

ITALY

Key contextual data

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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 ECEC provision are: **nursery** (nido 0–3) and **pre-primary school** (*scuola dell’infanzia* 3–6)¹. Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Italy

1828	First childcare centre (<i>asilo</i>) founded in Cremona by the priest Ferrante Aporti to educate and care for children from 2 to 6 years in poverty or affected by health problems. Aporti’s ideas spread rapidly in some northern regions in Italy, in particular in Lombardy and Tuscany. Nearly 20 years later, Aporti reports that 178 <i>asili infantili</i> have been established.
1840	First vocational schools established with a three-year programme for the training of childhood assistants, who could work in nurseries, children’s orphanages, children’s hospital wards and any other childcare institution.
Late 1850s	Several kindergartens based on Froebelian principles are founded. Resistance within the Catholic Church to the new educational ideas.
1861	Unification of Italy
1862	Childcare institutions are brought together with other public welfare institutions under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior. Provincial educational authorities are responsible for the suitability of staff and inspections. ECEC settings remain institutions provided mainly by private or religious associations and charities, but not as state-run educational institutions.
1895-1917	Rosa and Carolina Agazzi initiate a fusion of Aporti’s infant school and Froebel’s kindergarten in Mompiano near Brescia and produce a prototypical Italian school for young children (<i>scuola materna</i>) with a family-like atmosphere. They call for a broad expansion of educational services with state participation.
1907	Opening of first Montessori kindergarten (<i>Casa dei Bambini</i>) in Rome
1910-1920	Reggio Emilia is a pioneer among Italian cities, founding the first municipal nurseries.
1920s	Establishment of ONMI [<i>National organisation for the protection of mother and child</i>], public services for destitute families, under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior (Law 227/1925)
1923	<i>Scuola materna</i> recognised as a pre-primary educational institution.
1933	First upper secondary schools of education established with a three-year programme for the training of pre-primary teachers. Apart from some slight modifications, these schools remain in operation until 2001.
1963	First municipal preschool/kindergarten opened in Bologna and Reggio Emilia.
1968	Integration of the <i>scuola materna</i> into the state education system (Law 444/1968)
1969	Publication of the first National Guidelines for educational activities in the state <i>scuola materna</i> (<i>Orientamenti per l’attività educativa nella scuola materna statale</i> – Decree n. 647/1969)

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 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 the case of Italy, in compliance with Italian legislation and regulations, the authors of this report have chosen the age formats: **0–3** years for children up to 3 years of age and **3–6** years for those attending pre-primary settings.



1970s	Establishment of nurseries, childcare services for infant and toddlers of working mothers. Nurseries are defined not as universal provision, but as an individual service on demand in support of women's employment. Municipalities and private entities are responsible for providing them (Law 1044/1971).
1980s	The project <i>Tempo per le Famiglie</i> is initiated in Milan by the city council and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation – a precursor to the later integrative services for under-threes and their families (<i>Centri per bambini e famiglie</i>). Research on the dissemination of these centres shows that in 2013, 423 such centres were in operation, the majority in central and northern Italy.
1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Publication of new pedagogical guidelines for pre-primary education (<i>Nuovi Orientamenti dell'attività educativa per la scuola materna</i> – Decree 3 June 1991) – Services for the under-threes start expanding, accompanied by increasing collaboration between research agencies and ECEC services. A culture of Early Education begins and new professional organisations are established, such as the <i>Gruppo Nazionale Nidi Infanzia</i> (founded by Loris Malaguzzi). – Establishment of a special national fund for local administrations to use for actions supporting children and young people – Expansion of integrative services for under-threes such as <i>Centri per bambini e famiglie</i> (Centres for Children and families) and <i>Spazi Gioco</i> (Playgroups) (Law 285/1997) – Establishment of four-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education that makes teachers eligible to teach in pre-primary (3–6) and primary (6–11) schools (DM 26 May 1998) – A growing number of studies, most of them action-research projects, are conducted in collaboration between researchers and practitioners and are closely related to practice and methodological innovation.
2004	National Guidelines for “individualised educational activities” in the <i>scuola dell'infanzia</i> (<i>Indicazioni per i piani personalizzati delle attività educative alla scuola dell'infanzia</i> – DM 59/2004).
2007	National Curricular Guidelines for pre-primary and primary cycle of education (<i>Indicazioni Nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione</i> – DM 31 July 2007)
2010	Establishment of a single-cycle 5-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (DM n. 249/ 2010)
2012	Revised version of the National Curricular Guidelines for pre-primary cycle (<i>Indicazioni Nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione</i> – DM 254/2012)
2015	Education Reform Act (Law 107/2015) outlines a “Reform of the national education and training system and mandate to reorganise existing legislative provisions” at all levels, including early childhood education and care.
2017	Law Decree 65/2017 (<i>Istituzione del Sistema integrato di educazione e istruzione dalla nascita sino ai 6 anni</i> – Establishing an integrated system of education from birth to six years) comes into force, introducing a series of implementation measures for the new unitary system.
2018	Update of the National Curricular Guidelines for pre-primary and primary education (<i>Indicazioni Nazionali e Nuovi Scenari</i> – MIUR, 1 March 2018)
2019/20	Bachelor's degree in Educational Science with a specific pathway in Early Childhood Education becomes obligatory for educators working with children under 3 years of age.
2021	National Guidelines defining both the cultural and pedagogical framework of the integrated system zero-to-six issued (<i>Linee guida pedagogiche per il sistema integrato zero-sei</i> – DM n. 334, 22 November 2021)
2022	National Guidelines for educational services 0–3 years (<i>Orientamenti nazionali per i servizi educativi per l'infanzia</i> , DM 43/2022)



