary of (Early Childhood) Educators. Persons with degree-level qualifications earn significantly more in business or research (Infoportal öffentlicher Dienst 2023b).

However, compared to the salaries of Primary School Teachers (most of whom are civil servants), the pay of professionals in ECEC centres is still significantly lower, with the differences between the western and eastern *Länder* decreasing overall. In 2022/23, a civil servant teacher (entry-level salary A12) earned between €3,619.23 gross (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) and €4,107.37 (Brandenburg) per month (Infoportal öffentlicher Dienst 2023c, valid until 30.09.2023).

Teachers in salaried employment are rather rare (mostly in temporary positions) and are paid nationwide (except in Hesse, where a separate collective bargaining agreement applies) according to the collective bargaining agreement of the federal states (TV-L, in municipalities TVöD). The starting gross salary averages €3,990.46 (EG11, January 2023) (GEW 2023). Both civil servants and salaried teachers are paid according to activity and level of professional experience between €3,520.65 gross (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania) and €3,979.84 (Bavaria) per month (Infoportal Öffentlicher Dienst 2022c).



7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in (E)CEC provision

According to the Early Education Staffing Barometer, a total of 722,043 persons worked in (E)CEC facilities in 2021 (FKB 2023), including out-of-school settings. Full-time employees work 38.5 hours per week or more, part-time employees work less than 38.5 hours per week. There are virtually no differences between the public and independent provider sectors. The decision to work full time or part time is agreed between the provider and the professional.

In 2022, very large regional differences were recorded: in the western federal states, 32.9% worked full time, in the eastern states (including Berlin) only 21.6%. One possible reason for this could be that many staff in the eastern federal states reduced their working hours to part time a few years ago in order to retain their jobs. On average, 34.1% of early childhood education professionals (excluding administrative staff) worked full time in 2023 (Destatis/Genesis 2023). If all employees in (E)CEC settings are taken into account (not only educational professionals, but also administrative, housekeeping and technical staff), 30.1% of staff were in full-time employment in 2023 (Destatis/Genesis 2023). The proportion varied considerably in 2022: from 15.6% in Brandenburg to 42.2% in North Rhine-Westphalia, including administrative staff (Destatis 2023, own calculations).

Table 12

Germany: Pedagogical staff – full-time and part-time employment in (E)CEC centres, 2023

| Number of working hours | Number of employees (excluding administrative personnel) | Proportion in % |
|-------------------------|---|-----------------|
| 38.5 and more | 253,755 | 34.1 |
| 32 to under 38.5 | 144,353 | 19.4 |
| 21 to under 31 | 213,810 | 28.7 |
| 10 to under 21 | 109,318 | 14.7 |
| under 10 | 23,657 | 3.2 |
| Total | 744,893 | |

Source: Destatis/Genesis 2023

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

There is no binding system of mentoring, coaching or supervision for newly qualified or newly employed (Early Childhood) Educators in Germany. Induction concepts and measures are the responsibility of the setting providers. In principle, specialist advisers/counsellors employed by the provider organisation offer support measures in the workplace in the broadest sense. On the one hand, these counselling staff are an integral part of the staff in the system of early childhood education and care in Germany, on the other hand, there is no legal protection, no binding task profile across all providers and no binding qualification requirements for this coordinating area of responsibility (see also *Chapter 2.3*).

7.4 Non-contact time

Non-contact time varies considerably across the federal states and may also be regulated by the individual service providers. A survey by the trade union ver.di of 19,250 ECEC professionals in 2021 showed that only slightly more than half (58.6%) have fixed availability times in the duty roster, and 28.9% have no hours set aside for preparation and follow-up. There are significant

differences between the federal states: for example, in Bremen and Hamburg there are no regulations on non-contact time, in Baden-Württemberg they are very clearly specified with at least ten hours per group/week (Ver.di 2021, 13; KVJS 2021).

