

HUNGARY

Key contextual data

Compiled by

Inge Schreyer and Pamela Oberhuemer

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC are **nursery** (*bölcsőde*, 0–2) and **kindergarten** (*óvoda*, 3–5)¹. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Hungary

1828	First kindergarten established by Therese Brunswick
1891	The first Kindergarten Act emphasises a holistic approach to children’s development.
1852	First day nursery for children of working mothers is opened in Budapest.
1879	First state kindergarten is opened.
1891	Attendance made compulsory for 3 to 6 year-olds but without compliance procedures
1936	The mission of kindergartens changes from an educational to a health-oriented approach.
1953	Legal entitlement to a place in early childhood provision is established and state provision transferred to the municipalities.
As from 1967	Steady expansion of ECEC provision with a number of quality measures (such as national guidelines, regular inspections) introduced both for nurseries and kindergartens.
1970	The first institute (<i>Bölcsődék Országos Módszertani Intézete</i>) for supporting, monitoring and inspecting nurseries nationwide is established by the Ministry of Health as part of a general effort to establish national institutes in many areas in Hungary.
1984-2003	Drop in the birth rate and financial constraints lead to the closing of roughly 60% of the available provision.
1993	Kindergartens recognised as part of the education system
1997	Nurseries are recognised as part of the new child protection/child welfare system.
1997	Licensed family day care and home childcare are also included in the 1997 legislation as basic services to be provided for families with young children.
2009	Introduction of Sure Start Children’s Houses as a pilot project
2012	National Core Curriculum for kindergartens comes into force.
2013	Sure Start Children’s Houses become a state-financed service regulated under the Child Protection Act.
2015	Kindergarten are made compulsory for 3 year-olds and above.
2017	Integration of all types of ECEC services for children under 3 years of age under the term <i>bölcsőde</i>
2018	The Public Education Act is amended.
2022	Responsibility for nurseries is assigned to the Minister of Culture and Innovation and for kindergartens to the Ministry of the Interior.

Sources: Korintus 2008; Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010; Korintus 2018; Pálfi et al. 2019; Farkas 2020, 80

¹ **Editors’ note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO3 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 Hungary, where children usually start school when they are 6 years old.

ECEC system type and auspices²

Early childhood education and care in Hungary is organised as a bi-sectoral system. Since 2022, nurseries (*bölcsőde*) for children under 3 years of age come under the responsibility of the Minister of Culture and Innovation, whereas kindergartens (*óvoda*) for children between the ages of 3 and statutory school age come under the Minister of the Interior. The municipalities are responsible for the operation and organisation of both nurseries and kindergartens.

General objectives and legislative framework

The Basic Law of 2011 enshrines the universal right to education, irrespective of gender, race, language, social origin or any other status.

The overarching socio-political goals of early childhood education, care and upbringing are to support family employment and to reduce disadvantages. Particularly important goals in education and learning processes are the transmission of democratic and humanistic values and respect for the individual. Emphasis is placed on the basic right to education and equality of opportunity as well as the right of national minorities to their culture. In the field of early education, the importance of cooperation between the family, ECEC settings and the state is also emphasised.

Relevant laws for kindergartens, childcare centres and home-based ECEC provision are, on the one hand, the Public Education Act (Act CXC, *törvény a nemzeti köznevelésről*) of 2011 with amendments) which confirms local authorities as the responsible bodies for providing kindergartens and on the other hand, the Child Protection Act (XXXI, 1997, amended in 2017), which in 2017 reorganised the structure of nursery provision (KSH 2023b) and confirms local authorities as the responsible bodies for providing nurseries. Other important legal provisions are:

- Government Decision 229/2012 on the implementation of the Education Act
- Ministerial Decision 20/2012 on the management of educational institutions
- Ministerial Decree 15/1998 on the Task and Operational Criteria of Child Protection Institutes and Personnel and
- Government Decision 1246/2015 on measures for effective early childhood development.