Sources: Albisetti 2009; Bove and Cescato 2018; Hohnerlein 2009; Musatti 2015; Musatti and Mantovani 2013; Musatti and Picchio 2010; OECD 2017; Willekens and Scheiwe 2020, Picchio and Bove 2023.

ECEC system type and auspices²

The ECEC system in Italy has been changed by law from a split-sector to an integrated system recognised as the first stage of the national education system. In 2015, the Education Reform Act (107/2015) was adopted. Two years later a Law (65/2017) established the framework for an integrated ECEC system from birth to six years of age. Not only pre-primary schools (*scuole dell'infanzia*) for 3 to 6 year-olds and so-called 'Spring sections' (*sezione primavera*) for 2 to 3 year-olds now come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education (*Ministero dell'Istruzione*), but also educational services for children under three years of age (*servizi educativi per l'infanzia*).

Italy has a three-tier system of ECEC governance. Besides the Ministry of Education at the national level, the 20 Regions of Italy are responsible for the regulatory framework for educational services for under-threes and the administrative body may be either the education or the social policy department. At the local level, services for under-threes are provided by municipalities or the private sector while *scuole per l'infanzia* are provided by the state, municipalities and the private sector.

General objectives and legislative framework

Key legislative frameworks and declarations regarding children's right to education in an ECEC setting are the Italian Constitution, which emphasises the state's commitment to redress inequalities and promote the full development of all citizens; the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and relevant European Union documents. Overarching goals of early childhood education are to support children's identity building, autonomy and competence development, as well as laying the foundations for an understanding of civic values.

The Education Reform Act 107/2015 ("Reform of the national education and training system and mandate to reorganise existing legislation") and the related Legislative Decree 65/2017 ("Establishing an integrated system of education from birth to six years") provide the framework for a fundamental reform of the Italian education system. As described in the previous section, the two previously separated sectors of early childhood education and care are to be integrated into a unitary system.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

There is no legal entitlement to a place in an ECEC setting for 0 to 6 year-olds; nevertheless, high enrolment rates are the norm in pre-primary schools, including 3 year-olds. Attendance in all kinds of ECEC provision for 0 to 6 year-olds is voluntary.

Statutory schooling begins at age 6.

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

Main types of provision

Nurseries (*nidi*) provide care and education for children aged 0–3 years. Children with special educational needs are prioritised in admissions policies. Opening hours range between 7:30 and 9:00 in the morning to between 16:00 and 18:00 in the afternoon (Musatti and Picchio 2010).

According to national statistics (ISTAT 2023a), in 2021/2022 there were 11,618 nurseries, mini-crèches, and Spring sections in Italy, of which 4,282 (=37.2%) had a public provider. Of the total of 326,660 places available, about half (163,927) were public. In total, 57.9% of the Italian municipalities provided nurseries. At the end of 2021, the Lombardy Region had the most nurseries and mini-crèches (1,850). Overall, the largest number of settings (nurseries, mini-crèches and Spring sections combined) was in Lombardy (2,399), Lazio (1,283) and Veneto (1,135) (ISTAT 2023a).