7.5 Current staffing issues (e.g. staff shortages, recruitment, age composition of workforce)

There has been a considerable shortage of staff in the German ECEC system for years. There are many reasons for this: on the one hand, the expansion of places since 2013 after the introduction of the legal entitlement for one year-olds to a place in centre-based or home-based provision led to a higher demand for qualified workers. In addition - especially in the eastern federal states - a large group of professionals will soon retire and for whom no adequate replacement is available. Dissatisfaction with the working conditions, mainly with the pay, has led to many graduates of the Childhood Pedagogy Bachelor's degree course only staying in the ECEC sector for a short time and, where possible, looking for a job in higher education teaching or research. In the last 15 years, around 800,000 new places in (E)CEC have been created in Germany. Nevertheless, evaluations by the German Youth Institute as part of the National Education Report 2022 found that the biggest gap in terms of staff shortages is expected to be in 2025: There will then be a shortage of up to 73,000 specialist workers, particularly in western Germany (Rauschenbach et al. 2022).

The Bertelsmann Foundation's current monitoring report shows that there will be a shortage of up to 383,600 places in 2023: far more in the western federal states (362,400) than in the eastern part of the country (21,200) and especially places for under 3 year-olds (271,000 in total). To cover this need, 98,600 people would have to be recruited (Bock-Famulla et al. 2023).

In addition, the relatively constant average age since 2012 and rather high average age in 2023 of both E()CEC staff (40.8 years) and Centre Leaders (47 years) means that many specialist staff will retire in the coming years for reasons of age (Destatis/Genesis 2023, own calculations, excluding administrative staff).

The lack of staff is particularly noticeable in urban conurbations, whereas in rural areas it can happen that groups have to be closed because too few children attend the settings.

In order to further increase IPE capacities, an urgent priority would be to increase the number of teaching staff in the *Fachschulen* for social pedagogy, as intended in North Rhine-Westphalia. The shortage of qualified ECEC personnel has thus also reached the level of initial professional education (Fuchs-Rechlin und Rauschenbach 2021).

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

Professional Development Initiative for Early Childhood Educators (WiFF)

In 2008, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Robert Bosch Foundation in cooperation with the German Youth Institute launched a comprehensive professional development initiative for early childhood educators called WiFF (*Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte*). With the new *WiFF-Transfer* line of action, the initiative has been extended until the end of 2026. This makes it one of the most far-reaching – if not the most far-reaching – professionalisation initiative for early childhood personnel in Europe (Oberhuemer 2014, 22).



The professional development initiative supports the professionalisation both of ECEC staff as well as the ECEC system as a whole in a number of ways (WiFF 2023b). These include specialist reports, field evaluations and research studies providing up-to-date knowledge on current topics in ECEC as well as promoting competence-oriented CPD by observing and analysing the ongoing professionalisation process. In addition, the initiative is committed to improving the links between vocational and higher education skills acquisition so that educational pathways can be better connected. Specialists from initial and continuing education, policy development, provider associations and academia are involved in order to keep the discourse on quality in ECEC alive.

Through specialist conferences and workshops, WiFF also acts as a professional network for the growing number of stakeholders in the field of early childhood education and care. Moreover, WiFF exchanges ideas twice a year in an open-door group with representatives from the social and education ministries of the federal states as well as with staff and heads of the vocational technical colleges for social pedagogy (WiFF 2023d).

Staff monitoring – The Early Education Staffing Barometer

A sub-project of the Professional Development Initiative for Early Childhood Educators (WiFF) is The Early Education Staffing Barometer (FKB 2023). The first edition of this comprehensive compilation of data was published in 2014; the fifth edition became available in October 2023. The Barometer provides detailed information on staff in ECEC settings and their qualification structures, on ECEC teams, on the employment market, on IPE pathways into ECEC, diversity in staff composition and future staffing requirements. There is also a comprehensive appendix of tables with data, some of which are also broken down by federal state.

The data sources include employment, earnings and higher education statistics, as well as child and youth welfare and education statistics.

