

# LITHUANIA

## 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](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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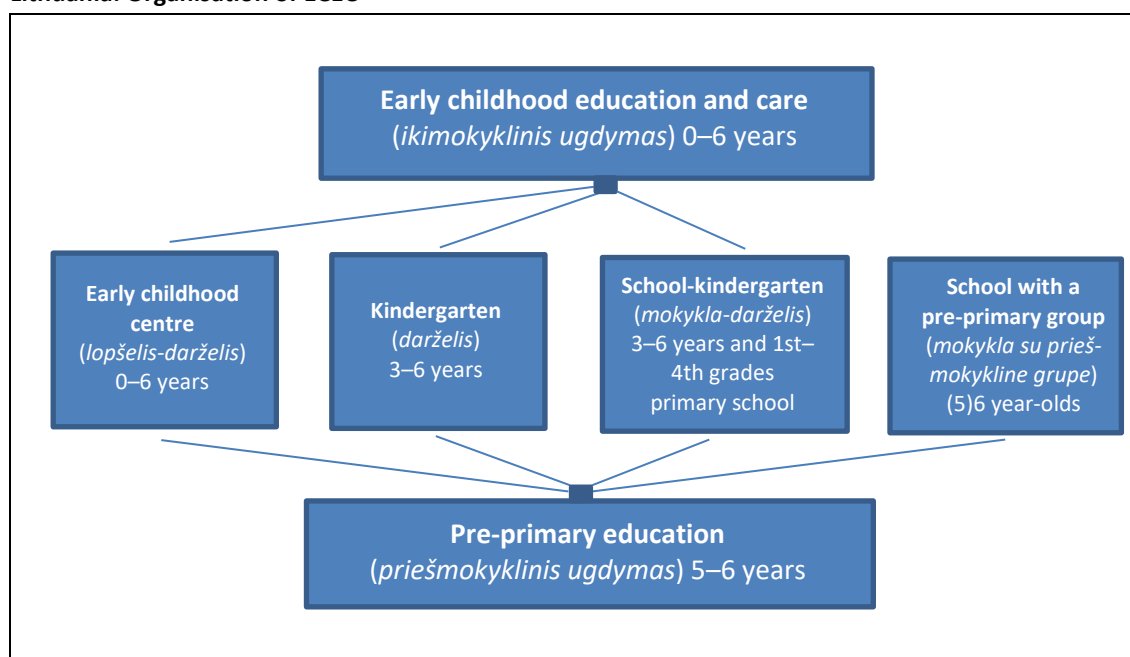
**Hanna Siarova** is Research Director at the Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI) in Vilnius. She has more than ten years of experience in research and evaluating policy areas such as equity and inclusion in and through education (specialising in ECEC and school education), gender equality and intersecting inequalities. In addition, she was a Deputy Scientific Coordinator of NESET (Network of experts on the social dimension of education and training) and EENEE (European expert network on economics in education), ECEC and school education and youth policies being one of the central themes of both networks.

## 1. ECEC governance in Lithuania

In Lithuania, early childhood education and care (ECEC) is classified as non-formal education. It is organised for children up to statutory schooling at the age of 7 as a unitary system in two stages and comes under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MoESS). **Early childhood education**<sup>1</sup> (*ikimokyklinis ugdymas*) in Lithuania is not compulsory except when a child is considered to live in a socially at-risk family. It is organised for children from birth up to age 6 or, in some instances, up to the age of 5. **Pre-primary education** (*priešmokyklinis ugdymas*) has been compulsory since 2016, and is organised as a preparatory class focusing on ‘school readiness’ for 6 year-olds and, in some instances, for 5 year-olds. The education system in Lithuania is decentralised, with the state and municipal levels working closely together. Both stages of ECEC are granted partial public funding for up to 20 hours per week. The Ministry of Education is responsible for developing and implementing educational policy and curricula. All ECEC provision comes under the responsibility of the municipal authorities. Therefore, admission to pre-primary education is processed either by the educational institution or centralised through a registration system developed by the municipality.

Figure 1

Lithuania: Organisation of ECEC



<sup>1</sup> **Editors’ note 1:** In government documents in Lithuania, the first stage of ECEC is referred to as “pre-school education” and the second stage as “pre-primary education”. However, since there is no clear distinction between the terms in English, in this report “pre-school education” will be referred to as **early childhood education** and “pre-school pedagogues” as **Early Childhood Pedagogues**.

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

### 2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

There are two kinds of core practitioners in Lithuanian ECEC provision:

- **Early Childhood Pedagogues** (*ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogė -as*), who work in early childhood centres, kindergartens and school-kindergartens, and
- **Pre-primary Pedagogues** (*priešmokyklinio ugdymo pedagogė -as*), who work in schools with a pre-primary education group. A co-worker with a professional training certificate generally assists the core practitioners. Pre-primary Pedagogues are entitled to an Assistant if there are more than 20 children in the group and there is no chance to create a sub-group.

Pedagogue Assistants in Lithuania (*ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogo padėjėja -as*) must have a secondary school leaving certificate and a professional training that lasts four months to be able to take care of children independently and support pedagogues in educational activities. Therefore, most staff hired in ECEC institutions have a pedagogical qualification that enables them to work with groups of younger or older children (MoESS 2015a).

Table 1 gives a brief description of the staff working in centre-based settings in Lithuania and also categorises the core practitioners (i.e. staff with a group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO-study (see Box 1 at the end of this chapter).

Table 1

Lithuania: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age-range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
<b>Early Childhood Pedagogue</b> <i>Ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogė -as</i>  Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	<i>Lopšelis-darželis</i> <b>Early childhood centre</b> 0–6 years <sup>2</sup>  <i>Darželis</i> <b>Kindergarten</b> 3–6 years  <i>Darželis-mokykla</i> <b>School-kindergarten</b> 3–6 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility	0–6 years	Professional Bachelor's degree or Bachelor's degree  ECTS credits: 180 or 240 EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2011: 6

<sup>2</sup> **Editors' note 2:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **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 Lithuania, the main relevant formats are **0–6** (early childhood centre) or **3–6** years (kindergarten/school-kindergarten) since compulsory primary school starts at age 7.