Integrative centres/services (*servizi integrativi*) are also available for the under threes. They were initiated in the 1980s within a family policy framework (*Tempo per le Famiglie*). At the end of 2021, there were 1,900 of these services, of which 697 were playgroups; however, these settings are found in only 12.7% of municipalities and the attendance rate (0 to under 3 years) accounts for only 0.7% (ISTAT 2023a).

'Spring sections' (*sezioni primavera*) for 2 to 3 year-olds are aimed to smooth the transition between nurseries and pre-primary education. They may be located in either kind of setting, depending on the local circumstances. 'Spring sections' were first established in 2007 as an experimental form to meet the growing demand of families. In 2021, there were 2,679 Spring sections (ISTAT 2023a).

In total, at the end of 2021 in Italy, there were 13,518 facilities for under-threes with 350,307 places, almost half of which (48.8%) had public providers. Only 11.2% of the places are found in the southern regions (ISTAT 2023a), even though more than one third of all children under 3 years of age live there (CRC 2022).

In 2021/2022, 85.4% of available places for under 3 year-olds were in nurseries (*nidi*), 13.6% in Spring sections and 7.2% in integrative services, which include playgroups and centres for children and families (ISTAT 2023a, and own calculations).

Pre-primary schools (*scuole dell'infanzia*) are the regular form of provision for 3 to 6 year-olds. In general, these are state-maintained. However, in the larger cities with well-developed municipal provision the children often attend a municipal pre-primary school. Children must usually be at least 3 years old by the 31st December in any one year to attend. If places are available, younger children can also be accepted. *Scuole dell'infanzia* are open for eight hours daily, from 8:00/9:00 to 16:00/16:30 (Musatti and Picchio 2010). Municipal and private pre-primary schools often offer longer opening hours if there is a need. They are closed in July and August for the summer break.

According to national statistics, in 2021 there were 22,476 *scuole dell'infanzia* with 1,338,067 children attending, 72.9% of them in public pre-primary schools. 2.4% were children with disabilities and 11.5% were children with a non-Italian background (ISTAT 2023c).

A number of 2 year-olds, that is in advance of the planned starting age of 3 years, access *scuola dell'infanzia* and are included in the same groups of older children. This is the case in areas where the provision of ECEC services for children under 3 is scarce, such as in southern regions.

Provider structures

Nurseries and integrative services for the under 3 year-olds are usually run by municipal or private providers. Local authorities can also commission private agencies to establish nursery settings, or they may be provided by cooperatives or companies for their employees (Bove and Cescato 2018).

In 2021/2022, 4,606 of all (13,518) settings (nurseries, integrative services, Spring sections) were public (=34.1%), as were 48.8% of the available places. Regional variations are considerable: in Calabria, only 20.8% of the settings had a public provider whereas in Molise 59.2% were public (ISTAT 2023a, own calculations). Particularly in the larger cities, the proportion of publicly run settings is significantly higher, whereas in the southern parts of the country, some municipalities do not offer any kind of service.

The majority of Spring sections (83.1%) and of the integrative services (82.9%) were private in 2021/2022 (ISTAT 2023a).

Pre-primary schools (*scuole dell'infanzia*) may be run by the state, the municipalities or private (mostly church-affiliated) providers. Some pre-primary classes are in private independent schools which, under certain circumstances, have a status similar to that of state schools (*scuole dell'infanzia paritarie*). Regional disparities in the distribution of providers are considerable. In the southern parts of the country there tend to be more state-run pre-primary schools than in the north. As far as 0–3 services are concerned, public sector provision dominates in most of the northern and central Italian cities as well as on the outskirts of Bologna, Florence and Milan (ISTAT, Università Ca' Foscari and MIPA 2022, 14).

Overall, in 2021, more than half (58.8%) of pre-primary schools were public, nearly one third (32.2%) were private and 9.1% were run by municipalities. 72.9% of all children under the age of 6 attend a public pre-primary school. However, there are clear regional differences: While in Valle d'Aosta 83.1% of children are enrolled in a public setting, this is only the case for only just over half of children (58%) in Lombardy (ISTAT 2023c).