Federal programme “Staffing Campaign”

As already reported, there has been a significant shortage of staff in the ECEC sector in Germany for some time now. In order to recruit new staff and retain existing professionals, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth funded a "Staffing Campaign" from 2019 to 2021 (BMFSFJ 2023b). Three programme priorities were developed: (1) paid practice-integrated training, (2) practicum guidance and (3) promotion bonus. The evaluation through representative online-supported written surveys as well as focus groups and telephone interviews included 500 providers per programme area and resulted in recommendations for action (Weltzien et al. 2021 – see *Chapter 9* for details of the research findings).

State by state monitoring – a Bertelsmann Foundation initiative

The private monitoring initiative by the Bertelsmann Foundation, which has been published every two years since 2008, is based on data from official child and youth welfare statistics and surveys of the responsible state ministries. The status quo of the ECEC systems in the 16 federal states is analysed according to three key areas: "Ensuring participation", "Using investments effectively" and "Promoting education - ensuring quality" (cf. Bock-Famulla et al. 2023). Online, it is also possible to compile individual comparisons across the *Länder*. Furthermore, data on the personnel working in ECEC are also presented and supplemented by analyses of staff-related topics, such as the “Staffing Radar for Kita and Primary School” (*Fachkräfte-Radar*), which was launched in 2021 and will be published bi-annually, detailing staffing trends and predicting staffing needs.



Federal programme “Language Kitas” (“Sprach-Kitas”)

The core themes of the federal programme “Language Kitas: Because language is the key to the world” (2016 to mid-2023) are language education integrated into everyday life, inclusive education and cooperation with families. Since July 2023, responsibility for the programme is now in the hands of the federal states, which aim to continue it mostly from their own funds or from funds from the fields of action set out in the Kita Quality Act (Das Portal der Kinder und Jugendhilfe 2023).

Since 2021, there has been a new focus within these fields of action on the use of digital media and on media pedagogical issues - especially in ECEC settings attended by an above-average proportion of children with language support needs. In addition, digital education and digital communication formats are to be enhanced in the qualification of professionals. In each “Sprach-Kita”, an additional professional is employed who is accompanied by external specialist advisers. In 2020, 6,360 additional professionals in “Sprach-Kitas” and 503 accompanying expert advisers, each with a half-time position, were funded (BMFSFJ 2021b). The Free University of Berlin and the University of Bamberg examined the implementation and effects of the programme in an accompanying evaluation. 1,069 Centre Leaders, 1,018 Educators and 102 specialist advisers were included. In 2021, a further 77 specialist Counsellors/advisers, 576 Centre Leaders and 547 additional Educators took part in an online survey. Recommendations for successful implementation emphasised the cooperation in tandems between ECEC teams and specialist counsellors (*Fachberatung*), the provision of CPD courses on digitalisation issues and intensive preparation of Educators for their supporting and advisory role. At the same time, it was pointed out that further efforts are needed in terms of improving the digital infrastructure of ECEC settings (BMFSFJ 2021d).

Overall strategy for the continuing professionalisation of socio-pedagogical staff

In a joint meeting in October 2023, the Conference of Ministers of Youth and Family Affairs (JFMK) and the Conference of Ministers of Education and Culture (KMK) viewed the recruitment, long-term retention and personnel development of a sufficient number of qualified staff for child and youth welfare as the greatest challenge for the near future. A joint working group will focus on the following priorities (MBS Brandenburg 2023):

- Initial professional education
- Continuing professional development
- Higher education qualifying pathways
- Professional fields of employment
- Development and career opportunities
- Attracting new target groups
- Recognition of staff with non-German qualifications
- Shortening the duration of IPE while maintaining quality standards
- Modularisation and digitalisation of IPE
- Permeability of IPE programmes

“In order to make optimum use of the potential options for recruiting and retaining pedagogical staff, training and qualification options must be considered in addition to quantitative issues, particularly with a focus on child and youth welfare. In view of the increasing heterogeneity of staff, there is also a need for agreement on the necessary quality assurance measures. In addition, it is important to establish continuing learning opportunities through targeted CPD offers for pedagogical staff in order to retain qualified staff” (MBS Brandenburg 2023).