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age-range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
<b>Early Childhood or Pre-primary Pedagogue's Assistant</b> <i>Ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogo padėjėja -(as)</i>	<i>Lopšelis-darželis</i> <b>Early childhood centre</b> 0–6 years <i>Darželis,</i> <b>Kindergarten</b> 3–6 years <i>Darželis-mokykla,</i> <b>School-kindergarten</b> 3–6 years	Minimally qualified co-worker supporting the learning process and care duties	0–6 years	The requirements may vary but are usually a completed upper secondary school education and/or vocational training course lasting between 4 months to around a year, usually 6 months) + first aid courses and hygiene training. <i>Award: Vocational Certificate</i>  ECTS credits: at least 35, usually 45 EQF: Level 4 ISCED 2011: 4
<b>Pre-primary Pedagogue</b> <i>Priešmokyklinio ugdymo pedagogė – (as)</i>  <i>Profile:</i> Pre-primary Education Professional	<i>Lopšelis-darželis,</i> <b>Early childhood centre</b> 0–6 years  <i>Darželis,</i> <b>Kindergarten</b> 3–6 years  <i>Darželis-mokykla,</i> <b>School-kindergarten</b> 3–6 years  <i>Mokykla su priešmokyklinio ugdymo grupe</i> <b>School with a pre-primary education group</b> 6 year-olds	A core practitioner with group responsibility	0–6 years	Professional Bachelor's degree or Bachelor's degree  ECTS credits: 180 or 240 EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2011: 6

#### 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 ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)

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

## 2.2 Centre leader

In Lithuania, the leader of an early childhood centre (as for all educational institutions) is seen as the person with the most decision-making powers and responsibility. It is a hierarchical position rather than a collaborative one. It is expected that the leader will have sufficient management competencies and encourage the whole institution to strive for better results (NŠA 2021a). In addition, there is no requirement to work with children directly regularly. Therefore, the leadership role is more administrative than pedagogical.

The head of a state or municipal early childhood centre is appointed through a public tender. Applicants for the post of Centre Leader is expected to meet the following requirements and possess the required competences:

Table 2

**Lithuania: Required competences for the Centre Leader**

Requirements	General competences	Leadership competences
University degree or equivalent education	Personal efficiency	Strategic governance of the educational institution
An impeccable reputation	Strategic thinking and change management	Pedagogical leadership (teaching process)
General and leadership competencies, and have no less than one year of experience managing a group of people.	Ability to continue learning	Knowledge of the structures of educational institutions, processes and resources management
Be able to work with information technologies.	Efficient communication and information	Leading partnerships between educational institutions and cooperation initiatives
Have a good command of Lithuanian and know at least one of the European Union working languages (English, French, German) at level B1 or higher		
Alternative requirements include a Pedagogue qualification, work experience and educational degree.		

## 2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

In ECEC in Lithuania, there are no specifically designated positions for specialised pedagogical work across the ECEC centre (e.g. with a focus on working with the parents of migrant children or on students completing a practicum), except for experienced and practising pedagogues sometimes acting as mentors for student pedagogues during their internships in ECEC institutions.

However, Early Childhood and Pre-primary Pedagogues are rewarded for particularly complex educational work according to the criteria laid out below (Eurydice 2023c):

<b>5-10% salary increase</b>	– If two or more pupils in the group have <i>medium</i> special educational needs due to congenital or acquired disorders, or one to three pupils have <i>significant or severe</i> special educational needs due to genetic or acquired disorders
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– If one or more children with a migration background or with Lithuanian citizenship have come to live in Lithuania and do not speak the state language are educated in the group for the first two years after beginning schooling in Lithuania.</li> </ul>
<b>5-20% salary increase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– If the teacher works in an early childhood centre (group) for children with <i>significant or severe</i> special educational needs due to congenital or acquired disorders</li> <li>– If teaching children for whom home schooling is intended due to illness or a pathological condition.</li> </ul>

## 2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

In Lithuania, there are no legal provisions for **coordinating** staff with a counselling, coaching or support role who are responsible for a number of early childhood settings in a certain region with a focus on team and centre improvement. However, in the case of social pedagogical assistance to learners, the early childhood education institutions collaborate with social assistance providers, healthcare and law enforcement institutions, and offer consultations to children's parents and teachers. This is regulated by the General Regulations on Provisions of Social and Pedagogical Assistance (Eurydice 2023b).

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is responsible for the state supervision of education providers' activities. The supervision of education institutions, including early childhood education institutions, are performed by the owners, institutions that implement the rights and obligations of the owners, and municipal executive institutions, with the help of external evaluators, if needed. External evaluations are performed regularly, initiated by the same actors. The external evaluation procedures are established and regulated by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport. The National Education Agency, an evaluation institution operating at the national level, is responsible for preparing external evaluators for all educational institutions throughout Lithuania. A single assessment system is used across all types of institution, including early childhood centres. However, there are no specialist supervisory staff specifically for the ECEC sector, only for general education institutions (Eurydice 2023d).

## 2.5 Specialist support staff

Specialist support staff include Psychologists, Social Pedagogical Assistants, and Public Health Consultants. Psychologists are in early childhood centres and kindergartens on a regular basis. They provide counselling and support for children, organise psychological tests, contribute to didactic materials, and work with children with special needs. Social Pedagogical Assistants also have a permanent working space in schools and early childhood centres. Their task is to ensure the child's safety at education institutions and cooperate with social assistance providers, parents, and guardians. Health Care specialists' working space is also based in education institutions. They are responsible for primary health care and methodological assistance providing health care and consultations on health improvement activities to teachers, learners, and parents. Language coaches and Special Needs staff can work with up to 30 and 24 children accordingly both on a demand basis or regularly in ECEC institutions.



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

The ECEC workforce in Lithuania is rather homogenous. Most of the professionals working as ECEC educators are women with a specialist higher education degree or vocational qualification. This gender imbalance may be influenced by existing stereotypes about the teaching profession and ECEC sector and limited recognition of the profession. The ethnic composition of the ECEC workforce is unknown as such statistics are not available. Most of the staff in ECEC sector are the core practitioners, meaning general educators, and only slightly more than 10% of staff are other pedagogical or support staff, such as psychologists, special teachers, art instructors, and others. This may be a result of an integrated and holistic approach to early childhood education, where general educators are responsible for different subjects and development activities, including arts and socio-emotional competences.