These laws define minimum standards, the inspection system, educational content and quality standards.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Attendance is voluntary for children under 3 years of age. Since 2017, however, municipalities have been obliged to provide places if at least 40 children under the age of 3 live in the area or at least five families express a wish for childcare services.

Children from the age of 3 have a legal right to a free place in a kindergarten. The Education Act stipulates that attendance is compulsory for at least four hours per day. Hungary is one of the few European countries with a three-year compulsory kindergarten enrolment (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 53). Stricter regulations have been in place since 2019 to strengthen compliance with this requirement.

Primary school (ISCED 1) starts at the age of 6.

² The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Hungary provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are indicated within the text and in the references section.

Main types of provision

Childcare sector

Since January 2017, there are three types of ECEC setting for under 3 year-olds: (1) centre-based (childcare centres, mini nurseries), (2) home-based and (3) workplace nurseries.

Nurseries (*bölcsőde*) are the most common type. They operate according to the National Core Framework for Education and Care in Nurseries. A few (no statistical data available) offer 24-hour care or care during weekends or holidays. However, these may be used by a child for a maximum of ten days per year.

Mini nurseries (*mini-bölcsőde*) can be set up if necessary where only a few children (seven or even eight if they are all over 2 years old) are to be cared for.

Family nurseries (*családi bölcsőde*) as a home-based ECEC setting provide for children between 20 weeks and 3 years and may be (but are not usually) located in the provider's home. Since 2017, this form of care has replaced the former family day care (*családi napközi*) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 183).

Workplace nurseries (*munkahelyi bölcsőde*) are set up by employers, primarily for the children of their employees. Here, a maximum of seven children can be cared for on the premises of the workplace. Family nurseries and workplace nurseries have less strict legal requirements for operation than regular nurseries.

Sure Start Children's Houses (*biztos kezdet gyerekházak*) are a new kind of multi-age ECEC setting established by law in 2013. They provide for 0 to 5 year-old children and their families in disadvantaged areas where most of the population live in poverty and social exclusion (Farkas 2020, 80) (see section on *Inclusion agenda*). They provide preventive services to support the healthy development of children, compensate developmental delay and strengthen parental competence.

In 2023, 55,748 children were enrolled in a total of 2,611 different nursery facilities. The number of available places was slightly higher than the relevant demand (see *Table 1*), yet the available places and attendance rates are very unevenly distributed across the country: In Budapest in 2018, for example, 21.2% of children under 2 attended a nursery, but only less than 10% in northern Hungary (Farkas 2020, 90). Although the number of children under 3 years of age who do not have access to childcare facilities at their place of residence decreased in recent years, 20.1% of children (4,991) under 3 years of age were still unable to attend an ECEC setting in 2023 (KSH 2023b, 25.1.1.9).

Table 1

Hungary: Number of nurseries, available places and enrolments, 2023

Type of nursery	Number of nurseries	Number of available places	Number of children enrolled
Traditional day nursery	1,016	48,444	44,420
Mini-nurseries	398	3,500	3,283
Family nurseries	1,171	8,018	7,829
Workplace nurseries	26	300	216
Total	2,611	60,262	55,748

Source: KSH 2023b, 25.1.1.9

Nurseries are open for at least ten hours a day; the opening hours, which are usually based on parents' working hours, are set by the provider. According to the Welfare Act 15/1998, a child

should spend a minimum of four and a maximum of twelve hours in a nursery. In summer, nurseries can be closed for up to five weeks, some are open all summer.

Education sector

Kindergartens (*óvoda*) provide education, care and upbringing for children aged between 3 years and statutory school age. The kindergarten year runs from 1 September to 31 August. The daily opening and closing times and holidays are decided by the provider or the kindergarten head. Kindergartens are usually open on 250 to 252 working days per year, mostly from 7:00 to 18:00; in summer they are closed for up to five weeks.