9. Recent country-specific research focusing on (E)CEC staff

TALIS Starting Strong Survey

Source: DJI 2023 (see *References* for further details)

Background and aims: Germany is participating in this international study for the second time. The TALIS study is led by the OECD and the OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care. Sixteen countries from five continents are participating; seven, including Germany, are focussing not only on professionals who work with 3 to 6 year-olds, but also with under 3 year-olds. For Germany, the study is being conducted by the International Centre for Early Childhood Education and Care (ICEC) at the German Youth Institute (DJI). Funding comes from the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and the European Union (EU). The first survey took place in 2018, with evaluations of 520 Centre Leaders and 2,572 ECEC professionals (see Turani et al. 2022) and will be supplemented by a second study in 2024, which will enable an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses and special features of the ECEC systems.

Procedure: For Germany, the relevance of the OECD questionnaires was tested in 2023 in a pilot study with 60 ECEC centres and 350 Educators and Centre Leaders. In spring 2024, a total of around 500 randomly selected ECEC centres with 3,000 staff and centre managers will be surveyed nationwide. Topics include working conditions and stress, aspects of initial and continuing education, pedagogical practices and settings, diversity in the ECEC centre, digitalisation in ECEC, learning environment, work organisation and climate, and pedagogical management tasks.

Selected findings: Results are not yet available; they are expected from 2025 onwards.

Implications: As with the 2018 study, it can be assumed that the findings of the new study will also contribute to keeping an eye on and further developing the importance of everyday practice, diversity, leadership and the recruitment and retention of pedagogical staff in the field of early childhood education and thus improving quality in order to adequately meet the existing challenges in Germany.

Evaluation of the federal programme "Staffing Campaign"

Source: Weltzien, Hohagen, Kassel, Pasquale und Wirth et al. 2022 (see *References* for further details).

Background and aims: Against the background of the acute shortage of qualified staff in the field of early education and care, a federal programme "Staffing Campaign" (2019-2021) was launched. The aim was to promote the recruitment and retention of staff.

Procedure: The evaluation of the campaign focused on three programme areas: the recently introduced remunerated practice-integrated training (PiA); professional practice guidance; and a promotion bonus as a means of retaining existing staff. A mixed-methods design was developed which gave equal weighting to various qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches. In the quantitative part, the experiences and assessments of PiA trainees, practice supervisors, college lecturers, centre leaders, and ECEC providers were combined in statistical analyses. The initial sample was 500 ECEC providers per programme area. Qualitative methods were used during the process to deepen the findings and included the reconstruction of perspectives. Results were combined and triangulated and an overall evaluation of the federal programme conducted.

Selected findings: Key findings are as follows: (1) The remunerated practice-integrated model of training proved to be a successful strategy for recruiting young talent and was rated very positively by trainees, centre managers and college staff. Binding agreements between vocational technical colleges and the workplace learning location are seen as an important aspect of this. However, the Centre Leaders were particularly critical of the pro-rata crediting of trainees to the staffing ratio and the ECEC providers were critical of the unclear funding situation at the end of the programme. (2) Professional guidance and supervision increased the quality of the training practice, especially if the mentors were appropriately qualified and released for two hours per week for these activities. Challenges arose here due to staff shortages or turnover, unclear task allocations and – depending on the specific framework conditions of the institution - correspondingly adapted personnel development measures or financial structures. (3) All participants considered a promotion bonus for existing professionals to be an effective method of retaining professionals, which increases appreciation and job satisfaction. On the provider side, however, it was pointed out that a bonus could also lead to team conflicts if there are no transparent criteria for allocation. In addition, the collective bargaining system, which does not provide for bonus payments, is likely to stand in the way of continuity.