Table 3

Lithuania: Structural composition of ECEC workforce, 2021

Pedagogical staff categories	Percentage
Pedagogical staff with a specialist three-year (or longer) early years higher education degree ( <i>Aukštasis išsilavinimas</i> ) in <b>Total</b> / urban / rural areas	<b>74.9</b> / 74.8 / 76
Pedagogical staff with a specialist vocational qualification: post-secondary education ( <i>Aukštesnysis išsilavinimas</i> ) in <b>Total</b> / urban / rural areas	<b>19</b> / 19 / 19.2
Pedagogue Assistants (primarily unqualified) with only secondary education ( <i>vidurinis išsilavinimas</i> ) in <b>Total</b> / urban / rural areas	<b>4.4</b> / 4.4 / 4.1
Specialist support staff who work on-site regularly <b>Total</b> / urban / rural areas	Core practitioners: <b>77.3</b> / 79.8 / 81.4 Art instructors: <b>4.2</b> / 4.5 / 3 Special teachers: <b>0.7</b> / 0.4 / 0.4 Speech therapists: <b>4.1</b> / 4.4 / 3.3 Psychologists: <b>0.6</b> / 0.6 / 0.2 Other pedagogical staff: <b>4.6</b> / 4.6 / 5.6
Leading staff <b>Total</b> / urban / rural areas	Principals: <b>3.9</b> / 4.1 / 3.3 Deputy director: <b>3.6</b> / 3.8 / 2.6
Male staff in the ECEC workforce	Less than <b>1%</b>
Staff with a background of migration	No national data available

Source: Statistics Lithuania 2022

## 4. Initial professional education (IPE)

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

Since 2009, pedagogues employed in early childhood centres and pre-primary institutions must have a higher education degree at Bachelor's level.<sup>3</sup> Up to 2009, the requirement was a post-secondary specialist qualification; up to 1995, an upper secondary specialist qualification (MoESS 2005). **Early Childhood Pedagogues** have a degree either awarded from attending a study programme specialising in early childhood education or from a study programme specialising in education and who have then acquired a supplementary teaching qualification. **Pre-primary Pedagogues** have a degree from a study programme specialising in early childhood or pre-primary education and have completed a 40-hour course on work in pre-primary groups (or a similar course) during their studies.

In addition, all ECEC pedagogues are required to complete courses in special pedagogy and special psychology (*specialiosios pedagogikos ir specialiosios psichologijos kursas mokytojoms - (ams)*; MoESS 2007b). These courses have to be completed within one year after starting work as an Early Childhood/Pre-primary Pedagogue if comparable courses (of 2 ECTS credits or 60 hours) have not been followed before or during their initial professional education. Such requirements do not apply to teachers who completed special pedagogy or special psychology study programmes. Moreover, ECEC pedagogues have to complete a certificate of competence in computer literacy (*Reikalavimai mokytojų kompiuterinio raštingumo programoms*, MoESS 2007c).

Initial professional education (IPE) for future Early Childhood and Pre-primary Pedagogues are integrated into respective university or college study programmes at both Bachelor and Master levels. Students enrolling to study early childhood education usually have to provide the IPE institution with three different kinds of university entrance examination results (*Brandos egzaminas*) and participate in a motivation assessment. In some institutions, high-school exam results are sufficient to receive a state-funded scholarship for Bachelor's studies. Master study admissions are often based on previous academic achievements and an admission exam.

The duration of a Bachelor's study programme varies between three and four years: in most cases, full-time pre-school/pre-primary education studies (or childhood pedagogy) taking place at colleges are of three years' duration (180 ECTS), whereas university courses usually take four years (240 ECTS) to complete. Based on individual learning, writing and exams (and including professional practice), part-time studies can take up to 50% more time (MoESS 2015b).

In a recent 2020 study carried out by PPMI (2020), interviewed educational experts agreed that professional education in colleges is less demanding, and the requirements to secure a study place are significantly lower in comparison to universities. Also, universities attract professors and tutors with more experience and higher qualifications. Therefore, experts agree that pedagogues graduating from colleges could have a lower overall capability than those studying at university.

A Master's degree course in pre-school or pre-primary education often provides students with knowledge on curriculum formation, education strategies, and other higher-level educational issues.

<sup>3</sup> Qualifications obtained abroad are also accepted upon request to the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (*Studijų kokybės vertinimo centras*).

Table 4

**Lithuania: Early Childhood Pedagogue / Pre-primary Pedagogue**

<b>Job titles in Lithuanian:</b> <i>Ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogė -(as) / Priešmokyklinio ugdymo pedagogė -(as)</i> <b>Profiles:</b> Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional / Pre-primary Pedagogy Professional
<p><b>Entry requirements:</b> Secondary education and university entrance examination</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b></p> <p><i>Route 1:</i> 3 years at a higher education institution (college)</p> <p><i>Route 2:</i> 3 years at a higher education institution (college), plus a 40-hour course in pre-primary education if wishing to work as a Pre-primary Pedagogue</p> <p><i>Route 3:</i> 4 years at a higher education institution (university), plus a 40-hour course on work in pre-primary education if wishing to work as a Pre-primary Pedagogue</p> <p><b>Awards:</b> (<i>Routes 1 and 2</i>): Professional Bachelor's degree in early childhood and pre-primary pedagogy</p> <p><b>ECTS credits:</b> 180 <b>EQF level:</b> 6 <b>ISCED 2011:</b> 6 (<i>Route 3</i>): Bachelor's degree in early childhood and pre-primary pedagogy – can also be followed by a Master's degree</p> <p><b>ECTS credits:</b> 240 <b>EQF level:</b> 6 <b>ISCED level:</b> 6</p> <p><i>Route 4:</i> <b>Professional studies:</b> On completion of a Bachelor's degree, 1½ years of studies at <u>university</u> (90 ECTS credits), plus a 40-hour course on work in pre-primary education if wishing to work as a Pre-primary Pedagogue</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Master's degree in early childhood education and pre-primary education <b>ECTS credits:</b> 330 altogether <b>EQF level:</b> 7 <b>ISCED 2011:</b> 7</p> <p><i>Route 5:</i> <b>Professional studies:</b> Completed upper secondary school education and any programme in a professional education institution, plus a 40-hour course on work in pre-primary education if wishing to work as a Pre-primary Pedagogue</p> <p><b>Award:</b> n/a <b>ECTS credits:</b> n/a <b>EQF level:</b> 4 <b>ISCED 2011:</b> 4</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplaces:</b> Early childhood centre (<i>Lopšelis-darželis</i>), 0–6 years; Kindergarten (<i>Darželis</i>), 3–6 years; School-kindergarten (<i>Darželis-mokykla</i>), 3–6 years</p>

Table 5

**Lithuania: Early Childhood Education / Pre-primary Pedagogue's Assistant**

<b>Job title in Lithuanian:</b> <i>Ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogo padėjėjas -(a)</i>
<b>Entry requirements:</b> Secondary education <b>Professional studies:</b> A course of up to 1 year (from 4 months to a year, usually around 6 months) at a vocational secondary school <b>Award:</b> Vocational education certificate as an Early Childhood /Pre-primary Pedagogue's Assistant <b>ECTS credits:</b> At least 35, usually 45 <b>EQF level:</b> 4 <b>ISCED 2011:</b> 4 <b>Main ECEC workplaces:</b> Early childhood centre ( <i>Lopšelis-darželis</i> ), 0–6 years; Kindergarten ( <i>Darželis</i> ), 3–6 years

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

Competence specifications for early childhood/pre-primary education studies in Lithuania are outlined in the *Standards Regulation for the Training of Early Childhood and Pre-primary Age Pedagogues (Ikimokyklinio ir priešmokyklinio amžiaus vaikų pedagogo rengimo standartas)*. Three main areas of competence are outlined in the document (see Table 6; QVETDC 2008).