In 2022/2023, there were 4,599 kindergartens in Hungary, with 387,649 available places and 322,868 children. Of these, 2,335 children attended special education groups or facilities (KSH 2023a, Tab 23.1.1.7). As with the nurseries, the total supply of places is greater than the demand. Despite this, in 2017, an average of 2% of children nationwide lived in an area without kindergarten, and in some parts of the country up to 14% of children had no access to kindergarten (Farkas 2020, 94).

Provider structures

Kindergartens and nurseries are predominantly public and are then either run by the state or by municipalities. Private, state-subsidised facilities, or settings run by churches or other legal entities were attended by 12.1% of kindergarten children in 2021 (Eurostat 2023e, own calculations).

Table 2

Hungary: Number and relative share of children in kindergartens by age-group and provider type, 2021

Type of provider	Under 3 year-olds**		3 years to statutory school age	
	Number of children	Relative share of age-group*	Number of children	Relative share of age-group*
Public	11,235	79.2	276,091	87.9
Private state-subsidised	1,349	9.5	26,229	8.3
Private independent	1,599	11.3	11,949	3.8
Total	14,183		314,269	

*Own calculations ** These are children aged 2½ to 3 years who are admitted to kindergartens if needed
Source: Eurostat 2023e

Childcare sector

The greater majority of centre-based provision (nurseries and mini nurseries) for under 3 year-olds is publicly run. However, most home-based settings (family nurseries) are private, non-profit (see Table 3).

Table 3

Hungary: Distribution of nursery provision by provider type, 2022

Provider type	Nurseries		Mini nurseries		Family nurseries		Workplace nurseries	
	No. of settings	No. of children	No. of settings	No. of children	No. of settings	No. of children	No. of settings	No. of children
Public	853	38,519	290	2,232	118	754	6	39
Private non-profit	75	2,345	44	403	924	6,104	5	37



Provider type	Nurseries		Mini nurseries		Family nurseries		Workplace nurseries	
	No. of settings	No. of children	No. of settings	No. of children	No. of settings	No. of children	No. of settings	No. of children
Private commercial					44	273	1	14
Total	928	40,864	334	2,635	1,086	7,131	12	90

Source: KSH 2023g (HB1021)

Education sector

In 2022, most of the 4,599 kindergartens had a public provider (82.2%), 9.9% of the facilities were run by churches and 7.9% had another provider (foundations, private organisations), see Table 4.

Table 4

Hungary: Number and distribution of kindergartens by provider type, 2022

Provider type	Number of kindergartens	Relative share, in %
Municipal	3,782	82.2
Church-affiliated	455	9.9
Others	362	7.9
Total	4,599	

Source: KSH 2023g (FS1A03)

Participation rates in regulated provision

The proportion of children under 3 years of age attending kindergartens increased from 7% to 12.9% between 2005 and 2022. In the same period, the attendance rate of children between 3 years and statutory school entry increased from 79% to 100% (see Table 5).

Table 5

Hungary: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings according to age group and duration of attendance, 2005-2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds, in %*	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	2	30
	Over 30 hours	5	49
	No enrolment in ECEC	93	22
2010	1 to 29 hours	1	14
	Over 30 hours	8	66
	No enrolment in ECEC	91	21
2015	1 to 29 hours	4.6	9.6
	Over 30 hours	10.8	79.5
	No enrolment in ECEC	84.7	10.9
2022	1 to 29 hours	3.9	20.9
	Over 30 hours	9.0	79.1
	No enrolment in ECEC	87.1	0.0

*These data refer only to children under 3 in kindergartens, not in the various nursery types.

Source: Eurostat 2023b, Slight deviations from 100% due to rounding

Looking at the age groups separately (see *Table 6*), the 4 to under 6 year-olds in particular had very high attendance rates of more than 95% in 2021. However, very few under 2 year-olds are enrolled in centre-based nursery settings.