Initial education and training of Educators: “a permanent construction site”

Source: Mende und Fuchs-Rechlin 2022 (see *References* for further details)

Background and aims: Due to inconsistent federal and state statistics, there is little data available on changes in the vocational technical college landscape and the initial education and training of prospective Educators. The data generated in the study aim to give these key aspects more visibility.

Procedure: A total of 293 vocational technical colleges (56% of which are publicly funded) took part in an online survey in 2021. The questionnaire was answered in roughly equal parts by college and department heads (41.9% and 40.4% respectively), heads of educational programmes and deputy college heads. Among other things, the survey asked for information on the college structure and organisation; on the teaching staff; on the training to become an Educator; on capacities and entry requirements; on costs and funding; on cooperation between learning locations; on forms of organisation and on assessments of the education and training to become an Educator.

Selected findings: The number of publicly funded institutions is currently decreasing and only accounts for 46% of all training colleges for EC Educators. They are more frequently located in the western federal states and in rural areas and are more inclined to participate in pilot projects or offer examinations for external applicants than the private vocational colleges. Due to expanded access opportunities to education, an increased diversity of students can be observed: the proportion of beginners with a higher education entrance qualification has increased.

Offers of different IPE options are distributed differently across the vocational colleges, with more options being available in public institutions. Nationwide, there are four main types of IPE: 1) full-time IPE (51%), 2) practice-integrated training (PiA, 22%), 3) part-time IPE alongside work (19%) and 4) part-time IPE (4%) - 4% could not be allocated. Even though overall responsibility lies with the vocational technical colleges, numerous institutionalised forms of cooperation between college and (E)CEC settings can now be observed, and thus also active, structural cooperation between learning locations. Colleges providing full-time and PiA training are the most satisfied with this type of cooperation.

Implications: The four IPE formats identified appeal to different groups of people and each offers advantages and disadvantages. It would be desirable to standardise these formats nationwide, to formulate orientation standards and to include them in the KMK framework agreement.



It would be important to define what a specific format should stand for, which would, however, require common terminology and cross-state agreements. Since, unlike other dual professions, the professional preparation of prospective Educators is not subject to ongoing monitoring, and also due to heterogeneity and federalism, it is difficult to observe and analyse developments in a continuous way.

International ECEC professionals and team-oriented centre development

Source: Robert Bosch Foundation 2023; Faas et al. 2021 (see *References* for further details)

Background and aims: The aim of the project was to raise awareness and improve the way ECEC centres handle diversity. Specifically, it involved, among other things, the targeted qualification of professionals from other countries, the creation of a cross-centre network on migration-specific topics and the removal of barriers to the recognition of equivalence of qualifications.

The "Diversity Welcome" project was initially implemented in Baden-Württemberg (BBQ - Bildung und Berufliche Qualifizierung gGmbH) and has also been running in Thuringia since 2023.

The scientific monitoring of the first project run focussed on the investigation of conditions for the successful implementation of the project, such as reaching ECEC professionals with a migration background who have obtained a pedagogical qualification abroad; the willingness of providers and ECEC centres to employ such staff; the comparison with IPE structures and job profiles in other countries; and the on-site activities in the early education field in terms of integrating professionals with a migration background with educators, children and parents in ECEC centres.

Procedure: A multi-perspective and multi-method research design was adopted. In addition to literature research, online research and expert interviews, standardised online questionnaires were used as evaluation instruments. In sub-project A, all 23 authorities for the recognition of non-German qualifications were contacted for a standardised survey, but only eight of them agreed to participate. In sub-project B, between January and June 2020, 12 ECEC centre managers and 65 professionals were surveyed using online questionnaires, and guided interviews were conducted with 11 professionals undergoing the recognition process, 12 centre leaders and 7 field trainers.