Table 6

**Lithuania: Competence specifications in early childhood/pre-primary education studies (IPE)**

<b>Areas of competence</b>	<b>Competences</b>
1. Getting to know the child and recognising their individuality	1.1. Recognising general and individual characteristics of child development 1.2. Combining general goals of early childhood/pre-primary education with the individual needs of children 1.3. Recognising symptoms of illness, providing first aid
2. Designing the content of education	2.1. Individualising and integrating educational content 2.2. Planning, organising, evaluating, analysing and documenting children's behaviour in an interactive pedagogical process 2.3. Creating an environment to stimulate children's physical and intellectual abilities 2.4. Actively including the children's families in pedagogical interactions
3. Continuing professional development	3.1. Adopting a reflective stance and participating in life-long learning 3.2. Using tools of information and communication technologies 3.3. Using the Lithuanian language correctly in real and virtual professional environments

In addition to the Standards Regulation, key competences for ECEC staff are outlined in the Description of Competences for Pedagogues (*Pedagogo profesijos kompetencijų aprašas*). These include (1) personal improvement and learning; (2) cultural knowledge; (3) ability to use new technologies and work with information; (4) professional communication (MoESS 2015a). Additional competences include (1) recognising children's differences and capabilities/giving support while learning/motivating children; (2) creating a learning environment with varieties in content and stimulation; (3) achieving goals and supporting development; (4) evaluating children's achievements and progress. In addition to the mentioned list of competencies, the Ministry of

Education also offers a framework of intercultural competences- (*bendrakultūrinės kompetencijos*) for teachers of all education levels (MoESS 2007a).

These competence requirements aim to help pedagogues develop curricular content, apply different methods, and ensure that educational strategies match new developments in the respective area of learning and include the latest achievements in science or technology (MoESS 2015a). All study programmes in Lithuania are shaped by autonomous higher education institutions and have a variety of courses such as child psychology, physical culture, language and communication, multicultural education, social development, etc.

### 4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Several alternative pathways exist for becoming an ECEC pedagogue. Partly, the variety of ways has been driven due to a need to re-orientate pedagogues from secondary education to early childhood and pre-primary education in the face of demographic issues. Policy reforms in the ECEC sector, such as introducing compulsory pre-primary education and the expansion of early childhood education provision, are leading to increased ECEC participation levels and thus to a growing need for more pedagogues.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport announced that pedagogues without a specialist qualification in ECEC and pre-primary education have to obtain the pedagogue qualification within two years. In the following cases, individuals are considered as having a pedagogue qualification if they:

- Have a post-secondary award (pre-2009) or a specialist secondary award (pre-1995), have no less than eight years of pedagogical work experience, and have completed no less than 320 hours (or 12 ECTS credits) of pedagogy, psychology and didactics courses; *or*
- Have a higher education degree, have no less than six years of pedagogical experience, and have completed no less than 240 hours (9 ECTS credits) of pedagogy, psychology and didactics courses; *or*
- Have a higher education degree awarded by a university, have no less than five years of pedagogical experience, and have completed no less than 160 hours (6 ECTS credits) of pedagogy, psychology and didactics courses; *or*
- Have a higher education degree and have completed 1600 hours (60 ECTS credits) of pedagogy, psychology and didactics courses during full-time or part-time studies and have passed all exams in these courses.

In this respect, there is a possibility for current school teachers and graduates in education, the humanities or social sciences to change their profession and qualify as early childhood or pre-primary pedagogues. For instance, primary or secondary school teachers with a completed Bachelor's degree can gain an additional qualification in ECEC by attending a particular module (90 ECTS credits) provided by higher education institutions. For those applying for a modular course in a pedagogical specialisation (*Pedagoginės specializacijos modulių studijos*), the University accepts up to 30 ECTS credits for previously completed similar studies (in terms of content and duration).



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

Learning in the early childhood workplace is not regulated in detail through national or regional guidelines. The only requirement for the IPE institutions is to dedicate at least 30 ECTS credits to learning in the ECEC education environment (MoESS 2012). How higher education institutions or post-secondary schools arrange placements/practica within the professional curriculum is the responsibility of each IPE institution.

Students are prepared for their future work as pedagogues during the programme and learn how to apply theoretical knowledge in practice. Work placements/internships are organised in ECEC institutions. The skills and competences which students are expected to develop during their field-based studies are as follows: learn how to provide professional education support to children, evaluate the quality of education and children's achievements, and reflect on and plan a child's progress. During the internship, student pedagogues are assigned a Mentor. A Mentor is an experienced and practising pedagogue who supports students during their pedagogical practice in ECEC institutions. According to the Regulation of Pedagogue Preparation (*Pedagogų rengimo reglamentas*), Mentors should have five years of pedagogy experience. The quality of the student's completion of the scheduled tasks during the practicum, students' activities, and their contribution to the educational programme are discussed between the IPE supervisor, the mentor, and the student.

Lastly, at the end of the placement period, the institution's principal, the centre team, the Mentor, the IPE supervisor and the students discuss the results of the work placement together. Mentors spend up to 60% of the total placement time with the student. Remuneration for the task of mentoring is agreed upon on an individual basis, as are all additional assignments carried out by ECEC pedagogues. The table below provides an overview of workplace-based learning offered in different initial professional education programmes.