Table 1

Italy: Number and share of pre-primary schools and children by provider type, 2021

Provider	Number of schools	Share of schools, in %	Number of children	Share of children, in %
Public (state)	13,205	58.8	841,394	62.9
Public (municipal)	2,042	9.1	133,411	10.0
Private	7,229	32.2	363,262	27.1
Total	22,476		1,338,067	

Source: ISTAT 2023c, own calculations

Participation rates in regulated provision

The overall enrolment rate of 0 to 3 year-olds in nurseries, mini-crèches and Spring sections at the end of 2021 was 15.2%. Considerable differences in the enrolment rates remain between northern and southern Italy –22.9% in the North-East and only 6.6% in the southern regions. The highest participation rates were in Trento (32.1%), Emilia Romagna (30.9%), and in Friuli (30.5%), while in Calabria these rates were only 4.5% and in Campania only 4.3% (ISTAT 2023a).

25% of under 3 year-olds participated in centre-based provision in 2005, by 2022 this proportion has increased to 30.9%. The larger majority of children between 3 years of age and school entry attend some form of ECEC provision, although overall participation increased marginally from 91% in 2005 to 92.1% in 2022.

Table 2

Italy: Participation rates according to duration of attendance in centre-based settings 2005-2022

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years, in %	3 years up to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	9	21
	Over 30 hours	16	70
	No enrolment in ECEC	79	9
2010	1 to 29 hours	6	17
	Over 30 hours	16	70
	No enrolment in ECEC	78	13
2015	1 to 29 hours	10.4	23.3
	Over 30 hours	16.9	62.6
	No enrolment in ECEC	72.7	14.1
2022	1 to 29 hours	10.8	21.0
	Over 30 hours	20.1	71.1
	No enrolment in ECEC	69.1	7.9

Source: Eurostat 2023b

The participation rates for 3 to 6 year-olds are much higher: between 87% and 92% in 2021, whereas only 12.7% of the 2 year-olds attend an ECEC setting (see Table 3).

Table 3

Italy: Number and enrolment rates of children in centre-based ECEC settings, by age, 2021

Age	Number of children in ISCED 01 settings	Enrolment rates in ISCED 01 settings, in %	Number of children in ISCED 02 settings	Enrolment rates in ISCED 02 settings, in %
Under 2 years	n.d.			
2 year-olds	56,503	1.7		
3 year-olds			404,923	87.2
4 year-olds			441,498	91.9
5 year-olds			428,794	86.9
6 year-olds			6,349	1.3

Source: Eurostat 2023h, i

In 2020/21, the overall attendance rate of the over 3 year-olds was 88.7%. Especially in the southern regions and on the islands the groups also include some 2 year-olds (21.7% and 16.9% respectively) (CRC 2022, 127).

Financing and costs for parents

According to OECD data, total public expenditure on early childhood education and care amounted to 0.56% of GDP in 2019: 0.1% on provision for under 3 year-olds and approximately 0.5% on provision for 3 to under 6 year-olds (OECD 2023).



The Ministry of Education is responsible for the allocation of financial resources to the regional authorities, which provide guidelines for promoting the integrated system at the local level.

Nurseries and other ECEC services for under 3 year-olds are fee-paying for parents - in 2020 the national average comprised 12.7% of the total costs; compared to 2019 it fell by almost 6 percentage points (ISTAT 2023b, 3). The fees vary according to the family income, with considerable regional differences (CRC 2021). However, the Legislative Decree 65/2017 introduced an 'upper limit' to the contribution of families for covering the costs of running ECEC services.

State-maintained **pre-primary schools** are fully publicly funded: salaries by the state and buildings and meals by the municipalities. Municipal ECEC pre-primary schools working according to the national guidelines receive part-funding by the state, while buildings and staff salaries are financed by the municipality. Apart from a small sum for meals and transport, public pre-primary schooling is free of charge. Low-income families do not have to pay for meals and transport. There are no available data regarding the fee levels of private *scuole dell'infanzia*, which are established by the provider).

Staff to child ratios and group size

In **nurseries** and other settings for under 3 year-olds, children are mostly allocated to same-age groups, sometimes to mixed-age groups. The Regions decide on the required group size and staff to child ratios. There are no national regulations. The staff to child ratio varies between 1:5 and 1:10 according to the children's age and the region.