Table 6

Hungary: Number and enrolment rates of children in nurseries and kindergartens, by age, 2021

Age	Number of children in nurseries	Enrolment rates in nurseries	Number of children in kindergartens	Enrolment rates in kindergartens
Under 2 years	1,736	0.9	--	--
2 year-olds	10,113	10.9	--	--
3 year-olds	1,395	1.5	79,413	83.9
4 year-olds	637	0.7	91,709	95.7
5 year-olds	247	0.3	91,217	98.4
6 year-olds	55	0.1	50,062	53.3

Source: Eurostat 2023f, g

According to national statistics, in 2022/23, the nationwide enrolment rate in the 3–5 years age group is 93.1% (KSH 2023e, Table 23.1.2.3).

Table 7

Hungary: Number and enrolment rates of children in kindergartens by age, 2020/21

Age	Number of children	Enrolment rate, in %*
Under 3 years	8,500	3.0
3 year-olds	79,400	85.0
4 year-olds	91,800	96.8
5 year-olds	91,200	95.1
6 year-olds	50,000	53.9
7 year-olds	1,900	2.0
Total	322,800	

Source: KSH 2021; * own calculations based on data of KSH 2023c

Financing and costs for parents

The share of GDP spent on education was 3.5% in 2021 – a significant reduction during the past decade from 4.3% in 2011, especially from 2019 onwards. 16% of education expenditure was spent on kindergartens (KSH 2023f, own calculations).

According to OECD data, total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 0.66% of GDP in 2019. Of this, 0.1% was allocated to childcare (OECD 2023).

In nurseries, parental fees may not exceed 25% of the family's per capita net income. In traditional nurseries and mini nurseries, the fee averages 8,000 HUF (€21) per month in 2022, in family crèches 40,000-100,000 HUF (€102-256). There is no charge for the care of children with disabilities, or for families with more than three children, or for families with an income below 130% of the minimum income (Farkas 2020, 92).

Kindergartens are usually financed through municipal budgets. The municipalities receive funds from the national budget for this purpose, based on the number of core professionals and support staff. The calculation is based on the average national salary of kindergarten teachers and the number of kindergarten children.



Kindergartens that care for children with language disabilities or learning difficulties receive double the rate for each of these children, and triple the rate for children with physical or sensory impairments.

In public kindergartens, parents pay only for meals. In privately subsidised kindergartens, parents pay a monthly fee of about €223 (without meals).

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 4% of net household income on childcare costs³ (OECD.Stat 2023).

Staff to child ratios and group size

In **nurseries**, there are usually 12 children in a group with two professionals, or 14 if all the children are over 2 years old. Up to seven children are cared for in a mini nursery by one professional and one assistant. Up to seven children are also cared for in a workplace nursery; if more than five children are present, an assistant must be employed, whose working hours are determined by the provider. In family nurseries there can be 5 children or up to 8 if 2 core pedagogues or 1 core pedagogue and 1 assistant are employed.

Table 8

Hungary: Staffing ratios and group size in nursery settings

Nursery type	Number of staff	Maximum number of children per group
Traditional nursery	2 core pedagogues	12
Nursery where all children are over 2 years of age	2 core pedagogues	14
Mini nursery	1 core pedagogue and 1 assistant	7 8 if all children are over 2 years of age
Workplace nursery	1 core pedagogue 1 core pedagogue and 1 assistant if more than 5 children are in the group	7 or 8 if children are older than 2 years of age

Source: Ministry of Welfare 1998 with amendments 2017

As a rule, **kindergartens** have an average of four same-age or mixed-age groups, with a maximum group size of 25 children. Each group is staffed by two professionals, whose working hours overlap by two hours, and one assistant. One full-time pedagogical assistant must be employed for every three groups.

In 2022/23, one core pedagogue was responsible for an average of 10.5 children and there was an average of 21.5 children in a group. While there are hardly any differences between public and church-affiliated kindergartens, the average number of children in a group in facilities run by foundations or other organisations tends to be slightly lower (KSH 2023a).