Table 7

Lithuania: Workplace-based learning in different IPE study programmes

Institution	Name of the programme	ECTS credits allocated to workplace learning <sup>4</sup>
Kaunas University of Applied Sciences (Kauno kolegija)	Early childhood education (full time) ( <i>Ikimokyklinis ugdymas (dieninė NL)</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Pedagogical practice 1 (3<sup>rd</sup> semester, 6 ECTS)</li> <li>– Pedagogical practice 2 (4<sup>th</sup> semester, 6 ECTS)</li> <li>– Pedagogical practice 3 (5<sup>th</sup> semester, 6 ECTS)</li> <li>– Practice of educational activity (6<sup>th</sup> semester, 9 ECTS)</li> </ul>
	Early childhood education (part time) ( <i>Ikimokyklinis ugdymas (sesijinė I)</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Pedagogical practice 1 (3<sup>rd</sup> semester, 6 ECTS)</li> <li>– Pedagogical practice 2 (4<sup>th</sup> semester, 6 ECTS)</li> <li>– Pedagogical practice 3 (5<sup>th</sup> semester, 6 ECTS)</li> <li>– Practice of educational activity (6<sup>th</sup> semester, 9 ECTS)</li> </ul>
Klaipėda State College ( <i>Klaipėdos valstybinė kolegija</i> )	Pedagogy of early childhood and pre-primary education (full time) ( <i>Ikimokyklinė ir priešmokyklinė pedagogika (dieninė NL)</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Test Practice of Learning Activities (3<sup>rd</sup> semester, 9 ECTS)</li> <li>– Early childhood and primary teaching practice (4<sup>th</sup> semester, 7 ECTS)</li> <li>– Early childhood and primary teaching practice, (5<sup>th</sup> semester, 9 ECTS)</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> 1 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credit is equal to 25-30 hours of work.  
[http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/docs/ects-guide\\_lt.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/docs/ects-guide_lt.pdf)

Institution	Name of the programme	ECTS credits allocated to workplace learning <sup>4</sup>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Final teaching practice (6<sup>th</sup> semester, 11 ECTS)</li> </ul>
	Pedagogy of early childhood and pre-primary education (part time) ( <i>Ikimokyklinė ir priešmokyklinė pedagogika (sesijinė I)</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observational practice (3<sup>rd</sup> semester, 3 ECTS)</li> <li>Test Practice of Learning Activities (5<sup>th</sup> semester, 9 ECTS)</li> <li>Early childhood and pre-primary teaching practice (6<sup>th</sup> semester, 7 ECTS)</li> <li>Pre-primary teaching practice (7<sup>th</sup> semester, 7 ECTS)</li> <li>Final teaching practice (8<sup>th</sup> semester, 11 ECTS)</li> </ul>
Klaipėda University ( <i>Klaipėdos universitetas</i> )	Childhood pedagogy (full time) ( <i>Vaikystės pedagogika (dieninė NL)</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introductory practice in educational institutions (1<sup>st</sup> semester, 5 ECTS)</li> <li>Pedagogical practice (6<sup>th</sup> semester, 8 ECTS)</li> <li>Autonomous practice of pedagogical work (7<sup>th</sup> semester, 17 ECTS)</li> </ul>
	Childhood pedagogy (part time) ( <i>Vaikystės pedagogika (sesijinė NL)</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introductory practice in educational institutions (1<sup>st</sup> semester, 5 ECTS)</li> <li>Pedagogical practice (6<sup>th</sup> semester, 8 ECTS)</li> <li>Autonomous practice of pedagogical work (7<sup>th</sup> semester, 17 ECTS)</li> </ul>
Marijampolė College ( <i>Marijampolės kolegija</i> )	Childhood pedagogy (part time) ( <i>Vaikystės pedagogika (dieninė NL)</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>30 ECTS credits dedicated to the professional practice (pedagogical practice, practice as Pedagogue Assistant, educational practice, educational-pre-primary practice, final practice)</li> </ul>
Panevėžys College ( <i>Panevėžio kolegija</i> )	Pedagogy of early childhood education (part time) ( <i>Ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogika (sesijinė I)</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introductory practice</li> <li>Practice as a Pedagogue Assistant</li> <li>Integrated practice in early childhood education groups</li> <li>Integrated practice in pre-primary education groups</li> <li>Final practice (no specific information on ECTS)</li> </ul>
Vilnius University – Šiauliai Academy ( <i>Vilniaus Universiteto Šiaulių akademija</i> )	Pedagogy of primary and early childhood education (full-time) ( <i>Pradinio ugdymo pedagogika ir ikimokyklinis ugdymas (dieninė NL)</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pedagogical practice (early childhood education), 15 ECTS</li> <li>Pedagogical practice (pre-primary education), 15 ECTS</li> </ul>
Vytautas Magnus university ( <i>Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas</i> )	Early childhood and pre-primary education (full-time) ( <i>Ikimokyklinė ir priešmokyklinė pedagogika (dieninė NL)</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional self-reflective practice (2<sup>nd</sup> semester, 4 ECTS)</li> <li>Pedagogical practice as an assistant (4<sup>th</sup> semester, 6 ECTS)</li> <li>Pedagogical practice with a mentor (6<sup>th</sup> semester, 10 ECTS)</li> <li>Autonomous pedagogical practice (7<sup>th</sup> semester, 10 ECTS)</li> </ul>
Vilnius University of Applied Sciences ( <i>Vilniaus kolegija</i> )	Childhood pedagogy (full-time) ( <i>Vaikystės pedagogika (dieninė NL)</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practice of Pedagogue Assistant 1 + 2 (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> semesters, in total 126 ECTS)</li> <li>Pedagogical practice with a mentor (3<sup>rd</sup> semester, 6 ECTS)</li> <li>Autonomous pedagogical practice (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> semesters, in total 12 ECTS)</li> </ul>



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

The National Education Agency is an educational support institution founded in 2019 by merging five institutions governed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania. Besides policy implementation measures, the centre also provides information, counselling, qualification improvement and education environment building assistance, conducts education-related monitoring and educational research, develops curricular content and coordinates its implementation.

After graduation from college or university, legislative frameworks require a compulsory probationary year in the workplace, considered the start of professional development. This is organised by the higher education institution in cooperation with ECEC institution. Usually, the experienced practising mentor is assigned for easier integration into the educational institution after the newly-qualified professionals gain a higher level of competence and can work independently.

Under Lithuanian Education Law (2011), core practitioners are entitled to five days per year for their professional development; however, they are not obliged to use this opportunity. As with other issues, there is no specific regulation for the professional development of Pedagogue Assistants since they are not considered part of the core educational staff. Pedagogues do not have to pay for continuing professional development. Costs are covered either by the ECEC institution where the pedagogue is employed or by the state (through the National Education Agency).

The Teachers' Professional Development Concept (2012) outlines multiple ways of using the professional development days and other free time to raise professional competence:

- Individual learning (including scientific activities and research, and professional publications)
- Collegial knowledge sharing (participation in methodological groups and associations of subject teachers, demonstration and reflective supervision of lessons and other educational activities, coaching, mentoring and consultation)
- Specialised events (seminars, courses, projects, internships, training)
- Public activities (social activities, cultural activities, artistic expression)
- Academic studies (higher degree studies, studies in another study field, study programmes aimed at retraining which do not award a degree, etc.).

According to the regulation applicable to all higher education programmes in Lithuania, the state financially supports participation in further study routes such as Master-level studies. Depending on their previous study achievements and an admission test and competition in the study area, students can receive complete funding from the government.