In **pre-primary schools**, groups are also usually organised according to the children's age. However, for some activities children of different ages are brought together in order to strengthen relationships between the older and younger children. In state-run provision, group size varies between a minimum of 18 and a maximum of 26 (under certain circumstances this may be 29). If children with special educational needs are enrolled, the group size is reduced accordingly. Each full-time class has two teachers who alternate and work individually in the morning or afternoon. During the midday meal, both teachers are present. In many municipal pre-primary schools, the co-presence of two teachers is also provided during other times of the day in order to divide the group of children into small groups. The staff to child ratio, taking as a reference the maximum limit of children for each section, is 1:26. In 2021, 19.7 children were enrolled in public settings, 19.1 in private settings, i.e. 19.5 on average (ISTAT 2023c).

Curricular framework

In 2021, Pedagogical Guidelines for the Integrated System 0–6 (*Linee Pedagogiche per il Sistema Integrato Zerosei*) were adopted by the Ministry of Education. They define both the cultural and the pedagogical framework of ECEC services, proposing a unitary and holistic approach to the education of children from birth up to 6 years of age.

In 2022, National orientation guidelines for educational practice in ECEC services attended by children **under 3 years of age** (*Orientamenti nazionali per i servizi educativi per l'infanzia*) were issued by the Ministry of Education. The guidelines provide a framework for planning and implementing a high-quality educational environment which supports children's agency and the development of their cognitive, social and communicative competences – through play, exploration, relationships with peers and adults, respecting each child's needs and rhythms of growth.



Centre programmes include various activities (e.g. times for play and rest, mealtimes, health care); sometimes family members (e.g. grandparents) are involved in parts of the everyday programme. Activities aim to foster the children’s socialisation and learning at the individual and group level.

Since 2013/14, **pre-primary schools** are required to work according to the “National Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-primary Institutions and the First Cycle of Education” (*Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell’infanzia e del primo ciclo di istruzione 2012; Indicazioni Nazionali e nuovi scenari 2018*) issued by the Ministry of Education in line with key competences for life-long learning adopted by the European Parliament. They are also binding for private pre-primary settings with equal status to state schools (*scuole paritarie*).

The curriculum is structured according to five key areas of experience and learning: (1) The self and others, (2) Body and movement, (3) Pictures, sounds and colours, (4) Language and words, (5) Knowledge of the world. Catholic kindergartens develop their own area of learning regarding religious education. The guidelines include competences which children are expected to have acquired by the end of their time in pre-primary schools, e.g. to be able to express their feelings, to enter into relationships with others, to convey experiences through language, to think about different meanings, or to show an understanding of rules. ‘Civic education’ has been a compulsory, cross-curricular subject in schools since 2020 (Ministerial Decree 35/2020). At the pre-primary level the focus is on identity development, respect, health, and well-being. ‘Reading literacy’ is not specified as a learning area in the National Guidelines (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 99).

Although staff are free to choose their preferred teaching methods, they are expected to ensure that the children experience a balanced curriculum between routine procedures and new learning; to be aware of the importance of active and discovery-oriented approaches; to organise the rooms in an aesthetically stimulating way; to feel responsible for the children’s overall spatial experiences; and to offer them support when needed.

Digital education

The Ministerial Decree 35/2020 for all stages of the education system states that children should be introduced to digital devices in an age-appropriate way. Besides experiencing positive examples, teachers should also help children to become aware of the related risks.

Monitoring – Evaluation

In Italy, there is currently no nationally regulated or mandated system of evaluation of children’s individual achievements, while national assessment procedures of pre-primary schools were recently introduced (Eurydice 2023; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019).

Child-related assessment

In both **nurseries** and **pre-primary schools** no formal or testing assessment takes place. According to the Pedagogical Guidelines for the Integrated System 0–6 (*Linee Pedagogiche per il Sistema Integrato Zerosei*), observations and narrative documentation of children’s experience in everyday life of ECEC service provide the basis for tracing, analysing and understanding the development of this experience over time at the individual and group level in order to share it with parents and children and plan improved educational practices.

Centre-level assessment

There are no national regulations for internal evaluations at the centre level in **nurseries**. However, some Regions are developing self-evaluation instruments to qualify for accreditation procedures for nurseries.

Pre-primary schools have recently been included in the national educational quality assurance framework. Each pre-primary school is required to submit a Self-Evaluation Report (*RAV Infanzia*) following a set format developed by the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education System (INVALSI).

External evaluation

Regional and municipal authorities are responsible for inspections in **nurseries** and other provision for under 3 year-olds. These monitoring and evaluation procedures focus mainly on the structural quality of provision and compliance with the regional regulations.