Selected findings: The programme addresses relevant social, labour market and education policy issues and problems and is seen as innovative and conceptually sustainable. Nevertheless, the recognition procedure is seen as a complex process and specific hurdles continue to arise, especially for professionals from countries outside the EU – even after the Immigration of Skilled Workers Act was introduced in 2020.

The equivalence assessment and the associated concept of “substantial differences” introduced by the EU are viewed critically. Above all, the rather deficient view of qualifications acquired abroad further exacerbates the problem of different educational and professional systems as well as the different organisation of ECEC systems and associated professional profiles. There is also a lack of transparency for all stakeholders, as different authorities are responsible for equivalence assessment throughout Germany.

It should be noted that causal relationships between the analysed variables cannot be verified and the small sample sizes also represent a limitation of the study.

Implications: Although the question of the impact of a measure is important, it does not do justice to the “Diversity welcome” programme or its complexity if it is assessed solely in terms of its effects. For the most part, the programme has succeeded in conceptually anchoring aspects of culturally sensitive and prejudice-conscious pedagogy in the participating ECEC centres and in raising awareness of the opportunities for the integration of professionals with a migration background in the centre teams. It is recommended that further training measures continue



to be provided for the professionals in the recognition process and that parallel further training and process support be provided to support organisational and team development in the participating ECEC centres. At the same time, however, more specific options and methods should also be made available to the centre teams in order to be able to provide even more targeted guidance and support to the professionals in the accreditation process in their day-to-day work.

Licence for multi-professionalism in times of staffing shortages?

Source: Grgic und Friederich 2023 (see *References* for further details)

Background and aims: Against the background of the prevailing shortage of qualified staff in ECEC centres, the loosening of the so-called “skilled worker catalogues” of the federal states for occupational groups without a specifically (socio-)pedagogical qualification is examined. The question of whether and under what conditions multi-professional teams can promote professionalisation in early education is investigated. The definition of the term “multiprofessionalism” is analysed: On the one hand, in the sense of interdisciplinarity, people from other professional groups can take on specifically designated positions in the ECEC centre; on the other hand, people with different professional qualifications can also carry out the same tasks in the ECEC setting. It was investigated how these professionals can be integrated into the respective team and what added value they represent for ECEC centres.

Procedure: Using a multi-stage qualitative content analysis, the licensing laws of the federal states and their legal basis were examined and categories were formed with regard to authorised occupational groups and professional positions.

Selected results: Professional theory and also professional policy arguments may speak in favour of different professions working together in teams, but attention must be paid to the specific implementation, as the term “multiprofessional” is variously used: as cooperation between different professional groups with different qualification levels from the same professional field, or from different professional fields.

Three types of staff catalogues could be distinguished in the federal states: 1) narrowly defined, socio-pedagogically oriented (Bremen and Saarland); 2) academically extended, pedagogically oriented (Bavaria, Brandenburg, Hesse, Lower Saxony, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein, Thuringia); and 3) multi-professionally oriented, with further vocational technical college qualifications (Baden-Württemberg, Berlin, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Rheinland-Palatinate, North Rhein-Westphalia).

The highest rates of ECEC staff with a higher education degree (9-11%) are to be found in states with an academically extended, pedagogically oriented specialist staff catalogue (Saxony, Thuringia, Hesse). In federal states with a multi-professionally oriented catalogue of skilled workers, there is also a “downward opening”. These persons (e.g. with therapeutic or healthcare qualifications) are sometimes limited in their deployment or are required to be re-qualified with regard to the pedagogical content knowledge they bring with them (compared to the minimum 1,000 hours of pedagogical content in the initial professional education of Educators, only between 50 and 300 hours) and subsequently supported by the ECEC Centre Leader and the team. It was not possible to establish clear advantages or disadvantages for the deployment of people with “non-specialist” qualifications in ECEC centres, as a wide range of conditions need to be met for this to happen.

Implications: Multi-professional teams cannot therefore contribute to solving the shortage of qualified staff or to improving quality or professionalisation per se, as the resources required for successful integration into the team are generally not available in the ECEC centres – particularly in the face of acute staff shortages.