When children with disabilities attend, the group size is reduced – as a rule, one child with a disability counts as two or three children without a disability. If only children with disabilities are

³ The OECD calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included. From 2022, the gross childcare fee is calculated using an ad-hoc survey managed by the Ministry for Culture and Innovation. Previously, the gross childcare fee was based on the regulations of Budapest-District 8.



in a group, the maximum number may not exceed seven to 15, depending on the type of disability.

Curricular frameworks

Childcare sector

The National Core Programme for Nursery Education and Care (Ministry Decision 15/1998) applies to various nursery settings and the centre-based educational programmes are based on this. The following aspects are emphasised: the importance of family upbringing, respect for the child's personality, the unity of education and care, individualisation, security and stability, encouraging activity and self-confidence, the influence of education. Nurseries are required to support these goals by advocating a healthy lifestyle and fostering emotional, social and cognitive development. Methods that the professionals are free to choose include play, story reading, singing and creative activities. An individual plan is drawn up for each child based on observations by the core pedagogue.

Education sector

The compulsory National Core Programme for Kindergarten Education (Government Decision 363/2012, XII. 17) applies to all kindergartens, regardless of the provider, and defines the pedagogical principles and goals, such as the individual, needs-based development of emotional, social and cognitive skills. Particular emphasis is placed on accepting each child as a unique person and adapting pedagogical approaches to account for this. Based on the core curriculum, the professionals either develop their own centre-specific programme or adopt a ready-made one. An overriding goal is always to achieve "school readiness" and a smooth transition to school. Beyond this, the acquisition of key competences is also emphasised, such as communication in the family language, mathematical and scientific competences as well as social and artistic competences. Play is considered the most important form of learning, but reading stories is also valued, as are singing, drawing, painting and motor activities. The professionals are free to choose their own methods. The core curriculum is updated every five years by the government and supplemented if necessary.

Digital education

The government's Digital Education Strategy (Hungarian Government 1536/2016) makes it clear that knowledge of information technology and digital education must be integrated into everyday activities in kindergarten. As part of the Digital Success programme, the Digital Child Protection Strategy was also developed in 2016.

Among other things, the strategy recommends integrating digital education in ECEC settings, particularly since neither the information society per se nor digital tools or technologies are currently addressed in the core curriculum. Nor is there any mention of how professionals should deal with them. Therefore, the strategy emphasises the need to adapt the curriculum accordingly.

As a rule, digital devices are used in kindergartens primarily for documentation purposes. Here data protection needs to be guaranteed, that parents are included and that a safety awareness is developed among all those involved. In practice, this means supporting children in developing safety awareness to the extent that they become aware of the possible risks of the internet. It

also means ensuring that the professionals have sufficient digital knowledge, that only controlled content is accessible on the end devices used in kindergartens, that the children's personal data is always protected and that overall children learn to acquire critical digital consumer behaviour.

The strategy also points out that kindergartens need the appropriate equipment for this and that the training of professionals must be adapted. It is also recommended that specialist centres be set up to support the ECEC settings with problems in this area (Hungarian Government 2016a, b).

Monitoring – evaluation

Child-related assessment

In **nursery settings**, observations on the development of the children are documented by the core professionals in a diary, provided that the parents have given their consent. At the request of the parents, this documentation is handed over to them. Entries are made monthly until the first birthday, then every three months. Keeping a group diary is obligatory for centre-based nurseries.

In **kindergartens**, the assessment of children is laid down by law (Government Decision 20/2012, VIII. 31) and is also based primarily on observations. The professionals choose a monitoring system which can be adapted to the respective setting's programme. Health data, emotional, social, intellectual, linguistic and physical development (at least every six months) as well as other observations by the professionals are recorded. Parents are informed regularly. At the end of the kindergarten period, an assessment is made to determine whether the child has the "maturity" required for school. The standardised DIFER instrument (Diagnostic Instrument for the Assessment of Children, 4 to 8 years old, DIFER) is also used as an assessment method. This instrument is particularly suitable for assessing basic competencies and skills that are considered necessary for a successful start in primary school.