External evaluations in **pre-primary schools** take place through the Regional Education Office of the Ministry of Education, but not necessarily on a regular basis. Beyond inspecting the rooms, equipment and compliance with safety regulations, staffing quality, curriculum implementation and the children's progress are also the focus of such evaluations. Inspections are not conducted according to a standardised instrument. The *scuole dell'infanzia paritarie* are checked for compliance with regulations every three years, when they reapply for accreditation.

Inclusion agenda

The principle of inclusion is enshrined in the Italian Constitution. Legislation and policy for inclusive education is cross-sectoral to ensure the efficient co-ordination of services, as well as clearly defining roles and responsibilities (EASNIE 2021).

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

In Italy, legislation adopted in 1992 ("Framework Law for the assistance, social integration and the rights of persons with disabilities") requires that children with disabilities and other special educational needs are included as far as possible in mainstream provision, both in nurseries and in pre-primary schools. Relevant guidance was issued by the Ministry of Education in 2009. Individual educational plans are developed for these children and they receive special support measures which may include additional specialist staff. Segregated pre-primary schools no longer exist. In a small number of schools that are considered "bilingual", deaf children are included in regular groups where both they and their peers without a hearing impairment learn sign language as a second language.

A Special Needs Teacher is usually employed in a pre-primary school if a child with special needs is enrolled. Their role is to support the individual child, but also to promote processes of inclusion and integration within the group of children. If a child with special needs is enrolled in an educational service 0–3 years, employing a Special Needs Teacher is not a requirement, but either the number of children in the group is decreased or the number of educators is increased (Picchio and Bove 2023).

In 2021, children with disabilities accounted for 2.4% of the total number of children enrolled in pre-primary schools, 2.8% of those in public and 1.2% of those in private settings (ISTAT 2023c).

No data are available for nurseries.

Children with a migration background

In 2021, 11.5% children with a non-Italian background were enrolled in a pre-primary setting, 13.2% in public, 6.9% in private settings (ISTAT 2023c).

In 2022, 8.5% of the population in Italy held a non-Italian citizenship. More than two-thirds of them (72.4%) came from countries outside the EU-27 (2020). In the group of children under 5 years, 14.1% had a non-Italian background and three-quarters (75.4%) of them were from non-EU countries (Eurostat 2023c).

Parental leave arrangements³

Compulsory **Maternity leave** (*congedo di maternità*) lasts five months. At least four weeks of these can be taken before the expected birth date. During this period, monthly payments are based on 80% of previous earnings (no upper limit).

Employed fathers have to take ten compulsory days **Paternity leave** (*congedo di paternità*) in the period from two months before the birth to five months after the birth; they are fully paid with no upper limit. A further one day of optional Leave is available if the mother transfers part of her Maternity leave.

Each (employed) parent can be granted up to six months of **Parental leave** (*congedo parentale*), three months are non-transferable. It may be taken in different time blocks and also simultaneously at any time up to the child's 12th birthday. Parental benefit is paid for three months for mother and father each, as well as three additional months for one of them. If the father takes at least three months, parental leave is extended to 11 months. While the children are still under 6 years of age, parents receive 30% of their earnings; once the child is older, leave is unpaid. After nine months, an income-related allowance is paid if the income is less than 2.5 times the amount of the minimum pension (2021: €515.28).

Parental leave, which lasts about 15–16 months (depending on the bonus months of the father), is only well paid for about five months, but ECEC provision for children under 3 is fee-paying and availability varies considerably from region to region, resulting in a significant gap between leave entitlement and access to childcare services.

In 2021, 21% of employees making use of Parental leave in the private sector were men. On average fathers took 25 months of parental leave – compared to 61 months taken by mothers.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Italy

Country expert assessment by Mariacristina Picchio and Chiara Bove

As already described in the Italian *ECEC Workforce Profile*, an important reform of the Early Childhood Education and Care system is in progress in Italy. In relation to the approval of the national law 107/2015 and the subsequent Law implementation Decree 65/2017, which legislates the “institution of the integrated system from birth to six years”, a process of gradually establishing this system is in progress.

Main challenges are:

³ The brief information in this section is based mainly on the country note for Italy by Tindara Addabbo, Valentina Cardinali, Dino Giovannini, and Sara Mazzucchelli in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see *References*).