The National Education Agency provides the list of accredited institutions offering teachers' professional development. In 2022, there were 71 institutions, including methodological centres at schools, municipal teacher education centres, and non-governmental organisations (NŠA 2022a). In addition, there are 13 higher education institution departments focusing explicitly on the CPD of teachers.

In 2022, the National Education Agency acknowledged 16 professional development programmes for the teachers (NŠA 2022b). These types of CPD are formally recognised in terms of promotion and career advancement. Some of these programmes are aimed at ECEC Teachers:



Table 7

**Lithuania: Examples of accredited CPD programmes for (ECEC) pedagogues in 2022**

Name of the programme	Applicable dates	Total hours
Choosing to be a leader of the educational institution – relevant competencies and tools	From 2022-02-07 to 2023-02-06	52
Raising ICT competences in pedagogues	From 2021-09-22 to 2024-09-21	80
The individual progress of schoolchildren: monitoring, achievements, self-evaluation	From 2021-12-22 to 2024-12-21	40
How to successfully implement the reformed early childhood education programme?	From 2022-03-16 to 2025-03-15	40

There are other types of CPD, which include professional development events, short courses, and weekend programmes. Teachers can contact people responsible for teachers' appraisal and continuing professional development in their education institution or directly at the regional teacher education centres. The municipal education authorities and regional teacher education centres regularly provide information about the plans for continuing professional development programmes, seminars and other events.

In 2021, a large-scale state-funded research project on pedagogue CPD improvement was published. The data for the indicators were collected in 2019-2020 in nine municipalities covering all education institutions providing CPD and teacher education centres. Findings show that in nine municipalities, on average, only 68% of teachers use the five-day CPD opportunity. It is demonstrated that pedagogues are well informed about the CPD opportunities at the municipality and state levels. The recommendations include increasing CPD programmes over 40 hours in duration and extending these programmes to early childhood, pre-primary and primary education teachers and also to administrative staff (NŠA 2021b).

Currently, governmental institutions, teachers' trade unions and the media do not portray CPD for ECEC staff as an issue.

## 7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

### 7.1 Remuneration

Remuneration is still a topic under heavy debate in society and especially among pedagogues themselves. Although there were no more large-scale strikes and demonstrations in the past five years (as was the case 5–10 years ago), teachers are still generally unhappy with their salaries, exacerbated through rising inflation and living costs, especially in the major cities of Lithuania. However, the expression of this dissatisfaction initially led to a gradual increase in their salary. Since 2018, the remuneration of educational staff in general in Lithuania has been continually increasing after the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport introduced full-time equivalent pay instead of workload-based pay. Government Strategic Analysis Centre conducted thorough research after the reform and concluded that in 2018 remuneration grew by 13.6% (STRATA 2018), and in 2019 by 10% (STRATA 2019). However, Early Childhood and Pre-primary Education Teachers still had lower remuneration than other teachers. Therefore, this increase was significantly lower for ECEC pedagogues. Finally, in 2020 the income was equalised for both ECEC and primary and secondary staff. Thus, that year the wage increased for school teachers by 10% on average, while Early Childhood Pedagogues received a salary increase of over 46%

and Pre-primary Pedagogues an increase of over 30% (svietimonaujienos.lt 2020a). In 2021 and 2022, remuneration was increased by approximately 10% for all teachers.

In the last quarter of 2021, the average monthly salary of teachers working at all levels of public sector education was €1034.40 net and €1636.80 gross (Statistics Lithuania 2022), which means that the average salary of teachers (all grades) caught up with the average national monthly wage of €1679.30 gross. No national data is available on the average wages of Early Childhood and Pre-primary Pedagogues. Remuneration differs greatly, based on working experience, qualification, and working time (full-time equivalent). *Table 9* presents the base remuneration coefficients for core practitioners (including Special Pedagogues, Speech Therapists, Psychologists and others) and centre leaders.

*Table 9*

**Lithuania: Salary coefficients for ECEC Teachers and Centre Leaders**

Salary coefficients for core practitioners (pre-primary and early childhood education)			
Qualification category	Length of working experience		
	0–2 years	5–10 years	25+ years
Teacher	7.99	8.02	8.17
Senior teacher	-	8.21	8.66
Teacher-methodologist	-	8.74	9.28
Teacher-expert	-	9.94	10.45
Centre leaders			
Student count	Length of working experience		
	0–10 years	10–15 years	15+ years
Up to 200	12.54	13.00	13.31
201–400	13.70	13.82	13.83
401–600	13.75	13.84	13.88
601–1,000	14.75	14.78	14.81
1,001+	14.78	14.80	14.85

Source: Statistics Lithuania 2022

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

The working week of an Early Childhood and Pre-primary Pedagogue is 36 hours. Of these, 32 hours are devoted to working directly with children, and four hours are dedicated to indirect work— planning, preparing documents related to education, cooperating with other teachers and parents (guardians) on educational issues, etc. However, over 65% of teachers do not reach the full-time equivalent of working time, according to the state audit conducted in 2020 (AAI 2020). There are no national-level statistics specifically for ECEC pedagogues.

In addition, the Centre Leader is no longer the only person to approve teachers' workloads. Workloads are coordinated with the setting's work council. If no such committee exists, workloads are coordinated with the employee-level trade union (Eurydice 2023c).

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

Before 2018 there was neither an on-site mentoring system in Lithuania nor a formal induction programme for newly qualified teachers. This can be explained by the lack of young pedagogues in early childhood education institutions and the requirement for higher education institutions

to organise field-based studies during their IPE programmes; therefore, induction programmes are not deemed necessary at the policy level.

Since 2018, the National Education Agency has tested the EU funded project “TĘSK”, which supports the ECEC Teachers by providing an internship for the first year of their professional career (NŠA 2022c). This is organised by the higher education institution in cooperation with the ECEC institution. An experienced practising mentor is assigned for the whole period, providing five hours of their time each month towards helping to draw up an internship plan and supporting ad-hoc questions. During the internship, various events and integration activities are envisaged in close cooperation with educational institutions.

#### 7.4 Non-contact time

Core practitioners working on a full-time basis in municipal early childhood institutions have 34 hours weekly to fulfil their regular duties with children. In addition to that, four hours of non-contact time are granted for complementary work such as planning or working with parents.

The regulation differs for Pre-primary Pedagogues. The principal of an early childhood institution or a school with a pre-primary education group prepares a specific description of the Pre-primary Pedagogue’s workload. The number of hours to be spent on each activity is set down according to the pre-primary education organisation model approved by the municipality.