Centre-level internal evaluation

Each kindergarten carries out self-evaluation procedures, the results of which are included in the external evaluation and feedback from parents and children. These self-evaluation measures also serve to prepare the five-year plan (see below). The work of the management and staff as well as the work of the institution as a whole are evaluated. In 2019, revised guidelines for self-evaluation in kindergartens were issued by the education authority (*Oktatási Hivatal*).

External evaluation

A national inspection system evaluates all levels of education according to the same criteria. In **nurseries** these evaluations are conducted by a government agency (*Kormányhivatal*) every two years and by local authorities once a year. For **kindergartens** they are carried out by the education authority and take place every five years.

This national inspection system, also for kindergartens, is the responsibility of the State Education Secretariat, which appoints specialist education authorities for this purpose. In detail, the professionals, the management and the facilities are inspected, usually through on-site visits. The methods used are document analysis, observations, questionnaires and interviews. With regard to the inspection of the kindergartens, the emphasis is on pedagogical processes, the

implementation of the national core programme through centre-specific plans, the centre management, the work of the staff and compliance with prescribed standards. The results are summarised in a report which is sent to the management and the provider.

Based on this report, the management draws up a five-year action plan to implement improvement measures. The provider of an institution has to examine its efficiency as well as the implementation of the respective pedagogical programme. The education authority analyses the reports and evaluations and compiles them in the education information system (*köznevelés információs rendszerének*, KIR). Since 2018, the evaluated managers and professionals have the possibility to evaluate the evaluators in an anonymous questionnaire.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and with disabilities

Regulations regarding the education and care of children with special educational needs are laid down by the Government Decision 110/2012 (amended in this respect in 2022). With the involvement of the National Committee for Minorities in Hungary, the Ministry of Education issued guidelines as early as 1997 which are to be observed by kindergartens when drawing up their curricula. The National Core Programme for Kindergarten Education also applies in special education settings.

Children with disabilities can – depending on their disability – attend either special or mainstream institutions or, for example, receive additional support measures beyond attending a mainstream institution. Guidelines for inclusive education in mainstream settings are provided as a support for professionals.

Additionally, educational support services which employ around 5,000 professionals also provide free diagnoses and advice to special education institutions. In 2016/17, 4,542 children under 5 years of age in these settings attended special educational counselling and early intervention services, but this represented less than 1% of the age group (Farkas 2020, 79).

ECEC settings attended by children with special educational needs have a duty to ensure that they receive sufficient support. An individual plan is drawn up for each child and the methods used are based on individual needs. The institutions are supported by the staff of the Methodological Centres in Integrative Support Education (*Integrált Gyógypedagógiai Módszertani Intitutió*).

Kindergartens that work inclusively and follow the corresponding regulations of the Ministry can receive financial subsidies.

In 2022, 2,335 kindergarten children attended separate special needs classes and 9,244 were enrolled in integrative groups (KSH2023g, HB1015).

Children with a migration background and from national ethnic minorities – children from Roma communities

In 2023, 2.4% of the total population had non-Hungarian citizenship. Of these, almost one half (45%) came from other EU27 countries, mainly from Germany, Slovakia and Romania. Persons from Ukraine represented 15.9% of the population with non-Hungarian citizenship (KSH 2023c, tab 22.1.1.3, KSH 2023d, tab 22.1.1.23, own calculations).

According to Eurostat data, in 2022, 0.9% in the age group up to 5 years had a non-Hungarian citizenship with 62.7% of them coming from countries outside the EU27 (as of 2020) (Eurostat 2023c, own calculations).