10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Country expert assessment by Sigrid Ebert

Changing demands on the professional education and upbringing of children in early childhood settings, mostly a women's task, have been part of social modernisation processes in Germany for over 100 years. The *Conference of Ministers for Youth and Family Affairs* of the 16 federal states, the body responsible for child and youth welfare, has repeatedly positioned itself in terms of social change. One example: "In (E)CEC facilities, the education of young children needs to be challenging at a complex level, enhanced through everyday practices and supported through a caring environment. This represents a new interpretation of bringing up children. It recognises children as the subject of their education and at the same time makes demands on adults to ensure that sustainable and legitimate cultural experiences are made available to children for their own self-education" (JMK 2001a).

In the course of successive **legal entitlements** for the institutional support of children in (E)CEC services (nurseries, kindergartens, out-of-school care services), this system of "supervised childhood" as a public responsibility underpinning family upbringing is assessed in educational and social science discourses from the point of view of effectiveness. Support encompasses the upbringing, education and care of the child, it relates to the child's social, emotional, physical and intellectual development and it starts with the child (Federal Ministry of Justice 1990, SGB VIII, §22, para. 3). From a child policy perspective, this is about the child's right to a "good childhood". Beyond this, the coronavirus pandemic has revealed that childhood education and care settings in Germany must also be measured against whether they are perceived as a visible and socially significant part of a satisfying childhood (BJK 2008).

The current high demand for qualified staff in childhood education and care settings can be attributed on the one hand to the fact that more and more children from the age of two are spending an increasing amount of time in ECEC settings and that young schoolchildren are also increasingly attending various forms of all-day care outside school hours (König 2021). At the same time, the diverse lifestyles of children and their families place new demands on the pedagogical work of professionals which they need to encounter through a pedagogy designed to reflect children's real-life situations. The well-being of children is the "starting point and goal of pedagogical quality" (Reker und Spiekermann 2021). In the 16 federal states, curricular frameworks are available to support professionals in shaping this everyday informal learning culture. However, the **density of interaction quality** is the deciding factor and challenge in providing individual support for each child (Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Verband 2023). In turn, this pedagogical quality depends on the number of children for whom an Educator is responsible (staff to child ratio), and this varies considerably across the federal states. The extent to which the "knowledge and skills" of an Educator come into play is a question of time with and proximity to the individual child and of co-operation within the team.

In the context of centre-based ECEC, the concept of care tends to have a custodial connotation: "The care and upbringing of children are the natural right of parents and their primary duty" (Federal Ministry of Justice 1990, SGB VIII §1, 2). Nevertheless, in addition to education and upbringing, the responsibility for children's well-being in the sense of "care", is part of the professional identity of Educators. They observe and experience in their pedagogical interactions with children that the more children are enabled to be self-effective on an everyday basis and the more they are enabled to help shape their living and learning environment, the greater their



wellbeing. It is crucial that they feel respected and recognised as a valuable member of the community of people who learn, live, play and work in the ECEC centre in a context of secure relationships. This **concept of agency** is the "key to a successful educational biography" (Schleicher 2019) and also applies without restriction to children under the age of 3 as well as to children of primary school age ("good all-day care").

The societal significance of the social professions, to which the Educator profession belongs, is undisputed (Deutscher Verein 2020). Educators represent the strongest occupational group within the qualifications pyramid of social professions. However, parallel to the current expansion of places in ECEC, the field is facing an **acute shortage of qualified staff**, especially in the western German federal states. There is even talk of a "dramatically worsening skills gap" (Rauschenbach et al. 2022). According to forecasts, this staffing shortage of Educators could reach a peak of up to 73,000 by 2025.