#### 7.5 Current staffing issues

In 2021, the Government Strategic Analysis Centre assessed the future demand for pedagogues in the Lithuanian education system. The relative shortage of teachers will gradually evolve to a lack of teachers in almost all specialities and qualification levels (STRATA 2021). The government is trying to solve the staffing issues in several ways: for example, by increasing scholarships for students at university, by funding travel costs for travelling to work and by enabling flexible working schedules to combine pedagogy with other commitments. However, to this day, the tendency of a rising shortage of ECEC staff continues to be a problem. Strategic actions will need to be taken during the coming years in order to bridge the gap.

In terms of gender distribution, the workforce is heavily dominated by women. According to data of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 87.5% of teachers in schools and ECEC centres in Lithuania are female. The overall share of male teachers across the country is inadequate; moreover, the number of male pedagogues in early childhood education institutions is even lower than in other levels of the education system and accounts for less than 1% of the workforce (MoESS 2016). For example, there were 1,116 ECEC pedagogues in total in the city of Klaipėda, with only one male amongst them. Similar tendencies can be observed in other municipalities, too, so ECEC pedagogy is overwhelmingly female-dominated (atviraklaipėda.lt 2020). This can be partly explained by the somewhat unfavourable and biased views towards male Early Childhood Pedagogues amongst the general population.



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

### Pedagogue forecasting model

In 2018, the Science and Studies Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA) developed a pedagogue forecasting model that aims to create preconditions for more accurate planning of teachers and persons admitted to studies providing pedagogical qualifications, taking into account the changing needs of the economy, the labour market and the education system. The model provides opportunities to provide evidence-based public policy recommendations to match the supply and demand of teachers. The reports are generated annually by the Government's Strategic Analysis Centre (svietimonaujienos.lt 2018).

### Expansion of Lithuanian language teaching in ethnic minority schools

From January 1st 2019, all ethnic minority schools working at early childhood and pre-primary education levels will provide no less than five hours per week of Lithuanian language teaching. In the fourth quarter of 2018, there were 7,000 children in early childhood education and 2,000 in pre-primary education. Although part of the early childhood education programme is available in Lithuanian, research and practice confirmed that without allocating specific hours and the necessary finances, education in Lithuanian usually does not occur even if the parents express a desire for their children to receive such education. Parents who regularly send their children to national minority schools want a specific number of hours dedicated to the Lithuanian language. However, the providers of these schools do not always take this into account and often do not have the financial means to do so. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport therefore confirmed a legislative proposal to increase the teaching of the Lithuanian language by one hour in minority schools (MoESS 2018).

### Reorganisation of higher education institutions

On 13 January 2018, the Parliament of Lithuania ruled that Aleksandras Stulginskis University (ASU) and the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences (LUES) would be integrated into Vytautas Magnus University. After this change, Vytautas Magnus University became a university with the widest range of very different study programmes in Lithuania, taking over the educational programmes from LUES in the context of reputation and funding issues over the past few years. The reorganisation affected the prestige of the educational programmes. On a positive note, more emphasis was given to inclusive education in ECEC programmes (svietimonaujienos.lt 2019).

### Pre-primary education can last up to two years

In 2020, the Minister of Education, Science and Sport adopted changes in pre-primary education, enabling an individualised learning approach for children which allows them to start school from age 5 for up to two years continuously (MoESS 2020a). After assessing the child's education and support needs and progress in the procedure established by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport, pre-primary education may be provided to a child when they reach the age of 5 in the calendar year before the 1st of September and can last for two years instead of one. Early childhood education is still available on a voluntary basis for children of two years of age until they are ready for pre-primary education. Mandatory early childhood education is still in place

for children living in poor socioeconomic conditions (according to 2020 data, there are over 4,000 such children).

### **Updated recommendations for Pre-primary Pedagogues working with children with autism spectrum disorders**

In August 2020, new recommendations were developed, envisaging an individual support plan for children which would supplement the usual teaching plan in pre-primary education. It provides a perspective on the child's learning, expected changes in behaviour, forms and methods of providing educational support, behaviour prevention and intervention methods, and social skills development activities. The guidelines also provide advice on adapting to the learning environment at school. For children with autism, it is recommended to designate a permanent place for educational activities, if necessary, to use walls and screens to help focus during lessons. It is recommended that the school provides as much noise-isolated space as possible in the classroom, group, or another place where the children can rest quietly during breaks or during a state of emotional instability. In addition, it is proposed that the educational setting hosting the pupil organises a meeting with the "school welfare commission" no later than seven working days before the start of the school year. It is envisaged that the child, together with their parents, external pedagogical and psychological specialists and the relevant teachers would be able to participate in the meeting and discuss how to educate the child and how to assist the family (MoESS 2020b).

### **A monthly stipend for participation in pedagogy studies**

In order to increase participation in professional bachelor or bachelor programmes in pedagogy, the Lithuanian government, since September 2020, has provided a €300 monthly grant for students. This support was extended in 2021. In 2022, students who sign a contract with a specific educational setting agreeing on their employment after completion of their studies are awarded a €500/month stipend. This targeted support is much higher than the usual basic grant in other study programmes of €42 per month for the highest achieving students in all other EQF 6 programmes (LRT 2021).

### **Additional support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in early childhood education**

From September 2021, the government adopted new financial aid for children with disadvantaged backgrounds to increase their participation in pre-primary education. It is estimated that there are around 4,000 such children, but only 100 of them participate in the programmes. The main reason is the low incentive for parents to bring the children to school, especially if they have to support the transportation. Therefore, additional funding of €1,3 million for all municipalities will ensure access to transport, healthy food and proper care (MoESS 2021).

### **ECEC Teachers' remuneration rate unified with primary and secondary teachers' pay**

In September 2020, ECEC Teachers' wages increased dramatically, and they became equal to those of other teachers in the education system. In 2020 alone, the average salary for school-teachers increased by 10%, while Early Childhood Teachers received a salary increase of over 46% and Pre-primary Teachers an increase of over 30% (svietimonaujienos.lt 2020a). These changes were adopted in the context of frustration expressed by pedagogues who undergo a similar length and complexity of university studies (compared to primary and secondary education) but until now have received significantly lower salaries.

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

### The development of distributed leadership in Lithuanian early childhood education institutions

**Source:** Dambrauskiene and Liukineviciene 2018 (see *References* for full details)

**Aims and methods:** The article aims to analyse the theoretical literature and other sources (strategic documents, legislation, statistical information) and reveal the possibilities of distributed leadership development in Lithuanian early childhood education institutions.