The core curriculum states that every child in Hungarian kindergartens has the right to education in his or her ethnic or family language. If there are at least eight children of a specific national minority, the establishment of an ethnic kindergarten can be applied for (Pálfi et al. 2019, 15f). According to the Rights of National Minorities Act (2011), the languages of ethnic groups from Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Poland, Germany, Armenia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Slovakia and Ukraine as well as the language of the Ruthenians and the Roma are legally defined as languages of national and ethnic minorities. Kindergartens are required to promote their culture and language and they should have access to education in their family language.

In the 2011 census, 315,000 people (at that time about 3% of the population) identified themselves as Roma, making them the largest minority group in Hungary. Efforts to provide better opportunities for participation, especially for Roma children suffering from poverty or social exclusion, are particularly concentrated in the areas with the most Roma communities in northern Hungary. In the past, Roma children were often excluded from educational opportunities (Farkas 2020, 70, 80).

In order to integrate disadvantaged children, especially Roma children, into the education system as early as possible, relevant support measures have been implemented. For example, "Sure Start Children's Houses" have been established in the most disadvantaged areas of Hungary to provide comprehensive and free support to families with children under 6 years of age. In 2019, there were 155 centres reaching 2,150 families (Farkas 2020, 81).

Parental leave arrangements⁴

Maternity leave (*csecsemőgondozási díj- CSED*) is 24 weeks, of which up to four weeks can be taken before the birth. Two weeks are compulsory. Women who have been employed for at least 365 days over the last two years receive 100% of their daily average earnings (without upper limit).

Paternity leave is fully paid for ten days, which can be taken in the first two months of the child's life, also in two parts.

There are two types of **Parental leave** and allowances: (1) for uninsured parents (*Gyermekgondozási segítő ellátás – GYES*) and (2) for insured parents (*Gyermekgondozási díj – GYED*). GYES is a lump sum, equal to the twofold daily minimum salary of HUF 28,500 (€74,42), paid until the child's 3rd birthday. Parents receiving GYES must not work until the child turns 6 months, after that they may work full time. The GYED allowance is 70% of the average income of the 365 days before birth, up to a maximum of HUF 324,000 (€848.15) per month, and cannot be claimed by both parents at the same time; it is possible to work in addition. GYED can also be claimed under the same conditions by grandparents from the 1. to the 3. birthday of the child, if they care for the child at home. All parents who have been employed for at least one year and have at least one child under the age of 3 receive 44 additional days paid at 10% of an absence fee.

It is estimated that almost all mothers take Maternity leave and most fathers also take the days to which they are entitled. Only absolute figures exist on the take-up of parental leave: in 2021, 113,033 parents received GYED and 148,496 GEYES. No further statistics are available.

⁴ The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Hungary by András Gábos and Zsuzsanna Makay in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Hungary

Country expert assessment by **Marta Korintus**

Several changes in the auspices of nurseries within the government structure and ministerial re-organisation after the 2022 elections have affected the perspectives. Before 2022, nurseries and kindergartens came under the same ministry (EMMI – Ministry of Human Resources). Even though the responsibilities were under different ministry departments, there was some hope of achieving a unified approach to ECEC. Now different ministries are once again responsible for nurseries (Ministry of Culture and Innovation) and kindergartens (Ministry of the Interior), thus diminishing hopes of a society-level acceptance of nurseries as places of early childhood education.