1. Redefining and implementing regular State financing or co-financing of ECEC services through one source, namely the Ministry of Education (MIUR)
2. Earmarking state funding for local services according to minimal standards
3. Progressively redefining ECEC governance to guarantee greater homogeneity and basic requirements through negotiations in a Standing Committee (*Conferenza Unificata*) comprising representatives of the state, the regions, the provinces and the municipalities
4. Ensuring more accessible services for all families, especially for the most vulnerable ones; increasing provision for children up to the age of three (overcoming inequalities and cultural barriers – Decree 65/2017, Article 4 (h))
5. Developing high quality integrated centres for the education of children aged 0–6 years (*Poli per l'infanzia*) and encouraging training programmes that involve 0–3 Educators and 3–6 Teachers
6. Progressively reconceptualising the 0–3 services as no longer being services provided according to individual demand. This process will include reduced fees for families.
7. Establishing educational continuity across the ECEC sector, integrating ECEC services both horizontally (among different providers, i.e. state, municipalities, associations, private providers) and vertically (0–3/3-6)
8. Clarifying the various possible professional profiles, qualifications, functions, roles and in-service training of the Pedagogical Coordinators to ensure that they can act as a *key figure* in the local integration of the 0–3 and 3–6 sectors, according to the specificities of the region
9. Developing a national system for monitoring ECEC quality, for sustaining the expansion and improvement of ECEC services within the integrated system, and for reducing disparities and differences between Regions
10. Developing an *updated* professional profile for ECEC Educators and Teachers, capable of working within a more flexible and integrated 0–6 system
11. Reviewing the University curricula required for working in a 0–3 service: Bachelor degree in Educational Science with a specific pathway in Early Childhood Education, the additional course of 60 ECTS credits following a five-year degree in primary and pre-primary education required for teachers of *Scuola dell'Infanzia* to enter the 0–3 profession
12. Designing new integrated opportunities for CPD (as envisaged in Law 107/2015 and Legislative Decree 65/2017), by encouraging a strong commitment through Universities and local agencies.

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 population in Italy totalled 59,030,133. This represents a steady growth over the past 20 years; however, from 2020 it has been falling (2000: 56,923,524; 2010: 59,190,143; 2020: 59,641,488) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate of the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13).⁴ At 1.25, Italy is well below the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d).

Children under age 6

Table 4

Italy: Children under 6 years of age, 2022

Age of children	Number of children
Under age 1	400,626
1 year-olds	407,634
2 year-olds	425,183
3 year-olds	444,638
4 year-olds	464,753
5 year-olds	478,684
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	2,621,518

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, children under age 3 accounted for 2.5% and children under 6 years of age for 5.2% of the total population. Since 2000, these percentage rates have been consistently lower than the EU average.

Table 5

Italy: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population from 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Italy /EU	Under 3 year- olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Italy	2.8	2.8	5.5
	Ø EU15 ⁵	3.2	3.2	6.
2005	Italy	2.8	2.8	5.6
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Italy	2.5	2.8	5.3
	Ø EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Italy	2.1	2.4	4.4
	Ø EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

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

⁴ 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>).

⁵ 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 und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, 82.5% of households with children under age 6 were couple households. Single parent households accounted for 3.1%, whereby these were almost exclusively single mother households (2.9%).

Table 6

Italy: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Total households, in %*
Households – total	4,537,100	
Couple households	3,743,400	82.5
Other types of households	653,200	14.4
Single households, total	140,500	3.1
Single households, women	132,800	2.9
Single households, men	7,700	0.2

Source: Eurostat 2023k, * Own calculations

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Italy, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 74.6% and for women 56.4% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 52.6% of women and 87.2% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers corresponded with the EU-average (87.2%); those of mothers were significantly lower (average 63.6%) (Eurostat 2023e, own calculations).

Table 7a

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

	2010	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %
Italy	51.8	88.8
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries ⁶	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2021	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %
Italy	52.6	87.2
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries ⁷	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 7b*.

⁶ 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

⁷ 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 7b

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) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	⁺⁺ 72.3 ⁺⁺ 72.1 (2023)	⁺⁺ 79.2 ⁺⁺ 79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023j

**[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/eanse/Archznmve.htm>

⁺⁺Statista. 2023. *Employment rate in the United Kingdom from June 1971 to January 2023, by gender*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/280120/employment-rate-in-the-uk-by-gender/>

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion⁸

In 2022, 26.8% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was above 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 also was 24.4% (EU: 21.6%). 5.4% of children under 6 and 6.1% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation in 2020 (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023f, g).

⁸ '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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