**Selected findings:** The current context in the Lithuanian education system is favourable for developing the ideas of distributed leadership both in general and early childhood education institutions. According to the theoretical research, the institutional development and staff-specific contexts in Lithuanian ECEC settings are favourable for developing distributed leadership. At the same time, the national cultural context and the different communities of education institutions can pose difficulties in implementing the ideas of distributed leadership.

**Implications:** The theoretical material and legal framework analysis reveal the need to conduct empirical research on distributed leadership in Lithuanian early childhood education institutions to uncover the challenges and particularities of its implementation and reveal good practices.

### Factors demotivating the choice of the teaching profession in early and pre-primary education

**Source:** Pikturnaite and Tamašauskiene 2021 (see *References* for full details)

**Aims and methods:** To find out what demotivating factors determine the reluctance to choose the teaching profession in early and pre-school education. Methods were the analysis of research literature and a questionnaire survey. Participants were 421 students studying preschool education and early childhood education and care as well as 111 graduates of such programmes, who are now the professionals working in the field.

**Selected findings:** Theoretically and empirically analysed factors negatively affecting the choice of teaching in early and pre-school education can be classified into three groups: (1) the general political and socio-cultural situation in the field of education; (2) working conditions in ECEC institutions; (3) person-related characteristics, previous experience, and the lack of career advancement possibilities. The most critical demotivating factors were the low prestige, status and image of the teaching profession in the political and socio-cultural context, negative feedback about stress at work, disagreements with colleagues and competition. Moreover, the possibility for improvement was insufficient for beginner teachers.

**Implications:** Analysis of the demotivating factors for entering the ECEC teaching profession enhances understandings of the current situation and provides a basis for adopting necessary institutional and legislative changes to improve education.

### Experiences of pre-primary education teachers in assessing children's achievements and progress in distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic

**Source:** Norvilienė et al. 2021 (see *References* for full details)

**Aims and methods:** The research aims were to investigate the views of Pre-primary Education Teachers about their experiences of distance learning in assessing children's achievements and progress during the first lockdown in the Covid-19 pandemic. Methods included an analysis of



the research literature and policy documents, semi-structured interviews with 15 pre-primary teachers who worked remotely in the spring of 2020, and qualitative content analysis.

**Selected findings:** Organisation of distance education after the declaration of lockdown in Lithuania posed new challenges for all participants in pre-primary education: the administrators of educational institutions, teachers and parents. However, the teachers managed to master digital software and information flows quickly, cooperate with colleagues and parents of children, maintain the continuity of pre-primary education, and individually consider each child's situation.

**Implications:** The research provides a basis for studying the views of primary school teachers working with first graders about the impact of distance learning in pre-primary settings on pupils' educational results.

## 10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Beyond historically low salaries, difficult working conditions due to an excessive number of children in the group, the challenging work and psychological stress and the dim prospects of CPD, there is also the problem of the **perceived low status of the teaching profession**, which has proved to be a significant problem for many years. Recent research by Pikturaitė and Tamašauskaitė (2021) on demotivating factors in choosing the ECEC pedagogue profession revealed that the most demotivating factor is the low prestige, status and image of the teaching profession. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport report notes that 17 higher education institutions had at least one study programme for initial teacher education before the reform. This dispersion of resources was one of the reasons that led to a decline in the quality of initial teacher education. It was inevitably connected to the diminishment of the prestige of the teaching profession (Varanauskas 2020).

Lithuanian early childhood and pre-primary education programmes have an internal quality assurance system based on voluntary self-assessment. However, there is no comprehensive quality assurance system which would be widely applicable and would generate data that sheds light on the quality of education and children's achievement at the national level. The education analysis centre of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport developed a research paper on this issue and concludes that the assessment of achievement and planning of education is one of the weakest areas within the education system. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen teacher competence related to assessing children's educational achievements and progress, especially in areas such as children's self-assessment skills, involvement of parents (guardians) and children in the assessment process, and use of assessment results for educational planning and improvement. Recommendations have therefore been issued to teacher training centres, focusing on initial teacher training and/or continuing professional development, to consider modern assessment trends, monitoring and research developments and other skills related to better evaluation outcomes. Experts estimate that in five years, more thorough national reporting will be developed. Therefore, current teachers may face difficulties in adapting to these changes (MoESS 2022).

**Poor ICT skills** among the older pedagogue cohort are already a substantial problem affecting pre-primary education. Recent research on the COVID-19 impact highlighted challenges related to competences and infrastructure. Even though in some cases the teachers managed to adapt

rather quickly and improve their competences, existing digital infrastructure, specifically the lack of it, presented serious challenges for teachers and early childhood education institutions when introducing distance learning. Educators lacked support from management, adequate equipment, training, and time to prepare for activities. Distance learning eliminated the possibility of direct, “live” communication with children and complicated the processes of motivating students and assessing achievement. The lack of teachers’ self-confidence and low motivation to participate in the distance learning process became apparent.

Research shows that adequate qualifications are essential for the child’s development and learning and for working towards the curriculum goals. In Lithuania, there is a problem of **staff lacking relevant professional or formal education** both in early childhood and pre-primary education institutions. Between 2016 and 2019, the proportion of non-qualified pedagogues increased from 22.1% to 33.7% in early childhood education and from 10.7% to 16.5% in pre-primary education institutions (MoESS 2020c). In 2018, a thorough evaluation of 101 ECEC institutions (kindergartens) was carried out in the capital city of Vilnius<sup>5</sup>. One of the major problems regarding staff was the qualification of pedagogues, especially in early childhood education. It was estimated that over 50% of pedagogues do not qualify for ECEC education as they have a primary or secondary education degree. In some cases, the staff have not received comprehensive teacher training and attended only a 40-hour pre-primary teacher training course, while having academic background and degree in different field, such as logistics, law and similar (tavovai-kas.lt 2018).

Moreover, the decreasing number of qualified workforce in some regions, specifically more rural regions, and a growing number of children with special educational needs proves to be a complicated problem to tackle in the long term. The 2020 report on education in Lithuania estimates that one particular support staff member has over 38 children to take care of in rural areas compared to 25 in urban areas (MoESS 2020c). This means an additional burden for early childhood and pre-primary education pedagogues, who lack support to work with children with special educational needs, further diminishing the attractiveness of the specialisation. In addition, there are over 1,500 children who learn in separate special education institutions for early childhood education, according to 2019–2020 data. According to the law passed in 2021, a national integration of these children will start in 2024 September (svietimonaujienos.lt 2020b). That means an additional influx of children with particular needs will be apparent in most municipalities, and the current challenges will be exacerbated unless a specific focus and appropriate funding are allocated.

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<sup>5</sup> Evaluation also covered 113 schools providing primary education.





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