1. Affecting workers in both sectors is the *The Digital Education Strategy of Hungary*, which was adopted by the Government Decree 1536/2016, IX. 13 (Hungarian Government, 1536/2016). The main goal of DES is that nobody leaves the public education and training system without adequate digital competencies. An expected additional result would be to ensure that all children's groups in nurseries and kindergartens have the necessary equipment (e.g. laptops) for the administrative tasks.
2. The workforce challenges Hungary is facing are still related to the level of wages. Teachers, *óvodapedagógusok* in kindergartens and *kisgyermeknevelő* in nurseries, have always had lower wages compared with other sectors (maybe the only exception being social services). Over the past years, the government introduced higher wages in many sectors of the economy with the result that earnings in the education sector as a whole have been left behind. The situation had become so serious that in 2022, fewer prospective students applied for admission to pedagogical oriented universities than the number of places available. However, the government has now recently introduced a major wage increase for pedagogues employed in *bölcsőde*, *óvoda* and schools and other types of services. The scale of contribution from the central budget is an average 32.2% effective on 1 January 2024 (Hungarian Government 662/2023). Further plans include yearly increases to achieve an average 90% wage increase by the year 2025.
3. Due to changes in the remuneration (i.e. the introduction of wage supplements) for *kisgyermeknevelő* with lower-level qualifications in nurseries, staff with a BA education level now earn somewhat less. This situation creates tensions within the workplace, and also results in less people wanting to work in these jobs.

Demographic data

Please note

For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Hungary was 9,689,010, representing a continuous decrease over the last 20 years (2000: 10,221,644; 2010: 10,014,324; 2020: 9,769,526) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.61, Hungary was slightly above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)⁵.

Children under 6 years of age

Table 9

Hungary: Number of children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under age 1	93,594
1 year-olds	93,677
2 year-olds	93,107
3 year-olds	93,411
4 year-olds	94,835
5 year-olds	95,918
Total 0 to 6 year-olds	564,542

Source: Eurostat 2023a.

In 2022, 2.9% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, 5.8% were children under 6 years of age. Since 2000, these percentages have been below the respective EU averages, in 2022 they were slightly above.

Table 10

Hungary: Distribution of under 6 year-olds in population by age-group compared with EU averages, 2000 – 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Hungary/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Hungary	2.8	3.2	6.0
	Ø EU15 ⁶	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Hungary	2.8	2.9	5.7
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Hungary	2.8	2.8	5.6
	Ø EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Hungary	2.9	2.9	5.8
	Ø EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, *Own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

⁵ Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/> and <https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/>). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU>).

⁶ The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO and HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Single households with children under 6 years of age

71.7% of households with children under 6 in Hungary were couple households in 2022. Households with single parents accounted for only 1.8% – almost exclusively single mothers (1.7%).

Table 11

Hungary: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in %*
Total households	970,500	
Couple households	695,700	71.7
Other types of households	257,500	26.5
Total single households	17,200	1.8
Single households, women	16,200	1.7
Single households, men	1,000**	0.1

Source: Eurostat 2023l, *Own calculations **Calculated data

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Hungary, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 81.9% and for women 72.4% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 68.3% of women and 89.5% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were above the EU-average (87.2%) as were those of mothers (EU-average 63.6%) (Eurostat 2023k, own calculations).

Table 12a

Hungary: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Hungary	32.7	78.5
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries ⁷	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Hungary	68.3	89.5
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries ⁸	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023k

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 12b*

⁷ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

⁸ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Table 12b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023)
*Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
+++United Kingdom (2021/2023)	75.6	92.1	++72.3	++79.2
with dependent children	72.4	93.1	++72.1 (2023)	++79.4 (2023)
with children under 2 years	70.7	95.0		
with children 3–4 years				

*Eurostat 2023j, 2023k

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03>

***Rosstat. 2022. *Statistical annex SDG in Russia 2022*. <https://eng.rosstat.gov.ru/sdg/report/document/70355>;

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+[SSSU] State Statistics Service of Ukraine. 2022. *Employed population in 2021, by age group, sex and place of residence*. https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2017/rp/eans/eans_e/Arch_znsmv_e.htm

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion⁹

In 2022, 16.3% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was well below the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 18.4% (EU: 21.6%). In 2020, 15.6% of children under 6 and 7.6% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation which was significantly above the EU average (6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023h, i). National data show that in 2019, the proportion of families with more than three children (22%) and Roma families (30.9%) suffering from severe material deprivation were among the highest in Europe (Eurochild 2021).

⁹ 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or (severely) materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)

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