In particular, the shortages are experienced most strongly in ECEC settings for children under 3 years of age, meaning that the quality standards achieved to date can hardly be maintained under the given conditions, especially with regard to the staff to child ratio (FKB 2023). Moreover, the curricular framework programmes include little guidance in terms of the specific pedagogical competences needed by staff when working with nursery-age children (Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Verband 2023), despite the fact that more and more parents with under 3 year-olds wish to see them attend an ECEC centre (FKB 2023).¹⁵

However, when it comes to the **conflicting demands of professionalism and staffing shortages**, it is the federal structures of the system of professional education and training which pose the greatest challenge to quality control for ECEC system. The newer "dualised" training formats, which combine time in a vocational technical college with a paid workplace in an ECEC setting, aim to ensure that as many people as possible are recruited for the Educator profession. These prospective professionals are counted towards the staffing ratio with the aim of retaining them in the centre in the long term.

There is also currently a broad debate in Germany as to whether the current **vocational programme of professional education/training** actually imparts or can impart the professional skills in the necessary breadth and depth that are required in the context of the increased and still rising expectations of the quality of socio-pedagogical work in ECEC settings (Ebert et al. 2018; Kalicki et al. 2019). A recent survey conducted by the Paritätischer Gesamtverband shows that the confidence of service providers in the quality of the outcomes of the vocational education/training route is only middling (Der Paritätische Gesamtverband 2022). This is the case despite the fact that with the framework specifications of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* significant steps have been taken to sharpen the competence profile and professional profile of Educators (KMK 2017; KMK 2020b).

The current aim of the federal government is to re-evaluate the social professions in terms of their professional expertise and social significance. Through "performance-related remuneration and career options ... female and male professionals are to be recruited and retained in this occupational field in the long term and gender-specific attributions are to be replaced by a widely perceived professionalism and a modern understanding of the profession" (BMFSFJ 2020b, 15ff). A broad alliance of experts under the leadership of the Federal Ministry for Youth Affairs is now to develop an **overall strategy for professionals in ECEC and all-day childhood care and education for school-age children** as part of a participatory and consecutive process.

¹⁵ The revised version of the *Common Framework of the Federal States for Early Education in ECEC Centres* now includes a separate section on "Pedagogical focus areas for children under three" (KMK 2022, 21-22).



A standardised national framework for initial, continuing and further education/training is envisaged to enable coherent management of the system and, as a result, help to secure the supply of qualified staff. The success of such an "overall strategy" will depend not least on whether it is possible to overcome the stumbling blocks and hurdles of the German Qualifications Framework (Ebert 2012; Rauschenbach 2013) in line with the guiding principle of "lifelong learning". It is hoped that a strategic concept that takes into account the interactive type of work demanded in the person-related health and social care professions will enable tailor-made specialist and project careers on the basis of a coordinated organisational and personnel development concept in ECEC settings and all-day care and education provision for school children (FKB 2023).

The effects of the pandemic as well as the current political discussion about a "basic child support programme" are challenging child and youth welfare services to become more open to children and families affected by poverty. This is not just about the child's right to a place in ECEC, but also about the fact that, in order to realise the children's right of support in their development, childhood education and care settings contribute to "creating positive living conditions for young people and their families (...)" (Federal Ministry of Justice 1990, SGB VIII, § 1, (3)). However, such a task requires additional qualifications, such as a "specialist for working with children in poverty and cooperation with families" (Kalicki et al. 2019); this in turn would require closer cooperation between ECEC providers and higher education institutions.

In conclusion, it must be stated that it was only in the wake of the post-PISA debate that Germany began to take a long-term look at its public early childhood education and care services and – associated with this – to consider qualification requirements beyond the current generalist profile of professionals. The Daycare Expansion Act, which came into force in 2005, also changed the focus to the quality of childhood education and care settings and to the need for strengthening initial and continuing education and training for professionals. To date, however, the vocational education and training system in Germany has not succeeded in providing graduates with a professional profile that corresponds to their professional tasks and requirements (Janssen 2010). For this reason, a **renewed "National Quality Initiative"** in the system of (early) childhood education and care, such as the one which was launched over 20 years ago, is arguably an urgent priority.

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